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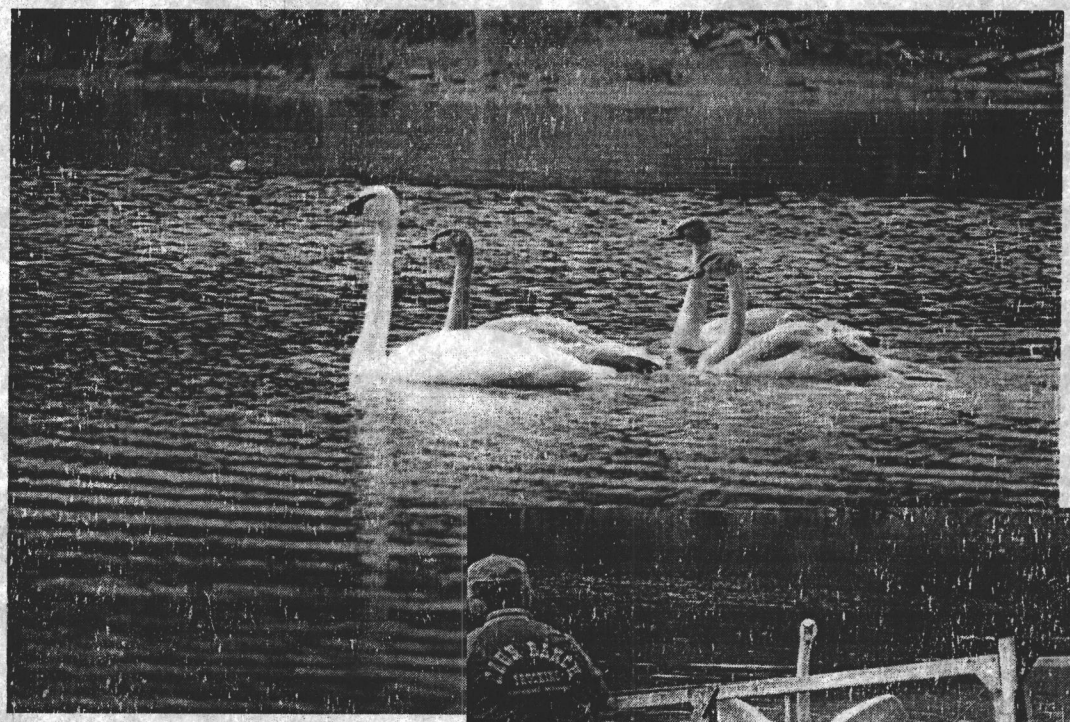
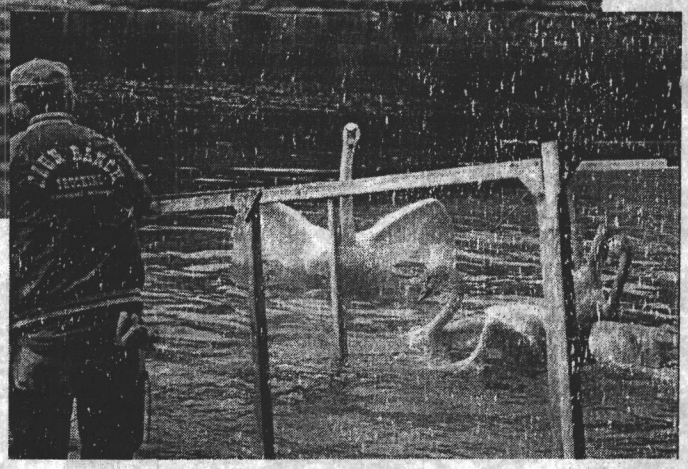
Restoring Trumpeter Swans

To Historic Breeding Habitat In the Blackfoot Valley





Cygnets reunited with paternal male in the upper Blackfoot Valley, 2003. The eggs were recovered and captive-hatched after the maternal female died.

DRAFT Environmental Assessment

A Proposal by *Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT March 3, 2004

A PROPOSAL TO RESTORE

Breeding Trumpeter Swans

In

IN THE

BLACKFOOT VALLEY

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Introduction

A pair of trumpeter swans nested on a marsh at the Bouma Post & Pole property, east of Lincoln, in 2003. This was the first documented trumpeter swan nesting in the Blackfoot Valley since breeding trumpeters were extirpated in the valley with European settlement. The pair was seen about 3 years earlier on Bouma's wetlands, but were probably too young to nest until this year. Mid-way through incubation, the female hit a power line and was killed. Working with the landowner, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) recovered the 4 eggs (which the female had left covered in the nest) and took them to John Jarvis at the Montana Waterfowl Foundation in Ronan, who is working with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes on their swan reintroduction program. He put the eggs in an incubator, then, near hatching time, transferred them to the nest of a surrogate captive pair's nest. Three of the four eggs hatched. The cygnets remained with the captive pair, penned in a wetland at the Montana Waterfowl Foundation and isolated from humans. The plan was to release them back with their father who stayed on the Bouma wetland throughout the summer and that they would migrate as a group to the father's traditional wintering areas. It was believed that the father swan wintered in west-central Wyoming. Northwestern Energy replaced the overhead power line at the Bouma marsh with a buried line, cost-shared with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

On September 10, 2003, the 3 banded cygnets were released on the Bouma wetland. Mr. Bouma reported that the male was very aggressive toward intruders. The swans left Bouma's on Oct. 25, 2003. Three days later the ponds froze solid. On October 25, a hunter observed the swans on Kleinschmidt Lake Waterfowl Production Area near Ovando. He saw the leg bands when they flushed. All four swans were present. They were observed in Jackson, Wyoming on November 12 by Susan Patla of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department as they fed and then moved out on the ice of Flat Creek. One cygnet, F28, was missing from the group, now three birds. F28 was the smallest cygnet, suspected to be a female.

The swans were last seen together about November 22, 2003, in Jackson, Wyoming. One of the cygnets (marked F27) was observed again on February 2 at Flaming Gorge Reservoir in northeastern Utah by two anglers. It was apparently alone.

The presence of this adult male trumpeter swan provides a unique opportunity to restore the breeding population of trumpeter swans in the Blackfoot Valley, with hopes of establishing a population that would be present each spring and summer on a number of the valley's wetlands. The immediate objective of this proposal is to enable project partners to release more cygnets with the male if he returns to the Blackfoot watershed without a mate in 2004. Or, if the male returns with a new mate, there may be an opportunity to use the surviving yearlings as guide birds for a release of additional cygnets. The long-term objective of this proposal is to establish at least 5-7 pairs in the Blackfoot Valley. Based on the number of wetlands which may support breeding swans, a maximum number of breeding pairs in the valley would be expected at 20-30 pairs.

Agency Authority for the Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is authorized under the authority granted in 87-1-201 MCA to "spend for the protection, preservation, and propagation of . . . game and nongame birds all state funds collected or acquired for that purpose . ." FWP's authority to protect, preserve and propagate game and nongame birds is subject to rules and policies that may be adopted by the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission, as described in 87-1-301 MCA. The trumpeter swan is classified as a "migratory game bird" under 87-2-101 MCA.

As a voting member of the Pacific Flyway Council, the state of Montana, represented by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, cooperates with other states and agencies in the Pacific Flyway to restore, conserve, and manage migratory bird populations. The Pacific Flyway Council identified the upper Blackfoot Valley as a priority area for trumpeter swan restoration in the July 2003 Annual Report of the Pacific Flyway Implementation Plan for the Rocky Mountain Population of Trumpeter Swans.

Location and Area Description

The Blackfoot River Watershed consists of 1.5 million acres in west-central Montana. The Blackfoot River itself is 132 miles long, with headwaters in Lewis and Clark County, middle reaches in Powell County, and the lower reaches (including the entirety of the Clearwater River drainage) in Missoula County. Land ownership is divided among federal (53%), corporate timber-holdings (20%), privately owned ranches and other settlements (20%), and state land (7%). Settlements in the watershed are Lincoln, Helmville, Ovando, Seeley Lake, Greenough, Potomac, and Bonner. There are 2,500 households in the watershed. Ranching, forest management, and tourism are the principal land uses from which residents generate their livings. Hunting, fishing, trapping, camping, and river floating are important recreational pursuits.

The physical geography of the watershed ranges from glaciated alpine meadows at above 8,000 feet, forests of natural and commercial value at mid-elevations, to prairie pothole topography on the valley floor. Glacial landforms, moraine and outwash, glacial lake sediments and erratic boulders cover the floor of the entire Blackfoot Valley and exert a controlling influence on the wetland and aquatic features upon it. Wetland densities exceed 100 basins per square mile throughout significant portions of the valley. Wetlands occurring near the north-end

forested communities of the watershed contain relatively fresh water, while southern wetlands become increasingly brackish. Six plant communities considered rare or uncommon are found here. The three-tip sagebrush/rough fescue plant association is common locally, yet found nowhere else in the world. The big sagebrush/rough fescue plant association, endemic to west- and north-central Montana, abound in the Kleinschmidt Flat area. Expanses of Drummond's willow plant association occur along Monture Creek, and three communities considered rare, including a peatland association, are found in the north and east portion of the Ovando Valley.

The National Wetland Inventory has been completed on the Blackfoot watershed, which documented a high concentration of depressional wetlands. A field inspection by trumpeter swan biologists in the summer of 2003 indicated a high suitability of the area for breeding trumpeter swans. Approximately 62 wetlands of more than 10 acres in size exist in the valley. Of those, expert opinion identified 25 as potential nesting habitat for trumpeter swans in the Ovando/Helmville area. At least 30-40 wetland basins are assumed to meet requirements of trumpeter swans in the entire watershed.

Lesica estimates that 600 vascular plant species occur within the valley, nearly 30 percent of which are associated with wetlands. Four rare plants are found in freshwater wetlands (boreal peatland species at the southern limit of their continuous reach). Howell's gumweed is common, but found nowhere outside the Ovando Valley, and is considered globally threatened. Ninety-eight percent of the project area remains in natural or semi-natural vegetation (Montana Natural Heritage Program 2002).

A list of 234 bird species has been compiled for the watershed, as of February 2002 (attached). Both tundra and trumpeter swan have been observed as transients in this area in recent years, and as mentioned above, one pair of trumpeters did nest near the headwaters in 2003. The project area supports 45 bird species on the Partners in Flight (PIF) priority list for Montana, including three of Level 1 priority: Common Loon, Trumpeter Swan, and Harlequin Duck. Both the Common Loon and Harlequin Duck breed within the project area; 32 of the remaining PIF species breed or are suspected breeders here. Within Priority Area 1, the Sandhill Crane population has grown from 100+ birds in 1988 to over 560 birds in 1998, a 222 percent increase. Other priority birds within the PIF, U.S. Shorebird, and North American Waterbird conservation plans that occur in the proposed project area include American Bittern, Peregrine Falcon, Black-necked Stilt, and marsh-dependent songbirds, such as Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Brewer's Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike and Northern Goshawk, among other upland species, also occur here. Indicative of nesting suitability for trumpeter swan is the common occurrence of breeding diving ducks, specifically redhead, canvasback, and lesser scaup, which also require high quality, semi-permanent and permanent wetlands for nesting. Mammals in the valley bottom and adjacent forests include elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, moose, black bear, grizzly bear, gray wolf, mountain lion, bobcat, and beaver.

Evidence of trumpeter swan presence in the Blackfoot Valley prior to European settlement comes from the Lewis and Clark Expedition journals. Their journal entry for July 6, 1806 stated that swans were observed on "Werner's Creek" (which is actually the Clearwater River) in the Blackfoot Valley. These were probably trumpeter swans, since tundra swans are rarely observed in Montana during the summer months. Lewis and Clark would not have

identified the species of swan because at the time of expedition it was not yet recognized that there were two species of swans in North America.

Most of the potential trumpeter swan habitat is located in the broad valley bottom which is primarily private land. This land area has been the focus of an outstanding cooperative private/public effort to conserve the rural character of the Blackfoot watershed. Operating under the name of the Blackfoot Challenge, this "grass roots" group of local ranchers, forest managers, agencies, non-profit organizations and others with a stake in the future of the Blackfoot has brought a long-term vision and stability to land and resource management across this landscape, particularly in the valley bottom. The Blackfoot Challenge has been talking with residents of the valley about trumpeter swan restoration and has found consistent support for their restoration to the area. Since forming officially in 1993, the Challenge partners have:

- Sponsored riparian grazing, weed control and timber management workshops,
- Granted and implemented 85,000 acres of conservation easements,
- Restored 407 acres of wetlands,
- Enhanced 1,550 acres of wetlands,
- Enhanced 42 miles of riparian habitat,
- Restored 29 miles of stream channel,
- Reseeded 1,430 acres to native prairie species,
- Removed 250 miles of fish passage barriers,
- Implemented 34 miles of erosion control along roads,
- Controlled exotic vegetation on over 100 individual land ownerships.

A copy of the 2002 annual report of the Blackfoot Challenge is attached.

In 2002, the Blackfoot Challenge was awarded a conservation grant of $1 million from the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) program to acquire conservation easements on additional properties with outstanding wetland values. This is the first North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) proposal for this project area and will result in permanent protection (13,453 acres) and restoration and enhancement (2,569 acres) of wetland and associated grasslands. This proposal is anticipated to be the first of three submitted by the Blackfoot Challenge on behalf of its numerous partners. At this time, it appears that most of the work funded by this first grant will focus in the Tupper Lake and Deer Park wetland complex in the mountain/prairie ecotone.

While private lands and partnerships with private landowners are critical to maintaining and enhancing wetland habitats in the Blackfoot Valley, publicly owned wildlife/waterfowl areas serve as management cornerstones. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service owns and manages the Blackfoot and H2-O Waterfowl Production Areas, and FWP owns the adjoining Aunt Molly Wildlife Management Area, all in the oxbow wetland complex of the Blackfoot River as it leaves the Lincoln Canyon, including a portion of Brown's Lake. Similarly, permanent wetlands in a prairie and forest ecotone environment occur on the Bandy Ranch (owned by the Montana Forest and Conservation Experiment Station, University of Montana) and the adjoining Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (owned by FWP) at the western neck of the Ovando Valley.

Other Agencies with Overlapping Jurisdiction

Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1916, the U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is entrusted with responsibility for all migratory birds of the U.S.

Description of the Proposed Action

FWP proposes to obtain trumpeter swan eggs and release approximately 10 cygnets in the Blackfoot Valley in summer 2004. FWP proposes to repeat this process as needed in subsequent years with the goal of establishing a minimum of five to seven nesting pairs in the Blackfoot Valley. 2004 is a critical year because, while the Bouma adult male is still in the area, he serves as a guide to lead young swans out of the area in the fall to suitable wintering habitats and back to the valley in the spring.

Protocols for procurement and release of the eggs/cygnets would be coordinated with state and federal agencies that comprise the Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Subcommittee of the Pacific Flyway Study Committee. The selection of a release site and subsequent monitoring of the birds would be closely coordinated with local agency representatives and trumpeter swan specialists from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Public input into the review and potential implementation of this proposal would be coordinated through the Blackfoot Challenge organization of local landowners and agencies. Cygnets would only be released with permission from the public or private landowner of the selected release site, and only with the concurrence of immediately adjacent landowners. FWP proposes to involve local landowners and schools in monitoring numbers, movements, and distribution of swans in the Blackfoot Valley.

List of Agencies Consulted During Preparation of the Environmental Assessment

Kevin Ertl, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 271 Cut Off Road, Helmville, MT 58843

Greg Neudecker, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 922 Bootlegger Trail, Great Falls, MT 59404
_____, Blackfoot Challenge, 922 Bootlegger Trail, Great Falls, MT 59404

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
< a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
< c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other (list)		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The proposed action will not impact land resources, as noted above.

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated [3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
< a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ¢For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The proposed action would not affect air resources.

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
< a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of flood water or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
I. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ¢¢For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		X				
m. ¢For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		X				
n. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The proposed action will not affect water resources.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X			4.a. See comment below
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X			4.a. See comment below

c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		X				
f. ¢¢For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?			X			4.a. See comment below
g. Other:						

4.a. Trumpeter swans feed mostly in shallow waters and eat stems and leaves of aquatic plants growing on the bottom of wetlands. Trumpeters will also dig holes a foot deep in search of roots and shoots in the bottom of the wetland. Trumpeter swans rarely feed on land, according to Terres (1995), so would not be expected to become agricultural pests. Collectively, these alterations of the existing plant community would be minor, and are viewed as positive from the perspective of wildlife management objectives for restoring natural processes in wetlands.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The proposed action will not contribute to a negative cumulative effect on vegetation. It may add a minor natural treatment of aquatic vegetation that could contribute a slight increase in wetland habitat diversity.

< 5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?				X		5.a. See comment below
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
h. ¢¢For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)		X				
I. ¢For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)		X				
j. Other:						

5.a. The proposed action, if successful over a period of years, would supplement the existing trumpeter swan population with the addition of 5-7 nesting pairs in the Blackfoot drainage. This would be a minor addition of total birds in the larger trumpeter swan population, but would be of greater importance to the local fauna in the Blackfoot. Whereas nesting of trumpeter swans in the Blackfoot is now uncommon to rare, this proposal would change this to a common occurrence by a low number of individuals.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The interaction of 5-7 additional pairs of trumpeter swans with other wildlife species in the Blackfoot Valley would be unlikely to cause a negative cumulative effect on any of these wildlife species.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): None

7. LAND USE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				7.a. See comment below
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other: _____						

7.a. Trumpeter swans do occasionally fly into above-ground powerlines, as experienced last summer on the nesting area east of Lincoln. Once trumpeters select nesting areas, FWP may approach local power companies to voluntarily install devices on selected nearby lines to help swans see the lines more readily. In extreme cases, FWP may seek cooperation from the local power company and funding to bury the line, as was accomplished last summer. Local power companies will not incur any involuntary obligation as a result of the proposed action.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The proposed action could contribute to a minor negative cumulative impact on power companies to voluntarily address potential conflicts with wildlife, in combination with the existing situation involving osprey and Canada geese nesting on power poles.

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. ¢For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		X				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The proposed action will not contribute to a negative cumulative effect on human health.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		x				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				
f. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The proposed action will not contribute to a negative cumulative effect on human communities.

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?		X				
< e. Define projected revenue sources						10.a. See comment below
< f. Define projected maintenance costs.						10.b. See comment below
g. Other:						

10.a. Revenue sources for implementing the proposed augmentation of trumpeter swans come from annual sales of Montana hunting licenses. Possible sources of supplemental funds include the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and private donors.

10.b. FWP maintenance costs would be incurred in the form of monitoring swan distribution and nest success. FWP would accomplish as much of this as possible by way of public involvement and volunteerism in the local community, perhaps coordinated via the Blackfoot Challenge. Otherwise, management actions would be included and absorbed by the existing FWP Native Species Program and FWP Region 2 Wildlife, and are expected to be less than $1,000 annually.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The proposed action will not contribute to a negative cumulative effect on public services.

< 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				

<c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)			X			11.a. See comment below
d. ¢For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)		X				
e. Other:						

11.a. The habitual presence of increased numbers of trumpeter swans could attract a minor amount of additional tourism to the Blackfoot Valley. We would expect this to occur as multiple visits over the years by relatively few interested individuals, rather than one or two visits by many tourists.

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The proposed action will not contribute to a negative cumulative effect on aesthetics. However, an increase of trumpeter swans in the Blackfoot may contribute to a minor cumulative benefit to the aesthetic environment, considering the possibility of also viewing grizzly bear, sandhill crane, and other charismatic wildlife in this area.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
<a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ¢¢For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)		X				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): The proposed action will not contribute to a negative cumulative effect on cultural resources.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT[3]				Can Impact Be Mitigated[3]	Comment Index
	Unknown[3]	None	Minor[3]	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources which create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ¢For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)		X				
g. ¢¢For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW, CONTINUED

1. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

No action is the only practical alternative to this proposed action. If the proposed action to augment the trumpeter swan population in the Blackfoot Valley were not selected, FWP would simply be left with the alternative of taking no action to augment the trumpeter swan population in the Blackfoot Valley. The no-action alternative would not risk the persistence of the larger trumpeter swan population in Montana. However, no action would allow an unusual opportunity for augmentation in the Blackfoot Valley to pass; i.e., the opportunity to use an experienced parent swan in the Blackfoot Valley to teach its migration pattern to captive-hatched cygnets, thereby accelerating the recolonization of suitable habitat in the Blackfoot Valley by trumpeter swans.

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency: none

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

FWP concludes that the proposed action best implements direction in the statewide trumpeter swan management plan. It is an action that would increase the numbers of trumpeter swans in the Blackfoot, which would increase natural values of the environment for many local residents and tourists alike. These benefits would be possible with negligible or no detrimental effects on local economies or land uses.

PART IV. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? YES / NO If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment, under MEPA, the proposed action is not a significant action affecting the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not a necessary level of review.

2. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

Public comment will be solicited during the 30-day comment period described below. Copies of this draft EA will be mailed directly to affected landowners, agencies and entities with overlapping jurisdictional authority, all known private organizations with a possible interest in the project, and a standard mailing list of parties interested in actions proposed by FWP. Notice of the availability of the draft EA also will be advertised on FWP's Internet website. This level of opportunity for public comment should ensure that all appropriate issues are raised and may be addressed in the final plan.

3. Duration of comment period if any:

The public comment period will begin on March 8, 2004 and close at the end of the day on April 7, 2004 (an April 7 postmark will be accepted).

4. Name, title, address and phone number of the Person(s) Responsible for Preparing the EA:

Kristi DuBois (responsible for the information in the draft), Native Species Program Coordinator, FWP, 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804

Mike Thompson (assisted in preparing the draft), Wildlife Biologist, FWP, 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804

John Firebaugh (regional program review), Regional Wildlife Manager, FWP, 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804

Tom Hinz (statewide program review), Wetlands Legacy Program Coordinator, FWP, PO Box 173220, Bozeman, MT 59717-3220

APPENDIX A

Map and Attachments

Blackfoot Watershed Birdlist	2/21/2002		
		Osprey	B
	Status	Prairie Falcon	B
Common Loon	B	Merlin	b
Clark's Grebe	b	American Kestrel	B
Red-necked Grebe	B	Flammulated Owl	B
Horned Grebe	B	Great Horned Owl	B
Eared Grebe	B	Great Grey Owl	B
Western Grebe	b	Long-eared Owl	t
Pied-billed Grebe	B	Short-eared Owl	t
White Pelican	t	Northern Pygmy Owl	b
Double-crested Cormorant	B	Northern Saw-whet Owl	b
Great Blue Heron	B	Western Screech Owl	b
Tundra Swan	t	Barred Owl	t
Trumpeter Swan	t	Ruffed Grouse	B
Canada Goose	B	Blue Grouse	B
Snow Goose	t	Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse	B
Ross's Goose	t	Spruce Grouse	B
Greater White-Fronted Goose	t	Gray Partridge	B
Mallard	B	Ring-necked Pheasant	B
Gadwall	B	Whooping Crane	t
Harlequin Duck	B	Sandhill Crane	B
Northern Pintail	B	Bittern	b
Green-winged Teal	B	Virginia Rail	t
Blue-winged Teal	B	Sora Rail	B
Cinnamon Teal	B	American Coot	B
Eurasian Wigeon	t	Killdeer	B
American Wigeon	B	Semipalmated Plover	t
Northern Shoveler	B	American Golden Plover	t
Wood Duck	B	Common Snipe	B
Redhead	B	Long-billed Curlew	B
Ring-necked Duck	B	Long-billed Dowitcher	t
Canvasback	B	Spotted Sandpiper	b
Greater Scaup	t	Solitary Sandpiper	t
Lesser Scaup	B	Upland Sandpiper	b
White-winged Scoter	t	Least Sandpiper	t
Surf Scoter	t	Western Sandpiper	t
Common Goldeneye	B	Sanderling	t
Barrow's Goldeneye	B	Whimbrel	t
Bufflehead	B	White-faced Ibis	t
Ruddy Duck	B	Willet	b
Hooded Merganser	B	Lesser Yellowlegs	t
Common Merganser	B	Greater Yellowlegs	t
Red-breasted Merganser	t	Marbled Godwit	t
Turkey Vulture	b	Black-necked Stilt	b
Ferruginous Hawk	t	American Avocet	B
Sharp-shinned Hawk	b	Wilson's Phalarope	B
Cooper's Hawk	b	California Gull	t
Red-tailed Hawk	B	Ring-billed Gull	t
Swainson's Hawk	b	Franklin's Gull	t
Rough-legged Hawk	t	Herring Gull	t

Golden Eagle	B	Bonaparte's Gull	t
Bald Eagle	B	Long-tailed Jaeger	t
Northern Harrier	B	Black Tern	B
Northern Goshawk	B	Forster's Tern	t
Peregrine Falcon	B	Caspian Tern	t
Vaux's Swift	B	Common Tern	t
White-throated Swift	t	Rock Dove	B
Black Swift	B	Mourning Dove	B
Northern Flicker	B	Common Nighthawk	B
Red-naped Sapsucker	B	Golden-crowned Kinglet	B
Williamson's Sapsucker	B	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	B
Hairy Woodpecker	B	Water Pipit	b
Downy Woodpecker	B	Northern Shrike	t
Lewis's Woodpecker	B	Loggerhead Shrike	t
Pileated Woodpecker	B	European Starling	B
Black-backed Woodpecker	B	Western Wood Pewee	B
Three-toed Woodpecker	B	Cassin's Vireo	B
Eastern Kingbird	B	Red-eyed Vireo	b
Horned Lark	t	Warbling Vireo	B
Western Kingbird	t	Least Flycatcher	B
Belted Kingfisher	B	Dusky Flycatcher	B
Violet-green Swallow	B	Cordilleran Flycatcher	b
Tree Swallow	B	Hammond's Flycatcher	B
Bank Swallow	B	Olive-sided Flycatcher	b
N.Rough-winged Swallow	B	Willow Flycatcher	B
Barn Swallow	B	Cedar Waxwing	B
Cliff Swallow	B	Bohemian Waxwing	t
Blue Jay	t	Audubon's Warbler	B
Gray Jay	b	Orange-crowned Warbler	B
Steller's Jay	b	Nashville Warbler	b
Black-billed Magpie	B	Yellow Warbler	B
Common Raven	B	Yellow-rumped Warbler	b
American Crow	B	MacGillivray's Warbler	B
Clark's Nutcracker	B	Townsend's Warbler	B
Black-capped Chickadee	B	American Redstart	B
Mountain Chickadee	B	Common Yellowthroat	B
Chestnut-backed Chickadee		Wilson's Warbler	b
White-breasted Nuthatch	B	Northern Waterthrush	b
Red-breasted Nuthatch	B	Western Tanager	B
Pygmy Nuthatch	b	Spotted Towhee	b
Brown Creeper	b	House Sparrow	B
Rock Wren	t	Bobolink	B
House Wren	B	Western Meadowlark	B
Winter Wren	b	Yellow-headed Blackbird	B
American Dipper	B	Red-winged Blackbird	B
Marsh Wren	B	Brewer's Blackbird	B
Calliope Hummingbird	B	Lazuli Bunting	B
Rufous Hummingbird	B	Cassin's Finch	B
American Robin	B	American Goldfinch	b
Varied Thrush	b	House Finch	b
Hermit Thrush	b	Gray-Crowned Rosy Finch	t
Swainson's Thrush	B	Pine Siskin	B

Gray Catbird	b
Western Bluebird	B
Mountain Bluebird	B
Townsend's Solataire	B
Clay-colored Sparrow	B
Grasshopper Sparrow	t
White-crowned Sparrow	t
Lark Sparrow	b
Fox Sparrow	t
Song Sparrow	B
Lincoln's Sparrow	b
LeConte's Sparrow	t
Harris' Sparrow	t
Common Redpoll	t
Hoary Redpoll	t
Snow Bunting	t
Veery	B
Brown-headed Cowbird	B
Bullock's Oriole	B
Pine Grosbeak	t
Evening Grosbeak	B
Black-headed Grosbeak	t
Say's Phoebe	B
Red Crossbill	B
White-Winged Crossbill	t
American Tree Sparrow	b
Brewer's Sparrow	B
Savannah Sparrow	B
Vesper Sparrow	B
Dark-eyed Junco	b
Oregon Junco	B
Chipping Sparrow	B

BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE

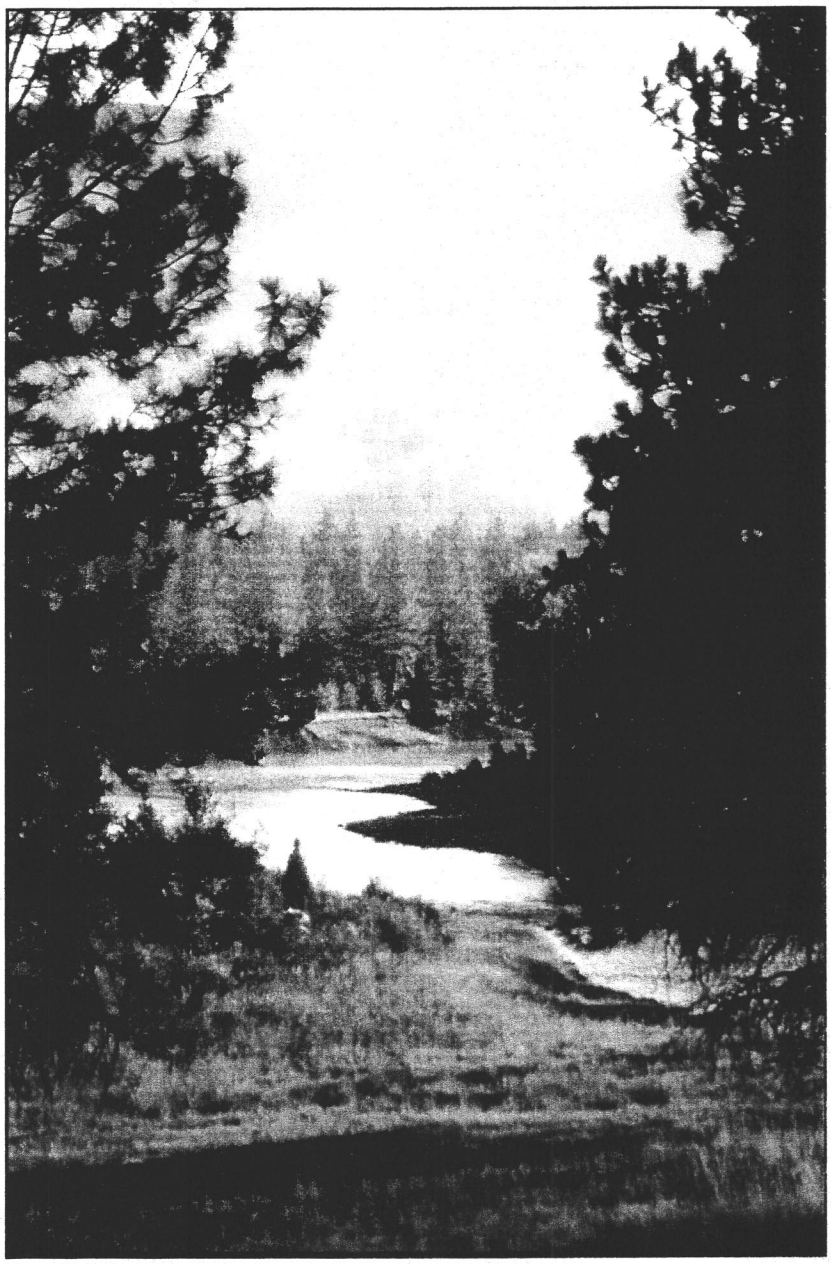


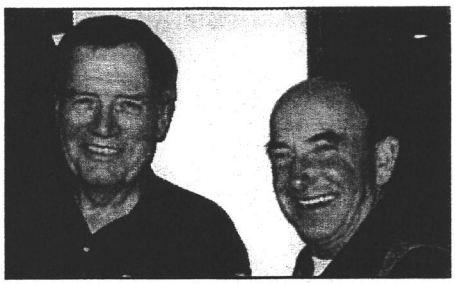
Photo by Teri Garrison

ANNUAL REPORT

2002

Darrell Sall Memorial Award

In October 2002, we conducted a Tour for the Board and the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, ending with a dinner awards ceremony at the H2O Ranch where Hank Goetz received the "Darrell Sall Memorial Award" in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the Blackfoot Challenge and its mission to protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot River Valley.



Land Lindbergh with his best buddy Hank Goetz

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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793-5830
rsranch@blackfoot.net

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USFWS

Nancy Anderson, Secretary
BLM

Dave Cochran, Treasurer
Landowner

Land Lindbergh, Officer
Landowner

Daina Bambe, USFS

Andy Erickson, Landowner

Racene Friede, Blackfoot Telephone

Denny Iverson, Landowner

Tony Liane, DNRC

Mack Long, FWP

Jeff McNally, Rocky Mt. Elk Foundation

Denny Sigars, Plum Creek Timber

Dave Streufert, Powell County Extension

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Web Sites

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

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

BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE ANNUAL REPORT 2002

From the Chairman

Jim Stone

For those of you still counting the years (let's hope that is most of you) we are celebrating a ten-year milestone with the Blackfoot Challenge. That is an amazing statistic for me, but as you read this annual report you will begin to comprehend how productive this past year has been, and how far we have come in that short amount of time.

As I am reminded of the conflicts that we see in this world everyday, I am humbled by the fact that we have chosen a direction that is notably more productive and holds true to a vision; people are the difference. This is a world of special interest, political wrestling, and unprincipled compromise affecting how we will leave this land for future generations. We could become complacent and let over-bearing technocrats dictate to this watershed what their visions and aspirations would be. I think we have spoken to that, and we have embarked on a much healthier road. This will never be an issue that can be solved, but we can shape it within the framework of this watershed to accomplish our goals for the next ten, twenty years. As landowners and managers we have to show by example. This is our legacy. We should be proud of where we have been; and more importantly where we choose to go.

These next ten years will be very important for all of us to become involved, join a community organization, be pro-active in representation of our business and communities, and commit to our effort of watershed planning. The Challenge speaks from the landowners in this valley. If we do not speak-up and be heard, then someone else will speak for us.

The Blackfoot Challenge is very appreciative of all the support we have had and we look forward to having more of you become involved. My door is always open. Please don't hesitate to call on issues that you feel are important. Remember: "better communities are built through communication."

Board and Committees

The Blackfoot Challenge Board of Directors met monthly to foster communication, coordinate activities and help resolve issues and conflicts. Priority topics this year included conservation strategies, headwaters water quality/TMDLs for metals and sediments, weed management, water conservation, and education.

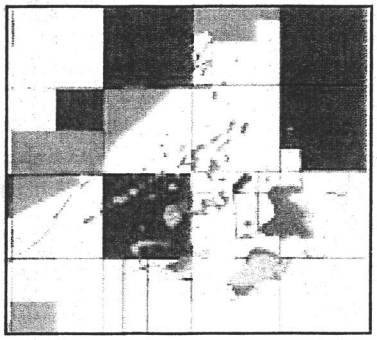
Active Committees of the Blackfoot Challenge in 2002 include:

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

Conservation Strategies

Greg Neudecker, Chair

The Blackfoot Conservation Strategies Committee provides a quarterly forum for information exchanges on conservation work in the Blackfoot. In 2002 we took a giant step forward with some major joint venture projects. The Blackfoot Challenge received a $1 million wetlands conservation grant.



Middle Blackfoot Wetlands Map

We made great progress towards a community-based "disposition and management strategy" for the buy-out of almost a third of the Plum Creek Timber Company lands in the Blackfoot, hosting community meetings attended by over 130 citizens to identify community values of these lands for access, recreation, grazing, timber, other natural resource values. We have expanded community involvement on the Committee and continue work on a Blackfoot Conservation Plan.

With help from USFWS, the National Wetlands Inventory mapping project is progressing. We developed a watershed-wide bird list. At present the partnership has easements conservation activities 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.

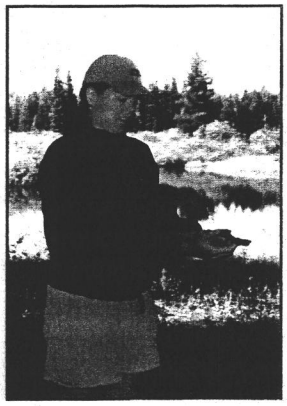
We will continue to seek funding opportunities to better coordinate stewardship activities and partner on conservation strategies. And, we have a very full plate as we move into 2003.

Education Committee
Racene Friede, Chair

2002 offered many exciting opportunities for Blackfoot teachers through the Blackfoot Challenge. The Teacher Summit on February 25 allowed teachers from all over the watershed to share watershed education projects they have led at their own schools, and to learn about new opportunities for natural resource education. A series of 3 GIS/GPS workshops provided through the EOS Center at UM were well attended by watershed teachers. Many teachers participated in the Adopt-A-Trout program this year, with a teacher workshop, field trips, and web-based monitoring of fish movements. Check Website: http://fwp.state.mt.us/adoptatrout/.

WET Teachers examine wetlands restoration site with Greg Neudecker of USFWS

Youth Field Day 2002 unfortunately was cancelled due to a late season snowstorm. But the weather was plenty warm for the Project WET Tour in June and July, when participating teachers learned about place-based education, wetland functions and values, plant identification, and wetland birds and bird research at Seeley Lake, enjoying a canoe trip down the Clearwater Canoe Trail and Seeley Lake.



Lincoln teacher releases songbird at WET Tour

The valuable Teacher Steering Committee met throughout the year to advise the Challenge on issues important to schools. Many thanks to those teachers who have participated in this committee and to all of you hardworking teachers who do so much for students in the Blackfoot Watershed.

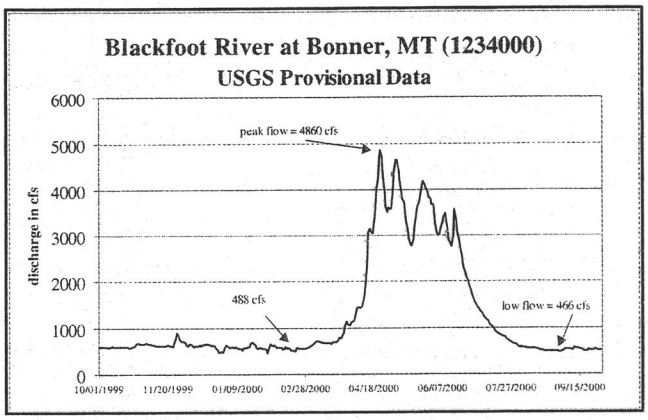
With funding from Mary Bradshaw, we developed an outdoor learning program for the H2O ranch, property in Helmville that was donated to USFWS in 2000 as a Waterfowl Production Area.

We hosted over 10 tours in the Blackfoot. We reached about 400 adults through meetings, workshops, tours, training and other education outreach efforts in 2002. We presented our power point slide show at meetings, workshops and conferences, distributed our brochure and made presentations to agency and non-profit organizations throughout Montana.

Elaine Caton joined the Blackfoot Challenge as our Education Coordinator to help us implement our year-round Blackfoot Watershed Education Program. Thanks to funding support from the Chutney Foundation, USFWS, FWP, DNRC, EPA and private donations, as well as volunteer services provided by our Board members and partners, education will remain a priority activity.

Drought and Water Conservation Committee

Mike McLane, Field Staff to Committee



In 2002 the Drought Committee met, tracked snowpack and flow forecasts, and evaluated whether to call for emergency drought response. Luckily stream flows did not fall below 700 cfs at the Bonner USGS stream gage until late August. Though emergency drought plans for individual water right holders and recreationists were not requested, we provided outreach and education through posters at local post offices and businesses showing low flow forecasts, newspaper articles and press releases, as well as 100 flyers and three separate mailings to 73 drought plan participants. It is evident that ten years of stream restoration work in the Blackfoot has reduced our vulnerability in low flow periods.

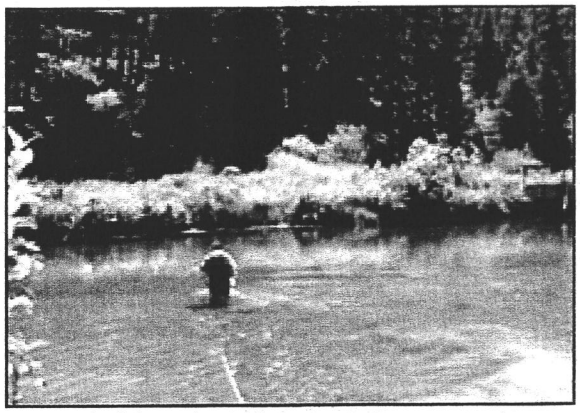
NCAT Soil Moisture Probe Installed in Blackfoot

The Drought Committee sponsored year-two of 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. Vicki Lynn from NCAT provided technical support. In 2002, 12 ranches (including the Bandy Research Ranch), one golf course, 14 fields, and about 1,500 acres were part of the project. Irrigation system types included 13 pivot systems, one wheel line and the underground sprinkler system at the golf course. Cooperators grew alfalfa hay, grass hay, pasture, and turf.

Thanks to a Watershed Assistance Grant from DNRC, we made progress in developing a Long-Term Water Conservation Strategy to benefit irrigators, other water users as well as fisheries in the Blackfoot. Strategies include ditch lining projects, habitat improvements, and instream flow leases to guide our efforts in non-drought years.

Habitat, Water Quality and Restoration Committee

Tina Bernd-Cohen, Ex. Director & Project Coordinator

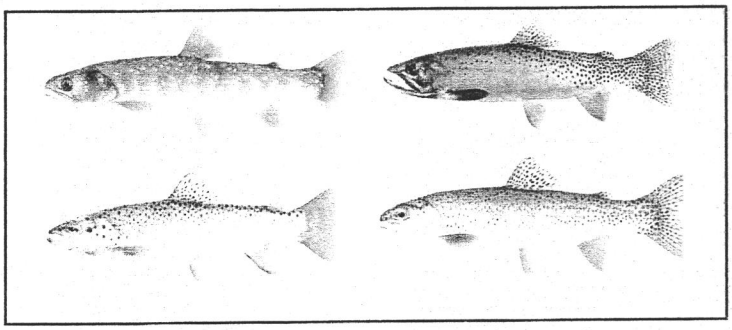


Blackfoot physical assessment survey work

The Blackfoot Challenge, thanks to its Habitat and Water Quality Restoration Committee, spent countless hours working with its scientific team, consultant, and the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to develop metals and sediment water quality restoration plans in the Blackfoot 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, DEQ, FWP, and others. The metals TMDL went to public comment and is available at the DEQ Website:http://www.deq.state.mt.us/ppa/mdm/tmdl/tmdlPublicComments.asp The sediment *Phase 1 Assessement Report* can be viewed on the NRIS website: http://nris.state.mt.us/specialproj/blackfoot watershed/upper%20blackfoot%20report%20 final.pdf

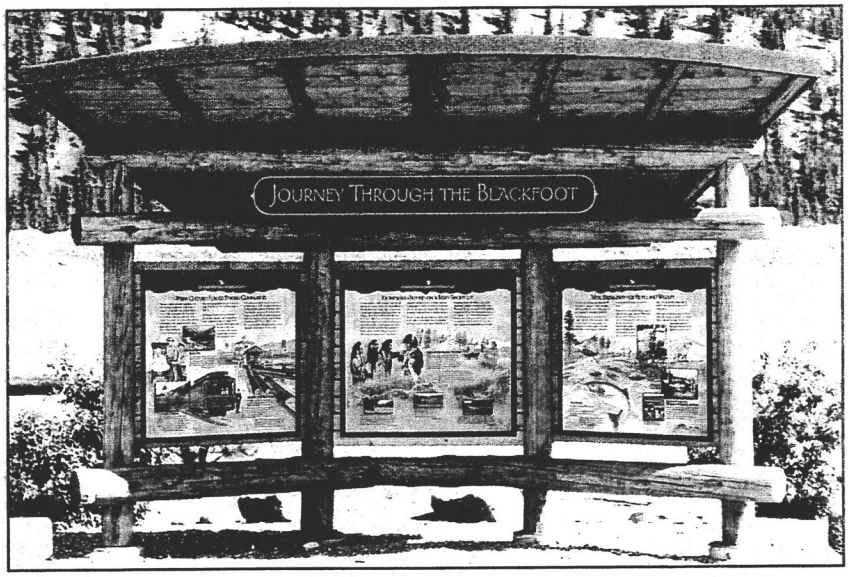
A Monitoring Work Group was formed to address data needs for the TMDL, as well as track the long-term health of the watershed, and document how Blackfoot restoration projects achieve water quality and habitat health objectives. Fish, Widlife and Parks continued its monitoring of fisheries health in the Blackfoot, as a cornerstone activity

and barometer of the health of the watershed. FWP also produced stream prioritization report that will guide future restoration work on 83 impaired tributaries of the Blackfoot. The Blackfoot Challenge has continued its partnership activities with the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited in 2002, by securing and passing-through funds for stream restoration projects in the Blackfoot. We are looking forward to sustaining this excellent partnership.



Lewis and Clark Committee
David Cochran, Chair

The Committee continued its efforts to prepare for anticipated tourists wanting to travel along the Lewis & Clark Trail during the Bicentennial years. In the Blackfoot, this "River by the road to the Buffalo" runs along the well-worn Native American trail up the Blackfoot River and across the Continental Divide to the Missouri River. The Committee serves as the grass-roots organization serving as a clearinghouse and partnership on L&C opportunities. We are working on three gateway kiosks and a driving map through the Blackfoot. In October we celebrated the dedication of the first Lewis & Clark Gateway kiosk at Bonner.

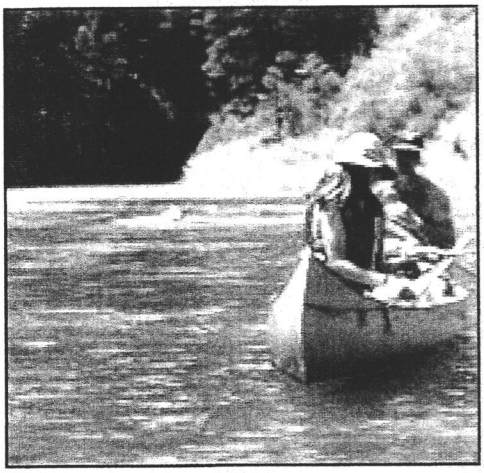


Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Gateway Interpretive Kiosk at Bonner, Montana

Recreational Steering Committee
Land Lindbergh, Member

Members of the Challenge sit on 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 2002, controversy over a traditional public access site at Scotty Brown Bridge was successfully resolved with the help of key local landowners. A recreational use survey was conducted in the summer of 2002 to quantify increased recreational river use. The group participated in two Weed Pulls to raise public awareness about the need for river stewardship and river etiquette.

The Committee has been waiting for the Statewide River Recreation Management Committee to complete its policy recommendations to the F&W Commission. The Commission's response to those efforts will be all-determining as to where things go from here. ... and will certainly be a very critical junction for this on-going process of managing recreational river uses on the Blackfoot. While waiting on the Statewide Management Committee for policy direction, the local group has concentrated on local access point improvement where necessary to protect the resource and provide a better recreation experience for the public.



Summer fun on the Blackfoot River

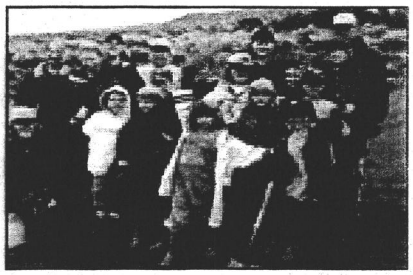
Weed Steering Committee
Jim Stone, Chair

Blackfoot Challenge Weed Tour to MSU 2002

In 2002, the Blackfoot Challenge continued its leadership role in education and management of noxious weeds in the Blackfoot Valley. The Weed Steering Committee guides this effort and includes landowners, county, state and federal agencies, and university researchers. About 80 people attended the annual weed meeting in February 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 2001 accomplishments and set the 2002 work plan.

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 activities including two Weed Pull/River Cleanup Days at Russell Gates and a Weed Tour to MSU to learn about the latest techniques in the war against weeds.

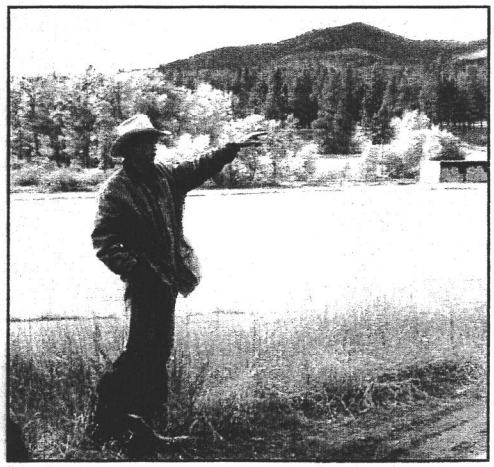
During the summer, chemical weed control was undertaken in the nine WMAs: Middle Blackfoot, North Fork, Greenough, Douglas Creek, Nevada Creek, River Junction, Woodworth, Potomac, and Double Arrow on private, state and federally managed lands. Over 100 individual landowners implemented weed management on their lands. Annual cost-share funding came from the Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund. The Challenge, with foundation funds and grants, sponsored several projects in 2002. For a second year, 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.



Nevada Creek 4-H Club Weed Pull

We completed our successful Pulling Together grant. 4-H Clubs and schools in the town centers of Greenough, Seeley Lake, Ovando, Helmville, Elliston, and Deer Lodge used GIS/GPS 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 at these town centers.

Weed management area signs were installed throughout the Blackfoot letting folks know about our weed management work. The Helmville School GIS/GPS weed mapping/monitoring demonstration project got a second year under its belt, serving as a model for applied GIS/GPS technology. The Mannix Brothers completed their third and final year of goat grazing trials for containment of spotted knapweed using 600 'herded' goats over the summer. The Blackfoot Challenge sponsored a Montana State University biological weed control project for yellow toadflax and dalmatian toadflax. The War on Weeds continues.

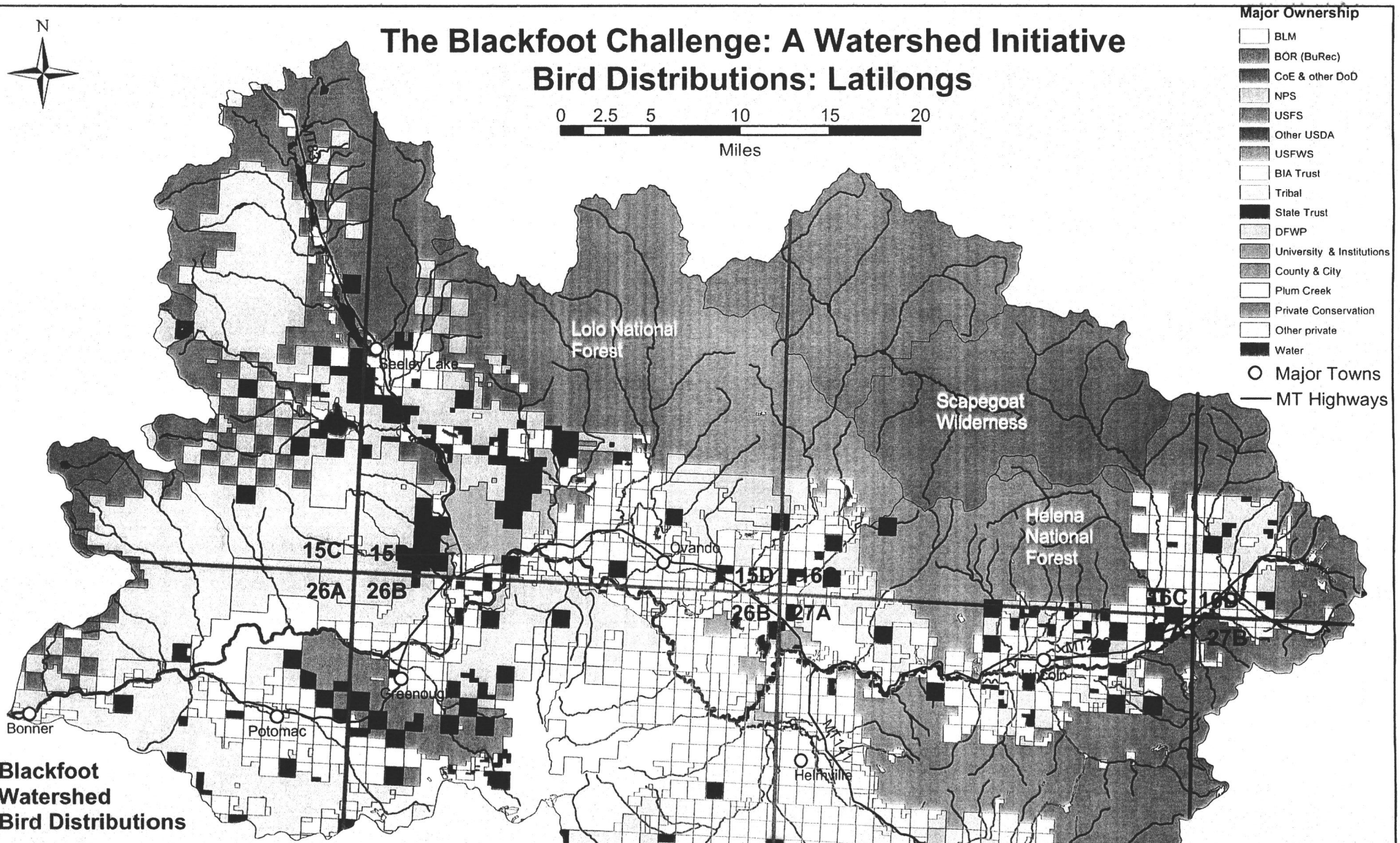


Joe Broesder presenting Grizzly Management at the Bandy Ranch

Wildlife Committee
Greg Neudecker, Chair

The Wildlife Committee was created in 2002 to exchange information and coordinate efforts related to management of wildlife and human interactions in the Blackfoot. A landowner advisory group of seven local landowners or land managers throughout the valley advise on major issues and guide us on solving conflicts. We started a preventative management program of fencing calving and lambing yards with high tensile electric fences to keep predators like grizzly bears and wolves out of these areas. We also began a GIS mapping program on livestock operator lands with known grizzly bear locations to identify bear and human conflict areas and devise solutions. To inform and involve landowners, we hosted a meeting and tour with about 40 ranches concerned about grizzly activity on their lands.

The Blackfoot Challenge: A Watershed Initiative
Bird Distributions: Latilongs



Blackfoot Watershed Bird Distributions

To submit observations and contribute to a better understanding of birds in the Blackfoot, log online to: http://nhp.state.mt.us/mbd

Required Information: Name and Telephone number of observer
Name of Species, Date of Sighting, and Location of observation.
B = Direct evidence of breeding b = indirect evidence of breeding
t = No evidence of breeding but oberved between 02/16 - 12/14
W = Overwintering - regular sightings Dec 15 - Feb 15
w = Observed during winter but not overwintering

By Mail: Montana Bird Distribution
Montana Audubon
P.O. Box 595
Helena, MT 59624