



## **Blackfoot Community Project Land Purchase Continues to Make Headway**

**By Alicia Vanderheiden**

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**Ovando, MT**— The Blackfoot Community Project, a partnership between the Blackfoot Challenge and The Nature Conservancy, is a community-based and locally developed effort to guide the future ownership and management of key lands formerly owned by Plum Creek Timber Company in the Blackfoot Valley. The project involves the purchase of up to 88,000 acres of Plum Creek lands from the headwaters of the Blackfoot to the Clearwater River drainage.

Our achievements over the last 3 years illustrate the depth of commitment this challenging endeavor has received from a great diversity of individuals and organizations. By the end of 2005, the Conservancy purchased roughly 54,000 acres. They expect to purchase another 14,000 acres this fall and hold one last option to purchase the remaining 20,000 acres in 2007.

Of the nearly 54,000 acres purchased to date by the Conservancy, more than 20,000 acres of project land has been re-sold to private and public landowners. We expect to sell another 9,000 acres to the US Forest Service before the end of 2006. All project lands are being re-sold according to the Disposition Plan approved by individual communities and the Blackfoot Challenge Board.

An essential part of the success we have enjoyed is the high level of financial support that we have received from our congressional delegation and private donors. In FY05, Senator Burns was very instrumental in securing \$18.3 million in Land & Water Conservation Funds [LWCF] and Forest Legacy funds for land acquisition by public agencies. Our project also received \$7.4 million in FY06 that will provide \$6 million in LWCF for fee title acquisitions by the Forest Service and \$1.4 million in Forest Legacy funds for conservation easements by Fish Wildlife & Parks in the Nevada Creek region. Thanks to our many private partners, we have surpassed \$6.5 million in gifts and pledges toward our \$10 million private campaign goal in only our second year of fundraising.

We have also made significant progress on a remarkable component of the project, the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area [BCCA]. The BCCA is a 41,000 acre tract of land around Ovando Mountain. The tract consists of land owned by the Forest Service, Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, Fish Wildlife & Parks, private individuals, and a 5,600 acre parcel that will be owned and operated by the community through the Blackfoot Challenge. This unique cooperative management venture was showcased in June 2005 during a national convention on Community Forests held in Missoula, MT. A 15 person council comprised of private landowners and public land managers has been hard at work since August of 2005 developing a management plan for the core 5,600 acre area. The public is welcome to attend the council meetings held at the Ovando Fire Hall from 4-6pm on the first Tuesday of every month.

Each year brings new successes and new challenges, but our partners continue to be engaged and are working to preserve project lands for traditional uses and community values. To track our progress or to learn more about this effort, please contact our Lands Director, Hank Goetz at [406] 793-5589 - [hank@blackfoot.net](mailto:hank@blackfoot.net) - or visit our website: [www.blackfootchallenge.org](http://www.blackfootchallenge.org).