

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ABBREVIATED MINUTES

June 10th, 2010

4:00 – 6:30 pm

<b>Present:</b>	Tim Aldrich	Jenny Tollefson	<b>Absent:</b>
	Jeff Stevens	Maureen Hartman	Mary Manning
	Bob Clark	Gary Knudsen	
	Ethel MacDonald	Jed Little	
	Adam Liljeblad	Bert Lindler	

Also Present: Jackie Corday, Open Space Program Mgr, Mike Mueller (RMEF) & Charlie Deschamps (landowner)

**Fieldtrip to Deschamps Ranch**

Landowner Charlie Deschamps and Mike Mueller from the Rocky Mt Elk Foundation (RMEF) took us on a fieldtrip of Charlie's 1036 acre ranch property located NW of the WYE. The property has been owned by the Deschamps family since the late 1800's and has been used mostly for cattle grazing and timber harvesting. There are no structures on the property, just some gravel ranch roads. The property consists predominately of open grassy fields that range from pasture grasses to healthy native bunch grasses and forbes. The northern 1/3 of the property is forested predominately by Ponderosa Pine and Douglas Fir and is traversed by Deschamps Creek, a tributary to O'Keefe Creek. The ranchland is bordered to the south and east by residential properties averaging 10 acres in size, to the west by large acreage parcels, and to the north by USFS lands. Charlie described the property as a "piece of heaven close to town," and we all agreed with that description for it is truly a beautiful place.



RMEF and Charlie's family would like to place a conservation easement on the property that will allow one home-site in the lower SW corner of the property. The easement would protect the conservation values which are, in general, open space, farm and ranchland, and wildlife and fisheries habitat. While on our fieldtrip, we saw a mama black bear with her two cubs, wolf scat and prints, and lots of elk droppings. This property can be seen from many locales in the Missoula Valleys and Highways I-90 and 93. The property includes a prominent grassy knob that likely had Native American significance since you can see so far in all directions, including all of Missoula to the east and up to Huson to the west.

This area and location in proximity to Missoula (near I-90 and Highway 93) is experiencing development pressure. Charlie indicated that if not protected by a conservation easement, this important viewshed and wildlife habitat would ultimately be subdivided and support residential construction. There is already a preliminarily approved 129 unit subdivision on 275 acres that the Deschamps currently own and have listed for sale that is adjacent to the southern boundary of the subject property.

The property abuts Lolo National Forest and is in the vicinity of other private property that RMEF has protected with a conservation easement. Primary conservation values of the property are:

- **Wildlife habitat** for elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer, bear, mountain lion, gray wolf, coyote, Swainson's and red-tailed hawks, long-eared owls, and numerous other species of mammals, invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles. Approximately 75-100 elk utilize the property.
- Habitat for **2 species of concern** reported in the Montana Natural Heritage Program (Swainson's Hawk and Grasshopper Sparrow).
- The **Quebec Deschamps Creek watershed** and riparian habitat, which is a valuable tributary to O'Keefe Creek that supports a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout.
- **Valuable farm and ranchland** for traditional farming.
- **Grasslands, wetlands, coniferous forests, shrublands, and numerous species of grass and forbs.**
- **Open space land visible to the public** from I-90 and State Highway 93 and Missoula Valley.
- A buffer to adjacent state and federal forests.

RMEF has applied to both the County and the City for \$175,000 each because while the property is located entirely within the Open Space Plan boundaries, it is located about 1/2 in the Missoula Planning Region and 1/2 in the Frenchtown Planning region. The conservation easement has an estimated value of \$673,000. RMEF is searching for other funds to reach \$400,000, the negotiated price of the easement as the family has stated they will donate \$273,000 of the value.

Members asked about the ownership of the two 40-acre parcels adjacent and to the north of the ranch. Charlie explained that Fred Deschamps owns that 80 acres, but has no legal access. He has been given permission to use existing roads to the east and south to manage the timber on it over the years.

Members filled out the Rough Cut evaluation and scored the project high enough to proceed to further evaluation.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 pm with the next meeting date scheduled for 4:00 – 6:00pm on Thursday, July 8<sup>th</sup> at Currents.