



MONTANA BEAVER WORKING GROUP CHARTER

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Photo Credit: Tanner Saul (NWF)

The purpose of this charter is to codify the BWG's identity and mission, outline the BWG's guiding principles, clarify the BWG's governance and operating structure, and strengthen the BWG's internal and external communications.

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Purpose of the Montana Beaver Working Group

The Montana Beaver Working Group (BWG) is a collaborative network of individuals and organizations committed to supporting the role beavers play in Montana's watershed health. As a non-centralized organizational entity, we provide a collaborative forum for Montanans engaged in beaver-related work to communicate and coordinate their efforts focused on beaver restoration, management, policy, research, and education across the state. Our work is grounded in strong relationships, shared learning, careful consideration of nuance, and sustainable socio-ecological practices that help us support long-term ecological and community resilience.

Our mission is to *connect people and share resources to elevate the vital role of beavers in Montana's ecosystems*. We support restoring beavers to their historic range, where appropriate, and recognize the numerous benefits beavers bring to the landscape while simultaneously acknowledging potential conflicts between human interests and beaver behavior. We do not advocate for particular outcomes for particular projects, take positions on controversial topics, or get involved in moral debates, nor are we a centralized organization with a single, fixed agenda.

In support of our mission, we:

- Connect restoration practitioners, state and federal agencies, Tribes, non-profit organizations, and other interested individuals across regions and disciplines.
- Provide a platform for beaver-related information sharing, project collaboration, and the joint creation of statewide resources.
- Create conditions for members to more effectively implement their work.

Members' on-the-ground projects include addressing beaver conflicts, providing resources to manage beavers on the landscape, implementing beaver restoration and ecosystem recovery, and working on policies and research that can benefit beaver restoration and management. Connecting through the BWG enables members to maintain a holistic perspective on beaver-related work in Montana, recognize differences and similarities across regions, develop consistent language and protocols, and encourage management practices which are carefully considered and sustainable.

As a connector and convener, we engage our members by:

- Circulating our bi-monthly newsletter which focuses on relevant beaver-related content, sharing stories, events, resources, and opportunities both in Montana and nationally.
- Coordinating the drafting and implementation of the Montana Beaver Action Plan (Action Plan).
- Hosting two annual meetings open to all our members: a Winter virtual meeting and a Spring in-person meeting. These meetings provide a forum for members to receive updates on working group actions, share information, make collaborative decisions, and update and execute the Action Plan.

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles motivate and direct the BWG's approach to working together and implementing projects:

- *Commitment to Science:* We ground our decisions and practices in the best available science, relying on evidence-based information to guide our work.
- *Recognition of Ecosystem Values:* We value healthy ecosystems and the socio-ecological benefits they provide. While we explicitly recognize the contributions of beavers to ecosystem function, watershed resilience, and climate adaptation, we ground our decisions in a holistic understanding of ecosystem health rather than a single-species focus.
- *Collaboration:* We recognize that working across diverse backgrounds, agendas, and approaches can be challenging, yet remain committed to learning from one another and openly sharing our perspectives. As a group, we come together to engage in difficult conversations and support one another’s efforts. Acknowledging that participants may hold conflicting views, we ensure all voices are heard and considered in group decisions.
- *Inclusivity:* We are committed to creating an inclusive space where everyone—with their diverse experiences, perspectives, and worldviews—is welcome. We actively invite participation from all individuals, groups, and Montana communities with an interest in beaver-related work to meaningfully contribute to BWG discussions, decisions, and actions so long as their behavior and participation remains in accordance with our other guiding principles.
- *Respect:* We are committed to engaging with all individuals in an open and respectful manner regardless of differences in perspective and worldview. We foster a culture where people communicate honestly and listen deeply, treating one another with professionalism and care. We show this same respect to the communities, partners, and landscapes that we work with.
- *Tribal Sovereignty:* We acknowledge Tribal Sovereignty and commit to recognizing how our actions may affect Tribal communities. We follow free, prior, and informed consent ([FPIC](#)) best practices to ensure Tribes are informed and their consent freely given before decisions move forward. We follow ownership, control, access, and possession ([OCAP](#)) principles to guide our use and distribution of Tribal information.

Montana Beaver Action Plan

As the BWG’s foundational document, the Action Plan reflects our members’ current projects and guides future work, providing collective, applied direction for advancing beaver-related work in Montana.

Components: Each version of the Action Plan outlines our overarching goals, strategies to achieve those goals, and the specific actions our members will undertake towards attaining those goals.

- *Goals* are broad statements which provide our work direction by reflecting our long-term objectives.
- *Strategies* specify the approaches we have decided to pursue to achieve our goals.
- *Actions* describe the work our members and partners will seek to complete during the three-year term of the Action Plan to implement our Strategies.

Revision Process: We update the Action Plan every three years through a collaborative and facilitated process which elicits input from all our members.

Membership

Becoming a BWG member offers the opportunity to participate in our collaborative forum, learn from other members, and have an impact on the direction of beaver-related work in Montana. Membership in the BWG is free and voluntary. We welcome all interested individuals to participate so long as they remain committed to our guiding principles.

Member Benefits

BWG Members can:

- Participate in BWG meetings and activities.
- Get direct access to the Montana BWG Newsletter, with communications about upcoming events, new research, and stories from beaver-related work in Montana and beyond.
- Have a voice in the direction and organization of the BWG:
 - Provide input on the 3-year Action Plan.
 - Share and provide content to the newsletter.
 - Provide content and direction for BWG annual meeting topics and presentations.
- Become part of the BWG's larger network, which includes people at both a local and national scale who are interested and engaged in beaver restoration and management, providing support and sharing information across disciplines, regions, and skillsets.

Member Responsibilities

BWG Members are expected to:

- Demonstrate our guiding principles in meetings, group discussions, and actions associated with the BWG and when representing the BWG to other partners and the public.
- Share their experiences, data, and information around beaver restoration and management that could benefit other BWG members.
- Engage in meetings and actions (if volunteered for) to further our mission and goals.
- While there are no membership fees to participate in the BWG, voluntary contributions of time, money, and energy from members are welcome and help support shared activities.

Governance and Operating Structure

The purpose of this section is to formalize the BWG's current structure and processes used to define leadership roles, make decisions, and standardize our communications. This description is neither wholly comprehensive nor static as our leadership, structure, and functioning remain flexible and will inevitably evolve over time.

Decision Making

Recognizing the challenge of reaching consensus among our diverse members and their potentially conflicting views, the BWG strives to make decisions that reflect a science-driven, majority perspective. After considering all relevant voices, participant needs, and member feedback processes, the Leadership Team retains final decision-making authority. Although decisions may not reflect the views of every individual member, we remain committed to collaborative decision-making and conflict resolution.

Structure of Teams and Roles

Leadership Team

The Leadership Team provides strategic guidance and collective leadership to the BWG by steering Action Plan development, facilitating member engagement, planning meetings, representing the group in external forums, and navigating sensitive decisions that shape our direction and evolution.

Members: Leadership Team members are volunteers who are deeply invested in the BWG's body of work. The Leadership Team includes the Coordination Team, Subcommittee Co-Chairs, and other members who typically participate most in BWG meetings. We strive for a balance between representatives of private and public organizations and interests. The Leadership Team is chaired by a member of the Coordination Team.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Guide high-level Action Plan and Charter development and drafting.
- Plan and execute all-BWG annual meetings (i.e., Winter virtual and Spring in-person).
- Seek volunteers and assign roles to members interested in serving on subcommittees.
- Make decisions around controversial or sensitive issues, including when input from the entire BWG or specific members may be needed on such topics.
- Evaluate organizational structure, as needed.
- Reflect the BWG's shared values when making decisions and representing the BWG.
- Support the Coordination Team with BWG administrative functions, including advising Charter amendments and addressing funding gaps.
- Chair's responsibilities:
 - Act as a primary point of contact for questions and inquiries regarding the BWG and the BWG Leadership Team.
 - Maintain regular communication and coordination among Leadership Team members to support effective group functioning.

Coordination Team

The Coordination Team manages the BWG's operations, internal communications, and outreach efforts. The BWG is currently coordinated by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). This coordination structure can be re-evaluated by the Leadership Team as needed.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Organize and participate in meetings (all-member, Leadership Team, and others as needed), including scheduling times, coordinating logistics, and drafting agendas.
- Handle internal communications, including publishing the newsletter and managing the BWG listserv, which includes BWG members and people interested in the BWG's work.
- Manage funding, including sponsorships, meeting expenses/budgets, and contractual costs associated with newsletter and meeting logistics, facilitation, and development.
- Provide updates to the Leadership Team about current available funding and elicit direct asks to the BWG to fill funding gaps as needed.
- Make outreach decisions and represent the BWG during external events and processes when a few members are needed.
- Share resources with Leadership Team and larger BWG and facilitate dialogue between similar state and national efforts.
- Review and amend the Charter in accordance with guidance from the Leadership Team.

Subcommittees

Subcommittees focus on executing specific Goals, Actions, or other activities. They are formed and revised annually ahead of all-BWG meetings to meet needs related to the revision and implementation of individual Action Plan components.

Members: Subcommittees are comprised of member volunteers with an interest in the subcommittee's focus. Each subcommittee is chaired by two member volunteers with relevant expertise and a willingness to take on the responsibilities of subcommittee leadership.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- Actively reach out to BWG members to garner participation, answer questions, engage in discussions, and build agreement around the subcommittee's focus.
- Support Action Plan revision efforts:
 - Provide the BWG Leadership Team with guidance in the development and revision of specific strategies and actions related to their focus.
 - Assist with member feedback processes by leading breakout groups, compiling notes, and reporting out to the larger BWG.
- Co-Chairs' responsibilities:
 - Create timelines, track subcommittee progress, and ensure that activities are accomplished.
 - Determine meeting frequency and dates in consultation with the Leadership Team and subcommittee members.
 - Document meeting minutes and provide consistent written notes and meeting outcomes to BWG Leadership.

Amending the Charter

This charter is a living document that will evolve to meet our group's needs as we continue to grow and develop. The charter will be reviewed and amended every five years by the Coordination Team based on guidance from the Leadership Team. The charter may be amended outside of the five-year schedule in response to any urgent changes and/or at the request of the Leadership Team.

Communications

For inquiries regarding the BWG, please reach out to Shelby Weigand, the current Leadership Team Chair and designated point of contact, at WeigandS@nwf.org.

The Coordination Team is responsible for sharing meeting announcements, summaries, and other relevant information with members via email. Important or urgent announcements are similarly shared with the larger BWG listserv. All other communications are distributed through the BWG newsletter, which is also posted on [our website](#).

To maintain consistent and accurate representation of the BWG, members are expected to abide by the following guidelines when referencing or representing the BWG in external communications or other public-facing activities (e.g., Action Plan-related work, funding proposals, media coverage, events, or with partner organizations):

- Members may serve as BWG representatives only on specific occasions when authorized by the Leadership Team and performing in an official capacity on behalf of the BWG (e.g., tabling events, newspaper articles, interviews, contribution to national beaver working groups, or responding to inquiries from other organizations).
- Members are responsible for not misrepresenting the BWG or leveraging its name, work, or Action Plan in external communications to advance personal or organizational agendas, including by suggesting that we endorse positions or goals we have not formally adopted.
- Members may reference the BWG when applying for funding opportunities only when the opportunity either applies to their direct role within the BWG or advances individual Action Plan components.

The views, opinions, and positions expressed by BWG members are solely those of the individual; they do not represent, nor do they necessarily reflect the position of the BWG, our affiliates, or any of our other members.

Funding

The BWG is primarily funded through a combination of grants, donations, and sponsorships. Our actions operate independently from all funding sources. The BWG only accepts financial support that maintains the group's sole authority over its operations and use of funds, declining support from funders who expect that the group's decisions or priorities will align with those of the funder.