

FALL 2016

# VIEWPOINTS



FLATHEAD  
LAND TRUST  
Conserving Our Legacy of Land and Water

*"When we see land as a community to which we belong,  
we may begin to use it with love and respect." – Aldo Leopold*



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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.*



# THE VALUE OF OPEN SPACES

As a kid I remember riding in the back of my parents old 1972 Ford LTD, watching miles and miles of open farmland unfold as we drove along Hwy 82 just north of Flathead Lake. I think this is when I first understood the value of open spaces. That space, in places like the lower valley or even the forested foothills of the Whitefish Range, gives back to us more than we think. In essence, open spaces give us an intact piece of our natural world that we get to experience every day. This is something that many other growing communities have lost, making it all the more valuable for us.

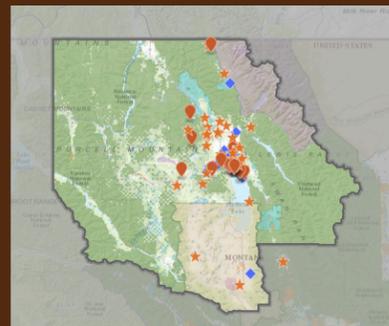
It's a gift to be able to watch hundreds of sandhill cranes converge in open farm fields and wetlands just outside of town, or eat fresh, local vegetables grown on some of the richest soils in Montana. What's more, open spaces contribute to our local economy and property values, they help us save on everything from health care to recreation, and they perform valuable ecosystem services that naturally improve the air we breathe and the water we drink. I think it's pretty clear that we can't afford not to protect our open spaces, especially while we still have the opportunity.

This issue of View Points shows how we are working with partners to protect more of those valuable open spaces in the Flathead and an exciting current effort to protect 400 acres of exceptional sandhill crane and bird habitat in the West Valley. None of this would be possible without the incredibly valuable support that you give. By working together, we can shape what the future holds for open spaces in northwest Montana so that we can pass down their incredible value for many generations to come.

Paul Travis, Executive Director

## CURIOUS WHAT YOU'VE HELPED FLT TO CONSERVE THE PAST 30 YEARS?

Check out our brand new interactive Map of Protected Places on our website [www.flatheadlandtrust.org](http://www.flatheadlandtrust.org). The map includes specially featured conservation projects that tell the story from the landowner's perspective of their connection to the land and why they saw a need to protect it forever. The new map and conservation stories were all made possible by a generous grant from the Land Trust Alliance.



# WORKING WITH PARTNERS

*Exponentially Increases Conservation Success*



Frey property along the Mission Mountain front protects key grizzly bear habitat.

Flathead Land Trust worked on two projects that were completed in cooperation with partners this summer that conserved 185 acres of important habitat in the Flathead and Mission Valleys. These projects were accomplished as a result of the \$1 million North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant received and administered by Flathead Land Trust to fund conservation projects that benefit migratory birds. This large grant requiring significant matching acres and funding was made possible by many partners including the Flathead Lakers, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and Montana Land Reliance.

Mountain Front by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe. The property is in a key area used by grizzly bears. The Tribe will restore aspen seep wetland habitat to 21 acres on the property that was altered in the early 1900s for agriculture and the development of an extensive irrigation system for the Mission Valley. The Tribe has been working for decades to conserve and restore aspen seep wetlands along the Mission Front. This project also borders a 75-acre property with aspen seep habitat protected by a conservation easement with Five Valleys Land Trust and is near other properties protected by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe.

The two most recent projects accomplished with funding from the NAWCA grant were completed by partners in May and July. In May, Flathead Land Trust helped to facilitate the purchase of a conservation easement on the 155-acre Brenneman property by Montana Land Reliance. The Brenneman project protects a family farm and adds to a block of properties under conservation easements protecting a total of over 900 acres, 1.7 contiguous miles of the Flathead River, and many miles of other backwater channels and sloughs in the braided reach of the river east of Kalispell. One of the sloughs the Brenneman project protects is spring-fed and rarely freezes in winter providing migratory waterfowl with an oasis of open water in a frozen landscape. In July, Flathead Land Trust facilitated the purchase of the 30-acre Frey property along the Mission



Brenneman property along the Flathead River



Photo by Dick Walker

Photo by Dick Walker

Photo by Steve Muller



View of the pothole wetland complex from the proposed bird viewing area. Photo by William Janach

# CONSERVING A FLATHEAD VALLEY

## *Ecological and Community Treasure*

Last fall we shared a story with you about a special place in the West Valley with a unique mix of pothole wetland habitat and open farmland that is critical to the magnificent sandhill crane. For the past two years, we have been working to protect it and we are thrilled to report a key landowner is interested in conserving a portion of this important habitat. But, we need your help to ensure we can capitalize on this rare conservation opportunity. We have already secured \$800,000 in grants and are now working to raise the last \$100,000 that is needed. In order to save this incredible place before it is lost to fast growing residential and commercial development in this part of the Valley, we must act now and you are the key to making that happen. The West Valley Wetlands conservation project will con-

serve almost 400-acres of rich farmland with an exceptional 45-acre pothole wetland. The project is part of an area critical for tens of thousands of waterfowl, 20 species of shorebirds, and hundreds of sandhill cranes. In fact, it provides important habitat for 144 bird species and is part of the only known place that sandhill cranes stage in the Flathead.

A bird viewing area for the public overlooking the unique pothole wetland will also be created as part of this project. The bird viewing area will serve as an education site for many local schools and communities in the Flathead.

The project will also preserve a family farming legacy that is part of our agricultural heritage in the Flathead. This prop-

erty is part of an extensive family operation west of Kalispell that has been in farming for over 100 years and first homesteaded by the family in 1900. By wanting to conserve their land through this project, they are taking the steps to ensure this rich farmland in West Valley stays permanently in agriculture.

Development of this land is imminent if the conservation project does not move forward as it is close to the growing residential and commercial area on the northwest side of Kalispell. What's more, this project's success has the potential to snowball as other neighbors are interested in similar protection of their land.

Your help is vital to protect this area for sandhill cranes and

many other bird species that thrive here, as well as for its rich agricultural heritage and open space beauty that will make it a community treasure for many generations to come.

*To make a financial contribution towards making this conservation project possible, please give online at [www.flatheadlandtrust.org](http://www.flatheadlandtrust.org) or call us at 406-752-8293. Make sure to let us know your gift is designated for the West Valley Wetlands conservation project.*



## WHY WE GIVE

“As someone who grew up in this beautiful Flathead Valley, I value the conservation and preservation work being done by the Flathead Land Trust. I have witnessed the hard work and dedication put forth in stewardship of these lands. Membership and corporate sponsorship are key to the continued success of this valuable organization. That’s why I support the Flathead Land Trust both personally and professionally.”

- Christina Ohler, Vice President, Insured Titles of Flathead County



“We moved to Montana 3 years ago from Florida, and have supported the Flathead Land Trust since Day One. Our advice to Montana .... Don’t make the mistakes Florida made, support Open Lands and the Flathead Land Trust. You won’t regret it!”

- Kathi and John Hartlieb, FLT members

## CONNECTING YOU TO PLACES

*Worth Protecting*

A big thank you to everyone who attending our Bike and Bird field trip in May, our North Shore Boat Tour with the Flathead Lakers in July, and our 2nd Annual Barn Bash fundraiser in September. Your participation and support not only plays a major role in our ability to protect more places that matter, but shows how vital they are to this community.

SEE MORE PHOTOS FROM OUR EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES AT FLICKR.



Photo by Harley Mumma



## FIREFLIES IN MONTANA?!?!

*Rare habitat protected in Mission Valley*

Although it is unusual to see fireflies in Montana or in the western United States for that matter, one of Flathead Land Trust’s newest conservation easements on the 159-acre John Weaver property in the Mission Valley near the National Bison Range has fireflies. Interestingly, fireflies are found on almost every continent, but it is rare to see flashing fireflies west of Kansas in the United States and experts are not sure why. According to a Montana State University entomologist, Mike Ivie, “They’re not supposed to be in the state according to the scientific literature, but they’re here. They’re very much at the margins of where they can live.”

Montana presents several problems for the flashing fireflies. The flashes of light are how the male and female fireflies find each other, so if the fireflies flash earlier in the evening their glow might not even be noticed since summer days are so long in Montana. They have a hard time getting their flash going when temperatures are low which is typical for Montana nights. Winter is also a concern since the fireflies’ larvae need water warm enough to keep them from freezing. That’s why many of the documented firefly sightings in the state have been around hot springs or springs where the water temperature is fairly constant. Most species of firefly spend the winter in larval form in the soil or in rotting logs. Perhaps that is why the fireflies live on the John Weaver conservation easement. The property has two spring creeks and a few years ago John placed portions of dead cottonwood trees over the creek to create natural habitat for wildlife. Shortly after he placed the logs, he noticed the fireflies.

John’s knowledge of wildlife no doubt was instrumental in his sighting of fireflies and in his interest to protect his land with a conservation easement. He has a Ph.D in wildlife biology and works for the Wildlife Conservation Society based in Missoula. Over the past 25 years, John has played many key roles in large carnivore conservation in the United States and Canada focusing on large landscape conservation, wildlife connectivity and adaptation to climate change. John has held leadership positions with the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on endangered species and has served on several recovery teams, including for both wolves and grizzly bears.

Along with providing exceptionally rare natural habitat for fireflies, John’s easement property is also part of a wildlife migration corridor between the Mission Mountains and the bison range. Black bear, grizzly bear, white-tailed deer, hawks, waterfowl, and many other birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians use the property. In addition to protecting important wildlife habitat, the open space and traditional agricultural practices will forever be preserved on this beautiful piece of land.



Mission Valley and the Weaver property from the National Bison Range.



**THEY’RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE IN THE STATE ACCORDING TO THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE, BUT THEY’RE HERE.**

-MIKE IVIE, MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY ENTOMOLOGIST

## YOU’RE INVITED!



Mark your calendars for Flathead Land Trust’s annual holiday party, open house and membership appreciation celebration on Thursday, December 1st from 6-8 pm. Come check out our new office location at 690 N. Meridian and celebrate a fabulous year of conservation in the Flathead, thanks to your support. FLT members as well as non-members are all invited.

Please RSVP by November 30 to Dar at darw@flatheadlandtrust.org or 752-8293.



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LAND TRUST**  
Conserving Our Legacy of Land and Water

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## YOU CAN MAKE EVEN BIGGER THINGS HAPPEN

Your year-end gift or monthly pledge can conserve more land in the coming year.

Given the urgency to conserve more land important for our wildlife, water quality, family farms, and way of life in the Flathead, several funders have stated that they will match new membership gifts or increases in annual donations through December 31st.

What's more, if you join as a monthly donor before the end of the year, your pledge contribution will be fully matched.

Here's a great way to make a big difference. Help us meet our goal of raising \$20,000 so we can start the New Year off by conserving more land and saving places we just can't afford to lose in the Flathead.

Give a year-end gift or join as a monthly donor this year and make your money go farther. Visit [www.flathead-landtrust.org](http://www.flathead-landtrust.org) for details and to donate or send a check to PO Box 1913, Kalispell, MT 59903



Sandhill cranes in flight over the West Valley Wetlands project area. Photo by Steve Muller



FIND US ON FACEBOOK AND AT [FLATHEADLANDTRUST.ORG](http://FLATHEADLANDTRUST.ORG) TO FIND MORE ABOUT UPCOMING EVENTS.