

**The Madison Valley** is a place where wildlife is close at hand and a vital part of the landscape, enriching the lives of all who live and visit here. Montana Audubon, Sacajawea Audubon, and the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group have teamed up to focus attention on birds that use riparian cottonwoods and shrublands, associated wetlands, and Ennis Lake—all within the Madison Valley's Important Bird Area (IBA). We hope by sharing information about this valley's wildlife diversity and habitats, we can encourage conversation and conservation. Collaborative efforts are needed now more than ever—our wildlife habitats and open spaces are disappearing and those that remain are increasingly threatened. It's not too late to retain the natural amenities that make this valley special.

### Importance of Riparian Areas and Wetlands

These habitats are less than 4% of Montana's land area, yet are used by more than 80% of Montana's bird species during all or part of the year. Cottonwood riparian forests are especially critical as no other habitat in the West supports a higher diversity of breeding birds, and many species that breed elsewhere, use cottonwoods as stopover sites during migration.

Riparian and wetlands are also habitat types that are under threat from a variety of sources. For example, interruption of natural flooding regimes from dams can inhibit the recruitment of young cottonwoods, as can overgrazing by livestock, deer, and elk. Invasion of exotic trees and grasses that out compete cottonwood and other native seedlings can also be problematic in some areas.

Not surprisingly, riparian cottonwoods and wetlands have been identified as "Tier I" priority habitats by Montana Audubon and as "Community Types of Greatest Conservation Need" by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The high use of these habitats by birds, their natural scarcity, and the threats to their existence make riparian cottonwoods and wetlands critical components in the conservation of native birds in Montana and elsewhere in the West.

### Red-naped Sapsucker



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*There are over 40 pairs of Red-naped Sapsuckers breeding in the cottonwoods galleries along the Madison river.*

### Habitat within the Madison Valley IBA

includes riparian cottonwoods and willows along the Madison River, surrounded by shortgrass prairie. Small wetlands and riparian streams that feed into the main river are also present. Ennis Lake, at the northern end of the IBA, provides essential habitat.

### Surveys Find Important Birds

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. The Madison Valley has all three!

In the last decade, Montana Audubon staff and friends have conducted surveys in this valley, documenting the occurrence of 160 species of birds in the area, 70 of which are likely to breed in the riparian corridor. Moreover, we found 13 species of conservation priority (as defined by the *Partners in Flight* Bird Conservation Plan for Montana) nesting in the IBA, including six pairs of Bald Eagles, numerous Red-naped Sapsuckers, Willow Flycatchers, American Redstarts, and even a few Veerys.

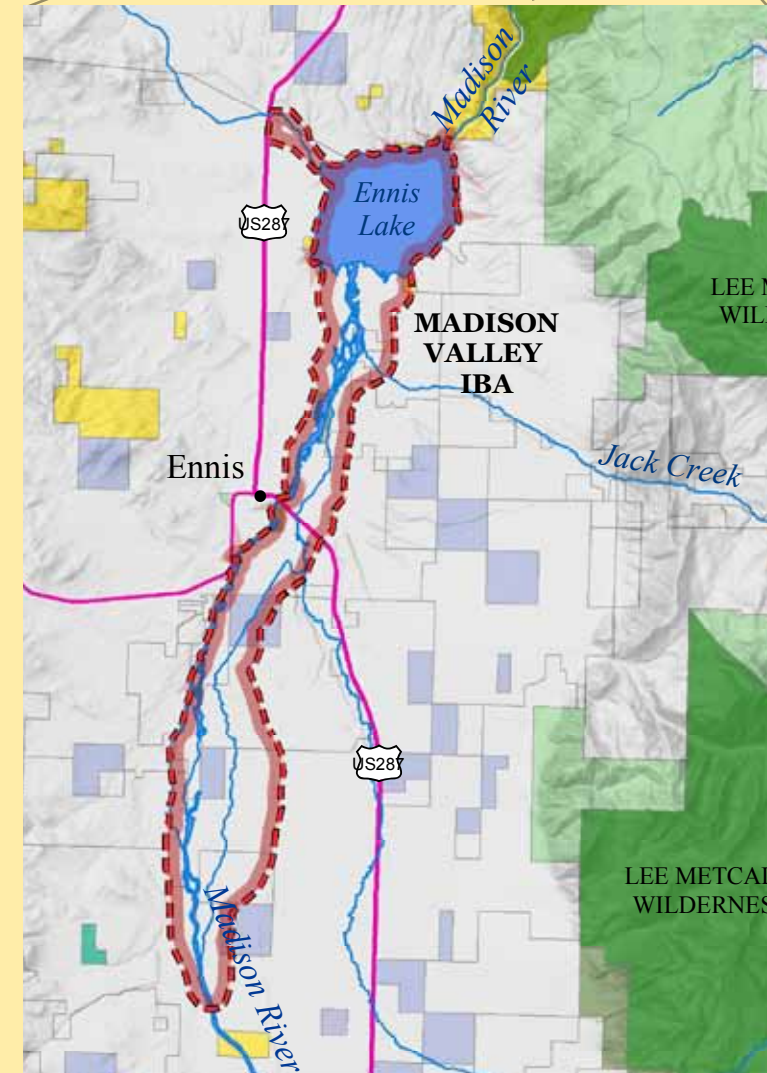
Surveys show that Ennis Lake is a major stopover site for migrating Common Loons and waterfowl. In the fall, over 20,000 ducks stop to refuel, including high numbers of American Wigeons and Redheads. American White Pelicans use the river and lake throughout the summer, and Red-breasted Mergansers and other waterfowl stop during spring migration.

We continue to collect monitoring data with the help of volunteers and the University of Montana's Avian Science Center.

The Madison Valley Important Bird Area west of Bozeman encompasses city, state, federal, and private lands including lands protected by conservation easements.



## Madison Valley IBA



**Willow Flycatcher**  
*Willow Flycatcher, a songbird of conservation concern, nests in dense patches of willow shrubs along the river.*

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**The Important Bird Area Program** is a global initiative to identify a network of sites that are critical for the conservation of birds. The concept is simple: identify areas that sustain healthy populations of birds—usually species of conservation concern—then focus attention on these sites to encourage conservation through habitat management, conservation easements, or other protective measures. IBAs are not legally binding and convey no regulatory authority. Informing landowners about various conservation options is an important part of the program. By bringing attention to areas with high value for birds, the IBA program can contribute significantly to wildlife protection over large areas. National Audubon Society implements the IBA program in the US; Montana Audubon directs the program in our state.

## The Mission of Montana Audubon

is to promote the appreciation, knowledge, and conservation of native birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. Founded in 1976, Montana Audubon has built effective programs in public policy, education, and bird conservation to serve its members and Montana's nine community-based Audubon Chapters. Visit [www.mtaudubon.org](http://www.mtaudubon.org), call 406.443.3949.

### Ferruginous Hawk

*A large bird of prey, these hawks are known to nest in the grasslands of the Madison Valley. They are also a species of concern owing to habitat loss.*



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### Contact Us

For more information about the Madison Valley IBA, contact Amy Cilimburg, Montana Audubon's Director of Bird Conservation 406.465.1141; [amy@mtaudubon.org](mailto:amy@mtaudubon.org). See [mtaudubon.org/birds/madison.html](http://mtaudubon.org/birds/madison.html). Write to us at PO Box 595, Helena, Montana, 59624

### Thanks!

This brochure was made possible through the generous support of the Bullitt Foundation. Creation of the IBA was a cooperative partnership among the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group, the Rio Tinto-BirdLife International Partnership Action Fund, Luzenac America, and Montana Audubon.



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### Conservation Efforts in the Valley

The Madison Valley IBA was approved as a State IBA in 2006. To date, our conservation efforts include talking with landowners and other stakeholders about the IBA and the importance of protecting the unique habitat qualities of the Madison Valley.

Almost all of the land within the IBA is privately owned, and the valley has experienced significant increases in housing developments that convert open space into subdivisions. Restoration, best management practices for grazing and conservation easements are just a few of the tools that can be used to conserve the IBA's finest features.

### Restoration in the Valley

Wetlands and small streams are recovering thanks to a fantastic collaboration of public and private efforts at O'dell Creek just south of Ennis in this IBA. And the birds are taking notice!

On the Granger Ranch, the landowner has overseen the closing of drainage canals and the restoration of an extensive spring fed stream and wetland complex. While there were a handful of breeding ducks prior to restoration, today the areas boasts over 70 breeding waterfowl pairs (at least 11 species) and the beginnings of a healthy riparian bird community, not to mention native fish. More information is at our website.

### Common Loon

*Ennis Lake is a major stopover for migrating Common Loons in fall. It is not unusual to see more than 200 loons on a good day in late October.*



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### What You Can Do:

- Volunteer with Montana Audubon to monitor this IBA (good birding is guaranteed!).
- Be a site partner: use this brochure and other materials to outreach to land owners, eco-tourism and related businesses, elected officials, teachers, and others with a stake in the valley.
- Work with the MV Ranchlands or other conservation groups in land protection efforts.
- Contribute financially (tax-deductible) to support our IBA monitoring and outreach efforts.



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### The Madison Valley Ranchlands Group

is a non-profit group of private citizens dedicated to protecting the ranching way of life, open space, and wildlife in the Madison Valley.

Visit [www.madisonvalleyranchlands.org](http://www.madisonvalleyranchlands.org) or call 406.682.3259.



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## Madison Valley Important Bird Area

*"IBAs have the unique power to unite people, communities, and organizations in proactive bird conservation, one place at a time."*

-- Frank Gill, Audubon

Montana Audubon

