



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

May 6, 2024

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Attn: Leah Breidinger
490 N. Meridian Rd
Kalispell, MT 59901
LBreidinger@mt.gov

RE: Montana Great Outdoors Conservation Easement – Phase 1
(FWP-SEA-WLD-R1-23-011)

Dear Leah,

On behalf of our 400+ members of the Flathead Audubon Society, we would like to give our full support for the proposed nearly 33,000-acre Montana Great American Outdoors Phase 1 conservation easement on property of the Green Diamond Resources Company (Green Diamond). The project clearly fits without our mission: “*To conserve birds, wildlife habitat, and ecosystem diversity through education and conservation programs in northwest Montana*”.

This project will help conserve important wildlife habitats for big game species (moose, deer, elk, black bears, and mountain lions) as well as many listed species such as Canada Lynx, Bull Trout, Grizzly Bear, and Wolverine, all listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The project will reduce threat of forest habitat fragmentation due to possible future development if the conservation easement is not approved. The proposed conservation easement will provide needed connectivity from the Green Diamond lands at the head of the Thompson River to FWP’s Thompson Chain of Lakes and to the rest of the already conserved Thompson River area. It will help secure connectivity along the Wolf Creek uplands helping connect the Salish Mountains with the Fisher River drainage. It will be critical that FWP undertake Phase 2, that will complete final connectivity from the Thompson to the Fisher and Salish to the Cabinet Mountains.

Other huge benefits of this proposed project include habitat conservation for many less common species (37 Montana Species of Special Concern) that include 16 bird species such as Flammulated Owl, Great Gray Owl, Northern Goshawk, Pileated Woodpecker, Evening Grosbeak, Great Blue Heron, Pacific Wren, and Varied Thrush as well as many important species of bats. The proposed project will also protect unique dry habitats for Western Skink and Northern Alligator Lizard as well as wetter habitats for Western Toad and Coeur D’Alene Salamander. The project will benefit many native fish such as the unique Redband Trout in the Kootenai drainage.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this very important proposed conservation easement and we encourage the State’s approval.

Sincerely,

Darcy Thomas, President
Flathead Audubon Society Board of Directors