

# Improving Public Access: Unlocking Public Lands

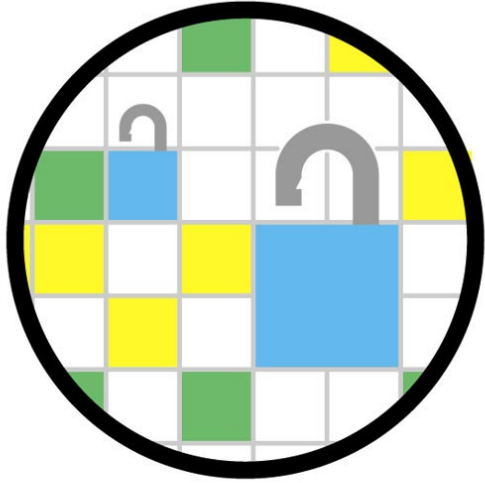
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Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks

# Objective

Determine if there are barriers for the Unlocking Public Lands program to increase public land access.





# **UNLOCKING PUBLIC LANDS**

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**

Created by statute in 2013

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Up to four \$750 Tax Credits  
per landowner per year

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One of six MT public land  
access programs

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Managed by FWP Hunting  
Access Program



# Methodology

- Visited all active projects
- Interviewed staff and stakeholders
- Reviewed documentation
- Compared to other Montana access programs
- Reviewed other state access programs





# Participant Recruitment Challenges



# Each Public Access Program Follows Different Criteria and Restrictions

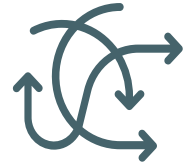
Program	Legally Inaccessible	Contract Terms	Access Time Frame	Lease Required	Annual Compensation Amount/ Contract
Unlocking Public Land	Yes	1 year	≥6 months + 1 day	State: Yes Federal: No	\$750 tax credit, Max 4
Access Public Lands	No	1 year - perpetuity	Flexible	No	Negotiable payment
Block Management (Public Access Corridors Only)	No	1 - 5 years	Sept. 1 - Jan. 1 OR any hunting season	No	Max \$6.80 per hunter up to \$50,000, complimentary license, weed control support, max \$1,000 enrollment payment*
HB 637 Easements	Yes	Perpetuity	Year-round	Yes	Negotiable payment
MT-PLAN (DNRC)	No	3 years - perpetuity	Unknown	Yes	Appraised value
Public Access Land Agreements	No	1 - 10 years	Flexible	Yes	≤\$15,000 & ≤\$1,000 cost reimbursement

\*One time only.

# Not All Programs Improve Public Access

Program	# of Projects (Active 2024)	Public Acres Accessed	Year Created
Unlocking Public Land	4	864	2013
Access Public Lands	20	154,619+	2009
Block Management <i>(Public Access Corridors Only)</i>	3	61,236	1995
HB 637 Easements	0	0	2022
MT-PLAN (DNRC)	0	0	2017
Public Access Land Agreements	69	317,024+	2019

# **Program Simplification Could Improve Public Access**



**Difficult to understand and  
communicate program  
differences**



**Other states have fewer,  
more flexible programs**



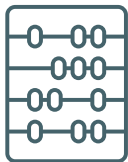
# UPL Structure is Counter-Productive



Compensation is fixed, relatively low, and burdensome to collect



Restrictions limit program's effectiveness



Projects that qualify are not vetted for value

# Recommendation #1

The department review state public access programs to develop and present a comprehensive recommendation to the legislature to consolidate or simplify access programs.

Department Response: Concur



A person wearing camouflage pants and black rubber boots is walking a black and white dog through a field of tall, dry, golden-brown grass. The person is holding a leash, and the dog is walking ahead of them. The background is a blurred landscape with more grass and some distant trees under a clear sky.

# User Challenges

# Limited Information for Users

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- Incomplete map and list of projects on FWP website
- UPL access location data is limited
- Other (MT and elsewhere) access programs provide more detailed location information













# Recommendation #2

The department improve access to public land access projects by providing additional data to the FWP online map and to datasets for use outside of FWP's website.

Department Response: Concur