



Press Release – For Immediate Release

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Contact: Sarah Brooks, Executive Director; Ashley Lodato, Associate Director; Benj Drummond, Board President

509-996-2870

sarah@methowconservancy.org, ashley@methowconservancy.org, benj@benjandsara.com

Methow Conservancy purchases the Sunny M Ranch

The Methow Conservancy is pleased to announce that it has purchased the Sunny M Ranch: 1200 acres of land near the Town of Winthrop. The Methow Conservancy plans to hold the land on behalf of the community (both human and wild) in support of the following values: wildlife habitat, farmland, trail access, and affordable housing.

Launched on December 28, 2022, the Campaign for Sunny M Ranch inspired more than 1500 donors to contribute more than \$8.7M in five and a half months.

“We knew this Valley was loved,” noted Sarah Brooks, Executive Director of the Methow Conservancy. “But we were humbled by the depth and breadth of that appreciation.”

Half of the donors to the campaign are new to the Methow Conservancy, which emphasizes how widely important the future of the Methow Valley is to so many people, from local residents to frequent visitors to those who experienced the Methow Valley for the first time during the campaign. Brooks reported that more than half a million dollars came from gifts under \$5k, with an average of \$400. “That’s a phenomenal statement on how much this community values having a say in the future of this land,” she said.

Held in 26 parcels of varying size, the land includes the largest irrigated farm field in the Methow Valley, dryland fields, shrub-steppe terrain, forested uplands, and several wetlands. It was originally part of the 4000-acre Sunny M Ranch, which stretched from Wolf Creek Road to Patterson Lake. The Sunny M name was short for “Sunny Mountain,” a nod to the prominent climate and topography of the area. In the late 1980s, Helga and Erivan Haub purchased 2500 acres of the Sunny M Ranch, which was by then no longer a single holding, and remodeled the Sun Mountain Lodge from a small mountaintop motel into a AAA Four Diamond hotel. In May 2022, the Haub Family sold the lodge, the Patterson Lake Cabins, and approximately 1300 acres to GEM Partners. On June 15, 2023, they sold the remaining 1200 acres to the Methow Conservancy.

“The Sunny M is a unique opportunity to combine four community values into a single project: wildlife habitat, agriculture, trails access and affordable housing.” said Methow Conservancy Board President Benj Drummond. “It has been exhilarating to see this community step up and rally around these priorities in such a significant way. The success of this campaign is a testament to what’s important to so many of us who live

in or love this valley and a reflection of how people are always part of conservation outcomes in so many ways. I'm confident that this community will continue to be engaged as we transition from fundraising to ownership and management in the months to come.”

All land trusts are required to create a management plan for the property they own. The Methow Conservancy is in the process of creating a management plan that articulates its vision and intent for these lands, which will guide them in being responsible and accountable stewards of the land. The Methow Conservancy website (methowconservancy.org/sunnym) shares management objectives, opportunities for community engagement, and updates about activities and progress in each of the four value areas.

The Sunny M Ranch Conservation Project:

- **Protects vital wildlife habitat:** Much of this land, including the area known as Power's Plunge (aka Cougar Alley), is a true wildlife haven, home to the Methow Valley's full array of mammals and birds. It is also an area that would have been in demand for upscale development.
- **Preserves significant farmland:** The fields along Wolf Creek and Patterson Lake are productive irrigated farmland and iconic reminders of agriculture's role in this Valley.
- **Provides the opportunity for housing that is affordable for people who work in the Methow Valley:** We are partnering with the Methow Housing Trust (and partners they may identify) to design a neighborhood close to the Town of Winthrop with housing that is permanently affordable.
- **Makes access to trails permanent** through a partnership with Methow Trails: The Methow Community Trail, the Winthrop Trail, and the Barnsley-Bitterbrush loops are essential components of the Methow Valley's recreation-based economy. By owning the land, the Methow Conservancy can ensure they remain accessible forever.

Brooks said, “Part of our goal in purchasing the Sunny M is to continue the legacy of Helga and Erivan Haub and keeping the trails, farming, and wildlife habitat we've all come to love available for the community. New projects, like the affordable neighborhood near town, will take some time, but we're working on it behind the scenes and look forward to engaging with the community on it this fall.”

Donations are still being accepted, to make ongoing care and stewardship of the property possible. A long-term Stewardship & Maintenance Fund has been established, seeded with a \$500K gift from Helga Haub, and boosted by a \$250K Challenge Grant from the Lucky Seven Foundation, whose founders, Frances and Manson Backus, owned the Sunny M Ranch in the 1940s. The Fund will cover things like property tax (approx. \$25K per year), infrastructure maintenance on the barn and other buildings at the Sunny M Ranch, weed control, forest management for forest health and resilience, fence repair, and restoration efforts to bring back native plants in key areas. All donations received since the Lucky Seven Foundation Challenge Grant was announced in mid-May are matched by the Lucky Seven Foundation and added to the Stewardship & Maintenance Fund, which originally had a goal of \$1M.

The Methow Conservancy wishes to express deepest gratitude to the thousands of people who made the Campaign for Sunny M Ranch a success: donors, campaign co-chairs, Steering Committee and sub-committee members, volunteers, key collaborators, project partners, members of the Board of Directors, and Advisory Council members.

For more information visit the Sunny M website at: <https://methowconservancy.org/sunnym>