



Proposed Missouri Headwaters Conservation Area



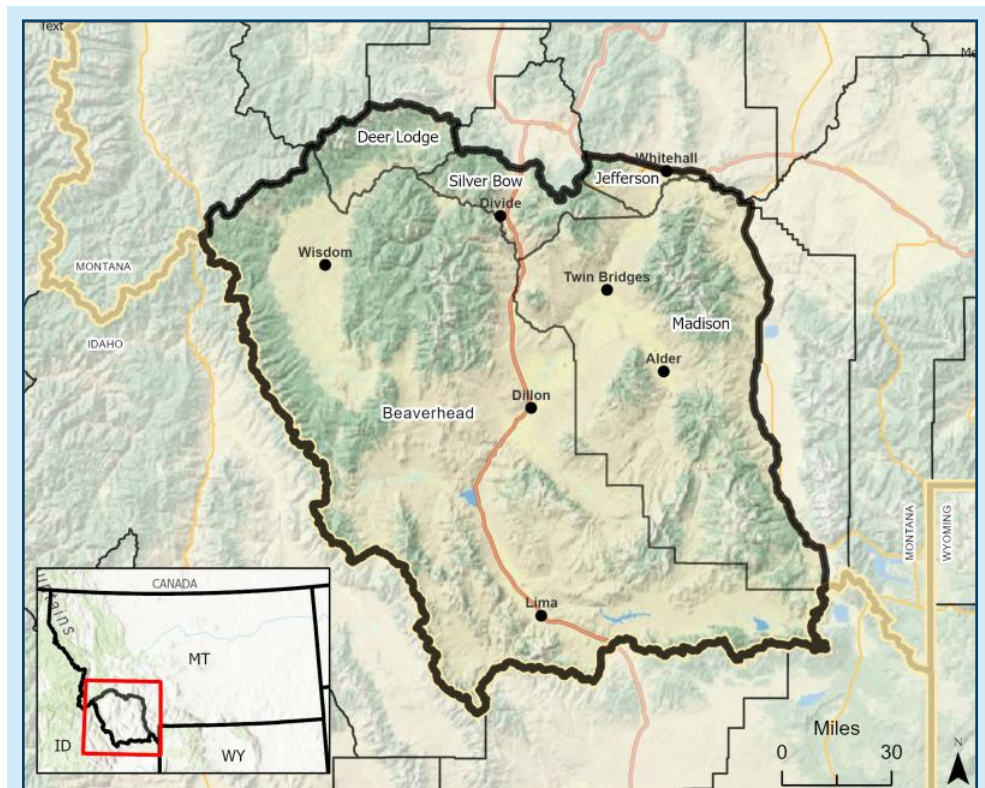
Building on decades of success working with private landowners in Montana, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to establish the Missouri Headwaters Conservation Area in southwest Montana. This area of Montana is known regionally and nationally for its significant biological resources. Across this landscape, the large working ranches and rural character play a vital role in conserving fish and wildlife habitat.

Agricultural lands in western Montana are being lost to residential and commercial development or converted to other non-agricultural uses. Such development tends to fragment habitat and erodes the agricultural land base that is important for wildlife populations across the state.

What is being proposed?

If the Missouri Headwaters Conservation Area is created, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would work with willing sellers to acquire up to a proposed 250,000 acres of conservation easements within the proposed 5.7-million-acre Conservation Area boundary (see map).

Conservation easements protect wildlife habitat while also protecting open space and working lands into the future to help preserve the rural way of life, including ranching. Acquisition of conservation easements would be voluntary



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and would occur over time as funds are available and allocated.

Money from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund would be used, as available, to purchase easements within the Conservation Area. These funds are derived from federal offshore oil and gas leasing and are not taxpayer dollars. No fee-title acquisition would be authorized.

How would the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service easement program work?

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service easements are designed to be compatible with working ranches. The easements typically restrict subdivision and development but contain no restrictions on grazing and allow existing agricultural practices to continue. Easements also typically permit existing and/or reserved residences and agricultural buildings. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service easements purchased within the proposed Missouri



Kyle Cutting/USFWS

Headwaters Conservation Area would not require public access.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service only purchases easements from willing sellers. Landowners always have the right to accept or reject an easement offer.

Unlike fee title acquisition, easements enable the land to stay on the county tax rolls because the property remains in private ownership. Conservation easements have proven to be an effective approach to conserving fish and wildlife habitat in Montana.

What biological resources will benefit from this easement program?

The proposed project area is a stronghold for wildlife that has disappeared from much of

their historic range and is the centerpiece for connectivity between the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the Crown of the Continent, and the wilderness of central Idaho. In particular, this area includes high priority connectivity and movement corridors for wide-ranging species such as grizzly bear, pronghorn, elk, mule deer and bighorn sheep. River systems and wetlands in the valley bottoms are essential to many species, including the few remaining native populations of Arctic grayling in the lower 48 states. In addition, the intact sage steppe habitat in this landscape is some of the highest quality in the nation and supports numerous wildlife species, migratory corridors, and winter range habitat.

How do I get involved?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service welcomes your questions and comments! We are accepting comments during the public scoping period from September 20th - October 26th, 2023.

Please submit official written comments via:

Mail: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Attn: Ben Gilles
922 Bootlegger Trail
Great Falls, MT 59404
OR
Email: MOHWCA@fws.gov

Visit our website for more information:

<https://www.fws.gov/project/proposed-missouri-headwaters-conservation-area>