

## North Fork Flathead Geographic Area

### Unique Characteristics

- The North Fork Valley provides a distinct rural way of life that is highly valued by residents and enjoyed by visitors.
- Federal ownership of land dominates the North Fork Valley and includes the Glacier View Ranger District of the Flathead National Forest and Glacier National Park, and the valley is bounded on the north by the international border with Canada.
- The North Fork River originates about 57 river miles north of the border in British Columbia, Canada.
- The North Fork Flathead River watershed is subject to Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 between the U.S. and Canada, and the 2010 Memorandum of Understanding between Montana and B.C.
- The historic threat of mountaintop removal coal mining in British Columbia required the intervention of the International Joint Commission (IJC) in 1976, their final report in 1988, and provided motivation for legislation in both B.C. and Montana that would prevent inappropriate industrial development that would harm water quality, fish and wildlife habitat.
- Congress designated the North Fork Flathead River as a free flowing, Wild and Scenic River in 1976 that is co-managed by the Flathead National Forest and Glacier National Park.
- The Whitefish Range provides approximately 225,000 acres of Inventoried Roadless Lands that, under current Forest regulation, are not part of the timber base, and provide secure habitat for many species.
- Forest Products industry is a significant portion of the regional economy, and the Flathead National Forest - including the North Fork - is a significant supplier of fiber for that industry.
- The North Fork River watershed displays some of the greatest diversity of species in North America from the diversity of invertebrate species to mammals, birds, insects and plants.
- The creeks flowing out of the Whitefish Range provide some of the best bull trout spawning habitat in the region because of its colder water compared to Glacier Park streams.
- The North Fork River watershed is a significant refuge for genetically pure west slope cutthroat trout.
- The North Fork Flathead River Valley has some of the highest densities of grizzly bears in the lower 48 states and is key grizzly bear habitat.
- The North Fork Flathead Valley contains seven significant wetland complexes that

represent some of the least impacted wetlands in the Flathead River basin.

- Flathead County is one of the fastest growing counties in Montana and the Whitefish Range and North Fork Flathead River provide a wide range of front and back country recreational opportunities ranging from motorized to primitive wilderness experiences across all four seasons as well as substantial and long-term commercial recreation interests.
- Regional universities, along with the Glacier Institute located at the Big Creek Works Center, provide quality environmental education in cooperation with the Forest Service, other resource management agencies, public schools and families from across America.
- Large wild fire events have affected over 260,000 acres of the watershed since 2008.
- The Tuchuck Research Natural Area (RNA) provides reference habitat for a subalpine larch/subalpine fir habitat type.

---

**Approved by unanimous consensus of the Whitefish Range Partnership on 4/8/2013.**

**Drafted by Dave Hadden, edited by the committee as a whole.**