



Flathead Audubon Society

PO Box 9173
Kalispell, MT 59904

November 16, 2015

RE: South Whitefish Range Conservation Project

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Flathead Audubon Society, composed of over 400 members from the Flathead Valley, I am writing to fully support the proposed South Whitefish Range Conservation Easement projects. These two projects will extend protection to over 10,000 acres of important foothill forested, riparian, and wetland habitats on private lands at the north end of the Flathead Valley. These low to mid-elevation lands support productive and important wildlife habitats but most of these lower elevation lands in western Montana are not protected by national forest, park, or other ownership status. Conservation easement protection of these key habitat types is critical to maintaining wildlife connectivity across this forested landscape and helps link wildlife movement from Glacier National Park and the Swan Range to the Whitefish and Salish Mountains.

This project will protect some of the most critical and important seasonal habitats for many Montana Species of Special Concern birds such as the Pileated and Black-backed woodpeckers; Great Gray, Northern Hawk, and Flammulated Owls. These lands also support Clark's Nutcracker, Boreal Chickadee, Brown Creeper, Evening Grosbeak, and Varied Thrush, species that have shown declines over the last few decades. Additionally, the riparian/wetlands areas support nesting habitat for neotropical migratory songbirds and, in particular, the Veery, a riparian Montana Species of Special Concern.

Other wildlife that will benefit from this project include Western Toad, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, and federally listed species such as Wolverine (candidate), Grizzly Bear, and Canada Lynx. The South Whitefish Range is an essential linkage and an integral part of the Crown of the Continent, a large geographic area that encompasses Glacier National and International Peace Parks, the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex, and portions of British Columbia and Alberta, Canada, that support nearly all our native wildlife populations.

Flathead Audubon also supports this project because it maintains productive forestland in private ownership that will continue to be important to the local economy and stewarded by the F.H. Stolze Land and Lumber Company, an important economic force and community partner in the Flathead Valley. Flathead Audubon has participated in the Forestry Expo every year since the Expo's inception. The Trumbull Creek conservation easement will greatly ensure this important outdoor educational program as well as the Ravenwood Center will be able to continue for decades to come. This project will also maintain public recreational access to lands close to our communities and will allow families and kids to get outdoors, a primary goal of our organization.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Kay Mitchell, President
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