

BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE



ANNUAL REPORT
2001

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The Blackfoot Challenge is a private nonprofit organization whose mission since 1993 is to protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot River Valley.

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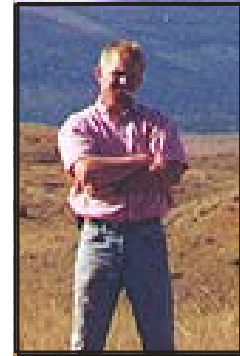
Web Sites

HomePage: www.r6.fws.gov/pfw/montana/mt6.htm

Adopt-A-Trout:
<http://fwp.state.mt.us/adoptatrout/>

From the Chairman, Jim Stone

It has been another year and as hard as it is to find a rancher to do any paper work, it is a great opportunity to update the progress of the Blackfoot Challenge. We have been extremely fortunate to find one of the finest watershed coordinators, Tina Bernd-Cohen, in her second year as our Executive Director. Tina comes from an exhaustive background of conservation, and more importantly an outstanding ability to handle the likes of myself and some other 'un-named' characters that make up the Blackfoot Challenge Board. The biggest challenge for Tina is to understand in eighteen months what has taken some of us a lifetime, and I can assure you through the success and the progress of the Challenge, she has accomplished that goal with perfection. Always with a smile and a flurry of emails, Tina has us on schedule with conference calls, meetings, tours, and many community functions. Usually the mundane paper trail is accomplished long after even the 'night calver' has surrendered to the long hours. In the true tradition of the Valley, we are still over worked and under paid, Tina, you are no exception-THANK YOU!



As for the rest of the crew, there are never enough hours in a day to recognize the tremendous amount of time and dedication the board members commit to the mission of the Blackfoot Challenge. Our mission is to *protect and preserve the rural lifestyle in the Blackfoot Valley for present and future generations*; these dedicated individuals from public and private walks of life have made an indelible imprint in this watershed. These folks have come together, pooled resources, ideals, and conducted a forum that promotes communication and collaboration for the entire resource. This is a monumental task and they deserve a large amount of the credit for the successes that we all share as we enjoy and continue to strive towards a watershed approach to survival. As you read through this annual report, there will be numerous chances to understand why the Blackfoot Valley is such a treasured place for many of us, and thanks to all of you for your continued support.

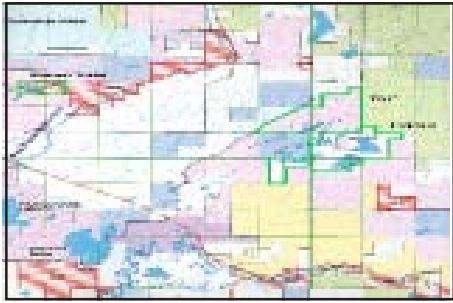
Board and Committees

Our fourteen-member Board of Directors met monthly to foster communication, coordinate activities and help resolve issues and conflicts. Priority topics this year were drought and water rights, fire hazards, conservation strategies, water quality and TMDLs, weed management, and education. Active Committees of the Blackfoot Challenge in 2001 include:

- Executive & Finance
- Conservation Strategies
- Drought & Water Conservation
- Education
- Habitat, Water Quality & Restoration
- Lewis & Clark
- Recreation
- Strategic Planning
- Teacher Steering
- Weed Steering

Conservation Strategies, Greg Neudecker, Chair

The Blackfoot Conservation Strategies Committee provides a quarterly forum for information exchanges on conservation work in the Blackfoot. We have made great progress in finding ways to pool our resources and joint venture projects among the 20 members representing all organizations with



conservation easements on over 85,000 acres of private lands in the Blackfoot. Our common goal is to maintain intact large landscapes to protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot Watershed. The Blackfoot Conservation Strategies Committee has become proactive this year in looking for conservation opportunities in the Valley. We began work on a wetlands grant that will bring \$1 million into the Blackfoot for wetlands protection. We partnered with Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service in acquiring the Sparks Property that will be added to the Bandy Ranch, run by Montana State U and U of Montana. We will continue to seek funding

opportunities to better coordinating stewardship activities and partner on conservation strategies and we expect to be very active in the coming years.

Education Committee, Racene Friede, Chair

The Blackfoot Challenge Education Program took off in 2001. We hosted a Teacher Summit in January that laid the foundation for our 5-year school-based education program. We completed the first year of a very successful Adopt-A-Trout Project that includes teacher training, field trips and in-class education. We hosted quarterly teacher steering committee meetings to advise on school needs. In the spring, we hosted a Youth Field Day focusing on the "impact of fire on the watershed" that over 100 students attended. In late June we sponsored the annual WET (Water Education for Teachers) Tour that looked at "a sense of place through water quality" and naturally ended with a float trip on the Blackfoot. Throughout 2001, we reached about 400 adults through meetings, workshops, tours, training and other education outreach efforts. The Challenge developed a power point slide show, distributed its brochure and made presentations to agency and non-profit organizations throughout Montana. In the fall, we hosted a Montana Watershed Coordinators Retreat at the E Bar L Guest Ranch for watershed groups to share their experiences and identify common needs. I am pleased to say that we are well on our way to implementing a year-round Watershed Education Program in the Blackfoot thanks to funding support from the Chutney Foundation, USFWS, DNRC and private donations and to volunteer services provided by our Board members and partners.



Adopt-A-Trout is an innovative project that links fisheries migration data collected by biologists to teachers and students in the Blackfoot Watershed through Web sites and field trips. This project offers students hands-on opportunities to track and monitor, in the field and on the Web, fish that have been captured and tagged and to work with resource professionals, giving them real life exposure to scientific research being conducted in the Blackfoot River Watershed. The 2001 Web site was hosted for us by US Fish and Wildlife Service. In 2002, it is hosted by MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Check it out at: <http://fwp.state.mt.us/adoptatrout/>.



The purpose of our annual youth field day is to offer outdoor hands-on educational experience for students to learn more about the natural resources of the watershed and sound land management practices. The goal of **Youth Field Day 2001** was to educate students about the impact of fire in the watershed. Students came away with knowledge in a) how to use a compass/map to locate where you are in the field; b) history of fire in the Blackfoot Watershed; c) man's response to fire; d) impacts of fire on natural resources (water, soil, vegetation, wildlife, fish); and e) value of forest products and fire salvage.

Drought and Water Conservation Committee, Land Lindbergh, Co-Vice Chair

2001 was another drought summer with low flows. The Blackfoot Drought Committee went into high gear and the community rallied behind a second year of emergency drought response. Over seventy irrigators signed up to participate, as well as the Double Arrow Golf Course, river outfitters, and some recreationists. Plan participants conserved an estimated 210 cfs. Posters went up at local post offices and businesses showing low flow forecasts, along with public outreach newspaper articles and press releases. Although in-stream flows dropped to below 409 cfs, fisheries resources were not as severely impacted because of

instream flow savings during critical periods in critical reaches and because the habitat is in better condition due to ten-years of stream restoration work.

Our goal in recent drought years has been to involve the community to minimize adverse impacts on fishery resources and aid in the equitable distribution of water reductions through shared-sacrifice of water resources during low flows. We have tried to integrate the FWP Murphy Right Call strategy within a broader drought response effort, as an incentive to participate. Our hope was to create a greater benefit from a cooperative community-wide effort, than would be gained from the Murphy Right Call strategy alone.

The Drought Committee sponsored a soil moisture probe pilot project involving twelve large irrigators in the Blackfoot and the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) to study irrigation usage and assess over-watering and possible efficiencies based on crop, rotation, and soil.

In 2002, we would like to get more outfitters, anglers, and recreational users to limit their trips during high temperatures and low flows. We hope to shift our focus to long-term water conservation strategies that will benefit not only the fisheries, but irrigators and other water users as well.



Habitat, Water Quality and Restoration Committee, Greg Neudecker, Chair



In the summer of 2001, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) asked the Blackfoot Challenge to become involved in creating a habitat and water quality restoration strategy for the Blackfoot starting with the Headwaters. This is part of the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Planning required in Montana under a federal court order to clean up degraded streams. The Challenge agreed to lead the restoration planning process in cooperation with its partners, conservation districts, the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Plum Creek Timber, US Forest Service, and others. This project continues the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks data collection effort that deals with

habitat in the Blackfoot and tributaries to improve fisheries habitat. It will address habitat and water quality issues in the Blackfoot headwaters and lead to restoration efforts. The Blackfoot Challenge stepped up its partnership activities with the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited in 2001, by securing and passing-through funds for stream restoration projects in the Blackfoot. We are looking forward to strengthening this excellent partnership in coming years.

Lewis & Clark Committee, Daina Bambe, Chair

In 1806, Captain Meriwether Lewis chose the historic and well-worn Native American trail called the "River of the road to the Buffalo" as his return trail that lead Lewis's party up the Blackfoot River and quickly across the Continental Divide to the Missouri River. In anticipation of tourists wanting to travel the Lewis & Clark Trail during the Bicentennial years, the Blackfoot Lewis & Clark Committee is working on several fronts to manage human impacts, protect private property, and provide educational and interpretive signage, maps and sites highlighting Lewis's return trip through the Blackfoot River corridor. Our Committee serves as a grassroots organization coordinating community involvement, state and federal agency programs, and serving as an information clearinghouse on L&C Bicentennial events and opportunities. We are working on a gateway interpretive kiosk in Bonner and a driving map through the Blackfoot.



Recreational Steering Committee, Land Lindbergh

Several members of the Challenge sit of the Blackfoot River Recreational Steering Committee that advises Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on river recreation management and ways to protect the natural resources and quality of the recreational experience on the river. In 2001, the group continued to develop recommendations on a management direction that included guidance on access and facilities, commercial use, user fees, and use limitations. Due to increasing use of the river, the group wants to take proactive measures to quantify, understand and manage recreational use on the River to allow for modification of management practices as circumstances change and pressures increase.

The group participated in a Weed Pull on the Blackfoot in June 2001 and hopes to raise public awareness about the need for river stewardship and river etiquette in 2002.



Weed Steering Committee- George Hirschenberger, Co-Chair

In 2001, the Blackfoot Challenge continued its leadership role in education and management of noxious weeds in the Blackfoot Valley. The Weed Steering Committee that guides this effort includes landowners, county, state and federal agencies, and university researchers.

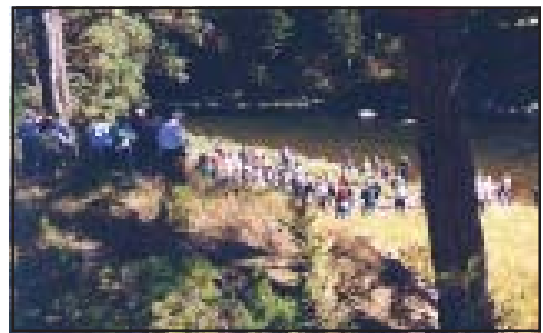


The Committee's annual meeting in February was attended by about 70 people including Weed Management Area leaders, Powell, Missoula, and Lewis & Clark County weed coordinators and extension agents, federal agency staff (BLM, USFS), state agency staff (FWP, SNRC), Plum Creek Timber, MSU staff and the Blackfoot Challenge members. This meeting recapped 2000 accomplishments and set general direction for 2001 work.

The Blackfoot Challenge and its weed partners conducted their annual education efforts including training and workshops on *dirty dozen*, *new invaders*, *weeds and wildfires*, *leave no weeds*, and *monitoring biocontrol agents*. We sponsored weed education at a youth field day at Monture Fire Ranger Station, an *Anglers Against Weeds* pull at Russell Gates, and a River Cleanup Day near Marcum Mountain. Groups attended the Bison Range Weed Tour and a Stillwater County Sheep Grazing Demonstration on Leafy Spurge control. A Leafy Spurge Day was hosted at which flea beetles were distributed.

During the summer, chemical weed control was undertaken in the nine WMAs: Middle Blackfoot, North Fork, Greenough, Douglas Creek, Nevada Creek, River Junction, Woodworth, Potomac, and Double Arrow on private, state and federally managed lands. Over 100 individual landowners implemented weed management on their lands. Annual cost-share funding came from the MT Noxious Weed Trust Fund.

The Challenge, with foundation funds and grants, sponsored and initiated several new projects in 2001. Though the Blackfoot River Leafy Spurge Cooperative Project, sites along 40 miles of the Blackfoot were sprayed from the water's edge to the high water mark to eliminate seed production on infested sites. We also completed a Cottonwood drainage leafy spurge GIS/GPS survey of infestations on public and private lands. Through a Pulling Together grant, 4-H Clubs in the town centers of Helmville, Avon, Elliston, and Deer Lodge used GIS/GIS mapping technology to encourage urban landowners to begin noxious weed control in town- some for the first time. In addition to hand pulling, biocontrol was implemented near five urban centers. The Mannix Bros. completed their second year of goat grazing trials for containment of spotted knapweed using 600 'herded' goats from June through September. The Blackfoot Challenge continued sponsorship of a Montana State University biological weed control project for yellow toadflax and dalmatian toadflax.



Signs were constructed to let folks know about our weed management work. These and smaller interpretive weed signage will be installed in 2002. We also started a GIS/GPS weed mapping and monitoring demonstration project with the Helmville School to serve as a model for applying GIS/GPS in weed management. All in all, 2001 was a busy year in the weed management arena.

**Blackfoot Challenge
PO Box 563
Helena, MT 59624**

I WANT TO SUPPORT THE BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE:

**Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation in the amount of \$ _____
and payable to:**

**The Blackfoot Challenge
PO Box 563
Helena, MT 59624**

OPTIONAL---I would like my donation directed to support:

- * The Blackfoot Challenge and its Program**
- * The work of the following Committee/Activity: (specify) _____**
- * The Blackfoot Watershed Endowment**

Name:

Address: