



Centennial Valley Focus Area

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in Montana

Introduction and General Description

The Centennial Valley is a large, high elevation, undeveloped watershed in Beaverhead and Madison Counties. The Centennial Valley encompasses approximately 385,000 acres north and east of the Continental Divide along the Montana-Idaho border. The Centennial Mountains flank the south side of the valley, and the rolling foothills of Gravelly Mountain range extend to the north. The Red Rock River meanders through the broad and flat valley floor feeding Upper and Lower Red Rock Lakes. The valley contains the largest wetland complex in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem comprising thousands of acres in a mosaic of open water and emergent vegetation. The uplands on the valley floor are characterized by lowlands dominated by sagebrush, grasslands, and lush willow dominated riparian areas. The Montana Natural Heritage

Program has rated the Centennial Valley as one of the most significant natural landscapes in Montana, a tribute to its intact ecological systems, expansive wetlands, diverse native fauna and flora, and unique concentrations of rare species.

In the heart of the valley is the 45,000-acre Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge was established in 1935, primarily to protect trumpeter swans and wildlife habitat. The refuge provides core habitat for trumpeter swans; however, many of the swans nest and rear young on private land in the valley. Landownership in the Centennial Valley is predominately public lands with 285,000 acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Montana Department of Natural Resource Conservation. The remaining 100,000 acres, located within the

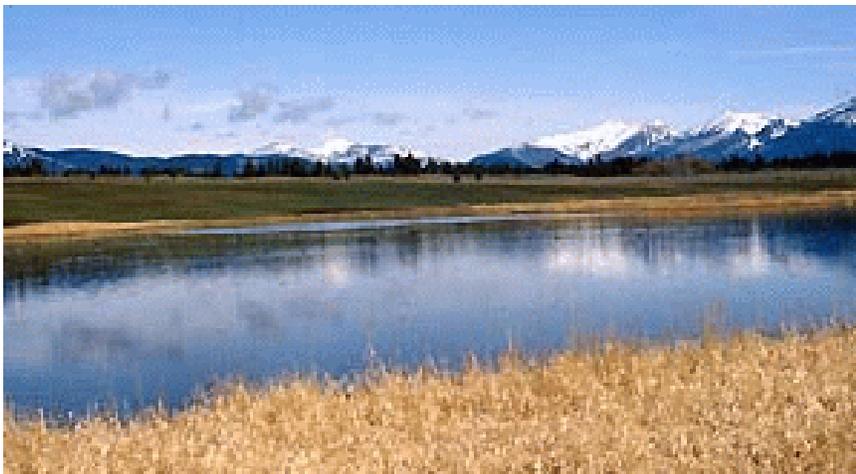


Trumpeter swans.

river valley, are privately owned. Approximately 90 percent of these lands is controlled by 15 ranches.

Species of Special Concern

There are 261 bird species, approximately 70 percent of those found in Montana, inhabit the valley. At least 150 bird species breed in the valley. The valley has been the base for trumpeter swan recovery efforts in the northern Rockies since a remnant population was discovered here in the early 1900s. The Centennial Valley hosts the densest breeding population of peregrine falcons, ferruginous hawks, and trumpeter swans in Montana. The valley historically had a large population of sage grouse and still maintains remnant populations. Red Rock Creek and Upper Red Rock Lake contain one of the only native lake populations of Arctic grayling (a native fish) in the lower 48 States. Several streams in the valley contain genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. The stream habitat of the valley also provides habitat for river otters. Lying only 20 miles from Yellowstone National Park, the Centennial Valley is a



linkage zone and provides secure habitat for wide ranging native predators such as grizzly bear, wolf, wolverine, and lynx.

The Centennial Valley's soils support a diverse array of plants and plant communities, including some of considerable scientific importance. Location records indicate 41 plant Species of Special Concern, including five that may be globally rare and seven that are known only from the Centennial Valley in Montana. Vegetation in the Centennial Sandhills represents one of Montana's most intact native plant associations and includes at least five State-rare species.

Threats

The biggest threat to the Centennial Valley is habitat fragmentation from construction of housing subdivisions. While the valley is still relatively intact, outside pressures to chop up the valley into "ranchettes" threaten crucial fish and wildlife habitat. Additional long-term impacts to habitat in the valley include: overgrazing, brush control, poorly designed irrigation systems, undersized culvert crossings, channelized streams, and improper mining operations.

Conservation Strategies

The goal of the Partners Program in the Centennial Valley is to work cooperatively with private landowners and other agencies and conservation groups to restore and preserve unique fish and wildlife habitat on private lands. The Program got started in the Centennial Valley in 1994, at the



request of then Director Mollie Beattie. The Partners Program gives special emphasis to those properties and projects that provide habitat connections on private lands to Red Rocks National Wildlife Refuge and the surrounding Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management properties. Projects include: in-stream restoration, riparian restoration, wetland restoration, grazing management, off-site water development, and native grass reseeding.

The costs associated with these restorations are:

- Wetland restoration - \$500/acre
- Grassland enhancement - \$10/ac
- In-stream Restoration - \$9.50/linear foot
- Riparian Restoration - \$1.50/linear foot

Noxious weeds (e.g., spotted knapweed, houndstongue, and henbane) are rare in most of the valley; however, they are beginning to appear throughout the

region. A weed district was started in 1998, and intensive control efforts were started in 1999.

Current tools being used include educational, mechanical, biological, and chemical controls. Unless better control methods become available, noxious weeds will require diligence from all land managers and resource users long into the future.

Partners

In addition to our participating private landowners, other partners include:

- Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- U.S. Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- Arctic Grayling Recovery Program
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Ducks Unlimited
- Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem
- The Nature Conservancy
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- Beaverhead County

Montana State University
Natural Resource Conservation Service
Montana Department of Natural Resource
Conservation
Montana Land Reliance
The Conservation Fund

Accomplishments

Habitat Restoration Accomplishments to Date:

Wetland Restoration	130 Acres
Grazing Management Implemented	3,300 Acres
Stream/Riparian Restoration	8 Miles

Habitat restoration projects have been funded by Partners for Fish and Wildlife (\$100,000); Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Arctic Grayling Recovery Program, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Bureau of Land Management, The Nature Conservancy, and private landowners (\$125,000).

Future Needs

- Restore 2,000 acres of wetlands in this Focus Area on private lands.
- Restore or enhance 75,000 acres of grasslands.
- Restore 175 miles of in-stream and riparian habitat.



Corral Creek before in-stream and streamside restoration.



Corral Creek after restoration - note the corral has been moved out of the stream and the vegetation has recovered along the creek.

Centennial Valley (350,000 acres)

