

## **PROTECTING PUBLIC RESOURCES ON PRIVATE LAND: ADAPTING BUSINESS STRATEGIES TO CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND DEMANDS**

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Plum Creek is the largest private forest landowner in the United States with 7.4 million acres in 19 states and 1.1 million acres in Montana. While Plum Creek's core business is timber management, real estate transactions have always been a part of the business, including conservation transactions and land sales to private entities. Conservation strategies, beyond easements and sales, are integrated into routine management efforts including adherence to the standards of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative ®, habitat conservation plans, cooperative

agreements, and land exchanges. Since 1989, conservation transactions to public agencies, conservation organizations, and timber companies have accounted for 81 percent of all Plum Creek land sales in Montana. Additionally, conservation easements sold to public agencies in Montana have amounted to more than 149,000 acres and include one of the largest easements completed in the U.S. Private parties seeking Montana property increasingly want to be viewed as “green” and consequently are more receptive to deed restrictions and protection practices that address public resources, such as grizzly bears and native fish habitat. The “recipe” for success in conservation land transactions includes (1) availability of large, strategically important tracts, (2) willingness by Plum Creek to work with innovative partnerships, and (3) patience; and adherence to a “win-win” strategy for the company and the public. The potential for future conservation transactions in Montana will hinge on finding creative financing solutions and incorporating active forest management provisions to support local timber-based economies. The Montana Working Forest Project, seeking to transfer 320,000 acres of Plum Creek property to federal, state, and other private ownership is an example of this type of conservation transaction.