



# Mission Valley Focus Area

## Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in Montana

### Introduction and General Description

The Mission Valley, a glacially carved remnant of 12,000 years past, is located in Lake County of western Montana. The 350,000-acre valley is also within the exterior boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The northern end of the valley is bordered by Flathead Lake with the main stem of the Flathead River to the west. The National Bison Range National Wildlife Refuge forms the southern boundary, and the majestic Mission Mountains tower above the valley's eastern edge. Ownership is a checkerboard of private land, Tribal trust parcels, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Wildlife Management Areas, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service waterfowl production areas, and national wildlife refuges.

### Species of Special Concern

Habitat types are diverse and varied with a mosaic of forests, glacial fed streams and rivers, spring creeks, riparian areas, glacial potholes, and small remnants of native Palouse prairie. This natural diversity, along with irrigated pastures and small crop fields, makes the Mission Valley an oasis for a unique array of fish and wildlife. Not only does the valley support some of the highest densities of ground nesting migratory birds in the lower 48 States, it is also home to a number of threatened and endangered species. These include bull trout, peregrine falcon, gray wolf, and bald eagles. Grizzly bears are also becoming regular visitors to the valley floor. Grizzlies have always inhabited the surrounding mountain ranges but were rarely seen in the lowlands.



**A pair of redheads.**

Today, it is commonplace for bears to venture into the valley. Some theories for this behavior include:

1. plentiful vole populations (a seasonal food source)
2. poor berry production in the mountains
3. changing social structure within the bear populations
4. movement by juveniles into new territories

For whatever reason, the Mission Valley has become important grizzly bear habitat.

### Threats

Habitat fragmentation and habitat degradation are the two biggest threats to the Mission Valley.

Spring creeks and streams have been overgrazed, channelized, diverted, and dewatered.

Wetlands have been drained and filled. Upland areas are often overgrazed, and invasive species are expanding rapidly. But these problems pale in comparison to the habitat fragmentation caused by subdivision development. Like many western Montana valleys, Mission Valley's landscape is



being carved into 20- and 40-acre subdivisions. Unfortunately, land subdivision and associated buildings and fences fragment the habitat.

### **Conservation Strategies**

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program began working in the Mission Valley in 1990. To a great extent, past Partners Program efforts have focused on wetland restoration. Over time, our restoration emphasis expanded to all habitat types including streams and riparian (streamside) corridors. The stream restoration are providing critical habitat for native and wild salmonids (trout and salmon). Restoring and enhancing riparian corridors improves habitat connectivity for bears and migratory birds. Working cooperatively with private landowners to restore habitat will continue to be a key component of our conservation efforts in the Mission Valley.

We are also working with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe within the Clarke Fork Watershed and helping them with their efforts to restore the Jocko River.

The costs for habitat restoration in this Focus Area are:

- Wetland Restoration - \$600/acre
- Upland Restoration - \$10/acre
- In-stream Restoration -  
\$9.50/linear foot
- Riparian Restoration -  
\$1.50/linear foot



**7-acre wetland establishment along the Mission Mountains.**



**Prairie pothole complex under perpetual protection.**

### **Partners**

In addition to private landowners, one or more of the various partners listed below has played an integral role in each and every project that has been completed thus far.

- Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
- Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- Pheasants Forever

- Ducks Unlimited
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Trout Unlimited
- Montana Trout Foundation
- Montana Lane Reliance
- Lake County Conservation District
- Lake County Weed District
- Lower Flathead Valley Community Foundation
- Flathead Resource Organization
- Salish and Kootenai College

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University of Montana  
Charlo Schools  
Montana Department of Transportation  
Flathead Irrigation Project

## **Accomplishments**

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Since its inception in 1990, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, along with a variety of diverse partners, has been successful in completing numerous habitat restoration projects.

- 910 acres of wetland restoration on 370 sites.
- 52 miles of stream restoration on 34 sites.
- 1,450 acres of upland enhancement on 19 sites.

## **Future Needs**

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- Restore 4,000 acres of wetlands on private and tribal lands within this Focus Area.
- Enhance or restore 50,000 acres of grasslands.
- Restore 175 miles of in-stream or riparian habitat.



**In-stream restoration on Ronan Spring Creek.**

# Mission Valley (600,000 acres)

