



OPEN LANDS BOND PROGRAM (OLBP)

**Chesebro Ranch  
Conservation Easement  
OLBP #2025-03**

**Tax Identifiers: 32110, 32100, 25510, 25520, 24900,  
& 24700**

**DRAFT STAFF REPORT FOR OPEN LANDS BOARD (OLB)**

**CASE PLANNER:** Jamie Moffatt

**PUBLIC MEETINGS/  
HEARING:**

Open Lands Board Meeting (site visit)	December 4, 2025
OLB Conservation Subcommittee Mtg.	December 16, 2025
OLB Meeting	December 18, 2025
Board of County Commissioners (BCC)	
Site Visit	March 2, 2026
BCC Public Hearing	March 5, 2026

**APPLICANTS:** Bruce & Joan Chesebro, Members of the Chesebro Ranch LLC.  
881 Willow Creek Road  
Corvallis, MT 59828

**SPONSORING AGENCY:** Bitter Root Land Trust  
400 W Main St. #102  
Hamilton, MT 59840

**PROJECT LOCATION:** The proposed Chesebro Ranch Conservation Easement (CE) is located about 1.5 miles east of the center of Corvallis, which is accessed off of Willow Creek Road (see Location Map).

## INTRODUCTION

The Chesebro property is situated east of the center of Corvallis, at 881 Willow Creek Road. The property is comprised of six parcels of approximately 263 acres and is owned by Bruce and Joan Chesebro, Members of the Chesebro Ranch LLC. Bruce and Joan have lived on the property since 1973, when they purchased the first 80 acres from Fred Hosko. The Chesebros will exclude approximately 12.5 acres, resulting in a 251.94-acre conservation easement. There are approximately 166 acres of pasture and hayfields with water rights from Willow Creek, the BRID Canal, and the Hedge Ditch. Rights of way for the BRID canal and the Hedge Ditch run through the property. The conservation easement excludes the Hedge Ditch right of way as shown on Certificate of Survey No. 606752-R based on Bitter Root Land Trust title research which notes they believe the current property boundary corresponds to the eastern and western boundaries of the Hedge right of way.

The land serves as a habitat for wildlife, including elk, deer, foxes, bobcats, sandhill cranes, golden eagles, western toads, and various other birds, mammals, and amphibians. These habitats provide open space and areas for wildlife movement, especially when combined with the other nearby agricultural lands and open space lands that are already conserved.

The landowners are reserving one building envelope within the 251.94-acre property around the existing farmstead area. Two additional residential dwellings are being reserved within the farmstead area for farm help or extended family. No splits will be allowed, meaning the conserved property must be transferred as a single tract. The Chesebros have owned parts of their ranch for over 50 years, during which they raised their family and leased the land to grain, hay, and cattle producers. Structures on the property include one residence, a bunkhouse, a large barn, and residential outbuildings.

The land is leased to Alan and Andy Maki and makes up an important part of their operation.

Conservation of the Chesebro property will enhance and expand upon the 824 acres of conserved open lands in the area. This includes the Triple J Bar Conservation easement (159 acres) and the James Farm Conservation Easement (111 acres) to the south, the Curdy Family Farm Conservation Easement (105 acres) to the north, and the Soft Rock State Trust lands (MT DNRC, 449 acres) to the northeast. Other nearby farms are also in the process of completing conservation easements but details are not yet available to provide to the OLB program.

As described in greater detail below, the conservation values of the Chesebro ranch are its productive agricultural resources, wildlife habitat, and scenic open space. The proposed conservation easement will protect these values for the benefit of current and future generations of Bitterroot residents by limiting incompatible land use and development. In doing so, the conservation easement will ensure continued opportunities for agricultural production, wildlife usage, and scenic enjoyment of the property.

## CONSERVATION VALUES AND GOALS

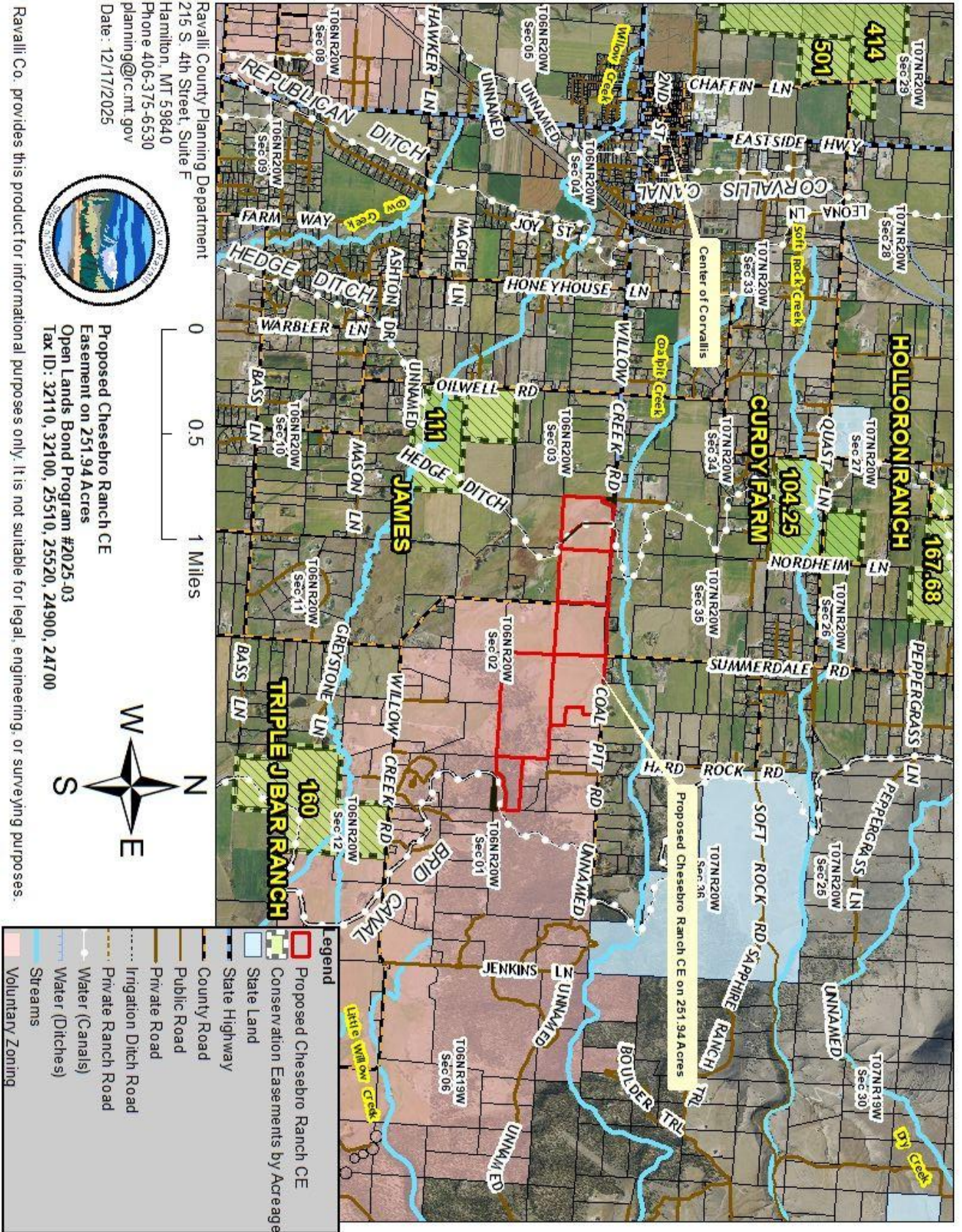
**Working Agricultural Lands:** The Chesebro property is currently in active agriculture production and is primarily irrigated pasture for livestock grazing and hay production. In the recent past, the Chesebro's lessees have also produced grain on their land. Approximately 167 acres, or 66%, is identified by the NRCS as agriculturally important soil, including 29 acres of Prime Soils (11%), 14 acres of Soils of Statewide Importance (5%), and 125 acres of Soils of Local Importance (50%). The property possesses

water rights used for sprinkler and flood irrigation of pastureland and hay, which are sourced from Willow Creek, the BRID Canal, and the Hedge Ditch and are described in greater detail below.

**Wildlife Habitat:** The property's diverse vegetation types and location at the transition zone between irrigated valley bottom and forested uplands provides wildlife habitat and areas for wildlife movement. Its conifer woodlands, sagebrush shrublands, riparian areas, wetlands, and irrigated fields provide diverse habitat types for locally important wildlife and many Species of Concern. Species frequently seen include elk, sandhill cranes, evening grosbeaks, and western toads. Parts of the ranch are located within FWP-designated elk winter range, mule deer winter range, and the East Bitterroot Grasslands Tier II SWAP Terrestrial Focal Area. It is also less than one mile from the Soft Rock State Trust property and three existing conservation easements.

**Scenic Open Space:** The proposed conservation easement offers scenic open space views of the property's agricultural land and wildlife habitat, visible from public roads, including Willow Creek Road, Coal Pit Road, Summerdale Road, and Oil Well Road. It is also visible from the Soft Rock State Trust Lands, which is popular among hikers, horseback riders, and bicyclists. The conservation easement will protect the scenic values of this property, as well as expand and enhance the protected open lands that surround this property

# Chesebro Ranch CE Location Map



Location View Map (Source Data: Ravalli County Planning)

## **Property Ownership & Legal Description**

**Landowner: Chesebro Ranch LLC, a Montana limited liability company**

### **Conservation Easement Legal Description**

#### **Parcel I:**

A tract of land located in the NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of Section 1 and the NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of Section 2, Township 6 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., situated in Ravalli County, Montana, and being more particularly described as Tract C, Certificate of Survey No. 606752-R.

LESS AND EXCEPTING a tract of land being a portion of Tract C of Certificate of Survey No. 606752, recorded in the Ravalli County Clerk and Recorder's office, and located in the NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of Section 1, Township 6 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., and more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at the Center-West <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> corner in Section 1, Township 6 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., and running thence, first course, N89°37'49"W along the East-West midsection line of said Section 1 for 870.56 feet; thence, second course, on a non-tangent curve to the right, having a radius of 324.19 feet, a length of 86.49 feet, a chord bearing of N53°10'01"E, and a chord distance of 86.23 feet; thence, third course, N60°48'36"E on a tangent line for 445.78 feet; thence, fourth course, on a tangent curve to the right, having a radius of 143.03 feet, a length of 142.97 feet, a chord bearing of N89°26'45"E, and a chord distance of 137.09 feet; thence, fifth course, S61°55'06"E on a tangent line for 189.90 feet; thence, sixth course, on a tangent curve to the left, having a radius of 111.19 feet, a length of 110.77 feet, a chord bearing of N89°32'32"E, and a chord distance of 106.24 feet to its intersection with the East line of Tract C of Certificate of Survey No. 606752; thence, seventh course, S00°27'01"E on a non-tangent line along the east line of Certificate Of Survey No. 606752 for 187.51 feet to the Point Of Beginning. Containing 3.712 acres in all. Subject to the easements shown on this map and any other recorded or unrecorded easements.

See "Exclusion Exhibit #2"

#### **Parcel II:**

A tract of land including Government Lot 2, Section 2, Township 6 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., and a portion of Block 8, Summerdale Orchards, a platted subdivision, in Ravalli County, State of Montana, and being more particularly described as Parcel D-2, Amended Subdivision Plat No. 808218.

#### **Parcel III:**

Lot 3 (NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>) of Section 2, Township 6 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., situated in Ravalli County, Montana, and being more particularly described as Tract A of Certificate of Survey No. 3854 and as shown as Government Lot 3, Certificate of Survey No. 606752-R.

#### **Parcel IV:**

A tract of land located in Government Lot 4 (NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>) of Section 2 and Government Lot 1 (NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>NE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>) of Section 3, Township 6 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., situated in Ravalli County, Montana, and being more particularly described as Tract B, Certificate of Survey No. 606752-R

LESS AND EXCEPTING that portion of Tract B of Certificate of Survey No. 606752-R lying east of the center of the Hedge Ditch, which is a strip of land approximately thirty (30) feet wide and more particularly described in Bargain and Sale Deed recorded on April 4, 1900, in Book 23, Page

181, records of Ravalli County, Montana, and in Quit Claim Deed recorded on March 10, 1983, in Book 164, Page 623, records of Ravalli County, Montana.

**Parcel V:**

A tract of land located in Government Lot 1 (NE1/4NE1/4) of Section 3, Township 6 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., situated in Ravalli County, Montana, and being more particularly described as Tract A, Certificate of Survey No. 606752-R

LESS AND EXCEPTING a tract of land being a portion of Tract A of Certificate of Survey No. 606752, recorded in the Ravalli County Clerk and Recorder's office, and located in the NE¼ of Section 3, Township 6 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., and more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at the East 1/16 corner between Section 3, Township 6 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M. and Section 34, Township 7 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., and running thence, first course, S89°55'14"E along the North line of Section 3, Township 6 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., for 194.46 feet; thence, second course, S00°52'26"E for 312.56 feet to its intersection with a small irrigation ditch; thence, third course, along said irrigation ditch, N58°33'36"W for 12.76 feet; thence, fourth course, continuing along said irrigation ditch, N51°49'34"W for 88.07 feet; thence, fifth course, continuing along said irrigation ditch, N48°00'11"W for 50.17 feet; thence, sixth course, continuing along said irrigation ditch, N44°28'52"W for 115.06 feet to its intersection with the North-South 1/16 aliquot part line in the NE¼ of said Section 3; thence, seventh course, N00°30'27"W along the North-South 1/16 aliquot part line in the NE¼ of said Section 3 for 136.05 feet to the Point of Beginning. Containing 1.034 acres in all. Subject to the easements shown on this map and any other recorded or unrecorded easements.

See "Exclusion Exhibit #1"

ALSO LESS AND EXCEPTING that portion of Tract A of Certificate of Survey No. 606752-R lying west of the center of the Hedge Ditch, which is a strip of land approximately thirty (30) feet wide and more particularly described in Bargain and Sale Deed recorded on April 4, 1900, in Book 23, Page 181, records of Ravalli County, Montana, and in Quit Claim Deed recorded on March 10, 1983, in Book 164, Page 623, records of Ravalli County, Montana

**End of Legal Description**

**FUNDING REQUESTED FROM THE OLBP**

**\$315,000.00** (See Appendix A, Funding Worksheet)

**APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

The pre-submission meeting was held on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025, and the full application was submitted November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The Open Lands Board (OLB) conducted a site visit on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025, and the

OLB Conservation Subcommittee met to discuss the proposal on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The OLB will conduct a Public Meeting to review the proposal on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The date and time of the Ravalli County Board of County Commissioners' (BCC) site visit and the (BCC) Public Hearing will be determined at a later date. **This Conservation Easement project is being reviewed under the Ravalli County criteria and procedure, as adopted by Resolution 2256 by a majority of the Board of County Commissioners on December 5, 2007.**

## **OPEN LANDS BOARD PROJECT SCORING WORKSHEETS REPORT**

The following report includes data from the OLBP Project Scoring Worksheets, which was compiled based on the findings of the OLB during their site visit, after a review of the application materials, and after adjustments to average scores during the OLB Conservation Subcommittee meeting. The OLB, at their upcoming meeting, will utilize the score sheet data to formulate written findings and a recommendation to the BCC:

- Scores ranged from 62 to 75 points, with an average of 69 points (see Appendix B for further detail).

## **OPEN LANDS BOARD CONSERVATION SUBCOMITTEE REPORT**

### **Background**

The Open Lands Board Conservation Subcommittee (OLB-CS) is tasked under the adopted Open Lands Bond Program (OLBP) Application Review Procedure with reviewing applications under the criteria in the Project Scoring Worksheet for the subject application, and performing a site visit on the subject property.

### **Meeting**

On December 16th, 2025, the OLB-CS convened to discuss the Chesebro Ranch CE project. Members present included Albert Babel, Bob Cron, Kate Stone, Kent Meyers, and Sharon Barnes. Also in attendance were Jamie Moffatt and Shannon Bivens from the Planning Department, along with Melissa Odell and Jake Blessing, representing the Bitter Root Land Trust. The following topics were discussed:

### **Findings**

Based on the application materials submitted and the property site visit, the OLB-CS made the following findings:

- **GA4** – half of the board scored it as a 3 and the other half scored it as a 4.
- **AR5** – Katrina scored a 2, further discussion requested at OLB meeting. Kate felt that the BRLT underscored this section. Jake explained that they scored it lower because the timber is in a lower tier.
- **AR7** – Al scored a 4 because it is 3.5 miles from the Maki sw 1/4 and surrounded by farming land on all 4 sides.
- **AR8** – Al, same as AR7.
- **NA2** – Sharon scored a 1 because sage brush and seasonal wetlands are probably not protected by the clean water act.
- **NA5** – Sharon scored a 1 because of the wetland law... is it protected?

- **NA6** – Kate explained that this area is super vibrant.
- Kent moved to recommend the project to the BCC, Bob seconded, with unanimous support from the OLB-CS.

**The Open Lands Board Conservation Subcommittee recommended the Chesebro Ranch Conservation Easement for approval to the Open Lands Board following the discussion of the scores.**

### **PUBLIC AND AGENCY COMMENTS RECEIVED**

No Agency nor Public Comments have been received to date.

### **OPEN LANDS BOARD REPORT**

#### **Background**

The Open Lands Board (OLB) is tasked under the adopted Open Lands Bond Program (OLBP) Application Review Procedure with reviewing applications and making a recommendation to the BCC. On December 18, 2025, the OLB met to discuss the Chesebro Ranch CE project. The OLB members present were Tonia Bloom, Albert Babel, Bob Cron, Kent Myers, Katrina Mendrey, Gil Gale, Kimberly Richardson, Kate Stone (zoom), Sharon Barnes (zoom), Paul More (zoom), Cherie Fisher (zoom), and Kara Maplethorpe (zoom).

Also in attendance was Joan and Bruce Chesebro (Applicant/Landowner), Melissa O'dell (BRLT), Jake Blessing (BRLT), Rob Livesay (Planning Department), Jamie Moffatt (Planning Department), and Shannon Bivens (Planning Department/Minutes).

Bob Cron moved to recommend approval of the Chesebro Ranch CE, OLBP#2025-03 project as presented to the BCC. Seconded by Albert Babel. Public Comment on motion: none. Discussion: none. All voted "aye" (10-0).

**The OLB recommended that the BCC approve the Chesebro Ranch CE project, OLBP#2025-03 in the amount of \$315,000. The motion passed 10-0.**

## APPENDIX A – Proposed Funding

**Preliminary Estimate of Conservation Easement Value..... \$ 1,060,000.00**

**Anticipated Costs:\***

Appraisal.....	\$ 18,000.00
Legal Review (Landowner).....	\$ 1,500.00
Legal Review (Land Trust).....	\$ 3,500.00
Baseline Study & Consultant fees.....	\$ 4,000.00
Title Report/Commitment.....	\$ 3,700.00
Application Fees (Open Lands Program).....	\$ 655.00
Printing.....	\$ 500.00
Surveys.....	\$ 6,350.00
Project Assessment (25 hours @ \$55.00/hour).....	\$ 1,375.00
Project Facilitation (275 hours @ \$55.00/hour).....	\$ 15,125.00
Mineral Rights Report & Remoteness Test.....	\$ 750.00
Environmental Hazard Assessment.....	\$ 250.00
Closing.....	\$ 1,000.00
Recording.....	\$ 390.00

**Total Anticipated Costs:..... \$ 57,095.00\***

**Appraised Conservation Easement Value..... \$1,060,000.00**

**Total Budget (Easement Value + Anticipated Costs):..... \$1,117,095.00**

**Matching Contributions:**

NRCS Agricultural Lands Easement Program** .....	\$530,000.00
Donated Easement Value (donated by landowner).....	<u>\$272,095.00</u>

**Total Matching Contributions:..... \$802,095.00**

Total Budget (Easement Value + Anticipated Costs)..... \$1,117,095.00

(Less Total Matching Contributions)..... - \$802,095.00

**Total Requested Payment from Open Lands Program:..... \$ 315,000.00**

*(\$1,250.00/acre)*

**NOTES:**

\* Anticipated Project Costs reflect the best estimates of the applicants at the time the application is submitted. These Anticipated Project Costs are provided solely to explain how the applicants' total requested Open Lands payment was developed. Actual project costs *will differ* somewhat from those estimated on this Proposed Funding worksheet. It is critical to note that in the event this project is funded by the Open Lands Program, *all* actual costs (except recording, title insurance, and closing costs) will be paid in advance of closing by the applicants, not by Open Lands Program Funds. The applicants are requesting \$315,000.00 in Open Lands Bond funds for the purchase of this conservation easement.

# APENDIX B – Open Lands Board Members Scores for Chesebro Ranch CE

Board Members Scores for OLBP2025-03 Chesebro CE																											
Original: 12/15/2025 Updated 00/00/0000																											
Name	Cherle Fisher		Bob Corn		Penny Howe		Gill Galle		Alan Wahl		Kathina Mendrey		Paul Moore		Kent Myers		Sharon Barnes		Kara Mappethorpe		Kate Stone		Albert Babbel		Average Score		
<b>AGRI-CULTURAL ATTRIBUTES</b>																											
GAL State of Easement	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.0
GAL2 Water Rights	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.0
GAL3 % reserved for homes	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.0
GAL Weed Management	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.0
<b>AG RESOURCES</b>																											
AR1 % Soils as Ag	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.0
AR2 % Irrigated	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.0
AR3 Irrigation	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.0
AR4 AUV	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.0
AR5 Crop potential	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3.5
AR6 Ag Resources	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.6
AR7 Prox to other Ag	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.1
AR8 Prox to other CE's	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.1
<b>NATURAL ATTRIBUTES</b>																											
NA1 Hydric Soil %	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
NA2 Wildlife Habitat	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.0
NA3 Wildlife	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.0
NA4 Project Stream	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2.7
NA5 Project Wetland	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.0
NA6 Enhances Wildlife/1/20	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.0
NA7 Prox to wildlife areas	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.5
NA8 Prox to natural under CE	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.1
<b>ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY BENEFITS</b>																											
CB1 Scenic Values	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.0
CB2 Public Policy	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.0
CB3 Public Access	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
<b>PROCESSED FUNDING</b>																											
PF1 Landowner Contribution	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.0
PF2 Personal Benefits	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.0
PF3 Matching CE's	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
<b>SPECIAL ATTRIBUTES</b>																											
SA1 Utility	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Notes:</b>																											
Member did not turn in sheet																											
Certificate of Interest																											
No score provided																											