

Crown of the Continent Event – June 1, 2010

Melanie Parker's Comments

“On behalf of our land owners, community members, and partner organizations in the Swan Valley, I would like to say thank you to Senator Baucus , and to Governor Schweitzer, for working so closely with us over the past several years to make landscape level conservation of working forests a reality. The reality that our landscape is no longer constrained by the checkerboard land ownership pattern, what Charles Wilkins dubbed the “historical hangover” is just now sinking in. It is awesome. Together, we are making history.

What I would like to offer our esteemed administration officials is this. Conservation is very important to rural America. If you read the press you would think that rural people only care about the land because they wake up every morning wanting to use it or, even, exploit it. Contrary to that perception, rural people love the land, love the wildlife and fish, love the forests, the ranges and the rivers that they are blessed to live and work in every day. But urban conservation movements have mostly succeeded in alienating their very best rural allies – our country's ranchers, our loggers, our sportsmen and our farmers.

What the three landscapes represented here in the Crown have done successfully is to tap into the love that rural people have for the land and build strong partnerships that find conservation solutions that are supported by rural America....solutions that keep people working, that include careful uses of the land. Increasingly, we see urban America also wanting to support large working landscapes as they are seeing the benefits of locally grown food, locally harvested wood and fiber, locally produced fuel and energy. So, beyond conservation, we think our work here is a building block to a new economy.

We are thankful for all of the support you have given us. And we want you to know that we are hard at work to push the envelope on where this kind of work can take us here in the Crown, and in other key regions of the country.”