

University of Montana

## ScholarWorks at University of Montana

---

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &  
Professional Papers

Graduate School

---

2003

### From ridge to river| Conserving open space in Missoula, Montana

Jed D. Little

*The University of Montana*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

**Let us know how access to this document benefits you.**

---

#### Recommended Citation

Little, Jed D., "From ridge to river| Conserving open space in Missoula, Montana" (2003). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 2413.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2413>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).



**Maureen and Mike  
MANSFIELD LIBRARY**

The University of  
**Montana**

---

Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

**\*\*Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature\*\***

Yes, I grant permission  \_\_\_\_\_

No, I do not grant permission  \_\_\_\_\_

Author's Signature: Red A. Little

Date: 12/17/03

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with the author's explicit consent.

---



**FROM RIDGE TO RIVER:  
CONSERVING OPEN SPACE IN MISSOULA, MONTANA**

by

Jed D. Little

B.A. Stanford University, 1995

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

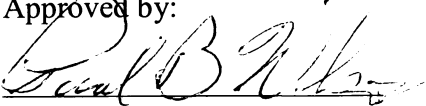
Master of Arts

The University of Montana


Department of Geography

May 2002

Approved by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Dean, Graduate School

12-17-03

Date



UMI Number: EP35361

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35361

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

From Ridge to River: Conserving Open Space in Missoula, Montana

Director: Paul Wilson 

Missoula, Montana has a rich history of open space protection dating to the early 1970s. Faced with rapid growth and sprawling development, those efforts took a major step forward in 1995 with the development of an open space plan, the subsequent voter approval of a \$5 million open space bond, and the creation of an open space program in the City Parks and Recreation Department. The open space bond money was primarily used to purchase large portions of the hillsides surrounding downtown Missoula, critical cornerstones of the open space network envisioned in the open space plan. With the open space plan now nearly eight years old and most of the open space bond exhausted, Missoulians are taking stock of their newly expanded open space system. While few would argue that the open space bond money was poorly spent, critical parcels of open space remain unprotected. Moreover, new land management challenges have come with the ownership of large tracts of open space. Before Missoula can claim to have the “coherent, connected” open space network envisioned in the 1995 open space plan, these issues will need to be addressed.

Compared to other open space programs, Missoula’s has made due with far less funding and fewer employees. Remarkably, a world-class open space system is emerging from this under funded, under staffed program, a testament to the determination of the community. The Open Space Program now finds itself at a critical juncture, needing to meet the challenge of managing its current open space holdings while continuing the expansion of Missoula’s open space system. This challenge will require a renewed investment of public interest and tax dollars, giving the Open Space Program the tools and the mandate to complete the vision of the 1995 open space plan.

# CONTENTS

Maps and Tables .....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Purpose Statement.....	2
Research Methods.....	3
Chapter 1: Open Space Background .....	6
Origins of a Movement .....	6
Who Will Save Open Space?.....	8
Open Space Conservation Techniques.....	11
Chapter 2: Case Studies .....	19
Jefferson County, Colorado .....	20
Eugene, Oregon.....	27
Santa Fe County, New Mexico .....	33
Chapter 3: Open space in Missoula .....	40
Early Open Space Conservation Efforts .....	40
The Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan.....	43
The Open Space Program .....	48
The Open Space System .....	50
Analysis.....	62
Chapter 4: The Future of Open Space in Missoula.....	76
Challenges.....	78
Opportunities.....	87
Bibliography .....	89

## MAPS AND TABLES

Map 1: Early Open Space Acquisitions .....	42
Table 1: Open Space Bond Acquisitions .....	53
Map 2: Open Space Cornerstones.....	Map Pocket 1
Map 3: Open Space Acquisitions.....	Map Pocket 2
Map 4: The North Hills.....	54
Map 5: The Bike Commuter Network.....	55
Table 2: Fundamental Elements of Open Space Programs.....	63

## INTRODUCTION

Missoula, Montana, a small city nestled in a mountain valley, has long treasured its scenic vistas and proximity to the outdoors. Like many communities in the American West, however, Missoula has been faced with rapid growth and sprawling development, threatening the very amenities that make the area so attractive. Concerned about the rapid loss of open space that endangered the town's aesthetic appeal, community leaders and concerned citizens began an effort to preserve open space in the Missoula urban area that culminated in the *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*<sup>1</sup> and the development of the Missoula Open Space Program. Adopted by the City and County of Missoula in August 1995, the plan articulates a vision of an open space system for Missoula and suggests a course of action for the Open Space Program to make it a reality. The first major step occurred three months later when City of Missoula voters passed a \$5 million open space bond to acquire and preserve open space within the urban area.<sup>2</sup>

The *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan* is now approaching its eighth birthday and most of the open space bond money has been spent. Thought has turned toward a revision of the open space plan in conjunction with a new bond effort. Since the plan was written, the Open Space Program has had great success acquiring critical open space in Missoula. But has the plan been an effective guide for the Open Space Program to achieve the plan's vision? Furthermore, while there is little doubt that the bond money has been put to good use with the purchase of critical land on Mount Jumbo, Mount

---

<sup>1</sup> The Citizens Advisory Committee on Open Space, Missoula Parks and Recreation Department, Missoula Office of Planning and Grants. *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*. Missoula, Montana: Missoula Parks and Recreation, Missoula Office of Planning and Grants, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*, December 2001 Update.

Sentinel, and the North Hills, it is vital to ascertain how these purchases fit with the goals outlined in the 1995 plan and to determine what goals of the plan remain unsatisfied.

This thesis will analyze the work done to protect open space in Missoula, Montana since the passage of the *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*. It will examine open space preservation efforts in other similar communities, and compare their experience to Missoula's in an attempt to put Missoula's Open Space Program in context. It will evaluate the current character of Missoula's open space network based on the six types of open space described in the open space plan and identify strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the current network. This analysis will result in recommendations for how the Open Space Program can better achieve the vision of the open space plan and create an open space system that generations of Missoulians can enjoy.

### ***Purpose Statement***

This thesis will analyze the history and effectiveness of open space conservation in Missoula, Montana with particular regard to the goals and techniques outlined in the *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*.

Open space preservation efforts in Missoula will be studied and compared to the efforts of other, similar communities, providing a coherent history of open space conservation in Missoula. Missoula's current open space system will be examined to see if it resembles the vision outlined in the *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*. Recommendations will be made as to how Missoula can improve open space conservation and possible directions for future expansion of Missoula's open space will be explored.

This thesis will answer the following research questions:

1. What is the current state of open space conservation in Missoula, Montana?
2. How can Missoula improve its open space conservation efforts to best achieve the vision outlined in the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan?

By understanding the history of open space in Missoula, valuable lessons can be drawn from the community's experience. The successes and failures of the Missoula Open Space Program can be compared to those of other programs; highlighting the things unique to Missoula, the areas that need improvement, and the ideas that should be tried. Comprehending the past is critical to gaining insight into the present and charting a promising future. By exploring the origins of the open space movement and the history of open space in Missoula, this thesis will provide a solid foundation for building the future of open space in Missoula.

### ***Research Methods***

Because this thesis focuses on the open space conservation experience of Missoula, Montana, discussions of local open space conservation efforts are geographically limited to the open space planning boundary defined in the *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*.<sup>3</sup> This study area encompasses the majority of the Missoula Valley, including its surrounding foothills. The community of Frenchtown, at the western terminus of the valley, is not included. Lolo, the small bedroom community of Missoula just south of the Missoula Valley, is also excluded.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*, 3.

The research for this thesis is divided into four sections: the background of open space conservation, case studies describing other communities' open space programs for comparison with Missoula's program, a detailed analysis of Missoula's open space program, and a comparative analysis of the Missoula program and the programs described in the case studies.

A thorough review of the background of open space conservation is critical to this thesis both to establish the current best practices in land conservation and to be able to put the open space conservation efforts of Missoula and the three case studies into context. Open space literature was found through a detailed search of the University of Montana's Mansfield Library catalogue, as well as various online databases and journal indexes. Following the initial round of literature collection, additional literature was found referenced in the material and in bibliographies. Other literature was either downloaded or found referenced on websites for various conservation organizations such as the Trust for Public Land.<sup>4</sup>

Three communities roughly similar to Missoula in size and geography were chosen for case studies. The three case studies will provide examples of what techniques these communities are using to protect and manage open space. The three communities were chosen based on the review of open space literature and after consulting numerous experts in the open space field.<sup>5</sup> They are not meant to represent the best open space programs in the country, but were thought to present diverse examples of techniques and

---

<sup>4</sup> [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org).

<sup>5</sup> Experts consulted include: Bruce Bugbee (American Public Land Exchange), Donna Erickson (The University of Michigan School of Natural Resources & Environment), Ed McMahon (The Conservation Fund), Larry Swanson (The Center for the Rocky Mtn. West), and John Wright (New Mexico State University).



program structures being utilized by other communities concerned with open space conservation.

The history of open space conservation in Missoula was researched through a combination of literature, local planning documents, and interviews. As part of an internship with the Missoula Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) and the Missoula Office of Planning and Grants, 25 interviews were conducted during the spring of 2002 with people currently or formerly involved with the Missoula Open Space Program.<sup>6</sup> The semi-formal interviews were conducted either in person or over the telephone with notes taken by hand.

Finally, a comparative analysis was conducted between the open space programs discussed in the case study section and the Missoula Open Space Program. A table listing every open space conservation technique, funding source, and organizational structure discussed in this thesis illustrates what techniques and structures are employed by each program and stresses deficiencies in those programs. The resulting comparisons highlight the areas where the Missoula program has been successful and draws attention to areas where the program can improve.

---

<sup>6</sup> The interviews included: Geoff Badenoch (Director, Missoula Redevelopment Agency), Tim Bechtold (Chair Missoula City Park Board), Bruce Bugbee (American Public Land Exchange), Don Carroll (District Ranger, Missoula Ranger District, Lolo National Forest), David Claman (Park and Trail Design and Development Manager, Missoula Parks and Recreation), Ron Erickson (State Representative, Missoula), Doris Fischer (former Planner, Missoula City County Planning Office), Dan Funsch (Chair, Open Space Advisory Committee), Donna Gaukler (Director, Missoula Parks and Recreation), Dick Gotshalk (former Chair, Open Space Advisory Committee), Mike Kadas (Missoula Mayor), Nick Kaufman (WGM Group), Cindy Klette (Director, Missoula Office of Planning and Grants), Larry McGinnis (City Forester, Missoula Parks and Recreation), Brian Maiorano (Flood Plane Administrator, Missoula Office of Planning and Grants), Mary Manning (Open Space Advisory Committee; Chair, North Hills Subcommittee), Jerry Marks (Missoula County Extension), Marilyn Marler (Noxious Weed Coordinator, The University of Montana), Laval Means (Senior Planner, Missoula Office of Planning and Grants), Wendy Ninteman (Five Valleys Land Trust), Minie Smith (Open Space Advisory Committee), Janet Sproull (Missoula City Park Board; co-Chair, Mount Jumbo Advisory Committee), Kate Supplee (Open Space Program Manager, Missoula Parks and Recreation), Greg Tollefson (Five Valleys Land Trust), and Doug Waters (Missoula City Cemetery).

# CHAPTER 1:

## OPEN SPACE BACKGROUND

Americans have always valued open space, however, in a historical sense, it was only very recently that we recognized its importance. Because of its abundance, open space was taken for granted for many years. Traditional towns and cities were usually surrounded by open space and often contained pockets of undeveloped land within their borders.<sup>7</sup> In the last sixty years, however, the rapid pace of development has caused much of this open land to disappear. As Americans have watched favorite childhood play areas, the neighborhood walk, or the view of a rolling hill from the kitchen sink all succumb to development, many people have realized that they can no longer take these open spaces for granted. This chapter examines the birth of the open space movement in the United States and discusses the conservation techniques and the groups using them that have emerged from this movement.

### *Origins of a Movement*

The modern era of open space preservation in the United States emerged in reaction to the rapid development and widespread suburbanization that occurred in the decades following World War II.<sup>8</sup> A 1955 conference dedicated to the groundbreaking geographer George Perkins Marsh, the Wenner-Gren Conference held at Princeton on “Man’s Role in Changing the Face of the Earth,” brought together seventy-six scholars

---

<sup>7</sup> Arendt, Randall, Elizabeth A. Brabec, Harry L. Dodson, Christine Reid, Robert D. Yaro. *Rural By Design: Maintaining Small Town Character*. Chicago: Planners Press, 1994, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Stokes, Samuel N. , A. Elizabeth Watson, Shelley S. Mastran. *Saving America's Countryside*. 2nd ed. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, 214.

who voiced concern that unbridled growth and development were causing irreparable harm to the world's landscapes.<sup>9</sup> Out of the conference emerged such voices as Lewis Mumford and Jean Gottman whose writings warned of the dangers urbanization posed to the surrounding countryside.<sup>10</sup>

In 1958 sociologist William H. Whyte, Jr. penned an essay called "Urban Sprawl" that has been called the "manifesto of the 1960s urban conservation movement."<sup>11</sup>

Writing on the needless waste of land caused by hastily planned, poorly designed development, Whyte argued:

In many suburbs the opportunity has vanished, but it is not too late to lay down sensible guidelines for the communities of the future. Most important of all, it is not too late to reserve open space while there is still some left – land for parks, for landscaped industrial districts, and for just plain scenery and breathing space.<sup>12</sup>

To preserve open space, Whyte recommended methods such as outright purchase, exercising the right of eminent domain, the purchase of development rights, and the donation of development rights to land trusts.<sup>13</sup> The value of these tools has been proven time and again, and open space advocates continue to use them today.

Ian McHarg, Charles Little, and Rutherford H. Platt are other early open space promoters whose writings were significant in the development of the open space movement and the current practices of open space conservation.<sup>14</sup> The ideas of these

---

<sup>9</sup> Platt, Rutherford H. *Land Use and Society: Geography, Law, and Public Policy*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996, 396.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>12</sup> Whyte, William H. Jr. "Urban Sprawl." In *The Exploding Metropolis*, ed. The Editors of *Fortune*, 133-156. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958, 135.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-151.

<sup>14</sup> By arguing that nature should be given as much design consideration as the homes and office buildings that so often supplant it, McHarg's 1969 book *Design with Nature* had a significant impact on land use planning. His use of map overlays to identify areas where development will have the least impact

early advocates have been more recently advanced by Randall Arendt, Frederick Steiner, Samuel Stokes and many others while organizations like the Trust For Public Land and the Nature Conservancy have emerged as regional clearinghouses providing knowledge and expertise on open space conservation.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Who Will Save Open Space?***

Interest in preserving open space has grown exponentially since the 1960s. Countless programs and organizations have emerged across the country that focus on open space conservation. The groups working to preserve open space can be divided into two general categories: public programs and private land trusts. The public efforts are primarily local programs at either the city or county level. Often formed as a result of grassroots efforts on the part of concerned citizens, the programs are predominantly funded by local initiatives that set aside money from either a sales tax or general obligation bonds. Land trusts lead the private endeavors to preserve open space. As non-profit organizations that work with private landowners to protect land of significant

---

on nature has been cited as the first utilization of the primary concept behind modern Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

In 1968, Charles Little's *Challenge of the Land* made a strong case for open space conservation and presented a number of valuable open space conservation tools. Platt's 1972 book *The Open Space Decision Process* discusses a variety of thinkers, ranging from Plato to Frank Lloyd Wright, whose work was germane to open space conservation. He then presents a number of case studies illustrating the kinds of choices that need to be made when deciding what land to preserve as open space.

<sup>15</sup> Arendt and Stokes have each published books on creating and preserving rural character. Stokes's *Saving America's Countryside* is a handbook rural communities can use to preserve the character and aesthetics of their towns and countrysides and plan for sustainable development. Arendt's *Rural By Design* discusses strategies for incorporating traditional neighborhood design in development projects to create charming, functional communities while minimizing environmental impact. Both books deal in depth with open space conservation and the open space conservation tools available. Other works by Arendt, such as *Growing Greener* (1999) and *Conservation Design for Subdivisions* (1996) advance his belief that developments designed to preserve the most ecologically valuable land as communal open space while clustering houses in the less sensitive areas will actually be more desirable, and more valuable. Steiner's *The Living Landscape: An Ecological Approach to Landscape Planning* (1999) advances the McHargian method of finding the most suitable locations for specific land uses. Steiner expands the work of McHarg by placing greater emphasis on the establishment of goals and public participation.

ecological, open space, recreational, and historic value land trusts have proliferated across the country.<sup>16</sup>

### Public Programs

Public open space programs are funded from a variety of sources and generally operate at either the city or county level. Often working in partnership with local land trusts, public programs have been very successful in acquiring open space for recreation and conservation. One of the earliest and perhaps the most famous city open space program is in Boulder, Colorado. The program got its start in 1967 when citizens, concerned about the sprawling growth that was devouring Boulder's scenic mountain backdrop, placed an initiative on the ballot to permanently increase the city sales tax by four-tenths of a cent specifically to "buy, preserve, and maintain" open space.<sup>17</sup> The program resulted in the acquisition of over 30,000 acres of open space and the employment of 72 full-time workers.<sup>18</sup> Boulder's success has been repeated across the country as cities and counties take it upon themselves to save land from development and create networks of parks and open space. The various types of public open space programs found around the country will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

---

<sup>16</sup> Wright, J. B. "Land trusts in the USA." *Land Use Policy* 9, no. 2 (1992): 83-86., 83.

<sup>17</sup> The City of Boulder Open Space Department, . *Long Range Management Policies*. Boulder, Co: City of Boulder, 1995, 1-1.

<sup>18</sup> The Trust for Public Land, "The City of Boulder Leads the Way," in *Creating a Local Greenprint for Growth*. 2001. Available from [http://www.tpl.org/tier3\\_print.cfm?folder\\_id=1645&content\\_item\\_id=6365&mod\\_type=1](http://www.tpl.org/tier3_print.cfm?folder_id=1645&content_item_id=6365&mod_type=1), accessed 1/25/02.

## Land Trusts

Land trusts are arguably the most effective land conservation organizations in the country. Since the first land trust was established in 1891, they have preserved more than 4.7 million acres of land in the United States.<sup>19</sup> Land trusts function by working with private landowners who are willing to either sell or donate their land outright, or sell or donate conservation easements on their land. Land trusts will then either hold the land, or certain rights to the land, for the public's benefit.<sup>20</sup> Because many land trusts are not able to take on the responsibilities of managing land, they will often transfer land they have acquired outright to a public land management agency, such as a city open space program or the U.S. Forest Service.

Land trusts have significant advantages over mainstream regulatory efforts to control land use. By being able to focus on the basic mission of conserving land, land trusts are insulated from the politics that so often bog down public land use planning and conservation efforts. Free from bureaucracy, they also have an advantage over public programs by being able to more easily build personal relationships with private landowners and swiftly take advantage of land conservation opportunities.<sup>21</sup> Land trusts are proliferating across the country. As of 2000, more than 1,200 land trusts existed in the United States, supported by more than 900,000 members.<sup>22</sup>

The best open space conservation scenario is when public open space programs and private land trusts work together. Because each conservation approach has its

---

<sup>19</sup> Gustanski, Julie Ann, Roderick H. Squires, ed. *Protecting the Land: Conservation Easements Past, Present, and Future*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000., 18.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Stokes, *Saving America's Countryside*, 247.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, J. B. "Land trusts in the USA." *Land Use Policy* 9, no. 2 (1992): 83-86, 85.

<sup>22</sup> Julie Ann Gustanski, *Protecting the Land: Conservation Easements Past, Present, and Future*, 17.

advantages and disadvantages, collaboration can maximize returns. Land trusts, for example, are often cash-poor. They are rarely able to purchase land outright, relying instead on the donation of land and easements. These donations generally come about from the rapport they are able to build with private landowners who might not trust a government agency that appears to be intent on acquiring their land. In some cases landowners approached by a land trust may not be interested in selling or donating an easement, wishing only to sell their land outright. This can be problematic for cash poor land trusts. Public open space programs, however, often have large pots of money specifically for acquiring open space. When faced with a landowner only willing to sell land outright, land trusts can act as middlemen between the seller and a public open space program.

### ***Open Space Conservation Techniques***

A variety of tools exist for conserving open space. Divided into two general categories, voluntary and regulatory, they range from fee simple acquisition (the outright purchase of land), conservation easements and leasing, to zoning and the right of eminent domain. This section will discuss the most common of these conservation techniques in detail, while briefly touching on some of the other methods.

#### **Fee Simple Acquisition**

Fee simple acquisition, or the outright purchase of land, is a very effective method of obtaining permanent protection for open space. By attaining full ownership of land, public open space programs and land trusts are able to provide the public with full access

to open space.<sup>23</sup> Purchasing open space is expensive, however, and once the land is purchased the owner takes over responsibility for liability and maintenance. City and county open space programs will typically purchase open space using funds set aside specifically for that purpose.

Two of the most common sources of funding for open space acquisition are special sales taxes and general obligation bonds. Sales taxes, such as those funding Boulder, Colorado's open space program, provide a steady flow of money that can be used for both land acquisition and for the costs associated with running an open space program and maintaining open space. General obligation bonds are essentially loans taken out by a city or county against the value of their taxable property.<sup>24</sup> While a sales tax takes time for funds to accumulate, bonds can provide large sums of money that can be immediately put towards open space acquisition. However, depending on how a bond is presented to voters, bond money often cannot be used for open space maintenance or program development and overhead costs.

Financing for fee simple acquisition can also come from outside sources such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Created by congress in 1964, the LWCF is funded mostly from fees paid by companies drilling offshore for oil and gas. The fund provides money to federal, state and local governments to purchase land for

---

<sup>23</sup> The Trust for Public Land, *Creating a Greenprint*, "Ch. 4 Financing Land Conservation," 2001, available from [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org), accessed 1/25/02.

<sup>24</sup> The Trust for Public Land, *Local Parks, Local Financing Volume 1*, 1998, "Borrowing," available from [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org), accessed 4/1/02.



public benefit.<sup>25</sup> Local governments often provide matching funds for LWCF or other federal grant money.

### Conservation Easements

The principal open space preservation tool used by land trusts is the conservation easement. Through 1998, land trusts in the U.S. had protected 1,385,000 acres of land with conservation easements.<sup>26</sup> Conservation easements can best be understood through the oft-used “Bundle of Sticks” analogy. Property ownership is akin to owning a bundle of sticks where each stick represents a right associated with the property. Each right, ranging from the right to farm, mine, or develop the land to the right of public access, can be separated from the bundle and transferred to another party. A typical conservation easement will involve the donation of any rights that may damage the conservation value of the property to a land trust or other agency which holds those rights with the understanding that the rights will never be used.<sup>27</sup>

Development rights can also be bought and sold. Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs have been protecting land from development since the 1970s by paying landowners for conservation easements. PDR programs have mostly focused on keeping farmland in agricultural production by buying the right to subdivide the land from the owner using a variety of public funding sources. The owner still owns the land and retains the right to farm the land but is compensated for relinquishing the right to

---

<sup>25</sup> USDA Forest Service, *The Land and Water Conservation Fund and your National Forests*, available from <http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/LWCF/>, accessed 6/13/03.

<sup>26</sup> Julie Ann Gustanski, *Protecting the Land: Conservation Easements Past, Present, and Future*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Samuel Stokes, *Saving America's Countryside*, 215.

develop the land as real estate.<sup>28</sup> As of the early 1990s, PDR programs had spent around \$400 million to conserve about 205,000 acres in 11 states.<sup>29</sup> While Purchase of Development Rights is an appealing form of open space conservation that directly compensates landowners for not developing their land, the high cost of PDRs can present a challenge to cash-poor land trusts and open space programs.

## Zoning

Zoning, the principal regulatory method of conserving open space, divides land into districts or zones that have different size, density, and use requirements.<sup>30</sup> Reasoning that limiting development to large lots will preserve the rural character of an area and maintain open space between houses, planners have engaged in large lot zoning in certain areas, limiting development to one house per five or more acres. Large-lot zoning has proven to be an ineffective method of preserving open space. Indeed, it has had the opposite effect, causing much more land to be developed than if houses were limited to smaller lots. The development of five acre lots fragments an area: while there may be open space between houses, the land is effectively locked up and loses what aesthetic, recreation, or habitat value it once had. Zoning can also be changed, or done away with all together, making it a temporary form of conservation.

Using zoning to preclude development in floodplains has also been touted as an effective open space conservation method. While many areas within the 50 or 100-year

---

<sup>28</sup> The Western Governors' Association, the Trust for Public Land, the National Cattleman's Beef Association. *Purchase of Development Rights: Conserving Lands, Preserving Western Livelihoods*, 2001, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, J. B. "Designing and applying conservation easements." *Journal. American Planning Association* 60, no. 3 (1994): 380-388, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Stokes, *Saving America's Countryside*, 166.

floodplain remain undeveloped, there are too many ways to get around the floodplain designation for it to be an effective, permanent method of preserving open space. Developers have been able to create gravel pits in the floodplain, arguably a greater aesthetic evil than commercial or residential development. Landowners have also been able to develop land within the floodplain by bringing in fill to raise their property above the floodplain level.

Agricultural zoning mandates an even larger minimum lot size, often ranging from 60 acres to as large as a section (640 acres).<sup>31</sup> Agricultural zoning ordinances often include anti-nuisance clauses that protect farmers from complaints about normal farm operations such as herbicide spraying, night plowing, dust, noise, or odors.<sup>32</sup> Agricultural zoning ordinances are often unique to a community and may allow some kinds of limited development. They often give farmers property tax breaks, making it affordable to keep large acreages of land in agricultural production. Due to the unusually large lot sizes necessary for agricultural zoning to be effective, proposed ordinances can be difficult to pass and generally require broad community support. When approved, however, agricultural zoning can be very effective in protecting farms and ranches from development.

### Green Development

While open space conservation has long been seen as an antidote to sprawl and development, in recent years developers have begun to see the value of open space. Open space advocates such as Randall Arendt have been promoting open space

---

<sup>31</sup> Terry Murphy, "Most effective tools for protecting agricultural land," (lecture given at Big Sky or Big Sprawl? 3: Investing in Montana's Communities, Helena, Montana, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Stokes, *Saving America's Countryside*, 173, 211.

subdivision design for years, arguing that developments that cluster houses in one area while preserving open space elsewhere preserve open space while creating more desirable, livable communities. Advocates point to the popularity of neighborhoods built around golf courses among people who do not golf as evidence that home buyers want to be close to open space, whether it is a fairway or an open meadow.

Open space subdivisions and Planned Unit Developments (PUD) function by conserving unique natural features or the areas on the property that would be the most visually impacted by new home construction. Houses are then clustered on the remaining parts of the property at a much greater density than found in the average development. The resulting neighborhood has much less visual impact and contains significant open space for the new residents to enjoy. Developers are finding that homebuyers are willing to pay a premium to live near open space. As an added bonus, they can save on the cost of infrastructure construction because of the smaller lots and reduction in streets that result from clustering.<sup>33</sup>

Local governments are using tools such as overlay and performance zoning to encourage developers to cluster houses and preserve open space. Overlay zoning creates an additional set of requirements for developers to meet in areas containing unique features such as steep hillsides, scenic views, historic sites or sensitive areas.<sup>34</sup> Performance zoning rewards developers for preserving or enhancing unique features in an area. Arendt cites a New York example of performance zoning where developers preserved 80 percent of a development as open space. By building at a much greater

---

<sup>33</sup> Arendt, Randall. *Growing Greener: Putting Conservation into Local Plans and Ordinances*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1999, 88-89.

<sup>34</sup> Stokes, *Saving America's Countryside*, 177.

density than normally allowed, they were able to build the same number of lots as if no open space were preserved.<sup>35</sup>

### Other Techniques

Other open space conservation techniques include leasing, lease/purchase contracts, eminent domain condemnation, and right-of-first refusal. Sometimes, it is possible to lease a piece of land instead of buying it. This can be cheaper, but does not provide permanent protection. Often leasing is used to secure land for trail corridors from a landowner who is not willing to sell his or her land, but is willing to be compensated for the public use of a trail corridor. Lease/purchase contracts are often entered into if a community needs time to secure funding for an open space acquisition: the seller agrees to lease the land until enough money is obtained to finalize the acquisition. Right-of-first refusal is a similar technique where a property owner agrees to give an organization the first opportunity to purchase his land if it goes on the market. Governments have the right to eminent domain condemnation: the right of the government to take private property for public purposes upon payment of just compensation. While eminent domain can enable agencies to acquire desired land when no other techniques are workable, it can be a very unpopular and controversial technique and is therefore rarely used.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Arendt, *Rural by Design: Maintaining Small Town Character*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> The Trust for Public Land, *Creating a Greenprint*, 2001., "Chapter 4: Financing Land Conservation", available from: [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org), accessed 4/1/02.

## Evaluation

Voluntary open space conservation techniques tend to be much less controversial and generate more public support than the regulatory approach. Public support can be critical to open space programs that depend on voter approved bonds and taxes for financing. While the regulatory approach can be effectively used to prevent development in sensitive areas or to control development patterns, it often draws the ire of property rights activists and can undercut the community support that can be so important to a successful open space program.

Of the voluntary techniques, fee simple acquisition is often the most effective method, especially if providing land for public use is a secondary goal. However, because the cost of purchasing open space outright is often prohibitively expensive, many open space programs and land trusts rely heavily on donated or purchased conservation easements. A good open space program will be aware of every conservation tool at their disposal and use the appropriate one for the property in question.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **CASE STUDIES**

Since Boulder, Colorado began its public effort to preserve open space in 1967, public open space programs have sprouted across the country. With a variety of funding sources, the programs range in structure from stand-alone open space departments to ad hoc programs that draw support from a variety of other city or county departments. This chapter will examine three very different programs from around the West. The three programs represent cities, roughly similar to Missoula in terms of geography and demography, that have grappled with many of the same issues faced by Missoula today.

Studying the successes and failures experienced by other communities working to conserve open space can benefit the Missoula Open Space Program by putting Missoula's efforts in context. Is Missoula's Open Space Program exceptional, average or deficient when compared to other communities in the West? What open space conservation tools are successfully being used by other programs? How are they funding open space acquisition and management? Valuable lessons can be gleaned from the experience of other open space conservation efforts that can help Missoula chart the future of its open space program. Awareness of other conservation efforts can provide Missoula with the perspective to understand the weaknesses in its Open Space Program and take pride in the areas where Missoula has excelled.

The open space programs studied in this chapter include Jefferson County, Colorado; Eugene, Oregon; and Santa Fe County, New Mexico. Jefferson County, Colorado is an example of a well-funded, stand-alone open space program. Eugene, Oregon's open space program is an integrated part of the city parks department, that has

been acquiring and managing natural areas for over 100 years. Santa Fe County, New Mexico has a brand new, rapidly developing open space program that has undergone numerous structural changes in a short time span. These three programs are not meant to represent the best public open space programs in the region, but are used here as examples of how other communities similar to Missoula have approached open space conservation.

### ***Jefferson County, Colorado***

Jefferson County, Colorado is a suburban county of over 500,000 just west of Denver that includes the cities of Golden, Lakewood, and Arvada. Following the example of the city of Boulder, Colorado, Jefferson County residents voted in 1972 to dedicate one-half percent of the county retail sales tax “exclusively for the planning for, developing necessary access to, acquisition, maintenance and preservation of open space real property for the use and benefit of the public.”<sup>37</sup> This mandate was expanded in a 1980 election to allow funds to be used for the construction, maintenance, and management of park and recreation facilities. The thirty-year-old program now manages 38,795 acres of open space and is aggressively pursuing more open space acquisitions.<sup>38</sup> Jefferson County is faced with a high demand for new residential and commercial development that threatens to consume much of the county’s remaining open land. Additionally, rapidly increasing levels of use has pressured existing open space parks. Challenged by these pressures, Jefferson County Open Space has been extremely successful at acquiring and managing open space. The program exemplifies what can be

---

<sup>37</sup> Jefferson County Open Space. *The Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan*, Golden, Co, 1998, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Jefferson County Open Space. *Jefferson County Open Space Facts Sheet*, Golden, Co, 2001.



achieved when a community so strongly supports open space conservation that it commits to fully funding an open space program.

Jefferson County's open space system is massive and diverse. According to the Open Space Program's website, over \$211 million has been spent in the county since 1972 to acquire over 43,000 acres of land, water, and facilities.<sup>39</sup> A fact sheet published in December 2001 updates the number of acres acquired to 49,278.<sup>40</sup> Nearly 10% of Jefferson County has been preserved as open space. Many of Jefferson County's open spaces are large tracts of former ranchland that possess significant ecological, habitat, and recreational value. The 4,355-acre White Ranch Park, for example, was acquired from descendants of the original homesteaders who ranched the land through the 1960s. It is "home to abundant wildlife and encompasses open meadows, forested foothills, a pristine canyon, buttes, rock formations and Van Bibber Creek along the southern border."<sup>41</sup>

Much of the open space in Jefferson County protects its portion of the dramatic front range of the Rocky Mountains. Areas like 1,095-acre Matthews/Winters Park, the first open space purchased by the program in 1973, "dramatically separate the mountains and the plains with its twisted folds of geologic history."<sup>42</sup> In addition to large acreages of conservation open space, Jefferson County Open Space also owns a historic museum, located in a restored 17-room lodge from the 1890s, and a nature center and preserve. The program also manages a number of campgrounds and is developing a network of urban trails. Additionally, some Jefferson County Open Space properties were purchased

---

<sup>39</sup> Jefferson County Colorado, "General Open Space Information – Jefferson County, Co.", available from [http://206.247.49.21/ext/dpt/comm\\_res/openspac/osoffice.htm](http://206.247.49.21/ext/dpt/comm_res/openspac/osoffice.htm), accessed 1/23/02.

<sup>40</sup> Jefferson County Open Space. *Jefferson County Open Space Facts Sheet*, Golden, Co, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> Jefferson County, Colorado, "White Ranch Park", available from [http://206.247.49.21/ext/dpt/comm\\_res/openspac/white.htm](http://206.247.49.21/ext/dpt/comm_res/openspac/white.htm), accessed 12/15/02.

<sup>42</sup> Jefferson County, Colorado, "Matthews/Winters Park, available from [http://206.247.49.21/ext/dpt/comm\\_res/openspac/maw.htm](http://206.247.49.21/ext/dpt/comm_res/openspac/maw.htm), accessed 12/15/02.

primarily to protect the county's viewshed. Mt. Lindo and Mt. Glennon have limited access "due to extreme slopes and rock cliffs," but are significant visual features.<sup>43</sup>

The Jefferson County open space program is administered from within the Community Resources Division of Jefferson County. Other programs in the Community Resources Division include the Fairgrounds, Boettcher Mansion, and the Cooperative Extension.<sup>44</sup> The program is overseen by the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, which also appoints citizens to the ten-member Open Space Advisory Committee (O.S.A.C.).<sup>45</sup> O.S.A.C. plays a key role in the acquisition process, their primary responsibility being the consideration and evaluation of potential acquisitions and making recommendations to the County Board of Commissioners regarding potential acquisitions.<sup>46</sup>

The 93 permanent (full-time equivalent) open space staff are divided into six sections: Acquisitions, Administrative & Education Services, Citizen Outreach, Design & Development, Park Services, and Planning. The Park Services Section is further divided into five sub-sections that include Building Maintenance & Construction, Natural Resources, Park Maintenance, Trail Maintenance & Construction and Visitor & Resource Protection.<sup>47</sup> Educating and communicating with the public is a priority for the program. The Citizen Outreach Section focuses on responding to citizen inquiries and promoting the benefits of open space through special events, reception services, brochures, web site, and the media. Additionally, the Administration and Education Services Section puts on

---

<sup>43</sup> Jefferson County, Colorado, "White Ranch Park".

<sup>44</sup> Space. Jefferson County Open. *Jefferson County Open Space Facts Sheet*. Golden, Co, 2001..

<sup>45</sup> Jefferson County Colorado, "Who & What in Open Space," available from [http://206.247.49.21/ext/dpt/comm\\_res/openspac/whowhat.htm](http://206.247.49.21/ext/dpt/comm_res/openspac/whowhat.htm), accessed 12/16/02.

<sup>46</sup> *The Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> *Jefferson County Open Space Facts Sheet*.

environmental and cultural education programs and exhibits.<sup>48</sup> The Administration and Education Services Section also administers the Volunteer Services Program. Between 500 and 800 people volunteer for the program, “providing a wide array of services and skills benefiting the Open Space Program.”<sup>49</sup>

Unlike many open space programs where the same people handle long-range planning and acquisitions, Jefferson County has specific departments for each of those tasks. The Planning Section is responsible for drafting long-range plans such as the Open Space Master Plan, planning for acquisition of open space lands, trail corridors, and concept plans for parks prior to their development. The Acquisition Section then uses these planning documents, as well as recommendations from O.S.A.C. and approvals from the County Commissioners to guide its acquisition work.<sup>50</sup>

In writing the Open Space Master Plan, the Planning Section created a list of twenty-five goals for the program divided into six categories: open land, trail, natural resource, wildlife, recreation, and education goals. The goals put acquisition of land as the top priority of the open space program with development of that land as a secondary consideration. Other goals include the acquisition of open space to separate urban growth areas and enhance individual community identity, preserving prime open land in advance of development in high-growth areas, and conserving the more significant remaining working ranches throughout the county “as reserves of local cultural history and open land.”<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Jefferson County Colorado, “Who & What in Open Space,” available from [http://206.247.49.21/ext/dpt/comm\\_res/openspac/whowhat.htm](http://206.247.49.21/ext/dpt/comm_res/openspac/whowhat.htm), accessed 12/16/02.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> *The Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan*, 17.

To meet these goals, Jefferson County Open Space often coordinates its efforts with cities and recreation districts within the county and with regional open space partners. Individual cities and recreation districts within the county identify their own acquisition and development priorities in their capital improvement plans and are assisted by the Open Space Program in meeting those goals. Cities in the county receive a one-third share of the Open Space funds to use towards land acquisition and development.<sup>52</sup> The Open Space Program is also involved in the regional Front Range Mountain Backdrop Project, a cooperative effort with Boulder, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, and Larimer Counties. The goal of the project is to preserve the visual backdrop of the Front Range and has resulted in an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) to jointly study and inventory the Front Range mountain backdrop, seek public and stakeholder input, and formulate joint projects that would be eligible for matching funds grants from the Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund (GOCO).<sup>53</sup>

The acquisition and land management work being done by Jefferson County Open Space is primarily funded from the one-half of one percent sales tax that county residents voted to invest in open space in 1972.<sup>54</sup> In 1980 voters expanded the use of Open Space funds to include the construction, maintenance, and management of park and recreation facilities.<sup>55</sup> Additional funding for acquisitions comes from a \$160 million general

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>55</sup> Jefferson County Colorado, "Who & What in Open Space."

obligation bond that 70% of Jefferson County voters passed in 1998.<sup>56</sup> The projected 2002 budget for the Open Space Program was \$22.14 million.<sup>57</sup>

But even with the steady inflow of sales tax money and the \$160 million open space bond, the Open Space Master Plan notes that Jefferson County's open space budget:

could not conceivably provide for the fee-simple acquisition (purchase) of all the land identified as desirable open areas or to control growth. It is simply too expensive to accomplish with the future estimated resources available to the program.<sup>58</sup>

To meet the challenge of conserving open space in the face of astronomical real estate prices, Jefferson County has identified open space issues in the Natural Resources and Recreation Action Plan components of its Comprehensive Plan. The Plan recommends combining multiple land preservation options on different levels of government. Some of the techniques explored by the Master Plan include: accepting cash-in-lieu of the land dedication requirement from developers; coordinating land dedications with schools to allow for joint school/park complexes; exploring tax structure changes to create incentives for maintaining open lands; using mapping and inventorying techniques to set acquisition priorities; and amending subdivision regulations to require interconnecting linkages between new developments.<sup>59</sup>

With 29 Open Space Parks, 163 miles of hard and natural surfaced trails and nearly 39,000 acres of land to manage,<sup>60</sup> Jefferson County Open Space has developed

---

<sup>56</sup> *Jefferson County Open Space Facts Sheet.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *The Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>60</sup> *Jefferson County Open Space Facts Sheet.*

sophisticated land and land use management techniques and a strong resource protection ethic:

The importance of preservation and enhancement of the natural systems on open space lands is second only to the acquisition of park land itself. Adopting a philosophy of land conservation or preservation defines what our stewardship of the land should be. Without such an ethic, the cumulative impact from large numbers of park users on the landscape will degrade the natural systems that characterize the open space park lands.<sup>61</sup>

The backbone of Jefferson County's land management strategy is a system of ecosystem-based resource management plans for each park based on a land classification system containing eight distinct management categories: preserves, natural lands, scenic lands, recreation lands, active recreation lands, trail corridors, buffer areas, and historic areas.<sup>62</sup> An open space park is typically managed with a combination of land classifications. Thus a critical part of the acquisition and management process is the inventory and mapping of sensitive areas and deciding how best to maximize the conservation and recreation potential of an area. With these guidelines and philosophy, Jefferson County Open Space is able to provide a wide range of recreation opportunities while also protecting the biodiversity of its open space parks.

Jefferson County Open Space demonstrates the kind of large-scale open space conservation that can be achieved by a stand-alone open space program with a large

---

<sup>61</sup> *The Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan*, 48.

<sup>62</sup> Preserves are classified as sensitive lands essentially off limits to the public. Natural Areas are slightly less sensitive and typically have seasonal closures to protect wildlife or rare plant life but are open to the public during other times of the year. Scenic Lands are managed to protect the area's scenic value and may or may not have public access. Recreation Lands are managed for high levels of public use centered on passive recreation. Development of Recreation Lands is generally limited to a trail network and trailhead facilities. Active Recreation Lands contain ballfields and other forms of developed recreation opportunities. Jefferson County Open Space generally turns the management of Active Recreation Lands over to the city or recreation district that has jurisdiction over the facility. Trail corridors are strips of land purchased to make connections between Open Space Parks and in the urban trail network. Buffer Areas are open lands between urbanized areas that help define community boundaries and break up the pattern of urban sprawl. Historic Areas are purchased to preserve unique features with local or regional historic value and typically provide educational opportunities. *The Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan*, 19-20.

budget. While most open space programs will never have the resources of a well-funded Colorado program, lessons can be learned from their sophisticated management techniques, and their county and region wide partnerships.

### ***Eugene, Oregon***

Eugene, Oregon, a university town of 140,000 situated at the southern end of Oregon's Willamette Valley, has a rich history of park and open space conservation dating to the early 1900s. The City of Eugene Parks and Open Space Division has been acquiring, developing and managing traditional parks and conservation open space for much of this time. Because of Eugene's experience at concurrently managing traditional parks and conservation open space, Eugene's Parks and Open Space Division is a good example of an integrated parks and open space program.

Eugene's Parks and Open Space Division is responsible for the maintenance of approximately 350 acres of developed city parks, over 300 acres of wetlands, and more than 1,000 acres of ridgeline open space.<sup>63</sup> Eugene's parks and open space system contains two unique features: the West Eugene Wetlands and the Ridgeline Park and Trail System. Additionally, a number of Eugene's oldest parks, including Hendricks Park and Spencer Butte, consist of woodland and other undeveloped open space.<sup>64</sup>

Eugene's first park, Hendricks Park, was donated to the city in 1906. According to the Hendricks Park Forest Management Plan, the 78-acre forested park:

represents Eugene's earliest commitment to preserve and provide public access to the extensive forested ridgeline, which surrounds much of the

---

<sup>63</sup> Mayor's Parks and Open Space Committee, *Report: Final Recommendations*, Eugene, Oregon, 1998, Johnny Medlin, Eugene Parks and Open Space Division Manager, interviewed by author 11/21/02.

<sup>64</sup> Johnny Medlin, interviewed by author 11/21/02.

south and southeast parts of the city. Since then, over 700 acres of ridgeline open space have been added to the park system.<sup>65</sup>

Another of Eugene's oldest parks, Skinner Butte Park, acquired in 1914, has significant open space values. A volcanic hill on the bank of the Willamette River, Skinner Butte Park is the heart of Eugene's park system and contains significant historic and geographic features and natural areas.<sup>66</sup>

The West Eugene Wetlands represent a remnant of the native wetland prairies that were once widespread in the Willamette Valley.<sup>67</sup> Eugene first became actively involved in the management of the wetlands in 1989 when it began developing a wetland plan that would allow development of the West Eugene Wetlands while protecting wetland values and rare plant communities.<sup>68</sup> In 1994 the City, the Nature Conservancy, and the Bureau of Land Management signed a partnership agreement to manage the wetlands in a cooperative manner. Other partners include the Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps.<sup>69</sup> The Wetland Executive Team, made up of representatives of the six participating agencies, manages the 2,500-acre wetland. It is unique for a city parks department to be involved in such a partnership with federal agencies, making the West Eugene Wetlands a national model of cooperative wetlands restoration and management.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> David Reed and Associates, *Hendricks Park Forest Management Plan*, Eugene, Oregon, 2000, 53.

<sup>66</sup> City of Eugene Parks and Open Space Division, *Skinner Butte Park*, Eugene, Oregon, 2001., 11.

<sup>67</sup> Nelson, Judy Ellen, Jock Beall. *West Eugene (Oregon) Wetlands Initiative*, Eugene, Oregon: Bureau of Land Management, available on the world wide web: <http://www.fs.fed.us/eco/wteugene.htm>, accessed 3/22/02.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Lane Council of Governments, *West Eugene Wetlands Plan*, Eugene, Oregon, 1992.

<sup>70</sup> Johnny Medlin, interviewed by author 11/21/02.



The Ridgeline Park and Trail System is described on the University of Oregon's website as "one of the outdoor treasures of the Eugene area: nearby to town but also scenic enough that you forget about the proximity."<sup>71</sup> Anchored by Hendricks Park and another of Eugene's older parks, Spencer Butte, the forested ridgeline is a prominent feature visible from much of the city. Today, twenty parks protect the ridgeline from development, ensuring that the view from town will remain unmarred and providing trail connections. The Ridgeline park system is the city's top priority for open space acquisitions: six potential acquisitions totaling 230 acres at a cost of nearly \$4 million were identified in the 1998 park and open space bond.<sup>72</sup>

With open space parks like Skinner Butte and Hendricks Park that have been in parks system from the very beginning, the continued expansion of the West Eugene Wetlands and the Ridgeline Trail system, the Eugene Parks and Open Space Division has significant experience acquiring and managing open space. Unlike the many parks departments that had to integrate open space into their park systems when open space acquisitions became a priority in the late 1960s and 1970s, Eugene has always had an open space component in its city park system.

The Eugene Parks and Open Space Division is a part of the City Public Works Department. The Parks and Open Space Division is responsible for maintaining existing parks, caring for the urban forest (including street trees), developing park management plans, planning and constructing new parks, acquiring land for new parks and open space, and managing storm water runoff and wetlands. The Parks and Open Space Division is

---

<sup>71</sup> "Hit the Trails, Take a tour of Eugene's best walking/jogging paths," May 16, 2000, available on the world wide web: <http://goducks.ocsn.com/genrel/072298aaa.html>, accessed December 10, 2002.

<sup>72</sup> Eugene Measure 20-03, "Parks & Open Space Projects," available on the world wide web: <http://www.ci.eugene.or.us/PW/PARKS/map.htm>.

not responsible for building maintenance or developing recreation programs. The 85 full-time and more than 50 seasonal employees are divided into five sections: Administrative, Parks Maintenance, Wetlands and Open Waterways, Urban Forestry, and Planning. The bulk of the employees (approximately 50) are in Parks Maintenance. Twelve to 14 work in Wetlands and Open Waterways, six in Urban Forestry, six in Planning with the remainder in the Administrative Section.<sup>73</sup>

The Parks Maintenance Section contains the bulk of the Parks and Open Space Division's employees and is divided into three subsections: Park Amenities & Natural Resources, Landscape, Medians & Floral, and Turf & Grounds. While nine full-time employees focus on natural resources, Parks and Open Space Division manager Johnny Medlin states that it is much more expensive to maintain traditional parks than open space.<sup>74</sup>

The Wetlands and Open Waterways Section works with federal partners on the West Eugene Wetlands program and is responsible for Eugene's storm water runoff. The city has a storm water management fund which the Parks and Open Space Division is working to invest in an interconnected system of streams and wetlands that can both absorb storm water runoff and serve as park and trail corridors.<sup>75</sup> Due to technical nature of the water quality arena, the staff of the Wetlands and Open Waterways Section is weighted towards people with advanced science degrees (generally masters). The high level of staff education has a lot to do with how a city parks department has been able to take on responsibility for the management of wetlands and storm runoff.

---

<sup>73</sup> "Organizational Chart – Parks and Open Space Division," November 21, 2002, provided by the City of Eugene Parks and Open Space Division.

<sup>74</sup> Johnny Medlin, interviewed by author, 11/21/02.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

The Parks Planning Section is responsible for long-range planning and parks and open space acquisition. These employees work with neighborhood groups and the public to develop park master plans and deal with land use issues. The section consists of five landscape architects and a technician.

The Eugene Parks and Open Space Division has an annual budget of over \$8 million. The Division also receives funding from System Development Charges (SDCs), fees assessed to new development to pay for expanding the capacity of infrastructure to handle growth. Every new residential development is charged a one-time assessment of approximately \$900 for parks. Additional project specific funding comes from grants, storm water funds, and a \$25 million parks and open space bond passed by Eugene voters in 1998.<sup>76</sup> Much of the work done in the West Eugene Wetlands is grant funded. The interagency partnership team that manages the wetlands has brought over \$25 million into the program for acquisition, maintenance and wetland restoration.<sup>77</sup>

The 1998 Parks and Open Space Bond, Eugene Measure 20-03, was passed by over 70% of Eugene voters in November, 1998.<sup>78</sup> The bond was a result of a five-month effort by the “Mayor’s Parks and Open Space Committee.”<sup>79</sup> The bond was the first tax measure for parks and open space that Eugene voters had seen in 20 years. It put money toward eight diverse types of acquisitions including a \$4.4 million pool replacement,

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> The Mayor’s Parks and Open Space Committee, a citizen’s committee, was charged with making specific recommendations on an acquisition and funding plan to fill gaps in Eugene’s park and open space system that were identified in a previous study, *Parks, Open Space, and Natural Areas Study: A Report to the Eugene City Council—Phase 1 and 2 Reports, June 1996 and February 1997*. Mayor’s Parks and Open Space Committee, *Report: Final Recommendations*, 5.

construction of neighborhood, community and youth sports parks, and approximately \$9 million in neighborhood, community park and natural area land acquisition.<sup>80</sup>

The Eugene Parks and Open Space Division is blessed with a community that cares greatly about parks and open space, healthy sources of funding, and decades of experience managing and acquiring parks and open space. Valuable lessons can be learned from the department's structure. By emphasizing planning and acquisition, and having an in-house staff of planners and landscape architects to develop management plans and acquisition strategies, Eugene Parks and Open Space is able to proactively chart the future of Eugene's park and open space system. The diverse sources of funding Eugene receives for its parks and open space deserves much of the credit for enabling the Parks and Open Space Division to be so successful. However, the Division's ability to identify and respond to community wants and needs has brought much funding into the program and earned the community support to overwhelmingly pass the 1998 park and open space bond measure.

Support for parks and open space can be attributed to the Parks and Open Space Division's aggressive public outreach. According to Medlin, the community's attitude towards the city is critical. One of the Division's top priorities is to proactively advertise the successful things they are doing. "If things go wrong, the newspapers and politicians hear about it, but they don't hear about the good things."<sup>81</sup> It seems like there are plenty of good things for the Eugene media to report on these days, as the Parks and Open Space Division has been busy.

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>81</sup> Johnny Medlin, interviewed by author, 11/21/02.

## ***Santa Fe County, New Mexico***

Santa Fe County is a sparsely populated, 1,900 square mile, highly diverse county in north central New Mexico. The county's 130,000 residents are a mix of Hispanics, Native Americans, and Anglos. Nearly half of the county's population lives in its one major urban area, the city of Santa Fe. The rest of the county's residents are highly dispersed, resulting in a countywide population density of only 67.7 people per square mile.<sup>82</sup>

Santa Fe County's relatively new open space program got its start when voters overwhelmingly passed a \$12 million open space bond in 1998. The bond funded the Wildlife, Mountains, Trails and Historic Places Program, and spurred the creation of a citizens advisory committee. The Citizens' Open Land and Trails Planning Advisory Committee (COLTPAC), was mandated by the measure to oversee the expenditure of bond money and assist county staff in the development of management plans. COLTPAC and county staff developed the Open Lands and Trails Plan, an open space plan to guide the program and set strict criteria for land acquisitions. The program had acquired nearly \$7 million worth of open space by 1999. It was so successful that voters approved a second open space bond in 2000, setting aside another \$8 million for open space acquisition.<sup>83</sup>

Santa Fe County has used money from the two bonds to acquire approximately 3,200 acres of open space across the county. The properties range in size from five acres to 1,000 acres and are as diverse in character as the residents of the Hispanic, Native

---

<sup>82</sup> US Census Bureau, "Santa Fe County QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau," available from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/35/35049.html>, accessed 1/20/03.

<sup>83</sup> The Trust for Public Land, "Santa Fe, New Mexico—Wildlife, Mountains, Trails, and Historic Places Program," 6/24/01, available from [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org), accessed 4/30/02.

American and Anglo county are in culture and ethnicity. Originally overseen by the Planning Division of the County Land Use Department, the open space program recently moved to the County Project and Facilities Management Department's Operations Division, where it has become its own department, the Open Space and Trails Program. The program currently has a staff of two: a program manager and a project manager. The planning office anticipated this move. While the planning office had staff able to oversee open space acquisitions, the program received help from other county departments, including the County Manager, General Services, Finance, Sheriff, and Public Works Departments, and the County Attorney. Because the planning office knew that it was not qualified to manage newly acquired open space, it was felt that a stand-alone open space department was appropriate.<sup>84</sup>

In anticipating the challenge of land management, the planning office studied other counties in the Southwest and Rocky Mountain region, determining that the open space program would need a minimum of \$100 an acre annually for open space management and maintenance and two full time staff positions for every 1,000 acres of land. The \$100 per acre includes the salaries of staff and covers tasks such as planning, maintenance, legal issues, patrol and enforcement, volunteer coordination, real estate transactions, and equipment costs. The \$100 an acre does not cover funding for new open space acquisitions or land improvement projects.<sup>85</sup> According to the Trust for Public Land, the \$100-an-acre estimate is conservative; the counties studied spent an

---

<sup>84</sup> The Trust for Public Land, "Management Models: Santa Fe County's Land Conservation Program Takes Shape," in *Creating a Local Greenprint for Growth*, 2001, Available from [http://www.tpl.org/tier3\\_print.cfm?folder\\_id=1645&content\\_item\\_id=6365&mod\\_type=1](http://www.tpl.org/tier3_print.cfm?folder_id=1645&content_item_id=6365&mod_type=1), accessed 1/25/02.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

average of \$149 per acre and have between two and three full-time staff for every 1,000 acres of open space.

To come up with the \$100 an acre needed for management, the Santa Fe County Open Space and Trails Department receives funding from two sources. Initial funding for maintaining newly acquired land comes from the seller, who is required to deposit five percent of the purchase price into a management and maintenance fund. According to Open Space and Trails Program Manager Shelly Johnson, this policy has worked well and provided the program with money for initial maintenance needs such as cleanup and fencing. In some cases, the communities where land was being purchased have rallied behind the acquisition and raised the five percent to ensure that the sale goes through.<sup>86</sup> The program also receives funding through the county's gross-receipts tax. In April 2002, more than two-thirds of county voters approved a sales tax increase, 15% of which is allocated for open space and trails. The tax increase is anticipated to bring in approximately \$1.2 million a year.<sup>87</sup>

Barely four years old, Santa Fe County's Open Space and Trails program is developing rapidly. It is clear the program receives strong community and political support: more than 70% of voters approved the 1998 and 2000 open space bonds while the 2002 tax increase was approved by a 75% majority.<sup>88</sup> While Santa Fe County is facing moderate growth pressure, much of the support for open space is believed to come from residents' desire for historic and cultural preservation and increased recreational

---

<sup>86</sup> Shelly Johnson interviewed by author, July 3, 2002.

<sup>87</sup> The Trust for Public Land, "Santa Fe Voters Support Open Space Funding," 4/10/02, available from [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org), accessed 4/30/02.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

opportunities.<sup>89</sup> Program Manager Johnson currently has one staff person and anticipates adding an enforcement person to patrol county open space, followed by a maintenance crew. The program currently borrows the maintenance crew from the Project and Facilities Management Department or hires outside contractors for management projects. While open space acquisitions will continue, Johnson anticipates they will occur in a more deliberate, targeted fashion than the initial flurry of acquisitions. The main emphasis of the program will be developing an overall open space management plan for all properties as well as site-specific management plans. Johnson feels good about the thought that went into land management, which enables her to begin maintaining land as soon as it is acquired. She is confident that the program will find a balance between acquisition and management.<sup>90</sup>

Santa Fe County's young open space program is a good example of the rapid progress that can be made through foresight and cooperation. The program has made good use of the resources it has available as it develops and is ready to emerge as a strong, independent program.

## Evaluation

Jefferson County Open Space, the Eugene Parks and Open Space Division, and Santa Fe County's Open Space and Trails Program are very different in size and structure, but they have one major commonality: financing. With an annual budget of over \$22 million, Jefferson County is by far the biggest and best endowed of the three

---

<sup>89</sup> The Trust for Public Land, "Santa Fe, New Mexico—Wildlife, Mountains, Trails, and Historic Places Program," 6/24/01, available from [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org), accessed 4/30/02; Shelly Johnson interviewed by author, July 3, 2002.

<sup>90</sup> Shelly Johnson, interviewed by author, July 3, 2002.



programs. Eugene's Parks and Open Space Division spends \$8 million a year in addition to the \$25 million it received from the 1998 Parks and Open Space Bond. Santa Fe County's Open Space and Trails Program received \$1.2 million a year in addition to the \$20 million of bond money at the programs disposal. Healthy funding has made it possible for these programs to acquire significant acreages of open space and effectively manage it. It also enables strong planning and citizen outreach; critical components of a successful program.

The three programs receive their funding from a variety of sources including sales taxes and general obligation bonds. Eugene receives additional funding from System Development Charges (SDCs), impact fees assessed to new development that provide approximately \$900 for parks per every new residential development. Eugene is also able to use storm water management fund dollars to invest in streams and wetlands that will serve the dual purpose of absorbing storm runoff and serve as park and trail corridors. Additional funding for open space in Santa Fe County comes from the five percent of purchase price deposit that sellers of open space are required to put into the management and maintenance fund.

Jefferson County uses a number of techniques to stretch its resources and maximize the amount of land it can conserve. They include: accepting cash-in-lieu of the land dedication requirement from developers; coordinating land dedications with schools to allow for joint school/park complexes; exploring tax structure changes to create incentives for maintaining open lands; using mapping and inventorying techniques to set acquisition priorities; and amending subdivision regulations to require interconnecting linkages between new developments. While these funding mechanisms

are not unique to Jefferson County, Eugene, and Santa Fe, they demonstrate the importance of thinking outside of the box when funding an open space program.

Much credit for the successful financing of these programs can be given to the high level of public support they enjoy. All three programs have passed open space bonds with strong voter approval. In Jefferson and Santa Fe Counties, voters have easily passed sales tax measures for open space. A great deal of this success at the ballot box can be attributed to the programs' success at reaching out to and involving citizens. Both Jefferson and Santa Fe Counties have citizen committees that play a key role in open space acquisitions. The Santa Fe County citizen committee also assists with the development of management plans. Jefferson County Open Space goes so far as to have a department focused on public outreach and a volunteer services program. Eugene also has an aggressive public outreach program, working hard to communicate the benefits of parks and open space to the public and advertise the program's successes.

Another common theme that runs through the three programs is an emphasis on planning. Both Eugene and Jefferson County have robust planning sections within their parks and open space programs while the Santa Fe County program remains closely tied to the county planning department. Having dedicated planners enables the departments to develop management plans in-house and to approach open space acquisitions in a proactive, forward-looking manner.

The final, critical components of these open space programs are their methods for managing open space. Santa Fe County's innovative technique of calculating what open space will cost to manage per acre is worth noting. By anticipating the cost of land management, Santa Fe County has been able to initiate management projects such as

fence construction or trail maintenance as soon as a property is acquired. Jefferson County Open Space, however, clearly has the most experience and expertise at land management. A great deal of their success at providing high quality recreation and wilderness to the 500,000 residents of their county while preventing damage to the nearly 40,000 acres of open space can be attributed to their land classification system. By identifying sensitive areas and areas with special management concerns, Jefferson County is able to maximize recreational opportunities while protecting the biodiversity of its open space.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **OPEN SPACE IN MISSOULA**

The history of open space conservation in Missoula is central to the city's current programs and efforts. The community's conservation efforts over the years, both successful and unsuccessful, have shaped the current program. Valuable lessons can be drawn from these experiences, and that history needs to be known and understood so it can be used as a solid foundation for the future.

This chapter will provide that foundation by exploring the early days of open space conservation in Missoula that ultimately gave birth to the *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*. The key elements of the open space plan, including the vision of an open space system for Missoula and the means to achieve that vision, will be evaluated. Finally, this chapter will look at the structure and mission of the Missoula Open Space Program and analyze the system of open spaces that it has produced. This analysis will enable comparisons to be drawn between the Missoula Open Space Program and the programs studied in Chapter 2 and facilitate an in depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Missoula program.

#### ***Early Open Space Conservation Efforts***

Missoula has a rich history of open space protection dating to the early 1970s. When Missoula adopted its first urban comprehensive plan in 1968, it called for the expansion and equitable distribution of "areas for open spaces, parks, recreational and cultural facilities within the urban area" and to "preserve mountainous areas and water

courses in the planning area for future generations.”<sup>91</sup> Subsequent planning documents also called for the protection of open space including a 1975 update of the comprehensive plan.<sup>92</sup>

In 1976 Missoula’s first open space plan was adopted. *The Missoula County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan* described Missoula’s urban area open space resources in detail and recommended that the city and county “establish and preserve open space through zoning, acquisition, easements, grants, donations, and other available means to prevent undesirable land uses in critical areas.”<sup>93</sup> The plan identified four types of open space in Missoula: public lands, visual resource lands, conservation reserves, and deferred development areas.<sup>94</sup> It discussed the impact these lands have on the lifestyles of Missoula residents. Stating that the implementation of open space recommendations “is not feasible within the limited scope of recreation planning,” the plan suggested an open space program linked to the comprehensive planning process as the most effective way to conserve open space.<sup>95</sup>

While the planning process recognized the need for open space conservation, the first on-the-ground-action was taken by citizens. The Five Valley’s River Parks Association (FVRPA) was formed in 1972 to protect stream corridors, wildlife habitat

---

<sup>91</sup> *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*, 55.

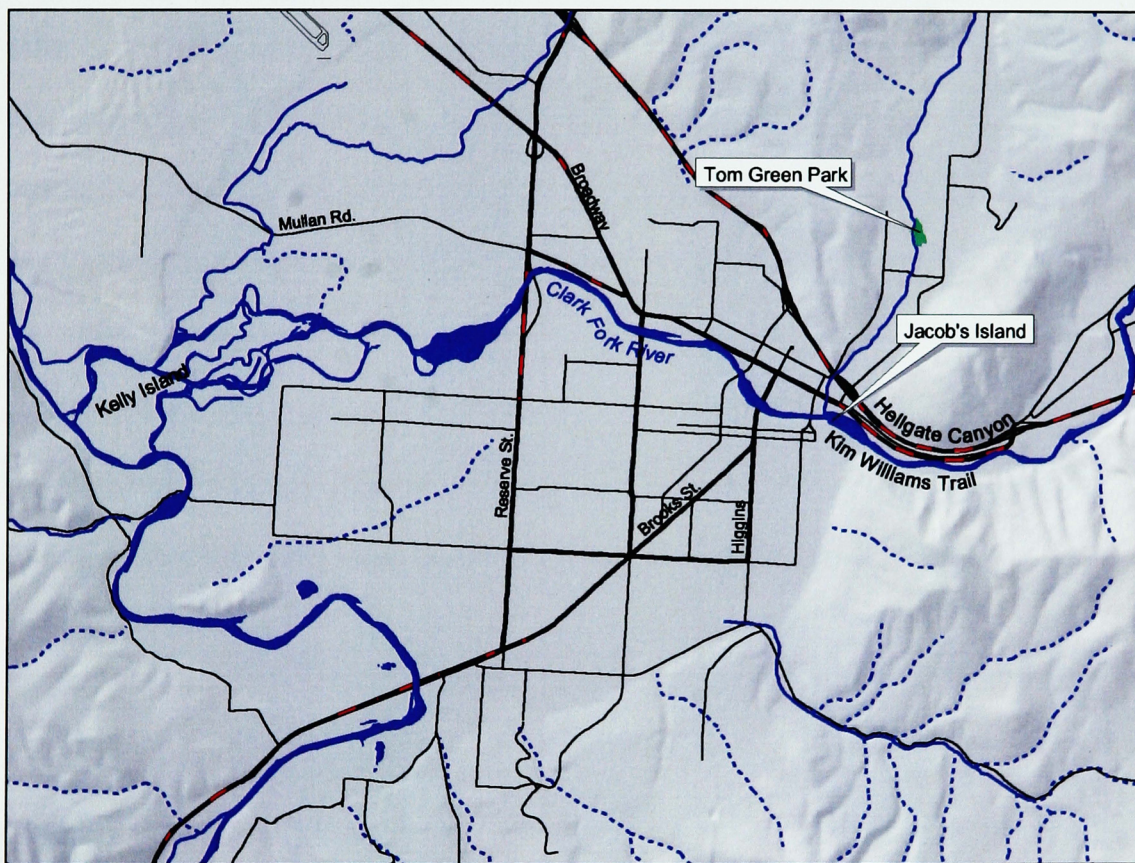
<sup>92</sup> 1975’s Comprehensive Plan update, *A Policy Guide for Urban Growth* (Missoula Planning Board, 1975), went into much greater detail on open space than the original Comprehensive Plan, recognizing the importance of preserving ecologically important habitat types, natural drainage patterns, cultural, scenic and historic values. The Plan states, “The opportunity for Missoula to develop a uniquely large and beautiful open space area which links developed park facilities and all living and commerce areas is an idea in which Missoulians have expressed great interest and support. . . . An open space pattern should be created which gives the community an aesthetically pleasing form and provides corridors which may be used as travel ways from one section of the community to another.”<sup>92</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Missoula Planning Board Staff, William C. Hollenbaugh, Karyn A. Robb. *Missoula County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan*. Missoula, MT: Missoula Planning Board Staff, 1976. 5.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

and open space in Missoula's five valleys. The creation of a riverfront park system through Missoula became the group's first goal.<sup>96</sup> With support from the city council, FVRPA successfully acquired numerous properties, including Maclay Island, Kelly Island, Tom P. Green Memorial Park, land in Hellgate Canyon, and Jacob's Island Park (Map 1).<sup>97</sup> In addition to these on-the-ground accomplishments, FVRPA successfully



**Map 1: Early Open Space Acquisitions**

<sup>96</sup> Five Valleys Land Trust, *About FVLT*. Webpage accessed April 8, 2002, available from <http://www.fvlt.org/whowere.htm>.

<sup>97</sup> Desch, David Patrick. "Open Space in Missoula, Montana: A Case Study." University of Montana, 1983., 23.

focused attention on Missoula's riverfront and its importance to the community. This laid the groundwork for a \$500,000 open space bond. The twice-defeated bond passed on its third attempt in November of 1980.<sup>98</sup>

The 1980 Open Space Bond was used to acquire a parcel of land on Mount Jumbo, the Kim Williams Nature Area in Hellgate Canyon, land in downtown Missoula along the Clark Fork River, and a conservation easement on the face of Mount Sentinel (Map 1).<sup>99</sup> It also resulted in the January 5, 1981 adoption of an Open Space Ordinance that created the fifteen-member Citizen's Advisory Committee on Open Space Acquisition, that later became known as the Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC). The ordinance also resulted in a set of criteria to guide the acquisition of open space.<sup>100</sup> The 1981 Open Space Ordinance marked the first time that the City of Missoula had an official policy on open space and a political body to enact it. A new era of city involvement in open space planning and acquisition began with the 1981 Open Space Ordinance and the Citizen's Advisory Committee on Open Space (OSAC).

### ***The Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan***

In the fall of 1991 OSAC recommended to city and county elected officials that citizens and public agencies commit to achieving an urban area open space system by developing an open space plan. The plan would formulate a vision of an urban area open space system and develop the guidelines and tools to make the vision a reality.<sup>101</sup> The

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 38. The Five Valleys River Parks Association later became Five Valleys Land Trust and has continued to play an instrumental role in preserving Missoula's open spaces.

<sup>99</sup> Kadas, Mike. "The Value of Open Space in Missoula County Montana: An Economic Study Using Contingent Valuation." University of Montana, 1995., 6.

<sup>100</sup> David Patrick Desch, "Open Space in Missoula, Montana: A Case Study," 40-41.

<sup>101</sup> *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*, 63.

recommendation led the city council to make a one-year commitment of \$16,000 to the development of an open space plan that was used by the Missoula County Office of Community Development (OCD), the Missoula Parks and Recreation Department, and OSAC for a pilot study on open space in Missoula.

The \$16,000 Pilot Project successfully resulted in the 1993 hiring of a full-time open space planner at the Office of Community Development to staff a new open space-planning program nicknamed ORION.<sup>102</sup> With assistance from the pilot project team, the new open space planner began work on the *Urban Area Open Space Plan*. That launched over a year of research and studies, including an inventory of city parklands, mapping of large parcels of state and federal lands and comprehensive plan recommendations for parks and open space, and current “designated” open space. The study also involved the community by conducting an urban area parkland use and demand survey and three community open houses to share preliminary proposals for the plan and take suggestions for “potential additional cornerstones.” The plan was completed and adopted as an amendment to the Missoula Comprehensive Plan in August of 1995.<sup>103</sup>

*The Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan* articulates a comprehensive vision of an interconnected open space system for Missoula. It focuses on land: identifying open space protected at the time of its writing and discussing in depth the types of open space and its location that Missoula residents would like to see conserved. After laying out a detailed vision of the ideal open space system in Missoula, the open space plan identifies agencies, organizations, and programs in Missoula viewed as partners in the cause of open space conservation. It then presents over twenty “recommended actions” for

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 64-66.



making the vision of the plan a reality and focusing Missoula’s various open space conservation efforts on achieving the goals of the plan.

The vision of the *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan* is of a coherent, connected system of parks, trails and open space. Citing a need to move beyond having a “simple set of designated open spaces,” the plan calls for an open space system with four central features: 1) six major types of open space, 2) three key elements, 3) three types of connections, and 4) coherence within the system, as well as between the system and the built environment.<sup>104</sup>

Key to the vision of a coherent open space system in Missoula is what the open space plan identifies as open space cornerstones. These “high-value” areas anchor the overall system by protecting the most important scenic and natural areas, making critical connections between open areas, or conserving valuable local landmarks and natural features. The plan identifies cornerstone areas where high-value open space was already

---

<sup>104</sup> The six types of open space, which include conservation lands, parks lands, urban forest, agricultural lands, trails, and views & vistas, are divided into “three key elements:” Central (conservation lands, park lands), Complementary (urban forest, agricultural lands), and Linkage (Trails, Views & Vistas). The three types of connections include connections within each type of open space, between different types of open space, and between the open space and the built environment.

Conservation lands are defined as land existing in a natural state that support flora and fauna and provide habitat. When compatible, conservation lands can support secondary uses such as recreation and education. In contrast to conservation land, parklands are generally developed with recreational facilities and landscaping, providing opportunities for both passive and active recreation.

While park and conservation lands are generally tracts of land owned by the city, other agencies, or private citizens, the urban forest category of open space refers to any woody vegetation in the urban area. It can include trees in urban parks, street trees, or trees in backyards. Urban forests enhance the open space system primarily through aesthetic contributions, not by providing land for habitat or recreation. Similarly, agricultural land is valued for the potential aesthetic value it can bring to an open space system. Used primarily for raising crops, which can include timber, agricultural land can be visually attractive, and can provide view corridors.

Trails are included in the Open Space Plan’s six categories because of their value to the open space system as linkages. The plan defines trails as recreational paths, walkways, and corridors that serve people traveling on foot, bicycle, or horseback. The final open space type defined in the Open Space Plan, views and vistas, refers to land that either has aesthetic value when viewed, or provides a view corridor to, or overlooks a scenic area. While all six types of open space have their own intrinsic value, they can also complement each other and contribute to the overall value of the system. *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*, 17-21.

protected when the plan was written. It goes on to identify broad areas of “potential additional cornerstones.” Identified through the public planning process, potential additional cornerstones represent areas that should be given priority for open space acquisition. The areas are outlined generally on a map of the open space planning area (Map 2 – see back pocket).

With a few exceptions, the potential cornerstones represent the hillsides surrounding the Missoula Valley and riparian areas along both the Bitterroot and Clark Fork Rivers. Additional cornerstones include a large piece of the valley floor at Grass Valley and around Fort Missoula, McCauley Butte, and numerous wide sections along the two rivers including Bandmann Flats in Hellgate Canyon. A number of areas are inexplicably left off of the cornerstone map. These include existing cornerstone open space in the form of national forest land at Blue Mountain and O’Brien Creek, and potential additional cornerstones such as the Miller Creek Valley, the Big Hill separating Miller Creek from Lolo and areas on the west side of the Missoula Valley. It is possible that these areas were not considered as cornerstones due to a lack of participation in the open space planning process by citizens from the southern and western edges of the open space planning area, where these areas are located.

The last section of the open space plan, “Part Four: Making It Happen,” discusses various methods for turning the vision of an open space system in Missoula into reality. Three general areas are considered: groups, activities and programs already working to preserve open space; actions that can be taken to further develop an open space system in Missoula; and tools that can be used to protect open space.

Calling them “Current Efforts,” the plan identifies ten groups, programs, or committees whose work seems to support the objectives of the open space plan. The efforts described range from entities whose work is at the core of open space conservation in Missoula, such as the Citizens Advisory Committee on Open Space and the ORION program (the precursor to the Missoula Open Space Program), to the Missoula County Extension Service, whose agents provide technical assistance to the city but are not a major force in open space preservation. While the Plan discusses the work each group does that is relevant to the implementation of the open space plan, it makes no suggestions as to how the groups can continue to support open space or the role they should play in the implementation of the plan. It does, however, identify the need for a “more comprehensive, deliberate approach to addressing our open space needs and opportunities,” suggesting that plan implementation should follow two parallel tracks focusing on both the larger, urban area scale and the more localized, neighborhood level.<sup>105</sup>

The final two areas covered by the implementation strategy of the plan are recommended actions and available tools. These list 23 actions thought essential to the realization of the plan’s goals and 15 tools that could be used to carry out these actions. Essentially a list of things that could be done and tools that could be used to implement the Open Space Plan, no attempt is made to rank the actions or tools in order of importance or feasibility. The actions that the plan recommends be carried out in the 18 months following its adoption are mostly very specific and cover areas critical to the development of an open space system such as completing a feasibility evaluation of

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 44.

potential open space cornerstones and pursuing a city or countywide open space bond initiative. Other recommendations are more general, discussing actions or tools that could be considered.

### ***The Open Space Program***

Following the adoption of the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan, the ORION program moved to the City Parks and Recreation Department and became the Missoula Open Space Program. The open space planner, originally hired through the Missoula City-County Office of Planning and Program Development to provide staff support to the Citizens Advisory Committee on Open Space (OSAC) and assist in the drafting of the Open Space Plan, became the Open Space Program Manager.

The Open Space Program Manager's initial focus was on acquiring open space land using open space bond money. As more and more open space has been acquired, management of that land has become a greater priority. The position is now split fairly evenly between acquisition and management. The program manager also provides staff support to OSAC, which makes recommendations to the city council regarding "open space conservation proposals, including proposed acquisitions and trail development proposals."<sup>106</sup>

Although the Open Space Program Manager receives funding and supervision through the Parks and Recreation Department, until recently the Open Space Program acted as a stand-alone department. Originally housed in a downtown office, the program has been physically removed from the McCormick Park based Parks and Recreation

---

<sup>106</sup> Missoula, Montana. 1995. Ordinance number 2958.

Department and the program manager has traditionally received little guidance from the Parks Department. Because of the need for the Parks Department and the Open Space Program to work closely on issues such as land management, this arrangement has been problematic. The Open Space Program receives direction from a variety of other entities, including the City Council, the Mayor, OSAC, and the City Parks Board. The lack of a clearly defined chain of command has created an inconsistency in direction for the program, with a variety of often-conflicting directives coming down from the various guiding entities.

As a relatively new program, open space has had difficulty finding its place in the City of Missoula governmental structure. The Parks and Recreation Department has been reluctant to embrace a program that was essentially created by OSAC and the citizens of Missoula who voted for the Open Space Bond. The program was placed in the Parks Department as a matter of convenience. This disconnect has made routine tasks challenging. It has sometimes forced the Open Space Program to complete tasks already handled by the Parks Department. The resulting dysfunction has the Open Space Program spread thin while critical tasks such as subdivision review and land management are neglected.

In the past year much progress has been made. New leadership in the Parks Department has embraced the Open Space Program and started the process of fully integrating both the program and the many acres of open space it has acquired into the city parks system. The Open Space Program Manager has moved from downtown into the Parks Department's main office, allowing daily contact with Parks Department staff.

Integration with the Parks and Recreation Department has provided greater staff support for the Open Space Program. The Parks Department's Park and Trail Design and Development Manager, for example, now handles the subdivision review process, analyzing the impact of proposed subdivisions on both the park and open space system and looking for ways new subdivisions can contribute to those systems. The Park and Trail Design and Development Manager is also focusing more attention on open space trail systems, while the Parks maintenance staff is taking greater responsibility for the management of open space. These developments should take considerable pressure off of the Open Space Program Manager and allow that position to refocus on its acquisition and planning responsibilities.

### ***The Open Space System***

After two failed attempts to pass an open space bond, City of Missoula voters approved a \$5 million open space bond in November 1995, shortly after the adoption of the *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*. While the new open space plan helped to focus the public's attention on the need for open space conservation and reassured citizens that the city would use tax money wisely, the bond campaign focused on the acquisition of Mount Jumbo. One of the most prominent of the hills ringing Missoula, Mount Jumbo had long been treasured as a scenic backdrop to downtown Missoula, and for its recreation value and wildlife habitat. Having acquired purchase options on four Mount Jumbo parcels, Five Valleys Land Trust initiated the Mount Jumbo Campaign in the summer of 1995 to raise the \$3.3 million needed to buy 1,600 acres on Mount Jumbo. "A tremendous community effort," the campaign and its related fun runs, garage sales, and benefits generated widespread community support. Pledges included \$100,000 from

the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and \$280,000 from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.<sup>107</sup> The Missoula City Council pledged its unanimous support and put the \$5 million open space bond on the November ballot. It was the perfect time to get an open space bond passed, something not easily done in Missoula as evidenced by failed open space bonds dating back to the 1980s. Stating that the bond never would have passed without Mount Jumbo as a focus, Greg Tollefson, a key player at Five Valleys Land Trust, called the bond “a serendipitous junction of opportunity and collective interest.”<sup>108</sup>

While receiving much support from the Five Valleys Land Trust Mount Jumbo Campaign, the bond money was not just for Mount Jumbo. According to the ballot language, the bond money would be spent to acquire:

in fee, by easement, or otherwise, open space land in or near the City, guided by the open space plan recently adopted by Missoula local governments, such as some Mount Jumbo lands, lands at the South end of Mount Sentinel, Fort Missoula area lands, upper South Hills lands, North Hills, Clark Fork River Corridors, areas for recreational playing fields, or for acquiring and establishing community trails consistent with the open space plan, and for defraying costs related to such acquisition.<sup>109</sup>

The Open Space Bond gave the City of Missoula the means to begin developing the open space system envisioned in the open space plan.

To date, \$4.4 million of bond money has been spent on over 2,776 acres of open space. The acquisitions include significant open space cornerstones, such as Mount Jumbo, Mount Sentinel and Waterworks Hill, as well as land for a regional sports

---

<sup>107</sup> Mount Jumbo Stewardship Subcommittee, The Citizens Advisory Committee on Open Space, The Missoula Parks and Recreation Department. *The Mount Jumbo Management Plan*. Missoula, MT, 1999., 3.

<sup>108</sup> Greg Tollefson, interviewed by author, March 15, 2002.

<sup>109</sup> Kemmis, Daniel. "Resolution Number 5760." , 1995..

complex at Fort Missoula and additions to the City's Bicycle Commuter Network. All of the acquisitions complement the Open Space Plan's vision of an open space system and were vigorously scrutinized with the Open Space Suitability Criteria before they were purchased.<sup>110</sup>

While the acquisitions to date have generally been balanced, they were based more on opportunities than an overall acquisition strategy.<sup>111</sup> Table 1 lists the Open Space Bond Acquisitions to date, the acreage and cost of each purchase, and the type of open space conserved while Map 3 provides an overview of the acquisitions and how they relate to the open space cornerstones. Each acquisition is then described and evaluated in greater detail.

### Mount Jumbo

Mount Jumbo was purchased for \$3.3 million, \$2 million of which came from the Open Space Bond. \$1.3 million was raised by the Five Valleys Land Trust Mount Jumbo Campaign, through individual, agency, and corporate funding and Forest Service and Fish Wildlife and Parks purchases. Mount Jumbo can be considered one of the crown jewels of Missoula's open space system. Providing a stunning visual backdrop to downtown Missoula, recognizable from far across the Missoula Valley, it was identified in the Open Space Plan as an open space cornerstone and provides first-class wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities in close proximity to downtown. Extending from

---

<sup>110</sup> *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*, Appendix I. OSAC subjects every proposed Open Space Bond acquisition to a five-step lands selection process developed after the adoption of the *Open Space Plan* and passage of the Open Space Bond. The process includes a preliminary consideration of the property (rough cut checklist), testimonies and site visits, a contributions matrix scoring system, and an innate characteristics scoring system before a final vote. A two-thirds vote is required to send the proposed acquisition to the City Council for final approval.

<sup>111</sup> Bruce Bugbee, interviewed by author, March 8, 2002.



Hellgate Canyon north to United States Forest Service Land south of Wood's Gulch, the Mount Jumbo acquisition is a critical link between downtown Missoula and the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area.

**Table 1: Open Space Bond Acquisitions**

<b>Property</b>	<b>Date of Acquisition</b>	<b>Acreage</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Type of Open Space</b>
Mount Jumbo	1996	1,465	\$2 million	Conservation/Views & Vistas
Randolph Property (North Hills)	1996	467	\$580,000	Conservation/Views & Vistas
Bicycle Commuter Network	1996/1999	N/A	\$435,000	Trails
Schilling Property	1997	120	\$7,000	Conservation/Views & Vistas
Fort Missoula	1998	97	\$700,000	Park Lands
Mount Sentinel Cox Property	2000	475	\$175,000	Conservation/Views & Vistas
Wilbert Riverfront Property	2001	79	\$250,000	Conservation
Mount Jumbo Cromwell Property	2001	33	\$40,000	Conservation/Views & Vistas
Mount Sentinel Backside	2003	40	\$100,000	Conservation/Views & Vistas

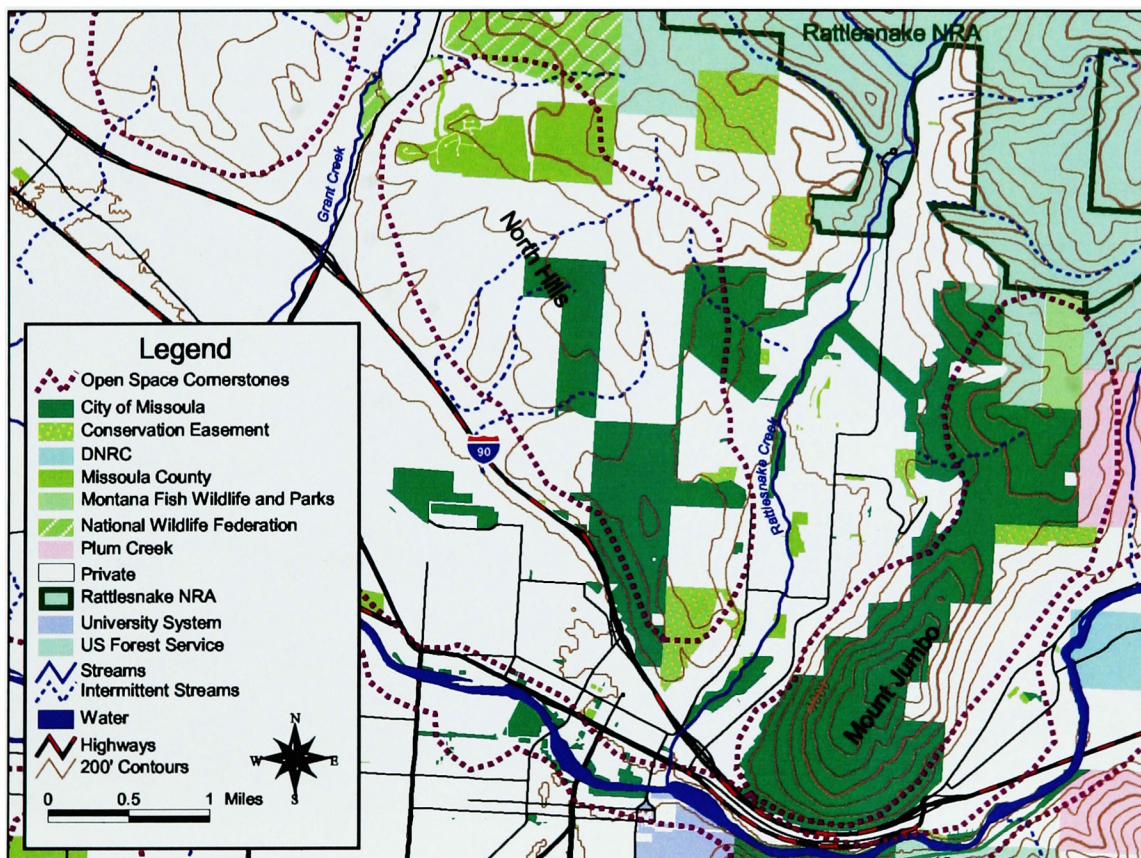
#### Randolph Property (North Hills)

Purchased in 1996 for \$580,000, the Randolph Property is another key cornerstone of the Missoula open space system. Commonly known as Waterworks Hill, the Randolph Property provides a visual backdrop to downtown Missoula and the Northside and Westside neighborhoods. Its proximity to downtown Missoula has made it a popular hiking and dog-walking destination. The Randolph Property is one of only a few places in Montana where Missoula Phlox, a rare subspecies phlox in the northern Rocky Mountains, is able to grow.<sup>112</sup> The property is home to many other native

---

<sup>112</sup> Save Open Space, *The Waterworks Hill Conservation Easement* (brochure).

wildflowers including Douglasia, Bitterroot and Arrowleaf Balsamroot. It also includes the historic Randolph Homestead. Adjoining City land purchased as part of the Rattlesnake Greenway and a private conservation easement held by Missoula land trust Save Open Space (SOS), the Randolph Property is a significant piece of the land ownership puzzle in the North Hills that could one day provide a trail connection from downtown Missoula, the Northside and Westside neighborhoods, and Rattlesnake Valley to the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area (Map 4).



**Map 4: The North Hills**

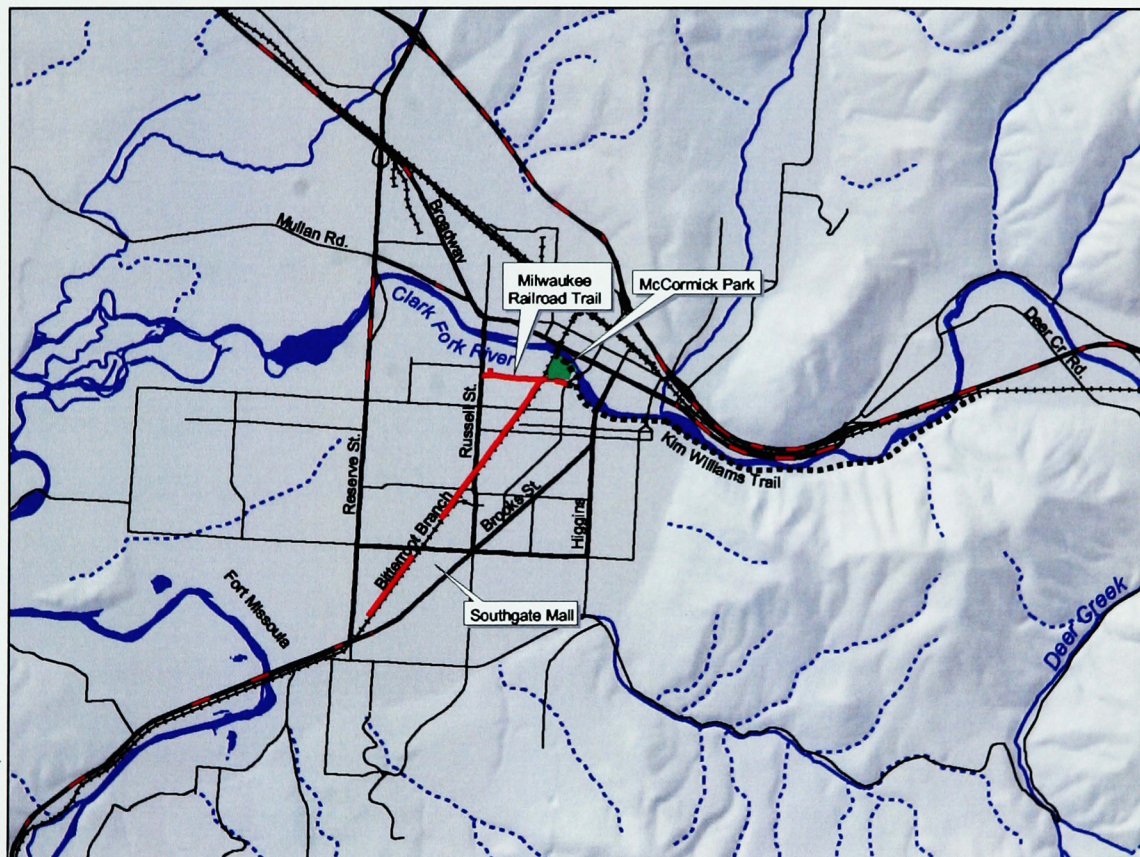
### Bicycle Commuter Network

In 1996 the City Council voted to use \$235,000 of Open Space Bond money as local matching funds for the Bicycle Commuter Network. Another \$200,000 of Open



Space Bond money was committed to the Bicycle Commuter Network in 1999.

Altogether, \$3.1 million of mostly federal funding has been put towards the development of urban trails in Missoula. Developed by Feet First (now a component of the Missoula Parks and Recreation Department), completed trail projects to date include the Bitterroot Branch Trail from McCormick Park to the Southgate Mall and Reserve Street and the Milwaukee Railroad Trail from McCormick Park to Russell Street (Map 5). Future work



**Map 5: The Bicycle Commuter Network**

will include an extension of the Bitterroot Branch to Fort Missoula, extending the Milwaukee Railroad Trail to Mullen Road west of Reserve Street, and extending the Kim Williams Trail to Deer Creek Road and toward Bonner (Map 5). While not necessarily an open space cornerstone element, the Bicycle Commuter Network is an open space

linkage element as defined by the Open Space Plan.<sup>113</sup> By providing connections between open space and urban and residential areas, the Bicycle Commuter Network is an integral part of making Missoula's open space system coherent.

### Schilling Property

Adjoining the north end of the Randolph Property, the Schilling Property adds to the City's open space holdings in the North Hills (Map 4). The Schilling Property was donated to the City in 1997. Adhering to the terms of the gift, the City paid \$7,000 to cover the costs of a conservation easement on the property. At the time of acquisition the property had an estimated value of approximately \$150,000.<sup>114</sup> The property is currently under lease to a local rancher, another term of the gift, which closes it to public access. The property is visually significant from many parts of town, including the South Hills. If the City is able to acquire more pieces of the patchwork property in the North Hills, the valuable trail potential of the Schilling Property can be fully realized.

### Fort Missoula

When Missoulians passed the Open Space Bond in 1995, they were promised in the ballot language that part of the money would be spent on recreational playing fields. The ballot language also promised that money would be spent to protect land in the Fort Missoula area.<sup>115</sup> Both of those goals were accomplished in 1998 with the \$700,000 acquisition of 97 acres at Fort Missoula to be used as a regional park and for recreational playing fields. Identified in the Open Space Plan as a cornerstone element, the land at

---

<sup>113</sup> *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*, 22.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, January 2002 Update.

<sup>115</sup> Kemmis, Daniel. "Resolution Number 5760." , 1995.

Fort Missoula will be a valuable addition to Missoula's park and open space system. Developing the playing fields, however, will be a major project. It is estimated that approximately \$17 million will be needed to construct the playing fields, a significant challenge for Missoula.<sup>116</sup>

### Mount Sentinel Cox Property

City efforts to protect the west face of Mount Sentinel began in 1981 when the city purchased a conservation easement on 475 acres of land owned by the Cox family. Mount Sentinel is one of the most visually significant natural landmarks in Missoula and provides excellent habitat and recreational opportunities as well as linkages to adjoining National Forest Land. In partnership with Five Valleys Land Trust, the city was able to purchase the 475 acres outright for \$175,000. At the time of the purchase, the land had an appraised value of \$236,500.

While the city has received some criticism for spending valuable Open Space Bond money on land that was already protected from development and open to public access, the outright purchase of the land has enabled Five Valleys Land Trust and the city to pursue a conservation solution for 474 acres of land also owned by the Cox family on the southeast slope of Mount Sentinel. Called Missoula's "Hidden Treasure," the backside of Mount Sentinel is a grassland that provides a critical link to the Lolo National Forest's Pattee Canyon Recreation Area.

In July 2003, the backside of Mount Sentinel became public land. The City of Missoula contributed \$100,000 of Open Space Bond money to match \$800,000 from the U.S. Land and Water Conservation Fund. The city received 40 acres along the ridgeline

---

<sup>116</sup> Mike Kadas, Missoula Mayor, interviewed by author March 7, 2002.

separating the front and backsides of the mountain with the remaining 475 acres going to the Lolo National Forest.<sup>117</sup> With the acquisition of the backside, all of Mount Sentinel is now in public ownership.

### Wilbert Riverfront Property

The purchase of the Wilbert Property marked the first time 1995 Open Space Bond money was spent on riverfront property. Purchased for \$250,000 in June of 2001, the 79 acres along the Clark Fork River at the north end of Tower Street is a lush bottomland heavily forested with black cottonwood. The rich wildlife habitat along the river is home to foxes, deer and many other mammals and birds. Surrounded by undeveloped private land, the Wilbert Property is an important component of the city's efforts to protect the Clark Fork and Bitterroot River corridors and bring this valuable land into the open space system. Not only will the property provide public river access and new trail opportunities, but it is a key first step in linking downtown Missoula and the downtown riverfront trail system with downstream open space such as Kelly Island.

The purchase did receive some criticism in the form of letters to the editor and other comments.<sup>118</sup> Opponents of the acquisition argued that it was unnecessary because the land was already precluded from development by virtue of being within the 100-year floodplain. Opponents also felt that a City Open Space designation would bring swarms of people and their dogs into a relatively peaceful, untrammelled area.<sup>119</sup> While the

---

<sup>117</sup> Gadbow, Daryl. "Deal to secure Cox family property expected today." *The Missoulian*, July 9, 2003, A7.

<sup>118</sup> Edwards, Jim J. "Floodplain a waste of money (Letter to the editor)." *The Missoulian*, May 28, 2001.

<sup>119</sup> Devlin, Sherry. "Neighbors question open-space idea: Some concerned problems will arise if city buys land on Clark Fork." *The Missoulian*, May 15, 2001, B1.

floodplain argument addresses the difficult decisions OSAC faces when evaluating potential open space acquisitions and striving to make the most balanced, beneficial purchases possible, numerous examples of developed floodplains exist in Missoula. For example, an open field in the floodplain that once formed a scenic gateway at Missoula's southern entrance, has been converted to a low-density commercial strip through fill brought in to raise the lot above the floodplain. The numerous gravel pits that have been developed along Missoula's streams and rivers also make it clear that 100 year floodplain designation alone will not ensure land remains open space.

#### Mount Jumbo Cromwell Property

More land on Mount Jumbo was conserved in August of 2001 when the City negotiated a conservation easement on 33 acres of the Mount Jumbo saddle. The complex deal involved a city purchase of the 10-acre Cromwell property. The City then placed conservation and public access easements on the property and sold the land to adjoining landowners, who in return placed conservation and public access easements on 23 additional acres in the saddle and made a \$16,000 gift to the open space bond fund. The deal protected a part of the Mount Jumbo saddle that many people may have mistakenly believed was already city open space. While the 33 acres conserved does not seem like much when compared to the nearly 1,500 acres already owned by the city on Mount Jumbo, even one trophy home on the property would have had the potential to ruin the natural character of the Mount Jumbo saddle and constrict the already narrow corridor used by elk to migrate to their winter range on the south end of the mountain. The Cromwell purchase is a good example of innovative open space conservation. It stretched \$40,000 of Open Space Bond money to protect land worth much more.

## Evaluation

The nearly \$4.4 million of bond money spent to date has been leveraged to protect over \$7 million worth of open space. With just over \$650,000 of Open Space Bond money remaining, the city is continuing to research potential open space acquisitions, especially in cornerstone areas that so far have been neglected.

The majority of the land acquired by the Open Space Program with 1995 Open Space Bond money are both conservation land and views and vistas. While money from the bond was put toward the development of urban bike commuter trails and the acquisition of parkland at Fort Missoula, no bond money was spent on agricultural lands or urban forest.<sup>120</sup> The bulk of the land acquired with 1995 Open Space Bond money represents the hillsides to the north and east of downtown Missoula, major landmarks important to downtown Missoula, the University of Montana, and Missoula's older neighborhoods. The purchase of these cornerstone areas is a reflection of the opportunistic nature of open space acquisition rather than a bias towards downtown. As a result, however, areas where there have been limited acquisition opportunities have been neglected. These include the South Hills, the Clark Fork and Bitterroot riverfronts, and the western side of the Urban Area Open Space Planning Area.

The open space acquisitions have created the beginning of a very well connected, diverse open space system. With the purchase of Mount Jumbo, for example, it is now possible to hike from downtown Missoula north to the Flathead Indian Reservation (approximately 20 miles as the crow flies) without leaving public land (Map 3 – see back

---

<sup>120</sup> Agricultural lands and urban forest are considered by the Open Space Plan to be “Complementary” elements of the Open Space System. Neither types of open space were mentioned in the Open Space Bond ballot language.



pocket). Mount Sentinel, a critical open space cornerstone, is now entirely in public ownership, connecting Pattee Canyon Recreation Area to the University of Montana. Downtown Missoula has nearly been connected to the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area through the North Hills. In the areas where land has been acquired, the Open Space Program has very nearly achieved the vision of the Open Space Plan.

While the hillsides surrounding downtown have been critical additions to Missoula's open space system, those lands are not the most vulnerable. Growth in Missoula is occurring to the south and the west and it is in these areas where the most open space is being lost. The rapid pace of development, especially in the South Hills and in the Grass Valley/Mullan Road areas, adds an even greater sense of urgency. Open space preservation in the South Hills and Grass Valley would not only diversify Missoula's open space system and make newly developed neighborhoods in these areas more appealing. Protecting these areas would generate the broad, community wide support for open space that is critical to the program's future.

With but a fraction of the 1995 Open Space Bond money remaining and a vast acreage of open space cornerstones and other potential open space not yet protected, it is clear that the program will need additional funding if it hopes to continue adding to Missoula's open space system. Of the six open space bond efforts since the 1980s, only two have been successful, both by narrow margins. Clearly another open space bond effort will require broad support and a popular rallying point, like Mount Jumbo, to focus that support. Because the majority of Missoula's growth is occurring in areas that have seen few benefits from the 1995 Open Space Bond, the residents in these indirectly affected areas may be reluctant to support an additional tax from which they can see little

benefit. Therefore, both politically and for the sake of a diverse open space system, it is critical for the Open Space Program to look to the south and west for its next acquisition.

### ***Analysis***

The Missoula Open Space Program and the other three other open space programs profiled in this thesis have numerous traits in common, but they each also utilize unique approaches and tools. This section will compare the many methods employed by the four programs. Drawing on *Chapter 1: Open Space Background* as well as the three case studies, Table 2 lists every conservation technique, funding source, organizational structure, and type of personnel identified in this thesis. Checkmarks next to each method used by a particular program highlight both the shared techniques and the areas where a program is unique. By enabling comparisons to be made between the Missoula Open Space Program and the case studies, Table 2 and the subsequent analysis illustrate how Missoula's program stacks up against other programs in the west. This analysis will provide Missoula with a point of reference, identifying new approaches for the open space program as well as underscoring areas where the program has excelled.

<b>Table 2: Fundamental Elements of Open Space Programs</b>	Missoula	Jefferson County	Eugene	Santa Fe County
<b>Organizational Structures</b>				
Stand-Alone Open Space Program		X		
Integrated Parks and Open Space Program	X		X	
Ad Hoc Open Space Program				X
<b>Funding Sources</b>				
Open Space Sales Tax		X		X
General Obligation Bond	X	X	X	X
5% of Purchase Price Deposit				X
Cash-in-lieu of Land Dedication	X	X		
System Development Charges (SDCs)			X	
Storm Water Funds			X	
Land and Water Conservation Fund	X			
Other Grants	X	X	X	
<b>Conservation Techniques</b>				
Fee Simple Acquisition	X	X	X	X
Land Donation	X	X	X	
Purchase of Development Rights (conservation easement)	X			
Donation of Development Rights (conservation easement)	X	X		X
Right of First Refusal				
Eminent Domain				
Leasing		X		
Zoning Techniques (Overlay, Performance)				
Planned Unit Development/Open Space Subdivision		X		
Coordination with other agencies	X	X	X	X
Coordination with Schools for joint school/park complexes		X		
Coordination with Private Land Trusts	X	X		X
Open Space Land Classification System		X		
Prioritizing Acquisition through inventory and mapping		X		
<b>Personnel</b>				
Citizens Advisory Committee	X	X	X	X
Planning	X	X	X	
Urban Forestry	X		X	
Wetlands			X	
Acquisitions	X	X		
Administrative & Education Services		X	X	
Citizen Outreach		X		
Design & Development	X	X		
Maintenance	X	X	X	

## Organizational Structures

Three types of organizational structures for open space were discussed in this thesis: stand-alone programs, programs integrated with parks departments, and ad hoc open space programs. Stand-alone programs have sufficient staffing and resources to operate independently of other programs or agencies and programs integrated into parks departments have resource needs met by that department. Ad hoc programs typically have few employees and receive assistance ranging from planning to trail maintenance from other departments. Each of the case studies represent one of those program types: Jefferson County has a stand-alone program, Eugene has an integrated parks and open space department, and Santa Fe County will remain an ad hoc program until it has sufficient resources to be considered a fully functioning stand alone-program.

While the origins of the Missoula Open Space Program are most similar to those of Santa Fe County, the program has become very close to Eugene, Oregon's in structure. Like Missoula, Santa Fe County's program was born in the planning department. As the program developed, it moved out from under the umbrella of the planning department and became a stand-alone department. The Santa Fe program is still developing and is currently limited in staff. Eventually it will grow to be a fully functional, independent department much like the Jefferson County Open Space Program.

For a number of years the Missoula Open Space Program acted as a stand-alone program within the Parks and Recreation Department. As the city's open space holdings and the Open Space Program's responsibilities grew, it became clear that the program would need to either expand in staff and funding or fully integrate with the Parks and Recreation Department. Without a sales tax or other source of perpetual funding and the

City of Missoula budget already stretched thin, there were no resources for the program to expand. This left full integration into the Parks Department as the only real option. Now that integration has occurred, the program has had more resources to put towards previously neglected tasks such as land management, planning, and subdivision review.

### Funding Sources

Of the numerous funding sources listed in Table 2, it is clear that general obligation bonds are the most popular. Both the Missoula Open Space Program and all three case study programs use bonds to finance open space land acquisitions. General obligation bonds are a key source of funding for open space programs looking to buy land outright and are a tool that is widely used by open space conservationists around the country.

Another key source of funding for open space programs is a sales tax dedicated to open space acquisitions and management. Both Jefferson County and Santa Fe County are recipients of an open space sales tax. Sales tax revenue is the biggest reason why Jefferson County is able to function as a stand-alone open space program and why Santa Fe County is heading in that direction. Without a sales tax, it is likely that both of these open space programs would need to rely more on other departments within their respective counties. However, even with the open-space sales tax, Jefferson and Santa Fe Counties still rely on general obligation bonds for the bulk of their open space land acquisitions, using the sales tax primarily to finance their programs and to cover the cost of maintaining open space.

Given the sensitivity of Montana voters to questions of instating a statewide sales tax, the Missoula Open Space Program should not expect to receive revenue from an

open space sales tax any time soon. Like Montana, however, Oregon does not have a sales tax. Despite the lack of sales tax revenue, the Eugene open space program is well funded and has been very successful. One of the secrets to the success of the Eugene program is its ability to bring in revenue from sources other than open space sales taxes and general obligation bonds. These revenue sources include the System Development Charges assessed on new development and storm water runoff funds. Much of Eugene's work with wetlands has also been funded by a variety of outside grants.

The unique sources of revenue employed by Eugene need to be explored by Missoula. While the Missoula Parks and Recreation Department does not administer storm water runoff issues, the idea of having green areas that serve the dual purpose of handling storm water and providing open space, makes a lot of sense. Instead of spending tens of thousands of dollars upgrading its storm drain system, the City of Missoula would be wise to investigate Eugene's approach.

The City of Missoula is considering levying impact fees on new development to offset the cost of providing city services to those areas. Impact fees would go a long way toward helping the Missoula Parks and Recreation Department ensure that there are sufficient parks and open space for Missoula's rapidly developing growth areas. The 1995 Open Space Bond is currently the only viable resource for new park acquisitions, even though the people that voted for it were told it would be used for conservation open space, not urban parks. Impact fees would take the pressure off of the open space bond, allowing it to be put to its intended use. They would also force developers to share the burden of creating livable communities in Missoula.

Missoula has been successful in using Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) dollars for land acquisitions and in tapping various state and federal grant sources for trail improvements and the development of the bicycle commuter network. These are critical funding sources that the city should continue to pursue.

Jefferson County is unique among the three case study programs in the thought given to accepting cash-in-lieu of a parkland dedication from new developers. Cash-in-lieu can be a valuable source of funding for either the acquisition of parkland or the development of new parks. When developers are required to set aside a percentage of the total acres they are building on for parks or open space, the public all too often end up with the least desirable or unbuildable portion of the property. Receiving cash-in-lieu of that land can be a win win situation for a parks department: they avoid receiving an undesirable parcel of land, and they receive money that can be put towards either acquiring park or open space land in that neighborhood or developing a park on land already in public ownership.

Missoula has been receiving cash-in-lieu of parkland money for a number of years, but has been unable to spend it due to a technicality that requires the approval of a parks master plan before cash-in-lieu funds can be expended. The Missoula Parks and Recreation Department is currently developing a parks master plan and should be able to fully utilize its cash-in-lieu fund within the next year.

The final unique funding source found among the case studies is Santa Fe County's practice of requiring a 5% of purchase price deposit from sellers of open space. Santa Fe County uses these funds to offset the initial costs of maintaining open space, often cleanup or fencing. The risk of requiring a seller to provide such a deposit is that it

could create a disincentive for owners of potential open space to sell their land to the public. But the practice has apparently worked well in Santa Fe County and should therefore be considered by the Missoula Open Space Program. Maintenance of newly acquired open space has been one of Missoula's weaknesses, in great part due to a lack of staff and funding. Having funding for initial improvements on newly acquired open space will only enhance the city's image as a good neighbor and steward of the land.

### Conservation Techniques

Table 2 clearly illustrates that fee simple acquisition, land donation, and the acceptance of donated conservation easements are the most widely used land conservation techniques among the three case study programs and Missoula. Fee simple acquisition is obviously desirable because it serves the dual function of protecting conservation land from development and opening it for public recreation and enjoyment. All four of the programs studied in this thesis utilize fee simple acquisition. Many of Eugene and Missoula's best-known parks were at least partially donated by civic minded community members. The donation of land for public use is wonderful when it happens, but should not be considered a conservation technique. Demonstrating good stewardship of park and open space land, however, could encourage potential land donors.

Conservation easements are very effective at protecting land from development, preserving viewsheds, and keeping land in traditional use such as agriculture. However, many conservation easements do not allow public access. Therefore, programs more oriented towards providing recreation experiences to the public, such as the Eugene program, do not utilize conservation easements. Missoula, Jefferson County, and Santa Fe County, however, have all effectively used conservation easements to protect critical



open space in their respective communities. As the Missoula Open Space Program completes its integration into the Parks and Recreation Department, it is imperative that it maintains focus on open space conservation even if such conservation precludes public use. Conservation easements, whether donated or purchased, should continue to be a critical tool for the Missoula Open Space Program.

A number of land conservation techniques listed in Table 2 (page 63) are only useful in specific circumstances. Though none of the programs studied in this thesis have employed right-of-first refusal or eminent domain, and only Jefferson County leases open space, these techniques likely would be utilized should the circumstances arise. Right-of-first refusal can be very valuable when a program is seeking a specific property that is not necessarily available. By getting the first option to purchase the land should it go on the market, open space programs can ensure that the public has a fair chance at acquiring the property. Leasing can be a useful way to gain public trail linkages over private parcels or to hold land while funding is secured for its acquisition. Both of these techniques are valuable, but are only rarely employed when the right set of circumstances arise. Eminent domain can be a highly controversial open space acquisition technique, and is therefore only used when absolutely necessary, if at all.

Zoning can have some impact on open space conservation if used appropriately. Other than Jefferson County's exploration of amending subdivision regulations to require interconnecting linkages between new developments, none of the open space departments in this thesis specify zoning, planned unit developments or open space subdivisions as a part of their programs. The likely reason for this is that these techniques are more the realm of planning departments than open space programs. For zoning and open space

development to become a functioning part of the Missoula Open Space Program, better coordination with the Office of Planning and Grants would be required. While open space subdivisions and planned unit developments are becoming more and more common in Missoula, to ensure they complement the Missoula open space system requires the involvement of the open space program. Both the planning office and the Missoula Open Space Program need to make more of an effort to communicate about future development that potentially impacts Missoula's open space.

Jefferson County is unique among the case studies in that open space issues are identified in the Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan. In an effort to “make open space and trails issues a county-wide priority that will be addressed beyond the Open Space Program when projects are reviewed by the Jefferson County Planning and Zoning Department prior to development,” the Natural Resources and Recreation Action Plan component of the comprehensive plan list numerous open space conservation strategies. The ideas explored by the comprehensive plan include: accepting cash-in-lieu of land dedication requirements from developers, coordinating land dedications with schools to allow for joint school/park complexes, exploring tax structure changes to create incentives for maintaining open lands, and amending subdivision regulations to require interconnecting linkages between new developments.<sup>121</sup> Jefferson County's effort to make open space conservation a county-wide issue through the use of the comprehensive plan should be emulated by every county working to preserve open space. Missoula could only gain if the planning office and every department reviewing proposed projects considered the effect of that project on potential or existing open space.

---

<sup>121</sup> *The Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan*, 14.

All four open space programs in this study have had success coordinating their efforts with other public agencies and land trusts. Eugene's involvement in the West Eugene Wetlands project is a national model of interagency cooperative wetlands restoration.<sup>122</sup> Jefferson County Open Space works with the cities and recreation districts within the county, neighboring counties, and local and national land trusts.<sup>123</sup> Santa Fe County has received substantial assistance from the Trust for Public Land.<sup>124</sup>

The Missoula Open Space Program has a long history of working with Five Valleys Land Trust and the Lolo National Forest. The recent acquisition of the backside of Mount Sentinel, for example, relied heavily on a strong working relationship with both of those organizations. These partnerships are critical to the future success of open space conservation in Missoula. Every effort should be made to strengthen these relationships and cultivate new ones with other key land managers and landowners in the Missoula Valley such as the Montana State Department of Natural Resources (DNRC), Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), and Plum Creek Timber.<sup>125</sup>

The Missoula County Public School District represents another potential partner for the Missoula Open Space Program. Jefferson County successfully coordinates with its public school districts to create joint school/park complexes. While only available to public use during the hours that school is not in session, schools grounds can provide important public parkland. By the same token, schools that are bordered by parks or

---

<sup>122</sup> Johnny Medlin, Eugene Parks and Open Space Division Manager, interviewed by author 11/21/02.

<sup>123</sup> *The Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan*, 24-25.

<sup>124</sup> The Trust for Public Land, "Santa Fe, New Mexico—Wildlife, Mountains, Trails, and Historic Places Program," 6/24/01, available from [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org), accessed 4/30/02.

<sup>125</sup> Plum Creek Timber is the largest private landowner in Montana. Their recent activity suggests that their long-term business plan is to sell their depleted timberland to developers. The Missoula Open Space Program would be wise to position itself to conserve parcels of Plum Creek land deemed critical viewshed, popular for recreation, , or potential habitat.

open space can greatly increase in aesthetic and educational value. Coordination between schools and open space programs makes sense and can exponentially increase the value to both the public and students alike of open space and school grounds.

Jefferson County employs two additional techniques that could potentially benefit the Missoula Open Space Program. The tiered land classification technique used by Jefferson County to manage its open space maximizes the conservation, recreation, and aesthetic value of its open space by determining the best and most ecologically sound use for each acre of land holdings. By finding a balance between recreation and conservation, this approach could significantly ease the tensions between the two camps in Missoula that, at their extremes, see open space as either a playground or a wildlife preserve.

The Jefferson County Comprehensive Plan also suggests the strategy of using inventory and mapping techniques to prioritize open space land acquisition.<sup>126</sup> Geographic information systems (GIS) have reached the level of sophistication where the Missoula Open Space Program could easily employ the technology to inventory current parks and open space, and desired or potential open space. Through coordination with the planning office, potential and planned developments could be monitored and evaluated as to their impact on the open space system. A robust GIS could enable the Missoula Open Space Program to anticipate development pressure on open space cornerstones early enough to get involved in the development process in time to secure desired parcels of land.

---

<sup>126</sup> *The Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan*, 14.

## Personnel

With the exception of Santa Fe County, which is still in the process of developing its open space program, all of the open space programs in this study have many of the same types of personnel. As an ad hoc program, Santa Fe borrows many of these personnel from other county departments. For example, Missoula, Jefferson County, and Eugene all have trained planners on their staff. Santa Fe relies on the county planning department for its open space planning needs. Other common personnel types shared by at least two of these programs include maintenance, park design and development, urban forestry, acquisitions, and administrative and education services. Eugene is unique in that it has specialized employees working on wetlands issues.

All of the programs have citizen advisory committees. Citizen advisory committees are a critical link to the community and can be fundamental to the success of an open space program. By making specific recommendations to the city council based on a rigorous evaluation using an open space suitability criteria matrix, the Missoula Open Space Advisory Committee works to ensure that the community as a whole is involved in every open space acquisition. The citizens advisory committees in Jefferson and Santa Fe Counties have similar roles. Eugene's citizen advisory committee, the Mayor's Parks and Open Space Committee, made critical suggestions on an acquisition and funding plan that resulted in the passage of Eugene's major \$25 million parks and open space bond.<sup>127</sup>

While the Missoula Open Space Program shares many of the types of personnel as the other programs, in a number of cases this is because Missoula has one person

---

<sup>127</sup> Mayor's Parks and Open Space Committee, *Report: Final Recommendations*, 1.

doing tasks that would be handled by multiple employees in other programs. For example, Missoula has one person, the open space program manager, who handles all open space planning duties as well as new land acquisitions. Jefferson County has separate departments for those two tasks while Eugene has five landscape architects and a support person in its planning section.

The reason for these across the board discrepancies in personnel between the Missoula Open Space Program, Eugene, Jefferson County boils down to one critical factor: funding. Eugene's Parks and Open Space Division has an \$8 million annual budget and a staff of 85 full-time employees, 15 of whom work on open space issues. By comparison, the Missoula Parks and Recreation Department has an annual budget of \$2.3 million. Of the department's 45 employees, only one is dedicated to open space. The 1000 acres of conservation land managed by Eugene is less than one-third Missoula's 3500 acres.<sup>128</sup> The differences between the two programs in size and budget can be partially attributed to the fact that Eugene has more than double the population of Missoula. Other differences include the Missoula Parks and Recreation Department not handling storm water runoff issues and the Eugene Parks and Open Space Division not running a recreation program.

Despite those differences, it seems clear that Missoula's parks and open space program operates on a significantly smaller relative budget than Eugene and the other case study programs. Considering those significant budgetary and staff deficiencies, it is remarkable what the Parks and Recreation Department and Open Space Program has been able to achieve. Like many Montana agencies, the Missoula Parks and Recreation

---

<sup>128</sup> Donna Gaukler, Director Missoula Parks and Recreation, interviewed by author December 12, 2002.

Department has learned to do as much as possible with a limited budget and few employees.

Finally, Eugene's emphasis on public outreach and the success of its park and open space bond effort demonstrates the effectiveness of listening to what the public wants and understanding what it will support. The long list of failed park and open space funding measures in Missoula makes it clear that passing park and open space bonds or mill levies is not easy in this community. Therefore, it is critical to do extensive research before attempting to pass a tax increase. Eugene was successful in passing its \$25 million bond because of a five-month research effort that included surveys and a great deal of input from the public. Another reason for the bond's success was the diversity of spending projects it contained. Instead of targeting a specific segment of the population, the bond had something for everyone, resulting in broad community support. While Missoula has repeatedly failed to pass bonds or mill levies to fund specific projects such as open space acquisition or park development, a well thought out bond funding a wide range of community park and open space needs could be successful.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **THE FUTURE OF OPEN SPACE IN MISSOULA**

In the summer of 2002, residents of the Rattlesnake Valley noticed orange fencing and other signs of impending construction high on the Mount Jumbo Saddle. Inquiries soon revealed that a prominent doctor owned several large lots of buildable land surrounded on three sides by city open space where he planned to build his dream home. Many people, including some within the open space program, assumed that this open grassland just below the Jumbo Saddle was a part of the Mount Jumbo open space and thus protected from development. It was not.

The Upper Rattlesnake Neighborhood Council and other concerned citizens rallied to preserve the unbroken view of the Jumbo ridgeline, distributing a flier with the blaring headline “Mount Jumbo’s Skyline is Changing!” Opponents of the project soon learned that it was already a done deal. The only opportunity to raise objections was at a Board of Adjustments hearing where the property owner was requesting a 15 foot variance to exceed the 30-foot height limit. Scores of opponents attended the hearing and the variance request was denied, but construction went forward. The house now looms over neighborhoods at the base of Mount Jumbo, dominating the skyline. Visitors to Mount Jumbo are shocked to discover a massive house in the meadow where they once could watch white-tailed deer peacefully grazing.

The construction of the doctor’s dream home on the Mount Jumbo Saddle underscores the threat that open space in Missoula continues to face. Undeveloped areas valued as scenery, a trail connection or a peaceful place to walk the dog can come under construction seemingly overnight. The shock of seeing native bunch grass bulldozed off



a favorite prairie can spur citizens to action, but at that point it is too late. Preemptive action needs to be taken to ensure that Missoula's most valuable open spaces remain in their natural state and that new development takes place in areas where it is more appropriate. While vigilant citizens can watch guard their neighborhoods, ultimately it is the job of the Open Space Program and the Office of Planning and Grants (OPG) to safeguard Missoula's scenic vistas and natural lands.

More effort needs to be put into knowing in advance what areas of high quality open space are slated for development and taking appropriate action to bring those lands into the folds of the open space system. The Open Space Program needs to operate ahead of development, not picking up the scraps of marginal land unwanted by the developers. The Office of Planning and Grants needs to work with the Open Space Program so parks and open space planners know where developments are planned with enough lead time to take proactive action to ensure that the development benefits parks and open space. When a doctor is planning to build a trophy home in the center of an open space cornerstone, people need to be aware of it before the orange construction fencing is erected.

This chapter will look in depth at the challenges and opportunities the Missoula Open Space Program faces as it continues to develop. What steps need to be taken to complete the open space system envisioned by the authors of the open space plan? How should the Parks and Recreation Department streamline the stewardship of open space to the point where city ownership of conservation land is welcomed, if not desired? How can the Open Space Program meet the challenge of staying ahead of development and

proactively expanding the open space system while properly caring for city open space and providing Missoulians with the best possible outdoor experience?

## ***Challenges***

Following seven exciting years of major open space acquisitions, the Missoula Open Space Program now finds itself in its adolescence. With most of the 1995 Bond money spent and a host of new issues to grapple with, the program is ready to graduate to a new level of maturity. Like most adolescents, the program is still struggling to find its new identity, but is clearly making progress and is on track to emerge as a confident, sophisticated adult. The challenge the program now faces is to continue acquiring land while simultaneously developing and maintaining the open space system it now possesses.

A number of challenges face the Missoula Open Space Program. While some issues, such as land management, are the result of the Program's success and represent new areas of responsibility, other problems are a result of inaction or neglect. For example, the Open Space Program simply has not had the time or the resources to deal with small parks or to plan sufficiently for the next source of open space acquisition funding. Certain areas of the program's routine operations could be improved, resulting in greater efficiency and productivity. For instance, smoothing coordination with citizen groups and holding joint meetings with all parties involved with open space in Missoula could streamline the Open Space Program. Each of these issues is discussed in detail in the following section.

## Land Management

Missoulians are flocking to their newly acquired open space. Areas such as Mount Jumbo and the North Hills that once only saw light public use either by permission or trespass are now heavily used by hikers, mountain bikers, horseback riders, dog walkers, and paragliders. The old ranch roads and cow trails that provide access to this diverse group of users are being heavily impacted and new, user-created trails are proliferating. Occasional conflicts arise between users. Noxious weeds cover much of Missoula's open space, threatening its aesthetic value and wildlife habitat potential and drawing the ire of neighboring landowners. These management challenges are standard fare for land management organizations such as the U.S. Forest Service or the National Park Service, but this is new territory for the City of Missoula.

Missoula has not yet developed a solidly funded land management and maintenance program for its open space. The Open Space Program Manager is currently in charge of the management and maintenance of open space. The City Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for carrying out the maintenance of open space, but as Missoula's open space holdings have increased, there has been no comparable change in the department's budget. The lack of funding and staff for open space maintenance in the Parks Department, combined with the many other demands put on the Open Space Program Manager, have resulted in piecemeal management. The inconsistency of Missoula's open space maintenance efforts has frustrated some citizens, who see the skyrocketing use of popular open space areas such as Mount Jumbo and the North Hills taking a toll on the very natural values open space designation was meant to protect.

Compounding this problem is a lack of management plans for some of Missoula's newer pieces of open space. Originally it was thought that the Mount Jumbo Management Plan could be used as a template for future plans. However, developing management plans is time and labor intensive. The Mount Jumbo Management plan could not have been developed without the efforts of a good number of citizen volunteers. Repeating this process for every new area of open space acquired by the City will require a huge amount of time and energy and will prove to be overly cumbersome and impractical.

A solution to this dilemma is the development of one overall plan that would apply to all open space in Missoula. The plan could be modeled after the Mount Jumbo Plan, with sections dealing specifically with the various types of open space found in the Missoula system. When a new piece of land is acquired it would be a simple process to work it into the management plan, making whatever special provisions are necessary to accommodate any unique characteristics the property may possess.

In 1995 when the open space plan was written and the open space bond conceived, securing open space and protecting Missoula's open space cornerstones from development were seen as the top priorities. The authors of the open space plan believed that any discussion of what to do with open space land once it was acquired could harm the effort to pass the open space bond. Management was something that they thought could be figured out later. Now that time has come. Developing a "solidly funded land management and maintenance program" is a top priority for many of the people involved in the open space program. The Parks Department is working to fund a position that will focus on conservation land management, a critical step towards solving the maintenance

dilemma. As the Parks Department better integrates the Open Space Program, land management will be a high priority and a well planned, funded management strategy should emerge from that process.

### Planning

The focus on acquisition and management of open space has left a void in the open space program's planning efforts. When the Open Space Program moved to the Parks and Recreation Department, the open space planner position at the Office of Planning and Grants moved with it. However, long range planning has had to take a back seat to the more immediate acquisition and management needs of the Open Space Program. While a recent emphasis has been placed on the development of management plans for specific parks and open space, as well as a parks master plan, a number of areas of planning remain neglected.

Reinvigorated open space planning could dramatically bolster two areas of the open space program: funding and growth management. One of the most immediate threats to the program is a lack of funds for open space acquisition when the 1995 open space bond is exhausted. To date, little or no action has been taken to replenish the open space acquisition account. Because of the length of time that planning and executing a bond campaign requires, it is likely that the Open Space Program will run out of money for acquisition before a new source of money is found. Due to the opportunistic nature of the acquisition program, this could prove to be problematic if a highly desirable parcel of open space comes available while the program has no money. It is imperative that the Open Space Program actively seek out new sources of funding, including, but not limited to, another open space bond.

The other critical function of open space planning is tracking growth in the Missoula Valley. The Park and Trail Design and Development Manager currently handles subdivision review, ensuring that proposed subdivisions have adequate parks and do not compromise existing parks and open space. However, by the time a property reaches the subdivision review process, it is far too late to conserve it as open space. The Open Space Program needs to have a better notion of the long-range plans of owners of potential open space, especially within the open space cornerstone areas. Having a broader view of the likely long-range development scenarios in the Missoula Valley could allow the Open Space Program to move from opportunistic acquisitions to targeted, prioritized acquisitions that conserve at risk properties ahead of development. It is likely that closer communication with OPG will produce the knowledge needed to make this happen. Currently, however, neither OPG nor the Open Space Program seem to have the time or resources to conduct the kind of information sharing necessary.

The Open Space Program needs to make planning a priority. In a perfect world the program would have full-time planner on staff. Realistically, however, much could be accomplished through a reallocation of duties that relieves the Open Space Program Manager of some land management tasks, freeing time for planning.

### Citizen Involvement

Citizens have been directly involved in the Open Space Program through citizen boards. The Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC), City Park Board and subcommittees of those boards such as the Mount Jumbo Advisory Committee (MJAC), and the North Hills Advisory Committee are heavily involved in open space acquisition,

planning and management. These committees have made significant contributions to the Open Space Program.

However, there have been problems coordinating the efforts of citizen boards and city staff. As management of open space has become a bigger issue and higher priority, boards have become frustrated by what they see as the inability of staff to deal with pressing issues in a timely manner. There is a temptation for citizen boards to take matters into their own hands, generating projects that require heavy staff investment. Unfortunately, these actions can compound the problem by creating even more work for staff. Spread thin, staff workers are even more limited in what they are able to accomplish, resulting in more frustration for citizen boards.

Part of the problem may stem from the large number of boards, committees and subcommittees currently expecting staff support. Dissolving or redefining some of the boards and committees might help. Many of the citizen groups are reaching the end of their initial missions and need to redefine their role. There is currently no protocol for the maturation of citizen boards when they complete the projects around which they were initially formed. It is critical for boards and staff to continually clarify their respective roles and resolve how best to work together to achieve the needs of the Open Space Program.

### Agricultural Land and Parks

One criticism of the Open Space Program is that it has been ineffective at conserving open space ahead of development. Missoula is growing rapidly. Even as the majority of the country suffers through an economic slowdown, construction is booming in Missoula. Countless major construction projects can be found throughout the valley.

While most of the open space acquisitions have occurred in and around the foothills north and east of downtown, Missoula's construction activity is concentrated on the western and southern edges of town. Missoula's growth causes two major concerns. Will any of Missoula's agricultural land be spared from development? Will Missoula's newest neighborhoods have parks and areas for playing fields?

Much of the undeveloped land west of Missoula remains in agricultural production. While not usually open to public use, agricultural land can be valuable open space, providing visual and aesthetic relief from the built environment and serving as wildlife habitat. Agricultural land can also be very attractive to developers. As a result, rising property taxes often force family farmers and ranchers to sell their land for development. Keeping land in agricultural production retains the land's value as open space.

But preserving agricultural land presents challenges. The Open Space Program lacks the resources to manage agricultural land should it acquire it. The program should instead look for ways to preserve agricultural land as open space while allowing the owners to continue working the land. This can easily be done with conservation easements. Because Five Valleys Land Trust has already developed a successful conservation easement program in the Missoula Valley, the most expedient way for the Open Space Program to conserve agricultural land would be to support the work of Five Valleys Land Trust.

Five Valleys does not have funds to purchase development rights from ranchers. Instead it seeks donated conservation easements. But even donated easements can be expensive to put in place. The Open Space Program can contribute to the efforts of Five



Valleys Land Trust by providing funds for the purchase of development rights (PDR) or defraying the costs of implementing donated conservation easements. The agricultural land that could be protected through a city PDR program would be a great boon to the Open Space System.

As Missoula continues to grow it is important that a sufficient amount of neighborhood scale parks and open space is created to ensure that each new neighborhood is a livable community. While a number of parks have been created in new developments in the south hills, areas of intensive infill development are often left devoid of parks. The Emma Dickinson neighborhood, for example, is seeing an unprecedented level of infill development with no comparable park creation. There are few resources for park acquisition in Missoula, so neighborhoods and the Parks Department increasingly turn to the Open Space Bond. There is some debate as to whether Open Space Bond Money was intended for small parks, and whether city park acquisition is the responsibility of the Open Space Program or the Parks and Recreation Department.

There are two schools of thought about small park acquisitions. One views small parks as integral to a diverse and integrated park and open space system. The Open Space Program should put more energy and Open Space Bond money into the acquisition of small parks, this camp believes. Arguing that small parks are a legitimate component of the open space program, proponents of small park acquisition contend that community support for open space will dwindle if no land is acquired in neighborhoods where it is accessible.

Opponents of using Open Space Bond money for small park acquisition argue that it is the role of the Parks and Recreation Department, not the Open Space Program, to

research and acquire land for neighborhood parks. Small park acquisition was not mentioned in the ballot language of the Open Space Bond, they say. Furthermore, OSAC lacks the expertise of the Parks Department when it comes to evaluating potential parkland and it has not developed suitability criteria for small parks. Moreover, there are more funding options for small park acquisition than for large tracts of open space. Finally, opponents of small park acquisition fear that the higher prices generally paid for city parkland could set a dangerous precedent, driving up the price of large open space acquisitions.

As the Open Space Program and the Parks and Recreation Department continue to integrate, there will be opportunities for them to work together to develop a strategy for developing the City park system in conjunction with the Open Space System. In the mean time, small park acquisition should be looked at by OSAC on a case-by-case basis. Care should be taken to not set a precedent of open space money being used for park acquisition. There are more appropriate sources of funding for park acquisition, such as impact fees, cash-in-lieu funds, or special improvement districts. Small park acquisition should be considered when future sources of acquisition funding are researched.

It is imperative that Missoulians never take their protected and unprotected open spaces for granted. Missoula is growing rapidly, devouring large pieces of open land. Entire neighborhoods seemingly appear overnight. Will these new neighborhoods and commercial districts have parks where dogs can be walked and Frisbees can be thrown? Will there be special places where people can go to escape the rush of modern life? Unless Missoulians find a sustainable way to preserve open space and create new parks on pace with the rapid development of our remaining open land, a grim future awaits our

community. It is imperative that we all continue to support open space in Missoula, push for funding for the Parks and Open Space Program and land acquisitions and never take the open spaces that we treasure for granted.

### ***Opportunities***

In spite of some missed opportunities and other setbacks, much has been accomplished in Missoula since open space conservation was first mentioned in the 1968 Comprehensive Plan. The City of Missoula now has an open space plan and an open space program. The city and local land trusts are working with private landowners to protect open space. A successful citizens committee on open space works with the city's open space program to develop the city's open space system. Voters have demonstrated their desire for open space by passing two separate open space bonds. Most significantly, the City now owns nearly 4,000 acres of open space.

Sitting at a Missoula restaurant on a summer evening with alpenglow illuminating the golden slopes of Mount Jumbo and Mount Sentinel, one is reminded of the amazing achievements of the Missoula Open Space Program. The acquisition of two entire mountains and a downtown riverfront, so critical to the character of Missoula, is nothing short of remarkable. While Missoulians fret over missed opportunities to preserve open space and bicker over the management of the open space already protected, most communities would be simply in awe of the beauty and diversity preserved here. The myriad opportunities to add to this system of ridges, meadows, riverbanks, parks and hillsides are extraordinary.

The authors of the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan set a deadline of 2010

for the achievement of an urban area open space system.<sup>129</sup> Seven years into that fifteen-year planning period, a tremendous amount has been accomplished. While there is much more work remaining, the Missoula Open Space Program is on track to develop the sophisticated network of open spaces envisioned by the Open Space Plan by 2010. But attaining the Open Space Plan's vision will take a renewed community commitment to the objectives of the plan.

Missoula's open space system should be considered one of the premier systems in the country. Considering the relatively low price tag for such a large, diverse system, Missoulians should be very proud. While Missoula has but a fraction of the funding that many western communities enjoy for open space, we have made extraordinary use of the resources we do have. Though open space advocates in Missoula still face many challenges, the opportunity to complete the vision of the open space plan is extraordinary. It is not difficult to envision a future Missoula ringed with open space, trails and greenways linking parks, connecting them to the Clark Fork riverfront and to the hills surrounding Missoula, permanently protected for the public's enjoyment.

As one bikes, in this future Missoula, through the tunnel next to where the Milltown Dam once plugged the Clark Fork River and continues along the river trail all the way to its confluence with the Bitterroot River, they will think, what a remarkable community that thought to preserve this river, these hills, this farmland, this place. The golden hills surrounding Missoula, the river that runs through it, these are the things that make this place special, these are the things worth fighting for, these are the backbones of community.

---

<sup>129</sup> *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*, 17.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arendt, Randall, Elizabeth A. Brabec, Harry L. Dodson, Christine Reid, Robert D. Yaro. *Rural By Design: Maintaining Small Town Character*. Chicago: Planners Press, 1994.
- Arendt, Randall. *Growing Greener: Putting Conservation into Local Plans and Ordinances*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1999.
- The Citizens Advisory Committee on Open Space, Missoula Parks and Recreation Department, Missoula Office of Planning and Grants. *Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan*. Missoula, Montana, 1995.
- The City of Boulder Open Space Department. *Long Range Management Policies*. Boulder, Co: City of Boulder, 1995.
- City of Eugene Parks and Open Space Division, *Skinner Butte Park*. Eugene, Oregon, 2001.
- Desch, David Patrick. "Open Space in Missoula, Montana: A Case Study." University of Montana, 1983.
- Devlin, Sherry. "Neighbors question open-space idea: Some concerned problems will arise if city buys land on Clark Fork." *The Missoulian*, May 15, 2001.
- Edwards, Jim J. "Floodplain a waste of money (Letter to the editor)." *The Missoulian*, May 28, 2001.
- Gadbow, Daryl. "Deal to secure Cox family property expected today." *The Missoulian*, July 9, 2003.
- Gustanski, Julie Ann, Roderick H. Squires, ed. *Protecting the Land: Conservation Easements Past, Present, and Future*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000.
- Jefferson County Open Space, *The Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan*. Golden, Colorado: Jefferson County Open Space, 1998.
- Jefferson County Open Space, *Jefferson County Open Space Facts Sheet*. Golden, Co, 2001.
- Kadas, Mike. "The Value of Open Space in Missoula County Montana: An Economic Study Using Contingent Valuation." University of Montana, 1995.
- Kemmis, Daniel. "Resolution Number 5760.", 1995.

- Mayor's Parks and Open Space Committee. *Report: Final Recommendations*. Eugene, Oregon, 1998.
- Lane Council of Governments, *West Eugene Wetlands Plan*. Eugene, Oregon, 1992.
- Missoula Planning Board Staff, William C. Hollenbaugh, Karyn A. Robb. *Missoula County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan*. Missoula, MT: Missoula Planning Board Staff, 1976.
- Mount Jumbo Stewardship Subcommittee, The Citizens Advisory Committee on Open Space, The Missoula Parks and Recreation Department. *The Mount Jumbo Management Plan*. Missoula, MT, 1999.
- Nelson, Judy Ellen, Jock Beall. *West Eugene (Oregon) Wetlands Initiative*. Eugene, Oregon: Bureau of Land Management.
- Platt, Rutherford H. *Land Use and Society: Geography, Law, and Public Policy*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996.
- Stokes, Samuel N. , A. Elizabeth Watson, Shelley S. Mastran. *Saving America's Countryside*. 2nd ed. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- The Trust for Public Land, *Local Parks, Local Financing Volume 1*, 1998.
- The Trust for Public Land, *Creating a Greenprint: The Trust for Public Land*, 2001.
- The Western Governors' Association, the Trust for Public Land, the National Cattleman's Beef Association. *Purchase of Development Rights: Conserving Lands, Preserving Western Livelihoods*, 2001.
- Whyte, William H. Jr. "Urban Sprawl." In *The Exploding Metropolis*, ed. The Editors of Fortune, 133-156. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958.
- Wright, J. B. "Land trusts in the USA." *Land Use Policy* 9, no. 2 (1992): 83-86.
- Wright, J. B. "Designing and applying conservation easements." *Journal, American Planning Association* 60, no. 3 (1994): 380-388.