



***Wisherd-Blackfoot Canyon: Proposed Conservation Easement on 297-acres of Bonner Bighorn Sheep Habitat along Highway 200***



Bonner bighorn sheep ram photographed on the Wisherd property by Vickie Edwards, Spring 2009.

REQUEST FOR FUNDING TO: Montana Wild Sheep Foundation  
Attn: Max Bauer  
P.O. Box 17731  
Missoula, MT 59808

REQUEST FROM: Five Valleys Land Trust  
120 Hickory Street, Suite B  
Missoula, MT 59801

FEDERAL ID #: 23-7182055

CONTACT PERSON: Vickie Edwards  
Conservation Project Manager  
(406) 549-0755, Vickie@fvlt.org

AMOUNT REQUESTED: \$25,000

EST. PROJECT CLOSING: 8/1/2015

**Project Overview**

The historic 297-acre Wisherd property is located approximately 5 miles east of Bonner along Highway 200 and the Blackfoot River (Fig's. 1 & 2). The property is in the eastern portion of the Bonner bighorn sheep's home range in hunting district 283. It abuts U.S. Forest Service lands on the southwest corner and Nature Conservancy lands on the northeast and eastern boundaries (Fig. 1). The steep, extensive rock outcroppings on the north side of the property provide important year-round and lambing habitat. The property incorporates 5,700 feet of Wisherd Gulch and a portion of the Blackfoot River, allowing bighorn sheep and other wildlife to naturally filter along the ridge and the gulch towards the Blackfoot River. The Wisherd property is an integral wildlife movement area for the Bonner bighorn sheep population and other wildlife moving east and west, but also north and south across Highway 200 to the Blackfoot River. Undisturbed riparian corridors on the property provides high water quality and wildlife habitat and connectivity values. At a broader landscape, the property connects to larger blocks of protected habitat leading north into the Rattlesnake and Mission Mountain Wilderness areas, and south into Bear Creek and the Clark Fork River face (Fig. 1).

As described in the Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy (2010), management challenges to the Bonner bighorn sheep population include maintaining separation of domestic sheep and goats from bighorns to reduce the opportunity for disease transmission to wild sheep. Habitat management strategies of the Plan include working with private landowners to limit the use of domestic sheep and goats within this management unit. A Five Valley's Land Trust conservation easement on the property would protect the Bonner bighorn sheep herd by providing continued habitat connectivity, as well as eliminating the opportunity for current and future property owners to have domestic sheep and goats on the property for any purpose.

In addition to the fish and wildlife resource values of the property, the property has high scenic values and an extended family history that shapes the cultural fabric of this area. The property provides scenic open space for travellers along Highway 200, as well as open space and a natural viewshed for rafters and other Blackfoot River users along this stretch of the river. The property has been in the Wisherd family for more than 100 years and historically portions of the land with prime-irrigated soils were managed for agricultural use and most recently as an organic raspberry farm. The family tells stories about how families came from Missoula to work for food on the farm during the Depression.

The Wisherd family would like to conserve their family's legacy by protecting the wildlife, scenic, and open space values of the property. Also, due medical reasons, the family would like to place a purchased conservation easement on the property. Five Valleys Land Trust requests \$25,000 from the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation to help support conserving the Wisherd-Blackfoot Canyon property for the Bonner bighorn sheep population.

**Projected Budget**

<b>2015 Wisherd-Blackfoot Canyon Estimated Budget</b>	
<i>Estimated Conservation Easement Value:</i>	\$100,000
<i>Estimated Transaction Costs</i>	\$20,700
<i>Total Estimated Project Costs:</i>	<b>\$120,700</b>
<b>Anticipated Funding Sources:</b>	
Missoula County (requesting)	\$70,000
Five Valleys Land Trust (requesting)	\$25,700
Montana Wild Sheep Foundation (requesting)	\$25,000
<b>Total Anticipated Funds</b>	<b>\$120,700</b>

**Five Valleys Land Trust Credentials**

Five Valleys Land Trust has a long and established record of protecting rural landscapes in western Montana. Our mission is to preserve and protect western Montana's natural legacy--our river corridors, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, and scenic open spaces. Since its inception over forty years ago, Five Valleys has helped protect over 70,000 acres of open space, wildlife habitat, and agricultural land, of which over 57,000 are protected under conservation easements held by Five Valleys.

Five Valleys has acquired and currently stewards 143 conservation easements in 8 counties in western Montana. We have shown consistent commitment to an exceptional easement stewardship program since we began acquiring conservation easements in 1989, and Five Valleys requires a contribution to our Stewardship and Legal Defense Fund with each easement acquired. This fund has now grown into a viable legal defense resource; interest from this account is available for our stewardship program and ensures that it will remain viable into the future for easement enforcement and administration. A state-of-the-art easement stewardship program for monitoring and enforcement of conservation easements has grown along with Five Valleys land protection program. We have an excellent record in easement compliance and in maintaining positive landowner relations. Both our land protection and stewardship programs take advantage of a wealth of local and regional partnerships with community members, agencies, consultants, and conservation organizations. In 2008 Five Valleys was among the first land trusts in the nation to be accredited by the Land Trust Alliance Accreditation Commission, demonstrating that Five Valleys lives up to rigorous standards for the governance and management of the organization and the systems and policies it uses to protect land.

**References**

MFWP 2010. Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena.

Figure 1: Vicinity map of Wisherd-Blackfoot Canyon proposed conservation easement.

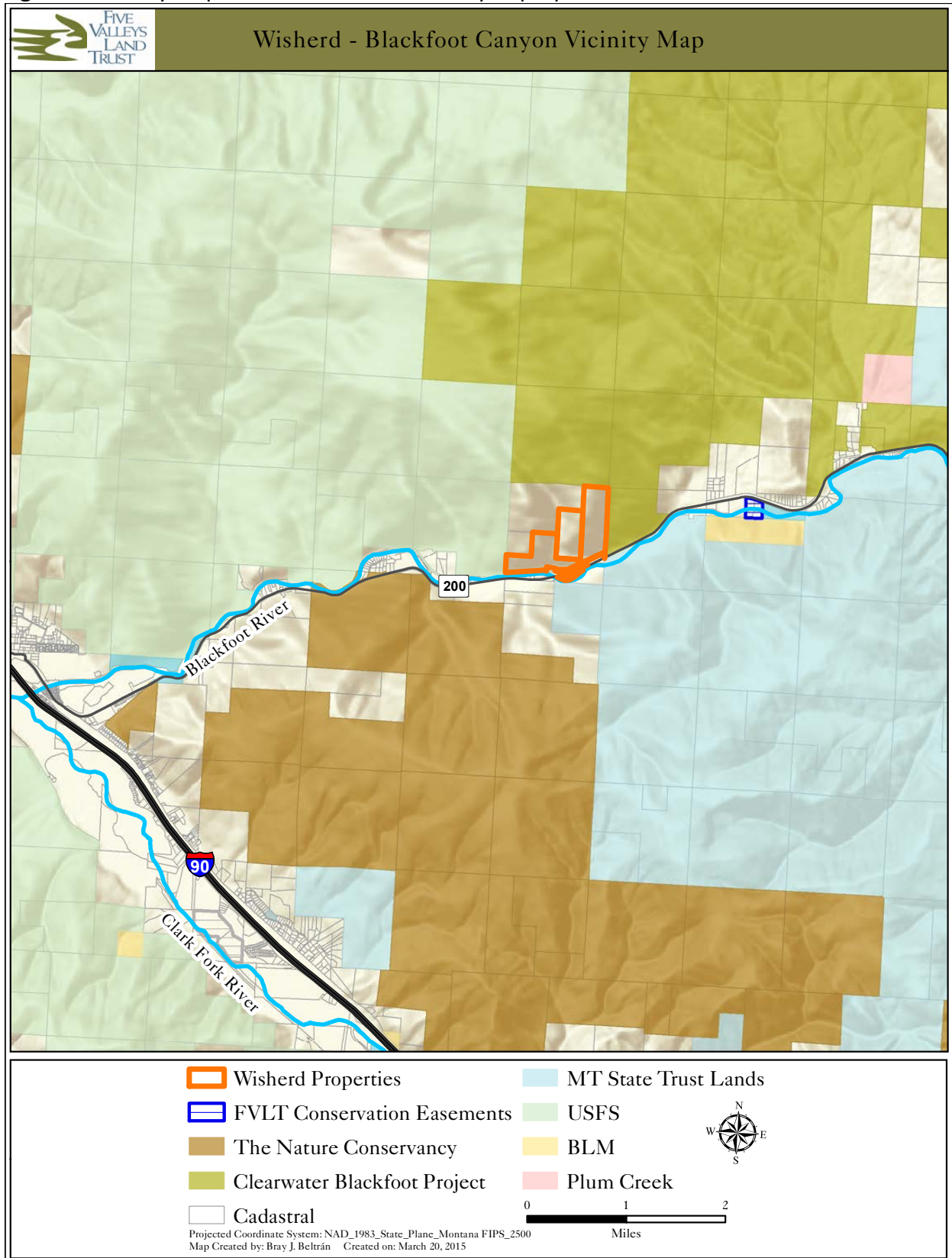




Figure 2: Wisherd-Blackfoot Canyon aerial map.

