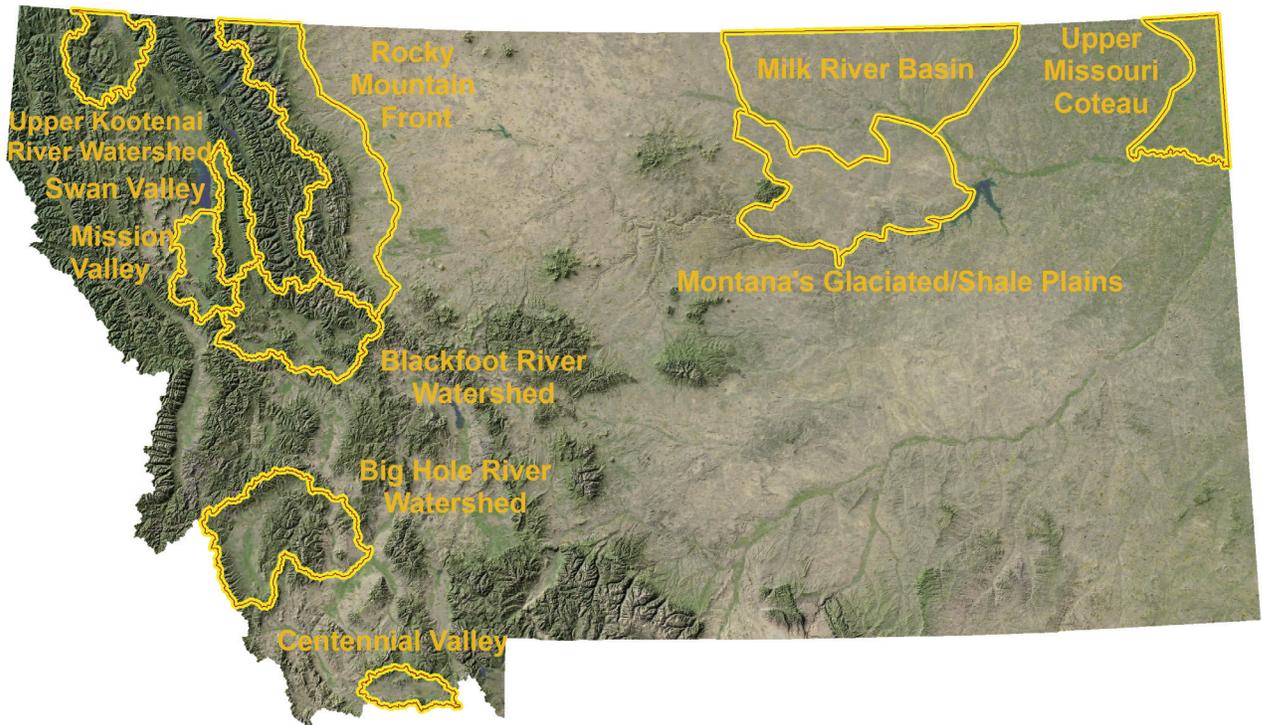


Montana



Montana Partners Program Conservation Focus Areas

Introduction and Overview

In a perfect world, there would be enough time and money to address every conservation issue. Instead we face a growing list of imperiled species, habitat degradation, elevated risks to intact landscapes and limited budgets. These constraints demand an overall approach based on 'conservation triage' defined here as the prioritization of landscapes to which limited resources are allocated to maximize biological return on investment (Bottrill et al. 2008, 2009).

Once seen as a defeatist, conservation triage is now viewed as a new approach that targets limited resources at critical conservation issues. In contrast, providing palliative care to severely

degraded landscapes tends to stretch limited resources even further. Indeed, the conservation paradigm has shifted in scale and practice from small and reactive to large and proactive. This approach allows practitioners to implement landscape conservation before the opportunity to do so is lost.

Landscape planning has typically been a biological endeavor but the real key to implementing lasting conservation is working with people to maintain rural lifestyles that are compatible with biological goals. Community-based conservation originated in the 1980s in response to criticism of major international organizations for designing and implementing conservation with little input from local communities (Chambers 2007). The rise of community-based conservation also

resonated in the U.S. as agencies explored a related, but somewhat independent, trend away from top-down, regulatory-based and expert-driven resource management toward voluntary, incentive-based conservation with broad public and community inclusion in land management programs (Weber 2000, Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). Today, community-based conservation has evolved from a theoretical argument against actions that exclude humans to integrated approaches that embrace equally the societal and biological aspects of conservation (Horwich and Lyons 2007).

The Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife (MT PFW) program began discussing the merits of conservation focus areas in the mid 1990's. In 1999, the MT

PFW program developed its first strategic plan using intact habitats as the basis for selecting conservation focus areas. In FY 2007, the Montana Step-Down Strategic Plan refined the conservation planning process. The 2007 Plan identified geographic planning areas, selected priority focal species for each geographic planning area, analyzed biological models and incorporated other scientifically based conservation plans. The process included a robust outreach effort.

In FY 2007, this comprehensive, multi-step approach initially identified 18 potential MT PFW conservation focus areas. Final selection was completed by in-depth analysis of the 18 areas using the following filters; public/private land patterns, proximity to FWS field stations, existing community-based partnerships, intact landscapes, and threats. This led to the selection of 10 priority conservation focus areas encompassing 11% of the private lands in Montana.

For the 2012-16 planning cycle, MT PFW has adopted a 10-step approach for selecting conservation focus areas. These steps provide filters for designating the most important areas to invest limited time and resources.

In application, the PFW program model of biological planning begins by locating focus areas within broad geographic areas. Geographic areas are similar to eco-regions in that they cover relatively large areas that contain geographically and climatically distinct assemblages of natural communities and fish

A 10-step Conservation Focus Area (CFA) approach.

- Use geographic areas or ecoregions as a foundation for planning.
- Select a representative set of focal species.
- Initiate biological planning by compiling in a geographic information system all relevant habitat and population data for focal species.
- Identify initial overlap in conservation plans between state, federal, and nongovernment partners.
- Consult with partners to view strengths and weaknesses in biological data.
- Draft initial set of CFAs.
- Use landscape intactness and public/private ownership patterns to compare draft CFAs.
- Assess existing community-based conservation groups already working in identified CFAs.
- Evaluate realized and potential future threats to CFAs.
- Formally select final set of CFAs.

and wildlife species, in contrast to jurisdictional lines for management such as state or county boundaries (Bailey 1995). We began by dividing Montana into four distinct areas; Prairie Potholes, Great Plains, Upper Missouri/Yellowstone Watershed and the Upper Columbia Watershed.

We then selected focal species for each distinct geographic area. Focal species help provide a practical bridge between single- and multiple-species approaches to wildlife conservation and management (Mills 2007). However, with 1.5 million identified species, practitioners face major challenges implementing conservation actions in a way that is logistically, financially and politically feasible. One viable solution is to develop inference about the larger community or landscape based on a subset of species in the system. Six categories of focal species including keystone, trend detector, umbrella,

indicator, species of special concern and flagship were used collectively to move beyond single-species management towards landscape scale conservation.

For the MT PFW Strategic Plan, we further refined the Focal Species concept by establishing four specific selection criteria. Those include: 1) Landscape Species (Mills 2007); 2) Species that are data rich as described by Service Strategic Habitat Conservation Model; 3) Species that one or more of our partners are actively monitoring to establish biological outcomes related to restoration, management and protection activities at the population level; 4) Politically, socially, and logistically attainable on private lands in Montana as determined by the MT PFW program and our 2011 Science Advisors (Dr. Naugle – University of Montana, Dr. Vest – Intermountain West Joint Venture, and Sean Fields – Habitat and Population Evaluation and Assessment Team).

A three tiered process was then developed for each geographic area to further refine our Focal Species selection. These tiers are defined as: Tier 1 (Primary Species): A species that meets all four categories for prioritization; Tier 2 (Secondary Species): A species that does not meet one of the four categories used for prioritization, or is a Tier 1 species for only a small segment of larger geographic area (e.g., grizzly bear on the Rocky



Table I lists the MT PFW 2012-16 Strategic Plan focal species by tier.

	Prairie Pothole	Great Plains	Upper Missouri	Upper Columbia
TIER 1	Sage-grouse	Sage-grouse	Sage-grouse	
				Grizzly bears
				Bull trout
	Mallard			
			Arctic grayling	
TIER 2	Piping plover			
	B.T. prairie dog	B.T. prairie dog		
		Pallid sturgeon		
	Ws. C. trout		Ws. C. trout	Ws. C. trout
			Trumpeter swan	Trumpeter swan
	Bull trout			
	Grizzly bears			
TIER 3	L. B. curlew	L. B. curlew	L. B. curlew	L. B. curlew
			Grizzly bears	
			Y.S.C trout	
	Mixed Grass Grassland Bird Suite*	Mixed Grass Grassland Bird Suite*		
	Mountain plover	Mountain plover		

* McCowan’s longspur, Chestnut-collared longspur, Sprague’s pipit & Baird’s sparrow

Mountain Front within the prairie pothole area), trumpeter swan in the Centennial Valley within the upper Missouri area, and Westslope cutthroat trout in the Blackfoot Watershed in the upper Columbia area); Tier 3 (Science Need): A Landscape Species lacking empirical data to apply the Strategic Habitat Conservation Model for on-the-ground delivery within a geographic area.

Once geographic areas and focal species had been selected, biological planning and conservation design follow. Biological planning is the systematic application of scientific knowledge about species and habitat conservation (Johnson et al. 2009c). Planning includes articulating measurable population objectives for selected focal species, identifying what may be limiting populations below desired levels and compiling models that describe how populations are expected to respond to specific conservation actions (on-the-ground delivery). Conservation design is a rigorous GIS-based mapping process that predicts patterns in the landscape and develops species-

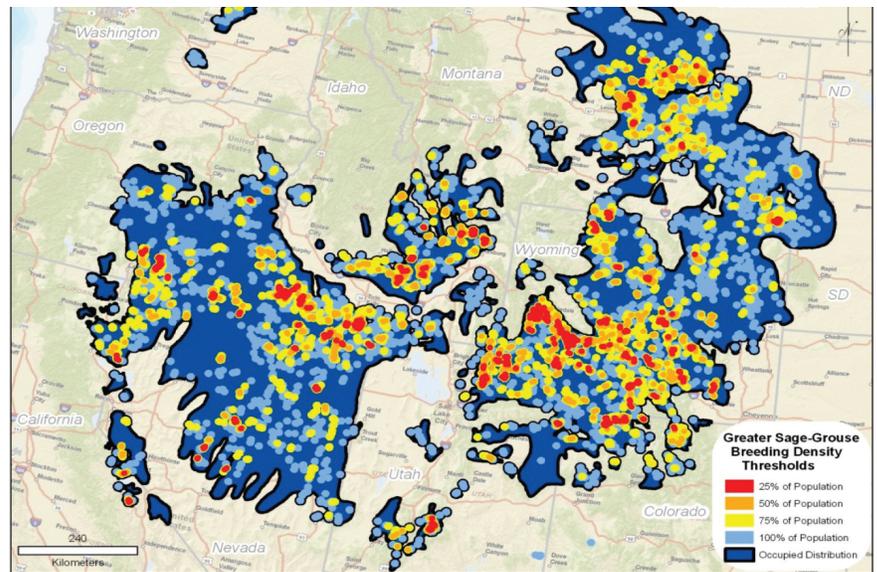


Figure 1. Range-wide breeding sage-grouse density areas represent spatial locations of 25%, 50%, 75% and 100% of the known breeding population differentiated by color. Because colors are additive, red and orange represents 50% of the breeding population in 10% of the range.

specific models, associated habitat objectives and maps of biodiversity and species richness. The maps are produced by applying empirical models to spatial data (Johnson et al. 2009c). The empirical models displayed in a spatial data format will be the basis for prioritizing conservation delivery as well as

linking biological outcomes to habitat outcomes.

Figure 1 tells us where to work in a landscape but it doesn’t address limiting factors. Furthermore, it does not link biological outcomes to habitat outcomes. Our goal is to complete



Figure 2. Number of grizzly bear conflicts within the Blackfoot focus area pre (1998-2003) and post (2003 to present) with conflict reduction activities implemented.

that link for all Tier 1 species during this five year strategic planning timeline. For example, an explicit objective for greater sage-grouse in the Glaciated Shale Plain Focus Area might read; “Increase the Sage-Grouse Populations by 10% over the next five years.” Accomplishing this biological outcome will entail implementing grazing management on 30,000 acres of privately owned sage-steppe habitat resulting in a 5 cm average increase in cover height. This will equate to an 8% increase in nest success and a 10% increase in the sage-grouse population (Walker et al. 2007, Doherty et al. 2009).

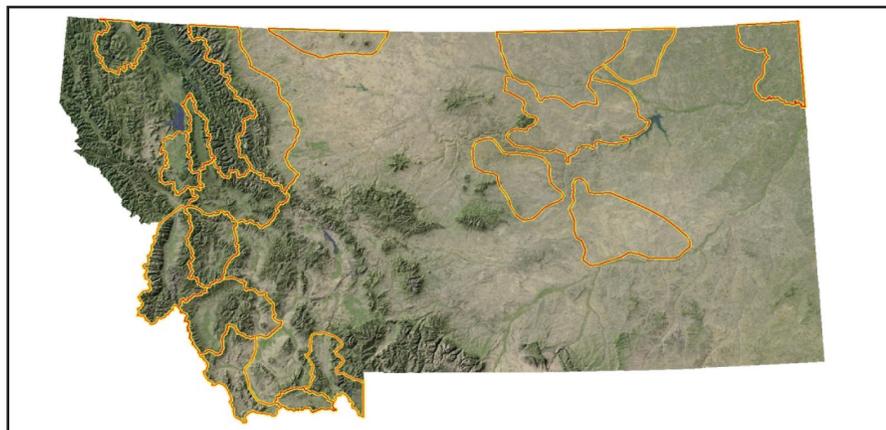
mortalities were management related, where bears are removed due to livestock depredation (Servheen, 2011). Research shows that these mortalities are a direct result of human/grizzly bear conflicts. By mapping the known conflicts within the Blackfoot River Watershed Focus Area and working proactively to address those issues we can track biological outcomes in the form of reduced conflicts and mortalities. MT PFW program conservation delivery activities that address conflict reduction include removal of dead livestock carcasses, protecting spring calving areas and installing power fencing around apiaries (bee hives).

Another example of linking conservation delivery to biological objectives is our work with grizzly bears in the upper Columbia and prairie pothole geographic areas. The Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) grizzly bear population is increasing at an annual rate of 3% and the overall population is estimated at approximately 900 bears (Servheen, 2011). There were 232 mortalities documented between 2000 and 2010 with 49% of those deaths occurring on private lands (Servheen, 2011). Eighteen percent of the

The next step involved consultation with other conservation professionals. First, the MT PFW program draft focus areas were compared to other biologically-based conservation plans that cover the same geographic areas. One example is the Montana Comprehensive Wildlife Plan. Key conservation partners were asked to review data layers and discuss data gaps prior to selecting the focus areas.

We then developed a draft of potential MT PFW focus areas. For this plan, the PFW program and its partners identified 18 potential focus areas across Montana. Next, draft focus areas were evaluated by assessing landscape intactness and public-private ownership patterns. If focus areas have equivalent values after the sixth step, priority is given to landscapes with large tracts of native vegetation that are embedded within ≥50 percent public ownership or where private landowners own relatively large parcels.

The next filter involved assessing viable community-based conservation groups working within the identified focus areas. We believe working with watershed, place-based interest or other non-profit organizations is a key component to a successful private lands program. When high biological values align with community values there is fertile ground for effective conservation delivery at the landscape scale.



Biologically Significant Areas Based on Focal Species



Ten final Montana PFW program Focus Areas.

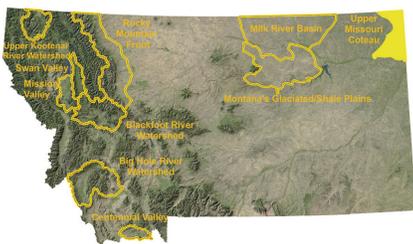
At this point, threats are assessed. Evaluating potential habitat fragmentation threats from residential subdivision, energy development and sodbusting is an important step in focus area selection process. We put this step towards the end of the process as we believe using threats too early in the planning stage typically leads to reactive rather than proactive conservation and poses the risk of bypassing conservation opportunities within intact landscapes. The MT PFW focus area selection process addressed threats only after previous filters had been used and all other biological, scale and ownership factors were equal. This approach generated focus areas with high biological values and low or moderate threat levels. The focus area model seeks to abate threats by delivering proactive conservation and working in relatively intact areas to address threats before they create irreversible resource damage. The final step in the process was formal selection of focus areas. The PFW program selected 10 focus areas

covering 23% of Montana's land ownership (12 percent public and 11 percent private). The PFW program will set targets and goals to restore and enhance habitats on the private land, working with partners who will make their emphasis the public land within the focus areas.

Over the next 5 years, the ten MT PFW focus areas will include a Site Specific Plan that displays empirical models in spatial data form. These plans will be the basis for prioritizing conservation delivery actions that link biological outcomes to habitat outcomes. The Kootenai River Focus Area has completed the first step in the process by developing population objectives for bull trout, identifying private lands habitat limiting factors and prioritizing on-the-ground projects. The plan also reviews limiting factors influencing population objectives, identifies selection criteria for on-the-ground habitat restoration projects and develops a protocol to monitor success.

Selecting specific places to work using a biologically-based, thorough, and systematic approach is critical to implementing community-based landscape conservation. The Montana PFW program believes that selection of appropriate focus areas based on scientifically-sound strategies constitutes approximately 20 percent of the recipe for success. The remaining 80 percent of this new conservation paradigm and its value in practice come from hiring staff with specific skills and aligning the program with goal-oriented partners who assist in implementation of these common goals.

Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area



The Upper Missouri Coteau 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 was 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 as the dominant land uses.

A significant amount of native prairie has been converted to cropland and wetland drainage has been a common occurrence. A portion of the Missouri Coteau lies in the northern and eastern portions of the focus area. The Coteau is very rolling with a very high wetland density. Conversion

of prairie to cropland and wetland drainage have occurred to a lesser extent on the Coteau than other parts of the focus area, but are still significant threats. The focus 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, endangered, and candidate species such as piping plover (Threatened) and Sprague's pipit (Candidate).

The Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area encompasses about 1 million acres. It is predominantly in private ownership, with an interspersed of State school section 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 (NRCS); Fort Peck Tribes; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP); North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA); DU;

TNC; and private landowners.

The PFW Program will develop a Site Specific Plan for mallards and piping plovers by year two of this planning effort. PFW program restoration activities will be guided by the plan and will likely concentrate on restoring wetland and grassland systems that will have tangible biological outcomes for mallards. Specific activities will likely also include seeding marginal cropland back to native prairie species, and developing prescribed grazing systems to enhance grassland and wetland habitat. Project activities will also be designed specifically to directly benefit piping plovers. These include removal of mammalian predator den sites (abandoned buildings, junk piles, rock piles) near nesting beaches, creation of new nesting beaches by spreading gravel along select shorelines of alkali lakes, and development of prescribed grazing systems to restrict cattle access to nesting beaches during the nesting and brood-rearing seasons.



Wetland habitat restoration project. USFWS photo.

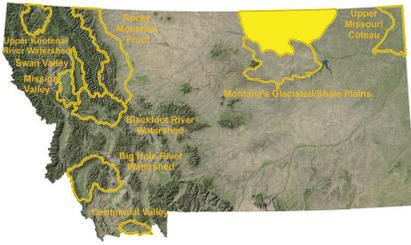
PRIORITY	UPPER MISSOURI COTEAU FOCAL SPECIES
TIER 1	Mallard, Piping Plover
TIER 2	
TIER 3	Long-billed Curlew, Mixed Grass Grassland Bird Suite

Upper Missouri Coteau Focus Area Five Year Targets	
• Wetland Acres Restored/Enhanced	500 acres
• Upland Acres Restored/Enhanced	7,500 acres
• Stream Miles Restored/Enhanced	2.0 miles
• Fish Passage	0
Partnerships	
• # of Agreements	40
• Cost-Share Ratio	1:1
• Technical Assistance	120 total staff days



Removal of junk pile (artificial predator den sites) along Piping Plover nesting beach. USFWS photo.

Milk River Basin Focus Area



The Milk River Basin Focus Area, located in north central Montana, is part of a larger landscape known locally as the “Hi-Line.” The region is bordered on the south by the Milk River and on the north by prairie Canada. This focus area has relatively high densities of palustrine wetlands and intact tracts of mixed-grass native prairie. Ranching and farming are the primary land-uses. Oil and gas production is increasing throughout the focus area.

Prior to European settlement, this “sea of grass” was inhabited by bison, pronghorn, elk, deer,

grizzly bear, gray wolf, swift fox, and black-tailed prairie dog along with a myriad of grassland birds. Today, the Milk River focus area remains a critically important landscape for numerous Federal trust species. Black-tailed prairie dogs and greater sage-grouse are common. The focus area provides critical habitat for a number of declining migratory bird species including; long-billed curlew, McCown’s longspur, chestnut-collared longspur, Sprague’s pipit, and Baird’s sparrow. Recent telemetry studies show that the Milk River Basin is a key corridor for greater sage- grouse and pronghorn antelope during seasonal north-south migrations. Canadian populations of sage-grouse and pronghorn were documented migrating through the Milk River Basin Focus Area to the Missouri River Breaks in the winter of 2011.

The Milk River Basin Focus Area encompasses about 2.5 million acres. Land ownership is a mixture

of private land, National Wildlife Refuge lands (Bowdoin NWR) and Waterfowl Production Areas, BLM, State school section lands and private non-profit conservation lands. Ownership is comprised of 65% private land and 35% public land.

Key partners in the Milk River Basin include; MFWP, DU, Pheasants Forever (PF), Bureau of Land Management, TNC, NRCS, Tribes and private landowners.

North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) funding has been an important conservation delivery funding source for habitat projects in the Milk River Basin. We expect this trend to continue. A Standard Grant proposal submitted for the 2012 funding cycle recently received the highest score in the Nation.

The Milk River Basin field biologist position is currently vacant.



Aerial photo of the Milk River Basin. USFWS photo.



Prairie grassland restoration project in the Milk River Basin Focus Area. USFWS Photo.

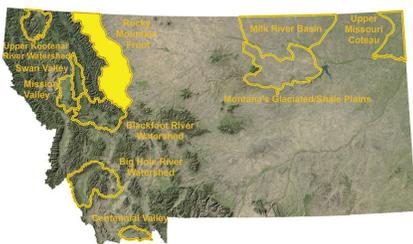
Budget uncertainties dictate that the position will remain vacant for an undetermined time period. This situation will impact PFW conservation delivery activities. A robust partnership exists in this focus area and the coalition will be exploring creative ways to maintain momentum. One option could be to pool resources to establish a shared position in the Milk River Basin. PFW activities will concentrate on restoring and enhancing wetland and native prairie habitat for migratory birds as well as candidate, threatened and endangered species.

Under the MT PFW Focal Species criteria; two Tier 1 focal species have been selected for the Milk River Basin; greater sage-grouse and mallard. The site specific plan developed for the Milk River Basin will link habitat projects to explicit population objectives for these two species. Refer to the MT PFW Strategic Plan Introduction for a detailed explanation on the process used to select and prioritize focal species.

PRIORITY	MILK RIVER BASIN FOCAL SPECIES
TIER 1	Greater sage-grouse, Mallard
TIER 2	Piping Plover, Black-tailed Prairie Dog
TIER 3	Long-billed Curlew, Mixed Grass Grassland Bird Suite, Mountain Plover

Milk River Basin Focus Area Five Year Plan	
• Wetland Acres Restored/Enhanced	250 acres
• Upland Acres Restored/Enhanced	1,000 acres
• Stream Miles Restored/Enhanced	5 miles
• Fish Passage	0
Partnerships	
• # of Agreements	25
• Cost-Share Ratio	1:1.5
• Technical Assistance	60 total staff days

Rocky Mountain Front Focus Area



The Rocky Mountain Front 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 elevational and climatic 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. The species diversity is

remarkable. It includes some of the best remaining grizzly bear habitat in the lower-48 States. Breeding and migratory 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 public and private land, including Service Waterfowl Production Areas; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Management Areas and Department of Natural Resources and Conservation lands; Blackfeet tribal lands; TNC and Boone and Crockett Club's private preserves; and privately owned ranch and farm land. Ownership is 49% private and 51% public.

Key partners in the area include the USDA - Forest Service, USDA - NRCS, Blackfeet Nation, MFWP, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, TNC, county conservation districts, four county weed control districts,

the Sun and Teton Watershed groups, the Rocky Mountain Front Weed Roundtable, the Boone and Crockett Club, and the NAWCA program.

The MT PFW program, working closely with many partners on the Front will develop a Site Specific Plan for grizzly bears over the next 3 years. PFW restoration activities will be guided by the plan and will likely concentrate on restoring riparian habitats that will have tangible biological outcomes for grizzly bears. We will also focus our efforts on wetland restoration and upland management projects including invasive species management benefiting mallards and grizzly bears. Restoration projects will also focus on in-stream habitats important to bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout.



Private landowners with previous Service Director, Sam Hamilton. USFWS photo.

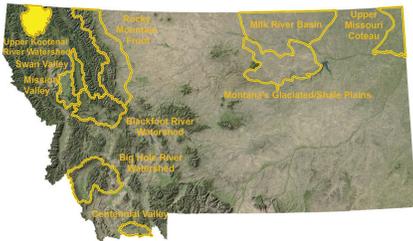
PRIORITY	ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT FOCAL SPECIES
TIER 1	Bull Trout, Grizzly Bears, Mallards
TIER 2	Westslope Cutthroat Trout
TIER 3	Long-Billed Curlew

Rocky Mountain Front Focus Area Five Year Plan	
• Wetland Acres Restored/Enhanced	75 acres
• Upland Acres Restored/Enhanced	4,000 acres
• Stream Miles Restored/Enhanced	6.0 miles
• Fish Passage	0
Partnerships	
• # of Agreements	25
• Cost-Share Ratio	1:1
• Technical Assistance	120 total staff days



Rocky Mountain Front. USFWS photo.

Upper Kootenai River Watershed Focus Area



The Upper Kootenai River Watershed Focus Area is an international watershed encompassing nearly 18,000 square miles of northwest Montana, British Columbia, and Alberta. The Kootenai River originates in British Columbia, and the river flows 485 miles through the steep mountain terrain and agricultural flat land.

The watershed contains important fluvial and adfluvial populations of native bull trout (Federally threatened under the ESA). The upper Kootenai is a designated core area for the recovery of bull trout listed in the Service, Bull Trout Critical Habitat plan. The area is

also home to healthy populations of native westslope cutthroat trout, grizzly bear (Federally threatened under ESA), gray wolf, wolverine, Canada lynx, and many migratory bird species of conservation concern. Land use consists of logging, livestock production, recreation and tourism. 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, State school section lands, and crown lands.

Key partners in the Upper Kootenai River Watershed include the Kootenai River Network; MFWP; U.S. Forest Service; British Columbia Ministry of Environment; Environmental Farm Plan, British Columbia, CA; Trout Unlimited (TU), Alberta, CA; Montana Department of Environmental Quality; Bonneville Power Administration; Glen Lake Irrigation District; Lincoln Conservation District; Plum Creek Timber Company; Mainstreams, British Columbia, BC; East

Kootenai Conservation Program, British Columbia, CA. The MT PFW program has completed a Site Specific Plan for the Upper Kootenai River Watershed. The plan sets the stage for developing population objectives for bull trout, identifying private lands habitat limiting factors, prioritizing on-the-ground projects to address limiting factors and meeting population objectives. It also framed delivering tangible on-the-ground habitat restoration projects, and working with our partners to monitor success and evaluate the Site Specific Plan. Based on the plan, activities will concentrate on restoring in-stream and riparian habitats for native salmonids, in particular bull trout. Projects will also focus on wetland, riparian and upland habitat projects that will benefit grizzly bear, a Tier 1 species for the Kootenai. Due to the international configuration of the basin, strong trans-boundary coordination is necessary to improve fish and wildlife populations.



Darris Flannigan, Landowner, Rox Rogers, PFW Biologist, Tamara McCandless, former Chief of the Branch of Habitat Restoration. USFWS photo.

PRIORITY	KOOTENAI RIVER WATERSHED FOCAL SPECIES
TIER 1	Bull Trout, Grizzly Bears
TIER 2	Westslope Cutthroat Trout
TIER 3	Long-Billed Curlew

The Upper Kootenai River Watershed Focus Area Five Year Targets

- Wetland Restoration / Enhancement: 50 acres
- Upland Restoration / Enhancement: 1,500 acres
- River / Stream Restoration/Enhancement: 18 miles
- Fish Passage 3 Structures

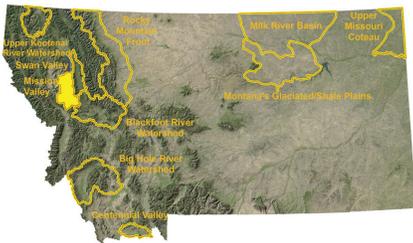
Partnerships

- Number of new landowner partners (landowner agreements) 30
- Percentage of leveraging (ratio of Service to Partner) 1: 1
- Technical Assistance 150 total staff days



Bull Trout Recovery Team inspecting MT PFW program fish screen on Grave Creek. USFWS photo.

Mission Valley Focus Area



The Mission Valley Focus Area is a glacially gouged remnant of 12,000 years past. It is located in Lake County of western Montana and is within the exterior boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The southern shore of Flathead Lake defines the northern boundary with the main stem of the Flathead River to the west. The Jocko River watershed 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 home to native westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. Grizzly bear are regularly observed in the Valley.

The Mission Valley Focus Area encompasses about 600,000 acres. Land ownership patterns in this area are a mixture of private, tribal, Service refuges and waterfowl production areas and state wildlife management areas. Ownership is comprised of 92% private land and 8% public land. Key partners in the Mission Valley include; Confederated Salish and Kootenai

Tribes, MFWP, NRCS, DU, PF, TU, Lake County Conservation District and private landowners.

The PFW program, working closely with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, will develop a Site Specific Plan for native salmonids. MT PFW program restoration activities will be guided by the plan and will likely concentrate on restoring in-stream and riparian habitats, with tangible biological outcomes for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. We will also focus our efforts on wetland restoration and management projects that benefit the Rocky Mountain population of trumpeter swans. Restoration projects will also focus on important grizzly bear habitat and will involve restoration and enhancement of riparian, wetland, and upland habitats.



Underwater photo of bull trout. Photo by National Geographic.

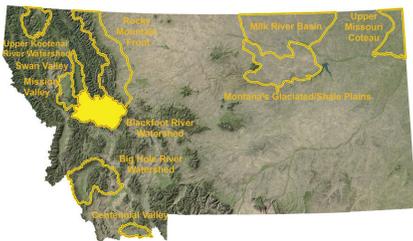


Mission Valley wetlands. USFWS photo.

PRIORITY	MISSION VALLEY FOCAL SPECIES
TIER 1	Bull Trout, Grizzly Bears Trumpeter Swans
TIER 2	Westslope Cutthroat Trout
TIER 3	Long-Billed Curlew

Mission Valley Focus Area Five Year Targets	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetland Acres Restored/Enhanced • Upland Acres Restored/Enhanced • Stream Miles Restored/Enhanced • Fish Passage 	<p>350 acres 2500 acres 15 miles 3 Structures</p>
Partnerships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of Agreements • Cost-Share Ratio • Technical Assistance 	<p>25 1: 1 150 total staff days</p>

Blackfoot River Watershed Focus Area



The headwaters of the Blackfoot River begins atop the Continental Divide at Roger's Pass and flows 132 miles westerly to its confluence with the Clark Fork River near Missoula, Montana. The watershed totals 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, while highly productive private lands are located in the foothills and valley floor. 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 bear, gray wolf, wolverine, Canada lynx, elk, deer and moose. High priority species of 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 Blackfoot 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. Land ownership patterns in this focus area are a mixture of private, Plum Creek Timber, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Service Waterfowl Production

Areas, MFWP Wildlife Management Units, TNC preserve and State school section lands. Ownership is comprised of 35% private land and 65% public land.

Key partners in the Blackfoot River Valley Watershed are members of The Blackfoot Challenge, a community-based organization that includes over 500 landowners and 160 partner organizations. These members support the overall work and mission of the Blackfoot Challenge with a mission of protecting and restoring natural resources and rural ways of life for present and future generations.

MT PFW program activities will continue to concentrate on restoring and enhancing in-stream and riparian habitats that link habitat outcomes with biological outcomes benefiting bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. For example, westslope cutthroat trout have averaged a 59% increase in total numbers on stream restoration projects three years after restoration. Bull trout redd numbers in the North Fork of the



Autumn on the Blackfoot River. USFWS photo.

Blackfoot have increased from 8 redds in 1989 to 86 redds in 2010 after reconstruction of all five irrigation diversions, screening of all the ditches and entering into in stream flow agreements on three of the ditches.

MT PFW program activities within the Blackfoot will also focus on preventative activities to reduce grizzly bear conflicts (see introduction for more details). Continued prioritization of key grizzly bear habitats and conflict locations will guide our preventative fencing and carcass pick-up programs.

Wetland restoration and management activities will be guided by our trumpeter swan habitat suitability study completed in 2005. This joint study between the Service, MT FWP and the University of Montana assessed the 30,000 wetlands in the Blackfoot Valley ranking suitability for nesting trumpeter swans. Reintroduction of trumpeter swans in the Blackfoot began in 2006 with territory establishment happening in 2009 and nesting occurring in 2011, including on two PFW program restored wetlands. The plan calls for reintroduction until we have 7 nesting pairs for three consecutive years.



Public participation in Adopt-A-Swan Program (re-introduction). USFWS photo.

PRIORITY	BLACKFOOT RIVER WATERSHED FOCAL SPECIES
TIER 1	Bull Trout, Grizzly Bears Westslope Cutthroat Trout Trumpeter Swans
TIER 2	
TIER 3	Long-Billed Curlew

Blackfoot River Watershed Focus Area Five Year Targets	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wetland Acres Restored/Enhanced Upland Acres Restored/Enhanced Stream Miles Restored/Enhanced Fish Passage 	<p>150 acres 2800 acres 14 miles 8 Structures</p>
<p>Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of Agreements Cost-Share Ratio Technical Assistance 	<p>25 1:2 175 total staff days</p>



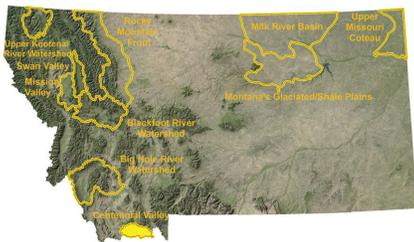
Restored wetland in the Big Hole Focus Area. USFWS photo.

Watershed will link habitat projects to explicit population objectives for these two species. For a detailed explanation of the process used to select and prioritize focal species, refer to the MT PFW Strategic Plan Introduction.

PRIORITY	BIG HOLE RIVER WATERSHED FOCAL SPECIES
TIER 1	Arctic Grayling Greater sage-grouse
TIER 2	Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Trumpeter Swans
TIER 3	Long-Billed Curlew Grizzly Bear

Big Hole Watershed Focus Area Five Year Targets	
• Wetlands Restored/Enhanced	110 acres
• Uplands Restored/Enhanced	12,000 acres
• Stream Miles Restored/Enhanced	43 miles
• Fish Passage	10 structures
Partnerships	
• # of Agreements	30
• Cost-Share Ratio	1:3.5
• Technical Assistance	150 total staff days

Centennial Valley Focus Area



The Centennial Valley 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 along the Montana-Idaho border. The Centennial Mountains form the south boundary and the rolling 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 approximately 100,000 acres of private land in the Centennial. Ranching is the dominant land-use. Native fish and wildlife are abundant, highlighted by populations of trumpeter swan, grizzly bear, gray wolf, moose, sandhill crane, Yellowstone cutthroat trout and Arctic grayling.

The Centennial Valley Focus Area encompasses about 360,000 acres. Land ownership patterns in this area are a mixture of private, National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and state lands. Ownership is comprised of 29% private land and 71% public land.

Key partners in the Centennial Valley Focus Area include; Arctic Grayling Recovery Program, Centennial Valley Landowners Association, MT FWP, NRCS,

U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, TNC, DU, and private landowners. PFW program activities will concentrate on restoring and enhancing wetland, stream and riparian areas, and uplands for native fish, migratory birds, Federally listed threatened, endangered, and candidate species with special emphasis given to Arctic grayling, greater sage-grouse and trumpeter swan.



Fluvial Arctic grayling. Photo by Mark Conlin©

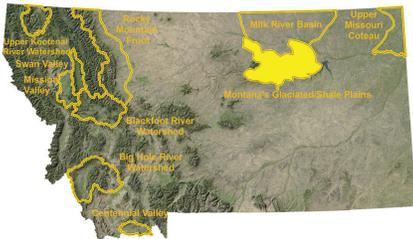


Centennial Valley Focus Area. USFWS photo.

PRIORITY	CENTENNIAL VALLEY FOCAL SPECIES
TIER 1	Arctic Grayling Greater sage-grouse, Trumpeter Swans
TIER 2	Westslope Cutthroat Trout
TIER 3	Long-Billed Curlew Grizzly Bear

Centennial Valley Focus Area Five Year Targets	
• Wetlands Restored/Enhanced	100 acres
• Uplands Restored/Enhanced	7,500 acres
• Stream Miles Restored/Enhanced	5 miles
• Fish Passage	5 structures
Partnerships	
• # of Agreements	10
• Cost-Share Ratio	1:2
• Technical Assistance	90 total staff days

Montana's Glaciated/Shale Plains Focus Area



The Glaciated Shale Plains Focus Area is an extensive region in north central Montana, characterized by undulating plains dominated by sagebrush-steppe and mixed-grass native prairie. Large river systems include the Milk and Missouri Rivers with smaller prairie streams and accompanying riparian habitat scattered through drier uplands. Moderate to high densities of pothole-type wetlands are dispersed across the focus area. Black-tailed prairie dogs are abundant. Key migratory bird species found in the focus area include mountain plover, burrowing owl, greater sage-grouse, ferruginous hawk, chestnut-collared longspur, Sprague's pipit and long-billed curlew. Livestock production and farming are the primary land-uses.

The Glaciated/Shale Plains Focus Area encompasses about 2.5 million acres. Land ownership is a checkerboard of public and private lands. Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge lies at the southern boundary of the focus area and BLM manages numerous large allotments. The Matador Ranch, a 60,000 acre preserve owned by TNC, lies in the heart of the focus area. Private ownership is dominated by large working ranches. Ownership is 37% private and 63% public lands.

Key partners in the Glaciated Shale Plains Focus Area include the Rancher Stewardship Alliance, MT FWP, NRCS, Bureau of Land Management, TNC, DU and private landowners.

NAWCA funding has been an important conservation delivery funding source for habitat projects in the Glaciated Shale Plains.

We expect this trend to continue. A Standard Grant proposal submitted for the 2012 funding cycle recently received the highest score in the Nation.

The Glaciated Shale Plains PFW program field biologist position is currently vacant. Budget uncertainties have precluded the hiring of a biologist and it's likely that the position will remain vacant in the short-term. This situation will impact PFW conservation delivery activities. A robust partnership exists in this focus area and the coalition will be exploring creative ways to maintain momentum with private landowners.

Under the MT PFW program focal species criteria, two Tier 1 focal species have been selected for the Glaciated Shale Plains, including greater sage-grouse and mallard. When the Site Specific Plan is developed for the Glaciated Shale Plains, it will link habitat projects to explicit population objectives for these two species. For a detailed explanation on the process used to select and prioritize focal species, refer to the MT PFW Strategic Plan introduction.

PFW program activities will concentrate on restoring and enhancing upland and wetland habitats for migratory birds, Federally listed threatened, endangered, and candidate species. Greater sage-grouse is a Tier 1 focal species in this focus area. MT PFW staff will work with NRCS to help implement habitat projects in the Glaciated Shale Plains under the Sage-Grouse Initiative (SGI). Montana sage-grouse Core Area #2 is located in the Glaciated Shale Plains Focus Area and research on populations, habitat quality, migration corridors and threats indicate that conservation delivery in this core area should be a top-priority for conservation delivery practitioners. An SGI shared position began work in this focus area in FY 2012. On the Matador Ranch Preserve, which lies in the heart of this focus area, TNC has established an innovative grass-banking system with neighboring

landowners. This project has increased the conservation "footprint" in south Phillips County to nearly 300,000 acres. The PFW program will continue to work on habitat projects with grass-bank participants in the next 5 years.



Montana’s Glaciated/Shale Plains Focus Area. USFWS photo.

PRIORITY	MONTANA’S GLACIATED/SHALE PLAIN FOCAL SPECIES
TIER 1	Arctic Grayling Greater sage-grouse, Trumpeter Swans
TIER 2	Westslope Cutthroat Trout
TIER 3	Long-Billed Curlew Grizzly Bear

Montana’s Glaciated/Shale Plain Focus Area Five Year Targets	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetlands Restored/Enhanced • Uplands Restored/Enhanced • Stream Miles Restored/Enhanced • Fish Passage 	<p>250 acres 5,000 acres 5 miles 0 structures</p>
Partnerships	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost-Share Ratio • Technical Assistance 	<p>1: 0.5 60 total staff days</p>



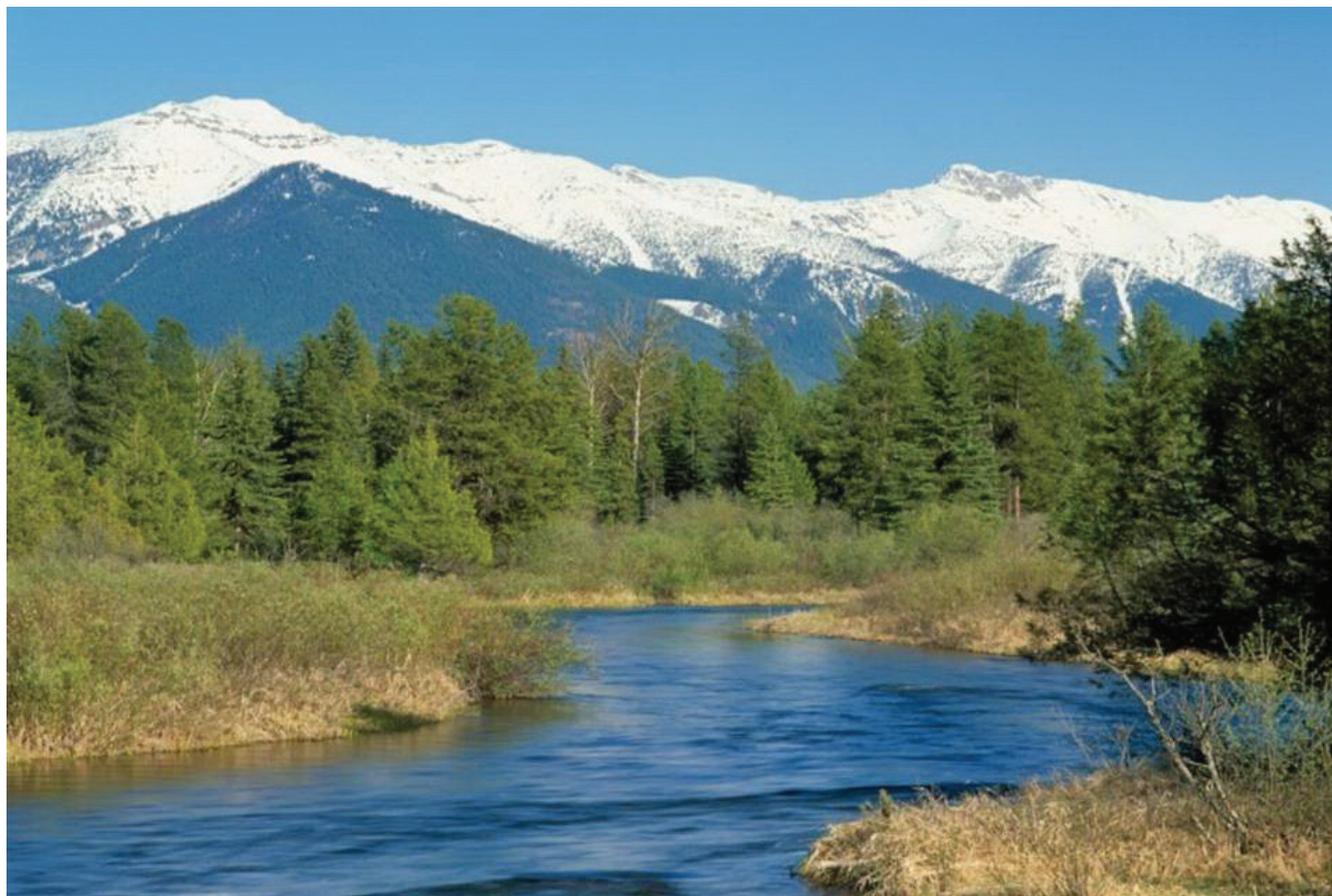
The Swan River Watershed is part of the Interior Columbia River Basin Area which includes the larger Columbia Basin and the Upper Missouri/Yellowstone rivers watersheds. Swan River originates at Gray Wolf Lake in the Mission Mountains and flows through Swan Lake at the northern end of the valley, before entering the Flathead Lake Watershed, ultimately flowing into the Columbia River System. Swan River Watershed lies at the western edge of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem (CoCE) which is the last remaining ecosystem that still supports the full assemblage of large mammalian

predators including grizzly bear, gray wolf, wolverine, and Canada lynx. Within the CoCE, an exceptional diversity of wetland types occurs including major riparian areas, smaller riparian tributaries, glacial prairie potholes, lakes, bogs, fens, swamps, and boreal peatlands. The lowlands support over 170 different species of wetland plants. Along the elevation gradient, large expanses of fescue grasslands phase into alpine meadows or sagebrush-steppe, which then transition into montane forests consisting of white pine, Douglas-fir, and ponderosa pine. These transitional zones of valley floors to montane forests are extremely important to fish and wildlife.

The continued presence of large expansive intact habitat and historic wildlife corridors, along the Swan Valley, would benefit Federal trust species such as the grizzly bear, gray wolf, wolverine, pine martin and Canada lynx. Migratory birds such as harlequin duck,

common loon, red-necked grebe, black tern, olive-sided flycatcher, peregrine falcon, greater sandhill crane and trumpeter swan would flourish. Westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout will continue to thrive. Additionally, the Swan Valley provides excellent habitat for black bear, elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, moose, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, wolverine, fisher, and a wide variety of small mammals. It also provide habitat for the Federally threatened howellia aquatilis, or water howellia.

The Swan River Watershed Focus Area encompasses approximately 470,000 acres. Until recently the valley bottom had a large checkerboard ownership between the U.S. Forest Service and Plum Creek Timber Company (PCTC). TNC and Trust for Public Lands purchased the remaining PCTC lands as part of the Montana Legacy Project and transferred the bulk of the ownership to state and federal partners. Today ownership



Swan River and Swan Mountain Range. USFWS photo.



Grizzly bear sow with cubs along glaciated wetland in the Swan River Watershed. USFWS photo.

is comprised of 10% private lands and 90% public lands with the U.S. Forest Service, Montana State Forest and the Services’ Swan River National Wildlife Refuge as the large public owners.

Key partners in the Swan River Valley Focus Area include private landowners, MT FWP, MT Department of Natural Resource and Conservation, U.S. Forest Service, Swan Ecosystem Center, Northwest Connections, Swan Valley Community Council, Missoula County, TNC, Trust for Public Lands, Vital Ground, and the

Montana Reliance.

The PFW program, working closely with the Swan Ecosystem Center and Northwest Connections, will develop a Site Specific Plan for the Swan River Watershed. PFW restoration activities will be guided by the plan and will likely concentrate on restoring in-stream and riparian habitats that will have tangible biological outcomes for

bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. We will also focus our efforts on wetland restoration and management projects that benefit the Rocky Mountain population of trumpeter swans. Restoration projects will also focus on important grizzly bear habitat and will involve restoration and enhancement of riparian, wetland and upland

PRIORITY	SWAN RIVER WATERSHED FOCAL SPECIES
TIER 1	Bull Trout, Grizzly Bears
TIER 2	Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Trumpeter Swan
TIER 3	

Swan River Watershed Focus Area Five Year Targets	
• Wetlands Restored/Enhanced	150 acres
• Uplands Restored/Enhanced	640 acres
• Stream Miles Restored/Enhanced	8 miles
• Fish Passage	4 structures
Partnerships	
• # of Agreements	20
• Cost-Share Ratio	1: 1
• Technical Assistance	150 total staff days

Montana Statewide Goals

habitats.



Improve Information Sharing and Communication

The MT PFW program operates under the principle that successful community-based, landscape conservation is multi-dimensional, working across spatial, temporal, ecological, and social scales. Communication, collaboration and outreach with conservation partners is an integral part of a successful conservation delivery program. To be successful, the program will strive to maintain, build and strengthen relationships with internal and external partners.

5-Year Targets:

- Organize and participate in 100 (20/yr.) landowner/watershed meetings, conferences or workshops throughout Montana;
- Enter into 12 Cooperative Agreements, Contribution Agreements or Memorandums of Understanding with partners or landowner based groups in MT; Sponsor or directly assist in 10 field tours that promote the MT PFW program;
- Assist in five National Conservation Training Center courses as instructors or guest speakers;
- Host five coordination meetings with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to assure program consistencies;
- Attend 12 Natural Resource Conservation Service State Technical Committee meetings;
- Participate in 10 Congressional staff meetings regarding the MT PFW Program;
- Provide 15 MT PFW program updates to Regional and Washington FWS offices;
- Hold 10 MT PFW program staff meetings to improve internal communication;
- Initiate 10 media events/stories related to MT PFW program activities.

Enhancing Our Workforce

All MT PFW 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 (i.e. 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 PFW staff will be encouraged to take advantage of the USFWS National Conservation Training Center, workshops, seminars, and other continuing education opportunities.

Currently Milk River Basin, Glaciated Shale Plains and Swan River Valley focus areas are unstaffed. If new field biologists are added to these focus areas, they will be trained and mentored by senior MT PFW program staff.

In accordance with the USFWS EPAP system, performance and special achievement awards will be used to recognize exceptional projects and employees.

Increase Accountability

Objectives:

- By 2015 develop site specific plans for each MT PFW focus area. These plans will be developed in consultation with the MT HAPET Office and will include GIS layers, data sets, and habitat assessments. Key partners will also be engaged in this process;
- Field biologists will GPS all new habitat projects;
- Create GIS layer of all MT PFW program habitat projects;
- By 2017, each MT PFW program focus area will have at least one peer reviewed biological assessment. These assessments may be conducted by universities, U.S. Geological Survey, The MT Natural Heritage Program, MT FWP, USFWS Research Centers or conservation organizations;
- The MT PFW State Coordinator and HabITS Coordinator will ensure that HabITS data entries are timely and accurate.

External Factors:

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

Global climate change accompanied by persistent droughts and rapid snowmelt could affect project availability and the response of Federal trust species to PFW program restoration projects.

Other external factors that could have adverse effects on the MT PFW program include budget shortfalls, personnel turnover, changing Service leadership, and restrictive policies.

