Bitterroot River (84 River Miles)

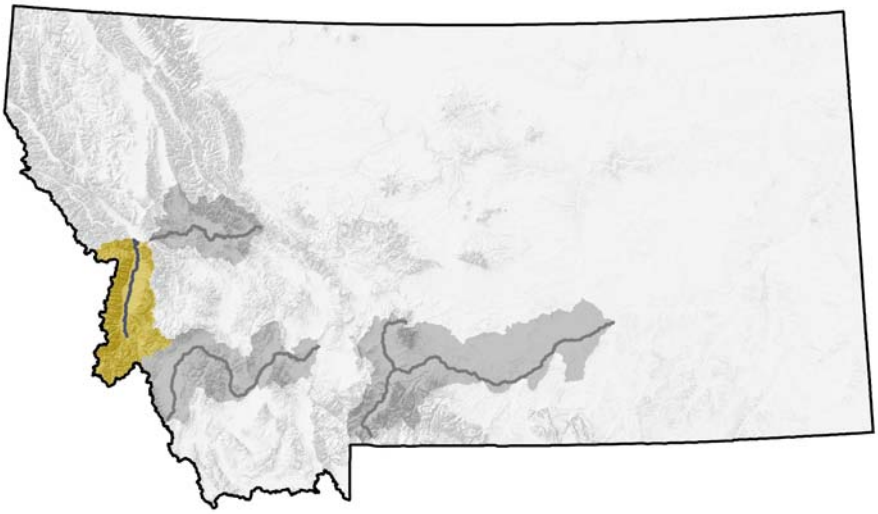

Figure 14. Bitterroot River Focus Area

The Bitterroot River originates in the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness and the Bitterroot Mountains in Montana. As the primary tributaries flow together near Conner, Montana, it continues north along U.S. Highway 93 for 85 miles to where it empties into the Clark Fork River near Missoula. To the west is the glacial Bitterroot Range, and to the east rises the smoother and drier Sapphire Mountains. Just west of the Bitterroot Range lies the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, which encompasses more than 2.15 million acres. The river is characterized by constantly shifting stream channels among extensive cottonwood and ponderosa pine bottomland.

Associated Habitats

Habitat Type	Habitat Tier	Acres	Miles
Intermountain Valley Rivers	II		84
Intermountain Valley Streams	II		325
Lowland Lakes	III	1,260	
Mountain Lakes	III	2,946	
Mountain Reservoirs	III	27	
Mountain Streams	I		3,304

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)

There are a total of 21 aquatic species that are found within the Bitterroot River Focus Area. Tier I species are listed below. All associations can be found in Table 20.

Invertebrates: Western Pearlshell

Fish: Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Bull Trout

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies
Valley fragmentation as a result of human population growth	Pursue conservation easements within the valley
Presence of non-native aquatic species including warmwater fishes, bullfrogs, crayfish, and milfoil	Programs to control exotic species and promote natural habitats that support native species but not exotic species
Water quality problems due to municipal discharge, irrigation return water, and other sources	Work with municipal government and private landowners to reduce point source pollutants
Culverts, dams, irrigation diversions, and other instream barriers that fully or partially impede fish movement and reduce connectivity of habitat	Removal or modification of barriers in a manner that restores beneficial fish passage
Entrainment of juvenile and adult fishes by irrigation diversions or other water intakes	Screening or modification of irrigation diversions or other water intakes in a manner that prevents entrainment of fishes
Modification and degradation of stream channels caused by various construction or land management practices	Restoration of stream channels or streambanks to a condition that simulates their natural form and function
Riparian vegetation effected by range and forest management practices and streamside residential development (such activities destabilize streambanks, increase sediment inputs, reduced shading, and remove woody debris)	Support government and private conservation activities that encourage and support sustainable land management practices in riparian areas
	Modification of riparian management practices such that riparian vegetation is allowed to recover
	Develop statewide riparian best management principles

Alterations of the quantity or timing of stream flows, causing dewatering or unnatural flow fluctuations that diminish the quantity or quality of essential habitats	Implementation of various water conservation or flow management practices that restore essential habitats, simulate the natural hydrograph and also protect instream flows