

# Montana's Important Bird Areas

The Important Bird Area (IBA) Program 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 conservation of birds and their habitats across the state 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. The National

Audubon Society implements the IBA program in the US, and Montana Audubon spearheads this program here.

As a science-based conservation tool, an IBA can only be designated 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 IBA Program is a valuable tool for helping set conservation priorities. It works like this: identify 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 2011, we have 40 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 work 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.

### Sagebrush Shrubsteppe

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



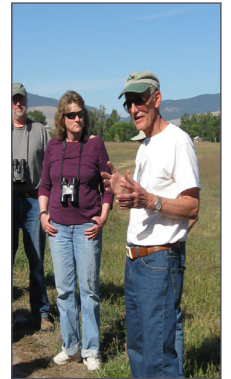
ameliorate by working with our partners to protect core areas. Citizen scientists can help via our new Adopt-a-Lek program.



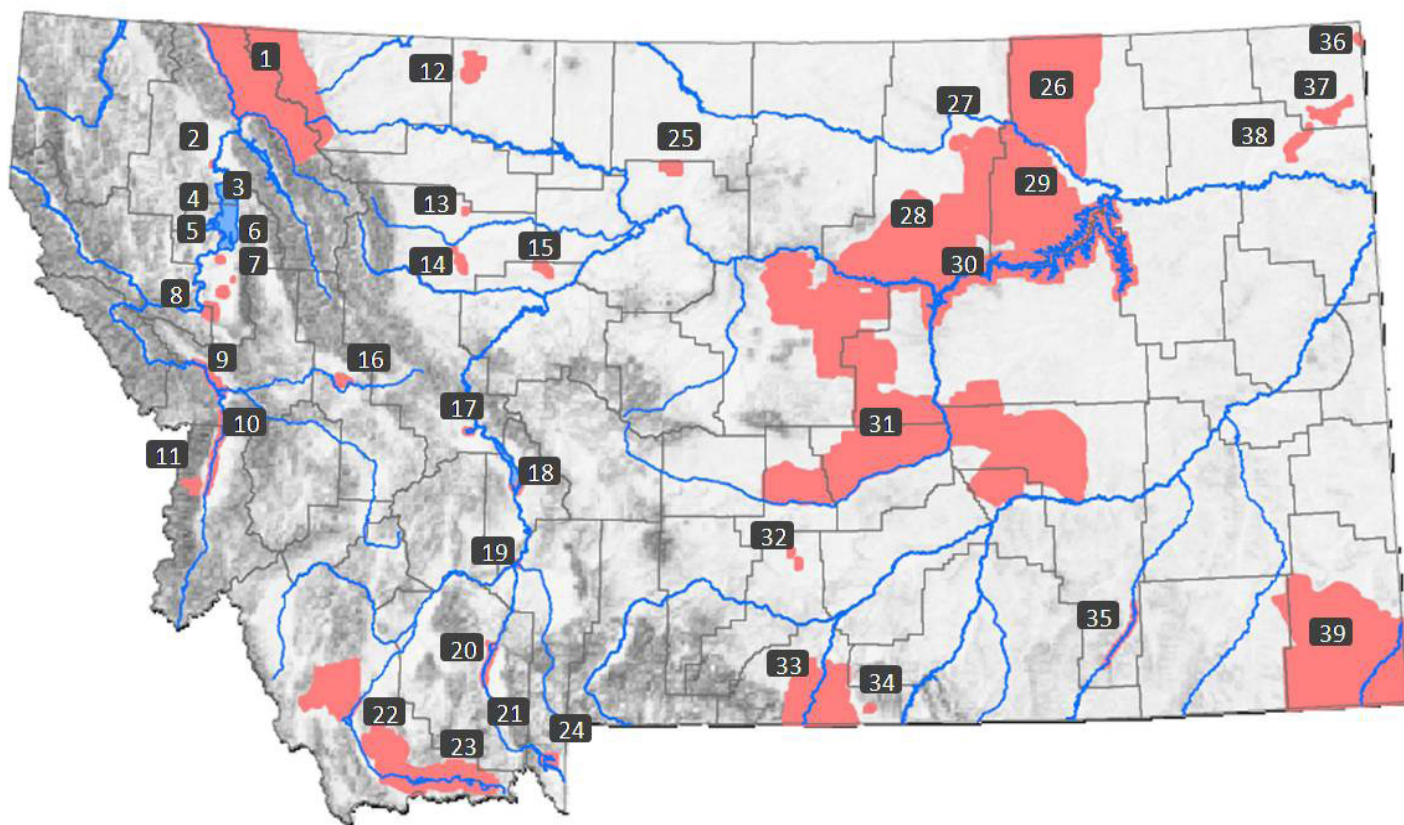
Freezout Lake (above) is a premier wetland/prairie complex. Thousands of waterfowl breed here, and hundreds of thousands congregate during migration. Counts of Snow and Ross's geese in early spring have exceeded 300,000 individuals! Colonies of Franklin's Gulls, and Eared and Western Grebes nest on the 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-Grass Valley IBA. 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.

Jim Brown (right) shares ideas about the value of this IBA.



# Montana's 40 Important Bird Areas



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|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Glacier National Park         | 15. Benton Lake Natl. Wildlife Refuge | 29. Little Beaver Creek                     |
| 2. Owen Sowerine Natural Area    | 16. Blackfoot Valley                  | 30. CMR & UL Bend N. W. Refuges             |
| 3. North Shore Flathead Lake     | 17. Lake Helena                       | 31. Mussellshell Sage-steppe                |
| 4. Safe Harbor Marsh             | 18. Canyon Ferry WMA                  | 32. Halfbreed N. Wildlife Refuge            |
| 5. Pablo Natl. Wildlife Refuge   | 19. Missouri Headwaters State Park    | 33. Bridger Sage-steppe                     |
| 6. Ronan Hawk Roost              | 20. Madison Valley                    | 34. Bear Canyon                             |
| 7. Ninepipes N.W Refuge - WMA    | 21. Sun Ranch                         | 35. Tongue River                            |
| 8. National Bison Range          | 22. Beaverhead Sage-steppe            | 36. Westby Prairie-Wetland Complex          |
| 9. Clark Fork River-Grass Valley | 23. Red Rocks Natl. Wildlife Refuge   | 37. Medicine Lake N Wildlife Refuge         |
| 10. Bitterroot River             | 24. Hebgen Lake                       | 38. Manning Lake Wetland Complex            |
| 11. Blodgett Fire                | 25. Lonesome Lake                     | 39. Powder/Carbon Sage-steppe               |
| 12. Kevin Rim                    | 26. North Valley Grasslands           | 40. Harrison Reservoir ( <i>not shown</i> ) |
| 13. Arod Lakes                   | 27. Bowdoin Natl. Wildlife Refuge     |   |
| 14. Freezeout Lake               | 28. Glaciated Prairie Sage-steppe     |   |

## Learn More!

### Subscribe to our E-newsletter:

We send out a 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, priority bird species, maps, Google Earth layers, and more at [mtaudubon.org](http://mtaudubon.org): click on "Birds & Science" then "Important Bird Areas."

Also on the web: how you can help as a **citizen scientist**.

