



Mount Ascension viewed from Bompert Hill

20 YEARS ASCENDING AND EXPANDING

MOVING MOUNTAINS

Eliza Wiley

IN 1999, THE CREATION of what is now Mt. Ascension Natural Park began with its first land addition to the city of Helena. This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of that first project, which started just three years after PPLT formed. Today, the mountain continues to host healthy stands of Douglas fir and Ponderosa pines, an elk herd in winter, incredible recreational amenities and a mosaic of wildflowers in spring and summer ranging from arrowleaf balsamroot to yellow bells. And while Mt. Ascension in all its beauty is worthy of a twenty-year celebration, this year we honor more of what the park symbolizes—that with foresight, diligence, creativity, and a commitment to community needs, together we can move mountains.

To many, the permanent protection of lands in the South Hills is PPLT's defining achievement. There's a reason for this. The fledgling land trust largely grew out of the decades-long effort to protect the mountain. The land trust advocated on behalf of its supporters and cut its teeth brokering land deals to add to local public space. PPLT has been at the center of every property added to the South Hills since 1999, including those on Mount Ascension, Wakina Sky, and Mount Helena. Thus far, these efforts have effectively doubled city open space, united it with adjacent National Forest land, and made an already impressive South Hills one of the largest urban parks in the U.S.

"By protecting key lands and water access for future generations, these spaces can define our communities' cultural values long into the future."

—Mary Hollow

But our work is not done. The South Hills project is less an end goal than it is a training ground for our broader and growing vision. Through the climb up Mt. Ascension, PPLT developed an effective model for conserving lands by using purchases and transfers, conservation easements, and trail easements. And while PPLT sharpened these skills, this community time and again backed our efforts through volunteering, donations, and advocacy. Building on those results and the public trust developed in the process of protecting the South Hills, Prickly Pear Land Trust continues to respond to the growing needs of this part of the state. PPLT is actively working for more open space, recreation for people of all abilities, conservation education, and greater access to the outdoors. And we do this in an enormous, four-county area.

PPLT's expanding project resume includes numerous conservation easements for agriculture and wildlife on Mullan Pass, in the Elkhorns, and the Helena Valley. We partnered with Five Valleys Land Trust to secure funding for the Lincoln River Park on the Blackfoot. The Upper Prickly Pear Fishing Access site and Tenmile Creek Park give all residents the chance to be at, near, or in the water. Projects near York have opened up opportunities for those who like to recreate in even wilder places. The restoration of Sevenmile Creek provides new habitat, flood mitigation, and place-based education. And the

latest LeGrande Cannon purchase on Mt. Helena will minimize the risk of wildfires, while securing public access and great views.

You help us keep our finger on the pulse of the community, which means we can continue to be dynamic and act quickly when opportunities arise to protect land and water in a way that benefits you. Looking ahead to the next fifty years, the opportunities we take advantage of now will become even more important. "Helena and surrounding areas will inevitably grow, but by protecting key lands and water

access for future generations, these spaces can define our communities' cultural values long into the future," says Executive Director, Mary Hollow.

Back in 1999, a handful of individuals recognized their town's love for a mountain and took action to protect it. Today, Prickly Pear Land Trust has grown into an institution with a wide reach and dedicated staff equipped with the unique skills needed for land conservation. Together, we can keep the momentum going to protect not just the mountains, but also the creeks and valleys that we love and rely on.

CONSERVATION IN THE SOUTH HILLS

Altogether, PPLT has worked to protect over 1,500 acres behind Montana's Capitol and historic downtown Helena.

And the tradition continues. Just this month, PPLT closed on over 90 acres of prime open space along the LeGrande Cannon Trail and up Mt. Helena's West Side (see LeGrande Finale, page 3). With the addition of the LeGrande parcel, PPLT has facilitated the transfer of 23 individual properties to public land in the South Hills. That's 23 places that all are free to roam. In addition, PPLT holds three critical conservation easements on private land, meaning all of Mount Helena and Ascension will remain protected as open space for future generations.



Eliza Wiley

HARVEST MOON SHINES SEPTEMBER 28

CELEBRATE A BUMPER CROP of community and conservation projects by gathering with us for a night of music, drinks, dining, and a high-stakes auction. Prickly Pear Land Trust invites you to our annual Harvest Moon Banquet and Auction at the Helena Civic Center Ballroom on Saturday, September 28, 2019.

Beginning at 5 PM, attendees can get down with the house band, swinging, swaying, or swooning to their sweet string tunes. Enjoy a variety of hors d'oeuvres while perusing a diverse selection of premier and silent auction items including outdoor getaways, unique art pieces, adventure equipment,

and more. Harvest Moon brings in over eighty silent auction packages from well over a hundred generous local businesses and community donors, so everyone has a chance at being a big winner. Afterwards, 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 and neighbors!

It's been a banner year with a variety of reasons to celebrate. The action on-stage will start off with a PPLT highlight reel of the year's stellar conservation victories and outdoor recreation projects. Harvest Moon then reaches its peak in the live auction with a great list of top-notch

auction items and unique experiences with you in mind. Whether attending or not, you can also shoot the moon for one of our live auction items with the golden ticket raffle. We only sell 100 golden tickets, but for just \$100 you have a chance at your choice of one outstanding live auction item.

Each year, the 500 seats at Harvest Moon sell out quickly, so put your gardening on hold and purchase your ticket or table of eight today by visiting our website, pricklypearlt.org/events. Thanks to 2019's generous local business and individual sponsors, each and every dollar in proceeds directly supports PPLT's mission to connect land and people.



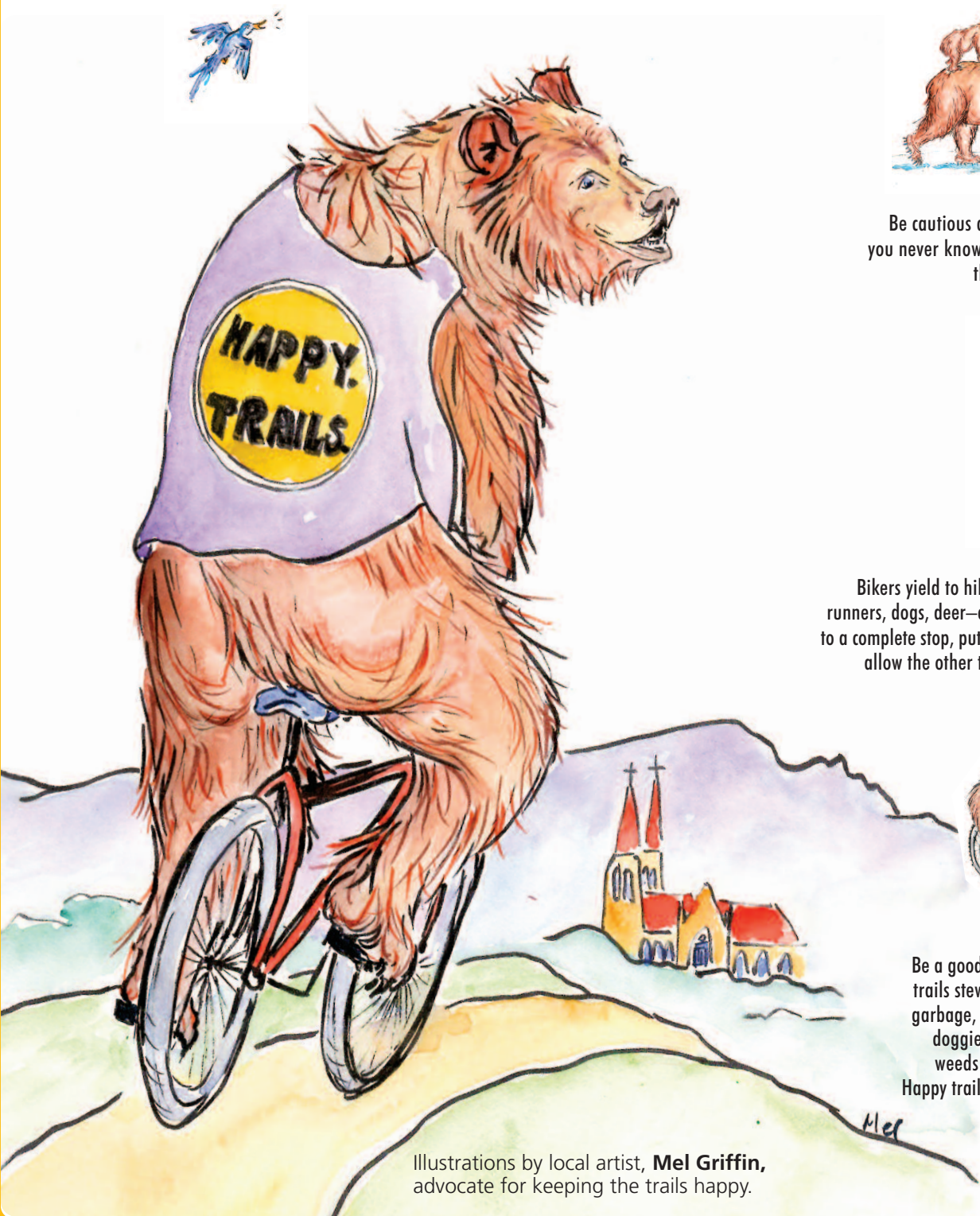
PPLT staff showcases Leah Cupino painting

Eliza Wiley

TRAIL TIPS

Prickly Pear Land Trust believes that spending time on the trails is a part of who we are as Montanans, whether you're near York, along Tenmile Creek, in the South Hills, or beyond. That's why we have spent over two decades protecting open space and building and maintaining trails for you to enjoy.

To ensure that Helena's multi-use trails remain a safe and fun atmosphere, we have come up with a few guidelines for what to do, and what to avoid, on Helena area trails. Follow these tips for good trail practice and the best ways to share these treasured trails with all hikers, bikers, trail runners, dog walkers, bird watchers, and trail lovers!



Illustrations by local artist, **Mel Griffin**, advocate for keeping the trails happy.

Be sure to have your pet under voice control and follow on-leash rules at trailheads and parking lots.

1



2

There is no poo fairy! Take time to pack out your pet's waste.



While recreating, keep one ear free of headphones. It is important to listen for what's around the corner or someone asking to pass you.

3



4

In all conditions, stay on the established trail. Going around icy or muddy spots widens the trail and kills surrounding plants.

Be cautious and slow down—you never know what is around the blind corner!

5



6

When wishing to pass by another trail user, communicate, smile, and be friendly. Slower travelers: be courteous and move aside to allow others by.



Bikers yield to hikers, horses, trail runners, dogs, deer—everything. Come to a complete stop, put a foot down and allow the other trail user to pass.

7



8

Riding bikes downhill can be a lot of fun, but always keep the safety of others in mind. Ride in control to avoid close calls with other trail users, know your limits, and exercise caution.



Be a good public lands and trails steward. Pack out all garbage, food, equipment, doggie waste, and even weeds if you pull them. Happy trails are clean trails!

9



LEGRANDE FINALE

PPLT COMPLETES PROTECTION OF LEGRANDE CANNON RECREATION AREA

OUR BELOVED public land is growing in size and community value. In July of 2019, Prickly Pear Land Trust purchased the LeGrande Cannon property from the William Whyte, Jr. family, then donated it to be the newest addition to Mt. Helena City Park.

At the base of our iconic landmark, roughly 90 acres of gentle foothills gained official protection. "The Whyte family has been so gracious with public access over the years, that many thought this was already public land," stated PPLT Director, Mary Hollow. But now, it's real and forever. The property straddles the edge of Helena, half a mile south of Kessler Elementary and offers open space for the public as a walking, biking, and nature route.

There is great history here too — the LeGrande Cannon Trail is one of Helena's original carriage routes. The relatively flat trail is retired from motorized use, and remains the only accessible trail in the South Hills, serving to connect neighborhoods and pedestrians to the rest of Mt. Helena. Recent fire mapping has also identified the area as a particularly dangerous hotspot not well-suited for residential development. As PPLT's Hollow puts it, "The conservation of this open space allows the public, in a broader sense, the opportunity to address some of the wildland-urban interface fuels hazards on the property." Adding the property to existing public lands not only eliminates the dangers and costs of protecting homes in the fire-prone

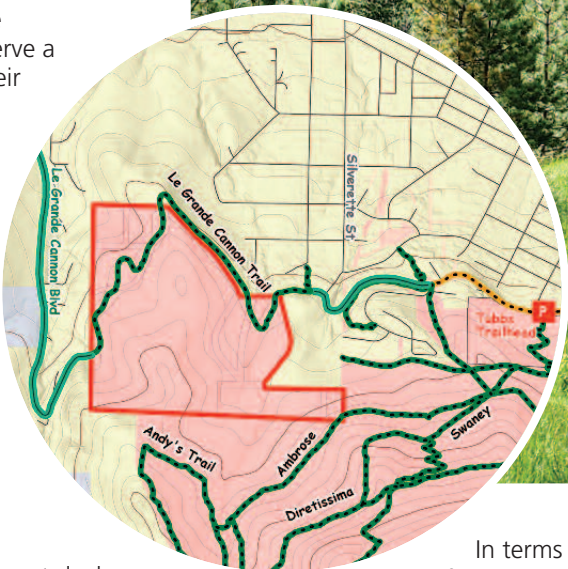
The property offers open space for the public as a walking, biking, and nature route.

zone, but permits the city of Helena to thin excess trees and actually reduce the threat of wildfire.

For these reasons, Prickly Pear Land Trust has been trying to hammer out how best to protect this property for years. The parcel has been in private family ownership for generations. We are grateful to the Whyte family for their continued interest in conserving the property.

The neighbors around the LeGrande parcel also deserve a great deal of credit for their years of commitment to protecting the west flank of Mt. Helena for future generations. Two of those neighbors, Ken Eden, a long-time supporter and former board president of PPLT, and his wife, Liz, organized several hundred residents in support of the acquisition and transfer to public ownership.

Projects like these are increasingly costly, and a great deal of thanks go to the numerous supporters and community members who rallied to make sure PPLT had the wherewithal to complete this project. If they hadn't stepped up and contributed funds, this acquisition would not have become a reality.



Eliza Wiley

Trail runners enjoy the LeGrande Cannon Trail.

PPLT purchased the property outlined in red in July of 2019 and donated it to the Mt. Helena City Park (shown in pink).

In terms of open space advocacy, acres protected, outdoor ethic, and individual involvement, this community punches far above its weight. Thank you to every individual, partner and neighbor who helped make the LeGrande addition a grand success.

TENMILE PARTNERSHIP MAKES FOR AN IMPROVED PARK

PPLT IS HITTING ITS STRIDE at Tenmile Creek Park. Folks from all walks and rolls of life have been out at the park since it officially opened last summer. Whether using the park for a lunch break, taking the dog out for a spin on the upper loop, or as an accessible spot to enjoy the babbling creek and views of Mt. Helena — there's something for everyone. But with the help of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, we are doing more!

When we took on the Tenmile project, PPLT set its sights on getting everyone outside by providing the amenities necessary to make the park a fun, safe, and comfortable outdoor space. The park now boasts flat, universally

accessible trails, a parking area, a toilet, picnic pads and tables, and a stellar bridge across the creek. All of this comes at a cost, but thanks to our partners and the generosity of the individuals in this community, we accomplished that mission quickly.

We were excited, then, when Spring Meadow Lake State Park agreed to help us with our management of the park. This summer, the Parks Division of FWP will be expanding their Spring Meadow Lake State Park management to include litter pick-up and garbage disposal, mutt-mitt restocking, and bathroom maintenance at Tenmile Creek Park. FWP employees are also helping by doing what they do best: being a

smiling presence on the ground. These extra pairs of eyes and hands at the park have helped us to pursue some of the other improvements on our bucket list. We have already rebuilt the trails damaged by last year's floods, moving the new trail closer to the creek, but higher up on a berm. We'll also be improving the experience by continuing a vigorous weed treatment program and bringing more student groups to the park.



Progress photo of the new Tenmile Creek Park trail that was surfaced with granite in July.



Shane Sater

MARSHY, MARSHY, MARSHY. THESE BIG BUGLERS LOVE THE WETLANDS

Listen for the wild bugling of the Sandhill Crane in the spring and summer, and keep your eyes open for a pair flying over or foraging in the grassland. Cranes nest in wet marshy places, so look for signs of breeding in restored wetland areas. Their calls can be heard from over two miles away,

and are a key ingredient of the Montana landscape in spring.

Catch all our fun facts about Sandhill Cranes and other birds found at Sevenmile and Tenmile creeks by following PPLT on Facebook and Instagram. [#pricklypearlandtrust](#)

Sandhill Crane at Sevenmile Creek

WHILE PRICKLY PEAR BLOOMS, CACTUS CLUB BOOMS

In honor of our 20 years of work on Mt. Ascension and the newest addition to Mt. Helena, Prickly Pear Land Trust supporters spent a solid week in July volunteering, celebrating, and chattin’ it up about conservation. As part of that celebration, we expanded our monthly giving program, Cactus Club! Thanks to you bringing out your friends and family and encouraging them to give a little each month, we are translating this community’s support into action and projects that everyone can enjoy. But if you didn’t get the chance, it is

not too late to join this group of amazing and sustaining PPLT supporters.

Whether just signing up, or switching your annual membership to Cactus Club, enrolling is easy and designed for folks who do not want renewal notices. The ease of supporting conservation month-to-month via Cactus Club is a great way to advance PPLT’s projects and help us make big plans for what to tackle next year.



Laura Sanders

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NEW SWAG AT OUR MERCH PERCH

PPLT members have asked, and we are answering their calls for new, fun swag! We have attire for all adventures, shapes, sizes, and styles. New to PPLT merchandise this year are socks, hats, temporary tattoos, and dog leashes made in the USA from

retired bike tires. But fear not, we still have the ol’ reliable hats, hoodies, onesies, and Happy Trails stickers. Come on by the office at 40 W. Lawrence and check out our “Merch Perch.”



UPCOMING EVENTS

September 10
Family Hike at
Tenmile Creek Park

September 16
Community Trail
Work Day

September 28
Harvest Moon
Banquet and Auction

You can find more information at pricklypearlt.org/events

connecting land and people

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SUMMER 2019

MT. ASCENSION
TURNS 20

LEGRANDE
FINALE

HARVEST MOON
COMING SEPT. 28

