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EXHIBIT 11
DATE 2.18.05
HB 675

February 18, 2005

Honorable Jim Peterson, Chair
House Natural Resources Committee

RE: HB 675 (Changes to Open-Space Land and Voluntary Conservation Easement Act)

Chairman Peterson and members of the Committee:

Five Valleys Land Trust is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to conserving Montana's natural legacy—our river corridors, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, and scenic open spaces. For over thirty years Five Valleys Land Trust has been working with willing landowners on voluntary private land conservation projects in eight Western Montana counties. Our main tool is the conservation easement. To date, we hold 74 conservation easements, which range in size from 40 acres to 4,000 acres and range in location from Superior to Plains to Deer Lodge to Rock Creek.

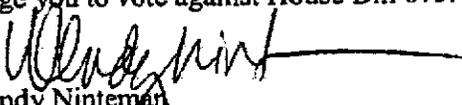
We are a local land trust dedicated to implementing local priorities. That is what we do. We are community based and community driven. We work hand in hand with private landowners in Western Montana who recognize and appreciate their right to exercise the full range of options when it comes to charting a future for their family land.

House Bill 675 would strip land trusts of the right to administer and enforce these conservation easements that we hold in trust for the public benefit. But more importantly, HB 675 strips private property owners in Montana of the choice to place a conservation easement on their land. Shouldn't Montana landowners have access to these rights just like every other American does?

It's ironic that this proposal comes at the same time that the federal government is demanding that land trusts step up our efforts in terms of administering and enforcing conservation easements.

The donation of a conservation easement has been referred to as the "highest expression" of one's private property rights. It is our privilege to work with Montana landowners who are willing to make such far-sighted decisions regarding the future of land they love.

I urge you to vote against House Bill 675. Thank you for your consideration.


Wendy Ninteman
Executive Director, Five Valleys Land Trust

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