



**THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY
MONTANA CHAPTER**

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April 13, 2006

The Honorable Conrad Burns
United States Senate
187 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Burns:

The Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society encourages your continued support of Land and Water Conservation and Forest Legacy funding for Swan Valley land conservation purposes.

The Wildlife Society is a non-profit association dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. For nearly 70 years it has promoted wildlife conservation and its connections with people. The Society's goals include:

- Advancing professional stewardship of wildlife resources and their habitats, and
- Advocating the use of sound biological information for wildlife policy decisions.

The Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society works across the State supporting the wildlife management profession, efforts to preserve and restore habitat for wildlife, and sound conservation policies that sustain hunting and wildlife-related recreation for present and future generations.

Montanans have hunted, fished, and recreated in the Swan Valley for many years. The Valley's forestlands provide for a rich diversity of wildlife and fisheries habitat, outdoor recreation opportunities, and support a variety of forest-based livelihoods in the local and regional economy. Its location between the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex and the Mission Mountains Wilderness provides a critical link between some of the most celebrated natural areas in our great State. Maintaining the connectivity between these areas and avoiding the habitat fragmentation that can occur through conversion of forestland to rural residential uses is critical to the maintenance of a variety of wildlife populations in the area. Plum Creek Timberlands is selling some of its large holdings in the Valley. When these lands are sold for private development, traditional public recreational access will likely be terminated and the continuity of habitat will be permanently altered.

Through a long-term collaborative effort, Plum Creek has offered some significant Swan Valley lands for conservation sale to the public. This process included a science-based assessment of resource values and a conservation strategy that appropriately addresses the identified resources. The MT Chapter of the Wildlife Society wants to lend its support for the U.S. Forest Service request for a \$16.2 million appropriation in FY07 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This would allow the Flathead National Forest to acquire lands in the southern and central part of the Valley that are important for grizzly bear habitat, big game species, and public recreation. In particular, the Condon Creek properties underlie a critical portion of a grizzly bear linkage zone, in an area that is heavily used by a variety of wildlife species. Wetlands and riparian areas

provide important spring bear habitat and big game winter range is also found on the property. Nearly a mile of Swan River frontage is located on the western portion of the property and tributary streams cross through the eastern portion. These parcels are adjacent to or near Highway 83, are highly valued for public access, and are susceptible to subdivision and development. Such acquisitions would also reduce land ownership fragmentation and lead to more effective and cost-efficient land management. We also support the State of Montana's request for \$6.2 million in FY07 from the Forest Legacy Program. These funds will serve to protect important lands within the Swan River State Forest for ongoing forestry, as well as for public access. These Swan Valley requests are the highest priority for the Forest Service and the State this year.

The MT Wildlife Society recognizes your leadership over the past few years to secure Land and Water Conservation Fund and Forest Legacy Program funding for the Swan Valley. We support these high-priority projects and encourage their full funding. It is important that we act on these opportunities when they exist. Your continued support for these programs will allow the citizens of Montana to use and enjoy these lands and their rich resources for generations to come. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Gayle Joslin, President
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c: Senator Max Baucus
Representative Denny Rehberg