



Blackfoot Challenge

“Better communities through cooperation”

Photo Courtesy: Teri Garrison



Photo Courtesy: Bruce Andre

Who Are We?

The Blackfoot Challenge is a landowner-based group that coordinates management of the Blackfoot River, its tributaries, and adjacent lands. It is organized locally and known nationally as a model for preserving the rural character and natural beauty of a watershed. Although its charter dates to 1993, Blackfoot landowners have played an instrumental stewardship role since the late 1970s - bringing conservation easement legislation, walk-in hunting areas and recreation corridor management to Montana.

The mission of the Blackfoot Challenge is to coordinate efforts that will enhance, conserve and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot River Valley for present and future generations. The Challenge supports environmentally responsible resource stewardship through cooperation of private and public interests.

Private landowners, federal and state land managers, local government officials, and corporate landowners compose our membership. All share a common vision of resource stewardship accomplished by building trust and partnerships.

A perceived collision course between resource development and resource protection led to the formation of the Blackfoot Challenge. The group seeks common ground and offers a forum for give-and-take discussions on issues facing the watershed from ridge to ridge. Is it working? Take a look at our accomplishments.

What is Special about the Blackfoot Valley?

The Blackfoot River flows from its headwaters on the Continental Divide to merge with the Clark Fork River just east of Missoula, Montana. In its 132-mile journey, the river runs through some of the most productive fish and wildlife habitat in the Northern Rocky Mountains. The valley shelters glaciated wetlands, lush riparian areas and blue ribbon trout streams. Stunning mountain ranges, National Forests and the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness Areas define the valley. Sprinkled within the watershed are some 2,759 households and seven communities.

The ranchers who manage the valley floor are stewards of prairie wetland complexes that attract sandhill cranes, black terns and a host of other birds. Tributary streams to the Blackfoot River that flow through ranches provide crucial spawning and rearing habitat for our rare native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. The valley forms the southern edge of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem that supports the largest population of grizzly bears in the lower 48 states. The Blackfoot Challenge is proud to represent the landowners dedicated to preserving its exceptional wildlife, mosaic of habitats and a rural life.

Building Trust and Working Together

"As landowners and managers we have to show by example. This is our legacy."

-Jim Stone, Ovando landowner,
2004 Chairman of Blackfoot
Challenge Board

Blackfoot Challenge Accomplishments with its Partners preserving our natural resources and rural lifestyle

- **Weeds Managed** -- Over 380 landowners utilizing integrated weed management practices on over 45,000 acres of noxious weeds since 1997. GIS weed mapping on 474,727 acres with 34% under active weed and grazing management.
- **Large Landscapes Kept Intact** -- 89,000 acres of private lands under perpetual conservation easements.
- **Streams Restored** -- 39 tributaries including 38 miles of instream restoration and 62 miles of riparian restoration.
- **Habitat Improved** -- 2,600 acres of wetlands and 2,300 acres of native grasslands restored.
- **Water Conserved** -- Over 75 key irrigators & recreational outfitters participating voluntarily in emergency drought response efforts.
- **Fisheries Improved** -- Over 460 miles of fish passage barrier removal and 13 self-cleaning fish screens installed on irrigation ditches.
- **Community Shaping Its Future** -- Community-driven plan directing the resale of 88,000 acres of corporate timber lands.
- **Human-Wildlife Conflicts Reduced** -- 93 landowners participating with over 200 carcasses removed, 14,000 linear feet of electrified predator-friendly fencing, 60% of the apiary yards fenced, and 80 bear-resistant dumpsters in the watershed.
- **Schools Involved** -- Teachers and students from all schools in the Blackfoot are engaged in watershed education.
- **Community Engaged and Networked** -- At least 500 people involved in Blackfoot committees, education outreach, and tours. Challenge Webpage and newspaper articles reach 2,759 households in Blackfoot and over 60 partners.
- **Lewis' Return Trail** -- Mapped and accessible through the Blackfoot, with three gateway kiosks.





Photo Courtesy: Bruce Andre

Blackfoot Challenge Committees at Work

The Blackfoot Challenge is putting its mission into action every day. Hundreds of landowners and partners participate in our committees. The Blackfoot Challenge Board serves as the umbrella group to coordinate efforts through its monthly meetings. Here's a sampling of the work of the committees - open to folks in the Blackfoot willing to roll up their sleeves and work cooperatively to help conserve our valley - from ridge to ridge.



Conservation Strategies

Keeping Open Landscapes Intact

Conserving large landscapes in the Blackfoot takes sharing good ideas from neighbor to neighbor. This quarterly forum of private and public land trusts and landowners working in the valley coordinates conservation easements on more than 89,000 acres. Teaming up for conservation helped net a \$1 million wetlands conservation grant for the Challenge in 2002. The committee hosts community meetings on key issues like the disposition of Plum Creek Timber Company lands. Partnerships are essential to protecting, restoring and enhancing ecologically significant habitat and agricultural lands under private ownership.



Photo Courtesy: Bruce Andre

Drought, Water Conservation and Recreation

Efficient Ways to Share Water, Balance Use and Quality

The drought and fires of 2000 sent a clear signal to plan carefully for an emergency response in low-water years and to encourage water conservation as a way of life. A "shared sacrifice" approach involves every water user - from irrigators to outfitters. You'll find this group keeping busy checking snowpacks, reading stream gauges and testing soil moisture. They also work on ways to protect and share the river experience as more people flock to the river for fly-fishing, boating, picnics, and camping. The ultimate goal is to find win-win solutions for landowners, river users, fish and wildlife.

Executive and Finance

Strategic Planning

Managing the present and planning for the future, this committee oversees the day-to-day work of the Blackfoot Challenge and guides its mission using strategic planning and financial management.

Forestry

Keeping an Eye on our Forests

With growing interest in forestry issues, such as fire in the landscape and the future of the timber economy, we formed this committee in 2004 to provide a forum for information exchange on forest management issues and to provide valley residents with experience, expertise, and educational opportunities to help make management decisions for today and tomorrow.

Habitat and Water Quality Restoration

Nursing our Headwaters Back to Health

A century of mining in the headwaters and other land-altering activities contributed to 83 tributaries of the Blackfoot falling under the state's "impaired stream" list. Landowners and partners are spending countless hours developing restoration plans that meet state and national water quality requirements of the Federal Clean Water Act. We also actively restore streams through key partners -- the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. As of 2004, over 200 projects have been completed in 39 tributaries with over 100 landowners.

Education

From Field Days to Adopt-A-Trout

What's the best classroom for teaching the values of the Blackfoot watershed?

Outdoors. This committee reaches hundreds of people through our annual Watershed Youth Field Day, teacher trainings and opportunities, outdoor learning sites, public tours and workshops. The Challenge also initiated a partnership school program that gives students a chance to join fish biologists tracking and restoring trout.

For more information on Adopt-A-Trout, visit the website:

<http://fwp.state.mt.us/adoptatrout/>



Weeds

Pulling together to stop invaders

A two-prong approach of weed control and education is slowing the tide of noxious weeds that threaten our precious native grasslands, fields, forests and streamsides. Our twelve Weed Management Areas help us target weeds systematically through an integrated approach of biological and chemical control, sheep and goat grazing, and hand pulling. The list of weeds may be daunting—knapweed, leafy spurge, toadflax and more - but the impressive list of people tackling weeds is making a noticeable difference. Please join in one of our organized weed pulls, river clean up days or tours to learn the latest control techniques.



Wildlife

Living with Bears, Wolves and Elk

The Blackfoot is rich in wildlife that has disappeared from most of the country. Species like grizzly bears, wolves, and elk require creative management. This committee formed in 2002 to minimize human-wildlife conflicts. Waste management and public education are helping. A fencing program to protect calving/lambing areas and beehives now keeps predators at bay. GIS based mapping of attractants will identify and predict conflict hotspots and aid in devising solutions. Meetings, field tours, and visits with landowners, help us address concerns up front.

Blackfoot Challenge Partners - Who's Involved?

Private Landowners

Over 400 private landowners—large ranches, local landowners and citizens, local businesses, guest ranches, outfitters

Federal Agencies

U.S. Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Geological Survey
U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service

State Agencies

Lubrecht Experimental Forest/UM
Montana Department of Agriculture
Montana Department of Commerce—Travel Montana
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Montana Department of Transportation
Montana Natural Resource Information Service
Montana State University
MSU Extension Services

The Montana Watercourse

University of Montana

UM Earth Observing System Education Project

Local Agencies and Government Organizations

Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Commission
North Powell, Lewis & Clark, and Missoula Conservation District
North Powell, Lewis & Clark, and Missoula County Commissions
North Powell, Lewis & Clark, and Missoula Weed Control Districts
Schools- Bonner, Potomac, Sunset, Ovando, Helmville, Seeley, Lincoln

Private Corporate and Foundations

Plum Creek Timber Company
Bouma Post and Pole
Bonner Economic Development Group
Browning Fenis Industries Waste Management Systems
Blackfoot Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation
Cinnabar Foundation
Chutney Foundation
Engelhard Foundation

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Non-Profit Partners—Land Trusts, Environmental and Professional Groups

Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Montana Trout Unlimited
Trout Unlimited Western Water Project
Blackfoot Legacy
The Nature Conservancy
Five Valley Land Trust
Montana Land Reliance
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ovando Fire Department
Potomac Fire and Rescue
Montana GIS Users Group
Duck Unlimited (DU)
National Center for Appropriate Technology
Audubon Society
Defenders of Wildlife
Brown Bear Resources
Great Bear Foundation
Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative
Montana Riparian Association
River Network

Blackfoot Watershed - consists of 1.5 million acres including the 132 mile long Blackfoot River, its tributaries and adjacent lands within portions of four counties.

60% Public Ownership

(53% Federal/7% state lands)

20% Corporate Timber

20% Privately-owned ranches

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The Blackfoot Watershed - Montana

