

BIRDING AREAS FOUND ON THE MAP

1 LAWRENCE PARK

This city park is located below the Buffalo Hill Golf Course at the north end of Kalispell. Lawrence Park includes a developed park, wetlands, mature trees and a walking/biking trail through mixed riparian habitats along the Stillwater River.

Directions: From downtown Kalispell, follow Highway 93 North (Main Street) across Highway 2; 1/4 mile bear right on Main Street where Highway 93 veers left (follow public golf course signs). The entrance to Lawrence Park is on the right, just before the road heads uphill to the golf course.

Habitat

- Birch, large cottonwoods, dense dogwood understory
- Cattail wetlands along the backwater slough
- Thinned forest and dense riparian shrubs along the bike trail

Birds: A variety of woodpeckers nest here, from Downy to Pileated. Wood Duck are easily found. Black-chinned Hummingbird and Lazuli Bunting are among

the more interesting breeding birds, and Cooper's Hawk have also nested in the past. At the south end of the park the swampy tangle supports Red-eyed Vireo and Black-headed Grosbeak in the overstory, Northern Waterthrush and Yellow Warbler in the understory. Listen for Blue Jay.

Seasons: Open year-round.

2 OWEN SOWERWINE NATURAL AREA

This gem is an outstanding 442 acres of undisturbed riparian bottomland located along the eastern outskirts of Kalispell. Montana's only state-designated Natural Area is managed by Flathead Audubon and Montana Audubon. Most of the Natural Area lies on the east side of the Stillwater River, accessible primarily by boat. There is a network of maintained trails on the west side of the Natural Area and the first 600 feet of the main trail is ADA accessible.

To access by boat: Float about a mile downstream from the Conrad Drive bridge over the

Stillwater River located just east of intersection with Willow Glen Drive. Or, paddle up river (it is very slow in the summer) 2 miles from the county river access located at the end of Leisure Lane (off Willow Glen Drive). Explore the islands that comprise the bulk of the area, and the highest quality habitat. Trails are not maintained and the understory is dense.

Directions for hiking: From downtown Kalispell, take 2nd Street east towards Woodland Park. Continue about a mile on Conrad Drive. Turn right on Willow Glen Drive and continue 0.9 miles south; left onto Treasure Lane. Limited parking is located at the end of Treasure Lane; please do not block any driveways. From Highway 93 heading north to Kalispell, access Willow Glen Drive at the Toyota dealership, about 3 miles south of town. Treasure Lane is 1.7 miles north of the intersection.

Habitat

- Mature cottonwood gallery forests, dense understory
- Riparian shrubs, backwater channels
- Birch, spruce
- Forest openings

Birds: Over 100 species of birds have been



Bald Eagle

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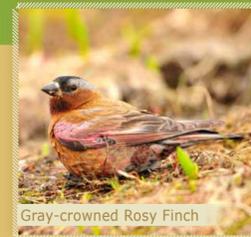


Yellow-headed Blackbird



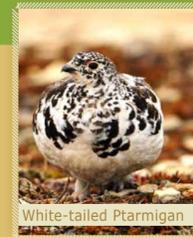
Hooded Merganser

© DickandPamWalker.com



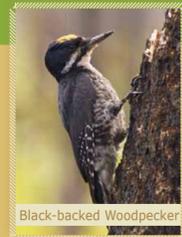
Gray-crowned Rosy Finch

© Kurt Lindsay



White-tailed Ptarmigan

© Kurt Lindsay



Black-backed Woodpecker

© DickandPamWalker.com

recorded in this area. In spring look for Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos, Gray Catbird, Bullock's Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeak, White-breasted Nuthatch, Least and Willow Flycatcher, Red-naped Sapsucker, Wild Turkey and Yellow Warbler. Look around the huge cottonwood snags for Pileated Woodpecker and Vaux's Swift. Along the river you will find Common Goldeneye, Common and Hooded Mergansers, Wood Duck, Osprey and Great Blue Heron. On the south end of Owen Sowerwine you can see a heronry across the river channel.

Seasons: Open year-round.

3 LOWER VALLEY (ROAD)

The area known as "Lower Valley" extends from Kalispell to Flathead Lake. A number of farm roads, including Lower Valley Road, Farm Road, and N. Somers Road meander through farmlands and past pothole wetlands, oxbow sloughs, and riparian areas.

Directions: Lower Valley Road is accessible from Highway 93 (along with Willow Glen Drive) at the Toyota dealership intersection south of Kalispell. Turn east from Highway 93 and immediately southeast extends south to Highway 82.

Habitat

- Agricultural area
- Riparian forests, creeks, sloughs, upland shrubs (hawthorn, rose and snowberry) and grasslands
- Notable pothole wetlands located on North Somers and Farm Roads

Birds: Church Slough, about 5 miles from Highway 93 just east of the Ashley Creek bridge, is one of the best places for migratory waterfowl in early spring. There are thousands of Tundra Swan, geese, and ducks in late March and early April. It is the most reliable place in the Flathead Valley to find Greater Scaup and Eurasian Wigeon. The pothole wetlands support breeding Eared Grebe, Redhead, Ruddy Duck, Common Goldeneye, other ducks and small numbers of Black Tern. Sora, Virginia Rail and Wilson's Phalarope families can be seen in summer, followed by a wide variety of sandpipers (mid-August is best). Breeding Clay-colored Sparrow and Savannah Sparrow are abundant. Common breeding raptors include Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle and Northern Harrier. Rough-legged and Red-tailed (including Harlan's) Hawks, falcons and even the occasional Snowy Owl hunt the lower valley fields in winter. The Blasdel Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) on North Somers Road is the only sizeable piece of public land here, and offers grassland, shrub and wetland birds such as Short-eared Owl, Northern Harrier, Marsh Wren and several

sparrow species. The WPA is closed from March 1st through July 1st to protect nesting birds.

Seasons: Year-round.

4 SMITH LAKE

A short drive west from Kalispell takes you to Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area—a complex of large, shallow wetlands, peat marsh, agricultural lands, willow and some dry coniferous forest.

Directions: From the intersection of Highway 93 and Highway 2 in Kalispell, head west on Highway 2 for 9 miles. Turn left at the fishing access sign toward Kila. Bear left across the Ashley Creek bridge and continue to the public fishing access. Drive on gravel roads around Smith Lake, past the Batavia Waterfowl Production Area back to Kalispell.

Habitat

- Bull rush, cattails, and tall impenetrable grasses
- Upland grasslands, Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir stands, and some rocky cliffs along the Smith Lake Road (back side of the lake)
- Riparian shrubs such as willow, red-osier dogwood

NEARBY OPPORTUNITIES

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

No visit to the Flathead Valley is complete without a trip to Glacier National Park. Pick up a park map at the entrance. Some of our most unique and rewarding birding opportunities are found in the park.

Directions: Glacier National Park is located about 35 miles northeast of Kalispell off Highway 2 and about 26 miles northeast of Whitefish off Highway 40. Routes from both Kalispell and Whitefish are well marked.

Habitat

- Wet cedar and hemlock forests on the West side
- Alpine and subalpine habitats
- Remnant prairies
- Aspen parkland dominates the East side

Birds: Along Going-to-the-Sun Road you can often get close-up views of breeding Harlequin Duck in McDonald Creek. Look for them in May and June along the upper reaches from Avalanche Creek to Logan Creek along the roadside. American Dipper are all along this reach. Logan Pass is *the* place for White-tailed Ptarmigan, one of our most sought-after birds. Look along the boardwalk trail to Hidden Lake, especially right after daybreak. The tundra here also supports Gray-crowned Rosy Finch and American Pipit. Check the surrounding low spruce for White-crowned Sparrow and Hermit Thrush. The (rustic) Inside North Fork Road offers the best chances to find Spruce Grouse, Great Gray Owl, Three-toed Woodpecker, LeConte's Sparrow and a host of other forest and meadow species. Check the meadow edges, burned stands and small lakes for Common Loon and Red-necked Grebe. Black-backed Woodpecker and Northern Hawk-Owl have nested in the burned areas here in

recent years. Check the Fish Creek Campground for such cedar specialties as Varied Thrush. Take the Camas Loop to the North Fork, stopping at McGee Meadows for Common Snipe and LeConte's Sparrow. Watch for Boreal Chickadee in these areas as well. In winter, near Apgar entrance, you can often see American Dipper, Bald Eagle, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, various woodpeckers and occasionally observe Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Trumpeter Swan, Common Redpoll, Chestnut-backed Chickadee and Northern Shrike.

Seasons: Glacier National Park is open year-round, however the main roads are not plowed in winter except in and around Park Headquarters and the Apgar area to Lake McDonald Lodge.

SWAN LAKE

A visit to Swan Lake always produces some birding rewards, especially in spring and summer. Start at the Forest Service boat ramp and swimming area Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge. After that, head to Porcupine Creek Road, stopping at the Porcupine Creek bridge. Be sure to also visit The Nature Conservancy's Swan River Oxbow Preserve, populated with many hiking trails.

Directions: Drive south from Bigfork about 30 miles along Highway 83 to the southeast end of Swan Lake—a mile before the town of Swan Lake. The Forest Service boat ramp access is located west of the highway, the camping area is on east side. Access Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge via Bog Road, located another 2.2 miles south of the boat ramp (marked with a "binoculars" sign). Porcupine

Creek is west of Highway 83 another 1.6 miles south of the refuge. Follow signs to the Swan River Oxbow Preserve off Porcupine Creek Road.

Habitat

- Stands of cottonwood, dogwood and other shrubs along the trails located near the Swan Lake loat access
- Swampy tributary, dense shrubs, forest, and lake just east of the highway near the camping area
- Refuge observation tower overlooks vast wetlands and marsh (seasonally flooded)
- Porcupine Creek Road and the Swan River Oxbow Preserve trails intersect the Swan River mainstem, with numerous backwater channels, wetlands, a large oxbow lake, winding through mature coniferous and cottonwood forests

Birds: At the Forest Service boat access look for Red-naped Sapsucker, Hammond's Flycatcher, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush and Black-headed Grosbeak. In the swampy area across the highway, you can find Vaux's Swift, Rufous Hummingbird, and Warbling and Red-eyed Vireos. The refuge viewing platform often yields views of Wilson's Snipe, American Bittern, Black Tern and other marsh residents. Less common recent visitors have included Bobolink, Loggerhead Shrike and Lark Sparrow. Watch for Vaux's and Black Swifts overhead on overcast summer days. Round out your day's list by traveling down Pocupine Creek Road with the Fox Sparrow, MacGillivray's Warbler, Ruffed Grouse, Varied Thrush and Chestnut-backed Chickadee.

Seasons: Best spring, summer, and early fall.

LOST TRAIL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Located about 30 miles west of Kalispell, the nearly 8,000-acre Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is the newest local addition to the National Wildlife Refuge system and is important to elk, waterbirds and grassland species. The refuge lies along the bottom of a picturesque east-west valley composed of lakes, wetlands and grasslands that transition to conifer forests. The headquarters is located at the western end and is open most weekdays between 7:30 AM to 3:30 PM.

Directions: From Kalispell, drive west approximately 20 miles along Highway 2 to Marion. Turn north at Marion onto Pleasant Valley Road. Take the right fork at 1.3 miles and continue on the blacktop past Little Bitterroot Lake until reaching the graveled road. Continue on the gravel road for approximately 13 miles over Haskill Pass dropping into Pleasant Valley.

Habitat

- Grassland, wet meadows and lake

Birds: This area supports Vesper and Savannah Sparrows, Mountain Bluebird and Long-billed Curlew in summer. The wet meadows and Dahl Lake provide habitat for migrant and breeding waterfowl and Sandhill Crane. Bald Eagle and Black Tern nest here, and thousands of duck, geese and swan can be seen in spring.

Seasons: Best spring, summer, and early fall. A portion of the refuge valley is closed in the fall.

BIRDING GUIDE TO FLATHEAD Valley of Northwest MONTANA

CONTRIBUTORS:

Flathead Audubon Society

FlatheadAudubon.org

Glacier Country Regional Tourism

GlacierMT.com

Kalispell Convention & Visitors Bureau

DiscoverKalispell.com

Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau

ExploreWhitefish.com



Northern hawk owl

Photo © Kurt Lindsay

DIRECTIONS

HABITAT

BIRDS

SEASONS

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Pictured: Lazuli Bunting by Kurt Lindsay

BIRDING AREAS FOUND ON THE MAP

and Douglas hawthorn along Ashley Creek

Birds: Red-necked, Eared and Pied-billed Grebes breed in numbers here, as do Black Tern, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron and Bald Eagle loaf on pilings in the marsh, and thousands of Sandhill Crane nest most years, and a wide variety of other birds can be found reliably on a drive around the south and east end of the area, including Wood Duck, American Bittern (at dawn), Willow Flycatcher, and both Mountain and Western Bluebirds. During early fall migration the chokecherry and other shrub stands around the boat ramp can be remarkable for mixed flocks of migrants: warblers, vireos, flycatchers, tanagers, sparrows and thrushes. It is not unusual to find more than 20 species using the same patch of berries at this time of year. Recent rarities here include Yellow-breasted Chat and Alder Flycatcher.

Seasons: Best spring, summer, and fall.

5 WEST VALLEY

The area known as “West Valley” lies between Kalispell and Whitefish west of Highway 93 and offers a variety of habitats from lakes and wetlands to agricultural fields and conifer forests. This birding loop can start at either Whitefish or Kalispell, with a return via Highway 93. On your return you can turn west into the county sanitary landfill and observe a number of gull species that often concentrate there. The distance is about 20 miles one way.

Directions: From Highway 2 west of Kalispell, head north for 3/4 mile on North Meridian Road Turn left on Three Mile Drive (which becomes Farm to Market Road) and continue about 4 miles north and west to West Valley Drive, passing farm land and spring creek habitats. Turn right (north) on West Valley Drive, go north 3 miles to Clark Drive looking for raptors and farmland species. Turn right onto Clark Drive, which soon turns to a gravel road. North of the road is a wetland and pasture complex that holds migratory waterfowl spring and fall, Sandhill Crane, shorebirds and nesting grassland birds. Continue east on this gravel road up a hill and bear left (north) on West Spring Creek Road and continue north past other nice wetlands/ponds to Church Drive (paved). Go left on Church Drive for 1/4 mile along a large shrubby shelterbelt, and continue north on Fox Farm Road where Church Drive turns left. You will jog north and west, passing from farmlands to patches of Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine, and crossing a spring creek. After 2 miles, Fox Farm Road joins West Valley Drive. Turn north to the intersection with the paved Spring Prairie Road continuing left (west) onto Kuhns Road passing the Kuhns Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which is open for foot traffic from May 15th to November 30th each year. Continue on Kuhns Road for 2 miles to Farm to Market Road near milepost 12. Turn right (north) on Farm to Market Road passing forested state lands on the west (parking areas are open for biking and hiking year round) and Kuhns WMA on the right. After 1.7 miles, turn right (northeast) onto Lodgepole Road, which becomes Twin Bridges Road, bear right as it approaches Whitefish. Where you intersect with Highway 93 west of Whitefish, you will be at the west end of Spencer Lake (a loon-nesting lake) where you can pull over and walk along part of



Harlequin Duck

© Kurt Lindsay



Spruce Grouse

© Sue Janssen (new © Brandon Smith)



Red-naped Sapsucker

© Kurt Lindsay



Chestnut-backed Chickadee

© Paula Craft



American Dipper

© Kurt Lindsay

the south shore (better views exist at a large pull-out off the highway above the lake). Head east 4 miles to Whitefish on Highway 93.

Habitat

- Grain fields, farm land, pastures
- Spring creeks, small shallow pothole wetlands
- Patches of coniferous forest including low elevation Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine stands

- Near Whitefish, the route passes by Spencer Lake, a nesting lake for Common Loon—usually there from ice-out to early fall

Birds: These pothole wetlands offer great views of migratory waterfowl during spring and fall, as well as the best local diversity of shorebirds during fall migration including Pectoral Sandpiper, Black-bellied and American Golden Plover, Stilt Sandpiper, and Long-billed Dowitchers. Raptors are abundant year-round (especially winter). Red-tailed Hawk (including Harlan’s) and Rough-legged Hawk, Bald Eagle and Prairie Falcon, and the sporadic Snowy Owl are found here. On the ponds look for Eared and Horned Grebes, Barrow’s Goldeneye, and Cinnamon Teal in spring and summer. Many species of ducks breed here. Sandhill Crane also gather here in large numbers in the fall. Less common, but regular migrants include Snow and Ross’s Geese (in spring) and Bonaparte’s Gull. Savannah and Vesper Sparrow, Western Meadowlark and Gray Partridge are common along the roadsides. Watch for flocks of American Pipit, Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting in winter.

Seasons: Year-round.

6 TALLY LAKE CAMPGROUND

This Forest Service Road heads to a popular large lake within the Tally Lake Ranger District northwest of Kalispell and southwest of Whitefish. It offers a pleasant drive through forested streambeds and mature mixed larch forest. The Tally Lake Road brings you to a Forest Service campground (follow signs) with parking, swimming and walking trails through great streamside birding habitat.

Directions: From Kalispell, go north on Highway 93 to Reserve Drive, and continue west 4 miles to Farm to Market Road. Turn right on Farm to Market Road and proceed north 9 miles to the Tally Lake Road (FS 913), turn left and go about 7 miles on the gravel road to the campground. From Whitefish, take Highway 93 west 4 miles to Twin Bridges Road, turn left and go 2 miles west to Farm to Market Road. Turn left (south) on Farm to Market Road, proceed 2 miles to the Tally Lake Road (FS 913) and turn right (west) about 7 miles to the campground.

Habitat

- Low elevation mature larch and Douglas fir forests
- Streamside willow, alder, and cottonwood forests
- Lakeshore

Birds: Beginning at Farm to Market Road, look for Northern Waterthrush and other willow/alder species around milepost 3. Townsend’s Warbler reside in the mature larch near milepost 4. At Tally Lake where Logan Creek enters the lake (north shore), you can find Wilson’s, MacGillivray’s and Yellow Warbler during

the nesting season. Watch also for American Redstart, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Willow Flycatcher, Calliope and Rufous Hummingbirds, Gray Catbird and Cedar Waxwing. Both Common Loon and Bald Eagle breed along the lakeshore. Late evenings along Logan Creek upstream of the lake might yield Great Horned, Northern Saw-whet, Barred or even Great Gray Owl.

Seasons: Accessible late spring through fall.

7 DANNY ON TRAIL

Named for a favorite local outdoor enthusiast and naturalist from Whitefish, this trail starts from the base of the Whitefish Mountain Ski Resort and ends at the Summit House on the top of Big Mountain. During summer the resort offers chair and gondola rides up or down the mountain for a fee. The trail gains about 2,000 feet vertically, passing through some wonderful birding habitat. Plan at least 2-4 hours to hike up. Wear good hiking shoes and take a lot of water.

Directions: From Whitefish, follow the signs to Whitefish Mountain Resort by driving north on Wisconsin Avenue across the railroad tracks for a few miles, turning right on the Big Mountain Road, continue for 4 miles ending at the Whitefish Mountain Resort. Follow signs to the Danny On trailhead, located at the upper end of the village. From the village you can also access the chair lift. Trail maps are available at the resort.

Habitat

- Mid elevation forests
- Open meadows
- Numerous intermittent streams
- Subalpine and exposed near-timberline habitats at the summit

Birds: During late May and early June on the lower part of the trail you will hear Townsend’s Warbler. The trail is also an excellent place to see Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, and MacGillivray’s Warblers, as well as Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Other common birds on the lower part of the trail are Swainson’s Thrush, Townsend’s Solitaire, Cassin’s and Warbling Vireos. Most of the flycatchers can be seen here, particularly Olive-sided Flycatcher. About half way up the trail the habitat becomes wet subalpine forest and brushfields. Here you will find Pacific Wren, Hermit Thrush and Varied Thrush, as well as Fox and White-crowned Sparrows. Look for raptors from the summit house deck.

Seasons: Best Memorial Day through late July.



Rough-legged Hawk

© Kurt Lindsay



Common Yellowthroat

© Kurt Lindsay



Western Tanager

© Kurt Lindsay



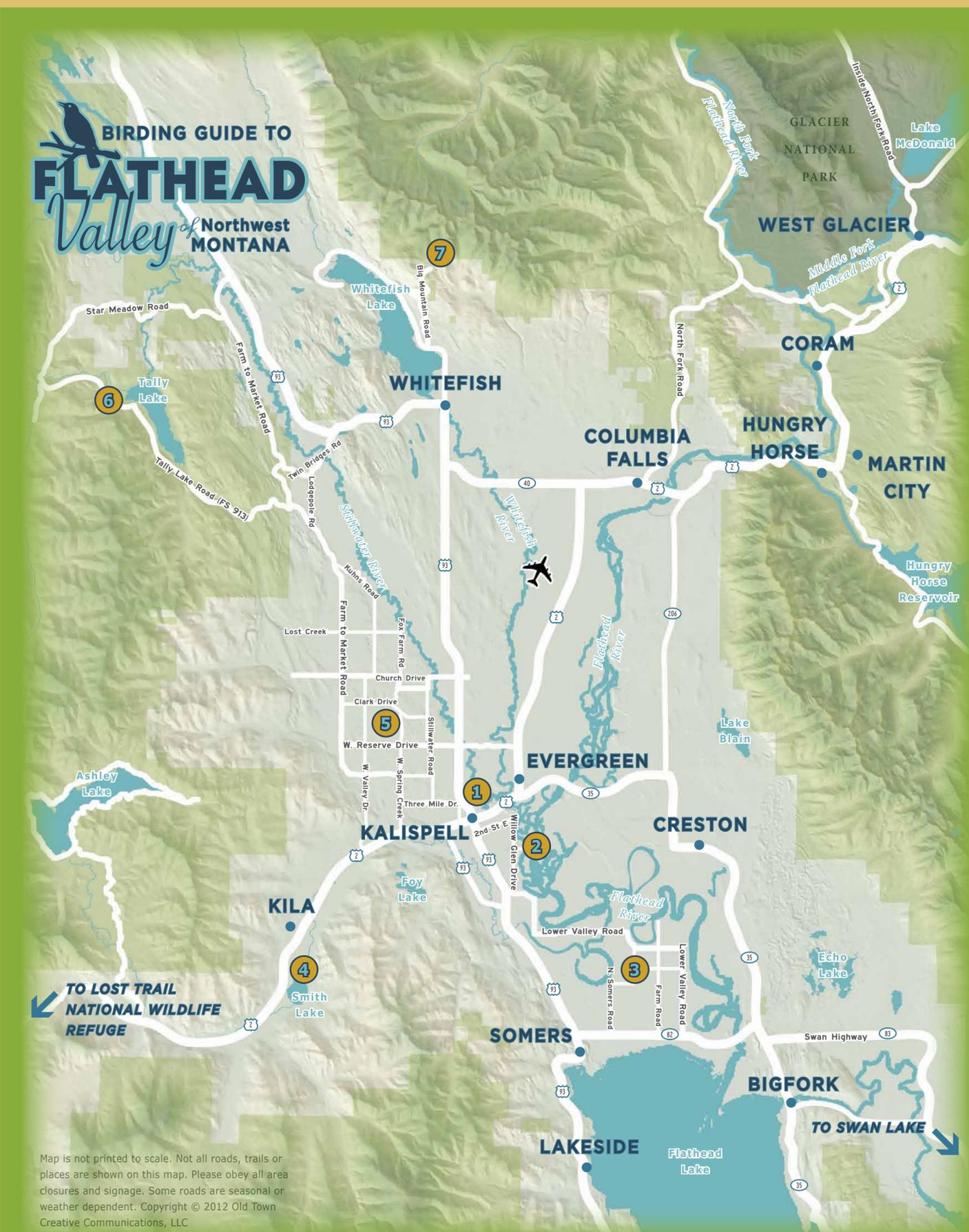
Mountain Bluebird

© Kurt Lindsay



Rufous Hummingbird

© Dan Casey



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