



Backgrounder

Flathead River Valley

- Straddling the BC-Montana border in the western shadow of the Rocky Mountains, the Flathead River Valley is one of North America's most spectacular wilderness areas.
- The BC portion of the valley spans almost 400,000 acres (160,000 hectares).
- The valley has maintained its ecological integrity as one of the most abundant natural areas on the planet.
- Freehold and leased mining tenures have existed throughout the BC Flathead for more than a century, and the potential for mining and oil, gas and coal exploration has been the biggest threat to the natural values of this celebrated wilderness area.
- The Flathead River flows entirely across the border into Montana, and water quantity and quality concerns have been a long-standing issue between Canada and the U.S.
- In February 2010, BC Premier Gordon Campbell and the Governor of the State of Montana Brian Schweitzer signed a memorandum of understanding to prohibit mining and the development of oil, gas and coal resources throughout the BC Flathead.
- The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Province of BC reached an agreement in 2011 in which the conservation groups provide \$9.4 million to assist the province in meeting the conservation commitments outlined in the MOU.
- The *Flathead Watershed Area Conservation Act* was passed by the BC legislature in November 2011.
- The Nature Conservancy of Canada and The Nature Conservancy are also committed to assisting the Province in maintaining and enhancing high conservation standards in the natural area in order to protect the rich diversity of plant and animal life.

The Natural Values

- Total area of the BC Flathead: nearly 400,000 acres (160,000 hectares); 1,600 square kilometers.
- Has been called the "Serengeti of the North" because of the abundance and diversity of plant and animal life it sustains.
- Harbours the greatest density of grizzly bears in the interior of North America and provides habitat for such iconic Rocky Mountain animals as wolverine, Canada lynx, wolf, mountain goat, elk and fisher.
- Diversity of species: 70 mammal species (16 carnivores), 270 bird species, 25 fish species and 1,200 species of vascular plants.
- The Flathead Valley is an ecological powerhouse that contributes to the integrity of surrounding national and provincial parks (Alberta's Waterton Park, Montana's Glacier National Park and

BC's Askimena-Kishenina Provincial Park). It offers a vitally important habitat corridor for large animals.

- Large intact areas of habitat will be an important element of wildlife's ability to adapt to climate change.
- The river creates vital habitat for endangered bull trout and westslope cutthroat – the Canadian section of the river is particularly crucial for bull trout spawning.
- Contains some of the purest water in North America.
- Declared a Wild and Scenic River in the U.S. in 1975.
- Adjacent to the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, which is also a designated World Heritage Site and a UN Biosphere Reserve.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and the Southern Rockies

- NCC is the leading land conservation organization in British Columbia.
- NCC has worked in BC since 1974.
- NCC has protected more than 175,000 acres (70,000 hectares) of ecologically significant land in the Canadian Rockies.
- A donation of the 22,000 acres (8,900 hectares) Mount Broadwood Heritage Area by Shell Canada in 1992 anchored NCC's work in the Elk Valley to the NW of the Flathead.
- In 2004, NCC negotiated a landmark agreement with Tembec Inc, one of Canada's largest lumber producers, to permanently secure significant wildlife corridors in the Elk Valley, while continuing to provide for sustainable forest use and accommodating the needs of the local community.
- NCC works with ranchers and foresters throughout the southern Rockies to protect the natural features of the area while also supporting compatible land uses.
- NCC's Flathead River Ranch conservation area is one of the few pieces of private land in the Flathead Valley.
- Tembec's Flathead Townsite property is included in the moratorium agreement, which prevents residential intensification. The current agreement expires in 2014.



The 49th parallel cuts through the Flathead River Valley (photo by NCC)



The Flathead River (photo by Tim Ennis/NCC)



Bunchberry (photo by NCC)