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January 20, 2026

Derek Goble  
Five Valleys Land Trust  
120 Hickory St., Suite B  
Missoula, MT 59801

RE: Case Ranch Conservation Easement

Dear Derek,

After reviewing the Case Ranch Conservation Easement proposed by Five Valleys Land Trust, Missoula County's Lands Culture and Recreation and Planning, Development and Sustainability departments have determined that the easement meets the criteria of Missoula County's natural resource and open space planning. This easement recognizes wildlife habitat values, including wetland and riparian habitat, open space values, scenic viewshed and public recreational opportunities, and provides measures to protect, enhance, and maintain those values of the property.

The conservation easement is approximately 2,330 acres and the full and lengthy legal description can be found in Exhibit A of the Conservation Easement document. The property is in an un-zoned portion of Missoula County. The property is adjacent to thousands of acres owned and managed through the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) as part of the Clearwater State Forest. DNRC manages Montana's state forests through cross-boundary forest restoration and management guided by the Forest Action Plan. The Forest action plan aims to reduce wildfire risk to communities, watersheds, and infrastructure, maintain working forests landscapes for multiple benefits, maintain and improve habitat conditions for healthy and viable populations of native species and to maintain or increase recreational opportunities.

Additionally, the property is adjacent to thousands of acres of land that DNRC manages as State Trust Lands, for agriculture, grazing, and recreational uses to benefit Montana's public schools, and adjacent to 21,432 of acres of land that the State of Montana owns and manages through the University of Montana, W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, as the Lubrecht Experimental Forest.

The property is also adjacent to eleven other properties in the Potomac Valley that are protected by perpetual conservation easements held by Five Valleys and the Montana Land Reliance for public benefit. These conservation easements, which collectively protect 3,461 acres of open-space land, also restrict development and preserve important agricultural, scenic, and wildlife habitat resources.

Missoula County's current Growth Policy (2019) plan seeks to protect the natural landscape and open spaces that are important to Missoula County while preparing for growth and promoting the economic wellbeing of Missoula County residents. The Growth Policy recognizes that a healthy agriculture sector is essential to the well-being of the community due to benefits such as food security, open space, wildlife habitat, economic activity, health promotion, and quality of life. The Growth Policy establishes the objective of conserving agricultural lands in order to sustain and promote agriculture in Missoula County. This Easement is consistent with the objectives of Missoula County's growth policy.

Furthermore, Missoula County's current Community Wildfire Protection Plan (2018), states that "utilizing land conservation tools such as the open space bond to buffer developed areas from wildfire" is part of the County's Protection Plan. This Easement is consistent with the County's Protection Plan by utilizing Missoula County Open Space Bond funds to support the acquisition of this Easement, which protects open-space land in an area that the County has designated as having a high risk of wildfire.

Any activities allowed by the easement, including building and road construction, would be subject to any applicable local and state regulations. Thank you for your efforts on this project. The natural resources being conserved are a valuable component of Missoula County. Please contact our program at 406-258-4869 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Zaso

Missoula County Lands, Culture, and Recreation