

# BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE

## Annual Report 2003

### **Darrell Sall Memorial Award**

At the June landowner tour, Blackfoot Challenge board chairman and Ovando rancher Jim Stone received the 2003 Darrell Sall Memorial Award in recognition of his outstanding long-term contribution to the protection of natural resources and preservation of the rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot Valley. The Bureau of Land Management created the award in 1997 to honor the late Darrell Sall, a BLM regional manager from Missoula whose inspirational leadership helped establish the Blackfoot Challenge and the Blackfoot River Recreational Corridor.

### **US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Watershed Stewardship Award**

The Blackfoot Challenge earned the prestigious national award for its leadership in conservation partnerships. USFWS Director Steve Williams flew to Montana in June to present the plaque and to attend a workshop for top leaders in his agency who studied the Blackfoot Challenge as a model for cooperative conservation.



# BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE ANNUAL REPORT 2003



## *From the Chairman, Jim Stone*

The past year has been very productive for the Blackfoot Challenge, with over 500 people involved in our programs and activities; it has helped us celebrate our ten years of community involvement. Most of you are aware of our Mission, and the vast array of projects that are ongoing to help us protect the rural character of the communities. One of the most important tributes, that go mostly unnoticed, is the incredible amount of time the private individuals dedicate to this effort. Each of these folks found an area of expertise to help lead the programs, then come together once a month to further the goal of a collaborative, landowner driven watershed approach. These are monumental tasks and the Valley owes them thanks for their vision and dedication.

**David Cochran:** a Helmville rancher, 35 years with the North Powell Conservation District. David has been our Treasurer since our first dollar, a member of the Executive Board and the Chair of the Lewis and Clark committee.

**Denny Iverson:** a Potomac rancher/logger, involved with FSA and numerous community groups. Denny is a member of the Executive Board, sits on the Forestry committee and is the Plum Creek/ TNC Project leader for Potomac.

**Andy Erickson:** a Greenough rancher/ Guest ranch, spends a major portion of the year educating guests about the Blackfoot. Andy is a Board member and is member of the Education and Fundraising committees.

**Racene Friede:** an Ovando landowner, Telecommunications Specialist in Missoula. Racene is a Board member, Chairs the Education committee, and is the Web Specialist and designer for our web page.

**Jeff McNally:** an Ovando rancher, a Marketing Professional. Jeff is a Board member and a member of the Conservation Strategies committee. He is one of the founders of the Plum Creek/TNC Project concept.

**David Mannix:** a Helmville Rancher, 21 years with the North Powell Conservation District. David is a Board Member and Chair of the Habitat, Water Quality Restoration committee, and member of the Weed Steering committee. He is involved in many Helmville community organizations.

**Bob Bushnell:** a Lincoln Landowner, and a leader in the local Snowmobile Club. Bob is the Plum Creek/TNC Project leader in Lincoln and is a member of the Weed Steering committee.

**Rick Lieglund:** a Greenough ranch manager. Rick is the Plum Creek/TNC Project leader in Greenough and an active member of the Blackfoot Challenge.

Without missing the other two legs of the stool, our agency and contract partners put equal time to all of our programs. We are fortunate to work with professionals who are very credible and have the patience to work with landowners like myself! They are part of the community and part of the long-term solutions. The last, and definitely not least, is Tina Bernd Cohen our Executive Director. We can have the best ideas and intent, but without leadership we will not achieve the goals set forth. Tina's ability to guide us through the resource and social issues is unmatched, her ability to put up with us is staggering!

This is an incredible group of individuals to work with and it is my pleasure to be associated with them and the Blackfoot Challenge. We look forward to great opportunities this year, and hope all of you will join us in building "Better Communities through Cooperation." My door is always open.



## Board and Committees

The Blackfoot Challenge Board of Directors meets monthly to foster communication, coordinate activities and help resolve conflicts. Priority topics this year included the future of Plum Creek Timber lands, water quality planning, weed management, drought response, grizzly bear and elk conflicts, and education outreach, as well as fund raising and strategic planning.

### These Committees were active in 2003:

- Executive, Finance & Strategic Planning
- Drought, Water Conservation & Recreation
- Habitat, Water Quality Restoration & Recreation
- Weed Steering
- Conservation Strategies
- Education & Teacher Steering
- Lewis & Clark
- Wildlife

## Conservation Strategies Committee

*Greg Neudecker, Chair*

### Blackfoot Community Project

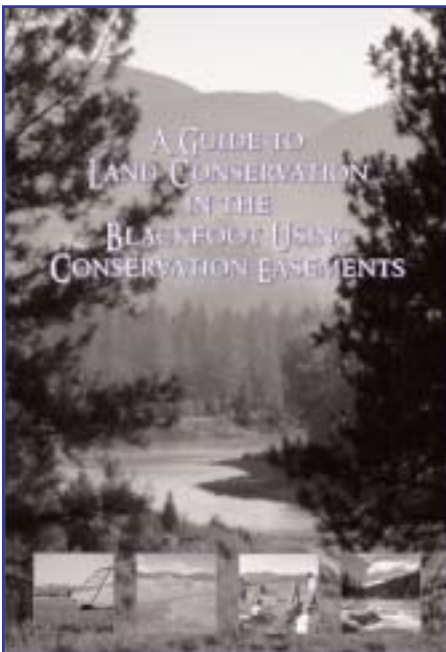
Our quarterly forums serve as good places for swapping ideas and building trust. The forums also can lead to impressive conservation efforts too. When local folks expressed concern that the piecemeal sale of Plum Creek Timber Company lands would change the rural character and natural resources of the valley, the Blackfoot Challenge responded with help from The Nature Conservancy. In October, TNC agreed to purchase 41,500 acres with an option to buy a total of 88,000 acres. TNC will dispose of these lands based on a community-driven plan developed by the Blackfoot Challenge in partnership with the communities. Lands will be resold to private and public buyers to preserve community and conservation values in the Blackfoot.



Senator Burns meeting with ranchers in the Blackfoot

### Conservation Easements

More than 85,000 acres in the Blackfoot watershed have been protected by private land trusts and government agencies working with landowners concerned about the future of their lands. A \$1 million North American Wetland Conservation grant (secured in 2002) is providing key funding to help secure wetlands conservation easements on lands in the Blackfoot. Conservation easements are tax-deductible, voluntary legal agreements between a landowner and a land trust that permanently limit some land uses (usually subdivision and development) in order to protect the property's natural characteristics.



### Land Steward

In April, the Challenge hired a land steward to work with private landowners, land trusts, and public agencies. Already, he has assisted more than 20 landowners with grazing plans and riparian restoration.

### Mapping Project

To help our partners make land use decisions in the future, we've launched a major mapping project. The Blackfoot's agricultural, biological and community resources will be mapped as separate overlays to form the Conservation Resources Database Library. This effort--part of what's called a Geographic Information System (GIS)-- builds on another mapping project focusing on all the wetlands in the Blackfoot. This USFWS National Wetlands Inventory mapping project is nearly complete for the watershed.

### New Publications

Check out our website for *A Guide to Land Conservation in the Blackfoot Using Conservation Easements* and the *Blackfoot Watershed-Wide Bird List*.

## Education Committee

*Racene Friede, Chair*

### Adopt-A-Trout

Three Blackfoot schools participated in the Adopt-A-Trout Project focusing on the role of northern pike in trout habitat. In January, teachers participated in a workshop. In March, students took field trips to Milltown Dam, where they observed fish capture, identification, data collection, and transmitter implantations (for radio-tracking fish). Classes adopted a fish they had seen captured and tagged. Students followed fish activities on the website and posted questions weekly to fisheries biologists. (Log On Website at <http://fwp.state.mt.us/adoptat trout>). During field trips in April, students measured, weighed and identified fish, collected scales, and assessed spawning condition. Teachers extended the experience by applying it to math, science, writing, art, technology, and research.



### Youth Field Day

Seventy students and teachers from Lincoln, Ovando and Helmville schools gathered at the Monture Ranger Station in May for Youth Field Day, featuring "Humans and Wildlife in the Blackfoot Watershed." Presenters spoke about elk, bears, mountain lions, wolves, predator control, waterfowl, bird watching, lynx, mountain goats, and wildlife regulations. Many organizations provided support.



### Teacher Steering Committee

What better way to find out what the schools need than to ask the teachers? The Teacher Steering Committee met in the spring and fall to advise the Blackfoot Challenge on issues of importance to the schools. As a result, a two-day workshop will be held in the fall of 2004 with the theme, "Following Meriwether Lewis: The Blackfoot Then and Now."



### Workshops and Tours

Twenty-five USFWS employees from across the nation took an up-close look at what makes the Blackfoot Challenge partnership a success during a National Conservation Training Center workshop in June. The same month, the Landowner Tour attracted 68 participants to the bus tour that began and ended at the White Tail Ranch. We stopped at points along Meriwether Lewis's eastward trail and at sites that illustrate efforts to maintain large intact landscapes. We viewed projects to manage weeds, restore habitat, monitor drought, conserve water and to fence areas to reduce grizzly bear conflicts. The tour wound up with a social barbecue.



### Education Round-Up

Work continued on Outdoor Learning Sites to illustrate land stewardship in the Blackfoot. We created Stream Restoration and Water Quality Site Flyers for ten sites in the Watershed. We created a five-year education plan for the H2-O Ranch, property in Helmville that was donated to USFWS in 2000 as a Waterfowl Production Area. We also completed a trail brochure and bird checklist for the H2-O Ranch.

### Website

The Blackfoot Challenge website, designed in 2003, is up and running. Log on to view our activities: [www.blackfootchallenge.org](http://www.blackfootchallenge.org)



## Drought, Water Conservation & Recreation Committee

Harry Poett, Chair

### Early Awareness

Conditions looked promising at the start of 2003 as we began to track snowpack and flow forecasts. Unfortunately, record high temperatures and below average precipitation between June and September quickly pushed the watershed into a drought. On July 24, the Bonner USGS stream gauge read 500 cubic feet per second. By late July, fires burned in the drought-stricken watershed.



As part of our early awareness effort, we sent letters and email to all drought plan participants, updating them on flows and drought conditions. We hung posters at stores and post offices. Our thanks go to irrigators, outfitters, businesses and homeowners for their support.

### Voluntary Water Reduction

Fifty-nine people responded to our letters and put into practice our voluntary water reduction plan that conserved almost 60 cubic feet per second. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) issued fishing restrictions throughout the Blackfoot and closed bull trout streams at the end of July. Eight of

ten angling outfitters responded to a request to reduce time or to stay off the river. At a fall meeting of irrigators and outfitters, we reviewed the plan and discussed how we might improve it. We learned that full participation by all irrigators and outfitters is critical to ensure a successful voluntary shared-sacrifice response.

### Water Flows for Bull Trout

In late September, the Challenge collaborated with FWP, USFWS, Trout Unlimited and several irrigators to stage an unprecedented, coordinated shut-down of diversions on a key stretch of the North Fork of the Blackfoot to assure adequate flows for bull trout during their migration back to the main Blackfoot River. The movement of radio-tagged fish downstream during the shutdown indicated that it provided sufficient

additional flows to allow bull trout to complete their migration.

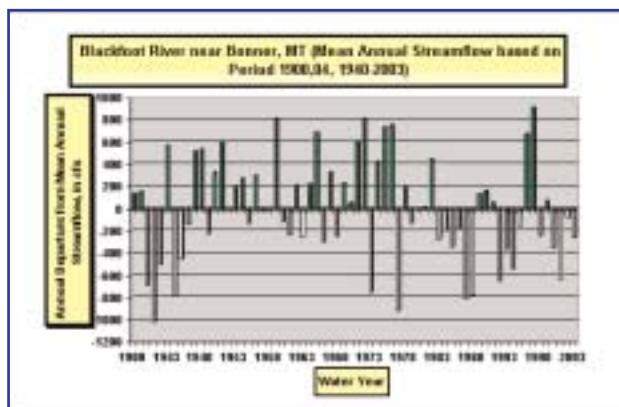
Flows and temperatures continue to affect fisheries. Only about one-third of the FWP tagged fish survived the summer. Counts for bull trout redds (where trout spawn) were down almost 50 percent, potentially a result of a fire retardant drop. Low flows may also contribute to the spread of whirling disease in rainbow trout, according to new studies.

### Long-Term Water Conservation Plan

Planning and restoration can help our fisheries in low flow periods and improve irrigation efficiency. Ditch lining projects, water leases and irrigation efficiency projects are planned for 2004, as well as continuing hydrologic assessments of Spring Creek/Doney Lake and Kleinschmidt Flats, biological telemetry of native salmonids, and water stress effects on cottonwood trees in the Kleinschmidt Flats.

### Soil Moisture Probe Pilot Project

The Challenge sponsored the third year of a soil moisture probe pilot project with the help of the National Center for Appropriate Technology. We monitored 14 ranches and one golf course - about 1800 acres altogether. The project should lead to improved irrigation efficiency based on crop, rotation and soil. Additional irrigators are eager to participate in 2004. We are seeking matching funds to meet the growing demand.

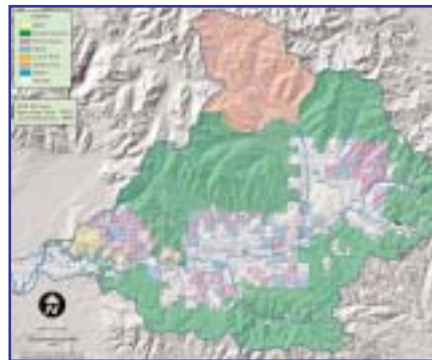
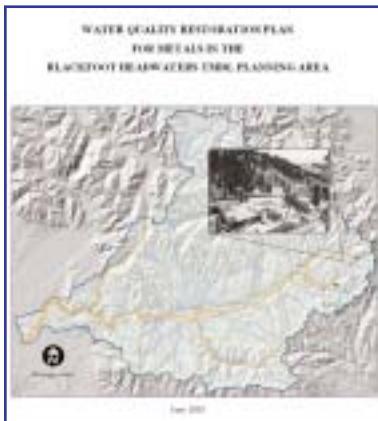


## Habitat, Water Quality and Restoration Committee

*Tina Bernd-Cohen, Executive Director*

### Help for Impaired Streams

Past mining in the Blackfoot headwaters continues to impact streams, and in turn the river. This committee oversees what is known as Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) plans to restore the habitat and water quality of streams listed by the State as "impaired." The program is expanding to address watershed-wide planning, funding for restoration projects and water quality monitoring. TMDL planning proved the 2003 focus of this committee of landowners, technical staff and consultants.



The Environmental Protection Agency approved the Blackfoot Headwaters Metals TMDL Plan in December 2003. Stakeholders reviewed the Headwaters Sediment TMDL Plan, to be completed in early 2004. We started work on the Middle Blackfoot and Nevada Creek water quality plans with a rapid field reconnaissance in the summer and data review in the fall.

**To view the metals plan online:**

[www.Deq.state.mt.us/ppa/TMDL/finalReport.asp](http://www.Deq.state.mt.us/ppa/TMDL/finalReport.asp)

**To view the sediment proposed plan:**

[www.deq.state.mt.us/ppa/mdm/tmdl/tmdl/publiccomment.asp](http://www.deq.state.mt.us/ppa/mdm/tmdl/tmdl/publiccomment.asp)

### Fish Habitat Restoration

The Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited took on a dozen projects across the watershed in 2003, with pass-through funds from the Challenge, Chutney Foundation and USFWS. Poorman Creek is a better home for fish now, thanks to improvements in irrigation efficiency, a water lease project, removal of several fish passage barriers, construction of a fish-friendly irrigation diversion, and riparian restoration. The Upper Poorman Creek culvert project replaced three undersized culverts with fish-friendly stream crossings, with several more to be completed in 2004. Lower Nevada Spring Creek now will flow with high-quality, cold waters from its spring source to Nevada Creek, marking the completion of a three-year project to restore more than 11,000 feet (3.2-miles) of stream.

Improved grazing production, better range conditions and more water in the North Fork adds up to good news for participating ranches near Helmville and for fisheries. We helped ranchers with off-site water development and grazing management on more than 2,500 acres. We drilled wells, installed solar-powered pumps and stock tank watering systems. Fencing riparian areas went hand in hand with assisting with grazing management plans. In addition, we completed three grazing, fencing and water-conservation projects on more than 3,000 acres in the Ovando and Clearwater areas.

### Water Quality and Restoration Round-Up

The Challenge received a grant to develop a Restoration Action Plan that will integrate all Blackfoot restoration projects. The merged list of projects will include The Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited's priority habitat restoration projects; TMDL restoration projects; and our drought and water conservation projects.

Our water quality monitoring work group is working hard to identify water quality-monitoring needs in the basin. We were awarded an EPA Watershed Initiative Grant to monitor 12 sites in 2004 as part of a Status and Trends Project that will ultimately lead to a State of the Basin Report.

We are creating a Blackfoot Watershed Water Quality Monitoring Network to provide a Blackfoot Challenge site on the Montana Natural Resources Information System (NRIS) website. Internet users will be able to easily view maps and water quality monitoring data in the Blackfoot.

Nevada Spring Creek - Before



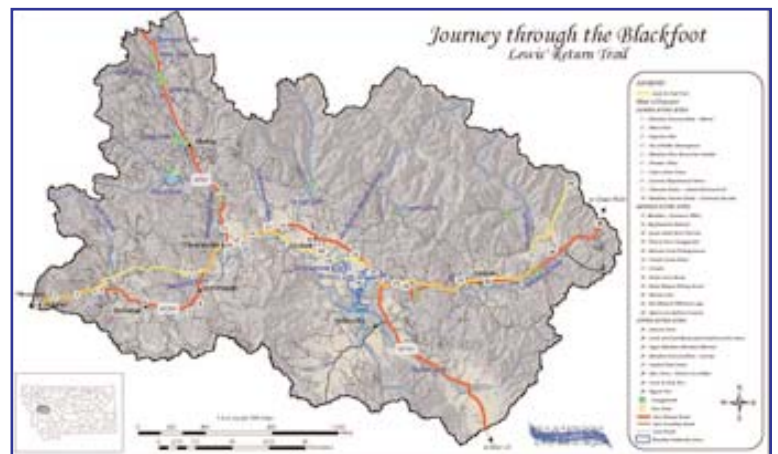
Nevada Spring Creek - After



**Lewis & Clark Committee**  
**David Cochran**

The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial is upon us and the timing couldn't be better for completing two major interpretive projects to help visitors and residents appreciate Lewis's 1806 return trip through the Blackfoot in context of our spectacular landscape, wildlife and history. Our interpretive kiosk project for Bonner, Clearwater Junction and Lincoln continues to progress. Visitors are stopping often at the Bonner kiosk, featuring three interpretive signs and a sculpture of Meriwether Lewis with his dog Seaman. In 2003, we constructed the kiosk structure at the Clearwater Junction rest area. The interpretive panels for Clearwater Junction and Lincoln will be installed in spring of 2004.

Our second project will be ready to unveil in 2004 - a driving brochure and map, featuring 30 stops highlighting Lewis and party's journey and other landmarks along "The Road to the Buffalo," a route followed by Native Americans for thousands of years. The driving brochure starts in Bonner and ends at Rogers Pass with a side destination of Lewis and Clark Pass.



## Weed Steering Committee

*Jim Stone, Co-Chair*



### **Education-Leave No Weeds**

Whether bringing people together for seminars or pulling weeds on a cleanup day, education is helping us make headway against invading weeds. Our annual meeting in February attracted about 60 people, representing landowners, Powell, Missoula, and Lewis & Clark counties, federal and state agencies, Plum Creek Timber, Montana State University and the Blackfoot Challenge. Together with partners we offered training and workshops on new invaders, plant ecology and revegetation, "leave no weeds," and weed management area participation. Our Weed Management Area meetings

taught landowners plant ecology and succession to help them develop effective revegetation plans. Weed education activities we sponsored included two Weed Pulls/River Cleanup Days at Russell Gates in June and August. Students, too, can now take a more active role as they participate in a weed mapping and demonstration project developed by Helmville schoolteacher Dean Phillips.

### **Managing Weeds**

During the summer, we undertook chemical weed control on private, state and federally managed lands in the nine Weed Management Areas: Middle Blackfoot, North Fork, Greenough, Douglas Creek, Nevada Creek, River Junction, Woodworth, Potomac, and Double Arrow. More than 100 landowners employed weed management on their lands. The Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund provided cost-share funding.



The formation of the Patterson Prairie Weed Management Area in 2003 marks the completion of a long-term goal. All lands in the Blackfoot Watershed of Powell County are now Weed Management Areas.

To aid in replacing weeds with desirable grasses and forbs, the Montana State University and the Challenge developed special seed mixes. In 2004, those seeds will be planted in revegetation plots.

Thanks to Foundation funds and grants we continued with the third year of the Blackfoot River Leafy Spurge Cooperative Project, spraying sites along 40 miles of the Blackfoot from the water's edge to the high water mark to eliminate seed production on infested sites. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation funded a project to target and control 280 acres of leafy spurge in the Cottonwood Drainage.



The Challenge helped sponsor advisory group meetings for the Mannix Brothers to further develop a cost-effective spotted knapweed management strategy. This year, sheep grazed on weeds, a change from past goat grazing for weed control.







The **Blackfoot Challenge** is a private non-profit organization whose mission is to protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot River Valley.

### OFFICERS & BOARD

- Jim Stone**, Chairman  
Landowner  
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Ovando, MT  
(Ph) 793-5830  
rsranch@blackfoot.net
- Greg Neudecker**, V. Chair  
USFWS
- Nancy Anderson**, Secretary  
BLM
- Dave Cochran**, Treasurer  
Landowner
- Denny Iverson**, Officer  
Landowner
- Andy Erickson**  
Landowner
- Racene Friede**  
Blackfoot Telephone
- Amber Kamps**  
USFS
- Tony Liane**  
DNRC
- Mack Long**  
FWP
- Tim Love**  
USFS
- David Mannix**  
Rancher
- Jeff McNally**  
Landowner
- Denny Sigars**  
Plum Creek Timber
- Tina Bernd-Cohen**, Executive Director  
PO Box 563  
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(Fax) 442-4114  
(E-mail) blkfootchallenge@aol.com

### Web Site

[www.blackfootchallenge.org](http://www.blackfootchallenge.org)

# Blackfoot Challenge Income and Expenditures

January 1, 2003 - December 31, 2003

## Income

### Private Donations

Individuals (61)	\$ 16,595
Foundations (3)	\$ 20,250
Corporate/Land Trusts (4)	<u>\$ 15,200</u>

\$ 52,045

Private Grants

\$268,040

Public Grants

\$320,980

Interest & Gain/Loss

\$ 13,627

### Total New Income

**\$654,692**

## Expenses

Operations and Programs

\$ 75,332

Projects

\$400,007

### Total Expenses

**\$475,339**

Carry-Over Programs/Projects

\$179,353







## 10th Anniversary Celebration

The Blackfoot Challenge celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2003 with a landowner tour. We thank supporters for your generous donations and welcome your continued support to help us protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot River Valley. With a donation of \$25 or more we will send you a genuine Blackfoot Challenge hat.

We established a Blackfoot Stewardship Cooperative Fund in 2003 to raise funds to sustain the wide array of stewardship efforts. With a donation of \$10,000 or more, we will place 10% of the donation in the Blackfoot Stewardship Cooperative Fund to sustain this important work in the years ahead.

We will host a Blackfoot Challenge Tour in June 2004 and you are invited!

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### **I WANT TO SUPPORT THE BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE:**

Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
and payable to:

**The Blackfoot Challenge**  
**PO Box 563**  
**Helena, MT 59624**

**OPTIONAL** - I would like my donation directed to support:

- The Blackfoot Challenge and its Programs
- The work of the following Committee/Activity: *(specify)* \_\_\_\_\_
- The Blackfoot Watershed Endowment

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

I want to learn more about the June 2004 Tour: \_\_\_\_\_



PO Box 563  
Helena, MT 59624