

# THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE results

## MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS UTILIZE THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE TO COMBAT WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS (MFWP)** was established 105 years ago to serve the people of Montana through conserving the state's fish, wildlife, recreational, and cultural resources. The organization accomplishes its mission through the collective efforts of nearly 1,000 employees including seasonal laborers, technicians, biologists, wardens, park managers, accountants, attorneys, managers, and administrators among others. Like many agencies in Montana State Government, a large number of MFWP employees are at or near retirement eligibility. Of the almost 600 full-time employees in the Department, more than 100 will have either met the criteria for full retirement in the next five years, or be eligible for early retirement. Attracting, retaining, training, and managing a highly qualified and motivated workforce is essential to the Department's ability to accomplish its goals and objectives. To help in this effort MFWP turned to *The Leadership Challenge*. MFWP created the Leadership and Management Development Program in 2003 to provide ongoing career development for its employees. Modeled after the principles of *The Leadership Challenge*, the program was designed to recruit and develop the next generation of leaders and managers within the agency. Marc Scow, who leads organizational development initiatives for MFWP, said the decision to use *The Leadership Challenge* as the foundation for the program was an easy one. "I probably have about 50 leadership books on my shelves, but *The Leadership Challenge* really stands out as the best book, and I knew it was the right choice for modeling our leadership development program," he explained.

The Leadership and Management Development Program encourages applicants from the entire organization and selects no more than 30 employees for each class. The program consists of three-day sessions held quarterly throughout the year. A key component to the program is *The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)*, the best-selling 360-degree leadership assessment tool developed by *The Leadership Challenge* co-authors Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner. "The LPI is a terrific means for developing

awareness and a baseline of each participant's leadership practices," says Pam Boggs, who works in the MFWP Human Resource Bureau and serves as the program leader. "Not only does it provide a useful path for improving leadership, but it also demonstrates the tremendous progress of each and every participant by the end of the program." During the first three-day session of the Leadership and Management Development Program, *The Leadership Challenge* is introduced with an orientation to the LPI. In between sessions, the participants take the LPI self-assessment and assign their observers. In the second session, the participants receive their LPI Feedback Reports and review the *LPI Participant Workbook* to interpret the results.

"The open-ended comments that can accompany LPI feedback allow us to create customized questions specific to relevant MFWP issues and core competencies," said Boggs. "The participants gain valuable 360-degree feedback encouraging increased dialogue between our staff, resulting in relationships that are actively building."

The inter-session work involves completing a personalized development plan to build on strengths and address development opportunities identified during the LPI process. During the third session, the participants share their progress with their development plans and work together in small groups to review their plans to gain ideas from each other on various approaches to development.

By the fourth session, the participants have implemented changes and report back on their progress. This final session includes a leadership panel of current and retired managers that share their leadership and management experiences. Even without a prepared script, these shared experiences reinforce The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® from *The Leadership Challenge* and emphasizes the real life application of these practices.

Thus far, MFWP has completed four programs and graduated 100 employees representing a mix

of regional and divisional staff ranging from entry-level to current managers looking to advance in the organization. The fifth program is underway and a new program is scheduled to begin each spring into the foreseeable future. Scow and Boggs have tracked promotions in the agency and report that they seen a high percentage of employees applying for positions that they would not have otherwise applied for and a greater percentage of program graduates obtaining those positions.

"The Leadership and Management Development Program has broken down the 'us and them' attitude," said Scow. "Like many organizations that employ a large numbers or people with many different roles and responsibilities, there was a silo mentality. Employees didn't have the chance to build relationships within the organization. The leadership training program has really helped to change that, bringing the entire organization closer together."