

More than 69,000 acres conserved as part of the Blackfoot Community Project



Blackfoot Wetlands Photo © Jim Steinberg

Project adds and re-sells more Plum Creek lands

One of Montana's most ambitious conservation projects, the 88,000-acre Blackfoot Community Project, continues to gain momentum.

In March, 2007, the Conservancy purchased the 1,103-acre Little Doney Lake property from Plum Creek Timber Company. Many wildlife species frequent this property: grizzly bear, painted turtles, bald eagles, loons and wetland loving creatures.

To date, the Conservancy has purchased a total of 69,179 acres from Plum Creek as part of the project.

Of this, the Conservancy has re-sold 32,480 acres to public agencies. The most recent sale in May, 2007 was 5,234 acres of the western Horseshoe Hills to the U.S. Forest Service, which owns adjacent lands. The Forest Service previously purchased the eastern half of the Horseshoe Hills.

The Horseshoe Hills are an important wildlife corridor between the Bob Marshall Wilderness and the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area. The Forest Service has also purchased wildlife-rich lands in the Alice Creek area -- along the continental divide -- for a total project land purchase in the Blackfoot of 21,000 acres.

Previously the Conservancy sold 2,480 acres to the state Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and in the first public sale sold inholdings in the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (via the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation).

The community has expressed public support for putting these lands, important grizzly and wildlife habitat, in public ownership as a way

to preserve the public access they enjoyed under Plum Creek and Conservancy ownership.

Almost half of the lands the Conservancy has purchased will eventually be re-sold to private landowners with conservation easements.

NEWS: In April 2007, the project received a \$3.887 million federal Habitat Conservation Program grant that will be used to purchase conservation easements on Conservancy owned land. Last year, the project received \$2.699 million from the same program for the same purpose. The easements will restrict development and lower the land value, helping to make the land more affordable for adjacent landowners. Some of the funding may also be used to purchase conservation easements on those adjacent lands.

[Blackfoot project goal:](#) To protect the rural character and traditional values of the valley. These values include recreational access, grazing, wildlife habitat, economic stability and forestry in the Blackfoot Valley.

The Blackfoot Community Conservation Area

A key element of the Blackfoot Community Project is the Blackfoot Challenge's purchase of 5,600 acres to be the core of the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area. This property is on and surrounding Ovando Mountain in the heart of the Blackfoot Valley.

Surrounding the core area is the greater BCCA, a complex of public and private lands at the southern end of the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness Areas. Ideally, this surrounding land -- roughly 34,000 acres -- would be managed to complement that of the core area.

The Challenge plans to manage this area to preserve access for hunting, wildlife viewing, sustainable forestry, grazing and recreation as desired by the local community.

This area has large aspen groves as well as lodgepole and Ponderosa pine, native grasslands and spruce bog wetlands. Three creeks in the area serve as corridors for grizzly bear and other wildlife.

The Conservancy and Challenge are working to raise funds for the Challenge's purchase of the BCCA. About \$715,000 in private contributions must be raised by September 1, 2007 to reach a \$10 million goal and to meet the terms of an \$850,000 challenge grant from The Kresge Foundation.