



**AMERICAN  
RIVERS**

Life Depends on Rivers<sup>SM</sup>

# Protecting Rivers While Still Cutting Trees

**NEW ASSESSMENT FROM AMERICAN RIVERS EXAMINES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TIMBER HARVEST, FIRE MITIGATION, AND RIVER PROTECTION IN MONTANA, WITH IMPLICATIONS NATIONWIDE.**

## BACKGROUND

There has been longstanding debate over whether the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act impedes or benefits effective forest management. Despite the importance and persistence of this debate, there has been scant analysis based on actual data. To shine light on this issue, American Rivers conducted an assessment of on-the-ground tensions and compatibility between forest management and river protection on Montana's Flathead National Forest, drawing on over 50 years of Forest Service data. The Flathead Wild and Scenic River, designated in 1976, provides an excellent lens through which to explore this topic.

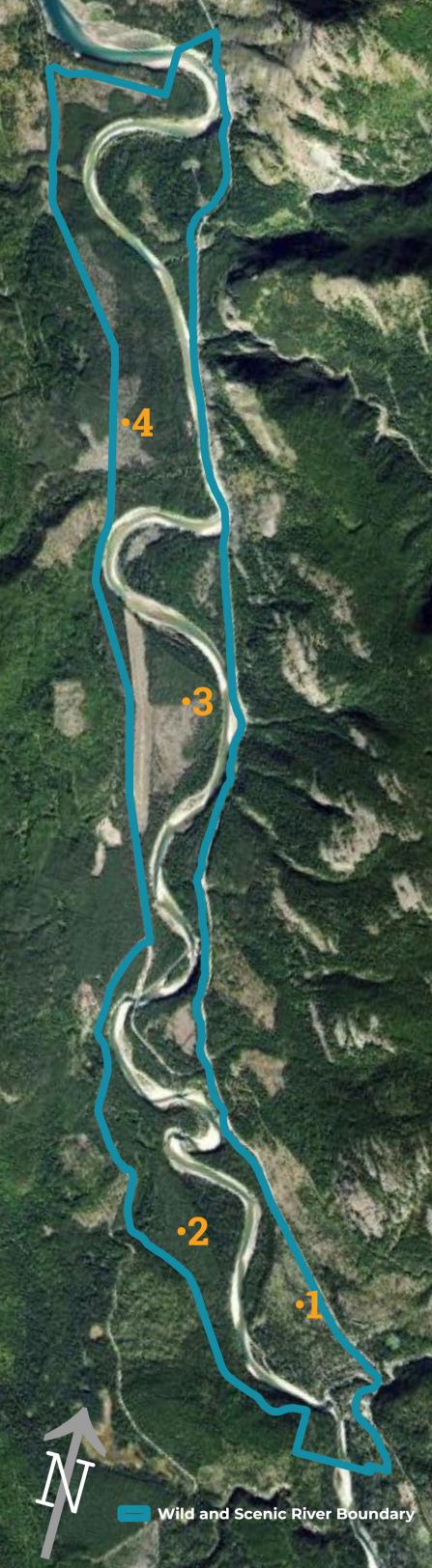
## KEY FINDINGS

- Active forest management occurs inside Wild and Scenic River corridors
- Forest management compatible with river protections can include timber harvest and prescribed burning—actions that mitigate catastrophic wildfire
- Forest management intensity is often lower near rivers in order to protect river values
- River values can be protected and sometimes enhanced when dedicated Forest Service staff commit to balancing the need to both protect rivers and cut trees

## CONCLUSION

Protecting rivers while cutting trees is not hypothetical—it is a proven practice, with a long history and culture on one of America's flagship Wild and Scenic Rivers.

## TOUR THE FOREST MANAGEMENT HISTORY ON THE SOUTH FORK FLATHEAD WILD AND SCENIC RIVER



1. The forest between Spotted Bear Campground and Spotted Bear Ranch has been actively managed including commercial thinning in 2000, prescribed burning in 2001, planting in 2003, and thinning again in 2015. Today, stands here are open with trees of different types and sizes.



2. In contrast to #1, this area has been lightly managed. The stands here are currently thicker with similar sized trees that are generally smaller in diameter.



3. Timber between the river and Spotted Bear airstrip is being managed to thin trees that were first clearcut then roller planted in the late 70s and early 80s. Even after thinning in 2014, you can still see some of the rows that roller planting left behind. Longterm, this area will appear more natural as uneven gaps increase.



4. On the west side of the river, the road generally marks the boundary between the Wild and Scenic River corridor and the lands outside it. The lands on the left side of the road in this picture are within the river corridor, and treatments here have been moderated by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

### ABOUT AMERICAN RIVERS

American Rivers is a national conservation organization working to make every river clean and healthy for people and wildlife. We combine evidence-based solutions with enduring partnerships to safeguard the 4.4 million miles of rivers and streams that are essential to our nation's clean drinking water, extraordinary wildlife, and the strength of our communities. For more than 50 years, our staff, supporters, and partners have been driven by a common belief: Life Depends on Rivers. [AmericanRivers.org](https://www.AmericanRivers.org)



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