# Flathead River Valley (1,586,787 acres)



Figure 6. Flathead River Valley Focus Area

The glaciated Flathead Valley of northwestern Montana lies among majestic mountain ranges and cradles the Flathead River. The primary stem of the Flathead River and the Stillwater and Tobacco rivers are among the major headwater rivers of the Columbia basin. The valley supports diverse wetland and aquatic communities including glacial lakes, ponds, spring creeks, riparian swamps, cottonwood forests, oxbow lakes, and Flathead Lake, the nation's largest natural freshwater lake west of the Mississippi. The northern and southern reaches of the valley still support intact palouse prairie habitats interspersed with wetlands and forest. This region historically has provided habitat for nesting, migrating, and wintering waterfowl and a range of habitats for upland game birds, raptors, shorebirds, colonial waterbirds, and other resident and migratory species. In particular, the region was an important historic northern leopard frog habitat and is the focus of northern leopard frog reintroduction efforts. It also contains important seasonal habitat for black bears, grizzly bears, mountain lions, elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer. The rich resources of the valley floor—riparian/wetlands, grasslands, and foothills—are primarily in private ownership and are under extreme development pressure.

### **Landscape Characteristics**

This subsection consists of an intermontane basin that formed in alluvium, glacial outwash, and lacustrine sediments underlain by argillite, siltite, and dolomite. Elevations range from 2,300 to 6,200 feet. Drainage density is low to moderate. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 14 to 25 inches, with about 50 percent falling as snow. The soil temperature and moisture regimes are frigid and typically xeric. The primary natural disturbances are fire and flooding. Another

important natural biotic disturbance is beaver activity in riparian and wetland areas. Land use is predominantly agriculture and timber harvest on public and to a greater degree private lands, as well as rural/suburban development. The breakdown for land stewardship in the Flathead River Valley area is as follows:

U.S. Federal Agencies: 132,943 acres, or 8.4% of total area, which include:

USFS: 108,047 acres, or 6.8% of total area USFWS: 24,711 acres, or 1.6% of total area State Agencies: 98,904 acres, or 6.2% of total area Tribal Lands: 456,713 acres, or 28.8% of total area Private: 898,121 acres, or 56.6% of total area

#### **Associated Habitats**

Habitat	Habitat Tier	Percentage of Area
Lodgepole Pine	III	2.54
Wetland and Riparian	1	2.85
Mixed Mesic Shrubs	II	2.85
Ponderosa Pine	II	2.92
Mixed Xeric Forest	III	3.06
Agricultural Lands - Dry	III	3.40
Altered Herbaceous	II	4.22
Sagebrush	I	6.63
Douglas Fir	II	7.26
Water	III	9.29
Agricultural Lands - Irrigated	III	9.88
Low/Moderate Cover Grasslands	I	15.56
Mixed Mesic Forest	II	17.71

Note: A total of 88.16% of the Flathead River Valley area is represented; 11.84% is made up of a combination of other habitat types.

# **Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)**

There are a total of 344 terrestrial vertebrate species that are found within the Flathead River Valley Focus Area. Tier I species are listed below. All associations can be found in Table 12.

**Amphibians:** Western Toad and Northern Leopard Frog

**Birds:** Common Loon, Trumpeter Swan, Bald Eagle, Columbia Sharp-tailed Grouse, Long-billed Curlew, Black Tern, Flammulated Owl, Black-backed Woodpecker, and Olive-sided Flycatcher

**Mammals:** Townsend's Big-eared Bat, Northern Bog Lemming, Grizzly Bear, Gray Wolf, and Canada Lynx

# **Conservation Concerns & Strategies**

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies	
Habitat fragmentation, especially as a	Support conservation easements and	
result of human population	other methods that help protect critical	
growth/development and expansion of	habitat on private lands, including	
the transportation network	corporate forested lands	
and transportation notwork	Work with Montana Department of	
	Transportation and Federal Highway	
	Commission to effectively mitigate	
	impacts of highway construction	
	Identify and prioritize key wildlife	
	linkage areas, and work with other	
	state and federal agencies,	
	conservation groups, and landowners	
	to restore wildlife connectivity	
	Support state/federal tax incentives	
	that discourage habitat fragmentation	
	Promote further development of county	
	ordinances that help guide future	
	residential and commercial	
	development	
Human/wildlife conflicts and related	Public education regarding	
wildlife mortality	human/wildlife conflicts	
	Work with Montana Department of	
	Transportation and Federal Highway	
	Commission to effectively mitigate	
	impacts of highway construction	
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	
Water quality degradation	Support watershed, riparian, and	
	grassland restoration opportunities with	
	Confederated Salish and Kootenai	
	Tribes, Montana Department of	
	Environmental Quality, U.S. Natural	
	Resource Conservation, and Partners	
	for Wildlife Program	
Invasive or exotic plant species	Support efforts to eradicate exotic or	
	invasive plant species when	
	appropriate	

Altered fire regimes	Work with coordinating agencies to
_	mimic natural fire regimes

### References

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. 2003. Flathead Subbasin Plan Assessment: Executive Summary. Northwest Power and Conservation Council. Portland, OR.

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