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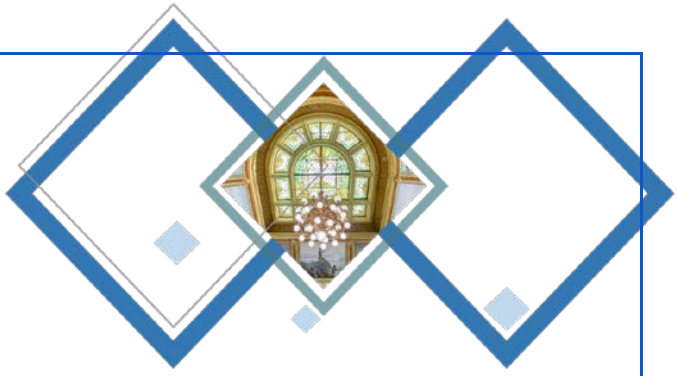
Environmental Quality Council
Joe Kolman, Legislative Environmental Analyst



FUNDING THE NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

STUDY

The 2017-18 Environmental Quality Council is examining the Natural Heritage Program, a program that gathers and disseminates information on plants, animals, and habitat.

HISTORY

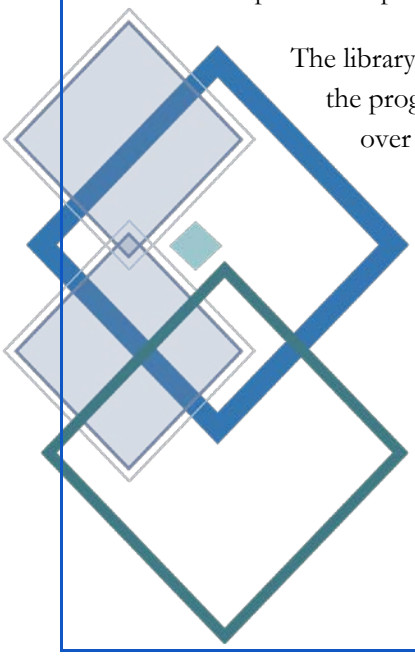
After the creation of state and national environmental policy acts almost a half century ago, legislators and others identified the need to stockpile environmental information to conduct studies. In 1982, a Council on Management organized by Gov. Ted Schwinden found that natural resource agencies needed better coordination and access to growing amounts of data.

Moving to fill that need in 1983, legislation proposed an appropriation of $500,000 a biennium to fund the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) and the Natural Heritage Program (NHP). The bill tapped revenue from the electric energy producer's license tax provided for in 15-51-101, MCA. In the end, the legislature appropriated $500 and created an advisory committee to further study the implementation of NRIS and NHP.[1]

In 1985, acting on recommendations from the advisory committee and the EQC, the Legislature moved the programs to the State Library, citing its mission to disseminate information without bias. Funding came from a variety of sources, including a Resource Indemnity Trust grant, license fees collected by Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, federal funds, and money from the Nature Conservancy.[2]

That 1985 legislation laid the groundwork for ongoing funding. It provided that the library, along with the departments of Natural Resources and Conservation; Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; Environmental Quality; Agriculture, and Transportation; could obtain public and private funding. The state Historical Society and the university system also were included.[3]

The library contracted with the Nature Conservancy, which was one of the early backers of the NHP, to run the program. The Nature Conservancy also provided funding. In 2006, the University of Montana took over the contract.



[1] Chapter No. 650, 1983. The Heritage Program was the first step in creating a natural resources information system, a comprehensive system of natural resource data. Often referred to as NRIS, the Natural Heritage Program is part of that system.
[2] NRIS History, 1982 to 1998.
[3] Legislative history, House Bill No. 860, 1985.

TODAY

A variety of sources dedicated to different purposes fund NRIS and NHP.

Core Funding. Agreements with DFWP, DNRC, DEQ, the Department of Transportation, and the university system as well as general fund dollars appropriated to the library go toward the services outlined in the original legislation for NHP:

> "a program of information acquisition, storage, and retrieval for data relating to the flora, fauna, and biological community types of Montana."[4]

As the EQC heard in September, this is the part of the NHP that state and federal agencies as well as private industry use to complete environmental studies.

Supplemental Core Funding. NHP also seeks and obtains supplemental funding for core services. Federal partners that provide money for this include U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Bonneville Power Administration, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. State-based agencies that supply additional core funding are the University of Montana, the Department of Agriculture, and the state library through its oversight of the Montana land information account.[5] Other contributors to this funding area include NatureServe, which is an umbrella organization for programs like NHP around the world; the Nature Conservancy; and Weyerhaeuser, a timber and land management company.

Project Funding. The NHP takes on specific projects such as conducting field surveys for rare plants or animals, entering invasive species data into a central database, or mapping sage brush communities. While specific projects fit into the overall mission of NHP, they do require specific deliverables and work that is in addition to the core services.

The accompanying chart illustrates the current funding mechanism. Staff from the NHP will provide more information at the January EQC meeting.

[4] 90-15-102, MCA.
[5] The Montana land information account is funded by fees for recording documents filed in at county clerk offices. 7-4-2637, MCA.

Natural Heritage Program Funding Overview

MONTANA Natural Heritage Program

December 2017

Montana State Library Contract Funding

MSL (General Fund): $57,168

Core Funding Agency Support: $281,541

Fish, Wildlife, and Parks ($68,857)

Department of Environmental Quality ($88,307)

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation ($48,813)

Montana University System ($43,942)

Department of Transportation ($31,622)

Supplemental Core Agreements

Federal ($141,000)

University of Montana ($50,000)

State Agencies ($40,000)

Private/NGO ($51,500)

Approximate Total Funding from State and Federal Partners for Botany, Ecology, and Zoology Projects

	FY18	FY13-17 Average
MSL Core	$338,709	$462,680
Supplemental Core	$282,500	$252,971
~Total Projects / Project Avg	$888,791	$978,364
~FY18 Total Budget / FY13-17 Avg Total	$1,510,000	$ 1,694,015

MSL Core

Supplemental Core

Project

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