



# Cooperative Management of the 3 Forks of the Flathead Wild & Scenic River



## Flathead National Forest & Glacier National Park

**Background:** The 3 Forks of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River is 219 miles of free flowing water in northwest Montana that spans an area from the Canadian Border to the heart of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The designated reaches include the North, Middle and South Forks of the Flathead River. From the snow-capped, stunning peaks of Glacier National Park that line the North Fork of the Flathead River, to the deep canyons of the Middle Fork of the Flathead, to the wild, trout filled waters of the South Fork of the Flathead in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, the 3 Forks travel through some of the most wild, rugged country in the United States.

Designated in 1976, the river is cooperatively managed by the Flathead National Forest and Glacier National Park. The North Fork and a portion of the Middle Fork of the Flathead form the western and southern boundary the Flathead National Forest and Glacier National Park. The South Fork is located entirely within the Flathead National Forest. The outstandingly remarkable values include fisheries, geology, water quality, wildlife, botanical, recreation, scenery, history and ethnography. To jointly manage this river system, a cooperative and collaborative approach is needed. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Flathead National Forest and Glacier National Park provides the foundation for cooperative management.

### River Management Challenges

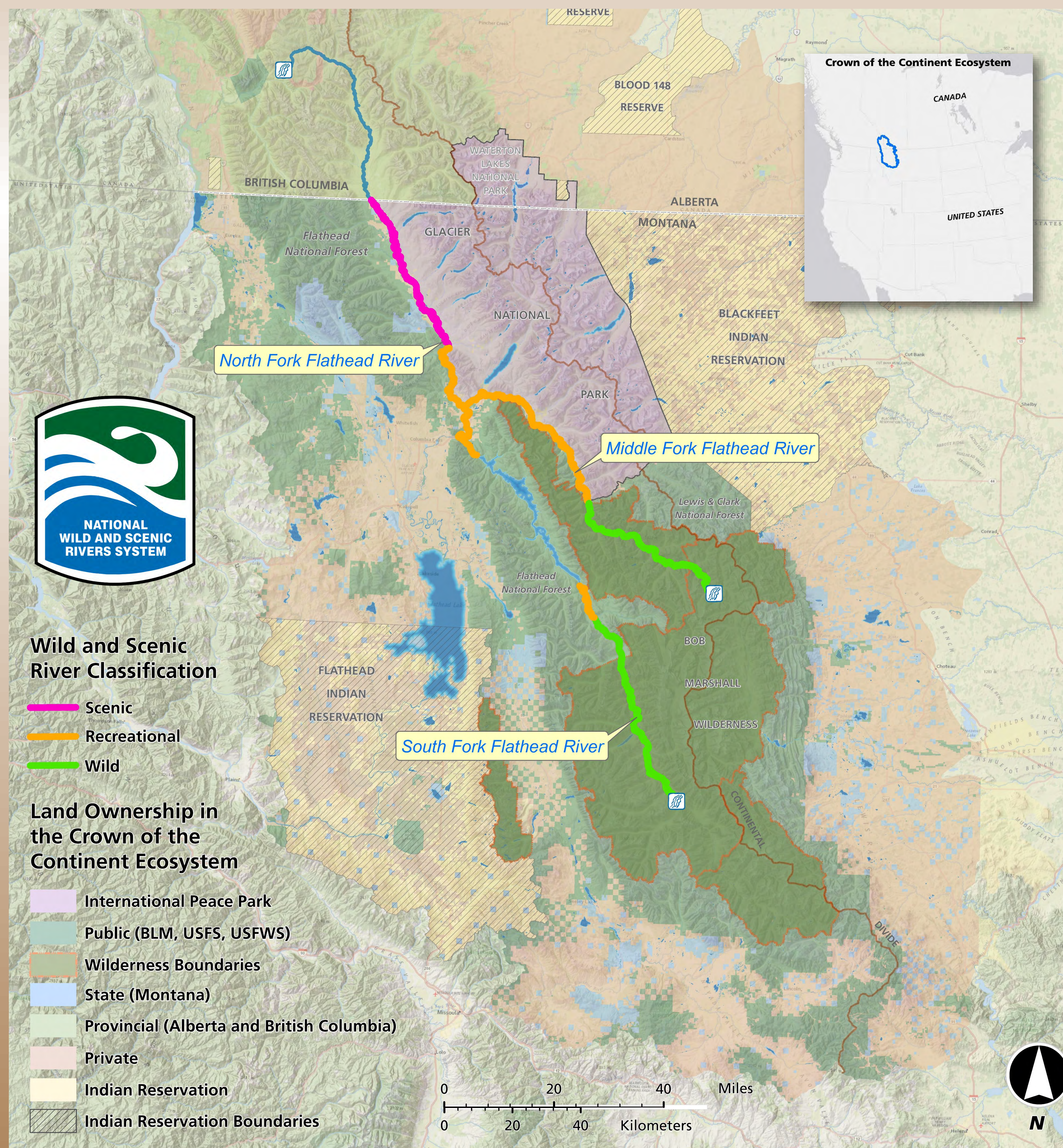
- Transportation of hazardous materials in the Middle Fork corridor
- Invasive Species – aquatic and vegetation
- Increasing visitation and river use
- Coal mine development in British Columbia (North Fork headwaters)
- Differing agency missions



Left: Interagency River Skills Training on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River



**The 3 Forks of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River system compels neighboring federal land management agencies, the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service, to cooperate, co-manage, and use each agency's unique and specialized resources to protect and enhance the river together.**



### Collaboration

- Joint resource management – the agencies are working together to develop a Comprehensive River Management Plan
- Collaborative training – professional and technical river skills training has been jointly developed, and offered to staff with both agencies
- Sharing of staff and expertise – crossing boundaries for planning river access site development, river patrols, interpretive opportunities, and monitoring
- Leveraging funding resources – at various times each agency has accessed funds to support river management
- Integration of volunteers – Glacier National Park's robust volunteer program has been shared by integrating these volunteers into Flathead National Forest river ranger patrols
- Boundary management – avulsive river events complicate land ownership and boundary management between the park and the forest, requiring ongoing resolution
- Research – each agency is able to access unique research opportunities, which are leveraged to benefit the joint mission



Above: USFS and NPS River Ranger Patrol

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