

## LEN & SANDY SARGENT STEWARDSHIP RECIPIENT

2001

Ellen Knight

Ellen Knight received the third Len and Sandy Sargent Stewardship Award for her work in securing protection of 13.5 miles of stream frontage and more than 10,000 acres of land in the watershed of this vital Montana tributary of the Clark Fork River. As executive director, Ellen's integrity, tenacity, dedication, and good humor were essential to the success of the Rock Creek Trust.

The Trust evolved from the Rock Creek Advisory Council, a quasi-governmental body created in 1986 to oversee \$1.65 million designated for conservation projects to mitigate the impact of power lines across the lower portion of the Rock Creek drainage.



In 1989, the Council hired Ellen to begin the daunting effort to save one of Montana's last best places. Although the council was charged with negotiating conservation easements, it lacked the structure to receive and monitor them in perpetuity. So Ellen enlisted the private, nonprofit Montana Land Reliance to accept easements on nearly 3,000 acres in the Rock Creek drainage. Then, in 1995, the Rock Creek Advisory Council was privatized and renamed the Rock Creek Trust, a project of the private, nonprofit Five Valleys Land Trust in Missoula. Five Valleys Land Trust was then and is now fully authorized to accept and monitor conservation easements.

With the conservation tools in place and development interest in Rock Creek mounting, Ellen envisioned and carried out an ambitious three-year "Campaign for Rock Creek" to raise \$1.5 million to protect even more of the drainage. Working with landowners, supporters, and state and federal agencies, Ellen and the Rock Creek Trust met their fundraising goal and added nearly four miles of stream frontage and 7,100 acres to those already protected.

Since her retirement in December 2000, the Five Valleys Land Trust has continued to work with Rock Creek landowners and to monitor activities in the drainage.

Ellen's recognition for outstanding environmental achievement included a \$5,000 Special Award grant to the Rock Creek Trust.