

MONTANA SAGE GROUSE HABITAT CONSERVATION PROGRAM



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SCOPING NOTICE

Proposed Sage Grouse Habitat Stewardship Fund Project – Rath's Livestock Corp. Conservation Easement

July 11, 2016

The Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT) is soliciting comments and concerns on requested use of the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Stewardship Fund to support the Rath's Livestock Corp. Conservation Easement Project.

The Montana Land Reliance (MLR), an IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, sponsored and presented an application for the Rath's Livestock Corp. Conservation Easement to MSGOT for funding from the Habitat Stewardship Fund (Fund) (MCA 76-22-101 et seq.) during MSGOT's meeting on May 24, 2016. MLR requested \$812,500 from the Fund, which would be matched with \$2,437,500 from the Natural Resources Conservation Service Agricultural Land Easement Program, and a \$58,794 donation from the landowner. The estimated value of the easement is \$3,200,500. MSGOT approved the Rath's Livestock Corp. Conservation Easement proposal to move to the next stages of the granting process, administrative procedures, and preparation of an environmental assessment under the Montana Environmental Policy Act.

MLR is proposing to purchase a 11,230-acre perpetual conservation easement on a ranch owned by the Rath's in Golden Valley County. The proposed easement is made up of five distinct parcels, all owned by the Watsons. The proposed easement property is located entirely within habitat classified as a core area (Golden Valley Core Area), northeast of Ryegate, Montana. The Golden Valley Core Area is relatively small compared to other designated core areas in central and northcentral Montana. Four other conservation easements exist within the Golden Valley Core Area, but most of the private land in the Golden Valley Core Area is not currently protected from cultivation or development through a conservation easement.

Of the total 11,230 acres, about 30 acres are managed as cropland, 8,557 acres are managed as rangeland, and 1,986 acres are managed as grassland. The Rath's lease 640 acres from the State of Montana. The Rath's family ranch has been participating in a long-term sage grouse research project led by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, University of Montana, and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Many other agencies and other private landowners in the area are participating as project



partners The Raths parcel proposed for easement borders three separate sections of Montana State Trust Land.

The proposed easement area has a minimum of three active leks on the parcel. A minimum of 13 active leks are located within four miles, and 22 are located within 12 miles of the property.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified the following threats to sage grouse in this part of Montana: conversion of sagebrush grassland to cropland; energy development due to oil and gas and wind; energy development and maintenance related infrastructure, and surface mining.

The terms of the conservation easement would permit the following: two additional residential dwelling unit and associated outbuildings located within a 3-acre building envelopes (one development area is clustered with existing home site and the other is located on the north end of the property); transfer of two parcels only subject to Natural Resource Conservation Service Agricultural Land Easement Program minimum parcel size;

The Raths have agreed to observe the 0.6-mile no-surface-occupancy and the sagebrush eradication and treatment stipulations of Executive Order 12-2015. New power and communication infrastructure is required to be buried where possible and economically feasible.

The easement would prohibit the following: surface mining; commercial gravel operations; conversion of grazing/grassland to crop land; new road construction other than for residential access; turbine-style wind energy development and commercial wind and solar development.

This notice has been sent to individuals or organizations who may have interest in the proposal area. In accordance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act, public concerns about the project and potential environmental impacts must be considered and analyzed prior to making the decision of whether to grant the funding to MLR.

Interested parties have until July 21, 2016 to submit concerns or comments relating to this project. Mail written comments to *Carolyn Sime, Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program, 1625 11th Ave, Helena, MT 59620*. Written comments must be postmarked and mailed on or before July 21. Submit comments electronically and attach documents through the public comment web application tool located on the MSGOT webpage at <https://sagegrouse.mt.gov/msgot.html>. Electronic comments must be received by 11:59 p.m. on July 21, 2016.

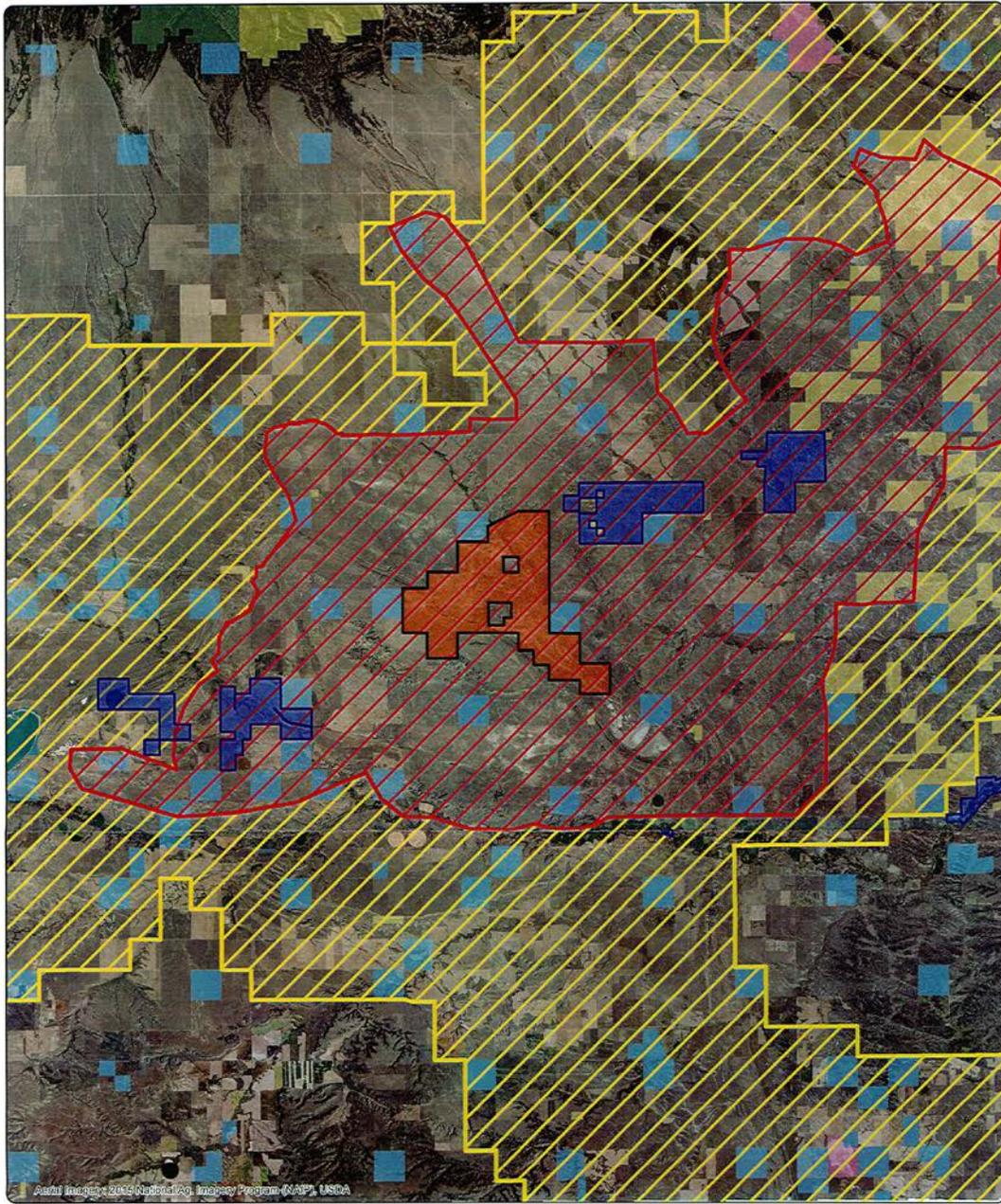
To be added to the interested parties list for this project or future, public scoping notices, please call Carolyn Sime 406-444-0554 or submit that request to the public comment web application tool at <https://sagegrouse.mt.gov/msgot.html> during this same period.

To join the list serve and receive notices regarding all activities of the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program, visit www.sagegrouse.mt.gov. Subscribe at the bottom of the column on the left side of the webpage.



Raths Livestock Inc. Conservation Easement

Public Scoping Map



Public Lands and Conservation Easement Data from Montana Department of Revenue database.

- Conservation Easement
- BLM
- US Forest Service
- State of Montana

Protected Lands - Public & Private

The Executive Order Sage-grouse layers are intended to provide a representation of sage-grouse core and connectivity areas, as well as general habitat in Montana.

- Offered Acres
- Property Acreage: 11,230
- Resources & Conservation
- Dept. of Natural Resources
- Apr 08 2016

Sage Grouse Habitat Area

- Core Area
- Connectivity Area
- General Habitat

EXHIBIT F

RATHS LIVESTOCK CORP

SAGE-GROUSE DESIGNATED HABITAT AREA

Date: April 7, 2016

RECEIVED