



Eliza Wiley

PROTECTING MONTANA'S HERITAGE

PROACTIVE RANCHERS SAVING WILDLIFE'S LAST BEST PLACE

MONTANA'S UNBROKEN forest and grasslands are vast and unique. Keeping Montana as the last best place will only happen by intentional efforts and key partnerships with those that care for the land.

"We aren't making more land" is a common refrain among ranchers in west-central Montana.

And at Prickly Pear Land Trust we are increasingly aware of the driving demand to fracture prime ranch and farmland, and wildlife habitat for that matter. To address these rapid land use changes, PPLT and landowners are taking proactive steps to save the most important landscapes in our region of the state. Through PPLT's private lands program and conservation easements, our ranching partners are ensuring that wildlife, farming, and ranching have a place in Montana's future.

Why protect private lands? With PPLT's goal of promoting outcomes for clean water, uninterrupted views, and wildlife on our landscape, protecting private lands is a must. For wildlife in particular, our public lands, though vast, are not enough. To sustain wide-ranging species throughout their annual cycles, we have to ensure the availability of large connected tracts of private, open land. Montana's most inspiring species – elk, bear, lynx, owls, wolverine, cutthroat trout, mountain lion, grouse, wolves – live large portions of their lives on private lands and depend on private acreage for shelter, food, breeding, and migration corridors. If we want wildlife to persist in the face of development

pressures, it's going to take working together with ranchers to safeguard the grasslands and valley bottoms between our publicly-held mountain ranges.

Private land protection provides several benefits to Montana residents and our local, rural economies too. Montana is a major player in our nation's agricultural sector and through conservation easements, we can secure working

With a conservation easement, the rancher continues to steward the land and contribute to the agriculture economy, while the land trust protects wildlife habitat for the long-term.

lands of an appropriate scale to meet growing food production needs. Ranches also create buffers against flood and wildfire, allow for hunting and other recreation, and knit together high-elevation

mountains and low-elevation valley habitats. The largest properties in our four-county service area are feeling the pressure. Nationwide, we lose three acres of agricultural land every minute. The likelihood of maintaining our large, unbroken fields and floodplains becomes exponentially more remote as property is divided among heirs, and population pressures from the west and south creep up.

Land trusts across the West are seeing increases in demand for partnering with landowners on conservation easements, because it's a practical win-win. With a conservation easement, the rancher continues to steward the land and contribute to the agriculture economy, while the land trust protects wildlife habitat for the long term. Ranchers are innately conservation-minded too, as their bottom lines depend on their ability to be good grass managers – what's good for the land is good for them. By partnering on conservation

easements, PPLT and landowners can keep land in the hands of farmers and ranchers while maintaining quality open space and wildlife habitat.

Conservation easements also secure agriculture's place in our system by providing working families with the means to pass the ranch on in its entirety to future generations. When ranches do leave a family's hands, those properties have a lower entry cost for new ranchers – making agriculture a permanent and financially viable option for future generations.

And while it might be hard to recognize the need to protect lands in our rural, so-far so-open section of the country, the time to decide what we want our landscape to look like is now.

Positioned between Glacier and Yellowstone, we have a great deal of potential to connect our unique ecosystems and provide breaks in the cityscape between the Divide and the Big Belts. Our region's proximity to water, wildlands and open space means that our region will continue to feel development pressure. As Montana grows, newcomers will bring jobs, revenue, great food and, of course, they will need a place to live. Smart coordination of land conservation efforts and community development are at the core of our future success. Our role at the Land Trust is to offer tools in this region, to encourage land conservation that will benefit our communities – our incredible outdoor heritage, recreation, wildlife, and agricultural legacy that defines Montana.

Above: Bison roaming on the Gehring Ranch, PPLT's largest conservation easement to date, with a backdrop view of Great Divide Ski Area. Below: Species like elk depend on private acreage for shelter, food, breeding, and migration corridors.





FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PRICKLY PEAR LAND TRUST is celebrating 23 years of connecting people of all ages, shapes, colors, sizes, and abilities to the land. And 20 years ago this October, PPLT acquired the first parcel in the South Hills, on Mount Ascension. That acquisition which today houses the popular Entertainment Trail, led to dozens more like it and \$8 million raised. Today, our region enjoys some of the best access to nature and our State Capitol dome has a unique and vast backdrop of public land to boot, because of the support that each of you gives, in the various ways you provide it to Prickly Pear Land Trust.

The entire land base of Mount Ascension, the Wakina Meadow, parts of Rodney Ridge, the Eddy McClure and Entertainment Trails, the Tubbs Trailhead, and most recently Tenmile Creek Park, and an awesome 90-acre Legrande addition to Mount Helena City Park are just a few of the places that are now public land thanks to the work of this land trust and its great supporters like you. Those lands and the trails on them unite this community, and thanks to the leader and steward in all of us, they always will.

When I look back on this year, the word “partnership” comes to mind. Everything we do relies on strong partner relationships. This year, PPLT partnered with well over 100 entities to complete trail maintenance, major stream restoration, and an opportunistic Mount Helena acquisition. Our 2019 partners include individuals, watershed groups, local municipalities, state and federal government, the private sector, conservation corps, Americorps VISTA, our construction partners, and private landowners. I am exceptionally proud of the strong partnerships and the work they make possible in this community, to create a lasting local trails and conservation impact. In amongst those partnerships this year, PPLT staff led more than 3,000 service hours, plus 2,200 volunteer hours maintaining and beautifying trails and open space in the South Hills, at Tenmile Creek Park, community events, and continuing stream restoration activities at Sevenmile Creek. Volunteers provided outdoor classrooms for our amazing public school districts and helped finalize the trail connection from Montana WILD to Tenmile Creek Park.

In our private land conservation program, we partnered on a key conservation easement that protects over 3,000 acres of prime wildlife habitat on the southern Rocky Mountain Front. Today, we have more demand than ever for working ranch easements which will protect key agricultural land along our waterways and in our mountain valleys.

This year, thanks to you, a major stream restoration project on Sevenmile Creek is helping fish thrive while increasing the water storage and filtration of that system. The Sevenmile project saw willow plantings, bird counts up to 144 species, water sampling and measurement science, new outdoor classrooms, and corporate volunteer days. This stream project is valued for



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its contributions to clean and plentiful water. Over time, this work will undoubtedly grow a more ecologically resilient future for our region’s waterways.

The footprint of this land trust is expanding – more time digging deep in the communities we serve to diversify and strengthen our collective outcomes. The people of Prickly Pear Land Trust are a beautiful cross-section

of Montana—the young and more seasoned, trail and public land lovers of every shape and size, hunters, birders, and those just seeking quiet and solitude.

Thank you for another wonderful year,
– Mary Hollow

2019 VOLUNTEER HOURS BY THE NUMBERS

With new types of volunteer opportunities and more individuals and partner organizations getting involved, your 2019 volunteer hours at PPLT are way up! Our volunteers are teaching outside, sprigging willows, working the trails, running the run and showing the show at our community events. We’ve broken down the numbers so you can see just how much PPLT’s work is a community lift.

575
VOLUNTEERS
2,203
HOURS

PROJECT	VOLUNTEERS	HOURS
Trail Work on City land	154	436
Trail work on Forest Service land	24	192
Work at Tenmile Creek Park	132	372
Work at Sevenmile Creek Restoration	47	117
Harvest Moon Banquet & Auction	55	415
Don’t Fence Me In Trail Run	114	387
Education & Outreach	49	284

SEVENMILE CREEK RESTORATION

BROWN TROUT MAKE MOVES INTO RESTORED STRETCH

THOUGH THIS SUMMER’S insect invasion stole a handful of our newly planted trees at Tenmile Creek Park, the bumper crop of grasshoppers provided ample food for the brown trout now spawning and rearing young in PPLT’s freshly restored section of Sevenmile Creek. This last September, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks electrofished the Sevenmile site for the second time and found that the creek is coming alive. Adam Strainer, FWP’s Helena Area Fisheries Biologist, returned to four sections of Sevenmile Creek established in 2018 – two of the sections below the restored reach and two within the new channel. The results showed fish numbers were unchanged in the unrestored part of the creek, but there has been a significant development

in the newly restored channel. The restored channel saw only nine sculpin and no trout last year, while this year yielded numerous juvenile brown trout ranging from 3 to 4 inches, a fair number of adult brown trout ranging from 8 to 14.5 inches, and many sculpin. Strainer explains that the difference is due to natural sedimentation and significant growth in riparian vegetation (aka: water plants!). The restored reach, he says, is officially providing new spawning and/or rearing habitat and adult trout loved the grasshopper feast. Fisheries data on the before and after populations help us better understand how fisheries respond to restoration projects and inspires us to continue improving our waterways!



A juvenile and adult brown trout that were studied at the Sevenmile Creek Restoration site showing progress of ongoing habitat restoration.

Adam Strainer

FOR THE BIRDSONGS!

Birds numbers are decreasing globally but they abound at the Sevenmile restoration site. They twitter, squabble, whir, soar, warble, whip, spring, buzz, tackle, bathe, and gulp. With no shortage of avian activity, it can be a challenge to hone in on this hum or single-out the strike of that shriek.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Only the most observant and trained professionals can catch most of what is going on. To get up to speed on the day’s dramatic events occurring around us, PPLT will be profiling a handful of individual birds from our service area. Look for photos and cool “green” facts about “greenheads” and other local birds on our social media. Or, to find a full list of these common birds

Follow **#SevenmileScience**
Instagram: **Pricklypearlandtrust**
Facebook: **Prickly Pear Land Trust**

with uncommon attitudes, check out our website. This project is supported by PPLT and Montana Audubon, and relies heavily on the written and photographic work of Last Chance Audubon’s Shane Sater.



Shane Sater

THE VA AND CONSERVATION

ON THE HOME FRONT

IN THE WARM AUGUST SUN, PPLT sat at a picnic table at the Veterans Affairs complex with Dr. Greg Normandin, Karen Zawacki, the VA's occupational health nurse coordinator, and Jim Lund, longtime physical therapist at the hospital. Tenmile Creek Park, PPLT's flagship community conservation effort, is located right across Williams Street from the state's only Veterans' Affairs hospital, so we scheduled the visit with our VA partners to gauge how our work is helping vets. We also wanted to explore improvements for our military neighbors. It was an enlightening conversation that we wanted to share, in honor of Veterans Day.

In trying to understand who in the veteran community uses Tenmile Creek Park, our partners explained that the medical benefits of spending time outdoors impacts everyone. Many of their patients and families visit the park daily. Helena-area veterans use it for a walk or bike ride, or to get to and from their regular appointments, while residential patients supplement their recovery programs with daily exercise at Tenmile. The VA issues passes for inpatients to spend time outdoors at the park and they have added a fleet of bicycles and fishing gear. Many of the reservists and civilians at the national guard side of Fort Harrison visit the park and its trails for lunch breaks or required physical fitness training. Jim recalls one younger servicewoman who bikes daily at the park to rehab her knee. And every other week at the picnic tables at 7 a.m. sharp, a group of vets meet for coffee. One rule to join the group: no driving to the park. It's a walk or bike-in only affair.

Encouraging time outdoors or along the creek is good for the recovering soul.

Dr. Normandin works with the Rehabilitation Therapy Program (RTP), which treats veterans from across the state for PTSD or substance abuse. An enthusiastic supporter from the beginning, he integrates time at Tenmile Park into his three-week treatment plans. Encouraging time outdoors or along the creek is good for the recovering soul. At times during treatment when there's no in-house therapy, he adds that the park is an attractive option for patients. For a patient to say, "I can go for a walk to Spring Meadow and back, about two hours at a leisurely pace. I can do that." That's a huge step toward recovery.

To add variety, Jim takes his exercise group to the park for walking and yoga. Some patients have even taken to adding it as part of their routine. "With behavioral change... when there's an intervention, you usually see the change work [at first]," says Jim. However, without making the transition to a daily routine, the change often disappears. Jim explains, "Having the park so close is a nice opportunity for people trying to make that transition. Once exercising becomes a natural thing, then the potential to continue that healthy behavior increases, it becomes more of the norm. And with the park's flat, accessible trails and rest areas, it makes it easier for vets to begin making exercise a part of their lifestyle."

Karen leads workforce health programs for the VA staff and is charged with developing a "culture of health." Greg, Karen, Jim and other staff are leading by example, riding bikes to work each day or running, walking, or cross-country skiing on the trails. To raise the



Summertime at Tenmile Creek Park includes fishing at Tenmile Creek.



Eliza Wiley

issue of veteran health even more, Karen implemented the now annual VA2K walk at Tenmile. Karen estimated that of the roughly 700 employees at the VA, over half are veterans themselves. "There's a lot of people commuting daily... in other words, the park and connecting trails are delivering veterans to work – that's pretty cool."

As for expanding the opportunities at Fort Harrison and the VA, Karen, Jim, and Greg are already scheming. In the works are a new map of Tenmile for the rehabilitation center, new bike lanes and pedestrian crossings facility-wide, and a connector trail between the VA and National Guard side, so folks can come and go on foot. Karen and Greg excitedly tell us of a new program coming online at the VA to address veteran homelessness. The VA is building and renovating residential housing for homeless veterans and their families on campus. Two or three families have already moved in. "We're excited to see these old homes and buildings being used and they have little kids. These families will be connected now to the park and by trails to town. The park is going to be quite the afternoon place," says Karen.

As for PPLT's role, they explain that expanding public open space and trails near the Fort but also throughout the community will benefit veterans. With Montana having one of the highest per-capita veteran and reservists populations, it is important to serve all areas of the region. Whether through acquisitions like LeGrande, or by opening accessible recreational lands in East Helena and beyond, we need more connections.

PPLT's Community Conservation program aims to serve new areas as well as specific communities, like our veterans and reservists. In honor of Veterans Day, join us in celebrating our military servicemen and women, and in highlighting the projects that seek to make their lives a little happier and healthier, right here at home. Prickly Pear Land Trust is incredibly proud to partner with the VA and Army National Guard in our efforts to connect land and all people, servicemember and citizen alike.

PPLT AND MONTANA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD TO RECEIVE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AWARD

IN DECEMBER, Mary Hollow, PPLT Executive Director, will accompany Montana's Adjutant General Quinn to the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes to receive a 2019 Army Community Partnership Award. The award, only given to a handful of partnerships nationwide, is designed to highlight examples of exceptional cooperation and diligence between Army facilities and community programs. The awardees represent partnerships that have improved readiness, driven modernization and

contributed to reform initiatives throughout the Army, and, in PPLT's case, improved soldier, family, and community life.

The partnership between the Montana Army National Guard and Prickly Pear Land Trust has served to integrate the people of Fort Harrison and the Montana VA Hospital as an important part of the Helena community. The cooperation that arose from practical considerations about land use has blossomed into a program that creates genuine benefits for everyone in our combined communities—from children to soldiers in training, from the developmentally disabled to VA doctors commuting to work, from the dog-walking elderly and wheelchair-bound to veterans still recovering from wars long ago. This achievement would not be possible without the backing and trust of this community. This award goes to each of you—it is yours to celebrate.

General Quinn and Mary Hollow announce the partnership between Fort Harrison and PPLT at Tenmile Creek in 2016.



PRESIDENTIAL PHOTO OP!

We jumped at the opportunity to get PPLT's present and past board presidents together for a photo. These individuals shaped who we have become, and they continue to serve the land trust in numerous ways. Whether it's maintaining or building strong partnerships with stakeholders, donating generously or organizing funding efforts to support the organization's financial success, emceeing at Harvest Moon and Don't Fence Me In or leading outreach on projects like the LeGrande addition—thank you to these leaders who do so much for this organization!

Past and present board presidents on a rainy yet beautiful morning at PPLT's Tenmile Creek Park. Left to right: Johnathan Krauss, Curt Larsen, Connie Cole, John Beaver, Sarah Jaeger, Ken Eden, and Jim Utterback.





WELCOME NEW PPLT SUPPORTERS

These members joined between August 1 and October 31, 2019

Dan Baris	Patrick & Holly Fox	Aaron Pratt
Bryan & Carly Bergquist	Melissa Hornbein	Robert & Krista Simons
Paul & Kristin Berry	Tim Kelly	Kyle Spencer
Alex & Shanna Brown	Dr. Mari & Brandon Kiesling	Paul Sturm
Barbara Chillcott	Evan Kulesa & Krystle	& Deb Wambach
Kyna Christensen	Gawel-Kulesa	Kellen & Sara Sullivan
Brad & Katie Cook	Cody Langbehn	Kristin & Brock Tessman
Deb & Bill Entwistle	Canon Luerkens	Taylor & Abby Todd
Taylor & Brad Fjeldheim	Alex MacGrath	Gary & Claire Vert
	Eric & Carolyn Meyer	Daniel & Kelsey Wiegand
	Chris & Didi Peccia	Tia & Bo Wilkins
	Perk Perkins	Gates Watson
	& Laurie Andrews	

HELP DRIVE PPLT’S SUCCESS–GET YOUR LICENSE PLATE BY YEAR’S END

Purchase a PPLT license plate and help us reach our goal while looking snazzy in your adventure rig. When you choose the PPLT plates, you’re supporting local conservation right here at home.

Prickly Pear Land Trust license plates are an option through the Montana Department of Motor Vehicles when you register your vehicle, with 100% of the proceeds going to PPLT.

The State of Montana is updating this program and we need just a handful more PPLT plates out on the streets to make them a permanent option. Both annual and permanent plates are eligible and you can update your plates anytime before your registration runs out. A few more cars sporting PPLT plates gets us there!



NEW MERCHANDISE JUST IN TIME!

We’re stocked! PPLT has all of your favorite swag, some new and some classic favorites, for anyone on your list. Stop on by the office at 40 W. Lawrence St. to check out all these items and stuff those stockings with PPLT stockings!

NEW Long Sleeve Tees - \$25
Zip-up Hoodies - \$40
NEW Sweatshirts - \$40
Women’s Tanks - \$15
NEW Socks - \$10
Hats - \$20
NEW T-shirts - \$20
Baby Onesies - \$15
Kid Shirts - \$15
NEW Kid Sweatshirts - \$35
Coffee or Beer Thermos - \$20
NEW Metal Pints - \$10
Growlers - \$10
Dog Leashes - \$20
Trail Maps including Tenmile Creek Park - \$8

As always, free Happy Trails stickers!



YOUR GIFT STRENGTHENS OUR WORK!

Your gifts to PPLT go directly to landscapes, water, wildlife, recreation and agricultural heritage in west-central Montana. Our work for land and people is strategic, focused, and makes an impact now and for future generations. Your generous support makes this work happen every year—please make your 2019 annual gift now to ensure our continued strength.

There are many ways to contribute and play a direct role in ensuring our work continues. Your gift can be dedicated to general support, or directed to our endowment to be utilized time and time again for decades to come. For more information about how you can make a legacy gift, contact ingrid@pricklypearlt.org

You inspire us to connect land and people every day! Your investment in PPLT has built a strong organization that will continue to protect and steward open spaces forever.

connecting land and people

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FALL 2019

PROTECTING
MONTANA’S
HERITAGE

THE VA AND
CONSERVATION

SEVENMILE
RESTORATION
UPDATES