



# Gallatin County, Montana

311 West Main Street, Bozeman, MT 59715



## Open Space Bond

The Gallatin County Open Space Bond was passed by the voters in the fall of 2000. The bond, in the amount of \$10 million dollars, is for the purpose of preserving open space in Gallatin County by purchasing land and conservation easements from willing landowners for the following purposes: managing growth, preserving ranches and farms, protecting wildlife habitat and water quality of streams and rivers, providing parks and recreation areas.

The Gallatin County Commission appointed a 15 member citizens' advisory committee, (Gallatin County Open Lands Board) to oversee the grant program. The Open Lands Board reviews all applications and makes project funding recommendations to the County Commissioners who have the authority to spend the bond money.

By County resolution the Commissioners must appoint a majority of ranchers and farmers to serve on the Open Lands Board. The mission statement of the Open Lands Board is to work with the citizens of Gallatin County to preserve natural lands and encourage the economic viability of agriculturally productive lands. This is accomplished through voluntary programs that ensure the protection of open-space lands, either in perpetuity or for a term of years; and through the identification or establishment of funding sources, tax measures and other incentives. By law the County Commissioners must hold public hearings explaining what projects have been recommended for funding from the bond money. This process allows full public disclosure and input.

### **Bond Language:**

Shall the Board be authorized to issue and sell general obligation bonds of the county, in the amount of up to Ten Million and No/100 Dollars (\$10,000,000.00), for the purpose of preserving open space in Gallatin County by purchasing land and conservation easements from willing landowners for the following purposes: managing growth, preserving ranches and farms, protecting wildlife habitat and water quality of streams and rivers, providing parks and recreation areas and paying costs associated with the sale and issuance of general obligation bonds, which bonds shall bear interest at a rate to be determined by the Board, payable semiannually during a term of not to exceed twenty (20) years and redeemable on any interest payment date after one-half of their term, with all expenditures based on recommendations of the Open Lands Board (citizens' advisory committee), after public comment, and subject to an independent audit?

One of the goals of the Gallatin County Open Space Preservation Program is to place as many acres as possible in conservation easements, providing open space and preserving the agriculturally productive land and its rich community heritage. When families in agriculture are faced with financial need, they are often forced to sell their land. The bond money creates a grant pool to which land owners can apply for funds. In exchange for financial compensation, their land (or a portion of it) would be placed in a conservation easement keeping the land in agricultural production and preserving open space in perpetuity, as well as maintaining the economic viability of the ranch or farm. The grant money received does not have to be paid back. Farmers, ranchers, and other land owners, individuals, government entities, organizations, or businesses may apply for open space grants. The applications must meet the criteria set forth by the Open Lands Board. Grant money can be used for projects that will support the goals of

open space preservation.

### **Selections Criteria**

Give a description of the physical location of the property (i.e. distance and location from nearest town) and the amount of acreage proposed for easement, and/or purchase, along with appropriate maps or aerial photos:

#### **SECTION IV. CRITERIA DOCUMENTATION**

The following 11 criteria will assist the Open Lands Board in prioritizing which projects will receive funding. Please explain how your project will meet the following criteria. Please limit your responses to one page per criteria:

##### **Prime agriculture crop, range, and forest land**

A higher priority will be given to land with historical ties to agriculture and where the preservation of this land will maintain the rural landscape and important view shed areas.

##### **Size and configuration of land**

A higher priority will be given to projects of 640 or more acres of land. The configuration will be considered, giving a higher priority to land enhancing all of the selection criteria.

##### **Positive social and economic impacts**

A higher priority will be given to applications that promote and maintain economic viability of the agriculture industry, thereby benefitting the community's social and economic stability.

##### **Wildlife habitat and wildlife movement corridors**

A higher priority will be given to areas containing basic habitat components needed to support diverse, healthy, and viable fish and wildlife species. The more of these components there are and the more juxtaposition there is of these components in any given area, the more important this area will be to fish and wildlife species diversity. These components are food, cover, water, and open space.

##### **Riparian areas and wetlands**

A higher priority will be given to land that has perennial or intermittent streams, rivers, ponds and/or wetlands. Preservation of this land will help maintain the quality of surface water and underground aquifers.

##### **Development pressures**

A higher priority will be given to land that is currently for sale or in the process of conversion to uses other than agriculture or open space. Consideration will be given for urgency in decision making because of development probability.

##### **Recreational value**

A higher priority will be given to land for recreational consideration that will provide regional benefits. Consideration for recreational use will be given land that has suitable topography, soils, vegetation, size, and environmental education possibilities. The area should have optimal potential for social, cultural, and or athletic activities.

##### **Within designated preservation areas**

A higher priority will be given to land that is located in an area that has been identified for preservation in accordance with the County's growth policy.

##### **Acceptable contract**

A higher priority will be given to an application in which cost, conditions, and terms support the goals and objectives of the Gallatin County open space program.

Close or next to existing preserved areas

A higher priority will be given to land that adjoins or is close to an area already preserved by conservation easement or designated for public use.

Away from existing development

A higher priority will be given to applications on the basis of relation to existing development.

**Grant Application Process**

Funding cycles or grant application deadlines are May 15th, and November 15th. Application packets can be obtained by writing or calling:

Gallatin County Open Lands Board

311 West Main, Room 304

Bozeman, MT 59715

Phone: (406) 582-3178

Email: Michael Harris, Coordinator

Applications must be submitted by a qualified government entity, land trust or sponsoring organization.

Grant are only awarded for purchase or donation of land or development rights or transaction costs related to conservation easement.

Funding cannot be used for construction of recreational facilities, operation and maintenance, or administrative costs.