

MEDIA RELEASE

September 1, 2016

Missoula County, City of Missoula to Host Tenth Anniversary Open Space Bond Celebration

The Missoula County Parks, Trails and Open Lands Program and the City of Missoula Open Space Program invite members of the media and the public to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the first county-wide Open Space Bond. The event, which will be held on Thursday, Sept. 8, 2016 from 5 to 7 p.m. at Silver Park in Missoula, will recognize the accomplishments made possible by the 2006 voter-approved open space bond and the countless landowners and partners who contributed to its success.

Enjoy local music, ice cream and beverages, folk and other kid-friendly activities while hearing from landowners about their experiences within the program. Commissioner Jean Curtiss and Mayor John Engen will also be speaking. Partner agencies and organizations will host tables at the event where the public can learn more about their initiatives and current projects. Raffles and other prizes will be given away throughout the evening. The event is free and we hope to see a large turnout to celebrate the Open Space Bond program.

“We are excited to have the opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of the City and County’s open space bond programs,” City Open Space Acquisitions Attorney, Elizabeth Erickson said. “This past decade of successful conservation work would never have been possible without the dedication, generosity and hard work of so many individuals and organizations, and we look forward to sharing those stories.”

Since 2006, more than 29,000 acres have been conserved as open space throughout the county. That is 7,500 more acres than the entire island of Manhattan. These 29,000 acres have high conservation and recreation values that protect river corridors, wildlife habitat, working lands and scenic vistas across the county. The Open Space Bond has been a key tool in supporting private land conservation throughout the county as well as securing additional City Open Space land in the Missoula Valley.

“We are very grateful for the open space bond program,” landowner Barbara Barmeyer said. “We know that if a child grows up with a connection to wild places and the earth, it’s a lifelong blessing and an indelible influence. In our crowded and increasingly mechanized world, a walk in the woods brings peace, clarity, spirituality.”

The Barmeyer family has generously conserved 130 acres in Pattee Canyon with support from the 2006 open space bond.

The City and County's open space programs have been successful for a number of reasons, including the fact that for every dollar expended by the city or county, there has been an average \$3.60 in matching funds. The funding is often secured by project partners, often land trusts, and the matching funds have come from private and public sources including significant contributions from private landowners. Of the \$10 million approved in general obligation funds in 2006, \$2.9 million currently remains available for projects.

"Our work would not be possible without generous private landowners and the support of our countless community partners and land trusts, including The Nature Conservancy, Five Valleys Land Trust, The Vital Ground Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, United States Forest Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and Montana Land Reliance among others" County Rural Landscape Scientist, Kali Becher said. "We rely on the volunteers who comprise our Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee and the City's Open Space Advisory Council to evaluate and recommend proposed projects. Their efforts are invaluable."

After the Open Space Bond was passed in 2006, half of the voter-approved funding was allocated to the City of Missoula to be spent in the Missoula area and half was allocated to the County to be spent outside of the urban area. The City and County Open Space programs are each administered by staff and a citizen advisory board, which make recommendations to the elected officials on project funding requests. The requests for project funding most often come from partner groups such as land trusts, but can be sponsored by other qualified organizations as well.

Please contact Missoula County's Rural Landscape Scientist, Kali Becher at (406) 258-4869 or the City of Missoula's Open Space Acquisitions Attorney, Elizabeth Erickson at (406) 552-6267 with questions.

