



For Immediate Release

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Travelers for Open Land Awards \$18,000 in Grant Funds To Help Conserve Montana's Open Lands



Travelers for Open Land, an innovative Montana program that allows visitors and residents to make voluntary contributions to conserve open land, recently awarded \$18,000 to help fund five voluntary Montana private land conservation projects.

“Everything about Travelers for Open Land is voluntary,” said Mike Scholz, founder of Travelers for Open Land, former owner of Buck’s T-4 Lodge and a hospitality industry leader. “The donation is voluntary, the business’s participation is voluntary, and the landowner’s participation is voluntary. It’s a cooperative program designed to conserve a Montana economic and quality of life asset: open land.”

“This year Travelers for Open Land grants will help fund outstanding conservation projects in the Flathead, Madison, Bitterroot, Gallatin and Helena valleys,” said Glenn Marx of the Montana Association of Land Trusts. “These collaborative projects will conserve wildlife habitat, key riparian areas, open land and important agricultural soils. Each project brings together an impressive group of partners and diverse benefits to the area.”

Travelers for Open Land (TFOL) was launched in 2009. Since then it has awarded close to \$220,000 to help fund 35 private land conservation projects throughout Montana. Among TFOL supporters are the Montana Lodging and Hospitality Association, Montana Association of Land Trusts, Montana Community Foundation, the Montana Office of Tourism, other tourist-related and outdoor recreation businesses, and the traveling public.

When visitors stay or shop at a business participating in Travelers for Open Land, they’re asked to make a small donation in support of the program. Participating businesses include hotels, dude ranches, bed and breakfasts, outfitters with lodging, fly fishing shops, rafting companies and other tourism-related properties and businesses. The funds are awarded as grants to land trusts through a competitive grant program. In addition to TFOL, two new open land conservation initiatives were launched in 2015: Round Up for Open Land and Weddings for Open Land.

Here is a brief summary of the five projects approved for funding by the Travelers for Open Land Advisory Committee:

Flathead Land Trust - \$5,000 – To help fund two conservation easement totaling 671 acres on the well-known Darrow family properties near Bigfork in the Flathead Valley. The proposed projects include conservation of the Swims Creek riparian area, wildlife winter range, forested habitat and private working agricultural lands. The projects would also provide open land conservation and scenic views, including prominent ridgelines and hilltops.

The Montana Land Reliance - \$4,500 – To help fund a 120-acre conservation easement on the Reints Ranch in the Madison Valley. The property is comprised of wetlands, wildlife habitat and agricultural lands, that include Madison River and O’Dell Spring Creek frontage. The Madison River Foundation is a project partner, and the project is supported by Madison Valley businesses and conservation organizations.

Gallatin Valley Land Trust - \$4,000 – To help fund a 960-acre conservation easement on the Toohey Farm near the Bridger Mountain foothills in the Gallatin Valley. Over 98 percent of the farm has soils designated as important by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The property also provides elk winter range habitat, and contains wetlands and riparian areas associated with the East Gallatin River. The Toohey Farm project will be in partnership with the Gallatin County Open Space program and the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and will be the first Regional Conservation Partnership Project in Montana history.

Prickly Pear Land Trust - \$2,500 – To help leverage funding for a 3,000-acre conservation easement in the Canyon Creek area northwest of Helena. The property has public access managed by Fish Wildlife & Parks, has been in the same homestead family for generations, provides important habitat for a diverse array of wildlife, and the easement would help conserve riparian areas on two Helena Valley creeks. Project partners include other conservation groups and local government.

Bitter Root Land Trust - \$2,000 – To help fund a 467-acre conservation easement on the Weber Ranch near Corvallis in Ravalli County. The ranch is adjacent to the Calf Creek Wildlife Management Area and provides exceptional wildlife habitat for a range of species, from songbirds to large predators. Key partners in the project include the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Agricultural Land Easement program.

In addition to the grants to land trusts, the new Round Up for Open Land initiative also awarded a total of \$10,800 to the Gallatin River Task Force, Big Sky Community Corporation and Travelers for Open Land for local watershed projects, local community trails efforts and open land conservation.

“2015 was a great year for cooperative programs such as Travelers for Open Land, Montana Open Land Month and Round Up for Open Land,” said Scholz. “2016 marks the 40th anniversary of Montana’s first conservation easement, and also marks 40 years of private land conservation excellence in Montana. Montana has a lot to be proud of.”

For more information about Travelers for Open Land, visit the program’s website at <http://www.travelersforopenland.org/>.