

The Montana Legacy Project (Conserving a Jewel in the Crown)

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The Montana Legacy Project is one of the largest private conservation projects in U.S. history – and certainly the most ambitious ever undertaken by The Nature Conservancy. In 2008, the Conservancy penned a deal to purchase more than 310,000 acres of private forest land from the Plum Creek timber company. The land sits within the heart of the 10-million acre Crown of the Continent – one of the last, intact and functioning ecoregions left on the planet. Not a single

ensured a livelihood for local communities whose economies are based on these productive forests.

More than 65,500 acres of the project land are in the Swan Valley, within the Flathead watershed. For years, the Swan has been the focus of intense conservation efforts because of its strategic location as a crossroads for wildlife movement. These include migrations from Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness southwest to the Mission Mountains and the Salmon-Selway Wilderness Complex in Idaho. Moreover, Swan lands provide essential low-elevation habitat for a treasury of wildlife. They encompass a tremendous number of wetlands, and harbor rare plants such as endangered water howellia.

The project is an innovative response to sweeping changes in the timber industry. Increasingly, private forest land is being taken out of timber production and being placed on the market for development. Within Montana alone, approximately one million acres may undergo this transition.

This sort of rural subdivision and development causes irreparable damage to wildlife because it creates isolated, disconnected islands of habitat that simply can't support the great diversity of animals that now thrive in the area.

Adding to the threat, much of this private forest is interspersed in a checkerboard pattern with publically-owned land. By purchasing this patchwork of private holdings, and then transferring them to adjacent public and conservation owners, the project is helping erase the threat of piecemeal development and ensuring this remains a vital, intact natural system for generations to come.



Source: Janet Haas/The Nature Conservancy

Canada lynx

plant or animal has gone extinct on the Crown in recorded history. It's one of the last places in the lower 48 states where grizzly bears, wolverines and Canada lynx still freely roam.

The Montana Legacy Project land includes both core habitat for these imperiled animals, and preserves the vital links between other areas of essential habitat. The land has been cherished by generations of outdoor enthusiasts as a place of both recreation and respite from the pressures of modern life. The forests have also