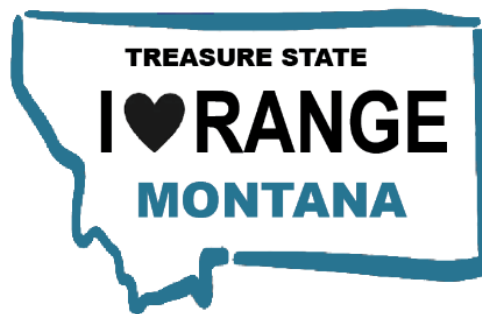

Montana Rangeland Resources Program

2022-2023 Strategic Plan



Prepared by
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March 2022

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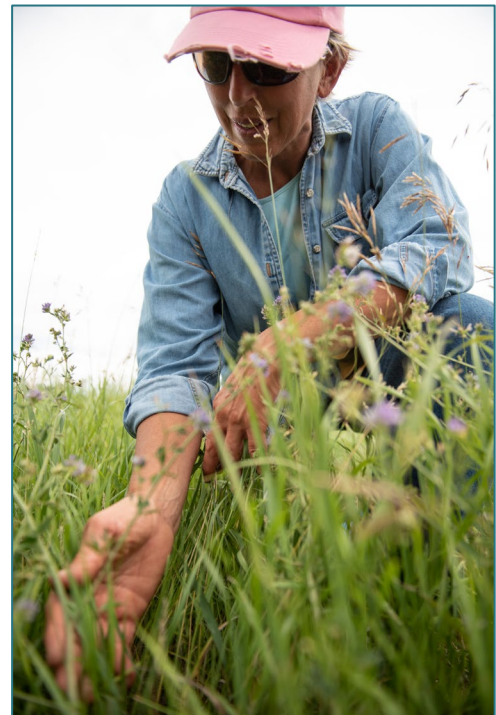
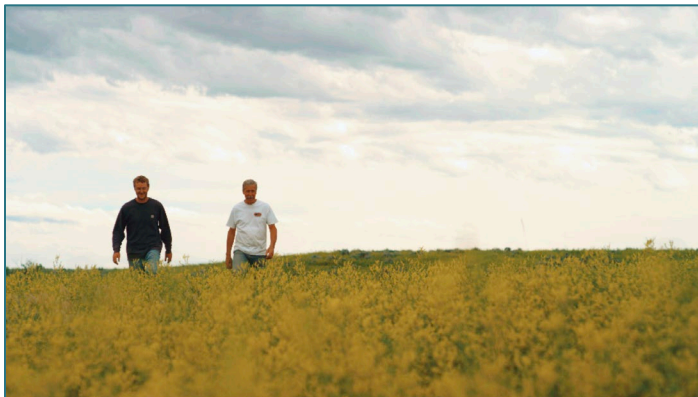


INTRODUCTION

Rangeland is Montana’s largest resource — over 65 million acres are classified as rangeland, grasslands and grazeable woodland. Too often the importance of this vast resource is underestimated, and in many ways, almost taken for granted. These lands rarely receive the attention or the credit they deserve as a vital part of our state’s economic and ecological complex. Likewise, the stewardship of the owners and managers of our rangelands also has gone largely unrecognized.

The Rangeland Resources Committee (RRC) is administratively attached to DNRC per MCA 2-15-121. The Committee has been in existence since 1979 and is comprised of Governor appointed ranchers from select geographic areas in Montana. The Rangeland Resources Committee is statutorily mandated to make recommendations to and provide guidance for the Rangeland Resources Program to DNRC. The RRC also has the responsibility of providing support and guidance to the State Coordinator for Rangeland Resources. The State Coordinator is also defined in MCA 76-14-105 and as such has specific roles in the program.

The following strategic plan serves to guide the work of the State Coordinator, reaffirm priorities that determine which activities are appropriate to further the vision, and prevent distraction from work that does not move the program toward its mission. The plan constantly keeps the vision of the program in the spotlight and provides guidelines for the State Coordinator to determine which activities are appropriate for the program. Although meant to guide actions for decades, the plan is flexible enough to change as the program develops with implementation.



VISION AND VALUES

Vision Statement

The Rangeland Resources Program is committed to creating a program to ensure that the rangeland resource is acknowledged as the largest and most important natural resource supporting people, wildlife, recreation, clean water, natural scenic beauty, and the economy of Montana.

Core Values

Rangeland Resources Program provides opportunities to bring together people who care to learn from one another and collaborate on common goals. The program will focus on building relationships with diverse groups and share perspectives and ideas while creating positive relationships proactively working together with other groups while advocating for healthy rangelands.



CURRENT PROGRAM ANALYSIS

Strengths –

- Rangeland Resources Program is in statute, **76-14-102, MCA**
- Conduit to educational opportunities such as Ranching for Profit, grazing schools, etc. through NRCS and statewide non-profits
- Long standing program based on a local grassroots connection with Conservation Districts, Grazing Districts, Stakeholders and NGOs
- Range Improvement Loan Program – long history of providing a loan program for rangeland improvements

Challenges –

- Lack of public understanding of the importance of rangelands and the role they play in the economic and ecological health of Montana
- Decision and policymakers lack of knowledge of the importance and relevancy of rangelands to Montana's ecology and economy
- Inadequate funding to support program at an effective level
- 1 staff person for the whole state

Opportunities –

- Tours, speakers, and workshops hosted by other partners that staff and committee attend
- Professional development opportunities for State Coordinator
- Development of new partnerships and projects to further increase awareness of the importance of rangelands
- Increased involvement in review process and issues with grazing on public lands
- Participate, and when appropriate, provide input and comments on State Water Plan, Forest Revisions, watershed plans, resource management plans, State and Federal land management agency's rangeland program revisions
- Increased level of participation with Montana University Systems research on rangelands in Montana

CURRENT PROGRAM ANALYSIS CONTINUED

Threats -

- Economic changes that could affect budgets
- Montana is a vast state and considerable amount of travel is required for the State Coordinator
- Competing interests from similar programs
- Changes in organizational structure and personnel
- Changes in Montana's demographics.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Based upon the Vision and Core Values the Rangeland Resources Committee has defined three Strategic Priorities and supporting activities that will set the path for the future of the program. These priorities are also the programs purpose as defined in MCA 76-14-101 Montana Rangeland Resources Act.

A. To Promote the importance of Montana's rangeland with respect to livestock, forage, wildlife habitat, high-quality water production, pollution control, erosion control, recreation, and the natural beauty of the state is recognized.

Activities to achieve this priority:

- Workshops/educational outreach
- Support to Partners
- Working Lands Internship Program
- Rangeland Improvement Loan Program
- Rangelands in the Rotunda/Winter Conference
- 406 Grazing Academy

B. Create a program in which cooperation and coordination of range management activities between persons and organizations charged with or having the management of rangeland, whether private or public, can be promoted and developed.

Activities to achieve this priority:

- Montana Rangelands Monitoring MOU
- Section 8 MOU
- Newsletter
- Working Lands Internship Program
- 406 Grazing Academy

C. To develop a program to recognize those who are doing exceptional work in range management.

Activities to achieve this priority:

- Leopold Conservation Award
- Montana Range Tour
- Newsletter

PRIORITIZATION OF ACTIVITIES

Determining which activities to focus on first is one of the greatest challenges of implementing a strategic plan. In December 2021 the Rangeland Resources Committee met and re-evaluated the strategic plan. During that meeting, they were each asked to prioritize current program activities. The following are the results:

Priority 1

Working Lands Internship Program - This internship provides interns an opportunity to travel the state and stay two weeks at each of the host ranches. This is an opportunity for students not from a ranching or agriculture background, to experience life as a producer utilizing natural resources to produce food and fiber for our country. The students stay with each ranch host, eat meals with them, help with any aspect of ranch life that might be pressing at the time. The list of exposure and experience for these students is long and varied. The purpose behind the program is to give students pursuing a degree in natural resources an opportunity to learn how a working operation does conservation as well as to improve or develop their communication skills and give them an on the ground perspective for working agriculture lands in Montana.

Leopold Conservation Award - The Rangeland Resource Program honors those doing exceptional work on the landscape [MCA-76-14-102(3)] by bringing the Leopold Conservation Award to Montana in 2019. Named in honor of Aldo Leopold, the Leopold Conservation Award makes an impact by publicly recognizing extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation. It inspires other landowners representing millions of acres and influences the general public's understanding of the importance of private working lands.

Rangelands in the Rotunda / Winter Conference - This event is hosted by the Rangeland Resources Committee (RRC) and joined by agricultural partners in rangeland from across the state and is a celebration of Montana's largest natural resource through education and awareness. This is also an opportunity to showcase rangeland's economic, social, and environmental importance to our State.

Rangeland Improvement Loan Program - The Rangeland Improvement Loan Program was started in 1979 as part of the Rangeland Resource Program (MCA 76-14-111). It makes low-interest loans available to Montana's farmers and ranchers for rangeland improvements and development and provides low-interest loans as an incentive for private landowners to undertake range improvement practices. The Rangeland Resources Committee evaluates and sets the interest rate every year. As of 2022, there have been 272 applications, 161 loans, and no defaults.

Priority 2

Montana Range Tour - Montana Range Tour works closely with Conservation Districts, agency personnel and landowners to showcase rangelands. MRT highlights and visits many NRCS

conservation funded projects such as watering systems, grazing systems, stream restoration, conservation easements, cover crops, fencing, wildlife habitat improvements, and AFO/CAFO.

406 Grazing Academy- The 406 Grazing Academy is a 3-day, hands-on workshop for ranchers wanting to hone their skills for solving grazing management challenges on their ranch. The Academy is offered cooperatively by the Rangeland Resources Program in the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Montana State University (MSU) Extension, and the Dan Scott Ranch Management Program in the MSU Department of Animal and Range Sciences. The Academy provides participants practical information to help make strategic decisions on their ranch by showcasing successful Montana Ranchers, range managers, and MSU educators.

Outreach - Rangelands cover 68 million acres of land, which equates to 70 percent of Montana's landscape. This important land base provides habitat for wildlife, forage for livestock and a host of ecosystem goods and services to the State. DNRC Rangelands Program has worked with partners to promote conservation of working lands and to celebrate Montana's excellent land stewards, this project consists of the creation of digital videos, photography, written articles, social media, and design of accompanying promotional written materials which capture the conservation efforts and partnerships from across Montana. In 2022, the program will update historic program material, such as the 'Montana Rangeland Resource Program' 1986 publication.

Coordinating/Supporting of Events with Partners- The program will continue to support Conservation Districts with education, outreach and support for rangeland workshops and activities. This also includes information transfer of important issues affecting Conservation Districts and their producers in a timely and efficient manner. The program will focus on working with state Grazing Districts, the Public Lands Council, Montana Grass Conservation Commission, Montana Grazing Lands Coalition, and other partners to promote collaboration on common goals.

Newsletter- *406 Rangelands* Newsletter was launched in January of 2020 using the Gov Delivery system. This started with about 250 subscribers and now has over 830, with a lofty goal of 1,500 by the end of 2022. This is a means to share information and important issues affecting rangelands in Montana.

Priority 3

MOUs - The program currently has two Memoranda of Understanding tied to a specific purpose. The Section 8 Public Lands Grazing MOU and the Monitoring Program MOU.

Montana Rangelands Monitoring Program - This program was created in partnership with Montana State University in the early 1990s to foster agreement and standardize monitoring methods for landowners and permittees to use on lands they own or manage. The MOU was updated in 2017 and signed by all land management agencies in Montana.

406 Rangelands Forum - What happens on rangeland in Montana affects just about all of us in some way. The forum brings together private and public lands stakeholders and decision-makers to discuss some of the major issues involving rangelands in Montana.

IMPLEMENTATION AND PREFORMANCE INDICATORS

Implementation

The strategic planning exercise is beneficial for articulating a shared vision of the RANGELAND RESOURCES PROGRAM's values, priorities, and activities. To gain the full benefit of the strategic plan, it must be implemented in a way that helps to guide all actions of the Committee and administration. For example, it must remain integrated in annual planning, decision making, and reporting. Finally, it must also remain in the minds (and hearts) of the people.

Ways to do this include:

- a. New committee members review the strategic plan upon agreeing to serve on the committee;
- b. State Coordinator and Committee to review the strategic plan at least once annually;
- c. The strategic plan is used to set annual goals and allocate financial resources (budgeting);
- d. Use as the basis for State Coordinator reports to the committee;
- e. Align Department Administrator and State Coordinator expectations for program performance and progress;
- f. Post the strategic plan prominently on the RANGELAND RESOURCES PROGRAM's website.

Performance Indicators

The program has a definable purpose in Montana Statute in which the activities and priorities achieve several performance targets. The challenge is in measuring or quantifying program success.

One way to gauge program success - a performance target, is the level or participation or increased inclusion of rangelands in non-tradition venues and groups.

A second performance target source would be public and decision maker increased awareness and support of the Rangeland Resources Program. This would take an annual polling or survey to accurately assess and measure.

TITLE 76. LAND RESOURCES AND USE
CHAPTER 14. RANGELAND RESOURCES
Part 1. Rangeland Management

Short Title

76-14-101. Short title. This part shall be known as the "Montana Rangeland Resources Act".

History: En. 76-301 by Sec. 1, Ch. 408, L. 1977; R.C.M. 1947, 76-301.

Purpose

76-14-102. Purpose. The purpose of this part is to establish a program of rangeland management whereby:

(1) the importance of Montana's rangeland with respect to livestock, forage, wildlife habitat, high-quality water production, pollution control, erosion control, recreation, and the natural beauty of the state is recognized;

(2) cooperation and coordination of range management activities between persons and organizations charged with or having the management of rangeland, whether private or public, can be promoted and developed; and

(3) those who are doing exceptional work in range management can receive appropriate recognition.

History: En. 76-302 by Sec. 2, Ch. 408, L. 1977; R.C.M. 1947, 76-302.

Definitions

76-14-103. Definitions. As used in this part, the following definitions apply:

(1) "Committee" means the Montana rangeland resources committee selected as provided in **2-15-3305**(2).

(2) "Department" means the department of natural resources and conservation.

(3) "Montana rangeland resource program" means the rangeland resource program administered by the conservation districts division of the department of natural resources and conservation in concert with the Montana conservation districts law and the Grass Conservation Act to maintain and enhance the rangeland resources of the state.

(4) "Person" means any individual or association, partnership, corporation, or other business entity.

(5) "Range condition" means the current condition of the vegetation on a range site in relation to the natural potential plant community for that site.

(6) "Range management" means a distinct discipline founded on ecological principles and dealing with the husbandry of rangelands and range resources.

(7) "Rangeland" means land on which the native vegetation (climax or natural potential) is predominantly grasses, grasslike plants, forbs, or shrubs suitable for grazing or browsing use.

(8) "State coordinator" means the state coordinator for the Montana Rangeland Resources Act provided for in **2-15-3304**.

(9) "Tame pastureland" means land that has been modified by mechanical cultivation and that has current vegetation consisting of native or introduced species, or both.

(10) "Users of rangeland" means all persons, including but not limited to ranchers, farmers, hunters, anglers, recreationists, and others appreciative of the functional, productive, aesthetic, and recreational uses of rangelands.

History: (1) thru (6), (8)En. 76-303 by Sec. 3, Ch. 408, L. 1977; Sec. 76-303, R.C.M. 1947; (7)En. by Code Commissioner, 1979; R.C.M. 1947, 76-303(part); amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 171, L. 1983; amd. Sec. 66, Ch. 44, L. 2007.

Types Of Land Included As Rangeland

76-14-104. Types of land included as rangeland. The term "rangeland" includes lands revegetated naturally or artificially to provide a forage cover that is managed like native vegetation. Rangelands include natural grasslands, savannahs, shrublands, most deserts, tundra, alpine communities, coastal marshes, and wet meadows.

History: En. 76-303 by Sec. 3, Ch. 408, L. 1977; R.C.M. 1947, 76-303(part).

Role Of State Coordinator

76-14-105. Role of state coordinator. The state coordinator shall:

- (1) serve as an advisor, counselor, and coordinator for and between persons and agencies involved in range management;
- (2) strive to create understanding and compatibility between the many users of rangeland, including hunters, anglers, recreationists, ranchers, and others;
- (3) promote and coordinate the adoption and implementation of sound range management plans to minimize conflicts between governmental agencies and private landowners;
- (4) participate in zoning and planning studies to ensure that native ranges are adequately represented at sessions for development of zoning and planning regulations;
- (5) coordinate range management research to help prevent duplication and overlap of effort in this area.

History: En. 76-304 by Sec. 4, Ch. 408, L. 1977; R.C.M. 1947, 76-304(2); amd. Sec. 2524, Ch. 56, L. 2009.

Duties of Rangeland Resources Committee

76-14-106. Duties of rangeland resources committee. (1) The committee shall:

- (a) review and recommend annual and long-range work programs;
 - (b) suggest priorities of work;
 - (c) provide advice and counsel to the coordinator for carrying out the rangeland resource program.
- (2) The committee may consult with state and federal agencies and units of the university system as it considers appropriate in performing its duties.

History: En. 76-307 by Sec. 7, Ch. 408, L. 1977; R.C.M. 1947, 76-307; amd. Sec. 2, Ch. 44, L. 1985.

Through 76-14-110 Reserved

Rangeland Improvement Loan Program

76-14-111. Rangeland improvement loan program. The department may make rangeland improvement loans for rangeland development and improvement, including but not limited to stock water development, cross fencing, establishment of grazing systems, reseeding, mechanical renovation, sagebrush management, and weed control.

History: En. Sec. 2, Ch. 171, L. 1983.

6-14-107 through 6-14-110 reserved.

Rangeland Improvement Loan Special Revenue Account

76-14-112. Rangeland improvement loan special revenue account. (1) There is created a rangeland improvement loan special revenue account within the state special revenue fund established in **17-2-102**.

(2) There must be allocated to the rangeland improvement loan earmarked account any principal and accrued interest received in repayment of a loan made under the rangeland improvement loan program and any fees or charges collected by the department pursuant to **76-14-116** for the servicing of loans, including arrangements for obtaining security interests.

History: En. Sec. 3, Ch. 171, L. 1983; amd. Sec. 48, Ch. 281, L. 1983; amd. Sec. 14, Ch. 418, L. 1987; amd. Sec. 55, Ch. 16, L. 1991.

Eligibility For Loans

76-14-113. Eligibility for loans. (1) Any person may apply for a loan to finance rangeland improvements to be constructed, developed, and operated in Montana who:

- (a) is a resident of Montana;
 - (b) is engaged in farming or ranching; and
 - (c) possesses the necessary expertise to make a rangeland loan practical.
- (2) All loans must be for rangeland improvement or development exclusively.

(3) An application for a loan must be in the form prescribed by the department and accompanied by a resource conservation plan, which may be prepared in consultation with the United States natural resources conservation service.

History: En. Sec. 4, Ch. 171, L. 1983; amd. Sec. 280, Ch. 42, L. 1997.

Criteria For Evaluation Of Loan Applications

76-14-114. Criteria for evaluation of loan applications. The following criteria must be considered in selecting loan recipients:

- (1) Loan applications must be ranked according to the following priorities:
 - (a) Range improvement or development projects undertaken on native rangeland, resulting in the improvement of native range condition and of benefit to more than a single operator, have first priority.
 - (b) Range improvement or development projects undertaken on native rangeland, resulting in the improvement of native range condition but of benefit to only a single operator, have second priority.
 - (c) Range improvement or development projects undertaken on either native rangeland or tame pastureland used in conjunction with native rangeland, or both, resulting in the improvement of native range condition and the condition of the tame pastureland used in conjunction with native rangeland, have third priority.
 - (d) Range improvement or development projects undertaken on tame pastureland, resulting in the improvement of the tame pastureland exclusively, have fourth priority.
 - (e) Range improvement or development projects undertaken to return to rangeland status land that was once native rangeland and that has since been cultivated have fifth priority.
- (2) Consideration must be given to the number of related resources that will benefit, including but not limited to water quality, wildlife habitat, and soil conservation.
- (3) Consideration must be given to the amount of funding from other sources.
- (4) Consideration must be given to the feasibility and practicality of the project.

History: En. Sec. 5, Ch. 171, L. 1983.

Selection Of Loan Recipients

76-14-115. Selection of loan recipients. (1) Conservation district supervisors shall initially review loan applications for feasibility and prioritize applications for referral to the department.

(2) The department shall organize and review applications for clarity and completeness prior to committee review.

(3) The committee shall consider applications and make recommendations to the department.

(4) The department shall finally approve or disapprove applications recommended by the committee and shall select loan recipients.

History: En. Sec. 6, Ch. 171, L. 1983.

Rules

76-14-116. Rules. The department shall adopt rules:

(1) prescribing the form and content of applications for loans and the required conservation plan;

(2) governing the application of the criteria for awarding loans and the procedure for the review of applications by conservation district supervisors, the committee, and the department;

(3) providing for the servicing of loans, including arrangements for obtaining security interests and the establishment of reasonable fees or charges;

(4) providing for the confidentiality of financial statements submitted; and

(5) prescribing the conditions for making loans.

History: En. Sec. 7, Ch. 171, L. 1983.

Montana Code Annotated 2017

TITLE 2. GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION

CHAPTER 15. EXECUTIVE BRANCH OFFICERS AND AGENCIES

Part 33. Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

State Coordinator For Rangeland Resources

2-15-3304. State coordinator for rangeland resources. The department shall maintain and staff the office of state coordinator for the Montana Rangeland Resources Act.

History: En. 76-304 by Sec. 4, Ch. 408, L. 1977; R.C.M. 1947, 76-304(1); amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 44, L. 2007.

Rangeland Resources Committee

2-15-3305. Rangeland resources committee. (1) The governor may select a committee of six members in accordance with subsection (2) that is composed of:

(a) a presiding officer who is a rancher;

(b) a vice presiding officer who is a rancher;

(c) a rancher from the eastern area of the state;

(d) a rancher from the northern area of the state;

(e) a rancher from the area of the state west of the continental divide;

(f) a rancher from the southern area of the state.

(2) The governor shall select the members described in subsection (1) from a list submitted by the executive committee of the association of conservation districts and the board of directors of the Montana association of state grazing districts.

(3) The committee members shall serve without compensation.

(4) All persons appointed to the committee shall serve at the pleasure of the governor.

(5) The committee is allocated to the department for administrative purposes only as provided in **2-15-121**.

History: En. 76-305, 76-306 by Secs. 5, 6, Ch. 408, L. 1977; R.C.M. 1947, 76-305, 76-306; amd. Sec. 24, Ch. 184, L. 1979; amd. Sec. 2, Ch. 218, L. 1979; amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 44, L. 1985; amd. Sec. 92, Ch. 61, L. 2007.

Montana Code Annotated 2017

TITLE 2. GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION

CHAPTER 15. EXECUTIVE BRANCH OFFICERS AND AGENCIES

Part 1. General Provisions

Allocation For Administrative Purposes Only

2-15-121. (*Temporary*) Allocation for administrative purposes only. (1) An agency allocated to a department for administrative purposes only in this chapter shall:

(a) (i) exercise its quasi-judicial, quasi-legislative, licensing, and policymaking functions independently of the department and without approval or control of the department except as provided in subsection (1)(a)(ii);

(ii) accede, if the agency is a licensing board regulated by the department of labor and industry under Title 37, to the active supervision required by 37-1-121(1)(d);

(b) submit its budgetary requests through the department; and

(c) submit reports required of it by law or by the governor through the department.

(2) The department to which an agency is allocated for administrative purposes only in this title shall:

(a) direct and supervise the budgeting, recordkeeping, reporting, and related administrative and clerical functions of the agency;

(b) include the agency's budgetary requests in the departmental budget;

(c) collect all revenues for the agency and deposit them in the proper fund or account. Except as provided in 37-1-101, the department may not use or divert the revenues from the fund or account for purposes other than provided by law.

(d) provide staff for the agency. Unless otherwise indicated in this chapter, the agency may not hire its own personnel.

(e) print and disseminate for the agency any required notices, rules, or orders adopted, amended, or repealed by the agency.

(3) The department head of a department to which any agency is allocated for administrative purposes only in this chapter shall:

(a) represent the agency in communications with the governor;

(b) allocate office space to the agency as necessary, subject to the approval of the department of administration. (*Terminates July 1, 2021--sec. 8, Ch. 322, L. 2017.*)

2-15-121. (*Effective July 2, 2021*) Allocation for administrative purposes only. (1) An agency allocated to a department for administrative purposes only in this chapter shall:

-
- (a) exercise its quasi-judicial, quasi-legislative, licensing, and policymaking functions independently of the department and without approval or control of the department;
 - (b) submit its budgetary requests through the department;
 - (c) submit reports required of it by law or by the governor through the department.
- (2) The department to which an agency is allocated for administrative purposes only in this title shall:
- (a) direct and supervise the budgeting, recordkeeping, reporting, and related administrative and clerical functions of the agency;
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 - (d) provide staff for the agency. Unless otherwise indicated in this chapter, the agency may not hire its own personnel.
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