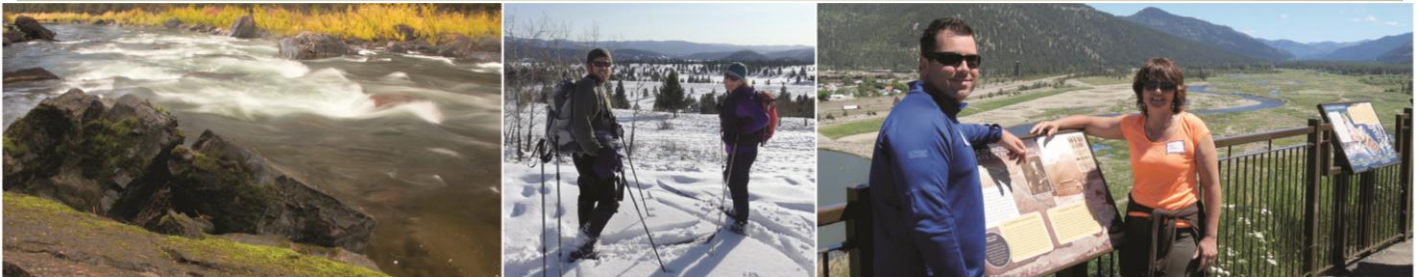




Photos (clockwise from top left): Paul Brainerd, Brad Weltzien, Amy Vann, Elaine Caton, Mannix Bros Ranch

Your Voice for Land and Community ≈ Summary of Results



Photos (from left): Laura Verhaeghe, Steve Kloetzel, Sara Schmidt



Blackfoot Challenge, Inc
405 Main Street | PO Box 103 Ovando MT 59854
406-793-3900
outreach@blackfootchallenge.org
www.blackfootchallenge.org

Overview:

The Blackfoot Challenge formed in 1993 to address community concerns about conserving the Blackfoot watershed's natural resources and rural way of life. At that time, committees and programs developed through multiple conversations with the communities to identify priorities and opportunities. Twenty years later, the Blackfoot Challenge hosted the Your Voice for Land and Community discussions to revisit the same topics and inform the organization's priorities for the next 20 years.

In September 2013, the Blackfoot Challenge coordinated five meetings in Bonner, Greenough-Potomac, Ovando-Helmville, Lincoln, and Seeley Lake to ask the following questions:

1. What is important to you in your local community, economy and environment today?
2. What do you want your community, economy and environment to look like in 20 years?
3. How can the Challenge and its partners help accomplish those goals?

Over 180 watershed residents attended the meetings in-person and 26 people submitted responses through an online survey. Meetings began with a brief overview of the history of the Blackfoot Challenge and the evolution of the organization's committees and programs. In small groups, attendees then answered the questions above with the guidance of a professional facilitator. What follows is an outline of the feedback collected. Responses to question #1 are listed in no particular order, while the answers to questions #2 and #3 are listed in the order of frequency mentioned.

The Blackfoot Challenge would like to thank everyone who participated in these discussions. The feedback will continue to inform the organization's priorities for years to come. If you are interested in continuing to be a part of the conversation, we hope you will consider becoming a member of the Blackfoot Challenge and joining a committee or workgroup. We always look forward to hearing from you.

Schedule and Details:

- Monday Sept. 23rd, Bonner at Bonner School, 15 attended, facilitated by Ginny Tribe
- Tuesday Sept. 24th, Greenough/Potomac at Paws Up Saddle Club, 47 attended, facilitated by Ginny Tribe
- Wednesday Sept. 25th, Ovando/Helmville @ Ovando School, 25 attended, facilitated by Ben Alexander
- Thursday Sept. 26th, Lincoln @ Montanan Steakhouse, 40 attended, facilitated by Ben Alexander
- Monday Sept. 30th, Seeley Lake @ Double Arrow Resort, 60 attended, facilitated by Ginny Tribe

1. What is important to you in your local community, economy, and environment today?

(in no particular order)

- a. **High quality of life**
- b. **Vast rich history**
- c. **The people**
 - i. Neighborly, kind, and willing to help and look out for one another (e.g., borrowing a neighbor's backhoe; making sure kids get home from school)
 - ii. Agree to disagree; respect differing perspectives
 - iii. Take responsibility and ownership beyond their property line; engaged in solutions not complaints
 - iv. Participation in "shared sacrifice" – not just water resources
 - v. Trust established over time
 - vi. Family-oriented
 - vii. Welcoming
 - viii. Positive
 - ix. Close-knit
 - x. Educated
 - xi. Collaborative
 - xii. High level of volunteerism
 - xiii. A balance of **institutional knowledge and incoming knowledge**
 - 1. Older generations with knowledge of people, history, land management, how to get along; are respected
 - 2. Histories intact
 - 3. Willingness to try new approaches/strategies
 - 4. Passion and skills new people bring
 - 5. Retirement community
- d. Extensive **recreational opportunities** exist
 - i. public and private land access
- e. The **rural character** and **small town lifestyle**
 - i. Proximity to wildlife (e.g., I can see a moose out my front door)
 - ii. Freedom, solstice, remoteness, independence, quiet, not crowded
 - iii. No traffic
 - iv. Small local schools
 - v. Post Offices
 - vi. Great place to raise kids; safe
 - vii. Communities have "the lead"; local decision-making
 - viii. Blend of small-acreage parcels and large ranches
 - ix. Proximity to services in Missoula, Helena
 - x. Private property rights; no zoning
- f. **Local services and businesses**
 - i. Health care and ambulance

- ii. Post Offices
- iii. Fire Departments
- iv. High Country Beef
- v. BVD/SSP
- vi. Organizations work together
- g. Health and quality of the **natural environment**
 - i. A beautiful view and natural beauty
 - ii. Clean air, water, forests
 - iii. Comprehensive weed control
 - iv. Community-managed forest
 - v. Ridge-top to ridge-top appreciation/approach
 - vi. Restoration efforts (e.g., water quality)
- h. Diversity of **wildlife and habitat**
 - i. Wolves, grizzlies, mountain lions
 - ii. All the flora and fauna
- i. **Agricultural/timber use and heritage**
 - i. Multi-generational
 - ii. Open space
 - iii. Working lands and lifestyles intact
 - iv. Progressive and innovative approaches

2. What do you want your community, economy and environment to look like in 20 years?

(in order of frequency mentioned)

- a. Watershed-wide
 - i. **Stay the same as it is now; maintain values identified above**
 - ii. **Economic Development** (thoughtful, deliberate, diverse and sustainable)
 - 1. **Youth**
 - a. More families; small school still open
 - b. More opportunities to participate and engage in volunteer activities, councils, community meetings, etc
 - c. More job opportunities/training
 - d. Internships in various fields
 - 2. **Business**
 - a. Independently-owned (i.e., no franchises)
 - b. Cottage industries (e.g., craftsman cabinetry)
 - c. Telecommunication
 - d. Opportunities for innovation
 - 3. **Forestry**
 - a. Restoration economy jobs (i.e., bug killed tree harvesting)
 - b. Locally-produced value-added timber products
 - c. Utilizing small-diameter and salvaged materials
 - 4. **Recreation Tourism**
 - a. Unique recreation opportunities
 - i. Gateway to wilderness areas
 - ii. More respect of public/private property/resources
 - b. Awareness of local stewardship
 - 5. **Housing**
 - a. Smaller-acreage parcels available (while maintaining intact landscape and open space)
 - b. More affordable options for families
 - 6. **Energy**
 - a. Locally-produced
 - b. Renewable
 - c. More efficient
 - d. Reduce climate change effects
 - 7. **Agriculture**
 - a. Locally-produced value-added
 - b. “Blackfoot Brand” that embodies local and conservation values
 - iii. **Natural resource-related:**
 - 1. Healthier forests
 - 2. Improved water quality
 - 3. Fewer weeds

4. Avoid over-recreation of water resources
 5. Wildfire management
 6. Drought management
 7. Communities involved in mining exploration/remediation
 8. Improved fish migration
 9. Dust control
 10. Community has more influence on how resources are managed
- iv. Local government; **local decision-making**
 - v. **Adult Education**
 1. Issues specific to new residents and landowners
 2. Forestry; fuels reduction benefits
 3. Grazing/Ranching; cattle and soil management in drought
 4. Specific job skill training
 5. Property succession plans for families
 6. Weed management
 7. Living with wildlife
 8. Starting/maintaining a rural business
 9. Computer help
 10. Cultural presentations
 - vi. **Historic buildings/sites preserved**
- b. Community-specific
 - i. Certain issues pertain to specific communities (e.g., the sculpture park in Lincoln, mining exploration in Potomac, and the centralized sewer system in Seeley); while not outlined here, these can be found in the full list of results.
 - c. Two issues people were divided on:
 - i. Gateless vs. Gated
 - ii. Fire mitigation/retardation (e.g., no smoke in the summers) vs. fire on the landscape as a management tool/controlled burns

3. How can the Blackfoot Challenge and partners help accomplish those goals?

(in order of frequency mentioned)

- a. **Keep doing what you're doing**
 - i. Protect rural character/way-of-life
 - ii. Local decision-making
 - iii. Active forest management
 - iv. Collaboration between agencies
 - v. Youth education
- b. **Keep encouraging feedback; keep involving communities**
- c. **Encourage more collaboration within and between the watershed communities**
 - i. Economic opportunities (e.g., a Blackfoot-wide art show)
 - ii. Support local events
 - iii. Recreation opportunities offered in different areas
- d. **Establish an Economics Committee to address economic issues identified above**
 - i. Sustainable growth/business plan; help define what needs to be done
- e. **Natural resource-related:**
 - i. Influence appeals process; encourage collaboration in restoration proposals to eliminate stalemates; more restoration on USFS lands
- f. **Offer/coordinate educational classes on topics identified above**
 - i. Workshops with visiting consultants
 - ii. Target younger people, as well
- g. **Form partnerships with:**
 - i. Community Councils
 - ii. Chambers of Commerce
 - iii. Seeley Community Foundation
 - iv. Schools
 - v. Conservation Districts
 - vi. County Commissioners
 - vii. Realtors
 - 1. Share values: open space, wildlife, habitat
 - 2. Be an info source re: conserved land sales
- h. **Secure funds to:**
 - i. Preserve historic buildings and heritage sites
 - ii. Put on education programs (youth through adult)
 - iii. Do forest fuel reduction on private lands
- i. **Specific to Blackfoot Challenge:**
 - i. Be more inclusive
 - ii. Make opportunities to participate (committees, work groups, etc) more visible
 - 1. Website calendar
 - 2. Calendars in BVD and SSP

- 3. Bulletin boards
 - iii. More inclusion of those who don't live in immediate Blackfoot Valley
 - iv. Involve younger people
- j. **Specific to SWCC:**
 - i. Offer field trips so people can provide input on projects