



**Testimony of Wendy Ninteman, Executive Director,
Five Valleys Land Trust**

**House Natural Resources Committee
March 30, 2007 -- SB 452 (Williams) Montana Working Forests, ERanches, Farms
and Watersheds**

Mr. Chairman, my name is Wendy Ninteman, and I am the Executive Director of the Five Valleys Land Trust. Five Valleys is a member of the Montana Association of Land Trusts and has adopted the national Standards and Practices of the Land Trust Alliance. We serve the local communities of eight Western Montana counties, and are based in Missoula County. We have a membership at about 1100.

I am here today in support of Senate Bill 452 – Montana Working Forests, Ranches, Farms, and Watersheds. First I want to commend Senator Williams for bringing forward this bill that recognizes the importance of the working landscape in shaping our history, our culture and our communities, all across this beautiful state. That working landscape has enriched the lives of each and every one of us who is fortunate enough to live in this state, and it continues to do so every day.

Intact forest lands are critical for clean water and healthy watersheds, essential for wildlife, provide access to recreational opportunities that are essential to the quality of life we Montanans enjoy, offer economic opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and timber producers that supply lumber for our homes and food for our tables, provide scenic views that define the landscape of this place, and finally forests and other working landscapes provide opportunity for a sense of connection to the land and to each other. We have to stop the fragmentation of these lands in Western Montana.

What do you want Western Montana to look like through the eyes of your kids and their kids in 20, 50, or 100 years? Does your picture include clean water, family farms and ranches, abundant wildlife and access to a myriad of recreational opportunities? If it does, we need to act now, because intact forest lands are critical to that picture, and the future of intact forest lands and other working landscapes in Western Montana is precarious.

As Missoula Mayor John Engen said when Missoula County passed an open space bond designed to purchase easements on working landscapes last fall, "when we are dust, this will still matter."

I urge you to support SB 452 because it provides a mechanism that will help us keep our working landscape alive and vibrant. Thank you.