

SPRING/SUMMER 2022

VIEW *Points*



Flathead Valley, Canada Field, Scott Wilson Photography



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

"Land trusts here in Montana have been very successful in promoting the conservation of farm and ranch land to minimize fragmentation."

- Tom Watson, State Conservationist for NRCS in Montana



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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.



This spring you may have read that Flathead County now has the distinction of being the fastest growing area in Montana, surpassing Gallatin County which had held that position for years. 2020 Census data has confirmed not only that this part of Montana is growing fast (the county's population grew by 3,681 people between July 1, 2020, and July 1, 2021, amounting to a 3.5% increase) but that Kalispell is now the fastest growing micro-politan city (population under 50,000) in the United States. This new data backs up anecdotal evidence (and I'm sure your own observations) of a definite uptick in growth and new development. In addition, a recently released University of Montana bi-partisan public survey shows that a majority of Montanan's are concerned about the current pace of growth and support conservation, including the need for more public funding. Fifty-seven percent of Montanan's surveyed say the current pace of growth is too fast and 85% say the loss of agricultural lands and open spaces to new development is a serious problem.

Montana at its core is an open land state with its farms, ranches, abundant wildlife, intact landscapes, and outdoor recreation as its most defining features. It's seemingly everywhere yet is disappearing at an alarming rate of over 1,500 acres each month.

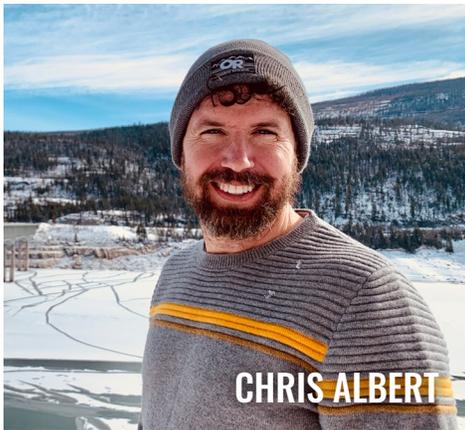
I think many of you would agree that growth is important for our economy, but there is a growing anxiety of what fast paced growth means and the challenges it brings. The recent U of M survey shows that the majority of Montanan's want to keep our state livable and affordable, and want to increase efforts to protect open lands, farmland and wildlife habitat. Montanan's want to protect the intrinsic natural qualities and rural character that make Montana, well...Montana.

Even with the concerns the census data provides and the flurry of changes we are witnessing around us, I am here to tell you that there is a silver lining. As a land trust, we are now seeing more interest by landowners and the public to prioritize conservation and implement land conservation strategies that are successful. This is evidenced by our recent work with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the support from landowners, community members, partners and funding sources to create the new Somers Beach State Park and Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area. More funding is now available for conservation, both public and private, than we've seen in the past. The interest and capacity to do more land conservation projects is growing and that is exciting. We are also seeing that there are real economic benefits from conservation through the protection of farm and ranch land with the Farm Bill Agricultural Land Easement program.

This issue of ViewPoints focuses on this Farm Bill easement program and what it provides not only for local working farms and conserving open space, but its economic benefits as well. We are grateful for funding programs like this and to so many of you who are helping us increase the quantity and quality of conservation. It really makes a difference in saving what we as Montanan's want to ensure we don't lose.

Paul Travis, Executive Director

WE WELCOME CHRIS ALBERT AND LISA FLOWERS WHO JOINED THE FLT BOARD OF DIRECTORS THIS SPRING AND JEN GUSE WHO WILL BE JOINING OUR STAFF THIS SUMMER.



CHRIS ALBERT



LISA FLOWERS



JEN GUSE

As an environmental attorney for over 10 years, Chris Albert is passionate about the outdoors and environmental conservation. Chris served as a founding board member of Richmond's Capital Region Land Conservancy in Virginia and volunteered as its legal counsel for seven years.

The frequent changes to environmental laws have made Chris a strong proponent of conservation easements because of the enduring environmental protections they offer. Chris is proud to continue that advocacy through the Flathead Land Trust.

Chris and his wife enjoy cross-country skiing, fishing, and camping. When he's not enjoying the outdoors, Chris is managing the development of an automated research platform through a technology start-up that he co-founded with the assistance of a local venture capital firm.

Lisa Flowers moved with her family to the Flathead Valley in the early 1970s from Colorado. They ranched on the east side of the Valley for many years. Her father, Lex Blood, taught geology and helped to found several conservation nonprofits including FLT. Lisa received degrees in Botany with a minor in Geology and a Masters in Science Teaching, before earning her Ph.D. in Forestry & Conservation at the University of Montana, Missoula in

2007. She has worked as an educator in public schools and for not-for-profits for over 30 years.

Her zeal for the natural sciences, education and conservation has led her to serve in many professional and volunteer roles for local, regional and collaborative entities throughout Montana. Most of the time she can be found outside enjoying her passions – hiking, biking, birding, boating, skiing, and gardening.

We are also excited to announce that Jen Guse will join our staff this July as our new FLT Communications, Outreach and Special Projects Coordinator. After 20 years as a seasonal botanist in Glacier National Park, where she fell in love with the local flora, she developed an appreciation for the natural resources of Montana. Living in the Flathead Valley for the past several decades fostered a deep desire to preserve the natural beauty and heritage of Montana. Jen is enthusiastic about merging her artistic and scientific passions since earning an associate degree in Graphic Design from Flathead Valley Community College in 2021 and a Master's degree in Zoology from the University of South Florida in 1993. She enjoys sharing her heart-place in the foothills of Whitefish with her husband, Scott, her dog, horses and chickens, and hiking with any or all of them as much as possible.



On May 12, FLT proudly joined with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Montana State Parks Foundation, the Sliter Family, the Governor and many other partners and supporters to dedicate the new Somers Beach State Park along the north shore of Flathead Lake.

The Multiple Benefits of CONSERVING AGRICULTURAL LAND



Danford family farm which is protected through a Farm Bill ALE conservation easement.

We have some of the most productive farmland in the nation in the Flathead Valley. However, it is being threatened by rapid subdivision and development. We are not alone though - according to the American Farmland Trust, between 2001 and 2016, 11 million acres of farm and ranch lands were lost to subdivision and residential development in the U.S. That is 2,000 acres of agricultural land being paved and developed every day, threatening the future of agriculture.

Farmland being lost to development is not a new issue. In fact, in the 1970s, concern for protecting the long-term security of the nation's food supply fueled the development of programs to ensure some of America's most productive lands remain in agriculture. Initially, state programs were developed to give farmers and ranchers cash through purchased agricultural conservation easements to keep important soils in agriculture. Then, in 1996, in response to the growing concern that our nation's farmland was being lost at an alarming rate, Congress established a federal farmland protection program to

add to the states' efforts to compensate farmers and ranchers to keep their land in agriculture.

This Farm Bill program, originally called the Farm and Ranch Protection Program and now the Agricultural Land Easement Program, is administered through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and has been important in conserving farmland in the U.S. and especially in Montana. A recently released report by the NRCS, Montana Association of Land Trusts, and Heart of the Rockies Initiative shows that since 2014 alone, 289,000 acres of farm and ranch lands in Montana have been protected with the Agricultural Land Easement Program.

The report shows that these purchased agricultural conservation easements have done more than protect farmland - they have provided an infusion of millions of dollars into our economy. Since 2014, purchased agricultural conservation easements have provided \$109 million to farmers and ranchers to keep their land in agriculture. This funding also helps these landowners



Aerial view of Danford family farm.



Bob Danford on his farm with his new tractor.



Canola field in the Flathead Valley.

strengthen the financial health of their operation by reducing debt, increasing production and solidifying family succession planning. Overall, this investment since 2014 has yielded \$182 million in economic impact in the state.

Flathead Land Trust has been able to complete 13 conservation easements to keep 2,287 acres with important soils in agriculture using these programs. This work has brought over \$3.5 million in federal funding and leveraged an additional \$2.5 million in partner funding for farmers in the Flathead Valley. The Danford family are a great example of how these dollars have helped to sustain local agricultural production and benefited our local economy. With Agricultural Land Easement funding awarded to keep their 155-acre farm along the Flathead River in agriculture, Bob Danford and Terri Peterson purchased a Case tractor from Torgerson's in Kalispell; two new buildings from MQS in Noxon; and a grain trailer from Vaughn Truck Sales in Havre. We are currently working with landowners on three more purchased

agricultural conservation easements that will protect another 1,333 acres of agricultural land in the next year, providing more conservation and economic benefit for the Flathead.

We are fortunate to have agricultural landowners that have the foresight to conserve their land and to have funding programs like the Agricultural Land Easement Program that make it possible. These conservation easements also provide the public benefits of protecting our water quality, wildlife habitat, and beautiful open spaces. The ripple effect to helping our economy is an added bonus and no small financial contribution.

To download a copy of Working for Montana Agriculture: Economic Benefits of Conservation Easements for Farm's Ranches and Communities, visit montanalandtrusts.org. If you would like to receive a hard copy of the report, contact us at info@flatheadlandtrusts.org.

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2021 ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Because of you, we achieved big conservation wins in 2021. Your support helped save vital pieces of our landscape, created new recreational opportunities, and increased our ability to expand our work.

» In March, we protected important migratory bird habitat southeast of Kalispell with a conservation easement in partnership with the Danford Family. The conservation easement protects over 36 acres including 15 acres of Reed's Slough, a popular birding location in lower valley.

» In October, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks completed the purchase of the 106-acre Somers Beach property from the Sliter family to become Montana's newest State Park. FLT worked with the Sliter family for the past decade towards a shared goal to find a conservation and public access solution for the property and we are so excited to see it finally achieved.

» In December, we helped Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks finalize the purchase of the 772-acre Bad Rock Canyon property from Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. to become a new public accessible Wildlife Management Area. After more than two years of building community support, extensive

fundraising and collaboration with many partners, we are thrilled to see this project completed. The property is now open to the public (starting May 15) including the partial opening of the Gateway to Glacier River Trail.

» In late December, we completed the Taylor conservation easement that protects 38.9 acres of land owned by siblings, Charles and Diane Taylor, located south of Columbia Falls. This scenic property is less than a half mile from the Flathead River and three miles from the Swan Mountains. The farm is underlain by rich agricultural soils including "prime farmland" as designated by the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

» Bigfork-Harrell Forest Community Trails – FLT is partnering with The Trust for Public Land and Montana Land Reliance to create new community trails and permanent protection of 236 acres of forestland in Bigfork's backyard. The new trail system and trailhead are expected to be complete and open to the public by summer, 2023.

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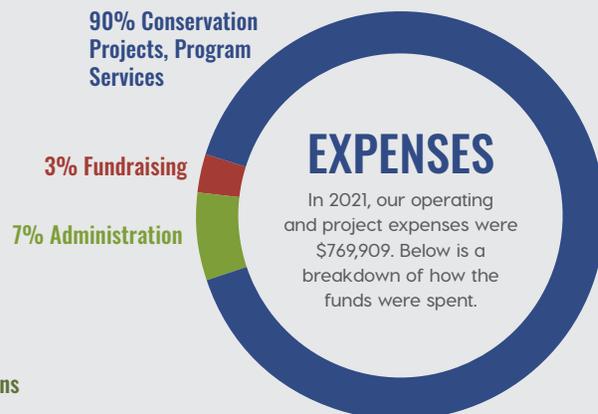
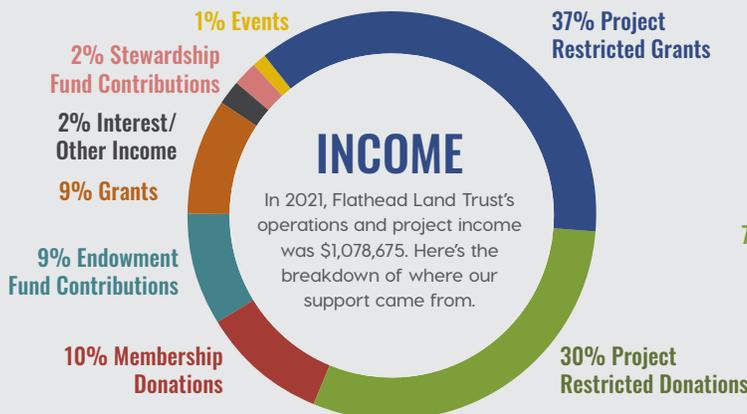
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Note: Summaries depict unaudited financials. Most recent audited financials are available on our website or by request.



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AUG 17 • 2022

Get your tickets for Flathead Land Trust's annual fundraising event benefitting community-based conservation of northwest Montana's spectacular open spaces and wild places. Hosted at the beautiful Snowline Acres Ashley Creek Historic Venue with live music by the Christian Johnson Project, locally-sourced fare by Cartwright Catering, and topped off with an exciting live drive paddle raise. All proceeds go to a good cause - conservation of our land, water and the open spaces we love in the Flathead.

Tickets are \$50 and can be purchased at www.flatheadlandtrust.org or by calling 406-752-8293.