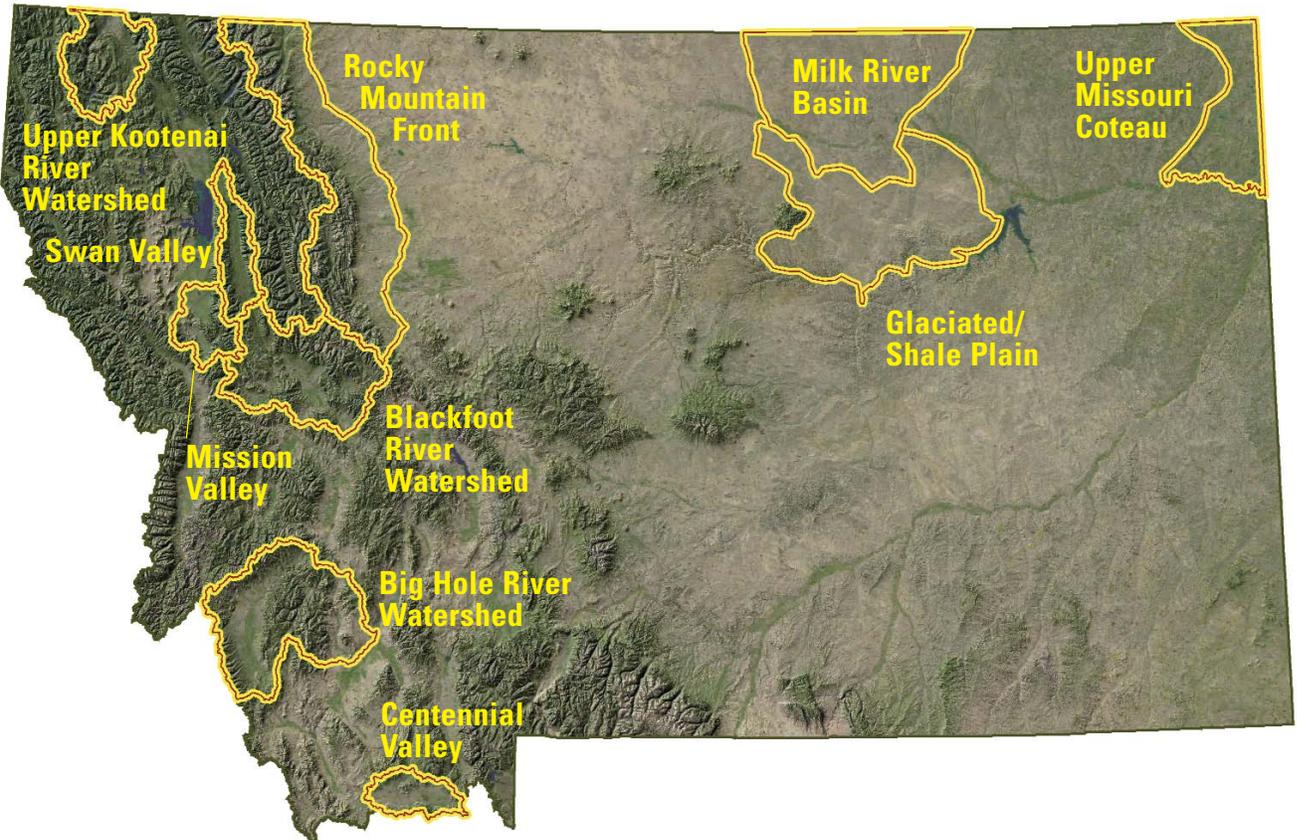


Montana



Montana Partners Program Conservation Focus Areas

Introduction

The Montana Partners Program began discussing the merits of conservation focus areas in the mid-1990s. The discussions were prompted by a growing emphasis on science-based priority setting, limited budgets, staff shortages, increased program accountability, and strategic planning by key partners. In 1999, the Partners Program developed its first strategic plan and identified eight focus areas. Selection criteria included trust species diversity, intact landscapes, public-private land patterns, partnership opportunities, proximity to Service

field stations, and threats. The program made a commitment to update the strategic plan every five years.

In Fiscal Year 2004, Service directorate instructed the Partners Program to develop a national strategic plan. The plan was to include “regional geographic areas in which to focus local projects in order to realize the greatest benefit to those fish and wildlife resources most in need.” The guidance directed the preparation of regional and state step-down plans. The Montana Partners Program welcomed the assignment because of its 1999 commitment to five-year

revisions. The 2007 Montana Step-down Strategic Plan identifies geographic focus areas, provides focus area habitat accomplishment targets and describes benefits to federal trust species. The plan also provides state-wide measurable objectives for the categories of “Improving Information Sharing and Communication,” “Enhancing Our Workforce,” and “Improving Accountability.”

Montana is a rich mosaic of habitat types; however, various agencies and organizations have divided the state into three broad geographic regions. These landscapes are often referred to as the Northern Rocky

Mountains, Northern Great Plains, and Prairie Pothole Region. In the first step of the process, the Partners Program elected to use these geographic regions as a coarse filter in defining conservation focus areas.

The second step entailed identifying priority federal trust species and species “guilds” for each geographic region. Grizzly bear and native salmonids were used for the Northern Rocky Mountains, black-tailed prairie dog and sage grouse were selected for the Northern Great Plains, and waterfowl and shorebirds were priority guilds for the Prairie Pothole Region. The program used the considerable expertise of the Montana Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) biologist in evaluating models and data sets.

The third step involved incorporating the scientific-based

planning efforts of partner agencies and conservation organizations in Montana. In addition to Service Washington Office and Regional Office direction to develop step-down strategic plans, the Partners Program used the Strategic Habitat Conservation Report completed by the National Ecological Assessment Team (NEAT) for further guidance. Four key statewide conservation plans were also used extensively: the Service’s Upper Missouri/Yellowstone/Upper Columbia River Ecosystem Team Focus Area Plan, the Montana Partners Program 1999 Conservation Focus Area Plan, Montana’s Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy Plan, and The Nature Conservancy of Montana’s Statewide Conservation Plan.

Input from partners proved critically important to identify focus areas and develop an appropriate conservation strategy.

Seven stakeholder meetings were held in 2006. The meetings gave Partners Program partners an opportunity to provide professional input on criteria, models, and data sets. This input was used to refine and designate conservation focus areas. Stakeholder participants are included in Appendix A.

This comprehensive, multi-step process initially identified 18 potential Partners Program conservation focus areas in Montana. Final selection was completed by in-depth analysis of the 18 areas using the following filters: public/private land patterns, proximity to Service field stations, existing community-based partnerships, intact landscapes, and threats.

The Montana Partners Program’s 2007 Strategic Plan consists of the 10 conservation focus areas described in detail below.



Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area

The Upper Missouri Coteau Conservation Focus Area is located in extreme northeast Montana. This region was entirely glaciated and is part of the Prairie Pothole Region of the Midwest United States and Canada. The landscape is dominated by rolling mixed-grass native prairie and glaciated pothole wetlands. The region has an agricultural-based economy with small grain farming and livestock ranching being dominant land uses. The area provides critical habitat for numerous federal trust species including migratory birds (waterfowl, shorebirds, wading

birds, colonial nesting birds, grassland passerines) and federally listed threatened and endangered species such as piping plover.

The Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area encompasses about 1 million acres. This focus area is predominantly in private ownership, with an interspersed of state school lands and national wildlife refuge lands (Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Waterfowl Production Areas). Ownership is 91% private and 9% public.

Key partners in the Upper Missouri Coteau include the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Fort Peck Tribes; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; North American Wetlands Conservation Act; Ducks Unlimited; The Nature Conservancy; and private landowners.

Partners Program activities concentrate on restoring and

enhancing wetland and native prairie habitat for migratory birds, and for candidate, threatened, and endangered species. Partners Program restoration projects have tangible breeding and migration benefits for piping plover (federally listed as threatened). There are secondary benefits for bald eagle and whooping crane (federally listed as endangered).

Priority Species

- Mallard
- Northern pintail
- Lesser scaup
- Upland sandpiper
- Long-billed curlew
- Marbled godwit
- Short-eared owl
- Sprague’s pipit
- Grasshopper sparrow
- Baird’s sparrow

Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 1,000 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 18,000 acres
- River/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 20 miles

Partnerships

- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements): 40
- Amount of technical assistance: 325 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:2.5



Prairie pothole wetlands imbedded in native prairie grasslands. USFWS Photo.



Montana

Milk River Basin Focus Area

The Milk River Basin Conservation Focus Area is located in north central Montana and includes vast, rolling native grasslands. Known locally as the “Hi-Line,” the region is bordered on the south by the Missouri River and on the north by prairie Canada. The region has relatively high densities of depressional wetlands and vast tracts of shortgrass or mixed-grass uplands. Ranching and farming are primary land uses. Prior to settlement, this “sea of grass” was a land of bison, pronghorn, elk, deer, grizzly bears, gray wolves, swift fox, and black-tailed prairie dogs along with myriad grassland birds. Today, the Milk River Focus Area remains a vitally important region for numerous water and grassland birds. Prairie dog colonies and sage grouse leks are abundant throughout the focus area.

The Milk River Basin Focus Area encompasses about 2.5 million acres. This focus area is a mixture of private lands, wildlife refuge lands (Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge) and Waterfowl Production Areas, Bureau of Land Management lands,



Grassland and wetland complexes provide excellent habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and other waterbird species. USFWS Photo.

and state school lands. Ownership is 65% private and 35% public.

Key partners in the Milk River Basin include the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Bureau of Land Management; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; North American Wetlands Conservation Act; Ducks Unlimited; The Nature Conservancy; Pheasants Forever; and private landowners.

Partners Program activities concentrate on restoring and enhancing wetland and native prairie habitat for migratory birds, as well as candidate, threatened, and endangered species. Habitat projects in the Milk River Focus Area will benefit multiple Service Migratory Bird Program focal species. Partners Program restoration projects provide tangible breeding and migration

benefits for piping plover (federally listed as threatened). There are also secondary benefits for bald eagle and whooping crane (federally listed as endangered).

Priority Species

- American wigeon
- Mallard
- Northern pintail
- Lesser scaup
- Greater sage-grouse
- Bald eagle
- Ferruginous hawk
- Whooping crane (Endangered)
- Piping plover (Threatened)
- Long-billed curlew
- Marbled godwit
- Wilson’s phalarope
- Burrowing owl
- Chestnut-collared longspur
- Black-tailed prairie dog

Milk River Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 1,500 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 1,500 acres
- River/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 0 miles

Partnerships

- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements): 50
- Amount of technical assistance: 100 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:3



Montana's Rocky Mountain Front is a vast intact landscape, with diverse fish and wildlife habitat.
Photo by Greg Neudecker, USFWS.



Rocky Mountain Front Focus Area

The Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Focus Area is a spectacular and expansive landscape at the juncture of the Rocky Mountains and the western margin of the Northern Great Plains. The abrupt change from rolling native grasslands to rugged mountain topography produces significant elevation and climate gradients, creating amazing species and habitat diversity. The transition from alpine tundra and montane forest to foothills and mid-grass prairie includes incredible stream and riparian habitat. Glaciated wetlands are scattered throughout the Rocky Mountain Front. Overall species diversity is

remarkable. This focus area includes some of the best remaining grizzly bear habitat in the lower 48 states. Breeding and migration use by migratory birds is unmatched. Livestock ranching has been the primary land use since settlement.

The Rocky Mountain Front Focus Area encompasses about 2.6 million acres. This focus area is a mixture of private lands; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Management Units; The Nature Conservancy and Boone and Crockett Club private preserves; Service Waterfowl Production Areas; and state school lands. Ownership is 49% private and 51% public.

Key partners in the Rocky Mountain Front Focus Area include the U.S. Forest Service; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Blackfeet Tribe; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; conservation districts; county weed control districts; North American Wetlands

Conservation Act; watershed groups; The Nature Conservancy; Boone and Crockett Club; and Ducks Unlimited.

Partners Program activities concentrate on restoring and enhancing wetland areas, stream and riparian areas, and native prairie habitat for migratory birds and native fish, as well as for candidate, threatened, and endangered species. Invasive species management is also a key component of Partners Program activities in this focus area. Partners Program restoration projects have tangible benefits for grizzly bear (federally listed as threatened), gray wolf (federally listed as endangered) and bald eagle. Habitat projects in the Rocky Mountain Front Focus Area benefit many Service Migratory Bird Program focal species.

Priority Species

- Trumpeter swan (Rocky Mountain)
- American wigeon
- Northern pintail
- Lesser scaup
- Bald eagle
- Peregrine falcon
- Sandhill crane
- Long-billed curlew
- Wilson’s phalarope
- Black tern
- Burrowing owl
- Chestnut-collared longspur
- Grizzly Bear (Threatened)
- Gray wolf (Endangered)

Rocky Mountain Front Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 75 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 8,500 acres
- River/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 20 miles

Partnerships

- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements): 40
- Amount of technical assistance: 175 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:0.75



Montana

Upper Kootenai River Watershed Focus Area

The Upper Kootenai River Watershed Conservation Focus Area is an international watershed encompassing nearly 18,000 square miles of northwest Montana, British Columbia, and Alberta. The Kootenai River headwaters are in British Columbia, and the river flows 485 miles through steep mountain terrain and agricultural flat land. The watershed contains important fluvial and adfluvial populations of native bull trout (listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act). The Upper Kootenai River is designated as 1 of 12 restoration/conservation areas for bull trout by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The area is also home to healthy populations of native west-slope cutthroat trout, grizzly bears, gray wolves, and migratory birds. Land use consists of logging, livestock production, and recreation.



This grassland/stream restoration project provides positive benefits to native fish as well as a suite of migratory birds. USFWS Photo.

The Upper Kootenai River Watershed Focus Area encompasses about 750,000 acres. This area is a mixture of private lands, national forest lands, state forest lands, and state school lands. Ownership of the land is 15% private and 85% public.

Key partners in the Upper Kootenai River Watershed include the USDA Natural Resources

Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service, British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Kootenai River Network, Trout Unlimited, Bonneville Power Administration, Glen Lake Irrigation District, Plum Creek Timer Company, and private landowners.

Partners Program activities will concentrate on restoring in-stream habitats for native salmonids and on enhancing riparian areas for migratory birds, as well as threatened, endangered and candidate species. Partners Program restoration projects will have tangible benefits for grizzly bear (listed as threatened), gray wolf (listed as endangered), Canada lynx (listed as threatened) and bull trout (listed as threatened). Secondary benefits for bald eagle and water howellia (listed as threatened) are expected. Habitat projects will also benefit many Service Migratory Bird Program focal species.

- Priority Species**
- Wood duck
 - American wigeon
 - Mallard
 - Lesser scaup
 - Bald eagle
 - Peregrine falcon
 - Sandhill crane
 - Long-billed curlew
 - Mourning dove
 - Northern saw-whet owl
 - Olive-sided flycatcher
 - Grizzly bear (Threatened)
 - Gray wolf (Endangered)
 - Canada lynx (Threatened)
 - Bull trout (Threatened)
 - West-slope cutthroat trout
 - Water howellia (Threatened)

- The Upper Kootenai River Watershed Focus Area Five-year Targets**
- Habitat**
- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 50 acres
 - Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 1,100 acres
 - River/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 15 miles
- Partnerships**
- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements): 40
 - Amount of technical assistance: 100 staff days
 - Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:0.75



Mission Valley Focus Area

The Mission Valley Conservation Focus Area, a glacially gouged remnant of 12,000 years past, is located in Lake County of western Montana. The 350,000 acre valley floor is also located within the exterior boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The Mission Creek watershed makes up the northern boundary with the main stem of the Flathead River to the west. The National Bison Range National Wildlife Refuge forms the southern boundary and the magnificent Mission Mountains

tower above the eastern valley edge. The valley floor is covered with glaciated wetlands. Wildlife and fish species inhabiting the Mission landscape are diverse and

abundant. The wetlands and grasslands attract breeding and migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, and passerine birds. The streams and spring creeks are



The Mission Valley is a large valley with diverse wetlands and grasslands, hosting migratory birds as well as high priority listed species, such as the grizzly bear and gray wolf. USFWS Photo.

home to native west-slope cutthroat trout and bull trout. Grizzly bears are regularly observed in the valley.

The Mission Valley Focus Area encompasses about 410,000 acres. This focus area is a mixture of private and tribal lands, Service Waterfowl Production Areas, and state school lands. Ownership is 92% private and 8% public.

Key partners in the Mission Valley include the Natural Resources Conservation Service; Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Lake County Conservation District; Ducks Unlimited;

Pheasants Forever; Trout Unlimited; and private landowners.

Partners Program activities will concentrate on restoring and enhancing wetland areas, stream and riparian areas, and uplands for native fish, migratory birds, and for threatened, endangered, and candidate species. Partners Program restoration projects will have tangible benefits for bald eagle, grizzly bear (listed as threatened) and bull trout (listed as threatened). Habitat projects in the Mission Valley Focus Area will also benefit many of the Service’s Migratory Bird Program focal species.

Priority Species

- Trumpeter swan (Rocky Mountain)
- American wigeon
- Northern pintail
- Lesser scaup
- Bald eagle
- Peregrine falcon
- Sandhill crane
- Long-billed curlew
- Black tern
- Short-eared owl
- Olive-sided flycatcher
- Grizzly Bear (Threatened)
- Bull trout (Threatened)

Mission Valley Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 500 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 12,500 acres
- River/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 30 miles

Partnerships

- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements): 35
- Amount of technical assistance: 250 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:0.9



Blackfoot River Watershed Focus Area

The Blackfoot River headwaters atop the Continental Divide at Rogers Pass and flows 132 miles westerly to its confluence with the Clark Fork River near Missoula, Montana. The Watershed totals about 1.5 million acres and is nestled between the Continental

Divide, Bob Marshall/Scapegoat Wilderness and Garnet Mountain Range. Land ownership is extremely diverse with public lands covering much of the higher mountainous elevations. In general, the highly productive private lands are located in the foothills and valley floor. Habitats are incredibly diverse. The Blackfoot Valley was shaped by glacial ice and a large glacial lake. Geologic, hydrologic, and topographic features combine to produce a wide array of plant and animal communities. Wetland features include glacial lakes, ponds, bogs, fens, basin-fed creeks, spring creeks, large rivers, scrub/shrub riparian areas, and

cottonwood forests. The uplands are dominated by native grasslands, sagebrush-steppe, aspen groves and conifers. Fish and wildlife assemblages are highly diverse. The watershed is home to grizzly bears, gray wolves, wolverines, Canada lynx, elk, deer, and moose. Breeding migratory birds include such species as trumpeter swan, sandhill crane, long-billed curlew, red-necked grebe, common loon, great gray owl, and Brewer’s sparrow. The area has maintained its rural lifestyle with livestock ranching and timber production being the predominant land use.

The Blackfoot River Watershed Focus Area encompasses about 1.5 million acres. This area is a mixture of private land; Plum Creek Timber land; U.S. Forest Service land; Bureau of Land Management land; Service Waterfowl Production Areas; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Management Units; The Nature Conservancy preserve; and state school lands. Ownership is 43% private and 57% public.

Key partners in the Blackfoot River Watershed Focus Area are all members of the Blackfoot Challenge. Over 500 landowners and 160 partner organizations support the overall work and mission of the Blackfoot Challenge.

Partners Program activities will concentrate on restoring and enhancing in-stream and riparian areas with special emphasis on the needs of grizzly bears and native salmonids (e.g., bull trout). Wetland and associated upland restoration and management will target migratory birds with emphasis on trumpeter swans. Partners Program restoration projects will have tangible benefits for grizzly bear (listed as threatened), gray wolf (listed as endangered), Canada lynx (listed as threatened), and bull trout (listed as threatened). Habitat projects will also benefit many of the Service's Migratory Bird Program focal species.



The Partners Program has restored many rivers and streams within the Blackfoot Valley, benefiting native bull trout and many other aquatic species. USFWS Photo.



The Blackfoot Challenge community-based partnership works closely with the Montana Partners Program to identify creative solutions to maintaining abundant wildlife, intact landscapes, and a viable agricultural community. USFWS Photo.

Priority Species

- Trumpeter swan (Rocky Mountain)
- Lesser scaup
- Bald eagle
- Peregrine falcon
- Sandhill crane
- Upland sandpiper
- Long-billed curlew
- Black tern
- Northern saw-whet owl
- Olive-sided flycatcher
- Brewer's sparrow
- Grizzly bear (Threatened)
- Gray wolf (Endangered)
- Canada lynx (Threatened)
- Bull trout (Threatened)

Blackfoot River Watershed Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 150 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 7,700 acres
- River/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 18 miles

Partnerships

- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements): 30
- Amount of technical assistance: 225 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:3.5



Big Hole River Watershed Focus Area

The Big Hole River Watershed Conservation Focus Area is the highest and widest mountain valley in southwest Montana. Much of the valley floor lies above 6,000 feet. The Big Hole River emanates from the Beaverhead Mountains and winds for nearly 156 miles to its confluence with the Beaverhead River to create the Jefferson River. The Big Hole terrestrial and aquatic habitats consist of sagebrush-steppe grasslands, irrigated hay lands, willow-dominated riparian communities, small tributary streams, and the Big Hole River itself. The valley

floor is largely privately owned with livestock and hay production being the primary land uses. The Big Hole River is considered a “blue-ribbon” wild trout fishery and is one of the last free-flowing rivers in the West. The Big Hole River provides critical habitat for one of nation’s last remaining fluvial Arctic grayling populations. In addition, the watershed is home to myriad migratory birds. Gray wolves, Canada lynx, wolverines and a large Shiras moose population also inhabit the Big Hole.

The Big Hole River Watershed Focus Area encompasses about 1.8 million acres. This focus area is a mixture of private lands, U.S. Forest Service lands, Bureau of Land Management lands, and state lands. Ownership is 27% private and 73% public.

Key partners in the Big Hole River Watershed Focus Area include the USDA Natural Resources

Conservation Service; U.S. Forest Service; Bureau of Land Management; Environmental Protection Agency; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; Montana Department of Environmental Quality; Big Hole Watershed Committee; Arctic Grayling Recovery Program; The Nature Conservancy; Trout Unlimited; and private landowners.

Partners Program activities will concentrate on restoring and enhancing in-stream and riparian habitats for fluvial Arctic grayling and west-slope cutthroat trout. In-stream flows will also be augmented. Upland and wetland restoration and enhancement projects will benefit a variety of migratory birds, and threatened, endangered, and candidate species. Partners Program restoration projects will have tangible benefits to Montana Arctic grayling (listed as candidate), grizzly bear (listed as

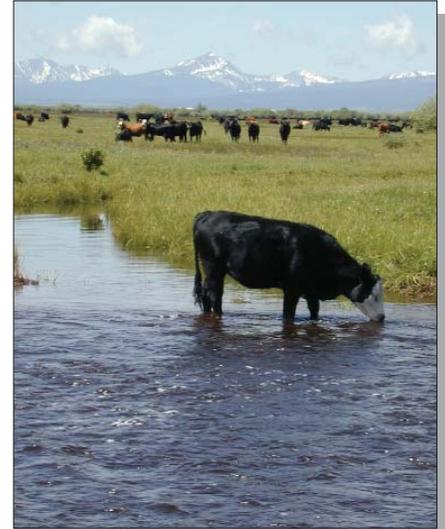


Big Hole River Watershed. USFWS Photo.

threatened) and gray wolf (listed as experimental non-essential). Secondary benefits for bald eagle are expected. Habitat projects will also benefit many of the Service’s Migratory Bird Program focal species.

Priority Species

- American wigeon
- Mallard
- Lesser scaup
- Bald eagle
- Peregrine falcon
- Sandhill crane
- Long-billed curlew
- Wilson’s phalarope
- Mourning dove
- Short-eared owl
- Olive-sided flycatcher
- Montana Arctic grayling (Candidate)
- Grizzly bear (Threatened)
- Gray wolf (Experimental)



The Partners Program works closely with local ranchers to restore habitat for wildlife and maintain agricultural viability. USFWS Photo.

Big Hole River Watershed Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 110 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 58,500 acres
- River/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 43 miles

Partnerships

- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements): 30
- Amount of technical assistance: 250 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:3.5



Centennial Valley Focus Area

The Centennial Valley Conservation Focus Area is a large, high-elevation, undeveloped watershed in Beaverhead and Madison counties. The Red Rock River meanders through the broad valley floor and lies north and east of the Continental Divide. The Centennial Mountains form the south boundary and the rolling



Trumpeter swans in the Centennial Valley. USFWS Photo.

foothills of the Gravelly Mountain Range extend to the north. In the heart of the valley lies the 45,000 acre Red Rock Lakes National

Wildlife Refuge. The largest wetland complex in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is found in the Centennial Valley. The uplands are dominated by sagebrush, native grasslands, and willow-dominated riparian areas. There are about 100,000 acres of private land in the valley. Ranching is the dominant land use. Native fish and wildlife are abundant, highlighted by populations of trumpeter swan, sandhill crane, grizzly bear, gray wolf, moose, Yellowstone cutthroat trout, and Arctic grayling.

The Centennial Valley Focus Area encompasses about 360,000 acres. This focus area is a mixture of private lands, national wildlife refuge lands, U.S. Forest Service lands, Bureau of Land

Management lands, and state lands. Ownership is 29% private and 71% public.

Key partners in the Centennial Valley Focus Area include the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; U.S. Forest Service; Bureau of Land Management; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Arctic Grayling Recovery Program; Centennial Valley Landowners Association; The Nature Conservancy; Ducks Unlimited; and private landowners.

Partners Program activities will concentrate on restoring and enhancing wetland areas, stream and riparian areas, and uplands for native fish, migratory birds, and for threatened, endangered and candidate species. Special emphasis will be given to Arctic grayling, west-slope cutthroat trout, and trumpeter swans. Partners Program restoration projects will have tangible benefits for Montana Arctic grayling (listed as candidate), bald eagle, grizzly bear (listed as threatened), and gray wolf (listed as experimental non-essential). Habitat projects will also benefit many of the Service's Migratory Bird Program focal species.



*The Centennial Valley is still a vast open landscape with intact grasslands, sagebrush-steppe, and wetland complexes. The private landowners in the Valley are proud of their stewardship efforts and work closely with the Montana Partners Program.
Photo by Heather Johnson, USFWS.*

Priority Species

- Trumpeter swan (Rocky Mountain)
- American wigeon
- Lesser scaup
- Bald eagle
- Ferruginous hawk
- Peregrine falcon
- Sandhill crane
- Long-billed curlew
- Black tern
- Olive-sided flycatcher
- Brewer's sparrow
- Montana Arctic grayling (Candidate)
- Grizzly bear (Threatened)
- Gray wolf (Experimental)
- West-slope cutthroat trout

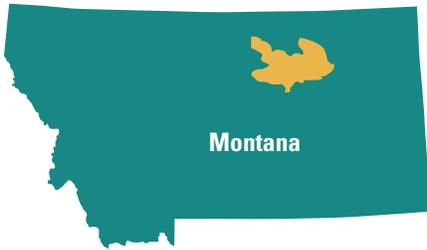
Centennial Valley Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 150 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 15,000 acres
- River/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 15 miles

Partnerships

- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements): 10
- Amount of technical assistance: 150 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:1.25



Glaciated/Shale Plains Focus Area

The Glaciated/Shale Plains Conservation Focus Area, an extensive region of north central Montana, is dominated by undulating plains with sagebrush grasslands and mixed-grass prairie. Large river systems include the Milk, Missouri, and Musselshell, with smaller prairie streams and accompanying riparian habitat sprinkled through the dry uplands. In addition to black-tailed prairie dogs, black-footed ferrets, and swift fox, this area supports robust populations of grassland birds. Noteworthy species include mountain plovers, burrowing owls, greater sage-grouse, ferruginous hawks, chestnut-collared longspurs, and long-billed curlews. Public and private lands are interspersed throughout the focus area. Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge lies in the heart of the focus area and the Bureau of Land Management is a very large landowner. Livestock production is the primary land use.

The Glaciated/Shale Plains Focus Area encompasses about 2.5 million acres. This focus area is a mixture of private lands, national wildlife refuge lands, Bureau of Land Management lands, state school lands, and The Nature Conservancy private preserve lands. Ownership is 37% private and 63% public.

Key partners in the Glaciated/Shale Plains Focus Area include the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Bureau of Land Management; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Phillips County Rancher Stewardship Alliance; The Nature Conservancy; Ducks Unlimited; and private landowners.



Partners in the Glaciated/Shale Plains Focus Area discuss upcoming projects on the Matador Ranch and other neighboring ranches. Included are Linda Poole, Dale Veseth and Tim, the famous blue heeler. Photo by Heather Johnson, USFWS.

Partners Program activities will concentrate on restoring and enhancing upland habitats for migratory birds, and threatened, endangered, and candidate species. Partners Program activities also will focus on enhancing habitat for two non-federal trust species: greater sage-grouse and black-tailed prairie dogs. Montana Partners Program restoration projects will have tangible benefits for black-footed ferrets (listed as endangered). Secondary benefits for bald eagles are expected. Habitat projects will also benefit many of the Service's Migratory Bird Program focal species.

- Priority Species**
- Northern pintail
 - Greater sage-grouse
 - Ferruginous hawk
 - Mountain plover
 - Upland sandpiper
 - Long-billed curlew
 - Burrowing owl
 - Loggerhead shrike
 - Sprague's pipit
 - Grasshopper sparrow
 - Chestnut-collared longspur
 - Black-tailed prairie dog
 - Black-footed ferret (Endangered)
 - Bald eagle

Glaciated/Shale Plains Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 100 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 5,320 acres
- River/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 1 mile

Partnerships

- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements): 8
- Amount of technical assistance: 50 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:0.5



The Swan River Valley Conservation Focus Area lies within the Columbia River Basin and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem of northwest Montana. The valley is bordered by the Bob Marshall Wilderness on the east and Mission Mountain Wilderness on the west. The southern boundary of Glacier National Park, widely acknowledged as a “biological anchor” for the region, is less than 30 miles from the northern end of the Swan Valley. The Blackfoot Valley lies to the south. The valley provides critical habitat for numerous federal trust species. It has been identified by the Service as an important linkage zone for the Northern Continental Divide grizzly bear population. Native fish, including west-slope cutthroat trout and bull trout, are plentiful. The valley floor is predominantly private land with the surrounding mountainous regions being owned by the Plum Creek Timber Company, the U.S. Forest Service, and the State of Montana.

The Swan River Valley Focus Area encompasses about 470,000 acres. This focus area is a mixture of private, national wildlife refuge, national forest, state forest, state school, and Plum Creek Timber Company lands. Ownership is 28% private and 72% public.

Key partners in the Swan River Valley Focus Area include the U.S. Forest Service; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; Missoula County; The Nature Conservancy; Trust for Public Lands; Northwest Connections; Vital Ground; and private landowners.



Swan Valley. USFWS Photo.

Partners Program activities will concentrate on restoring and enhancing wetland, riparian, and upland habitats for native fish, migratory birds, and threatened, endangered, and candidate species. Special emphasis will be on grizzly bears and bull trout. Partners Program restoration projects will have tangible benefits for grizzly bear (listed as threatened), gray wolf (listed as endangered), Canada lynx (listed as threatened), water howellia (listed as threatened), and bull trout (listed as threatened). Habitat projects will also benefit many of the Service’s Migratory Bird Program focal species.

Priority Species

- American wigeon
- Mallard
- Wood duck
- Lesser scaup
- Bald eagle
- Peregrine falcon
- Sandhill crane
- Black tern
- Long-billed curlew
- Mourning dove
- Northern saw-whet owl
- Olive-sided flycatcher
- Grizzly bear (Threatened)
- Bull trout (Threatened)
- Gray wolf (Endangered)
- Canada lynx (Threatened)
- Water howellia (Threatened)

Swan River Valley Focus Area Five-year Targets

Habitat

- Wetland Restoration/Enhancement: 30 acres
- Upland Restoration/Enhancement: 800 acres
- River/Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 2 miles

Partnerships

- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements): 10
- Amount of technical assistance: 75 staff days
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio Service to Partner): 1:0.5

Montana Statewide Goals



Improve Information Sharing and Communication

The Montana Partners Program operates under the principle that fish and wildlife habitat restoration and management go hand-in-hand with building lasting relationships with landowners and rural communities. As such, the single most important element of the program is the grassroots, community-based partnerships that promote cooperative conservation while maintaining rural lifestyles across Montana.

Communication, education, and outreach with conservation partners will be a critical component in the success of the Montana Partners Program. To be successful with large landscape-scale conservation, the program must rely heavily on relationships within and outside the Service.

Five-year Targets

- Actively participate in 75 landowner/watershed meetings, conferences or workshops throughout Montana.
- Enter into 10 Cooperative Agreements, Contribution Agreements, or Memoranda of Understanding with landowner-based groups in Montana.
- Sponsor, or directly assist in, 10 landowner tours that promote the Montana Partners Program.
- Assist in five National Conservation Training Center courses as instructors or guest speakers.
- Host five coordination meetings with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to assure program consistencies.
- Participate in 12 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service State Technical Committee meetings.
- Participate in 10 congressional staff meetings regarding the Montana Partners Program.
- Provide 10 Montana Partners Program updates to Service Washington Office and Regional Office staff.
- Hold 10 Montana Partners Program staff meetings to improve internal communications.
- Facilitate 10 media events/stories on the Montana Partners Program.
- Working with the education working groups of community-based partnerships in Montana, the Partners Program will complete a minimum of 10 school field trips, in support of the Director's priority to re-connect America's youth to the outdoors. In addition, these students will be taught a variety of activities they can do on their own, with their families.

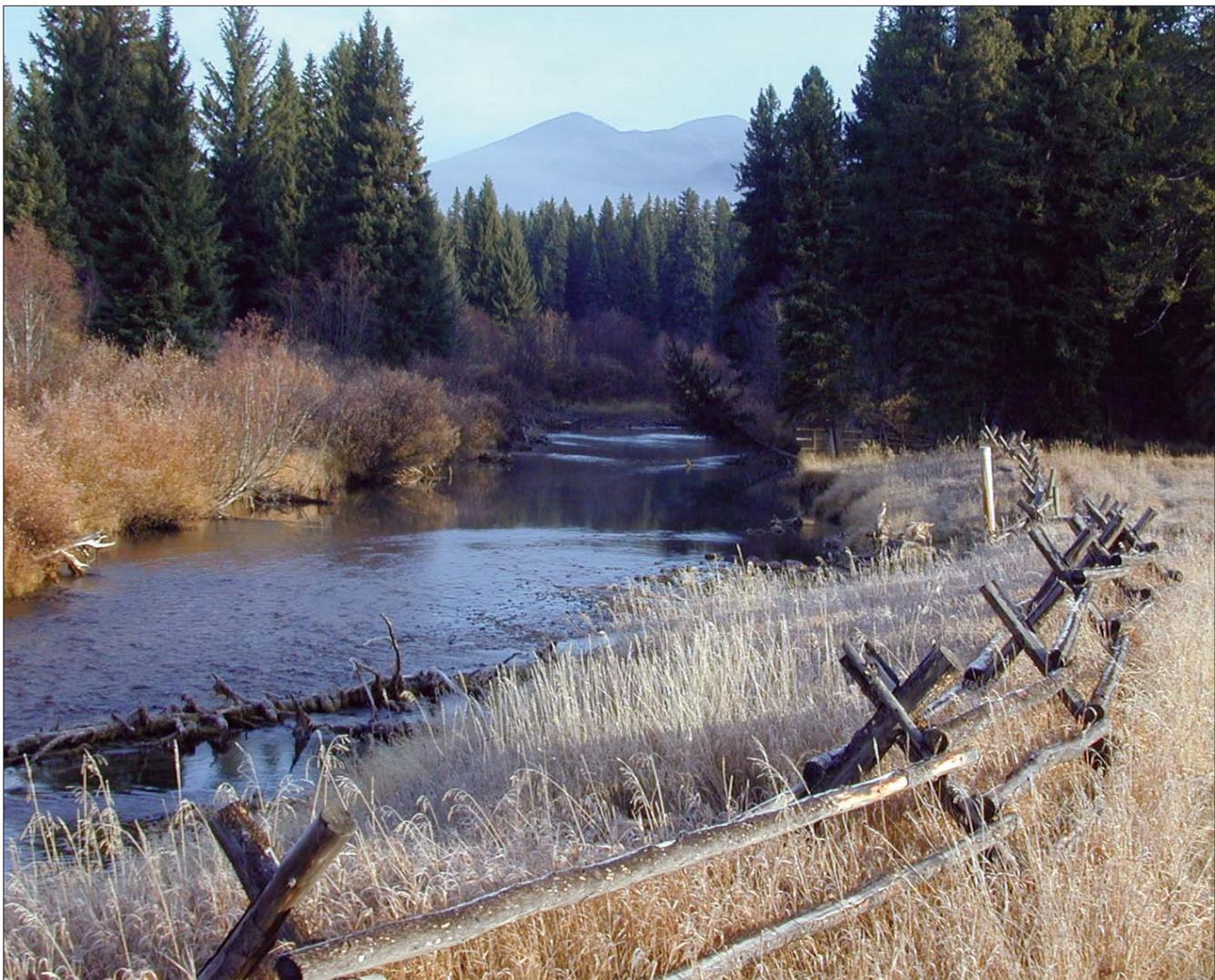


Blackfoot Valley. USFWS Photo.

Enhance Our Workforce

Five-year Targets

- All Montana Partners Program staff will be provided an opportunity to acquire 40 hours of training each year. This training may include the following categories:
 - Technical Proficiency: restoration techniques (e.g., Rosgen), GIS, Candidate Conservation Agreements / Safe Harbor / ESA Recovery
 - Enhancing Cooperative Community Conservation
 - Leadership
 - Communication
 - Congressional Operations
 - Administrative Procedures
- Training needs will be met through internal and external training facilities. Montana Partners Program staff will be encouraged to take advantage of the Service's National Conservation Training Center, workshops, seminars, and other continuing education courses.
- New Montana Partners Program conservation focus area start-ups have been identified for the Glaciated Shale/Plains and Swan River Valley. When field biologists are available to staff these focus areas they will be trained and mentored by senior Montana Partners Program staff.
- In accordance with the Service's Employee Performance Appraisal System, performance and special achievement awards will be used to recognize exceptional projects and Partners Program staff.



*Fencing project completed to enhance riverine habitat for native trout species.
Photo by Greg Neudecker, USFWS.*

Increase Accountability

Five-year Targets

- By 2010, develop site specific plans for each Montana Partners Program conservation focus area. These plans will be developed in consultation with the Montana HAPET Office and will include GIS layers, data sets, and habitat assessments. Key partners will also be engaged in this process.
- Field biologists will use GIS technology on all new habitat projects starting in 2007.
- Create GIS layer of all (historic and new) Montana Partners Program habitat projects by 2011.
- Increase the number of HabITS entries with associated photos by 5% each year.
- By 2011, each Montana Partners Program conservation focus area will have at least one peer reviewed biological assessment. These assessments may be conducted by universities; U.S. Geological Survey; Montana Natural Heritage Program; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Service Research Centers; or conservation organizations.
- The Partners Program state coordinator will ensure that HabITS data entry is timely and accurate.

External Factors

Generally, the ten Montana Partners Program conservation focus areas identify intact landscapes with a livestock ranching-based economy. The economic and social pressures to develop or fragment these areas could have a significant impact on the program's ability to deliver an effective Partners Program.

Global climate change, accompanied by persistent droughts and rapid snowmelt, could affect project availability and the response of federal trust species to Partners Program restoration projects.

Other external factors that could have adverse effects to the Montana Partners Program include budget shortfalls and restrictive policies and procedures.

