



openviews

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

Continuing an Agricultural Tradition

PPLT Works with Bill Gehring to Preserve Historic Ranch

IF BILL GEHRING'S GRANDPA hadn't been put in the oven as a newborn to warm up, this story might have had a different ending. But thanks to the quick thinking of a family friend, Bill's grandpa, David Gehring, survived his cold winter birth in 1873; David's twin, however, did not survive.

David Gehring was the only child of Bartholomew and Jane (Auchard) Gehring, who homesteaded in the Prickly Pear Valley in what Bill estimates was 1864.

In the more than 150 years since that claim, the Gehring ranch passed through four generations and grew to nearly 3,000 acres, most of which has seen little change since Bartholomew first set foot on it.

The ranch, which is about 10 miles northwest of Helena on Lincoln Road, is one of the few historic ranches in the area that remains intact. Bill Gehring, the current owner, has taken steps to make sure it stays that way. Through a conservation easement with Prickly Pear Land Trust and requested partial funding from the Lewis & Clark County Open Space Bond, and grants from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Travelers for Open Lands, Gehring will keep the ranch safe from development and ensure that future generations enjoy the view of wide open space.

Early on a recent Friday morning, Bill sat at a table in the kitchen of the house where his great grandparents, grandparents and parents once lived. His mother, Rose, made a pot of fresh coffee to which she added a dash of

salt—it takes away the bitterness she explained. On the table before him, Bill had old diaries in which his grandfather David penciled in the daily happenings at the ranch and printouts of photos his grandmother, Ann (Hardie), took dating back to at least 1910. How they had the foresight to keep such detailed documentation is a mystery, but it is coming in handy to the Helena/Lewis & Clark County Historic Preservation Commission,

“Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever... this will be my legacy to the land; this will be my stewardship.”

which is helping Bill to get the Gehring ranch designated to the National Register of Historic Places.

“Golly, golly,” Bill said. “My roots are deep here.”

Bill walked around the living room of the house pointing out old photos and paintings of the original homestead and calling attention to the short, wide doorways. “They were short people,” Bill says of his great-grandparents, Bartholomew and Jane. “My great-grandmother was only 4-foot-9.” There is a worn spot in the floor where David regularly rocked in his rocking chair. The house is a series of small spaces, a reflection of the number of times it was added on to. The front part of the house is from the 1870s, the kitchen was added in the 1930s, and bedrooms on the second floor were added even later. Bill doesn't live in the house; he lives about a quarter mile down the road in a more modern house. Bill's mother, Rose, no longer lives in the house either, having divorced Bill's father in 1964. But Bill keeps up the house for visitors.



Eric Ian

He walked up the stairs and pointed to the railing on the landing—it's where he used to play “rancher” as a boy, using the railing slats as stalls for his toy cows and horses, he said. Ranching, no doubt, runs deep in Bill's blood and his hope, through the conservation easement, is that someday his grandkids inherit the land along with the passion for ranching and stewardship that has become a Gehring tradition.

Bartholomew picked a good spot for a ranch; two creeks—Silver and Threemile—run through the property and its position on what was known as the Mullan Road ensured that passing traffic would bring business. Originally established for cattle and pigs, the ranch adjusted to changing times. According to a family history written by Bill's Aunt Ruth, the Gehrings sold dairy products, horses, chickens, oxen, mules, hay, grain, potatoes, strawberries, currants, gooseberries, vegetables, eggs, cheese and, eventually, bison. Bill continues to raise cattle and bison on the ranch.

Maintaining a 3,000-acre ranch has not been easy for Bill. To keep a steady income, Bill worked as a laborer at Cretex Concrete for 39 years. After Bill's dad, Jack, got into a little trouble

in the 1970s for not paying taxes, the ranch came close to foreclosure and a buy/sell agreement was even made on the ranch in the 1990s. But through hard work, Bill was able to keep the ranch together.

“I have preserved the place; it's still here,” Bill said.

Bill drove his truck past the big red barn, a landmark to those who frequently drive on Lincoln Road, through some pasture land and up to the high point of the ranch. Helena can be seen to the south, the Sleeping Giant is to the northeast and, creeping into view from almost every direction, are houses that are part of minor subdivisions.

“Golly, golly,” Bill said. “I used to be against conservation easements; they take some control of the ownership out of the property. But if you look at what our grandparents and great-grandparents went through—they never threw their hands up.”

“Once it's gone, it's gone forever,” Bill said. “Hopefully, this will be my legacy to the land; this will be my stewardship. The window that a person owns a piece of land is small. God gave me the gift to preserve this.”

The 3,000-acre ranch, which is about 10 miles northwest of Helena on Lincoln Road, is one of the few historic ranches in the area that remains intact.

Nate Kopp

20 Years and Rising:

Harvest Moon Highlights the Importance of Open Spaces for All

WHAT A FANTASTIC WAY to celebrate Prickly Pear Land Trust’s 20th anniversary — a room full of people standing in support of trails, community conservation and a legacy of open space for future generations!

Thanks to all of those who attended and provided support, the 2016 Harvest Moon Banquet and Auction set a new record for our fundraising efforts. We had incredibly generous sponsors (see the list of sponsors this page), auction donors and auction bidders.

Local artists A.L. Swanson, Dale Livezey and Beth Cummings each created a special item for the live auction. Al’s collector’s cabinet, “Autumn,” inspired a friendly bidding war as did Livezey’s painting, “Sunrise on the 7-mile.” Cumming’s wooden quilt called “Hikers. And Runners. And Bikers. Oh, My!” was her best one yet!

During the event, we were proud to premiere our new video, “Community Conservation,” which was created by Bozeman photographer Eric Ian. You can view the video along with two others, “Private Land Conservation” and “Trails and Recreation,” on PPLT’s YouTube page.



Gov. Steve Bullock talks about what PPLT means to him and his family.



The 2016 Harvest Moon Banquet and Auction set a new record for PPLT’s fundraising efforts.

PPLT Board President Jim Utterback with Mary Hollow, PPLT Executive Director



“Community Conservation” focuses on PPLT’s Peaks to Creeks project, which consists of 556 acres and stream access on Tennile and Sevenmile creeks. The acquisition will provide opportunities for all types of trail users including recovering vets from the VA Hospital and residents at Spring Meadow Resources.

“One measure of success, in my mind, is seeing a diversity of people able to be outdoors,” PPLT Executive Mary Hollow says in the video.” We’re doing that more and more every day.”

“One measure of success is seeing a diversity of people able to be outdoors.”

—PPLT Executive Director Mary Hollow

And of course, Harvest Moon would not be possible without all the volunteers who give their time and effort before, during and after the event. Thanks especially to our Harvest Moon committee members:

Jonathan Krauss, Bob Walker, Ann Mary Norton, Tammy Lavigne, Betsy Baur, Sarah Jaeger, Stuart Segrest, Jane Kollmeyer and Sheila Habeck.

Prickly Pear Land Trust celebrates its 20th anniversary

Thanks for a great 20 years!
We’ve come a long way since the founders of PPLT met for the first time in a living room at the base of Mount Ascension in 1996. But this anniversary is about more than PPLT; it’s about celebrating a community and a legacy of conservation that wouldn’t be possible without the support of our members. And it’s about imagining what we can accomplish together in the next 20 years.

We’d like for you to reflect on some of the achievements that were made possible in the past 20 years only because of your support, participation, contributions and vision for making Helena a great place to live.

In the last 20 years, you have helped us:

- Secure Helena’s backdrop: Helena’s southern skyline provides one of the most beautiful backdrops of any city in the United States.
- Protect thousands of acres through strategic private land conservation projects with open space, working farms/ranches, and critical wildlife habitat.
- Increase public access to the incredible open spaces in the Prickly Pear Valley and adjoining lands in Lewis and Clark, Jefferson, Broadwater and Powell counties.
- Protect and Build a destination trail system, ranked as a Silver Level ride center by the

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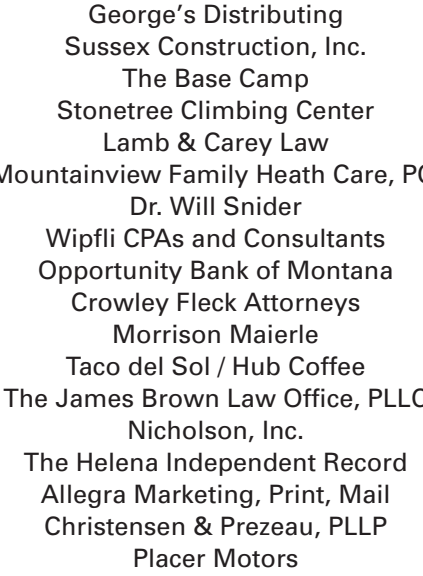
PLATINUM



GOLD



SILVER



International Mountain Biking Association, with more than 75 miles of singletrack.

- Establish and grow, with the city of Helena, one of the largest city parks in the U.S., with nearly 2,000 acres right outside our back door.

Thank you so much for your support of PPLT. We look forward to the next 20 years of connecting land and people.

For a full timeline of PPLT's 20 years, see our annual report at pricklypear.org.

New and Improved: Volunteers Give Trails a Little TLC

IT WAS A BUSY SUMMER!
PPLT volunteers helped us construct new trails and widen and maintain existing trails. More than 210 volunteers logged nearly 650 hours, which translates to about \$10,000 worth of work!
To show our appreciation, we will host a Volunteer Appreciation Night on Dec. 6, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., at the Hub downtown.

We'd like to extend special thanks to our partners and volunteer groups from Carroll College, the Montana Conservation Corps, Deloitte, the Montana Bicycle Guild, the local Boy Scouts, World Montana and local schools. The Adopt-a-Trail program, which seeks to assign trails to volunteer ambassadors, continued throughout the year. The AAT program is designed to provide routine monitoring and maintenance for the Helena area's recreational trails. Through the program, volunteers logged another 70 hours of work. About 15 trails have yet to be adopted. If you use the South Hills

trail system and are interested in this program, please contact PPLT. PPLT also purchased and installed counters at several trailheads. The data will help us improve trail activities. The PPLT Trails Committee will be busy with new trail alignments and map revisions. Another 61 hours of volunteer efforts have been amassed by this large, representative committee to date.

Some of our summer projects included work on the Bull Run Trail, painting the kiosk at the Old Shooting Range Trailhead, creating maps for several trailheads, brushing and sign installation on the PanHandle and the WestRidge trails, and investigating possible alignments on the Brooklyn Bridge and the Ridge to Bridge trails (see story below).



VOLUNTEER PROFILE David Payne

PPLT would like to give a shout-out to David Payne, a trail volunteer who has helped us tremendously over the last few years. He graciously agreed to a Q&A with us, below are some of the highlights.

David moved to Montana in 1975 and worked seasonally for the U.S. Forest Service for several years. After working 10 years for the Forest Service in Philipsburg, he moved to Helena in 1988 and worked in the Forest Service recreation program until retiring in 2013.

What inspired you to volunteer for Prickly Pear Land Trust?

I value our natural resources and the Helena community, and I think highly of PPLT. About 25 years ago I worked on several trail projects with "The Friends of Mount Helena" and thought it would be fun to, once again, provide some physical labor in support of our urban trails.

How long have you been volunteering for us?

I began working on PPLT trail projects during the spring of 2014 and have helped since that time.

What has been your favorite project to work on?

No favorites, I've enjoyed each of the individual trail projects I've helped with including: trail construction, trail maintenance and trailhead improvements.

Do you use the trail system, and if so, what's your favorite trail?

Yes, I do hike the trails in the South Hills but have a favorite area rather than a specific trail. I really enjoy any time I can spend on the Mount Helena City Park; it's such a unique and cherished place.

What would you say to encourage other people to volunteer on trail workdays?

First and foremost, it's actually fun to help with the trail projects. It's satisfying to see what an energetic group is able to accomplish within a couple of hours.

The PPLT trail staff are always well-prepared with thoughtfully planned projects and friendly support. Additionally, the workdays present a wonderful opportunity for those who use the fantastic trails in the Helena area to maintain their lasting legacy.

A Look Toward the Future Expanding Ridge to Bridge and Brooklyn Bridge

IMAGINE 12 MILES of new singletrack added to the South Hills trail system! Prickly Pear Land Trust has been working with several partners to make this a reality. This is a huge undertaking in terms of funds needed, but this trail is critical as it would give the South Hills that "30-mile loop" and would really broaden the trail experience. The proposed routes would expand the Ridge to Bridge and Brooklyn Bridge trail corridors, adding approximately 2.7 miles of new trail to Ridge to Bridge and 9 miles to Brooklyn Bridge. Ridge to Bridge refers to the segment located between the Helena Ridge trailhead (Park City) and the Brooklyn Bridge parking area located at the top of the divide between Lewis and Clark and

Jefferson counties. Brooklyn Bridge refers to the corridor between the Brooklyn Bridge parking area past Skihi Peak and down to the Tucker Gulch/ Cox Lake area of Helena. PPLT gathered input from a variety of stakeholders, including hikers, bikers, horsemen, Montana Bicycle Guild, PPLT's 16-plus member Trails Committee, and Pete Costain of Terraflow Trails. In September, we submitted a proposed trail corridor to the U.S. Forest Service; it is currently under review and we're hoping to know more by early next year.

A view looking northeast toward Mt. Ascension from the proposed trail corridor.



Eric Sivers

Peaks to Creeks Update

Permits are being submitted and we are working to raise funds with the goal of opening trails early next summer to hikers and bikers on the Tenmile Creek parcel of our Peaks to Creeks project. PPLT is especially excited about this project, which has been called one of the best examples of community conservation by the national Land Trust Alliance, as it will provide outdoor opportunities for all types of trail users. The trails on the 200-acre Tenmile parcel will include a couple of loops that connect about a mile of singletrack and 2.5 miles of 6-foot-wide crushed granite, which is ADA accessible. Initial trail construction should be completed by summer of 2017.

With significant help from generous donations, PPLT will purchase a bridge over the winter that will allow trail users to cross Tenmile Creek. The bridge will be installed as soon as weather allows. A parking area will be complete by May of next year. Other facilities being considered for the property include benches, picnic tables and a restroom. On the 350-acre Sevenmile parcel, PPLT is engaging in restoration work. This property has been damaged by years of overgrazing, poor land-use practices, and the channelization of Sevenmile Creek in places. The creek itself will be the focus of the majority of the efforts as the channel is deeply incised, has limited

vegetation cover, contains a barrier to fish passage, and is one of the top contributors of sediment to the Tenmile watershed. At this point PPLT is working to secure funding for some of the upper reaches on the property and is hopeful that tools can be put in the ground as early as 2018, if not sooner. This project will have the added benefit of providing opportunities to engage the public, local students and other volunteers in the restoration work itself. Getting one's hands dirty and seeing the work first hand goes a long

PEAKS TO CREEKS

CURIOUS? PLEASE COME
Open house on Thursday,
December 8, from 4 to 6 p.m.
at the Lewis & Clark
Public Library.

way to connecting people to their local landscape. This will be the biggest restoration project ever pursued by PPLT and provides an exciting chance to showcase what being a good steward means and why restoration and the protection of our waterways is so important. To learn more about the Peaks to Creeks project and to give your input, please plan on attending an open house on Dec. 8, from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Lewis & Clark Public Library.

Open house November 4

While you're out enjoying the Fall Art Walk on November 4, stop in and say hi to the PPLT staff. We will be hosting an open house from 4 to 6 p.m. Our new office is located at 40 W. Lawrence, between the Gold Bar and Allegra printing. We will be serving wine and will display paintings by wonderful local artist Helen Rietz. Among Rietz's work on display will be a watercolor of the barn on the Gehring Ranch. The beautiful painting is called "Sheltering."

"I love the land, history, and people of America, especially the intermountain West, and my goal is to capture the fading traces of an old way of life," Helen says in her artist's statement.

Volunteer appreciation party December 6

We got so much accomplished this year, thanks to all of our wonderful volunteers! Join us for a celebration December 6, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., at the Hub on Last Chance Gulch. Enjoy dinner, beer and wine on us. You deserve it!

All volunteers are invited. Whether you worked on the trail system, participated on a committee, were an Adopt-a-Trail volunteer, participated in the Don't Fence Me In trail runs or Harvest Moon Banquet and Auction, worked in the PPLT office, or helped in any other way, please plan on joining us. It is our way of acknowledging all the volunteer efforts that make PPLT successful. Family members are also invited.

Thanks so much to Shalon Hastings and Hub Coffee for donating the use of her space to us for the event!

Please remember to RSVP so we can plan food and beverages; call us at 442-0490 or email peggy@pricklypearlt.org. See you there!

PPLT welcomes new members!

We thank you for joining us! Membership dues play a vital role in helping PPLT sustain and further our mission.

Your dues will help us preserve open space through conservation easements, develop trails along the creek corridors in the Helena Valley while preserving and restoring these natural areas, and allow us to

enhance and maintain the world-class trail system in the South Hills.

Thank you to our newest members, who joined between August 1 and October 25, 2016, for supporting Prickly Pear Land Trust. We're so glad you share our vision of protecting working lands and improving access to public lands.

We warmly welcome:

Mark & Beth Barry

Bill and Marita Hallinan

Doubek, Pyfer and Fox Law Firm

Annual Report available online

PPLT's Fiscal Year 2015 annual report is available on our website. Visit pricklypearlt.org/publications/.

PPLT schwag makes perfect stocking stuffers

Get your Christmas shopping done all in one spot and get a warm fuzzy feeling for supporting your local land trust. PPLT has all kinds of gear in all kinds of sizes for all kinds of trail users. Check this list, you'll find something for the naughty and nice:

- Happy Trails T-shirts: \$20
- Happy Trails sweatshirts: \$40
- PPLT ball caps (in new colors!): \$20
- PPLT visors: \$15
- PPLT beanies: \$15
- Dog leashes: \$10
- Trail maps: \$8
- License plate frames: \$2

Stop by our office; we have new gear coming in soon.



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PRICKLY PEAR LAND TRUST

40 W. Lawrence St., Ste. A
PO Box 892, Helena MT 59624

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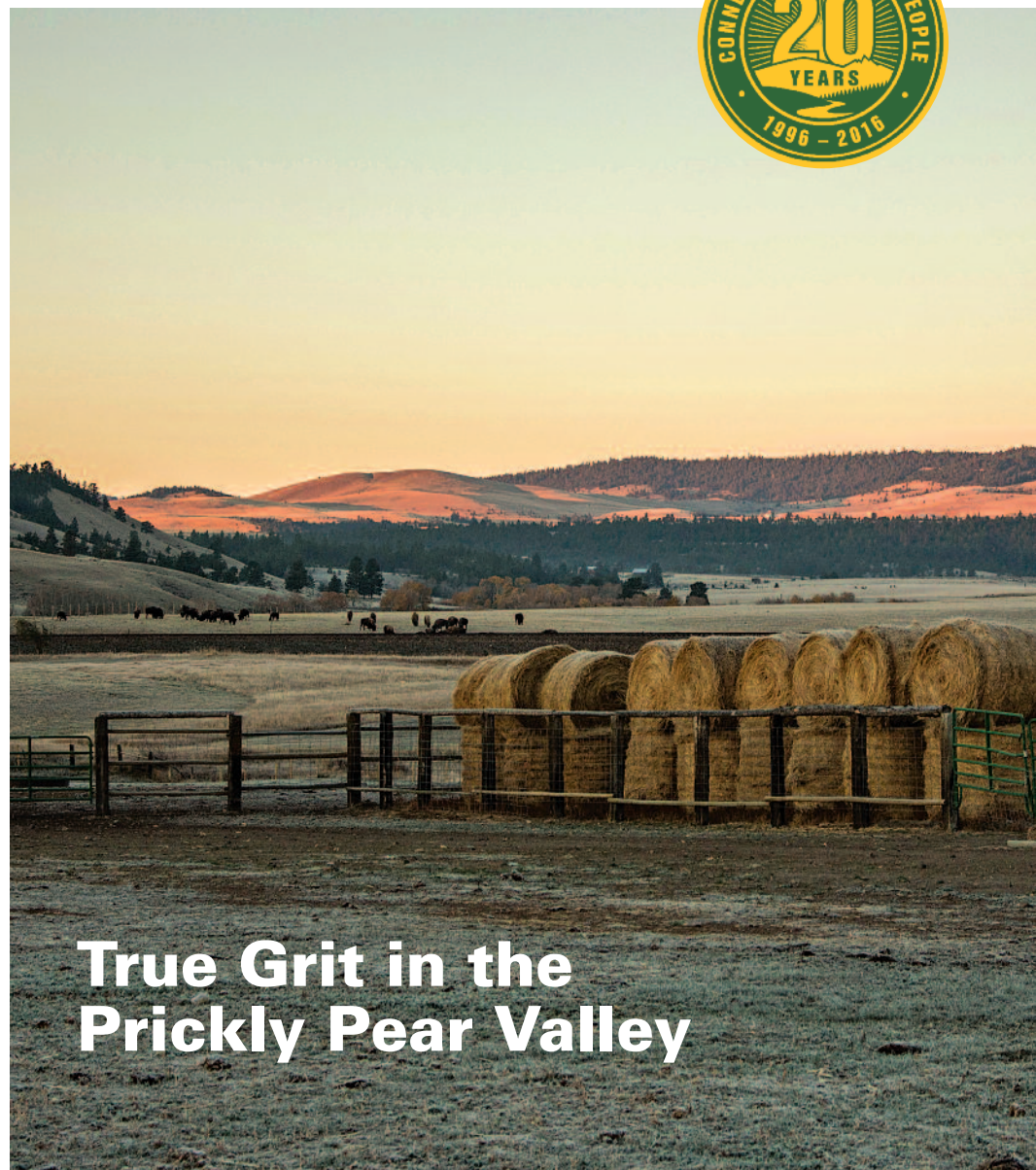


THE NEWSLETTER OF PRICKLY PEAR LAND TRUST

Connecting land and people

openviews

FALL 2016



True Grit in the Prickly Pear Valley