



Press Release

September 4, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Methow Conservancy Works With Heath Family to Protect Wetlands, Forests and Floodplain for Wildlife and Fish

The Methow Conservancy, the local non-profit land trust, recently completed a conservation easement with Harold and Tina Heath, permanently protecting 140.5 acres of habitat-rich wetlands and forests in the Mazama-Winthrop corridor.

The Heath conservation easement protects a structurally complex riparian forest, spring-fed wetlands, and the dynamic Methow River floodplain as well as open space, conifer woodlands and agricultural lands by prohibiting future subdivision and development.

The conservation easement with Harold and Tina Heath is the culmination of three years of conversations and walks on the property between Methow Conservancy staff and the Heaths. The easement contains the most productive area of unprotected salmon reeds remaining in single ownership in the Methow Valley.

“We didn’t want to sell it or divide it, but as we got older we realized we had to sell something to support ourselves. We thought we would have to sell it to developers over time. Then we started talking to the Methow Conservancy and the conservation easement was the perfect solution. We retain ownership and it’s protected forever,” said Tina and Harold.

The easement contains 1.5 miles of shoreline on the Methow River, and is situated in a corridor of public lands and other Methow Conservancy conservation easements so that a mosaic of habitat-rich riparian areas, river miles, open spaces, and working agricultural lands are protected in this well-traveled and particularly visible portion of the Methow Valley. The Big Valley Ranch, which the Heaths sold to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife in 1991, bounds the property to the north.

“The easement property is incredibly rich and diverse biologically. During the course of creating the easement, I saw spawning salmon, eagle, osprey, great blue herons and black bear. When we had biologists on the property, they told us of any project in the Methow, this would be the one to “go to the mat’ for,” said John Sunderland, Methow Conservancy Land Project Manager.

Harold and Tina bought the land in 1967, one year after they married. “When I was first introduced to this property, we drove around for a while, then went down to the bottomlands, and the sun was out and the pine trees smelled so good and water was everywhere. I knew I wanted it,” said Harold.

“This piece, even when we had 2000 acres, was our favorite. We held onto it for 40 years because we loved it, not because we thought specifically about the bears and the birds and fish. But our purpose has worked for the Conservancy’s purpose,” added Tina.

Two large spring-fed ponds on the Heath conservation easement connect to a creek and flow to the Methow River, providing constant year round flows that moderate temperatures and support productive riparian and wetland habitats. These habitats include a diverse mixture of native trees and plants and provide important forage, security cover, and movement corridors for a wide variety of fish and wildlife, including endangered spring Chinook salmon and threatened steelhead and bull trout, as well as amphibians, bald eagles and other raptors, mule deer, waterfowl, cougar, bear and, occasionally, elk and moose. The Heath easement property also supports the only known Great Blue Heron rookery in the Methow Valley.

The Methow Conservancy partnered with the Bonneville Power Administration’s Columbia Basin Riparian Conservation Easement Program, the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board, and the Douglas County Public Utility District No. 1 Wells Hydroelectric Project HCP Plan Species Account to provide funding for the conservation easement.

The Methow Conservancy creates conservation easements with voluntary, private landowners to permanently protect specific conservation values like wildlife habitat, scenic views and open space, riverfronts, forests, and working farms and ranches by restricting future development. The easements are protected forever and the Conservancy partners with current and future easement landowners to help monitor and steward the land.

The Methow Conservancy is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring people to care for and conserve the land of the Methow Valley by accepting voluntary conservation easements, providing conservation education opportunities for visitors and residents, and assisting with community-based conservation projects. To date, the Conservancy has worked with more than 75 families to protect more than 5,000 acres of critical habitat and over 15 miles of shoreline in the Methow Valley.

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