Central Montana Broad Valleys (2,604,058 acres)



Figure 4. Central Montana Broad Valleys Focus Area

These central valleys include the areas from Three Forks, where the Missouri River begins, north through the Helena Valley, as well as White Sulphur Springs, and south, on the east side of the Belt and Bridger mountains. The valleys are situated among the foothills of the Rocky Mountains where precipitation is reduced by the rain shadow effect. Low and moderate cover grasslands dominate the valley floors, and the dry environment highlights the importance of the riparian areas along the Missouri, Smith, and other rivers and streams. Higher elevations capture enough precipitation to support fir, spruce, and pine forests.

Landscape Characteristics

This subsection has broad intermontane valleys that formed in Tertiary sediments and Quaternary alluvial deposits derived from volcanic rocks, shale, and sandstone. Elevations range from 3,750 to 6,800 feet. Drainage density is low. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 10 to 25 inches, with about 30 percent falling as snow. The soil temperature and moisture regimes are frigid and aridic ustic. The primary natural disturbances are fire and flooding. Another important natural biotic disturbance is beaver activity in riparian areas. Land use is predominantly livestock grazing, crop production, and urban/suburban development. The breakdown for land stewardship in the Central Montana Broad Valleys area is as follows:

U.S. Federal Agencies: 101,375 acres, or 3.8% of total area, which include:

BLM: 67,460 acres, or 2.6% of total area USFS: 21,313 acres, or 0.8% of total area

USFWS: 556 acres, or less than 0.1% of total area

State Agencies: 162,163 acres, or 6.2% of total area 2,331,192 acres, or 89.5% of total area

Associated Habitats

Habitat	Habitat Tier	Percentage of Area
Moderate/High Cover Grasslands	I	2.19
Rock	III	3.83
Wetland and Riparian	I	5.24
Sagebrush	I	8.16
Very Low Cover Grasslands	Į	8.45
Agricultural Lands - Irrigated	III	9.45
Agricultural Lands - Dry	III	11.08
Low/Moderate Cover Grasslands	I	38.26

Note: A total of 86.65% of the Central Montana Broad Valleys area is represented; 13.35% is made up of a combination of other habitat types.

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)

There are a total of 318 terrestrial vertebrate species that are found within the Central Montana Broad Valleys Focus Area. Tier I species are listed below. All associations can be found in Table 10.

Amphibians: Western Toad and Northern Leopard Frog

Birds: Common Loon, Bald Eagle, Greater Sage-Grouse, Mountain Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Black Tern, and Burrowing Owl

Mammals: Townsend's Big-eared Bat, Pallid Bat, Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Grizzly Bear, Canada Lynx, and American Bison

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies	
Habitat loss, degradation, and	Support strategic conservation	
fragmentation, especially as a result of	easements by conservation	
human population growth	organizations and public agencies	
	Support state/federal tax incentives	
	that discourage habitat fragmentation	
	Promote further development of county	
	ordinances that help guide future	
	residential and commercial	
	development	

	Identify and prioritize key wildlife linkage areas, and work with other state and federal agencies, conservation groups, and landowners to restore wildlife connectivity
Invasive and exotic plant species	Participate in partnerships to develop and implement weed control strategies
Range or forest management practices	Support government and private conservation activities that encourage and support sustainable land management practices (example; rest and rotation schedules)
Streamside residential development	Develop statewide riparian best management principles

References

The Nature Conservancy. 2000. Middle Rockies-Blue Mountains Ecoregional Conservation Plan. Prepared by the Middle Rockies-Blue Mountains Planning Team. 58 pp + appendices.