



NEWS

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WORKING FORESTS AND CRITICAL HABITAT PROTECTED IN SWAN VALLEY

SWAN LAKE, Montana – Forestlands rich with wildlife and fisheries habitat will be forever protected and public recreational uses preserved under a voluntary conservation agreement announced today by Plum Creek, the MT Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), and The Trust for Public Land (TPL).

As a result of the agreement, 6,083 acres of Plum Creek lands located within the Swan River State Forest will continue to be managed for the multitude of forest-based resources associated with this northern portion of the Swan Valley. Residents of the valley, Plum Creek,

and TPL have worked closely with local officials, resource agencies, private foundations, and Montana's congressional delegation to secure the necessary funds to protect these important lands. An additional 1,121 acres are scheduled to be included under the agreement by the end of the year, providing protection to most of Plum Creek lands east of Highway 83 intermingled within the State Forest.

Principal funding for this agreement comes from the federal Forest Legacy Program (FLP), administered by the USDA - Forest Service in conjunction with participating state agencies; the Montana program is administered by FWP. The program is directed toward the protection of productive forestlands that are at risk of conversion to non-forest uses. Proposals are evaluated for their effectiveness to protect the resources associated with forested lands, including wildlife, fisheries, wetlands, scenic and cultural resources, recreation, water quality and watershed conservation. Under the agreement, protection of these conservation values will be accomplished through sustainable forest management practices, designated riparian influence zones, and provisions for public recreational access. Plum Creek will continue to own these lands and will manage them in accordance with the agreement, which will be monitored by FWP.

The federal funding was secured through the leadership of Senator Conrad Burns, the Chairman of the Senate's Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, with the support of the Montana Congressional Delegation. Additional matching funds were provided by a generous grant from the Paul G. Allen Forest Protection Foundation and from TPL.

"This conservation agreement will protect these lands for continued forest management, contributing to the local forest-based economy," said Senator Conrad Burns, R-Montana. "There is strong community support for this project, which will provide significant public benefits for habitat protection and public access."

"The Swan Valley and surrounding lands are an important part of the Northern Rockies landscape and this agreement will contribute to maintaining these lands as working forests, and for the public to enjoy," said Eric Love, TPL's Rocky Mountain Program Director. "We could not have done this without Senator Burns' commitment to this landscape and to those Montanans who live, work and play here, the support of the Montana congressional delegation, the local community and folks from around the state who have made this community-driven effort a reality. The cooperation of our partners, Plum Creek and the Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, was also critical to the successful completion of this agreement."

"I support this effort to protect our working forests and continue the traditions of public recreational use of these lands," commented Lake County Commissioner Paddy Trusler. "The conservation easement will prevent the fragmentation of the forest."

"Plum Creek is pleased to partner with The Trust for Public Land and The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks to permanently protect this area of the Swan Valley," said Rick Holley, president and chief executive officer. "This conservation partnership ensures that this important land will forever remain a working, sustainably-managed forest while allowing members of the community to continue to enjoy its environmental and recreational attributes. Senator Burns' leadership in the appropriations process has been instrumental in continuing this project."

"The Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks is pleased to see the completion of this first phase of the Forest Legacy Program in the Swan Valley," noted Steve Knapp, Wildlife Habitat

Bureau Chief for the Department. "We believe this project is an ideal implementation of the FLP in Montana. These are very productive forestlands and they support a rich diversity of wildlife and fisheries habitat. The provision for public recreational access is important to the hunting and fishing community and other outdoor enthusiasts."

"This is another step toward conserving the natural resources of the Swan Valley and the traditional lifestyles dependent upon these forestlands," noted Tom Parker, long time valley resident and outfitter. "I have trapped, hunted, and guided in this valley for many years and I appreciate the on-going support of Senator Burns in this effort." The agreement will maintain the wildlife habitat and public access that creates the varied opportunities for hunting in the area.

"What happens with these lands affects the entire Swan Valley community," says Anne Dahl of the Swan Ecosystem Center. "It's essential we protect the forest resources that are the foundation of our local economy and ecology."

Located southeast of Kalispell and northeast of Missoula, these Swan Valley lands are extremely rich with wildlife, including mountain lion, grizzly and black bear, goshawk, pine marten, owl, elk, moose, deer, lynx, wolf, and wolverine. The area also contributes to one of the strongest bull trout populations in Montana, which is protected under the Endangered Species Act.

In addition, the land contains important habitat for the threatened grizzly bear. This agreement enhances the area's use as a corridor for grizzlies to travel between the Bob Marshall and Mission Mountain Wilderness Areas, which support the 1995 Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement (signed by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Plum Creek, the Flathead National Forest and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

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, The Trust for Public Land has protected over 2 million acres nationwide with a value in excess of \$4 billion. In Montana alone, the national non-profit organization has been responsible for conserving more than 175,000 acres. This includes incredible fishing, hunting and recreation land in the Taylor Fork drainage south of Big Sky, the Swan Valley between the Mission and Bob Marshall Wilderness Areas and the Thompson and Fisher river drainages northwest of Missoula. To learn more about TPL, please go to www.tpl.org.

Plum Creek is one of the largest private timberland owners in the nation, with more than 8 million acres of timberlands in major timber producing regions of the United States and 10 wood products manufacturing facilities in the Northwest.

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