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NEWS RELEASE

Multi-party Effort Conserves Land in the Swan Valley

GRANT FROM BPA HELPS PROTECT 1,760 ACRES IN MONTANA'S SWAN VALLEY

Contact:

Eric Love, The Trust for Public Land, 406.579.6930

Carrie Reese, Bonneville Power Administration, 503.230.5246

Kathy Budinick, Plum Creek, 206.467.3620

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Condon, Montana – The Trust for Public Land (TPL), Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), and Plum Creek Timber Company announced today the protection of 1,761 acres in the Swan Valley, thanks to a \$10.7 million grant from the Bonneville Power Administration. The funding is part of a memorandum of agreement between the BPA, the Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT). The Northwest Power and Conservation Council recommended allocation of BPA mitigation dollars through its fish and wildlife program and approved the Swan Valley projects earlier this summer. The Swan Valley is located in northwest Montana.

The Swan Valley projects involve the acquisition of 640 acres of Plum Creek lands in the Elk Creek drainage near Condon, as well as completion of a conservation easement on the final 1,121 acres of a 7,204-acre project on Plum Creek lands in the Goat and Squeezer creek drainages at the north end of the valley within the Swan River State Forest.

“It was extremely gratifying to see all parties come together to achieve such a desirable outcome,” stated Cecilia Brown, fishery biologist with BPA's Fish and Wildlife Program. “The Tribes, the State, and TPL worked quickly and efficiently to make sure this valuable habitat was secured for conservation.” FWP, CSKT, and TPL each played an instrumental role in the design of the projects. Due to the high resource values of these streams, BPA will receive credit for its obligation to mitigate for fisheries losses resulting from the construction of Hungry Horse dam and reservoir.

The Swan Valley provides a stronghold for a native bull trout population (listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act) and the affected stream reaches provide significant fisheries habitat. Goat, Squeezer, and Elk Creeks each provide excellent spawning habitat, and their watersheds produce high quality cold water that benefit many species. In addition, the confluence of the Swan River and Elk Creek is a critical staging area for the migration of spawning bull trout. The protection of these stream segments will further the maintenance and recovery of this species.

The first phase of the Goat and Squeezer Creeks conservation easement (6,083 acres) was completed in February, with significant financial support from the USDA Forest Legacy Program, which focuses on the conservation of high-value forestlands at risk of conversion to non-forest uses. The Paul G. Allen Forest Protection Foundation and The Trust for Public Land provided substantial matching funds. The addition of 1,121 acres to this easement completes this element of the conservation protection strategy for these watersheds.

The Elk Creek property has been conveyed equally to the Swan Ecosystem Center and the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, and will be subject to a conservation easement held by the BPA. The properties will be managed in a coordinated manner pursuant to the easement and a jointly developed management plan. The plan will provide direction for land use activities that will protect and further enhance the fisheries mitigation provided for in the conservation easement.

“Bull trout has been a very important species of concern for the tribes”, noted Tom McDonald, division manager of Fish, Wildlife & Conservation for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. McDonald seemed especially pleased with the collaboration to protect critical bull trout habitat in the Swan, saying, “We need cooperative projects like this, particularly in these times, when it’s getting harder and harder to pull off conservation projects of this size.”

Anne Dahl, executive director of the Swan Ecosystem Center, stated, "After working diligently with Plum Creek in the 1990's to exchange the headwaters of Elk Creek into public land, we are excited that another portion of the drainage is now protected. Elk Creek is a very important resource for native fish, for wildlife and for the community; this project makes a significant contribution to protecting habitat and public access in the heart of the Swan Valley. We're looking forward with enthusiasm to working on a cooperative management plan with the Tribes."

Land ownership in the Swan Valley forms a checkerboard pattern, where one-square-mile sections alternate in private and public ownership. By far, the largest private landowner is Plum Creek, which currently owns more than 70,000 acres in the Swan Valley. Plum Creek’s participation in the Swan Valley conservation initiatives provided a key element in the successful completion of these projects involving its properties.

"Plum Creek has a history of engaging in conservation partnerships in Montana and across the country," said Rick Holley, president and chief executive officer. "We are pleased to collaborate with our partners to protect this important property. Over time, Plum Creek has offered 30 percent of its lands in the Swan Valley for conservation because we understand the important forestry, environmental and recreational attributes of this property."

These two conservation projects represent the latest successes in a multi-year community-driven, science-based conservation strategy advanced by The Trust for Public Land, Swan Ecosystem Center, various federal, state, and county governments and agencies, landowners, foundations, regional and national conservation organizations, local citizens, and community groups. TPL and its partners have been working for many years to define conservation priorities, implement conservation plans, and, ultimately, protect those lands with the highest conservation values, some of which will be placed in public ownership. The objectives of this collaborative effort include the preservation and restoration of the valley's ecological integrity, the maintenance of local forest-based economies, and the continuance of public access and recreational opportunities.

“The Trust for Public Land is committed to working with our landowner, agency, tribal, and community partners to conserve habitat, protect water quality, and maintain a working forest in the Swan Valley,” notes Eric Love, director of TPL's Rocky Mountain program. “We are fortunate to be working with such a stellar group of partners—all of whom are committed to protecting this amazing place. And we appreciate the continued participation of Plum Creek in this effort.”

Since 1999, TPL has worked with Plum Creek to acquire approximately 8,650 acres of fee title and 7,200 acres of conservation easement interests on its Swan Valley holdings. Fee lands have been conveyed to the USDA Forest Service, the Swan Ecosystem Center, and the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, while the state easements are held by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Groups such as the Montana Land Reliance, The Nature Conservancy, and the Vital Ground Foundation have protected another 5,000 acres of the valley through conservation easements.

TPL maintains an option with Plum Creek to purchase approximately 10,000 additional acres. Once completed, these transactions will have collectively protected nearly 25,000 acres in the Swan Valley. These partnerships clearly demonstrate the collaborative effort and multiple funding sources required to achieve conservation of such high resource value lands across the unique landscape of the Swan Valley.

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The Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit organization, uses real-estate expertise and a cooperative approach in partnership with landowners, community groups and public agencies to protect land for public use. Since 1972, TPL has protected over 2 million acres nationwide with a value of more than \$1.6 billion. TPL depends on the support of individuals, foundations and corporations. Projects in Montana include protection of Garnet Ghost Town, waterfowl habitat at the Blasdel National Wildlife Refuge, the Swan Valley landscape, open space on Mount Sentinel, the Thompson and Fisher River Valleys, habitat in the Taylor Fork and other lands near Yellowstone National Park, several agricultural easements in the Gallatin Valley, and access to the Madison River. TPL has Montana offices in Helena and Bozeman.

Plum Creek is the largest and most geographically diverse private landowner in the nation with more than 8 million acres of timberland in major timber producing regions of the United States and 10 wood products manufacturing facilities in the Northwest. Since 1989, the company has

participated in conservation transactions on nearly half a million acres of land across the country.

The Bonneville Power Administration, headquartered in Portland, Oregon, is a federal agency under the U.S. Department of Energy. BPA serves the Pacific Northwest through operating an extensive electricity transmission system and marketing wholesale electrical power at cost from federal dams, one non-federal nuclear plant and other nonfederal hydroelectric and wind energy generation facilities. BPA aims to be a national leader in providing high reliability, low rates consistent with sound business principles, responsible environmental stewardship and accountability to the region.

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