

# News Release

---

The Conservation Fund  
1800 North Kent Street  
Arlington, Virginia 22209  
[www.conservationfund.org](http://www.conservationfund.org)

**CONTACT:**

Jenna Thompson, (703) 908-5809

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Public-Private Partnership Protects Historic Working Ranchland, Wildlife Habitat and Recreation Areas in Western Montana**

HELENA, MT (July 26, 2004) – The Conservation Fund, in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and private landowner James McMaster, announced today the acquisition of 5,636 acres of ranchland in western Montana. Utilizing funds from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, today’s acquisition protects wildlife habitat and significant historic resources along the Missouri River and provides an opportunity to establish a federally managed grass bank. Located 15 miles outside of Helena, the ranch sits on Spokane Creek on the western shore of Hauser Lake and Canyon Ferry Reservoir. Two hundred years ago, Lewis and Clark journeyed in this area, noting the spectacular cliffs and the picturesque Helena Valley in their journals.

“Thanks to the support of Senator Burns and the steadfast dedication of James McMaster and the BLM, the citizens of Montana will forever enjoy the vast landscape and historic resources of the McMaster Ranch,” said the Conservation Fund’s president, Larry Selzer. “By balancing economic and environmental objectives, we are designing conservation solutions that protect important wildlife habitat, create new areas for recreation, and provide economic benefits to ranchers in the Elkhorn Mountain region.”

Identified by the BLM as the number one acquisition priority in Montana, the ranch will be incorporated into the Chain of Lakes recreation area in two phases. The first phase, to be completed this fall, will protect 1,894 acres of rolling hills, grasslands, and lakeshore, including critical fish spawning habitat in Spokane Creek. The second phase is scheduled to be completed early next year and will protect 3,724 acres of critical habitat for elk, bighorn sheep, and antelope.

“BLM is pleased to be a partner in the effort to maintain the open space character of the landscape in the Helena area,” stated Rick Hotaling, field manager for the BLM in Butte. “This is a wonderful opportunity to acquire nearly 6,000 acres with high resource values for the public.”

Working closely with the BLM, United States Senator Conrad Burns spearheaded efforts to secure critical federal funds to finance the purchase of the first phase of the McMaster Ranch as well as additional properties located within the Chain of Lakes region. Congress is currently considering the President’s budget request, which would provide additional funding to complete the second and final phase of the McMaster transaction.

“It is partnerships like this, where public and private parties work together to come up with well-rounded solutions, that really benefit our state,” said Burns. “Montana is known as the ‘big sky state’ because of the beautiful landscapes and skylines we all treasure, and this acquisition will maintain some of those spaces in our state, and create valuable recreational areas and increase public land grazing opportunities for generations to come. I am glad to have been a part of working to find a common-sense solution to reach this goal.”

A third generation rancher, James McMaster and his family owned and operated the ranch since his grandfather homesteaded the property in the 1800s. As development pressure near Helena increased, McMaster, who has no heirs, grew worried that in time, his property would be fragmented, sold to the highest bidder, and developed. As a result, McMaster turned to The Conservation Fund and the BLM to design a solution that includes the protection of the ranch’s natural and historic resources and preserves the ranching traditions of the landscape.

The resulting agreement permanently protects wildlife habitat and recreation areas and provides an opportunity to establish a federally run grass bank for cattle grazing. Grass banks can help to improve grazing management on federal lands, including lands in the Elkhorn Mountains, by providing area ranchers with an alternative location to graze their cattle.

Since 1985, The Conservation Fund and its partners have protected more than 24,000 acres in Montana, including the recent transfer of 2,200 acres at the nearby Ward Ranch to the BLM which utilized funding raised from land exchanges and federal appropriations secured by Senator Burns.

The Conservation Fund is the nation's foremost environmental nonprofit dedicated to protecting America's land and water legacy for current and future generations. Seeking innovative conservation solutions for the 21st century, the Fund works to integrate economic and environmental goals. Since its founding in 1985, the Fund has helped its partners safeguard wildlife habitat, working landscapes, community "greenspace," and historic sites totaling more than 4 million acres. With 1% fund raising costs and 96% program allocation, The Conservation Fund is recognized as the nation's top rated environmental nonprofit by the American Institute of Philanthropy.

###