

# Flathead River Focus Watershed Coordinator

Annual Report 2005 - 2006

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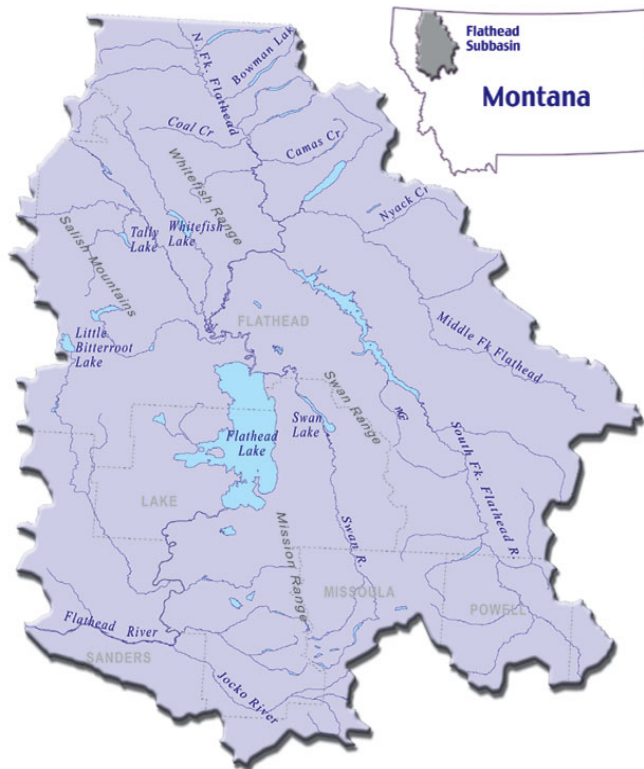
# Flathead River Focus Watershed Coordinator

Annual Report FY 2005

Project 1996-087-01

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by:

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Watershed Coordinator

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

May 2006

## INTRODUCTION

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) has long been involved with funding of the Cooperative Habitat Protection and Improvement with Private Landowners program in accordance with the Northwest Power Planning Council's (NPPC) Fish & Wildlife Program (Section 7.7). Section 7.7B.1 requires the establishment of "at least one model watershed coordinator selected by each representative state". This project was initiated in 1997 with the purpose of fulfilling the NWPPC's watershed program within the Flathead River basin in western Montana.

Currently, the Flathead watershed has been radically altered by hydropower and other land uses. With the construction of Hungry Horse, Bigfork and Kerr dams, the Flathead River system has been divided into isolated populations. Bull trout have been listed as threatened by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and westslope cutthroat trout have been petitioned for listing. Many streams in the drainage have been destabilized during recent decades. Past legal and illegal species introductions are also causing problems. This project fosters in-kind, out-of-place mitigation to offset the impacts of hydroelectric power to 72 miles of the South Fork of the Flathead River and its tributaries upstream of Hungry Horse Dam.

Key subbasins within the Flathead drainage, which are critical to native species restoration, are experiencing rapid changes in land ownership and management direction. Subdivision and residential development of agricultural and timber lands adjacent to waterways in the drainage pose one of the greatest threats to weak but recoverable stocks of trout species. Plum Creek Timber Company, a major landholder in the Flathead drainage is currently divesting itself of large tracts of its lakeshore and streamside holdings. Growth of small tract development throughout the area and its tributaries is occurring at a record rate. Immediate to short-term action is required to protect stream corridors through many of these areas if cost-effective recovery efforts are to be implemented.

In order to adequately address the issues, other segments of society and other (non-BPA) funding sources must be incorporated into the solution. As stated in the 1994 Fish and Wildlife Program (section 7.7), "Comprehensive watershed management should enhance and expedite implementation of actions by clearly identifying gaps in programs and knowledge, by striving over time to resolve conflicts, and by keying on activities that address priorities." A watershed coordinator helps to initiate and facilitate efforts for addressing the issues mentioned above and pulling together a plan for mitigation. Local support is essential before local governments and individual citizens are going to allow government initiatives to be implemented.

## **Summary of significant activities**

### **Objective 1: Continue to identify watershed entities**

No new entities have been created that I am aware of.

### **Objective 2: Enhance communication network**

I continue to participate in many local and regional meetings including meetings held by the Flathead Basin Commission (FBC), Critical Lands Working Group, USDA/Tribal coordination meetings, local groups, Tribal inter-disciplinary meetings, and Conservation District meetings. I continue to track the Ashley Creek and Stoner Creek watershed groups. I also am involved and continue to participate in the Kerr mitigation and Jocko River restoration and planning processes with private stakeholders, Tribal personnel, state and federal representatives.

I continue to work with private landowners, USFWS, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Plum Creek, the Tribes, FBC, etc. in the Dayton Creek drainage. We also continue to work with the Montana Water Trust to lease water for instream flows in Ronan Creek and lower Dayton Creek. MWT has recently completed a long lease with Delbert Hawkins to insure instream flows in Ronan Creek. Although efforts with the Meulis' has failed at this point, we are gearing up to work with the Carpenter family and the Bain family. Interdisciplinary efforts also continue in Valley Creek, DuCharme Creek, Post Creek, the Stillwater River and the Jocko River watersheds. Ashley Creek and Stoner Creek activities have not advanced significantly in terms of watershed group participation.

### **Objective 3: Establish watershed forum. Meet with landowners one-on-one.**

I continue to keep abreast of efforts in the Ashley Creek watershed. Although the group has been relatively inactive for over a year due to the resignation of their Chairman, restoration activities continue to be considered and submitted for funding. The Flathead Basin Commission completed phase 1 of the relocation of the streamside road with the assistance of grant dollars and the Flathead County Road Department.

I continue to work with project 9101901 and residents of the DuCharme/Moss/Centipede drainages. We also continue to pursue the long-term project of moving several in-channel ponds. We continue to work with other landowners in the watershed to coordinate restoration projects. Through sister project 200200300, we attempted to purchase the Walhood properties but were unable to negotiate an agreeable purchase price.

The Dayton Creek Watershed restoration project is active and we continue to identify and plan projects and work with private landowners and other agencies to implement restoration activities. I continue to work with the Montana Water Trust to expand their water right leasing program to insure an instream flow in Ronan Creek and lower Dayton Creek. With appropriate funding, additional landowners will be solicited for their interest in leasing irrigation water. We are also extremely close to negotiating an MOA with BPA to continue toward acquiring parcels in the drainage that are crucial to forwarding

our restoration goals. I continue to work with landowners in the Dayton Creek drainage on more of a one-on-one basis to implement conservation practices. Watershed meetings are scheduled on an as-needed basis.

I continued to work with private landowners, NRCS, Flathead Agency Irrigation Division and Tribal personnel in the Post Creek drainage. We are targeting individual landowners in selected areas of the watershed to determine interest in conservation measures. Potential projects include several riparian and wetland restoration/protection projects and the Mission B to C canal connection are near completion.

Landowner interest in participating in watershed improvements in the Valley Creek drainage is picking up momentum again. At this point, we are working with landowners and lessees on a one-on-one basis and restoration/protection efforts are gaining momentum. Future projects include the installation of riparian fencing and a pipeline to reduce irrigation withdrawals from Valley Creek. We are also working toward the installation of several fish screens on the North Fork of Valley Creek. Partners in the Valley Creek drainage include the USFWS, private landowners, NRCS and the local grazing association.

Workings with landowners in a group format and one-on-one has really helped identify limiting factors and problems within each drainage. It seems like an overall picture is developed in the group setting and becomes further pinpointed when visiting with landowners one-on-one on their property. The group setting has helped establish goals and objectives as well as recognize rules and regulations that must be considered.

#### **Objective 4: Cooperative implementation and funding**

We continue to work towards improving stream flows and stream habitat in the Dayton drainage with multiple landowners and agencies in the drainage. We continue to partner with the Montana Water Trust to purchase water rights in the Dayton Creek drainage. A long term agreement with Mr. Hawkins on Ronan Creek has recently been signed. BPA/CSKT will again provide cost share by assisting with the monitoring of stream flows. Due to a lack of personnel resources with Plum Creek, we are going to postpone the fencing work upstream of Lake Mary Ronan to exclude trespass cattle from a neighboring lease. The USFWS has also committed to cost sharing a livestock water well at the mouth of Dayton Creek through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. This project is on hold indefinitely due to water rights issues on the Reservation. Through sister project 200200300, we are working with Mr. Hawkins and Mr. Moran to acquire their parcels of land along Ronan and Dayton Creeks to protect them in perpetuity for fisheries habitat values. Mr. Carpenter has completed the installation of a headgate on his irrigation ditch allowing him to control the amount of stream flow that is captured by his canal. We are working with Lake County, a new landowner, and local residents in the drainage to remove a barrier to upstream fish passage and eliminate a substantial sediment source. This project will involve the removal of a private road and culvert. MFWP is also a vital partner in identifying and implementing projects in the Dayton Creek watershed. Landowner cost share is a vital part of all projects.

We continue to work in the DuCharme/Moss/Centipede Creek drainages. In cooperation with the Flathead Agency Irrigation Division, we continue to use the in-channel pond for

the purpose of capturing sediment still moving through the drainage from the previous irrigation canal failure. We are working with the landowner of the in-channel pond toward removing the pond and a potentially unnecessary stream crossing just upstream of the pond. I continue to work with the USFWS and one private landowner toward land acquisition and restoration in this drainage. We have received preliminary funding approval from the USFWS to assist with land acquisition activities in the drainage. We have signed a buy-sell agreement for the Belfield property which has a significant portion of Moss Creek within the property boundaries and a significant portion of hydric soils. Closing is scheduled for May.

Restoration efforts continue in the Post Creek drainage. Numerous landowners have been contacted this past year and I am working with several private landowners to continue project implementation. We have nearly completed the Mission B-C canal connection to improve the quality of Post Creek. Remaining tasks include the construction of the irrigation ditch through the Cable property, installation of several small turn out gates which are currently being constructed by the Tribal Safety of Dams Program and some road repair of the cooperating landowners. We also still need to complete the easement survey on Mr. Cable's property. We also continue to complete the implementation of the Pablo flume project. This project is being cost shared between a USFWS FRIMA grant, BPA, the Tribes, and the Flathead Agency Irrigation Division. A contract will soon be let to place the actual flume structure on the completed supports.

We continue to work with the Flathead Agency Irrigation Division and the USFWS to implement and cost share several fish screen projects in the Post Creek and Jocko River drainages under the FRIMA (Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act). The Kicking Horse Feeder Canal fish screen is up and running for irrigation season. The bypasses needed to complete the N Canal screen and Tabor Feeder screen have also been completed. N Canal and Tabor Feeder screens are scheduled to be up and running in the fall of this year. The Pablo flume has been fabricated and installation is scheduled for spring. These projects are cost shared between the USFWS, CSKT and the BIA Flathead Agency Irrigation Division. BPA costs include staff time. These projects will prevent native cutthroat and bull trout from being entrained in irrigation canals in these systems and in the case of the Pablo flume, improve water quality and lower stream temperatures in Post Creek. Additional fish screen projects have been submitted for funding to the USFWS and if funding is secured, will be coordinated for implementation this coming fall.

As mentioned above, landowner interest in the Valley Creek drainage is picking up momentum again. We continue to work to install a pipeline in an irrigation canal fed by Valley Creek to increase the efficiency in delivering irrigation water. The current irrigation canal leaks extreme amounts of water and we hope to reduce stream withdrawals by placing a portion of the ditch in a pipe. Water quality benefits will also be an advantage of this project. USFWS funds have been secured to provide cost share for this project. Other potential projects include the installation of two fish screens on irrigation canals near the confluence of North Valley and South Valley Creeks. We are also working with the Tribal Agricultural Program to eliminate livestock from a portion of North Valley Creek recently purchased by the Tribes. Potential cooperators in these

projects include private landowners, USDA through NRCS, FRIMA, the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and BPA (primarily staff time).

We completed the installation of the stock water well near the Jocko River. This project includes a well, stock tank and heater for the purposes of eliminating livestock on the Jocko River. Partners in this project include the Tribal Agricultural Program, NRCS and the USFWS. Cost share includes the leasee, the USFWS and CSKT Agricultural Program dollars. We completed approximately three miles of riparian fence along the Jocko River and the mainstem of Valley Creek within the boundaries of the Nicholson purchase. Several stock tanks were installed to allow livestock to access water without impacting the stream. Cost share includes NRCS and Tribal ARCO restoration dollars. BPA dollars will contribute in terms of personnel time.

I continue to work with the Flathead County Conservation District, Flathead Lakers, MFWP, Flathead County VoAg School, a private contractor and several other potential partners to do a stream stabilization project on the Stillwater River. This project will involve sloping back and stabilizing the banks, constructing a floodplain bank and revegetation. Funds for the restoration work are in place and the needed for the relocation of the barn has been identified and secured. The implementation of this project is scheduled for early May. Partners in this project include the Flathead Lakers, MFWP, Flathead County Vo-Ag School, Flathead High School, National Park Service, Critical Lands Working Group, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the Audubon Society.

#### **Objective 5: Project coordination**

This project has assisted in coordinating multiple projects this year (see objective 4). Project coordination includes grant writing, agency and landowner contacts, materials assessment, funding sources, ordering and purchasing, contracting, etc.

We continue to work with multiple agencies to assess the feasibility of increasing water storage in either Big Meadow or Lake Mary Ronan to supplement late season flows in lower Dayton Creek. Our relationship with the Montana Water Trust has been fruitful in recent months as they have been negotiating the leasing of water rights in the Dayton Creek drainage to insure instream flows throughout the year. If successful, this program will be implemented throughout the drainage in order to increase stream flows for fish.

I continue to participate in the Kerr and ARCO mitigation processes. These mitigation activities dovetail well with BPA mitigation activities and with potential BPA resident fish acquisition. Coordination includes prioritizing and guiding the land acquisition process for mitigation properties.

#### **Objective 8: Establish watershed monitoring & evaluation**

Cooperative monitoring is occurring in the DuCharme and Dayton drainages through project 9101901, MFWP, NRCS and Plum Creek on completed passive restoration projects. Additional monitoring in the Dayton Creek drainage is being coordinated between CSKT and MFWP Fisheries biologists. The Tribal Fisheries and Water Quality programs monitor Marsh Creek and Post Creek. The EPA funded non-point source coordinator will continue to monitoring and implement irrigation return flow issues and dairy farm issues in the Post Creek drainage. Monitoring plans for the Valley Creek

drainage are being developed as part of the Jocko River restoration process between Tribal wildlife, agriculture, and water administration, and fisheries programs and baseline data is being gathered.

The continual implementation of on the ground projects evaluates the success of the coordinator's efforts. Stakeholder cooperation and involvement is an essential element to project implementation and a direct gauge of a coordinator's efforts.