

ELK CREEK CONSERVATION AREA



*Protecting
forestlands,
habitat and
a rural way
of life.*

**Swan
Valley,
Montana**

Forests • Fish • Wildlife • People



Our Challenge

Swan Ecosystem Center has one year to purchase ecologically critical lands at the confluence of Elk Creek and the Swan River in the Swan Valley of Montana. These lands harbor significant habitat for bull trout and other species and are at risk of conversion from timberlands to subdivisions and development. We are raising private funds to complement federal dollars with the goal of purchasing up to 1,920 acres over several years. By the end of this year, we plan to purchase the first section of land, 640 acres, known as Elk Creek Section 35, or the parcel may be sold to a developer.

Background

About one third of the Swan Valley lands are private corporate timberlands owned by Plum Creek Timber Company. Originally about 84,000 acres, these lands are interspersed with public lands. In recent years, many of these timberlands have been put on the market and sold, and some have been subdivided.

In response, conservationists, land and wildlife agencies and community members have identified lands most important for wildlife and fisheries habitat, public recreation and timber. Using appropriate federal and private funds, about 13,300 acres have been preserved to date. Nearly 7,200 acres have been transferred to the national forest, while 6,100 acres have been protected through a timberland conservation easement. Private landowners have protected more than 4,000 acres with

conservation easements. About 3,000 acres of timberlands, however, have been sold to private individuals. And much more land is on the market.

Due to the significance of Elk Creek as a world class bull trout fishery, protection of the creek qualifies for mitigation funding from Bonneville Power Administration and the Habitat Conservation Plan.

Strategy

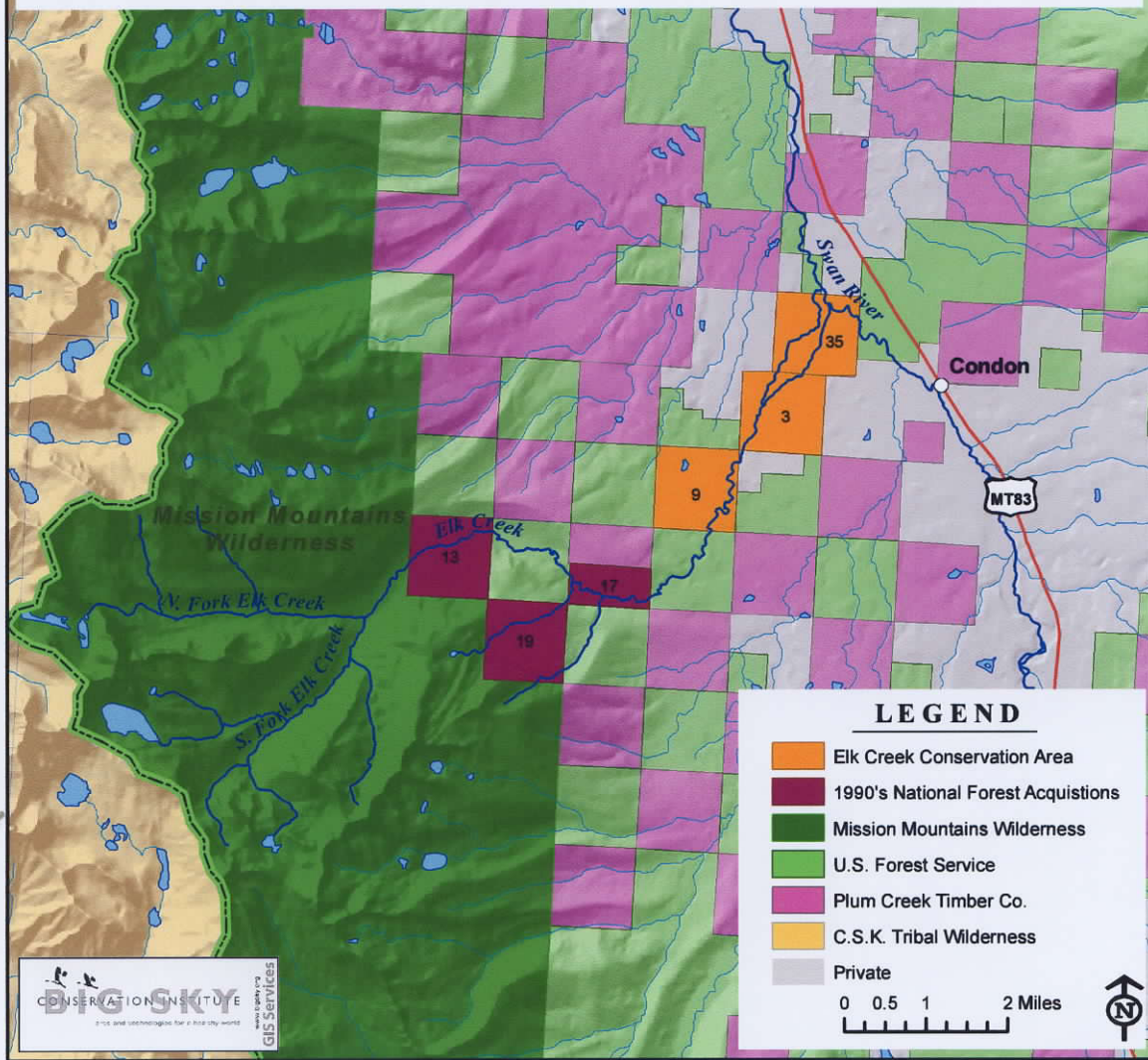
Longtime resident Neil Meyer has said, “If Swan Ecosystem Center protects Section 35 in the Swan Valley this year, it will have done an enormous service and left an enormous legacy for all of us.”

Three sections along Elk Creek are at stake. This year we are working with Montana Fish, wildlife and Parks and Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit, to secure funding through the Bonneville Power Administration and private sources for Section 35, which must be purchased by the end of the year. Bonneville will hold a conservation easement on the property. Trust for Public Land has secured an option to purchase the parcel for appraised fair market value.

The next step is to protect Sections 3 and 9, using public and private funds. We also plan to raise funds for an endowment to support restoration and stewardship on all three sections.



PROPOSED ELK CREEK CONSERVATION AREA

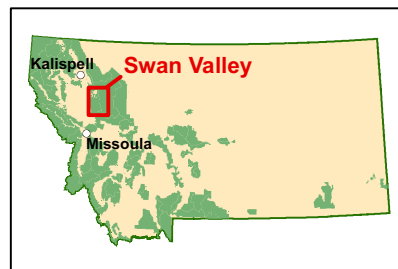


LEGEND

- Elk Creek Conservation Area
- 1990's National Forest Acquisitions
- Mission Mountains Wilderness
- U.S. Forest Service
- Plum Creek Timber Co.
- C.S.K. Tribal Wilderness
- Private

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

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The Significance of Elk Creek

Elk Creek springs from the pristine Mission Mountains Wilderness. As fish habitat, Elk Creek has consistently ranked “highest and best” in every category, supporting one of the healthiest bull trout populations in the world. Bull trout are a native species listed as “threatened” on the federal Threatened and Endangered Species list. Nearly all the bull trout that spawn in Elk Creek “stage” at the mouth of the creek in Section 35 where they are vulnerable to poaching before swimming upstream to spawn. Loss of these lands to development would put this bull trout population at risk.

The cottonwood and willow streamside areas and the many wetlands on these parcels also offer important low elevation habitat for grizzly bears, winter range for deer and elk and important rare plant habitat. Elk Creek is a vital streamside travelway for all wildlife species. It connects habitat in the Mission Mountains



Wilderness on the west side of the valley with a major wetland complex on the east

side of the valley—which connects to the Swan Range and the greater Bob Marshall Wilderness.

The Forest Service acquired the upper reaches of Elk Creek, outside of wilderness, through a land exchange in the 1990s. Protecting the lower sections of Elk Creek as the Elk Creek Conservation Area will prevent development along the entire stream length and uplands, providing forestlands, habitat for fish and wildlife, and community access for generations to come.

The 1,920 acres we seek provide critical fisheries and wildlife

habitat. This year we plan to purchase the Elk Creek Section 35 that lies at the heart of the Swan Valley—at the confluence of Elk Creek and the Swan River.

The Swan Valley

The Swan Valley runs 90 miles north and south, located between Missoula and Kalispell. It is one of the most biologically diverse parts of Montana, with more native plant and animal species than any other region of the state. It is also one of the most scenic, bordered on the west by the Mission Mountains Wilderness and on the east by the Bob Marshall Wilderness.





The Elk Creek Conservation Area

The Elk Creek Conservation Area is a component of the larger Swan Valley Conservation Strategy. If successful, the Elk Creek Conservation Area will be the core of a valley-wide network of protected community forestlands—dovetailing with other conservation measures on public and private land in the valley. Additional protected lands can be added in the future through acquisitions and easements.

Acquiring the land and applying conservation measures will protect significant ecological, economic and social values for the Valley.

Swan Ecosystem Center will own and manage the land as the Elk Creek Conservation Area to protect the highly productive and sensitive fish and wildlife habitats of Elk Creek. Through planned and thoughtful stewardship, some of this land will eventually contribute to a sustainable forest economy. It will be open for traditional recreational uses such as hunting and firewood gathering and provide opportunities for the community to practice stewardship.





The Swan Ecosystem Center is an inclusive 501(c)(3) nonprofit citizens group. SEC formed in 1996 to ensure that residents are well-informed and able to participate in decisions affecting the Swan Valley. We work in partnership with diverse groups and agencies. We are leading the coordinated response to timberland divestment in the Swan Valley. We will hold the Elk Creek sections and manage the land as a community forest.

Mission: *We, citizens of the Swan Valley, Montana, have a self-imposed sense of responsibility to maintain a strong, vital community, one involved in setting its own destiny through partnerships that encourage sustainable use and care of public and private lands.*

How You Can Help

If successful, Section 35 will be purchased in 2006 with funds from BPA and private sources. Then in the next couple of years we will raise funds for Sections 3 and 9.

You can leave a legacy of conservation in the Swan Valley that is larger than the gift you make. Because anticipated federal funds require a 25 percent non-public match, every \$1 you contribute for purchase of Elk Creek will protect an additional \$3 worth of land.

Swan Ecosystem Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation and your contribution is tax deductible.

Please talk with us about making an investment in the future of the Swan Valley's forests, fish, wildlife and people.

Thank you.

Anne Dahl



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Elk Creek basin, Mission Mountains Wilderness


Our Challenge

Over the next two or three years, three sections of land along Elk Creek will be on the market. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect the Elk Creek watershed, forever.

This year, we are working with the Trust for Public Land to purchase Section 35, using funds from the Bonneville Power Administration and private sources.

In Phase II and III, we will seek additional federal funds and raise private matching dollars at a three to one ratio. We also plan to raise an endowment for longterm restoration and stewardship.





*Respecting each other.
Sustaining the land.*

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Proposed Timeline	
\$1 million private funds for endowment	Phase III
Private funds for Section 9	
Habitat Conservation Plan federal funds for Section 9	
Private funds for Section 3	Phase II
Habitat Conservation Plan Federal funds for Section 3	
Bonneville Power Administration Federal funds and Private funds for Section 35	Phase I