

**Swan Lands Coordinating Committee
Conservation Strategies Subcommittee
Outline for 12-7-11**

Purpose:

The Swan Lands Conservation Strategies Subcommittee was formed to maintain the traditional uses of the valley's working lands and to promote coordinated land management practices across public and private ownership boundaries. These efforts are focused on lands with high ecological significance and that have high community values for timber management and public access. Currently, the group serves to coordinate opportunities to work with private land owners to achieve their conservation objectives through voluntary agreements - primarily conservation easements. We continue to work as a partnership of interested stakeholders to share information and develop conservation tools and strategies to promote and conserve the extraordinary qualities of the Swan Valley.

Recent and On-going Activities:

Subcommittee Coordination –

The Subcommittee meets at least twice a year to inform partners of activities and identify potentials for coordination. The conservation efforts in the Valley focus on watershed scale considerations, incorporating MT Legacy Project lands, current conservation easements, wildland urban interface data, private ownership, the local growth policies, and other variables.

Montana Legacy Project –

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and The Trust for Public Land (TPL) completed the acquisition of all Plum Creek lands in the Swan Valley, totaling ~65,630 acres. Approx. 44,820 acres were donated to the U.S. Forest Service and incorporated into the Flathead National Forest. A conservation easement was placed on ~9,350 acres, which is held by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP); ~1,920 acres of these lands were conveyed to the Montana Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC). Additionally, 620 acres were conveyed to FWP. It is anticipated that ~14,620 acres within the Swan River State Forest (and subject to conservation easements) will be conveyed to DNRC in the future. There are ~3,630 acres of MLP lands in the Valley in various stages of analysis regarding their disposition and achievement of project objectives. TNC and TPL continue to work with affected entities in the Valley.

Local Land Trusts –

The Montana Land Reliance and the Vital Ground Foundation have been successful in working with private landowners who are interested in conserving the resource values of their property. Though no conservation easement activity has occurred in the Valley in 2011, these land trust organizations maintain engagement with landowners of existing conservation easement lands and also with landowners of potential conservation easement lands.

US Fish & Wildlife Service –

In 2010-2011 the USF&WS established a conservation easement program that could acquire conservation easements on up to 11,000 acres within the 469,000-acre Swan Valley watershed. The program purposes include protection of wildlife corridors, prevention of habitat fragmentation, and protection of wetland and riparian areas. To date, no funding has been directly allocated for implementation of this program; but the concept allows for interaction with landowners of potential conservation easement lands. The USF&WS continues to be a party to the Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement.

Swan Valley Community Council, Growth Policy Committee –

In the last year, the Growth Policy Committee completed and submitted the draft profile for public comments; a team attended a Sonoran Institute/FWP planning workshop; and the Committee completed a two-phase grant from FWP, administered by Rural Initiatives. Geo Data Services, Inc., completed maps for the profile and established a working GIS format, database, and digital map resources. Land Solutions, LLC developed a public outreach plan meeting criteria of the committee and Rural Initiatives. This will identify important planning issues, draft goals, objectives and implementation language, for private lands in the Upper Swan in the next year.

Swan Valley Innovations –

A formal LLC named Swan Valley Innovations (SVI) was created in August 2011. SVI is currently owned by Northwest Connections and Swan Ecosystem Center. SVI is working closely with TPL and TNC to develop ownership and management concepts for Section 31 directly across from the Swan Valley Community Hall. The current thinking is geared toward the creation of a demonstration forestry site on the bulk of the property, with a sustainable business campus located on southwestern portion of the section. The sustainable business campus could include a woody biomass utilization center, a learning center for students and visitors, and a small business incubator.

Swan Ecosystem Center –

Swan Ecosystem Center continues to be a liaison between agencies and the community and provide technical support for forest management, wetland restoration, and education.

Northwest Connections –

Northwest Connections continues to participate with agencies and affected parties and inform discussions of conservation resources and social and cultural issues in the Valley.

Other entities –

Additional participation in the Conservation Strategies Committee includes several agencies and individuals.