



Photo by
Gravity Shots

Water. Wildlife. Way of Life

River to Lake Initiative

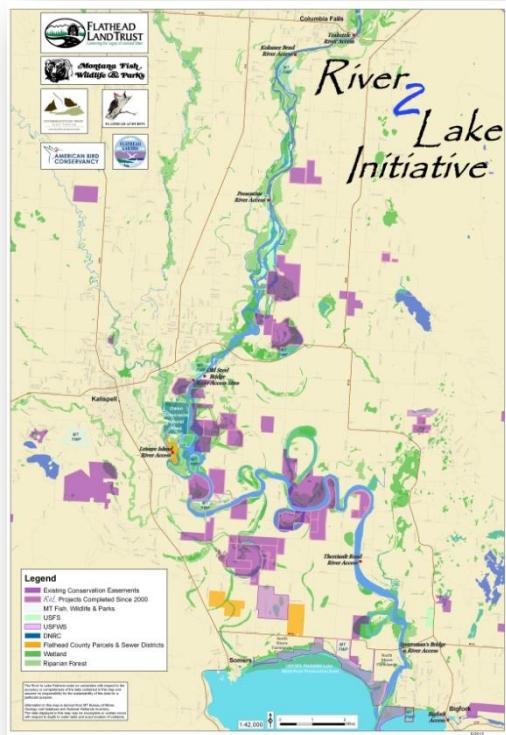
The *River to Lake Initiative* is a collaborative effort to conserve and restore our Flathead River and Lake natural heritage – excellent water quality, outstanding scenic and recreation values, abundant fish and wildlife, and prime soils.



OUR FLATHEAD HERITAGE

The *River to Lake Initiative* encompasses the main stem of the Flathead River from Columbia Falls to the North Shore of Flathead Lake in Northwest Montana. *River to Lake* partners work with interested landowners to find opportunities that work for them to conserve critical habitat, restore vegetated stream banks, and sustain farms. These areas help protect water quality and encompass some of the valley's best fish and wildlife habitat and agricultural soils.

Protecting Our Flathead River and Lake Natural Heritage



CONSERVATION GOALS

When we protect the Flathead River and Flathead Lake, its forests and wetlands, floodplains and shallow groundwater and feeder streams, we help:

- 1) Maintain and improve water quality.
- 2) Protect floodplains.
- 3) Maintain traditional rural and scenic character.
- 4) Protect and enhance critical fish and wildlife habitat.
- 5) Conserve prime farmlands.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since 2000, partners have protected over 5,000 acres of critical wetlands and restored nearly 3 miles of riparian habitat, adding to a conservation network of about 11,000 acres of private and publicly protected lands.

RIVER TO LAKE INITIATIVE: *River to Lake Initiative*

By working together for over a decade, landowners and other River to Lake partners have conserved a significant amount of river and lake lands.

Conservation Success

An evaluation of all protected areas (public and private) showed that the following have been protected:

- 41% of the 100-year floodplain
- 34% of the corridor's important agricultural soils
- 49% of high quality riparian areas
- 51% of the wetlands
- 43% of the areas overlying shallow groundwater
- 29% of the banks along the Flathead River's main channel.

Private-land conservation resulted in 57% of this success, 45% resulted from *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* projects.

Partners

Landowners

American Bird Conservancy
Flathead Land Trust
Flathead Lakers
Flathead Audubon
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Montana Land Reliance
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Flathead Conservation District
Flathead River Commission
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes

WHERE CAN WE LEARN MORE?

For more information contact the Flathead Lakers (883-1341), the Flathead Land Trust (752-8293), or any other partners. Visit our website at www.flatheadrivertolake.org.

Wetland Sloughs along the Flathead River Protected

The first large conservation project completed included four couples who protected 1,200 acres of farmland, wetlands, and riparian areas along the Flathead River.

"It takes an army to put a project like this together," the Flathead Land Trust's Executive Director told the Daily InterLake. "And we had one."

McWennerger and Weaver Sloughs are crescent-shaped wetland sloughs associated with the Flathead River. They provide **important migratory and breeding habitat** for numerous birds and other wildlife.

Thanks to conservation easements placed on the properties, future generations of farmers will be able to continue farming some of the best soils in Montana while helping maintain clean water in the Flathead River and Flathead Lake.

"We're just really happy to see it will continue to be open space," said Steve Cummings, another participating landowner.



Foys Bend, Photo by Gael Bissell



Rusby Seabaugh shows his restoration efforts along the Flathead River at Foys Bend.

River to Lake partners helped secure funding to compensate landowners for restricting development and enhancing conservation values on their properties.