

# **North Shore Conservation Project**

*A special plan for a special place.*

## **The North Shore: A Special Place**

The North Shore of Flathead Lake is a special place. Here, nature provides amenities that are key to the Flathead Valley's future prosperity. Its waters and wildlife are priceless assets. Stretching over seven miles of lake shoreline and over 2,500 acres, from the Flathead River to Somers and from Highway 82 to the lake, the North Shore provides a rare combination of beautiful scenery, wetland habitat, abundant waterfowl, hunting opportunities and a federally protected Waterfowl Protection Area – right on the shores of spectacular Flathead Lake, the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi River.

### ***Why act now?***

One quarter of the North Shore's 1,600 acres of privately owned lands is proposed for imminent development. If that occurs, the opportunity to conserve this special place is lost forever.

### ***A Conservation Vision***

It is the vision of the North Shore Conservation Project to conserve this inspirational landscape that enriches life in the Flathead – a living landscape for future generations to enjoy and appreciate. Land owners, community members, organizations and agencies are working together to conserve the North Shore's special qualities. A special place deserves a special plan.

### ***Scenic Vistas***

The magnificent scenery provided by North Shore's panorama of open fields, Flathead Lake and mountain peaks enthalls longtime residents and visitors alike. The breathtaking views leave a lasting impression.

### ***A Bird Paradise***

The North Shore's unique combination of wetlands, lakeshore and farm fields is a magnet for birds. Bald eagles, osprey, owls, hawks, herons, ducks, geese, swan and shorebirds all use the area, often moving daily between the lake and various wetlands and fields. It is an important refueling stop for thousands of Central and Pacific Flyway migratory birds moving to nesting or wintering grounds.

### ***Clean Water Connections***

Flathead Lake's renowned water clarity depends on the quality of upstream land use practices. A green ribbon of vegetation, wetlands, and floodplains along the Flathead River and the North Shore help maintain our treasured lake quality. Flathead Lake will remain one of the world's cleanest large lakes only if these critical areas for water quality remain healthy.

### ***Prime Farm Land***

Land owners continue to farm the productive fields adjacent to the Flathead Waterfowl Production Area. The area has been recognized for its prime soils, some of the best in the state.

### ***Hunting Heritage***

Waterfowl hunting is an important part of the Flathead Valley's outdoor heritage. The North Shore is the single most heavily used public hunting area for waterfowl and upland game birds north of the lake. It is important both for hunting in the fall and nesting habitat in spring and summer.

### ***Natural Wealth***

The natural environment has become a competitive advantage and economic driver in the Flathead. The desirability of the Flathead Valley quality of life, which is exemplified in the North Shore's clean water, abundant wildlife and scenic beauty, is a key factor in the valley's economic prosperity. The University of Montana estimated that Flathead Lake alone contributes \$8-10 billion to the economy.

## **North Shore Conservation Solutions**

Many people think the North Shore is already protected from large-scale development. But even though part of the area is included in the Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area, over 1,200 acres of undeveloped farm land is at risk.

North Shore land owners are embracing a conservation vision for the North Shore and are working with partners to achieve a practical conservation strategy that sustains the North Shore's farming tradition, wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, hunting heritage and clean water.

### ***Conservation Goals***

- Securing funding to provide land owners with choices and incentives to help them conserve farm lands and open space.
- Protecting critical waterfowl and wildlife habitat.
- Restoring wetlands.
- Protecting water quality.
- Enhancing public access and maintaining traditional hunting opportunities.
- Purchasing land from willing land owners to provide new public recreational opportunities, such as trails, a park, and bird watching areas.
- Connecting local communities and augmenting economic vitality.

### ***Funding Assessment***

Project partners are pursuing funding opportunities to create a funding package for a cooperative conservation plan that will allow willing North Shore land owners to participate in the comprehensive North Shore conservation solution they help craft. The project has already received commitments from some funders and discussions with others are underway. The project:

- recently was awarded a Doris Duke Foundation grant;
- received a verbal commitment for U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service mitigation funds.

The project will be implemented in a phased, multiyear approach. At this stage, a rough estimate of costs for the entire project is approximately \$25 million. Funding opportunities include:

- federal funding programs (North American Wetland Conservation Act grant, Farm & Ranch Protection Program Grant, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Kerr Dam Mitigation, etc.);
- state funding programs (Habitat Montana, Duck Stamp Program, Access Montana, DNRC Land Banking Program, etc.);
- additional private funding (individual donations, foundations and corporations, conservation organizations, etc.).

### ***Landscape Connections***

North Shore conservation fits into a larger vision for protecting Flathead Valley's critical lands. In 2000, resource managers, scientists, conservationists and interested individuals came together to identify and protect or restore lands critical to protecting water quality in the Flathead watershed, initiating the collaborative *Critical Lands Project*. The primary focus area identified, the Flathead River corridor and the North Shore of Flathead Lake, later became the *River to Lake Initiative*. These projects have already resulted in protection of over 2,000 acres of critical wetlands, riparian areas and prime farm lands along the Flathead River. Over 20 agencies and organizations have participated in these efforts. In addition, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks Comprehensive Strategy identified the Flathead Valley as a focus area, with protection of riparian and wetland habitat as the primary conservation imperative.

### ***Project Urgency***

Flathead County is one of the three most rapidly developing counties in Montana. Development is threatening the North Shore, putting its irreplaceable amenities at risk. We have a short window of opportunity to conserve this priceless treasure. Once broken, we cannot put the pieces back together again. It is important to act now!

### ***North Shore Conservation Project Partners & Supporters***

North Shore land owners

Flathead Land Trust

Flathead Lakers

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

American Bird Conservancy

Trout Unlimited

Doris Duke Foundation

Flathead Basin Commission

The Nature Conservancy