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**AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS: Salazar Tours Crown of Continent, Highlights Economic Benefits of Conserva**

Ken Salazar toured Montana's Blackfoot Valley, highlighting community-based partnerships in the Crown of the Continent region that conserve the area's natural heritage

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AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS: Salazar Tours Crown of Continent, Highlights Economic Benefits of Conservation



OVANDO, MT - Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar toured Montana's Blackfoot Valley, highlighting community-based partnerships in the Crown of the Continent region that conserve the area's natural heritage, improve its quality of life, and support economic growth and jobs.

"The investment that the people of the Blackfoot Valley and throughout the Crown of the Continent are making in long-term stewardship of their land is a model for America, and illustrates that a healthy landscape directly supports a healthy economy," said Salazar. "Indeed, the Crown of the Continent is the cradle of community-based conservation and a leading example of conserving working landscapes, one of the goals of the America's Great Outdoors initiative."

Salazar joined U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe in touring working cattle ranches where the Service has partnered with landowners to restore vital wildlife habitat and, through perpetual conservation easements acquired from willing sellers, permanently protected these habitats while preserving traditional rural economies.

Salazar spent time in Ovando where, joined by representatives of the Blackfoot Challenge, the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Swan Ecosystem Center, Northwest Connections, Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Board, The Nature Conservancy, and other partners and community leaders, he highlighted the importance of community-based conservation in achieving real and lasting conservation results.

Salazar emphasized the connection between natural resources conservation and economic sustainability, noting that the restoration of the Blackfoot River – a storied Montana water featured in Norman Maclean's classic novella A River Runs Through It – has enabled fly fishing shops, outfitters, cafes, and other local businesses to take root.

"The investment we make in conservation directly benefits local economies," Salazar said. "Communities benefit from a better quality of life, a healthier environment, and good jobs in the outdoor recreation industry."

Salazar also toured Creston National Fish Hatchery in Montana that produces and stocks 750,000 rainbow and 150,000 westslope cutthroat trout supporting the state's recreational fishing industry.

For more than two decades, the Fish and Wildlife Service has worked closely with individual landowners, nongovernmental organizations, federal and state agencies, private foundations, and many other partners to develop non-regulatory, voluntary approaches to landscape conservation in the Crown of the Continent.

Beginning with small wetland restoration and invasive species control projects, the Service and its partners have grown these projects into landscape-scale conservation initiatives in the Blackfoot and on the Rocky Mountain Front and are also working in the Swan Valley to identify opportunities to link fish and wildlife conservation and rural economies.

Earlier this week, Salazar announced the establishment of a new grants program to foster the establishment of community-based coalitions like the Blackfoot Challenge across the country. The Landscape Stewards program, a partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, will leverage up to \$200,000 to support coalition-based conservation efforts beginning next year. Each grant will be matched by equal contributions from the coalition partners.

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