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# Plants of West-Central Montana— Identification and Ecology: Annotated Checklist

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## FOREWORD

The passage of the National Environmental Protection Act (1969), the Endangered Species Act (1973), the National Forest Management Act (1976), and related legislation has emphasized the need for detailed inventories of natural resources on National Forests and other public lands. National Forests in the Western United States are composed of diverse natural vegetation, virtually all of which will be affected by management decisions. Knowledge of the distributions and ecological characteristics of all species in a National Forest would be useful for land management and planning, but this information is not readily available.

A few years ago the opportunity arose to develop such information for vegetation in a major river drainage in western Montana. Botanist Klaus Lackschewitz had collected intensively for 20 years throughout the Bitterroot River drainage and the adjacent Missoula Valley and volunteered to develop an annotated checklist, a key for species identification, and ecological descriptions for all species of vascular plants. Personnel of the Intermountain Research Station and Northern Region of the Forest Service saw an opportunity to present this useful information to resource managers, foresters, wildlife biologists, soils scientists, other natural resource specialists, and planners. Its publication would also serve as excellent documentation for biological scientists, and it would be useful to ranchers, horticulturists, amateur botanists, and others.

The first installment of this detailed information is presented here as an annotated checklist of the vascular plants of west-central Montana. The checklist provides scientific and common names, abundance, habitat relationships, and geographic distributions. Occurrence of each species is listed in relation to "habitat type," a site classification widely used in forest and rangelands of the Western United States. The habitat type system is an ecological classification of the land based upon potential natural vegetation. The habitat type on a given site is named for the plant association or "potential vegetation type," representing the end point of succession. Habitat types have been mapped on many National Forest areas, including the Bitterroot and Lolo National Forests encompassed in this report.

The second part of this effort (in preparation) will contain an illustrated key to each species and brief descriptions of each plant's distinctive ecological relations and morphological features. We hope that these publications will not only prove valuable for science, resource management, and education in and near western Montana, but that they will serve as a guide for preparation of similar information in other regions.

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