

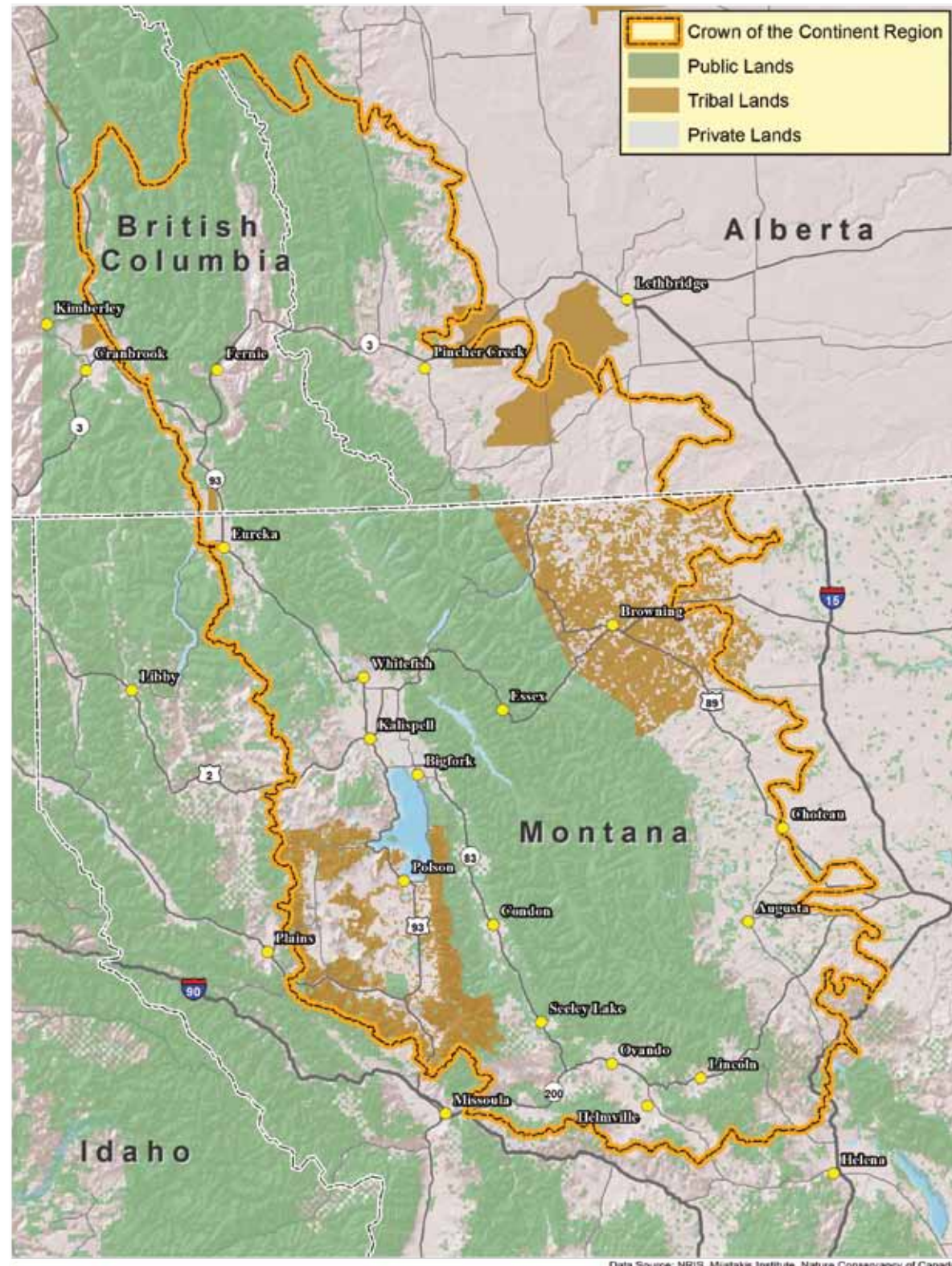
A Guide to

Land Conservation *and* Conservation Easements

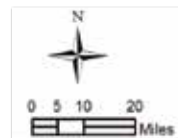
in the Southern Crown of the Continent



Crown of the Continent



Data Source: NRIS, Mistakis Institute, Nature Conservancy of Canada



This map was created by Rural Initiatives staff in July 2011. All property lines and boundaries are approximate. The information on this map is for reference only. No reliance should be placed on the completeness or accuracy of information without first consulting original records and personally verifying the accuracy of any and all information displayed on this map.



Crown of the Continent General Information



What Is the Crown of the Continent?

The Crown of the Continent (or the Crown) is a large, intact trans-boundary landscape that encompasses nearly 18 million acres in Northwestern Montana and the southern parts of both British Columbia and Alberta. The Crown of the Continent is a beautiful and diverse area that extends some 250 miles from north to south along both sides of the Continental Divide. It is both scientifically and historically important, with legendary landscapes such as the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area (University of Montana, 2010).

Why Is the Crown of the Continent Important?

The Crown of the Continent is an ecological crossroads where plant and animal communities from the Pacific Northwest, eastern prairies, southern Rockies, and boreal forests mingle. This unique area is the headwaters for North America. Rivers originate here and flow to the Pacific Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Hudson Bay. No other place on the continent retains its full complement of native wildlife and habitat—wolves, grizzly and black bears, cougars, coyotes, foxes, wolverines, bobcats, and lynx—as well as large populations of moose, elk, bighorn sheep, pronghorn, and deer (Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent, 2011).



Conservation Easements *and* You

Where Does My Land Fit?

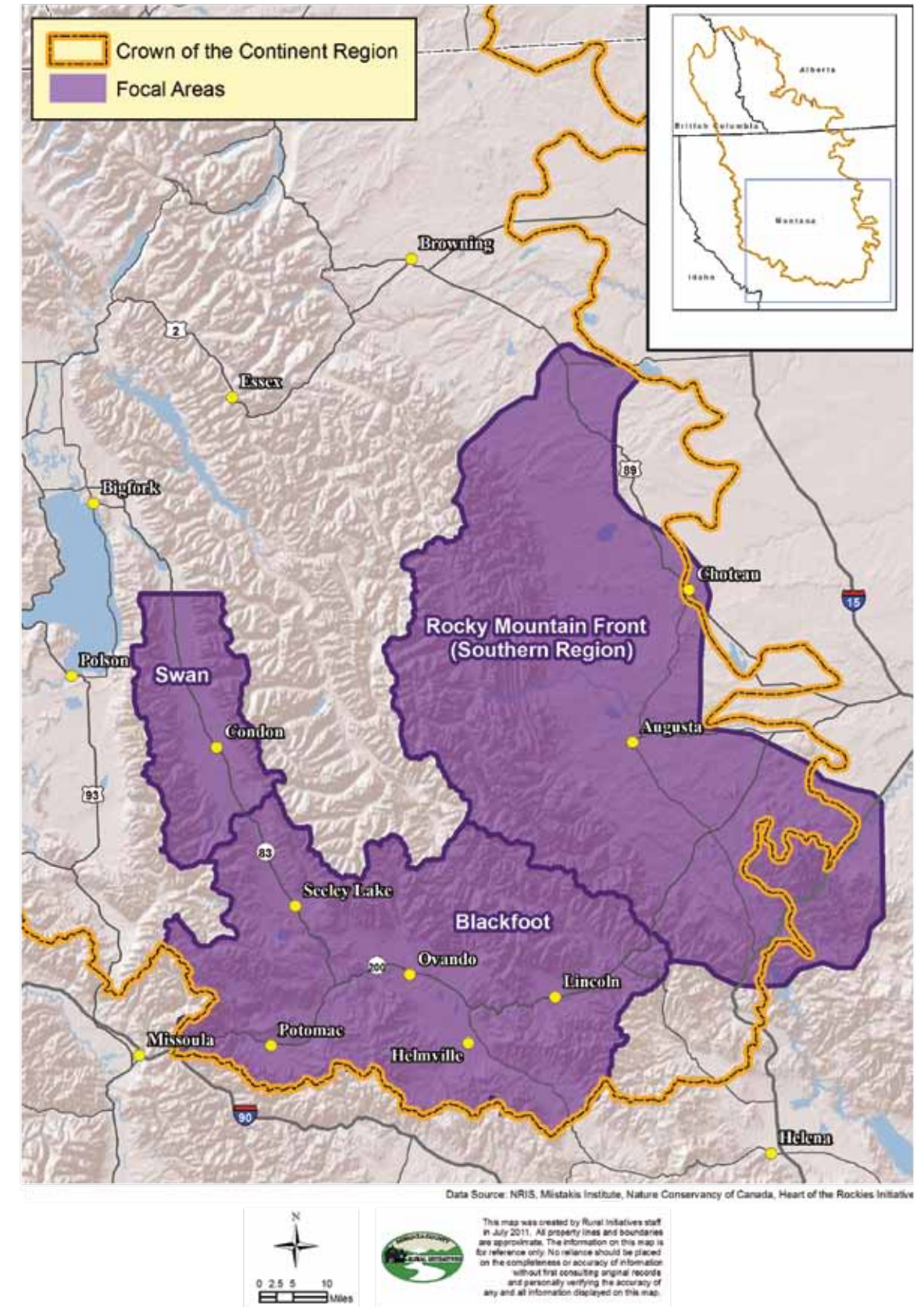
Private lands in the Crown provide wildlife habitat and corridors, including habitat for birds, waterfowl, and fish, open space, and numerous other ecological functions. Equally important, the Crown's private lands have supported resource-based economies such as agriculture, timber, and mining since the first settlers arrived. These economies still thrive today alongside new economies such as recreation and energy development. Private lands conservation plays a particularly important role in the preservation of this unique landscape and the livelihoods of the people who inhabit it. Conservation easements are a tool used by many private landowners to keep the Crown's lands and resources working and intact, and to ensure that the unparalleled natural heritage that they steward is protected for generations to come.

This brochure was designed specifically for Montana landowners in the Swan, Blackfoot, and Southern Rocky Mountain Front areas of the Crown of the Continent (Heart of the Rockies Initiative, 2011) seeking conservation easements. However, much of the information presented here is applicable to landowners throughout Montana and any of the organizations listed in this brochure will gladly direct you to resources in your area.

What Is a Conservation Easement?

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified organization that limits the uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. When you own land, you also own many "rights" associated with it. When you donate or sell a conservation easement, you give up some of those rights but, more importantly, you ensure that certain values are conserved forever while continuing to own and use your land.

Southern Crown of the Continent Focal Areas



What are some of the benefits of putting a conservation easement on my land?

Perhaps the most important benefit is that it allows you to permanently protect the natural and cultural values of your land for future generations. Easements can ensure that generations of your family's hard work and commitment to the land aren't reversed through development or subdivision. Additionally, there may be income and estate tax benefits for donating or selling a "bargain sale" (at below market value) conservation easement. The amount and type of tax benefits depends on a variety of factors, including the value of the donation, your income level, and the total amount of your estate. Under the current tax structure, any income and estate tax benefits are available only under perpetual conservation easements. Finally, you may be able to realize income through the sale of a conservation easement on your property. Landowners should consult with a financial advisor and an attorney to fully understand the tax and legal implications of a conservation easement.

Does my land qualify for a conservation easement?

Each of the qualified easement holding organizations listed in this brochure has its own conservation criteria for evaluating potential easements. The best way to determine if your property will qualify for an easement is to contact one of these organizations and get their advice. In general, the existing conservation easement programs in the Crown of the Continent are focused on maintaining conservation values such as significant fish and wildlife habitat, scenic open spaces, larger agricultural lands, lands along significant recreational corridors, and lands that border and provide a buffer to any lands with the above listed features. The amount of acreage to be placed under an easement varies with the resources to be conserved, the landowner objectives, the value of the easement, and the policies of each organization.

How would a conservation easement affect the management of my property?

Since each conservation easement can be different, the answer to this question depends on what rights you grant to the easement holding organization and what rights you retain. It also depends on how your management goals compare with the terms of your conservation easement. For example, if in your easement you retain all rights to continue agricultural use of the property, then your agricultural management practices may not be significantly affected by the easement. If, on the other hand, you give up the right to grow crops within a wetland without the review of the easement holding organization, your management of this wetland will be affected by your easement. The granting of a perpetual conservation easement with a qualified organization is the beginning of a long-term management partnership.

How would a conservation easement on my land affect the local tax base?

Granting of a conservation easement on ranchland does not impact the county real property tax base. A parcel of real property 160 acres or larger is eligible for valuation, assessment, and taxation as agricultural land. A conservation easement placed on a ranch property cannot be used to reclassify the property into a lower taxable classification. As a result, when a landowner voluntarily places a conservation easement upon his or her ranch property, the property continues to be taxed at the same rate and there is no loss of property tax revenues to the county.

How long does a conservation easement last?

Although term (or temporary) easements exist, most conservation easements are perpetual and "run with the land" regardless of future ownership changes. The easement is recorded at the county records office so that all future owners and lenders will learn about the easement when they obtain title reports.

Are all conservation easements the same?

Conservation easements are flexible land protection tools that can be tailored to meet both a landowner's financial and personal needs and protect the land's particular conservation values. For example, an easement designed to protect rare wildlife habitat may restrict most future development, while an easement designed to protect open space on a ranch may allow for continued ranching and the building of additional agricultural structures, but prohibit further subdivision. Even the most restrictive easements typically permit landowners to continue such traditional uses of the land as farming, ranching, and forest management.

What are the qualified organizations' responsibilities regarding conservation easements?

The land trust or agency is responsible for ensuring that the terms of the easement are upheld. The organization monitors the property on a regular basis, typically once a year, to ensure that the property remains in the condition prescribed by the easement document. These visits also provide the landowner a chance to keep in touch with the land trust or agency and to seek stewardship assistance. Most easement holding organizations have stewardship programs that can provide technical and financial assistance to landowners for stewardship projects.

What steps can I take to learn more about a conservation easement?

First, contact one of the easement holding organizations listed in this guide and become familiar with the organization and the services they can provide. If their particular focus does not suit you or your property, they may be able to refer you to a more appropriate group. When talking to a land trust, discuss the conservation values you want to protect, your ongoing management plans, what you want to accomplish, and what development rights you want to retain.

Talking with landowners who have a conservation easement is another way to gather the information needed to make an informed decision. Should you like to meet with an experienced conservation easement landowner, simply contact any of the organizations listed in this brochure and they will gladly assist you.

Finally, be sure to discuss this substantial decision with family members and your attorney or financial advisor.



Crown of the Continent Partner Groups

Entering a conservation easement is a major decision and taking those first steps can be overwhelming. As a landowner you have numerous options for placing an easement on your property. This brochure does not guide you through the conservation easement process, but it does provide some information to help you get started.

Finding the right organization to hold your conservation easement is perhaps the most critical step in the process. The next several pages give an

overview of local groups involved in conservation efforts in the Southern Crown of the Continent. These groups do not hold conservation easements, but they can be a great resource for you throughout the process. Descriptions of organizations that hold conservation easements begin on page 12. In these pages you will be able to review the various easement programs available and determine which organization best matches your resource and land management values.

Non-Easement Groups

Swan Ecosystem Center



Contact Information:

Swan Ecosystem Center
6887 MT Highway 83
Condon, MT 59826-9005
(406) 754-3137
info@swanecosystemcenter.org
www.SwanEcosystemCenter.org

Swan Ecosystem Center is an inclusive community-based nonprofit group that engages Swan Valley residents and the agencies and organizations that have a role in the watershed to collaboratively address stewardship and restoration on public and private land. The mission is to maintain a strong, vital community through partnerships that encourage sustainable use and care of public and private lands.

The Swan Valley is a rich, forested watershed where people and a natural diversity of native plants and animals thrive. The valley has more wetlands than anywhere else in Montana, providing habitat for nearly a full complement of native species. The Mission Mountains Wilderness and the Swan Range rim the valley and offer outstanding scenery. The economy has traditionally been sustained by timber and recreation. Maintaining a sustainable economy, vital wildlife habitat, and public access are the goals of conservation.

More than 20 landowners in the Swan Valley have chosen to protect their land with conservation easements, ensuring secure wildlife habitat, a source of timber for the future, and open space.



The Clearwater Resource Council

Non-Easement Groups



The Clearwater Resource Council was formed in 2003 by a group of local citizens interested in a place-based organization focused on natural resource issues in the area. CRC works to initiate and coordinate efforts that will enhance, conserve, and protect the natural ecosystems and rural lifestyle of the Clearwater River region of Montana for present and future generations.

As part of the southwest sector of the Crown of the Continent Eco-region, the Clearwater Watershed comprises aquatic and terrestrial resources of high ecological value. In addition to its network of streams and rivers, the Clearwater Watershed supports a chain of natural lakes that are unique in the Clark Fork Basin in their ecological, recreational, and aesthetic values, and are central to the local and regional economies.

CRC is committed to building long-term partnerships with landowners in the Clearwater watershed. To date, we have coordinated projects aimed at controlling invasive weeds, reducing fuels and monitoring lake water quality as well as demonstration projects aimed at restoring important riparian habitat.

Contact Information:

Ken Barber
Program Director
Clearwater Resource Council
P.O. Box 1471
Seeley Lake, MT 59868
(406) 677-0069
www.crcmt.org



The Blackfoot Challenge

Non-Easement Groups

The Blackfoot Challenge is a landowner-based group that coordinates management of the Blackfoot River, its tributaries, and adjacent lands. The mission of the Blackfoot Challenge is to coordinate efforts that conserve and enhance the natural resources and rural way of life in the Blackfoot Watershed for present and future generations.



The Blackfoot River flows through some of the most productive fish and wildlife habitat in the Northern Rockies. The valley shelters glaciated wetlands, lush riparian areas, and blue ribbon trout streams. Stunning mountain ranges, National Forests, and two Wilderness Areas surround the valley. The Blackfoot Watershed is home to many farms and ranches that provide acres of open space and a mosaic of habitats.

While the Blackfoot Challenge does not hold conservation easements, we are committed to building long-term conservation partnerships in the Blackfoot. In 2000, the Challenge formed the Conservation Strategies Committee in an effort to prioritize and proactively address conservation of the biological, agricultural, and community values of the watershed. To date, more than 285,000 acres have been conserved by private landowners, land trusts, and public agencies working together, including 110,000 acres of perpetual conservation easements.

Contact Information:

Blackfoot Challenge
PO Box 103
Ovando, MT 59854
(406) 793-3900
info@blackfootchallenge.org
www.blackfootchallenge.org



Photos by John Salisbury



Missoula County's Open Space Bond program offers potential funding support for conservation easements. Landowners working with a land trust or other easement holding organization can apply for Open Space Bond funding if the project meets specific conservation criteria. Proposed projects are reviewed by the County Commissioners and the Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee, a group comprising rural landowners from around the county. As of June 2011, over 6,850 acres of private land in rural Missoula County have been placed in conservation easement with help from this fund. Land trust partners have also used County Open Space Bond Projects as funding matches to leverage the protection of an additional 14,560 acres. To date, a total of 21,410 acres have been protected as a result of the Missoula County Open Space Bond program.



Contact Information:
Missoula County Rural Initiatives
 (406) 258-3432
www.co.missoula.mt.us/rural/OLC

THE CONSERVATION FUND

America's Partner in Conservation

The Conservation Fund is a top-ranked nonprofit that protects land and water resources across America. Over the past 25 years, we've conserved nearly 7 million acres of wildlife habitat, working forests and farms, battlefields, and other historic sites.

Along the Rocky Mountain Front on the eastern side of the Crown of the Continent, The Conservation Fund is working in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect 220,000 acres of critical wildlife habitat. The goal is to protect this rare environment while maintaining the region's traditional ranching heritage.

We work with ranching families to place conservation easements on their properties. Rather than selling the land to be developed into subdivisions, conservation easements allow them to continue ranching while protecting the land for wildlife habitat.

In its first three years, the Rocky Mountain Front Initiative has protected roughly 70,000 acres of critical migratory corridors for grizzly bears and a wide variety of other species that depend on the Front's rich ecosystem.

Contact Information:

Gates Watson
The Conservation Fund
 Montana State Director
 125 Bank Street, Suite 612
 Missoula, MT 59802
 (406) 541-8555
 Fax: (406) 541-8556
gwatson@conservationfund.org
www.conservationfund.org



In November 2008, voters in Lewis and Clark County, Montana, approved the Land, Water and Wildlife bond measure, a \$10 million general obligation bond measure for "...protecting drinking water sources and ground water quality; protecting water quality in and along rivers and streams; conserving working farm, ranch and forest lands; protecting wildlife areas; preserving open lands and natural areas; providing for recreation; and managing growth and development."

The primary purpose of the Program is to conserve resources on private lands in Lewis and Clark County that fulfill the objectives of the bond measure. Landowners and their sponsoring agencies can apply to the Lewis and Clark County Open Lands Program for funding to assist in securing a conservation easement on the property. Qualified sponsors include land trusts and state or federal agencies that hold conservation easements.

Contact Information:
Lewis and Clark County Open Land Program
 316 N. Park Ave.
 Helena, MT 59623
www.co.lewis-clark.mt.us
 (click Community, then Open Lands program)
 (406) 447-8374
 (Community Development and Planning Department)



CONSERVING LAND FOR PEOPLE

The Crown of the Continent represents not only intact wild lands, but also the working farms, ranches, and forests that epitomize the Northern Rockies and the American West. Vast expanses of public lands provide habitat for wildlife populations found nowhere else, and interconnecting the public lands are lower-elevation private lands, mostly working farms and ranches. For generations, people have worked these lands, hunted the hills, fished the streams, and raised their families to cherish their beautiful surroundings and rural way of life.

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit land conservation organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, community gardens, historic sites, rural lands, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. TPL's goal in the Northern Rockies is to advance globally significant landscape-scale conservation while sustaining healthy communities, protecting the land where we live, work and play.

For over ten years, TPL has assisted the communities of the Swan Valley to identify important conservation values, then develop and implement strategies resulting in their protection. This investment facilitated the Montana Legacy Project, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy.

Contact Information:

Deb Love, Northern Rockies Director
The Trust for Public Land
 Northern Rockies Office
 111 South Grand Avenue, Suite 203
 Bozeman, MT 59715
 406-522-7450
www.tpl.org

Conservation easements have been a tool utilized by landowners to further their objectives in conserving working forest lands that can contribute to the local economy while maintaining the integrity of the natural systems upon which the community depends. While TPL does work with landowners, other land trusts, and agencies in developing conservation easements, it does not hold easements for purposes of stewarding/monitoring/enforcement.



In collaboration with other partners, TPL has worked for the creation of major conservation programs, as well as local ballot measures, to assist landowners and agencies in meeting their land management objectives.

Services Provided by Partner Groups

See details in the following pages

Services Provided by Partner Groups, continued

Organization Name	Type	Geographic Extent (All in Montana)	Donated Conservation Easements
Blackfoot Challenge	Nonprofit	Blackfoot Watershed	
Clearwater Resource Council	Nonprofit	Clearwater River Region	
Five Valleys Land Trust	Nonprofit	Western Montana	●
Montana Land Reliance	Nonprofit	Statewide	●
Prickly Pear Land Trust	Nonprofit	Lewis and Clark, Broadwater, Powell, and Jefferson Counties	●
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	Nonprofit	Statewide	●
Swan Ecosystem Center	Nonprofit	Swan Valley	
The Conservation Fund	Nonprofit	Rocky Mountain Front	●
The Nature Conservancy	Nonprofit	Statewide	●
The Trust for Public Land	Nonprofit	Statewide	●
Vital Ground	Nonprofit	Western Montana	●
MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MT FWP)	State Agency	Statewide	●
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Federal	Statewide	●
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service	Federal	Statewide	●
Lewis and Clark County	Local Government	Lewis and Clark County	● <i>Funding Agent</i>
Missoula County	Local Government	Missoula County	● <i>Funding Agent</i>

Purchased Conservation Easements	Land Exchanges/ Acquisitions/Sales	Management Agreements and Partnerships	Restoration Cost-Share Agreements	Community Land Protection Initiatives; Community Based Conservation	Brochure Page #
			●	●	7
		●	●	●	7
●	●	●	●	●	12
●					13
●	●			●	15
●	●	●	●	●	16
		●		●	6
●	●	●			9
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●	●	●	●		18
●	●	●	●	●	20
●		●	●		19
● <i>Funding Agent</i>				●	8
● <i>Funding Agent</i>		●		●	8



History

Over the past four decades, Five Valleys Land Trust has helped landowners and communities protect over 65,000 acres across Western Montana. Five Valleys Land Trust remains a leader in land conservation; in 2008, Five Valleys was one of the first land trusts in the country to earn national accreditation.



she had lived and worked for over 50 years. The easement eliminates the potential for future subdivision yet allows for an additional residence, livestock grazing, timber harvest, and new agricultural structures. This easement also protects the abundant artesian wetlands that occur on Mrs. Dean’s property and the wildlife that rely on this habitat.

A Community Land Trust and a Leader Nationwide:

This well-established organization was among the nation’s first accredited land trusts. It has strong community support and staff committed exclusively to each distinct part of its service area. With board and membership composed primarily of “locals,” the organization is deeply committed to the long-term viability of this region’s natural and cultural landscape. FVLT also has a long history of successful and creative partnerships with a variety of landowners, conservation organizations, public agencies, elected officials, and ad-hoc citizens’ groups.

REGION: Local, community-based organization, serving ten counties in Western Montana.

EASEMENT CRITERIA: Wildlife Habitat, Riparian and Wetland Areas, Scenic Open Space, Agricultural Land, Cultural/Historic Resources, and Rare Species/Biological Diversity.

LAND PROTECTION TOOLS: Donated and Purchased Conservation Easements, Land Exchanges and Acquisitions.

Program Description

Since 1972 Five Valleys Land Trust has worked to conserve western Montana’s natural legacy—our clean water, wildlife habitat, family farms and ranches, and scenic open spaces. Five Valleys appreciates that every voluntary conservation effort is unique—reflecting both the vision of the landowner and the qualities of the land. This approach enables us to work with a wide variety of landowners achieving lasting benefits for our natural resources and our cultural heritage. FVLT works primarily with landowners who donate easements, but can also facilitate the purchase of “bargain sale” easements when properties qualify for capital assistance. FVLT is committed to providing easement landowners with high quality stewardship support that includes assistance with riparian and wetland restoration, weed control/mapping, and fire hazard mitigation and forest management.

Preserving a Way of Life

Five Valleys measures success by the quality of conservation and its impact on the community. Our efforts in western Montana have helped families protect ranches well over 7,000 acres and small farms under 100 acres. The 160-acre Dean Ranch, located north of Lincoln in the Blackfoot Valley, provides a good example of a Five Valleys conservation easement. Mrs. Dean wished to conserve the pasture, wetlands, aspen groves and forests of the property where



Contact Information:

Five Valleys Land Trust
 PO Box 8953
 Missoula, MT 59807
 (406) 549-0755
 office@fvlt.org
 www.fvlt.org



History

Since 1978, the Montana Land Reliance (MLR) has protected more than 866,000 acres of Montana’s open space, wildlife habitat, timber, and agricultural lands, including over 31,607 acres and more than 93 miles of river and stream frontage in the Crown of the Continent. Over 267,000 acres and more than 507 miles of river and stream frontage has been protected in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem by MLR conservation easements.

REGION: Statewide Land Trust

EASEMENT CRITERIA: Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat, Riparian and Wetland Areas, Open Space, and Agricultural Lands.

LAND PROTECTION TOOLS: Conservation Easements and Conservation Buyers Program.

Program Description

The mission of MLR is to partner with landowners to provide permanent protection for private lands that are ecologically significant for agricultural production, forest resources, fish and wildlife habitat, and open space. The immediate accomplishments of MLR’s conservation work are measured in miles of streambank and acres of land and habitat protected. The lasting benefits of MLR’s work are the perpetuation of a lifestyle and an economy that rely on responsibly managed private land and the increasingly valuable Montana spaces that will continue to nourish the spirit of future generations.

Regional Conservation for Wildlife and Agriculture

The Blacktail Ranch has been in the stewardship of the Rittel family for the last three generations. It covers 5,413 acres and 16 miles of the South Dearborn River and its tributaries. The landowner donated two separate easements on the ranch that protect the scenic open space, wildlife habitat, and agricultural lands. Elk, mule deer, wolves, and grizzlies are found on the ranch year-round, while sustained-yield forestry has been practiced with a light hand. In the

Contact Information:

Montana Land Reliance
 PO Box 355
 Helena, MT 59624
 Phone: (406) 443-7027
 Email: info@mtlandreliance.org
 Website: www.mtlandreliance.org



Rocky Mountain Front, MLR has conserved a total of 9,032 acres and over 17 miles of streamfront.

In the Blackfoot Valley, MLR holds 32 easements conserving 17,064 acres and 55 miles of stream frontage. The Heart Bar Heart Ranch encompasses nearly 4,700 acres along both sides of the Blackfoot River. Here, bison and cattle coexist with deer, elk, wolves, and bears on the land. The Blackfoot River provides important habitat for native bull and cutthroat trout. The landowner donated conservation easements on this property to protect open space, riparian corridors, and wildlife habitat. The easements prohibit subdivision and limit road building, yet allow for ongoing agricultural operations and sustainable timber harvest.

In the Swan Valley and Clearwater River region, MLR holds 33 easements conserving 5,511 acres and 21 miles of stream frontage. As one of the most ecologically diverse habitats in Montana, where a rich diversity of native plants and animals flourish, the Swan Valley is vital to the Crown of the Continent ecosystem. Neil and Dixie Meyer completed a conservation easement with MLR in 2007 protecting over 2 miles of the meandering Swan River. In addition to protecting wetlands critical to the wildlife habitat found in the Swan Valley, the landowners reserved the right to continue operating a commercial sawmill, allowing them to continue their traditional methods of managing the abundant timber on the property.

Did You Know that the Montana Land Reliance Is Montana’s Largest Land Trust?

MLR has offices in Helena and Bigfork. A board of Montana directors, including working farmers and ranchers, governs MLR. MLR strives to uphold the positive relationship between the lands it protects and Montana’s private landowner community. With 751 conservation easements, MLR has experience. Landowners choose to work with MLR because its experienced and professional staff understand the issues of a conservation easement from the perspective of the landowner as well as the land trust. As its portfolio of protected land grows, MLR increasingly directs its attention to the sustainability and stewardship of these lands.



Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

Program Description

The Nature Conservancy's mission is to preserve the plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. The Nature Conservancy (or the Conservancy) focuses its work in landscapes that have high conservation value, like the Blackfoot, Swan, and Rocky Mountain Front. The Conservancy believes that including, involving, and working with local communities and landowners is crucial to long-term conservation success. The Conservancy has crafted its conservation efforts to enhance the Crown of the Continent's high natural values while also serving to maintain its rural character and livelihood.

Sustainable Forestry at the E Bar L Guest Ranch, Greenough, MT

When the Potter family bought their guest ranch in 1913, most of its forested acres were logged over. For many decades now, Bill and Betty Potter have been working to institute a management program that creates a multilayer forest of different aged trees. This approach was formalized in a conservation easement that was donated to The Nature Conservancy in 1998, covering the ranch's 4,000 deeded acres. The Conservancy is now working with the family to add 3,400 adjacent acres of former corporate timberland, also under conservation easement, to the ranch to be integrated into their sustainable forestry operations.

Continuing a Ranching Heritage on the Rocky Mountain Front

In 1980, The Nature Conservancy worked with the Bowman and Gollehon families on its first conservation easement on the Rocky Mountain Front. The Gollehon's have lived on, leased, and run cattle on the 2,100-acre Bowman ranch for nearly three generations. In 2008, the Gollehon's sold an easement on a nearby ranch they own to the Conservancy. They then used the funds to purchase an adjacent property and sold an easement on it as well, resulting in 6,000 acres of new conservation. Thanks to the conservation easement tool,

Contact Information:

Western Montana (Blackfoot and Swan):
Caroline Byrd, Western MT Program Director
 526 E Front Street
 PO Box 8316
 Missoula, MT 59807
 (406) 543-6681
 cbyrd@tnc.org

Rocky Mountain Front:

Dave Carr, Senior Program Director, Rocky Mountain Front
 32 S Ewing Street
 Helena, MT 59601
 (406) 443-6726
 dcarr@tnc.org

www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/montana/index.htm

the Gollehon's have been able to expand their operations making it economically feasible to support the newest generation of the family.

Did You Know the Conservancy Helped Build Montana's Enabling Legislation for Conservation Easements?

In 1976, the Conservancy accepted a gift of the state's first easement along the Blackfoot River; 1,800 acres from Edna Brunner. Since that time, the Conservancy has continued its conservation legacy throughout the Crown.

History

As of 2011, the Nature Conservancy holds conservation easements on over 300,000 acres statewide, with 75,152 acres in the Crown of the Continent.

REGION: Global Organization, working in U.S., Canada and Mexico, and in more than two dozen other countries.

EASEMENT CRITERIA: Wetlands, Riparian Habitat, Native Plant Communities, Native Grasslands, Working Ranch, and Timberlands.

LAND PROTECTION TOOLS: Donated and Purchased Conservation Easements, Land Exchanges and Acquisitions, Management Agreements and Partnerships, Land Sales to Private Landowners and Public Entities (Federal, State, and Local Agencies), and Community Land Protection and Land Stewardship Initiatives.



History

As of 2010, PPLT has protected more than 3,200 acres with 13 conservation easements.

REGION: Local, community-based land trust serving four counties: Lewis and Clark, Powell, Jefferson, and Broadwater.

EASEMENT CRITERIA: Wildlife habitat, scenic open space, riparian areas and wetlands, agricultural lands, forests, cultural and historic resources.

LAND PROTECTION TOOLS: Donated and Purchased Conservation Easements, Land Exchanges and Acquisitions

Program Description

Since 1996, Prickly Pear Land Trust has worked with private landowners to conserve working farms and ranches, wildlife habitat, and other lands with high scenic, recreational and historic value. PPLT is a community-based, non-political, nonprofit organization working with local landowners to protect working farms and ranches, clean water, and wildlife habitat through voluntary conservation easements. Successful conservation easements are the result of a thoughtful process. Each agreement is unique, tailored to meet the personal needs of the landowner and the special qualities of the land.

Contact Information:

Andrea Silverman, Land Protection Coordinator
 21 N. Last Chance Gulch, Suite 203
 PO Box 892
 Helena, MT 59624.
 (406) 442-0490
 andrea@pricklypearlt.org
 www.pricklypearlt.org

Protecting a Working Ranch and Wildlife Habitat

The 670-acre Lazy Y3 Ranch was protected by a conservation easement in 2009. Located outside of Wolf Creek near the South Fork of the Dearborn River, the ranch has been in the landowner's family since the 1940s. She felt very strongly about putting an easement on the property to protect her family's legacy and the ranching tradition there.

The property is located in an important wildlife corridor and provides habitat for elk, deer, mountain lions, bears, and many other species. The Rocky Mountain Front is visible from the bench above the farmhouse, and the property is bordered on three sides by another ranch already under conservation easement with MT FWP. Together, these two ranches create 4,510 contiguous acres of protected land, preserving historical uses, valuable wildlife habitat, and riparian areas.

The landowner chose to work with Prickly Pear Land Trust because of the mix of flexibility and protection offered by the easement. Working with PPLT's land protection staff, she was able to negotiate terms that allowed the continuation of traditional uses while permanently protecting the creeks, habitat, and scenic views associated with the ranch.

Did You Know?

PPLT helped lead the effort to get the \$10 million Lewis and Clark County Land, Water & Wildlife bond measure passed in 2008. This provides an important source of funding to complete conservation easements, especially purchased and bargain sale easements. PPLT is able to work with a variety of partners, ranging from public agencies and conservation organizations to landowners and watershed groups, to get important projects completed.



Working with landowners, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has protected more than 408,000 acres across North America using conservation easements over the past 20 years. The Elk Foundation is a national conservation organization with more than 179,000 members and is headquartered in Missoula, Montana.



Contact Information:

Mike Mueller
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Missoula, MT 59808
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EASEMENT FOCUS: Critical Elk Habitat, Riparian Zones and Wetland Areas, Scenic Open Spaces, Agricultural Lands

LAND PROTECTION TOOLS: Donated and Purchased Conservation Easements, Land Exchanges and Acquisitions, Management Agreements and Partnerships, Community Land Protection Initiatives

Program Description

RMEF is a hunter-based land conservation organization that focuses on protecting and enhancing elk habitat. Its conservation easement program is designed to help protect vital wildlife habitat on private land. Conservation easements allow landowners to retain ownership while permanently protecting land for wildlife. Easements limit activities like subdivision while allowing traditional uses such as cattle grazing or sustainable forestry to continue if they remain compatible with healthy wildlife habitat.

Permanent Protection of the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area

RMEF currently holds 29 conservation easements in Montana. Though the Elk Foundation doesn't yet hold any easements in the Blackfoot Valley, it has a long history of land protection here, including key sections of the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

The Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA provides important winter range for thousands of migratory elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer that migrate out of the rugged and scenic Bob Marshall Wilderness during the winter. Although the WMA is owned and managed by the MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks

department, much of the region is still in private ownership, leaving room for opportunities to work with other private landowners and other agencies to continue to conserve this great elk country.

In 1998, the Elk Foundation and several partners came together on a series of land purchases and exchanges that brought 4,870 acres in the heart of the WMA into public ownership, ensuring elk, grizzly bears, moose, and many other species will continue to roam the Blackfoot Valley. The RMEF has completed one easement on the Rocky Mountain Front, the Dupuyer Creek CE, protecting 2,781 acres, and is interested in conserving more elk country in that area and across the Crown of the Continent.

Did You Know?

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has stewardship funding available for wildlife habitat enhancement projects on your conserved land. RMEF awarded more than \$264,000 in 2010 alone for habitat enhancement and wildlife management projects across Montana's elk country. Over the years, numerous projects in the Blackfoot Watershed have received RMEF financial assistance.

Applying herbicide and biological controls to control the spread of noxious weeds, modifying or replacing old barbed-wire with wildlife friendly fencing to avoid wildlife entanglement, and thinning conifers encroaching on native grasslands are just a few of the things RMEF has done to help ensure quality habitat for elk and other wildlife into the future. In addition, RMEF volunteers have come out in force to provide free labor for on-the-ground projects.



Contact Information:

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Program Description

Vital Ground works to ensure the recovery and long-term survival of North America's grizzly bear populations along with the many native wildlife species that share their range by protecting and restoring core grizzly bear habitat and landscape linkages.

History

Since 1990, Vital Ground has helped to protect and enhance more than one-half million acres of wildlife habitat in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Alaska, and British Columbia. In addition to collaborating with local, state, federal, and numerous nonprofit partners, Vital Ground works with private landowners to protect grizzly habitat through conservation easements that benefit wildlife while allowing traditional agricultural and forest management activities to continue.

REGIONS: Northwest Montana and North Idaho

CONSERVATION EASEMENT CRITERIA: Wildlife habitat within and between federally defined grizzly bear recovery zones in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and northeast Washington.

LAND PROTECTION TOOLS: Donated and Bargain Sale Conservation Easements; Land Acquisitions and Exchanges

Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Habitat Conservation Initiative

Vital Ground has partnered on conservation projects from the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to Alaska, but in 2005, the organization launched a dedicated effort to work with small, private landowners, state and federal agencies, Missoula County, and other nonprofit organizations to complement ongoing, large-scale conservation efforts in Montana's Swan Valley. Each of Vital Ground's Swan Valley conservation easements has been matched to the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, and each easement is tailored to prevent bear-human conflicts and ensure that productive forest ground is protected from intensive subdivision and development.

Did You Know?

In 1800, between 50,000 and 100,000 grizzlies likely roamed the Lower 48. However, today, roughly 1,500 grizzlies occupy less than two percent of their original habitat in the contiguous states.





Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) provides for the stewardship of Montana's fish, wildlife, and state parks, and manages opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, camping, boating, and other outdoor activities. FWP's Lands Program is integral to this mission, and statewide FWP holds 76 conservation easements encompassing 416,000 acres.

In the Crown of the Continent, FWP's 20 conservation easements total 85,000 acres that conserve key habitat for grizzly bears, black bears, lynx, deer, elk, and other wildlife species; protect critical stream habitat for native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout; and provide traditional public recreational access. FWP works with public and private landowners to conserve important fish and wildlife habitat.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks typically offers landowners the option of receiving payment for a conservation easement. Projects often bring together multiple funding sources, including state hunting and fishing license funds, federal habitat conservation funds, private grants, and landowner donations. Partnerships are key elements of FWP projects, and the Crown of the Continent is a high-priority landscape for FWP efforts.

FWP conservation easements provide for continued traditional land uses while ensuring perpetual habitat protection. Each easement is accompanied by a management plan that helps guide timber management and livestock grazing (where appropriate). Easements limit subdivision, residential development, land disturbance, and other activities that might impair habitat conditions. Because FWP conservation easements are purchased with public funds, the terms provide for managed public recreational access to the property, including seasonal hunting use. FWP works closely with the landowner to design an access plan that fits property conditions, landowner operations, and wildlife management objectives.

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 Website: <http://fwp.mt.gov>

Also, FWP Regional Offices:

Region 1 (Kalispell) (406) 752-5501
 Region 2 (Missoula) (406) 542-5500
 Region 4 (Great Falls) (406) 454-5840

Unfortunately, more landowners express a willingness to sell a conservation easement to FWP than funding can support. Projects are carefully evaluated, and funds are allocated to those that provide the greatest conservation benefits. The acquisition of a conservation easement by FWP entails a public process that includes an environmental assessment, public hearing, and approvals by the State decision makers.

Landowners with FWP conservation easements on their property become partners with an agency that offers expertise in fish and wildlife management, habitat conservation and restoration, recreational access, and other natural resource programs. FWP's professional staff recognizes and appreciates the crucial role of private landowners as stewards of the Crown of the Continent.

History

Since 1983, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has placed over 85,000 acres under conservation easement in the Crown of the Continent.

REGION: State of Montana

CONSERVATION EASEMENT CRITERIA: Important Habitat for Fish and Wildlife; Opportunities for Public Fishing, Hunting and Other Recreation

LAND PROTECTION TOOLS: Donated and Purchased Conservation Easements, Land Acquisitions, Land Exchanges, Management Agreements and Partnerships



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

History

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a federal agency that works with landowners to conserve natural resources on private lands. NRCS is part of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and has been "Helping People Help the Land" since 1935.

REGION: Statewide

LAND PROTECTION TOOLS: Donated and Purchased Conservation Easements, Restoration Cost-Shares, Management Agreements and Partnerships

Program Description

NRCS helps farmers and ranchers develop conservation systems uniquely suited to their land. The agency also provides assistance to reduce erosion, conserve and protect water, and address other resource concerns.

Authorized through the Farm Bill, the NRCS has two different conservation easement programs that can benefit private lands and landowners.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

WRP is a voluntary conservation program that enables landowners to restore, enhance, and protect wetlands on their property. The program is intended for sites where former wetlands have been drained, altered, or manipulated for agricultural production. In Montana, this often includes drainage ditches to drain wet meadows for hayland production, straightening and deepening streams to allow more ag land, or draining potholes for farming. If approved, NRCS will restore the wetland and purchase an easement to

Contact Information:

Contact your local NRCS Field Office/Service Center for information on Conservation Easement programs and other ways to conserve and protect the natural resources on your land.

Website:

www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/offices/localoff.html

protect the wetland and adjacent upland area. Landowners may still hunt and fish on their property, enjoying the wildlife habitat created. WRP easements are managed by NRCS with the landowner to facilitate the best wildlife habitat possible.

Currently there are five options available to landowners: Permanent Easements, 30-Year Easements, 10-Year Restoration Contracts, 30-Year Contracts on Tribal Land, and the Reserved Right Grazing Option. The Reserved Right Grazing Option allows landowners to retain their grazing rights in exchange for 25 percent less of the conservation easement price. Your local NRCS field office will help you determine which option is best for you and your land!

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

The FRPP is a voluntary conservation program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. The conservation easement buys the right to subdivide the property, allowing the participants to continue farming and ranching. Unlike WRP, FRPP requires another entity to provide matching funds and to hold the easement. For example, in the Blackfoot Watershed, potential matching entities include Five Valleys Land Trust and Montana Land Reliance. These entities apply to the program and, if approved, NRCS provides up to fifty percent of the easement purchase price. If interested please contact your local land trust or any State, Tribal, or local government or non-government organization with existing farm and ranch land protection programs that purchase conservation easements.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



History

As of 2011, the USFWS has protected over 130,000 acres in western Montana, with 44,000 acres protected in the Blackfoot Valley and 68,000 acres along the Rocky Mountain Front.



REGION: Federal Agency

EASEMENT CRITERIA: Wildlife Habitat, Habitat for Big Game, Riparian Zone/Wetland Areas, Scenic Open Space, Agricultural Lands, Cultural/Historic Resources, Rare Species and/or Biological Diversity, Upland Plant Communities

LAND PROTECTION TOOLS: Purchased Conservation Easements, Land Exchanges & Acquisitions, Management Agreements & Partnerships

Program Description

The Fish and Wildlife Service has developed a conservation easement program to protect important fish and wildlife habitat on private land in Western Montana. Perpetual easements are purchased from willing sellers who own properties within designated project areas in Western Montana. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service easements prohibit subdivision and development activities but generally allow for continued agricultural uses such as livestock grazing, haying, or farming of existing cropland.

Contact Information:

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Jim Lange, Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area

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 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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Stewardship for Generations at the Rolling Stone Ranch

The Stone family entered into a conservation easement with the USFWS in January of 1995. This agreement meant the preservation of a ranching heritage and continued stewardship ethics on their land for generations. The objectives were to maintain an agricultural base, eliminate the threat of subdivision, and further their estate planning. According to the Stones, this was not only a decision about their own welfare, but about the ability to help preserve the rural character in the Blackfoot Valley.

“We chose the USFWS easement program because of the flexibility to continue ranching in a productive and progressive manner, yet this agreement has opened up our operation to management tools and expertise that will help us meet our long-term objectives. Parts of the objectives are to leave our ranch in a condition that will allow for management decisions that are based on good stewardship values and the continued health of the land. If these objectives can be met, we will have accomplished our goals and allowed for the future to protect the rural integrity of the Blackfoot Valley.”

- Jim Stone, Landowner

Did You Know?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has federal funding to protect important wildlife habitat and help maintain family farms and ranches. Land and Water Conservation Funding (LWCF) is the funding source appropriated annually through Congress to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for purchase of conservation easements on private land in Western Montana in approved Conservation Areas like the Blackfoot Valley and Rocky Mountain Front. Funding for purchased conservation easements runs approximately between 25 and 50 percent of the property’s full fee value and allows the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect larger blocks of important habitat in Western Montana.

This brochure is the product of a partnership between these outstanding organizations...



Lewis & Clark County



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