

I. Community-Based Approach to Conservation for the 21st Century



Gary Burnett
Blackfoot Challenge

The Blackfoot Watershed of western Montana is a 1.5 million-acre landscape of diverse habitats worked by ranchers, loggers, and outfitters in partnership with public land managers to provide a refuge for wildlife, including grizzly bears, Canada lynx, fisher, gray wolves, bull trout, and migratory birds such as the trumpeter swan. Escaping the rapid land use changes facing many other valleys in the West, the Blackfoot remains working and wild, much like it was when the early pioneers put down their roots. This is no accident. Those who call the Blackfoot home or occasionally visit, who love it and whose livelihoods depend on it, have built partnerships to conserve the rural and natural values of this special place.

The Blackfoot River inspired the late author and fly fisherman Norman MacLean to write *A River Runs through It*, and the popular movie brought that story to millions of viewers. Many other people recognize that

the Blackfoot Watershed provides a critical southern link to the Crown of the Continent and provides a home to all of the wildlife Meriwether Lewis may have seen during his travels through Montana in 1806. And still others know us because of our reputation as a model for 21st century conservation, with nearly 40 years of community-based leadership leading to 75 percent of the 1.5 million-acre watershed in perpetual conservation status.

A History of Working Together

The Blackfoot Challenge grew out of the early cooperative efforts of landowners and public land managers to work together to protect and share this valuable area and resource. These public and private partnerships were formalized with its inception in 1993. The mission then—as today—follows a consensus-based approach to include all public and private

stakeholders and coordinates efforts to conserve and enhance the natural resources and rural way of life in the Blackfoot Watershed.

The Blackfoot Challenge's mission is to coordinate efforts to conserve and enhance the natural resources and rural way of life in the Blackfoot Watershed of western Montana for present and future generations.

The Model for Conservation in the 21st Century

The name “Blackfoot Challenge” comes from an observation that the mix of public and private landownership in the Blackfoot Watershed would present a challenge in finding consensus for resource management decisions. However, this became an opportunity to leverage public and private resources and cooperatively work together. Such social underpinnings are at the core of community-based conservation and address the need to shift from “biologist-centric” to “partner-centric” conservation planning and implementation. Conservation success depends heavily on the art of working with people where private and public interests are coordinated.

While our initial results were small in scale, over time we realized we could make a big difference if we worked throughout the entire watershed, “ridge to ridge,” and emphasized a crucial shift away from

“biologist-centric” conservation towards “partner-centric” conservation. Biologist-centric conservation is defined by Neudecker, Duvall and Stutzman as prioritization of conservation actions based on science, with the biologist and the resource of concern at the center of the decision-making process.¹ Partner-centric conservation is driven by an emphasis on social processes and the formation of the right team of people. This approach blurs the lines between public and private interests, local knowledge and technical expertise, and biological and socioeconomic values. Community-based landscape conservation is practiced when partners working in the right places on the right projects follow what has come to be known as the 80/20 rule—committing to work on the 80 percent in common, not the 20 percent that divides. Once partners build trust and credibility by working on the 80 percent, they are able to tackle the remaining 20 percent. In the end, success is borne not from the efforts of one person but rather through a conservation community.

Conservation outcomes rely on this approach of leading with private landowners willing to work with public agencies to conserve private land through voluntary, incentive-based programs. By leveraging resources through community-based efforts in the Blackfoot Watershed, the coordination of private landowner and public manager partnerships has now protected 231,795 acres of working land since

Private and Public Leadership Building Trust Through Communication and Cooperation

- Private landowners from each community in the Blackfoot Watershed
- Business owners Conservation groups
- Plum Creek Timber Company (PCTC)
- State agencies
 - Department Natural Resources and Conservation
 - Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- Federal agencies
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - Forest Service
 - Fish and Wildlife Service
 - Natural Resources Conservation Service

1993. In addition, these protection efforts, along with significant restoration and stewardship activities, are now recognized by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation as serving the downstream public with a measured increase in water quality of the Clark Fork of the Columbia River Basin at the confluence with the Blackfoot River.²

The community-based approach to conservation serves as a national model to spur efforts to conserve vital wildlife habitat and working land through collaborations of private landowners, conservation groups, and state and federal agencies. A diverse partnership and the commitment to work together serve an area’s neighboring watersheds, national conservation priority areas (as identified by the Obama administration’s America’s Great Outdoors initiative), as well as other regional and national landscapes with high natural resource values and a community-wide commitment to conservation.

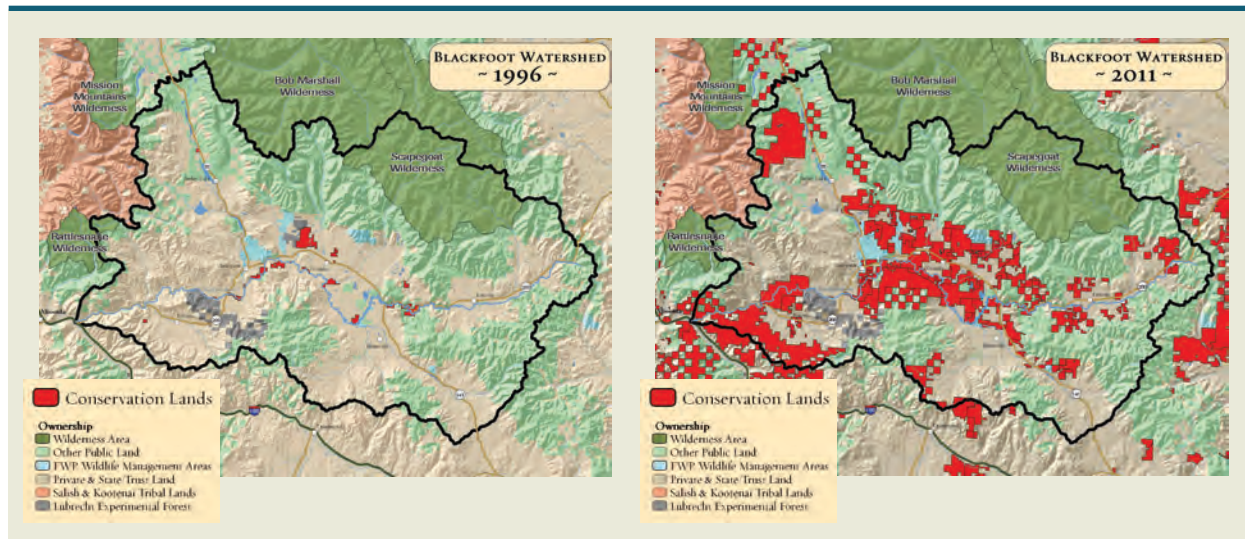
Community-Based Approach to Conservation

Neudecker, Duvall and Stutzman summarized numerous references in their effort to define community-based conservation; a firm definition is beset by numerous challenges because success

requires organic and innovative strategies for diverse situations and participants. A defined theoretical framework for community-based conservation becomes a moving target based on place, purpose, participants, goals, and activities. Still, efforts are being made to understand and define this new style of natural resource management. Key ingredients of community-based conservation are place-based characteristics in terms of scale and broad public/private partnerships, inclusiveness and diversity of participants (i.e., “coalitions of the unlike”), an emphasis on collaborative and consensus-based process with opportunities to learn from one another, and innovative approaches to intractable conflicts.

The Blackfoot Challenge experience with community-based conservation is grounded in the early cooperative efforts of public managers and private landowners to share access to natural resources. Although these conversations have been occurring since the mid-1970s, the Blackfoot Challenge began to officially organize in the 1990s due to growing concerns over the health of the Blackfoot River. By the turn of the century, the organization had coordinated an impressive list of conservation outcomes. We now find ourselves being asked to explain this success to an ever-growing group of new friends. And being a neighborly group, we oblige.

Blackfoot Watersheds 1996 and 2011



These requests have caused us to think rather hard about our outreach approach as we shoulder the responsibility of investing staff, board, and partners' time wisely. As our outreach efforts grow, we are blessed with opportunities to visit with community members, neighboring watersheds and landowner coalitions, and national and international partners about the community-based approach to conservation. We understand that community-based conservation involves the four following elements, pillars of our information-sharing dialogue:

Community-based conservation

- *Is driven by community values*
- *Invites participation by all stakeholders*
- *Includes a coordinating framework*
- *Is supported by good science*

Community Values

At the time that the Blackfoot Challenge formed, people in the valley were hungry for information. Many landowners had a desire to increase the sustainability of their current land use practices but were unaware where information advising how to do so could be found. Without the assistance of a coordinating framework, the majority of private landowners and public land managers in the watershed felt that beneficial natural resource decisions would be made, but on a case-by-case basis. Many believe these

individualized efforts could not have matched the collective success achieved through the diverse input, advice, and understanding on the part of all the stakeholders involved in the Blackfoot Challenge. Early concerns centered on responsiveness to community values, loss of rural character, uncoordinated efforts, and agency duplication.

Concerns over the loss of rural character have been summed up by Jim Stone, second-generation Blackfoot Valley rancher and Blackfoot Challenge Board Chair:

Although ranchers are the most impressive environmentalists, they are also the most passive. Without the Challenge we would just be out there all by ourselves trying to make a living. We would never have utilized the resources available like agency expertise. We would have also gotten into the regulatory part of agriculture, which I believe is not a part of agriculture.

Jim suggests that the future of ranching would be at stake without the Challenge, and that agriculture would have experienced considerably less opportunity without the formation of the group. Indeed, while the Challenge succeeds as a means for landowners to exchange information, it often remains difficult for people involved in the agricultural business to let down

Blackfoot Challenge 2012 Board of Directors

Jim Stone—Rolling Stone Ranch, Ovando

Greg Neudecker—US FWS

Denny Iverson—Iverson Ranch, Potomac

Amber Kamps—USFS, Lincoln

David Mannix—Mannix Bros. Ranch, Helmville

Brent Anderson—Lincoln Landowner

Patrick Bannister—Potomac Landowner

Caroline Byrd—The Nature Conservancy

Andy Erickson—E Bar L Guest Ranch, Greenough

Racene Friede—Ovando Landowner

Todd Johnson—Pyramid Mtn. Lumber, Seeley Lake

Tony Liane—MT DNRC

Mack Long—MT FWP

Tim Love—USFS, Seeley Lake

Jeff McNally—Ovando Landowner

Joel Nelson—Plum Creek Timber Co., Seeley Lake

Harry Poett—Ovando Landowner

Rich Torquemada—US BLM

their guard and ask for help. Without the continued coordination assistance from the community-based group, Jim Stone feels that many of the ranches in the Blackfoot, including his own, would cease to exist.

Identifying and recruiting community leaders like Jim Stone, David Mannix, and Denny Iverson (multi-generational ranchers and business owners in the Blackfoot Watershed) is the key to responding correctly to local resource concerns and conflicts. These three individuals are long-standing Executive Board members of the Blackfoot Challenge; they are considered leaders in their communities because their neighbors trust that they fairly represent a variety of community values. The Blackfoot Challenge Board of Directors is specifically structured through its bylaws to have private landowner representation from all the communities in the Blackfoot Watershed, as well as from all public resource management agencies. Federal partners enjoy a range of types of Board membership. For example, the USFWS is currently a full member. BLM, NRCS, and USFS are currently Board partners limited by certain authorities.

Participation at Board meetings is critical to building trust. The Board holds standing monthly meetings on the third Wednesday of each month. Meetings start with an Executive Committee session to direct administration and finances, and after lunch a roundtable discussion and information exchange occurs among all Board members, participants, and guests.

Participation from Board members, regular guests, and invited presenters or participants is critical to ensure that relationships are developed, work is accomplished together, and trust is built. The challenge is to sustain representation of a diverse set of values while coordinating efforts so partnerships are maintained and limited resources are not dissipated. Without the forum for information exchange to allow the diverse partners in the Blackfoot Watershed to stay in pace with each other, the potential is high for agencies and other participants to unnecessarily duplicate their efforts. (See attachment A).

Our Story of Community Values

The Blackfoot Community Project, the result of a partnership with The Nature Conservancy of Montana, purchased 89,000 acres of private timber company land owned by Plum Creek Timber Company (PCTC) in the Blackfoot Watershed. The idea for the Project began at community meetings in 2003 by discussing the option to purchase and the potential benefit to the Blackfoot Watershed resources and communities. People shared concerns over the loss of working land and recreational access due to development, should these lands come into different ownership. The community came out strongly in favor of the purchase by The Nature Conservancy, which intended to resell these lands into private and public ownership with conservation easements intact. The Project is now in its final phases of transferring acquired lands to private individuals and public agencies according to a community-driven disposition plan that meets community objectives, including protection of natural resources, traditional public recreational access, and sustainable grazing and timber harvest. To date, 70,000 acres of land have been transferred to public and private ownership with conservation restrictions in place. The Blackfoot Community Project serves as a model of landscape-level conservation by leveraging \$10 million of private funding with \$80 million in Land and Water Conservation Fund appropriations and other federal and state conservation funds, all driven by a community-based approach to conservation.³ The effort was a result of trust between diverse private and public partners: a global conservation organization, a local watershed-based group, a corporate timber company, federal and state wildlife and resource agencies, three counties, and five rural communities. The Blackfoot Community Project exemplifies landowner-driven conservation action and accomplishment.

Participants Representing All Values Are Invited to Take Part

The Blackfoot Challenge follows an inclusive process. Fair representation and communication of

“Ultimately, the people who are best able to take care of the land are those who live on the land, work on the land, and love the land. They have the knowledge, skills and motivation to care for the land. We need to empower them.”

—Gale Norton, U.S. Secretary of Interior, on August 31, 2005 when announcing the Department of Interior’s participation in the National Conference on Cooperative Conservation

all stakeholder values are critical to building trust between partners in the Watershed. The Board works on a consensus basis to make decisions and takes its lead from the Board-led committees on program work plans. Consensus is driven by the trust built over many years among members of the Board and hinges on honoring all values represented; if the Board feels not enough information is available to represent community and

partner values, it will seek additional information and discussion on the subject.

When the Blackfoot Challenge established itself as a formal organization, participants made every effort to include all stakeholders in the Blackfoot Watershed who were potentially affected by the changes occurring in the information-sharing and decision-making process. These efforts also were educational in purpose, aiming to inform residents of the implications that changes had on the community’s resource base.

Challenges indeed exist to getting all parties to the table and sustaining their participation. Therefore, an important component of inclusivity entails ensuring that the proceedings of all Blackfoot Challenge meetings (Board and otherwise) are readily available to any interested party who may care to view them. When Board members, Blackfoot Challenge members, and any interested party are unable to attend a meeting, they are able to learn what was discussed and decided and can make an informed decision about what they

do and do not support. This transparency, along with inclusivity, allows people to embed their trust in the community-based decision-making process.

Although inviting all values to participate provides for more sustainable long-term outcomes—a process that the Blackfoot Challenge swears by—it also tends to slow the process of finding consensus. Participants must have patience and avoid “getting ahead of their partners” when truly and fully committing to ground-up, all-inclusive problem solving.

Our Story of Inviting Representatives of All Values to Participate

As previously noted, the Blackfoot Community Project relied on a strong partnership between The Nature Conservancy and the Blackfoot Challenge, a partnership directed entirely by community values. This project established trust between these partners as the delicate transfer was made to new public and private conservation owners. The Blackfoot Community Project paved the way for the Montana Legacy Project, a partnership between the Trust for Public Lands and The Nature Conservancy, which resulted in the purchase of an additional 310,000 acres of corporate timberland.

Leaders from this new partnership approached the Blackfoot Challenge with an opportunity for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to obtain 32,000 acres of these newly acquired lands for the conservation of wildlife habitat and working lands. We were asked if the Blackfoot Challenge could provide guidance. Before assenting, the Blackfoot Challenge needed to understand the details of the purchase, specifically whether or not it was a “done deal.” If it were, we would be unable to provide assistance. However, if the partners were interested in knowing the community’s interest in such an opportunity, the Blackfoot Challenge could assist with setting up such a forum to do so. Fortunately the project partners were at a stage in which they

were looking for local input, and thus the Blackfoot Challenge held a series of community meetings, coordinated a working group representing a broad set of values, and successfully helped the community realize their desires for this conservation purchase. This collaborative, inclusive process resulted in a greater number of community members who understood what was at stake, voiced their concerns, knew who their partners were, and ultimately supported the purchase.

The Challenge holds such public meetings a few times each year, in which it invites groups or individuals to present information of interest to the community. By holding these public meetings and “riding the fence,” we effectively bring together multiple views of any particular issue and provide the public with an array of information so all can make educated and informed decisions. We hope that by doing this, all parties already see and will continue to view the Challenge as what it is—a neutral entity.

A Coordinating Framework

The core function in the Blackfoot Challenge’s mission statement is to “coordinate efforts.” These efforts fall under the themes of facilitating honest discussions, showing respect for all values both private and public, and reporting activities, and coordinating partnerships to solve shared resource problems.

By respecting all values, we have become identified in the area as a conduit for information sharing and open dialogue rather than a group that exists as a facilitator of conflicts. This effort has given landowners a favorable impression of the group and has enhanced relations between landowners and agency representatives. Ranchers, for instance, have grown to view the motives of agency representatives as benign or helpful in intent, rather than selfish. Coordinating an open forum encourages everyone in the Watershed to attend meetings, to participate in field tours, and to be involved in on-going projects.

The Blackfoot Challenge does not impose anything on anyone. We do not take positions but we seek a balanced approach where participants reflecting all values have a seat at the table and outcomes reflect that broad set of values. We facilitate a civil dialogue where science informs and supports conservation outcomes. We record the conversation and report the consensus, and we coordinate the partnerships.

A Recent Story of Coordinating

A specific example of facilitating an open and balanced discussion in the Blackfoot Watershed involves the Alberta tar sands. Companies were interested in trucking equipment from the Columbia River to Alberta along Highway 200—which runs along the entire 132 miles of the Blackfoot River—and were seeking permitted approval from the Montana Department of Transportation. Early voices were strongly opposed to this “big haul” and encouraged the Blackfoot Challenge to get involved by hosting a public meeting. We listened to these early voices while the Board of Directors waited for balanced information about the potential positive and negative impacts of the proposed hauling to communities in the Blackfoot Watershed. When this information was available from all parties, the Board facilitated a public meeting and respectful exchange of information to the public from the Montana Department of Transportation and the group against the hauling. Civil presentations from both sides eliminated hearsay and ensured a more informed picture of potential impacts to the Blackfoot.

Often such meetings end with a trip to a local establishment. Socializing after hours has been a way for participants to get to know each other as people and neighbors, in addition to working together on business interests. As common in rural areas, the Watershed’s local bars and cafes are the social hub of activity and conversation. Viewed as neutral territory, such establishments are traditionally where people are not looked upon as representing one point of view or another.

Supported by Good Science

Biological planning is critical to implementing landscape conservation, but lasting success depends on effective delivery through working with the right team of people to design the right projects. Conservation organizations excel at producing strategic habitat plans. Files in federal and state offices are filled with planning documents that have

“I do believe [the Blackfoot Watershed] is the birthplace of the conservation concept for the 21st century, so I’m very, very proud of you.”

—Ken Salazar, U.S. Secretary of Interior, on July 16, 2011 in the Blackfoot Watershed

yielded little success in on-the-ground implementation. Worse yet, shortcomings in traditional agency planning processes have resulted in a train wreck of acrimony and distrust among stakeholders. Specific shortcomings include the length of time to make decisions, complicated or inflexible financial assistance programs, inefficient cross-ownership land conservation, and lack of communication.

The politics of expertise, lack of transparency and accountability, and inconsistent responsiveness to public concerns and issues have made planning by agencies a superficial and top-down exercise. The problem is an inability to translate the plan into conservation delivery, and it is most evident in cumbersome procedural guidelines, complicated technical policies, and onerous eligibility requirements.⁴ This problem, combined with the failure to recognize the importance of personal relationships, practitioner social skills, and community support in conservation delivery, derails implementation. We believe, as described by Neudecker, Duvall and Stutzman that these failures can be prevented by working in the right place with the right people. A voluntary, incentive-based approach to private land conservation has led to success in the Blackfoot Watershed. Partners work together to conserve private and public resources where community values and resources solutions are supported, but not driven, by good science.

Our Stories of Science Supporting Communities

- In 2000, a team of public and private partners formed the Conservation Strategies Committee to share information, leverage technical and funding resources, and determine which areas in the Blackfoot Watershed were in need of protection and cooperative conservation through geographic information system mapping and integration of data and plans by partnering agencies. This forum consisted of private landowners; a corporate timber company; federal agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and Natural Resources Conservation Service; state agencies including Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; nonprofit conservation partners including The Nature Conservancy, Five Valleys Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation; and counties. They agreed to focus their strategic efforts on the mid-elevation PCTC lands whose amenity values were becoming increasingly attractive to real estate developers. These transitional lands formed important biological, agricultural, and public access and use connections between the higher-elevation public lands and the lower privately owned valley bottoms.

In contrast to purchase of the lands and a disposition strategy developed by the agencies and organization groups, project partners sought community input and support in the project before finalizing transfer of fee title. Public meetings were held in each of the affected communities to determine the community’s values related to the PCTC lands in their backyard and future management priorities, to seek recommendations as to whether specific parcels should be resold to public or private interests, and to ask public and private landowners with adjacent PCTC parcels to indicate whether they would be interested in purchase of the lands.

- The Blackfoot Community Project embodies the heart of community-based collaborative conservation, with an integrated decision-making process of local and scientific expertise with landowner leaders, leveraging of multiple funding sources, coordination and staff assistance from the Blackfoot Challenge and The Nature Conservancy, and support by other partners at the table to acquire and hold perpetual conservation easements. Shortly after the Project began, the same process was utilized on a smaller scale, resulting in the establishment of the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area (BCCA). Formerly PCTC lands, the BCCA now exists as a cooperative ecosystem management area under community-based ownership, covering a 41,000-acre landscape of public and private lands in the heart of the Blackfoot Watershed.
- In 2000, the Blackfoot Drought Committee was formalized to coordinate the development and implementation of a voluntary drought response effort. The drought response is intended to minimize the adverse impacts of drought on fisheries resources and to aid in the equitable distribution of water resources during low flow summers. It is based on the premise of “shared sacrifice,” with the goal that all Blackfoot water users (agricultural, irrigators, outfitters, anglers, recreational users, government agencies, homeowners associations, businesses, conservation groups, and others) voluntarily agree to water-saving measures (e.g., limiting water use of one or more irrigation pivots) and/or the reduction of stress to fisheries resources (e.g., limiting fishing to morning and early afternoon) during critical low flow periods. This approach was selected because drought and the management of low flows are a watershed-wide concern. Beneficiaries of the drought response effort include interests throughout the Watershed, and the greater benefit to maintaining river flows and sustaining the overall health of the river will be achieved by a cooperative effort with the larger community.⁵

This approach offers an alternative to angling restrictions and traditional enforcement of the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks’ in-stream flow right, while engaging the stakeholders of the Blackfoot in the protection and future conservation of its fisheries. Under the “shared sacrifice” concept, irrigators, outfitters, and recreationists have a unique opportunity to positively impact the future of the Blackfoot Watershed. The Drought Response Program is recognized by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes as a model that serves their interests in the Blackfoot Watershed and has merit to share water resources in the Upper Clark Fork River Basin. The Blackfoot Drought Response Plan provides the framework for the shared sacrifice approach to drought management in the Watershed. It details activities of the Blackfoot Drought Committee as well as actions taken by water users at biologically based stream flow and temperature triggers. Although the plan is dynamic, meaning it has and will continue to evolve based on knowledge and experience, the foundation of the plan lies in the following:

- Drought is a watershed-wide issue that requires action by all water users.
- The Blackfoot Drought Committee monitors snow pack, precipitation, weather, stream flows, and water temperatures throughout the year and provides water users with information to help plan for and prepare for drought.
- When flows in the Blackfoot River fall below 700 cubic feet per second (cfs), consumptive water users, primarily irrigators, are asked to implement individual drought management plans. Irrigators who meaningfully participate in the Drought Response will not receive a call for water from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.
- Fishing is restricted after 2 p.m. if temperatures in the Blackfoot River and/or core bull trout tributaries rise above temperature triggers for 3 consecutive days.

- Conflicts between people and grizzly bears came to a head in the Blackfoot in 2001 when a big game hunter was killed by a grizzly bear in a public hunting area. This event led to the formation of the Wildlife Committee and Landowner Advisory Committee and a shared value to reduce conflict. One area of conflict identified by the committees was boneyards—places where ranchers dispose of livestock carcasses resulting from natural spring calf loss and the occasional loss of other livestock. These boneyards attract grizzly bears from miles around, even months after burial.

Initially funded by a Conservation Innovation Grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, this attractant removal program reduced costs by nearly 75% and greatly enhanced landowner participation. This successful partnership with agricultural producers and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks helped reduce conflicts between people and grizzlies in the Blackfoot Watershed by 90% from 2003 to 2011 and resulted in a more “permeable” landscape for grizzly bears that facilitates dispersal, survivorship, and recolonization of former habitats.

The Blackfoot Challenge coordinates a program to remove attractants like livestock carcasses. It now also includes constructing electric fences around attractants like beehives and calving areas and securing household garbage. No grizzly bears have been killed in the project area since 2005 for management-related conflicts, and only one grizzly bear has been trapped and relocated due to conflicts.

As conflicts decrease, wildlife authorities report that grizzly bear populations are increasing at roughly 3% per year. Expanding and maintaining current efforts are critical for population recovery and improve prospects for connectivity to other grizzly bear populations, outcomes that may lead to the eventual de-listing of the grizzly bear under the Endangered Species Act.

- The Blackfoot Irrigation Efficiency Project is a partnership between private landowners, public agencies, and our funding partners. This project delivers knowledge of successful approaches to partners in Western Montana and increases the use of energy and water efficiency incentives by agricultural producers. Project objectives include completing energy efficiency evaluations on 25 sprinkler irrigation systems in the Blackfoot Watershed, hosting two educational workshops on maintaining irrigation equipment, and developing and implementing irrigation water management plans on 2,500 acres in the Blackfoot Watershed.

We expect to share knowledge gained and data collected with partners and to increase the application of irrigation efficiency activities in the Blackfoot Watershed and surrounding areas through innovative delivery of resource benefits using technical and financial assistance programs offered by NRCS and other agencies. The Blackfoot Irrigation Efficiency Project does not utilize or test new technologies, but offers an innovative approach to working with agricultural producers and is the only one of its kind in Western Montana. The success of the project is due to the one-on-one technical assistance provided to agricultural producers. The project is conserving energy, improving the efficient use of energy and water resources, and monitoring outcomes to assess effectiveness of conservation practices. The project is working to integrate energy and water conservation programs from various organizations (NRCS, Bonneville Power Administration, and NorthWestern Energy) to maximize resources and the application of conservation practices.

- The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is one of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s critical conservation tools for voluntary citizen- and community-based fish and wildlife habitat restoration activities on privately owned land. The Program provides a bridge between individual

partnerships and habitat restoration projects for the benefit of fish and wildlife species. Its approach is simple: engage willing partners and landowners, using direct financial and technical assistance, to conserve and protect fish and wildlife values on their property. Working with over 100 private landowners and a multitude of Blackfoot Partners from 1993 to 2011, the Program has successfully protected more than 160,000 acres of private land; restored 45 miles of streams, 2,600 acres of wetlands and 2,300 acres of native grasslands; reduced conflicts between people and grizzly bears by 90 percent; and increased fish numbers by more than 500 percent by leveraging \$1,500,000 in federal support and helping to deliver a conservative estimate of \$6 Million to on-the-ground wildlife conservation.

Outcomes of Community-Based Conservation

The outcomes of 20 years of community-based conservation in the Blackfoot Watershed are on-the-ground projects that leverage private, state, and federal partner resources. Since 1993, about 231,000 acres of land have been conserved in working status. Of the 1,500,000-acre Blackfoot Watershed, 75 percent is now in conservation status. Board-led committees have resulted in the following conservation outcomes:

Keeping Landscapes Working

- 120,000 acres under conservation easement, available for agriculture and wildlife
- 89,000 acres of corporate timberland kept working in conservation status
- 75% of watershed in conserved status
- 41,000 acres of public and private land managed by community council
- 32,000 acres approved for a new State forest in 2009

Reducing Conflicts

- Keeping grizzly bear conflicts below 94% since 2003 and reducing wolf conflicts since 2008
- Conserving Water for Agriculture and Fish
- Conserving 50 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water each year since 2002
- Conserving 10,000 kWh energy each year since 2009
- 50% of the irrigation systems participating in the Irrigation Efficiency Program

Connecting Classrooms and Communities with Place-Based Education

- Educating 500 youth each year since 1993
- Reaching 1,500 adults each year since 2004

Making Communities Safe and Maintaining Forest Health

- Treating an average of 500 acres each since 2009

Transferring Lessons Learned through Community-Based Conservation

- Hosting the nation's first America's Great Outdoor events under the Obama administration's initiative on June 1, 2010⁶
- Earning approval for a private landowner advisory group to Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture
- Forming Partners for Conservation to support community-based conservation across America
- Creating a model for new National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Landscape Conservation Stewardship program

Managing Noxious Weeds Across Fence Lines

- Managing an average of 1,000 acres each year since 2000

Outcome from the Conservation Leadership Council

While our communities are quite different from one another, what we share is extraordinary. We share a common love for the land and a strong desire to make a difference by caring for our families, communities, and the landscapes we call home. We live in working landscapes that drive the economy of our communities. Maintaining the livelihoods of the people who live here and steward these lands is the key to protecting the conservation values that are so important to our community and the American people.

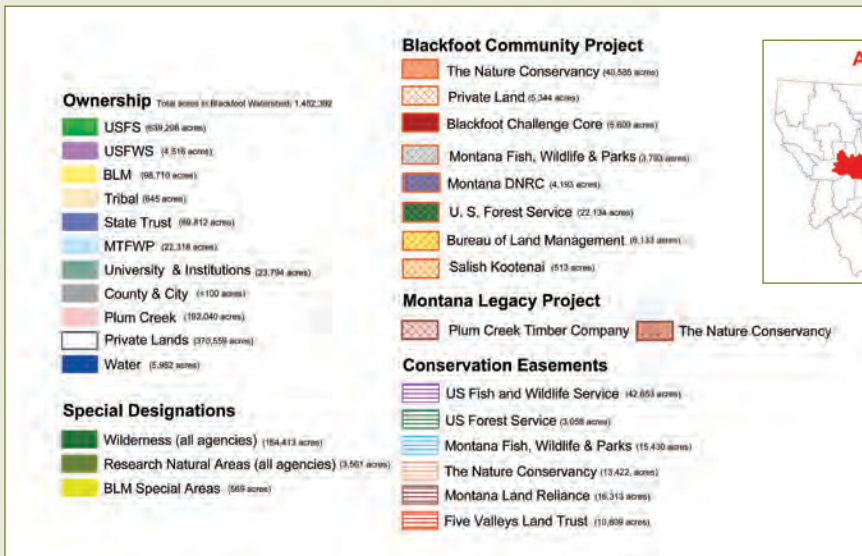
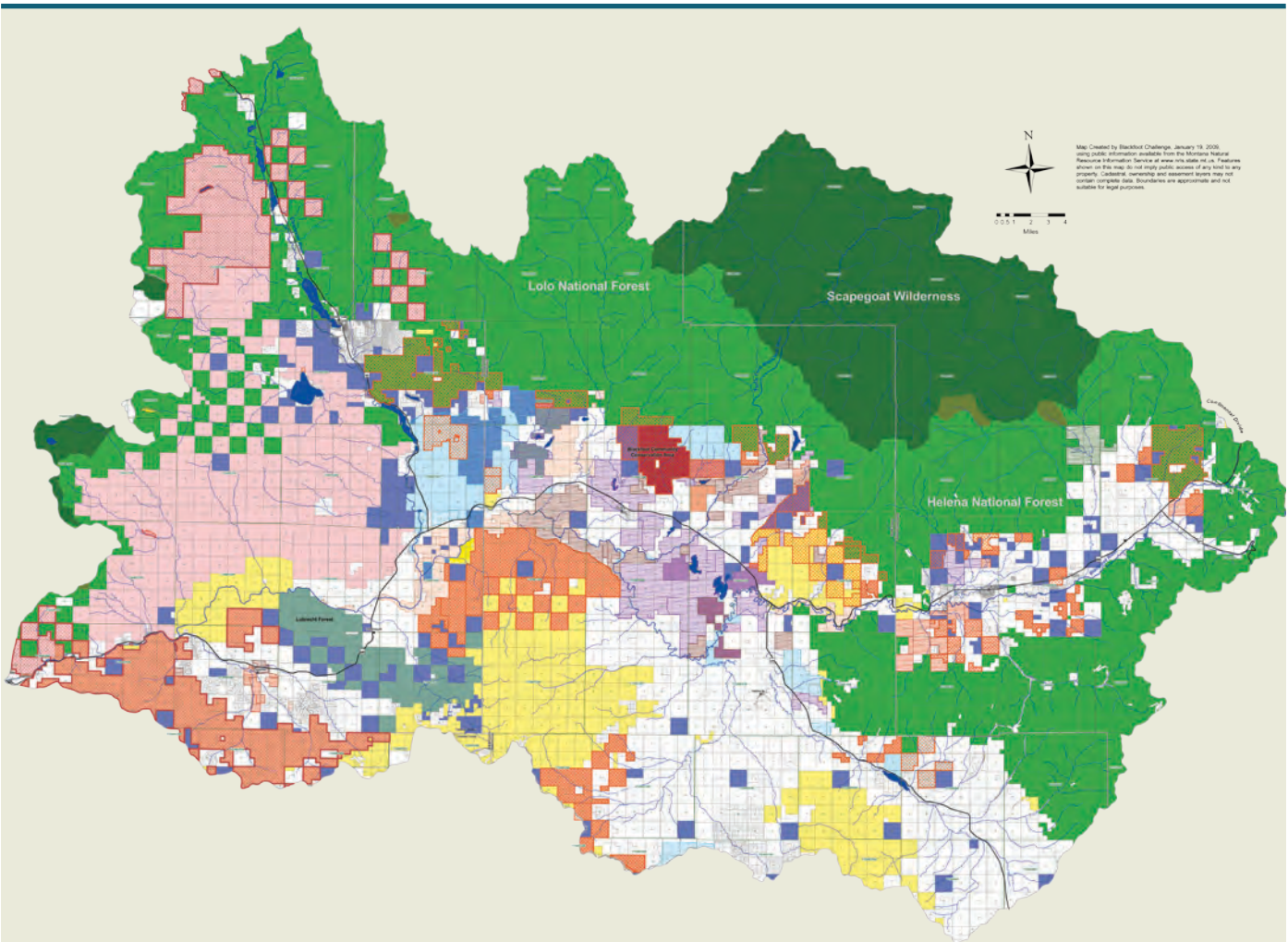
We realize that we are a small place in a big country, and so we have built bridges outside our watershed to find the partnerships that will strengthen our communities. Through a regional effort with the Working Lands Council in the Southern Crown of the Continent, and by participating with the national private landowner network Partners for Conservation, we can summarize a few recommendations for America's decision makers to keep land working for

our communities. These recommendations address the need throughout our country to enable federal agencies to empower others to share the responsibility for solving public land and resource problems and to be empowered to engage in more flexible, adaptive means to achieve their mission and mandate.

- Retain baseline funding for federal assistance that incentivizes voluntary, private landowner *conservation* in strategic landscapes and that maintains a strong agricultural economy. For example, Conservation Title in the Farm Bill is the primary conservation tool that incentivizes private land conservation of natural resources.
- Support grassroots initiatives with opportunities for federal agencies to partner in community-based and large-landscape conservation and to directly support community-based leadership. For example, agreements between federal partners and community-based groups leverage partnerships, work more efficiently, support local economies, and coordinate communication.

Attachment A

The Blackfoot Challenge: A Watershed Initiative



Notes

¹ See G. Neudecker, A. Duvall, and J. Stutzman. 2011. Chapter 12 in D. Naugle (ed.), *Energy Development and Wildlife Conservation in Western North America*.

² Comment from Mark Bostrom, Montana Department of Environmental Quality. Discussion with Ann Schwend, Montana Department of Natural Resource Conservation and Gary Burnett, Blackfoot Challenge. April 2012.

³ The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established by Congress in 1965 to provide funds and matching grants to federal, state, and local governments for land and water conservation. Funding comes from a portion of the receipts from offshore oil and gas drilling leases. LWCF is authorized at \$900 million annually. Examples of funded projects include national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges, as well as state and local parks and recreation areas. <http://www.tpl.org/what-we-do/policy-legislation/federal-funding-programs/land-and-water-conservation.html>.

⁴ Conservation Title in the Farm Bill provides the majority of the voluntary, incentives-based technical and financial assistance to private landowners. Private landowners find voluntary, incentive-based program most useful when they have an open sign period, are simple, recognize the partnership, and are driven by community values as they support conservation outcomes.

⁵ Learn more about the Blackfoot Drought Response Plan at <http://blackfootchallenge.org/Articles/?p=942>.

⁶ President Obama launched the America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative to develop a 21st Century conservation and recreation agenda. AGO takes as its premise that lasting conservation solutions should rise from the American people—that the protection of our natural heritage is a non-partisan objective shared by all Americans.