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UM Develops First Joint Wildlife Biology and Master of Public Administration Degree in the U.S.

MISSOULA – The University of Montana’s Master of Public Administration (MPA) program and Wildlife Biology Program are launching a new joint degree to meet the increasing demand for public sector careers in wildlife biology, public and nonprofit administration. This “4+1” program will allow students to earn both a four-year bachelor’s of science degree in wildlife biology and a two-year master’s in public administration at an accelerated pace of just five years instead of the usual six. The program is the first of its kind, not only in Montana, but in the whole United States.

The collaboration is led by Sara Rinfret, director of the Department of Public Administration and Policy in the School of Law, and Chad Bishop, director of the Wildlife Biology Program. Wildlife Biology is a joint program between the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, the Division of Biological Sciences and the Montana Cooperative Research Unit.

“Our programs are committed to serving workforce demands, and our collaboration will help to strengthen the gap between science, policy and public service,” Rinfret said.

“Additionally, it allows students to complete a B.S. and MPA in five years.”

Rinfret and Bishop first met in early summer 2019 to discuss ways to partner to successfully serve the workforce needs of their students. The result is an innovative program that gives wildlife biology students the advantage of enhancing their field work expertise with the core curriculum of the MPA Program which includes human resource management, policy analysis,

applied research methods, budgeting and finance, and public administration organization theory.

“Employers have consistently indicated a need for students majoring in wildlife biology to have a stronger foundation in public administration and policy,” Bishop said. “Our new joint BS/MPA degree offering squarely addresses this need.”

Students who graduate with a joint Wildlife Biology/MPA degree will be prepared for leadership roles within government agencies and nonprofit organizations. The program is now accepting applications for its first cohort. To be eligible for the program, UM students must be wildlife biology majors of at least junior standing with a 3.5 GPA.

For more information, please visit the Department of Public Administration & Policy website at <https://www.umt.edu/law/mpa/>.