



# Montana Loon Society 2020 Newsletter

## The Loon License Plate and Montana's Common Loon

Montana Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) began offering specialty plates in 2001 to raise money for colleges, businesses, advocacy groups and non-profits within the state. (Non-profits can be national, but they have to have their headquarters in Montana and 75 percent of the plate donations collected must be spent in Montana.)

The Montana Loon Society (MLS) has had its own specialty plate since 2010. The cost added to a Montana vehicle registration for a specialty plate is either \$20 or \$25. The Montana Loon Society requests the lower of the two, \$20. The money is collected at the time of the sale of the plate and again at the time of renewal each year. The money generated is then transferred to the non-profit.

The first year MLS began, 35 plates sold for \$700 in donation. It has grown to over 400 plates, which now generates a little over \$8000 a year. For a small non-profit with only 50 paid members scattered all across the state (and a few from other states), that's a big deal. With specialty plate money we have been able to support Montana's Loon Ranger Program, purchase new loon nesting sanctuary buoys, and meet many other important loon management and educational needs.

Competition for plates and the money they generate has always been fierce. Last year, in 2019, the state had 266 different specialty plates that residents could choose from to place on their Montana vehicle. MLS competed with 32 other wildlife and animal needs (like animal shelters) specialty plates. But with our beautiful plate (thanks to Monte Dolack's beautiful painting, "Loons of the Swan Valley") our plate has been holding its own.

But a new situation has arisen.

One of the rules at the time MLS developed its plate was the non-profit had to have 400 transactions on the plate each year (a sale of a new plate or a renewal counted as transaction). The state had the right to cancel a plate if it did not have 400 transactions each year. However, no plate had ever been revoked due to this rule, and specialty plates



*Purchase the Montana Loon Society Sponsored Loon License Plate at your county courthouse. \$20 from the sale of each plate sold goes toward the management of this beautiful bird to make sure its haunting calls will still be heard by your children and grandchildren on lakes in Northwest Montana.*

have grown to a large number. Some do not sell all that many plates.

A new state law (MCA 61-3-474 and 475) was enacted by the 2019 Montana Legislature that specifically stated that any plate that drops below 400 plates is revoked (unless it is within three years of its release date). If the plate is revoked (for falling below 400 transactions) it will not be able to apply for another specialty plate for four years. At that time, the non-profit must again pay an application fee. (In 2010, the application fee was \$4000. It presently costs \$5000 to renew, so who knows what it be in in four more years.)

Further, no grace period exists for falling under 400 plates. (Although, during this first year, so many non-profits were surprised and caught off guard by the new law, a grace period is being developed for this first year.) After that, if the plate sells only 399 plates, it will be revoked and removed from the selection of new plates immediately. At the time of renewal, people who have that plate will be notified that the plate is no longer available, so they will have to pick another plate (which doesn't have to be a specialty plate). A "Forever" specialty plate is permanent, but it only had a one-time donation attached to it at the time of purchase, so it does not count as a sale or renewal any year after the first year. (Continued on Page 6)

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By MLS President, Lynn Kelly

Greetings to all the faithful loon watchers! All of us have had seasons of loss and uncertainty and in those times we have noticed that the sun keeps coming up in the east and still drops down into the west. Winter still melts into spring and the tundra swans and snow geese fill the skies on the Rocky Mountain Front. These natural cycles are very comforting especially in the face of the unknown possibilities in the human world now. Right on time, true to the mystery of the migration cycle-the loons show up and without our bidding (but with the help of our floating signs), take over their territories, build nests, fight off intruders, lay eggs and raise chicks. And boy did they outdo themselves last year by raising an unheard of 75 chicks!!! We didn't believe the reports at first and had to go back and make sure that number was correct. Last year's nesting season was a "perfect storm" of perfect nesting conditions with cooler rainy weather that reduced human presence on the lakes. While we are thrilled to have had this kind of success, as strange as it sounds, we really don't want this to happen every year.

Loons are a "density-dependent" species, meaning that there are only so many territories and there only can be so many loon pairs. In a healthy loon population, about 40% of the birds should be sub-adult singles who are spending about 3 years looking for the right lake and partner. In an area with huge numbers of suitable and available nesting lakes (like Saskatchewan), these singles find their spot and do their thing but in a place like Montana, where good loon lakes are more finite, a large number of singles disrupt the nesting by constantly picking fights with the resident loons, to the point that the numbers of chicks drop. This is how loons regulate their populations. Every species has some method of population control - often involving available prey species like the lynx-snowshoe hare fluctuations. With loons, a major population regulator is available suitable nesting lakes.

And so it is that the Montana Loon Society and the Common Loon Working Group may have entered a new season. In 1980 when Don and Tedra Skaar pioneered loon research by determining the range of this species, loons were at a critical low point. We didn't know that at the time. Looking back, we realize that we were frighteningly close to losing this incredible bird altogether. My research, starting in 1986, determined that human recreational



MLS President Lynn Kelly at September, 2019 MLS Annual Meeting in Bigfork, MT .

activities, especially fishing, were limiting the reproductive success and with the addition of floating signs and education at boat ramps, the number of chicks increased significantly in 3 critical loon drainages. Providentially, we turned our attention to the Thompson Chain of Lakes and discovered that in about 8 years, the number of loon pairs had dropped from about 7 to 2 pairs....due to increasing human activity. After 39 years, with two more masters' theses by Justin Paugh and Chris Hammond and intensive effort by everyone in the Montana loon world, we ended up with 75 chicks in 2019. This means that in about 3 years, somewhere between 7-14 three-year old sub-adults will return to Montana from the west coast and begin their search for a lake and a partner. At that point in time, we might see signs that Montana has reached its upper limit for our loon population.

Does this mean that we are done...that we can all go home? Absolutely not! Notice that in the face of increasing human recreational pressure, the Thompson Chain lost about 5 pairs of loons in about 8 years without management intervention. We must maintain the placement of signs and monitoring of loons. This requires interns hired by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) and the United States Forest Service (USFS). Interns require money. For about 10 years MLS has benefitted greatly by monies generated from the sale of vehicle licenses plates featuring the beautiful "Loons of the Swan Valley" by Monte Dolack. In the face of declining government revenues to MFWP and USFS, we have been able to pick up some of the financial slack to insure that the loon work continues. Unbeknownst to us however, the 2019 Montana Legislature decided that they needed to strictly enforce the part of the law that each non-profit must sell a minimum of 400 plates per year to maintain their plate and earned revenues. MLS has done this in every year but one, BUT one low year is all it takes to lose our beautiful plate with the initial investment of \$4,000 and the essential monies required to maintain the wildlife interns. (*President's Corner Continued on Page 6*)

## 2019 AREA LOON REPORTS

"Area Loon Reports" are written by Common Loon Working Group (CLWG) area coordinators and wildlife biologists (and/or loon rangers) in the U.S. Forest Service, Glacier National Park, MFWP, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), and Blackfeet Tribe. Many individuals representing these agencies and other groups, including MLS, monitor Montana's loons. Chicks counted on Loon Day in July are assumed to have survived to migrate in the fall. The following summaries are greatly condensed versions of longer reports. To obtain full length versions contact Chris Hammond, [chammond@mt.gov](mailto:chammond@mt.gov) 406-752-4582

### **Blackfeet Indian Reservation**

*Anya Tyson, Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center*

In partnership with Glacier National Park's Citizen Science Program, Montana Conservation Corps' Piikani Land Crew monitored 9 loon lakes on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation between June 17 – 21. This dedicated group of young adults and crew leaders detected pairs of loons on Twins and Duck lakes as well as a pair with one chick on Mitten Lake and a pair with two chicks on Babb Beaver Pond. Two chicks each were confirmed on two privately owned ponds near Duck Lake. In addition to the efforts of the Piikani Land Crew, Glacier's citizen scientists monitored Babb Beaver Pond, Lower Two Medicine Lake, and Lower St. Mary Lake opportunistically throughout summer; detecting a sub-adult on Lower St. Mary over July Loon Days. With generous support from the Glacier National Park Conservancy, the Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center looks forward to continuing this important partnership with the MCC Piikani Land Crew in the future. Much remains to be learned about loon breeding activity across the numerous ponds and lakes of this area. Although the Babb Beaver Pond chick was the only chick formally recorded during Summer Loon Days, **seven total chicks were counted on the Blackfeet Reservation over the course of the field season.**

### **Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex**

BMWC loons and nesting activity info is greatly appreciated. (Loon calls count, too!) To report sightings, contact the nearest Forest Service Ranger Station. Nesting info is especially needed for Big Salmon Lake, so please contact the Hungry Horse Ranger Station if you have relevant information, including past observations.

### **Blackfoot/Clearwater (Ovando/Seeley Lake)**

*Loon Ranger Keely Benson*

Thirteen lakes are watched for loons in this combined area. Eight of 9 lakes hatched chicks that survived until July Loon Day, which is a 88.9% survival rate. In the Blackfoot drainage, Upsata Lake hatched 2 chicks. In the Clearwater drainage, Clearwater Lake had no known nest attempt (perhaps new birds to the lake), and Alva nested on the island with signs put out, but no known chicks. Seeley, Hidden and Summit lakes had 2 chicks each, and Rainy had 1 chick. A new development for Rainy is a pair of swans nested and raised two cygnets. Placid also produced 1 chick, but it was hatched after July Loon Day, so it didn't make the official count. The female on Placid was originally banded in 1996, so she is now 28 – 30 years old. So overall it with a successful season with **9 chicks counted on July Loon Day and 1 chick hatched after July Loon Day.**

### **Flathead Basin #2 (DNRC lakes in North Flathead and North Fork)s**

Nine lakes are monitored for loons in this area. The usual 2 chicks were counted on Boyle, and Murray Lake was our surprise which hatched the first known ever chick for that lake. Beaver Lake had very late chicks that were still riding on parent back during the July survey. Bands showed that one of the breeding loons on Beaver came from the Thompson Chain of Lakes. On that day an additional four loons were counted on Beaver. Another surprise, Dollar Lake had a loon adult counted on it for first time. **Seven chicks counted in this area on July Loon Day.**

## 2019 Area Loon Reports Continued...

### Flathead River-Forks

*Rachel Manley, USFS Wildlife Technician*

On the Hungry Horse/Glacier View districts of the Flathead National Forest, loons are monitored on six lakes including Cedar Creek Reservoir, Half Moon, Spoon, Mud, Stanton, and Tepee. An adult loon on Half Moon was found dead on the nest in 2018, and a necropsy of the bird indicated she died from injuries incurred in a battle with another loon (broken humerus, punctured esophagus, lung injury). A new pair formed, but did not nest in 2019. Then, this year another loon was found dead on a nest, this time on the one floating nest platform for the area, Tepee Lake. The bird was fairly decomposed when found, with no obvious puncture wounds, but it is also thought to have been hurt during a territorial dispute, but was then able to return to the nest where it died from its injuries.

The good news, a dedicated (human) family obtained loon information from MLS and with the help of their three children handed out non-lead sinkers and loon brochures to Spoon Lake's many vacation homes throughout the month of July, helping Spoon successfully hatch 2 chicks from a nest not far from a public boat launch. Mud also hatched 2 chicks, and Stanton, in the Great Bear Wilderness, hatched one chick as did Cedar Creek. So after all the this, **the season ended well with 6 chicks.**

### Flathead Indian Reservation

*Whisper Camel-Means, CSKT Wildlife Manager*

Fifteen water bodies in this area are surveyed for loons, but no territories or nests were located. The survey includes mountain lakes, irrigation reservoirs and Flathead Lake. Variations in water levels due to irrigation uses from the reservoirs poses a challenge to nesting loons. In the past, nesting attempts have failed due to water level fluctuation. The Flathead Reservation and Flathead Lake are important staging areas for migrating loons with loons regularly seen in spring and fall.

### Glacier National Park

*Anya Tyson, Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center*

From May - September, nearly 100 volunteers and NPS staff monitored loon activity at 48 lakes scattered across Glacier National Park's one million

acres. In May, park's citizen science program succeeded in surveying 26 lakes for loon breeding activity despite early-season challenges presented by weather and access. Over Summer Loon Days, 36 volunteers and seven staff surveyed 45 lakes involving excursions ranging from short day trips to high-mileage, multi-day treks. We documented one chick on Hidden Meadow Lake, one on Doverspike Pond, one on Trout Lake, and two on Howe Lake in addition to a total of 42 adult loons and 2 sub-adults. Two additional lakes remained inaccessible due to trail closures while another lake, Middle Quartz, went without a survey due to an unforeseen logistical obstacle. Later in the season, we confirmed that the elusive loons at this unsurveyed site, Middle Quartz Lake, did indeed produce two chicks! Unfortunately, we did not succeed in confirming a few other credible chick sightings on three other lakes in the Park. **In total, 7 chicks were documented in Glacier National Park in 2019.**

### Kalispell West

*Jacob King, MT FWP Intern*

Kalispell West and the Thompson Chain of Lakes had a 100% nest success rate, producing 17 chicks. This doesn't count 2 chicks that were hatched after the July Loon Day. This high success rate involved lakes with and without floating buoys. Undoubtedly, this occurred because cold, wet and rainy weather prevailed throughout the nesting season which prevented moderate to high levels of human recreation. The rain also did not cause flooding of nests. A 12 year-old abandoned nest platform was found on the shoreline of Horseshoe Lake. No chicks were observed on Island Lake. **Official loon day chick count for this area, 17 chicks.**

### Ksanka District (Eureka, Fortine & Murphy Lake Areas) *Kelsey Preslar*

Ten breeding lakes are regularly monitored in this area with an additional 22 lakes surveyed on the May and July Loon Days. This year, 9 of the breeding lakes had pairs. Dickey Lake was an early nester, hatching on May 19 while Murphy Lake hatched towards the end of July. Martin Lake hasn't had a pair for two years. It is possible that the fish population is low and restocking is needed. In the end, 6 pairs hatched **9 chicks which is our July Loon Day total.**

*2019 Area Loon Reports Continued...*

**Libby Ranger District**

*Ed Morgon, USFS Wildlife Biologist*

Rainbow, Howard, Lower Geiger, and Loon lakes were all checked for loon during summer surveys. A pair of loons were still present on Rainbow Lake in mid-August. No loons were observed on Howard, Loon, or Lower Geiger lakes. The caretakers for Double N and Kessler lakes both reported loon activity. Kessler Lake had a pair occupying the lake in the spring, but no chicks hatched. They had departed the lake by early June. Double N had a single pair that hatched two chicks, and according to the caretaker, were quite large, but both chicks were taken by eagles sometime mid and late June. So, 2 chicks hatched this season in this area, but none survived.

**Swan Geographic Area**

*By Sage Staven/ Mark Ruby*

The Swan Lake Geographic area had 5 nesting pairs in 2019 of which 4 pairs produced chicks. No chick mortality was documented. Pierce Lake, Loon Lake (Kraft Creek), Holland Lake and Loon Lake (Ferndale) all successfully nested and produced chicks. Each of these nests produced 2 chicks, with the exception of Holland Lake which only produced 1 documented chick. While the nesting pair was the earliest nest documented in the season, the pair abandoned the nest about mid-June. The cause is unknown.

Based on 20 years of records, Holland Lake is new successful nesting territory in the Swan Valley. The pair nested in a shallow bay on the north shore of the lake less than 20 yards from the Holland Falls trail. Despite the busy hiker activity on this trail through the nesting season, the birds successfully nested. Nesting Lakes have increased by 6 over the past 10 years. In 2009, Pierce Lake was the only successful nesting territory. In addition to the nesting lakes documented in 2019, Crystal Lake has also had successful nesting birds.

In addition to loon monitoring, staff at the Swan Lake Ranger District visited with members of the public boat ramps throughout the loon nesting season. Approximately 100 members of the public were engaged about loon conservation and how to coexist on the water around nesting loons. **Overall, 7 chicks survived through the July loon day survey.**

**Tally Lake/Stillwater Area**

*Heather Welch, USFS Wildlife Technician*

*And Laura Strong, Coordinator*

A total of 16 lakes were monitored on the Tally Lake Ranger District and Stillwater State Forest areas in 2019. We identified eight nesting pairs. Of these pairs 3 were unsuccessful with no known chicks hatched at Dog Lake, Lower Stillwater, and Spencer. 8 chicks are known to have hatched with 4 surviving until July Loon Day. The 4 chicks lost were at Blanchard, Lost Coon, and Skyles. Our 4 successful chicks were at Blanchard, Bootjack, Upper Stillwater. This year we saw a second pair in the middle of Upper Stillwater but did not see any evidence of them nesting. Pairs were not observed at Tally Lake or Hanson-Doyle Lakes – only individuals foraging were seen at these lakes. Lower Stillwater attempted nesting twice and failed both times likely due to disturbance from either boaters or the resident eagle pair. We observed them flushing the nest when eagles were near as well as when boaters came too close. Due to the wakes caused by boats as they go by the nesting island, this pair would likely benefit from repairing and revegetating the nesting platform. **A total of 4 chicks in this area survived until July Loon Day.**

**Total 2019 Montana Loon Chicks**

**75 chicks are reported in this newsletter, which were counted during the 2019 July Loon Day Count, including 7 chicks in Glacier National Park. Here's an interesting look back at the number of chicks reported in the newsletter.**

**2018—50 chicks**

**2017—55 chicks**

**2016—53 chicks**

**Thanks to our loon rangers and volunteers our loon numbers continue to hold steady.**

**Want to be a Loon Volunteer?**

Contact the area coordinator in your location of interest. (Contact info on page 11)

If you don't have a specific lake you love, contact the Common Loon Working Group Co-chairs:

Laura Strong: (406) 758-3501

[laurastrong@fs.fed.us](mailto:laurastrong@fs.fed.us)

Chris Hammond: (406) 751-4582

[chammond@mt.gov](mailto:chammond@mt.gov)



**(MLS License Plate and Montana's Loons: continued from Page 1)**

The collection time for the 400 plate sales runs from December 31 of one year until December 31 of the next, with the "snapshot" of sales taken on January 3 of one year until January 3 of the next year, beginning with January 3, 2020. If the plate does not have 400 transactions within that year it will be revoked. MVD will notify the non-profit of the immediate cancelation of the plate, however the non-profit will still receive the money collected for sales up to December 31, so it might look like sales are continuing, but they are not. A final distribution of the money for a revoked plate is to be paid by February 10 of the year it was revoked.

MLS sold over 400 plates in 2015, 2017, 2018, and 2019, but we are not that much over that we feel completely confident with our numbers. In 2016, for example, for some reason we dropped below 400 plates. If that occurs in 2021, our plate will be revoked (After this year, there is no grace period), and MLS will not be able to renew our application for four years and the cost of the application may prohibit us from doing so.

So we need your continued support. If you have purchased a new vehicle, please consider purchasing the Loon Specialty plate. If you have a loon plate, please continue to renew. 2020 will be a crucial year, as some specialty plates have already fallen by the way side. If we survive 2020, we may not face as much competition from other specialty plates in the future.

Montana Loon Society President, Lynn Kelly said, "The Montana Loon Society urges you to buy this plate for your Montana vehicle. Monies raised from this plate are used to make sure that the haunting call of this gorgeous water bird can still be heard by your kids and grandkids as you camp on the lakes in northwest Montana."

Thank you for your help!



To help Montana's loons, please purchase the Montana Loon Society License Plate for your Montana vehicle.

**(President's Corner Continued from Page 2)**

Teachers know that students cannot learn if their basic survival needs are not being met and they feel insecure. Insecurity and possible loss of basic survival needs is the state of mind and body of many as we face the COVID-19 pandemic. So, it's hard to encourage you to continue to financially support Montana's loons in the face of this threat to the human population. But as the loons on your lake return, consider the possibility of talking to your local Montana politicians about modifying the license law to say something like "over a 3-year period, each nonprofit must maintain an average of 400 plates sold" or that the State provide an adequate grace period. Also, what will happen in 2020 where many nonprofits could lose their plates due to the impact of the pandemic? If you have to renew your plates, please get or renew the MLS plate and encourage your home owner groups on your lakes to join you. And of course, any donation to the Montana Loon Society goes directly to maintaining our work on behalf of Montana's loons.

Thank God we live in a place where "sheltering in place" allows us to be outside, relishing the dependable seasonal cycles of Earth. The Governor's "stay at home" order states that we can "engage in outdoor activity, provided the individuals comply with social distancing, such as walking, hiking, running, or biking. Individuals may go to public parks and open outdoor recreation areas, including public lands in Montana provided they remain open to recreation. Montanans are discouraged from outdoor recreation activities that pose enhanced risks of injury or could otherwise stress the ability of local first responders to address the COVID-19 emergency (e.g., back-country skiing in a manner inconsistent with avalanche recommendations or in closed terrain)."

So please be well, be safe, be healthy and spend some good social distancing time out on your favorite loon lake as long as you don't have to risk avalanches to get there .... and THANK YOU!

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**FIND MLS ON FACEBOOK**  
**[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)**

**then search "Montana Loon Society."  
Get announcements, see up-to-date  
photos, post loon stories and photos of  
your own.**

**2019 MLS AWARDS**  
**Partner of the Year: Tim Thier**

2019 MLS Partner of the Year, Tim Thier, in his retirement photo, holds a darted lynx as a part of his 30 year career with MT FWP.



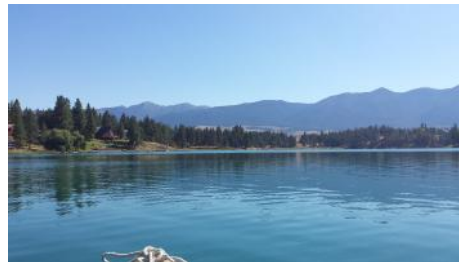
The 2019 MLS Partner of the Year Award goes to recently retired MT FWP Wildlife Biologist, Tim Thier. Chris Hammond, Co-Chair of the Common Loon Working Group, wrote in his nomination letter, "I do not know of a man more deserving of Montana Loon Society's Partner of the Year Award. In all reality, Tim Thier, was deserving of this award for as long as I have known him, nearly 20 years. I feel I have learned more from Tim than I learned in some of my wildlife courses in college. Without Tim, many of Montana's loon territories would likely have succumbed to human disturbance. He never even flinched when you asked for assistance and placed floating loon signs around a platform on Bull Lake for more years than I can remember. His dedication to common loon conservation in the Trego and Eureka areas contributed to the local expansion of breeding territories on public and private lakes, an amazing feat for anyone. If folks only knew of what Tim's schedule consisted of on a daily basis they would question whether he was even human. For these reasons, I believe Tim is long overdue to be recognized as the Partner of the Year." MLS President, Lynn Kelly, said, "Congratulations, Tim, on your retirement, and thank you, for all you have done for loons in Northwestern Montana. We look forward to working with you in your new role as a retiree on our lakes."

**MLS Volunteer of the Year:**  
**Kris Kindberg**

2019 MLS Volunteer of the Year Kris Kindberg, a Montana Loon Society Board Member, helped host a successful 2019 Pint Night in Eureka that raised over \$1000 for the society in just one evening.



The MLS Volunteer of the Year Award was received by Kris Kindberg who for the past 17 years has been watching loons on Eureka Area lakes. She has taken a special interest in monitoring the loon pair and nesting activities on Tetrault Lake in the Tobacco Valley and in 2019 was a midnight observer to the banding of both adults and 1 chick. Kris has been a MLS Board Member for the past 5 years and in 2019 she put a great amount of effort into organizing a successful Pint Night fundraiser at HA Brewery. This also provided a great opportunity for MLS to get information out to the local area and the proceeds help support the Loon Ranger Program that is critical to tracking loon nesting success and population counts of Montana's loons. Thank you, Kris, for your dedicated watch over the Tetrault loons and your contribution to the Montana Loon Society.



*The view from Kris' canoe on Tetrault Lake near Eureka, Montana*

**MLS Educational Loon Trunks Available In Four Places Around the State**

- ◆ Montana Natural History Center  
120 Hickory Street, Missoula, MT 59801  
(406) 327-0405, [info@TheNatureCenter.org](mailto:info@TheNatureCenter.org)
- ◆ Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes  
Natural Resource Department  
301 Main St., Polson, MT 59860  
(406) 883-2888, [germainew@cskt.org](mailto:germainew@cskt.org)
- ◆ Rexford Ranger District  
949 US Highway 93 N.  
Eureka, MT 59917 406-296-7104  
[lmjohnson@fs.fed.us](mailto:lmjohnson@fs.fed.us)

Tally Lake Ranger Station  
650 Wolf Pack Way, Kalispell, MT 59901  
(406) 758-3544 [ajacobs@fs.fed.us](mailto:ajacobs@fs.fed.us)



**Check out a loon trunk near you. Great for classrooms or homeschool!**



## **Montana Common Loon Working Group** **Spring 2020 Update**

By Laura Strong and Chris Hammond,  
CLWG Co-Chairs

For those interested in helping with our May and July surveys, and depending on the current virus concern, please give one of us a call to find out who the area contact is for the lake you're interested in and we'll get you tied in with them. With so many of us stretched so thin these days, we can use your help.

Please keep in mind that given the social distancing and telework mandates that many agencies are currently under, some staff availability may be limited for spring surveys. Any limitations will be dictated by the Governor and/or leadership within agencies.

We recommend that those wishing to volunteer also follow recommendations to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

Dates for the surveys are May 16<sup>th</sup> and July 18<sup>th</sup>. We ask that you try to conduct your survey on or close to these dates as possible; however, if necessary, the surveys can be conducted any time within that week as planned with your area coordinator.

Please look for bands while you're out there and report those as well! The Montana Loon Society is sponsoring the loon banding contest and there is \$100.00 up for grabs for the most bands reported by mid-June and \$100.00 up for grabs in a random drawing for anyone that submits a band observation up until mid-July.

### **DATES TO REMEMBER:**

**Spring Loon Survey date: May 16, 2020**

**Summer Loon Survey date: July 18, 2020**  
...Or as close to those Saturdays as possible.

**Summer CLWG Meeting:**  
**July 28-29.** Location: Logan State Park on the Thompson Chain of Lakes.

### **CONTACT:**

Laura Strong (406) 758-3501  
[laura.strong@usda.gov](mailto:laura.strong@usda.gov)  
Chris Hammond (406) 751-4582  
[chammond@mt.gov](mailto:chammond@mt.gov)



*At their September 2019 Annual Meeting, MLS Board Members and CLWG Co-chairs review the 2019 Breeding season and discuss 2020 needs.*

## **2019 Montana Loon Society Annual Board Meeting**

The 2019 Montana Loon Society Board of Directors meeting was held in the morning of Sunday, September 22 at the Bigfork Ranger Station. Six of nine board members (The Libby area Board Member position is currently vacant) and one guest attended. Along with the regular Secretary and Treasurer's Report, the Board completed a 19-Year General Fund Review. At lunch, CLWG Co-chair, Chris Hammond presented a Power-Point, "30 Years of Loon Management."

## **2019 Montana Loon Society Annual Membership Meeting**

The 2019 MLS Membership Meeting was held in the afternoon of Sunday, September 22 at the Bigfork Ranger Station. Six of nine board members and two regular members along with CLWG Co-Chair Chris Hammond were present. Chris discussed the 2019 Loon Season and their 2020 funding request. Election of Officers included MLS President Lynn Kelly, and Treasurer Don Skaar (both 2 year positions), and Region 2, 4, and 6 Board members including Mark Ruby, and Tony Dawson. Region 6 (Libby area) Board member is stepping down. This Board position will remain vacant until a replacement can be found.

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**REMEMBER**

***The Non-Game Check-off***  
*at the end of each year's tax form supports loons, too, so be sure to donate part of your tax return to the Non-Game Check-off.*





# REWARD



## **FOR OBSERVATIONS OF MONTANA'S BANDED & UNBANDED LOONS!**

*The Montana Loon Society is offering cash prizes for 2019 observations of unique banded loons or confirmed unbanded breeding loons!*

Two \$100 awards will be decided by a random drawing from all individuals who submitted at least one observation. To encourage early observations, one drawing will occur in mid-June and the other in mid-July. Send band observations to Chris Hammond of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (chammond@mt.gov or 406-751-4582). The most useful band reports are the ones that come in to Chris as soon as possible, so send them in as you see them, even if you are not 100% sure of your observation. Qualified observations will be determined and counted solely by Chris. See the reverse side for information about how to observe and report loon bands. Winners will be announced at the summer meeting of the Montana Common Loon Working Group on July 28-29, 2020.

*(Federal and State government employees are not eligible for the cash reward if they observe loons as part of their job.)*

**This contest is generously funded by the Montana Loon Society.**

*Loons are very sensitive. Please enjoy them at a distance.*

## How to Read a Common Loon Band in Montana

To determine population characteristics of common loons and better understand their behavior, we need everyone to look for color band combinations beginning as soon as ice out this year on both breeding and foraging lakes. During the early part of the season, many pairs will tolerate visits by offspring or other loons. This is one of our best chances of seeing and documenting the young birds we banded in previous years return to Montana.

If you spot common loons this spring, summer, or fall, and have a spotting scope handy, take a few minutes to check them for the presence of color leg band combinations. You can usually see a band, if one is present, within 10 minutes, but it could take up to an hour. If you see a band and your scope is not adequate or your time is limited, report this to Chris Hammond immediately. He can possibly provide a high power quality scope or send someone out to that lake to get the band combinations.

When you observe loons, you may catch them raising a leg out of the water to stretch or scratch. This is most common when a loon is loafing or preening.

If the loon is banded, each leg will have a band; sometimes two on each. Some bands have stripes or dots. For the right and left leg, record the color of the bands along with whether any stripe or dot is present on the band, and if so the color of the stripe or dot. Be sure to figure out correctly which color band is closest to the body and which is closest to the foot (not always intuitive when the bird is facing you and moving around).



Tidbits to help with accurate band recording:

- ◆ Band colors: blue, red, white, orange, yellow, green, silver, pink
- ◆ Silver on right leg means banded as an adult.
- ◆ Silver on left leg means banded as juvenile.
- ◆ Blue, green, and red bands have a white base, so etched markings on those bands show as white. Orange, white, and yellow bands have a black base so etched markings on those bands show as black.

Bands are **always** recorded in order as: 1. Left leg closest to body, 2. Left leg closest to foot, 3. Right leg closest to body, 4. Right leg closest to foot. This is what the band data part of the loon observation form looks like:

Left Leg (closest to body) (closest to foot)  
(LL) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Right Leg (closest to body) (closest to foot)  
(RL) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Chris Hammond **ASAP** with all new banded loon sightings, even if you couldn't read the bands -- [chammond@mt.gov](mailto:chammond@mt.gov), 406-751-4582.

For details about observing loons and their bands, see Appendix C of the Montana Loon Plan - <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/>

See Appendix D of the plan for background on banding loons in Montana.

## Web Sites of Interest

- ◆ **Montana Loon Society**  
[www.montanaloons.org](http://www.montanaloons.org)
- ◆ **Montana Loon Society on Facebook**  
[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) (Search for “Montana Loon Society”).
- ◆ **ABC Species Profile by Lynn Kelly**  
<http://www.montanaloons.org/ABC%20loon%20article.pdf>
- ◆ **MT FWP Common Loon Conservation Plan** <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/commonLoon/>
- ◆ **MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks Common Loon Field Guide**  
[http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail\\_ABNBA01030.aspx](http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail_ABNBA01030.aspx)
- ◆ **Glacier Park Citizens Science Loon Count**  
[http://www.nps.gov/glac/naturescience/ccrlc-citizen-science\\_loons.htm](http://www.nps.gov/glac/naturescience/ccrlc-citizen-science_loons.htm)
- ◆ **Loons and Lead Poisoning**  
<http://www.tufts.edu/vet/loons/>
- ◆ **Flathead Watershed Source Book—Loons**  
[http://www.flatheadwatershed.org/docs/wpPDF/Popout\\_Jacobs.pdf](http://www.flatheadwatershed.org/docs/wpPDF/Popout_Jacobs.pdf)
- ◆ **Montana Outdoors: Crazy About Loons**  
<http://fwp.mt.gov/mtoutdoors/HTML/articles/2011/loons.htm>
- ◆ **CBS News Clip:** <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/saving-loons-from-a-shrinking-range/>

## **Officers**

President	Lynn Kelly	406.883.5797
Vice President	Christie Ferruzzi	406.882.4856
Secretary	Donna Love	montanaloonsociety@charter.net
Treasurer	Don Skaar	406.442.3254

## **Board of Directors**

Blackfoot/ Clearwater	George Leighton	406.251.3925
Swan River Valley	Mark Ruby	mnruby@fs.fed.us
Kootenai/ Tobacco/ Stillwater	Kristina Kind- berg	406.889.5077
Thompson/ West Kalispell	Tony Dawson	406.253.6111
Glacier Park	Steve Gniadek	406.892.7406
Libby/Troy	Vacant	

## Mark Your 2020 Calendar

- ◆ May 16—Spring Loon Day Count/Survey
- ◆ July 18—Summer Loon Day Count/Survey
- ◆ July 28-29—CLWG Summer Meeting. Location: Logan State Park on the Thompson Chain of Lakes.
- ◆ September or Early October—MLS Annual Board and Membership Meetings, date and location pending.

## Help Montana's Loons

Sign up for a membership today.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Single Loon (Individual)	\$15.00
Breeding Pair (Family)	\$25.00
Loon Chick (Student)	\$10.00
Territorial Pair (Sustaining)	\$150.00
Raft of Loons (Organization)	\$300.00
Loon Lake (Life Member)	\$800.00

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

*(Membership is Tax-Deductible)*

*Now you can*

***DONATE ONLINE using PayPal***

***From our web site***

***www.montanaloons.org***

*or*

mail this form and membership or donation to:

**Montana Loon Society**

**P.O. Box 2386**

**Missoula, MT 59806**



## **MONTANA LOON SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 2386  
Missoula, MT 59806

406.926.2131  
montanaloonsociety@charter.net  
www.montanaloons.org

To:

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**TO READ THIS NEWSLETTER ONLINE go to  
[www.montanaloons.org](http://www.montanaloons.org) and click on "Newsletters."**

### **The Montana Loon Society's Purpose is to:**

- ◆ Monitor common loons in Montana
- ◆ Increase public knowledge about Montana's loons
- ◆ Protect and enhance critical loon habitat
- ◆ Identify management or research needs and obtain funds for same
- ◆ Facilitate cooperation between agencies, lakeshore owners and the general public to accomplish these goals

