

14. Lines on the Map

Land Ownership and Management

Centuries ago, no one owned the Crown of the Continent. The idea of titled land ownership was foreign to the native people and came only with European settlement.



Today, about 40% of the Crown of the Continent is in private hands. Yet the Crown of the Continent represents a wealth of public land. That is, most of the land is owned by the people of the United States and Canada and managed by their governments for the public good.

With this wealth of public land and interspersed private holdings, the map of the Crown of the Continent seems a confusing maze of different owners and agencies, with different mandates. Understanding the human construct of private and public lands is crucial to understanding the different economic and social forces pulling at the Crown of the Continent.

Private Land

The single largest private landowner in the state of Montana is Plum Creek Timber Co., with 580,000 hectares (1.45 million acres) statewide. Of that, roughly 180,000 hectares (450,000 acres) is within the Crown of the Continent, making Plum Creek the largest private landowner in the Crown of the

Continent Ecosystem as well. In addition to its timber interests, Plum Creek has been increasing its development and sale of waterfront and other scenic properties.

Many Plum

Creek landholdings appear to have a checkerboard pattern, with one-square-mile blocks of corporate timberland alternating with square-mile blocks of national or state forest land. This pattern dates back to the 1860s, when railroads were granted millions of acres from the U.S. government as an incentive to build track across the United States. Burlington Northern, an amalgamation of several smaller railroads, is also a parent company of Plum Creek Timber Co.

In ecosystem terms, this means Plum Creek is

the United States' largest private owner of grizzly bear and bull trout

habitat. The company, once widely criticized for its logging practices, today prides itself on its land stewardship policy called "Principles



of Environmental Forestry.”

Plum Creek has eight sawmills and manufacturing plants in the Crown of the Continent, including those at Ksanka, Pablo, Kalispell, and Columbia Falls. Its timberlands in the Crown include:

- 48,473 hectares (121,183 acres) in the Swan Valley
- 56,863 hectares (142,158 acres) in the Blackfoot River drainage
- 67,646 hectares (169,116 acres) in the Garnet Range
- 6,191 hectares (15,477 acres) in the Stillwater drainage
- 850 hectares (2,126 acres) near Swan Lake

The Sieben Ranch covers about 15,200 hectares (38,000 acres) on the southern edges of the Crown of the Continent. The ranch lies within the prairie and foothills region of the Rocky Mountain Front, northwest of Helena and in the headwaters of the Blackfoot River. It dates back to the 1890s and has traditionally been used for raising sheep. More recently, an international consortium has been interested in developing a gold mine on state and Sieben land in the Blackfoot drainage. About 6,000 hectares (15,000 acres) of the Sieben are under conservation easements with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, particularly the elk and deer winter range in the Lyons and Rattlesnake creeks.

Smaller timber companies also have holdings in the U.S. portion of the Crown. For example, Stoltze Land and Lumber has significant landholdings in the northern and western edges of the Flathead Valley, with a sawmill near Columbia Falls. There are also smaller, non-industrial timberlands in private hands in Montana, particularly west of the Continental Divide.

Generally, if land is flat in the Crown of the Continent, it is privately owned and converted to agriculture, or commercial or

residential development. This pattern includes the eastern prairie, as well as the broad flatlands of the Mission, Flathead, and other broad valleys. Narrow stringers of private land follow the Elk, the Middle and North Forks of the Flathead, and other rivers. East of the Rocky Mountain Front, thousands of hectares of ranch and farmland is in private hands.

A chain of private land crosses over Crowsnest Pass. Private land ownership ranges from large ranches of several thousand acres to hobby farms of less than two hectares.

As the Crown of the Continent has grown increasingly popular as a place to live, rising property prices have given rural landowners a powerful incentive to sell and develop their property. This is particularly true of land near parks, lakes, ski hills, and other attractions.

Conservation Owners and Conservation Easements

Some private landowners have recognized the ecological value of the Crown of the



Continent and have purchased land specifically to protect those values. For example, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC) conserve land to protect biodiversity. (The two groups are allied, but not officially affiliated.)

Pine Butte Swamp Preserve, a 7,200-hectare (18,000-acre) ranch on the Rocky Mountain Front near Choteau, is a flagship preserve for The Nature Conservancy. The preserve is focused on a fen, with a rich array of native plants and animals.

On the west side of the Crown, TNC owns the 272-hectare (680-acre) Dancing Prairie Preserve that protects the native grassland of the Tobacco Valley near Eureka. TNC also owns the 53-hectare (132-acre) Safe Harbor Marsh along Flathead Lake, and the 157-hectare (392-acre) Swan River Ox Bow Preserve, home of the Crown's only officially endangered plant, the water howellia.

The Nature Conservancy not only owns land outright, but also arranges conservation easements. In short, the group buys or accepts the donation of development rights, while the land stays in private ownership. For example, TNC has conserved 600 hectares (1,500 acres) in the North Fork of the Flathead Valley, mostly through conservation easements. Other private groups, such as the Montana Land Reliance, Flathead Land Trust, and The Southern Alberta Land Trust Society, also conserve habitat and open space through conservation easements. The Nature Conservancy Canada works cooperatively with The United States Nature Conservancy. Outside Waterton Lakes National Park, NCC has purchased 2,000 hectares (5,000 acres) of rangeland on the Rocky Mountain Front. In British Columbia, NCC was granted ownership of the 8,400-hectare (21,000-acre) Mt.

Broadwood Preserve south of Fernie.

The Boone and Crockett Club is another conservation owner on the



Rocky Mountain Front. Near Dupuyer, the club owns the 2,400-hectare (6,000-acre) Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch. Since 1986, the club has managed the ranch as a working cattle ranch. The three main objectives of the ranch are research, education, and demonstration. The research program is affiliated with the University of Montana. The education and demonstration are conducted on the ranch utilizing the Rasmuson Wildlife Conservation Center.

In Canada, the Prairie Crocus Ranching Coalition and the Southern Alberta Land Trust Society have been established to help preserve rangeland and open space in southwestern Alberta, in and on the border of the Crown of the Continent. These groups also educate people about the issues surrounding the subdivision and fragmentation of large tracts of rangelands and promote traditional uses of private ranches and woodlands to conserve valuable open space and wildlife habitat.

State Lands and Parks

When Montana achieved statehood, the federal government granted square-mile sections of land to the state to generate money for education. Sections 16 and 36 in each township are school trust lands. In land swaps, the creation of Glacier National Park, and similar transactions, some of those isolated sections have been consolidated. School trust lands are managed by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

State forests include the Coal Creek State Forest, (6,000 hectares; 15,000 acres) in the North Fork of the Flathead, the Stillwater State Forest, (36,000 hectares; 90,000 acres) near Olney, the Swan River State Forest (6,000 hectares; 15,000 acres) in the Swan River Valley, and the Clearwater State Forest (9,600 hectares; 24,000 acres). The Kalispell office of the Montana Department of Natural Resources

also manages (114,400 hectares; 286,000 acres) in western Montana.

These state trust lands are managed to generate revenue, traditionally by logging, grazing, or cabin site leases. There is now increasing interest in commercial and residential development of state land near urban centers. Other state lands are managed by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. On these parcels, recreation and wild-



life habitat are emphasized.

Montanans enjoy several state parks in the Crown. Flathead Lake State Park includes six units around the lake. The largest of these is 840-hectare (2,100-acre) Wild Horse Island State Park. There are also state parks at Lake Mary Ronan, Whitefish Lake, and Placid and Salmon lakes.

Several parks, like Wild Horse Island, are managed as primitive parks, with limited services and no fees.

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks also manages forty-five fishing access sites at the Crown's lakes, rivers, and reservoirs. These offer public access to water and are usually quite small.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks also

operates Wildlife Management Areas that protect deer and elk winter range, wetlands for waterfowl, and other habitat for deer, elk, and other hunted species. Some of these are owned outright by the state, while others are privately owned but protected by conservation easements, or a combination of the two. These WMAs include the 560-hectare (1,400-acre) Woods Ranch, near Eureka, the 640-hectare (1,600-acre) Kuhns area near Kalispell, and the 1,386-hectare (3,465-acre) Ninepipes Waterfowl Production Area in the Mission Valley.

Deer and elk which summer in the Crown spend winters on the Blackfoot/Clearwater Game Range, which totals more than 26,000 hectares (65,000 acres) near Ovando. Several important winter ranges are located on the Rocky Mountain Front, including Bay Ranch, (1,548 hectares; 3,870 acres), Blackleaf (4,160 hectares; 10,400 acres), Ear Mountain (4,160 hectares; 10,400 acres), and Sun River (16,574 hectares; 41,436 acres). Freezeout Lakes (5,353 hectares; 13,383 acres) is an important wetland complex near Choteau, managed for waterfowl.



Provincial Parks

There are no national parks in British Columbia's portion of the Crown of the Continent, but there are three striking provincial parks. Like national parks, provincial parks are managed to preserve the natural diversity within their boundaries, as well as provide recreation. B.C.'s parks are managed by the B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks

through the Kootenay District in Wasa.

In the uppermost reaches of the Elk River

drainage is Elk Lakes Provincial Park, at 17,325 hectares (42,792 acres). This park abuts provincial parks on the Alberta side of the Continental Divide and provides boating and fishing on mountain lakes, as well as backcountry recreation.



The Akamina-Kishinena Provincial Park is also along the Continental Divide, in the southeasternmost corner of B.C., abutting Waterton Lakes and Glacier national parks. Akamina-Kishinena is 10,922 hectares (26,977 acres) and also is managed for backcountry recreation and wildlife habitat. Both Elk Lakes and Akamina-Kishinena are almost entirely above timberline. There is a smaller 259-hectare (640-acre) Mt. Fernie Provincial Park near Fernie which offers developed camping and recreation.

About 30% of the 54,200-hectare (134,000-acre) Height of the Rockies Provincial Park is in the Elk drainage, and therefore in the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem. This includes Connor Lakes, Forsyth Creek, and Quarrie Creek. It joins Banff National Park and Peter Lougheed Provincial Park in Alberta, and thus is an alpine link between the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem and the rest of the Canadian Rockies.

In 1999, the Alberta Ministry of Environmental Protection gave some limited protection to 28,000 hectares (70,000 acres) in the Whaleback Ridge/Livingstone Range. These includes the 20,000-hectare (52,000-acre) Bob

Creek Wildland Park and the 7,000-hectare (18,000-acre) Black Creek Rangeland. Black Creek is the first provincially protected rangeland in Alberta.

Canadian environmental groups have lobbied for years to make the Castle-Crown—an area between Crowsnest Pass and Waterton Lakes National Park—a wilderness park. Between 1914 and 1921, the Castle-Crown was part of Waterton, but has been open for multiple use since 1984. Other Alberta Provincial Parks in the Crown of the Continent include Beauvais Lake (1,149 hectares; 2,872 acres), Police Outpost (220 hectares; 550 acres), and Chain Lakes (404 hectares; 1,010 acres), on the northeastern boundary of the Crown of the Continent. Southwestern Alberta also includes several protected natural areas, including Beehive (5,560 hectares; 13,900 acres), Mt. Livingstone (540 hectares; 1,350 acres), Outpost Wetlands (71 hectares; 179 acres), and Plateau Mountain (2,296 hectares; 5,740 acres). These areas are managed by Alberta Community Development, Parks and Protected Areas.

British Columbia

The province of British Columbia is two-thirds unreserved public or crown land. (Public crown land in this context has nothing to do with the phrase Crown of the Continent. To avoid confusion, references to crown land in this document will be spelled with a lower case c; references to Crown of the Continent with an uppercase C.) In total, some 59 million hectares (146 million acres) of British Columbia is public land, managed by the British Columbia Ministry of Forestry. Unlike provincial parks, this crown land is managed for multiple use, including timber, mining, grazing, recreation, wildlife, and watershed protection, under the Forest Practices Code.

Most of the public lands in the B.C. portion of the Crown (the Elk, Wigwam, and

Flathead drainages) are managed by the Cranbrook Forest District. That district totals 1.4 million hectares (3.5 million acres). Of that, 386,434 hectares (954,870 acres) are in the Crown of the Continent. That includes 184,986 hectares (457,099 acres) in the Elk River drainage; 63,326 hectares (156,478 acres) in the Wigwam River drainage (including Bighorn and Lodgepole Creeks, but not including the area within the Rocky Mountain Trench downstream from Silver Spring Lakes); and 138,123 hectares (341,301 acres) within the Flathead drainage.

In April, 2001, the British Columbia government announced the 280,000-hectare Southern Rocky Mountain Conservation Area. It extends from the international border north through the Flathead, Wigwam, and portions of the Elk/Bull river watersheds to the southern boundary of Top of the World Provincial Park. Most of this is within the Crown of the Continent.

Alberta

Public lands in the Alberta portion of the Crown of the Continent are managed by either federal or provincial agencies. Waterton Lakes National Park is an example of federal crown land managed by Parks Canada. However, most of the public land in the Crown of the Continent is provincial crown land. This includes both public forests in the mountains and public grasslands on the prairies.

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development oversees management of provincial crown land. Divisions within the agencies include the Forest Service, which manages



forests, and Public Lands, which manages grasslands. ASRD divisions also include Alberta Fish and Wildlife, which manages wildlife populations, and Forest Protection, which fights forest fires. The Rocky Mountain Forest Reserve is a large portion of provincial crown land in the mountains north of Waterton Lakes National Park. One component of that reserve is the 970-square kilometer (378-square mile) Castle Special Management Area, just north of Waterton Lakes National Park. Provincial crown lands are generally managed for sustained multiple use, including timber, oil and gas development, and recreation.

Grazing rights, timber rights, and recreation rights may be leased by private parties. In addition to land managed by the ASRD, the

province of Alberta has set aside places with special recreational or cultural values. These areas, including Bob Creek Wildland Park and Black Creek Heritage Ranchlands, are managed by Alberta Community

Development, Parks and Protected Areas. Land management agencies within Alberta were reorganized in 2001, and some management details were still being determined at the time this was written.

East of the mountains, the proportion of land in private hands increases. The foothills and prairies of the Cardston and Pincher Creek municipal districts are largely under private ownership. Ranching and farming are the dominant land uses, although increasing areas are being developed for recreational

homes and acreages. Traditional ranches in southern Alberta, like the Palmer Ranch a few kilometers east of Waterton, tend to be large, sometimes spreading 25,000 hectares or more.

The area also includes several colonies of Hutterite Brethren, who communally manage very large holdings. Other prominent ranches include the Waldron Grazing Cooperative (23,200 hectares), and the A-7, Bobs Creek, and Bar 11 ranches.

Another important agency is Alberta Environment, charged with “integrated resource management.” That is, the agency enforces laws regarding air and water pollution, water allocation, climate change, and the like.

Glacier National Park

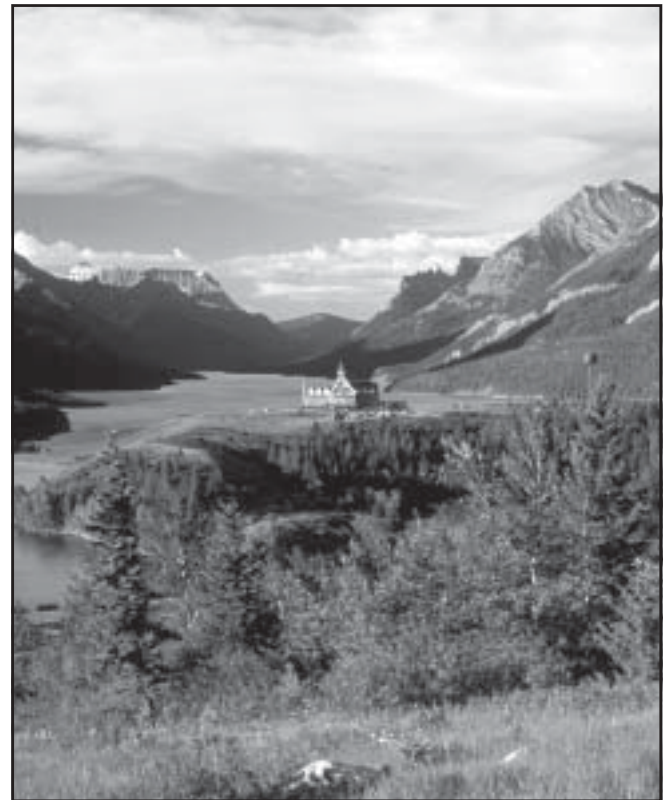
Founded in 1910, Glacier National Park is among the oldest and largest units in the U.S. National Park System. It is just under 400,000 hectares (1 million acres) and is managed to preserve its natural values and to provide recreation. Most of the park is managed as wilderness, except along road corridors and villages. Glacier is managed by the National Park Service, within the U.S. Department of the Interior.

There are about 418 acres of small inholdings—that is, private residences and parcels—within the boundaries of Glacier Park. These were in private hands before Glacier Park was created. Glacier Park hosts 1.5-2 million visitors annually, most between June and September.

Waterton Lakes National Park

Founded in 1895, Waterton Lakes National Park is 52,617 hectares (129,920 acres). Waterton is managed for preservation and recreation by Parks Canada, a federal agency that is part of the Department of Canadian

Heritage. Like Glacier, Waterton Lakes National Park is managed for preservation and recreation; that is, the managers’ first priority



is to protect the park’s ecological integrity, although visitor experiences, education, and enjoyment are encouraged. Unlike Glacier, there is a townsite within the park borders, at the foot of Upper Waterton Lake.

However, Waterton Lakes has no private inholdings; land within its boundaries is owned by the government and leased for cottages, motels, and other uses. Relative to its size, Waterton has a large number of visitors, and much of the park is accessible by roads and trails.

Together, the two national parks of the Crown of the Continent are called the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. At 4,667 square kilometers (1,802 square miles), Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park is larger than the state of Delaware and is the wilderness core of the Crown of the Continent



Ecosystem. The Peace Park was established in May, 1932 by the governments of Canada and the United States of America. In the beginning, the Peace Park commemorated the peace and goodwill of two nations sharing a common boundary and heritage. Today, the park reflects not only peace and goodwill, but also the need for cooperation in a world of limited shared resources. In 1976, Glacier National Park was designated by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a Biosphere Reserve under the Man and Biosphere Program. Waterton Lakes National Park received this designation in 1979. In 1995, UNESCO named Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park a World Heritage Site. That designation recognizes “outstanding universal values” and, in particular, “distinctive climate, physiographic setting, mountain/prairie interface and tri-ocean hydrographical divide as well as its scenic value and cultural importance.”

U.S. National Forest and



Other Public Lands

After massive logging deforested much of the U.S. upper Midwest in the late 1800s, the federal government feared the country faced a timber shortage. Led by President Theodore Roosevelt, the government created forest reserves to make sure the nation’s forests weren’t squandered. At the turn of the twentieth century, much of the Crown of the Continent was in the Lewis and Clark, Flathead, and Blackfoot Forest Reserves. Over time, some of that land was homesteaded and settled into private ownership. Today, these three forest reserves are parts of the Flathead, Lolo, Lewis and Clark, and Helena national forests and Glacier National Park.

The U.S. Forest Service is under the Department of Agriculture. The agency’s

mandate is for multiple use, compared to the more preservation-oriented mandate for national parks. Those uses include timber, mining, grazing, water, and recreation. The U.S. Forest Service regional office is in Missoula, which oversees national forests in Montana and northern Idaho.

The Crown of the Continent includes portions of four national forests: The Flathead, Lolo, Lewis and Clark, and Helena national forests. Together, about 1.4 million hectares (3.5 million acres) of U.S. National Forest are within the Crown of the Continent. Of those, about 800,000 hectares (2 million acres) are within the Flathead National Forest.

Another 308,000 hectares (770,000 acres) is in the Rocky Mountain District of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. The Lincoln District of the Helena National Forest is about 160,000 hectares (400,000 acres), and the Seeley Lake Ranger District of the Lolo National Forest is about 124,000 hectares (310,000 acres). Portions of the Lolo’s Missoula Ranger District and the Helena National Forest’s Helena Ranger District also lie within the Crown of the Continent.

Aside from national forest land, the Bureau of Land Management also manages about 5,200 hectares (13,000 acres) along the Rocky Mountain Front. The BLM is an agency within the Department of Interior and also manages for multiple use, tending to focus more on grazing and minerals and less on forestry. The Bureau of Reclamation manages two small parcels near the Rocky Mountain Front, around the Willow Creek and Pishkun reservoirs.

Indian Reservations

Two major Indian reservations overlap the Crown of the Continent in the United States: the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, just east of Glacier National Park, and the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes Reservation

(also called the Flathead Reservation) in the Mission Valley.

The Blackfeet (Pikuni) Reservation is 600,000 hectares (1.5 million acres) in Glacier County, Montana, bordering Glacier National Park. Most of the reservation is grassland,



with some forest on the western edge. The reservation is home to 9,000 people, of which 7,500 are tribal members. (In total, the U.S. Blackfeet Tribe has 14,700 registered members.)

The Confederated Salish-Kootenai Reservation lies south of Flathead Lake and encompasses 520,000 hectares (1.3 million acres). The Salish and Kootenai tribes include about 7,000 members, about half of whom live on the reservation. Tribal members comprise only about 30% of the people living on the reservation.

Within U.S. Indian reservations, tribes have management jurisdiction over resident wildlife, timber, and other resources. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have an agreement for managing migratory and exotic wildlife (such as pheasants) and a joint management plan for the Flathead Lake fishery. The southern half of Flathead Lake is in the Flathead Reservation.

While tribal governments have jurisdiction within the bounds of the reservation, much of the land within both reservations is

no longer owned by tribal members or the tribes. For example, in 1910, the U.S. government opened up surplus land on the Flathead Reservation to white settlers, over the objections of the tribes. Lately, however, the tribal government has been buying back land, and about 51% of the Flathead Reservation is now in tribal ownership. About 30% of the Flathead Reservation is forested, including the southwestern portion of the Mission Mountain Range.

The Blood Indian Reserve lies east of the Crown of the Continent in southern Alberta, but the tribe's timber reserve lies within the Crown, adjacent to Waterton. The timberlands are in the Belly River drainage, surrounded on three sides by Waterton Lakes National Park. At roughly 1,560 square kilometers (600 square miles), the Blood Reserve is the largest reserve in Canada. It's largely prairie and is used by tribal members for grazing and agriculture, as well as some manufacturing. There are about 8,600 Blood tribal members, about 6,800 of whom live on the reserve.



National Wildlife Refuges

National Wildlife Refuges are similar to Montana's wildlife management areas, except

that they are managed by the U.S. federal government, specifically the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Department of the Interior. Typically, no recreational activities are allowed on national wildlife refuges unless specifically authorized; hunting and fishing is automatically allowed on federal waterfowl production areas. National wildlife refuges in the Crown include the National Bison Range (7,410 hectares; 18,526 acres), Pablo (960

hectares; 2,500 acres), and Ninepipes (825 hectares; 2,062 acres), all in the Mission Valley. Swan River Refuge (627 hectares; 1,568 acres) is at the head of Swan Lake. The agency manages 2,295 hectares (5,739 acres) of waterfowl production areas in thirteen parcels in the Crown. The agency also has 2,440 hectares (6,100 acres) in conservation easements on twenty-four parcels of private land.



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Special thanks to:

The British Columbia Ministry of Forestry in Wasa.

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JURISDICTIONS IN THE CROWN OF THE CONTINENT

