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News Release



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Federal land purchase secures recreation and wildlife habitat in Montana's Crown of the Continent

MISSOULA, MONT., Aug. 27, 2014—U.S. Forest Service Regional Forester for the Northern Region, Faye L. Krueger, announced the acquisition of 26,700 acres in western Montana that will integrate private holdings into the surrounding national forests to better conserve wildlife and support public access. The Nature Conservancy was instrumental with the acquisitions.

“Landscape-scale conservation enhances water and air quality, improves forest health, increases resilience to infestations and wildfires, and supports local economies through tourism and recreation,” said Krueger. “The Land & Water Conservation Fund authority used here highlights the success of broad collaboration among federal agencies and private partnerships that help us sustain our natural resources.”

The \$26 million acquisition, along with an 11,600-acre acquisition completed last year, is one of the first projects implementing the Collaborative Land Protection appropriations of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a new approach initiated by the secretaries of Interior and Agriculture.

The purchase lies within the Flathead and Lolo National Forests and is part of the 18 million-acre Crown of the Continent, which is a key intersection connecting vital habitats across western Montana. This acquisition will broaden the effectiveness and increase the amount of conservation work that can be accomplished across this combined landscape.

The purchased acreage was part of the Montana Legacy Project, comprised of 310,586 acres obtained by The Nature Conservancy from Plum Creek Timberlands L.P., which is being transferred into surrounding public and private ownership.

“This sale epitomizes the vision we had with the Montana Legacy Project, and directly supports the great investment that Americans have made for generations in conservation on the Crown of the Continent,” said Richard Jeo, The Nature Conservancy’s Montana state director. “By re-stitching these once privately-owned parcels with the surrounding Forest Service holdings, we’re restoring the natural integrity of the land, securing habitat and links to the places animals need to feed, breed and rear their young, and where people have worked and played for generations.”

By consolidating ownership to eliminate historic checkerboard patterns of management, the Forest Service and its partners will have more latitude for:

- connecting and enhancing wildlife habitat for threatened and endangered species (lynx, grizzly bear, bull trout);
- implementing watershed scale management actions such as vegetation management for fuels reduction;
- addressing wildland fires in different ways by decreasing potential inholding residential development;
- reducing strain on local communities and counties from providing services in remote locations;
- improving public access; and,
- increasing recreational opportunities for hunting, angling, hiking and biking.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund was signed into law on September 3, 1964 and established in 1965 to invest in our nation's land, water and wildlife heritage. For 50 years, the fund has helped support our parks, historic sites; conserved our forests, rivers, lakes and wildlife habitat; and provided access to recreation, hunting and fishing for current and future generations. For every dollar spent on federal acquisitions, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has returned four dollars for the American taxpayer. In fact, every county across America has a park or playground or forest protected with funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The fund's primary source of income is royalty fees paid by oil and gas companies drilling offshore in waters owned by the American people.

The Nature Conservancy is a longstanding partner with the Forest Service in land conservation. Recent Montana acquisitions are located in the Swan Valley, Marshall Canyon, Pattee Canyon, Petty Creek, Lolo Creek and Mill Creek areas of Missoula and Lake Counties.

The mission of the U.S. Forest Service, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world. Public lands the Forest Service manages contribute more than \$13 billion to the economy each year through visitor spending alone. Those same lands provide 20 percent of the nation's clean water supply, a value estimated at \$7.2 billion per year. The agency has either a direct or indirect role in stewardship of about 80 percent of the 850 million forested acres within the U.S., of which 100 million acres are urban forests.

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