

# Upper Kootenai Watershed Restoration Project

## Annual Report: FY 2002



Fall Colors on the Kootenai



US Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service  
Kootenai National Forest  
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## I. Partnership Overview

The Upper Kootenai subbasin is located in Northwestern Montana. The subbasin extends from the Canadian border south/ southwest to the Idaho border. The watershed has some of the most productive and biologically diverse forestlands in Montana. The Upper Kootenai subbasin includes many features that are unique and valued by people.

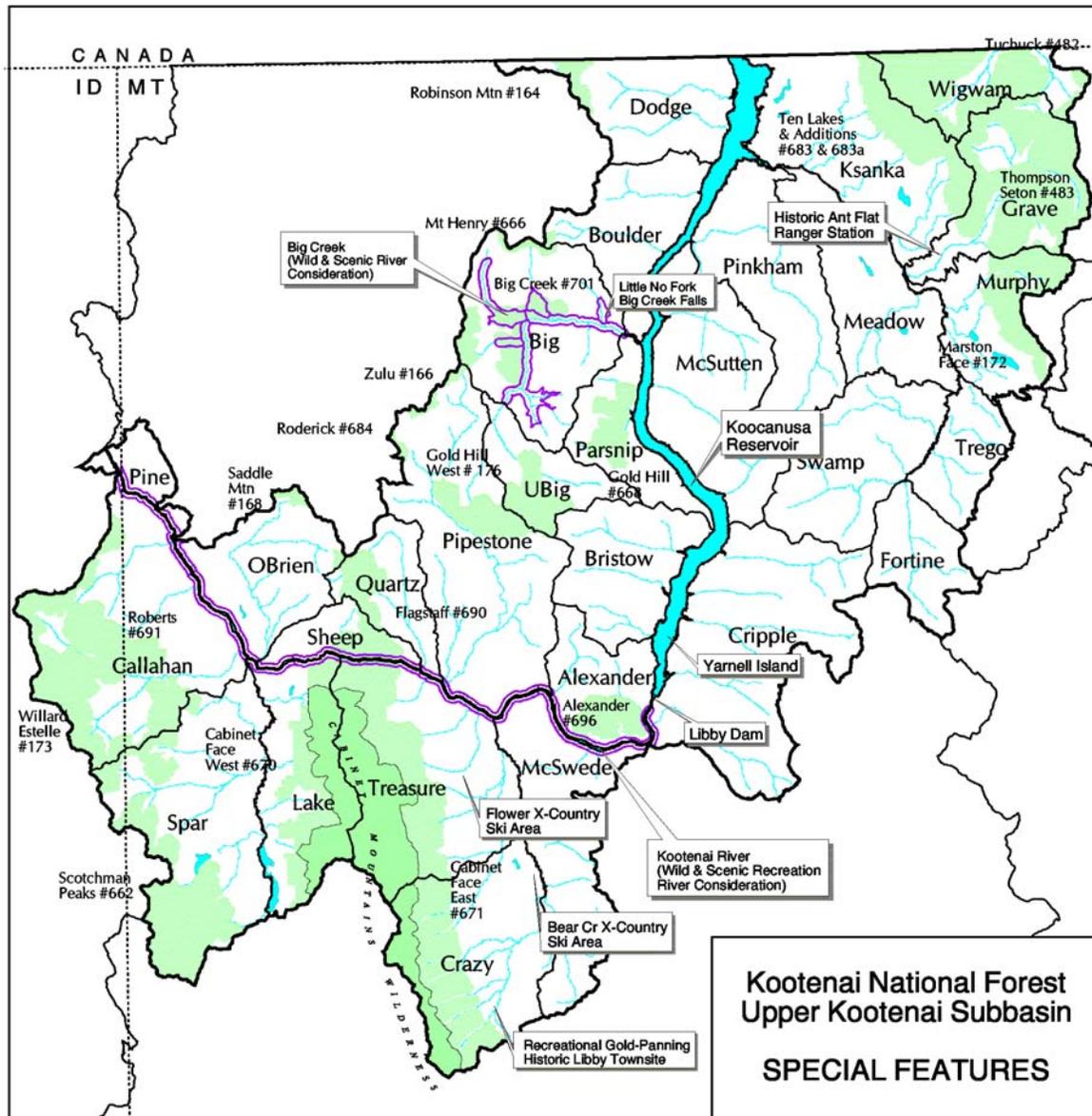


Figure 1. Upper Kootenai Subbasin Special Features

This is the third **year** of the Upper Kootenai Watershed Restoration project. This year the Forest took a big step in moving the project forward by completing the Upper Kootenai Subbasin Review. The Review identified restoration opportunities for the watershed on 1.4 million acres, which is 62 percent of the Kootenai National Forest.

This document is a blueprint for restoration that portrays opportunities which potential partners may be interested in. It depicts both risk and potential of the ecological components of the watershed. It will go far in enhancing our existing partnerships by illustrating the magnitude of restoration needs and focusing potential monies in areas with high priorities.

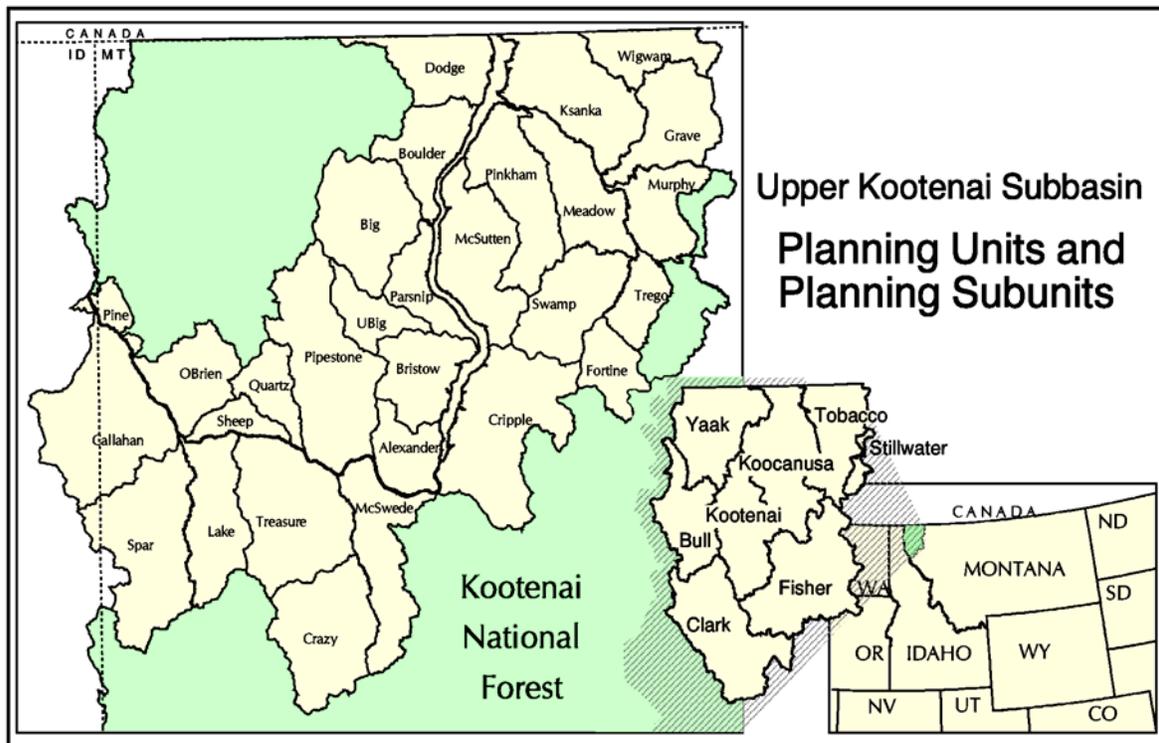
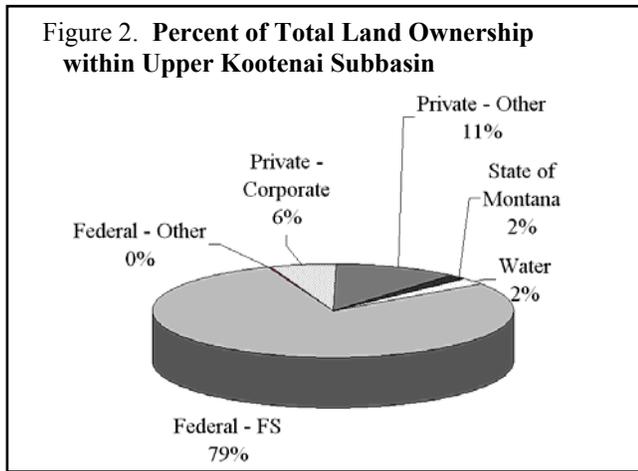


Figure 3. Upper Kootenai Subbasin Planning Units and Planning Subunits

## II. Partnership Goals

The mission statement for the Project is: *To protect, maintain and restore watershed health, and ecosystem condition through application of ecosystem management principles while providing for a range of uses, values, products and services.* This mission cannot be achieved without cooperation and development of strong working partnerships. The Forest will use the Upper Kootenai Review and Business Plan to start discussions with partners and communities to develop trust, commitment and financial support. The goal is to establish a coalition of partners to help us meet our mission.

### III. Accomplishments

1. In FY2001 the Upper Kootenai Subbasin Review was completed. The Review assessed resource status and condition as well as risks and opportunities, to provide context and priority for future restoration and enhancement projects. With the use of this Review several projects were accomplished.

Fish habitat surveys were completed on 52 miles of two key Bull trout streams. Also 26 in-channel structures were installed in Pipe Creek another key Bull trout and West Slope Cutthroat trout stream. In another project in key Bull trout habitat 1 mile of channel was restored and 13 acres stabilized.

Re-vegetation on three restored sites (4 acres) and 29 acres of abandoned road was accomplished along with monitoring of 94 acres of seeded re-vegetated areas.

Several riparian projects were accomplished within the Upper Kootenai subbasin. Riparian exclosure fencing was completed on 8 acres in Warland Creek. Also riparian planting was accomplished on 5.5 acres in several areas. Enhancement of Leopard frog habitat was accomplished on 1 acre plus several other sites.



*Glen Lake  
Irrigation  
District  
Diversion*

2. In FY2001 the GLID project (Glen Lake Irrigation District Diversion) replaced the dam with a series of rock weirs that restored the hydrological function of the channel. Also a sixty-foot self-cleaning screen was placed in front of the ditch head gate to keep fish out of the irrigation ditch. This past year, **FY2002** this project was extended, by stabilizing high erosive banks, building plunge pools and constructing in-channel structures, restoring one mile of Grave Creek below the old dam site.

The benefits to the fisheries resources within Grave Creek drainage are substantial. The project is expected to help restore the Tobacco Grave bull trout (endangered) metapopulation by improving habitat continuity and reducing the potential loss of several hundred bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. The project facilitates the GLID's exercise of its water rights with minimal risk to native fish.

The partners involved in the project are, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks; US Fish and Wildlife Service; GLID; American Fisheries Society; Kootenai River Network. The positive outcomes included a strong working relationship between the agencies and water users. Participation from the involved groups will continue during monitoring of the project. Future channel improvement works in the private downstream sections are ongoing because of the successful partnership built during the GLID Diversion improvement project.

3. In the Upper Kootenai watershed 1147 acres of big game habitat enhancement were accomplished with prescribe fire. Funds from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Libby Dam mitigation monies, through the State of Montana and Forest Service were used to fund these projects.

The Forest plans to continue the partnerships with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP) and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to restore and improve wildlife habitat. Currently an Environmental Assessment has been completed to treat 60,000 acres of habitat of which approximately 48,000 acres are within the Upper Kootenai watershed.

4. The Tobacco River Vegetation Restoration and Fuels treatment project was initiated in FY2001 and completed in 2002. The contract was awarded to do hazardous fuels abatement on 100 acres. This area is adjacent to a heavily used recreation area and close to the community of Rexford. The residence and community officials are pleased with the results of implementing this project. The work consisted of thinning the stand, using equipment to pile the slash and salvaging products such as firewood, post and poles. Another hazardous fuel reduction project in the subbasin treated 1235 acres.
5. Road restoration work to reduce sediment delivery to streams and enhance fish passage was accomplished through out the Upper Kootenai watershed. This work consisted of installing new culverts, replacing undersized culverts, surfacing, adding water deflectors and bringing roads up to State Best Management Practices (BMP) standards (91 miles). Surveying for future road BMP work (150 miles) and sediment source restoration work (8 miles) was also accomplished.

Another 119 miles of road was improved and brought up to BMP standards by the Forest's timber sale purchasers.

Decommissioning of 14 miles of road was accomplished.

6. Noxious weeds are a problem in the subbasin. They can dramatically alter the composition, structure and function of native plant communities. Noxious weeds can reduce biodiversity, change species interactions and forage availability and reduce the system's ability to buffer against changes. Current control efforts in the subbasin are aimed at eradicating new invaders and containing existing infestations. We have a partnership with the Lincoln County Weed Board, State of Montana and Plum Creek Timber Company to treat and monitor lands infested with noxious weeds. This year the Forest treated 3,505 acres with pesticides and biocontrols.



*Road Decommissioning*

7. In FY2002 one Snow Survey Site was maintained.

All these accomplishments were successfully completed with Large Scale Watershed, Trust Fund (KV, 10% Roads funds), appropriated fisheries, watershed, fuels, wildlife and timber monies as well as National Fire Plan (NFP) monies.

## IV. Challenges and Change

Management of the national forest tends to be controversial. These challenges have not varied from FY2001 to FY2002. Some of the general areas of controversy that we perceive may impact the Upper Kootenai Watershed Restoration Project are as follows:

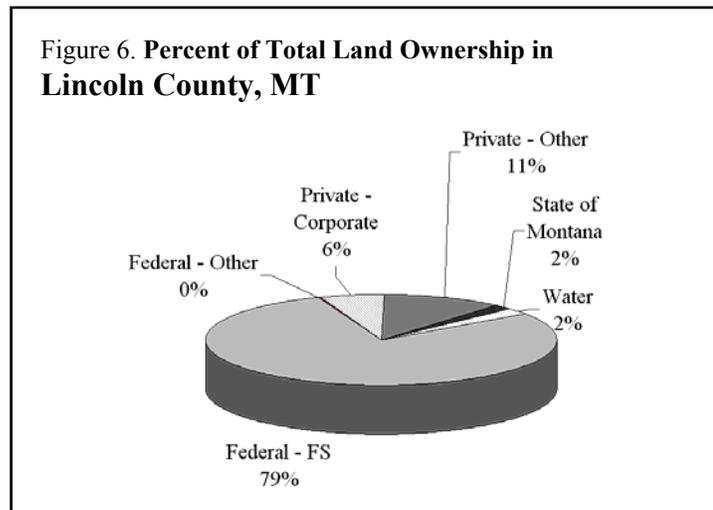


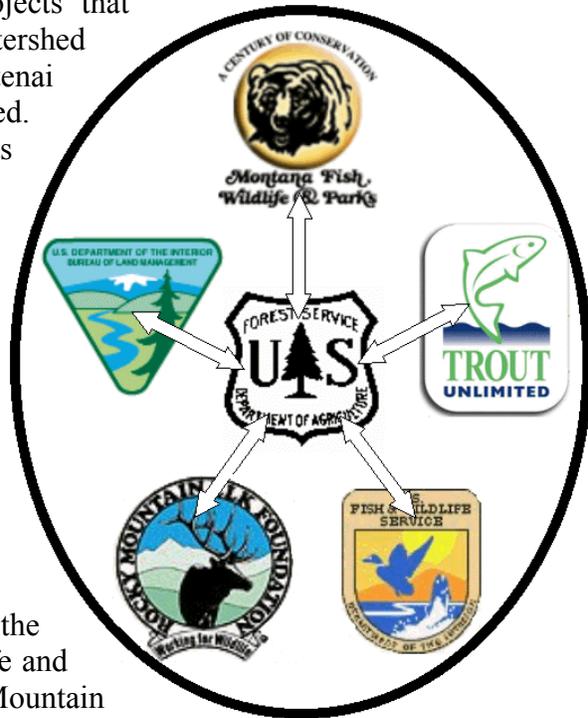
Figure 6. Percent of Total Land Ownership in Lincoln County

- Road Access –Stabilizing or removing damaging roads will create concerns by a large number of different interest groups.
- Timber Harvest Levels – The rural communities within the Upper Kootenai subbasin have historically been socially and economically dependant on timber harvest. Some of our customers would like timber harvest levels to be maintained or increased. Others perceive the forest may use restoration activities as a disguise or excuse for harvesting timber.
- Management of Roadless Areas – The conflict over management or roadless areas has been well established for several decades. There is increasing conflict with the concern over forest health and the desire to leave roadless areas unroaded. Managing these areas while retaining their roadless character will be difficult with potential for conflict.
- Economic Stability – Lincoln County has been plagued with double-digit unemployment for several decades. The county is highly dependent on management of the Kootenai National Forest. Some of our customers see restoration activities as having potential for providing local jobs and income. Others want to see management revert to “the way it was”, with much higher timber harvest volume levels. **It is highly likely that the only mill left in Libby will close. That would be a loss of 300 jobs.**

## V. Future Actions and Opportunities

Our capability to accomplish restoration in the Upper Kootenai Watershed is dependent on our ability to establish strong working partnerships with all our potential partners. With these partnerships more projects, which protect, maintain, enhance and restore watershed health can be achieved. Some of the future actions and opportunities are:

- One of the highlights of opportunities is our *Work in cooperation with both Lincoln and Sanders Counties to develop a partnership in developing restoration projects. The Forest would work with the county Resource Advisory Committee that is composed of 15 members representing community interests. This would be in conjunction with Public Law 106-393, Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act of 2000. The RAC group is up and functioning well. It has already financed work in recreation, road restoration, watershed restoration, fisheries and fuels for FY2003 to a level of \$600,000 which 90%+ is within the Upper Kootenai subbasin. They are in partnership on these projects with local water councils, local environmental groups (Yaak Valley Forest Council), several Montana State agencies, Trout Unlimited and local citizen groups.*
- There are numerous restoration projects that were identified in existing watershed assessments in the Upper Kootenai Project area that have not been funded. These projects will be accomplished as funding (Large-scale Watershed Project and other) becomes available.
- Continue to use Trust Fund (KV, 10% fund) from commercial restoration projects to finance watershed improvements associated with those projects. Use these funds to do stream restoration and improve road facilities to reduce impacts on watershed.
- Continue the partnerships with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP) and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to restore and improve wildlife habitat. This will be accomplished with the use of prescribed fire and some mechanical treatments. Currently an Environmental Assessment has been completed to treat 60,000 acres of habitat, 48,000 acres are within the Upper Kootenai subbasin.



- In accordance with the National Fire Plan (NFP), key point three, Hazardous Fuel Reduction; work with local governments and landowners to reduce risk of wildfire to communities. Continue to work with local governments in fire planning efforts.
- Continue to work with local landowners and homeowners associations to extend fuel reduction across private and Forest boundaries.
- Continue to develop *stewardship* projects like the ***Treasure Interface Project*** where, in essence, the Forest is trading commercial goods for restoration work. This project as well as another *stewardship* project were awarded in FY2002 and are being implemented. The local landowners and the Forest Service are cooperating to reduce the threat of wildfire to their property and Forestlands. This project will commercially thin 705 acres, where the product value will be traded for stream restoration work, noxious weed eradication, some non-commercial fuel reduction projects, aspen planting, ski trail extension, road improvements, recreational improvements, nesting platforms and boxes.
- Under NFP, key point two, rehabilitation and restoration, continue to restore the ecological processes associated with frequent, low intensity fire regimes on the drier vegetation types to reduce natural fuel loadings. Commercial treatments may be necessary to reduce fuels in some areas to achieve low intensity fires.
- Increase the scope of the invasive plant treatment program within the project area.

## VI. Partnership Budget/Cost

The Kootenai Forest spent 1.681 million dollars in the Upper Kootenai watershed in fiscal year 2002. It will use the Upper Kootenai Watershed Review, which was completed in FY2001, to help develop a coalition of partners to help with restoration in the watershed. Help will consist of using they're input for selecting areas and projects and also funding. The business plan for the Upper Kootenai will be used to help leverage these funds. The Forest is hiring a grant writer who will help facilitate this process. The Forest would like to see the percentage of funding from our partners increase from 7 percent to 10 percent in the near future.

It is difficult at best to put a value on these investments since the improvements are really cumulative over time. We do know that we are headed in the right direction, maintaining and improving the overall health of the Upper Kootenai watershed.

***\* Unfortunately due to several circumstances not all the monies designated to go for on the ground projects within the Upper Kootenai Watershed subbasin were diverted for other purposes. To help finance the fire suppression efforts of 2002, \$180,300 of the Large Scale Watershed monies (\$300,000) were used. Also another \$129,000 of NFP monies as well as a large sum of appropriate monies to be used in the subbasin was also needed to help pay the suppression bill. Another big drain on the monies designated for projects in the subbasin are the cost of litigation and appeals on all projects. It is highly unlikely the Forest will be paid back.***

## VII. Partnership Contacts

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