

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service -- Northern Region



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Montana Legacy Project Phase II Conserves Working Forests

Missoula, MT. – The Lolo and Flathead National Forests are assuming management of approximately 112,000 acres of former Plum Creek Timber Company lands purchased by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and The Trust for Public Land (TPL) as Phase II of the Montana Legacy Project comes to a close today with the official transfer of ownership to the Forest Service.

“It’s such an honor to witness the addition of over a hundred thousand acres of occupied lynx, grizzly bear, and bull trout habitat brought under the umbrella of public land management,” said Northern Regional Forester Leslie Weldon. “There is significant wetland habitat and a great diversity of plant species on these lands. Acquiring these parcels allows us to restore whole landscapes, assist wildlife in adapting to climate change by reducing habitat fragmentation and conserving water flows as these working forests are placed in permanent public ownership.”

On the Lolo National Forest, the 67,000 acres of new parcels are near Lolo Pass, Rock Creek, Mill Creek and Seeley Lake. The Seeley Lake District will manage approximately 7,592 acres of former Plum Creek land after the Phase II transfer is complete. Those parcels sit east of Highway 83 near the town of Seeley Lake and extend north to about Rainy Lake. This property is already home to species that wildlife and fish biologists are working to protect and view as important indicators of healthy ecosystems. The majority of the remaining acres are located in the Rock Creek and Lolo Pass areas and will be managed by the Missoula Ranger District.

The Flathead National Forest is receiving 45,000 acres in the Swan Valley through this second phase of the Montana Legacy Project. The Swan lake Ranger District is assuming management of the area located south of the Swan River State Forest, east and west of Montana Highway 83 and adjacent to the Lolo National Forest to the south. The land in the Swan Valley is productive forestlands, wetlands, and vital habitat for the threatened grizzly bear and other plant and wildlife species. The area is also a critical landscape connection between the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and the Mission Mountains Wilderness.

TPL and TNC purchased the land from Plum Creek in February 2009 with funds included in the 2008 Farm Bill. The newly acquired lands are under the umbrella of the Forest Service's multiple-use mission based on locally developed management direction, which is part will provide and ensure managed public access in the surrounding areas.

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