

**THE
MONTANA LEGACY
PROJECT**

**Swan Valley Factsheet
December 2009**

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. Under this partnership, interim land ownership and management responsibilities rest with The Nature Conservancy. The land will eventually be conveyed to a mix of federal, state and private owners.

Land Ownership Status

In December 2008, The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land completed the first phase of acquisition of Plum Creek land, consisting of approx. 129,340 acres. None of this land is located in the Swan Valley.

In February 2009, The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land completed the second phase of acquisition of Plum Creek lands, consisting of approx. 111,740 acres, which are in a checkerboard ownership pattern with National Forest System lands. Approx. 44,820 acres are located in the Swan Valley. This land will be donated to the USDA-Forest Service and incorporated into the Flathead National Forest. This conveyance is anticipated to occur in spring of 2010.

The third phase of acquisition of Plum Creek land is scheduled to occur in December 2010, and will include approx. 69,520 acres. Approx. 20,800 acres are located in the Swan Valley, mostly in a checkerboard ownership pattern within the Swan River State Forest.

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

Land Management Activity and Plans

All of the Swan Valley land acquired as part of the Montana Legacy Project land is subject to the Fiber Supply Agreement (FSA). As part of the purchase and sale agreement, TNC is obligated to provide a set amount of timber volume to Plum Creek for the next nine years. 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 a local contractor will be completing the work by the end of the year.

The Nature Conservancy is currently planning timber projects to meet its 2010 FSA obligations. TNC-managed logging projects are likely to occur in the Swan Valley in 2010. Under a contract with The Nature Conservancy, Northwest Management, Inc. will call for bids from potential contractors prior to the announcement of the sale. Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC) has a list of Swan Valley contractors that will be notified. If you are a contractor and are interested in receiving information about projects, please make sure your information is up to date with SEC, or contact Sue Macmeeken at The Nature Conservancy (406.543.6681) to be added to a list.

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 entire property in Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Block Management Program for hunter access. We have contracted with a local non-profit for assistance in monitoring and patrol of Legacy lands. In addition, non-commercial firewood gathering is allowed with a permit. Permits are available at SEC.

After acquiring the land from Plum Creek Timber, and in preparation for donation of land to the Lolo and Flathead National Forests in spring of 2010, The Nature Conservancy and the Forest Service identified a number of issues requiring attention. During the field season our stewardship team, as well as local contractors, worked hard to address these issues, which ranged from vandalized gates and illegal ATV or 4x4 trails to garbage dumps and property boundary encroachments. Nearly 45,000 acres in the Swan were assessed for acquisition by the Forest Service, as well as many miles of ownership boundaries and a complex patchwork of road access easements. Thank you to our team and our partners for addressing these situations before the snow flies. Thank you to the residents of the Swan Valley for your understanding and assistance helping resolve these issues as we prepare this land for public ownership.

Potential dispositions of Phase 3 lands in the Swan Valley

Most of the Phase 3 acquisition involves the checkerboard ownership area within the Swan River State Forest. These parcels are located in Lake County and contain approximately 17,180 acres. The Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and, to a lesser extent, the Forest Service, expressed interest in purchasing 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 a state acquisition.

The remaining Phase 3 land (approx. 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. Since the Phase 3 closing remains many months in the future, it is too early to predict the final disposition of land. 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.

Additional information, maps and updates are available at **www.TheMontanaLegacyProject.org**

If you have any questions or comments, please contact:

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