



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 15, 2009

Contact: Brian Schott, 406.261.6190

Travelers for Open Land Launches First State-Wide Collaborative Funding Program to Conserve Open Land

Partnership to Encourage Travelers to Help Protect Montana's Natural Horizons

Helena — The first state-wide program of its kind to seek voluntary contributions from travelers for private land conservation will be unveiled in a presentation at the Montana State Capitol Rotunda today at 1 p.m. Travelers for Open Land is a unique partnership between the Montana Innkeepers Association and other lodging properties, the Montana Association of Land Trusts, the Montana Community Foundation, Travel Montana, and the traveling public.

“Great landscapes are increasingly at risk,” said Jonathan Tourtellot, director of National Geographic’s Center for Sustainable Destinations. “Travelers for Open Land offers an opportunity for all visitors to help protect a destination that they love. Montana’s initiative sets an example for places everywhere.”

Research by the University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research has shown that the primary reasons people visit Montana are the vast open landscapes, river corridors, ranchlands, wildlife habitat, and tremendous outdoor recreation. Ten million annual visitors provide great economic and social benefits, but visitation also presents the challenge and responsibility of supporting conservation of irreplaceable and unforgettable Montana landscapes.

“I had been looking at research that clearly shows Montana’s top assets are our natural horizons and I asked myself who is protecting these assets?” said Mike Scholz, founder of the program. “Montanans have been getting behind land trust efforts and our program gives visitors the opportunity to add their support. We created Travelers for Open Land specifically based on the research we were seeing and created the voluntary program to protect Montana’s open lands.”

The purpose of Travelers for Open Land is to give visitors an opportunity to help preserve the core reasons Montana is a compelling place to visit and live. Funds will be collected either as an add-on to the room charge or with a special envelope available in each room.

A FUND TO CONSERVE MONTANA'S NATURAL HORIZONS



“This program not only supports the Montana tourism and recreation strategic plan, but also complements the Montana brand, specifically the primary reason people come to Montana, which is to experience our spectacular unspoiled nature,” said Betsy Baumgart, Administrator of the Montana Promotion Division. “We’ve supported Travelers from the start and we salute the individuals and organizations that have taken a unique idea and developed it into a national model of land protection and tourism promotion.”

When visitors stay at a participating property, lodging owners will seek a small \$1 or \$2 donation in support of the program. Member properties for the voluntary program include hotels, dude ranches, bed and breakfasts, outfitters with lodging, and other tourism-related properties and businesses.

“This is a progressive and forward-looking initiative that complements the vision of the lodging professionals who want to do their part in protecting open spaces for future generations,” said Stuart Doggett, executive director for the Montana Innkeepers Association. “Leaders in our industry understand the need to plan ahead and foster the unique features that lure visitors to our state, and that is why we find such strong support for the Travelers for Open Land program.”

As funds accumulate, they are awarded as grants to non-profit land trusts to protect valuable open lands throughout the state and to maintain a vibrant hospitality industry.

“The Montana experience is invariably an outdoor experience tied to open lands,” said Glenn Marx, executive director of the Montana Association of Land Trusts. “Travelers for Open Lands will be a huge asset in our ability to obtain voluntary conservation easements that can help maintain working farms and ranches, protect water quality, wildlife habitat, preserve open lands, and retain the values that make Montana such an attractive place to live, work and recreate.”

Travelers for Open Land is aligned with keeping tourism as a major economic force in Montana by conserving what are its major attractions—mountains, streams, wildlife, sight seeing and outdoor recreation.

“We’re on the verge of creating something extraordinary and it’s a completely voluntary program—from the landowner, to the hotel, to the guest,” added Scholz. “The small donations will all add up over time from travelers wanting to preserve Montana’s natural horizons.”

For more information, please visit www.travelersforopenland.org.

###

A FUND TO CONSERVE MONTANA'S NATURAL HORIZONS



Schedule of Events: April 15, 2009 — Montana State Capitol Rotunda

10 a.m. – Travelers for Open Land booth and display open

11:45 a.m. – Lunch served in the Rotunda courtesy of MacKenzie River Pizza

1:05 p.m. – Travelers for Open Land Program speaking presentations:

- Mike Scholz, Travelers for Open Land
- Betsy Baumgart, Travel Montana
- Stuart Doggett, Montana Innkeepers Association
- Linda Reed, Montana Community Foundation
- Glenn Marx, Montana Association of Land Trusts

1:15 p.m. – Participating lodging properties highlighted

1:15 to 2 p.m. – Travelers for Open Land Rotunda display open

Did you know?

- 71% of Montana visitors say that it's important to them that their visit does not damage the environment. 28,000 rooms are available each night across the state.
- According to the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, the top 5 attractions for first time travelers are Yellowstone National Park, Mountains/Forests, Glacier National Park, Open Space/Uncrowded Areas, Rivers, Wildlife/Fish, and Lakes. The top 3 activities are driving for pleasure, wildlife watching, and day hiking.
- Tourism and recreation is one of Montana's leading industries. In 2008, 10 million people visited Montana spending \$3 billion during their stay, with \$275 million of which was spent on lodging alone. Nearly 45,000 jobs are directly and indirectly supported by nonresident travel, resulting in over \$1 billion in total personal and proprietors' income for Montana residents.
- A major 2002 Geotourism Study by *National Geographic Traveler* magazine and the Travel Industry Association of America found that at least 55 million American adults can be classified as "geotourists" who look for authenticity and a distinctive destination character to immerse themselves in when they travel. This is a strong incentive for regions to protect and enhance natural and cultural assets for future visitors.



Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why was Travelers for Open Land created?

a. The program was created by the Montana Innkeepers Association and the Montana Association of Land Trusts, with assistance from Travel Montana, to provide a way for Montana residents and guests to make a voluntary contribution to protect Montana's open lands.

Q. Who can participate in Travelers for Open Land?

a. From a donation perspective, everyone. People can either donate on the website or through a stay at a participating lodging property. From a lodging property perspective, all hotels, dude ranches, B&B's, and outfitters with lodging are welcome to participate, as are other tourism-related industries.

Q. How is the donation money used?

a. The funds will be specifically used by non-profit land trusts to obtain voluntary conservation agreements called conservation easements from private landowners. Together, land trusts and landowners have been protecting private lands in Montana for over 30 years. Conservation easements protect working farms and ranches, protect water quality and wildlife habitat, conserve open lands and retain the values that make Montana such an attractive place to live, work and recreate.

Q. How will Montana visitors benefit from this program?

a. Virtually every public opinion survey conducted about Montana tourism indicates there are three main reasons why people come to Montana: Open lands, wildlife and outdoor recreation. Travelers for open lands directly and specifically protects open lands, wildlife habitat and helps maintain opportunities for outdoor recreation. These natural assets keep travelers coming back year after year and with the help of participating Travelers properties and thousands of small donations, Travelers for Open Land will help keep these natural assets intact over the years to come for everyone to experience.

Q. How will Montana residents benefit from this program?

a. Montanans have created, cultivated and maintained this special place, and treasure the state's mystique and majesty. Montanans are proud of our farm and ranch heritage, and value the state's working farms, ranches and forests. These open lands are essential not just to our way of life and our quality of life, but they are also essential to our economy and our future.



Q. Who manages the program and decides who receives grants?

a. The Travelers Grant Review Panel, which includes two board members and the Executive Director from the Montana Innkeepers Association, two board members and the Executive Director from the Montana Association of Land Trusts and one MIKA-approved Montana resident, reviews grant applications and awards funding based on a competitive grant application process. Grant application criteria explicitly requires a strong matching grant component, community support, cooperative partners and requires that projects must protect open lands, wildlife habitat, working farms/ranches, outdoor recreation, historic preservation or other important values held by Montana residents and guests.

Q. How much of the grant funds are spent on administration?

a. A very small portion—less than five percent—is spent on maintaining the fund and administering the program. There is a small cost associated with collecting the contributions, maintaining information in the participating hotels and motels and administering the funds. The funds are managed by the Montana Community Foundation to ensure transparency and accountability for every dollar contributed to the program.

Q. Can anyone request a grant from the Travelers for Open Land fund?

a. Only Montana Association of Land Trust members can submit grant proposals to support projects throughout the state. MALT promotes and supports excellence in private voluntary land conservation and is comprised of these 12 private, nonprofit members:

- Prickly Pear Land Trust
- Gallatin Valley Land Trust
- The Trust for Public Land
- Flathead Land Trust
- Montana Land Reliance
- Five Valleys Land Trust
- Bitterroot Land Trust
- The Conservation Fund
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Vital Ground Foundation
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Conservancy

Q. How does the grant work?

a. Montana Association of Land Trust members submit grant applications to the Travelers for Open Land program twice per year. The application must meet three essential criteria:



1. Funds are for conservation easements (no staff or administrative grants, and no fee title purchase of property.)
2. The proposed voluntary conservation agreement has broad-based community support.
3. Money from Travelers for Open Land is matched three to one (with a one to one cash match) by the requesting land trust. Another priority is that the funds be distributed for projects throughout the state.

Q. What do land trusts do?

a. Land trusts work with private landowners to obtain voluntary conservation easements that can help private land owners to maintain working farms and ranches, protect water quality, protect wildlife habitat, preserve open lands and retain the values that make Montana such an attractive place to live, work and recreate. Land trusts are private, nonprofit groups that specialize in private land conservation and conservation easements.

Q. What kind of lands would be eligible for a grant under Travelers for Open Lands?

a. Eligible lands must have conservation values. In other words, eligible lands must be worthy of conserving. They must contain wildlife or wildlife habitat, must be open and undeveloped (and stay that way) for the scenic enjoyment of the public, must preserve lands for outdoor recreation, or must protect riparian areas for fish.

Q. Why is the Travelers for Open Land Program important to the hospitality industry?

a. It's important for what it does, how it works, and its lasting benefits. The program demonstrates a commitment from the Montana hospitality industry as a vital and involved corporate citizen. The program allows the hospitality industry to partner with our guests, communities, landowners, and land trusts to conserve landscapes that we all respect and cherish.

Q. What does the Travelers for Open Land program want to accomplish?

a. The program is designed to protect open lands, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat—the reasons people visit Montana and what makes Montana so special to all of us. The partnership created by Travelers for Open Land is a friendly, voluntary way to sustain our way of life, what we value, and why we value it.