



**City of Missoula, Montana**  
**Item to be Referred to City Council Committee**

**Committee:** Parks and Conservation

**Item:** Bluebird-North Hills Open Space Acquisition

**Date:** July 8, 2019

**Sponsor(s):** Donna Gaukler

**Prepared by:** Elizabeth Erickson, Open Space Acquisitions Attorney

**Ward(s) Affected:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Ward 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Ward 4
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ward 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Ward 5
<input type="checkbox"/> Ward 3	<input type="checkbox"/> Ward 6
	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A

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**Action Required:**

Set a public hearing for adoption of a Resolution that authorizes the expenditure of up to \$450,000 of the City's portion of the 2006 Open Space Bond funds to purchase 124 acres of open space land in the North Hills to protect scenic open space and wildlife habitat and provide a new public access trailhead and recreational trail off Grant Creek Road.

**Recommended Motion(s):**

I move the City Council set a public hearing to adopt a resolution to expend up to \$450,000 of the City's portion of the 2006 Open Space Bond funds to purchase 124 acres of open space land in the North Hills to protect scenic open space and wildlife habitat and provide a new public access trailhead and recreational trail.

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**Timeline:**

Referral to committee:	July 15, 2019
Committee discussion:	July 17, 2019
Council acts to set hearing:	July 22, 2019
Public Hearing:	August 12, 2019 (joint Board of County Commissioners and City Council hearing)
Deadline:	<a href="#">Click or tap here to enter text.</a>

**Background and Alternatives Explored:**

The Bluebird-North Hills project would provide a new trailhead to the North Hills for residents living in the Reserve Street area, North Side, and Grant Creek while protecting plant and wildlife habitat and scenic values for Missoula area residents. The Bluebird-North Hills project consists of 124-acres that Five Valleys Land Trust (Five Valleys) acquired in fee as an interim owner, as well as, a public access and parking right-of-way across the Montana Snowbowl property adjacent to Grant Creek Road. Five Valleys proposes to transfer the property and right-of-way to the City of Missoula for incorporation

into the Conservation Lands system.

### **Public Benefits**

The Bluebird-North Hills project would allow the City of Missoula to open a new trailhead for residents in the rapidly growing area west of Reserve Street, which is underserved by the Conservation Lands system. A loop trail could be built on the Bluebird property and later expanded onto the North Hills-Allied Waste conservation easement. The City and County are planning for thousands of additional homes to be built in the area to address significant affordable housing needs. The Bluebird Trailhead would help ensure that these developments provide good places to live, where people have a place to get exercise and connect with each other and the natural world.

Providing significant recreational and scenic values, the Bluebird-North Hills project builds on decades of conservation work in the North Hills. The property also provides habitat for grassland species, include the endemic Missoula phlox, bitterroot, elk, birds of prey, and bluebirds. The highly visible property is located in the North Hills which form the scenic backdrop of the Missoula community and visually connect residents to the extensive Wilderness Areas of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem beyond.

At 124-acres of gently sloping ground, the Bluebird-North Hills property is large enough to accommodate a loop trail for one or two hour-long excursions. In the future the trail can be extended onto the adjacent North Hills-Allied Waste conservation easement property. Allied Waste, now Republic Services, granted public access across their 304-acre property in the 2010 conservation easement, even though the property was not accessible to the public at the time. The Bluebird-North Hills acquisition would finally provide the public with access to the North Hills-Allied Waste property. This project would not be possible without the strong partnership of Montana Snowbowl, and their collaboration in locating the public access easement and trail head across their land at the base of Grant Creek, where they own and maintain a parking area for their wintertime shuttle to the ski mountain.

Over the next year Five Valleys will work with Republic Services and the City of Missoula to define public access details which will include a pedestrian trail across the property and will likely be seasonal in nature to balance recreational use with winter range protection. Together the Bluebird acquisition and the Allied Waste conservation easement will open nearly 428 acres of newly accessible natural lands to the Missoula community.

The acquisition will serve the purposes of the 2006 Open Space Bond by protecting wildlife habitat, providing open space and scenic landscape; managing for growth; providing recreational trails; and paying non-personnel related transaction costs and other project related costs. The project received a unanimous recommendation from the City's Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) for funding up to \$450,000

### **Financial Implications:**

Five Valleys is requesting \$450,000 from the City's portion of the 2006 Open Space Bond for the City to purchase for open space conservation the 124-acre Five Valleys-owned fee property and the public access and parking right-of-way across the adjoining Montana

Snowbowl property. Five Valleys would match this Open Space Bond expenditure with an in-kind landowner contribution of \$210,000. The balance of the City's portion of the 2006 Open Space Bond, pending approval of Bluebird/North Hills project is approximately \$103,000.

Bluebird-North Hills Budget	
Open Space Bond request	\$450,000
Landowner contribution (in-kind)	\$210,000
Appraised Fair Market Value of Property	\$660,000

**Links to external websites:**

Draft Resolution

Maps of site and trail connections

Open Space Advisory Committee letter of support