



## Hunters and Anglers Gather for Issues ‘Congress’

Montana, hunters and anglers are at a crucial crossroads, a turning point that demands better coordination of approaches to increasing challenges facing our wildlife legacy and our heritage. Working to bring hunters and anglers into a cohesive voice, Montana Wildlife Federation dedicated an afternoon at its Annual Meeting to identify key issues and exchange ideas for priority approaches with hunters and anglers – member and non-member groups from across Montana.

Modeled after the first wildlife conference in North America organized by President Theodore Roosevelt, local and state wide hunting and fishing clubs came together to share perspectives on high priority issues in the “Returning to Our Roots: Hunters and Anglers Congress”. Following an educational and inspirational introduction by fair chase hunting author and Executive Director of Orion: The Hunters Institute, Jim Posewitz, a brainstorming session resulted in a list of over 30 issues that participants considered to have major importance. In an ensuing exercise, participants broke into two groups to discuss and prioritize the array of identified issues. There was considerable agreement that the top priorities included: 1) threats to habitat by subdivisions, energy developments, etc.; 2) stream access at bridges; 3) landowner-sportsman relations; and 4) the increasing loss of access to public land and wildlife. Time did not permit discussions to identify if, how and when participants wanted to cooperate and collaborate in pursuing common goals associated with these priority issues. In the near future, MWF plans to reach out to participants on a one-to-one basis in a continuing effort to define where we go from here but this first step resulted in considerable interest in working together on a number of issues.

“Groups in Forsyth and Missoula, and all points in between, need to be working together, and to each other, said MWF executive director Craig Sharpe. A Billings area sportsman that helped facilitate the break-out sessions, Mike Whittington said, “Montana is a big state where hunting and fishing is part of our culture and there are common issues whether you live in the eastern prairies or the western forests. We have the largest per capita number of hunters and anglers than any other state. By organizing the state’s hunters and anglers in some form of a network, Whittington said, the groups could play offense rather than being on the defense and move progressive policies.”