



HARVEST MOON SET FOR SEPTEMBER 23

Celebrate 21 years of conservation with us at the 2017 Harvest Moon Banquet and Auction at the Helena Civic Center.

Join us for a delectable dinner, superb live and silent auction items, musical entertainment and an evening filled with some of Helena's finest community members all coming

together for open space and recreation. Tickets are \$75 and can be purchased on the PPLT website, pricklypearlt.org, or by calling the office at 406-442-0490.

Tickets include dinner served by Chili O'Brien's, wine on your table and delicious bread and desserts donated by local bakeries.

Every penny spent during the evening goes directly to projects like the Tenmile Creek Park, trail improvements in the South Hills and the Prickly Pear Creek Greenway.

Tickets are going quickly and last year the event sold out three weeks in advance. Be sure to make your reservations early!

Harvest Moon is PPLT's most important fundraiser and largest celebration of the year. Thanks to our sponsors and auction donations, guests can be assured that every penny spent during

the evening goes directly to bringing projects like the Tenmile Creek Park, trail improvements in the South Hills and the Prickly Pear Creek Greenway project one step closer to completion.

Keep an eye on our Facebook page and website for updates on the event and auction item highlights.

We can't wait to see you on September 23.



Last year the event sold out three weeks in advance. Get your tickets now! Go to pricklypearlt.org or call 406-442-0490.

HARVEST MOON 2017 SCHEDULE

5:00 p.m. Doors open; cocktail hour and silent auction

6:30 p.m. Dinner is served

7:00 p.m. Silent auction closes

8:00 p.m. Silent auction winners are posted and live auction begins

9:00 p.m. Raffle drawing

Menu Options:

Meat Entree: Grilled Herbed Balsamic Skirt Steak with Italian Roasted Vegetables: A simple grilled dish that is a great crowd pleaser! This skirt steak is marinated in a garlic herbed balsamic marinade and grilled to perfection. Served on a bed of summer roasted vegetables.

Vegetable Entree: Portabella Mushroom Cheese Ravioli with a Pesto Cream Sauce. This tender ravioli is stuffed with a delicious blend of mushrooms and ricotta cheese. This dish is then drizzled with a garden fresh pesto cream sauce and sautéed mushrooms.

NEW LOOK!

Now that we are 21, PPLT is freshening up our look! As you'll notice above, we have a new logo that we believe better reflects our three work areas: trails, community conservation and private land conservation.

We are not changing our identity or our focus. We just thought it was time for a facelift.

In addition to our new logo, on September 1 we launched our new website, which we hope you will find to be more user friendly and welcoming.

WELCOME EVAN!

MEET NEW PPLT TRAILS COORDINATOR, Evan Kulesa. You’ve probably already seen him out working on the South Hills Trails. Before joining our staff this spring, Evan spent three years as a trail crew leader for the U.S. Forest Service on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District near Choteau. Before that, he worked as a crew leader for the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation and the Montana Conservation Corps.

Evan grew up in South Dakota and graduated from Augustana University in Sioux Falls. He lives in Helena with his wife Krystle and their cat Tofu. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, biking, skiing, climbing mountains and travelling.

As trails coordinator, Evan gets a lot of questions from the community. Here’s how he answered some questions we threw his way:

Q: What makes a good, sustainable trail?

A: When I think about sustainability I think about it in three equal parts — resource, economic and social. I hope the new trail on Mount Ascension from 2006 to Entertainment is a good example of all three. It is a contour trail on the side hill that uses the

topography to keep water off the trail so it should not have the erosion problems we see on trails like Powerline that go straight up the mountain. Because the resource is protected, it is an economically sustainable trail, as it will need only minor maintenance going forward. Most importantly, we tried our best to make it a fun trail with great views, which will keep it socially sustainable.

Q: What challenges and opportunities do you anticipate for the South Hills Trail System in the near future?

A: Helena continues to be a fast-growing, desirable place to live and the South Hills are a large part of our quality of life. As more people become aware of the treasure out their back door, there will be increasing demand for more trails and better trails. Our challenge is to make a system that meets the needs of today’s users, while planning the larger picture of what the system should look like in 20 years.

“Our challenge is to make a system that meets the needs of today’s users, while planning the larger picture of what the system should look like in 20 years.”



Peggy O’Neil

Q: What is a social trail and why should trail users avoid them?

A: Social trails pop up when trail users cut switchbacks, take routes through private property or travel off the inventoried trail system. Social trails generally do not meet any of the three parts of the sustainability test. They are too steep and cause increased erosion and possibility for weed spread in trampled areas. They add additional burden to the budget as the natural resource concerns cause us to need to close them, which costs money that could go to improving existing trails.

Finally, they are normally only used by a small percentage of users and are therefore socially unsustainable.

Q: What’s your favorite trail — ever, anywhere?

A: Cave Creek in the Scapegoat. The trail winds up from the valley floor to the base of the incomparable Scapegoat Plateau where you will see a cave, a spectacular alpine meadow filled with wildflowers and likely not another human soul for miles.

TRAILS UPDATE

DESPITE THE HOT WEATHER, PPLT, in coordination with public land managers and volunteers, has accomplished a lot of work on the South Hills Trail System so far this year.

Every year the trail system requires annual maintenance that includes maintaining drainage features, brushing the trail corridor, as well as widening and retreading the trail surface. This annual maintenance is important in curbing erosion from water and use as well as continuing to provide for a great user experience. With the efforts of PPLT staff, volunteers and partners,

the most critical annual maintenance needs have been completed including:

- widening the Dump Out trail near the bottom
- maintaining drains on fall-line sections of trail including Powerline, No Trail, Prospect Shafts, Prickly Pear and McKelvey, among others
- smoothing the trail surface of brake bumps on Show Me The Horse and Entertainment
- maintaining the trail corridor by cutting out small trees and branches on trails such as Prairie, Eagle Scout, Archery Range and Prickly Pear.

Managing recreational use and maintenance needs on more than 80 miles of trail can be hard work, and is made even harder by social trails. This summer, PPLT and our public land manager partners have focused on closing some of these social trails occurring along the 2006 trail. Closing trails is not our favorite activity, but, unfortunately, sometimes needs to happen to meet erosion, trail density or private property concerns.

As a reminder, please travel on the existing, inventoried trails and if you see someone who is traveling off-trail, use it as an opportunity to educate them about our amazing trail system and why it is important to stay on existing trails.

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Open Lands, the new trail is almost complete and will be opening this fall.

PPLT’S “ADOPT-A-TRAIL” Program

has engaged more than 40 individuals and groups who are responsible for identifying trail maintenance concerns and suggestions for improvement. Thanks to these volunteers downed and hazard trees have been removed, weed infestations have been identified and passed along to the land managers for remediation, and maintenance needs have been identified to help us coordinate future work on the system.

A HUGE THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS AND VOLUNTEERS

- City of Helena
- United States Forest Service
- Montana Conservation Corps
- Montana Bicycle Guild
- Target
- Carroll College Hunthausen
- Center for Peace and Justice
- Capital High
- Keller Williams
- Royal & Sons Hauling and Cleanup
- Helena Middle School
- Access to Success
- Individual volunteers: 188 and counting

Totals: 362 individuals completing 1,073 hours of volunteer trail maintenance.



Eliza Wiley

Annual maintenance is important in curbing erosion as well as continuing to provide for a great user experience.

REBIRTH AND SEVENMILE CREEK

WHEN PPLT FIRST ACQUIRED

the 350-acre Sevenmile parcel as part of the Peaks to Creeks project, it wasn't immediately evident just what a treasure had been secured. The streambanks were deeply eroded and incised, weeds out-competed native plants, and the stream often ran chocolate brown from sedimentation.

After a year and a half of rest, a different picture is emerging, even to the untrained eye. Native willows, all but gone at the time of acquisition, are sending up new growth along the streambanks, and nesting birds are returning to the thickening overstory. With extraordinary support from professionals as well as volunteers and generosity from several funders, Sevenmile stands a chance to reclaim its former glory – with a little help from PPLT.

Getting the restoration right

The first step PPLT took was to hire noted geomorphologist Karin Boyd and restoration specialist Mike Sanctuary to conduct a scientific analysis of past damage to the stream's natural function and potential restoration actions that could revive it. This initial assessment led in two directions: 1) securing the help of local experts and scientists to help us establish baseline conditions at the site so that restoration actions could be measured and adaptively managed, and 2) hiring restoration contractors to conduct the physical restoration to help correct identified problems.

The experts

In April 2017, Last Chance Audubon Chapter called upon its membership to help PPLT establish baseline monitoring for bird species and populations at the site. Project leader Shane Sater registered an eBird site with Cornell University to track the monitoring electronically and has since been conducting twice-weekly surveys using strict protocols to track data. As of June 12, 77 species have been documented at the site, including sandhill cranes and long-billed curlews.

In May, Jordan Tollefson, from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, led a streamside staff-training about protocols for measuring bank stability and erosion and sedimentation potential, as well as vegetation cover. This endeavor not only trained local professionals and PPLT Project manager, Nate Kopp, but also provided PPLT with baseline data for comparison with future restoration actions and outcomes.

Then in June, Natural Resources and Conservation Service staff leader Darcy Goodson headed up a team, including NRCS staff Diane Fitzgerald, PPLT restoration consultant Lisa Bay, and Montana Aquatic Resources Services' Lauren Alleman, to conduct "greenline" vegetation monitoring to establish current conditions with which to measure future results of vegetative restoration. "I was astonished to see the rate of re-growth of the native coyote willows, just from removing the cattle from the stream," said Darcy Goodson. "We found them rebounding

in all but the barest banks, when last year at this time there was hardly a willow to be found."

Weeds

One of the greatest challenges on the Sevenmile site is the level of weed infestation. Not only is there substantial weed coverage by at least eleven noxious weed species, but the list includes tenacious, hard-to-manage species such as leafy spurge and whitetop. Since weeds rob the streambanks and surrounding land of ecological value and health, and because PPLT is trying to be a responsible neighbor, it is employing an aggressive integrated weed management approach of chemical, mechanical, and biological methods — spraying at optimal seasons, hand-pulling or tree

removal (in the case of Russian olive), and release of biological control insects for Russian knapweed and leafy spurge. Lewis & Clark Conservation District has generously contributed to on-site weed control at both the Tenmile and Sevenmile sites.

Spraying has been deployed for the first time this year, with annual treatments anticipated for several years. A mighty crew of volunteers from Deloitte Consulting participated in a streamside weed pull in 2016, and Russian olive will be removed over the course of 2017. Other weed pulls may be scheduled to control leafy spurge in sensitive streamside areas harboring recolonizing willows.

In May, Lisa Bay accompanied Montana State University researcher Jeff Littlefield and assistant Annie deMeij in releasing the biocontrol Russian knapweed gall wasp. These tiny insects, first released in Montana in 2009, are being studied as possible control agents for this invasive species. Release sites at Sevenmile were marked with flagging and GPS points, with the hope of periodic inspections to see if the minute creatures are winning the day. Further, Lewis and Clark Weed District's Larry Hoffman supplied leafy spurge beetles to PPLT for distribution in 2016, with the promise of more to come in 2017.



Lisa Bay

Nesting birds are returning to the thickening overstory

Restoration activities

As of June, restoration contractors McNeal and Associates and Confluence, Inc. are preparing the necessary permit applications in anticipation of fall restoration activities on 1.8 miles of the stream. Restoration activities will range from relatively passive actions, such as removal of rock rip-rap in the upstream (westernmost) portions, to bank recontouring and rechannelization, plugging of the old channel, and revegetation in downstream portions. A fish passage will be constructed around the on-site irrigation diversion that currently

disconnects fish populations up- and downstream.

The remaining 0.4 mile of stream is slated for restoration in

2018–2019, with fundraising to begin later this year. Restoration of this last segment will likely be completed sometime in 2019.

Public access

This ambitious menu of activities will require restriction of public access for at least two years. Public health and safety concerns are implicit in spraying and construction activities, and post-construction restoration will need some time to manifest. But patience will pay off – in a relatively short while, this natural area will be ready and waiting for your footprints.

By Lisa Bay. This story previously appeared in the newsletter of the Lewis & Clark Conservation District.



Lisa Bay

Native willows, all but gone at the time of acquisition, are sending up new growth along the streambanks.

TENMILE CREEK PARK IS OPEN

If you haven't had a chance yet, please visit Tenmile Creek Park.

The trails are in, the parking lot is ready, the bathroom is in working order and the bridge in place! And most recently a group of Boy Scouts built and delivered picnic tables.

Helena's newest park is for you, whether you are an aspiring young angler, a bike commuter or someone who wants a flat, accessible place to recreate – there is something for everyone!

Comprising 180 acres of former ranchland, this property was acquired in 2016 in partnership with Fort

Harrison in order to preserve it as open space. Community conservation is an approach to land conservation with the goal of connecting the people of a community to place. Tenmile Creek Park creates these connections by providing accessible walking paths and the only urban creek access to one of Helena's primary water sources.

Tenmile Creek Park is located at 1505 Williams Street. Head west out of town on Highway 12, turn right at the light at Williams Street (near the Corner Bar); go about a quarter mile and the park will be on the right.



Eliza Wiley

Helena's newest park has something for everyone!

Recently a group of Boy Scouts built and delivered picnic tables.



Nate Kopp

TRAIL MIX

PPLT WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS!

Thank you for joining us! Membership dues play a vital role in helping PPLT sustain and advance 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 March 25, 2017 and August 16, 2017, 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:

Apex Animal Hospital
Barbara Banchemo
Sean Becker
Ed Coleman
Bill Gehring
Steve Gilbert
Leo Godlewski
Jesse Groman
Daniel Guzyski
Blair & Brian Haseman
Ted Hawn
Janet Hedges
Nick Hill
Tammy Hinderman
Bart & Gina Kellner
Karen Lane
Dave Leitheiser
Jason & Julie Merkel
Debra Morrell & Richard Sims
Eileen Mueller
Dan Oldenburg
Kristi Ponozzo
Andrew Rivers
Jill Roberts
Pamela Shubert
Zack Zawacki

MOUNTAIN LION ALERT

At least one mountain lion has been spotted recently on Mount Helena. It's not uncommon to see mountain lions when recreating in mountain lion country, particularly in the pre-dawn and late evening hours, when they're most active.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks offers the following guidelines to keep in mind while you're recreating in mountain lion country:

- Don't recreate alone
- Keep children close
- Carry bear spray
- Keep pets under control
- Avoid recreation at dawn and dusk

If you do encounter a mountain lion:

- Do not approach it
- Do not run
- Do not crouch down
- Appear large
- Be vocal – talk calmly and regularly

If a mountain lion attacks, aggressively defend yourself however you can: rocks, sticks, jackets, pepper spray, etc. Do your best to remain facing the mountain lion. More information: fwp.mt.gov/recreation/safety/wildlife/lion/lionBehave.html

Be careful out there!

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connecting land
and people

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SUMMER 2017

**HARVEST MOON
COMING
SEPTEMBER 23**

**REBIRTH AND
SEVENMILE
CREEK**

**TRAILS
UPDATE**