MONTANA NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM STRATEGIC PLAN
JULY 2015 – JUNE 2020

INTRODUCTION

The Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) is Montana's source for reliable and objective information on Montana's native species and habitats, emphasizing those of conservation concern. MTNHP was created by the Montana legislature in 1983 as part of the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) of the Montana State Library (MSL). MTNHP is "a program of information acquisition, storage, and retrieval for data relating to the flora, fauna, and biological community types of Montana." (MCA 90-15-102). MTNHP's activities are guided by statute (MCA 90-15) as well as through ongoing interaction with and feedback from principal data source agencies such as Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the Montana University System, the US Forest Service, and the US Bureau of Land Management.

Since the first staff was hired in 1985, the Program has logged a 30-year record of success, and developed into a highly respected, service-oriented program. Currently (2015) the program has an annual budget of approximately 1.5 million dollars and a staff of 20 professionals with expertise in zoology, ecology, botany, database management, and geographic information systems. MTNHP is widely recognized as one of the most advanced and effective of over 80 natural heritage programs throughout the western hemisphere.

The enabling legislation for MTNHP provides the State Library with the option to contract the operation of the Program, and to make available state resources and facilities as part of the contract for services. Since 2006, MTNHP has been operated by the University of Montana (UM) through a renewable 2-year contract with the MSL. The MSL receives legislative funding for core program functions and MTNHP leverages that core funding to acquire additional funds. As of 2015, the State Library contract provides approximately $440,000 per year for the core services of the program, and MTNHP secures an approximate additional $1,100,000 per year for more than 50 active projects with state, federal and private organizations.

MISSION

The Montana Natural Heritage Program is the state's source for reliable information and expertise to support stewardship of our native species and habitats, emphasizing those of conservation concern.

VISION

Our vision is that public agencies, the private sector, the education sector, and the general public will trust and rely upon MTNHP as the source for information and expertise on Montana's species and habitats, especially those of conservation concern. We strive to provide easy access to our information in order for users to save time and money, speed environmental reviews, and inform decision making.

CORE VALUES

- We endeavor to be a single statewide source of accurate and up-to-date information on Montana's plants, animals, and aquatic and terrestrial biological communities.
- We actively listen to our data users and work responsively to meet their information and training needs.
- We strive to provide neutral, trusted, timely, and equitable service to all of our information users.
- We make every effort to be transparent to our data users in setting work priorities and providing data products.

SCOPE OF THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

This plan is in effect from July 2015 to June 2020 (i.e., state fiscal years 2016 through 2020). The Scope of Work contained in the biennial contract between the State Library and the University of Montana is revised every two years. That Scope of Work is directed by this Strategic Plan and will reflect its implementation.

STRATEGIC RESULTS	GOALS
1. Adequate funding allows recruitment and retention of staff, expertise, and information services to support users Montana's governor and legislature and federal, state, and nongovernmental partners recognize the importance of providing adequate core and project funding to maintain program staff, expertise, and information services.	1. Secure adequate funding for core botany, ecology, zoology, and information service functions by communicating program needs through the executive planning process and to the Montana legislature. 2. When limited by legislative funding, secure adequate supplemental funding for core functions and information services from federal, state, and nongovernmental partners that are dependent on those functions and services as well as staff expertise. 3. Secure adequate funding for partner sponsored projects in order to fully fund staff positions and meet specific information needs for partners. 4. Empower partners to articulate the value of MTNHP information and data delivery services to help secure adequate funding.
2. Information is current and accurate Users of information and services have access to up-to-date and accurate information on plants, animals, and biological communities from a single trusted source.	1. Maintain up-to-date observation, structured survey, and species occurrence databases for all Species of Concern. 2. Review occurrence data on a continual basis for all Species of Concern through a combination of automated filters and manual review. 3. Maintain up-to-date information in the Montana Field Guide for the distribution, general biology and ecology, and conservation status for all species and ecological systems. 4. Review and update conservation status ranks and documentation of underlying scoring for all species, prioritizing those classified as Species of Concern or Status Under Review. 5. Complete/maintain recent wetland and riparian mapping for the entire state. 6. Update statewide land cover, land use, and habitat disturbance mapping. 7. Collect, maintain, and disseminate aquatic information.
3. Comprehensive information is available for all Montana taxa and habitats Users have access to the most current species lists, status ranks, and biology and management information to make informed decisions.	1. Obtain information for currently under-represented taxa. 2. Gather and maintain accurate and current information on Species of Concern and habitats of interest. 3. Enlist "outside" expertise as needed to fill information gaps. 4. Fill-in information gaps in species and habitat accounts on the Montana Field Guide to ensure basic information is available for all species and habitats listed, prioritizing species and habitats of conservation concern. 5. Create and regularly update checklists for all Montana taxa and habitats. 6. Crosswalk Montana and national classification systems as appropriate.
4. Patrons use data, tools, and staff expertise to make informed decisions Easy-to use tools, reliable and accurate data, and ready staff access supports our user community to make informed decisions.	1. Collaborate with partners on trainings that help users understand our data, how to access what they need, and what the appropriate uses of the information are. 2. Monitor how staff expertise, data, and web applications are used by partners in order to evaluate and improve services. 3. Develop new website and other information tools using new and existing technologies. 4. Partner with the larger Montana State Digital Library to leverage staff expertise and web tools to support users.
5. All partner agencies and users are aware of MTNHP information resources and services and are trained in their appropriate use Information and services are most useful when users are aware of what information we have and how to appropriately use it. The program needs to be proactive in reaching out to potential information users.	1. Prioritize outreach to partnering state and federal agencies. 2. Monitor how website information is used and, where appropriate, add clarification about the intended use or completeness of the data. 3. Train users on new web applications and information sources. 4. Develop and record training webinars appropriate to various levels of data access that can viewed on our website. 5. Evaluate, and where possible, expand our network of partners. 6. Develop outreach to local level users (e.g., county government, local citizen groups, and citizen scientists).
6. MTNHP adapts to changing user needs, while meeting statutory requirements The success of the program is due in large part to its ability to leverage core funding, adapt to changing user needs, and empower staff to identify new solutions and services.	1. Regularly engage partners and users to solicit advice, identify opportunities, and better understand user challenges, needs, and priorities. 2. Employ staff that maintain currency in their disciplines and exhibit professionalism and responsiveness in their service to users. 3. Maintain and strengthen the partnership between the Montana State Library and the University of Montana. 4. Engage in partner funded project work that enhances our data holdings and staff expertise, with emphasis on species and habitats of concern.