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Montanans Value Public Lands; Residents See Loss of Access as a Serious Problem Facing State

HELENA, Mont. (March 14, 2006) — Montanans link access to public lands with their passion for the state's outdoor lifestyle, and longtime residents and newcomers alike who enjoy hunting and fishing agree that the potential loss of access is a serious problem, according to a quality-of-life survey commissioned by PPL Montana.

Residents place great value on having access to public lands, with eight out of 10 saying that maintaining public access is an important goal, the statewide survey found.

One of the major findings reported in the survey results released today was that longtime residents and newcomers agree on almost every issue facing the state, including public land access. Eighty percent of those who grew up in Montana and 78 percent of those who moved to Montana agree public land access is a serious issue.

Those residents who are most concerned about the issue of public land access are younger — 83 percent are under 50 — and eight out of 10 have children at home. They also are slightly more likely to live in western Montana, according to the survey results.

Eight out of 10 survey respondents who feel strongly about this issue also are generally less optimistic about the future quality of life in the state and feel that new people moving into Montana are changing it for the worse. Interestingly, even people who have lived in the state for less than five years feel this way. When the responses are measured specifically among longtime and new residents, the percentages remain virtually unchanged (80 percent vs. 78 percent, respectively).

The Roper Public Affairs Group, which conducted the wide-ranging survey for PPL Montana, interviewed 1,013 adult residents across the state during a two-week period last December. The University of Montana consulted on the survey.

PPL Montana operates coal-fired power plants at Colstrip and Billings, as well as 11 hydroelectric power plants throughout the state. PPL EnergyPlus operates a trading floor in Butte that markets and sells power in the wholesale energy market. With offices in Billings, Butte and Helena, the companies employ 500 people in Montana.

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Editor's Note: This is the second of two sidebar news releases expanding on results of a statewide quality-of-life survey announced today by PPL Montana. Please call the number above if you did not receive all three news releases. Additional survey information can be found on our Web site at www.pplmontana.com.