



Figure 1: Vicinity Map of the Flathead National Forest.

Encircled by other national forests and Glacier National Park, the Flathead National Forest is the true heart of the northern Rocky Mountain wild ecosystem. Large designated wilderness areas, such as the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and the Mission Mountains Wilderness, in concert with other special areas such as wild and scenic river systems, the Jewel Basin Hiking Area, and other undeveloped backcountry areas, provide habitat strongholds for federally-listed species, such as grizzly bears, gray wolf, Canada lynx, and bull trout. The Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem Recovery Zone for grizzly bears covers most of the Flathead National Forest. In addition, more than 200 species of birds have been recorded.

The diversity of life on the Flathead is striking. Twenty to sixty inches of annual precipitation create a wide variety of plant life, from lush groves of cedars cloaked in moss to lone whitebark pines clinging to the tops of windswept mountain ridges. Dense forests occupy about 89 percent of the Flathead lands. Dominant tree species include Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, lodgepole pine, Douglas-fir, and western larch. Traces of grand fir, western white pine, ponderosa pine, and aspen also occur. Likewise, the landforms themselves vary greatly, from the magnificent peaks of the Mission Range with their craggy reaches of bare rock to the more rounded, glacial landforms of the Swan valley and Salish Mountains.