



Hello FWP,

With the fall season upon us, we're coming into what is typically one of our busiest times of the year. But of course, this has not been a typical year, and what we've already experienced in 2020 has been extra busy, extremely challenging and unprecedented.

Visitors have come to our parks and fishing access sites in record numbers, anglers hit the waters like never before, and we expect this increase will continue into general hunting season. All this activity is creating challenges for us, but it has also been an opportunity to help Montanans find a new or renewed passion for the outdoors as an important outlet in these times. Around the state our staff has risen to meet these demands, despite the pressures of the pandemic on us personally.

Right now, even with months of social distancing and mask wearing, case numbers are on the rise around the state. As you know, we've made it a priority to keep staff as safe as possible, no matter where we are. This continues to be an emphasis, as much as ever, for the protection of our communities and fellow co-workers. We are closely adhering to Gov. Bullock's directives – work from home if possible, keep socially distanced, and wear masks when you're at work and around your co-workers. We know this doesn't always make for an easy interaction with customers, but it's important we stay consistent with these safety measures.

While many of us are still working remotely, we are also in the field and at the office to keep operations running smoothly. I have so much appreciation for how we have come together to manage our work and duties during the pandemic amid all our other pressures. Teams and individuals continue to step forward to get the job done from front desks, cubicles, or home and field offices around the state.

As you well know, our work duties and public expectations ebb and flow with the seasons. Now that we are entering general hunting season, we are being called upon to help as our customer service needs increase with CWD sampling, check stations, enforcement patrols, wildlife tagging and more. Thank you for providing this public service while also being as safe as possible.

Additionally, with the fall back-to-school season in full swing (even though not a normal one for sure) we are getting more requests for our staff to deliver programs to organizations and school groups. As you get these requests, you can evaluate how to best answer them with a few guidelines, which are currently being finalized by our COVID Operations Team. Once complete, these guidance documents will be available on fwp.mt.gov/c19.

Also, please be aware that we now have updated guidance from the Department of Administration on how and when you can use different types of COVID leave. This guidance has been shared by HR at some recent meetings, including the September brown bag session, and it is available in a revised set of FAQs found [here](#).

In closing, I'd like to recognize that in very short order, we found new ways to connect to each other, like using Zoom and Teams for daily business and for larger events like regional all-staff meetings, council work and public meetings. We developed a call center and set up internal communications web pages for COVID. It is hard to believe that most of us had never used these tools before March of this

year. We even had employees that had the vision to begin virtual brown bag luncheons and coffee talks, bringing people together around the state in all new ways to share ideas.

Although this year has certainly been an unexpected change in the way we do business, adapting and getting creative allowed us to keep our work moving and to stay in touch with each other. I really appreciate everyone's resiliency and commitment to making that happen.

We'll continue to do our best to improve our internal communications through these online tools and new ones that we find along the way. We are adding resources online at fwp.mt.gov/c19 as needed. If you run into questions about work related to COVID, please refer to this page or ask your regional supervisor or division administrator.

Thank you for all you do to help us serve the public, our resources and each other. Let's stay the course.

-Martha