

# Case Studies

## **Blackfoot Challenge, Montana** **Madison Valley Ranchlands Group, Montana** **Centennial Valley, Montana** **Island Park, Idaho**

This section provides brief summaries of four case studies for collaboration in conservation. They range from a thirty-year effort; Montana’s Blackfoot Challenge, to a new effort in its initial stages in Island Park, Idaho. A common theme of the three established efforts is people coming together on a number of issues. For instance, the Blackfoot Challenge, Madison Valley Ranchlands Group and partners in the Centennial Valley all have a focus on weed control as well as land conservation.

The Blackfoot Valley is located in west-central Montana, while Montana’s Madison Valley and Centennial Valley and Idaho’s Island Park are located in the Greater Yellowstone Area.

### **Blackfoot Challenge, Montana**

Located in the Blackfoot River watershed of western Montana, with Ovando as its most central town, the Blackfoot Challenge began some thirty years ago and has evolved into a nationally recognized success story in collaborative resource management. Officially chartered in 1993, the Challenge is a partnership of landowners, public agency and non-governmental organization staff coordinating management of the Blackfoot River, its tributaries, and adjacent lands. It works to enhance, conserve, and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot Valley.



Source: [http://www.blackfootchallenge.org/am/uploads/blackfoot\\_challenge\\_2007\\_annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.blackfootchallenge.org/am/uploads/blackfoot_challenge_2007_annual_report.pdf)

Figure 4.1: Blackfoot Challenge Vicinity Map

The Blackfoot Challenge describes its mission as:

*“The Mission of the Blackfoot Challenge is to coordinate efforts that will enhance, conserve and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyles of the Blackfoot River Valley for present and future generations. We support environmentally responsible resource stewardship through cooperation of private and public interests. Private landowners, federal and state land managers, local government officials, and corporate landowners compose the informal membership. All share a common vision of how the Challenge operates in the Blackfoot watershed and believe that we can achieve success by building trust, partnerships, and working together.”*

The partners coordinate on weed management, landscape conservation, stream restoration, fish and wildlife habitat improvement, water conservation, reducing human-wildlife conflicts, community involvement, and education. The partnership can claim 89,000 acres of private lands under perpetual conservation easements. In fact, the partnership was instrumental in bringing conservation easement legislation to Montana, and the first conservation easement in the state was in the Blackfoot Valley. The Blackfoot Challenge uses a consensus-based approach. Relationships, trust, and credibility are key, and it takes time, effort and commitment to develop those relationships.

The remaining three case studies are located in the Greater Yellowstone Area:

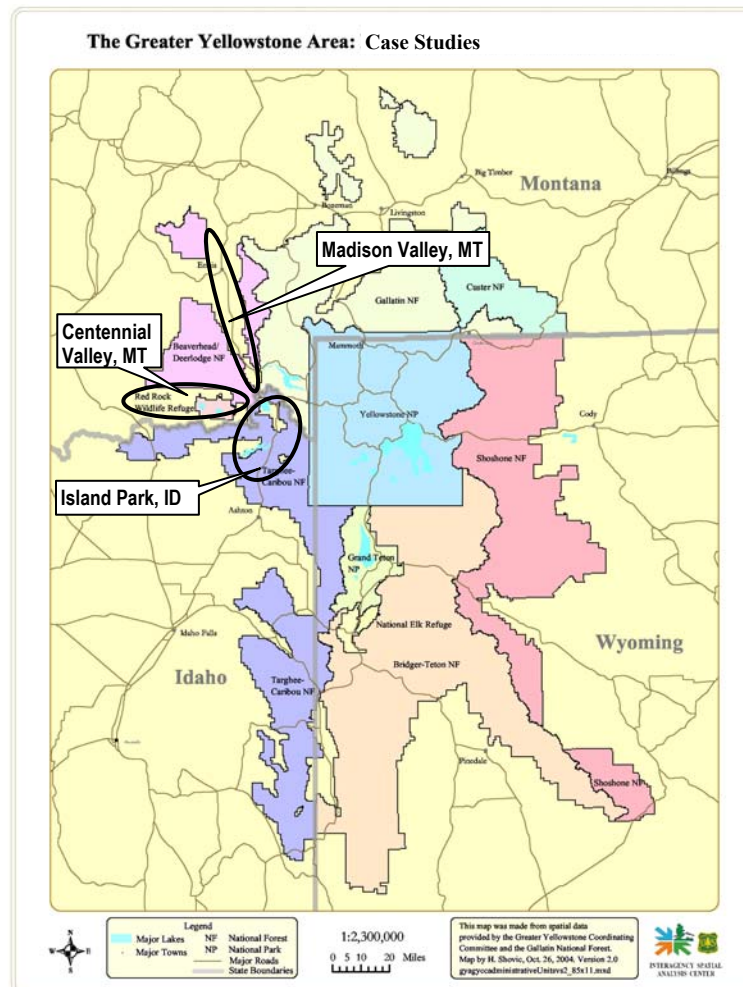


Figure 4.2: Greater Yellowstone Area Vicinity Map

## Madison Valley Ranchlands Group, Montana

Located in the southwestern Montana's Madison River Valley, with Ennis as its most central town, the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group (MVRG) works to "protect the ranching way of life and the biologically healthy open spaces on which ranching depends". MVRG's mission is:

*"The Madison Valley Ranchlands Group works to keep the ranching way of life in the Madison Valley Area. We accomplish this by developing ways to enhance the economic viability of family ranches; preserving traditional rural community and family ranch values; ensuring productive agriculture through the protection of private property rights and open space, as well as maintaining healthy grasslands, wildlife habitat, and watersheds; working cooperatively with groups, agencies, and individuals who share our goals and commitment to the land."*

The MVRG has committees organized around ecologically and economically sound land management practices, open space conservation, beef marketing, wildlife, and weeds. The Madison Valley Growth Solutions committee developed a *Growth Management Action Plan* for the Madison Valley and presented it to the Madison County Commissioners.

## Centennial Valley, Montana

Home to the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge just north of the Montana/Idaho border in southwestern Montana, the Centennial Valley was rated by the Montana Natural Heritage Program as one of the most significant natural landscapes in Montana, due to its intact ecological systems, expansive wetlands, diverse native fauna and flora, and unique concentrations of rare species. Landownership in the 385,000 acre valley is predominantly public land, with 285,000 acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Montana Department of Natural Resource Conservation. Some 90% of the remaining 100,000 privately owned acres on the valley floor is controlled by 15 ranches.



*Red Rock Lakes Refuge, USFWS photo*

The Centennial Valley does not have a chartered partnership such as the Blackfoot Challenge or the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group. However, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *Montana Partners in Wildlife Program* designated the Centennial Valley as a focus area. Partners such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Nature Conservancy and land trusts have focused efforts on land conservation in this remote valley. Partners have accomplished wetland, stream and riparian restoration, and over 20,000 acres in conservation easements. Former Red Rock Lakes Refuge Manager Mike Parker has noted the importance of finding common ground with local landowners, and cites weed control as a common objective.

## **Island Park, Idaho**

Partners in Island Park, Idaho are embarking on an open space conservation strategy for this ecologically important area. Partners include local land trusts, conservation organizations and federal and state agency staff.

The group has defined elements of a successful program as:

- Good data and information about resource values in the area;
- Clear set of mutually agreed priorities for conservation and protection;
- Strong public support or at least public acceptance for an open space conservation strategy;
- Recognition that development will occur and through smart growth planning, help steer development to the right places and in a manner that protects key habitat and other resource values;
- Political support at the local, state and federal level; and
- Partnerships between non-profits, federal and state agencies, individuals to help leverage resources and build support for open space conservation efforts.

The group is compiling resource data to determine critical resource areas, and will then identify priority target areas. The group then plans to develop a communication strategy to build support for open space conservation, build partnerships, and leverage resources to protect key areas.

Examples of the resource mapping include big game winter range, rare wildlife sites, wildlife migration, cut-throat trout habitat, wetlands and vegetation, as well as land status. Migration corridors and wetlands are shown below as examples.

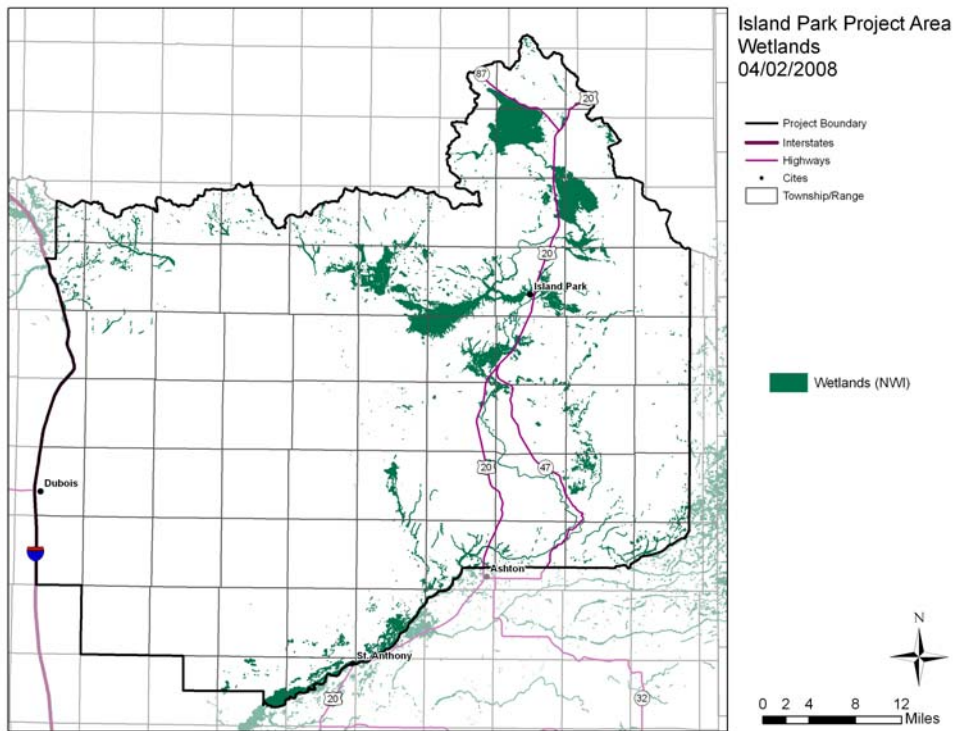
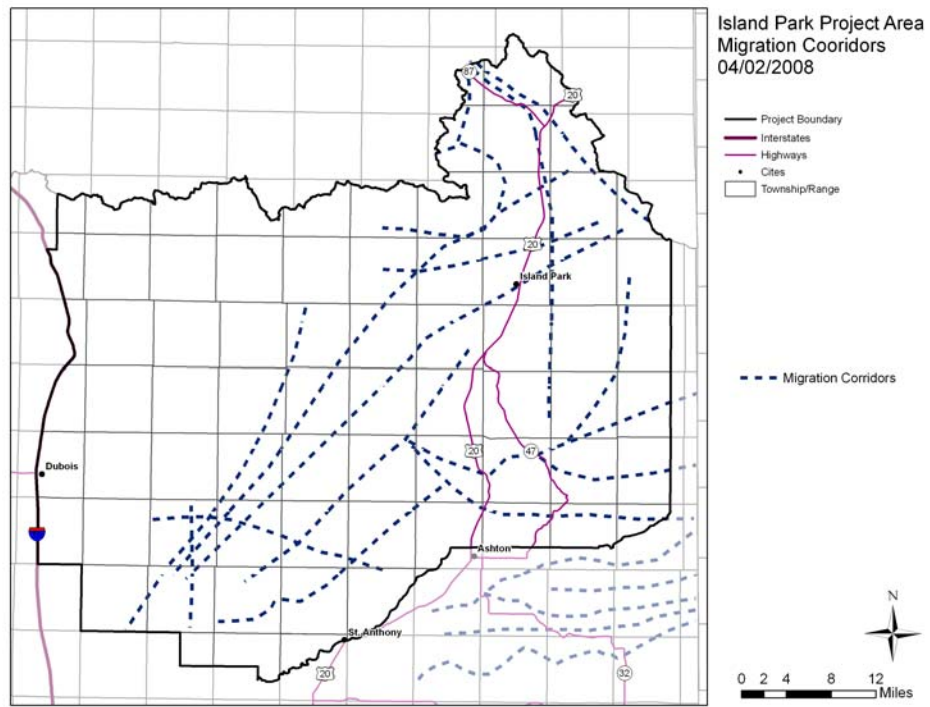


Figure 4.3: Island Park Project Area Migration Corridors and Wetlands Maps

## Sources

### *Blackfoot Challenge Case Study Sources*

Blackfoot Challenge Website: <http://www.blackfootchallenge.org/am/publish/index.php>

Coughlin, Chrissy. Undated. University of Michigan, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Ecosystem Management Initiative.

<http://www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt/pubs/crmp/blackfoot.PDF>

### *Madison Valley Ranchlands Groups Case Study Source*

Madison Valley Ranchlands Group Website: <http://www.madisonvalleyranchlands.org/>

### *Centennial Valley Montana Case Study Sources*

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife.

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/pfw/montana/mt3b.htm>

The Nature Conservancy.

<http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/montana/preserves/art15855.html>

Mike Parker Former Red Rock Lakes Refuge Manager, pers. communication April 2008.

### *Island Park, Idaho Case Study Source*

Timchak, Larry. USDA Forest Service, Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Unpublished.