



SEVENMILE CREEK: FROM DRAWING BOARD TO REALITY

In last summer's newsletter we regaled you with stories of what "could be," what "might happen soon" and spoke of the awesome restoration potential at PPLT's Sevenmile Creek property. Well, 365 days is a long time and we are pleased to share with you some incredible hydrological and biological victories!

LET'S CATCH YOU UP TO SPEED.

In 2016, PPLT partnered with the National Guard at Fort Harrison, Lewis & Clark County, and The Conservation Fund to acquire the 356-acre Sevenmile property. This move furthered the Guard's operational needs while also securing the land and water resources for community conservation purposes. The property includes a 2.2-mile stretch of Sevenmile Creek. At that time, the creek was in tough shape. Channelized and straightened in the 1940s, the creek was severed from its natural floodplain and moved against the toe of a hill. Unable to shift and move, deposit sediments here, and follow that path there, the creek had nowhere to go but down. The consistent down-cutting lowered the water table, increased creek speed, and abandoned tree roots and habitat. This decades-long cutting away also led the property to become one of the top contributors of sediment to the Lake Helena Watershed. Recognizing the potential for what the stream could be with just a little TLC, PPLT embarked on an ambitious stream restoration journey.

Fast forward to August of 2018. Where there were once barren banks from grazing pressures, there is now

riparian regrowth in the form of willows and alder, as well as grasses and sedges. Streambanks, sometimes twelve feet high, periodically sloughed into Helena's water. Improved bank treatments with expanded floodplain areas now catch the sediments. In place of the dried and cracked remains of an abandoned floodplain, a new wetland, over 1.5 acres in area, provides bird and wildlife habitat similar to what historically dotted the area. An improved irrigation diversion which allows brook and brown trout access to the entire waterway replaced the old structure which blocked all fish passage. Two years ago, a 2,300-foot, narrow stream 'tunnel' shot past its historic floodplain. Today, a fresh 2,800-foot stream follows a natural path, meandering as it should, prepared to flood and offload seasonal high water energy.

What's next? Have we finished the restoration yet? No! One final stretch of the creek remains, and happens to be the most in-need of restoration. This stream reach also lies within a FEMA-designated floodplain, necessitating significant additional costs and permitting. We have a major funding need to complete this section of restoration. This is an ambitious undertaking, but we are confident that it's a reasonable one.

We will be reaching out to partners and grant-writing throughout the fall and winter in hopes of securing funds that will enable us to break ground in the summer or fall 2019.

We are all very excited at the thought ten years from now, when

a vibrant, mature vegetation community is established on this property. When restoration is closer to being done, we will begin the scoping process for public access opportunities, such as birding and creekside jaunts. Stay tuned as we embark on our final phase of this exciting restoration journey.



Drone footage from Confluence Consulting

The rebuilt "Reach 3" section of Sevenmile Creek follows a natural meandering course.

GROUNDBREAKING PARTNERSHIPS

Accomplishments of this scale don't happen overnight. Behind the scenes there were countless hours of fundraising, permitting, planning, designing, and a whole team of people working to get it done. Piecing together the necessary \$250,000+ for such a task is a challenge, but we are incredibly grateful for our partners that saw the value in Sevenmile's overhaul and stepped up to the plate. Thanks to our awesome funders at Montana Aquatic Resource Service, Northwestern Energy, Montana FWP's Future Fisheries Program, The Cross Foundation, Montana Trout Foundation, and the City of Helena, this project not only got off the ground, but was expertly executed. Every dollar raised needs wise people to spend and stretch its value, and we were fortunate to put into action the talented and experienced contractors in Lisa Bay Consulting, Confluence Consulting, Inc., McNeal Resources, and Stream Works. Also our numerous volunteers - everything PPLT does relies on volunteer force. For this project so far, tasks have ranged from assistance with brainstorming, contract planning,

data collection, and willow cuttings and plantings to permitting. In particular, we'd like to acknowledge Trout Unlimited, the folks at DEQ and NRCS, our local Conservation District and Water Quality Protection Districts. Without solid people, quality work is impossible. We are lucky to have a community that has our back and allows us the freedom to take on ambitious projects like this with confidence.

Allen McNeal looks on as Stream Works uses excavator to plug old channel and direct flow to rebuilt floodplain.



Thom Bridge



Trout transplanted from old channel to new home with help of FWP and volunteers.

WELCOME BREENA BUETTNER AS NEW MEMBERSHIP AND OUTREACH COORDINATOR

A CERAMIC ARTIST BY TRADE, Breena followed her work to studios across the Rocky Mountain West before landing in Helena. After growing up in Amarillo, Texas and getting a degree in Fine Arts from the University of North Texas, she practiced wheel-thrown and hand-built porcelain work in Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado – the mountains always nearby.

While she continues to work in her studio at night and on the weekends (in between camping and boating adventures) we are thrilled to have Breena on board, as PPLT's Membership and Outreach Coordinator!

We were curious to hear Breena's perspective on conservation work and her ideas for inspiring those connections between our community and the local environment. Here's what she had to say:

Q: How do you see the role of a membership and outreach coordinator in PPLT's work?

My role at PPLT is to connect the people in our community with the great work we get to do! I was blown away my first week of work when I began to learn of the projects. I am incredibly impressed by the conservation achievements that PPLT has made over the past few decades and I am inspired by the trajectory to connect with underserved groups through the community conservation efforts.

Q: Why is outreach with PPLT a good fit for you?

For years, I have sold my own ceramic work and spent the last couple of years selling a great deal of work as Gallery Manager at the Archie Bray Foundation – the goal being to connect viewers and collectors with the concepts and process of the artwork. When someone buys a ceramic object, she is not only buying the object, but also the ideas, research, process, and labor of love that creates the whole. That notion now parallels my role with PPLT.

Through outreach and membership, we connect with the community by way of their involvement in working toward a finished product, but also through the labor of love surrounding conservation, land and water resources, and the idea that public access to the land creates a happier community. Surrounding oneself with handmade objects, good friends, and the great outdoors all make for a happier and healthier life. I am ecstatic to work for an organization that provides me a few of these intrinsic qualities!

Q: Why work for a land trust?

It is a crucial time for conservation and land trusts. Some of the happiest people are those who spend time in nature. Since I was raised in Texas without much access to the outdoors, education about nature, nor a close proximity to those wanting to protect

the land, I am highly aware of the privileges of close proximity to public lands and trails. I am incredibly grateful to everyone who has worked for and supported PPLT to provide these benefits that I get to enjoy everyday.

Q: What's your favorite Trail?

I use the trails for many purposes...evening strolls with the dog, hiking to the summits for exercise, mountain biking, and getting lost in the wildflowers (the only time I trail run is if I am running late to get back home!). So, I have a different "favorite trail" for every purpose! I am a beginner at mountain biking so it has brought an entirely new joy and outlet to my life. The Rent Money trail makes me giggle and "weeee" like a schoolgirl on a roller coaster.



GETTING INTO THE WEEDS ON LAND MANAGEMENT

FUELED BY this year's record water levels and a dozen or more previous years of overgrazing, weeds blanketed Tenmile Creek Park's creek corridor this June. Though it is not an invasive species, the sometimes shoulder-high mustard was certainly not one of our preferred grasses, shrubs, or trees either. Everyone loves the trails, handicap accessible parking, and bridge, but the question on people's minds now is, "What about the weeds?"

The path to a stable grassland requires work. Both Tenmile Creek Park and Sevenmile Creek property faced decades of degradation and were denuded of native, healthy ecosystems. After pressures were removed, the weeds moved in and exploded this spring with the ideal proportions of rain and sun. To make matters worse, there is no silver bullet to get rid of our leafy foes. Treatments for weeds range from mowing, burning, spraying, and biocontrol, to hand pulling. Whitetop, which you might have noticed lately all across Helena, sends shoots up before others, which means it gets its own treatment! Luckily, even if treatments are not 100% effective, we will have managed to stave off a

full-scale invasion and quarantine the outbreak away from our trails and creeks.

Knowing that weeds were going to be an issue and utilizing available cost-share programs, PPLT raised funds for a weed map (inventory) that guided our current weed treatment plan. We are committed and taking this seriously. In two seasons, we have spent around \$15,000 in weed control for the combined Tenmile and Sevenmile properties, roughly 550 acres of former ranchland. More is on the way. Tenmile received the brunt of the treatment in 2017, and has also hosted a number of volunteer weed pulls where the community attacked the problem by hand. In 2018, the focus shifted to the second, larger property along Sevenmile Creek. PPLT treated a buffer zone along the entire stream corridor and addressed each of the property's road "vectors" (likely weed pathways). Engaging with our county partners, the property has been treated with multiple biocontrols (insects) for

knapweed, one for leafy spurge, and it is even being used as a test site for some experimental biocontrols for whitetop.

Why treat weeds anyway? Well, for one, we want to be good neighbors, but landowners are also required to manage weeds. Without



Above: Trail volunteers at Tenmile Creek Park. Below: PPLT Development Manager Lanie White in a field of mustard at Tenmile Creek Park.

action, invasives cause an incredible amount of damage to crops and grazing land, as well as ecosystem services. We want to promote more natural, balanced vegetation (like the 100 trees recently planted at Tenmile). Not to mention, a grassland looks much better than a weed field!

We are currently refocusing our multi-year strategy, still prioritizing the treatment of the greatest weed threats, but also establishing grasses and native plants. In three years, you can expect to see

a very different park. We are incredibly grateful for the support of our partners and volunteers who help us tackle this problem through a variety of avenues. They provide us with expertise, recommendations, and funds, and Gardenwerks even voluntarily mowed a path to the creek. At every corner, the many hands of our volunteer corps make light work. Thank you to this

amazing community for all that you do! With a little creativity, and a little time for native regrowth, this community-led conservation project is taking root.



Find information on priority weeds and treatments in your area by searching your county's weed district service. Or go to the following link to find a fun and useful Montana weed

treatment chart produced by the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service.
www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcseprd387207.pdf



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COMING SEPTEMBER 29

HARVEST MOON BANQUET AND AUCTION

Celebrate the outdoors and conservation in our community with a night of music, drinks, dining, and a high-stakes auction.

Prickly Pear Land Trust invites you to the annual Harvest Moon Banquet and Auction at the Helena Civic Center Ballroom on September 29, 2018.

When the doors open, Cottonwood Club, Helena's own gypsy jazz quintet, will be slingin' swing string tunes straight out of the age of Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grapelli. Enjoy a variety of hors d'oeuvres while you peruse the silent auction replete with outdoor getaways, artisan works, adventure equipment, and more. Then grab wine, a specialty cocktail, or a local craft beer on your way to the ballroom for a delightful culinary experience to celebrate what you love with great friends!

The action on stage starts off with a PPLT highlight reel of the year's big conservation victories and outdoor recreation projects. It's been a wonderful year with many reasons to celebrate. Harvest Moon will then culminate in the live auction with a great list of top-notch auction items and unique experiences with you in mind. The nearly 500 spots sell out before the event. So iron those Wranglers or pull out the tux and reserve your ticket today on our website.



Jason O'Neil

Thanks to our incredible and generous local businesses and individual sponsors, each and every dollar in proceeds directly supports PPLT's mission of community conservation, private land conservation, and trails.

Please see list of sponsors on back page.



FIRECRACKER CLAUDIA DAVIS RETIRES

IN JUNE, Prickly Pear Land Trust gave a fond farewell to Claudia Davis (pictured in tiara and sash). For the past seven years, Claudia, as our office administrator, has kept Prickly Pear's wily staff in line, hounding us for our crumpled credit card receipts, balancing our books, keeping the lights on and the smart car runnin'. We will miss her quick jokes and storytelling and the gusto with which Claudia volunteered (or as she says, "volun-told") her husband of many decades, Jerry, to help with every PPLT construction project. They are a talented, roll-up-your-sleeves kind of duo. But Claudia promises they won't be far and she'll take breaks from playing on the water, sewing, and grandchildren time to check in on us. Claudia, we wish you the best and look forward to challenging you for a game of horseshoes around your new pit.

JONATHAN HITS THE ROAD

OUR LONGTIME ADVOCATE and dear friend, Jonathan Krauss, is hanging up his PPLT hat and retiring from our Board of Directors. Always willing to step up to the microphone or megaphone, you may know Jonathan as our energetic Don't Fence Me In M.C. or Harvest Moon host. Over a decade ago, Jonathan picked up a rake and joined the PPLT volunteer ranks helping build out the trails he'd grown to love. For years, Jonathan threw his weight behind the Harvest Moon committee, growing the fundraiser and celebrating Montana conservation.

During his tenure on the board and under his leadership as president, PPLT found its stride in land conservation, greatly expanding its footprint beyond Helena. Jonathan's limitless enthusiasm for the outdoors and everything "wild" has been contagious and appreciated. This champion of public access, trails, and open land will be missed (and will hopefully return someday!). Jonathan recently retired from his role as Montana's Assistant Attorney General, so he and his wife, Ann Mary, can live life on the road. They plan to first escape to the high elevations of Colorado. Happy trails for now... until we meet again!



TRAILS UPDATE

MAKE TRAILS while the sun shines! Thanks to over 800 community volunteer hours, 600 contract hours from our partners at Montana Conservation Corps (MCC), as well as help from the PPLT staff, city staff and other partners, your trails have been widened, narrowed, retread, tweaked, buttressed, bermed, cleaned up, leveled, de-rocked, re-rocked, shored up...you name it.

Trails on Mt. Ascension have been given the most noticeable tune-up. The lowest two switchbacks on Archery Range were converted to more user-friendly climbing turns. The City of Helena put the final touches on a gem of a bridge on 2017's Aftershock Trail and PPLT hired and led an MCC crew in grading and spiffing up the path leading to the bridge. Entertainment Trail received a much-needed retreading to fix the out-sloped sections that span much of the trail. You can thank MCC and the Montana Bicycle Guild volunteers for taking on this task and making the trail safer on corners. Finally, we're happy to present the newest route to the Mt. Ascension trail network — a connector trail winding its way up from Prickly Pear to Easy Rider — creating a stimulating, single-track option for cutting from Bompert Hill to Mt. Ascension or vice versa.

We know how seriously you, in Helena and the Valley, take your recreation and conservation, so we have been working across the web of trails, making tweaks here and there, to protect against erosion, ensuring that people and dirt stay on the trails and water stays off.

But don't worry, the summer heat isn't slowing us down. Keep an eye out for more improvements across the trail system. Pesky limbs will be trimmed, signs updated and inventoried, weeds catalogued and snuffed out, and more TLC applied to the trails you hike, run and bike.

OTHER CHANGES IN THE HILLS

- Barking Dog has been re-tread and we've done our best to wick water away from the trail
- Re-treading Mt. Ascension Loop Trail is halfway complete, making the trail flatter and more user friendly
- Sections on Mt. Helena Ridge Trail and Rodney Ridge have been built up out of their incised channels to make for better user experiences

WE WOULD ALSO LIKE to take this opportunity to give a huge thanks to all our die-hard community volunteers as well as the following community partners who donned their work gloves, and grabbed a pick to make our trails a happier place:

City of Helena, US Forest Service – Helena Ranger District, Montana Conservation Corps, Phat Trak Trail Company, Montana Bicycle Guild, Helena Climber's Coalition, Keller Williams Realty, SoFi, Deloitte Accountants, Access to Success, Helena Middle School, Xylem Inc., Veterans Affairs, Montana Youth Leadership Forum, and Evan's morning work group (you know who you are).

PPLT's seasonal trail assistant Lukas Savage and Montana Conservation Corps crew after a day of trail improvements.



TRAIL MIX

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to our new members and thanks for joining us! These members joined between March 24 and July 31, 2018. We're so glad you share our vision of connecting land and people. Together we will continue our work in private land conservation, trails and community conservation!

We warmly welcome:

Ron & Connie Bergum
Julie & Mike DalSoglio
Mike Menahan & Stacy Tureck
Patricia White
Chris & Emily Hardan
Rebecca Dockter
Declan Van Wyk
Aidan Van Wyk
Kat & Soren Koford
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Emily Geery & Ryan Weiss
Cathy Kendall
Chris Carparelli
Jim Tucker
Helena Psychotherapy-Pat Van Wyk
William Evans
Marlene Mickey
Erin Gallagher
Deborah Matteucci

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE EXCITING EVENTS

Aug. 20: Volunteer Appreciation
Sept. 11: Community Walk at Tenmile Creek Park
Sept. 17: Community Trail Work Day
Sept. 29: Harvest Moon Banquet and Auction

For times and locations, go to pricklypearlt.org/events.

THE (DIRT) PATH TO HEALTH

It was time, Tim Davis decided early this spring, to improve his health, eat better and work out. By April, he and his wife, Jen, were fully committed and had made some big changes to their diet. With the snow melting off the trails out his back door and two high-energy dogs ready to accompany him, Tim made the call. He was inspired to hike and bike every day and was going to lose 50 pounds by his 50th birthday in October.

And he's on his way. Tim is feeling better and reports that his hill climbs have gotten one to two gears easier. Though his five-year-old, Cameron, "can't quite bike the trails yet," the whole family is hiking regularly.

As Tim made progress to his goal, he made another resolution, or rather, his "Cactus Club Challenge." For every pound he loses, Tim has been adding \$1 to his contributions for Cactus Club, PPLT's monthly giving program. Tim says, "As of mid July, I have increased my monthly contribution by \$30 and am hoping to make it more by the Fall."

Tim has also been kicking in an extra dollar a month on behalf of his business, American Storage, here in Helena. "Thanks to the South Hills trail system and the work

done by PPLT, I am able to hike and bike twice-a-day most days and live as healthy a lifestyle as possible."



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SUMMER 2018

**HARVEST MOON
COMING
SEPTEMBER 29**

**SEVENMILE
CREEK
RESTORATION**

**WEED
MANAGEMENT**