Montana University System

REQUEST TO PLAN FORM – ACADEMIC, ADMINISTRATIVE OR RESEARCH UNIT

ITEM 224-1002-R0526 **Meeting Date: May 2026**

Item Name: Request to Plan the James C. Kennedy Waterfowl and Wetlands Center

Center/Institute/Unit Title: **James C. Kennedy Waterfowl and Wetlands Center**

Campus: **University of Montana, Missoula** Expected Final Submission Date: **July 2026**

Contact Name/Info: **Libby Metcalf, Dean, WA Franke College of Forestry and Conservation**

This form is meant to increase communication, collaboration, and problem-solving opportunities throughout the MUS in the center/institute development process. The completed form should exceed 2-3 pages. For more information regarding the center/institute approval process, please visit http://mus.edu/che/arsa/academicproposals.asp.

1) **Provide a brief description of the new center/institute (unit).**

The core mission of the James C. Kennedy Waterfowl and Wetlands Center (WWC) is to rapidly identify and mitigate limiting factors to waterfowl population growth, providing managers with science-backed strategies needed to secure the future of North America's migratory waterfowl. To accomplish this mission, the WWC will enhance scientific support of waterfowl and wetland management across North America at a time when permanent wetlands are declining. More specifically, the Center will integrate next-generation computational modeling to analyze and diagnose the continental-scale drivers of waterfowl population and habitat change. In turn, the Center will inform adaptive management strategies that improve predictions of waterfowl population change based on real-time habitat conditions. The Center will also seek to improve communication and collaboration between the agencies and organizations responsible for managing wetland habitat and waterfowl populations. In accomplishing this work, the Center will deepen existing partnerships with Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and state fish and wildlife agencies, thereby substantially elevating Montana's role in North American waterfowl and wetland conservation.

2) **Describe the need for the center/institute. Specifically, how the center/institute meets current student, state, and industry research or community engagement needs. (Please cite sources in an addendum to this document).**

North American waterfowl conservation is at a critical juncture. Pervasive wetland drying—driven by drought and cultivation—is fundamentally changing the distribution and abundance of waterfowl populations, posing a direct threat to our hunting heritage. Current management systems, constrained by outdated monitoring systems, are struggling to keep pace with the velocity of habitat transformations, highlighting an urgent, unmet need for innovation that leverages advanced science and technology to create a unified, dynamic approach. For over three decades, waterfowl managers have recognized the vision of a unified operational force capable of dynamically linking changing waterfowl populations with rapidly diminishing habitat resources, yet this vision remains unrealized due to the current system's reliance on stale data, which is updated only once every ten years, and the historic disconnect between population and habitat models.

The WWC is poised to meet this critical need by uniting unparalleled expertise with groundbreaking technology, moving waterfowl conservation from a reactive to a predictive discipline. The WWC brings together Dr. Thomas

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Riecke's generational talent in population modeling with Dr. Patrick Donnelly's new Wetland Evaluation Tool to provide high-frequency, remotely-sensed monitoring of wetland hydrology, reporting changes every 16 days, thereby filling a crucial knowledge gap. The WWC will integrate the work of Dr. David Naugle's lab, professor and science advisor for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Working Lands for Wildlife, incorporating the Rangeland Analysis Platform (RAP) to provide fine-scale spatial and temporal data on upland land cover and food resources for waterfowl.

Together, the WWC team is uniquely positioned to analyze the combined impact of aquatic and terrestrial resources, advancing waterfowl science to inform continent-scale management decisions. This is a generational opportunity to strengthen North American waterfowl and wetlands conservation, and UM is the ideal locus for this investment, as it stands as the only flagship university globally to champion Wildlife Biology as its premier, world-class program.

3) Describe how the center/institute fits with the institutional mission, strategic plan, and the existing MUS and institutional portfolios (refer to the most recent institutional Academic Priorities and Planning Statement).

The WWC is tightly aligned with UM priorities, particularly Priority for Action 2: driving excellence and innovation in teaching, learning, and research, and with the FY26 strategic objective to build partnerships and leverage research and economic development initiatives in response to community, state, and global needs. The WCC will intentionally bring together talent from across UM in remote sensing and predictive modeling and connect that expertise to national partners, including Ducks Unlimited and Delta Waterfowl. These partnerships are not symbolic; they are mission-driven and designed to meet pressing needs in Montana and across North America. Through this work, the WWC will position UM as a leader in advancing the scientific foundation for waterfowl and wetland management.

At the college level, a central FY26 priority is building research resilience. Ongoing federal funding uncertainty and shrinking research opportunities require us to diversify revenue streams while continuing to address critical natural resource challenges. We already know that several core research programs have been affected. In response, we have been deliberate about cultivating partnerships that strengthen and stabilize our areas of excellence. The WWC is a direct outcome of that effort. It allows us to intensify our nationally recognized strength in waterfowl and wetlands science while securing more stable, philanthropic support. This is not only a strategic investment in a signature area of expertise, but also a practical step toward ensuring long-term research vitality and impact.

4) Describe any opportunities for collaboration you have identified or initiated either within the institution or between MUS institutions (i.e. articulation, course-sharing, research collaboration). Include potential contacts and their institutional affiliation.

Opportunities for collaboration abound both within UM and between MUS institutions. Wetlands represent a small fraction of the landscape yet are critically important for supporting biological diversity and maintaining water quality. By extension, wetland habitats are critical for supporting sustainable ecosystems. Within UM, the WWC will help leverage grant dollars to support research in all disciplinary areas encompassed within the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation (FCFC). In particular, the WWC will strengthen and expand research and education opportunities within the Wildlife Biology Program. Additionally, direct collaborations will occur with both the Montana Climate Office and the Numerical Terradynamic Simulation Group (NTSG). As or more important, primary collaborations will be with Ducks Unlimited (https://www.ducks.org/) and Delta Waterfowl

(https://deltawaterfowl.org/), the recognized leaders in wetland and waterfowl conservation in North America. UM's Dr. Thomas Riecke, endowed Ringelman Chair in Waterfowl Conservation, has fostered close collaboration with both Delta Waterfowl and Ducks Unlimited. His direct involvement with the Center will strengthen collaborative partnerships with these conservation organizations. The collaboration with Ducks Unlimited will be further enhanced through Dr. Patrick Donnelly, who will be associated with the Center. Dr. Donnelly is a research scientist and wetland ecologist with Ducks Unlimited, based at University of Montana. He recently created the Wetland Evaluation Tool (WET), which is transforming wetland conservation by providing researchers and managers with fine-scale temporal and spatial data on wetland dynamics at a continental scale. The Center is also expected to bolster the long-standing collaboration between UM and the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV; https://iwjv.org/). The IWJV focuses on partner-based conservation across the intermountain West and prioritizes habitat conservation through public-private partnerships. Wetlands are one of IWJV's three focal areas for conservation.

UM has additionally established relationships with Ducks Unlimited's senior leadership in proposing and advancing the WWC. Specifically, Dr. Chad Bishop (Director and Professor, Wildlife Biology Program) have vetted the proposal and received support from DU's Adam Putnam (Chief Executive Officer), Dr. Karen Waldorp (Chief Conservation Officer), and Nick Wiley (Chief Operations Officer). Mr. Putnam formerly served five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives (Florida), Dr. Waldorp formerly served as Deputy Commissioner of Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, and Mr. Wiley formerly served as Director of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The WWC is expected to significantly strengthen UM's partnership with DU, based in Memphis, TN, and its leadership, who are high-profile figures in wildlife and wetland conservation in the southeastern U.S. Creation of the WWC will elevate UM's profile in the southeastern U.S., likely creating downstream benefits for student recruitment and research collaboration within the MUS.

5) Describe any significant new financial resources (staff and/or facilities) needed to launch and sustain the center/institute. How do you anticipate supporting this new center/institute/unit

The WWC will be created through a $5.5 M gift. Half of that gift will be used to create an endowment that will provide a permanent source of operational dollars to support the Center. The other half of the gift will go towards Treasure Montana, providing a space for the new Center within UM's new hub for the environment and conservation. The Center endowment will help facilitate the rapid development of novel, integrated science tools to support waterfowl and wetland conservation. We anticipate the WWC's pioneering work in data integration and advanced modeling will establish it as a primary, revenue-generating resource for federal agencies and major conservation NGOs, attracting substantial extramural grants and contracts that will help to ensure the long-term, self-sustaining financial vitality of the center. This self-sustaining model will benefit millions of waterfowlers and ensure the resilience of migratory waterfowl populations for the future.

Signature/Date
Chief Academic Officer:

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Chief Research Officer:
Chief Executive Officer:
Flagship Provost*:
Flagship President*:
*Not applicable to the Community Colleges.

Montana Board of Regents

ACADEMIC PROPOSAL REQUEST FORM

SUBMISSION MONTH/YEAR

ITEM 224-1002-LII0526

ITEM TITLE Request for authorization to establish and name the James C. Kennedy Waterfowl and Wetlands Center

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Institution: **University of Montana** CIP Code: _____

Program/Center/Institute Title: **James C. Kennedy Waterfowl and Wetlands Center**

Includes (please specify below): Face-to-face Offering: _____ Online Offering: _____ Blended Offering: _____

Options: _____

Proposal Summary [360 words maximum]

What: Creation of a new center focused on enhancing scientific support of waterfowl and wetland management across North America at a time when permanent wetlands are declining. The Center will integrate next-generation computational modeling to analyze and diagnose the continental-scale drivers of waterfowl population and habitat change. The Center will use that information to inform conservation strategies in coordination and collaboration with the federal and state agencies and non-governmental organizations responsible for waterfowl management and conservation in North America.

Why: North American waterfowl conservation is at a critical juncture. Pervasive wetland drying—driven by drought and cultivation—is fundamentally changing the distribution and abundance of waterfowl and waterbird populations, posing a direct threat to both our hunting heritage and our efforts to conserve species. Current management systems, constrained by outdated monitoring systems, are struggling to keep pace with the rapidity of habitat transformations, highlighting an urgent, unmet need for innovation that leverages advanced science and technology to provide timely, coordinated management responses. The Center is poised to meet this critical need by uniting unparalleled expertise with groundbreaking technology, moving waterfowl conservation from a reactive to a predictive discipline. The Center brings together Dr. Thomas Riecke's generational talent in population modeling with Dr. Patrick Donnelly's new Wetland Evaluation Tool to provide high-frequency, remotely-sensed monitoring of wetland hydrology, reporting changes every 16 days, thereby filling a crucial knowledge gap. The Center is uniquely positioned to analyze the combined impact of aquatic and terrestrial resources, advancing waterfowl science to inform continent-scale management decisions.

Resources: The Center will be created through a $5.5 M gift. Half of that gift will be used to create an endowment that will provide a permanent source of operational dollars to support the Center. The other half of the gift will go towards Treasure Montana, providing a space for the new Center within UM's new hub for the environment and conservation. We anticipate the Center's pioneering work in data integration and advanced modeling will establish it as a primary, revenue-generating resource for federal agencies and major conservation NGOs, attracting substantial extramural grants and contracts that will help to ensure the long-term, self-sustaining financial vitality of the center.

As required by policy 1004.1, a public listening session was held on May 13, 2026 in the University of Montana's President's Room Brantly Hall Feedback from the listening sessions is included in attachment #1

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ACADEMIC PROPOSAL REQUEST FORM

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments

Please mark the appropriate type of request and submit with any additional materials, including those listed in parentheses following the type of request. For more information pertaining to the types of requests listed below, how to complete an item request, or additional forms please visit http://mus.edu/che/arsa/academicproposals.asp.

____ A. Level I:

OCHE Notification

____ **1a. Placing a postsecondary educational program into moratorium** (Program Termination and Moratorium Form)

____ **1b. Withdrawing a postsecondary educational program from moratorium**

____ **2. Re-titling, terminating or revising a campus certificate of 29 credits or less**

____ **3. Offering an existing postsecondary educational program via distance or online delivery**

OCHE Approvals

____ **4. Re-titling an existing postsecondary educational program**

____ **5. Terminating an existing postsecondary educational program** (Program Termination and Moratorium Form)

____ **6. Consolidating existing postsecondary educational programs** (Curriculum Proposal Form)

____ **7. Establishing a new minor where there is a major or an option in a major** (Curriculum Proposal Form)

____ **8. Revising a postsecondary educational program** (Curriculum Proposal Form)

____ **9. Establishing a temporary C.A.S. or A.A.S. degree program Approval limited to 2 years**

____ **10. Withdrawing a postsecondary program from moratorium**

____ **11. Establishing a campus certificate of 29 credits or less (Curriculum Proposal Form)**

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X **B. Level II:**

_____ **1. Establishing a new postsecondary educational program** (Curriculum Proposal and Completed Request to Plan Form)

_____ **2. Requesting Permanent authorization for a temporary C.A.S. or A.A.S degree program** (Curriculum Proposal and Completed Request to Plan Form)

_____ **3. Requesting a variation of the 120-credit baccalaureate degrees** *Exception to policy 301.11*

X **4. Forming, eliminating or consolidating an academic, administrative, or research unit** (Curriculum or Center/Institute Proposal and completed Request to Plan, except when eliminating or consolidating)

_____ **5. Re-titling an academic, administrative, or research unit**

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RESEARCH CENTER AND INSTITUTE PROPOSAL FORM

Research Centers and Institutes differ from one another in focus, scope, and staffing, but each contributes in unique ways to the common goals of expanding knowledge, generating new discoveries and/or having a positive impact on society through informing policy and systemic change. Communities of researchers and staff in Research Centers and Institutes provide a stimulating environment that encourages early researchers and challenges experienced researchers. Research Centers and Institutes also contribute to the education and training of the researchers of the future by serving as learning environments for students. Interdisciplinary collaboration is promoted by Research Centers and Institutes both within the Institution and among MUS Institutions. Research Centers and Institutes do not provide didactic coursework, confer academic degrees or academic certificates or require accreditation by external accrediting bodies. Research Centers and Institutes frequently provide a portal for obtaining external funding in response to federal and/or state research priorities. As such, apparent duplication of mission between MUS research centers and institutes is not generally problematic as with academic programs due to the different sources of funding.

1. State the proposed Institute/Center's name and purpose.

The James C. Kennedy Waterfowl and Wetlands Center (WWC) is a proposed research center at the University of Montana dedicated to advancing the science of waterfowl and wetland conservation across North America. Its core purpose is to rapidly identify and mitigate limiting factors to waterfowl population growth, providing managers with science-backed strategies needed to secure the future of North America's migratory waterfowl. The Center will integrate next-generation computational modeling, remote sensing, and data analytics to analyze and diagnose the continental-scale drivers of waterfowl population and habitat change, inform adaptive management strategies, and improve collaboration between agencies and organizations responsible for managing wetland habitat and waterfowl populations.

2. A comprehensive statement of the Institute/Center's mission and its relationship to the University mission.

A. State the Institute/Center's mission.

The mission of the WWC is to rapidly identify and mitigate limiting factors to waterfowl population growth, providing managers with science-backed strategies needed to secure the future of North America's migratory waterfowl. The WWC will enhance scientific support of waterfowl and wetland management across North America at a time when permanent wetlands are declining, integrating next-generation computational modeling to analyze and diagnose continental-scale drivers of waterfowl population and habitat change. This mission directly aligns with UM's Priority for Action 2—driving excellence and innovation in teaching, learning, and research—and with the FY26 strategic objective to build partnerships and leverage research and economic development initiatives in response to community, state, and global needs.

B. Identify the Institute/Center's goals and objectives.

The WWC has four primary goals and objectives: (1) Integrate next-generation computational modeling to analyze and diagnose the continental-scale drivers of waterfowl population and habitat change; (2) Inform adaptive management strategies that improve predictions of waterfowl

population change based on real-time habitat conditions; (3) Improve communication and collaboration between agencies and organizations responsible for managing wetland habitat and waterfowl populations; and (4) Deepen existing partnerships with Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and state fish and wildlife agencies, thereby substantially elevating Montana's role in North American waterfowl and wetland conservation. The Center will move waterfowl conservation from a reactive to a predictive discipline by uniting pioneering population modeling expertise with high-frequency, remotely-sensed wetland monitoring and fine-scale spatial data on upland land cover and food resources.

C. What specific need is being responded to in developing the proposed Institute/Center?

North American waterfowl conservation is at a critical juncture. Pervasive wetland drying—driven by drought and cultivation—is fundamentally changing the distribution and abundance of waterfowl populations, posing a direct threat to our hunting heritage. These changes not only impact waterfowl populations, but all wetland-dependent species. Current management systems, constrained by outdated monitoring systems, are struggling to keep pace with the velocity of habitat transformations, highlighting an urgent, unmet need for innovation that leverages advanced science and technology to create a unified, dynamic approach. For over three decades, waterfowl managers have recognized the vision of a unified operational force capable of dynamically linking changing waterfowl populations with rapidly diminishing habitat resources, yet this vision remains unrealized due to the current system's reliance on stale data, which is updated only once every ten years, and the historic disconnect between population and habitat models. The WWC is poised to meet this critical need by uniting unparalleled expertise with groundbreaking technology, moving waterfowl conservation from a reactive to a predictive discipline. The Center will advance waterfowl science to better inform management decisions from local to continent-wide scales. The Center provides a generational opportunity to strengthen North American waterfowl and wetlands conservation.

D. Describe how the Institute/Center benefits the department, college, or institution.

The WWC will strengthen and expand research and education opportunities within the Wildlife Biology Program and other academic programs and departments within the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation (FCFC). The Center will help leverage grant dollars to support research across all disciplinary areas within the FCFC, while also supporting direct collaborations with the Montana Climate Office and the Numerical Terradynamic Simulation Group (NTSG). The WWC will also build research resilience for the College at a time of ongoing federal funding uncertainty, diversifying revenue streams while continuing to address critical natural resource challenges. The Center's pioneering work in data integration and advanced modeling is expected to establish UM as a primary, revenue-generating resource for federal agencies and major conservation NGOs focused on waterfowl conservation, attracting substantial extramural grants and contracts. Creation of the WWC will also elevate UM's profile nationally, particularly in the southeastern U.S. through its partnership with Ducks Unlimited, likely creating downstream benefits for student recruitment and research collaboration within the MUS.

E. Describe the Institute/Center's relationship to the University mission.

The WWC is tightly aligned with UM priorities, particularly Priority for Action 2: driving excellence and innovation in teaching, learning, and research. The Center also supports the FY26 strategic objective to build partnerships and leverage research and economic development initiatives in response to community, state, and global needs. The WWC will intentionally bring together talent

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from across UM in remote sensing and predictive modeling and connect that expertise to national partners, including Ducks Unlimited and Delta Waterfowl. These partnerships are mission-driven and designed to meet pressing needs in Montana and across North America. UM stands as the only flagship university globally to champion Wildlife Biology as its premier, world-class program, making it the ideal locus for this investment. Through this work, the WWC will position UM as a leader in advancing the scientific foundation for waterfowl and wetland management.

3. Briefly describe the Institute/Center's anticipated activities.

The WWC's primary activities will include: (1) conducting advanced population modeling studies to assess continent-scale drivers of waterfowl population change; (2) developing and applying the Wetland Evaluation Tool (WET) to provide high-frequency, remotely-sensed monitoring of wetland hydrology across the continent, reporting changes every 16 days; (3) integrating the Rangeland Analysis Platform (RAP) to provide fine-scale spatial and temporal data on upland land cover and food resources for waterfowl; (4) building and disseminating integrated models linking waterfowl population dynamics to real-time habitat conditions; (5) collaborating with Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state fish and wildlife agencies, and the Intermountain West Joint Venture to translate science into adaptive management strategies; and (6) training the next generation of waterfowl and wetland scientists through graduate education and mentorship within the Wildlife Biology Program at UM.

A. Identify faculty expertise available for participation in the Institute/Center's activities.

The WWC will draw on exceptional faculty expertise at UM. Dr. Thomas Riecke, the endowed Ringelman Chair in Waterfowl Conservation, brings generational talent in population modeling and has fostered close collaboration with Delta Waterfowl and Ducks Unlimited. Dr. Patrick Donnelly, a research scientist and wetland ecologist with Ducks Unlimited based at UM, recently created the Wetland Evaluation Tool (WET), which is transforming wetland conservation by providing researchers and managers with fine-scale temporal and spatial data on wetland dynamics at a continental scale. Dr. David Naugle, professor and science advisor for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Working Lands for Wildlife, contributes the Rangeland Analysis Platform (RAP) to provide fine-scale spatial and temporal data on upland land cover and food resources for waterfowl. Together, these researchers are uniquely positioned to analyze the combined impact of aquatic and terrestrial resources to advance waterfowl science at a continental scale. In addition to these core faculty, we anticipate various other UM avian and mammal ecologists, herpetologists, and hydrologists to collaborate with the Center. We additionally expect collaboration to occur with UM's newly created Center for Hunting and Conservation because an explicit goal of the WWC is to sustain and enhance waterfowl hunting through science-informed population and habitat management.

B. Which departments on campus will be involved and how will the Institute/Center contribute to the academic programs of the institution?

The WWC will primarily involve the Wildlife Biology Program within the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation (FCFC), which will be strengthened and expanded through the Center's activities. We also expect faculty from other academic units within FCFC to collaborate with the Center. Direct collaborations will also occur with the Montana Climate Office and the Numerical Terradynamic Simulation Group (NTSG) within UM. The Center will contribute to the academic programs of UM by providing graduate students in Wildlife Biology with unique training

opportunities in advanced population modeling, remote sensing, and waterfowl conservation science. By connecting students with national partners such as Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Intermountain West Joint Venture, the WWC will enhance graduate education and career preparation. The Center is also expected to create downstream benefits for student recruitment within the MUS by elevating UM's national profile in waterfowl and wetland science.

4. Identify the organizational structure of the Institute/Center within the institution.

The WWC Center will be housed within the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation at the University of Montana, under the direction of the Wildlife Biology Program. The Center will be led by core faculty including Dr. Thomas Riecke (Ringelman Chair in Waterfowl Conservation), Dr. David Naugle, and will include Dr. Patrick Donnelly (Ducks Unlimited research scientist based at UM) as an affiliated researcher. The Center will be supported through a $5.5 million gift, with half directed to an endowment for sustained operational funding and half contributed to the Treasure Montana campaign, which will create UM's new hub for environment and conservation, providing permanent physical space for the Center.

A. Identify all agencies, organizations and/or institutions that will be involved.

The WWC will involve a broad network of agencies, organizations, and institutions. Primary partners include: Ducks Unlimited (DU), headquartered in Memphis, TN, whose leadership including CEO Adam Putnam, Chief Conservation Officer Dr. Karen Waldorp, and Chief Operations Officer Nick Wiley have vetted and supported this proposal; Delta Waterfowl (https://deltawaterfowl.org/); the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; state fish and wildlife agencies across North America; the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV; https://iwjv.org/), which focuses on partner-based conservation across the intermountain West with wetlands as a focal area; the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Working Lands for Wildlife program; the Montana Climate Office; and the Numerical Terradynamic Simulation Group (NTSG) at UM.

B. Identify advisory council information.

In developing and advancing this proposal, UM engaged the leading waterfowl conservation organizations in the United States. We anticipate the advisory council will include leadership representatives from Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, one or more state fish and wildlife agencies, the Intermountain West Joint Venture, and one or more private landowners who manage privately-held wetland habitat. The formal advisory council structure will be finalized upon establishment of the Center.

5. Identify first year and continuing finances necessary to support the Center/Institute, including the sources of funding.

The WWC Conservation will be created through a $5.5 million philanthropic gift. Half of the gift ($2.75 million) will be used to create an endowment that will provide a permanent source of operational dollars to support the Center on an ongoing basis. The other half ($2.75 million) will be directed to Treasure Montana, providing physical space for the new Center within UM's new hub for environment and conservation. The Center endowment will facilitate the rapid development of novel, integrated science tools to support waterfowl and wetland conservation. Looking ahead, the WWC anticipates that its pioneering work in data integration and advanced modeling will establish it as a primary, revenue-

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generating resource for federal agencies and major conservation NGOs, attracting substantial extramural grants and contracts to ensure long-term financial vitality.

A. Will additional faculty and other resources be required to implement this Center/Institute? If yes, please describe the need and indicate the plan for meeting this need.

Yes. Creation of the Center is dependent on a $5.5 million gift as referenced above. The endowment portion of the $5.5 million gift will provide ongoing operational dollars to support the Center's director and staff, research activities, and collaborations. The Center's core faculty—Dr. Thomas Riecke (Ringelman Chair in Waterfowl Conservation, already in place), Dr. David Naugle (existing UM faculty), and Dr. Patrick Donnelly (Ducks Unlimited research scientist based at UM)—are already present at UM, meaning no new faculty hires are required for launch. Dr. Riecke's chair position in waterfowl is fully endowed through a separate fund agreement, ensuring long-term leadership support for the WWC even as position turnover occurs. The Center endowment income will primarily support graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, research operations, and Center administration. The plan for meeting resource needs is grounded in the philanthropic gift and supplemented by anticipated extramural grants and contracts from federal agencies and conservation NGOs.

B. Are other, additional resources required to ensure the success of the proposed Center/Institute? If yes, please describe the need and indicate the plan for meeting this need.

Yes. Physical space is required for the Center, and this need is addressed through the $2.75 million contribution to the Treasure Montana campaign which supports UM's new hub for environment and conservation. The new building will provide permanent office and research space for the WWC. Computational infrastructure to support advanced modeling and large-scale remote sensing data analysis will also be needed. Much of this need will be met through UM's existing Hellgate Shared Computing Cluster, and any additional computational infrastructure is expected to be funded through the Center endowment and extramural grants. The self-sustaining model—where the WWC becomes a primary resource for federal agencies and conservation NGOs focused on waterfowl conservation—is designed to ensure that all resource needs are met through a combination of endowment income, grant funding, and contractual partnerships over the long term.

6. Describe other similar Centers/Institutes or research capacities in the state and surrounding region.

The WWC is a unique entity within the Montana University System (MUS) and the surrounding region. No other MUS institution has a comparable center or institute dedicated to waterfowl and wetland conservation science at the continental scale. The Wildlife Biology Program is recognized globally as one of the premier programs at a flagship university, making UM an ideal and natural home for this initiative. While research on wildlife and natural resources occurs at other MUS institutions, the specific combination of population modeling, remote sensing, and waterfowl and wetland science represented by the WWC is not duplicated elsewhere in Montana or the wider intermountain West region.

Historically, eastern and central states and provinces have been the focal point of waterfowl conservation efforts in North America. However, the West is assuming greater importance presently because of its higher stability of wetland habitats and waterfowl populations when compared to other areas that are more highly subject to private landowner decisions and government funding via the Farm Bill. It is therefore a strategic time to stand up this type of center in western North America, and it should benefit Montana given the lack of comparable centers in the intermountain West.

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A. Describe the relationship between the proposed Center/Institute and any similar Centers/Institutes, programs, or research capacities within the Montana University System.

There are no other centers or institutes within the MUS that duplicate the proposed mission or research focus of the WCC. The WWC's unique combination of continental-scale population modeling, real-time remote sensing of wetland hydrology, and upland land cover analysis is not replicated at any other MUS institution. The WWC will complement, rather than compete with, existing natural resource research programs at Montana State University and other MUS institutions by occupying a highly specialized niche in waterfowl and wetland conservation science. Collaboration rather than duplication is expected, as the WWC's data and analytical tools may support research across multiple MUS institutions.

B. In cases of substantial duplication, explain the rationale for the proposed Center/Institute.

Not applicable. There is no substantial duplication of the WWC's proposed focus within the Montana University System or the surrounding region. The WWC is the only proposed center in the MUS or the broader intermountain West specifically dedicated to integrating continental-scale waterfowl population modeling with real-time, remotely-sensed wetland and upland habitat monitoring. Its specialized mission, expert faculty team, and philanthropic foundation establish it as a unique and necessary addition to the MUS research portfolio. As noted above, the WWC provides an opportunity to increase relevance and capacity of waterfowl and wetland science in the western United States.

7. Assessment: How will the success of the center/institute be measured?

The success of the WWC will be measured through multiple indicators: (1) Volume and impact of peer-reviewed scientific publications produced by Center researchers; (2) Amount of extramural grant and contract funding secured from federal agencies, state agencies, and conservation NGOs; (3) Number and quality of graduate students trained through the Center; (4) Adoption and use of Center-developed tools (e.g., the Wetland Evaluation Tool) by waterfowl managers and agencies; (5) Depth and breadth of partnerships with Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state agency waterfowl biologists, and the Intermountain West Joint Venture; (6) Measurable improvements in waterfowl population monitoring and management outcomes attributable to Center science; and (7) Annual reporting of these metrics to FCFC leadership, the Advisory Council, and philanthropic partners to ensure accountability and continued progress toward mission goals.

8. State the internal campus review and approval process which has occurred prior to submission to the Commissioner's Office. Indicate, where appropriate, involvement by faculty, students, community members, professional constituencies, etc.

The proposal for the WWC has been developed and vetted through an extensive internal review process at the University of Montana. Dr. Chad Bishop, Director and Professor of the Wildlife Biology Program, has championed the proposal and provided faculty-level review and endorsement. Melinda Booth, Senior Director of Development for the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, has been centrally involved in cultivating the philanthropic partnership and reviewing the proposal. Core faculty of the Wildlife Biology Program, including Dr. Thomas Riecke and Dr. David Naugle, have been directly engaged in shaping the Center's scientific mission and activities. Dr. Patrick Donnelly, Ducks Unlimited research scientist, provided key insights and input into proposal development. An earlier version of this

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proposal has also been reviewed by and received support from senior leadership at Ducks Unlimited—including CEO Adam Putnam, Chief Conservation Officer Dr. Karen Waldorp, and Chief Operations Officer Nick Wiley—representing key professional constituency engagement. The proposal has been advanced through FCFC college-level leadership review and is now being submitted to the Commissioner's Office for formal approval in accordance with MUS policy.