

## Montana Legislature 2015

### Finding Your Wings. . .And Voice

By Rita Harding

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Reflecting on the intensity of the current Montana legislative session and anticipating even more heated federal campaigns in the future, it is easy for us to complain, tire or just plain give up. Frustration builds as our world gets more and more complicated, alienated and even violent. We question why people cannot look toward common ground, compromise, and positive solutions rather than entrenching themselves deeper and deeper in win-lose situations and all-or-nothing divides.

There are no easy solutions or quick fixes but we must all remain committed to making our voices heard. That does not mean having to debate, resorting to name calling or spreading unsubstantiated information. It means thinking about what really is important to our self, our family and our world. It means learning more about issues, finding ways to objectively support our positions and most importantly making our voices heard in strong respectful manner.

How do we make our voices heard? There is a whole range of opportunities that can fit every passion, skill, interest and comfort level. Here are some ideas:

- Sharing concerns at YVAS and other conservation group meetings - You will very likely find others who are concerned about the same issues and want to work together for solutions.
- Participating in YVAS Study Group - If there are topics you want to learn more about so you have the most current accurate information, suggest topics and come to the meetings.
- Talking and educating family and friends about important issues - They always say the best place to start is at home and sharing accurate information or correcting false statements is a great place to start.
- Talking to your representatives at local, state, and federal level – Push them to “do the right thing” and be sure to thank them when they do – Every voice makes a difference.
  - Montana Legislature  
[http://laws.leg.mt.gov/legprd/law0203w\\$.startup?P\\_SESS=20151](http://laws.leg.mt.gov/legprd/law0203w$.startup?P_SESS=20151) makes communication easy. Our Congressional representatives all have their own web pages too and you can request they respond to your concern. And of course, any personal interactions are very influential too.
- Attending BLM Resource Advisory Committee meetings, Resource Management Plan comment sessions, and other government meetings – These meetings are supported with your taxpayer dollars so attend to hear what is being discussed and to share your concerns in the public comment period.

- Send a message\* to legislators or committees:  
<http://leg.mt.gov/css/Sessions/64th/legwebmessage.asp> and fill in the boxes:  
 Using the **Legislator** bullet and “drop down menu” - select a legislator and input your message; repeat the process and send to numerous legislators!  
 Using the **Committees** Bullet and “drop down menu”, select a Committee (e.g. House/Senate Natural Resources, Fish and Game) and input your message; repeat the process and send to numerous Committees!
- Attend public rallies like the recent public lands rally in Helena - The capitol rotunda was filled with energy and passion for keeping public lands as “American” lands - It made a difference!
- Writing letters to editor in local newspapers - Politician staffs really do read these to keep a pulse on what the public is saying so be sure you are heard.
- Posting on Facebook and other internet venues – Let the world know your concerns and issues – many people with busy schedules just don’t have a clue what is happening and will appreciate your pointing it out.
- Writing an article for YVAS Flyer – We all want to learn more so if you have knowledge in special areas, please consider sharing it.
- Running for public office – It is a hard job but you will have lots of support!!!

Remember you do not always have to be limited to one topic nor does it always have to be conservation. If you have opinions on sage grouse, public lands, schools and yoga pants, express them all. Keeping expressing them to different venues and with different scenarios so critical topics are not pushed aside, traded, or forgotten.

Birds have wings and use them to fly to environments that allow them to survive and flourish in the different seasons. We have voices and can use them to influence and craft the world around us. Migration is not fast or easy for birds. Changing our world is not fast or easy either. But both are critical to survival. We encourage all of you to find your voices no matter how small, large or diverse. . .and use them!!!