

The Lower Flathead River
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
Cultural Preservation Department

Perhaps the best place to begin our story is along the banks of the Lower Flathead River on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Since the beginning of our time here, this river had been a place of special importance to tribal people. It is our highway; the water path we took to visit our many relatives in the west. It is the place where our families have always camped, gathered their foods and medicines, prayed, hunted, and fished.

And still today, it is important in these ways for us. We did bitterroots by this river, the first food of the new spring that gives us life. We hunt deer and elk in the mountains here, and where fisheries have not been damaged by the changes imposed on our land in recent years, we still take fish from these waters. And on almost any given day, some of our people are simply praying in these sacred and powerful places, seeking solitude, guidance, and peace along the banks of the river.

Our elders have always told us of the importance of this place and our responsibility to take care of it. We need to respect it and care for it during the short time we are here, just as our ancestors have done for many thousands of years. They ensured that we would inherit a place of beauty and abundance, and we must do the same for generations to come. These powerful waters have been diminished by attempts to harness its wild energy, but they are still here for us to visit, and at least for a short while, to feel the presence of our ancestors and their way of life.



The Lower Flathead River, Courtesy of Jake Wallis