

Board of County Commissioners
Missoula County Courthouse
200 West Broadway
Missoula, MT 59802

Missoula City Council
435 Ryman Street
Missoula, MT 59802

May 31, 2019

RE: Purchase of 124 acres of open space land in Missoula's North Hills to protect scenic open space and wildlife habitat, provide a new public access trailhead and recreational trail.

Dear Members of the Board of County Commissioners and City Council:

The Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) enthusiastically recommends the City Council and County Commissioners approve the expenditure of up to \$450,000 of the City's portion of the 2006 Open Space Bond to purchase 124 acres of open space land in Missoula's North Hills - called the Bluebird-North Hills Project - to protect scenic open space and wildlife habitat, and provide a new public access trailhead and recreational trail.

The City of Missoula adopted the *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan 2006 Update* ("*Open Space Plan*"), which provides a vision for continuing to expand upon our open space and trail systems throughout the greater Missoula Area. The 2019 draft Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan carries forward that vision. The *Open Space Plan* describes Missoula's North Hills as an anchor of the open space system and encourages the preservation of scenic open space, wildlife habitat, rare and unique plant communities, and protection of lands for recreation, public access and trails.

The Bluebird-North Hills project accomplishes the above goals in a variety of ways. The project protects habitat for grassland species, including the endemic Missoula phlox, bitterroot, elk, birds of prey, and bluebirds. The North Hills provide a scenic backdrop to the Missoula Valley and visually connect residents to the extensive wilderness areas of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem beyond. The project provides significant recreational and scenic values and builds on decades of conservation work in the North Hills, and the addition of these 124 acres will provide a western anchor to the North Hills conservation lands and open space.

The Grant Creek and North Reserve Street areas of Missoula are experiencing significant residential and commercial growth. A new public access trailhead and trail in this location will provide recreational access to residents in the neighborhoods in and around North Reserve and Grant Creek, and will provide access for visitors staying in the various hotels in the area. The trailhead is also in close proximity to the Grant Creek Trail, that will hopefully be extended south and east from its current terminus at the base of Grant Creek Road, providing non-motorized connections to this location.

The project will carry out the purposes of the 2006 open space bonds 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 Open Space Advisory Committee supports and respectfully recommends this acquisition. We thank you for your consideration of our recommendation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rob Erickson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "E".

Rob Erickson, Chair
Open Space Advisory Committee