

FALL 2017

# VIEW *Points*



**FLATHEAD  
LAND TRUST**  
Conserving Our Legacy of Land and Water

*"Growing up, we were always told that cranes are a sign of good luck and to always take a moment to reflect on what you have when you see one." -Tanner Marvin*



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## OUR MISSION

*Flathead Land Trust is dedicated to the conservation of northwest Montana's land and water legacy through voluntary agreements with private landowners.*



# TAKING A LEAP OF FAITH

In the waning sunlight of a chilly October evening, you can hear them before you see them. As they fly overhead, their prehistoric calls really can't be mistaken for anything else. Then, as you watch their great wings spread out and they land along the wetlands in front of you to roost for the night, you can't help but feel a shiver of excitement. The Greater Sandhill Crane is a bird that intrigues and amazes just about anyone that is lucky enough to witness them close up. Luckily for us, there is a place in the West Valley where hundreds can be seen at any one time, especially during the Fall migration as this is their only known staging area the valley. Because of many of you, we now have the funding needed to move forward and fully conserve this special place forever. That certainly gives me a shiver of excitement, especially as I think about how much of a leap of faith it took to make it happen.



Several years ago, preliminary results from a scientific study by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the American Bird Conservancy showed that the Flathead Valley, an area characterized by agricultural lands and extensive wetlands is an important international waterfowl concentration area. The study determined there was a need to focus conservation efforts on high quality wetlands, farmland and bird habitat beyond just the Flathead River and the North Shore of Flathead Lake. This brought our attention to the little known pothole wetlands in the West Valley. Two years ago, we began working with the Grosswiler family who wanted to voluntarily protect part of their farmland in West Valley. As a bonus, not only does their land include rich agricultural soils, but it also includes one of the largest pothole wetlands in the West Valley. In order to conserve the family land, we were able to secure federal grants to compensate the family for the development rights on the property. But first, we had to raise a significant amount of nonfederal match. We pondered if it was feasible to go out and ask the community to support a project like this, and we quickly came to the conclusion that this was just too important not to. So, we took a leap of faith and reached out to partners, birders, donors, and foundations for help. It's been a whirlwind since then and I am in constant amazement of the outpouring of support from so many. Together, we did it! We took that leap of faith, and now look at what we've accomplished. This community came together to make sure this special place will be protected forever for the birds, as well as for all of us.

Paul Travis  
Executive Director



# NEW PARTNERSHIP HELPS TO ENHANCE RIVERS EDGE PARK IN COLUMBIA FALLS

In June, Flathead Land Trust and the City of Columbia Falls received a \$100,000 grant from the LOR Foundation to work collaboratively to enhance livability and build upon the strengths that make the Columbia Falls community unique. The LOR Foundation selected 15 rural communities, including Columbia Falls, from western Montana to southern New Mexico to participate in the grant program. “Columbia Falls was chosen as a finalist to receive the grant funding, I believe, because of the exciting projects that are springing up everywhere”, said Paul Travis, Executive Director for the Flathead Land Trust. **“There’s certainly a feeling of optimism for what this community is, and what it can be in the future. Working with multiple stakeholders to plan for the best future for Columbia Falls is important in order to enhance its best assets and retain its high quality of life”.** With Flathead Land Trust as a key partner, the goals of the grant are to help the community to plan and implement a project to increase access to recreation, protect clean water, and promote the quality of life in Columbia Falls.

Over the summer, Flathead Land Trust and the City convened a working group to help select a project that fit the needs of the community and the requirements of the

views of Teakettle and Columbia Mountains. The city has since added some park infrastructure including walking trails, a community garden, benches, and an improved parking lot. The new enhancements with this project will include a family fishing pond which will be designed and stocked by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Although details have not been finalized, the fishing pond will likely include a path along the pond’s perimeter, fishing piers and platforms, and educational signage about the native fishery in the Flathead drainage. Depending upon funding, the project may also include a new pedestrian trail which will allow people to access the park and the fishing pond from downtown.

Susan Nicosia, city manager for Columbia Falls said the City is excited to have the opportunity to work with Flathead Land Trust on this project. “The City Council’s long-term goals include improving recreational opportunities and specifically expanding the use of River’s Edge Park. This funding and partnership will ensure the project is successful.”

“As we continue our work with the community of Columbia Falls, I see this project as a step towards our larger



grant. The group includes city manager, Susan Nicosia, the city planner, small business owners, Hungry Horse News, the Chamber of Commerce, city councilors, trail advocates, and other nonprofits and community members. A decision was made to use the grant to enhance and expand the recreational opportunities at the 28 acre Rivers Edge Park along the Flathead River. The park was acquired by the City in 2007 and includes mature stands of cottonwood, beautiful meadows, wetland sloughs, and over 900 feet of Flathead River frontage with panoramic

conservation goals including protection of open space, clean water, wildlife habitat, and access to recreation. All of the things that make this community and the entire Flathead Valley such an amazing place to live” said Paul. “As the local, community-based land trust in the Flathead, connecting kids and families to the outdoors through fishing at a new pond in Rivers Edge Park is an exciting opportunity and something we’re proud to be part of.”

# THE WEST VALLEY WETLANDS

## *A Story of Inspiration, Unity and Good Fortune*



PHOTO BY HARLEY WUMIMA

Sandhill cranes during fall migration in the West Valley.

**E**xperiencing hundreds of sandhill cranes flying in to roost at sunset is at first exciting and awe-inspiring listening to the raucous din of their captivating calls. As flock after flock of the majestic birds continue to come in from all directions and land, you forget about all else while enjoying their grace and elegance. As the light levels grow low and the cranes settle in for the night, you feel peace, serenity, and contentment. These emotions stir the heart and are good for the soul.

Perhaps experiences such as this are why cranes are a symbol of happiness and good fortune and have been uniting people around the world for centuries. There are 15 species of cranes in the world on five continents that migrate across deserts, mountains, frozen tundra, and the borders of hundreds of nations. As such, the elegant birds have been ambassadors of peace among diverse peo-

ples, who have united in efforts to save them, and protect their habitat and migratory staging grounds.

Here in the Flathead a similar story can be told. Over 80 partners and contributors from the community came together to help protect the only known staging area in the Flathead that sandhill cranes use on their fall migration - the West Valley Wetlands. Because of the generosity and support from the community, we are excited to report that in September we reached our fundraising goal for the required non-federal match needed to bring the West Valley Wetlands conservation project to fruition.

We are also super excited to let you know that in October we completed conservation easements protecting 68 acres of the West Valley Wetlands conservation project area including most of the unique 45-acre pothole wetland! We are now working on last steps to close early in 2018 on the

conservation easement protecting the remaining 328 acres of the project including farmland surrounding the pothole wetland and the future bird viewing area.

The newly conserved land is owned by the Marvin and Grosswiler families and includes the home of Tanner Marvin. Tanner grew up on the land that is alive with the musical calls of sandhill cranes as they roost in the pothole wetland at night and feed in the nearby fields during the day each fall. "Growing up we were always told that cranes are a sign of good luck and to take a second to reflect on what you have when you see one," said Tanner Marvin. Now Tanner and his wife, Rachel Agan, are raising their children in the home on the family land. They feel fortunate to live in such a special place - to wake up to the cranes talking and see such an incredible diversity of birds from their home.



Old hay barn on the Grosswiler property.

Tanner's family has been farming in the West Valley for over 100 years and the conservation project will preserve their legacy. The family's rich farmland will stay in agriculture feeding people and refueling thousands of birds, including the majestic sandhill cranes, on their annual migrations in perpetuity. Tanner says "continuing farming in my great-grandpa's honor is very meaningful to me, but more so, to know my children can continue that tradition so we will have multiple generations living his legacy is incredible."

"It is so important for land to be conserved," says Tanner. "This valley is growing so rapidly that if we don't do something to protect parts of it we won't have any wild left. Flathead Valley has a unique freedom and beauty and that's what draws the tourists, but if we don't protect it, there will be none left. It is really great that open space has been conserved not too far out of town, within a short driving

distance, so hopefully many people will be able to enjoy the natural land in the years to come." Tanner's family has generously allowed for a bird viewing area to be created for the public overlooking the unique pothole wetland and roosting area for sandhill cranes as part of the conservation project. If all goes well, the bird viewing area will be constructed next summer in cooperation with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and open to the public next fall in time to view the sandhill cranes. People of the Flathead will forever be able to witness the epic spectacle of cranes in their fall staging area and experience the many emotions that it generates. The next time you see a crane, reflect on what you have, and also on how fortunate we all are thanks to the Marvin and Grosswiler families.

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CONTINUING FARMING IN MY GREAT-GRANDPA'S HONOR IS VERY MEANINGFUL TO ME, BUT MORE SO, TO KNOW MY CHILDREN CAN CONTINUE THAT TRADITION SO WE WILL HAVE MULTIPLE GENERATIONS LIVING HIS LEGACY IS INCREDIBLE.

-TANNER MARVIN

# BECOME A PRESERVATION PARTNER AND YOU COULD WIN



Make your annual gift to the Flathead Land Trust easier and more effective by joining as a Preservation Partner monthly donor. Your automatic recurring gift will put more of your support towards on-the-ground conservation. Plus, it's convenient and secure.

- + No need to remember to renew your membership – your credit/debit card or checking/savings account will be billed automatically each month.
- + Help save time, paper, and postage so that your gift can go further with fewer mailings to you.
- + Your gift will provide stable, monthly funding so we can better protect the places you love.

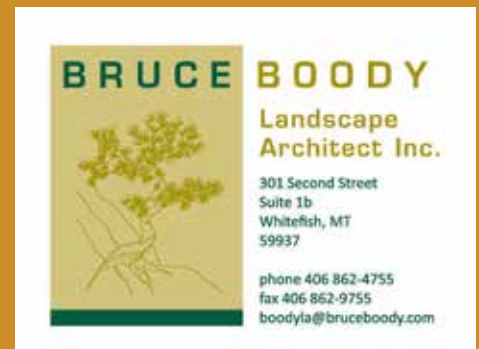
What's more, if you join by December 31st, you'll be entered to win a gift basket from Sage and Cedar, gourmet pepper from Gandy Dancer, or a Glacier Country 2018 Phenology Calendar!

Join as a Preservation Partner online at [flatheadlandtrust.org/ways-to-give/monthly-giving/](http://flatheadlandtrust.org/ways-to-give/monthly-giving/) or call us at 406-752-8293.

## WHY WE GIVE

"The Flathead Land Trust is an incredibly valuable collaborator in the on-going efforts to conserve the Flathead Valley's unique habitats, working lands and cultural and visual resources. While at times, this must appear to be an overwhelming task, the Flathead Land Trust has had significant successes and maintains a long term vision and goals that have enabled it to be an effective steward of the land."

--Bruce Boody Landscape Architect, Inc.



## CONNECTING YOU TO PLACES WORTH PROTECTING



It was our pleasure to host three birding field trips to the West Valley Wetlands, two screenings of the film *On the Shoulders of Giants* – the story of Montana Private Land Conservation, and our 3rd Annual Barn Bash fundraiser this year. We also took part in the new Haskill Trail ground-breaking ceremony with our partners Whitefish Legacy

Partners, and raised considerable awareness and funding through the Whitefish Community Foundation Great Fish Challenge. Community support is essential to our ability to protect more places that matter to you. Thank you to all who participated and donated this year. See more photos from our events and activities at Flickr.

# PROTECTION OF A WILDLIFE HAVEN

Imagine a series of large meadows with a gently gurgling stream meandering through them. Along the stream is an undisturbed wet forest with backwater areas flooded by beaver. A pair of playful whitetail deer fawns scamper across a grassy open area. A family of mergansers fishes nearby in the crystal clear creek. A black bear and its cub nap in the cool, moist forest. In the distance, is a grey wolf.

You are envisioning the Nelson conservation easement property – a 301 acre wildlife haven surrounded by Forest Service land northwest of Whitefish. About 1.5 miles of Good Creek and part of Miller Creek flow through the property. Much of the parcel contains wet forest communities including those dominated by cedar, spruce, and cottonwood. Flooded backwater areas are prominent on the landscape and many small wetlands are scattered throughout the property. The parcel contains a total of 90 acres of stream corridors, wet forests, and wetlands. Several large grassy meadows are also found on the property.

“I fell in love with this place the first time I saw it,” says Dick Nelson. “I am amazed at the diversity of wildlife on the property.” Dick and his wife Carol have seen wolf, mountain lion, bear, coyote, moose, elk, deer, beaver, skunk, and a variety of birds including spruce and ruffed grouse on the property. Many other small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles make their home on the property as well.

The property has a rich history. Old structures in the upper meadow are the remains of an original homestead. The homestead was built by a ranger for what later became Glacier National Park; he did some logging on the property. Later the homestead and large meadows were used as a cattle ranch. Dick and Carol have owned the property since 1969 and have grazed some cattle on the property but have largely kept it in its natural state.

Dick grew up in Portland and spent his professional life in California as a writer for television shows. Dick was known for his work in the television movies “The Challenger”, “Mayday at 40,000 Feet”, “One More Train to Rob”, and “Shootout in a One-Dog Town”. He wrote episodes for “Murder She Wrote”, “Falcon Crest”, “Dynasty”, “CHiPs”, “Wonder Woman”, “Gunsmoke”, and “Hawaii Five-O” among many others. Carol was born in Boston, but grew up mostly in Miami. She began her career as a dancer in Broadway shows in New York and later

moved to California and worked as a Montessori teacher. When Dick retired in 1988, he and Carol moved to their Montana property to live full time.

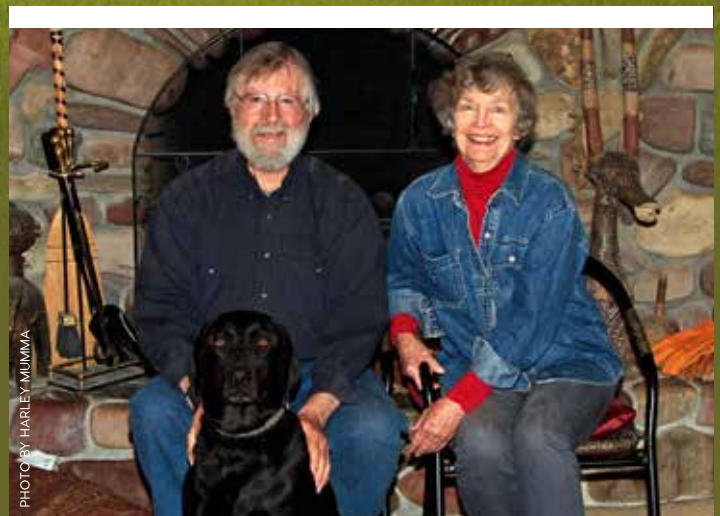


PHOTO BY HARLEY MUMMA

Dick and Carol Nelson at their home along Good Creek.

Dick and Carol started thinking about a conservation easement for their property after a wedding that was held in the upper meadow. One of the wedding guests was a realtor and talked about the sale and development potential for the property. Dick could not stand the thought of someone subdividing and commercializing the property. Shortly after the wedding, Carol saw a New Yorker cartoon that showed a place just like the upper meadow with a caption that said “What a wonderful place for a city!” This spurred Dick and Carol on to protect the property; they wanted to keep their property in a natural state and felt a conservation easement would be the best way to do so. Dick and Carol donated a conservation easement on the property to Flathead Land Trust in 2009.

What advice would Dick and Carol give to others considering a conservation easement? “If you love your land and would like to see it evolve in natural ways and be passed on to your heirs, it’s a good way to go.”



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# YOU'RE INVITED

Join us for our Holiday Party and Member Appreciation Celebration  
Thursday, December 7th

What a year it's been and we have YOU to thank for it. Join us to celebrate the conservation accomplishments of 2017 and find out what's brewing for 2018. We'll have appetizers and holiday treats along with beer, wine and soft drinks. We'll be hosting the party from 6-8 PM at our office which is located at 690 North Meridian in Kalispell.

Please RSVP to Paul at [ptravis@flatheadlandtrust.org](mailto:ptravis@flatheadlandtrust.org) or 406-752-8293.



**STAY IN THE KNOW!** Keep up to date on new conservation projects, field trips and exciting events. Sign up for our monthly e-News updates at [flatheadlandtrust.org](http://flatheadlandtrust.org) and follow us on Facebook. It's easy to do.