

Montana's Important Bird Areas

The Important Bird Area Program (IBA) is a global initiative to establish a network of sites that are critical for sustaining our native birds. The concept is simple: identify areas that sustain healthy populations of key bird species, then focus attention on these sites through monitoring, education, outreach and conservation initiatives. Join Us!

IBA Overview

The long-term conservation of birds and their habitats is a major goal of Montana Audubon, and central to this goal is the Important Bird Areas Program. The IBA Program works around the world to identify and conserve key bird and wildlife habitats. Since 1995, the National Audubon Society has taken the lead in implementing the IBA Program in the US, and Montana Audubon administers the program here.



As a science-based conservation tool, an IBA can only be identified if sound data show the occurrence, in a given area, of (1) bird species of high conservation priority, (2) exceptionally high numbers of birds, or (3) a high diversity of bird species.



By focusing attention on areas that are especially important for birds, the IBA Program is a valuable tool for helping set conservation priorities. It works like this: identify and compile an inventory of areas that sustain healthy populations of birds (usually species of conservation concern), and then focus attention on these sites so that they can be conserved through acquisitions or easements, voluntary management agreements, or other protective measures (IBAs are not legally binding). Successful IBA conservation takes effort, ingenuity, and strategy from diverse volunteers and stakeholders.

Key Birds & Habitats

As of spring 2010, we have 39 identified IBAs in our state (see back). Important Bird Areas in Montana span the breadth of habitat types in the state--from lush cottonwood bottom-lands to intact sage-steppe areas to key staging or stop-over areas for migratory birds.

Riparian and Wetland

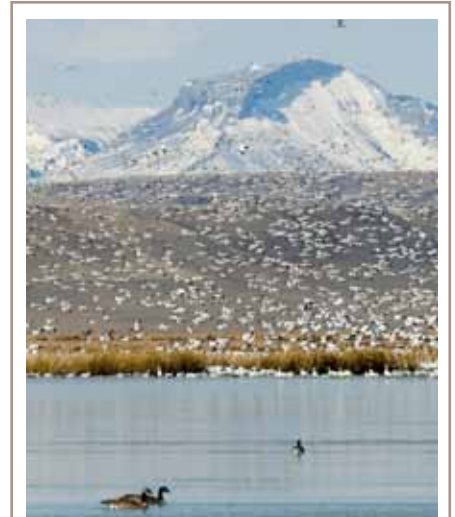
These habitats are < 4% of Montana's land area, yet are used by > 80% of our bird species! Many of our IBAs focus around these resilient, water-based habitats which are critical to birds and wildlife, especially as our climate warms. From the larger river system IBAs like the Madison, Bitterroot, and Clark Fork, to our key northern and western Montana wildlife refuges, we need to protect these IBAs.

Grassland

Across North America, grassland birds appear to be declining faster than any other group of birds. Montana supports critical grasslands that have not been tilled or developed, allowing for healthy populations of such species as Mountain Plovers, Long-billed Curlews, McCown's Longspurs, and Sprague's Pipits. Our North Valley Grasslands IBA is our preeminent grassland IBA, yet remains threatened from energy development.

Sage-brush Shrub-steppe

In the last few years we have identified 7 sage-steppe IBAs, totalling over 1 million acres, crucial to the long term persistence of the Greater Sage-Grouse and other sage-associated species. Tilling, poor grazing practices and development, especially energy development, are threats we seek to ameliorate through our IBA program.

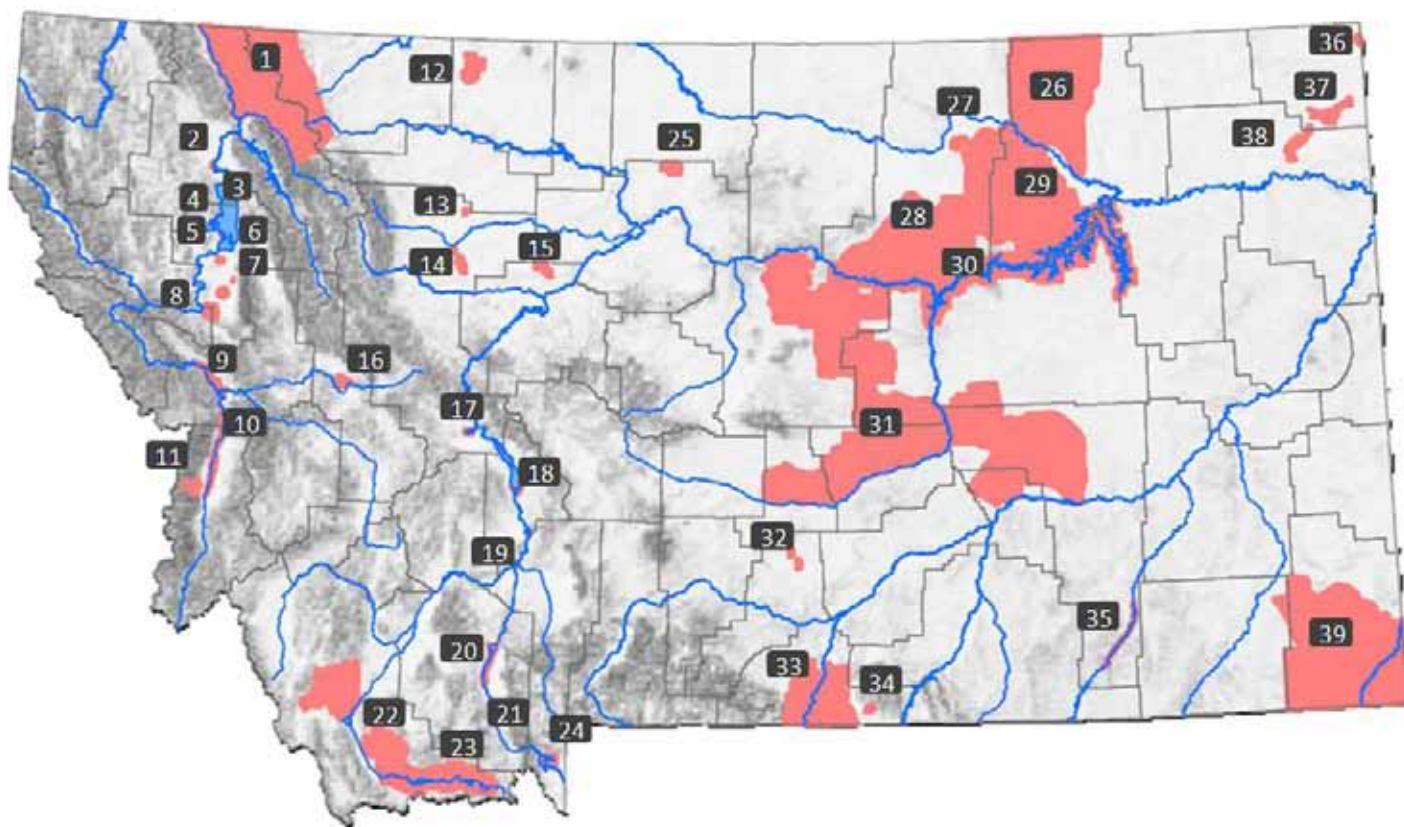


Freezout Lake (above) is a premier wetland/prairie complex. Thousands of waterfowl breed here, and hundreds of thousands congregate during migration. Counts of Snow and Ross's geese in early spring have exceeded 300,000 individuals! Colonies of Franklin's Gulls, Eared and Western Grebes nest on the main lake. Breeding shorebirds include Long-billed Curlews, Marbled Godwits, and Wilson's Phalaropes.

The Five Valleys Audubon Chapter has seen incredible success protecting the Clark Fork River IBA (below). It supports a high diversity of birds, including species of conservation priority like the Lewis's Woodpecker and Red-naped Sapsucker. Habitats include cottonwood gallery forests, riparian willows, wetlands, grasslands, woody draws, and agriculture lands.



Montana's 39 Important Bird Areas



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| 1. Glacier National Park | 14. Freezeout Lake | 27. Bowdoin Natl. Wildlife Refuge |
| 2. Owen Sowerine Natural Area | 15. Benton Lake Natl. Wildlife Refuge | 28. Glaciated Prairie Sage-steppe |
| 3. North Shore Flathead Lake | 16. Blackfoot Valley | 29. Little Beaver Creek |
| 4. Safe Harbor Marsh | 17. Lake Helena | 30. CMR & UL Bend N. W. Refuges |
| 5. Pablo Natl Wildlife Refuge | 18. Canyon Ferry WMA | 31. Mussellshell Sage-steppe |
| 6. Ronan Hawk Roost | 19. Missouri Headwaters State Park | 32. Halfbreed N. Wildlife Refuge |
| 7. Ninepipes NWR-WMA | 20. Madison Valley | 33. Bridger Sage-steppe |
| 8. National Bison Range | 21. Sun Ranch | 34. Bear Canyon |
| 9. Clark Fork River-Grass Valley | 22. Beaverhead Sage-steppe | 35. Tongue River |
| 10. Bitterroot River | 23. Red Rocks Natl. Wildlife Refuge | 36. Westby Prairie-Wetland Complex |
| 11. Blodgett Fire | 24. Hebgen Lake | 37. Medicine Lake N Wildlife Refuge |
| 12. Kevin Rim | 25. Lonesome Lake | 38. Manning Lake Wetland Complex |
| 13. Arod Lakes | 26. North Valley Grasslands | 39. Powder/Carbon Sage-steppe |

Learn More!

Subscribe to our E-newsletter:

We send out monthly electronic newsletter with updates on IBAs and other Montana Audubon initiatives.

To subscribe or learn more about what you can do, contact:

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Check out our website:

We have links to information on each IBA, including conservation priorities, maps, and more at mtaudubon.org: click on "Birds & Science" then "Important Bird Areas."

