



U.S. Department of the Interior



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Press Releases

Interior Announces Access to 13,000 Acres Near Montana's Lower Blackfoot River

Acquisition increases public land access available for recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, mountain biking and snowmobiling.

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Washington - Today, the Department of the Interior announced thousands of acres rich in recreation opportunities in the Lower Blackfoot River corridor will open to the public following the signing of a decision record yesterday by Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Nature Conservancy officials. The decision follows the publication of an Environmental Assessment and comment period that closed June 27, evaluating the impacts of acquiring the 13,000 acres of private land.

The new acreage is adjacent to BLM-managed lands within the Lower Blackfoot River-Belmont Creek area 25 miles northeast of Missoula. The lands would be acquired in phases using Sportsman's Access funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This year's allocation of \$5.6 million will allow the BLM to acquire approximately 7,300 of the 13,000 acres by late fall of this year. The funds are derived from development of oil and gas beneath the Outer Continental Shelf as managed by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

"The decision announced today improves and expands recreation access along Montana's iconic Lower Blackfoot River area," **said U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt**. "It also exemplifies the Bureau of Land Management's multiple-use mission by maintaining working lands with active forestry and fire-management projects that will also reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires and improve the health of the forest, consistent with the goals of Executive Order 13855,"

"Expanding access to public lands for outdoor recreation is one of this administration's highest priorities, and these acquisitions will make an enormous difference for all Americans who want to experience the beauty of the Blackfoot River and its watershed," **said BLM's Deputy Director for Policy and Programs William Perry Pendley**.

Missoula Field Manager Joe Ashor said he and his team are grateful to local nonprofit organizations that played a big role in securing a portion of the funds that made the acquisition possible. "We greatly appreciate the overwhelming support we have received on this acquisition from local landowners and sportsmen's groups as well as key partners such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation; Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; the Blackfoot Challenge; and the Missoula County county commissioners."

Ashor noted that recreational use is increasing in this area due to its proximity to the rapidly growing Missoula Valley. The proposed land acquisition increases the amount of public lands available for recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, mountain biking and snowmobiling. Existing grazing permits held by The Nature Conservancy would also be allowed to continue. The area is included in the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Block Management Program as well as the very popular hunting District 283.

The 13,000 acres the BLM is acquiring from The Nature Conservancy is part of a larger Clearwater-Blackfoot proposal to eventually acquire a total of 40,000 acres in the upper Belmont and Gold Creek drainages.

Made famous by Norman Maclean's classic story collection, "A River Runs Through It," the Lower Blackfoot winds its way through the mountains and Potomac Valley outside of Missoula. The Blackfoot River's waters are cold and fast with many deep spots, which makes it an ideal habitat for several trout species. The river is also a destination for many floaters, and excellent big game hunting opportunities abound in the area.

For more information, contact the Missoula Field Office at (406) 329-3914.