Trout Meadows River Ranch Subdivision
Testimony of Gerhard Knudsen
Five Valleys Audubon Society

Our interest in this development proposal stems from the fact that it encompasses considerable riparian habitat and lies within the Clark Fork River-Grass Valley Important Bird Area or IBA. The IBA designation conveys no regulatory authority. Rather, it is the concept of identifying areas that sustain bird species of conservation concern, and then focusing attention on these sites to encourage conservation through habitat management, conservation easements, or other protective measures. Key among the species of concern in this IBA are the Lewis's Woodpecker, Willow Flycatcher, Calliope Hummingbird, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, and Red-eyed Vireo. All would be found on Trout Meadows property.

The proposed Trout Meadows development will doubtlessly have an impact on bird species of the area. As an example, the proximity of some homes to nearby cottonwoods will reduce the number of species using the trees to those that are more tolerant of a human presence. However, the project encompasses a large area that will remain undeveloped and contains a rich diversity of habitat types. Within those areas, a wide range of avian species may be found. Past and present grazing activity on the land has limited natural vegetative diversity and the potential vitality of the ecosystem is not being realized. We can see, however, where changed land management practices could reverse the situation and, perhaps, offset impacts to resident bird populations and other wildlife.

In our written testimony, we noted the importance of developing a substantive resource management plan. Such a plan would serve as the foundation for action aimed at protecting and, hopefully, improving the site's wildlife habitat. It would lead to the mapping and description of the various habitat types and set forth management objectives for those lands. Among other things, it would also consider such matters as maintaining snags, increasing the density of understory vegetation to improve nesting and foraging opportunities, and preventing grazing or excessive human use so cottonwoods and understory plant species can regenerate. Allowable human activity would be further defined so as to minimize impacts to breeding bird populations and other wildlife species. It would also identify habitat enhancement opportunities such as that of restoring wetland areas impacted by long-standing grazing activity. Finally, the plan would identify the groups or individuals responsible for its implementation.

All too often, subdivision development results in the loss of farming opportunities. In this instance, however, the developer has indicated an interest in seeing limited farming take place within the project area. We don't see where such activity would necessarily be deleterious to resident bird populations. Depending on the crops involved, it may even provide some benefit, particularly to waterfowl. However, we would suggest that the land area to be farmed be identified in the resource management plan and that adequate setbacks be established between the farming activity and adjoining riparian wildlife habitat.

Fundamental to assuring the long-term vitality of the area's riparian habitat is that of establishing a conservation easement or similar protective measure regarding that land. The

developer is clear in his intention to see that becoming the case. As now contemplated, such action would be pursued after the second phase of the project and by the homeowners' association. We, however, would encourage taking any such action earlier through negotiations with the developer per se rather than the multiple interests of a homeowners' association. Working with a single individual, and one who is knowledgeable of the site, would better assure that, early in the land development process, these needed protection measures are in place.

The Trout Meadows Subdivision is unique in that it leaves considerable land area undeveloped - - land that encompasses very important riparian habitat. There is little doubt that physical development of the land and the introduction of new human activity will impact that habitat. At the same time, however, there are real opportunities to protect and restore the site's riparian resources and work to offset impacts of the development. To that end, and as a group interested in protecting our wildlife heritage, we would be most willing to assist in developing a resource management plan for the site and, where possible, participate in its implementation.

Thank you.