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## Star-News

# Payette Land Trust helps close Cougar Island sale

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BY DREW DODSON The Star-News

*Payment limits development on 2.5-acre parcel*

The Bellevue attorney who paid \$2.1 million to buy a lot on Cougar Island in Payette Lake sold development rights for the land to the Payette Land Trust to help complete the sale.

A conservation easement purchased by the land trust permanently bans a home on the 2.5-acre lot from being used as a short-term rental, as well as other commercial development.

Payette Land Trust Executive Director Craig Utter declined to disclose the amount paid for the easement, but said it was funded by private donors and donations to the land trust.

“Our goal was to prevent this property and its infrastructure from becoming anything other than a single-family residence,” Utter said.

Jim Laski, who now owns the only private land on the 14.2-acre island, told The Star-News that selling development rights to the 2.5-acre lot helped pay for the \$2.1 million sales price.

Laski was required to submit the payment to the Idaho Department of Lands this week to close on a bid he placed for the lot he has leased since 2013 at an auction held in September.

Laski said after the auction that he could not afford the \$2 million minimum bid set by the lands department and later listed the home for sale for \$3.8 million. However, Laski was an eligible bidder in the auction because he agreed to pay administrative fees upon closing and also paid for appraisals of the island leading up to the auction.

Laski's lot includes a three-bedroom, 2.5-bathroom house that spans 2,300 square feet, which he bought in 2013 when he began leasing the land from the lands department.

Ensuring the home never becomes a short-term rental property was a priority for the land trust.

“Unregulated commercial overuse of the land would be a serious problem for the island's natural habitat,” Utter said.

The easement allows sheds, outbuildings and other improvements on 0.75-acres surrounding the home on the 2.5-acre lot, but with limits on colors and size. However, no future improvements may be connected to a septic system that serves the home, he said.

“The easement does not expire and runs with the land,” Utter said. “Every subsequent landowner will be held to the standard of the easement.”

The land trust and United Payette had raised over \$1 million to bid on Cougar Island at an auction held in September by the Idaho Department of Lands.

However, the trust did not bid during the auction because no bids were placed on the island's four vacant lots, which had the highest conservation value, Utter said.

The land trust is currently awaiting an update from the State Land Board and the lands department on what is next for the four vacant lots on the island.

“Until they, as the owners decide what they would like to do, it is hard to make any plans for the future,” Utter said.

The land trust currently holds conservation easements on 14 properties in the region totaling more than 2,900 acres. Conservation easements restrict future development on land by paying fair market value for the development rights without land ownership changing hands.

The trust is a non-profit organization that was established in 1993 and is overseen by a local board of directors.

Here is a list of all properties that the trust owns or has conservation easements on:

### **Adams County**

- Boone Family Trust: 40-acre conservation easement for continued agricultural use and natural habitat preservation in Meadows Valley. (1998)
- Brees Ranch: 66-acre conservation easement for wildlife habitat and open space preservation in Meadows Valley. (1999)

### **Idaho County**

- Boar's Nest Ranch: 895-acre conservation easement for grazing/ranching and wildlife habitat preservation near Pollock. (2006)
- Hansberger South Fork Ranch: 100-acre Conservation easement to restrict future development and protect wildlife habitat in the South Fork River drainage. (2020)

### **Valley County**

- Whiteman Property: 40-acre conservation easement for continued agricultural use and natural habitat preservation near the Whitetail Subdivision in McCall. (1995)
- Busby Property: 93-acre conservation easement for continued agricultural use and wildlife habitat preservation near Lake Fork. (1996)
- Peterson Forest: 120-acre property donated for conservation of forest and natural landscape near Smiths Ferry. (1996)
- Huffman Property: 100-acre property donated for conservation of wildlife habitat and natural landscape near Lake Fork. (2001)
- Nahas Ranch: 288-acre conservation easement for natural landscape and historical preservation along North Fork Payette River near Donnelly. (2006)
- Blackhawk Wildlife Preserve: 154-acre conservation easement for public access and wildlife habitat preservation along the North Fork Payette River near McCall. (2006)
- The Meadows at Blackhawk: 210-acre conservation easement for public access and wildlife habitat preservation along the North Fork Payette River near McCall. (2006)
- Mountain View Property: 20-acre conservation easement to restrict future development and protect wildlife habitat along North Fork Payette River frontage near McCall. (2022)

- Gems of the Pines: 20acre conservation easement to restrict future development and protect public access to North Fork Payette River near McCall. (2022)
- Cougar Island: 2.5-acre conservation easement restricting future development and commercial uses on an island in Payette Lake. (2022)

**Washington County**

- Driscoll Ranch: 1,000acre conservation easement for open space and wildlife habitat preservation near Cambridge. (2007)