



[EXTERNAL] MTTWS 2024/25 Winter Newsletter

From MT TWS <secretary@mttws.org>

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The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society

Winter Newsletter: LOTS of details on the annual conference in Billings and more opportunities for you to engage in policy!

Hello Everyone!

First off, welcome to the new year! We've got lots of information in this newsletter on the upcoming conference in Billings and ways you can engage with the MT Chapter.

Before we dive into details on the conference, if you missed the last email, you have an opportunity right now to engage with National on which policy issues should be their top priority in 2025 and 2026. National has already identified 11 issues of most importance and would like each Chapter to provide input to narrow that focus. We are asking you to choose the top 3 of those 11 policy areas identified and number those within this [google sheet. \[mttws.org\]](#) If you can't access the google sheet, you can email mttws.secretary@gmail.com and provide your top 3 that way. You have the rest of today to get it done (January 3rd)! Thanks to all of you who have already provided input

on this effort!

On that note, we also want to mention our Conservation Affairs Committee and the board have been in touch with several of our members who work in the capitol in Helena to inform our policy efforts ahead of the 2025 legislative session (starts Monday!) Stay tuned for more information on bills pertinent to our Chapter's goals and objectives. If you're interested in learning about what's being proposed, you can head over to the [Montana Legislative Services' Bill Tracker \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org) and search for topics of interest (i.e. fish and wildlife). There's still a lot of unknowns, but we will do our best to keep members informed as we learn more about bills relevant to our Chapter. Also, spoiler alert, there's a workshop at this year's conference on conservation policy. You can learn more about the legislative process and how to be more engaged.

Speaking of workshops, see below for lots more information on this year's conference including a bunch of great workshop opportunities! The biggest thing to know right now is registration is live! Stop what you're doing and [register now! \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org)! Our **early bird deadline is January 27th**. If you take advantage of registering before that date, you'll get a discounted price AND a long-sleeve t-shirt with our logo and a pretty excellent critter of your choice on the back courtesy of John Kuntz. Thanks for your talents, John!

January 27th is also the deadline for everything this year. You can now [submit abstracts \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org), apply for [small grants \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org), and [nominate that colleague \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org) you know deserves an award! Do it now!!

Finally, we are still looking for artwork submissions for our program cover. This competition is only open to students. We are also seeking options for a new logo. This competition is open to ANY OF OUR MEMBERS and will be included in a vote at this year's conference. See below for more details on both opportunities. We'll be sending more reminders and additional details in the next few weeks, but please reach out to any of us on the board if you have questions. We can't wait to see you in Billings!!

~Your MTTWS Board

The 2025 MTTWS Annual Conference!

March 4-7, 2025
Billings Hotel and Convention Center
Billings, MT

**"Conservation Policy: Getting Involved, Staying Engaged,
and How TWS Can Help"**

Change is coming fast and furious to the wildlife of Montana, be it from increasing human populations and associated development, to novel diseases and invasive species, to climate change. At the same time funding and support for nongame wildlife is growing, conservation easements continue to pop up on important habitats across the state, and agencies are partnering to help connect fragmented wildlife populations and reduce the impacts of roads and fences. And the Recovering America's Wildlife Act continues to languish in legislative limbo in Washington, D.C....it may have failed in 2022, but it's not dead yet.

As I write this, America is choosing its next national leaders. When I think about our wildlife and other natural resources, there's a lot to worry about AND a lot to hope for. Most of us wildlife professionals and students probably go about our daily lives wondering what will happen, and feeling like the fate of our natural world is in somebody else's hands. But it doesn't have to be that way.

There are numerous organizations out there working on conservation policy; among them is our flagship Wildlife Society, which helps bridge the gap between professionals and politicians in order to effect meaningful policy changes that will preserve the things we've dedicated our lives to managing, studying, and protecting. TWS has long been a powerful voice in Washington and has developed tools to help state chapters tackle local policy issues and add our voice to national ones.

My hope in bringing this topic to you for our 2025 conference theme is to help our membership better understand how conservation policy development works across state, tribal, and national levels. And I want to get you fired up about it. Ultimately, I want the Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society to be more actively engaged with policy—and we need YOU!

[REGISTER NOW! \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org)

Reserve Your Hotel Room!

You can reserve your hotel room now with the Billings Hotel and Convention Center!

Call now (406-867-8111) and reserve your room by giving the **Group Code 64603** or mentioning the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society to receive the state rate (\$107/night plus tax).

You can also visit their [website \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org) and under book now, enter the **Group ID 64603**.

Workshops!

Path Analysis/Structural Equation Models. *Thomas Riecke*, Tuesday, March 4th 9am – 3pm (lunch provided) [Click here to register! \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org)
Cost: \$35 regular, \$15 student/retiree; Limit: 50

Ecological systems are complex and interconnected. This often creates collinearity among covariates, leading to challenges in conservation decision making. As a specific example, peaks in abundance of a harvested species might result in density-dependent effects as well as liberalized harvest regulations, creating confounding between the effects of harvest and density-dependence. Structural equation models are exceptionally useful for resolving this type of uncertainty. SEMs allow researchers to construct models with multiple ‘response’ variables, and estimate direct and indirect effects of covariates on parameters of interest. This workshop will give a broad overview of the foundations of structural equation modelling. In the morning, we’ll outline the theory underlying path analysis (Layton-Matthews et al. [2024] *Journal of Animal Ecology*), latent variables (Grace et al. [2010] *Ecological Monographs*), and cross-lags (Van de Pol & Brouwer [2021] *Journal of Animal Ecology*). We’ll then devote the afternoon to application using packages such as ‘piecewiseSEM’ and ‘lavaan,’ and also provide a brief tutorial on the construction of SEMs using Bayesian software. **Some experience with R and/or regression will be highly beneficial (necessary) for the afternoon component.

Nature Journaling. *Rebecca Newton*, Tuesday, March 4th 10am – 12pm [Click here to register! \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org)

Cost: \$35 regular, \$15 student/retiree; Limit 30

Nature journaling is a great way to enrich skills of observation, curiosity, and awareness. This practice has been employed for centuries by naturalists, scientists, and artists. Nature journaling is an accessible practice requiring only basic tools and a sense of curiosity. No previous art experience necessary! In this workshop we will explore several formats for nature journaling, practice approaching subjects with guiding questions, and document observations using combinations of words, symbols, numbers, and pictures. Instruction will cover techniques for sketching and recording observations in the field, and in-class sketching exercises. This will be an interactive class in which attendees will actively participate and carry out real-time exercises. Basic supplies will be provided. Attendees are also welcome to bring their own notebook or sketchbook and wet/dry media if they prefer.

Science-based self-care: How modern neuroscience informs whole-health practices to balance work, life, and relationships that won't burn you out! *Anna Rapson*, Tuesday, March 4th 3pm - 5pm. [Click here to register! \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org)

Cost: \$25 regular, \$10 student/retiree; Limit: 50

Learning to manage our stress and care for ourselves is essential to staying engaged with what we value and care about. Yet, how do we do so when there's already so much to fit in? Sustaining a work-life balance can be difficult, and managing stress healthily can be even more challenging.

Since we can't always change what's happening around us, we can learn to change how we relate to what's happening inside us. Our thoughts, emotions, and sensations are data for how we respond (or react!) to external circumstances.

Neuroplasticity confirms we can adjust maladaptive patterns and rewire our brains in a way that best serves our physical, emotional, and mental health. Adaptive strategies can replace problematic or unhelpful patterns with repetitive practice.

Psychoneuroimmunology and interpersonal neurobiology emphasize the importance of paying mindful attention to the inner workings of how we move through pleasant, neutral and unpleasant experiences.

This workshop will incorporate modern neuroscience and the science of mindfulness to inform practical, evidence-based applications for managing stress, creating time for worthwhile self-care, and improving intra- and interpersonal relating. In it, we will cover:

- “Psychological safety” - what it is, why it’s essential, and how to create it for a functional (vs. dysfunctional) workplace
- How to cope in the midst of feeling anxious, or even powerless, over what’s outside of your control
- What are mind states and what is essence?
- Renouncing “judging, comparing, and fixing” mind states
- Attending to your well-being from the inside out
- Revisiting imposter syndrome - how to work with self-doubt and/or comparative judgement
- Relational health in tense settings
- Identifying, interrupting, and changing patterns that contribute to frustration or unease

No annoying or awkward icebreakers included! Ultimately, the purpose of this workshop is to empower you to experience greater satisfaction in the interconnection of your professional and personal lives.

Conservation Policy. *Charlie Booher and Hannah Downey, Wednesday, March 5th*
8am – 12pm [Click here to register! \[mttws.org\]](#)

Cost: \$35 regular, \$15 student/retiree; Limit 30

Many wildlife students still don’t have an opportunity to take a policy class. Those who do have the opportunity typically experience either a recitation of agency structure, enabling legislation, and treaties, or a collection of stories from folks who have worked in the business of wildlife policy for some time. While both are valuable, we aim to offer guidance on how to understand and influence formal and informal policy in all its forms (private, public, local, corporate, state, federal, etc.).

Montana’s 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan: Partner Input on Threats and Conservation Actions. *Kimberly Szcodronski and Kristina Smucker,*
Wednesday, March 5th 9am – 12pm [Click here to register! \[mttws.org\]](#)

Cost: \$10; Limit 50

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is leading efforts to revise Montana’s State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), which is due to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in October 2025. SWAPs identify Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their habitats,

describe threats that impact those species and habitats, and identify conservation actions to address those threats. We are striving for Montana's SWAP to be a collaborative effort that helps to inform conservation work for all partners who work on wildlife and habitat conservation in Montana. To accomplish that, we are engaging with our conservation partners between December 2024 and August 2025 by providing draft SWAP products that are ready for review and feedback. We would like to use the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society conference as an opportunity to meet in-person with our partners. In this workshop, we will: 1) update partners on our progress on the SWAP revision, 2) provide an overview of threats and conservation actions in the SWAP, and 3) form breakout groups to review and update the threats and conservation actions.

Art Contest!

Calling all creative types (students only)! We need submissions for the design of our program cover. We prefer that the design fits the conference theme but is not mandatory. If you would like to have your design considered, e-mail the design to Rebecca Mowry at rmowry@mt.gov. The winner will receive free registration to the conference and \$100!!

New Logo Contest for MT TWS!

We've heard some rumblings through our membership to revamp our logo and we want your help! Imagine your artwork as our Chapter's logo! We will be accepting submissions from now until January 17th. If you have a vision for what our logo should look like, we want to see it! This contest is open to any and all members.

If interested in competing, submit your designs to mttws.president@gmail.com. You should receive a confirmation email from Katie. The board will narrow options (if necessary) and have membership vote on the final selection at this year's conference in Billings. The winner will receive \$100 and some sweet SWAG the following year with their new logo!

***Important to note, we will keep the current design as an option when voting.*

Small Grants Award

It's time to start submitting your applications for our small grants! This year is a little different. To hopefully entice more folks to take advantage of this grant, we are offering a little more money. Two grants will be available at \$1500 each! Visit our [website \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org) for details on what projects qualify for this award and consider applying! Just do it!!

Seeking Award Nominations

It's time to start thinking about who YOU want to nominate for one of our fabulous awards. We know so much amazing work is being done in this state. This is your chance to recognize that work and those deserving individuals! It's not too early to start working on that nomination now. See below for more details on each award or visit our [website \[mttws.org\]](https://mttws.org).

The Distinguished Service Award: This award is presented for cumulative, past, current, and/or continuing achievements in wildlife conservation. This is typically acknowledgment of accomplishments over a career.

The Biologist of the Year Award: This award is presented annually for significant achievements in wildlife conservation anytime during the five years immediately preceding the award presentation.

The Bob Watts Communication Award: This award is presented for significant communication in media such as professional publications, popular wildlife articles, books, movies, or videos that have a relatively wide audience.

The Wildlife Conservation Award: This award is given to an individual or non-governmental organization for past, present, or ongoing efforts that enhance wildlife conservation in Montana.

The Rising Professional Award: This award recognizes emerging professionals and rising leaders in the wildlife field who are drivers of professional progress in Montana. Eligible candidates will have worked in a part or full-time professional capacity (seasonal or year-round positions) for at least 3 years, and no more than 8 years. Employment need not be continuous. Current students are not eligible. Employment may include, but is not limited to: wildlife and habitat management or research, conservation policy or advocacy, environmental education or program development, consultation, etc.

To nominate, email a written recommendation for a specific award, along with compelling justification for the nomination and a discussion of the qualifications of the nominee. While there is no prescribed format, nominations often take the form of a formal letter or letters, and are often supported by several agencies, organizations, or MT TWS members. Nominations will be reviewed by the Award Committee and selections will be made in January. Nominators will be notified of selections at that time and will be asked to assist with coordinating the attendance of the awardee. Send nominations to **Megan O'Reilly** at moreilly@mt.gov.

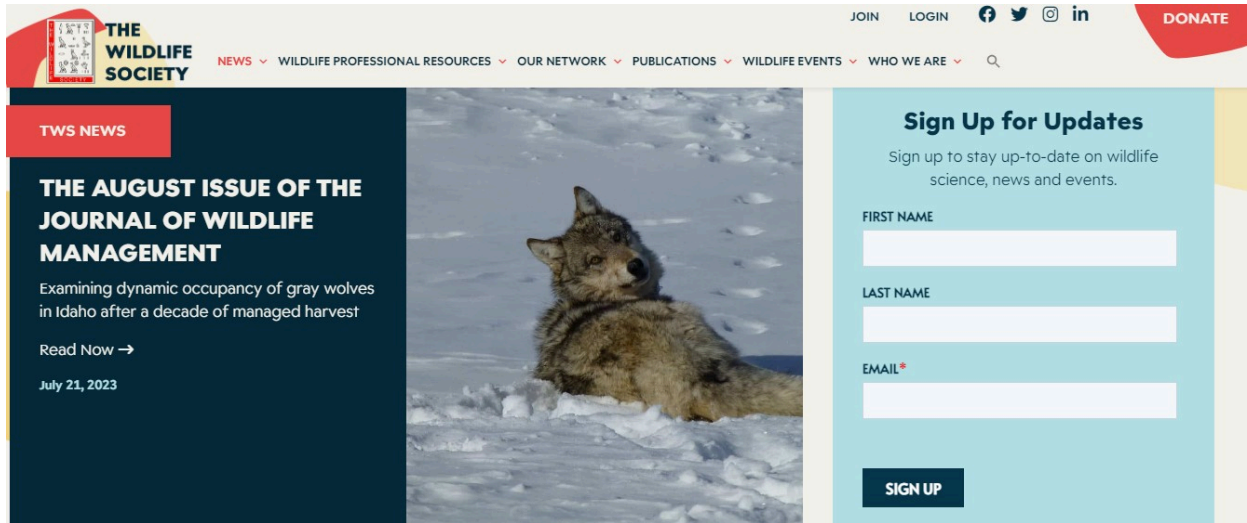
Seeking Nominations for President-Elect and Secretary!

Your MTTWS board is soliciting nominations for **President-Elect AND Secretary** this year. They are both 3-year terms full of excitement, surprises, and good-humored folks that want to help you put on the conference of your dreams... or whatever we have enough money to do. Please consider! And if interested, please e-mail Chad Bishop (chad.bishop@mso.umt.edu) to nominate yourself or someone else.

Got something for our next newsletter? Send it to mtws.secretary@gmail.com!

MTTWS website
[mttws.org]

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