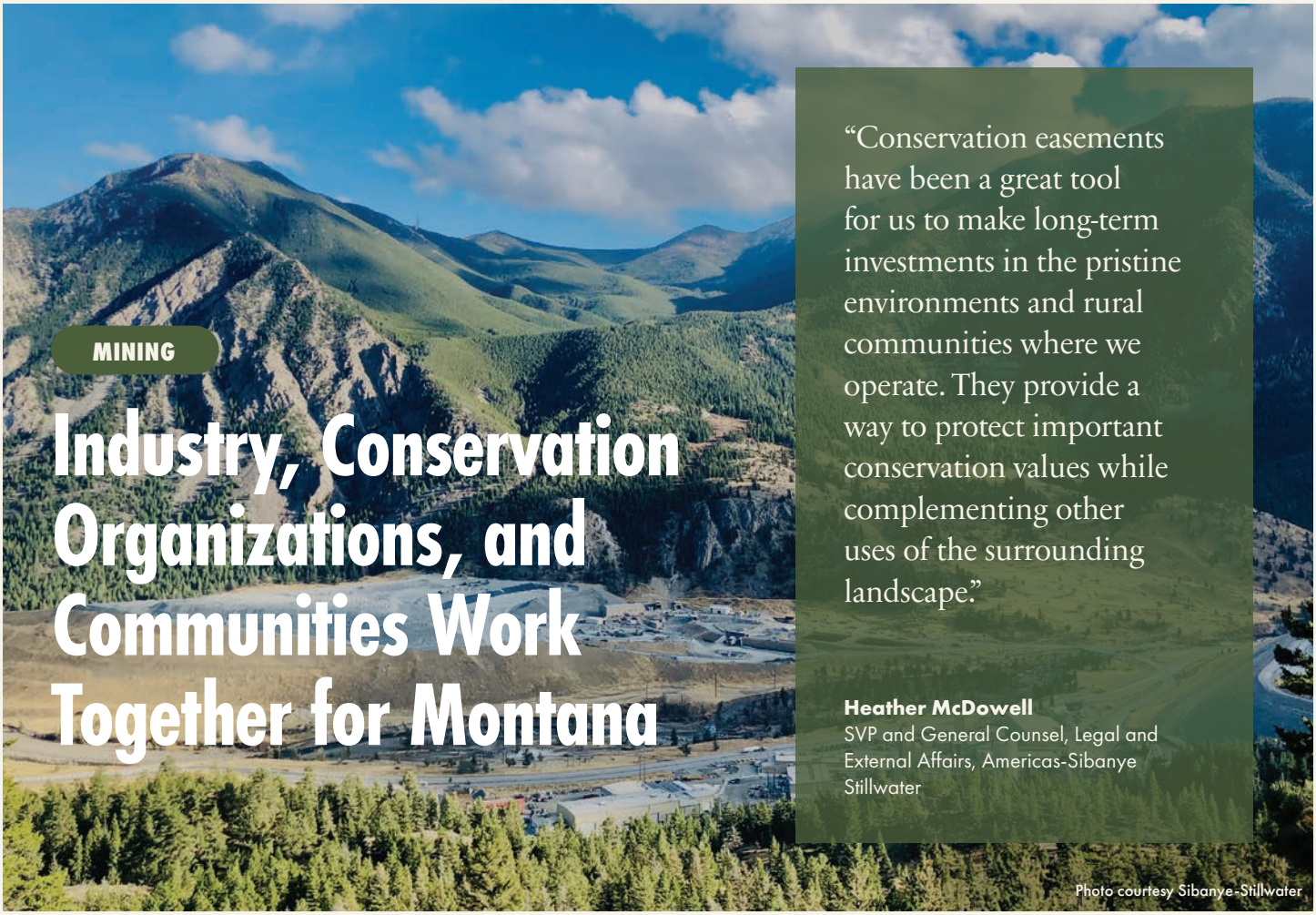


MINING

Industry, Conservation Organizations, and Communities Work Together for Montana

"Conservation easements have been a great tool for us to make long-term investments in the pristine environments and rural communities where we operate. They provide a way to protect important conservation values while complementing other uses of the surrounding landscape."

Heather McDowell
SVP and General Counsel, Legal and External Affairs, Americas-Sibanye Stillwater

Photo courtesy Sibanye-Stillwater

The Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA) between Stillwater Mining Company and Northern Plains Resource Council and its subsidiaries, the Stillwater Protective Association and the Cottonwood Resource Council, was signed in 2000 after nearly a decade of conflict between the company and the conservation organizations. Key objectives included minimizing mining impacts to local communities, protecting the environment beyond state and federal standards, fostering transparency into mine operations, and reducing future conflicts through collaboration.

While the formal conflicts between the parties were over water quality issues, protecting the Stillwater and Boulder River Valleys' rural character was of utmost importance. In addition to water quality, waste storage, traffic limitations, and other commitments designed to conserve the pristine environment around the nearly 15-year-old Stillwater Mine and the just-permitted East Boulder Mine, the parties agreed to protect significant ranchlands and open space in the Stillwater and East Boulder Valleys through permanent conservation easements held by The Montana Land Reliance.

As agreed in the Good Neighbor Agreement, Stillwater Mining Company donated conservation easements on six properties totaling more than 4,000 acres across Sweet Grass and Stillwater Counties. These easements were granted to The Montana Land Reliance to ensure the long-term protection of important open space, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, scenic viewsheds, and the rural and agricultural character of the region.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Montana is home to world-class mineral resources that are necessary for our modern, technology-based economy

Mining creates important jobs in rural Montana

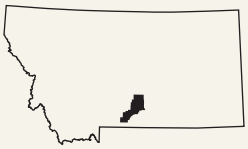
Conservation easements can help mine operations secure access to minerals and compensate companies for maintaining open space

These conservation easements generally prohibit residential subdivision, commercial and industrial development, and other activities that could compromise the rural character of the valleys. While traditional agricultural uses and land stewardship practices are allowed, the easements are designed to permanently prevent fragmentation of the landscape and maintain the agricultural activities and scenic viewsheds that define the East Boulder and Stillwater Valleys. The easements are perpetual and remain in effect regardless of future mine ownership.


Photo courtesy Sibanye-Stillwater

More than 25 years after the original agreement was signed, these conservation easements remain one of the Good Neighbor Agreement's most visible commitments. They have permanently conserved thousands of acres of working ranchland and open space and are a living example of how industry, conservation organizations, and local communities can work together to create rural vitality alongside economic development.


Photo courtesy Sibanye-Stillwater



SOUTH CENTRAL MONTANA
Stillwater County

PARTNERING LAND TRUST
The Montana Land Reliance

BY THE NUMBERS

Montana Mining

18,000+

JOBS

Created by Montana's hard rock mining industry across diverse sectors

$1.3B

IN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Received annually by Montana households from the hard rock mining industry

$427.9M

IN STATE REVENUE

Generated annually in state tax and nontax revenues through the hard rock mining industry and related economic activity

25,000+

MONTANANS

Live in Montana because of the hard rock mining industry

SOURCE FOR ALL ABOVE DATA: Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research. 2023. Montana Hard Rock Mining Industry Economic Contributions. University of Montana, Missoula, MT. https://www.bber.umt.edu/pubs/Econ/Montana-Hard-Rock-Mining-Industry-Economic-Contributions.pdf