

open views

Our mission is to inspire connections to the landscapes, water, wildlife, recreation and agricultural heritage of west-central Montana through conservation, now and for future generations.



PRICKLY PEAR
LAND TRUST

SPRING 2022 NEWSLETTER OF PRICKLY PEAR LAND TRUST

connecting land and people

DIFFERENT BEASTS ALL TOGETHER

PPLT's first easement in Broadwater County connects with Townsend. See page 3.

REGIONAL LAND TRUSTS BUILDING A DIVERSE ECOSYSTEM OF CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY

We live in a state with large, rare, and abundant beasts. Within a day, any one of us can hop in a rickety pickup and with a good hike, find ourselves on the trail of elk, flushing two species of deer from the brush, or catching the silhouette of our nation's only species of antelope in the sunset. Five minutes from any of our towns a mountain lion might lurk, a bighorn might loosen some rocks from above, and the prehistoric moose will wallow. For hunters in the fall, you might rightly wonder if you are in direct competition with a wolf or grizzly for your quarry.

Beyond the big game and the apex predators, we are fortunate enough to enjoy living amongst fifteen species of owl, healthy populations of bats, and vibrant pods of kokanee, walleye, and cutthroat. All told, Montana boasts 104 species of fish.

One reason Montana remains king of the jungle when it comes to conserving lands nationally is the diverse and interconnected conservation groups that remain linked to their specific landscape and community. In Montana, regional land trusts do the work that matters most to their local communities.

The rare tailed frog male has adapted to keep his tail, to aid in spawning in the swiftest of high mountain streams during runoff events. Similarly, Montana Land Trusts have adapted their models and evolved their project work to allow them to thrive in their unique habitat.

Recently, Gallatin Valley Land Trust protected the iconic Peet's Hill in Bozeman. Flathead Land Trust just closed on the Badrock Wildlife Management Area on the edge of Columbia Falls. Five Valleys builds on Missoula's Mt. Jumbo history by

establishing front country trails, backcountry trails, and trail-less areas on the massive Mt. Dean Stone project on Missoula's southern edge. The Bitterroot Land Trust is saving Montana's fruit basket by protecting farm lands while also developing Skalkaho Park for dogs, boats, and local Bitterroot River access. Regional land trusts in Montana are all different animals. Like the moose, antelope, and caribou, they are the same in that they are all adapting to their community and their space.

A handful of years ago, the conservation world racked its head over the question, what is a Community-based land trust? What is a Regional Land Trust? The idea that community conservation was simply a "buzz word" or boardroom jargon came from the fact that coming up with a perfect definition is akin to nailing jello to a wall. The board and staff of PPLT can tell you just how hard it is to come up with parameters for the

concept. But somewhere along the way, PPLT stopped trying to define it and just asked you, our community, what you needed instead. Our strength as an organization didn't come from a "new idea," it came from the continued community support for the trails.

It came from the collective "yay!" for our new projects at Tenmile and Sevenmile. Our goals and mission have expanded and stretched because our community pushed us to include more people, more types of people, and more varied projects that connect to more communities – even the wildlife ones.

Some still hold to the idea that a conservation organization has to choose between small, local recreation and protecting large landscapes. The problem with that idea is, if you stick to one or the other, you will miss opportunities in-between. Regional land trusts are proving that not only can you have the big projects that may save a species or sustain a key rural industry like timber production or agriculture,

but you can also do the projects close to home that serves hundreds of people daily.

After several years of community conservation, some other similarities are apparent. Regional land trusts are often the leaders pushing for local conservation funding sources. They rely on community reviews, polling, and asking open-ended questions to the communities they serve and those they hope to involve in conservation. They count on local partners and community events to get projects across the finish line. They empower creative, locally-minded businesses, nonprofits, and officials to get involved. And they follow through.

SIDEBAR HEADING

To complete the web, the symbiotic relationship between all land trusts operating in Montana is owed in a very large part to one individual, **Glenn Marx**. Glenn, the now-retired director of the Montana Association of Land Trusts (MALT), tirelessly advocated for Montana Land Trusts in D.C. and Helena, in the IRS building and in dozens of county courtrooms. But almost as importantly, Glenn has connected, through his newsletter and conference calls, the staff of land trusts and all sorts of conservation and landowner groups statewide. And he always encouraged conservation groups, landowners, and local officials – Republican and Democrat – to come together on the significant issues they agreed on, the future of Montana.

Glenn, more than anyone, appreciated every animal in the land trust's wild kingdom – from the scrappy grassroots groups to the mighty and established groups who've done tens of thousands of acres of conservation each year for decades. Wildlife, parks, fishing, farming, and ranching owe a debt of gratitude to Glenn, but he leaves the Montana landscape full and alive.





SAVING AMERICA'S RIVER

PRICKLY PEAR ASKS YOU TO JOIN THE EFFORT TO CONSERVE MILES OF THE MIGHTY MO'

THOSE WHO FISH the Missouri River from Craig – 154,582 individuals each year according to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks – know well the spectacular land that fronts the river’s west bank for the first five miles. You may have mused about the wild stretch being open land, free from the recreational homes and cabins that line so much of the prized fishery. Perhaps you have also wondered or even fretted about there only being a matter of time before this prized stretch is developed.

Well, soon you need not wonder or worry any longer. That is, if our community can come together in support of the Canyon Cattle Project. The Juedeman family, four siblings, and their mother, the owners of the Canyon Cattle Company, have begun the process of protecting the newest and one of the largest conservation easements in west-central Montana. No doubt, this property is also one of the most visible. Tucked between the river and Interstate 15, the nearly 4,000-acre cattle ranch can be viewed not only by fishermen but from

the 2.3 million vehicles that drive by the property annually, either via I-15 or Recreation Road, across the river.

“This is a massive project. We all know this stretch of the Missouri and we want our kids to know it the way we do,” says Executive Director Mary Hollow.

Entering a ranch into a conservation easement can be an arduous process. This project began with a generous financial contribution of half of the

land’s assessed value by the Juedeman family. Their significant contribution will be supplemented by public money. To make ends meet, PPLT is turning to the Lewis and Clark County Open Space

Bond fund, a voter-supported initiative to support projects like these explains PPLT Lands Project Manager Travis Vincent who’s been managing the process from the beginning.

Before the county commissioners cast their votes, PPLT will usher the project through a series of detailed meetings and site visits, first getting the blessings of the Citizens Advisory Council. When

JOIN THE EFFORT

You can help by telling the County Commissioners you support this project by signing PPLT’s letter of support online at www.pricklypearlt.org/projects.



Or you can directly submit your letter and testimony during the public comment period to the Lewis and Clark County Planner’s Office. For dates, addresses, or if you have any questions regarding this process, please contact Land Project Manager, Travis Vincent: 406-442-0490 or travis@pricklypearlt.org.

the project is finally heard by Lewis and Clark County’s three Commissioners, they will open a 30-day public comment period. This is YOUR time to shine.

If this project is to be approved and funded in full, we – that is, as many residents of Lewis & Clark County as possible – need to officially register our support. This works and we’ll help you do it. Through the public comment period, Prickly Pear Land Trust will host an online form to register your support with our County Commissioners. It takes 5 to 10 minutes and asks you about yourself and your reasons for supporting this project. We need to show just how important this land and river are. And not to just one portion of the public. If you’ve ever enjoyed the recreation road drive from Wolf Creek to Cascade, fishing or floating, or are just happy knowing that ranching and wildlife will always have a place in our county, please register your support. To get this across

the finish line, we need a record number of voices.

And the public value of keeping the Juedeman ranch a working ranch extends far beyond fishing and aesthetics. The property is frequented by a variety of wildlife including whitetail and mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep, black bear, wolves, and wild turkeys. The shoreline is a haven for migratory bird species as anyone who has had the pleasure of observing the river knows. An old homestead is also tucked away and may one day be renovated to preserve that portion of ranch history.

And water quality, an ever-increasing concern for Montana’s rivers and streams, would not be jeopardized by potential pollution associated with residential septic systems and storm runoff from roads. Further, the always menacing threat of wildfire damage to property is significantly lower for ranch land than dwellings.

“Member of Juedeman family Closing Quote - Member of Juedeman family Closing Quote”

Juedeman family member

HOLY SMOKES!

Sue McNicol Transitions to Role as “Minister of Happy”

When the Prickly Pear staffers brainstormed appropriate job titles for Sue McNicol’s new position, an answer came readily—Minister of Happy. After all, Sue, who worked as PPLT Office Manager in recent years, is also an honest-to-goodness part-time licensed local pastor in the United Methodist tradition.

Those ministerial skills will be advantageous in her new role. Sue will coordinate “all levels of giving back to our neighbors whether it be through volunteer coordination, community outreach or fostering fun,” she explains.

She intends to “support volunteers,” helping mobilize “a diverse group of people who express interest in the work we do.” PPLT enjoys a meaningful working rapport with the business community, civic groups, schools, and faith communities, which Sue hopes to

invite to work days, special community events, and collaborative projects.

Sue envisions her new role as also supporting the work of PPLT staff. “I will be finding ways to assist staff behind the scenes so they can keep boots on the ground,” allowing for focused work in the field. “Our team loves working together, partnering with volunteers, and building connections.” Engaging people



with the mission of PPLT is an ongoing process and may take new and exciting forms as we expand our physical office space over time. “I dream of future lectures, classes for all ages, book club offerings and so much more.” We are hopeful the role of “Minister of Happy” will take hold and serve all in need of some outdoor fun, friendship, and shared experiences.

DON'T FENCE ME IN

OPENING THE GATE ON IN-PERSON FUN RUN

NO DOUBT, many of us have felt a little “fenced in” during the past two years. May is typically the opening month of the trail season and PPLT’s annual Don’t Fence Me In trail run. As with all things Covid, we had to amend our in-person race and run (and walk) virtually the last couple of years. But now – on Saturday, May 7 – it’s time to break free!

Prickly Pear Land Trust devotees can match strides in 5k, 12k, or 30k runs. And for our canine friends, there will be the very popular 5k dog walk. Awards will be handed out for the top three finishers in each run. Are you just starting to run and looking for a training partner or group? Join the Happy Snails for Happy Trails running group and you’ll be ready for the big day in no time.



Whether you find the trail run to be “fun”, a great goal to shoot for, or just an excuse to get outside, the fundraising benefit is undeniable. Further your impact by adding the freshly designed 2022

T-shirt to your cart during registration that will boost your trail cred all season. But more importantly, know that every cent of your contribution goes directly to support PPLT projects, ranging from Mount Ascension and Mount Helena land acquisitions to South Hills trail maintenance and Tenmile Creek Park.

Prefer to get in your sweat equity off the trails? Show your support by becoming a TrailRaiser! We have some perks for those willing to put in a little extra mileage raising funds on PPLT’s behalf, check out pricklypearlt.org for more information.



Jason O'Neil

SAVE THESE DATES!

Don’t Fence Me In
Saturday, May 7, 2022

Walking Mall Block Party
Thursday, July 21, 2022

Find out about trail workdays, summer walk series, and other upcoming PPLT events at pricklypearlt.org/events

THE BROAD VIEW IN BROADWATER

PPLT COMPLETES FIRST EASEMENT IN BROADWATER COUNTY AND CONNECTS WITH TOWNSEND

A TRAVELER between Helena and Three Forks can’t help but notice new houses cropping up at alarming speed. Recent Census data supports what the eye sees – Broadwater County’s population has doubled since 1990. New subdivisions abound, especially north of I-90 and north of Townsend. As a Broadwater County’s Growth Policy foretold just two years ago, “...situated between Gallatin County and Lewis and Clark County, two of the fastest-growing counties in the state, and with rising housing prices in both those neighboring counties and the proximity of Broadwater County to Bozeman and Helena, the county will continue to become an attractive place to build new houses.”

While the citizen surveys on which the policy was based said economic development was the top concern, it also found that “residents like the

quality of life, open spaces, and rural lifestyle.”

This love of the land makes Broadwater County fertile ground for conservation. PPLT’s latest conservation easement, the Tri G River Ranch, sits on the rich agricultural land between Townsend and Toston. It has more than 1,000 acres, includes 1.6 miles of prime

Residents’ love of the quality of life, open spaces, and rural lifestyle makes Broadwater County fertile ground for conservation.

Missouri River shoreline, and is highly visible from Highway 287.

Cast your eyes further west and take in the vast (21,323 acres) Limestone Hills Montana Army National Guard training site, home to Guard training for weapons firing and aerial helicopter navigation.

As followers of PPLT’s open space acquisitions know, the Army National Guard has been a pivotal partner through its conservation buffer program. As with the Sevenmile restoration, Tenmile Creek Park, and new lands on Mount Helena,

the funding for the Tri G acquisition came from the buffer program and a generous donation from the landowner.

As Maj. Gen. J. Peter Honecker said at the time the easement closed in December, “conservation easement projects like this help preserve this land for future generations of Montanans while also ensuring we have the ability to continue to use nearby training areas.”

The Tri G parcel could harbor future conservation easements in Broadwater County. Perhaps “the very beginning for this community,” says Travis Vincent, who spearheaded PPLT’s foray into the county and specifically the county seat of Townsend. “It’s a budding partnership and relationship with PPLT,” says Executive Director Mary Hollow. “It’s good grounds for where we could go.”

Among those whom Travis has befriended is John Hahn, co-chair of the Broadwater County Development Corp. whose ranching family first settled the area in the late 1800s. And how’s this for a Montana pedigree: “In 1899 my great

grandfather designed the state seal,” John says with pride.

John has appreciated working with Travis and is astute about the balancing requirements of meeting housing needs, developing the economy, open space, and beautification. Townsend will be launching a second assessment study to help the development corporation prioritize its efforts.

The Tri G property, and perhaps subsequent easements, benefit the much-valued wildlife in the county. “There’s a population of elk on the river that travel back and forth. Mule deer and whitetail, occasional mountain lions, some bear, wild turkeys, and moose, too,” says John.

“Our work, potentially, is the best chance for wildlife passage from the Elkhorns to the Belts,” says Mary. And the legacy for agriculture is paramount, “This is now protected and will remain as open farmland forever. We hope to see farmers and ranchers working the land long into the future.”

EAST HELENA CONNECTIONS

NORTH 80 UNDERGOES FINAL SOILS-MIXING

THE NORTH PARCEL of the East Helena Greenway required more than a little sprucing up before the future 80-acre open space park could be enjoyed by the public. Its soil, a recipient of more than a century of smelter pollutants, needed to be “flipped and sifted so the top layer will meet a safe standard,” in the words of Nate Kopp, the Prickly Pear Land Trust program and trails director who is coordinating the project. The ambitious soil rehabilitation is nearly complete and will be followed by some re-seeding and re-vegetation done by the federal Fish and Wildlife Service, among the many partners who’ve joined forces on the project. (The site’s restoration plan included funding for natural resource management and public access. It transferred to PPLT in 2020.)

The Montana Natural Resource Damage Program, which administers environmental settlement funds stemming from the ASARCO bankruptcy, will partner with PPLT on the next phase. It will include the development of a 1.5-mile trail system, similar to the crushed granite, 10-foot-wide trails of the Tenmile Creek

“I am soooo happy you are making this acreage into a park! It’s a dream come true for many of us that love the area!”

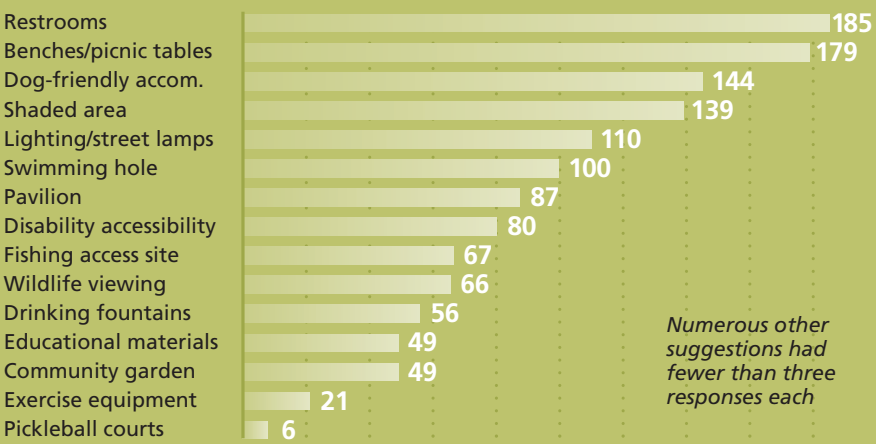
– Survey response

Park. Nate anticipates the trails will be open sometime this year.

To help steer the development of additional park amenities, the land trust conducted a public opinion survey, giving anyone connected to East

Helena an opportunity to weigh in. The survey was a success and PPLT thanks everyone who took time to provide thoughtful insight. Suggestions have ranged from a Prickly Pear Creek swimming hole to a pavilion, to benches and restrooms. Interests ranged from

Desired park features and amenities, by number of responses



wildlife viewing opportunities to concerns about maintenance, vandalism, and “unsavory behavior.” Oh yes, and pickleball courts and a splash park. Recognition of East Helena’s rich background was mentioned by some and desire to recognize Native American history by others.

The East Helena School District has already been involved and sees tremendous opportunity in the parcel. “It’s in very close proximity to four of our schools,” says Dan Rispens, the district’s

superintendent. As stakeholders that will someday inherit this open space, many East Helena High School kids participated in the survey. Their points of view and perspectives are valued by both Dan and Nate. The school district’s property, open space between the Greenway’s 80 acres and three of the district’s schools, as well as the city of East Helena’s much-loved JFK park to the south, make an impressive public land footprint.

COMMENT PERIOD OPEN FOR ACCREDITATION PROGRAM

The land trust accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. Prickly Pear Land Trust is pleased to announce that we are applying for renewal of accreditation. A public comment period is now open.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant's policies and programs. "Every five years, Prickly Pear Land Trust has an opportunity to review and assess our organization's work – to assure that we use best practices in our lands, trails, and operations functions. The accreditation process is one that we appreciate greatly as it will help ensure we are strong long into the future," says PPLT's Executive Director, Mary Hollow.

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how Prickly Pear Land Trust complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards see www.landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/indicator-practices.

To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org, or email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org.

Comments may also be faxed or mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments: (fax) 518-587-3183; (mail) 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866.

Comments on Prickly Pear Land Trust's application will be most useful by Friday, April 15, 2022.



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AMERICA'S
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IT'S BACK!

