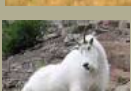


# THOMPSON RIVER



## SPECIES



## GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARY

The Thompson River linkage extends between Thompson Falls and Plains, Montana on Highway 200 and north up the Thompson River and Thompson River Road to Chippy Creek and Richards Peak. The Clark Fork River runs along Highway 200 and the Montana Rail Link Railroad. The area includes the Thompson River Sate Forest.

## IMPORTANCE OF LINKAGE AREA

This area includes the southern end of the grizzly bear recovery peninsula within the southern Cabinets and extends toward the Bitterroot Mountains and Salmon-Selway ecosystem. It is a natural riparian linkage as the Clark Fork and Thompson Rivers come together. Biologists gave the Thompson River linkage area a high priority rating.

## ECOLOGICAL SETTING

This linkage lies across the Clark Fork River valley between Thompson Falls and Plains, and extends up the Thompson River. This lower river section of the valley is somewhat narrower, with steep rocky scree slopes and cliffs on both sides. Highway 200, a railroad, and a power line and pipeline corridor parallel the river throughout. Residences, small subdivisions and communities occur in the linkage along with agricultural pasture and hay land. Roads bracket both side of the Thompson River to the headwaters where extensive logging and road development have occurred. Lower mountain slopes support large areas of ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and grasslands bounded at mid-to higher elevation by mixed conifer forest dominated by Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), western larch (*Larix occidentalis*), grand

fir (*Abies grandis*), western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), lodgepole pine (*P. contorta*), and subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*). Understory shrubs such as alder (*Alnus spp.*), huckleberry (*Vaccinium spp.*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos spp.*) and western serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) are common. The elevation in this area is 2,500 feet at the river and climbs above 6,000 feet in the surrounding mountains.

## WILDLIFE

The Thompson Falls linkage are is part of the grizzly bear recovery zone. There are reports of grizzly bear movement across Highway 200 near the islands east of Thompson Falls. Bighorn sheep occupy the cliffs on the north side of the highway between Plains and Thompson Falls. The linkage area contains winter range for ungulates, and is used by mule deer, white-tailed deer and elk for daily and seasonal movements. Thompson Falls is a biologically rich area that contains rare carnivores, such as fisher and wolverine. Wolves, white-tailed deer, and elk have been observed using an existing underpass on the highway. There is a small mountain goat population that winters in small side drainages. The U.S. Forest Service's Lynx Management Direction identifies a possible north-south lynx linkage east of the Thompson River Road.

## CONSERVATION THREATS

A major threat in this linkage is the paving and upgrading of the graveled Thompson River Road through the Forest Highways program. Paving the road could increase traffic volumes and speed, as well as facilitate subdivision and development. The Thompson Falls area is growing. Additional growth could lead to additional habitat fragmentation, avoidance of key