



open views

Our mission is to protect the natural diversity and rural character of the Prickly Pear Valley and adjoining lands through voluntary and cooperative means. The Land Trust is dedicated to perpetuating the recreational, wildlife, scenic, agricultural and historic values of the land.

PPLT Earns National Accreditation

by Andy Baur

WE KNEW IT WOULD BE COMING ANY DAY—a call we had been expecting for weeks. The call that would tell us our fate regarding our exhausting application to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. And the call came. Except for one problem: we were not there to answer the phone.

You see, every winter our staff goes on a ski outing for a day. Call it “team building,” call it a day out of the office, but it has become a tradition at PPLT. So we decided to head up to Mt. Haggin on a crystal clear February morning rather than head to a major ski area. As I drove towards Anaconda, I just knew that that call was going to come in the day we were out.

As we headed up the pass outside Anaconda, I decided to check voicemail at the office. And sure enough, there was a message from the Commission requesting a call back! The caller stealthily disguised the tone of her voice so I could not tell if we were successful in this three-year long journey or not. Conventional wisdom told me that we would not have gotten this far in the process only to be denied. But we still needed the confirmation that, indeed, those many hours of work had paid off. A quick call back—no answer. I left a message with my cell phone number. I got very quiet.

Accreditation provides the public with an assurance that land trusts meet high standards for quality and that their conservation work is permanent.

When we reached the parking lot, the day was sparkling under a deep blue sky and warm enough for just a light jacket. And, most amazing of all, no wind—almost unheard of up here this time of year.

With such a nice day, we decided to do the long loop—Little California. As we were gliding along, all I could think about was that call. I just needed to know. But between

being out of cell phone range and the fact that the Commission’s office is in the East, it seemed likely that we would have to wait until the next day.

As we crested the top of the long climb, the view opened up into a glorious panorama of mountains and sky. The Pioneer and Flint Creek Mountains unfolded draped in sunlight and snow framed by the fir and pine of a Mt. Haggin meadow. Now fully in cross-country ski mode, I had nearly forgotten the dropped phone call that would determine the fate of our organization. Then from

out of my pocket: “ping”—the sound my phone makes when I miss a message. Here we are, miles from nowhere, and my phone has bars. I always feel funny taking my phone out into the woods and it usually is out of range anyway. But now I had to check the message. Sure enough, it was Melissa at the Accreditation Commission. I immediately called her back.



Former Administrative Coordinator Joanne Martonik holds up the massive application just before sending it off last May.

So here we were, most of the PPLT staff, in the midst of this glorious Montana day surrounded by a dream-like mountain setting and the words I heard were: “Andy, this is my favorite day of the year, calling land trusts to let them know they have become accredited...” My arm launched into the air as the words came through.

After I hung up a group hug ensued—smiles and high fives. We were just sorry our colleagues, current and former, were not there to share the moment. After almost three years of work, thousands of hours of staff time, PPLT had earned a badge of honor—the seal of Accreditation. We flew down back to the car, smiles plastered to our faces. It couldn’t have happened in a better way—surrounded by the very kind of landscape PPLT is entrusted, and now accredited, to protect.

WHAT ACCREDITATION MEANS

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission was created as an independent entity by the Land Trust Alliance—the umbrella organization for over 1,700 land trust organizations in the U.S. The Accreditation process was set up to provide a system by which land trusts could truly show their communities and supporters that they conduct business in the most professional and transparent manner.

PPLT and 27 other land trusts were awarded the seal of Accreditation in this round. Since the fall of 2008, 158 land trusts from across the country have succeeded in earning the seal. This lands PPLT in the first ten percent of all land trusts nationally to become accredited.

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Coming May 12: 12th Annual Don't Fence Me In Trail Run

What do 12 and 12 and 12 add up to? A dozen years of a fun and exciting Helena South Hills tradition as this year marks the 12th annual Don't Fence Me In trail run on May 12, 2012. Help us celebrate the trails by participating in the 30K, 12K, 5K, or 5K dog walk.

Registering for any of the events is fast and simple! Just visit our website at www.pricklypearlt.org and click on “Register Online” below the picture of Mr. Prickers. The cost for the 30K is \$50 and the other events are \$25, plus \$5 for every dog that joins you for the dog walk.

Don't Fence Me In is a big fundraiser for PPLT, so please help us by not just participating, but soliciting donations from your friends and family. Setting up your own fundraising page on our website is easy and you can forward the link to your supporters. If you raise \$100,

we'll give you a PPLT hoodie and if you raise \$500 or more, we'll thank you with a custom DFMI spring jacket! To receive a pledge award, your pledges must be collected and turned into PPLT before the race. Please collect names and current addresses of pledgers so we can thank them and send a donation acknowledgement letter.

Runners from across the country have already started registering for the 30k because, once again, it's part of the La Sportiva Mountain Cup Trail Running Series. La Sportiva, a leading manufacturer of

trail running and mountaineering footwear, describes Don't Fence Me In as one of the “10 best trail races in the country.” Their series winner will take home \$5,000. Visit www.mountaincup.com for details.

The annual Open Space Fair begins at 10 a.m. There will be food and booths and the kids can enjoy painting a ceramic prickly pear ornament and bouncing in the free jumping castle!

Please visit pricklypearlt.org or call 406-442-0490 for more information!

See the list of generous sponsors on page 3.



Helena Valley Update

AS MANY OF YOU KNOW, Prickly Pear Land Trust has a long history of working in the South Hills of Helena. Those efforts to expand and improve the trail system are continuing of course, but PPLT is also focusing on a new area: the Helena Valley.

This new initiative encompasses not only trails, but agricultural land and riparian area protection as well. Lands program staff are busy exploring what conservation opportunities are possible along the major creeks flowing through the area into Lake Helena, and equally important, the significant areas that remain intact.

The goals of the initiative are:

- protect stream corridors, wetlands, water quality and fisheries
- restore fish and wildlife habitat
- protect and preserve key agricultural lands
- extend and link existing trail networks
- create new trail corridors where appropriate

PPLT is working to connect land-owners with funding organizations to get riparian fencing and restoration projects completed, looking into conservation easement opportunities on agricultural lands and more.



There are several exciting projects in the works right now, ranging from two acres to several hundred acres, so look for more details soon!

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Tackling the “Shadow” Trail System

PPLT BEGAN WORKING on the South Hills Trail System in 2001 when it became the City’s first Trails Coordinator. When we started, we found a spaghetti network of trails with few markers, very little trailhead information and no map. PPLT began work on the South Hills Trails plan by working with the City and the US Forest Service to map and assess the system. At the same time we began

our volunteer trail work day program, which puts volunteers on the ground to help build and maintain trails. In 2003, the South Hills Trails Plan (SHTP) made its way through the public process and became part of the Helena Open Land Management Plan. Since then the SHTP has provided a guide for maintenance, trail construction, trail marking and trailheads. It is heartening to look

back on the plan and see all that has been accomplished in the last nine years, thanks in large part to PPLT’s amazing corps of volunteers.

While an incredible amount of progress has been made to mark the system and close down redundant and unsustainable trails, there is still a vast network of unofficial “social” trails on the system. These trails exist for a number of reasons. Some sprout up from the habitual use of the same route as a short cut to a favorite trail. Once such a route is established, it begins to look more “official” and as others investigate it, a tread gets beat in. In other cases, a trail that has been closed in the past may get re-opened and used. In some instances brand new trails have been built purposefully (and illegally) outside of the approval process.

While there is no rule that keeps people from travelling off-trail on either City or USFS lands, the growing shadow system of trails has the potential to impact the conservation values of the public lands. This can include erosion from unsustainable trails that were not planned or laid out correctly. In addition, the density of approved official trails is already high on City open lands and increasing this

density with a network of social trails can have impacts on wildlife habitat.

Recently the PPLT Trails Committee and the Helena Open Lands Management Advisory Committee (HOLMAC) began a process to map and catalogue the social trails within the South Hills Trail system. The study, led by HOLMAC member Corey Baker, entails volunteers heading out with GPS units and maps to locate the trails and record their condition and character. Several volunteers have already completed their segments and are reporting numerous routes with varying degrees of use and abuse.

Once all the data are collected they will be compiled and displayed on a map. This information will be the basis of a public process which will look at the system as a whole to determine which routes may be designated as new official routes and which will be obliterated and reclaimed. Most likely the recommendations will be included when the SHTP is updated later this year. Projects from the study may be added to PPLT’s volunteer trail work schedule as early as next season.

Adopt-A-Trail

If you love the outdoors and you want to help keep it in good condition, why not volunteer for the Helena Open Lands through the Adopt-A-Trail Program (AAT)?

The City of Helena’s AAT provides opportunities for local volunteers to aid in the clean up and maintenance of the Helena Open Lands System. This program benefits the land, wildlife and all those who utilize the area for recreation.

AAT volunteers assist in trail maintenance by removing noxious weeds, litter and minor obstructions from in or around the trail and/or notifying the program manager of unsafe conditions or damaged trails.

Volunteers can currently sign-up as individuals or groups. Trail segments stretching from Mount Helena to Nob Hill are available for adoption. Interested groups should designate one person to be the liaison between your group and the city’s ATT program manager.

For more information or to sign up please contact Greta Dige, ATT Program Manager and Code Enforcement Officer, at 406-447-8458 or gdige@ci.helena.mt.us

Accreditation,

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“Accreditation provides the public with an assurance that land trusts meet high standards for quality and that their conservation work is permanent,” said Accreditation Commission Executive Director Tammara Van Ryn. “The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation, signifying that the accredited group meets national standards for excellence, upholds the public trust and ensures that conservation efforts are permanent.”

The seal of Accreditation is no rubber stamp. PPLT began working towards formal accreditation in 2008. After an internal assessment of our policies and procedures, the land trust mapped out a strategy to draft new and revised policies and take them through the board approval process. By 2010, we were ready to register, having met all of the criteria. Then the real work began.

PPLT’s former administrative coordinator, Joanne Martonik (who was designated Accreditation Czar-ess), carefully organized the criteria checklists and a protocol for assembling the application. Guided by a committee led by board members Jonathan Krauss and Bob Person and former board member Curt Larsen, each policy and procedure within the 12 Land Trust Standards was readied for placement in the application package. Not only does the Commission require the land trust to send a complete set of up-to-date policies, it also requires extensive documentation on selected land projects. In all, the application was about four inches thick and was submitted in May of last year. Once the Commission reviewed the application, a follow-up phone interview was arranged in August of 2011. That call allowed the reviewers to ask questions and clarify elements of the application.

That was followed by a letter requesting PPLT to submit additional

materials. Once those were shipped off, all we could do was wait and keep our fingers crossed.

And wait we did—for four more months until that shining day in February.

While PPLT can bask in the excitement of that day for a while, Accreditation requires that we work continuously to bolster our policies and conduct our business with excellence. In fact, along with the official announcement, PPLT like other accredited land trusts, received a list of areas where improvement is expected when it comes time for re-accreditation in about five years.

We thank all of our members and supporters for all of your wishes. And personally, I would like to thank the staff that worked so hard on preparing these many documents and the board members that helped guide the process. Accreditation solidifies PPLT’s status as a viable non-profit organization set up to protect this amazing part of Montana in perpetuity.

Prickly Pear Land Trust would like to thank those who gave a gift in honor or in memory.



Jessica Bailey,
in memory of Hudson Chaney

Dan & Jean Norderud,
in memory of Bill Francis Krings

Mignon & Ron Waterman,
in memory of Eddy McClure

Mary & Tyler Hollow,
in memory of Janice Hollow

Adventure Girls,
in honor of Amy Teegarden

Shannon Everts & Erik Brown,
in honor of Ed & Jody Everts

Julie Furgason,
in honor of Rebecca Ridenour and Aaron Anderson

Dori Quam,
in honor of Heather Grahame

Jim & Cindy Utterback,
in honor of PanHandler Plus

Thomas Jarrett,
in honor of Adrienne Jarrett & Tim Davis

Alexandra Garcia and Jim MacKay,
in honor of Sandra and John Jarvie

PPLT Welcomes Two New Board Members

At the Prickly Pear Land Trust annual meeting in February, two new directors were elected to the board. Welcome, John Beaver and Adrienne Jarrett! Thank you for your support, and we look forward to working with you.

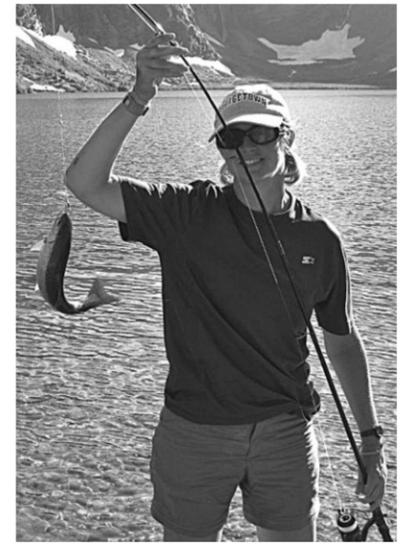
John Beaver grew up in rural Oklahoma and moved to Wilsall, Montana, in 1990 where he worked on a cattle ranch while his wife, Debra, managed a large organic garden. John graduated with a Bachelor's degree from Grinnell College in biology and obtained a Master's degree from MSU in range science. John is a partner at WESTECH Environmental Services, Inc. where he specializes in restoration with native species, plant and wildlife surveys, and noxious weed

management. He and his family live at the foot of Mt. Ascension where they get to enjoy the fruits of PPLT's efforts every day. John is particularly interested in the economic benefits that open space provides as a means of encouraging greater recognition of, and support for, open space and high-quality habitat.

Adrienne Jarrett is a small business owner (Mountain Spun) in downtown Helena whose past professional experience includes development work at Westminster College, University of Redlands and at the Sonoran Institute as well as non-profit investment management for The Commonfund. She is a graduate of the University of Utah.

Welcome, Kelli!

We are pleased to announce the addition of **Kelli Butenko** to the PPLT team. Kelli joined us in February as our part-time Events and Outreach Coordinator. Kelli has previously held marketing and communications positions with Downtown Helena, Inc. and the Montana Stockgrowers Association. This summer she'll celebrate her 10th anniversary living in Helena. She and her husband, Marc, take full advantage of Helena's trails on foot, mountain bikes, and snowshoes and they've been PPLT Cactus Club members for several years. Kelli will be



planning the Don't Fence Me In trail run and Harvest Moon banquet and working to share the PPLT message with our entire service area.

Significant Open Space Protected in Birdseye

On December 20, 2011, Prickly Pear Land Trust proudly closed on its 14th conservation easement. The 270-acre property owned by **Dennis and Deb Milburn** is now protected by an easement on 260 acres.



The remaining 10 acres, now known as the Birdseye Beaver Pond Parcel, was generously donated to PPLT by the Milburns. This parcel will soon be open for public access and hopefully managed on a permanent basis by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife

& Parks. The entire project could not have happened without generous funding from the Lewis & Clark County Open Space Bond—thank you Commissioners and Citizen's Advisory Committee!

The Milburn Conservation Easement and the Birdseye Beaver Pond Parcel protect an important corner of our backyard here in Helena, including an entire mile of Seven Mile Creek, which flows into Ten Mile Creek. The conservation easement covers native grasslands and high-quality wetland and riparian areas, and will maintain elk winter range and an important wildlife corridor between the nearby Continental Divide and the Scratchgravel Hills, Big Belt Mountains and beyond. As its name implies, the Beaver Pond Parcel showcases some incredible pond, wetland and stream habitat, and will be enjoyed by families, fishermen (and women!) and school groups.

Backdrop Initiative Moves One Step Closer

The City of Helena acquired its sixth parcel of land on Mt. Ascension from PPLT in December. The 20.5-acre Alpine Meadows Lot 15 is one of the key parcels identified in PPLT's Backdrop Initiative. Begun in 2006 with the acquisition of Lot 14A, this ambitious project set out to acquire eleven lots identified for their scenic, recreation and wildlife values. This area of Mt. Ascension is highly visible from most of the Helena area and frames the Capitol building with its open and timbered slopes.

So far PPLT has acquired nine lots in and adjacent to Alpine Meadows and has conveyed six to the City of Helena to be incorporated into Mt. Ascension Park. PPLT hopes to acquire two additional lots in the near future to complete this "block" of acquisitions.

When complete, the Backdrop Initiative will add about 256 acres to Mt. Ascension Park, increasing the

Park's size by 63%. While PPLT is making headway, it still needs substantial funding to complete the project. With loans and the associated interest, PPLT is working hard with its granting partners to continue to make headway towards this ambitious vision.

This ambitious project would not be possible without the generous support of our funding partners and our members. The FWP Recreational Trails Program and the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust have each contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Backdrop Initiative campaign. In addition, PPLT supporters continue to help the land trust with significant donations towards this project. Thanks to all of you.

If you would like to help, please contact Heather or Andy at the PPLT office.

Consider a Gift That Gives Forever

Did you know that Prickly Pear Land Trust has an endowment? Giving to our endowment gives us a permanent, stable source of operating income, now and forever! Did you also know that a planned gift to our endowment can save you money on your state income taxes?

Montana is one of the few states in the nation that has an incentive for charitable giving. The Montana Endowment Tax Credit allows donors to pay less in Montana state income taxes when they give a qualifying planned gift to a Montana charitable endowment.

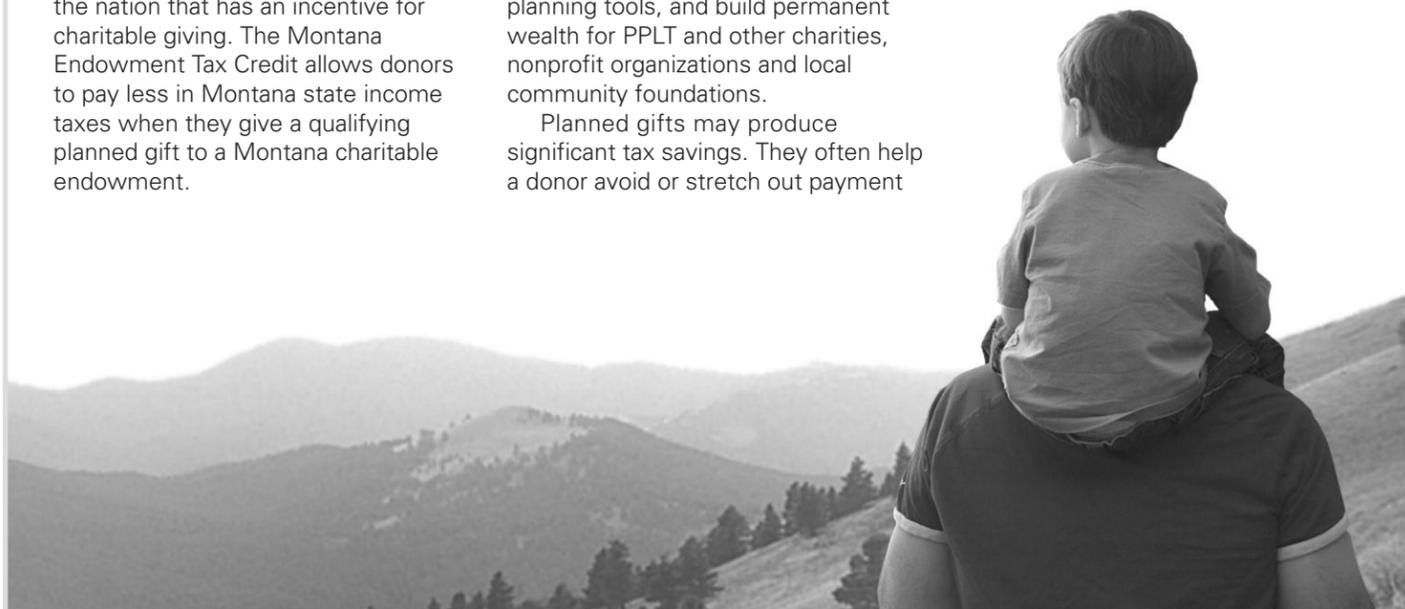
The incentive is 40% of the gift's federal charitable deduction, up to a maximum \$10,000 tax credit, per year, per individual, and a credit of 20% of a direct gift by a qualified business, up to a maximum of \$10,000 per year.

In addition, planned gifts allow you to maintain access to income during your lifetime, provide estate and tax planning tools, and build permanent wealth for PPLT and other charities, nonprofit organizations and local community foundations.

Planned gifts may produce significant tax savings. They often help a donor avoid or stretch out payment

of capital gains taxes, earn federal and state income tax deductions, reduce the size of the donor's estate, and, if given to a Montana endowment, may be eligible for the Montana Endowment Tax Credit.

For more information about saving money on your taxes, call Heather Nese at 406-442-0490.



We thank our Don't Fence Me In sponsors



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Valley Bank
Windbag Saloon

Calendar of Events

April 16 – Community Night at Blackfoot River Brewing Co.
April 25 – Don't Fence Me In packet stuffing
April 30 – Trail Work Day on the Nob Hill Loop
May 5 – International Migratory Bird Day
May 12 – Don't Fence Me In trail run
May 21 – Trail Work Day on the Archery Range/Entertainment Trail
May 23 – Wildflower Walk
June 2 – National Trails Day
June 14 – Kid's "Eye Spy" Walk
June 18 – Trail Work Day on Lower Wakina Gully
June 19 – Annual Weed and Seed BBQ
July 10 – Music on the Mountain (tentative date)
July 16 – Trail Work Day on LeGrande Cannon Boulevard
August – High Divide Trail Work Day (date to be determined)
September 10 – Trail Work Day on Rodney Ridge
September 13 – Carroll College hike
September 22 – Harvest Moon banquet

Details are subject to change. Please visit pricklypearlt.org for more information.

Show your support

for Prickly Pear Land Trust every time you hit the road with a PPLT license plate. They're just \$20 a year and help continue our efforts to protect open lands in Lewis and Clark, Jefferson, Broadwater, and Powell counties.

Cheers to PPLT!

It's time for Community Night at Blackfoot River Brewing to benefit Prickly Pear Land Trust. All day on Monday, April 16, Blackfoot will donate \$1 for every pint purchased to PPLT to continue our conservation efforts. PPLT staff will be on hand from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. to celebrate our recent accreditation (see article on page 1). So grab a friend, a beer, and a spot on the deck and help PPLT at the same time. Thanks to Blackfoot for their continued generosity to the Helena community!



Give Monthly, Get Goodies!

PPLT has a monthly giving program called the Cactus Club. Enrolling in the Cactus Club is simple, and automatically keeps your membership current. Plus, it's an incredibly affordable way to increase your membership support. For example, if you're a Guardian Member (\$50 annually) enrolling in Cactus Club at \$10 a month is affordable and more than doubles your membership!

PPLT relies on its members—your dues are the foundation of our operations.



As we strive to increase the miles of trail in the South Hills, create new recreational opportunities and protect important habitat, we need your support more than ever before.

Visit us at pricklypearlt.org, click on the "Donate Now" button and enroll today! You'll be glad you did when we thank you with the gifts listed below:

- Donate \$10–\$24 per month and receive a Prickly Pear Land Trust tote bag.
- Donate \$25–\$44 per month and receive your choice of a PPLT ball cap OR a PPLT beanie.
- Donate \$45 or more per month, and receive a specially etched blue pint glass, and a coupon for 20 free pints of Blackfoot River Brewing Company beer.

PPLT Goes Electronic

Can't wait for the next newsletter to arrive in the mail to get your Prickly Pear Land Trust news fix? We can help with that.

"Like" us on Facebook and you'll get regular updates on events, hikes, and trail work days, plus occasional articles we think you might find interesting as a fan of the outdoors and open space.

You can also sign up for our eviews electronic newsletter. It gets e-mailed when we've got longer-format news to share that just won't keep until the next newsletter goes out. To get on the eviews mailing list, send your e-mail address to kellib@pricklypearlt.org.

Welcome New Members!

We're sure glad to have you join us. Membership dues are the backbone of our ability to complete important projects. Thank you for supporting our efforts with a membership contribution.

Chris Beskid
 Tom Bourns
 Larry & Maureen Cole
 JD Davis
 Rebecca Fletcher
 Melissa & Kris Godlewski
 Midge & Jerry Golner
 Katie Guffin
 Phil Hohenlohe
 Angie Howell
 Mick Karls
 Sarah Kjorstad
 Nadean Klinkenborg
 Richard & P.L. Knatterud
 Bonnie Lambert
 Dick Morgan
 Dale & Dawn Newell
 Amy Omang Huber
 Patricia Pasini
 Robert Psurny, Jr
 Dori Quam
 Andrea Rankin
 Brad & Susan Robinson
 Ann Schile
 Diane Sipe
 Mountain Spun
 Lois Steinbeck
 Dennis Taylor
 William & Nancy Wells
 Gregory Wirth & Meghan Trainor Wirth
 Barry Wootten

New Cactus Club Members
 Jennifer Brunson & Bill Powers