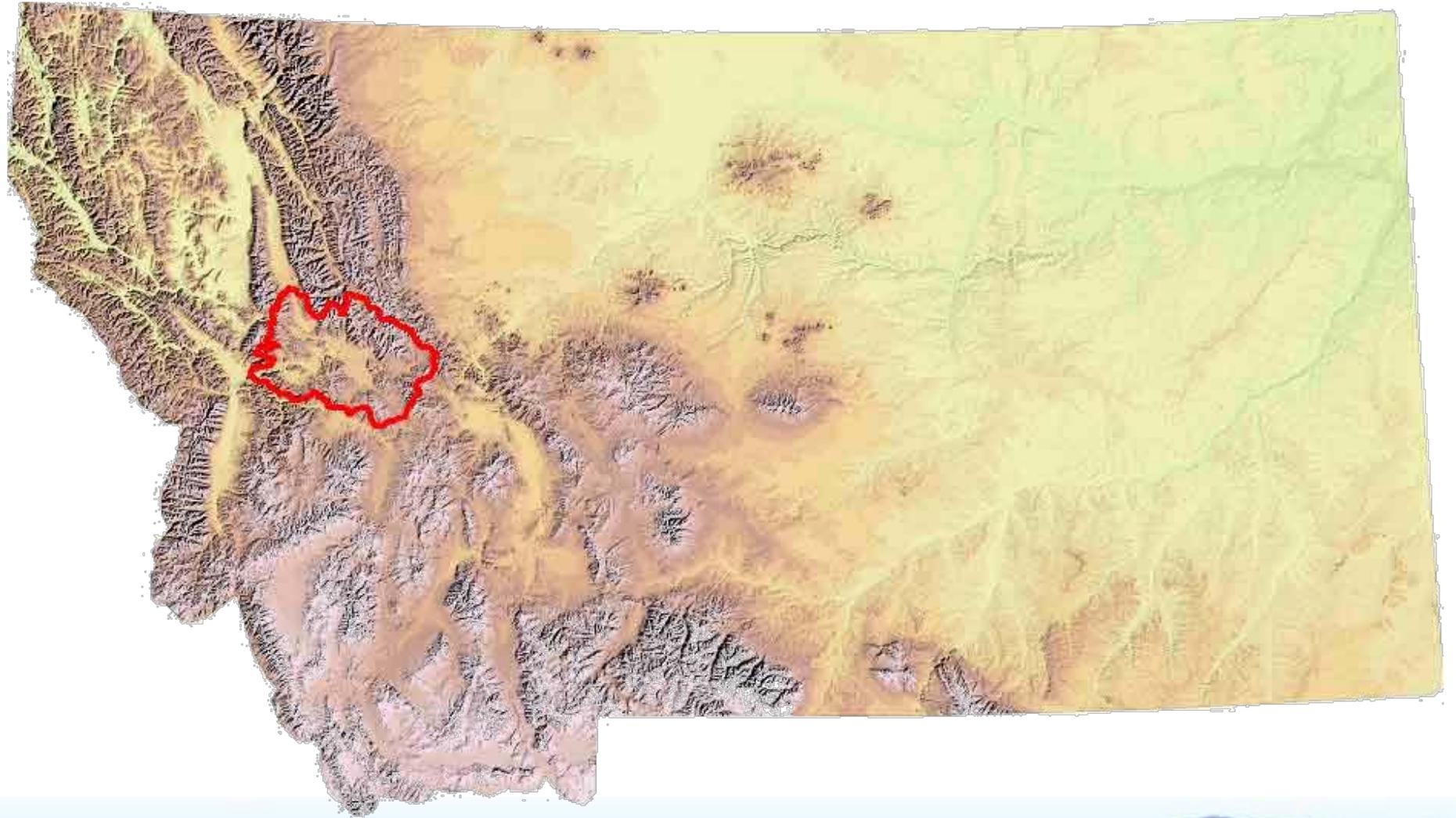




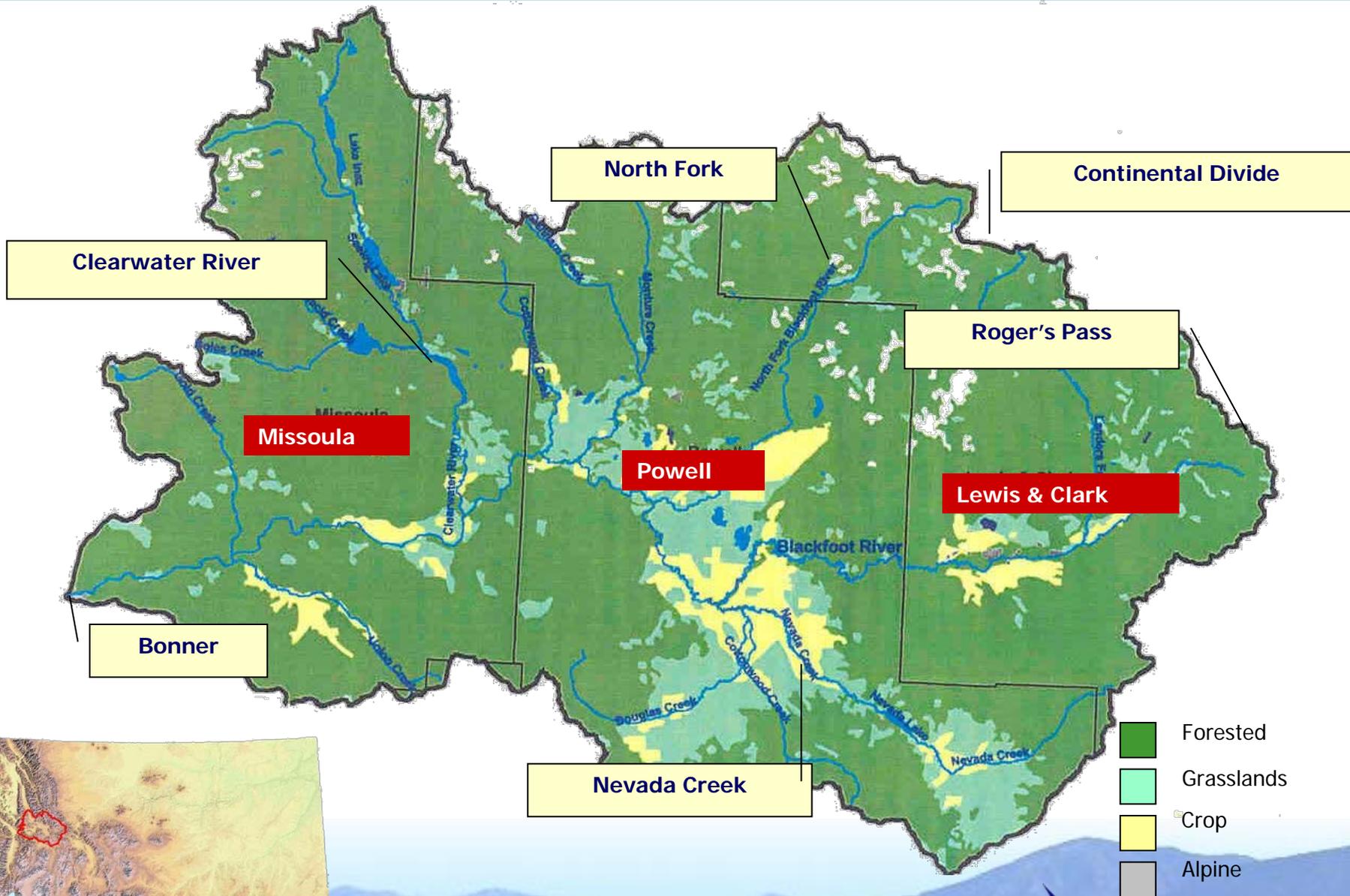
# ***BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE***

## **Drought Response Plan**

# Blackfoot Watershed



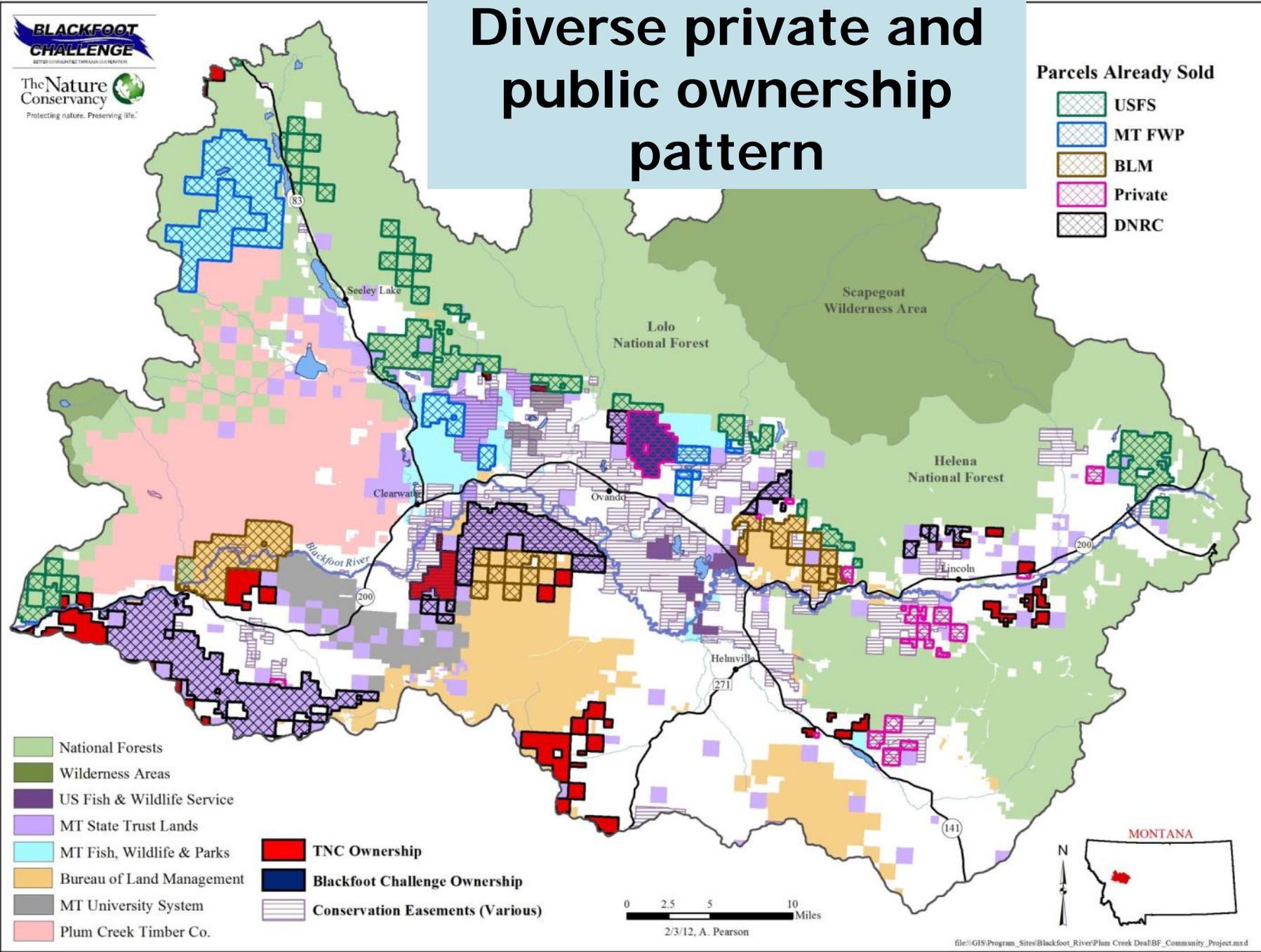
# Blackfoot Watershed ~ 1.5 million acres



# Diverse private and public ownership pattern

## Parcels Already Sold

-  USFS
-  MT FWP
-  BLM
-  Private
-  DNRC



 Supported by an abundance of natural resources



# All the wildlife Meriwether Lewis might have seen in 1804



# 1970s – Shared access to the Blackfoot River and private land through partnership of landowners and MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks



# 1971 – The Murphy Right





# 1992 – Blackfoot River listed as one of the 10 most endangered rivers in the United States



# 1992 – Community meetings held in response

1993 – Formation of the Blackfoot Challenge

Mission: Coordinate efforts to conserve and enhance the natural resources and rural way of life in the Blackfoot Watershed for present and future generations.



# Blackfoot Challenge Board and Partners

- Private and public stakeholders
  - Private Landowners
  - Business Owners
  - Conservation Groups
  - State Agencies
  - Federal Agencies
- Work first on the 80% in common
- Develop trust
- Create durable solutions
- Support with good science





# What enables us to be successful?

## **Inclusive, consensus-based process**

- We accomplish more by involving all stakeholders in finding consensus and implementing solutions on the ground.
- Solutions are sustainable when they come from the communities – from the ground up not top down.
- Trust builds when partners work together.





# Our Approach

We are directed through committees and working groups of community members.

Their voluntary efforts help identify community and resource concerns to which we can respond.

These committees continue to evolve along with the needs of the watershed.

- **Weeds** - A holistic approach to controlling invasive and noxious weeds
- **Education** - Reaching all ages through place-based education
- **Water** - Balancing water needs and availability through shared sacrifice and water conservation
- **Wildlife** - Reducing human-wildlife conflict using preventative and proactive abatement strategies
- **Conservation Strategies** - Intact working landscapes by coordinating land conservation and stewardship
- **Forestry** - Working to make forests healthier and communities safer from wildfire
- **Outreach** – Generating participation, sharing information and transferring lessons learned

# Late 1980s – First drought following new in-stream flow right



Blackfoot River  
at 667 cfs

# 2000 - Blackfoot Drought Committee forms



Committee includes landowners & irrigators, state & federal agencies, conservation groups, outfitters & recreation interests, community members. Open to any interested parties.

# Drought Response Plan Developed



Plan based on the concept of “shared sacrifice.”

- All users voluntarily agree to take actions that will result in water savings and/or the reduction of stress to fisheries resources during critical low flow periods.
- Alternative to traditional enforcement of the Murphy Right.

# Committee Logistics

- Drought committee meets monthly January – May; weekly meetings begin in June or July and continue through September.
- Committee (coordinated by Blackfoot Challenge staff) maintains rosters of participants, tracks individual drought management plans, tracks water conserved and recruits new participants.
- Committee (coordinator) manages outreach / announcements to participants and public about the plan.
  - Mailings / response cards
  - Phone calls
  - Email alerts
  - Announcements in local media



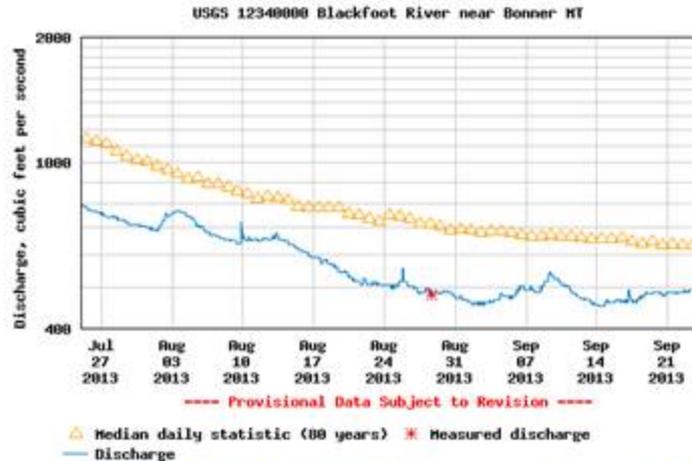
***Blackfoot irrigators with drought plans: 90***  
***Without plans but receiving alerts: 40***

# Science-based Information

The Blackfoot Drought Committee receives up-to-date reports from Montana FWP and Montana DNRC on water conditions. These reports are used at each meeting to help steer decision-making.

## Discharge, cubic feet per second

Most recent instantaneous value: 493 09-23-2013 09:45 MDT



Create [presentation-quality](#) / [stand-alone](#) graph. Subscribe to [WaterAlert](#)

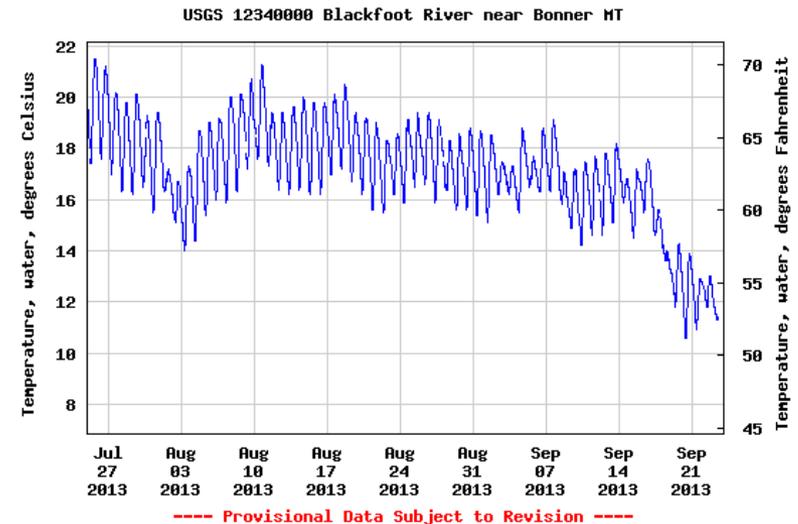
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Daily discharge, cubic feet per second -- statistics for Sep 23 based on 80 years of record [more](#)

Min (1905)	Most Recent Instantaneous Value Sep 23	25th percent - tile	Median	Mean	75th percent - tile	Max (1965)
365	493	524	635	652	754	1230

## Temperature, water, degrees Celsius

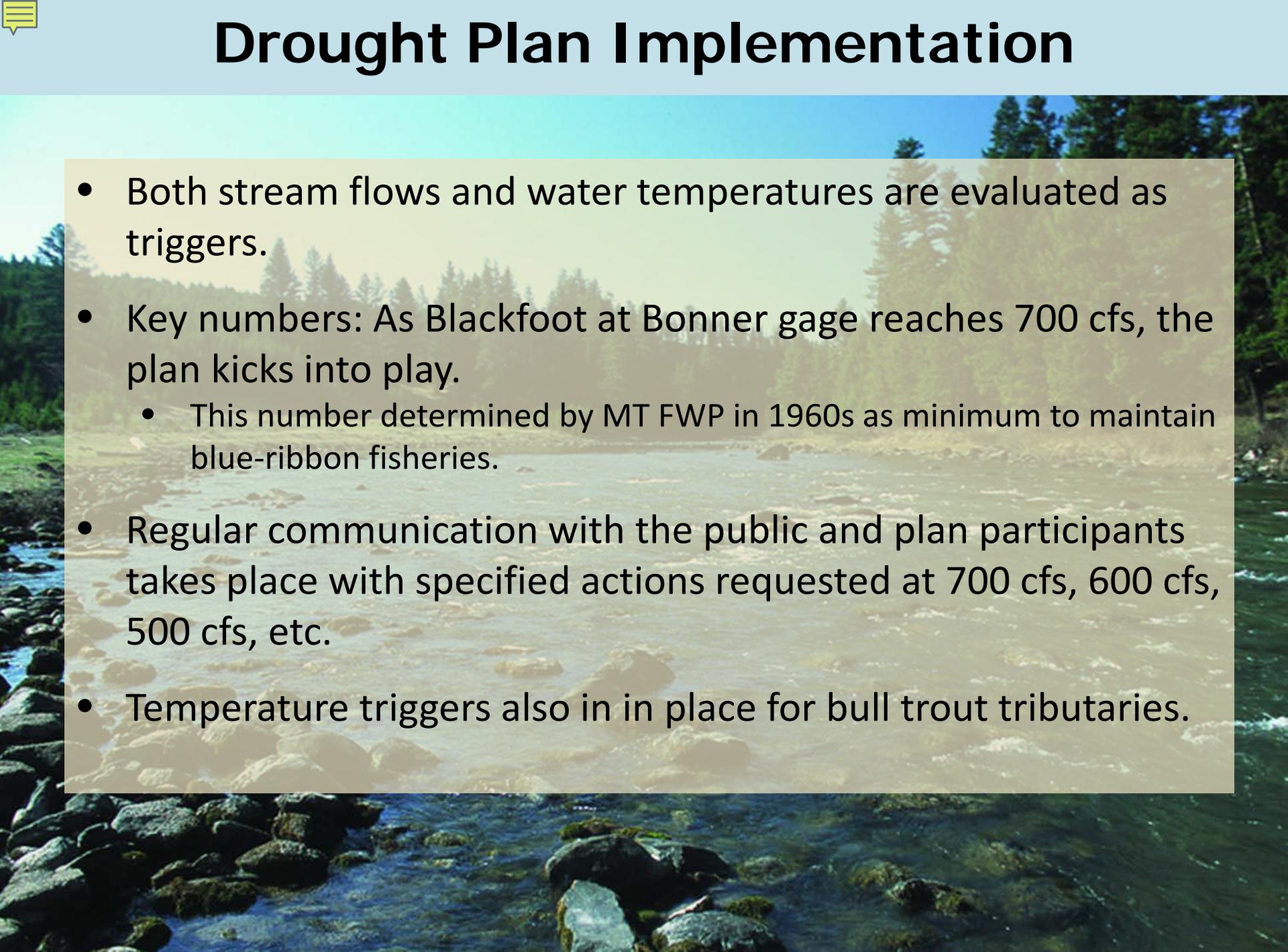
Most recent instantaneous value: 11.4 09-23-2013 09:45 MDT



**BLACKFOOT  
CHALLENGE**



# Drought Plan Implementation

- 
- Both stream flows and water temperatures are evaluated as triggers.
  - Key numbers: As Blackfoot at Bonner gage reaches 700 cfs, the plan kicks into play.
    - This number determined by MT FWP in 1960s as minimum to maintain blue-ribbon fisheries.
  - Regular communication with the public and plan participants takes place with specified actions requested at 700 cfs, 600 cfs, 500 cfs, etc.
  - Temperature triggers also in place for bull trout tributaries.

# History of Drought Plan Implementation

Since the Drought Committee and Plan were launched in 2000, the plan has been put into effect 8 times:

2000

2001

2003

2004

2005

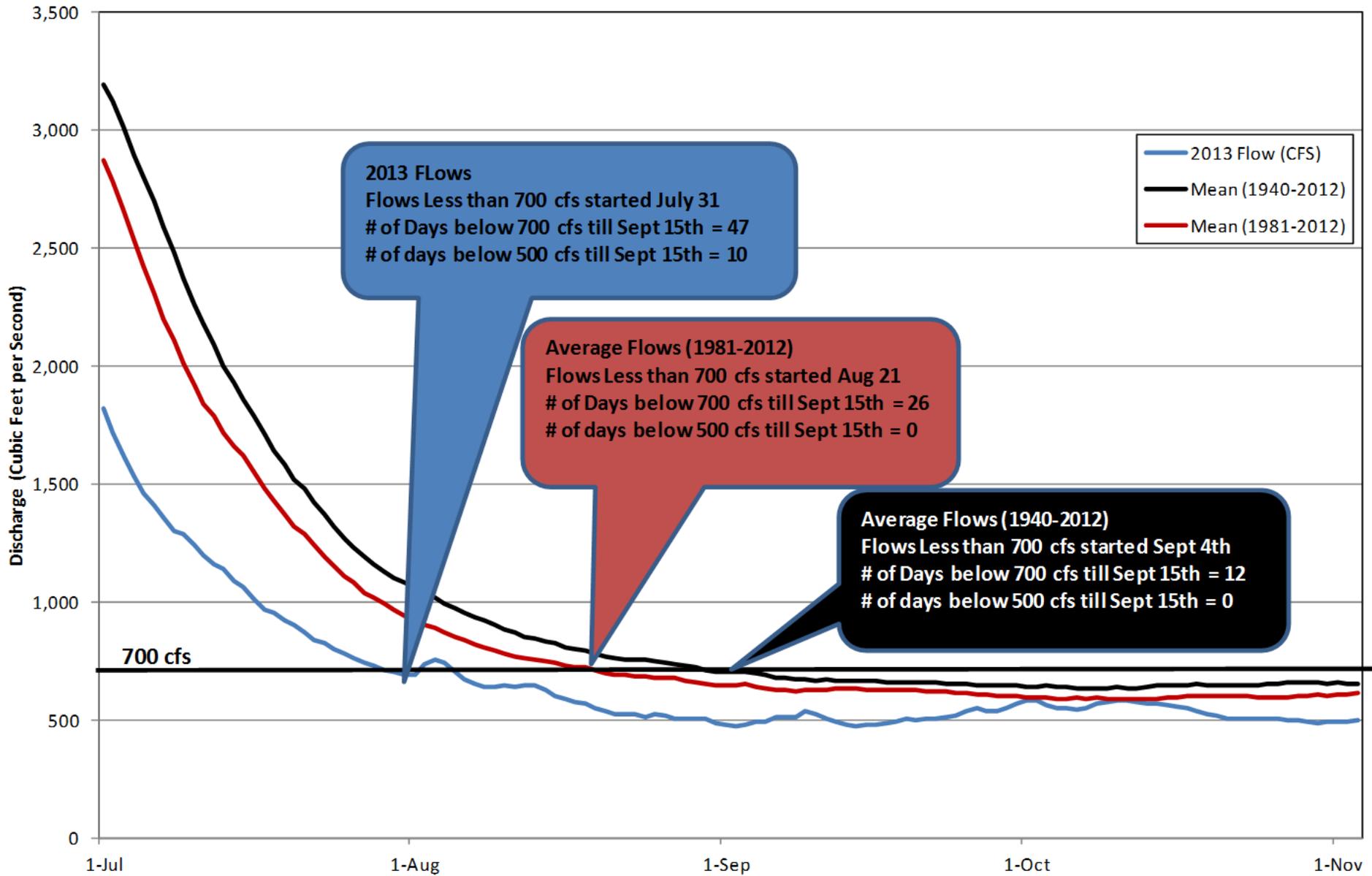
2006

2007

2013

From 2008-2010, flows were monitored closely and did dip below 700 cfs, but fluctuated back up.

# Blackfoot River Flows Late Season 2013



# 2013 Drought Season Summary

- Drought plan was enacted as flows reached very low levels for several weeks (470 cfs in mid-September), but temperatures stayed low. (Led to some confusion & tension with anglers.)
  - Suggested plan language about habitat security issue.
- A little slow to put plan into play this year – partly due to staff capacity, partly due to ensuring low flows would persist.
- Discussion of changing the term “shared sacrifice” to “shared giving.”
- Increasingly important for this plan to be part of comprehensive effort that also includes irrigation efficiency and scheduling, watershed restoration, TMDLs, land conservation, and public education.

# Important Considerations

- Under the plan, FWP agrees not to initiate a “call for water” under their senior right on junior water users who have approved drought plans & participate voluntarily.
- Plan success depends on both senior and junior water rights holders participating.
- Plan seeks equity among juniors, seniors, small users & large users across entire watershed.
- In addition to temperature and water flow triggers, the committee is flexible in its decision-making, also considering:
  - \* Time of year
  - \* Water demand
  - \* Resource conditions
  - \* Climatic conditions
  - \* Weather projections

# Resources for Success

- Process requires a central coordinator – Blackfoot Challenge has a dedicated staff person for water programs.
- Process requires funding – for coordination, meetings, etc. This comes from agency in-kind resources as well as private and public funds raised by the BC.
- Success requires time commitment of players representing all diverse interests. We depend on reports from FWP & DNRC, feedback from outfitters and landowners, commitment to a collaborative process from all.
- Plan requires constant coordination with irrigators to update their drought plans and monitor their participation.
- TRUST – the BC had developed credibility in the valley before implementing the drought program.

# Challenges & Benefits

## BENEFITS

- FWP doesn't call for water from landowners with drought plans.
- Less concern about pitting one group of stakeholders against another.
- The response is fluid and dynamic and can adapt to unique and changing conditions.
- Constant coordination enables people to have a voice and to feel engaged in the solutions.
- Plan gives us good sideboards to use in communicating a message of sharing a finite resource.

## CHALLENGES

- Confusion over how plan works that requires better public education. (Different rivers have different drought requirements.)
- Labor intensive process of validating irrigator plans and communicating with water users.
- Lack of understanding about junior vs. senior water rights among non-irrigators.
- Need better ways to demonstrate the water savings.
- Tension between fishing and agricultural interests.

**We build bridges between people with a stake in a landscape and those with decision-making authority to create durable solutions that benefit people, wildlife and the land.**



**[www.blackfootchallenge.org](http://www.blackfootchallenge.org)  
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*Better Rural Communities Through  
Cooperative Conservation*

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