More than one million acres of Montana land have been converted to large-lot housing since 2000, an area the size of Glacier National Park.[1] Montana is defined by open spaces, working lands, and the people who steward and depend on them. From family farms on the Hi-Line to ranches in the Centennial Valley, timberlands in the northwest, and communities large and small across our state, the stunning beauty of our open lands, and thriving agricultural industry reflect generations of landowners who have made deliberate choices to care for the land and invest in its future.

Over the last 50 years, more than 3,500 Montana families have chosen to partner with land trusts to conserve their land in perpetuity through a voluntary legal agreement known as a "conservation easement." These agreements allow landowners to monetize certain property rights, such as development or subdivision rights, while maintaining ownership and continuing to use their land for farming, ranching, forestry, hunting, outfitting, outdoor recreation, and other productive purposes.

> Today, more than 92 percent of Montanans support allowing private landowners to conserve land through conservation easements without government interference.[2]

In nearly every corner of our state – from Baker and Plentywood to Troy and Lima – landowners, businesses, community leaders, and public institutions have used conservation easements to achieve goals that are important to their families, businesses, and communities. As you'll read in the following pages, this tool has been put to work for ranchers, farmers, miners, loggers, hunters, outfitters, the Montana National Guard, and a wide range of local communities.

This report is intended to share the many ways that conservation easements benefit Montana's economy, the people who live and work on the land today, and future generations of Montanans who will carry the legacy of our treasured landscape forward. We hope the stories, faces, and economic data collected here provides a helpful view into the essential role of conservation easements in our state.

Finally, as you take in the stories and data here, know that the landowners featured in this report are the true conservation leaders in Montana. Their commitment to the future of their land helps ensure that the state remains a place where agriculture thrives, wildlife flourishes, communities prosper, open spaces are protected and outdoor traditions endure. We are proud to play a small role in helping these families achieve their goals and in protecting what makes Montana, Montana.

Sincerely,

Paul Travis

Paul Travis
President, Montana Association of Land Trusts

[1] Hernandez, P. 2024. Montana Losing Open Space. https://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/ montana-home-construction/

[2] Colorado College. 2025. Conservation in the West Poll. https://cwpoll.org/vis/



Skyline Angus conservation easement, Stevensville, MT/Photo by Firefly Imageworks