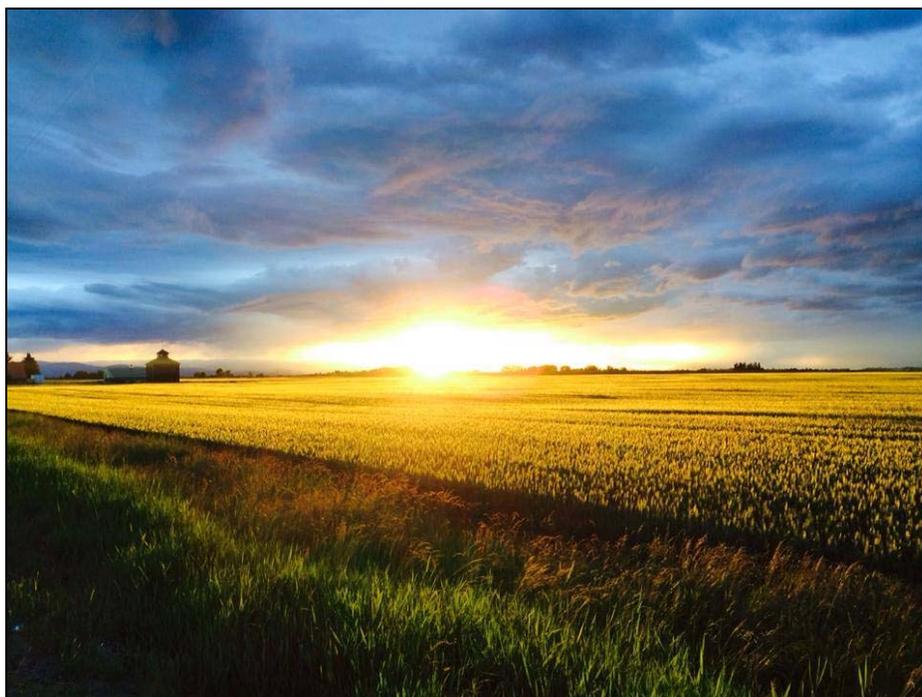




Conservation Plan 2016



*Protecting Northwest Montana's Spectacular Land and Water Legacy
Through Community-Based Conservation*

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This Conservation Plan provides focus for Flathead Land Trust's future landowner outreach efforts. We identify three new focus areas and the most important properties in those areas to conserve in order to prioritize our efforts in reaching out to landowners whose properties have the most important conservation values.

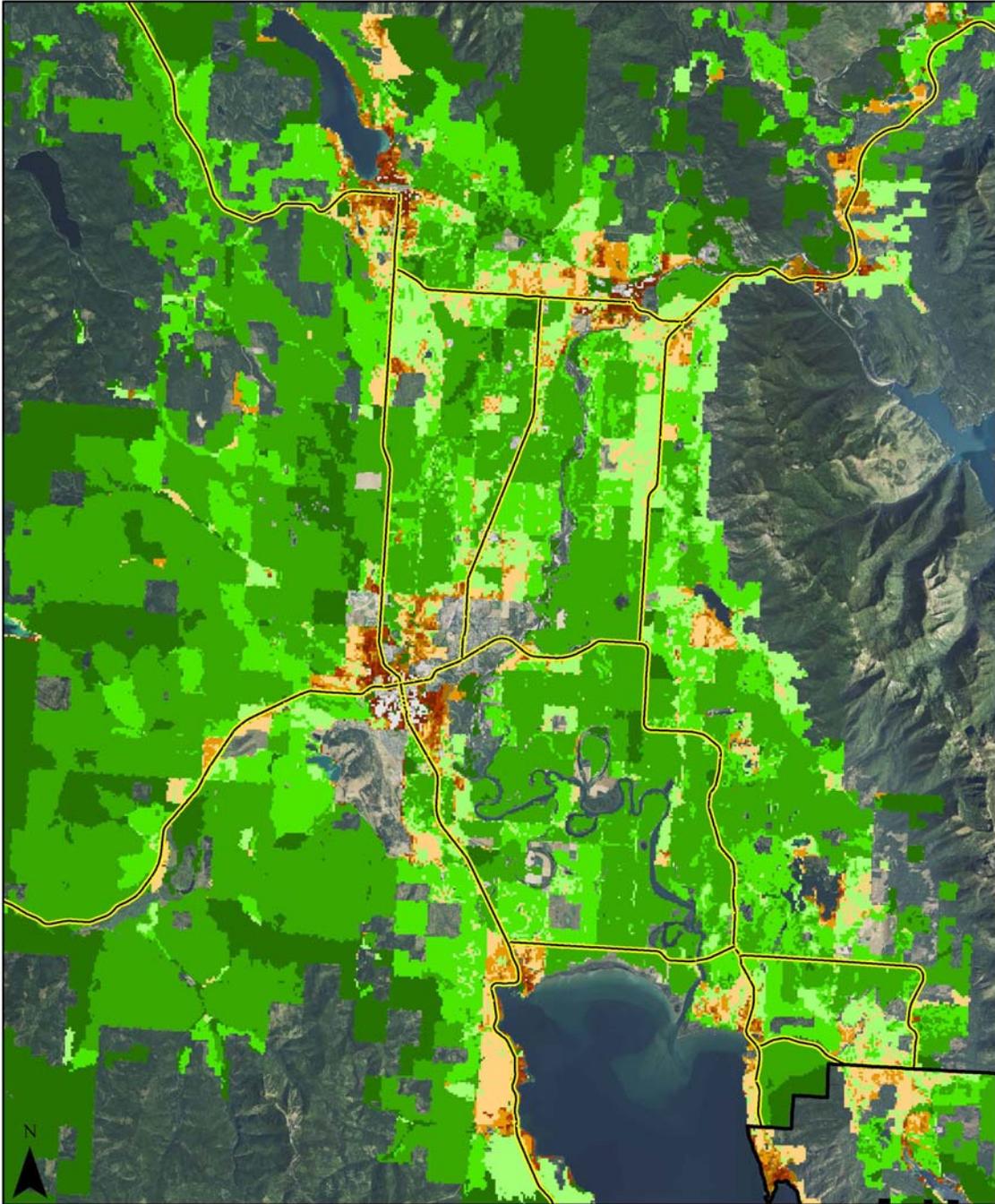
Why Conservation Matters

What will the Flathead Valley look like in 2050? Flathead County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state, with population increasing at an estimated 1.5% a year. An estimated 23,000 more residents are expected to live in the County by 2050.¹ That is the equivalent of adding another city the size of Kalispell to the County over the next 35 years. And that doesn't include the growth in seasonal visitors that flood the area annually. All these additional people will require more housing, commercial development and infrastructure.

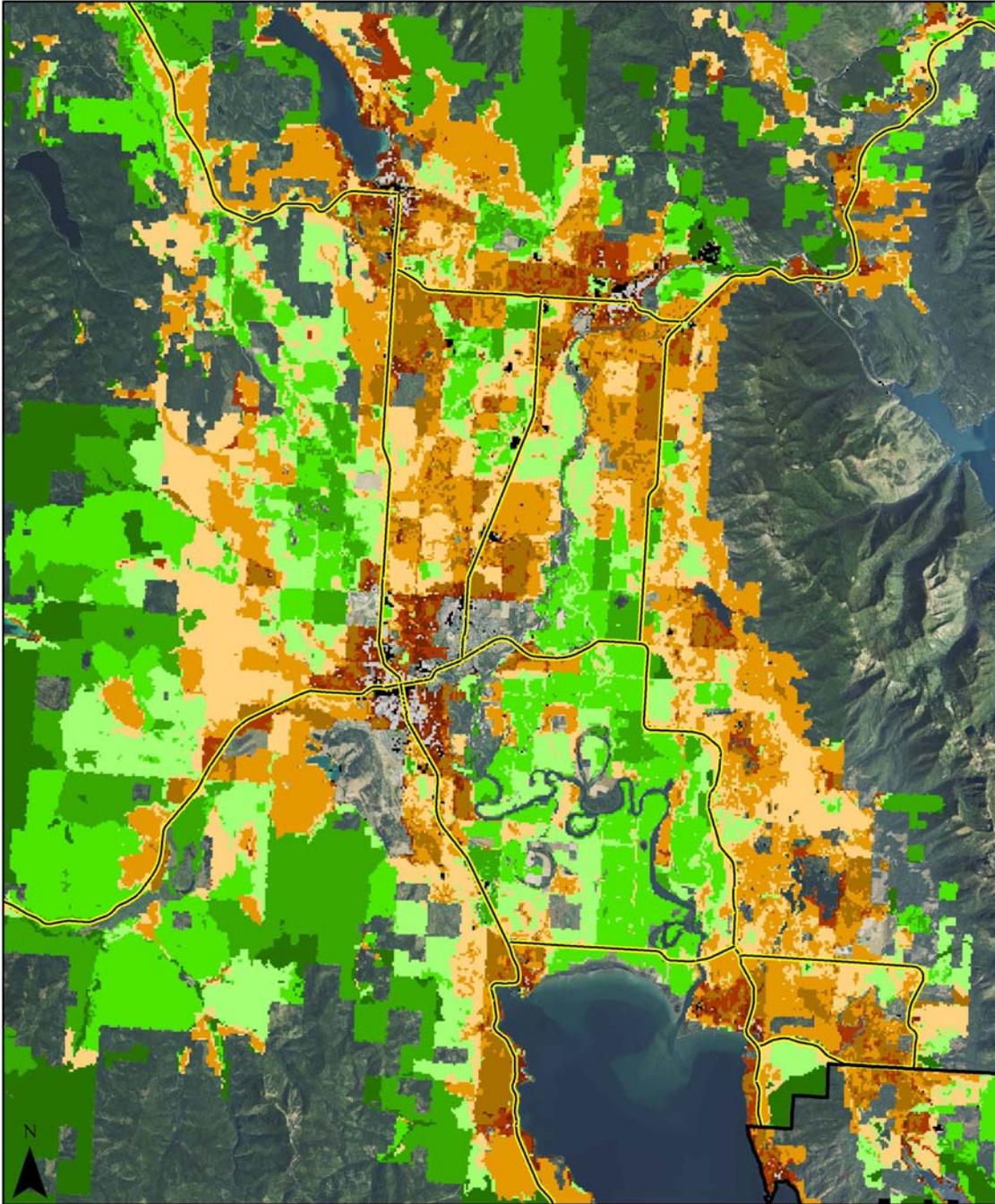
Yet what makes living and visiting here so special is our abundance of beautiful open space lands, outstanding fish and wildlife habitat, exceptionally clean water, and unsurpassed recreational opportunities. Northwest Montana is one of the only areas in the lower 48 states that still has the full complement of large carnivores (wolves, grizzly bears, wolverines, lynx, mountain lions) found at the time of European settlement. Flathead Lake is one of the cleanest lakes in the world and the largest natural body of fresh water in the United States west of the Mississippi River. Tourists are drawn to the Flathead because of the area's natural beauty, and University of Montana research showed that in 2014 tourist spending alone supported 808 million dollars in direct and indirect economic activity and 9,500 jobs in our local economy.² As past development has shown, however, continued population growth will chip away at our abundant natural heritage. Farms and forests will be converted to subdivisions, wetlands will be filled in, and lakes and rivers may be contaminated by leaking septic systems and other development.

Population growth in this beautiful corner of Montana is inevitable and contributes to our economic prosperity, but as anyone who has lived here for a while knows, it comes with some loss of the land and water legacy we cherish in the Flathead. This is why we must work together as a community to ensure that we conserve the most important open space lands for maintaining our rural agricultural heritage, abundant fish and wildlife, and clean water. While much of the surrounding landscape enjoys federal protection, the low-elevation private lands have a critical role in ensuring high water quality, as well as providing secure habitat for wildlife and rich farmland.

Flathead Co. Housing Density 1970



Flathead Co. Housing Density 2010



A Record of Success

Flathead Land Trust is a local non-profit founded in 1985 by forward thinking community members who wanted an organization dedicated to preserving the qualities that make the Flathead so special and a treasure for future generations. We provide a conservation alternative for private landowners who want to continue to own and manage their land with the assurance that the open space, fish and wildlife habitat and other important conservation values will be maintained forever.

The conservation alternative we provide landowners usually involves a conservation easement. Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements that meet the specific desires of the landowners for their properties while protecting the land's important resource values. A conservation easement stays with a property in perpetuity. Typically, conservation easements restrict residential subdivision and certain commercial activities. There are often federal tax benefits that landowners can take advantage of through the donation of a conservation easement. In some cases, there may be funding that can be used to purchase a conservation easement at a bargain sale on a property with certain resource value.

Thirty years of conservation work has resulted in Flathead Land Trust protecting nearly 10,700 acres of private land with 53 conservation easements. This conservation includes a nearly 4,000-acre ranch in Camas Prairie near Hot Springs that has giant ripples (prominent ridges some 45 feet high and thousands of feet long) from the strong currents that formed with the emptying of Glacial Lake Missoula. We have conserved important land along the Flathead and Stillwater Rivers, wetlands and lakeshores, forestland, family farmlands, and areas of tremendous scenic beauty visible to the public.

We have also collaborated with other like-minded conservation organizations and agencies to complete sixteen other projects protecting over 3,000 additional acres. Such projects have included the creation of the popular McWenneger Slough fishing access site and adding acreage to the Pine Grove Pond family recreation area, Herron Park, Lone Pine State Park, the Lupfer section of the Whitefish Trail network, and the North Shore of Flathead Lake Wildlife Management Area.

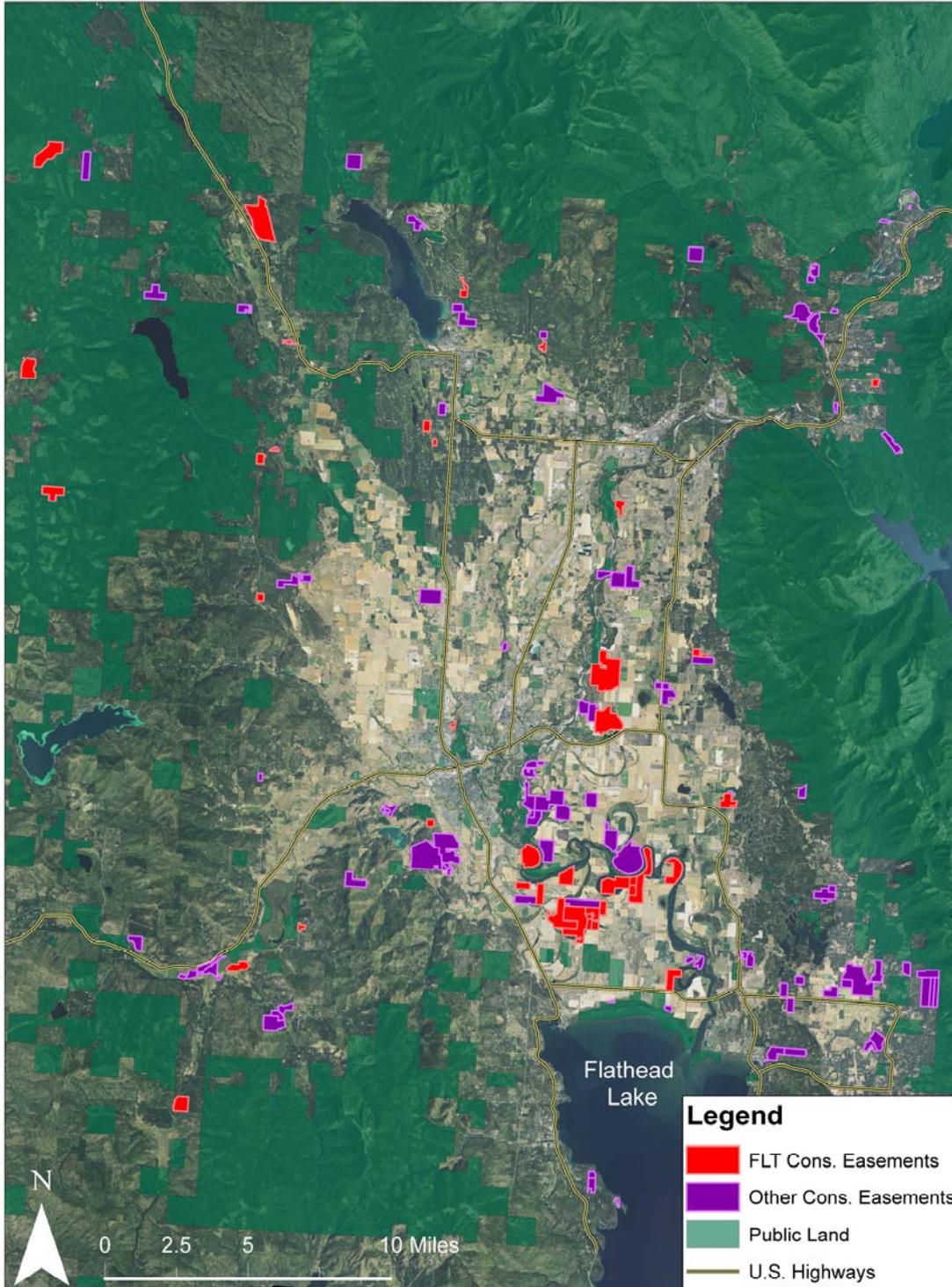
Flathead Land Trust produced its first Conservation Plan in 2006 to focus the organization's conservation activities in a proactive and strategic way through 2011.³ This Conservation Plan included input from partner organizations, scientists, and community leaders, and identified four focus areas including:

- 1) The *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* - a collaborative effort to protect the most critical lands that sustain water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, associated farm lands, and recreational opportunities along the Flathead River from Columbia Falls to the north shore of Flathead Lake;
- 2) Expansion and enhancement of existing isolated easements through an "Easement Neighborhood" effort; and,

- 3) Participation in community identified projects where private land conservation needs have been identified; and
- 4) Strategically addressing opportunities outside our focus project areas.

Efforts guided by this conservation plan have proven successful. As part of the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative*, Flathead Land Trust has protected 1,962 acres of open space farmland and associated riparian habitat along the main stem of the Flathead River during the period of time covered by the plan (2006-2011). We also protected over 398 acres as part of Easement Neighborhoods, and an additional 488 acres of community identified projects. We further protected another 552 acres outside of these focus areas. In total, Flathead Land Trust protected 3,400 acres of open space under the 2006 Conservation Plan.

Existing Conservation Easements



A Guide to the Future

It is clear that Flathead Land Trust has achieved tremendous success with our previous Conservation Plan and this new Conservation Plan will guide our future achievements in conservation.

With limited capacity and resources but plenty of private land worthy of conservation, Flathead Land Trust must be strategic in identifying and pursuing future conservation opportunities. Which lands are most important for the preservation of our natural heritage? Where are the important lands most threatened by development? Where are the opportunities for the greatest conservation success? Where does the community most want us to direct our efforts? This plan is intended to answer those questions and focus our future work to ensure that we are maximizing the effectiveness of our conservation work.

The Flathead River to Lake Initiative has received by far our greatest conservation efforts and remains Flathead Land Trust's priority focus area. It will continue to be an area of conservation work for several years to come as discussed in this Plan. A recently completed analysis of *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* completed projects and future opportunities provides solid direction for continued conservation actions.⁴ The conservation opportunities in this project area, however, are slowing as Flathead Land Trust and project partners have conducted outreach to most landowners in this area to let them know about conservation options for their land. We anticipate that conservation opportunities in the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area will continue, but at a slower pace than previously.

In addition to continuing the successful *Flathead River to Lake Initiative*, this Conservation Plan identifies three focus areas in which to direct our conservation efforts:

- 1) Important Agricultural Soils, especially those with shallow groundwater
- 2) Migratory Bird Habitat & Wetlands
- 3) Community Projects

These focus areas will overlap to an extent and they are intended to focus our outreach efforts and prioritize our work. We will continue to take advantage of opportunities presented to us to conserve important land, even if such land falls outside of these identified focus areas, as resources and capacity allows.

Developing the Plan

A Conservation Plan Update Assessment ("Assessment") was developed in late 2013 which evaluated the opportunities and challenges associated with pursuing a number of different potential focus areas. This Assessment was presented to the Flathead Land Trust Board of Directors ("Board") to help guide the discussion and decisions for the conservation plan update. The Assessment was then provided in 2014 to our conservation partners, including Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Flathead Lakers, Montana Land

Reliance, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Flathead River Commission. Meetings and discussions were held with each of these partners to obtain input on the future direction of our conservation work. Additional conversations were held with Whitefish Legacy Partners, the Whitefish Lake Institute, Foy's to Blacktail Trails, Gateway to Glacier, and Rails to Trails groups.

In the fall of 2014, Flathead Land Trust held a public meeting to gain input on the focus areas identified through the discussions with our Board and partners. Over 30 people participated in the public meeting and provided valuable feedback. In 2015, after obtaining a final decision from the Board to proceed with the conservation plan update, Flathead Land Trust staff conducted Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis of the designated focus areas to identify the highest priority properties for outreach to future landowners to let them know about conservation options for their land.*

Flathead River to Lake Initiative

The Flathead River drains six million acres as it flows from its headwaters in Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall Wilderness and Canada into Flathead Lake. The streams and rivers in the Flathead River watershed have excellent water quality and the watershed provides habitat for many species of fish and wildlife. The stretch of Flathead River from just upstream of Columbia Falls to Flathead Lake, as well as the north shore of Flathead Lake, provides important feeding, resting, and breeding areas for many species of waterfowl and other birds. Bald eagles nest along this stretch of river and this area is believed to have one of the highest densities of osprey nests in Montana. Bull trout, a federally threatened species, and westslope cutthroat trout, a state species of special concern, also use this stretch of river as migratory and overwintering habitat. Even grizzly bear, listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act, uses the riparian and wetland habitats in this portion of the Flathead River. Overall, there are more than 30 species of fish and wildlife in the Flathead Valley that Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) has identified as priorities for conservation.⁵

In addition, many of the soils along the Flathead River have been identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service as some of the best farming soils in Montana and the nation.

The Flathead River originates in wilderness, national park, and national forest lands; but between the confluence of the South Fork Flathead River and Flathead Lake most of the watershed is in private ownership. The waters, wetlands and riparian systems of this area are the most threatened in the watershed's unique landscape and the most vital for maintaining clean water and providing habitat for an amazing diversity of native fish and wildlife species. Threats to this portion of the Flathead River include clearing of vegetation and development along the banks of the river and of the land traditionally used for agriculture in the floodplain. In addition, much of the area in this lower reach has a shallow depth to the water table (much is less than 8 feet) and there is significant

* See Appendix A for methodology of GIS analysis.

movement between this shallow alluvial aquifer and the river.⁶ Thus, pollution entering the shallow alluvial aquifer can move quite quickly into the Flathead River. This shallow groundwater increases the threat to water quality from land use, and changes taking place on the private lands in this reach can have a lasting impact on the health and water quality of Flathead Lake.

The importance of this area for water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and other natural resources and the imminent threats to these resources, brought together Flathead Land Trust and a group of interested partners to create the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative*. The *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area encompasses the 100-year floodplain of the Flathead River from its confluence with the South Fork Flathead River to Flathead Lake and the north shore of Flathead Lake. The group of partners defined and identified critical areas needed to maintain the water quality and fish and wildlife of the area and summarized their findings in the “Critical Lands Status Report: The North Flathead Valley and the Flathead River System (2002).” The report identified sloughs and wetlands associated with the river, riparian corridors, floodplains, shallow groundwater areas, prime agricultural soils and farm land, and undeveloped lakeshore as the primary focus for conservation and restoration through the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative*.

Since 2002, the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* has protected over 5,000 acres of key lands in its focus area adding to a conservation network totaling over 11,000 acres of private and public lands. This acreage has protected, among other important accomplishments, 51% of the wetlands and 41% of the 100-year floodplain within the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area. An additional 650 acres in close proximity to the focus area that protect significant wetlands have also been protected.

Growth pressures and development can lead to the loss of riparian habitat, prime farm land, and other natural resources. By working together, *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* partners seek to conserve what is special about the Flathead Valley while accommodating growth.

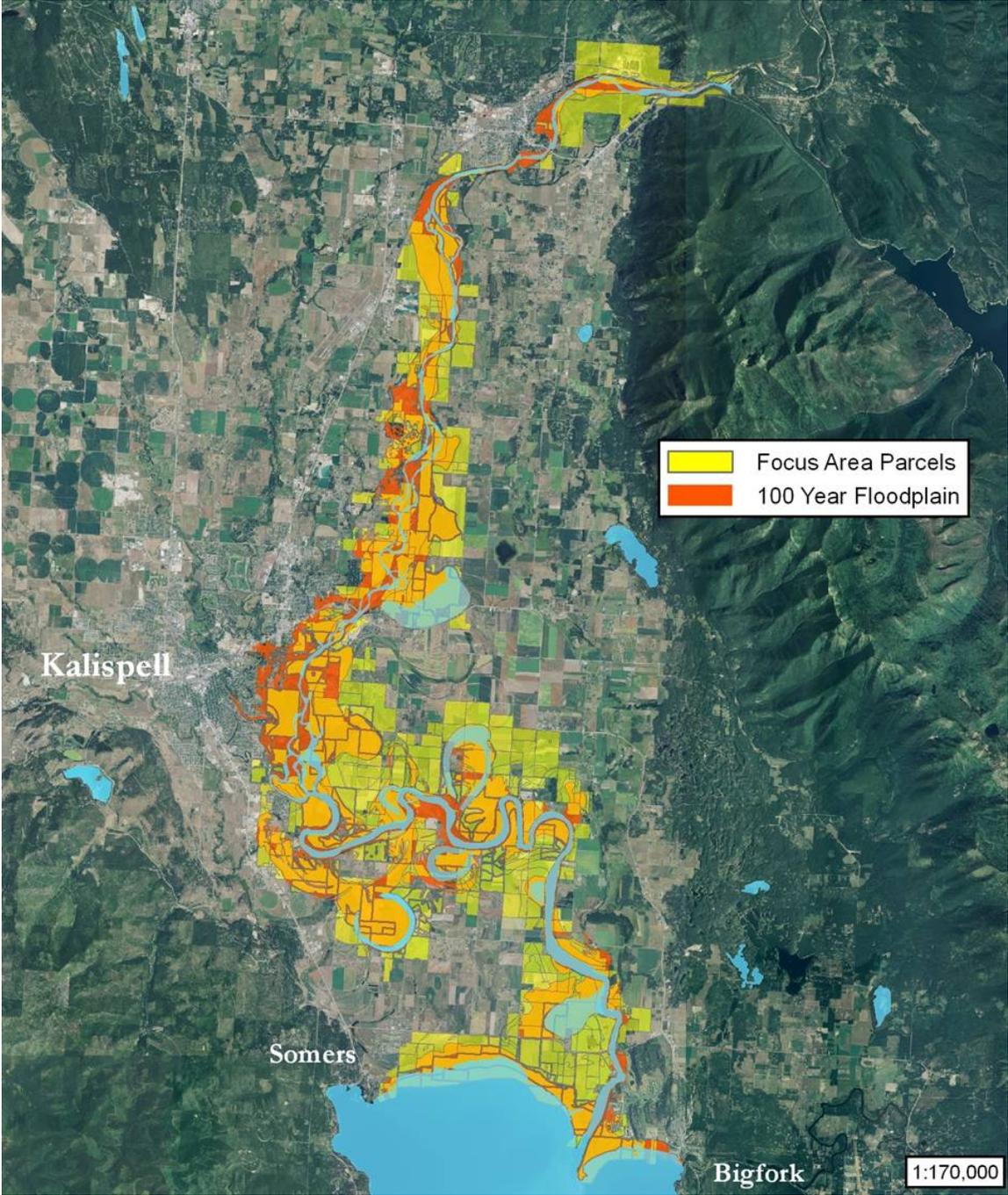
In 2012, Flathead Land Trust produced an analysis of future opportunities for conservation in the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area.⁷ Flathead Land Trust staff looked at eight conservation metrics including 100-yr floodplain, wetlands, shallow groundwater, sloughs, riparian habitat, amount bordering the Flathead River main channel, and important agricultural soils in a GIS analysis of the focus area. The analysis shows that, while opportunities in the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area are slowing, there are still a lot of great land protection opportunities remaining.

The analysis identified 135 properties 40 acres or larger that remained unprotected, giving *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* partners an opportunity to work with interested landowners to improve upon the existing conservation in the focus area. On these 135 parcels there are many important resources remaining. There was also some overlap between properties that protected significant amounts of multiple resource metrics. The analysis showed in fact that there were 32 key properties important for conserving

multiple resource metrics. The landowners of these 32 properties are those that Flathead Land Trust is focusing its outreach efforts in the area.

The report containing the results of this analysis will be useful not only to determine how to best prioritize future outreach efforts, but also for prioritizing the expenditure of limited funding for purchased conservation projects within the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area. For more details on the analysis results, please contact Flathead Land Trust for a copy of the report.

Flathead River to Lake Initiative



Important Farmland Conservation

Conservation Values:

The Flathead Valley has some of the best soils in the state and the nation for agriculture. Just over one hundred thousand acres in Flathead Valley are designated by U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service as having important agricultural soils (some of the land containing these soils has been developed). In 2012, the Flathead Valley generated nearly \$35 million in agricultural products.⁸ The local food movement, as typified by Purple Frog Gardens, Two Bear Farm, Lower Valley Farm, and Nourish the Flathead, among others, is growing in strength and providing important community benefits.

Yet, the Valley's best agricultural lands are under threat from encroaching development. Farmland, because it is usually flat, open and relatively close to existing communities, is the most easily developable land and therefore the most threatened. In developing farmland, however, we not only lose the economic contribution of agriculture to our valley and the opportunity to grow the food we consume locally, but we also lose much of the rural character and open space that makes our valley so special. We lose the benefits of having strong agricultural communities and the wildlife habitat that expanses of open farmland can provide.

Flathead Land Trust and our partners' efforts to protect farmland in the Flathead Valley and surrounding areas, as part of the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* and other conservation efforts, is the most significant and successful agricultural conservation effort in northwest Montana. However, there are opportunities to expand our existing efforts.

Our existing farmland conservation efforts have focused on private land along the Flathead River, north shore of Flathead Lake, or properties containing significant wetlands. Expanding protection of farmland will be an extension of our existing work along the Flathead River. We will be able to utilize many of our existing partnerships, funding sources, and unique professional expertise in private land conservation. It will allow us to expand our existing agricultural conservation efforts and preserve some of the best soils in the nation for food production, thus ensuring greater sustainability of agriculture in the Flathead.

Important Agricultural Soils:

By conducting GIS analysis, Flathead Land Trust has identified approximately 124 unprotected properties 80 acres or larger in the Flathead Valley outside of the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area that include a significant amount of important farmland soils. These properties include a total of over 23,000 acres of important agricultural soils. Thus, we have many opportunities to conserve some of this rich farmland. Some of this farmland, however, contains multiple resources that make it stand out above the rest as important to protect. Shallow groundwater is one of these important resources.

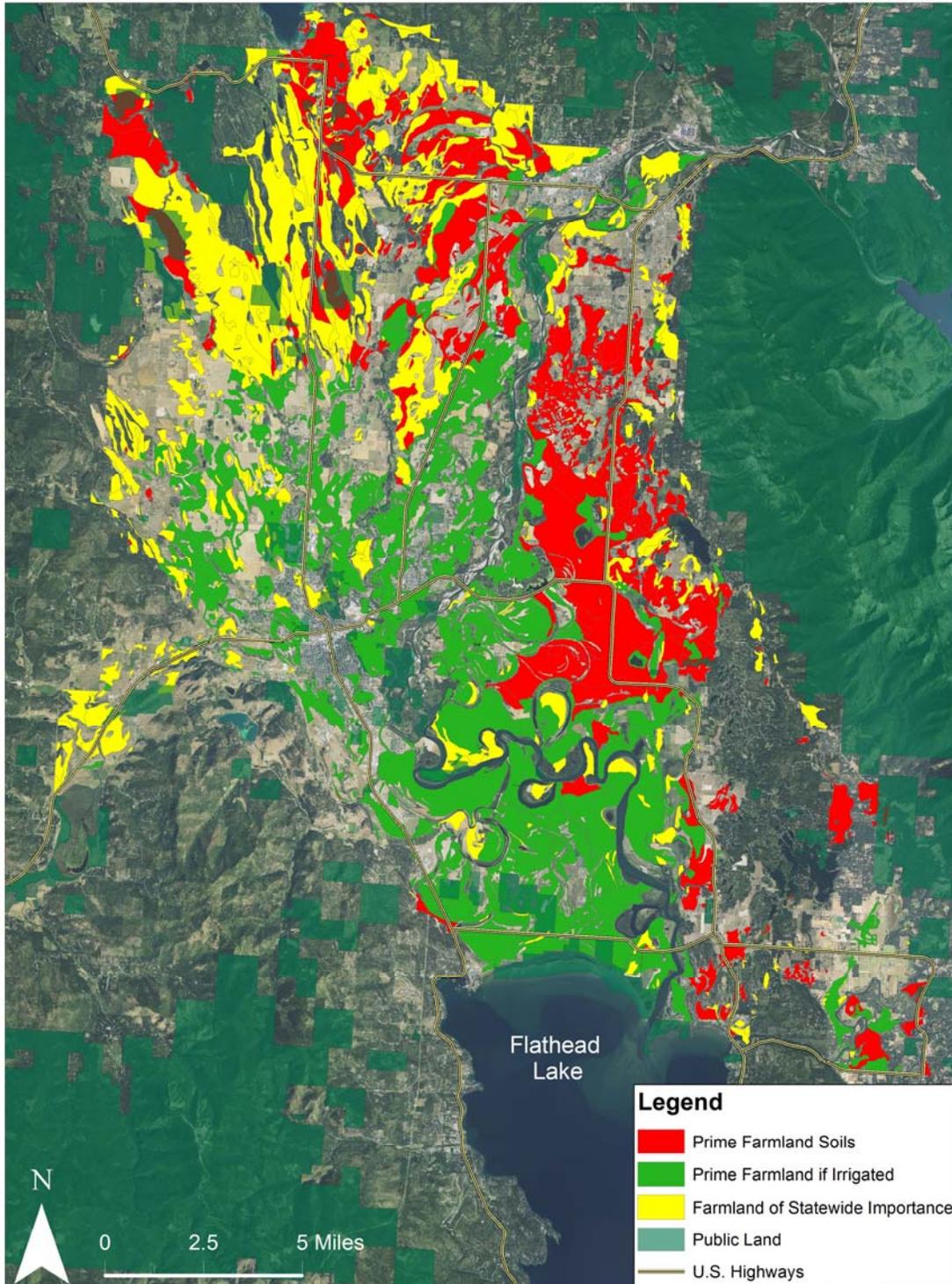
Farmland Over Shallow Groundwater:

We've defined as shallow groundwater as that which is twenty feet or less below the surface. Protecting land lying above shallow groundwater is important for many reasons: 1) it helps maintain clean water in our shallow aquifer and adjacent rivers and streams, preventing or reducing pollution from intensive land use activities and development from entering our aquifers; 2) it helps refill our aquifers, which provide important water storage functions throughout the summer and fall; and 3) can be an important factor in the productivity of a farm due to water being readily available to crops, often through capillary action.

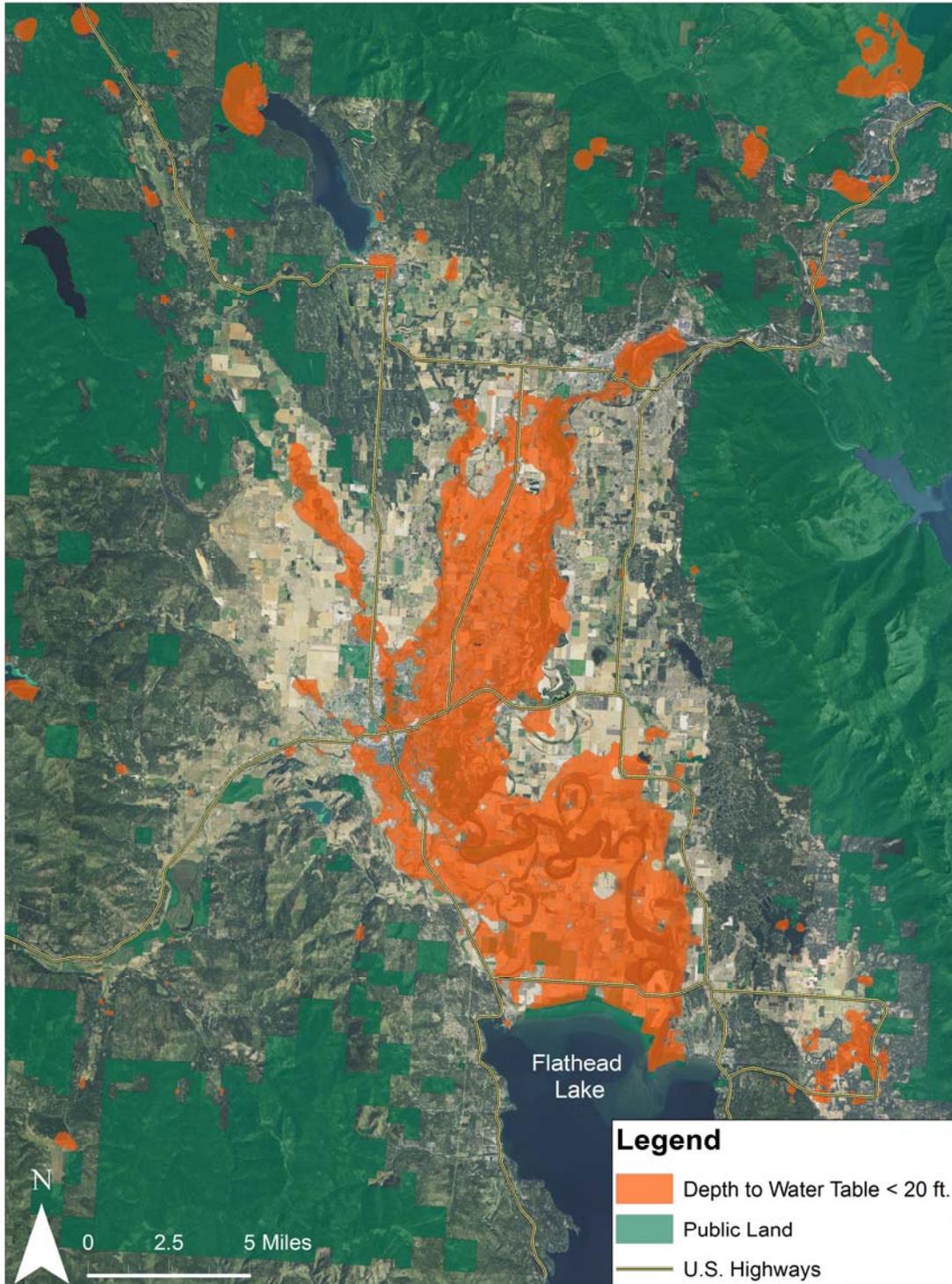
Flathead Land Trust identified approximately 135 unprotected properties 40 acres or larger that contain shallow groundwater beneath at least 40 acres of land and are outside of the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area. These properties included a total of 14,800 acres with shallow groundwater.

Of these, we identified 50 unprotected properties which include both the important farm soils from the previous analysis and shallow groundwater. These 50 properties contain nearly 11,000 acres of important farmland soils with over 8,500 acres lying above shallow groundwater. It is the landowners of these 50 properties that Flathead Land Trust will focus our outreach efforts on in order to conserve our most important farmland.

Important Farmland Soils



Shallow Groundwater



Migratory Bird Habitat & Wetland Conservation

Conservation Values:

In 2010, MFWP along with the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), Flathead Audubon, and citizen scientists initiated a multi-year study to quantify numbers and species of migratory waterfowl that use the Flathead Valley during the spring migration. The local partnership recognized that migratory birds use a much more expansive area than just the lands covered by the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative*. These organizations also recognized that the Flathead Valley, an area characterized by agricultural lands and extensive wetlands, is an important international waterfowl concentration area. MFWP is currently analyzing this data to determine which wetlands are most important for migratory waterfowl.

Preliminary results of this migratory waterfowl study identified wetland habitat and neighboring agricultural lands as important throughout the Flathead Valley. These wetlands and adjoining uplands in the Flathead Valley support a high number and wide diversity of resident, migratory, and wintering birds. A minimum of 229 bird species are known to occur on the north shore of Flathead Lake alone, and 172 of these are regular, common or abundant seasonally (D. Casey, ABC, pers. comm.). The Flathead Valley is an important refueling stop for tens of thousands of migratory birds, with Northern Pintail, American Widgeon, Tundra Swan, and Canada Goose being the most common species. Offshore habitats are important during winter when up to 2,000 diving ducks (including Redhead and Lesser Scaup) and 100-200 Tundra Swans overwinter here. Mallards breed throughout the targeted habitats, and there is a burgeoning Trumpeter Swan population using river sloughs, Flathead Lake, and other permanent wetlands in the valley as a result of recent reintroduction efforts. The Sora is a common to abundant breeder in emergent wetland habitats, particularly the Smith Lake Waterfowl Protection Area, but also throughout the area. Over 20 species of shorebirds are known to use the north shore of Flathead Lake alone, with daily counts in the hundreds, primarily during spring migration (including American Avocet and Wilson's Phalarope). Grassland, riparian and shrubland habitats also support nesting Wilson's Phalaropes along with Willow Flycatchers and Rufous Hummingbirds. Sandhill Cranes have been found in agricultural lands adjoining wetlands, and this species also can be found in feeding flocks in fall.

Through our work with the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative*, Flathead Land Trust and our partners have successfully conserved bird habitat on the Flathead River and north shore of Flathead Lake. Although the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* has been successful in protecting some key habitats, conservation of migratory bird habitat in the greater Flathead Valley had not been addressed until Flathead Land Trust recently began to implement the Flathead Land Trust Migratory Bird Habitat Protection Project. This project has expanded our focus area to wetlands and nearby agricultural lands throughout the Flathead Valley, with an initial emphasis on wetlands in the Smith and West valleys.

Flathead Land Trust can use many of our existing partnerships, funding sources, and professional expertise in identifying and protecting migratory bird habitat in the Flathead

Valley. Focusing on additional migratory bird habitat conservation areas also ties into and enhances our current conservation efforts. Achieving private land conservation along the Stillwater or Whitefish Rivers, for example, enhances the conservation we have already achieved along the Flathead River as part of the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative*.

Protecting migratory bird habitat also helps to achieve additional conservation goals of the Flathead Land Trust. By conserving property along the Whitefish and Stillwater Rivers, Ashley Creek and important spring creeks, we help protect water quality, fish habitat, and the wildlife habitat and travel corridors provided along the banks of these rivers, streams and spring creeks. By conserving wetlands for migratory birds, we also help to protect amphibians and other species dependent on the wetlands.

Important Migratory Bird Habitat Near Rivers:

Flathead Land Trust identified approximately 155 unprotected properties outside of the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area that are 40 acres or larger and within 300 feet of the Whitefish and Stillwater Rivers and Ashley Creek, as well within 300 feet of spring creeks in the Flathead Valley that are believed to be ice free for all or part of the winter and thereby are of particular importance to migrating waterfowl at times when other water bodies are frozen. Combined these properties account for over 49 miles of riparian habitat along rivers, streams or spring creeks.

Important Migratory Bird Habitat with Wetlands:

Flathead Land Trust further identified approximately 529 unprotected properties 40 acres or larger within 50 feet of wetlands in the Flathead and Smith Valleys, but which are outside of the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area. These properties include nearly 5,000 acres of wetlands.

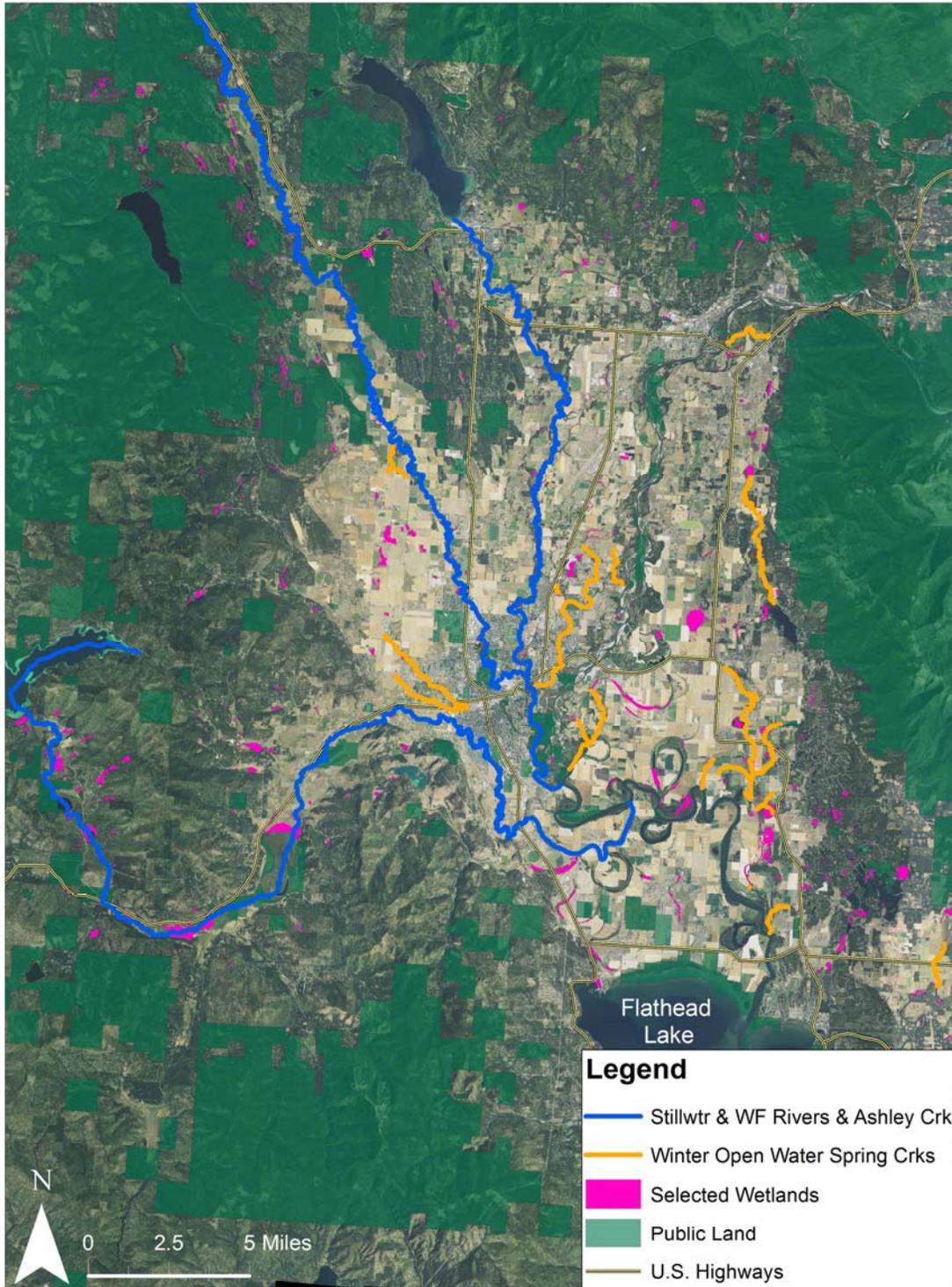
In both analyses of properties along the rivers, streams and spring creeks mentioned previously and these wetlands, some of the properties identified do not actually touch wet ground but were selected because they were in close proximity and play an important role in providing forage for migratory waterfowl or serve as a buffer for the wetlands.

When we combined the two analyses to identify properties that were along rivers, streams and spring creeks and near wetlands, Flathead Land Trust identified approximately 113 properties that included over 2,000 acres of wetlands and bordered 45 miles of river, streams or spring creek. Having identified these 113 properties will help Flathead Land Trust in focusing our outreach efforts in order to conserve our most important migratory bird habitat.

Important Migratory Bird Habitat, Wetlands & Farmland:

To further help prioritize and guide outreach efforts, Flathead Land Trust identified approximately 51 properties that contain both important agricultural soils and migratory bird habitat. Protecting these 51 properties would conserve nearly 11,000 acres of important farmland soils, over 8,500 acres lying above shallow groundwater, over 900 acres of wetlands, and over 10 miles of riparian habitat along rivers, streams or spring creeks.

Important Migratory Bird Habitat Features



Community Projects

Community projects are those driven by or have significant support from the community, involve enhancing public access to or use of open space land, provide outdoor recreation opportunities for communities, or are strongly associated with a particular location-based community. Participation in such projects was envisioned in Flathead Land Trust's previous Conservation Plan. We have had past success as noted previously, for example with helping to acquire and transfer to state ownership the McWeneger Slough fishing access site and facilitating an addition to Lone Pine State Park. To date, however, community projects have been primarily opportunistic in nature.

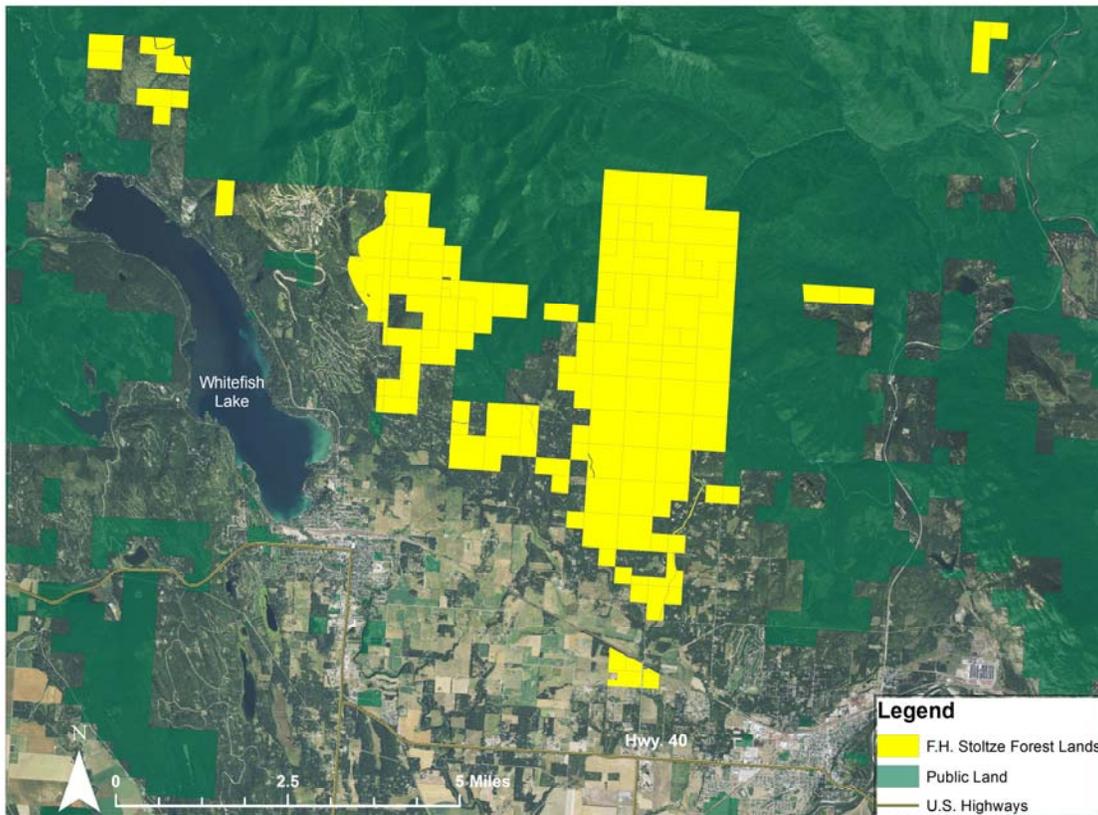
Land trusts in other Montana communities such as Bozeman, Helena, and Missoula have had great success in increasing public trails and recreation lands. Those land trusts, however, have relied on city/county conservation/open space bonds to fund such projects. Two previous attempts to pass a conservation/open space bond initiative have failed here in Flathead County, though there may be renewed future efforts to pass such a bond which would greatly expand our conservation opportunities.

North Valley Conservation:

One of the most prominent community projects in the region is the effort by F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Company and The Trust for Public Land, together with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the City of Whitefish and Whitefish Legacy Partners, to permanently conserve over 3,000 acres of Stoltze's timber land containing the headwaters of the City of Whitefish's water supply in Haskill Basin and over 7,000 acres of adjacent Stoltze land at the headwaters of Trumbull Creek. Protecting the water supply for the City of Whitefish and the wildlife habitat and recreational trails on Stoltze land has long been a top priority for the community and will be a significant and widely supported achievement.

Flathead Land Trust can support and expand upon that effort by conserving private land adjacent to the Stoltze timber lands and that are generally north of the BNSF railroad tracks, thus creating a larger block of conserved open space. Our GIS analysis identified 88 unprotected properties 40 acres or larger totaling over 9,600 acres in this area that we can work to conserve.

F.H. Stoltze Forest Lands



Trails:

In our region there have also been popular and successful community led efforts to create and protect a network of public trails. Such efforts include the Whitefish Legacy Trail program, Foy's to Blacktail Trails, the Gateway to Glacier Trail program, Rails to Trails of Northwest Montana's Great Northern Historic Trail, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Flathead Lake Marine Trail and the Flathead County trail program. Foy's to Blacktail Trails, for example, is a broadly supported community effort to establish a permanently protected public access trail network and community forest from Herron Park outside of Kalispell south to Blacktail Mountain. The effort, with some assistance from Flathead Land Trust, has protected 320 acres of land with heavily used trails that have now been incorporated into Herron Park. Flathead Land Trust will continue to work with these groups and others to identify ways in which we can help expand the community's access to high quality recreational trails.

Lake and River Access:

In addition, Flathead Land Trust will seek opportunities to increase public access to area lakes and rivers. Increasing the number of public access sites along Flathead Lake or other major water bodies in the area would be an important community benefit.

In fact, along Flathead Lake, not including the north shore which is part of the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative*, we've identified just 24 unprotected properties 40 acres or larger within 300 feet of the lake and totaling over 2,900 acres that we can work to conserve. Conserving these remaining large properties along the lake would help to ensure protection of the existing scenic open space views and fish and wildlife habitat along the Flathead Lake shoreline.

The North Fork:

Community projects also include those strongly associated with the "sense of place" of a particular location based community. An example of this is the community centered around Polebridge along the North Fork of the Flathead River (commonly referred to as "The North Fork"). The North Fork is widely believed to be the most ecologically intact and wild watershed in the lower forty eight states. Flathead Land Trust has already conserved or helped to conserve over 1,400 acres of private land in The North Fork. GIS analysis indicates that there is an additional 67 unprotected properties 40 acres or larger totaling over 7,800 acres in The North Fork that we can work to conserve.

Bad Rock Canyon:

Another location-based community project could include the Bad Rock Canyon area around the communities of Hungry Horse, Martin City and Coram. This is an important wildlife travel corridor and it is a community in which we've done very little conservation outside of a beautiful 36-acre conservation easement. Our GIS analysis suggests that there are 77 unprotected properties 40 acres or larger totaling over 6,900 acres in the Bad Rock Canyon area that we can work to conserve.

Implementation & Conclusion

There are many opportunities for private land conservation in the Flathead. This plan focuses Flathead Land Trust's work on four important areas: the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative* focus area, important farmland conservation, migratory bird habitat and wetlands conservation, and community projects. Identifying these four focus areas will ensure that future outreach efforts prioritize the most important and advantageous opportunities.

Conservation of private land, however, isn't possible without landowners willing to conserve their property in perpetuity. Our work is dependent on the generous foresight of landowners who voluntarily choose to leave a legacy of conserved open space for their descendants, the larger community, and the wildlife that depends on it. Many landowners have chosen to leave such a legacy, and many more no doubt will, but it often requires reaching out to and speaking with hundreds of landowners over years to build the relationships that result in a strong network of conserved land. The GIS analysis resulting from this plan helps us to identify which landowners to approach for our future success.

Moving forward, we will also explore with our partners the possibility of concentrating our collaborative efforts on a new geographic focus area that includes multiple, significant resource conservation values. Such a collaborative effort, modeled on and in

addition to the *Flathead River to Lake Initiative*, would strengthen our ability to achieve our conservation goals in priority areas identified by this plan and possibly some new areas.

In order to implement new conservation as guided by this plan, Flathead Land Trust and its partners will need support from the community, and all of those who love the Flathead. Only with the help and support from you, state agencies, municipalities, federal agencies, community groups, and other organizations will we accomplish the goals of this plan. By working together, we can ensure that the future of the Flathead will continue to include an abundance of beautiful open space, robust local agriculture, outstanding fish and wildlife habitat, clean water, and unsurpassed recreational opportunities.

References

¹ Census & Economic Information Center. 2013 and 2015. Demographic Data. Montana Dept. of Commerce.

² Grau, Kara. *2014 Economic Contribution of Nonresident Travel Spending in Montana Travel Regions and Counties*. Missoula. Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research. University of Montana. July 24, 2015. Print.

³ Flathead Land Trust's Land Conservation Plan 2006 – 2011 is on file at the Flathead Land Trust office.

⁴ *The Flathead River to Lake Initiative Analysis of Conservation Success and Future Priorities*, published in February 2012, is on file at the Flathead Land Trust office.

⁵ Montana's State Wildlife Action Plan. 2015. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East Sixth Avenue, Helena, MT 59620.

⁶ Noble, R.A., and J.A. Stanford. 1986. Groundwater Resources and Water Quality of the Unconfined Aquifers in Kalispell Valley, Polson, Montana. Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology Open File Report No. 177. Open File Report 093-86, Flathead Lake Biological Station, University of Montana, Polson, MT.

⁷ Katzman, Laura. *Flathead River to Lake Future Priorities Analysis*. Kalispell. Flathead Land Trust. February 2012.

⁸ *2012 Census of Agriculture, County Profile, Flathead County – Montana*. U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service. Web. 04 Dec. 2015.