

## LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND Project Data Sheet

**Agency:** Bureau of Land Management

**Fiscal Year:** 2023

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**Project/ Unit:** CA National Historic Trail

**Priority:** 1

**State(s):** CA

**Congressional District(s):**

CA-1, NV-2

**Location:**

The Nobles Emigrant Trail, a branch of the California National Historic Trail, is located in Shasta, Tehama, Plumas, and Lassen counties in California and Washoe County, Nevada. The trail begins in Nevada in the Smoke Creek Desert and runs west to its terminus in Shasta City, California.

Land/Cost	Acres	\$
Estimate for FY 2023	1,748	\$ 2,000,000
Acquired to Date	0	\$ 0
Remaining to be Acquired	6,600	\$ 6,600,000

**Project Description:**

The California National Historic Trail (CNHT - Nobles Emigrant segment) was developed in 1851 and was used as a cutoff for the Humboldt Trail in Nevada.

BLM manages 38 miles of the trail and is an iconic focus for the area, which is rich in historic and cultural resources. Numerous wagon roads and military routes crossed the area in the mid-to-late 19th century. Sections and traces of many of these trails remain today. Perhaps the most significant and intact is the Nobles Emigrant Trail.

Along the trail are numerous cultural sites, wildlife, wild horses and burros, water resources, geologic features, and open sage flats. Historic and heritage resources are an integral part of the visitor experience. With the lack of development in the area and unchanged landscape, members often experience what it was like in the 19th century.

This trail is also located near an easily accessible, well-maintained public road. There are many historic features along the trail; one of the more significant is the Smoke Creek Station. The Station was a Civil

War-era military post on the Nobles Trail used to check travelers entering California during the war and was a stop on the military supply route between Fort Churchill, Nevada and Fort Bidwell, California.

**Purpose / Need:**

The proposed acquisition parcels contain priority greater sage-grouse (GRSG) and wildlife habitat, fisheries, special status species, sites with cultural and historical significance or recreational value, and water. These ranches tie together, making both properties a perfect combination to protect and enhance resources in the area.

Acquiring the parcels enhances recreational opportunities and improves access. The parcels contain potential campground sites and trails and would open fishing and hunting access to 9.7 miles of creek, a small reservoir, and a spring-fed pond.

Access - The ranch is almost completely surrounded by public lands. Creating contiguous public land ownership would allow the BLM to plan projects to improve rangeland health, administer grazing, and improve access to the 11,000 acres of public lands to the north and south of the parcels, including new access points for hikers and outdoor enthusiasts. Existing access in the adjacent Wilderness Study Areas is fairly limited.

Species of Concern - This property provides important habitat for sage steppe species, including greater sage-grouse, and a variety of migratory birds (nesting waterfowl/shorebirds). Priority greater sage grouse habitat has some of the largest riparian meadows in the area. (cont. on p. 3)

**Cooperator(s):**

**Government Entities:** Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW); NGOs: Ducks Unlimited, Friends of Nevada Wilderness and Western Rivers. Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) is working with the landowner to repurchase the property.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have completed numerous projects on the property to improve its health. The local Tribes wish to see the area conserved and protected from development that would result in impacts to the historic trail and cultural sites.

Savings/Cost	Start-up	Annual
Estimated O&M Savings:	Startup: \$ 0	Annual: \$ 0
Estimated O&M Costs:	Startup: \$ 10,000	Annual: \$ 1,000

**Describe O&M:**

Labor, signage, kiosk, dispersed camping items (picnic tables, fire rings) could all be proposed if the parcels are acquired. These items are on hand and easy to install.

**Additional Space for Content Overflow****Purpose / Need (cont.)**

Water - Numerous springs are on the property, as well as 9.7 miles of Rush and Smoke Creeks. Water rights would be included with the acquisition to keep this area well flooded during the dry months.

Cultural/Historical - The California National Historic trail (Nobles Emigrant Trail) is within the Smoke Creek ranch and just south to the Rush Creek ranch. The BLM already manages 38 miles of the trail and this acquisition would provide continuity of management for this important historical resource. Securing the ranch would prevent future development and safeguard the viewshed from the trail. There are numerous cultural resource sites including petroglyphs in the area and on the ranch.

Recreation/Hunting & Fishing - Ranch is located in the California hunting zone X5B for mule deer and the Lassen Zone for pronghorn and the Nevada hunting unit 015 for mule deer and pronghorn. Chukar partridge, California Valley quail, and migratory waterfowl use the property heavily because of the habitat and water it provides. Fishing access to the Rush Creek Ranch pond is a unique resource in this area because it is not near any other public fishing opportunities other than Smoke Creek to the east. Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) plans to stock portions of the creek with sport species, including trout and some warm water species. An old homestead near a grove of cottonwood trees on Rush Creek and numerous spots on Smoke Creek would make ideal established campsites.

## LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND Project Data Sheet

**Agency:** Bureau of Land Management

**Fiscal Year:** 2023

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**Project/ Unit:** Big Hole River Access

**Priority:** 2

**State(s):** MT

**Congressional District(s):**

MT-At Large

**Location:**

Southwest Montana: 20 miles south of Butte along the Big Hole River corridor. Includes portions of Silver Bow, Beaverhead, and Deer Lodge Counties.

Land/Cost	Acres	\$
Estimate for FY 2023	3,250	\$ 11,300,000
Acquired to Date		
Remaining to be Acquired	11,750	\$ 33,700,000

**Project Description:**

The Big Hole River Access Acquisition project area overlaps with the Upper Big Hole River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), as designated by the Butte Resource Management Plan (2009). The FY 2023 request consists of one parcel spanning 3,250 acres that will secure public access to the renowned Big Hole River and adjacent BLM, U.S. Forest Service, and State of Montana Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area (WMA) lands. The Big Hole River, a blue-ribbon trout fishery, attracts anglers from across the Nation in pursuit of Arctic grayling, westslope cutthroat trout, brook trout, and other iconic mountain fish. Acquisition will provide new access to the Big Hole River and the property and improve access to existing BLM and other public lands adjacent to the parcel. Montana Highway 43, which borders approximately 3 miles of the parcel, and existing ranch roads provide motorized vehicle access to the parcel. Dramatic scenic views will be maintained once the parcel is acquired. No construction is necessary to facilitate access to the parcel.

**Purpose / Need:**

The proposal is to acquire 3,250 acres adjacent to the Mount Haggin State Wildlife Management Area. Fragmentation of the Big Hole watershed through subdivision and development is a threat to habitat and public access. Acquisition of this property will contribute to the ecological function of this area, provide high-quality hunting and fishing, and ensure a wide variety of public recreational opportunities to some of Montana's finest fish and wildlife resources.

Acquisitions within the Big Hole SRMA will support several Department of the Interior priorities. Specifically, conserving lands and waters protects biodiversity and facilitates natural climate solutions by limiting habitat fragmentation and conversion of land to rural residential subdivision. BLM management through its Healthy Forests Initiative strengthens resilience to climate change through increased carbon sequestration on forestlands. Critical riparian areas are found in the extensive willow bottomlands along Seymour Creek and throughout the SRMA. The Big Hole SRMA is located within Montana's Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Anaconda Range to Big Hole Watershed priority big-game winter range and migration corridor. The watershed serves as a crucial linkage corridor between the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the Northern Continental Divide recovery zones for grizzly bear (listed T&E species) and Canada lynx. Acquisitions will enhance public access for numerous recreational activities by acquiring Big Hole River frontage and connecting/consolidating existing U.S. Forest Service, BLM, and State lands, including the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area. The Flathead, Shoshone, and Lemhi Tribes use the area to continue their aboriginal hunting and gathering Treaty rights, and, as a result, acquisitions within the SRMA will strengthen government-to-government relations with the Tribes and support Tribal communities' access opportunities. (cont. on p. 3)

**Cooperator(s):**

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Trout Unlimited, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Big Hole Watershed Committee, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Anaconda Sportsmen's Club, and Skyline Sportsmen's Association.

Savings/Cost	Start-up	Annual
Estimated O&M Savings:	Startup: \$ 0	Annual: \$ 0
Estimated O&M Costs:	Startup: \$ 40,000	Annual: \$ 5,000

**Describe O&M:**

River access improvements, trailhead development, interpretive kiosk, noxious weed management.

**Additional Space for Content Overflow**

**Purpose / Need** (cont.): The Continental Divide Trail brings thru-hikers within approximately 1 mile of the parcel as they travel through the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. Managers of the SMRA acknowledge the heavy use of recreational facilities by visitors during the spring, summer, and fall and the attractiveness of the area as a destination for visitors.

Recreation opportunities highlighted in the RMP include semi-developed camping, fishing, floating, hunting, hiking, and wildlife and scenic viewing. Acquisition will complement the management goals and existing visitor uses in the SRMA by opening additional lands to public use and creating a contiguously owned parcel of land.

Acquisition will conserve habitat for elk, mule deer, pronghorn, moose, and other migratory and resident wildlife. The parcel provides winter range and calving habitat for approximately 250 elk, winter range for 20 moose, and summer range and fawning areas for pronghorn.

Protecting the ecological function of terrestrial and aquatic habitat within the Big Hole River Watershed will ensure habitat for wild populations of several sensitive fish species. Approximately 2 miles of the Big Hole River and approximately 2 miles of Seymour Creek flow alongside and through the parcel. The pristine waters and intact terrestrial habitat surrounding them support fluvial Arctic grayling and trout species, such as westslope cutthroat, brook, brown, and rainbow trout. The Big Hole River and its tributaries, such as Seymour Creek, provide a refuge for the last wild population of fluvial Arctic grayling in the lower 48. Acquisition of this sizable parcel will ensure that habitat remains intact for terrestrial and aquatic wildlife currently using the project area and those that may expand their ranges into the project area.

## LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND Project Data Sheet

**Agency:** Bureau of Land Management

**Fiscal Year:** 2023

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**Project/ Unit:** Upper Snake/South Fork Snake River ACEC/SRMA and Tex Creek WMA

**Priority:** 3

**State(s):** ID

**Congressional District(s):**

ID-2

**Location:**

Southeast Idaho, 20 miles northeast of Idaho Falls, ID. Parcels are located in Bonneville, Jefferson and Madison Counties.

Land/Cost	Acres	\$
Estimate for FY 2023	2,413	\$ 6,250,000
Acquired to Date	12,199	\$ 38,156,057
Remaining to be Acquired	2,314	\$ 11,000,000

**Project Description:**

Born of snowmelt and springs among high ridges of Yellowstone country, the 42,900-acre Upper Snake/South Fork Snake River project (South Fork, Henry's Fork and Main Snake Rivers) is an area like no other in the West. Gliding through mountains, canyons, and meadows, and the vast farmlands of the Snake River plains; this area is a valuable, biodiverse, and unique ecosystem in Idaho. The BLM designated the Snake River an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in 1985 and it is considered Idaho's #1 Priority Wetland based on resource values and threats to the river (Idaho Parks & Recreation report) and the last well-developed cottonwood riparian-wetland ecosystem in Idaho (USBOR 2014). A portion of the Snake River ACEC is eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and there are WSA islands within the river corridor.

The riparian corridor, lined with commanding cottonwood galleries (largest in the western United States) and a lush shrub understory, sustains a broad variety of plants, fish, birds, and wildlife populations. It is the only home for the Federally threatened Ute ladies'-tresses orchid in Idaho and the Federally threatened Yellow-billed cuckoo. USFWS designated much of the ACEC as Critical Habitat for Yellow-billed cuckoo in 2021. The project area is a world-famous blue-ribbon fishery, supporting the largest wild Yellowstone cutthroat trout population outside of Yellowstone National Park, and provides multiple wildlife migration corridors and habitat connectivity including habitat for the expanding Yellowstone National Park grizzly bear population, a Federally threatened species. The area provides crucial habitat for 126 bird species (most of them neotropical migrants), including the majority of Idaho's bald eagle production (with 27 nesting territories) and has been designated as a Nationally Important Bird Area.

### **Purpose / Need:**

The fee acquisition (1,963 acres) and conservation easement (450 acres) will support the Administration's priorities and key principles for guiding conservation efforts. Specifically, by conserving lands and waters to protect biodiversity and help address natural climate solutions (e.g., helps limit conversion of lands to subdivision). This project would expand opportunities for improving habitats and big-game migration corridors. In many cases, the acquisition of lands in fee managed by the BLM, ensure greater access to public lands and waters for current and future generations. These acquisitions would secure greater access for the public for a variety of different outdoor recreation opportunities and conserve significant big game migration corridors and crucial winter range. Additionally, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes rely heavily on this area to continue their aboriginal hunting and gathering Treaty rights.

Blacktail Ranch: Fee acquisition of 1,963 acres, and incorporation into the Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) would add significant value to landscape-level habitat protection for wintering big game, and wildlife species designated as Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) species of greatest concern and/or BLM Sensitive species. BLM is currently working with the Conservation Fund (TCF), IDFG and landowner regarding this acquisition. IDFG has been working with Bonneville Power Administration, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Teton Regional Land Trust and BLM for numerous years to protect properties within or adjacent to the Tex Creek WMA.

### **Cooperator(s):**

The Conservation Fund, Teton Regional Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Local county & municipal support, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Bonneville Power Administration, Ducks Unlimited, Trout Unlimited, Henrys Fork Foundation, Henrys Fork Legacy Project, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rocky Mt. Elk Foundation, Heart of the Rockies Initiative

Savings/Cost	Start-up	Annual
Estimated O&M Savings:	Startup: \$ 10,000	Annual: \$ 2,000
Estimated O&M Costs:	Startup: \$ 75,000	Annual: \$ 7,000

**Describe O&M:**

Savings are from partner contributions towards the acquisition process. Annual savings are from partner contributions for annual conservation easement stewardship.

Start up costs would be signing conserved properties and annual conservation easement stewardship. Information and interpretive signing would also be needed on the properties for public access. Upon fee acquisition of the parcels, the field office would need to develop public parking areas or access to the parcels. There could be removal and installation of fences. Information and interpretive signing would also be needed on the properties. Restoration may occur on some of the parcels.

**Additional Space for Content Overflow****Project Description**

The Upper Snake/South Fork Snake River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) designated in 1985 provides diverse water based recreational opportunities for over 250,000 visitors per year. The majority of the visitation is to fish the blue-ribbon native cutthroat trout population found on the Snake River. The Snake River is a culturally and economically valuable natural resource in the Eastern Idaho Region. Besides providing irrigation for millions of acres of agricultural land, the river is also an international draw for recreational opportunities, which provides an inflow of cash to local economies. The first World Fly Fishing Championship in North America took place on the South Fork in 1997. A March 26, 2004 USA Today article highlighted the Henry's Fork as one of the top ten places to fly fish. The Jackson One Fly Competition is held each year on the South Fork, taking advantage of a world-class blue-ribbon trout fishery. According to an economic report (Loomis, 2005) fishing and boating within the project area supports 350 jobs and generates \$12 million in income.

Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a mosaic of public lands that include US Bureau of Reclamation lands, BLM managed lands and IDFG lands that collectively protect 35,000 acres of foothills habitat. The WMA provides crucial, irreplaceable winter range for 4,000 elk, 3000 mule deer and several hundred moose. The WMA winter range supports mule deer and elk from major portions of four Game Management Units and is vital to maintaining regional big game hunting opportunities.

This project area shares a contiguous boundary with the Caribou-Targhee National Forest and serves as a national model for working with private landowners and partners for land conservation and providing access for recreation. The project strategically utilizes conservation easements and land acquisition to preserve the unique values of this area. The Conservation Fund and Teton Regional Land Trust (TRLT) are working with the private landowners to coordinate the sale of the parcels and negotiate the terms of conservation easements.

**Purpose/Need**

The Blacktail Ranch abuts Tex Creek WMA along a 7.125-mile shared boundary. The property possesses agricultural fields, canyon lands, brush stringers, and rock outcrops located on the west side of Willow Creek canyon. Acquisition of the Ranch would prevent habitat fragmentation that would inhibit wildlife use (especially in winter) on adjacent WMA lands. Mule deer and elk regularly use the Ranch throughout the winter especially as snows deepen to access forage and thermal cover. During heavy winters the majority of Tex Creek's 7,000 plus wintering ungulates are often on or within two miles of this property

with >1,500 mule deer and 2,000 elk documented on the property during winter months. Public access to the western portions of Tex Creek WMA would be significantly enhanced with BLM acquisition.

## LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND Project Data Sheet

**Agency:** Bureau of Land Management

**Fiscal Year:** 2023

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**Project/ Unit:** Pipe Fork Port Orford Cedar Research Natural Area (RNA) Addition / Medford District

**Priority:** 4

**State(s):** OR

**Congressional District(s):**

OR-4

### Location:

The Pipe Fork Port Orford Cedar RNA Addition is located in the Siskiyou Mountains in Josephine County, 6 miles south of Williams, Oregon. The project is within the headwaters of the Pipe Fork watershed, flowing into Williams creek.

Land/Cost	Acres	\$
Estimate for FY 2023	320	\$ 500,000
Acquired to Date	0	\$ 0
Remaining to be Acquired	0	\$ 0

### Project Description:

The Pipe Fork Port Orford Cedar Research Natural Area (RNA) Addition project involves the acquisition of a parcel which borders the BLM 529-acre Pipe Fork RNA. This RNA was designated in the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan to sustain the eastern-most grove of the Port Orford cedar in Oregon. It also conserves the steep highly erodible granitic soils found in this watershed. The south half of the grove is within the RNA, while the north half is located on the parcel. In addition, this parcel is surrounded on three sides by BLM property with a land use allocation of Late Successional Reserve (LSR) from the 2016 BLM Southern Oregon Resource Management Plan. This property shares the qualities of LSR and acquisition would enhance ecological value and become more easily manageable as a contiguous block.

The acquisition would support management objectives of the Pipe Fork RNA and the surrounding LSR BLM land. This RNA and late-seral high elevation coniferous forest are a high priority management asset on the BLM.

**Purpose / Need:**

This purpose of the project is to acquire 320 acres of land and add it to the existing RNA. Acquisition and addition to the Pipe Fork RNA is consistent with the programmatic 2016 BLM Southwestern Oregon Resource Management Plan. With the entire Port Orford cedar grove within the RNA, this biological gem will be in a durable state of resource conservation.

The parcel is threatened by a proposed timber sale on lands with steep mountainsides with deeply weathered and unstable slopes, within 30 yards of Pipe Fork creek. The creek is the main water source for the community of Williams, Oregon, located seven miles downstream of Pipe Fork creek. Acquiring this property will protect this source of pure, cold, plentiful water to the Williams Valley. The local community supports selling the parcel to the BLM for protection.

The Pipe Fork parcel lies within the territory of the Applegate Athapaskans (Dakubetede) who occupied the Applegate Valley. The Athapaskans were hunter-gatherers with small permanent villages located on terraces above major waterways. They utilized the many locally and seasonally abundant resources of the area. Port Orford Cedar is a culturally significant tree. The wood is highly valued for bows, fragrant boxes and caskets, as well as being an important construction material for Native American ceremonial buildings.

This acquisition would enlarge a contiguous mountainous area, mostly under BLM and USDA Forest Service ownership. Large, consolidated blocks of federal ownership make it more logistically feasible to implement process-based landscape restoration and ecosystem maintenance, such as managed fire.

**Cooperator(s):**

Josephine County Commissioners, City Of Williams, Williams Community Forest Project, Williams Creek Watershed Council, Institute for Applied Ecology, Trust for Public Lands, Ecotrust Forest Management

Savings/Cost	Start-up	Annual
Estimated O&M Savings:	Startup: \$ 0	Annual: \$ 0
Estimated O&M Costs:	Startup: \$ 10,000	Annual: \$ 1,000

**Describe O&M:**

The O&M costs of adding this 320-acre parcel will be minimal. It is surrounded on three sides by BLM managed land with allocation of LSR. This parcel shares those same LSR characteristics and could be added to the process-based management in this area.

**Additional Space for Content Overflow****Purpose / Need**

The riparian area and surrounding forests of Pipe Fork also provide a vital terrestrial wildlife linkage between high elevation coniferous habitat at Greyback Mountain (7,048') to Oak Madrone Woodlands below (1,500'). Some game species relying on this habitat are black-tailed deer, mountain lion, black-tailed deer, and black bear. This parcel includes  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of Pipe Fork creek which supports resident

cutthroat trout. As such, it is designated as Essential Salmonid Habitat. Downstream habitat for Coho and Chinook salmon, steelhead, and Pacific lamprey. These healthy stream conditions provide a valuable contribution to the Williams Creek Watershed, which is critical for salmon recovery.

Pipe Fork has the lowest stream temperatures and best late season baseflow conditions of any tributary to the East Fork of Williams Creek. Fifteen years of monitoring the Pipe Fork shows streamflow well into the summer, even during the driest years showing its connection to groundwater snowpack-fed aquifers.

Lastly, Port Orford cedar populations have been affected by the arrival of a disease-causing non-native fungus, *Phytophthora lateralis*, in the 1950s. Previous investigation of the Pipe Fork area has found that the Port Orford cedar grove on the property is healthy and not infected with the fungus. The entire parcel contains foraging habitat for the Northern California-Southern Oregon Distinct Population Segment of the sensitive fisher, in an area where fisher are known to occur. It also contains habitat for one northern spotted owl site.

## LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND Project Data Sheet

**Agency:** Bureau of Land Management

**Fiscal Year:** 2023

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**Project/ Unit:** Blackfoot River Watershed

**Priority:** 5

**State(s):** MT

**Congressional District(s):**

MT-At large

**Location:**

Montana, Lower Blackfoot Corridor, 24 miles east of Missoula. All acres are in Missoula County.

Land/Cost	Acres	\$
Estimate for FY 2023	3,238	\$ 2,250,000
Acquired to Date	35,440	\$ 33,690,000
Remaining to be Acquired	3,750	\$ 3,500,000

**Project Description:**

This proposed acquisition is a continuation of the Blackfoot River Watershed Project which started in 1992. The lands to be acquired with these funds have been prepurchased by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as a part of TNC's Clearwater-Blackfoot Project.

The proposed land acquisition maintains access to public lands available for recreational opportunities. Recreation use is increasing in this area due to the proximity to Missoula, Montana. Additional recreation uses in the area include, but are not limited to, snowmobile use, cross country skiing, hiking, biking, horseback riding, and fishing. The proposal maintains working lands with active forestry, grazing, and fuel management programs and is adjacent to existing BLM-managed lands. The efficiency and effectiveness of all resource management will be increased with the consolidation of ownership. All the land possesses either public or administrative access.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) use the area, which is adjacent to the Flathead Indian Reservation, extensively to continue their aboriginal hunting and gathering Treaty rights. The BLM recently developed a Reserved Treaty Rights Lands (RTRL) project with the CSKT in the Watershed for treatments on culturally important areas that will strengthen government-to-government relations with the Tribes as well as support at-risk Tribal communities.

Under past and present landowner "open lands" policies, recreational users have come to view the subject lands as publicly owned. The proposed acquisition maintains access for public use and enjoyment of lands, preserving important resource and resource-use values. The proposed acquisition would provide forest management for multiple benefits, including climate change mitigation, restoring habitat for Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species (Canada lynx and grizzly bear), and ensuring proper watershed function for aquatic species. It would also provide working lands with active forestry and fuels programs, continued grazing, and greater access to sacred areas, plant gathering areas (camas and bitterroot), and other important areas for Tribal groups.

Acquisitions within the Blackfoot River Watershed will support several Department of the Interior priorities. Specifically, conserving lands and waters protects biodiversity and facilitates natural climate solutions by limiting habitat fragmentation and conversion of land to rural residential subdivision. BLM management, through its Healthy Forests Initiative, strengthens resilience to climate change through increasing carbon sequestration on forestlands, maintaining working lands, and creating forest management jobs in reforestation, precommercial thinning, commercial thinning, and harvesting of forest products. Critical riparian areas are found along Gold Creek, Belmont Creek, and throughout the watershed, which supports T&E bull trout and native westslope cutthroat trout. The Blackfoot Watershed serves as a crucial linkage corridor between the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the Northern Continental Divide recovery zones for grizzly bear (listed T&E species) and Canada lynx. Acquisitions will enhance public access for numerous recreational activities (hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, etc.) connecting/consolidating existing U.S. Forest Service, BLM, and State lands.

**Cooperator(s):**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and Blackfoot Challenge

Savings/Cost	Start-up	Annual
Estimated O&M Savings:	Startup: \$ 2,000	Annual: \$ 1,000
Estimated O&M Costs:	Startup: \$ 1,000	Annual: \$ 2,000

**Describe O&M:**

Cost saving are provided through consolidation of Federal land creating efficiencies in management. There will be additional costs for repairing or removing fencing; maintaining culverts and road work.

**Project/Unit:** Mule Creek Ranch

**Priority:** 6

**State(s):** WY

**Congressional District(s):**

WY-At Large

**Location:**

Located in Albany County approximately 70 miles north of Laramie, and 45 miles southeast of Casper, WY.

Land/Cost	Acres	\$
Estimate for FY 2023	1,252	\$ 1,700,000
Acquired to Date	0	\$ 0
Remaining to be Acquired	1,252	\$ 1,700,000

**Project Description:**

The Mule Creek Ranch parcel is an important acquisition opportunity located in the western Laramie Range Mountains. The parcel provides year-long and crucial winter range for elk; crucial winter range for mule deer and pronghorn; and landscape connectivity for sage grouse, bobcat, mountain lion, black bear, ducks, geese, cottontail rabbit, coyote, and numerous other non-game avian, reptile, aquatic, and mammal species. The parcel hosts diverse vegetation communities, including healthy aspen stands, sagebrush steppe, sub-irrigated grass meadows, coniferous forest, and juniper-lined draws and benches. In addition, the parcel includes two springs, 27.6 acres of wetlands, and approximately 2 miles of Mule Creek drainage and 2 additional miles of unnamed tributary intermittent streams that provide important reliable water sources for wildlife and aquatic/riparian habitat in an otherwise arid ecosystem. These intact resources contribute to improved landscape resiliency and adaptive ecosystem response to potential future impacts from drought and other climate change variables. In addition, the acquisition will improve public access to dispersed backcountry recreational activities, such as hunting, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing, hiking, horseback riding, and bouldering in an area in need of additional public opportunities. The Mule Creek Ranch landscape is ecologically diverse, productive, and remote. It directly abuts and/or surrounds approximately 4,000 acres of mostly inaccessible State and BLM administered lands and is integral to providing improved administrative access for the benefit of public resource conservation and management.

The Mule Creek Ranch parcel acquisition will complement a separate, ongoing BLM collaboration involving multiple landowners and conservation partners known as the Southeast Wyoming Land Exchange (Land Exchange). Once completed the acquisition, together with the ongoing Land Exchange, will help consolidate a contiguous block of more than 38,000 acres of BLM and State of Wyoming lands.

The Mule Creek Ranch parcel is located in a remote Wyoming area where public hunting and general recreational access opportunities are limited due to land ownership patterns creating large blocks of land-locked public land. With adjacent and interspersed BLM- and State-administered land parcels and very limited infrastructure, the property is ideally suited for public ownership. The acquisition will increase protected land in direct support of the President's America the Beautiful initiative, identified in Executive Order 14008, and will provide for contiguous habitat, unfragmented natural resources, and public access in the Mule Creek drainage area adjacent to Smith Mountain and Mule Creek Mountain.

This parcel will allow BLM to consolidate ownership and management and reduce the number of isolated, inaccessible, low-quality habitat lands administered by the BLM Rawlins Field Office. The funding requested through this proposal will be used to acquire 1,252 acres of Mule Creek Ranch not being considered as part of the Land Exchange. By collaborating with local, State, and private groups, conservation and restoration efforts have already been completed on this parcel and will continue through vegetation and habitat improvement projects.

**Cooperator(s):**

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, The Conservation Fund, American Public Land Exchange, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Mule Creek Ranch, LLC

Savings/Cost	Start-up	Annual
Estimated O&M Savings:	Startup: \$ 0	Annual: \$ 0
Estimated O&M Costs:	Startup: \$ 40,000	Annual: \$ 20,000

**Describe O&M:**

As the acquisition has been private land, no inventories, assessments, or land health evaluations are on record. Given that these lands would be incorporated and permanently managed by BLM for multiple uses, all traditional natural resource baseline asset information would have to be collected and recorded in appropriate databases: forestry, fuels evaluations, cultural resources, all hydrology-related assessments, recreation resources, fisheries evaluations, noxious weeds inventories, land health evaluation assessments, engineering assessments of roads, and so forth. Operation costs will consist primarily of personnel time to inventory, assess, and record all the many varied resources this acquisition will afford BLM. Maintenance cost will ultimately be a function of how developed, primitive, or semi-primitive the National Environmental Policy Act analysis indicates is the will of the American public.

## LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND Project Data Sheet

**Agency:** Bureau of Land Management

**Fiscal Year:** 2023

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**Project/Unit:** Rio Grande del Norte National Monument

**Priority:** 7

**State(s):** NM

**Congressional District(s):**

NM-3

### Location:

The project is located in the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument on Cerro Montoso mountain and 30 miles from town of Taos in Taos County, New Mexico.

Land/Cost	Acres	\$
Estimate for FY 2023	1,950	\$ 9,900,000
Acquired to Date	5,643	\$ 51,730,000
Remaining to be Acquired	22,108	\$ 7,776,400

### Project Description:

On March 25, 2013, President Obama designated approximately 242,555 acres as the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. The protection of the Río Grande del Norte is to preserve its cultural, prehistoric, and historic legacy and maintain its diverse array of natural and scientific resources for the benefit of all Americans. The Monument includes two BLM recreation areas; the Taos Plateau Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and Wild Scenic Rio Grande Corridor.

The cultural significance of the area dates back 14,000 years to the Pleistocene era, when native hunters first followed the massive migrating herds of *Mammuthus Primigenius* (Wooley Mammoth) and *Bison Antipus* (Mega Bison) into the region. The Plateau is rife with remains of the earliest known human cultures in the hemisphere with petroglyphs, tipi rings, wickiup structure, arrow heads, and pottery shards scattered across the landscape. Continuing archaeological investigation has documented over 500 recorded sites. Several Native American tribes and descendants of Hispanic settlers continue to traditionally use these lands as important areas for hunting, native plants, pinon nuts and fire-wood gathering, and grazing.

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish identified the Taos Plateau as the most important winter range habitat for elk populations moving between CO and NM and best suited habitat for mule deer relocation projects. Up to 10,000 elk winter on the plateau each year. Mule deer, pronghorn and wild sheep also depend

on key habitat resources classified for protection in the NM Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (sagebrush shrubland, mixed conifer forest/woodland and wet meadow).

The proposed acquisition contains approximately 3,700 acres and would be purchased in two phases. This first phase contains approximately 1,950 acres that would preserve traditional uses, secure connectivity to the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River Corridor, preserve avian and wildlife habitat, protect prehistoric human habitation sites, and improve recreation & tourism. The acquisition consolidates and preserves unique big-game winter range for Rocky Mountain elk, pronghorn, antelope, and mule deer while also allowing conservation of special status species in the grassland, providing an opportunity for contiguous management of the integrated wildlife ecosystem and habitat. The acquisition would also protect habitat for species of greatest conservation need listed in the Comprehensive Wildlife

Conservation Strategy for New Mexico: Gunnison's prairie dog, loggerhead shrike, and burrowing owl.

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If the land is not acquired, existing natural resources may be used for commercial and residential developments and their encroachment. Increases in adjacent residential development typically results in greater demand for recreational opportunities on public lands. Also, large family ranches have been converted to subdivisions and exclusive hunting properties, fragmenting wildlife habitat and scenic character. Cumulatively, these changes in land use threaten the ability to fulfill the intent of the National monument's designation to preserve its cultural, prehistoric, and historic legacy and maintain its diverse array of natural and scientific resources, ensuring that the historic and scientific values of this area endure for the benefit of all Americans.

**Cooperator(s):**

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Rio Grande del Norte Coalition, NM Wilderness Alliance, NM Wildlife Federation, the Wilderness Society, Trout Unlimited, Mule Deer Foundation, and Backcounty hunters & Anglers. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Trust for Public Land

Savings/Cost	Start-up	Annual
Estimated O&M Savings:	Startup: \$ 0	Annual: \$ 0
Estimated O&M Costs:	Startup: \$ 10,000	Annual: \$ 5,000

**Describe O&M:**

O&M costs: Boundary fence and maintenance