



MEMO

To: State Library Commission
From: Bryce Maxell, Program Coordinator - Montana Natural Heritage Program
Date: January 30, 2023
Subject: Improving How Efficiently and Effectively MTNHP Information is Accessed and Used

The Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) is Montana's source for reliable and objective information on Montana's habitats and native and non-native species. MTNHP staff centralizes this information and makes it available to natural resource managers in public agencies, the private sector, the education sector, and the general public via popular websites including the [Montana Field Guide](#), [Map Viewer](#), and [Species Snapshot](#). In particular, MTNHP staff bring all relevant habitat, native and non-native species, survey, and land management information together in a standardized [Environmental Summary Report](#) that is compatible for use in all federal, state, local, and tribal environmental review, permitting, and planning processes. These Environmental Summary Reports can be generated for a wide variety of jurisdictions and custom areas of interest across Montana in a matter of minutes. They have become a document of record that is widely trusted by all users to save time and money, speed environmental reviews, and inform decision making. The extent of the confidence that State, federal, and private partners place in the MTNHP is exemplified by the fact that they contributed an additional \$228,002 in FY23 to the \$484,642 in state funding provided to accomplish the statutory mission of the program.

The MTNHP is now working toward providing training videos, brochures, and digital applications specific to individual patrons to allow them to use MTNHP information more efficiently and effectively in their specific workflows and processes. One example of this is the MTNHP's [G1-G2 Species Location Tool for Supporting Timber Sourcing](#). This ArcGIS Online tool is aimed at supporting timber mills across Montana with efficiently meeting Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) certification requirements which require that timber sourcing does not impact species that have global conservation status ranks of G1 (critically imperiled) or G2 (imperiled) as assigned by NatureServe. SFI certification indicates that source forests are managed sustainably and thus allows the timber to be sold at higher market prices.

Prior to the development of this tool, timber mills were independently querying out a list of the 178 G1-G2 species that have been documented in Montana from the Montana Field Guide and then sorting through those accounts by hand to determine which species they needed to be concerned about. This was a time consuming and tedious task that was being repeated by individual mills, potentially leading to inconsistent approaches. The G1-G2 Species Location Tool for Timber Sourcing identifies which of these species timber mills need to actually consider, in what context they need to consider them, and the general area that they need to consider them. Of the 184 G1-G2 species in Montana, only 57 of them occur in areas with commercial forests. Of these 57 species, 16 are only likely to be encountered in the process of accessing forest habitat and if existing roads are being used for hauling, they do not need to be considered. Of the remaining 41 species, 25 are aquatic or streamside species that should be protected when operators follow streamside management zone (SMZ) restrictions as required by SFI and Montana forest best management practices. Of the remaining 16 species that occupy terrestrial portions of forest habitats, 12 are known from only one to four locations so only need to be considered locally. Only 4 G1-G2 species occur in forest habitats with broader distributions; three snails and a native thistle. If the G1-G2 Species Location Tool for Timber Sourcing shows that a timber source area overlaps with the general location of G1-G2 species, the mill can request an Environmental Summary Report to identify locations of species and the specific habitats that they are known to use to work with the source provider to mitigate impacts. This tool is being further developed in 2023 to crosswalk with species accounts and best management practices to make it even easier for timber sourcing to meet SFI certification requirements.