



AMERICAN LAND
CONSERVANCY



NEWS RELEASE

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Critical Bighorn Sheep and Elk Habitat Permanently Protected in Western Montana

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ANACONDA, MT: On June 30th, American Land Conservancy (ALC) conveyed 220 acres on Stucky Ridge in the Deerlodge Valley to Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP), permanently protecting vital habitat for bighorn sheep, elk, and other wildlife. The project completes Phase One of a two-part acquisition of 298 acres considered by FWP to be some of the most valuable and imperiled wildlife habitat in the region.

Located three miles northwest of Anaconda, Stucky Ridge is a series of grassy windblown benches and timbered gulches providing critical winter range for elk, mule deer, and bighorn sheep and rutting and calving habitat for elk. Its seasonal riparian areas and thick aspen forests are also used by mountain lion, bear, coyote, fox, bobcat, and nesting songbirds.

"Stucky Ridge is an exceptional natural resource and a wonderful local treasure," said Kerry O'Toole, ALC President. "ALC is thrilled to have played a key role in protecting this irreplaceable wildlife habitat."

ALC worked in partnership with the Missoula-based FVLT to protect the property, beginning its efforts in summer, 2007 after initial work by FVLT. At that time preliminary survey and engineering work had been completed for a new residential subdivision on the parcel, including one access road and several test wells.

"As a community organization Five Valleys is always proud when we can bring together a strong partnership to protect the places Montanans love," said Grant

Kier, Five Valleys Executive Director. "This landowner, ALC, FWP, and the people of Montana all deserve a lot of credit for making this project successful."

Stucky Ridge is adjacent to the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and lies in close proximity to the Lost Creek, Blue-eyed Nellie, and Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Areas, making it an important part of the regional ecology. The native grasslands of the Stucky Ridge area are cited as an area of greatest conservation need in Montana's Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

"This is a key block of winter range in the Anaconda area and was a high priority acquisition for FWP," said Mike Thompson, Regional Wildlife Manager of Montana FWP. "We were running out of options to protect this critical habitat. The assistance from American Land Conservancy and Five Valleys Land Trust was invaluable."

The property is especially important to the Lost Creek bighorn sheep herd, which can be found on the site in fall, winter, or spring. The herd experienced a mass die-off in 1991 but now numbers more than 300 sheep, including some trophy rams. The protection of habitat at Stucky Ridge for this herd comes just after other bighorn populations in Montana have been decimated by disease.

"If Stucky Ridge weren't conserved, another piece of land vital to bighorn sheep would disappear," said James Weatherly, Executive Director of the Montana Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS). "Saving this critical habitat helps keep our wildlife populations from further decline."

FNAWS contributed \$10,000 toward the \$770,200 purchase price. The Five Valleys Chapter of Safari Club International and the Anaconda Wildlife Expo also contributed to the project (\$5,000 and \$1,000 respectively). State support was provided by Montana Sheep License funds (\$382,889) and the Habitat Montana Program (\$371,311).

The 220-acre Stucky Ridge acquisition is the second project ALC has completed in Montana. In 2002 ALC protected and helped restore a 20-acre parcel surrounding Crow Creek Falls in the Helena National Forest.

"ALC is thrilled to have Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and Five Valleys Land Trust as partners in our work," said O'Toole. "We look forward to completing Phase Two of this project so that Stucky Ridge and the abundant wildlife it supports are protected forever."

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See project photos next page

Stucky Ridge Photos



Photo: Five Valleys Land Trust

*View of Leavengood Gulch on Stucky Ridge property.
Aspen and conifer forests in foreground.*



Photo: American Land Conservancy

*Road building and preliminary engineering work for a new residential subdivision
on the property had already begun when FVLT and ALC became involved.*