



Quarterly Update | September 2023

Creating A Safer Montana Through Accountability, Rehabilitation, & Empowerment

New logo: Representing One DOC

The Montana Department of Corrections unveiled its new logo in September, one that represents the various types of work the department does to deliver upon its mission of creating a safer Montana through accountability, rehabilitation, and empowerment.

“We assembled an employee committee to collaborate on a logo that represents the many ways the department serves Montanans and individuals under its supervision,” DOC Director Brian Gootkin said. “It wasn’t an easy task because our roles are so varied, but I think the team arrived at a meaningful design in which all of us can recognize the work we do.”

Over the period of about a year, the committee met to discuss logo fundamentals, the meaning behind color and font usage, symbolism of elements, and more. After numerous iterations, the committee determined the logo should include the following elements:

- Silhouette of Montana – illustrates the department’s commitment to the citizens of Big Sky Country.
- Seven-pointed Star – reflects the department’s commitment to public safety. Throughout history, stars have represented protection.
- A compass – relates to the direction and guidance the DOC brings to the people under its supervision as they work toward their successful futures.

To complement the elements of the logo, the team selected the following colors:

- Blue – represents loyalty, strength, and trust.
- Gold – points to the gold stars worn in public safety professions, and the public safety element of corrections.
- Grey – the color generally used to represent the corrections profession.



Committee member Jonadel Ehret said she appreciated the opportunity to represent DOC employees in this effort.

“The team came together from different locations across Montana and if not for this project, wouldn’t have otherwise met. We quickly built a tight-knit group that could discuss pros and cons and still walk away with a smile. It was truly an honor to work with them and build these new friendships,” said Ehret, who works in the Human Resources Bureau at Montana State Prison. “This logo was designed to encompass all of us. We are one DOC, one family, and we stand united to create a safer Montana. I hope this logo is loved as much as we loved designing it.”



DOC employees receive first responder trauma training

In the criminal justice field, employees deal with trauma in their jobs on a daily basis. It's no different for employees of the Montana Department of Corrections. That's why the department invited law enforcement veteran Travis Gribble to speak with employees about navigating mental health challenges in their careers.

DOC Director Brian Gootkin, a former sheriff from Gallatin County, was thrilled when DOC employees approached the department about inviting Gribble to speak.

"As DOC employees, we know there are going to be challenging days, and we need the tools to process the effects of those in a positive way," Gootkin said. "The department hopes that with Travis sharing his story about dealing with his on-the-job trauma, we can normalize talking about strong emotions or feelings that occur after incidents."

Gribble is a retired 24-year law enforcement veteran. He worked in Michigan and Arizona as a deputy and on SWAT teams. In 2022, Gribble was awarded a post-traumatic stress injury retirement and he began speaking to other law enforcement officers about how to

find peace, healing, and strength as they navigate the mental health challenges as first responders.

A stigma exists around people in law enforcement careers asking for help, according to Gribble.

"Because you signed up for this literally heroic career, and it's not talked about what I should do if I'm experiencing difficult times when I go to these tough calls. We're hopeful that by getting the message out that you might have some very rough days and that's a normal response and you might need to seek out help, we can extend careers and help people have a better personal life."

For some of his presentations, Gribble travels with therapist Gypsy Rose to offer a clinical perspective on first-responder trauma. Rose emphasized that employees who don't directly interact with inmates can also experience secondary trauma.



Law enforcement veteran Travis Gribble speaks with employees about navigating mental health challenges in their careers.

Riverside Special Needs Unit Correctional Officer Teresa Ramos attended one of Gribble's presentations at Montana State Prison and said it was an excellent resource for correctional officers and DOC employees.

"I think we're kind of the forgotten partly because what others can't see, they don't know," she said. "I don't feel like we're out there like the police officer, but it definitely affects us being in there day after day and dealing with the stresses of it. It adds up."



The Non-Opioid Era in Montana correctional facilities

Since 2016, Montana Department of Corrections’ clinicians have cut opioid use, and misuse, at DOC secure facilities significantly, and in some cases, completely, thanks to their commitment to managing patient pain in alternative ways.

“We, similar to the rest of the nation, were seeing a high incidence in misuse of narcotics, muscle relaxers, and more,” said DOC’s Health Services Bureau Chief Cynthia McGillis-Hiner. “We knew we had a problem, so we came together to find a solution.”

Misuse of medications in a prison setting can include combining medications to achieve a high, diversion, inhalation, using medication as currency, and more. The result is a greater incidence of violence, a higher potential for overdoses, and poor patient outcomes.

To address these issues, DOC Medical Director Dr. Paul Rees worked with the medical and security teams to begin a conversation about the problem. This included providing education about opioids to both facility staff and offenders, and educating community health providers about substance abuse problems within the correctional system.

The department established a multidisciplinary Pain Committee to review cases and develop individual treatment plans avoiding controlled substances. Treatment plans included using techniques such as physical therapy, TENS units (electric current to activate nerves in order to decrease pain), topical analgesics, and Cognitive Behavioral Treatment programs. Also, patients were prescribed non-opioid medications like Cymbalta, Nortriptyline, Amitriptiline and Trileptal.

The result was a significant decrease in the delivery of opioids to DOC patients. See the chart to the right to view the decrease in dosage.

In 2018, Montana State Prison underwent a surprise audit by the Drug Enforcement Administration. Auditors said they were flagged by the significant decrease in use of controlled substances at the facility.

Upon medical review of charts, staff and offender interviews, the DOC was commended by the chief auditor as demonstrating the best example of ridding a correctional facility of narcotics she had seen.

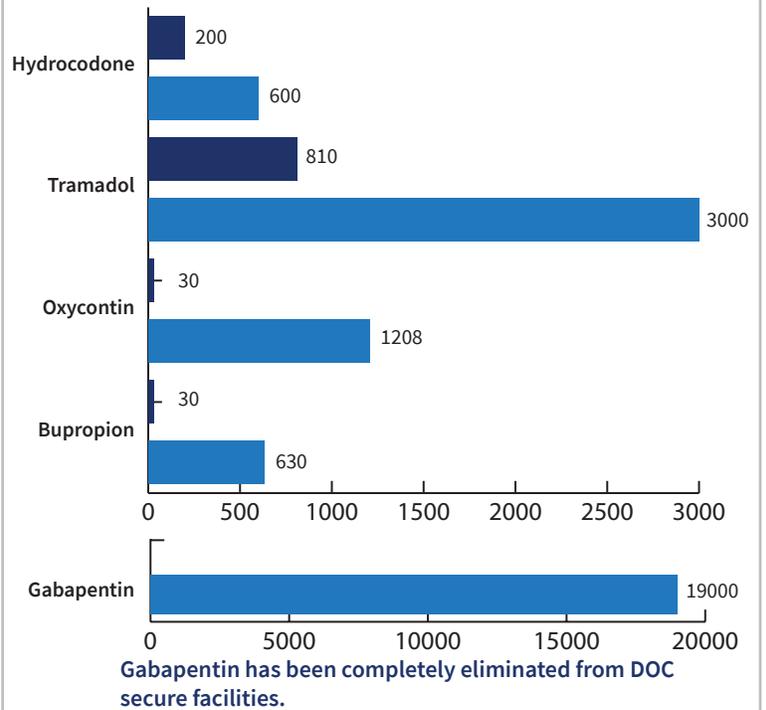
The department also took action to minimize the prospect of agitating existing injuries and prevent new ones. That included active weight loss instruction, stretching programs, installation of ergonomic body weight exercise equipment, purchase of more supportive mattresses, and more.

After the changes, the following occurred:

- Patients reported feeling better and lower pain scores.
- Patients offered gratitude for ending their use of opiates.
- Patients re-established relationships with their families.

“This was a brave, innovative response by DOC medical staff to a problem that plagues prisons throughout the nation,” McGillis-Hiner said. “Today, I think we have a healthier inmate population because of the effort.”

**Medication Quantities Dispensed
May 2016 vs. May 2023**



Inmates at Montana State Prison grow skills outside classrooms

At the Montana Department of Corrections' ranch office at Montana State Prison, inmate worker Parker Smith meticulously inspects a hanging basket of flowers. After plucking a few dried flowers, Smith douses the basket with water and moves on to the next basket of flowers.

As a Level 2 Master Gardener, Smith's job, along with several other inmate workers, is to tend the trees and flowers around the MSP property.

Smith said he took the Master Gardener course through the Montana State University Extension Center because his mom had a garden growing up.

"It was always fun to help her grow fruits and veggies," Smith said. "When I found out they had an opportunity at the ranch office, which is where my normal job is, I got really excited when I found out they had a greenhouse and were offering the class. It was always neat to see the flowers on the inside of the fence. It was even cooler to learn that we could grow them here."

While this isn't the first time inmates have been able to take the Master Gardener

courses, it was the first since 2020 that the course was offered. The Master Gardener program provides intensive horticultural training to individuals who volunteer as Master Gardeners on MSP grounds. Students complete classwork and must pass a test to become certified Master Gardeners.

The course is one of the many educational opportunities available to inmates under DOC supervision.

"While everyone who takes the course may not leave us to become a gardener or work in landscaping, students are gaining valuable skills that can transfer to other jobs," DOC Rehabilitation and Programs Chief Scott Eychner said.

"During the class, students spend time reading and understanding the science behind plants, learn patience with growing the plants from seeds, and then the dedication to care for the plants. We're proud that we can offer offenders various educational opportunities that will prepare them with skills to reenter our Montana communities."

Another course graduate, Jeff Cathel, said he enjoys nurturing the plants and looks

“ It was always neat to see the flowers on the inside of the fence. It was even cooler to learn that we could grow them here.”

~ Inmate worker Parker Smith

forward to using his skills and knowledge outside MSP.

"Given my age, I was wondering what I was going to do for employment once I got out," he said. "This has opened up a whole lot of stuff. I can work at a big box store that has a garden department or a nursery. This is something that feels like I've got something – a feather in my cap, so to speak. So, when I got out, I've got some tools I can work with."



MWP students gear up for careers in addiction counseling

When the Montana Department of Corrections considered classes to offer at the Montana Women’s Prison, one of the options that rose to the top was a Licensed Addiction Counselor program — the class through Dawson Community College fit the criteria for the Pell Grant program and was completely online. Most importantly, though, the women at MWP were ready to invest in a program that would change their lives and the lives of others.

Student Holly Lasher said she always wanted to go to school but couldn’t stay sober long enough.

“I always wanted to be some kind of counselor or go into social work,” she said. “I just think we have so much knowledge on the subject, and it makes schooling easier in a way. We have all this knowledge and information of experiences we’ve had and things that we’ve gone through. I think it will make us more empathic, and I think we’ll all be really good at it.”

The course is offered through the Second Chance Pell Grant program which kicked off in Montana’s secure facilities in fall 2022. A Pell Grant is a form of federal financial aid available to all students with financial need. Previously, incarcerated students in a federal or state prison could not access these funds.

With the expansion of the Second Chance Pell Program, the U.S. Department of Education selected Great Falls College, Montana State University Billings, Helena



Student Holly Lasher talks about taking classes in the Licensed Addiction Counselor program through Dawson Community College.

College, and Dawson Community College to provide postsecondary instruction to incarcerated students through the DOC.

“The Pell Grant program offers students the opportunity to build their skills before they return to our Montana communities, which is great for them and their families,” DOC Deputy Director Cynthia Wolken said. “For the women at MWP, this class allows them to draw upon their experiences to better serve individuals in need when they leave prison and to build a career they can be proud of.”

The program is a two-year course through Dawson Community College. After the classwork, the students must complete an internship. The women will graduate with an associate degree and then will apply for their licensed addiction counselor

licensure through the state.

Over the past five years, the top felony offense among men and women was possession of dangerous drugs. Also included in the list of top crimes was criminal possession with intent to distribute, criminal distribution of dangerous drugs and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Currently, four students are taking LAC classes at MWP and one is continuing courses at a prerelease center.

“We are so proud of the women working towards their associate degrees in Licensed Addiction Counseling,” Education Director Marisa Britton-Bostwick said. “The incarcerated students have been studying hard to complete the core classes through online instruction from Dawson Community College and are now in their third semester. The DOC is also working closely with the incarcerated students and Dawson Community College to ensure the students have a smooth pathway to continue this career path upon release.”

“For the women at MWP, this class allows them to draw upon their experiences to better serve individuals in need when they leave prison and to build a career they can be proud of.”
~DOC Deputy Director Cynthia Wolken



Sweat lodge ceremonies offer Native American inmates cultural and spiritual rejuvenation

Maintaining cultural and religious connections are key for many inmates' success at Montana Department of Corrections facilities.

A sweat lodge is a low-domed structure made of willows that are weaved and lashed together with rawhide or rope. The sweat lodge is a place of spiritual refuge, emotional, mental, and physical healing, and a place for guidance.

“For some inmates, an important part of their recovery and rehabilitation is connecting to their culture and religion,” Director Brian Gootkin said. “Through our dedicated Religious Activities coordinators at our facilities, we can offer a variety of religious activities for our inmates. For our Native American inmates, the sweat lodge ceremonies are an important religious ceremony we’re proud to be able to offer.”

Montana has 12 tribal nations, and each tribe has traditions involving sweat lodge ceremonies. But at the DOC’s secure

facilities, all the Native American inmates participate in one sweat lodge ceremony. At Montana State Prison and Crossroads Correctional Center, the ceremony is called the Prayer Warrior way.

“The reason we call it the Prayer Warrior is that it’s all the tribes combined as one, so we’re just one tribe here,” said Gary Heavygun, a Blackfeet member who is an inmate at Montana State Prison.

This summer, the sweat lodge at Montana State Prison was rebuilt. Staff members and inmates collected the willows for the construction.

The ceremonial part of the sweat lodge is performed inside the structure. Once the lodge is built, it is covered with animal skins or blankets. Inside the lodge is a fire pit with rocks that allows steam to fill up the structure for the sweat.

Heavygun, who has participated in sweat lodges his entire life, said to him that prayer

is one of the most important parts of the ceremony.

“Every day you pick up your prayer,” he said. “You say your prayer, you live your prayer, go to sleep, and you say your prayer before you go to sleep, you ask the Creator for good things even though we’re in a bad spot. It’s good to live your prayer, and that’s what we try to address and teach the younger people.”

Charlotte Wolfchild, a Chippewa-Cree inmate at Montana Women’s Prison, also participates in sweat lodge ceremonies.

“When I go into the sweat lodge, I get cleansed,” Wolfchild said. “I get renewed. I’m doing something very sacred for our Creator and I feel much cleaner when I come out. My mind is clear. I stay in there and I pray and pray for my grandbabies, my children, my friends, and everybody that I care about.”



Harvest Time: Residents at Pine Hills spend time in facility garden

Fall is in the air and that means it's harvest time at the Pine Hills Correctional Facility garden.

"We know it's important to have academic time, but we've also seen the benefits that working in the garden can offer adult residents," PHCF Superintendent Steve Ray said. "It teaches the members of the work crew how to be patient, how to nurture something from start to finish, and how to follow through until the very end. These are all soft skills that will help youth and adult residents when they return to our Montana communities."

The greenhouse is situated on the Pine Hills ranch property. This year, some of the vegetables that were grown included tomatoes, cucumbers, and a variety of peppers. The harvested food is used in the facility's kitchen, as donations to the food bank, and as gifts to staff members.

"Besides the food we grow in the greenhouse we grow potatoes, corn and pumpkins," Program Manager Jeff Hill said. "With the pumpkins we provide any offender and resident here with a pumpkin if they want to carve one for Halloween. They are displayed at the front of the facility for the staff and public to see."

“ We know it's important to have academic time, but we've also seen the benefits that working in the garden can offer adult residents.”
~ PHCF Superintendent Steve Ray

Aside from the garden, residents can work on the ranch with the facility's cattle or in therapeutic and training activities with horses.



Pine Hills inmate workers Richard Lawrence, left, and Fernando Nava, right, inspect the cucumbers they picked with Pine Hills Program Manager Jeff Lee.



Richard Lawrence, an inmate worker at Pine Hills, searches for tomatoes to harvest in the PHCF greenhouse.



Hunting season kicks off at Montana State Prison

Hunting season is officially underway on Montana Department of Corrections property on the Montana Correctional Enterprises (MCE) ranch near Deer Lodge. Applications and regulations are available on the DOC website at: <https://cor.mt.gov/MCE/Programs/Agriculture>.

Hunters wishing to hunt on the ranch are required to obtain a permit by either emailing, mailing or sending a fax with a completed permit application, copy of driver's license, and valid year conservation license and bow and arrow endorsement. Permit application materials can be emailed to NChandler2@mt.gov, mailed to 350 Conley Lake Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722, or faxed to 406-415-6587.

The archery-only hunting season on the ranch began Sept. 2, 2023 and ends Jan. 1, 2024. Hunting is not allowed on prison ranch lands between archery and rifle season, which is Oct. 16-20, 2023.

The random drawing for the special access rifle hunt for cow elk only on the prison ranch will be held Thursday, Oct. 5 at 7 p.m. at the Deer Lodge Community Center in Deer Lodge. Hunters must have a 213-01 elk B license and be present to enter. The only exceptions are youth and out-of-state hunters. If youth or out-of-state hunters are unable to be present, they must send a designee (on a one-for-one basis) to enter their name into the drawing.

The DOC is proud to be a part of hunting season in a way that benefits the hunter, the game population, and DOC ranching operations.



Congratulations Probation & Parole 2023 Graduates

In September, 32 Montana Department of Corrections probation and parole officers graduated from the Montana Law Enforcement Academy. The 33rd class was filled with officers from across the state who spent their summer months learning about the department and honing their skills in Helena. During the academy, the class learned how to work efficiently with offenders they supervise, the ins-and-outs of the department and created lifelong bonds with their fellow officers. The probation and parole bureau supervises almost 10,000 adults who are on community supervision across Montana.



Director Brian Gootkin and Public Safety Chief Jim Anderson speak at MLEA.



Class speaker - Jorey Thatcher



Pine Hills youth explore educational opportunities at college career fair

In September, four juvenile residents from the Pine Hills Correctional Facility attended a career fair at Miles Community College (MCC) to explore what educational and career opportunities are available to them after their release from Montana Department of Corrections' supervision.

“Students expressed that they always knew college was a possibility, but participating in the career fair made it feel attainable,” Pine Hills Principal Teagan Stanley said. “Although they have nerves regarding the transition, they’re mainly excited about the future opportunities.”

Every fall, MCC hosts a career fair and invites high school students from Miles City and other surrounding towns. The fair had representatives from military branches, businesses, state agencies and other universities.

“Just like the adults under DOC supervision, we want to make sure the youth under our supervision know that there are many



A youth from Pine Hills Correctional Facility speaks with a college representative from North Dakota State University at a recent career fair at Miles Community College.

opportunities available for them once they leave our care,” DOC Deputy Director Cynthia Wolken said. “The youth residents at Pine Hills are graduating with high school diplomas, just like if they went to a public school in Montana. Our hope is that through activities like this, our youth residents can see there is still a lot they can accomplish and achieve once they leave Pine Hills.”

Summer fun at Montana State Prison

In July Montana State Prison enjoyed some fun in the sun. Employees were invited to play outdoor games including Jenga, checkers, and corn hole during their breaks. Bonfire BBQ brought out their food truck so folks could enjoy some great eats!



Pretrial, Probation, and Parole Supervision Week 2023

Billings Probation and Parole

The Billings Region celebrated Pretrial, Probation, and Parole Supervision Week in a big way this year July 16-22! They played many team-building games (they even roped the Investigations folks into games when they stopped by to visit!). Lunch was served by Alternatives at the Metra.

The Yellowstone County Commissioners (John Ostlund, Don Jones, and Mark Morse) stopped by to thank the staff for all of their hard work in helping keep the community safe.

Montana Board of Probation and Parole Chairman, Steven Hurd, also stopped by to thank the staff. Many local businesses donated items to give to staff including a La-Z-Boy! Huge thanks go out to Probation & Parole Officer Shannon Berg who organized the event this year.



Probation Officers attending Montana Law Enforcement Academy in Helena

Pizza lunch, soda, cupcakes, and “New PO Survival Kits” were enjoyed by P&P Officers attending MLEA during Pretrial, Probation, and Parole Supervision Week.



Helena Probation and Parole

Helena Probation & Parole celebrated Pretrial, Probation, and Parole Supervision Week with some much-deserved lake time!

