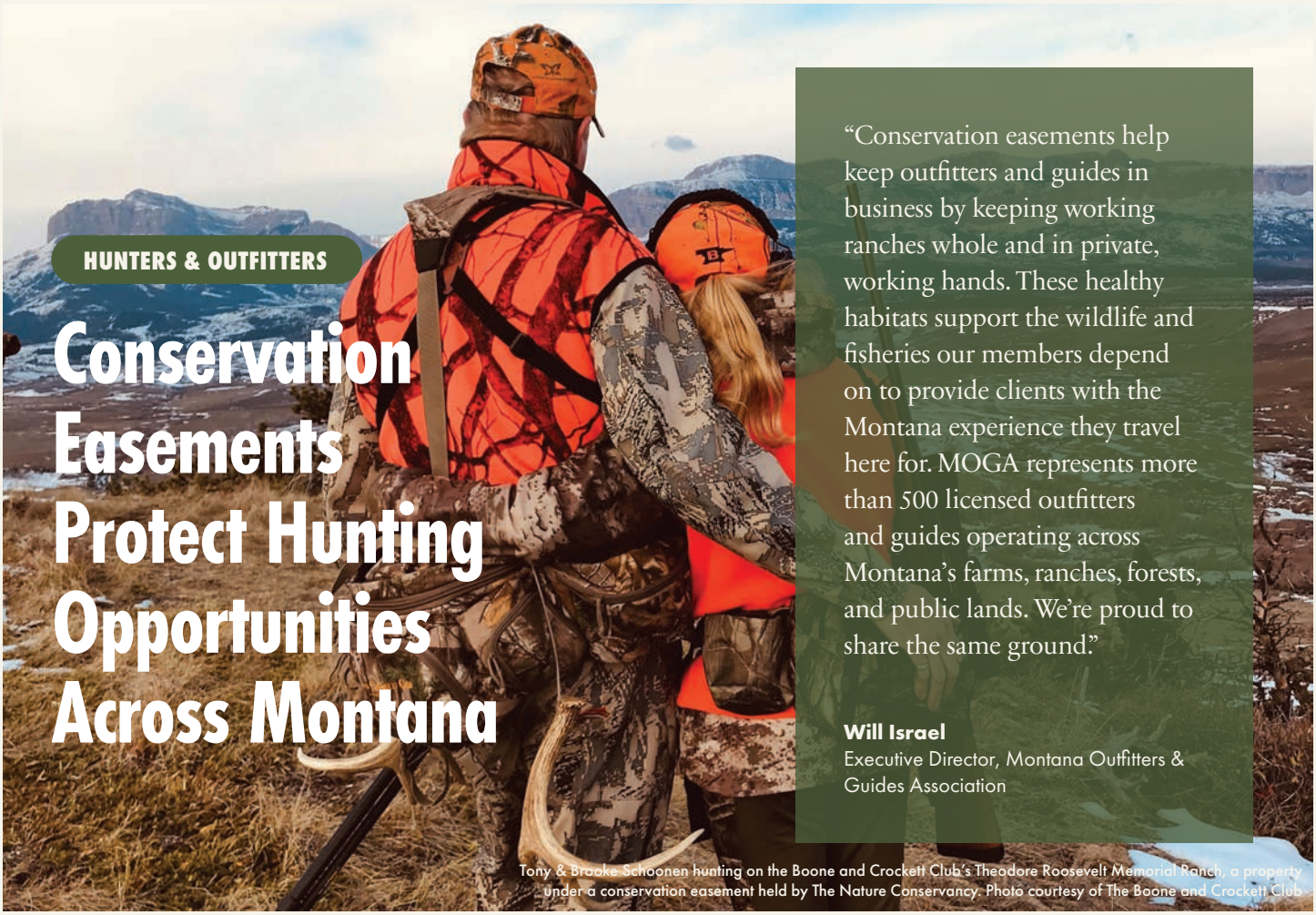


HUNTERS & OUTFITTERS

Conservation Easements Protect Hunting Opportunities Across Montana

> "Conservation easements help keep outfitters and guides in business by keeping working ranches whole and in private, working hands. These healthy habitats support the wildlife and fisheries our members depend on to provide clients with the Montana experience they travel here for. MOGA represents more than 500 licensed outfitters and guides operating across Montana's farms, ranches, forests, and public lands. We're proud to share the same ground."

Will Israel
Executive Director, Montana Outfitters & Guides Association

Tony & Brooke Schoonen hunting on the Boone and Crockett Club's Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch, a property under a conservation easement held by The Nature Conservancy. Photo courtesy of The Boone and Crockett Club

As Montana's most prominent conservationists, hunters have often been the first to recognize the inherent relationship between the species they pursue and the land that underpins that relationship. Healthy wildlife populations depend on healthy, intact habitat to thrive. Elk, mule deer, pronghorn, waterfowl and other wildlife do not recognize property lines. Their survival, and the hunting opportunities they provide, depends on connected landscapes that provide food, water, cover and places to raise young.

For hunters, outfitters, and guides, the equation is straightforward: conserve habitat, sustain wildlife, and maintain opportunities to hunt. In Montana, and across the country, conservation easements help make that equation work.

Conservation, properly understood, is the wise use of our nation's natural resources. It strengthens rural economies, supports hunting, and honors Montana's longstanding stewardship tradition. Conservation easements are one way to accomplish those goals through voluntary, landowner-driven conservation. They can provide economic benefits to landowners while helping keep Montana's landscapes open and productive for future generations.

As development pressure increases, keeping large blocks of working agricultural lands intact helps preserve the habitat that supports healthy big-game populations. Protecting migration corridors and winter range keeps elk and other wildlife moving across the landscapes they have used for generations. For guides and outfitters, maintaining these productive habitats can help sustain the wildlife resources

WHY THIS MATTERS

Montana's outfitters and guides make a significant contribution to the state's GDP

Conservation easements secure wildlife and fish habitat

Conservation easements can provide access for hunters and anglers

and hunting experiences that support their businesses and traditions of rural communities.

Montana's hunters, outfitters and guides, and landowners continue a legacy of working together to conserve Montana's wildlife, from the prairie pothole region of the Hi-line to the thick timberlands of Western Montana.

High Quality Habitat

The benefits of conserving habitat in Montana extend far beyond state lines.

The ducks and geese that nest and raise their young in Eastern Montana's prairie pothole wetlands, grasslands, and agricultural landscapes eventually migrate through or to other states, where hunters pursue them. Conserving these habitats in Montana helps sustain hunting opportunities throughout the Central Flyway.

North of Chinook, the Elloam Grazing Association has entered their pastureland into a conservation easement that was purchased with funds raised from the sale of "Duck Stamps," which all waterfowl hunters nationwide are required to purchase. Under this agreement, members of the Grazing Association continue to graze livestock at scale on the property, but intentionally conserve the important prairie pothole wetlands on the property for future generations of ranchers and waterfowl alike. This property is interspersed with state trust and BLM lands which serve as an island of conserved land for waterfowl.

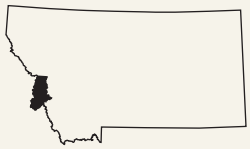
Likewise, migratory big game animals like elk rely on healthy intact habitat, including summer range, winter range, and clear pathways between the two. Conservation easements, donated by landowners or paid for using funds raised by hunters, contribute to all of the above. In addition to the work of Montana's land trusts, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks also invests funds from their Habitat Montana program in conservation easements.

Conservation Easements Protect Public Hunting Access

In Sula, in Ravalli County, the Wetzsteon family has donated perpetual public access to their family ranch to ensure that public hunting opportunities continue into the future as they have in the past. Owned by the family since 1889, the historic Lazy J Cross Ranch is open to public hunting through Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Block Management Program. A conservation easement on the property completed in partnership with the Bitter Root Land Trust ensures the property will continue to provide at least 250 hunter days during the fall hunting seasons for elk, deer, upland game birds, black bear, and bighorn sheep.

"Montana's hunting heritage depends on healthy wildlife populations, connected habitats, and the working landscapes that sustain them. Conservation easements, strategic land acquisitions, habitat restoration, and strong partnerships with private landowners all play an important role in keeping central and eastern Montana productive for elk and other wildlife. These conservation tools help maintain migration corridors, protect critical habitat, and support public access opportunities, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy Montana's rich hunting traditions."

– **JENNIFER DOHERTY, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF MISSION OPERATIONS, ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION**



WESTERN MONTANA
Ravalli County

PARTNERING LAND TRUST
Bitter Root Land Trust

BY THE NUMBERS

Montana Hunting & Fishing

$163M

TOURS & OUTFITTING

Contributed to Montana's GDP by guided tours and outfitting

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. 2024. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account.

$118M

HUNTING

Contributed to Montana's GDP by hunting

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. 2024. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account.

32,000

JOBS

Supported by Montana outdoor recreation

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. 2024. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account.

85%

OF MONTANANS

Say loss of habitat for fish and wildlife is a serious problem

SOURCE: Colorado College. 2026. Conservation in the West Poll. https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2026.html