



PO Box 9173
Kalispell, MT 59904-9173
www.flatheadaudubon.org

Rick Northrup
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

August 29, 2018

RE: Forest Legacy Lost Trail Conservation Project

Dear Mr. Northrup:

Flathead Audubon Society represents about 400 members from northwest Montana. Our mission is to conserve birds, wildlife habitat and ecosystem diversity; promote awareness and appreciation of the natural world through education and advocacy; work with diverse groups and agencies to achieve sound decisions on natural resource issues; provide community services such as school programs, work projects, and field trips. ***We strongly support Trust For Public Land's and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' efforts to secure FY 2020 Forest Legacy Program funding for a conservation easement on approximately 7,200 acres of forestland in northwest Flathead County, adjacent and south of the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge.***

Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge and the tens of thousands of acres of mostly private timberlands surrounding it comprise one of most undeveloped non-wilderness areas of northwest Montana. Lost Trail includes some of our best examples of restored wetlands and native grassland habitats. The refuge and surrounding area support a over a hundred different migratory and resident bird species including nesting trumpeter swans, western grebes, golden eagles, and Williamson sapsuckers. The surrounding forested uplands including the proposed conservation easement area likely support wolverine and Canada lynx. Expanding the protected area will also provide opportunities for other carnivores such as grizzly bears to be able to move between the Crown of the Continent and Cabinet-Purcell Ecosystems.

What occurs on the adjacent uplands can have a huge impact on the future quality of wetland, upland, and wildlife habitat values of the refuge. Maintaining the adjoining private lands as working timber lands would greatly help maintain the unique habitat and wildlife values of the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge. Much of this proposed project area drains directly into the Dahl Lake wetland complex or other refuge streams and wetlands; the boundary of the project area nearly touches Dahl Lake. Should the private timberlands adjacent to the refuge be split into lots, development would greatly degrade the refuge's wildlife habitat values, as well as hunting, viewing, and other recreational opportunities that currently occur.

Maintaining working lands with public access is also be a huge benefit for residents and visitors to northwest Montana. The proposed conservation easement area supports significant and popular population of accessible elk as well as mule deer and white-tailed deer. Flathead Audubon has sponsored annual spring birding trips to the refuge and adjacent lands for the last 4 or 5 years to see many species not common in the Flathead/Mission Valleys. Ensuring the boundaries of the refuge are protected will



PO Box 9173
Kalispell, MT 59904-9173
www.flatheadaudubon.org

ensure recreational, educational, and other economic activities will continue and potentially increase as more people discover the rich diverse landscape this area provides.

We also believe this project, as with other working land conservation easements in northwest Montana, would support continued sustainable timber management that is beneficial to the local economy and will promote forest health. If the Forest Legacy Program can financially support this project, Montana will be one step closer toward accomplishing its goal of conserving important fish and wildlife habitat in a priority conservation area that includes the unique Pleasant Valley Creek watershed.

Thank you for the opportunity to support this proposed project.

Sincerely,

*Kay Mitchell,
Flathead Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9173
Kalispell, MT 59904
406-756-8130*