

Forest Legacy is about keeping working forests, forests.

We would not have been able to conserve this property and keep it in tact without Forest Legacy.

Just over half of our nation's forestlands are privately owned.

They provide a multiplicity of benefits from forest products, water, recreation, wildlife, scenery, clean air, clean water.

I think if people knew more, they'd be even more excited and grateful that this was established and that we've managed to keep it rolling.

The Forest Legacy program is a tremendous outcome of combining professional forestry with the American ideal of private land and the right to use it as you see fit.

The Forest Legacy program was established to protect environmentally important forest areas from conversion to non-forest uses; through either acquiring a land for public ownership or through the purchase of a conservation easement.

A conservation easement restricts development but allows private owners to manage their forest in perpetuity.

The unique program is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, but relies on a partnership including state and local organizations.

While forestlands have experienced a tremendous recovery over the last century, the threat of losing large tracks of privately owned woodlands to development and other non-forest uses still exist.

Conserving these valuable and threatened forested properties in perpetuity has tremendous ecosystem implications.

The permanence of the agreement has become an important factor that develops trust in more complicated arrangements.

In 2016, the trust for public land arranged a successful conservation easement with the Stults Land and Lumber company using Forest Legacy funding.

The 10,000-acre property, adjacent to White Fish, Montana, is critical to ensuring safe drinking water and providing connected habitat for many threatened and endangered species.

It was the right location, the right place, and the right time.

It was the right thing to do and it's that simple.

This project really shows what the Forest Legacy program is all about.

It has all the components of Forest Legacy.

It has a strong forest component for future logging, providing jobs for the community.

It has endangered species.

It has water for the community of White Fish.

The community is behind this project.

They floated a bond, where they're helping to pay for the cost of this project.

So even though we are putting a conservation easement on the property, the property owner still has the option, and is encouraged to manage the forest as a working forest.

Why I admire and very much support the Forest Legacy program is that it allowed us to keep our lands in private ownership.

We still own it.

We can still manage it the way we want to.

We can treat the forest the way we want to and we've always been very good stewards of that land.

Our lands are part of the American Tree Farm System and have been certified to that program since 1964 and continue to be certified today.

So that's the basis of how we built our management plan for this conservation.

We have about 40,000-acres of timberland that we own and manage.

We operate a sawmill and a cogeneration facility that produces electricity and steam.

We produce about 60 million board-feet a year of lumber.

We employ 120 people.

Those are good, family-raising jobs.

Our little company puts about 25 to 30 million dollars a year worth of spending into our local economy.

Besides protecting the town's drinking water source and economy, the Hascal Basin Property will provide a number of other important benefits.

The vision for the White Fish Trail is to create a 55-mile loop trail surrounding White Fish Lake.

This Hascal Basin parcel is such a key component to allow us to keep the trail off the road and provide the greatest user experience.

The trail system has created this benefit for our local businesses like we would have never expected.

People end up spending the day, you know, out on the White Fish Trail, or exploring the lands, you know, White Fish Mountain Resort and then they walk down town, they go to the restaurants, and so there's so much more time spent in our community.

This project is within critical Links habitat, critical grizzly bear habitat, Bull Trout, all these threatened and endangered species- plus a lot of species of concern.

The landscape connectivity role of this really can't be overstated.

All of the federal land adjoining it has designated as critical for recovery for grizzly bears, and lynx; most federally listed species, and we have both of those species on the property.

They require large, undeveloped landscapes and they use huge areas.

A male grizzly bear's home range will be over 300 square-miles.

In this mountainous region, all of the high elevation lands are public lands.

The middle elevation lands are private and often corporate timberlands.

Then the valley bottoms are smaller private ownerships.

With a grizzly bear, they den up in high elevation on the National Forest lands, but they immediately come down in the springtime to the low elevation private lands.

All of the big game animals that spend the summers in the high mountains come down in the low elevation lands and winter all year long.

So, without that entire matrix, working together and conserved in a way that those animals can continue to use the landscape throughout the year, we don't have capacity to support our populations.

So, those critical private lands pieces are vital to maintaining those populations.

I really applaud the Forest Legacy Program, I mean, it's what made it along with a gentleman named Alex Diekmann from the Trust for Public Lands.

He was the facilitator, and the one driving the train, and he kept pushing us all and we got there.

Having an opportunity to protect these lands has made us realize that conservation is something that we all agree on because we all in this community and this place and we want to protect it.

So I think the big thing for the Forest Legacy program that I appreciate about the Forest Legacy program is that it's not a preservation program, it's a conservation program and that it retains these working landscapes, and I think that's what's really important.

We have a lot of wilderness in Montana and there's a real place for that, but there's a real place for these working landscapes, as well.

I'm really excited about being able to manage these lands into the future, knowing that we are going to still have the clean air, clean water, and healthy wildlife habitat, and still produce the fiber in the jobs that support our economies in our society.

Through working with many critical partners, more than 2.6 million acres of working forests have been permanently conserved through the Forest Legacy Program.

What started as a program to conserve the Northern Forest lands of five states, in the early 1990s, has dramatically evolved over the last 25 years.

Today, the Forest Legacy Program helps states and individual landowners identify and protect places that are at risk and important to all of us, for a myriad of reasons, including economics, recreation, wildlife habitat, and securing drinking water.

The same flexibility and attributes that led to this tremendous success will allow the program to continue to thrive and help conserve vulnerable forests and habitats in the future.