

## BLM Buys 7,300 Acres Of Land Northeast Of Missoula

By ERIC WHITNEY • AUG 13, 2019



A Nature Conservancy representative points out portions of the land that make up the Clearwater-Blackfoot Project in the Blackfoot Valley. January 2015. CHRISTOPHER B. ALLEN / MONTANA PUBLIC RADIO

The U.S. Interior Department approved a plan to purchase 7,300 acres of former private timber lands northeast of Missoula.

The former Plum Creek Timber company property was acquired by The Nature Conservancy in 2014. And now, as part of a deal several years in the works, that non-profit is selling it to the Bureau of Land management for \$5.6 million.

Most of that money is coming from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, which uses royalties from off shore oil and gas development to fund outdoor projects, but \$2.6 million was raised locally by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

Joe Ashor with the BLM in Missoula says the agency expects to officially take title to the land in the fall. Plum Creek and The Nature Conservancy have allowed public access for hunting, fishing, snowmobiling and other recreational uses, Ashor says.

"That kind of use will continue," Ashor said. "We'll tweak it a little bit in some areas, to try to get the right mix of uses on the land, but the kind of things that were going on will continue, generally. That includes grazing, timber harvest and wildfire control activities."

The 7,300 acres approved for purchase today are part of 40,000 BLM is planning to acquire from The Nature Conservancy in the upper Belmont and Gold Creek areas. Ashor says the plan is to use Land and Water Conservation Funds to purchase all the remaining land for around \$24 million.