To: City of Missoula Open Space Advisory Committee
To: Missoula County Open Lands Committee

We are writing to support use of open space bond funding to procure a conservation easement on the Brad and Stephanie Isbell property. Importantly, the Isbells have offered to accept a conservation easement with Five Valleys Land Trust at a bargain sale. This 75-acre property is situated in the center for the Clark Fork River--Grass Valley Important Bird Area (IBA). The Important Bird Area program is a global initiative that focuses attention on sites that are critical for the conservation of birds. This IBA contains riparian cottonwood bottomlands, adjacent wetlands and agricultural crop and pasture lands that support a high diversity of birds. Over 230 species have been known to occur in this area including a number of species having a high conservation priority. Bird surveys conducted by the Five Valleys Audubon Society resulted in the IBA being accorded continental significance.

The Isbell property includes a slough that is supplied year-around with water and provides excellent riparian bird habitat, especially for waterfowl. In conducting bird surveys and Christmas Bird Counts over the past ten years we have observed Green-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Mallard, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Canada Goose, and Great Blue Herons utilizing the slough. Several of the duck species were with broods of ducklings showing successful nesting. The slough is bordered by a row of Douglas Hawthorn that is a particularly important shrub habitat niche in the Missoula Valley because so much of it has been lost to development. A variety of bird species including Calliope Hummingbird utilize this habitat. The high value agricultural portion of the Isbell property and surrounding area is utilized in all seasons by several species of raptors, which is a significant bird resource in the Missoula Valley.

The Isbell property is an important component of the IBA and Missoula community. It certainly merits open space bond funding to secure a conservation easement that will protect the important bird resource and agricultural values.

Sincerely,

Rose Leach
President