

The South Fork

Acclaimed as one of Montana's most pristine and remote rivers, the Wild and Scenic South Fork of the Flathead River originates in the south end of the Bob Marshall Wilderness and flows northward to Hungry Horse Reservoir. Boats and supplies are generally packed



in on mules or horses over mountain passes to reach the headwaters and then packed again from the take-out just above Meadow Creek Gorge, to Meadow Creek Trailhead. There are several commercial outfitters who can provide packing services or full-service floats, but plan ahead as they have limited space available.

The floating season is generally from mid-June through late August. The river is Class II-III with standing river waves and shallow rocky shoals. Log jams and other hazards exist, and may change and move seasonally. Always scout from shore prior to floating into any river feature without clear passage.

Due to its remoteness, the South Fork requires advanced planning and preparation. Contact the Spotted Bear Ranger Station for updated information on river and trail conditions, regulations and list of permitted outfitters.

Restrictions

All sections of the South Fork

- Solid human waste containment and the use of fire pans and blankets is recommended.
- Store your attractants in a bear resistant manner, in an approved container or vehicle, or hang.

Section Specific Restrictions -

Confluence with Youngs Creek to Cedar Flats -

- Wilderness Section
- The party size is limited to 15 people per group and 35 head of stock per party.
- Use of weed free stock feed is required.
- No wheeled carts or wheelbarrows.

Cedar Flats to Spotted Bear Swinging Bridge -

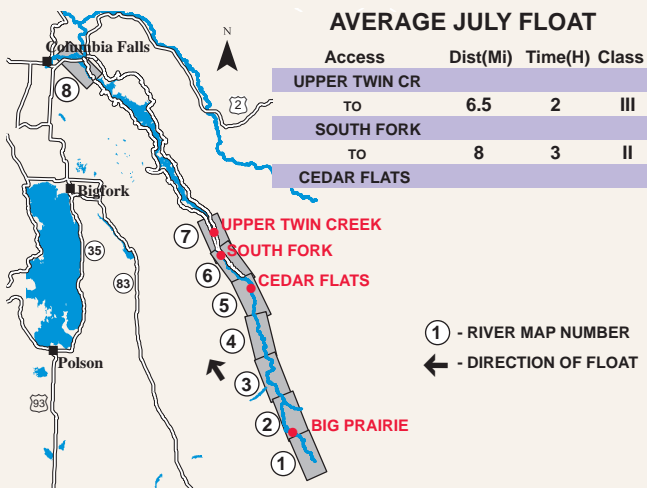
- Designated Wild River
- The party size is limited to 10 people per group.
- Use of weed free stock is required.
- No motorboats.

Swinging Bridge to Hungry Horse Reservoir -

- Designated Recreation River.
- Motorboats are limited to 10 horse power.

Hungry Horse Dam to Confluence -

- No Wild and Scenic Designation.
- Bureau of Reclamation Administrative site surrounding the dam is closed to all use.
- No campfires, overnight camping or shooting on river right.
- Motorboats are limited to 10 horse power.



RM 91: Big Prairie Work Center -

This historic Ranger Station was established in 1904 and moved to its current location in 1912. It serves as the center of Forest Service operations in the upper South Fork River drainage. Floaters are encouraged to stop in for current trail and river information at this historic backcountry work center.



RM 93.5: Gordon Creek - Drains the east slope of the Swan Range with access from Holland Lake via Gordon Pass on Trail #35.

RM 98-93: Wire Ford - Floaters may encounter channel spanning logjams. Campsites are not designated. However, good campsites are generally found near confluences with major tributaries and on the inside of oxbow bends.

RM 98: Headwaters of the South Fork -

The origin of the South Fork is the confluence of Youngs Creek and Danaher Creek. There may be channel-spanning logjams in this area that require short portages across gravel bars.

Youngs Creek can be floated during early summer for up to five miles above its confluence with the South Fork. Youngs Creek is Class IV with narrow rocky channels and logjam potential.

113°16'30"W

113°15'0"W

113°13'30"W

47°28'30"N

47°30'0"N

47°27'0"N

47°28'30"N

47°25'30"N

47°27'0"N

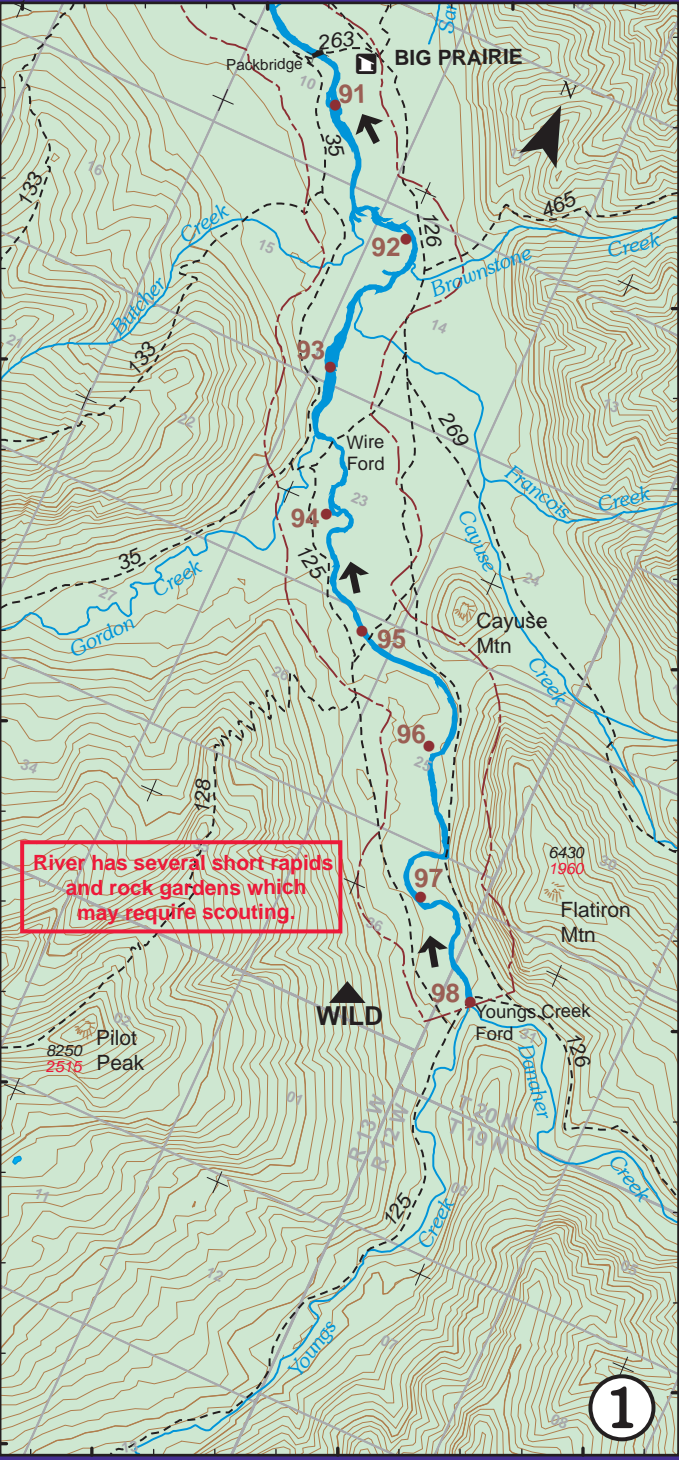
47°24'0"N

47°25'30"N

113°12'0"W

113°10'30"W

113°9'0"W



River has several short rapids and rock gardens which may require scouting.

1

Catch and Release: *The South Fork offers great fishing for all native species: westslope cutthroat, bull trout and mountain whitefish. In order to preserve and protect these species, please use barbless hooks, rapidly reel fish in, keep fish in water when removing the hook and handle them gently. A valid state fishing license and bull trout catch card are required.*



BULL TROUT

RM 81.5: White River -

White River is named for the white colored limestone rock that lines the river bottom and turns the water a milky white during high flow. Draining from the west slope of the Chinese Wall, White River is the largest tributary to the upper South Fork.

The river is navigable for up to 6 miles upstream from its confluence with the South Fork. The White River has adequate flows through early July. It is a Class III+ river, with steeper gradient upstream, expect narrow channels, shallow gravel bars and logjam potential.

RM 83-82: White River Park -

In open woodlands such as White River Park look for scars on large, old ponderosa pine. The cambium layer was used as a food source in the spring by the native people of the area. Some of these scars have been dated to the early 1700s.

113°19'30"W

113°18'0"W

47°34'30"N

47°36'0"N

47°33'0"N

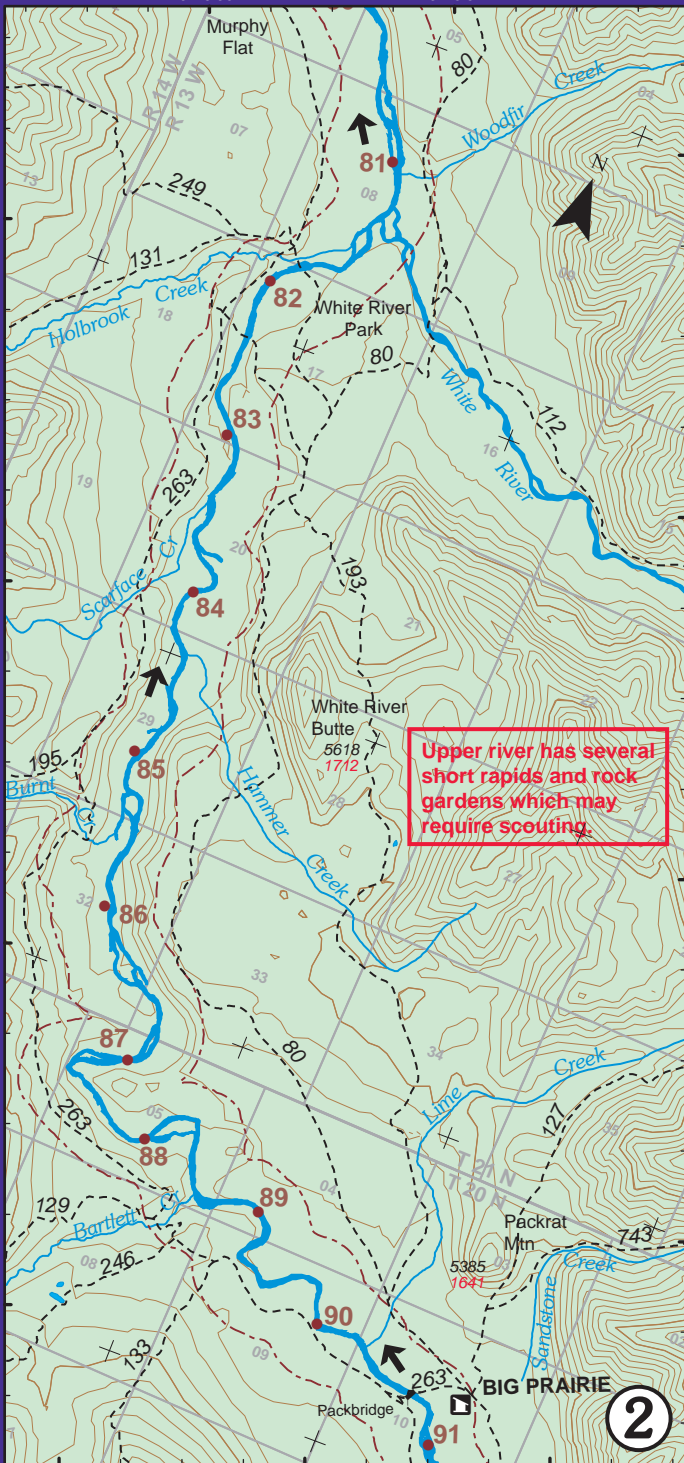
47°34'30"N

47°31'30"N

47°33'0"N

47°30'0"N

47°31'30"N



Upper river has several short rapids and rock gardens which may require scouting.

2

113°16'30"W

113°15'0"W

113°13'30"W

RM 74.5: Mineral Lick - Near Little Salmon Creek, the steep cut bank on river left provides a natural mineral lick used by wildlife. Watch for signs of wildlife as you pass.



RM 77: Salmon Forks Cabin - Named for bull trout that migrate to the area to spawn. The cabin is used by Forest Service workers. A jack-leg fence marks the edge of the Forest Service pasture and can be seen on river left. Follow Trail #110 up Big Salmon Creek for 1 mile to Big Salmon Lake, the largest lake in the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

RM 78: Mud Lake Mountain Lookout - A steep three mile hike on Trail #470 leads to a historic fire lookout built in the 1920's. This lookout is no longer staffed, but is open to the public and provides outstanding views of the surrounding area.

RM 80: Murphy Flat - This area was named after Joe Murphy of Ovando, MT. He started the first outfitting business in the South Fork in 1919. Remnants of the original hunting lodge can still be found on the flats. Commercial outfitting is an integral part of the cultural history of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Today, outfitters provide hunting, fishing, pack and float trips for visitors. They also help promote wilderness values and land stewardship ethics.

113°24'0"W

113°22'30"W

113°21'0"W

47°40'30"N

47°42'0"N

47°39'0"N

47°40'30"N

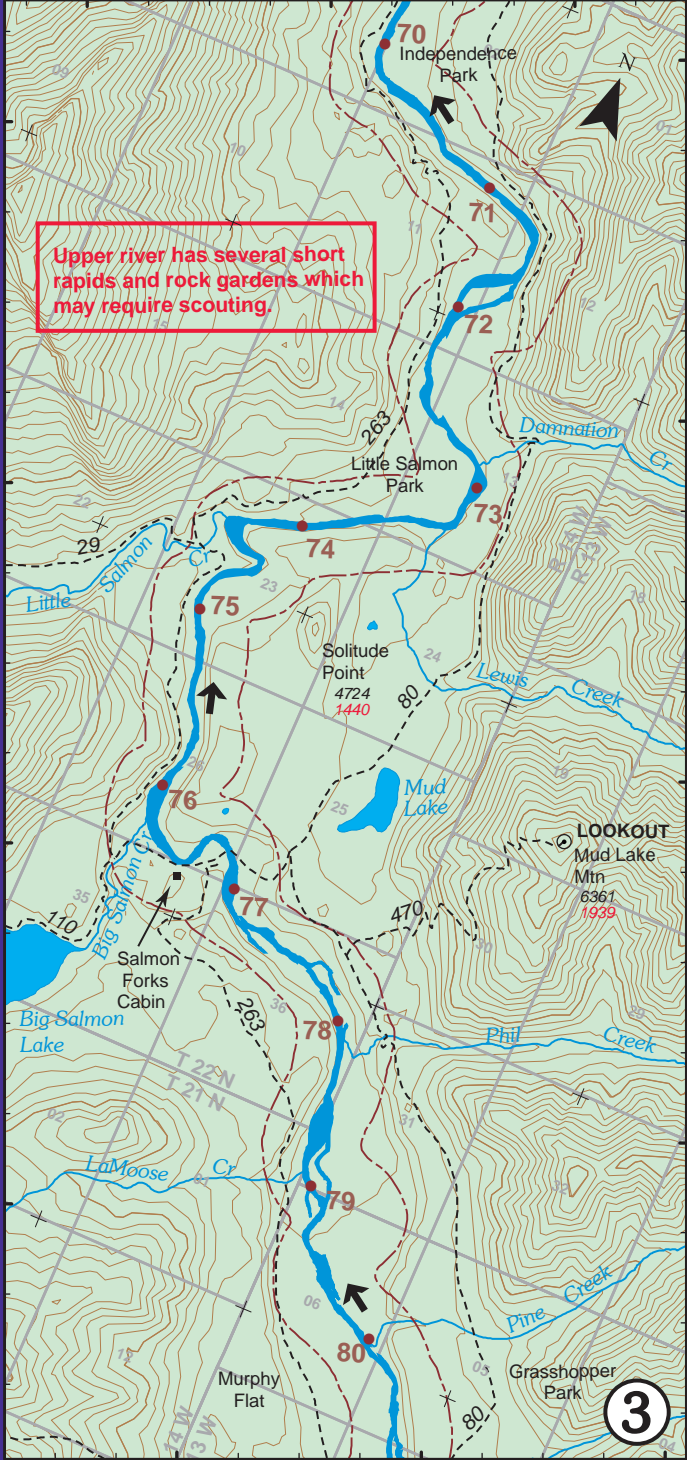
47°37'30"N

47°39'0"N

47°36'0"N

47°37'30"N

Upper river has several short rapids and rock gardens which may require scouting.



3

113°19'30"W

113°18'0"W

113°16'30"W

RM 68-64.5. Camping Opportunities - There are good campsites between Black Bear Bridge and the mouth of Black Bear Creek. Below Black Bear Creek the canyon narrows and good campsites are scarce.

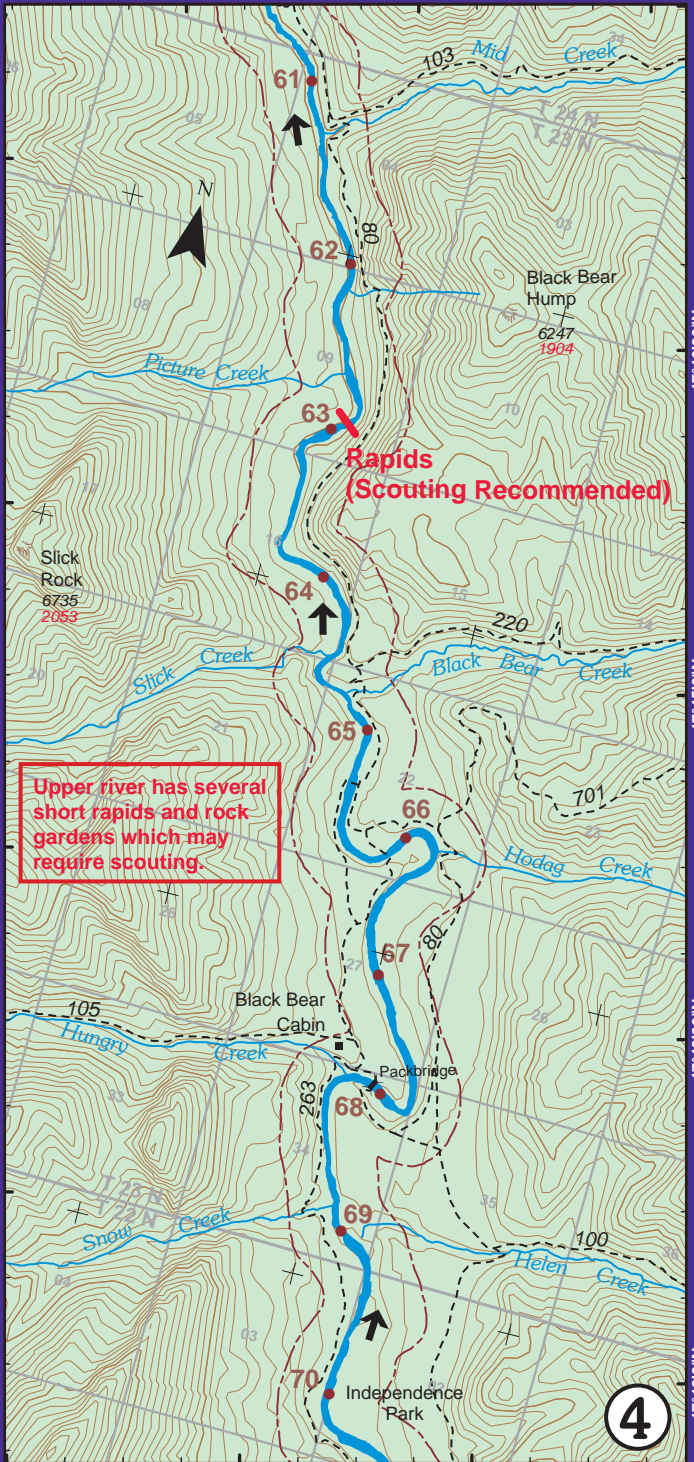
Bull Trout : A species of special concern, the threatened bull trout, actually a char, is among the least common fish in Montana. Bull trout can be recognized by light pale colored spots on their body and a complete lack of black spots. Adults can be up to 36 inches long and migrate in the late summer from Hungry Horse Reservoir up the South Fork and its tributaries to spawn.

Fires in the South Fork: As you travel along the river, the effects of wildfires are evident. From 2003 to 2007, more than 110,000 acres burned in the upper South Fork. Lightning-caused wildfire is an important part of the ecosystem. The “reintroduction” of natural wildfire promotes a healthy, diverse forest and improves wildlife habitat.

Caution: If you stop or camp in burned areas, be aware of potential hazard trees, especially in windy conditions.



RM 68: Black Bear Cabin and Pack Bridge - The original Black Bear Cabin was built in 1906. It was relocated to its current location in 1932. The cabin and corrals are used by Forest Service workers packing supplies and maintaining trails. The phone line crossing the river just upstream from the bridge runs from Black Bear cabin to Danaher Meadows. It is part of the oldest functioning phone line in the country.



Upper river has several short rapids and rock gardens which may require scouting.

RM 55.5: Cedar Flats River Access -

A steep, quarter-mile foot trail provides access to the river from the marked pull out at Milepost 11 on Forest Road #2826. There are no restrooms or other improvements at this site. Managed as a Wild River to the foot bridge at Spotted Bear, party size is limited to 10 people. Fishing is catch and release, to maintain a high quality fishery. River has standing waves and sections of deep slow water.



RM 60-56.5: Meadow Creek Gorge -

This section of the river is not recommended for floating. The river narrows to less than ten feet in places, has undercut rocks, steep drops and powerful hydraulics that are difficult to scout or portage.

RM 60: Mid Creek Take-out - Once you pass Mid Creek at RM 61.5, be alert for the take-out sign perched on the rocky ledge on river right. As water levels drop, it is recommended to pull out on the gravel bar on river right just upstream from the canyon entrance. It is 3 ½ miles by trail to the Meadow Creek Trailhead from the take-out. Stock is allowed at the take-out, but wheeled or mechanized equipment is prohibited.

113°28'30"W

113°27'0"W

47°51'0"N

47°52'30"N

47°49'30"N

47°51'0"N

47°48'0"N

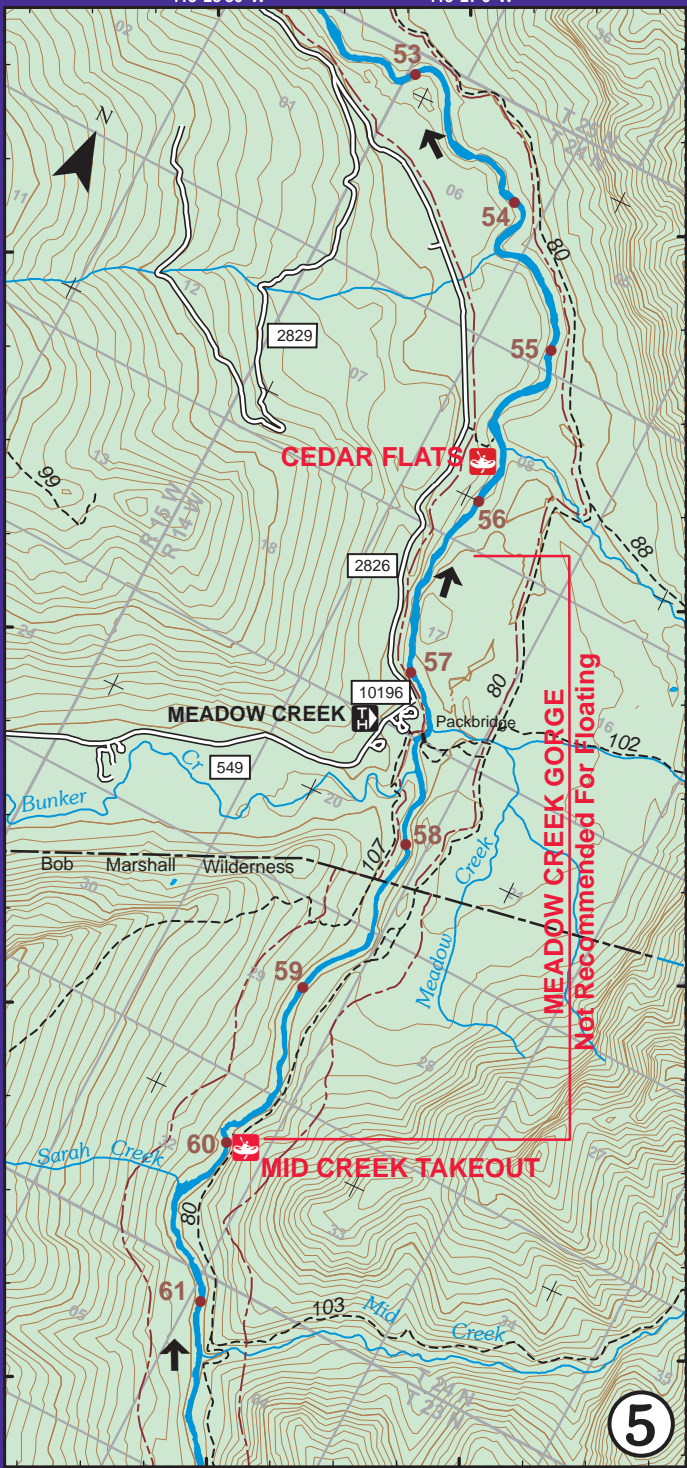
47°49'30"N

47°46'30"N

47°48'0"N

113°24'0"W

113°22'30"W



5

RM 46.5: South Fork River Access - Located one half mile from the Spotted Bear campground. A gravel road and undeveloped boat ramp provide floater access to the river. Facilities include a vault toilet. Overnight camping is permitted.

RM 47: Spotted Bear Campground -

Spotted Bear campground has 13 campsites, picnic tables, fire grates, and vault toilets. Garbage service, drinking water, and a dump station is available May 15-September 30. There is foot access from the campground to the river.

RM 47.3: Spotted Bear River - A class II-III with the exception of a class V+ drop at Spotted Bear Falls, which can be portaged on river left. Access is from Beaver Creek Campground at Milepost 8 on Forest Road #568. Generally flow is adequate until early July, and log jams may require portages.



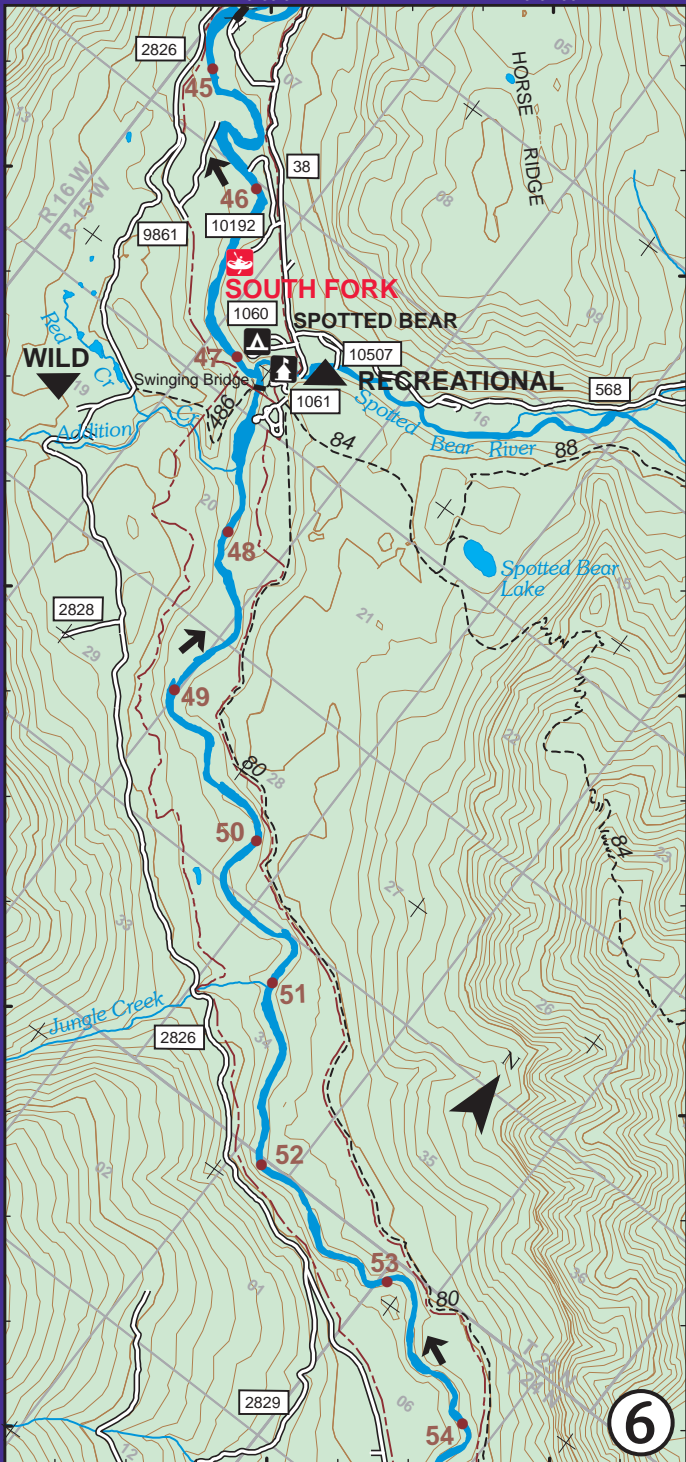
RM 47.3: Spotted Bear Ranger Station and Swinging Bridge - The original ranger station was built in 1906 at Spotted Bear Lake. The current ranger station was built in 1986. Various other buildings were constructed in the 1920-30s and many are still in use. The wood and cable foot suspension bridge was built in 1952 and reconstructed after the 1964 flood. Spotted Bear Ranger District workers live here from mid-May through mid-November. The office is open daily to visitors. There is an information desk, displays, and a small sales area. A public telephone on the porch of the ranger station is available 24 hours a day.

113°33'0"W

113°31'30"W

47°55'30"N

47°57'0"N



47°54'0"N

47°55'30"N

47°52'30"N

47°54'0"N

47°51'0"N

47°54'0"N

113°27'0"W

113°25'30"W

6

RM 38.5: Log Landing - There is foot access to the river, parking and a pit toilet. Overnight camping is permitted.



RM 39: Hungry Horse Reservoir and Dam - This 23,813 acre reservoir was created in 1953 with the construction of the Hungry Horse Dam. The dam, standing 564 feet tall, is the largest in Montana. The reservoir is accessible via two roads: Forest Road #38 along the east side of the reservoir is the primary route if you are traveling to Spotted Bear Ranger Station. Forest Road #895 over Hungry Horse Dam and along the west side of the reservoir is the primary route to Meadow Creek Trailhead. The Billy Garrett Memorial Bridge connects these roads above Hungry Horse Reservoir.

RM 40.7: Upper Twin Creek Access - An undeveloped boat ramp and parking area provide access to the river. This is the last take-out before the reservoir. Floaters should note that there is little current below Twin Creek.

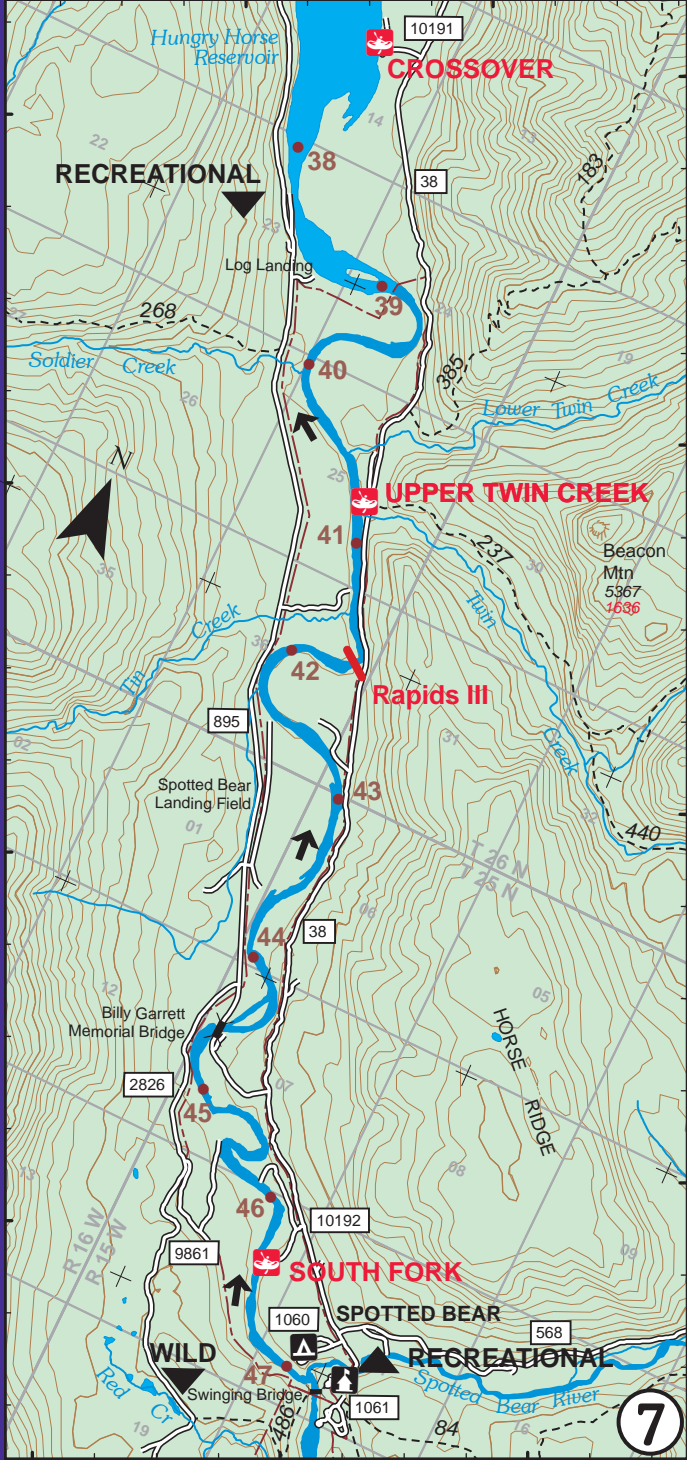
RM 44.5: Billy Garrett Memorial Bridge - This is a popular take-out for floaters putting in at Cedar Flats. It is also a good put-in for floating the lower section of the river. Overnight camping is permitted and a vault toilet is provided.

113°36'0"W

113°34'30"W

48°0'0"N

48°1'30"N



47°58'30"N

48°0'0"N

47°57'0"N

47°58'30"N

47°55'30"N

47°57'0"N

113°33'0"W

113°31'30"W

113°30'0"W

RM 0: Confluence of the South Fork with the Flathead River.

Construction of the Hungry Horse Dam began in 1945 and was completed in 1953. The workers were returning veterans from World War II. The dam is 564 feet high, 320 feet wide at its base, and has a volume of 2,934,500 cubic yards of concrete. The Hungry Horse Reservoir stores almost 3.5 million acre-feet of water and can produce up to 428,000 kilowatts of electricity.

The dam, reservoir, town, mountain, and creek are all named "Hungry Horse". According to the story, two lost and starved horses wandered the Flathead River area for a month until their owners found and nursed them back to health.

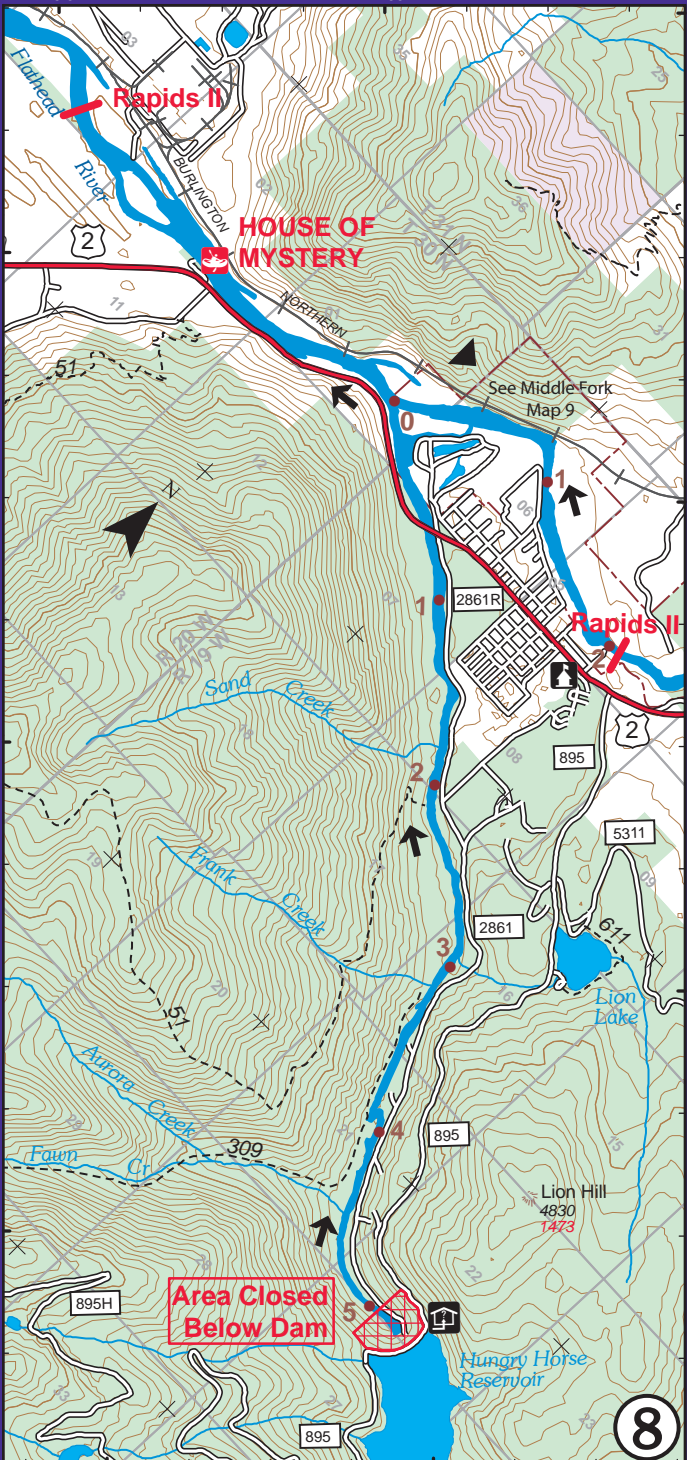
This stretch of the South Fork of the Flathead is not designated Wild and Scenic, however, it does have special restrictions. The Bureau of Reclamation operates the dam and has a closure around their administrative area. Use in the river corridor is restricted to day-use only. Fires, camping, and shooting are not allowed along this stretch to the confluence with the main Flathead River.



114°9'0"W

114°7'30"W

48°25'30"N



48°22'30"N

48°21'0"N

48°19'30"N

48°24'0"N

48°22'30"N

114°1'30"W

114°0'0"W

8