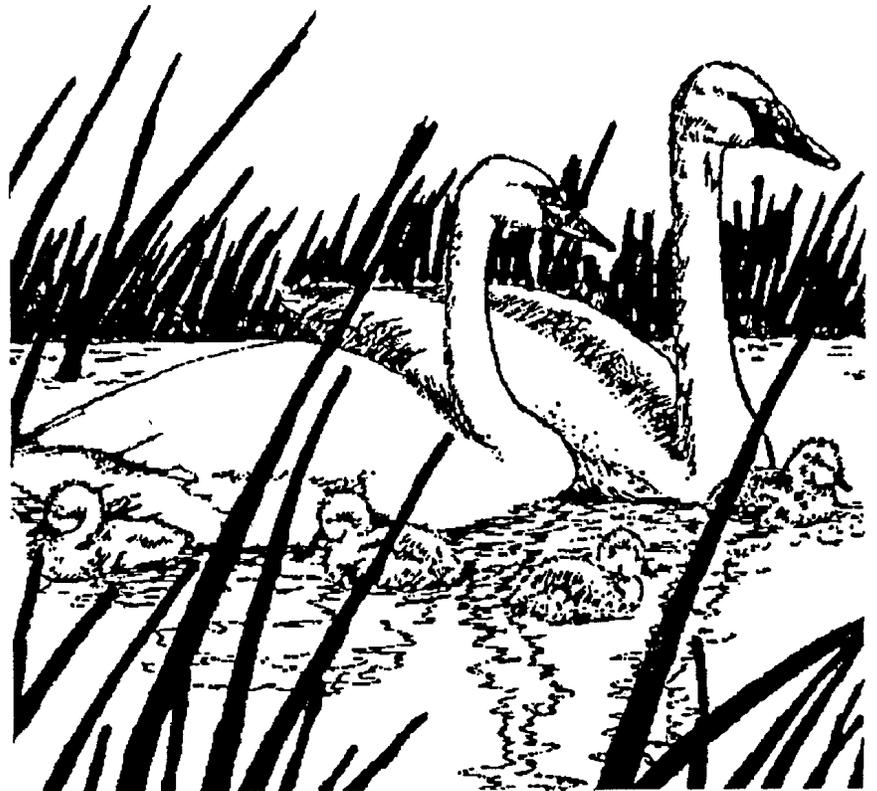


# Red Rock Lakes

*National Wildlife Refuge*

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*Centennial Valley  
Conservation Easement  
Program*



*Environmental Assessment  
and Land Protection Plan*

# Environmental Assessment

## *Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program*

*Prepared by*

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# *Chapter 1. Purpose of and Need for Action*

## **Introduction and Background**

“In Beaverhead County, when someone refers to the ‘Valley,’ chances are they mean the Centennial.” (Beaverhead County History Book Association, 1990). In 1876 one of the partners in the P&O Ranch and from the original ranching community, Mrs. William C. Orr, named this 60-mile long, east-west running Valley as the Centennial Valley, to commemorate the nation’s Centennial. Along with other ranches, the P&O Ranch summered livestock in the Valley. The Valley was then homesteaded in the late 1890s. Along with ranching, the Valley was used by hunting clubs for people who traveled by train to hunt waterfowl in the area (see photo insert 1).

The Valley, however, was well known to Native Americans long before the homestead era.

“Upon entering the Centennial Valley in 1835,” Osborne Russell wrote that the Valley, from which “. . . flows the head stream of the Missouri . . .” “. . . was full of Buffalo when we entered it and large numbers of which were killed by our hunters we repeatedly saw signs of Blackfeet about us to waylay the Trappers. 27th we stopped at this place to feast on fat Buffalo.”

Osborne Russell, September 1835

In addition to providing good seasonal trapping and hunting grounds, the Centennial Valley was a favored route between the headwaters of the upper Bighole River and the Yellowstone area.

The long winters and great distances to market made subsistence difficult at best, with few homesteaders remaining after the Great Depression and many selling their land back to the Federal Resettlement Administration during the 1930s.

From these lands, and with the population of trumpeter swans dwindling across the continent, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge on April 22, 1935 under Executive Order 7023 “. . . as a Refuge and breeding ground for wild birds and animals . . .”

The Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) is located 28 miles east of Monida, Beaverhead County, southwestern Montana (Figure 1), and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), an agency of the Department of Interior. This 44,157-acre Refuge sits at 6,670 feet above sea level in the Centennial Valley (Valley). Lying east of the Continental Divide, it is near the uppermost reach of the Missouri River drainage. Its 69 square miles of habitat comprise one of the most naturally diverse areas in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge headquarters is located 28 miles from the nearest paved road and 45 miles from Yellowstone National Park. About 15,000 people visit the Refuge annually, primarily to engage in various wildlife related recreational activities. The mission of the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is to protect, restore, and manage the Refuge in as natural a state as possible, as part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (Figure 2) in order to optimize wildlife resources.

Management of the Refuge has always focused on protecting a remnant population of rare trumpeter swans. About 300 trumpeter swans are currently in the tri-state (Idaho, Montana, Wyoming) population. Over 200 species of birds have been recorded on the Refuge with peregrine and prairie falcons, bald and golden eagles, hawks and owls, sandhill cranes, waterfowl and sage grouse being the most notable. Common mammalian species include antelope, Shiras moose, elk, mule and white-tailed deer, badger, coyote, and red fox.

While wildlife represents a significant portion of the area's history, archaeological and cultural sites document the use by early peoples. Occasional artifacts and explorer accounts demonstrate use of the area by early Native Americans. The present day settlement era is represented by the numerous historical structures which attest to the rough country lifestyle of the homesteaders. Such history is blended with the modern day use of such technologies as electric fencing and fire by prescription.

Along with many other people, the Service has been working since 1935 to preserve and restore waterfowl and wildlife habitat within the Centennial Valley, primarily by designating the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge as a breeding ground for wild birds and animals. More recently, the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife program is working with several landowners to help enhance habitats, such as wetlands and riparian corridors, to provide a continuing and improved habitat for wildlife.

### ***Proposed Action***

The Service is proposing to establish the Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program by purchasing or receiving in donation conservation easements from willing landowners, consisting of approximately 42,000 acres of private land adjacent to or in proximity to the Refuge (Figure 3). The proposed easement acreage is devised to link nearby protected areas, such as TNC easement tracts, to create a relatively large, unfragmented blocks of habitat for large mammal movement and migratory bird protection, within the targeted project area. The Service proposes to purchase conservation easements primarily on high quality wetland, grassland, and mountain frontage not only for waterfowl, but also for the myriad of other bird species, plants, and mammals that rely on this habitat as well as the overall protection of the critically declining intact intermountain landscapes. The Service views agriculturally-based and rural settings of the Centennial Valley as a mainstay in maintaining habitat integrity for wildlife. This habitat integrity would be changed dramatically if residential or commercial development began to take hold. Such changes have occurred elsewhere in Montana and the rural west. This type of development tends to fragment wildlife habitat and generally increases costs to counties which have to provide services to remote developments. The development can also lead to water quality issues, change big game migration patterns, and degrade wetlands. The goal of this project is to maintain wildlife habitat integrity on a large landscape scale by helping to maintain open space in a rural setting.

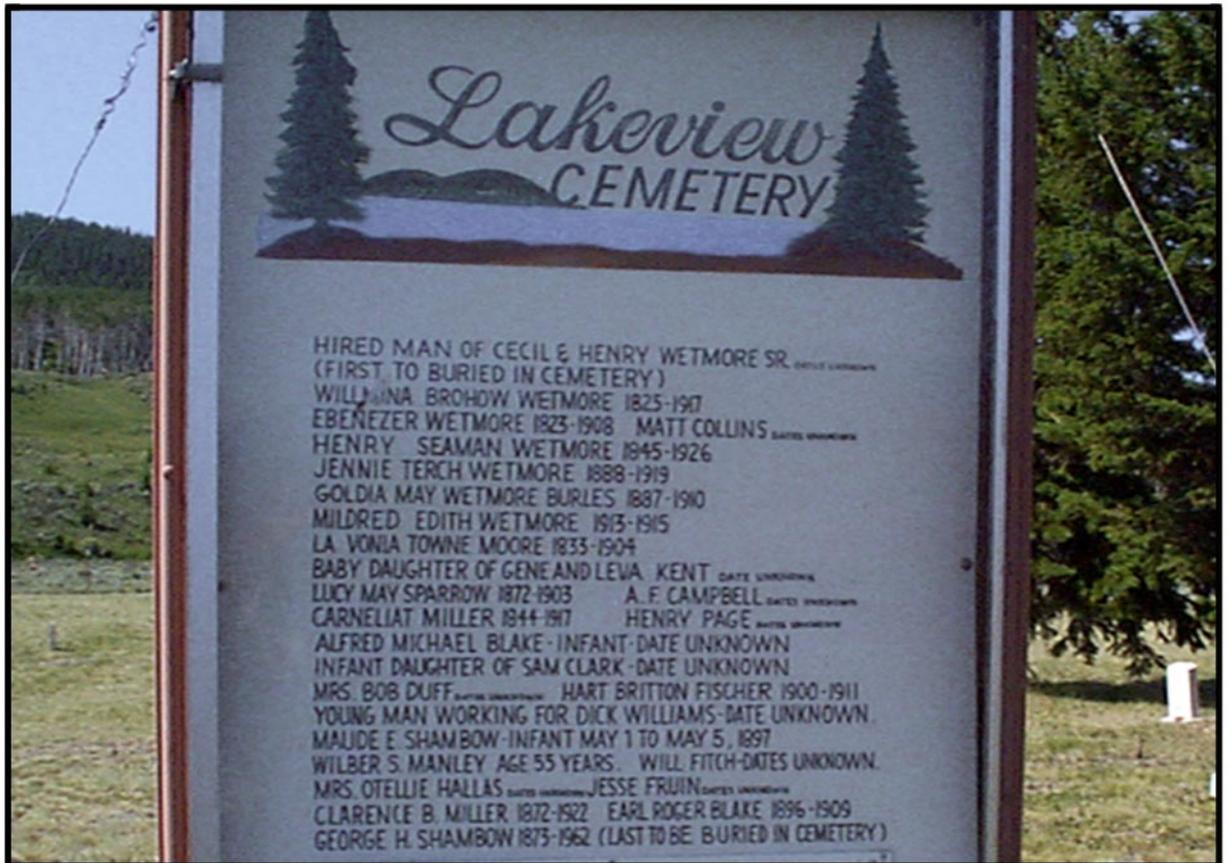
The Service views the Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program as compatible with current ranching management practices, such as grazing. Thus, the Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program can help protect the perpetual maintenance of the rapidly disappearing agricultural way of life.

The rural character of the Refuge and the Centennial Valley as a whole is likely to undergo substantial change in the next 10 to 20 years. The proposed conservation easement initiative is the next step towards perpetual support of wildlife values by protecting large tracts of private lands from the type of housing development that would undermine these values and fragment habitats.

Because the Centennial Valley can be thought of as interconnected habitats, lands not adjacent to the Refuge would be evaluated based on their relationship to key habitats or wildlife use patterns. The proposed easement program would prevent extensive residential development, protect wetland values, and secure open space. In so doing, the easements would also help protect air and water quality and maintain a large landscape which provides key wildlife habitats. Maintaining these habitat values also helps preserve the interconnected wildlife values of the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and the upper Centennial Valley.



Wetmore Hunting Lodge, USFWS



Lakeview Cemetery, USFWS

## Project Area

The project area extends from the upper headwaters of the Centennial Valley to the western downstream end at Lima Reservoir (Figure 3). The Service proposes to purchase conservation easements on 42,000 acres of private land within a project boundary of 158,972 acres. These private lands harbor miles of riparian (river) corridors and critical acres of wetlands that make up a core component of wildlife habitat, especially for trumpeter swans and other waterfowl and birds. The private lands lay primarily along the valley bottom and low foothills, while public land makes up more of the mid-to-upper slopes of the Centennial Mountains to the south and Gravelly Mountains to the north. The Refuge protects and manages valley-bottom wetlands, meadows, and uplands which make up a key habitat component at the upper end of the Valley.

The elevations in the project area range from over 6,400 feet at Lima Reservoir, to 6,600 feet at the Lower Lake Dam, to over 6,800 feet at the upper end of the Valley in Alaska Basin. The project area is primarily a mixture of grassland, sagebrush-grassland, wetlands, and mountain foothills (Figure 4). The public land is primarily owned by the State of Montana and the Federal government. Agencies within the Federal government that manage lands are the Bureau of Land Management (Dillon Resource Area) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge).

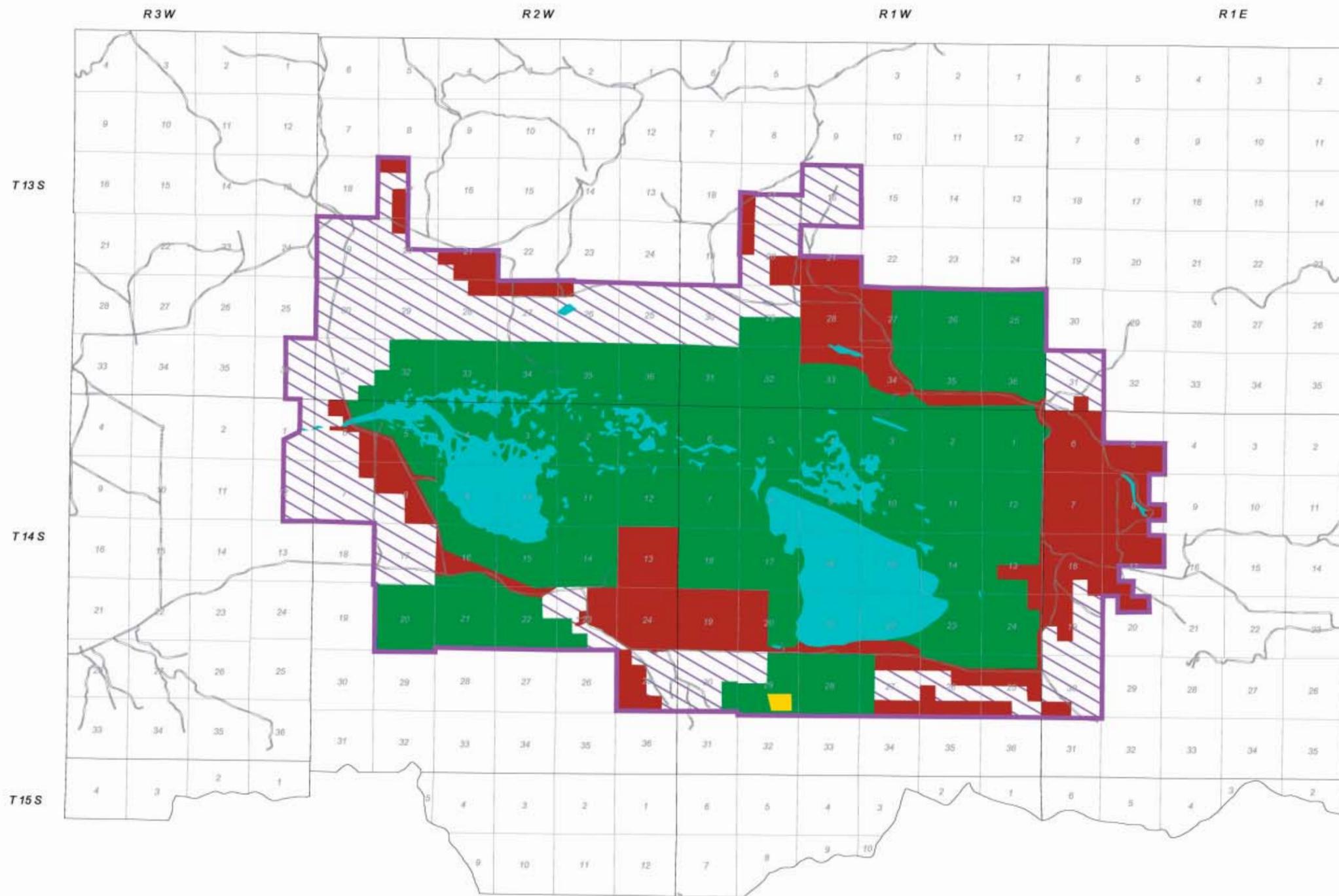
## Purpose of and Need for Proposed Action

The Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program encompasses some of the highest quality remaining intermountain wet meadow and wetlands within the western states. The Centennial Valley remains biologically intact and has not been converted to housing development. Given the diversity of plants and animals that rely on this habitat, the ability of this project to protect the habitat integrity in perpetuity is critical (see photo insert 2). However, most valleys and foothills in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Area and near the Centennial Valley are being developed or subdivided to provide second homes. During the 1960s demographers documented that for the first time in American history, higher proportions of people were leaving cities for parts rural than were making the return trip (Fuguitt 1985). "Exurbanization" only accelerated in the 1990s, drawing people still further out into the rural West. In the 1990s, the West's "beach front property" - rural lands adjacent to National Parks and Forests - are the fastest growing areas (Rudzitis 1996). In the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, fully one-third of all private lands have already been subdivided for development, with a majority of new lots locating outside existing towns (Harting and Glick 1994). In Gallatin County, 17,000 acres of farmland were subdivided between 1993 and 1999 alone. Madison County, not far behind, subdividing 16,000 acres into 685 lots between 1994 and 1998, most of this into 20 acre "ranchettes" (Johnson, V.K. 1999). Even in counties with slow growth rates, loss of agricultural land continues apace. The State of Montana, as a whole, is consuming land four times faster than the population growth rate (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1999).

The purposes of the Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program are:

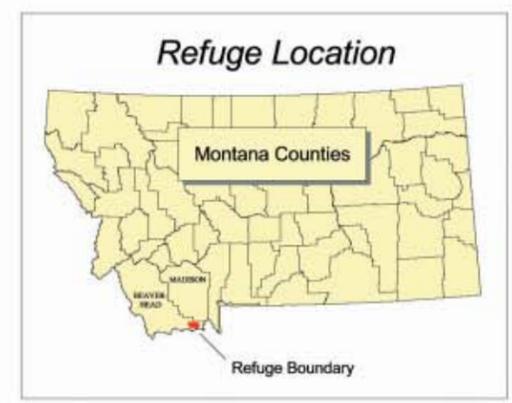
- to protect native wet meadows, wetlands, uplands, and mountain foothills from future conversion to second and recreational home uses,
- to protect habitat integrity by preventing fragmentation,
- to preserve key wilderness values and viewshed throughout and adjacent to the Red Rock Lakes Refuge,
- to promote landscape integrity in order to maintain, sustain, and enhance the historic plant, animal, and insect biodiversity of native prairie habitats, and associated ranching heritage,
- to minimize noxious weed infestations from soil disturbance, road building, and increased traffic resulting from rural housing development,
- to a lesser extent, to minimize future demands on local government resources necessitated by providing services associated with increasing rural development.

# Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge



**Legend**

- National Wildlife Refuge
- USFWS owned and managed RNA
- Water
- Red Rock Lakes NWR Wilderness
- Refuge Executive Order Boundary
- Road



Scale 1:125000



Figure 1 - Red Rock Lakes NWR



# Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Location

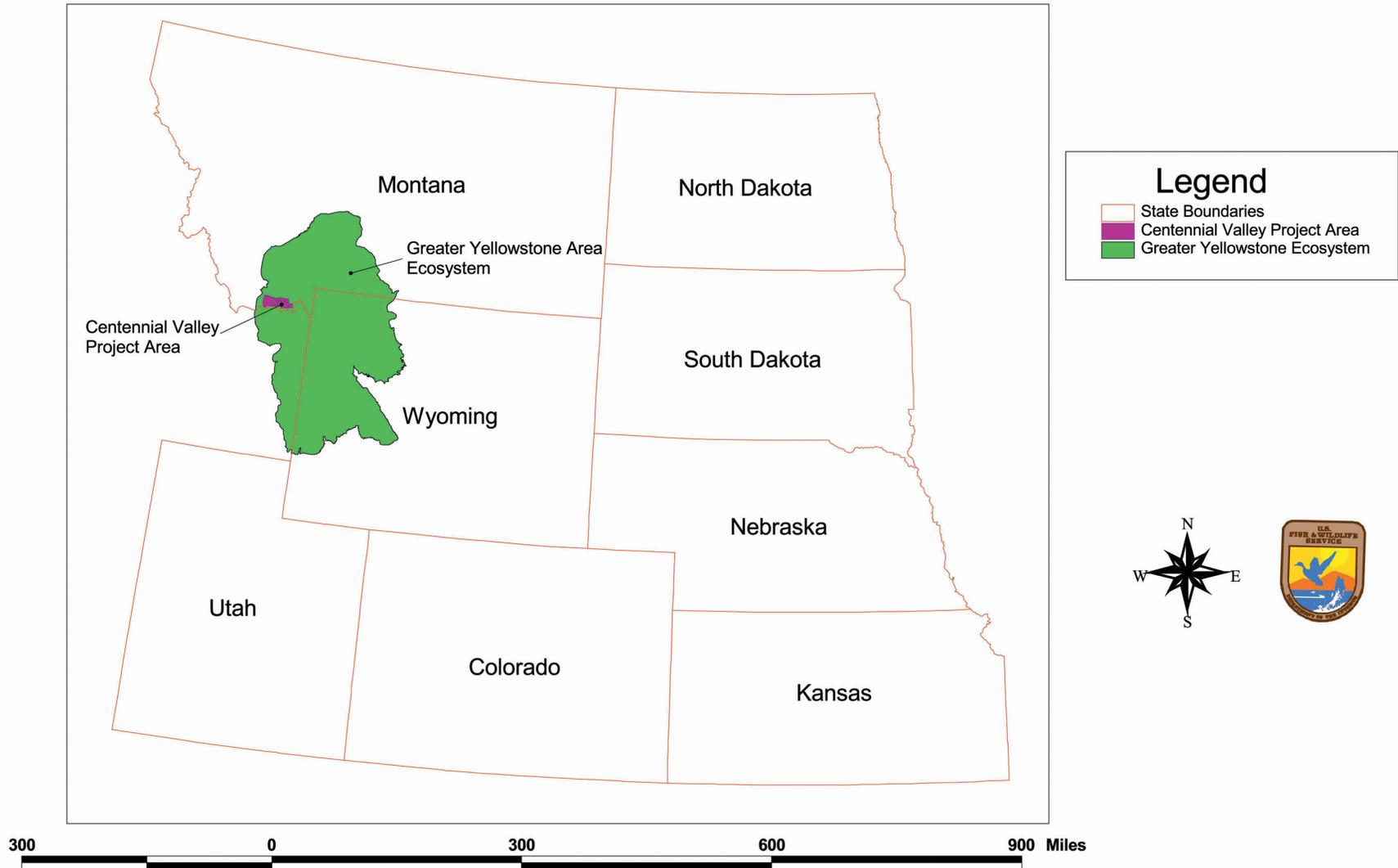
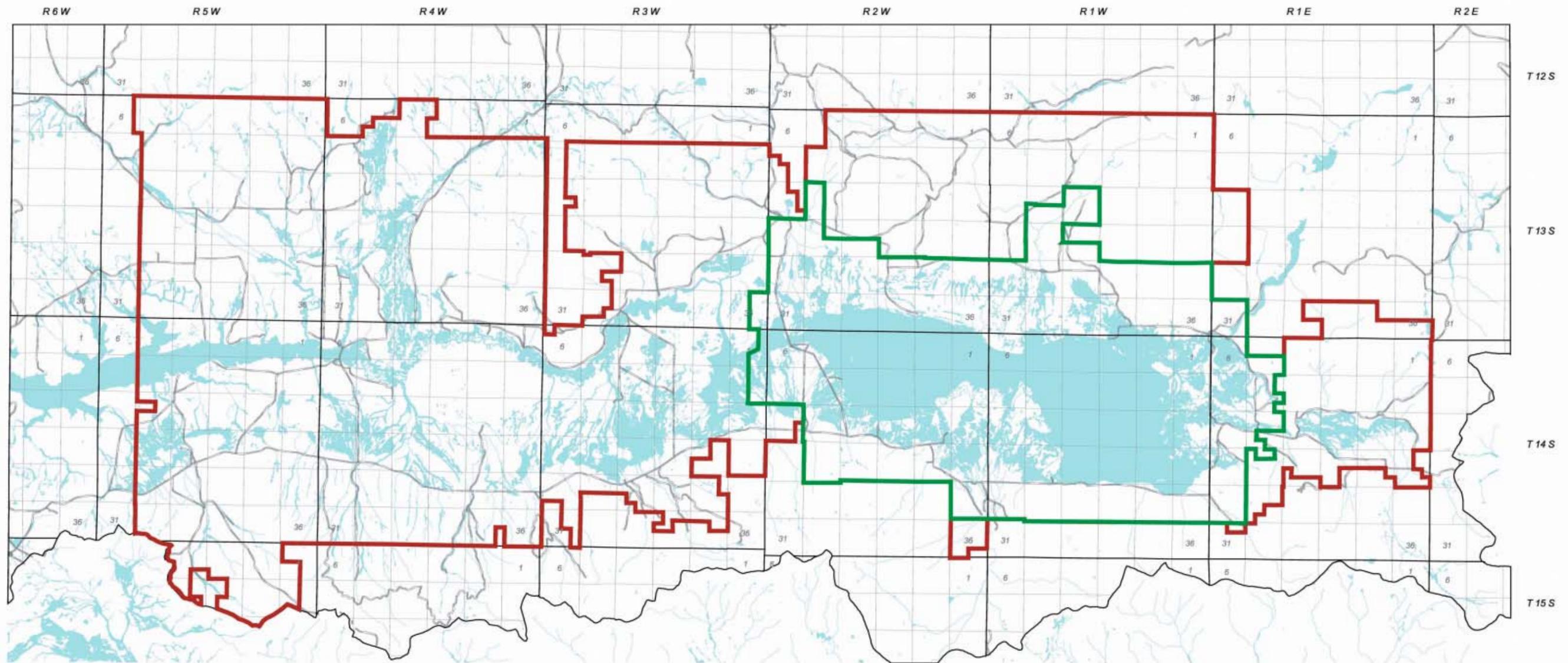


Figure 2 - Greater Yellowstone Area



# Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program



Scale 1:185000



## Legend

-  Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Boundary (Executive Order)
-  Project Boundary
-  Wetland
-  Section
-  Township
-  Road

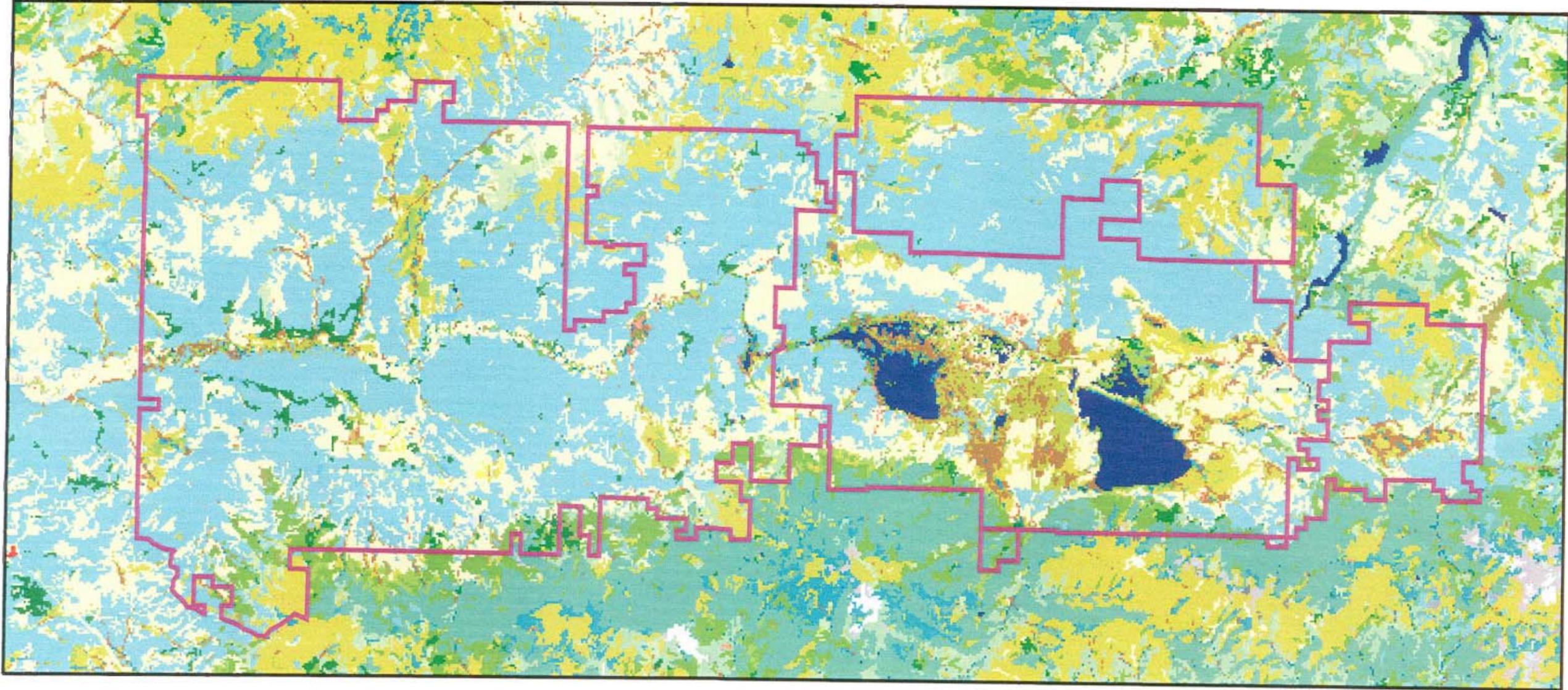
## Project Location



Figure 3 - Centennial Valley Project



# Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program



Scale 1:185000

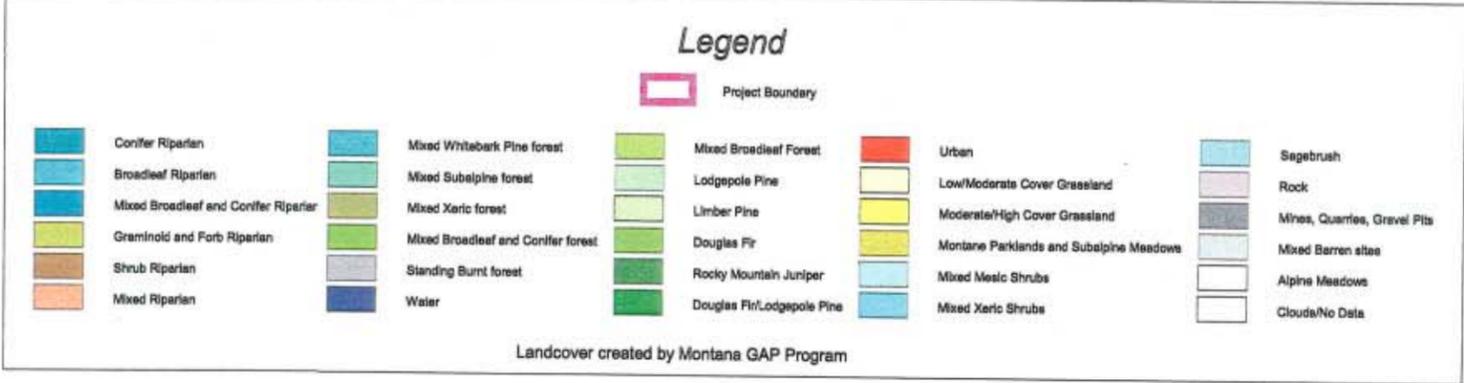


Figure 4 - Landcover Map





*Proposed Project Area, USFWS*



*Cluster Development, USFWS*



*Key Wetlands, USFWS*

## Decisions to be Made

Based on the analysis provided in this Environmental Assessment, the Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6 - Mountain Prairie Region, with the concurrence from the Director, will make three decisions.

1. Determine whether the Service should establish the Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program Area. If yes,
2. Select an approved Conservation Easement Area boundary that best fulfills the habitat protection purpose.
3. Determine whether the selected alternative will have a significant impact upon the quality of the human environment. This decision is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. If the quality of the human environment is not significantly affected, a Finding of No Significant Impact will be signed and will be made available to the public. If the alternative will have a significant impact, then an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared to further address those impacts.

## Issues Identified and Selected for Analysis

An open house was held in Lima, Montana on December 9, 1999. Approximately 20 landowners, citizens, and elected representatives attended. Most people expressed positive comments towards the project which would maintain the present landscape and the rural lifestyle. Through a partnership with the Service, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a private non-profit organization, has contacted landowners, outdoor users, other public and elected persons, and many have expressed interest and a desire to protect the Centennial Valley from the pressures brought about by housing development.

For the last three years, TNC has been working in the Centennial Valley with the goal of purchasing conservation easements for the protection of the Valley's biodiversity. To this end, TNC has also performed some baseline work on plant and animal inventory of the landscape. No major issues have surfaced to-date. However, people typically express concerns about the role the Service will have in the conservation easement, the need to keep private land in private ownership, and issues concerning access or other public uses.

The primary goal of the Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program is the maintenance of key habitat and landscape values by precluding development of the area as recreational homes sites. As such, the Service's role is to monitor the purchased easements to ensure that landowners maintain these characteristics and that the property is not subdivided or developed for home sites.

The Service, as well as local conservation groups, and people in the region have voiced concern with the fragmentation of habitats in other areas of Montana. This loss is due primarily to the conversion of lands, once significant to wildlife, to summer homes and associated human use pressures. For example, residential development in the Valley presents a potentially significant threat to the aquatic ecosystem. Sewage-derived nutrient additions to streams and lakes could have devastating effects on the aquatic ecology. Housing developments also can bring wetland drainage, water diversion, artificial ponds and introduction of nonnative fish and plants.

Another key result is habitat fragmentation caused by land subdivision and residential development. Almost 100,000 acres in the Centennial Valley are privately-owned, and the majority of this land remains as large ranches. However, given the current trends of low cattle prices and a strong market for scenic western properties, Centennial Valley ranches can be vulnerable to sale and subdivision for recreational development. The subdivision process is not difficult; under Montana law, land may be split into lots of 160 acres or greater without local review or approval. Moreover, with no county zoning in place, small-lot subdivisions are possible. In 1993, for example, the Beaverhead County Commissioners approved a controversial 5-lot subdivision adjacent to the headquarters of Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.

A conservation easement keeps land in private ownership and maintains its direct economic value to an area and protects the landscape integrity through conservation easements. Under a Service conservation easement, the landowner continues to use the land for ranching or similar agricultural purposes.

Public access to private lands covered by a Service conservation easement remains at the discretion of the landowner. Our focus again, is on protecting landscape integrity, not in attempting to manage private land uses. However, several ranches in the Valley participate in the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks Block Management Program - a program which provides for hunter access to private lands, while accommodating landowner concerns with off-road vehicle travel and other trespass issues.

## **Biological Issues**

### **Wildlife Habitat**

- In addition to direct loss of habitat, subdivision brings human presence in the form of roads, fences, snowmobiles, pets and other sources of disturbance that can disrupt wildlife movement patterns and render habitat unusable. Key geographic linkages can be lost, and wildlife populations isolated. Increased human settlement can also result in actions to control important natural ecological events, such as fire and seasonal floods.

### **Water Resources**

- Loss of wetland quality due to draining, filling, or building of structures along the shorelines is a concern in the project area. Historically, wetlands in the Valley have been key to nesting and brood-rearing of trumpeter swans. While private landowners venture near these wetlands, and cattle graze along the shorelines and water in the ponds, these patterns of use are predictable and trumpeter swans co-exist and carry out successful nesting and brood-rearing of young cygnets. Significant changes in this pattern of predictability could lead to trumpeter swans abandoning key wetland nest sites which has occurred in other areas, such as Henry's Lake, Idaho, where traditional trumpeter swan nesting sites have been lost to increased water-based recreational use and human presence.

### **Grassland Habitat**

- While unlikely, possible conversion of grasslands to croplands could also increase sedimentation and pesticide runoff into wetlands. Tillage increases the sediment load into wetlands when compared to grasslands (Gleason and Euliss 1998, Kantrud *et al.* 1989), primarily due to wind erosion (NRCS 1992b).

## **Social and Economic Issues**

### **Landownership/Land-Use:**

The Service has been contacted by many landowners who support the project and are interested in enrolling their land in the easement program. A few individuals expressed interest in selling their lands to the Service. Additional issues of concern were:

- Several individuals believed that perpetual easements would negatively affect future generations of landowners. They were concerned that the easements would limit the choices of future landowners, even though they may have paid as much for the land as if it had no restrictions. Others were concerned that perpetual easements would lower the resale value of the land.
- Comments were received that the process would favor landowners whose land was viewed as more threatened with development than others. Or, that the larger open expanse of sagebrush-grassland along the northern slopes of the Valley would carry lesser priority.
- Some verbal comments indicated the scope of the project should be increased and that additional management provisions such as weed control, habitat management for wildlife and hunting and fishing access should be included in the easement.

### **Public Use:**

- The Service received comments concerning the use of the public on purchased conservation easement lands. Landowners were concerned that they would be forced to allow the public and other activities on their land.

### **Issues Not Selected for Detailed Analysis**

Historically, concern has been expressed about the amount of tax generated to the counties when such land protection programs take place. Since this is a conservation easement program, the land enrolled in the program does not change hands and, therefore, the taxes paid by the landowner are not affected. Since development of rural landscapes often leads to increased demand for services and higher costs to rural counties, any perceived reduction in the tax base would be offset since the county would not incur the expense of providing services to rural developments. The use of conservation easements serves an additional function as easements preclude the necessity for county zoning in the program area.

## Related Actions and Activities

Several other entities are participating in cooperative habitat conservation programs in Centennial Valley. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, Beaverhead County Government, the Bureau of Land Management, and landowners are working together to manage noxious weeds in Beaverhead County.

**The Beaverhead Wetland Protection Project II** grant, funded by North American Wetland Conservation Act, is focused on wetland and upland habitat conservation in a much larger area of southwestern Beaverhead County. The grant was awarded to The Nature Conservancy for purchasing conservation easements to protect wetlands within a much larger area in Beaverhead County. The conservation easement program proposed is designed to complement on-going private and public landscape conservation efforts in southwestern Montana. The greatest benefit will be the long-term habitat integrity that will be preserved at a time when rural housing development elsewhere in the State is resulting in fragmentation of key habitats.

The **North American Waterfowl Management Plan** was enacted in 1986 to address declining waterfowl populations. Under this Plan, the Intermountain West Joint Venture Implementation Plan (1994) was created to coordinate the efforts of Montana, Idaho, Utah, and adjacent mountain states. A local project within the Joint Venture, the Beaverhead Wetland Protection Project II proposal, encompasses the Centennial Valley. The funding and efforts for these projects represent partnerships from many groups including the private entities and landowners such as The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Montana Audubon Society, National Park Trust, Trailsend Ranch, Arrow Land and Livestock, LaSalle Adams Fund, Willow Springs Foundation, Steve Liebmann (Morse Land and Cattle Company LLC), Beaverhead County, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. This funding will be used for the protection and enhancement of approximately 17,000 wetland and upland acres in southwestern Montana.

**Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)** manages over 57,450 acres of State lands in the Centennial Valley. The State land is used for ranching, timber, and recreational purposes. It is likely that the land will remain in its primitive rural setting into the future.

**U.S. Department of Agriculture, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest** borders the Centennial Valley to the north and east. While forest lands are used for multiple purposes, they will likely remain in a rural, primitive setting as well.

**Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFW)**, administered by the Service, began working in the Centennial Valley in 1994 at the request of then Director, Mollie Beattie. This program provides a tool to work cooperatively with landowners to voluntarily improve habitat. Habitat restoration to-date in the Valley has included 130 wetland acres, 3,300 acres of grazing management, and 8 miles of stream/riparian restoration. Habitat restoration projects to-date have been funded by Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Arctic Grayling Recovery Program, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Bureau of Land Management, The Nature Conservancy, and private landowners.

**Red Rock Watershed Weed Project**, fortunately, infestations of noxious weeds (spotted knapweed, houndstongue, henbane, etc.) are relatively limited throughout most of the Valley. However, they are present in the west end of the Valley and most surrounding valleys. In an effort to contain the current problem, Beaverhead County, The Nature Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Bureau of Land Management, PFW, Forest Service and private landowners started a weed district in 1998, and intensive control efforts were started in 1999. Two TNC interns coordinated the work and succeeded in securing four-year contracts on 90 percent of the land base in the District in 1999. Current tools being used include; education, mechanical, biological, and chemical.

**The Nature Conservancy** (TNC) has been working in the Centennial Valley over the past three years with other conservation organizations, agencies, and ranching families with the common goal of protecting the Valley from development for the benefit of agriculture and biodiversity. TNC owns a small tract of land in the project area, and they also hold and monitor one conservation easement to-date and expect to help other landowners protect as much as 10,000 acres of private land through donation and purchase of conservation easements. The Nature Conservancy has also helped in the public and private effort to control noxious weeds in the Red Rock Watershed.

**Private landowners** own over 25 percent of the project area, including several important wetland acres and miles of river frontage. At least two landowners have previously donated conservation easements to the Montana Land Reliance. Some landowners have already enhanced wetlands and protected riparian through their own efforts or by working with the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Many landowners in the area are concerned with protecting the primitive landscape and its rural, ranching heritage, and support this conservation easement initiative.

## **National Wildlife Refuge System and Authorities**

The Service proposes to help maintain the rural character of the Centennial Valley through conservation easements to enhance the survival prospects of key mammalian species in the area, such as wolverines, and to protect and maintain grassland and wetland habitat for migratory birds, such as trumpeter swans, and other species of animals, such as moose and elk, and sensitive plants.

The proposed resource protection actions would be consistent with the mission and guiding principles for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program would continue to assist landowners with livestock operation enhancements such as water development and fencing with the companion goal of enhancing wildlife habitat and use on private lands.

## **Guiding Principles of the National Wildlife Refuge System**

1. **Habitat.** Fish and wildlife will not prosper without high-quality habitat, and without fish and wildlife, traditional uses of Refuges cannot be sustained. The Refuge System will continue to conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of fish and wildlife habitat within Refuges.
2. **Public Use.** The Refuge System provides important opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.
3. **Partnership.** America's sportsmen and women were the first partners who insisted on protecting valuable wildlife habitat within National Wildlife Refuges. Conservation partnerships with other Federal agencies, State agencies, Tribes, organizations, industry and the general public can make significant contributions to the growth and management of the Refuge System.
4. **Public Involvement.** The public should be given full and open opportunity to participate in decisions regarding acquisition and management of our national wildlife refuges.

The Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Program would be monitored as part of the Refuge System and operated under a Conservation Easement Project Area. The program would further the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to preserve a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. The broad goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System describe the conservation of the nation's wildlife resources for the ultimate benefit of people.

### **Goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System**

1. To preserve, restore, and enhance in their natural ecosystems (when practicable) all species of animals and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
2. To perpetuate the migratory bird resource.
3. To preserve a natural diversity and abundance of fauna and flora on Refuge lands.
4. To provide an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology and the human's role in the environment.
5. To provide Refuge visitors with high quality, safe, wholesome, and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife, to the extent these activities are compatible with the purpose for which the Refuge was established.

To the extent consistent with the easement language, the proposed Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Project Area would be monitored as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, Executive Order 12996 (Management and General Public Use of the National Wildlife Refuge System), National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, and other relevant legislation, executive orders, regulations, and policies. That is, the authority of the Service to monitor the easement is provided by these laws. However, landowners retain any rights not expressly conveyed in the conservation easement, such as the right to regulate public access onto their private property and to manage their lands for agricultural purposes such as ranching.

Conservation of additional wildlife habitat in the Centennial Valley area would also continue to be consistent with the following policies and management plans:

1. Intermountain West Joint Venture Implementation Plan (1994)
2. North American Waterfowl Management Plan (USFWS 1994)
3. Peregrine Falcon Recovery Plan (USFWS 1984)
4. Bald Eagle Recovery Plan (Northern states) (USFWS 1983)
5. Migratory Bird Treaty Act (1918)
6. Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan (USFWS 1993)
7. Migratory Nongame Birds of Management Concern in the U.S. (USFWS 1995)

## **The Habitat Protection and Land Acquisition Process**

Once a project area boundary is approved, habitat protection will be through the purchase of conservation easements. It is the long established policy of the Service to acquire minimum interest in land from willing sellers to achieve our habitat acquisition goals.

The authorities for the acquisition of the proposed Centennial Valley Conservation Easement Project Area are the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. 742 f (b) (1), as amended), and the Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 715-715r, as amended). Acquisition funding is made available through the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965. The Federal monies used to acquire conservation easements on private lands through the Land and Water Conservation Fund are derived primarily from oil and gas leases on the outer continental shelf, motorboat fuel tax revenues, and sale of surplus Federal property. Additional funds could be made available through Congressional appropriations, Migratory Bird Conservation Account Funds, North American Waterfowl Conservation Act Funds, donations from non-profit organizations or other sources to acquire lands, waters, or interest therein for fish and wildlife conservation purposes.

The basic considerations in acquiring interest in lands are the biological significance of the land, existing and anticipated threats to wildlife resources, and landowner's willingness to sell conservation easements, or otherwise make property available to the project. The purchase of conservation easements will proceed according to availability of funds. Lands already within the Executive Order boundary of the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge would continue to be purchased from willing sellers as opportunities arise.

