

Conservation Resource Data Suggestions

Missoula County Rural Initiatives (RI) received over 60 comments recommending that additional data topics and/or data sources be included in the Conservation Resources Atlas and the database associated with the PLACE Project.

Suggestions fell within five broad categories. Those categories and RI responses to the suggestions are outlined below.

For additional details, or to submit new suggestions, please contact Rural Initiatives.

1. Suggested information that fits well within the goals of the PLACE project, and will be integrated into PLACE in the near future:

As a result of public comments, Rural Initiatives discovered additional data to include in the inventory. This information will be included in the database in the near future.

Examples of these suggestions:

- **Bull Trout Critical Habitat Final Designation**—This information will be updated when the final Critical Habitat is designated by US Fish & Wildlife Service (likely this winter).
- **Irrigation Ditches**—Additional information on the locations of irrigation ditches have now been included in the database. This data comes from the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, with caveats that they are adapted from older maps dating from the 50's and 60's and should be used in conjunction with Water Resources Survey books and site-specific information or surveys. Water resource survey books can be found here:
http://www.dnrc.mt.gov/wrd/water_rts/survey_books/default.asp
- **Trailheads**—Points showing trailheads on Forest Service lands are now included in the database.

2. Important conservation resource information that will be considered for inclusion in PLACE once it becomes available:

Rural Initiatives received suggestions for conservation resource information that has not been mapped, or is not in a digital form that can be easily added to the database. This information is valuable and Rural Initiatives encourages agencies or groups to provide GIS data when it becomes available, and we will consider including it in the PLACE database at a later date. Examples of these suggestions:

- **River Channel Data**—Channel Migration Zones and historic photos of wetlands, riparian areas, and floodplains will be included as maps and digital information become available.

- **Groundwater Data**—Some groundwater maps are available for specific areas, but there are currently no regional or countywide maps available indicating areas of high versus low groundwater. Well monitoring data are available in GIS format from the Bureau of Mines & Geology, but do not provide a comprehensive synthesis of information appropriate for this project. Comprehensive and scale-appropriate information will be included when available.
- **Other Historic Resources**—Historic sites or trails will continue to be added to the database as GIS data become available.
- **Wildlife Corridors**—As wildlife corridors in specific areas are mapped and agreed upon by wildlife experts, this information will be included in the database.

3. Information on additional wildlife and plant species and special habitats:

Many suggestions for additional information to include have been related to additional plant or wildlife species, or special habitat types. For example:

- **Other Wildlife and Plant Species**—Suggestions to add habitat information for wolverines, fisher, and other Species of Concern, as well as non-listed wildlife species.
- **Special Habitats**—Suggestions to add habitat types including woody draws, native grasslands, high alpine areas, old growth forests, cliffs, caves, recent wildfires, and others.

Missoula County is rich with a variety of habitat types that support a diversity of plant and animal species. Making a comprehensive atlas of all of the special resources in the County that could be affected by development or conservation projects is an enormous undertaking, and is beyond the scope of this project. Rather, the intent of PLACE is to identify representative species in the county for whom protecting habitat will benefit entire ecosystems, or for whom specific management recommendations or mitigations are often suggested.

Consulting PLACE is a good start at identifying plant and animal species that could be affected by a project. Other sources of information include landowner knowledge and observations and consultations with local wildlife and natural resource professionals. Additionally, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) has recently created an online mapping system called the Crucial Areas Assessment and Planning System (CAPS), which is available to the public at:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/conservationInAction/crucialAreas.html>.

This database includes information on 85 Species of Concern throughout Montana, and relies on habitat modeling information for these various species. PLACE is intended to complement the CAPS system. While CAPS does not show maps of habitat for each of these species, their potential presence in an area can be determined by looking at the list of Terrestrial Conservation Species and fish species data layers in the CAPS program.

For more information on how to use CAPS please contact Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks.

4. Suggested information that did not fit the goals of the PLACE project:

PLACE was created to compile information on conservation resources. Rural Initiatives received suggestions for data that are important to consider in subdivision review, Open Space Bond review, or other land use conservation planning efforts. However, these topics are outside the scope of the Conservation Resources Database. For many of these suggestions, data is available to the County through other sources. Examples include:

- **Information related to constraints on or suitability for development**—such as existing infrastructure and proximity to services. Examples include: sewer systems, fire stations, the wildland-urban interface, slopes, soil suitability for septic systems, and other development and current ownership information that would limit or preclude development.
- **Information related to environmental hazards or pollution sources**—such as mines and gravel pits, and areas impacted by sound and light pollution
- **Information related to current development**—such as industrial properties, current housing density, and location of existing homes

5. Suggestions to include analyses performed by conservation or interest organizations:

Rural Initiatives reviewed suggestions for including data from mapping and analysis work conducted by various organizations for the purpose of answering specific questions or identifying priority areas for conservation. Some of this information will not be included in PLACE at this time, because the data is accompanied by numerous caveats necessary to interpret the information. While this information is not included in the PLACE database, it can still be considered for a variety of conservation and planning purposes. Examples include:

- Priority Linkage Areas developed by American Wildlands (<http://wildlands.org/>)
- Hunter & Angler Valued Areas developed by Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partners (<http://www.trcp.org/>)