



The Importance Of The Roadless Backcountry For The Future Of Fishing Quality And Success In Montana: What The Science Tells Us

Current Road and Roadless Conditions

- National Forest System (NFS) lands in Montana have more than 32,531 miles of road, nearly 10% of all NFS roads in the country, and enough miles of road to reach around the circumference of the earth with almost 8,000 miles left over. Over 380,000 miles of mapped roads and 60,000 miles unmapped logging roads currently exist in the NFS, enough to reach the moon with more than 40,000 miles left over. *1*
- There is currently a \$558 million cumulative road maintenance backlog on 32,000 miles of NFS roads within Montana. The annual maintenance backlog is \$36 million, with roads receiving only 29.2% of the maintenance budget needed to keep them safe and usable. The current national NFS road maintenance backlog is \$8.4 billion.
- Montana has 229 Inventoried Roadless Areas totaling 6.397 million acres in 10 national forests. *2*

Roads and Cutthroat and Bull Trout

- The vast majority of remaining healthy populations of native trout are found on unroaded public lands, including wilderness areas, national parks and unprotected roadless areas.
- Roadless areas act as a barrier against noxious invasive plant and animal species and as strongholds for native fish populations due to cumulative degradation and loss of downstream aquatic habitats. *3*
- Westslope cutthroat and bull trout populations in streams in roadless areas often are closer to carrying capacity than populations in streams outside of roadless areas. *4*
- A study on the Clearwater National Forest in Idaho found that much of the best fish habitat is in unroaded areas where levels of fine streambed sediment are lower than in managed landscapes. *5*
- Increasing road density results in declining pool frequency from fine sediments filling pools. Pool habitat is essential to bull and cutthroat trout for overwintering habitat, thermal refuge and foraging areas.
- Five native subspecies of cutthroat trout—the Yellowstone, fine-spotted, westslope, Bonneville, and Colorado cutthroat—as well as the fluvial Arctic grayling, are at risk in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem due to sedimentation and habitat loss caused by off-road vehicle use. *6*
- There is a negative correlation between increasing road densities and viable native bull, redband, and Yellowstone and westslope cutthroat trout populations in the Columbia River Basin, an area with 144 million acres, 7 states and 35 National Forests. *7*
- Protection of critical spawning tributary catchments from additional road building and associated land-use disturbance is needed for the maintenance of viable bull trout populations in the Swan Basin. *8*
- Road construction results in significant loss of biological diversity at both local and regional scales due to: 1) restricted movement of species between local populations; 2) increased mortality; 3) habitat fragmentation and edge effects; 4) invasion by exotic species; and 5) increased human access to wildlife habitats, all of which are expected to increase local extinction rates or decrease local recolonization rates. *9*

- Angling in Montana has an economic value of \$270-300 million annually according to Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Roadless Country Important to Montana's Critical Native Fisheries

- The South Fork of the Flathead has the state's strongest populations of bull and westslope cutthroat trout and most of the watershed is in the roadless Bob Marshall Wilderness.
- The healthiest populations of fluvial bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout and best bull trout spawning reaches in the Blackfoot River drainage, especially Monture Creek, North Fork Blackfoot River and Landers Fork, are in the roadless upper parts of these watersheds.
- Most of the important spawning tributaries (Stony Mountain., Quigg Peak, and A-P additions) for fluvial and resident bull trout in Rock Creek are in roadless country.
- The healthiest populations of westslope cutthroat and bull trout in the middle Clark Fork River watershed are in headwater streams of Fish Creek in the Great Burn Roadless Areas.
- Tributaries of the Bitterroot River with the best water quality and most robust fisheries are found on the roadless public lands in the west side streams. The best on the east side are in upper Skalkaho drainage (including Daly Creek) and upper Burnt Fork where large portions of their upper watersheds are roadless.
- Most remaining pure-strain native westslope cutthroat trout in the upper Missouri River drainage are in roadless areas along the Rocky Mountain Front, upper Big Hole River, and Lima Peaks country.
- The most important tributary of the Smith River below Fort Logan is Deep Creek. With most of its drainage in roadless country, it's cold, clean and regular flows are critical to the Smith River when mainstem flows are low. In addition, it's the only tributary recruiting cutthroats into the river.
- The Gallatin, the Madison, Yellowstone, Boulder, Big Hole, Rock Creek, Montana's most famous free-stone trout streams, have important parts of their headwaters in roadless conditions.

Recommendations To Support Trout Habitat and Fishing

- The prevailing message from the hunters and anglers is "Leave things as they are now. Don't build new roads into roadless areas, but make sure hunters and anglers have access to national forest lands and roadless areas."
- Governor Schweitzer should petition to not allow any new roads in Inventoried Roadless Areas.

**For more information on the backcountry and how to get involved, go to
www.bigskylegacy.org**

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership is a coalition of leading conservation organizations and individual grassroots partners, working together to expand access to places to hunt and fish, conserve fish and wildlife and their habitat, and increase funding for conservation and management.

Sources of Information

1. 1996 Report of USDA Forest Service
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6. Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, www.greateryellowstone.org.
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9. Findlay, C.S. and J. Bourdages. 2000. Response time of wetland biodiversity to road construction on adjacent lands. *Conservation Biology* 14:86-94.