

# Conservation Partnerships in Montana

Because of effective, working partnerships between public and private groups and Plum Creek, this summer is a richer experience for all of us who love the outdoors. Boaters and recreationists are treated to frequent appearances by loons diving beneath lake surfaces and eagles perched atop the highest trees. Western Montana hikers spot elk, deer, and black bears and occasionally grizzlies.

Anglers are thrilled to get strikes from Montana's native fish, found in many streams on Plum Creek lands.

This fall, hunters will enjoy free access to Plum Creek lands—a privilege that is also a result of Plum Creek's partnership approach to managing our lands, working with state and local officials.

The timber industry has been a vital part of northwest Montana's history. At Plum Creek we work hard to make sure forest management is compatible with and in many cases beneficial to wildlife.

### Loons on the lake

The quirky common loon has become less common in the northwest U.S. over the years, causing some wildlife biologists to worry that their numbers may be declining. The Common Loon Working Group, made up of state, federal, tribal and non-government organizations, has spent the last several years preparing a management plan aimed at protecting the loon population in northwest Montana. Plum Creek is a participant and helps fund a public education



Common loon, courtesy of USFWS

program to make boaters and lake visitors more aware of and sensitive to nesting loons.

### Eagles: the next generation

Bald eagles nest from February through August, and Plum Creek has been an active member of the Montana Bald Eagle Working Group that since the 1980's has been monitoring nesting successes and crafting plans to protect eagles from disturbance. It is because of partnerships like this that bald eagles were removed from the federal endangered species list in 2007.

Most of the 500 known bald eagle territories (nests and surrounding areas) in Montana are in the western part of the state, and many are on or adjacent to Plum Creek lands. Plum Creek's policy is to establish a one-half mile "non-disturbance" zone around each nest, where forestry activities are on hold until the eaglets are mature enough to leave.

### Bull trout and water quality

Native fish such as bull and cutthroat trout are protected on Plum Creek lands through a cooperative Native Fish Habitat Conservation Plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In the nine years since the plan went into effect, Plum Creek has improved water quality by upgrading over 4,000 road miles to reduce erosion. Dozens of "fish-friendly" culverts and

bridges have also been installed to improve upstream fish migration. Ongoing assessments of road management practices and stream buffers indicate the plan to maintain and improve fish habitat and water quality has been successful.

### Antlers and claws

Many Montana residents are hoping to get their elk and deer on Plum Creek lands this hunting season, or just spend time in the woods *looking* for elk and deer. Plum Creek is the largest private landowner participating in Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP) Block Management Program. This cooperative program between private landowners and the state helps landowners manage hunting activities while providing free hunting access to the public. Thanks to Plum Creek's years of partnership with MDFWP to address such issues as migration corridors and winter range, elk and deer populations continue to provide world-class hunting in Montana.

Our work over the years with major landowners and the USFWS resulted in the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement to further grizzly conservation. The agreement coordinates activities among landowners and requires the implementation of special management practices from the forest stand to landscape level. Two of the biological goals of the agreement are to maintain connectivity between the Bob Marshall and Mission wilderness areas and to minimize the risks of death and injury to grizzly bears. Providing safe areas for the bears to roam has resulted in increased numbers of *Ursus arctos horribilis*.

