

WARD IRRIGATION DISTRICT  
220 Camas Creek Loop  
Hamilton, MT 59840

RECEIVED

SEP 17 2013

cc Planing

September 6, 2013

Ravalli County Commissioners  
215 South 4<sup>th</sup> St., Suite A  
Hamilton MT 59840

Ravalli County Commissioners

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**RE: Letter of Support for the KBK River Property**

The Ward Irrigation District Commissioners are enthusiastic that the KBK River Property (Keith Evans Family) has submitted an application to the Ravalli County Open Lands Program. Since 1938 the Ward Irrigation District has utilized right of entry through this property to access the District's River headgate and irrigation canal. The irrigation canal flows from the Bitterroot River through the property, through Lost Horse Creek and into the Charlos Heights agricultural lands serving 100 water users and provides irrigation water for over 1000 irrigable acres. Over the many years, Keith and family have always welcomed the District Commissioners right of entry to this property for ditch improvements, access to River headgate to adjust water flows and to perform routine maintenance. Keith always indicated he wanted the property set aside as special conservation lands. This land has always been wonderful habitat for a variety of animals and viewed as a sanctuary. It was also used for summer and fall cattle grazing.

Obtaining a life-time easement on the KBK River Property would mean Ward Irrigation District can proceed with our current siphon project supported by grant monies from:

- Montana DNRC Renewable Resource Grant Program
- Montana DEQ
- Montana FWP
- US Fish and Wildlife Service

This high profile project will transport water under Lost Horse Creek to ensure the Ward Irrigation District users' water entitlement is met, while preserving fisheries.

Besides the importance of our easement and pending project for Ward Irrigation District, we enthusiastically support the Evans family's desire to preserve this unique property. Besides its agricultural value, this scenic stretch of river is enjoyed by fishermen who come to the Bitterroot Valley to float this highly utilized section and support our local economy. The property is visible from Highway 93, Old Darby Road as well as from the River – a highly valuable asset to the local tourism industry. Fishing guides will take their customers elsewhere if the Bitterroot River is crowded with homes and their associated septic systems on the river shore.

The KBK property would add another link to the increasing number of river frontage land owners who see the significance in preserving the River's value to wildlife and fisheries with conservation easements. It would greatly simplify the District's ability to deal with one landowner rather than a number of separate landowners.

We applaud the Evans family for their land stewardship and recommend the Commissioners to support their application.

Sincerely,

*Cody Lee*

Ward Irrigation District  
Cody Lee, President

cc: Emailed to Melissa - BLT