



Welcome to the River to Lake newsletter.

Special Issue: Highlights from 2009 Newsletter

Issue 6 | February 2010

2009 Review: River to Lake Initiative Special Issue

Thank you River to Lake partners for a great year and for your vision, commitment, resourcefulness and cooperation in keeping the Flathead special for future generations.

And a special thank you to the landowners who made all of these projects possible!

Conservation Successes

2009 was a great year for the conservation of critical lands along the Flathead River and the North Shore of Flathead Lake. More than 1,000 acres critical for clean water, fish and wildlife, farming and recreation were protected through conservation easements and land acquisitions. This adds to a network of more than 7,000 acres of private and public conservation in the River to Lake focus area.

Scientific studies show that wetlands, riparian areas and associated uplands provide critical habitat for fish, birds and other wildlife. They also play a significant role in maintaining clean water and rich farming soils.

Conservation accomplishments this year include the Church Slough Project, the Louden Family Farms, the Foy's Bend and the Bigfork Fisheries Conservation Areas.

Church Slough

Church Slough is a magnificent oxbow slough along the Flathead River north of Flathead Lake, which is rich in wildlife and bird species. The Flathead Land Trust helped landowners Ben and Maureen Louden place a conservation easement on 300 acres of wetlands, riparian habitat, floodplain and farmland.



Louden Family Farms

The Flathead Land Trust helped the extended Louden family place three conservation easements on 540 acres of farmland, wetlands, riparian habitat and floodplain.

The properties stretch along the Flathead River to the east and west of Church Slough, connecting critical habitat for fish and wildlife along the river, as well as protecting large blocks of rich agricultural soils in the Flathead.



Project areas along the Flathead River

Foy's Bend River Fisheries Conservation Area

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks purchased a 243-acre property along two miles of the Flathead River for fisheries conservation. A management plan outlines public access, habitat enhancement,



Foy's Bend Fisheries Conservation Area
Photo by Gravity Shots.

weed management, agricultural land uses, and education activities that will be allowed and are compatible with the wildlife and fisheries goals for this property. Cap and Bonnie Ingham sold the property to FWP at a significantly lower price than the appraised value, making this project feasible and a great public value.

Bigfork Fisheries Conservation Area

Fish, Wildlife & Parks purchased a 70-acre parcel on the north shore of Flathead Lake, which borders the Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area (WPA), conserving fish and wildlife habitat conservation.

Restoration Successes

River to Lake partners are monitoring and maintaining six riparian restoration projects along the Flathead River and associated wetland sloughs and meanders and totaling more than 5,000 feet of restored riparian habitat. These areas are critical for fish and wildlife habitat as well as preventing pollution from entering rivers. New projects planned for 2010 include restoration projects at Church Slough and at Foy's Bend Fisheries Conservation Area. Landowners interested in riparian restoration call the Flathead Lakers at 883-1341.

Education & Outreach Accomplishments

Johnston's conservation easement celebrated at Flathead Land Trust Annual Meeting

In June, partners celebrated the donation of a conservation easement by the Johnston family, held by the Flathead Land Trust, on nearly 700 acres of wetlands, riparian forests and associated farm lands along the Flathead River. The Johnston family's contribution to conservation and stewardship greatly benefits clean water, fish and wildlife, and future generations.

"North Shore Magic" Focus of Flathead Lakers Annual Meeting

"...It is late February... The sun is beginning to reemerge. The south facing slope of Slitters Island in Fennon Slough, a large oxbow slough just to the north of the lake, is reflecting that sunlight. The melt has just begun. Flathead Lake and her connected waterways, the Flathead River and numerous sloughs defining the delta, have all been drawn down

approximately 8 to 10 feet from full pool. As this occurs, ice and snow cover where the water has receded. To the unobservant eye, this is a big mud flat. Au contraire, mes amis. It actually provides significant food for a very large migratory bird population that for the next two months will visit this area on its semiannual rite of migration."

Thus begins the eloquent tribute by Richard Hoffmaster, a north shore landowner, given at the Flathead Lakers' annual meeting last August to over 150 members and guests. Hoffmaster painted a picture we can all relate to – why it is important to conserve Flathead Lake's North Shore landscape. To read his evocative piece in full, visit the Flathead Lakers website at: www.flatheadlakers.org/publications_maps/newsletter/2009_fall.pdf.

This unique and special landscape has been a priority for conservation for decades leading to the creation of the Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area in the 1970s and the recent designation of 3,600 acres of the Flathead Lake North Shore as an "Important Bird Area" (IBA) by National Audubon Society. About 230 bird species are known to use the north shore, making it a stop area of global importance.

River to Lake partners are continuing efforts to find conservation opportunities and incentives that meet landowner needs. The North Shore not only protects our waters and wildlife but also helps drive economic vitality in the Flathead Watershed.

New Tools

Flathead County River Commission formed

The Flathead County Commissioners established a commission to focus attention on protecting and improving water quality in rivers and to better address river-related issues, including erosion and land use planning. The Commission meetings are open to the public. We welcome this new commission and plan to partner with it on river protection projects.

Critical Water Resources Maps

Maps identifying important areas for water quality protection and/or restoration for Flathead County have been completed and will soon be available online at the Flathead Lakers' website: www.flatheadlakers.org.

Please send news and information that you would like to share via the River to Lake E-News the first week of each month. If your information or request is time sensitive, you can request that we send an "Action Alert" e-mail. To post a message or to unsubscribe send message to: criticallands@flatheadlakers.org.