

Wilderness in the Flathead

*Dave Hadden, Director
Headwaters Montana*

If you're lucky enough to live in the Flathead Valley, then thank your lucky stars for the abundance of two essential elements that make your life so rich: water and wilderness.



Source: Dave Hadden, 2010

*Dave Hadden on Challis Ridge
in British Columbia*

If water is the elixir of life, then wilderness is the crucible. For all things arise from the commingling of those two wild sources: pure water and wild, elemental Nature.

And if Montana is iconic of open spaces, then the Flathead Watershed plays the same role for wilderness in this Big Sky state.

Flathead Lake, the vast Flathead River system (the North, Middle, and South forks) and the mountains that encircle the valley like the arms of a loved one were once all untamed wilderness. Today, we remain extremely fortunate to retain a large proportion of that original wild country.

As citizens of the Flathead we safeguard iconic American wildernesses, like the Bob Marshall ("The Bob"), Mission Mountain, and Great Bear. Millions of Americans from across the country, and countless visitors from overseas have visited these special places to expand their minds and enrich their lives.

Millions more visit Glacier National Park every year. More people step off the paved road and venture down sunlit trails in Glacier than almost any other wilderness park in the United States.

Our ancestors protected these special places in their great wisdom. They did so in order that we might stay in touch with our wilderness roots, and to ensure the health and spirit of the American People. Wilderness formed the American character just as surely as the glaciers carved the high peaks that surround us.

What do you cherish about this place? Catching a westslope cutthroat trout in a wild creek or river? Do you enjoy the clean water you drink? Does Flathead Lake's water clarity and coolness in summer mean anything to you? Do you horse pack or hunt in The Bob? Or backpack or day hike in the Jewel Basin or Missions? Do you thrill at knowing that grizzly bears still roam in their wilderness home? Huckleberries please everyone!

Next time you're out hiking a mountain trail, or even taking a cool drink of clean water, remember... wilderness makes it all possible.

Join one of the organizations in the Flathead Valley that promotes the protection of wild country, wild rivers and wildlife. Citizens today still have work to do to protect more of our wilderness heritage for the future. Wilderness is the Flathead way of life!

- *Headwaters Montana*
(www.headwatersmontana.org)
- *National Parks Conservation Association*
(www.npca.org)
- *Montana Wilderness Association*
(www.wildmontana.org)
- *The Bob Marshall Foundation*
(www.bmwf.org)
- *Trout Unlimited*
(www.flatheadtu.org)