

Conservation Easements on Plum Creek and Other Private Lands

The LWCF program is one of several complementary approaches to achieve landscape scale conservation objectives in the Swan Valley.

With financial support from the USDA Forest Legacy Program, the Paul G. Allen Forest Protection Foundation, the Bonneville Power Administration, and TPL, 7,204 acres of PCTC lands within the Swan River State Forest have been placed under conservation easement. These high production timberlands will continue to provide raw materials for the wood products industry.

In addition, since 1993 the Montana Land Reliance, The Nature Conservancy, the Flathead Land Trust, and the Vital Ground Foundation have worked with private landowners in the Swan to complete 29 conservation easements protecting about 6,000 acres of open space and wildlife habitat. These conservation groups continue to work with landowners to promote the benefits of conservation easements.

In 2006, SEC and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes acquired portions of a former PCTC section along Elk Creek with funding from the Bonneville Power Administration which retains a conservation easement on the property. These acquisitions completed Phase I of the Elk Creek Conservation Area strategy protecting this critical bull trout spawning stream. When future phases are completed the entire tributary will be protected.

Lands sold by PCTC to private parties are subject to deed restrictions developed by the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the US Fish & Wildlife Service designed to reduce conflicts between development and grizzly bears.

Cumulatively these acquisitions, easements, and restrictions are vital to the conservation of a working landscape and recovery of the grizzly bear and other species in northwest Montana.

CONSERVATION STRATEGIES	ACRES PLANNED	ACRES COMPLETED as of 4/2007	ACRES REMAINING
LWCF Purchase	13,824	8,206	5,618
Forest Legacy Easements	7,204	7,204	0
Forest Legacy Fee Purchase	2,400	480	1,920
Elk Creek Conservation Area	1,920	640	1,280
Private Conservation Easements	As Available	5,934	As Available
Habitat Conservation Plan	2,560	0	2,560

Crossing the Finish Line

It is critical that we continue the LWCF program in the Swan Valley.

Most of the remaining lands nominated for conservation are worth more for subdivision and development than for timber production, and are at high risk for such conversion. This would lead to significant loss of public resource values, not only on these lands, but also on adjacent public lands.

PCTC has placed all of the lands in the LWCF acquisition plan under a purchase option with TPL, which gives us a short time to secure funding for their incorporation into the National Forest System.

While the resource assessments and community conservation strategy provide a guide for prioritizing and coordinating conservation of important resource lands at risk, each transaction is based upon a landowner willing to engage in a conservation outcome for their property. With this in mind, and on the assumption that the plan will be completed, acquisitions are being approached systematically from the Upper Swan Valley linkage zone northward to the Swan River State Forest.

This approach complements the other important public and private conservation work in the Crown of the Continent region, and ensures that the character and natural beauty of the valley will be preserved for future generations.

The detailed maps on the following pages highlight LWCF acquisition targets over the coming years, and show their importance to creating a balanced working landscape for the Swan Valley.