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# CHAS F. MCDEVITT: Foothills levy money has preserved access, and will gain more for us in the future

On May 22, 2001, 59 percent of Boise voters supported a property tax known as the Foothills levy, which was collected in 2002 and 2003 in order to raise \$10 million for Foothills land preservation efforts. At the onset of the preservation effort, the 80,000 acres in the Boise Foothills, from Highway 21 to Highway 55, were a scattered mixture of public and private ownerships: 38,000 acres were owned by various state and federal agencies, while the remaining 42,000 acres were in private hands. Since that time, the volunteers serving on the Foothills Conservation Advisory Committee have been busy using the Foothills levy funds to conserve Foothills land in a variety of manners: fee title ownership, conservation easement, trail easement or land exchanges among federal and state agencies.

The priorities for conservation were identified in the 2000 Boise Foothills Open Space Plan for Public Lands. These included:

Table Rock area (east Foothills)

Hulls Gulch/Military Reserve area (central Foothills)

Dry Creek/West Foothills area

The city of Boise has acquired direct ownership of 1,200 acres of Foothills land - 240 will be known as the new Polecat Gulch Reserve in the western Foothills and 600 will be known as the new Noble Reserve in the northeastern Foothills. The remaining acreages have expanded the boundaries of the Table Rock, Hulls Gulch and Military reserves. A significant component of the Foothills conservation program has been land exchanges involving trading of land in one instance between the Idaho Department of Lands and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and in another instance involving more than 6,000 acres of Foothills land, among the Idaho Department of Lands, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service. These exchanges were possible because Boise facilitated and directed them, and will result in the consolidation of ownerships allowing for more seamless management in the Boise Foothills.

Since the efforts began, Boise City Parks and Recreation has set up a Foothills Heritage Fund where families, individuals, foundations and companies can contribute money to be used only as matching funds for Foothills preservation efforts.

The chart further exhibits how the Foothills Levy funds have been used with each transaction. Of the \$10 million dollars, about \$4 million remain for Foothills preservation efforts. The advisory committee remains dedicated to stretching these dollars for the benefit of the public, so they will continue discussions with Foothills landowners regarding possible new trail connections, protection of wildlife habitat and riparian corridors, and preservation of rare plants and historically significant sites. All of these elements make up the Foothills, the backdrop of the city.

Chas. F. McDevitt is the chairman of the Foothills Conservation Advisory Committee.