

FALL/WINTER 2021

VIEW *Points*



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

*"Of all the paths you take in life,
make sure a few of them are dirt."*

- John Muir



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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.



Responding to Growth

THROUGH CONSERVATION AND NEW RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

We've all heard the stories and have seen the impact of our valley's unprecedented growth. Houses selling sight unseen at well above asking price. Houses and storage units gobbling up once scenic farm land. Out of state license plates contributing to traffic that is no longer limited to the busy tourist season. The so called COVID boom has us all talking, and worried.

Flathead Land Trust continues to do the important work of conserving our most important farm and forest lands as open space in the face of this growth onslaught. But in the time of COVID, Flathead Land Trust has seen a boom in another aspect of our work... the combined effort of conserving open space land while also providing new public recreational opportunities.

Rapid growth not only imperils our open spaces, it also threatens to crowd our favorite places to hike, bike, swim, hunt and generally enjoy the outdoors. Increased users in the backcountry impacts wildlife habitat and strains limited infrastructure. This has the Forest Service and National Park Service seeking to encourage so called "front country" recreation, those places closer to communities. But even our State Park system is under strain, with visitors growing 44% over the past two years. Providing more front country recreational opportunities helps to ease the strain and crowding on existing recreational areas by spreading out users over more areas.

Flathead Land Trust is excited to be playing an important part in creating new front country recreational opportunities through collaborative efforts. The new 106-acre Somers Beach State Park; resulting from our collaboration with the Sliter family and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; will ease the strain on the thirteen existing public access sites along Flathead Lake and improve the access infrastructure for this popular spot.

The 772-acre Bad Rock Canyon project east of Columbia Falls is a collaborative effort with Columbia Falls Aluminum Company and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. This project not only conserves vital intact habitat along the Flathead River, but will also provide opportunities for youth hunting and a trail that is part of the Gateway to Glacier trail system running from Columbia Falls to Glacier National Park.

Finally, the recently announced Bigfork Community Trails project will create four miles of new trails on 236-acres of conserved forestland at the edge of Bigfork. This project is a collaboration with The Trust for Public Land, Montana Land Reliance and others to provide a much needed recreational amenity close to town. It will also compliment and ease the strain on the nearby Swan River Trail.

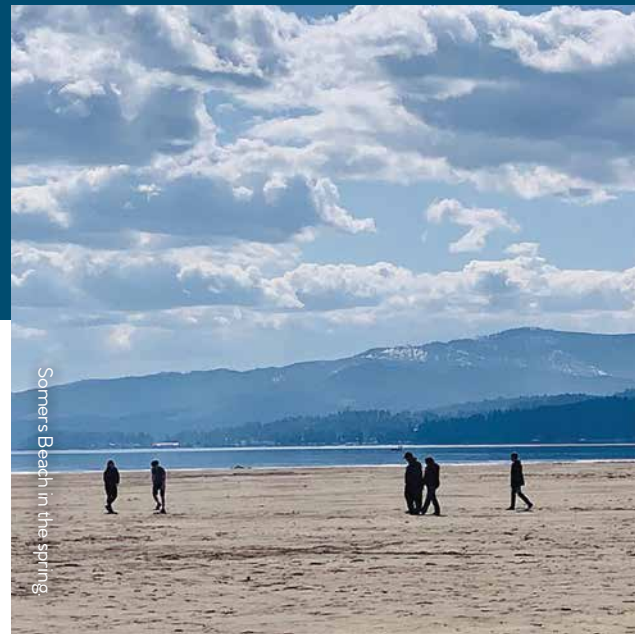
These projects expanding front country recreational opportunities help to ease the impact our growing population has on our public lands. As we continue to grow, Flathead Land Trust intends to not only conserve our important open spaces, but also to ensure that we can continue to enjoy them as we hike, bike, swim, hunt and fish with our family and friends.

Ryan Hunter
Lands Protection Specialist

Flathead River along the north side of the new Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area



Somers Beach in the spring



BAD ROCK CANYON & SOMERS BEACH

a celebration of community conservation

After more than two years of building community support, fundraising and collaboration with many partners, we are thrilled to announce that Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has been given the authorization to purchase the 772-acre Bad Rock property from Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. (CFAC) and create the new Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area. On November 15th, the State Land Board gave their approval for the acquisition giving Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks the final authorization necessary to purchase the property before the end of the year. This exciting news follows the project receiving Fish and Wildlife Commission approval on October 28th. As you are well aware, this acquisition is a huge achievement for conservation as it protects a well-loved block of land with significant fish and wildlife habitat right next to Columbia Falls. The acquisition also secures permanent public access to the property which includes a limited opportunity for youth hunting in the fall and a 3-mile community trail as part of the Gateway to Glacier Trail system.

We can't thank our partners and the community enough for their incredible support for the project. Raising \$7.1 million seemed nearly insurmountable two years ago when we signed the Option Agreement with CFAC to purchase the property. Luckily, we had plenty of help. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks stepped up and raised

\$6.5 million of the funding for the project by obtaining grants from the US Forest Service Forest Legacy Program which is funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and Habitat Montana which uses big game license fees for habitat conservation. Flathead Land Trust was tasked with raising the remaining \$590,000 – not a small endeavor. We are grateful for \$175,000 in grants from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust and \$100,000 from the Heart of the Rockies Keep It Connected and The Kendeda Fund. We are especially thankful for the remaining \$315,000 received from 11 organizations and 250 community members. Many thanks to the Flathead Lakers for their valuable partnership in fundraising for the project. See the list of major supporters and partners of Bad Rock on page 7. In addition, thanks so much to the 127 people who voiced support for the project through the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks scoping process and 209 through the environmental assessment process to consider the purchase. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks for their exceptional work to get this project to the finish line and to Columbia Falls Aluminum Co./Glencore Ltd, for giving us the opportunity to purchase and conserve this incredible property for the benefit of the community.

Continued on Page 7



BRINGING *New Trails and Conservation*

On the flanks of Swan Hill just a short distance from downtown Bigfork, a 236-acre forested property, once slated for development of 17 new residential lots, will be permanently conserved. Not only will this prime piece of ground be protected for its wildlife habitat and open space, but it will offer over four miles of new non-motorized trails for the community to enjoy with outstanding views of Flathead Lake and the Swan Range.

Flathead Land Trust is excited to be working with The Trust for Public Land and Montana Land Reliance on a partnership called the Bigfork Community Trails Project. Due to the generosity of the Horn family who donated the property to The Trust for Public Land, we are now in the beginning stages of fully conserving this acreage and completing a new network of trails for the public. The new trail system, though not officially open to the public until the project is complete, will be over four miles

in length with multiple loops. The trail network will also complement existing trails such as Swan River Nature Trail which have become increasingly crowded due to an uptick in usage during the COVID-19 pandemic. Project planning and community involvement will take place over the coming months, with groundbreaking sometime late next year and eventual opening to the public in 2023.

Trails are shown to bring a wide range of benefits to communities, including improved health, increased business, and higher quality of life. The goal of this project is to create a recreational asset that residents and visitors can enjoy and be proud of, while also further protecting the land from unwanted subdivision and residential development. This project also has the potential to provide future connections to other trails in the Bigfork area including the Swan River Nature Trail and other recreational amenities. The partners will be

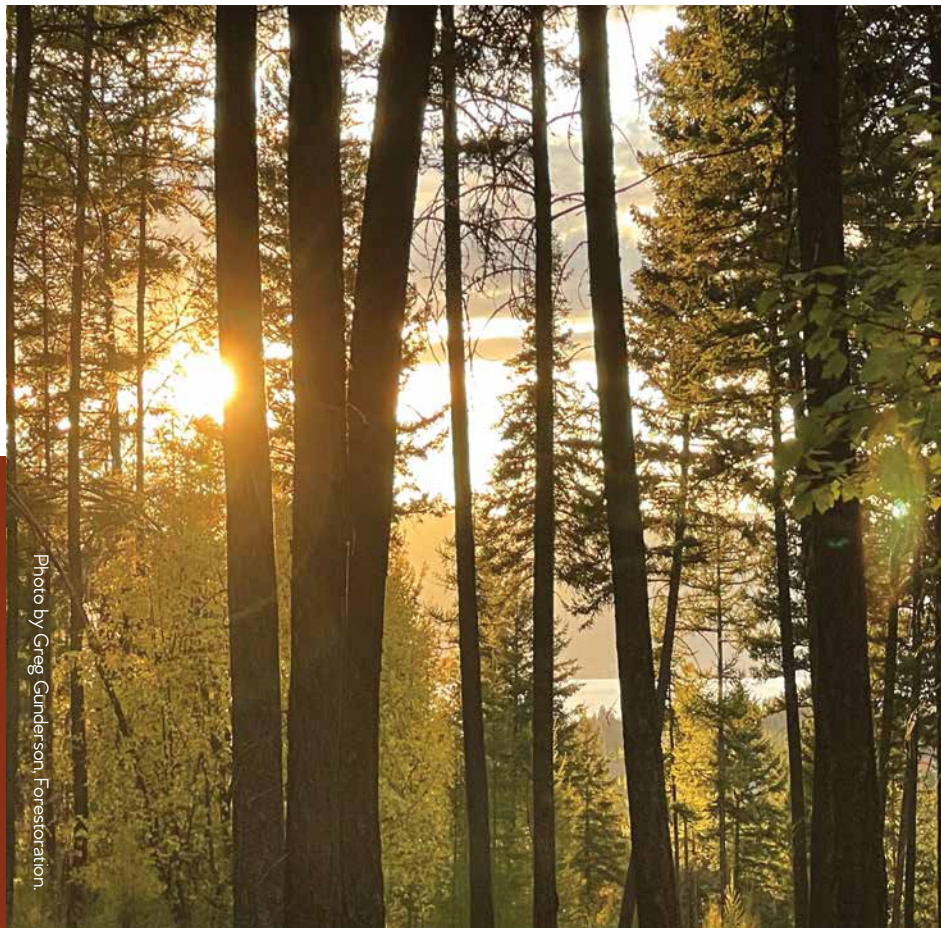


Photo by Greg Gunderson, Forestation

TO BIGFORK THROUGH COLLABORATION

undertaking further conversations and planning efforts with Bigfork area neighbors and community members to work towards achieving broader trail and recreational goals for the community. Please let us know if you would like to be part of those upcoming conversations.

While The Trust for Public Land is currently the property owner, long-term ownership and management will transfer to our organization as early as the end of 2022. Flathead Land Trust will own and manage the property for the public to enjoy, providing long-term conservation and public access benefits of the land to Bigfork area residents and visitors. We are beyond excited by this new opportunity to engage with the public in a direct way and provide significant community benefits as owner of this beautiful property. The Montana Land Reliance will also be involved as they will hold and steward the additional conservation restrictions that will be placed on the land. We believe this multi-faceted

partnership sets the project up for success in both the short and long term.

For years, many had hoped for an opportunity such as this to materialize and we are so excited to be part of the effort to bring much needed front country recreation on this property that otherwise could have been lost to subdivision and development. We look forward to engaging with the community on this project and towards those shared goals.

For more information about the Bigfork Community Trails and Open Space Project, contact Paul Travis at ptravis@flatheadlandtrust.org or 406-752-8293.

Summer and Fall EVENTS AND OUTREACH

The **Great Fish Community Challenge** was an incredible show of community giving again this year! In fact, an unbelievable \$4.2 Million was raised for the 61 participating nonprofits during the campaign from August 5 – September 17; a 28% increase over last year. We are thrilled to have had 177 donors give to Flathead Land Trust, helping us raise \$56,000 (by far our best yet) and secure a \$11,200 match from the Whitefish Community Foundation Circle of Giving donors and Friends of the Great Fish Match. Those funds will go to work right away to protect the Flathead Valley's vital bird and wildlife habitat, save scenic open spaces and wild places, and secure opportunities for new public access through community-based conservation. The financial support will significantly help us to complete big, collaborative efforts such as the Bigfork Community Trails Project and help secure future conservation in remarkable places similar to Bad Rock Canyon and Somers Beach. Thank you to so many of you for helping to make that possible through your generosity!

Even though we didn't get to host our annual fundraising event this August, we did offer several rewarding and safe ways to share our conservation work outside with many of you. Over 14 **tours of the Bad Rock Canyon Conservation Project property** were given to the public showing over 200 people the project between May and October in partnership with the Flathead Lakers, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Gateway to Glacier and others. We also co-hosted a **Bike and Bird in Lower Valley** with Flathead Audubon on May 15 with over 46 bikers and birders attending. In July, we hosted three tours of the new **Olney/Stillwater conservation easement** along with the landowner, F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber. And finally, we were excited to continue our **Bird Education Program** this year. In September, we connected 75 seventh graders from Evergreen Jr. High to the world of conservation, birds and sandhill cranes with multiple classroom presentations and field trips at the West Valley Wetlands.



Tour of Olney/Stillwater easement.



Great Fish Community Challenge awards ceremony.



Lower Valley bike and bird tour.



Whitefish Community Foundation board and staff presenting a special projects grant for Bad Rock.

Continued from Page 3

This fall, the Somers Beach project was also completed creating much needed public access to over a third of a mile of the north shore Flathead Lake east of Somers when Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks purchased the 106-acre property from the Sliter family to become a new State Park. We again thank our partners and the community for their remarkable support of the project. Many thanks to the 70 community members who donated over \$30,000 for the operations and maintenance of the future state park, exceeding the \$25,000 challenge match given by the Sliter family. Once again, we owe a debt of gratitude to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks for their amazing work to get this project to the finish line and to the Sliter family for the opportunity to do the project. Once again we owe a debt of gratitude to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks for their amazing work to get this project to the finish line and to the Sliter family for the opportunity to do the project.

It's a bright new day for conservation when our community steps up in a big way to save places that matter. Both projects will be remembered as some of the most significant conservation stories of our time and we celebrate you for making it all possible.



Thank you MAJOR DONORS & PARTNERS FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF THE BAD ROCK CANYON CONSERVATION PROJECT

USFS Forest Legacy Program
FWP Habitat Montana
MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Columbia Falls Aluminum Co.
Glencore, Ltd.
Gateway to Glacier Trail, Inc.
Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust
Flathead Lakers
Flathead River to Lake Initiative
Heart of the Rockies Initiative
The Kendeda Fund
AGL Foundation
Cinnabar Foundation
Cross Charitable Foundation
Headwaters Montana
Whitefish Community Foundation

Montana Trout Unlimited
Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited
Flathead Audubon Society
Flathead Wildlife
Vital Ground Foundation
Dean Marsh
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Bob and Betty Moore
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Sally Cameron and Michael Russell
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Alison Young
Debo Powers
Dennis Heinzig and Iona McMillan
Kramer Family Fund
Leanne Franzmann
Zachary Green
Bill and Sarah Dakin
Palmer Moe
Bill Boehme
Dan Short
Joel and Barbara Vignere
Karen Feather
And more than 220 additional supporters and partners!



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Celebrate With Us!

MEMBER & PARTNER APPRECIATION YEAR-END RECAP | DECEMBER 9TH

We want to recap a wildly successful year with you and announce the recipients of the 2021 FLT Conservation Leadership Award. You, our supporters, make all the difference in the world to what we can accomplish and we want to show how grateful we are. On December 9th, we'll send out a video link to everyone on our email list and you can watch at your convenience. If you are not already on our email list, contact us at ptravis@flatheadlandtrust.org to receive the link.

