

Strategies in Motion

The Lindbergh Lake (1999) and Van Lake (2003) acquisitions, funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund program (LWCF), were an important catalyst for conservation in the Swan Valley. Since then, LWCF acquisitions have become the fundamental conservation tool of the Swan Valley.

To date, LWCF funding has protected 8,208 acres through fee acquisitions from a willing seller, PCTC. Through this program, the Forest Service is consolidating land management, reducing fragmentation, and protecting and restoring important wildlife, fish and wetlands habitat in the Swan Valley, including critical travel corridors that link the Mission Mountains to the Swan Range. These LWCF purchases provide for wide ranging wildlife, including grizzly bears, and also ensure public access to wilderness areas and other public lands for traditional outdoor recreation activities, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and camping.

The Flathead National Forest Long Range Acquisition Plan for the Swan Valley identifies land parcels with high public resource values that would be compromised if converted to residential development. These forestlands are logical for inclusion in the National Forest System, and PCTC has made them available for purchase. Complete implementation of the plan will add about 13,825 acres to the Flathead National Forest, providing for multiple public benefits and consolidation of Forest ownership for more comprehensive land management.

Several other conservation initiatives, which complement the LWCF program, are also underway. They include the USDA Forest Legacy Program, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Section 6 Habitat Conservation Plan grants, Bonneville Power Administration fisheries mitigation, state and local conservation programs, as well as substantial involvement and contributions from private foundations, non-profit conservation organizations, and private landowners.

The Swan Valley Conservation Agreement

In 1995, the Swan Valley Conservation Agreement (SVCA) was developed to guide the conservation of the grizzly bear and its habitat in the Swan Valley. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Flathead National Forest, Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, and PCTC are all signatories. The SVCA directs the timing and location of timber harvest, road use and maintenance, and establishes grizzly bear linkage zones across the valley. Adherence to the agreement and ongoing monitoring of grizzly bear movement in the valley is reported annually.

Swan Ecosystem Center

The Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC), a nonprofit community-based group, has provided the focus for education, dialogue, and conservation efforts in the valley for over 10 years. Through SEC, local residents have been working with the Forest Service and other partners to discuss issues, set priorities, and develop and implement conservation strategies. Their 2004 Upper Swan Valley Landscape Assessment is one source document that helps guide strategy development.