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**GOGUEN LAND EXCHANGE APPROVED
\$3.1 Million Donated to “Trail Runs Through It”**

Helena, Mont. – A precedent-setting land exchange was approved by the Montana Board of Land Commissioners at their meeting in Helena today. The Montana Board of Land Commissioners, otherwise known as the “Land Board” consists of Montana’s five top elected officials who unanimously voted to approve the exchange. The Land Board has been working for several years with Whitefish landowner/philanthropist Michael Goguen on the proposed exchange that will boost public access, recreational opportunities and land conservation on state trust lands near Whitefish, Mont., as well as increase revenue to the school trust. A formal agreement with the City of Whitefish and the non-profit group Flathead Gateway Partners confirms Goguen’s donation of \$3.1 million to the public-private Trail Runs Through It partnership for construction of the extensive trail project and to secure permanent conservation of state lands.

Both the land exchange and the Trail Runs Through It implement strategies developed by dozens of local stakeholders through the Whitefish Area School Trust Lands Neighborhood Plan. The state trust lands affected by the neighborhood land-use and trail plans include Spencer Lake, Beaver Lake/Skyles, Stillwater, Swift Creek, Haskill Basin, and Happy Valley/KM areas, surrounding the community of Whitefish.

At its meeting, the Land Board determined that the exchange lands offered by Mike Goguen were of equal or greater value to the state, generated equal or greater income to the trust, provided more acreage, consolidated state lands, enhanced access and had potential for long-term appreciation based on appraisal and economic data provided by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). In a recently released report., DNRC outlined the exchange criteria and detailed the results of the extensive public involvement process. It concluded with a recommendation by DNRC to grant final approval to complete the exchange conditioned on the agreements, bonds, easements, etc. outlined in the report.

They also heard from residents of Whitefish who reported on the other community projects that are taking place under the neighborhood plan, such as efforts at reducing the risk of catastrophic fire on the state forest lands surrounding the Whitefish community.

In a prepared statement addressing the Land Board, Goguen stated, “One of the reasons we’ve been so successful with the trail and the land exchange is that the vision I have for where I live is the same as the community’s, and the state’s. It is important to me to be a good neighbor, respect the environment, protect water quality and wildlife habitat, and to take the time to appreciate the beauty of the landscape with my friends and family. The trail is going to be spectacular with awesome views and will provide a great opportunity for people to be able to get out and enjoy the best that Montana has to offer.”

Steve Thompson, member of Flathead Gateway Partners and chair of the city-appointed Trail Runs Through It steering committee, called Goguen’s contribution an outstanding example for future land exchanges and conservation projects, encouraging others to follow in his footsteps. “Mr. Goguen is a trailblazer, literally. He has been a gracious and community-spirited partner as we have crafted an innovative model to promote land conservation and public access. We encourage other community members to join Mr. Goguen by supporting this project with donations or volunteer time.”

Whitefish City Councilor Nancy Woodruff, also a member of the Trail Runs Through It Steering Committee represented the city at the hearing. She said that the Goguen donation is a boost to the local economy and quality of life. “This is a win-win project for everyone. This shows the ability of our community to work together and get extraordinary things done.”

DNRC Stillwater State Forest Unit Manager Bob Sandman commented, “The DNRC is obviously very pleased with the Land Board decision to grant final approval of the Goguen Land Exchange today. It’s nice to see some of the projects that were in the neighborhood move forward to the benefit of the trust and the community. We still have a long way to go, but we look ahead to the next project that will hopefully come forward as part of the neighborhood plan process. Our thanks goes out to the city, the county, the citizens and everyone who worked on it.”

State Lands were set aside at the time of statehood for the financial support of public schools. There are more than 5.1 million acres of state-owned school trust Lands and 6.2 million acres of state-owned mineral estates in Montana. Under the direction of the State Board of Land Commissioners, DNRC is charged with managing school trust lands to produce revenue for trust beneficiaries while considering environmental factors and protecting future income-generating capacities of the land.

Besides the \$3.1 million in funding, Goguen's contribution also includes placing an easement for the "Trail Runs Through It" across his private property and to construct and maintain a 3-mile section of the public trail from Two Bear Road to Beaver Lake Road. The "Trail Runs Through It" Steering Committee agreed to leverage the funds to raise additional funds when possible. The contribution stipulates at least one million dollars to acquire easements on state lands to establish permanent trail corridors and to conserve ecologically and culturally significant lands.

The "Trail Runs Through It" project, a priority of the Whitefish School Trust Neighborhood Plan, was spearheaded by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Whitefish and the non-profit organization Flathead Gateway Partners. The partnership has worked with citizen committees, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the U.S.F.S., and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, completing the trail master plan in 2006. The City of Whitefish signed a 10-year land use license with the DNRC in 2007. The City and Flathead Gateway Partners recently (September 19, 2008) signed an additional MOU when the City Council re-appointed a steering committee consisting of city representatives and Flathead Gateway Partners. The steering committee includes Diane Conradi, Steve Thompson, Karl Cozad and Nancy Woodruff (Nick Palmer is an alternate).

Flathead Gateway Partners is a Montana non-profit corporation, whose leadership includes Diane Conradi, Steve Thompson, Mike Jopek, Lin Akey, Charlie Abell, and Marshall Friedman. For more information on the "Trail Runs Through It" and the land exchange, log on to www.trailrunsthroughit.org.

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