

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ABBREVIATED MINUTES

August 13th, 2009  
5:15 – 7:30 pm

**Present:**

Tim Aldrich  
Mary Manning  
Jed Little  
Jeff Stevens  
Gary Knudsen  
Ethel MacDonald  
Ginny Fay, Park Board Rep  
Adam Liljebblad

**Absent:**

Peter Bugoni  
Bob Clark  
Maureen Hartman  
Karen Knudsen

Also Present: Jackie Corday, Open Space Program Mgr, County Open Lands Advisory Committee members, Mike Mueller (RMEF), Becky & Denny Anderson (Ranch owners)

**Spooner Creek Ranch - Miller Creek**

Members visited the 207 acre Spooner Creek Ranch owned by Becky & Denny Anderson that RMEF has proposed to obtain a conservation easement upon. The ranch is located in the upper Miller Creek Valley about a 20-25 minute drive from the Hwy 93 & Miller Creek Road intersection (approximately 12 miles). The non-cultivated areas of the property consist of a variety of plant communities including Ponderosa pine dominated forest, aspen groves, grassland, and wetland areas. The ranch has been owned by the Anderson family since 1966.

Current Uses – The ranch consists of approximately 120 forested acres and about 68 acres are used for sub-irrigated hay pasture. The Andersons have a number of horses, but have not had cattle for many years. There are 3 residences on the property: the Anderson's home and two smaller rental houses. The C.E. terms create two Residential Lot Sites (RLS); one is 5 acres in size and includes the Anderson's home and several outbuildings and the other is 10 acres and contains the two rental houses plus 6 outbuildings and a riding arena. No additional residential buildings will be allowed but other outbuildings may be constructed within the 5 or 10 acre RLSs. Any new outbuilding must be setback 150' or more from Miller and Spooner Creeks.

Surrounding land - The ranch is adjacent to land owned by USFS, The Nature Conservancy (part of the Montana Legacy project), and the 1000+ acre Wegener ranch. The large majority of land in the Upper Miller Creek Valley is owned by USFS, TNC, and State Lands.

Wildlife & Habitat - The property supports and is habitat for approximately 150-200 elk that utilize the land throughout the year. Other wildlife often sited in the area include black bear, mountain lion, moose, gray wolf, mule and white-tailed deer, turkey, beaver, blue and spruce grouse, as well as numerous small mammals and birds. The property is part of an important wildlife linkage zone that connects the Sapphire Mountains with the Bitterroot Valley. Spooner and Millers Creeks run through the property, both of which support native westslope cutthroat trout. Because no grazing occurs along the stream banks, the riparian vegetation is lush and diverse. Mary was very happy to see the healthy vigorous riparian vegetation along the banks of Miller Creek. The Andersons informed us that they had planted 169

cottonwoods and willows last year along the creek. About 50% survived and they plan to continue planting more trees and shrubs.

Scenic Value – Although public access will not be allowed due to the nature of the property (working ranch), the public does already take advantage of viewing wildlife in the pastureland from Miller Creek Road that runs adjacent to the hay fields where the elk often gather. The farmland itself is also very scenic.

Public Values – The proposed conservation easement will help to protect the water quality of both Spooner and Miller Creeks, protects significant wildlife habitat, elk summer and winter range, and wildlife corridor, conserves a working farm and ranch, manages growth, and provides an open and scenic landscape viewable from a public road. Approximately 50% of the soil is identified as "prime" or "local importance" by the Natural Resource and Conservation Services.

Proposed Funding – The conservation easement was recently appraised at \$1,800,000. RMEF has requested funding as follows: \$175,000 from the County O.S. Bond funds, \$25,000 from the City O.S. Bond funds, and a \$1,600,000 landowner donation. The Anderson's will also incur \$33,000 in costs (appraisal, baseline report, stewardship costs, closing costs) and RMEF will have incurred \$23,117 (legal & staff time & office expenses).

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm with the next meeting date scheduled for 4:00 – 5:30 on Thursday, September 10<sup>th</sup> at Currents.