

Some Bullets for Identifying Why Roadless Areas are Valuable to Fish

1. The timber industry itself admits roads harms fish. Core commitments in Plum Creek's proposed Habitat Conservation Plan for 17 native salmonids on its lands involve reducing sediment from roads and improving passage barriers, mainly road culverts. The company proposes enhancing its "BMPs," closing some roads, fixing "hot spots" (areas prone to catastrophic failure) and replacing culverts that are passage barriers. Other items being sold as "commitments" are some road closures and agreements with fish and wildlife agencies to reduce poaching. The company concludes these road-related items will have significant benefits to fish. In addition, the industry regularly cites its compliance with voluntary BMPs and mandatory streamside management regulations as examples of how committed it is to helping fish. These practices are devoted mainly to reducing sediment from roads.

2. Peer-reviewed scientific conclusions from the Interior Columbia EIS conclude that:

- Increasing road density and management intensity is correlated with declining pool frequency and increasing fine sediments. Thus roads are harming important elements of aquatic habitat.
- Increases in sedimentation are unavoidable even using the most cautious road methods. Thus, no roads is better than roads with BMPs.
- In streams in most unmanaged (ie., roadless) areas, pool habitat has been retained or improved during the last 55-60 years. Pool habitat is essential to all salmonids for overwinter habitat, thermal refugia and foraging areas. Sediment from roads fills pools.

· Roadless core areas with healthy aquatic habitat remain to serve as sources for restoring functional aquatic systems. That is, in order to rebuild important native fisheries, such as for westslope cutthroats or bull trout, we need to protect existing core areas then connect them by restoring corridors (in roaded country) to other core areas.

Specific Examples of How Roadless Country Has Been Important to Montana's Fisheries, Especially Critical Native Fisheries.

1. The South Fork of the Flathead has perhaps the state's strongest populations of bull and westslope cutthroat trout. Most of the watershed is roadless (mainly in the Bob Marshall Wilderness).

2. The Blackfoot drainage has some of the healthiest populations of fluvial bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout in Montana. The three most important spawning tributaries for bull trout are Monture Creek, the North Fork of the Blackfoot and the Landers Fork. Large portions of the upper parts of these watersheds, where most bull trout spawn are either roadless or in designated wilderness.

3. Rock Creek is one of the most popular wild trout fisheries in the state. More than half of its watershed is in roadless country. Biologists have found that most of the important spawning tributaries for fluvial and resident bull trout are in roadless areas (Stony Mtn., Quigg Peak, A-P additions, etc).

4. Some of the healthiest populations of westslope cutthroat and bull trout in the middle Clark Fork watershed (Milltown to Thompson Falls Reservoir) are found in headwater streams of Fish Creek. The best populations are in Cache Creek and the N. and W. Forks of Fish Creek. Most of their watersheds are in the Great Burn Roadless Areas.

5. The tributaries of the Bitterroot River with the best water quality and most robust fisheries (including the last bull trout) are found on the

public lands in the west side streams that are either in wilderness or roadless. The best on the east side are in the upper Skalkaho drainage (including Daly Creek) and upper Burnt Fork. Large portions of their upper watersheds are roadless. The tributaries with the worst water quality and habitat problems are the watersheds on the east side that have been developed.

6. The majority of the remaining pure-strain native westslope cutthroats in the upper Missouri drainage (about 144 tiny, very fragmented and at-risk) are in roadless areas including along the Rocky Mountain Front, upper Big Hole, Lima Peaks country and similar areas. The relationship is not coincidental.

7. Cutthroat and bull trout populations in NW Montana, especially those in the lower Clark Fork drainage, are, according to surveys conducted by FWP and the Washington Water Power Co., are in heavily roaded areas of the Cabinet and Bitterroot Ranges (see, portions of the Bull River drainage, Vermillion River, Elk Creek, Beaver Creek). Logging roads and logging have disrupted channel function, added sediment, increased temperature and reduced woody debris recruitment.

8. The most important tributary of the Smith River below Fort Logan (the floated stretch) is Deep Creek. It's cold, clean and regular flows are considered critical to the Smith, especially when mainstem flows get low. In addition, it's the only tributary recruiting cutthroats into the river. Much of the Deep Creek drainage is roadless.

9. Most of Montana's most famous free-stone trout streams have important parts of their headwaters in roadless conditions, including the Gallatin, the Madison, Yellowstone, Boulder, Big Hole, Rock Creek, etc. The relationship is not incidental. The least healthiest tributaries in terms of fishery production in these watersheds are generally those with significant roading and road-related development. For example, the West Fork of the Madison does not have a very robust trout fishery. One of its

acknowledged problems is sediment and bedload related. Much of the watershed is roaded (and grazed!). Look at the worst fisheries in major streams in Western Montana, and you'll find many have high road densities, including the Fisher River, Thompson River and Bull River. Though these streams have other problems, road related impacts have generally been acknowledged as prime culprits in fishery loss. It's not coincidental that they have large portions of private timber land.