

## **Swan Valley Factsheet – May 10, 2010**

The Montana Legacy Project is a cooperative project of The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land and many state, federal, and private partners. The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land have contracted to acquire approximately 310,000 acres of land owned by Plum Creek. The land will eventually be conveyed to a mix of public and private owners. Under this partnership, actual land ownership and management responsibilities rest with The Nature Conservancy.

### **Land Ownership Status**

In December 2008, The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land completed **Phase 1** of the acquisition of Plum Creek land, consisting of approx. 129,340 acres. None of the Phase 1 land is located in the Swan Valley. To date, none of this land has been re-conveyed; however two acquisitions by the State of Montana are in progress. MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is working to acquire ~41,000 acres in the Fish Creek drainage (west of Missoula), which is anticipated for completion in 2010. The MT Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is working to acquire ~32,000 acres in the Potomac area; this acquisition is a result of bond funding authorized by the 2009 Legislature and is also anticipated to be completed in 2010.

In February 2009, The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land completed **Phase 2** of the acquisition of Plum Creek lands, consisting of approx. 111,740 acres, which are in a checkerboard ownership pattern with National Forest System lands (Lolo NF and Flathead NF). Approx. 44,820 acres are located in the Swan Valley, and the remaining acreage is located in the Clearwater, Blackfoot, Clark Fork, and Lolo Creek drainages. After extensive due diligence activities (which included addressing vandalized gates, illegal ATV trails, illegal dumping, encroachment, etc.), all these lands were donated to the USDA-Forest Service in March 2010 and incorporated into the Lolo and Flathead national forests.

**Phase 3** of the acquisition of Plum Creek land is scheduled to occur in December 2010, and will include approx. 69,520 acres. Approximately 21,000 acres are located in the Swan Valley (mostly in a checkerboard ownership pattern within the Swan River State Forest); ~24,000 acres are located in the Clearwater Valley (a block of lands NW of Seeley Lake); and ~24,000 acres are located in the Mill Creek area (NW of Missoula). Both FWP and DNRC are actively working on projects that could result in acquisitions of portions of these Phase 3 lands in the Seeley-Swan within the next 12-18 months.

During the period of interim ownership of land acquired from Plum Creek, The Nature Conservancy continues to pay property taxes to Missoula, Lake, Mineral and Powell counties.

### **Potential dispositions of Phase 3 lands in the Swan Valley**

Most of the Phase 3 acquisition in the Swan Valley involves the checkerboard ownership area within the Swan River State Forest. These parcels are located in Lake County and contain approx. 17,180 acres. FWP and DNRC are working cooperatively to acquire interests in portions of this land. The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land continue to work with the State of Montana regarding funding mechanisms for these state acquisitions.

The remaining Phase 3 land (~3,630 acres) is scattered throughout the valley, mostly located at lower elevations and more accessible from Highway 83. Two parcels (containing a total of approx. 620 acres) are located in Lake County, and the remaining seven parcels (approx. 3,010 acres) are within Missoula County. The Forest Service has identified some of the remaining parcels of Phase 3 land for possible additions and has applied for funding through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund program.

Through several venues, the public has expressed the desire to provide for certain community interests through community or private purchase of some parcels of Montana Legacy Project land. Such interests include areas for a solid waste transfer site, historical society uses, workforce/affordable housing, community forest, and a cemetery. Since the Phase 3 closing will not occur until later this year, the final disposition of these lands is not certain; however,

interested parties need to pursue funding opportunities. While there are currently no solid commitments for these parcels, The Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy will continue to work with the Swan Valley Community Council and other interested local entities to evaluate site characteristics and identify feasible outcomes for long-term land uses. The role of these lands in meeting community needs may also be affected by the development of an updated growth policy for the Missoula County portion of the valley, which is in progress.

### **Land Management Activity and Plans**

The Fiber Supply Agreement (FSA) is an agreement between Plum Creek and the MT Legacy Project partners that provides for the harvest of approximately 92 million board feet of merchantable timber from MT Legacy Project lands over a 10-year period, which would be sold to Plum Creek. Any net proceeds from the sale of the timber will be used to cover the harvesting costs and restoring the land. All of the Swan Valley land acquired as part of the Montana Legacy Project is currently subject to the FSA. During 2009, Plum Creek continued to conduct limited forest management activities on the Phase 2 and Phase 3 lands in the Swan Valley, subject to the terms of the FSA. The Nature Conservancy's 2009 logging projects were limited to land surrounding the Potomac community, where local contractors conducted the work.

The Nature Conservancy (with its contractor, Northwest Management, Inc.) is planning timber harvest activities to meet its 2010 FSA obligations; such projects are not likely to occur in the Swan Valley until late-2010. Northwest Management will call for bids from potential contractors prior to the announcement of any sales. The Swan Ecosystem Center has a list of Swan Valley contractors that will be notified—please make sure your information is up to date with SEC, or contact Chris Bryant at The Nature Conservancy (406-543-6681) to be added to a list. After the Phase 3 acquisition at the end of 2010, Plum Creek will no longer conduct any forest management activities on MT Legacy Project lands; on-going FSA forest management activities will be authorized by The Nature Conservancy.

During the period of interim ownership of land acquired from Plum Creek, The Nature Conservancy continues to provide opportunities for public recreation, similar to what existed under Plum Creek ownership. This includes enrolling the property in Fish, Wildlife and Parks Block Management Program for hunter access. TNC has contracted with a local non-profit for assistance in monitoring and patrol of Legacy lands. In addition, non-commercial firewood gathering is allowed, subject to obtaining a permit, which is available at SEC.

### **Other issues**

The principal goals of this project are to:

- \* Conserve vital wildlife habitat and water resources
- \* Maintain the forestland production and restoration opportunities that sustain both the land and local economies
- \* Conserve traditional access for a broad variety of outdoor recreation activities

The majority of land dispositions are designed to achieve these goals. There may be some smaller parcels that have lower conservation values for which an alternative outcome may be possible. The project objectives are always foremost in any negotiation.

Additional information, maps and updates are available at [www.TheMontanaLegacyProject.org](http://www.TheMontanaLegacyProject.org)

If you have any questions or comments, please contact:

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