



“IT WAS THE BEST DECISION WE EVER MADE”

In 2008, the Helen C. Foreman Trust completed a conservation easement for their family’s 225 acres near the North Fork Flathead River on Garnet Lake about three miles south of the Canadian border. Now years after the easement has been put in place with Flathead Land Trust, Jason Cohn, one of the thirteen heirs of the Trust says, “It was the best decision our family ever made.”

“The North Fork, and our small piece of it, is a truly unique and special place,” says Jason. “The remote, wild beauty of it is important to protect both for its value as wildlife habitat and for its place in our family history.” As Jason’s mother, Margaret Cohn, said “The property is very important as a center for the family. Five generations have now had the experience of learning about wilderness and wildlife conservation from spending time on the property.” The family has owned land in the area since the 1940s and the Foreman name is well known and respected in the North Fork. In fact, Jason’s grandmother Helen had an uncle named L.O. Vaught after whom Glacier’s Mt. Vaught is named.

“I have been visiting the North Fork since I was just a few years old, and in many ways its more home than the town in Ohio I grew up in. My only memory of my grandfather is playing horseshoes in front of the main cabin in Montana. All my best memories of my grandmother are from the ranch, fishing, walking in the woods, cooking on the wood stove and spending rainy days playing cards in front of the big fireplace. I learned to drive on an old 1958 Willies Jeep that is still there, although not running anymore. As a kid, whenever I was stressed or worried, my mom would tell me to close my eyes and think of Montana to calm me down...I still do that to this day! I shared that with my wife who has grown to love the ranch as much as I do and she does the same thing. I’ve learned so many things about how to improvise and be more self-sufficient by spending time in the woods, and I can’t imagine how different my life would be without having been privileged to spend time in such a beautiful place.”



I'm proud that we chose to do that, and I think my grandparents and my great uncle Vaught would be pleased. The second reason I'm glad we have the easement is that family trusts, by their very nature, are tricky. The more people that own something together the harder it is to maintain. While everything is going well currently, as time passes and more people become owners, things can get very complicated and the possibility that the property will no longer be able to stay in the family becomes more likely. Thanks to the conservation easement, we know that no matter what happens down the road related to ownership, that we've done everything we can to protect the land for the future.

-Jason Cohn

Because the natural values of the land had been appreciated by the Foreman family for generations, when Jason's mother and uncle learned about conservation easements, they felt a responsibility to preserve the family's remote North Fork property as their parents would have wanted. In fact, Jason's grandfather was a founder of the North Fork Compact, one of the first land use planning agreements in Montana, formalized in 1971. The compact grew out of the concerns of some residents about the threat of subdivision and potential environmental harm that could come with no land use plan in place. This compact that was created from Jason's grandfather's vision is still in effect today with slight revisions.

But, even with a common conservation value, how did a family trust with 13 heirs come to an agreement about the future of their property? Jason explained, "we've always wanted to keep our property in as close to a natural state as possible, because it is in the center of important grizzly habitat and adjacent to a Wild and Scenic River corridor. My mother and uncle negotiated the easement details, making sure that we would have the ability to do what we needed to in order to manage the forest for fire safety, but with the idea of having as light an impact on the land as possible. They shared the terms with the rest of us and I think we were all on board with it. I don't recall any debate or dissent as we all recognize the natural value of the land is far greater than the financial value. The benefit to us of the easement is peace of mind in the knowledge that no matter what happens with our family and our ownership of the land, the land will be protected for many years to come."

Jason urges others to engage in conservation easements - "to have the courage and foresight to ensure that the ecological value of your land is protected for the future. The more people that do it, the better off we'll all be. There is so much environmental damage that is happening to the wild and scenic places in the world...if you can do something to protect a special place, please consider doing so. You won't regret it."

As Edward Foreman, Jason's uncle, stated: "the easement will protect the property in a way little else can," and concluded by paraphrasing Dr. King to add, "Safe at last."