

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

It's common knowledge that groups representing landowners and those representing hunters disagree over some issues, especially public access to private land. One side justly asserts landowners' legal rights to control access to their private property, while the other side justly defends hunters' legal rights to pursue wildlife, which is held in the public trust by the state but is often found on private land.

What's less well known, or at least acknowledged, is how often the landowners and hunters themselves cooperate for the common good. Since the state's inception, landowners have provided wildlife habitat on their property and allowed public access, while hunters have hunted on private property with courtesy and gratitude.

From this tradition of cooperation and respect have grown Montana's valuable hunting culture and heritage as well as wildlife populations that are the envy of most other states.

One of the most successful efforts to help strengthen bonds between hunters and landowners was the establishment in 1993 of the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council (PL/PW). Appointed by the governor, this board of citizens representing the interests of hunters, landowners, and outfitters is charged with, among other goals, increasing public hunting access and helping landowners who allow public access. Out of the PL/PW came Montana's nationally acclaimed Block Management Program, which each year opens up more than 8 million acres of private and isolated public land.

Despite these achievements, conflicts remain between hunters and landowners. Often those disagreements stem from one side not empathizing with or even understanding the other's point of view. The misperceptions weaken relations between hunters and landowners. That, in turn, threatens Montana's hunting heritage, public

access, public support for landowner issues, and the ability of FWP to manage wildlife populations using public hunting on private land.

To improve understanding between hunters and landowners, FWP—at the urging of the PL/PW—has started the Hunting Heritage Stewardship Project. The project aims to build stronger relationships and trust between hunters and landowners, and ultimately increase opportunities for the public to participate in safe, legal, and responsible hunting on private property. At the project's core is an interactive website where hunters and landowners can learn about and better understand the common values of and different perspectives held by hunters and landowners; learn which behaviors are most likely

to build trusting relationships and lead to public access; and discover new ways to foster stronger relations among hunters, ranchers, farmers, and other property owners.

One part of the project now being developed is modeled after FWP's popular Bear Identification website. The new site would allow participants to work their way through a series of challenges while learning about wildlife conservation, land stewardship, and more. Future issues of *Montana Outdoors* will monitor the project's progress.

One of the many things Montana landowners and hunters agree on is that they are fortunate to live in a state with a strong hunting heritage and tradition of wildlife stewardship. That's a large part of what makes Montana, well, Montana. FWP is doing all we can to strengthen the ties that bind this department, hunters, and landowners so we can keep it that way.

—JOE MAURIER, *Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*



DONALD M. JONES

## NATURAL WONDERS

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER GROSSHAUSER

**Q.** *I'm confused about all the different types of hunting dogs out there.*

**A.** There are two main categories of hunting dogs. Retrievers (mainly Labradors, Chesapeakes, and goldens) are big, strong dogs with thick, oily coats that withstand cold water. They are trained to sit until a duck or pheasant has been shot and then retrieve the bird. Pointers (mainly English setters, German wirehairs, English pointers, and Brittanies) are taught to run back and forth through a field and aim their muzzle at a hiding bird. The hunter walks up and signals the dog to flush the prey into the air for a shot. Some pointers also retrieve, but that is not their specialty. A third, smaller category is the flushers, which are trained to move through thick cover and force hiding birds into flying and then retrieve the kill. English springer spaniels are the most common breed in this category. Labradors and goldens also work well as flushers.

