

BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE



ANNUAL REPORT
2000

The Blackfoot Challenge is a private nonprofit organization whose mission since 1993 is to protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot River Valley.

Officers & Board

Jim Stone, Chairman
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Greg Neudecker, V. Chair
USFWS

Nancy Anderson, Secretary
BLM

Dave Cochran, Treasurer
Helmville, MT

Land Lindbergh,
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Daina Bambi, USFS

Andy Erickson, Landowner

Racene Friede, Blackfoot
Telephone

Denny Iverson, Landowner

Tony Liane, DNRC

Mack Long, FWP

Jeff McNally, Rocky Mt. Elk
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Denny Sigars, Plum Creek
Timber

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Web Sites

HomePage: [www.r6.fws.gov/
pfw/montana/mt6.htm](http://www.r6.fws.gov/pfw/montana/mt6.htm)

Adopt-A-Trout: [www.r6.fws.
pfw/montana/mt6/adopt](http://www.r6.fws.pfw/montana/mt6/adopt)

"I have been involved in natural resource management issues for thirty years and in that time have never been associated with an organization

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From the Chairman

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved with making the Blackfoot Challenge a success. We have a lot to be proud of, as we begin our ninth year as a chartered non-profit grass roots organization. At the same time, we face many challenges and opportunities as we enter the 21st century. I look forward to working with our outstanding Board of Directors and many dedicated partners to promote environmentally responsible resource stewardship in the Blackfoot." - Jim Stone

The Blackfoot Challenge Mission

Our mission is to coordinate the efforts of private and public members to enhance, conserve, and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot Valley for present and future generations. The Blackfoot Challenge achieves its mission through:

- * private-public forums
- * collaborative partnerships
- * information and education outreach

Major Programs

The Challenge operates within five major program areas:

- Communication, Coordination and Cooperation
- Information, Education and Outreach
- Partnering, Facilitation and Projects
- Financial & Technical Assistance
- Administration, Planning and Program Development

Board of Directors Meetings

The fourteen-member Board of Directors met monthly in 2000, except in July and August when summer fires closed the Valley. These forums fostered communication and helped resolve issues and conflicts. Priority topics this year included water rights and drought, fire hazards, conservation easements, road closures, weed management, and educational outreach needs.

Committees

Active committees of the Blackfoot Challenge in 2000 include:

- Executive
- Education
- Conservation Strategies
- Drought
- Lewis & Clark
- Strategic Planning
- Teacher Steering
- Weed Steering

Board Members' Views on the value of the Blackfoot Challenge---

"I like the Blackfoot Challenge for the opportunities to coordinate conservation efforts among the groups, agencies, and private land owners to help our rural lifestyle to continue as we know it."

Dave Cochran, Helmville Rancher

"I really value the opportunity to be involved in an organization like the Blackfoot Challenge. Having a forum to discuss issues facing us in the management of our lands is a huge benefit to me. It's great being able to sit down with private landowners, concerned citizens, and state and federal agencies to share ideas and concerns."

Nancy Anderson, Bureau of Land Management

which is as easy and rewarding to work with as the Blackfoot Challenge. I am sure this is due to the very specific mission statement and corresponding goals

that have been developed by the membership of the Challenge which tasks all interests groups to work cooperatively for the benefit of the Blackfoot Valley."

"Even though the Challenge's membership is comprised of public agencies, corporations, individuals and environmental organizations, all with very focused interests and objectives, they have been able to put aside their own agendas to protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot Valley."

"Through the cooperative structure of the Challenge the group has been able to successfully address such diverse issues as weed management, habitat restoration and

conservation easements without alienating one or more stakeholders within the valley."

"I don't know of any other organization fostering resource stewardship that is as successful in bringing such a wide range of special interest groups together to work for a common objective as the Blackfoot Challenge."

-Denny Sigars, Plum Creek Timber

Education Committee- Racene Friede, Chair

Resource education is one of our priority roles and responsibilities. In 2000, we reached about 400 people through meetings, workshops, tours, training and other education outreach efforts. We also set an ambitious goal to formalize a year-round Blackfoot Watershed Education Program over the next five years.

Over 100 people attended our public meeting on water rights. The Challenge distributed its brochure and made presentations to numerous agency and non-profit organizations throughout Montana. We sponsored the annual WET (Water Education for Teachers) Tour.

Starting in the fall of 2000, we began preparations for a Teacher Summit and created a Teacher Steering Committee to advise us on resource education needs in the schools. We created an Adopt-A-Trout website that will link school classes with scientific research underway on cutthroat and bulltrout in the Blackfoot Watershed. Major funding support for our educational activities was provided by the Chutney Foundation, USFWS, USFS, and EPA.

Conservation Strategies Committee-

Greg Neudecker, Chair

Beginning in 2000, a Conservation Strategies Committee has been meeting to provide a forum for exchanging information on conservation work being done in the Blackfoot watershed and to look for ways to pool resources, identify priority areas for conservation, and utilize appropriate conservation strategies. Our mission is to coordinate and cooperate in land conservation efforts between public agencies, conservation groups, and private landowners in ways that will conserve and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot watershed.

The committee includes 20 members representing all organizations with conservation easements on over 70,000 acres of private lands in the Blackfoot. A timber company has 20% of the holdings in the watershed; federal and state agencies manage 60% of the holdings in the watershed; and local land conservation interests manage the rest.

We have been successful in improving communication, cooperation and coordination; identifying and describe core focus areas; and prioritizing conservation activities within core areas. In 2001, we hope to improve funding opportunities; coordinate stewardship activities on conservation easements; and promote education outreach. With possible federal funding for conservation easements and acquisitions, this committee is expected to remain active in the coming years.

Drought Committee- Land Lindbergh, Co-Vice Chair

In the spring and summer of 2000, the Blackfoot Challenge and the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited helped develop and coordinate a successful voluntary drought response effort in the Blackfoot watershed. The plan encourages a "shared sacrifice" approach between all water users. The goal was to find ways to conserve instream flows on the Big Blackfoot River during the predicted summer drought.

There are presently over 3,000 recorded water claims to divert water from the Blackfoot River and its tributaries. Two hundred and fifty-eight of these are junior to the FWP Murphy Right. Any water right with a priority date later than January 1, 1973 is subject to "a call" by FWP to stop diverting water from the Blackfoot River and its tributaries during severe droughts in order to protect instream flows for fish.

Landowners, agencies and others served on the committee. We met throughout the late spring and summer, and hired field staff to work with individual water users to develop short-term water use responses and long-term conservation plans. In many instances, we were able to partner junior and senior water users within a "water bank account", successfully encouraging some senior users to pass on a share of their water use to junior users to allow for limited but critically needed crop irrigation. Fisheries experts identified certain stretches of the major tributaries which were critical to the survival of fish, and the Blackfoot Drought Committee focused its efforts on partnering senior and junior water users within these

important reaches. As a result, we succeeded in maintaining survival flows in critical stretches of the Blackfoot drainage.

We are now working to improve the monitoring of instream flows and annual drought forecasts. With the help of federal, state and county agencies, private landowners and public recreationists, we hope to implement productive long-term water conservation strategies that will benefit not only the fisheries, but irrigators and other water users as well.

Lewis & Clark Committee- *Daina Bambe, Chair*

The Blackfoot Challenge was asked to provide leadership in development and delivery of an educational and interpretive map and brochure highlighting Lewis's return trip through the Blackfoot River corridor. A work group was formed in 2000 to begin that effort. As the L&C Bicentennial approaches, the Challenge is being asked to serve as the grassroots organization to head-up the Bicentennial coordination in the Blackfoot-- to coordinate community involvement, state and federal agency programs, and serve as an information clearinghouse on L&C Bicentennial events and opportunities.

Weed Steering Committee- *George Hirschenberger, Co-Chair*

In 2000, the Blackfoot Challenge continued to coordinate education and management of noxious weeds on 350,000 acres in the Blackfoot Valley that are encompassed by nine Weed Management Areas (WMAs). The Weeds Steering Committee that guided these efforts includes landowners, county, state and federal agencies, and university researchers.

Two demonstration projects field tested the use of goats to graze leafy spurge and spotted knapweed. The results were mixed, and the experience gained in 2000 will be used to redesign goat-grazing trails for 2001.

During the summer, chemical weed control was undertaken in the nine WMAs: Middle Blackfoot, North Fork, Greenough, Douglas Creek, Nevada Creek, River Junction, Woodworth, Potomac, and Double Arrow on private, state and federally managed lands. Over 100 individual landowners implemented

Strategic Planning Committee- *Jim Stone, Chair*

This year, we updated our Strategic Plan. The 2000-2005 Plan affirms

weed management on their lands. Annual cost-share funding for weed control on private lands came from the Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund.

Powell and Missoula Counties, through their Cooperative Extension Programs and their Weeds Boards, played a key role in education, awareness and prevention.

In July, the education subcommittee sponsored a Leafy Spurge Field Day. Over 300,000 insects (flea beetles) were distributed for later release. About 35 people attended the field day and returned home with 'transplants' for their least favorite spurge patch.

The Blackfoot Challenge, with the help of a Chutney Foundation grant, continued sponsorship of a Montana State University project to develop biological weed control agents that attack yellow toadflax. The project, now in its fourth year of research, has insectaries near Ovando. The ultimate goal of the project is to establish a complex of natural enemies on the target weeds and to reduce toadflax populations to non-economically important levels.

A sophisticated GIS mapping and monitoring system continues to be used to track the control and spread of noxious weeds. Work continued on a "New Invaders" project. Mounted specimens of 37 noxious weeds that threaten the Blackfoot were delivered to county weed districts and the BLM's field office. Two plant identification courses were developed for presentation to landowners and full-time weed fighters in the spring of 2001.

The Challenge began work on the River Corridor Spurge Project and BLM implemented leafy spurge control for about 10 miles of river frontage lands in 2000. In the fall, a grant was submitted to the MT Noxious Weed Trust Fund to obtain cost-sharing for private landowners willing to control leafy spurge on river corridor lands for the 37 miles of river above McNamara Bridge.

The Weed management program has accomplished a lot in five years thanks to the outstanding participation by the WMA leaders, support from county officials, and the actions taken by private, state and federal landowners.

our mission and identifies critical issues, program areas, and goals and strategies to guide our activities over the next five years. It provides the framework for our work program and financial support.

**Partners-- Tina Bernd-Cohen,
Executive Director**

We are fortunate to have over thirty partners who work with us to achieve our common objective to protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot watershed. Many of these private, local, state and federal partners play a major role in our success. To the following, we would like to offer special thanks for your partnership efforts and financial support in 2000:

US Bureau of Land Management
US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Forest Service
US Environmental Protection Agency
Montana Dept. Natural Resources & Conservation
Montana Dept. Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Plum Creek Timber Company
Chutney Foundation
MT. Western Water Project
Montana Nature Conservancy
North Powell Conservation District
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Englehard Foundation
Anonymous Donors-you know who you are!

Total	\$155,320
<u>Carryover2001</u>	
Restricted Projects	\$105,637
General Reserve	\$ 45,000
General Operations	\$ 4,684

More Board views---

"Although I have only been with the Challenge for a short time, I have found the dedication and commitment from those involved to be commended. In a world full of personal opinions and potential conflict it is refreshing to see an organization who empowers through education and not preach bias points of view. I am proud to be associated with the Challenge - they respect people enough to form their own educated decisions."

--Racene Friede, Blackfoot Telephone

"For me the Blackfoot Challenge serves as a unique and invaluable mechanism for coordinated resource management in the Blackfoot River Valley. All too often, we are dealing with too many priorities and too little time to get things done. It is so easy to focus your energy on your own programs and miss what is happening elsewhere. The Blackfoot Challenge not only brings me back to the big picture of the entire Blackfoot Watershed but also enables me to become involved in projects and programs that are not located on National Forest System lands. Sometimes there may be opportunities where I can provide some assistance, whether financial or technical, that I would not otherwise be able if The Challenge was not present. For me, The Challenge enables the public land management agencies to connect with and coordinate activities with our private and corporate land neighbors."-- Daina Bambe, Lincoln District Ranger

**Blackfoot Challenge
Income & Expenditures
January 1 - December
31, 2000**

Income

Donations
\$35,440
Grants
\$93,665
Interest Income
\$ 2,668

**Total Income
\$132,373**

Expenses

Operating Expenses
\$25,192
Projects
\$50,769

**Total Expenses
\$75,862**

Equity

Net2000
\$56,511
Equity1999
\$98,808