

River 2 Lake News

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Welcome to the Flathead River to Lake Newsletter.

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue 29 | December 2016

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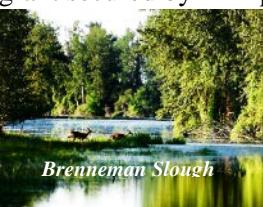
Events:

- * Christmas Bird Count Program meeting
- * Flathead River to Lake Initiative quarterly meeting
- * Managing Cropping Systems for Soil Health

Conservation and Restoration

2016 land conservation accomplishments summary

R2L partners protected over 700 acres this year. Projects conserving over 500 acres were completed with funding from the large North American Wetlands Conservation grant secured by R2L partners and managed by the Flathead Land Trust. Projects included:



Brenneman Slough Project protects 155 acres along the Flathead River through a conservation easement held by the Montana Land Reliance. The project adds to an existing block of over 1,000 acres of protected farmlands, wetlands, and riparian forests (blue shaded area).



Iverson/ Smith Lake Project protects 142 acres along Ashley Creek through a land donation to the Flathead Land Trust (yellow parcel). The property was incorporated into the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area managed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last March.

Flathead Lake North Shore Wildlife Management Area Project added

77 acres (yellow parcel) to the MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks North Shore Wildlife Management Area, bringing the WMA up to 426 acres.



Weaver & Frey Projects: An additional 189 acres were protected south of Flathead Lake along the Mission Mountains through the collaborative NAWCA grant, including a land sale to the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes and a conservation easement held by the Flathead Land Trust.

Darrow Family Project: The Flathead Land Trust and the family of George Darrow placed 200 acres between the Swan and Flathead Rivers near Creston in a conservation easement.

Flathead Land Trust raising funds to protect key Sandhill Crane habitat and farmland

The Flathead Land Trust secured over \$750,000 in Federal grants and \$80,000 in other grants and private donations to protect a wetland jewel in the West Valley northwest of Kalispell. The land trust needs an additional \$65,000 to close the deal.

The 400-acre farm includes a 45-acre pothole wetland that is critical habitat for tens of thousands of migratory waterfowl, 22 species of shorebirds, and hundreds of Sandhill Cranes.

Over 400 Sandhill Cranes have been seen using these wetlands and surrounding farmland, the only known staging area in the Flathead. The cranes refuel during their fall migration between Canada, where they breed, and southern U.S. and Mexico, their winter habitat. These magnificent birds stand five feet tall with a wingspan of six feet. A Large numbers of migrating cranes concentrate in relatively small areas and use the same areas year after year to rest and refuel during their migration.

The conservation project will establish a bird viewing area for the public and serve as an educational site for local schools and the community. The project will also preserve a family farming legacy and keep rich farmland in agriculture. For information or to make a donation, please contact Laura Katzman, Flathead Land Trust Land Protection Specialist, 752-8293 or LKatzman@FlatheadLandTrust.org. Click [here](#) to view a video about the project.



2016 riparian restoration accomplishments

Over 2,700 trees and shrubs were planted this year to enhance and restore riparian areas along the Flathead River and Ashley Creek. Fencing to protect the new trees plus other riparian areas was another important strategy for helping plants survive until they can better withstand deer browsing.

Program partners hope to help catalyze more new projects like these, in particular in riparian areas, where limiting livestock access by fencing can make a big difference.



Fish, Wildlife and Parks headwaters conservation
Fish, Wildlife and Parks has been working on two projects in headwaters to the River to Lake Initiative focus area. The *Trumbull Creek Conservation Easement Project* will protect important fish and wildlife habitat on over 7,000 acres in the Trumbull Creek watershed above Columbia Falls, while allowing F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Co. to continue active forest management.

The project is expected to be completed next February. The *Whitefish Lake Watershed Project* will protect about 15,000 acres of Weyerhaeuser Timber Company land in the Swift and Lazy Creek drainages above Whitefish Lake.

Funding for both projects was provided by the U. S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program, U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Program, Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust and Habitat Montana programs, Bonneville Power Administration Fisheries Mitigation Program, and private funds.

Flathead River Commission seeks funding to improve Flathead River flood maps

Flathead River Commission members are seeking funding to model and map water level fluctuations and flooding along the lower 22 miles of the Flathead River. The funding would add discharge data collection at the Foys Bend gage on the Flathead River. A river gage near Columbia Falls currently allows accurate flood modeling between the South Fork Flathead River and the bridge at Highway 35. The proposed gage would improve flood modeling for the entire mainstem of the Flathead River. Bob Storer, Chair of the FRC, will give a presentation to R2L partners on this project at the next R2L meeting. For more information contact Bob at 406-257-0202 or BobStorer@outlook.com.

Education & Outreach

Flathead Land Trust Annual Barn Bash raises funds for conservation

One hundred people came together at the beautiful Diamond B Ranch for the 2016 Barn Bash that raised over \$26,000 to help protect open lands, clean water, wildlife habitat, and working family farms. The strong support from participants, sponsors, musicians, and volunteers made the event not only fun, but also a great success for future conservation in the Flathead.



Ashley Creek Restoration Tour showcased successful project

This fall, River Steward Program partners teamed with landowners Richard and Joan Siderius to show neighbors recently completed riparian restoration project on their property along a half mile of Ashley Creek. “*This is one step to protect the water quality of Flathead Lake. That is a big concern in my mind,*” said Dick Siderius.

Participants go to try out the jet stinger, a water-powered

tool, to plant dormant unrooted willow cuttings and learned about opportunities for assistance planning similar projects.



Flathead Conservation District hires Assistant Conservationist

The Flathead Conservation District recently hired Cynthia Ingelfinger as their new Assistant Conservationist. Cynthia has a Master's Degree from the Field Naturalist Program at the University of Vermont and a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from Brown University.



Before moving here, Cynthia was the Outreach Coordinator for the Ipswich River Watershed Association, overseeing their communications and implementing programs to engage people in protecting the Ipswich River. Cynthia also taught at the Teton Science School and the Yosemite Institute, and worked for numerous conservation groups to improve bird habitat through farming practices.

Cynthia loves to mountain bike, hike, ski, and explore the Northwest with her husband, Franz, and their children, Nate and Maeve. Cynthia can be reached at 752-4220 CIngelfinger@FlatheadCD.org.

2016 Big Sky Watershed Corps members say goodbye

R2L partners hosted two Big Sky Watershed Corps members this year, infusing new energy and skills into our work. The Flathead Lakers hosted Jamie Dillon, the fourth Big Sky Watershed Corps member to help River Steward Program partners plan and implement planting and other restoration projects along the Flathead River, Ashley Creek, and the North Shore of Flathead Lake.

Jamie worked closely with Franz Ingelfinger, MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Restoration Ecologist, and three other key partners, to plant over 2,700 trees and shrubs along our rivers this year. *"My time with the R2L Initiative has been an exceptional experience. Our work is tangible and meaningful, thus it was easy to take pride in our accomplishments and approach challenges with enthusiasm. I'm exceedingly grateful for the opportunity, and I cannot thank my supervisors and partners enough for their mentorship."*

The Flathead Conservation District (FCD) hosted Corps member Sarah Bowman, who had the big task of writing the Stillwater-Whitefish Watershed Restoration Plan, which identifies river and riparian restoration needs and opportunities in rivers and streams in the Whitefish and

Stillwater watersheds. The plan is helpful not only in identifying problems and needs, but also opens the door to landowners and groups to apply for MT Department of Environmental Quality grant funding.

R2L partners thank Jamie and Sarah for a year of their time, their dedication, and their excellent work. Special thanks also go to the landowners who welcomed them in our common goal to protect clean water and improve fish and riparian habitat.



River Steward Program partners, Angel Rosario, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Franz Ingelfinger, FWP, Valerie Kurth, FCD, Constanza von der Pahlen, Flathead Lakers, and BSWC members Jamie and Sarah.

Events

December 12

Christmas Bird Count Program meeting

Interested in becoming a citizen scientist or learning what birds visit your backyard? Flathead Audubon Society is holding a free training on Monday, December 12 from 7-9 pm. You will learn to identify local birds and how to participate in the Christmas Bird Counts around the valley. The meeting is at the United Way conference room, 1203 Highway 2 West, Kalispell. For more information contact Craig at asoleado2003@yahoo.com or 406-890-1629, or visit Flathead Audubon's website at www.FlatheadAudubon.org.

December 14

Flathead River to Lake Initiative quarterly meeting

Mark your calendars for the next R2L Initiative meeting to be held on Wednesday, December 14, from 9:00 am to noon at the Flathead Land Trust office, 690 North Meridian, Suite 207, Kalispell. For more information, contact Constanza at 883-1341 or

CriticalLands@FlatheadLakers.org.

January 17-19

Managing Cropping Systems for Soil Health

The Montana Association of Conservation Districts is holding soil health workshops January 17-19 in Glasgow, Great Falls, Billings and Sidney. For more information contact Ann McCauley at 406-443-5711 or ann@macdnet.org, or visit their website at macd.net.

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