# Draft

# North Fork Neighborhood Plan

## Revised Draft - March 19, 2008

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**1 AUTHORIZATION ..... 1**

**2 SUMMARY ..... 1**

**3 BACKGROUND ..... 1**

3.1 PURPOSE ..... 4

**4 PLANNING AREA/ZONING DISTRICT ..... 5**

**5 PLANNING PROCESS ..... 7**

**6 EXISTING CONDITIONS ..... 7**

6.1 PHYSICAL SETTING ..... 7
6.2 NORTH FORK OF THE FLATHEAD RIVER ..... 9
6.3 FLOODPLAIN ..... 9
6.4 LAND OWNERSHIP ..... 10
6.5 TRANSPORTATION ..... 16
6.6 UTILITIES ..... 17
6.7 BUSINESS, INDUSTRY, AND ECONOMY ..... 17
6.8 PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES ..... 18
6.9 WILDLIFE ..... 20
6.10 RECREATION ..... 24
6.11 SCENIC VALUES ..... 25
6.12 AGRICULTURE ..... 26
6.13 ANTICIPATED GROWTH ..... 26

**7 ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES ..... 27**

**8 IMPACT ON RESOURCES ..... 30**

8.1 WILDLIFE ..... 31
8.2 RECREATION ..... 31
8.3 SCENERY ..... 31
8.4 AGRICULTURE ..... 32

**9 GOALS AND POLICIES ..... 32**

9.1 FLATHEAD COUNTY LINK ..... 38
9.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY ..... 39

# TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: North Fork Neighborhood Plan Planning Area ..... 6
Figure 2: Geology in the North Fork ..... 8
Figure 3: Land management ..... 10
Figure 4: Location of private lands ..... 11
Figure 5: Land use type on private lands from Polebridge area south to Camas Creek ... 13
Figure 6: Land use type on private lands from Kintla Creek south to Polebridge..... 14
Figure 7: Land use type on private lands from Canadian Border south to Kintla Creek.. 15
Figure 8: The Wildland Urban Interface in the North Fork Planning Area. ..... 19
Figure 9: Elk winter range in the North Fork Planning Area. ..... 23

# 1 Authorization

The Montana Code Annotated (76-1-601(4)(a), MCA) provides the framework for the development of neighborhood plans. The North Fork Neighborhood Plan has been prepared in compliance with the statutory criteria and is consistent with 13 goals and 23 policies outlined in the Flathead County Growth Policy, adopted March 19, 2007. North Fork landowners acknowledge and affirm that unlike their zoning regulations, their Neighborhood Plan is not a regulatory document and does not confer any authority to regulate. The Neighborhood Plan is, however, a foundational "vision statement" for the future of the North Fork Valley and was drafted through a democratic process. It represents a unified vision of local residents that should be utilized as a guide by decision-makers in assessing the suitability of development and future planning decisions within the zoning district.

# 2 Summary

The North Fork of the Flathead River Valley is a unique and very special place. Nestled between the towering mountains in Glacier National Park, and the thick pine stands of the Flathead National Forest, the valley is anchored by the North Fork of the Flathead River. The North Fork feels like a place left behind by the modern world. No phones or electricity gives the remote valley and its residents an experience hard to find today in the Lower 48 states. A wide open, un-crowded place, with pristine water, clean air, dark night skies, abundant wildlife, quiet and solitude with incredible scenic vistas are values residents of the North Fork hold dear. It is these values that residents of the North Fork wish to preserve and protect with the revisions of the North Fork Neighborhood Plan.

This revision is a combination of many efforts from the residents of the North Fork. The information provided in this plan has been collected from the 1987 Plan, the 1992 Amendments, information supplied by the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee, and comments of North Fork Residents collected during public workshops held August 4, and August 28, 2007, as well as at an Advisory Committee meeting held on October 6, 2007 and open to the public. The information has been interpreted by Planning Staff and incorporated into this Plan, to best conform to the Flathead County Growth Policy.

# 3 Background

For at least 50 years, North Fork landowners have sought to guide future development in their community. They have established a number of organizations that have worked to implement long-term planning goals. The North Fork Improvement Association (which changed its name to the North Fork Landowners' Association ("NFLA") in 2005, was established in 1953 to address various community issues and has continued to serve as a

clearinghouse and forum for landowners in the North Fork. The North Fork Compact was established in 1973 by a group of landowners who have voluntarily agreed to limit subdivision of their property to 20 acres or more by placing a covenant on the deed to their property. Their intent was to prevent their land from being heavily subdivided or devoted to commercial uses. The North Fork Preservation Association was formed in 1982 and has set its goal at promoting conservation policies to protect the natural resources of the North Fork.

In 1977, Flathead County initiated a planning process attempting to establish zoning in the North Fork. The process involved several meetings and a vote of the landowners (by mailings). Nearly successful, the zoning effort polarized opinion about land use planning in the community.

In the summer of 1984, elected representatives of the NFLA met with the U.S. Forest Service to discuss landowner concerns relating to potential changes and threats to the North Fork. The goal of this partnership was to establish a direction to help minimize future problems perceived to be derived by continued growth of the area. Subsequent to this meeting with the Forest Service, the Land Use Planning Committee ("LUPC") was established with the goal of developing a Land Use Plan for the private lands north of Camas Creek to the Canadian Border.

In 1985, an Inter Local Agency Agreement was entered into between resource management agencies and landowners. The goal of this agreement was to improve communication between all parties involved regarding development and maintenance affairs in the North Fork. This joint agreement was entered into by the Flathead County Board of Commissioners, Montana Department of State Lands, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Glacier National Park, Flathead National Forest, North Fork Improvement Association, North Fork Compact, and the North Fork Preservation Association. Bi-annual meetings between all parties continue to serve the interests of the North Fork.

In the summer of 1986, the North Fork of the Flathead River Valley Land Use Plan was completed in draft form and in March 1987, the Board of Commissioners of Flathead County adopted the Flathead County Master Plan and included the North Fork Neighborhood Plan as part of the Flathead County Master Plan.

In addition, the County Commissioners recognized the recommendation of the North Fork Neighborhood Plan to include a North Fork advisory board to serve as liaison between the County Commissioners, County Planning Board, other county offices, and local property owners. In July 1987, the Board of Commissioners created the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee ("NFLUAC") under Resolution 663, which in effect replaced the LUPC. Its stated purpose is to formally provide a process among all landowners and residents of the North Fork area to enhance the resource value of the North Fork River drainage and to allow active participation in shaping and guiding the future of the area.

The commissioners specified that the NFLUAC shall consist of 11 members, as follows: eight members of the NFLA board of directors, one representative from the North Fork Compact, one representative from the North Fork Preservation Association, and one member-at-large appointed by the County Commissioners as a County Representative serving a three-year term.

In 1991, the NFLUAC conducted its mandatory five-year review of the North Fork Land Use Plan, and following the review of a new survey sent to all North Fork landowners, submitted an addendum to the Flathead County Master Plan and the North Fork Neighborhood Plan (formally called the North Fork Land Use Plan). Two of its major conclusions included the following:

1. In the three geographic and two special areas identified and discussed in the addendum (A. Camas to Polebridge, B. Polebridge area, C. Polebridge to Canadian Border, D. River Frontage, and E. Wildlife Corridors) the consequences of unplanned and uncoordinated growth would be serious, although on a day-to-day basis the impact might not be apparent until too late.

2. It is recognized that a voluntary land use plan for such a varied area is no longer adequate. (The 1990 survey was sent to 416 landowners with 160 responses. Only 5% of the respondents felt that the voluntary-compliance system was adequate).

This addendum was adopted by the County Commissioners in September 1992, as Resolution 627C.

In July 1997, new statistics about the North Fork became available from Flathead County. From completion of the Land Use Plan in 1987 through March 1997, there was a 30% decrease in average lot size from 30 to 21 acres. During the same period, the total number of lots increased 25%, from 570 to 714. Of the 714 lots existing in the North Fork in 1997, 521 (or 73%) were less than 20 acres in size. Even without additional subdivision, that left the possibility for a total of 714 dwellings**.**

The NFLUAC held three meetings in the spring and summer of 1997 to discuss options for a five-year plan review following the 1992 addendum. It was decided by the committee to send a survey to all landowners with questions limited to five categories: lot size; setbacks of dwellings from public roads; setbacks of dwellings from waterways; off-site business signs; and screening of buildings from public view.

The survey results and subsequent meetings held by the NFLUAC provided support for another attempt to institute zoning in the North Fork. The North Fork Neighborhood Plan and its amendments provided the justification to do so. A zoning district was approved by the Flathead County Commission in October of 1998, and amended in 2003.

The North Fork Neighborhood Plan and the North Fork Zoning District are separate documents approved by the Flathead County Commission in separate actions, yet they rely on each other. The North Fork Neighborhood Plan, as written in 1987, and amended

in 1992, provides the basis for the North Fork Zoning District. Without the plan, the zoning district would not have the justification to exist. The zoning district is the tool used to carry out the recommendations of the North Fork Neighborhood Plan. Without the zoning district the recommendations of the plan could not be implemented.

On August 4, 2007, approximately 40 North Fork landowners attended a public meeting held in Sondreson Hall. They expressed an overwhelming desire to preserve their current zoning regulations. Thus, the goal of the 2007 revision of the Neighborhood Plan is to provide a sound foundation for the existing North Fork Zoning District, consistent with past efforts and compatible with Flathead County's new Growth Policy.

## *3.1 Purpose*

The information and ideas presented within this plan have a variety of purposes and practical applications. For example:

1. The plan is in support of the Goals and Policies of the Flathead County Growth Policy.
2. It explains how the private lands of the North Fork contribute to the public values of a much larger geographic region.
3. It documents and maps where specific resources are found on the private lands.
4. It discusses steps to be taken for retaining those resources.
5. It will assist private or public agencies in prioritizing potential land protection projects.
6. It demonstrates how individual land areas might be developed without jeopardizing public values.
7. It provides data for public officials to use in evaluating individual subdivision proposals.
8. It provides the justification for the North Fork Zoning District.

This plan is written for those who own property in the North Fork, who may not recognize the full impacts of the incremental changes in their valley, or realize there are still critical choices that can be made; for those who visit who should know more about the area, its critical resources, and its potential fate; and for people everywhere who care about special beautiful places and are sensitive to the increasing pressures on the landscape.

It demonstrates that the North Fork does indeed have a special combination of qualities found in few other places; that what happens on the valley's private lands does affect their values; that it is in the long-term interest of the local community, residents of Montana and of the entire Nation to take steps now to prevent the continued erosion of the valley's special resources; and that there are ways to do that which are fair, legal, and practical.

# 4 Planning Area/Zoning District

The North Fork of the Flathead River Valley is located in the northeast portion of Flathead County in northwestern Montana. The valley is formed by the Flathead River, which has its headwaters in British Columbia, Canada, and flows south for nearly 80 miles before joining the Middle Fork of the Flathead. The valley is bounded by the Livingston Range and Glacier National Park to the East, and the Whitefish Range and the Flathead National Forest to the West.

The Planning Area is located in the northern portion of the North Fork of the Flathead River Valley. The area is more specifically described as the portion of the North Fork of the Flathead River Valley bordered on the east by the Livingston Range in the Rocky Mountains, bordered on the west by the crest of the Whitefish Range, bordered on the south by the Camas Creek-Big Creek Drainages, and bordered on the north by the Canadian Border. Total acreage within the planning area is estimated at 523,880 acres (see figure 1).

The Zoning District was established in 1998 following the County Commissioners approval of the North Fork's zoning regulations. These regulations pertained to building setbacks, density and signage.

All private property within the Planning Area became the Zoning District, with the exception of private property in-holders in Glacier National Park. The eastern boundary of the Zoning District is legally described as the centerline of the North Fork of the Flathead River. Thus, private property in Glacier National Park, while part of the Planning Area, is not part of the Zoning District due to the legal description established in 1998.

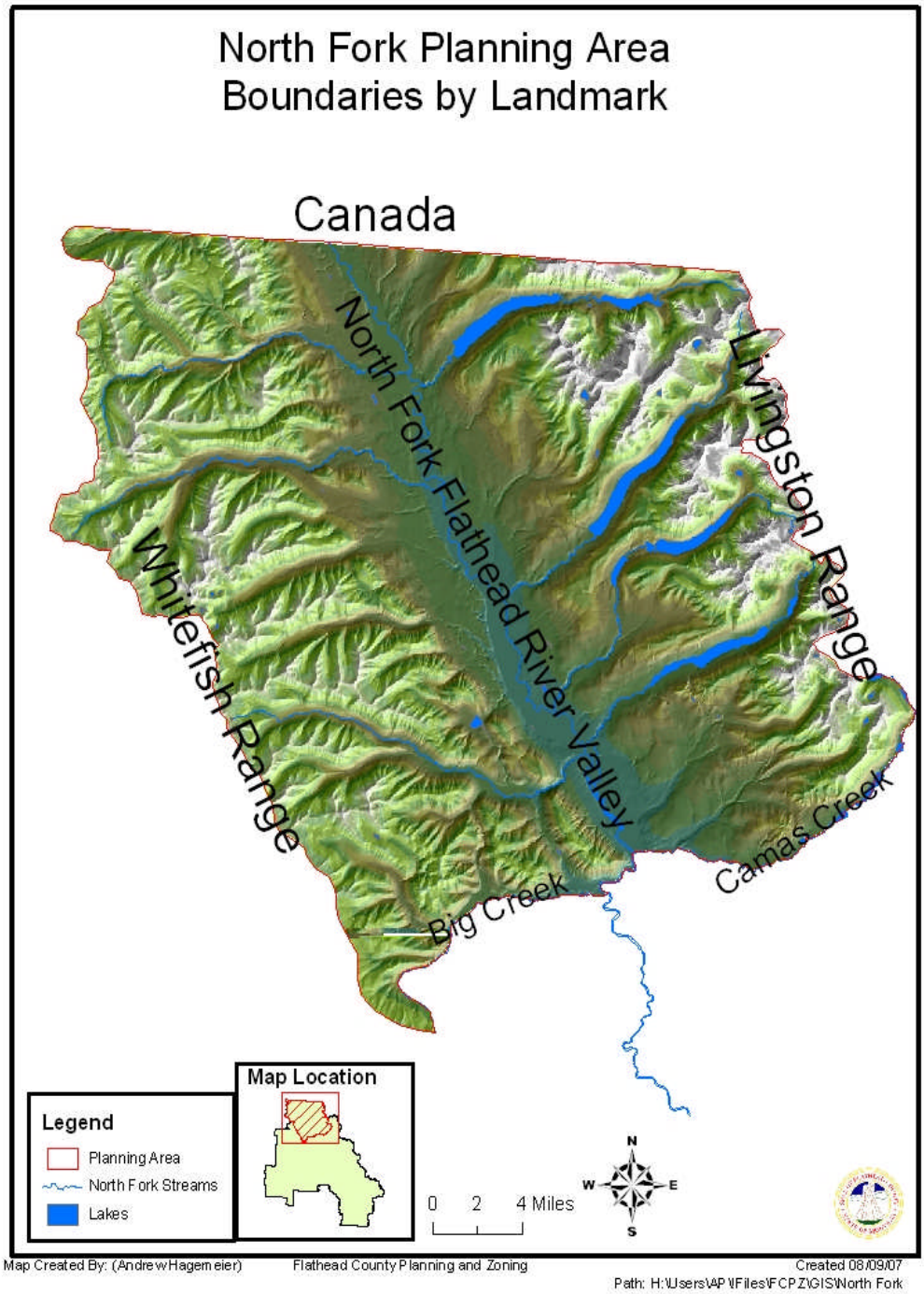


**Figure 1: North Fork Neighborhood Plan Planning Area**

# 5 Planning Process

In March of 2007, the Flathead County Commission adopted a new Growth Policy for Flathead County. The adoption of the new Growth Policy requires all Neighborhood Plans, including the North Fork Neighborhood Plan, to be revised and updated to conform to the goals and policies of the new Growth Policy. This revision process was initiated at the wishes of the people of the North Fork, and at the consent of the County Commissioners, and is consistent with Goal 45 of the Flathead County Growth Policy which states:

> "*Honor the integrity and purpose of existing neighborhood plans respecting the time and effort of the community involvement that has taken place*."

Furthermore, this plan has followed the necessary steps, and is in conformance with the process for updating neighborhood plans in Chapter 10, Part 4: Existing Plans, of the Flathead County Growth Policy.

Public workshops were held at Sondreson Hall in the North Fork on August 4 and August 28 of 2007. A draft of the plan was written in September of 2007, and was available for review and comment. Following the comment period, a draft refined by the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee was submitted to the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office. After a public comment period of 30 days the Plan was presented to the Planning Board in a public hearing on January 16, 2008. At the hearing the Board closed the public comment period and scheduled a workshop on the night of February 24, 2008. The workshop focused on discussing concerns of the Planning Board with members of the NFLUAC and the public. From this workshop, the NFLUAC made adjustments to the plan, and on March 19, 2008 presented these adjustments to the Planning Board. The Planning Board reviewed the plan, and feeling the adjustments were appropriate and not substantial enough to warrant another public hearing, voted unanimously to recommend approval to the County Commission. A final draft of the plan will be presented to the County Commissioners on XXXXXX for their consideration.

# 6 Existing Conditions

## *6.1 Physical Setting*

The North Fork of the Flathead Valley is a remote valley stretching in a north-south direction sandwiched between two mountain ranges. The valley is part of the North Fork of the Flathead River watershed. The North Fork of the Flathead River is classified as a Scenic River as part of the National Wild and Scenic River system. Twelve major streams are located on both sides of the river within the planning area. Four major lakes, Kintla, Bowman, Quartz and Logging are located on the east side of the drainage in Glacier National Park. Other smaller lakes are scattered on both sides of the river mostly in the upland areas of the tributaries.

Topography varies from a level valley bottom to very rugged-mountainous terrain. About 25 percent of the area is bottomland, 30 percent glaciated valleys and uplands, and 45 percent mountainous lands. Private lands are primarily located in the valley bottom. Soils within the area are generally river bottom alluvial soils and glacial tills with sand and gravel to gravelly loam type soils on the side slopes. (see figure 2).

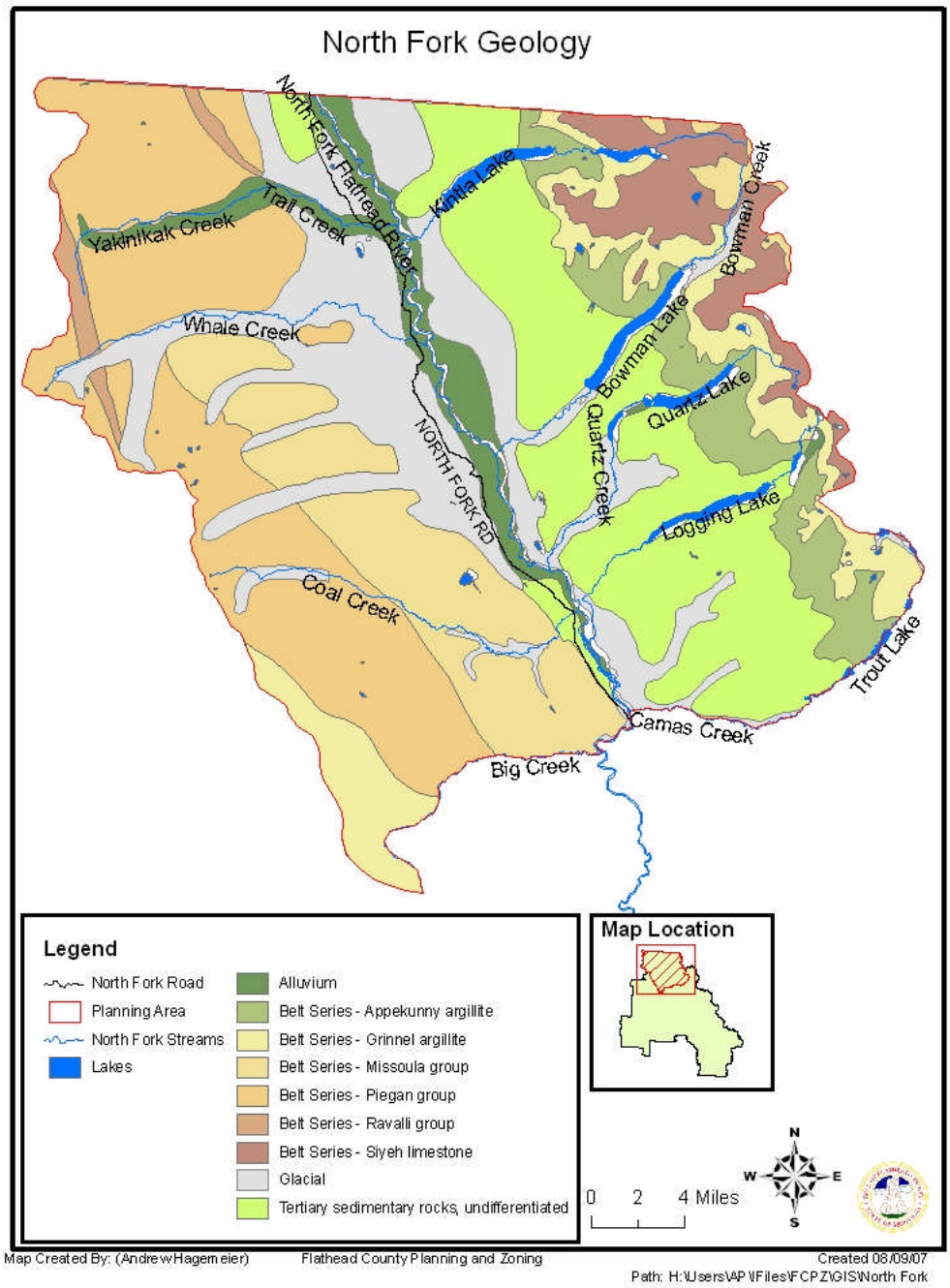


**Figure 2: Geology in the North Fork**

## 6.2 North Fork of the Flathead River

The North Fork of the Flathead River has its headwaters in British Columbia, Canada, and flows southwards, free flowing for 80 miles to its confluence with the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. The river provides an important component to wildlife habitat and serves as a source of recreation, along with its other values. Much of the river has been designated as a Scenic River, a component of the Wild and Scenic River System. This designation requires a primitive shoreline, and it is managed by the Forest Service on the West Bank and the National Park Service on the East Bank. The West Bank shoreline consists of both public and private land, developed and undeveloped. In the past the Forest Service has purchased river frontage or scenic easements from private sources and it is expected to continue to do so.

## 6.3 Floodplain

The 100-year and 500-year floodplain of the North Fork of the Flathead River in the planning area have not been delineated. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, flood stage of the North Fork of the Flathead River at Polebridge is 12 feet. Flooding in the North Fork can be common. In recent history, the river has reached flood stage at Polebridge in 1996, 1997, and reached 16.9 feet in June of 1995. Much of the private developable land in the North Fork lies in the valley bottom creating the possibility that some land lies in the floodplain. Without having the floodplain delineated, the potential for development to occur in hazardous areas is very real.

## *6.4 Land Ownership*

Most of the land in the North Fork is federal managed, with about 3 percent in private ownership and 3 percent state lands (see figure 3). Following is a general breakdown of the ownership:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Forest Service: | 246,600 acres | 47.1% |
| Park Service: | 244,200 acres | 46.7% |
| State: | 18,600 acres | 3.5% |
| Private: | 14,480 acres | 2.7% |

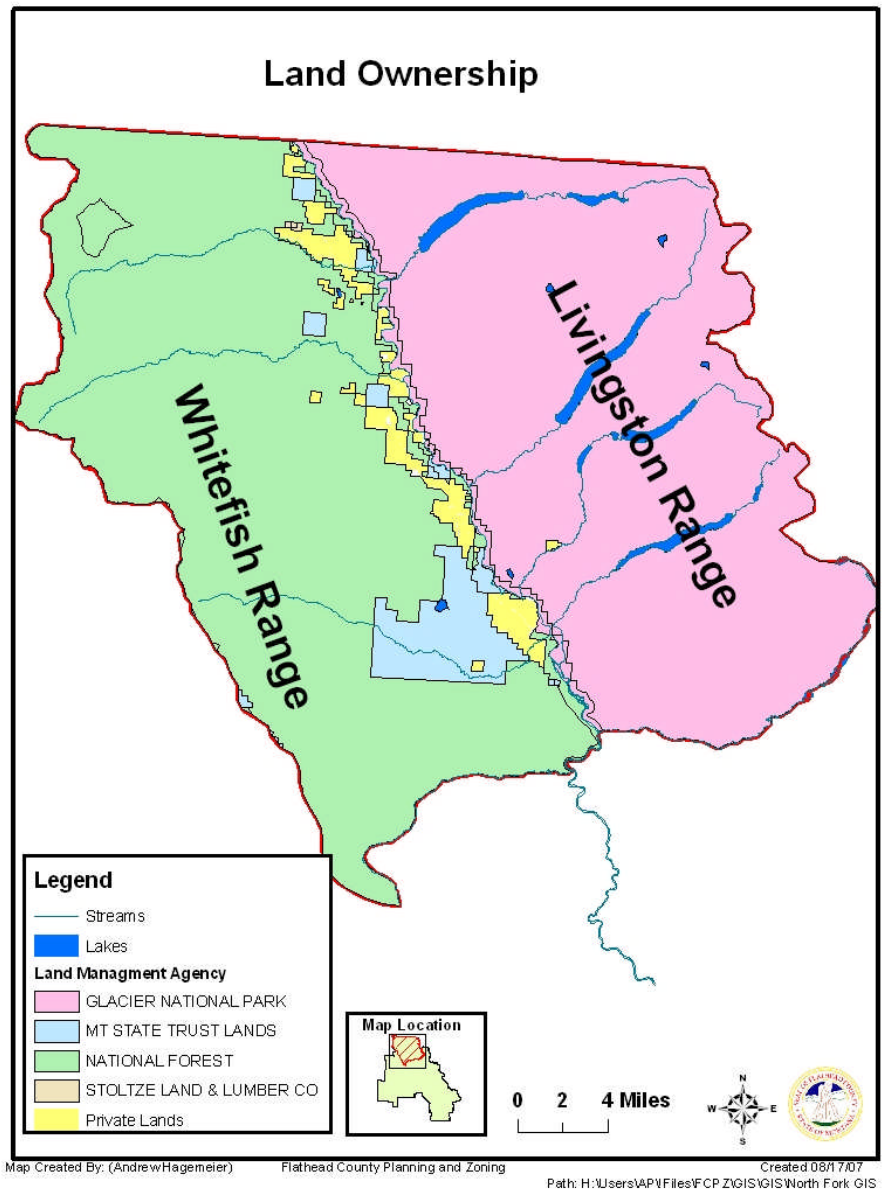


**Figure 3: Land management**

Private lands in the planning area are concentrated along the North Fork of the Flathead River starting in the vicinity of Coal Creek on the south and extending north to the Canadian Border. The private lands are scattered over all or parts of 64 sections in Townships 34, 35, and 37 (north-south), and Ranges 20, 21, and 22 (east-west). Private lands are concentrated within a 3-mile corridor on both sides of the river (see figure 4).

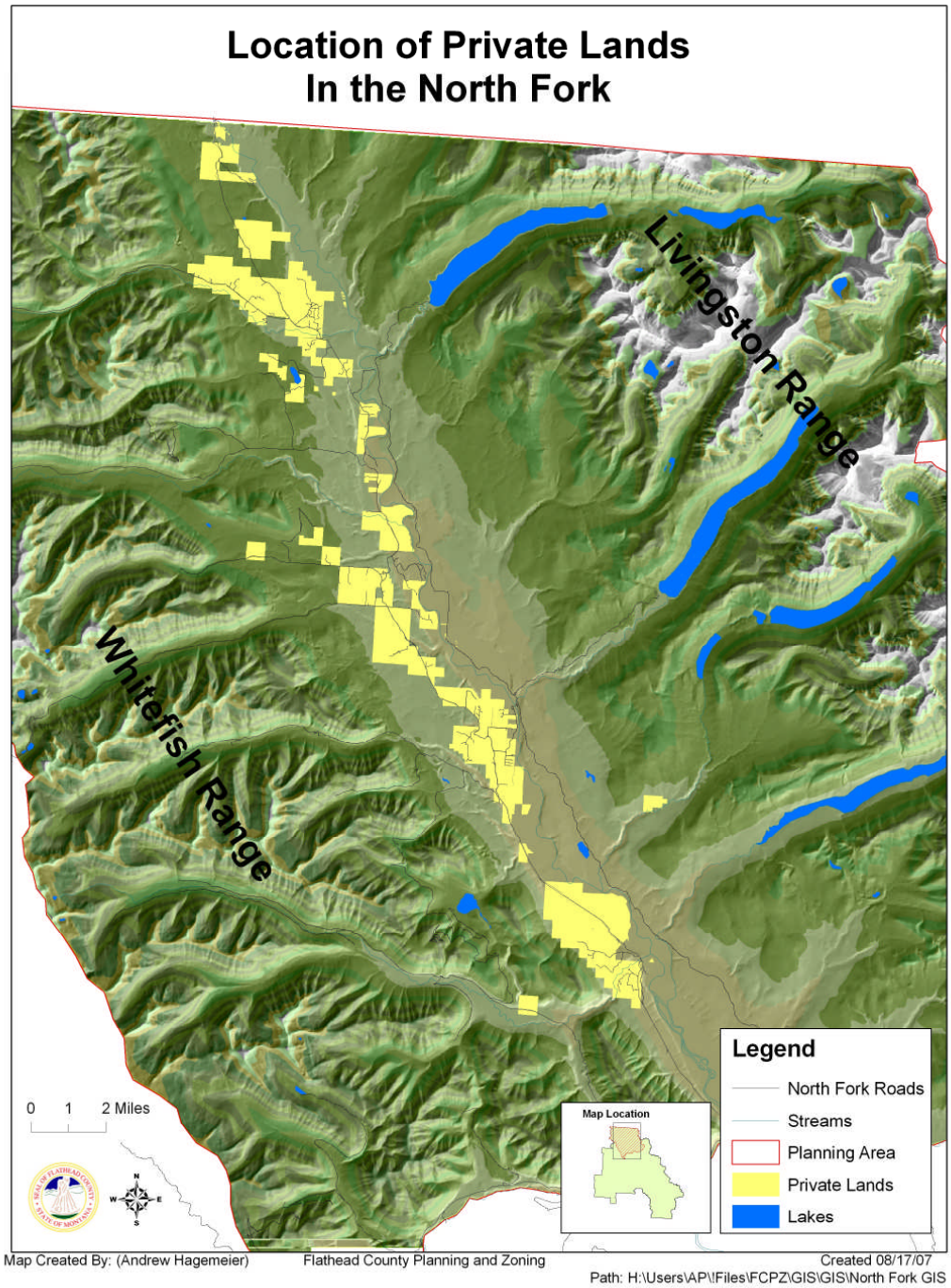


**Figure 4: Location of private lands**

Within the 14,480 acres of private land there are 746 separate tracts with over 400 landowners. Except for about 137 acres, most private land is located on the west side of the river. The tracts range in size from less than one acre to 240 acres. The largest landowner owns 11 percent of the private lands. From 1973 through 2007, there were 17 formally platted subdivisions creating 158 lots.

There are three land use types in the North Fork, residential, agriculture, and commercial (see figures 5, 6, and 7). A majority of the residential landowners use their properties for recreational purposes, frequenting the area primarily during the summer months. Less than 20 percent of the landowners live in this area on a permanent basis. The State of Montana indicates there are three commercial properties in the North Fork Valley. Of the 746 parcels in the North Fork, the average lot size is 19 acres.

The three land use types identified represent current uses in the North Fork and do not represent future land use types. The North Fork Zoning District is a single uniform zoning district that does not differentiate intensity or type of use. It is based upon a 20 acre density with conditional uses.

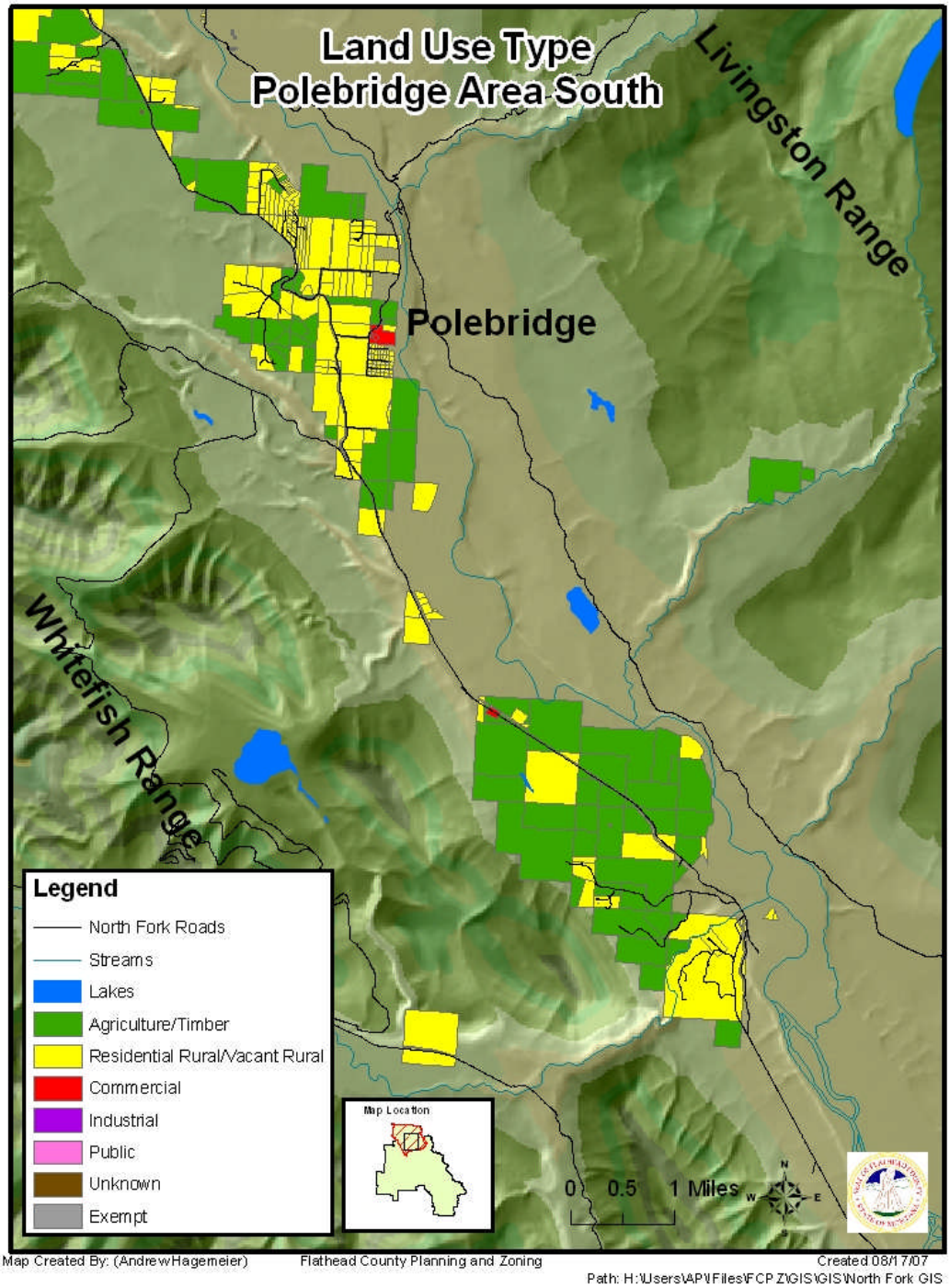


**Figure 5: Land use type on private lands from Polebridge area south to Camas Creek**

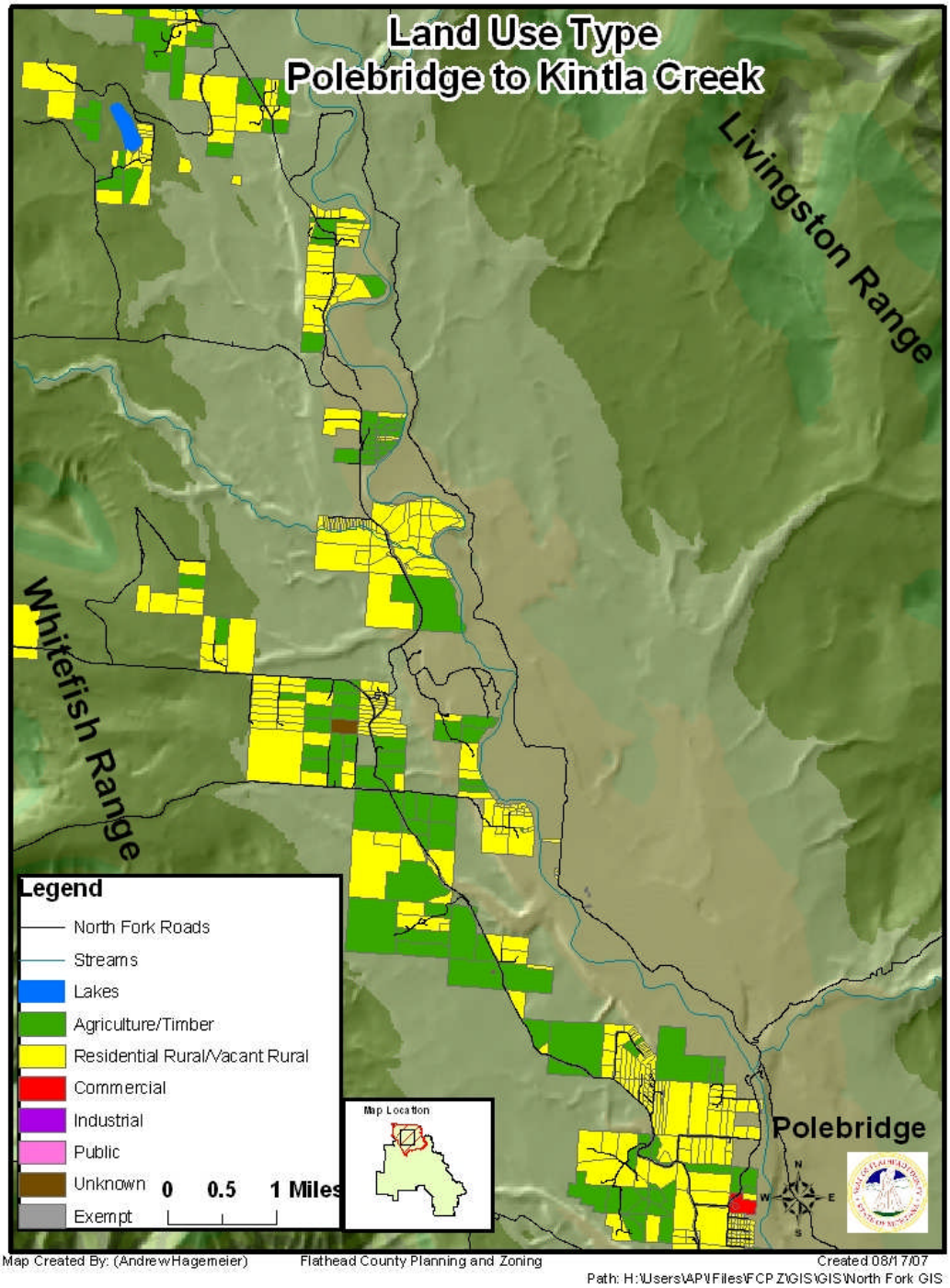


**Figure 6: Land use type on private lands from Kintla Creek south to Polebridge**

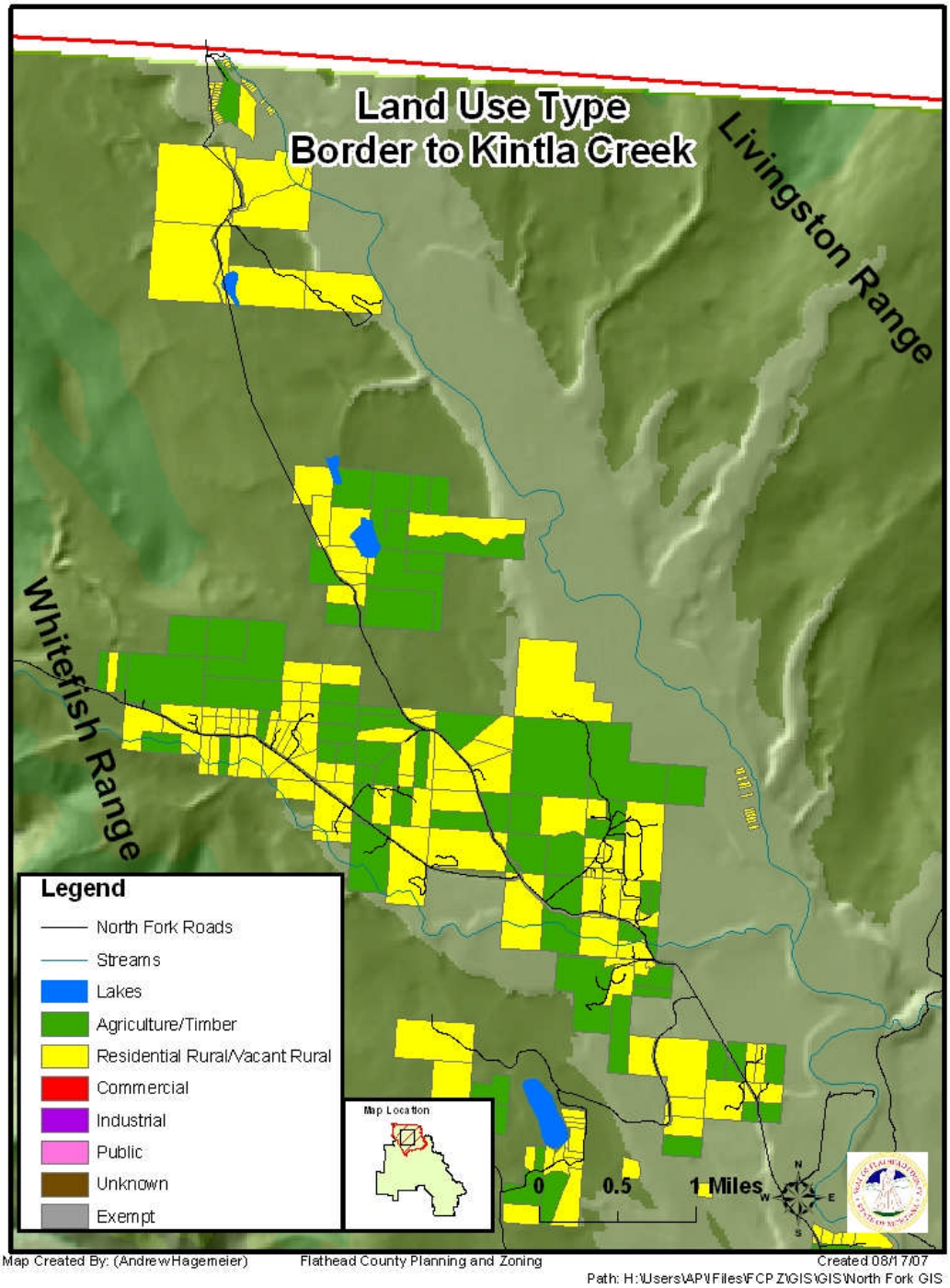


**Figure 7: Land use type on private lands from Canadian Border south to Kintla Creek**

### 6.4.1 In-Holdings

When Glacier National Park was created, some homesteads had been established in the North Fork that became wholly surrounded by the Park. These private properties inside the boundary of the Park have been termed in-holdings. These in-holdings, while private land within the North Fork Planning Area, are not part of the North Fork Zoning District. The Planning Area encompasses the entire North Fork of the Flathead River Valley, including the whole watershed, and is bordered on the east by the Livingston Range in Glacier National Park. The Zoning District was created in 1998 with the adoption of the North Fork Zoning Regulations. The eastern boundary of the Zoning District is legally described as the centerline of the North Fork of the Flathead River.

### 6.4.2 Current and Future Densities

The largest congregation of small tracts is found around Polebridge, Red Meadow Creek, Moose Creek Road, Whale Creek, Trail Creek, and the Moose City area near the Canadian Border. There are currently 746 separate lots in the North Fork with an average acreage of 19.4 acres. The potential build-out of the North Fork with a 20-acre density will allow 1,034 separate lots with an average lot size of 14 acres, an increase of potentially 288 lots.

## *6.5 Transportation*

### 6.5.1 Roads

The North Fork Road varies from a paved, double-lane standard at Columbia Falls to a single-lane dirt road at the Canadian Border. In 1967 the road in Glacier National Park from West Glacier to the North Fork Road at the Camas Creek junction was completed, which forms the southern boundary of the planning district. It is paved and double-lane, and situated approximately 20 miles from Columbia Falls. Also, within Glacier National Park, there is a low-standard, one-lane road adjacent to the river, which extends from Apgar, 40 miles to Kintla Lake, and is known as the Inner North Fork Road. Two low-standard roads, Trail Creek and Red Meadow, cross the Whitefish Divide, and connect the North Fork Road with Highway 93 on the west. Flathead County is responsible for road maintenance of the North Fork Road, including infrastructure repair of culverts and bridges, while the Forest Service maintains the trunk roads outside of Glacier National Park.

Increased public recreation is resulting in a significant increase in recreation traffic. Glacier National Park and the Wild and Scenic River are major contributors to recreation traffic in the North Fork Valley.

The North Fork Road extends into Canada and formerly provided access to British Columbia. In 1997, the border was closed due to a washout of the road on the Canadian and was not rebuilt. New border crossing stations which had been built in the North Fork since 1973 for both the Canadian and American Customs were also closed in 1997.

### 6.5.2 Trails

There are no public trails paralleling either side of the North Fork involving the private lands. Most trails lead into the Rockies within Glacier National Park or into the Whitefish Divide to the west.

### 6.5.3 Air

Several airstrips have been cleared and built to varying standards over the last 40-year period. Hazard conditions resulted in about half the strips receiving very limited or no use. The State of Montana Aeronautical Chart maps 2 strips in the North Fork Valley. Both strips are classified as private and are not for public use.

### 6.5.4 Water

Since the turn of the century, transportation by water has been attempted. Going upstream has been extremely difficult. Therefore, only recreational use under some controlled conditions, such as prohibition of motorized watercraft upon the river, within the "Scenic" segment of the Wild and Scenic River is allowed. No motorized equipment is allowed on this segment of the river without special permit.

## *6.6 Utilities*

No public service utilities provide service in the North Fork. Thus electric power, water supply, sewerage and garbage removal are the responsibility of the individual landowner, at their expense. There is landline telephone service at both Polebridge and the nearby Ranger Station in Glacier National Park, and for some properties south of Polebridge. Some North Fork landowners utilize satellite, radio or cell-pack telephone service to some degree of success. Others use radios for local communication to neighbors, while a few have installed satellite internet service and have access to email. At present, mail delivery is twice a week, unless weather conditions make the North Fork Road impassable.

## *6.7 Business, Industry, and Economy*

In the 1890's, the North Fork was opened to homesteading, and most of the pioneers discovered that both the soil and climate of the area proved negative factors in growing crops. Other enterprises included gas and oil exploration, coal mining and timber harvesting.

At present cattle ranching is still practiced by one of the larger landowner families, but most agricultural production is for private use. Home-based businesses include a private school, a bed and breakfast establishment, small-scale lumber milling, private gravel extraction, art studios, several home construction businesses and rental cabins. In the Polebridge home site area, businesses include a general store, a restaurant/bar, rental

cabins and a hostel. Approximately 4 miles south of Polebridge, businesses include a general store/tavern, camping site, laundry and showers. Some residents own heavy machinery and offer snow removal and building services. Some residents also harvest timber on their own property, in most cases contracting out for the work.

Eco-tourism is a very important industry in the North Fork. The natural amenities of Glacier National Park and the North Fork River attract hikers, backpackers, floaters, and fishermen. In addition, the National Forest draws berry pickers, hunters, and snowmobile riders.

## 6.8 Public Facilities and Services

### 6.8.1 Fire Protection

Wildfire has been a frequent visitor to the North Fork since glaciations shaped the valley's landscape. With permanent human habitation of the area in the last 90 or so years, fire suppression and control have become an important concern for life and property. In many cases following a great fire, cleanup of burned areas by residents along the critical migratory corridors has proved beneficial to their ungulate neighbors by providing new pastures and food sources for their travels.

The North Fork Planning Area is a part of the Flathead County Fire Service Area. As such, it provides a modicum of structure protection to the residents of the North Fork Valley. Currently, the Trail Creek/Red Meadow/Polebridge Volunteers are part of the Volunteer Fire Service Area. Existing equipment includes some vintage fire-fighting equipment and some radios provided by other fire departments, the Office of Emergency Services, and purchases by private parties. Due to freezing temperatures during winter months, they are mostly active from May through September.

In addition to the volunteer firefighters, in the event of a major forest fire, federal, state and county firefighting groups help in fire control and structure protection, along with neighbors helping neighbors.

There are areas in the North Fork identified by the Flathead County Community Wildfire Fuels Reduction/Mitigation Plan as being in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) (see Figure 8). The North Fork Landowners' Association appointed a Fire Mitigation Committee in 2003. Its purpose is to mitigate the risks of wildfire on and adjacent to private land, particularly the risks to structures. The committee has obtained several grants to assist landowners who wish to reduce hazardous fuels around their homes. The committee also has worked collaboratively with federal and state agencies to reduce the likelihood of high-intensity fire in interface areas adjoining private property. Because of its proactive stance, the North Fork was designated a Firewise Community and presented an award by Firewise Communities/USA in 2007.

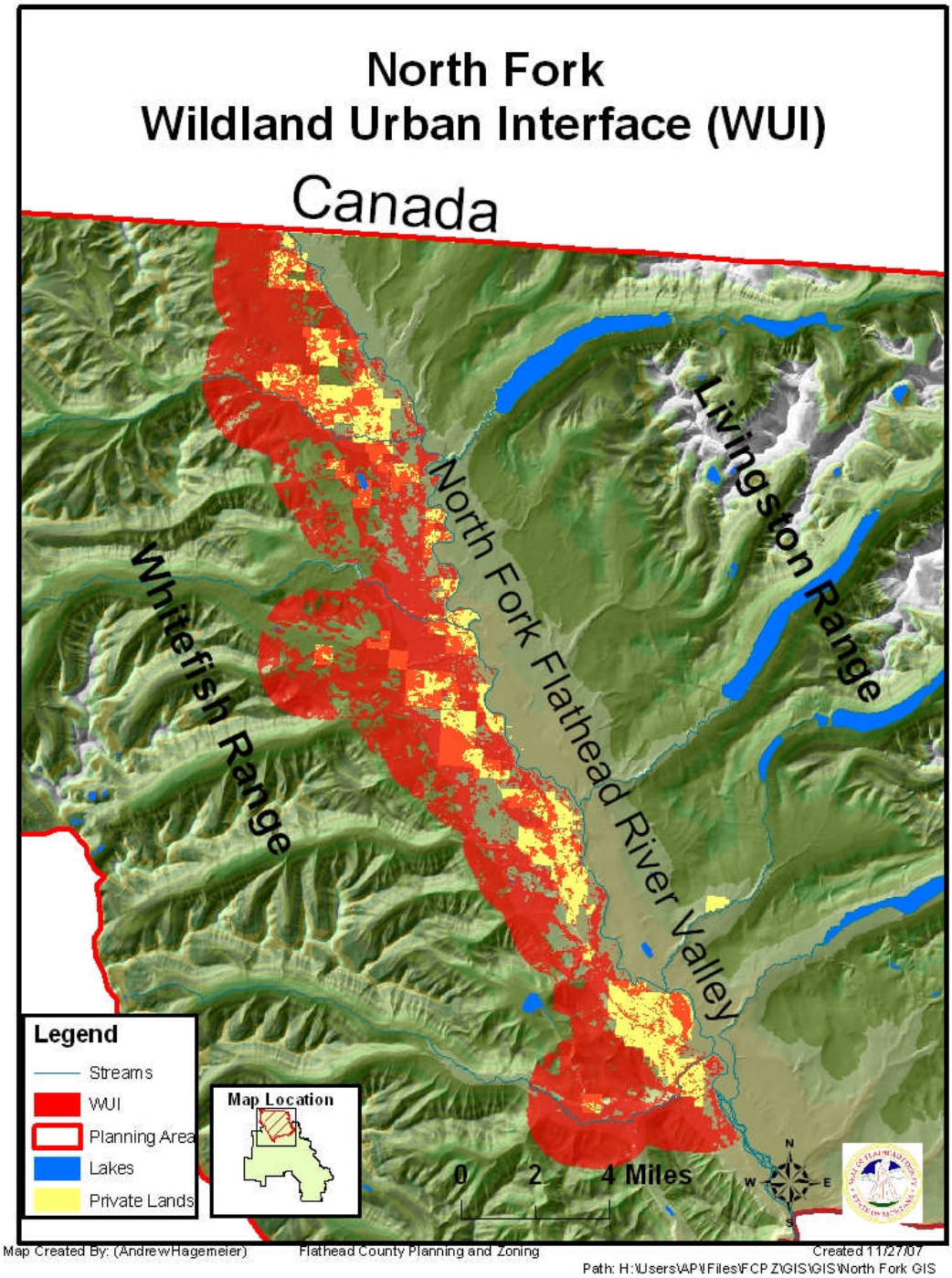


**Figure 8: The Wildland Urban Interface in the North Fork Planning Area as designated by the Flathead County Community Wildfire Fuels Reduction/Mitigation Plan.**

### 6.8.2 Law Enforcement

In terms of law enforcement and crime prevention, the Flathead County Sheriff provides all formal law enforcement activities to North Fork residents, but preventative patrol activities are next to impossible due to the vastness of the area and the limited manpower.

Other law enforcement includes the U.S. Border Patrol, which patrols our closed border with Canada at Moose City on the North Fork Road. The National Forest Service Law Enforcement patrols and enforces laws on National Forest Service lands in the North Fork. The Fish, Wildlife & Parks Game Warden enforces hunting and fishing regulations in the North Fork area, and maintains a game check station at the southern end of the road during the main hunting season. The local crime prevention group known as the North Fork Patrol was originated by the community-based North Fork Landowners' Association. It consists of local volunteer landowners who check private property for unauthorized entry, damage or theft, and contact the County Sheriff's office if a deputy is needed for further investigation.

### 6.8.3 Health Care

There are no medical facilities in the North Fork. Some residents are members of North Valley Search and Rescue and, in addition to performing immediate rescue operations, have radio contact with other emergency assistance agencies. Alert Helicopter Service, located in Kalispell, provides emergency medical evacuation for the North Fork, upon being contacted by telephone.

### 6.8.4 Education

Not many full-time North Fork residents have school-age children. Those who do, rely upon the home schooling program provided by the State of Montana, as there is no practical way for a North Fork school-age child to attend class in town. There is only one organized school in the North Fork, the Tamarack Springs High School. It is a private, religious school that accepts both local and out-of-state students who can board on site.

## *6.9 Wildlife*

The term wildlife is used to generally cover mammals, birds and fish for this report. Also addressed are four threatened and endangered species that occupy habitat within the planning area. Only wildlife of major concern to the landowners or the resource agencies will be discussed in this section.

### 6.9.1 Wildlife Corridors

Wildlife corridors serve as important routes connecting fragmented habitats within an ecosystem. These corridors serve a critical role in the maintenance of viable wildlife

populations by promoting species viability. Development on private land concentrated along the North Fork Road has the potential to sever wildlife corridors between federally managed lands in the Whitefish Mountains to the west, and the Livingston Range to the east. The loss of wildlife corridors through the valley may result in a decline in the abundant wildlife of the North Fork, or even the loss of certain populations altogether.

### 6.9.2 Threatened and Endangered Species

In 1973 the Endangered Species Act was established for the protection and conservation of threatened and endangered fish, wildlife, and plant species. Three species known to exist in the North Fork (bull trout, grizzly bear and Canada lynx) are listed as threatened. The gray wolf, listed as endangered, is also present in the North Fork. The bald eagle, also present in the North Fork, was removed from the list of threatened and endangered species in June, 2007, but it still protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The grizzly bear occupies all areas within the planning area. The greatest threat to the grizzly bear is humans. The more contact grizzly bears have with people, the higher the chance that the bear will be killed.

Bull trout are found in small creeks, major streams, and the North Fork of the Flathead within the planning area. The species requires cold and clean water with overhead cover. The species may be present at all times of the year.

Little is known about the Canada lynx but the information available is increasing as the species is studied in more detail. Montana has the healthiest population of this species in the lower 48 states. In the North Fork, the Canada lynx may be found in mature forests with downed trees, and dense young thickets of lodgepole pine.

The gray wolf, once defunct in Montana, made its reappearance in the North Fork area in the early 1980's. The gray wolf is becoming more common throughout the state, and is well established in the North Fork today. Packs may have territories covering vast areas, and may be seen throughout the valley.

### 6.9.3 Ungulates

Winter habitat is crucial for the population stability of deer, elk and moose. These animals are of major significance to the area landowners for year-round viewing and photography. The ungulates are also popular for hunting in the fall of the year.

Moose is the largest species of the ungulate species found in the North Fork. The winter habitat virtually covers all of the private land ownership, particularly along the streams and lakes. They tend to be extremely hardy animals with their range extending into upper lateral streams outside the bottomlands, where most private ownership is located.

Winter wildlife range for the whitetail deer, mule deer and Rocky Mountain elk was first mapped in the early 1970s in the North Fork area of Glacier National Park. A very generalized map of the west side of the river was drawn more recently by the Montana

Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Since these species generally occupy most of the same area during the winter months, winter wildlife habitat was mapped together showing those areas most frequented by the animals, using site information and key browse and cover types used for thermal protection (see figure 9).

Up until a few decades ago, the North Fork was home to a population of Woodland Caribou. Wildlife biologists feel that the area still contains potential habitat and that the North Fork could see the natural recolonization of the species through Canada in the future.

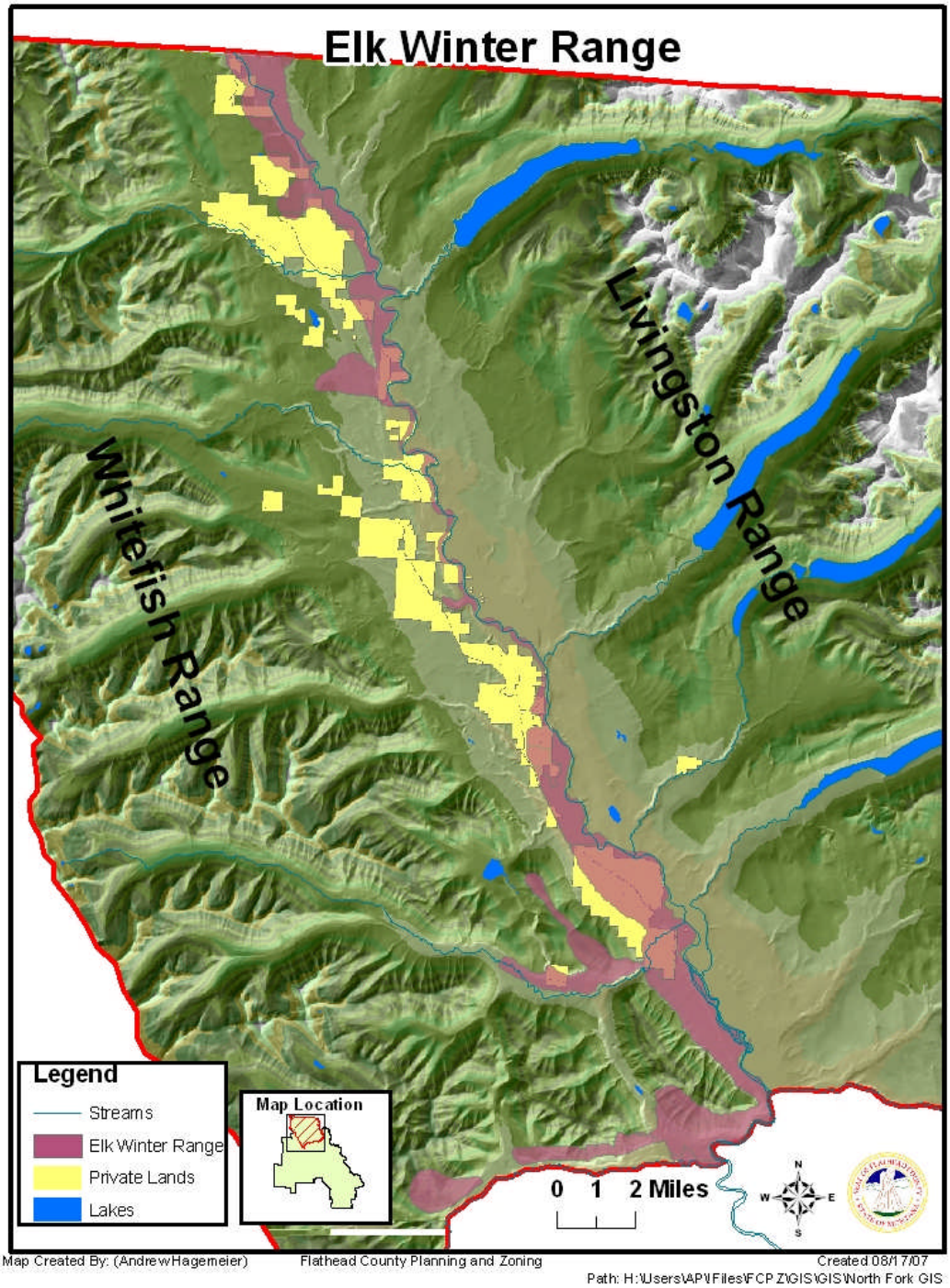


**Figure 9: Elk winter range in the North Fork Planning Area.**

The mapping reflects a general winter game range and a critical winter area. The general winter game range is an average occupied most often by deer and elk in an average year. We realize that in more severe winters the general winter range area becomes more concentrated along the river bottom and main lateral streams. During winters that are

more open, the deer and elk use most of the private lands and extend further up the side drainages.

### 6.9.4 Fisheries

The North Fork and its tributaries provide valuable spawning and rearing areas significant to most of the Flathead River system for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Three of the creeks within the area are closed to fishing (Trail Creek, Whale Creek and Coal Creek). Water quality is critical in this spawning area. The question of degrading water quality has been reflected through the establishment of the Flathead River Basin Commission for monitoring this water quality with specific emphasis on impacts from a potential major open-pit coal mine north of the border.

Other threats to water quality in the planning area include private land development, road building, timber harvesting, mineral-related activities, and North Fork Road dust, to name a few.

## *6.10 Recreation*

The value of this area for recreation use has substantially increased in recent years. The area has become more popular because of the proximity of Glacier National Park and as a result of the North Fork River being classified as part of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River system. It provides exceptional scenery; abundant and diverse wildlife; a rural western setting; ranch activities; crystal clear streams; and a great variety of recreational opportunities for the landowner, the local area visitor and the tourist. The geography and scenery enhance opportunities for hunting, fishing, cross-country skiing, hiking, canoeing, rafting, bicycling, horseback riding, photography, bird watching, berry picking, and other activities on both public and private lands. Snowmobile and ATV-riding are also enjoyed in the North Fork, although there are limited snowmobile trails in the area and no designated ATV trails. Also, recent road closures in the national forest have limited motorized vehicle use within the North Fork.

Two points of interest, having national exposure, probably generate the most recreation use in the North Fork: Glacier National Park and the North Fork of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River. The North Fork of the Flathead River is classified as a “Scenic” segment within the planning area. That means the Flathead National Forest is assigned management responsibility for the river corridor in this area to be free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads. Most of the Glacier National Park area in the North Fork has been recommended for “wilderness-threshold experience.”

An estimated 25,000 people use this portion of Glacier National Park each year. These figures have been relatively constant since 1981. The Park has three primitive campground sites and 12 backcountry campsites. Much of the use is concentrated around the large lakes, primarily Kintla and Bowman Lakes above Polebridge.

Only two limited campgrounds are found on National Forest lands on the west side of the river. They are located west toward the Whitefish Mountain range at Red Meadow Lake and along Trail Creek. Undeveloped campsites are frequently found on both sides of the North Fork River on public lands, as well as private lands along the west bank. The undeveloped campsites are used by river floaters. Campsites in the Park are illegal without a wilderness camping permit and campsites are unwanted on private property without permission of the owner. The unauthorized use of private land is a major source of landowner/floater conflict.

The Forest Service does not keep records on the amount of use on the North Fork of the Flathead River for all users. However, the Forest Service issues permits for commercial use of the river. Three companies have permits for guiding on the North Fork of the Flathead River. The three companies can take a combined 700 paying customers down the river in a given year. Public access to the river is limited to four sites from the Canadian Border to Polebridge. These sites are located to provide about ½ day float trips between successive access points. That portion of the river below Polebridge has no developed access until Big Creek, just south of the planning area.

There are very few private facilities available for recreation users at the present time. One private campground that receives intermittent use is located about four miles south of Polebridge. The only other facilities are a group of cabins and a hostel in the Polebridge area. In addition, the Forest Service maintains five cabins available for short-term rental to the public in various locations throughout the North Fork area.

Maps are available from the Forest Service showing established campsites in the North Fork, as well as access points to the river. The general availability of these maps lead to no map being included here specifically showing all the recreation improvements.

## *6.11 Scenic Values*

The scenic values of the North Fork are continuing to receive more attention and concern as the influence of humankind becomes more evident.

Scenery comes in many forms and seems to affect each of us differently. As is often quoted, “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.” However, past studies where questions of scenic and aesthetic values have been addressed show these values as a critical concern.

The North Fork of the Flathead River Valley has an expanse of grandeur between two mountain ranges making it one of the most scenic areas within the United States. Whether you are viewing wildlife or even cattle, as you drive along the road, travel by foot or horse, or float the river, most people are provided a moment of excitement.

Look into the river or mountain streams. The crystal clear water lets you see the bottom, observe fish, and the reflection of the mountains in the background. Even the fall colors along the waters provide pictures, if not captured on film or by an artist, that remain vivid in your mind.

Maybe your eyes are drawn to the majestic Livingston Range that is the backbone of the Rockies extending into Canada along the east side of the North Fork valley. Or maybe you are looking west into the Whitefish Range at Mount Hefty, Tuchuck Mountain or Nasukoin Mountain. From the valley bottom elevation of about 3,500 feet, the mountain peaks within the Park reach vertically to near 10,000 feet in elevation. The mountains are truly majestic!

Certain North Fork scenic values are protected. The protected areas include Glacier National Park and the Wild and Scenic River corridor. Congress specifically identified scenic values as a prime consideration in protecting these areas for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Scenic values for the general public are good examples of the type of public values that need protecting not only on public, but also on private lands. Most landowners in the North Fork are sensitive to these qualities.

## *6.12 Agriculture*

Agricultural lands located within the planning area have been limited. Only 600-700 acres of hay lands have been used to grow cattle feed. Production is marginal due to the short growing season. Most of the agriculture land is located from the Polebridge area south to Coal Creek. Currently the largest contiguous tract of private ownership is known as the Rocky Bar O Ranch, Incorporated.

Another agricultural use has been the tree-farm/small-wood-lot activities that have occurred throughout most of the homesteads over time. This activity continues and will remain an intermittent agricultural use in the future. Although there are pockets of larger commercial timber scattered throughout the valley bottom, most timber products removed today are post and poles from private property, and larger logging projects in and around recent burn areas with Forest Service approval.

The demand for recreational tracts has changed many of the old homesteads from an agricultural to a recreational use. Although agriculture is a declining industry in the local area, it still provides diversity in the scenery, maintains open space, and creates a feeling for the historical values that have been so important to the area.

## *6.13 Anticipated Growth*

The remote, undeveloped nature of the North Fork limits the opportunities for future growth. No utilities, long distances from law enforcement, health care and schools, a

pristine natural environment, and limited transportation infrastructure, all limit the types and amounts of acceptable uses in the area. However, due to its exceptional beauty and recreational opportunities, the North Fork may in the future face an influx of ex-urban sprawl that has occurred in other communities bordering our nation's most popular natural features.

With strong community support, the North Fork Zoning District limits future subdivision parcels to not less than 20 acres. While the zoning district will limit the potential build-out of the North Fork to a maximum of 1,034 different lots, it has fewer restrictions on the use of the property. It is anticipated that more uses such as rental cabins, bed and breakfasts, and residential businesses will become more common in the North Fork in the future. The North Fork also may face the development of resorts and other commercial attractions that are incompatible with its remote, undeveloped character.

# 7 Issues and Opportunities

Public workshops were held at Sondreson Hall on August 4 and August 28, 2007. The purpose of the workshops was to update the existing North Fork Neighborhood Plan to conform to requirements set forth in the Flathead County Growth Policy adopted March 19, 2007. During the first public workshop, planning staff members and North Fork landowners reviewed the "Changes and Threats" listed in the 1987 North Fork Neighborhood Plan. Those landowners present were asked if they felt the items listed were still valid or should be deleted, revised or supplemented. Their responses to the questions have been incorporated into the updated list that appears below. The title of the section has been changed to "Issues and Opportunities" to comply with the County Growth Policy.

- **Canadian Energy Development**

Landowners who attended the August 4, 2007 meeting unanimously recognized the threat posed by potential coal mining and coal bed methane drilling in the Canadian North Fork. They expressed frustration because they have no control over the Canadian officials who have the power to approve the proposed ventures. Landowners can only call attention to the threat and urge governmental action to protect the North Fork from the consequences of energy development north of the Border.

- **Planned Controlled Growth and Maintain Current Zoning District**

Landowners who attended the workshops expressed a strong commitment to preserving their current zoning regulations, which were the result of many years of effort and consensus-building. They feel that the regulations are the key to achieving planned, controlled growth in the community. Some landowners also expressed support for additional limitations on growth, square footage of buildings and signage.

- **Local and Federal Government Overlooking the Interest of the Citizens of the North Fork**

A number of residents were concerned the interests of North Fork residents are overlooked when decisions are made at the local, state and federal level that deal with North Fork issues.

- **Noise**

The citizens of the North Fork expressed the desire to keep the North Fork quiet. The sources of noise discussed originate from generators and from weekend activities in the Polebridge area. Some members expressed interest in a noise ordinance.

- **Air and Water Quality**

Concern was expressed about the degradation of air and water quality. The citizens of the North Fork feel the air and water quality in their community is one of the qualities of life that need special protection. Sources of contamination that were addressed were ambient dust from the North Fork Road, smoke from forest fires, construction in the floodplain, septic systems, and extractive industries. Many other sources of air and water contaminants are likely, however, they will not be addressed in this plan.

- **Noxious Weeds**

Noxious weeds are present in the North Fork, as is evident when driving the North Fork Road. The negative effects of noxious weeds on the North Fork ecosystem is a concern.

- **Forest Health**

Many residents are concerned over the health of the forest in the North Fork of the Flathead River watershed. A century of fire suppression, recent outbreaks in diseases, increasing numbers of non-native plant and animal species, drought, and wildland fire are all associated with forest health. A desire was expressed for low impact silviculture treatments to alleviate some of these concerns.

- **Fisheries and Wildlife Habitat Protection**

A substantial portion of the private lands is considered important, perhaps critical, wintering habitat for deer, elk and moose. In the spring and fall the grizzly bear habitat is significant with several travel corridors passing through the private lands. The conversion of this area from open space to houses, condominiums or commercial development may have a marked effect on the wildlife, scenery, and rural atmosphere of the North Fork. These activities are visible; they will have a cumulative result over time.

- **Enforcement of Regulations and Laws**

The remote location of the North Fork presents a difficult challenge to law enforcement agencies. Some citizens were concerned about the lack of enforcement of speed limits on the North Fork Road, and poaching of wildlife. Furthermore, some residents are concerned that the Planning and Zoning Office has not been addressing concerns over zoning violations.

- **Delisting of Species Protected by the ESA**

Some residents were concerned that as species are delisted from the Endangered Species Act, the removal of protection will result in a trend of diminishing populations and reductions in available habitat.

- **The North Fork Road**

For decades, North Fork landowners have debated what, if anything, should be done to improve the condition of the North Fork Road. Disparate issues have been raised in the debate, among them health and safety; air and water quality; fisheries and wildlife habitat; controlling growth; aesthetics; cost; and preserving a way of life. Landowners acknowledge the importance of the issues, but they do not want their ongoing debate to disrupt the planning process or to jeopardize their zoning regulations. Therefore, this plan does not address resolution of the debate.

- **Impact of Large Organized Events**

During summer months, a number of organized events are held in the North Fork that draw attendees from outside of the area. These events create short-term spikes in traffic and strain limited services. Several landowners felt that organizers should mitigate the impacts of the events on the community, including abatement of road dust.

- **Distance to Services**

The rural nature of the North Fork limits the ability of emergency services to respond to calls. There are concerns the condition of the transportation network creates a limiting factor in emergency services' already limited response time.

- **Open Space Preservation**

North Fork landowners recognize that open space serves as the foundation for many of their cherished values. As a corollary, open space must be protected in order to maintain those values. Some landowners addressed the role of conservation easements to protect open space on private lands. One person expressed the opinion that the proposed Winton Weydemeyer Wilderness was a way of achieving open space on public lands. (This is a proposal to designate, as wilderness, 171,000 acres of public land in the Kootenai and Flathead National Forests, and would require congressional designation.)

- **Taxation Policy**

Landowners want North Fork real estate taxes to remain reasonable. They are concerned that some owners may be forced to sub-divide or sell their properties if their taxes increase. Furthermore, some residents expressed concern that removal of lands from the tax base by federal purchase might place a greater burden on remaining private lands. One person inquired whether conservation easements might also impact the tax base. (The grantor of a conservation easement is allowed a charitable contribution to be taken off their federal and Montana tax returns; however, it does not affect the community real estate tax base.)

- **Floodplain Identification**

Residents are concerned about the location of the floodplain. The floodplain in the area has not been mapped, and some residents are worried development is occurring in the floodplain.

- **Coordination with Federal Land Management Agencies**

The vast majority of land in the North Fork is managed by federal agencies. The coordination with these agencies is critical to the management of the North Fork.

- **River Use**

Many residents of the North Fork feel that commercial float trips represent a threat to the North Fork of the Flathead River. These commercial float trips may have negative impacts on the transportation network as well as cause degradation along the river itself.

It should be noted the above items in the Issues and Opportunities section reflect comments and opinions provided by those landowners present at the August 4, 2007 Workshop. They may not include all current issues relevant to the North Fork.

# 8 Impact on Resources

Compared to what most of the modern day population in the United States is accustomed to today, the North Fork remains a remote, isolated valley. Historically, this valley has been accustomed to subsisting from agricultural and mineral activities, along with an abundant wildlife and fisheries resource that has drawn people from the local region on an intermittent basis.

Today, the North Fork is becoming a popular retreat area for tourists and summer homeowners. It may take more than a decade, but the current trends certainly point to potential impacts that could be detrimental to the resource values that make this area so unique.

As stated before, it is difficult to isolate one special quality of the North Fork from another, for they are truly interdependent. The private lands, particularly, are an important part of the scenery. They add rural western flavor. The elk, moose, deer, and other wildlife are certainly part of the scenery, and their abundance also makes sight-seeing, photography, hunting and fishing important forms of recreation. The geography and scenery enhance these and other recreational opportunities whether on public or private lands.

Although each of these resources is special in itself, it is their interrelationship and interdependence that make up the North Fork.

Four resource values initially considered by the LUPC (now the NFLUAC) as most vulnerable to development impacts are wildlife, recreation, scenery and agriculture. These are still available in varying degrees on the North Fork. Although a small part of

the total land area, private land holdings occupy much of the prime area where these resource values can be enjoyed. All activities impacting the resource values equate to one common denominator – people in increasing numbers requiring services and facilities. Satisfying these demands has one principal end result – the reduction of open space essential to enjoyment or use of the resource values. With public land use well defined by law, very little can realistically be done there towards modifying usage trends that may impact vulnerable resource values. The private land holdings are a key to maintaining an orderly evolution in the river bottom. Because of the importance of the immediate river environs to the total North Fork Valley, any change here can have impacts far beyond its local area.

## 8.1 Wildlife

The North Fork is unique to the lower 48 states in that the wildlife remains similar today to as it was when the first Europeans ventured into the area some 200 years ago. Species such as moose, grizzly bears, or wolves, which are relatively common in the North Fork, may be rare or even absent from more populated regions of the state. Most North Fork landowners and visitors to the area can draw upon their personal observation and judgment that alterations in open space or increasing density of habitations certainly relate, at least indirectly, with wildlife presence.

## 8.2 Recreation

Recreation is somewhat in the nature of a two-edged sword. Recreational opportunities attract visitors. The casual recreational visitor requires services and facilities (housing, food, etc.). The availability of these encourages additional visitations. Thus recreation induces something of an unstable situation insofar as maintaining a reasonably constant recreation resource base available for enjoyment by a continuing stream of participants. However, here too, open space is a key to continued availability of recreation opportunities, not only for the recreational visitor but also for the local residents. Private landholdings provide essential open space and, in some cases, ground topography that supports the other three resource values necessary for maintaining the recreation resource.

## 8.3 Scenery

Scenery (or scenic value) is a perceived value. As such, it is related directly to the other resource values. All impacts on the scenery resource value are purely subjective; that is, the impact being only as perceived by the observer. Therefore it is unwise to attempt any objective evaluation of development impact on the scenery resource.

The best that can be said is that as open space changes, the scenery will change and as numbers of people increase the number of scenic value perceptions will increase. Once again, open space and numbers of people are primary determinants of variations in the resource value.

### *8.4 Agriculture*

For reasons related to short growing seasons and marginal soils, the original homesteaders left the area. The same reasons make the agricultural resource today only marginally self-sustaining. The primary functions of this resource lie in the open space provided, and the scenic and recreation possibilities offered. The only large body of land offering possibilities for development would come from this resource.

Since World War II, logging has been the primary economic resource in the Flathead Valley area. Hundreds of Flathead Valley residents derive a living from this industry. Proper long-term management of this resource is vital to the industry as well as to the other resources.

# 9 Goals and Policies

This section of the plan is derived from the "Recommendations" section in the 1987 Plan and 1992 Amendment. The Recommendations in the 1987 Plan included three categories: 1) open space, 2) density and 3) visual quality. This section of the Plan forms the basis of our current North Fork Zoning District.

During the public workshop on August 28, 2007, Planning Staff members asked North Fork landowners if they felt that the recommendations were still valid or should be deleted, revised or supplemented. The results of the review have been cross-referenced with the issues compiled in section 7 of this Plan to assure consistency. They also have been converted into Goals and Policies to conform to the Flathead County Growth Policy.

The following Goals and Policies are intended to guide North Fork landowners and Flathead County officials, including the County Commissioners, the Planning Board and the Planning Department staff. They lay the foundation for making decisions that affect the North Fork community, providing support for implementation and action. Without Goals and Policies, action cannot be taken.

## Goal 1 To Preserve low densities and open spaces in the North Fork

The North Fork offers a special and perhaps unique combination of magnificent scenery, diverse wildlife, agricultural lands and recreational opportunities. Each of these interdependent resource values requires open space. If these values are to be secure for future generations, open space must be maintained and protected.

Throughout this plan, we have seen that private lands contribute substantially to maintenance of cherished resource values. Although development in some areas may not compromise the values, in other areas it may irreversibly damage them.

This section explores a variety of actions which could be taken to maintain open space in the North Fork where development has the most potential to damage the resource values. Some are actions in the private sector; others involve the public sector at federal, state and local levels. All require dedication and commitment, and none will happen unless people who care about the North Fork make them happen.

### *Policy 1.1 New subdivisions should not create lot sizes under 20 acres.*

North Fork landowners reiterated their commitment to preserving a density of not less than twenty acres for future subdivisions. The twenty-acre density will help to maintain existing low densities and to protect open space.

### *Policy 1.2 Residential construction should be limited to single-family dwellings (including accessory structures as defined by Flathead County Zoning Regulations).*

Apartment buildings, condos, townhouses or other multi-family structures would detract from the remote character of the North Fork.

### *Policy 1.3 Rental cabin density should be limited to one cabin per five acres.*

This minimum density requirement is intended to be a base guideline for rental cabin usage. Other requirements for rental cabins are encouraged to protect the open space concept.

### *Policy 1.4 Encourage the utilization of tools designed to help protect open space*

A number of tools are available to landowners to help protect open space. Landowners are encouraged to consider the following options:

- Conservation easements, either permanent or for a specified period of time.
- Land exchanges.
- Cooperative agreements among landowners.
- Covenants containing self-imposed development restrictions."

Other options for protecting open space may become available in the future. North Fork landowners recognize that it is important to communicate their interests and desires to responsible planning officials and to maintain working relationships with them. Through good planning, open space and the resource values that depend upon open space can be protected.

***Policy 1.5 The Forest Service and Land Trusts are encouraged to pursue conservation easements on private lands with wildlife corridors.***

Wildlife, for reasons explained above, should be considered during the process of land use planning. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the landowners responding to past surveys stated that the wildlife corridors should be preserved. Glacier National Park and the Forest Service have an interest in and data on these corridors.

## Goal 2 To maintain the remote undeveloped qualities unique to the North Fork

Due to the remote setting and few full-time residents, few commercial activities occur in the North Fork. Surveys conducted in the past indicate that commercial activities can erode values that many North Fork residents enjoy.

***Policy 2.1 Discourage commercial ventures that have intrusive, non-compatible designs or produce persistent auditory or olfactory impacts that can be easily detected from neighboring properties.***

This policy is intended to benefit both immediate landowner neighbors, as well as travelers along the North Fork Road.

***Policy 2.2 Approved commercial construction visible from the main road should blend with the surrounding area.***

***Policy 2.3 Destination resorts that are not scaled to meet the character of the neighborhood, and the available infrastructure and utilities, should not be allowed.***

This policy is intended to preserve the concept of open space as well as the impact of high-traffic business in an area without the infrastructure and public services to support it.

***Policy 2.4 Business or commercial development should be scaled to meet the needs of the immediate neighborhood and visitors to the area.***

This policy is also intended to preserve the concept of open space as well as the impact of high-traffic business in an area without the infrastructure and public services to support it.

***Policy 2.5 Industrial uses should not be allowed other than small-scale extractive industries, pursuant to the conditional use permit process.***

***Policy 2.6 Flathead County officials should strictly interpret county regulations concerning "exemptions to the subdivision and platting act" so as to prevent erosion of the area's natural state."***

The Montana Subdivision and Platting Act pertains to sub-dividing parcels of land less than 160 acres. The uniqueness of the North Fork is well described in the initial Neighborhood Plan, and the importance of protecting the values of the area is widely accepted. Increased development can strain the water quality and cause sewage pollution and noise pollution from the increased human activity.

***Policy 2.7 Expansion of public utilities in the North Fork is not necessary to meet the health, safety and welfare needs of the public given the low number of year-round residents and the remote location.***

Residents are satisfied in providing their own power with personal generators, as well as providing for their own sanitation systems, communication systems and garbage disposal.

## Goal 3 To maintain and enhance the pristine water and air quality found in the North Fork

***Policy 3.1 New buildings should be set back from rivers, lakes, and streams by 150 feet from the high water line.***

Development of buildings near rivers and streams contributes to the degradation of water quality in those systems. Research shows that 150-foot buffers from aquatic systems left in their natural vegetative state can significantly reduce the introduction of pollutants from new building development.

***Policy 3.2 No transportation of commercial quantities of any toxic materials by either private or public means. This would not include materials in quantities intended for domestic use or basic business use, such as propane, diesel fuel, gasoline, fertilizer, and the like.***

***Policy 3.3 New development that may occur in the floodplain should conduct a base elevation study on the property to determine the location of the floodplain.***

Development in the floodplain can also contribute to the degradation in water quality. Flathead County has regulations protecting the floodplain, however, the floodplain has

not been mapped in the North Fork. For protection of both the landowner and the environment, the flood plain in the North Fork watershed should be formally delineated by the proper government agency.

***Policy 3.4 Encourage the efforts of private entities and government agencies to monitor water quality on the North Fork of the Flathead River to document trends in quality of water coming from the Canadian portion of the North Fork watershed.***

The possibility of energy development on the Canadian side of the North Fork is perhaps the greatest threat to water quality in the North Fork. Residents are concerned if these interests are developed, significant degradation of water quality will ensue. The residents would like to see water quality monitored at the Canadian border to document any degradation.

***Policy 3.5 Support the efforts of local, state, tribal, and federal agencies to maintain high standards of water quality in the North Fork watershed. Coordinate with local, state and federal land management agencies to maintain or enhance air quality in the North Fork.***

***Policy 3.6 Work within the North Fork Community, and with local, state, and federal agencies to find solutions to reduce dust pollutants originating from the North Fork Road.***

Excessive dust from the North Fork Road has caused debate over health, safety and environmental issues among residents, landowners and visitors for decades. The problem is recognized by all, but the solution remains a topic of debate.

## Goal 4 To Preserve and Enhance the Scenic Values of the North Fork.

***Policy 4.1 Encourage governmental entities with a presence on the North Fork to notify and work with the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee when making decisions affecting the North Fork zoning district.***

***Policy 4.2 Encourage the issuing agencies to consider all the potential impacts on the North Fork planning area, such as increased road traffic and lack of public restroom facilities along the river, before issuing additional permits for commercial float trips on the river.***

***(Policies 4.3 – 4.7)***
Some of the most beautiful scenery in Montana, from creeks and forests to towering mountains can be enjoyed from the North Fork Road. Signs along the road should be controlled in order to prevent degradation of the scenery. Since it is impractical to eliminate all signs, those which are necessary or allowed should be constructed so that contrast with the surrounding area is at a minimum. They should blend in as much as possible to become a part of the scene.

***Policy 4.3 Encourage wooden signs over signs made with other materials.***

***Policy 4.4 Encourage limits on sign sizes of a maximum of four (4) square feet.***

***Policy 4.5 Discourage lighted or animated signs.***

***Policy 4.6 Limit off-site signs to directional signs not larger that four (4) square feet.***

Off-site signs which advertise anything not on the property they are located should be limited to directional signs stating the name of the business and/or providing directions to the business. Directional signs should be limited to a maximum size of four (4) square feet and should be placed only on private property.

***Policy 4.7 Commercial signs, including real estate signs, should not be visible from the North Fork of the Flathead River.***

***Policy 4.8 Discourage commercial and residential development that will detract from the scenic qualities of the North Fork.***

Planning should maintain and protect the North Fork's character without inhibiting acceptable development. Homeowners and builders are encouraged to consider the visual impact on their neighbors during the planning stage of any construction. Communications with surrounding landowners is encouraged during this process.

***Policy 4.9 Development of all new buildings should be set back 150 feet from the North Fork Road and 100 feet from other public roads.***

## *9.1 Flathead County Link*

Strong support for establishing a North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee came from the 1986 survey of the landowners responding. In addition, the County Commissioners recognized the recommendation of the North Fork Neighborhood Plan to include a North Fork advisory board to serve as liaison between the County Commissioners, County Planning Board, other county offices, and local property owners. In July 1987, the Board of Commissioners created the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee ("NFLUAC") under Resolution 663, which in effect replaced the LUPC. Its stated purpose is to formally provide a process among all landowners and residents of the North Fork area to enhance the resource value of the North Fork River drainage and to allow active participation in shaping and guiding the future of the area.

### 9.1.1 North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee

The North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee was created and appointed by the Flathead County Board of Commissioners in July 1987. The commissioners specified the NFLUAC shall consist of 11 members, as follows: eight members of the NFLA board of directors, one representative from the North Fork Compact, one representative from the North Fork Preservation Association, and one member-at-large appointed by the County Commissioners as a County Representative serving a three-year term.

***Policy 5.1 The North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee should work with landowners to provide a landowner interface with Flathead County agencies, represent landowner's positions on land use issues before those agencies, and monitor the effectiveness of this plan as perceived by landowners.***

### 9.1.2 Objectives of the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee

Four primary objectives are recommended for the NFLUAC:

1. Encourage landowners to become part of the Land Use Planning process.
2. Work responsively with landowners who want to subdivide and to develop their properties, using large-scale maps of sensitive resource value areas plus providing planning materials to help support decisions. The committee recommendations would then be made to Flathead County authorities prior to approval of a proposed project.
3. Monitor the effectiveness of the plan. The committee should make an annual report and review the results and recommendations with members of the Inter Local Agreement. A report to the landowners should be made at the joint annual meeting of the Inter Local Agreement members in the North Fork each summer.

4. Be responsible for initiating implementation of the plan's goals and policies.

### 9.1.3 Future Amendments and Revisions

This plan shall be reviewed on a five-year basis as prescribed by the Flathead County Growth Policy. Amendments to this plan can be made at any time or at the time of revision. Amendments and revisions will be approved by the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee, the Flathead County Planning Board, and the Flathead County Commission as prescribed by Chapter 10 of the Flathead County Growth Policy.

## *9.2 Implementation Strategy*

The scope of a neighborhood plan is approximately twenty years, projecting growth and development to occur gradually over that period of time. The North Fork Neighborhood Plan will be implemented over many years, and only as necessary, supporting the needs and wants of the community. Each property owner has a vision for his or her land and a timetable in which that vision may be implemented. Change within the North Fork will be gradual, and many of those living within the neighborhood currently will continue to use the land as they have in the past.

Implementation of the North Fork Neighborhood Plan includes zoning regulations, floodplain regulations, subdivision regulations and intergovernmental cooperation.

### 9.2.1 Zoning

Zoning is an important tool in implementing neighborhood plans. That portion of the North Fork Planning Area consisting of privately owned property became the North Fork Zoning District with the 1998 adoption of the Development Standards. This district was specifically created for the unique characteristics of the North Fork. The zoning district requires minimum 20-acre lots for new subdivisions, setbacks for new buildings of 150 feet from rivers and streams, 150 feet from the North Fork Road, and 100 feet from other public roads. This zoning district is the tool that is used to carry out many of the policies of this plan.

### 9.2.2 Subdivision Regulations

The Flathead County Subdivision Regulations govern the subdivision of property. If land within the North Fork Neighborhood Plan is divided, the County Subdivision Regulations govern road design, access, water and sewer services, parkland dedication, fire access and more. Flathead County, the local governing body, reviews subdivision applications pursuant to those regulations.

The County Subdivision Regulations, in conjunction with applicable County Zoning Regulations, govern the development of property in the North Fork Neighborhood Plan, defining design standards and required impact mitigation.

### 9.2.3 Floodplain Regulations

Floodplain Regulations are required to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) administered by the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency. This program is available to communities that acknowledge that flood prone areas pose a significant health hazard and have met the NFIP criteria and program requirements. Floodplain regulations govern land uses and development in areas of a 100-Year floodplain. The floodplains within the North Fork Neighborhood Planning area have not been mapped as part of this program. The value of participating in the NFIP is to ensure that low cost flood insurance is available for individuals who develop in 100-Year floodplains.

### 9.2.4 Intergovernmental Cooperation

In 1985, an Inter Local Agency Agreement was entered into between resource management agencies and landowners. The goal of this agreement was to improve communication between all parties involved regarding development and maintenance affairs in the North Fork. This joint Agreement was entered into by the Flathead County Board of Commissioners; Montana Department of State Lands; Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Glacier National Park; Flathead National Forest; North Fork Landowners' Association; North Fork Compact; and the North Fork Preservation Association. The U.S. Border Patrol was subsequently added as a party to the Agreement. Bi-annual meetings between all parties continue to serve the interests of the North Fork.