

SPRING 2016

# VIEWPOINTS



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



"Things are so ephemeral and they go so quickly. As you try to hold on to certain things they just slip right from your fingers, but if you can invest in things of true value that last, it is a very important thing to do."

*-Mark Johnston, Yellow Pine Ranch Conservation Easement Celebration*

Photo by Chuck Honey



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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 PATH FORWARD



I recently came across a Gallup Poll that asked people across the country to rank their state as the best place to live. Montana ranked at the very top of all states with 77% of respondents saying this is the best or one of the best states to live in the U.S. I am sure if a poll was completed asking the same question of residents of northwest Montana and the Flathead Valley, similar if not greater results would be found.

We are all incredibly lucky to live and work in a place with a quality of life that is considered one of the highest in the country.

Yet, it's easy to take that for granted. It's important we are mindful of what kind of future the Flathead holds for its residents and work together as a community so we don't lose the essential qualities that make Montana and our northwest corner of this great state the place that it is today.

Almost two years ago, we started a collaborative and community-involved process to decide how best to address our conservation challenges and opportunities for the future. Certainly we can't do it all, but with a strategic plan that focuses our conservation efforts on the greatest needs and those that will result in the most beneficial results, we can do quite a bit. The resulting Flathead Land Trust Conservation Plan serves as a road map for accomplishing the most important and needed conservation for the Flathead region for the years to come.

The plan outlines our focus in four key areas which include: 1. Important Farmland Conservation 2. Migratory Bird Habitat and Wetland Conservation 3. Community projects that enhance recreational opportunities and public access, and 4. the continuation of the partner driven Flathead River to Lake Initiative. Already, new conservation efforts are underway along the Stillwater and Whitefish Rivers, the pothole wetlands and farmland in West Valley, and in building greater private-land protections adjacent to the recent Haskill Basin conservation easement in the Whitefish Range. And, we're just getting started.

Thanks to you and your support, implementing this plan is possible. Even amidst the regions rapid growth and change, we can ensure a bright future for the Flathead by continuing to work together. To learn more, contact us to receive a copy of the Conservation Plan or download on our website at [flatheadlandtrust.org](http://flatheadlandtrust.org).

Paul Travis, Executive Director

## 300 ACRES OF BIRD AND WILDLIFE HABITAT PROTECTED IN 2015

In December, Ron and Carley Iverson donated 142 acres of their land to Flathead Land Trust in the Smith Valley west of Kalispell that was then transferred in March to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to become part of the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area. The donated wetlands add to a block of conserved lands now totaling about 2,000 acres that includes the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area and private lands with conservation easements that are important for migratory waterfowl, as well as other wildlife in the Smith Valley.

Also in December, 159 acres in the Mission Valley near the National Bison Range was protected as a result of Flathead Land Trust purchasing a conservation easement from John Weaver with North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant funding. The 159 acres will remain in private ownership and under John's management as a working farm, but the conservation easement will ensure the land will remain as open space allowing it to continue to be a working farm and valuable wildlife habitat in perpetuity.

# A VISION FOR A SPECIAL PLACE

## Protecting the North Shore of Flathead Lake

The north shore of Flathead Lake is a rare gem unmatched anywhere else in the western United States. This seven mile long largely undeveloped shoreline lies on a national treasure – the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi River which is fed by the Flathead River, the life blood of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem with headwaters in Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex. The north shore of Flathead Lake is a special place with inherent beautiful scenery, an array of wetlands helping to maintain the excellent water quality in Flathead Lake, and crucial habitat for tens of thousands of migratory birds each year, as well as other wildlife.

About 10 years ago, Flathead Land Trust and its partners began working towards a shared conservation vision to protect this important landscape. Flathead Land Trust and its partners including local landowners, business owners, community leaders, natural resource experts, tribal elders, agricultural interests, and representatives of the tourism industry met in 2007 to unify their conservation vision. From the dramatic view atop the local Pike's Peak in Somers they took in the scale and breadth of the stunning views of farmland, wetlands, lakeshore, and the spectacular Flathead Lake with the majestic Mission Mountains backdrop. A common goal was shared by this collective group – to protect the most distinctive feature of the Flathead Valley by protecting the intact farmland and wetlands surrounding the north shore of Flathead Lake. They knew the land protection they desired would be voluntary and depend on the interest of existing landowners - they hoped for a domino-effect conservation outcome for this amazing landscape.

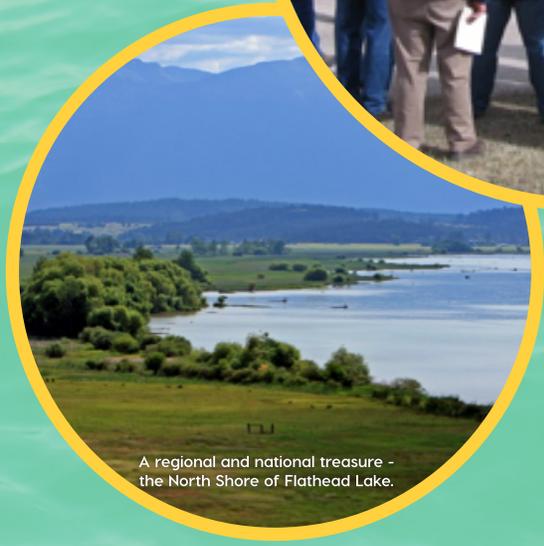
Since 2007, four conservation projects totaling 497 acres have been completed on the north shore adding to the existing protection provided by the 1,887-acre Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and 186 acres of private land under conservation easement. In February, the latest conservation project initiated and facilitated by Flathead Land Trust added 77 acres formerly owned by Richard and Kaye Hoffmaster to the North Shore Wildlife Management Area administered by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. When asked about how they feel about adding to the land protected, Richard said: "No second thoughts. To be part of the larger good of creating a wildlife refuge between Hwy. 82 and the waterfowl production area is exciting and a long-range wonderful use of this land. To think that in three hundred years' time the birds will still be here, engaging in their semi-annual migration truly stirs the heart."

Flathead Land Trust and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks are currently working to complete another north shore land conservation project totaling about 100 acres. The project has been more challenging to implement because the shoreline of the land has been eroding at higher than natural rates due to Kerr Dam. In order to attain the ultimate goal of having the

land become a conservation area and future community park the excessive erosion needs to be remedied. The good news is that Flathead Land Trust has recently obtained funding through the landowner, BNSE, the North American Wetland Conservation Act, and Flathead Conservation District to control the erosion of the most critical stretch of shoreline on the property. Following the completion of the shoreline restoration, along with partners Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and existing landowners, we envision new public lake access and a future community park as well as a portion conserved and managed similar to other north shore wildlife management areas. This exciting project will protect another critical piece of land and shoreline to be enjoyed by generations to come and will put us another step closer to realization of the north shore conservation vision.

On July 14, Flathead Land Trust is hosting a celebration of the many land conservation accomplishments to realize the north shore vision with a charter tour aboard the Far West Boat on Flathead Lake. The boat tour will begin at Lakeside and travel along the lake shore to the mouth of the Flathead River and then back across the lake on Thursday, July 14, from 6-9 pm. Join us for food, music, and celebration for \$20 per person; RSVP to Dar Wassink at [darw@flatheadlandtrust.org](mailto:darw@flatheadlandtrust.org) or 752-8293.

Partners discussing the North Shore Conservation Vision atop Pike's Peak in Somers, 2007.



A regional and national treasure - the North Shore of Flathead Lake.

# EXTENDING A TREMENDOUS CONSERVATION LEGACY WITH THE PALADIN FARM



Looking east to the Swan's on the newly conserved 200-acre farm.

**T**he next time you travel south along Highway 35 towards Bigfork, just after the junction with Highway 82, take a look at the farmland and wooded ridge just to the West that includes a beautiful old farmhouse and barn. As you admire the idyllic setting and stunning beauty of this open stretch of farm and forested land, know there is a compelling story connected to this place of a Montanan who made an incredible conservation impact that benefits us all.

In 1968, George Darrow bought the 200-acre old homestead property just north of Bigfork to farm and enjoy. The Paladin Farm became well known and certainly is a place that catches just about everyone's eye traveling to and from Bigfork. The property includes an old homestead cabin built in 1894, and a lovely barn and farmhouse built in the early 1900s that George and Elna worked to restore. The Darrows also purchased land north of the property and ran an extensive farming operation on both properties, growing grain and hay and raising livestock. In 2009, Elna passed away with George passing away early in 2015 at the age of 90.

This spring, Flathead Land Trust in partnership with the Darrow family will protect this special piece of land keeping it intact forever through a conservation easement. "It's been a real honor to work with the family to extend George's tremendous conservation legacy," said Ryan Hunter, FLT Land Protection Specialist who worked to complete the project with the Darrow family.

The stunning property not only protects open space and scenic values near a growing community, but is strategic in providing habitat and migration corridors for many animals. Its proximity to the confluence of the Flathead River with Flathead Lake renders it paramount for protection. Large areas along the north shore of Flathead Lake are protected as Waterfowl Production Areas and outlying open lands provide habitat for many species. Additionally, the proximity of the property to the Swan River, many smaller lakes and ponds, and the Swan Mountain Range to the east also supports some of the richest habitat in Montana, and is important for many animals in the area. The land also provides natural habitat for species listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service such as grizzly bear as well as those listed as Species of Concern by the State of Montana such as fisher, little brown myotis, pileated woodpecker, brown creeper, Cassin's finch, and evening grosbeak.

The legacy of George Darrow is profound and far reaching here in Montana, especially considering the incredible civic support and leadership he devoted to Bigfork and northwest Montana through many years of volunteerism. Called a "pillar of Bigfork", George began developing his conservation and community impact by ensuring the protection of our inalienable rights through the Montana Constitution to a clean and healthful environment.

George served as a Republican lawmaker in both the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Montana legislature from 1967 to 1974. One of the chief legislations George authored was the Montana Environmental Policy Act in 1971, which helps to protect and preserve environmental and water quality for all Montanans. He was also a sponsor of the Montana Water Policy Act in 1967, and remained a vocal advocate for clean water.

Throughout his life, he actively participated in environmental organizations and stayed politically active, successfully influencing environmental legislation. On a local level, he spearheaded an effort to conserve Cougar Canyon, a tract of state land on the mountainside above Woods Bay, as accessible public property. George contributed to the Bigfork community as a founding member of the Bigfork Center for Performing Arts, Sliter Park, and as a member of the Bigfork Chamber of Commerce.

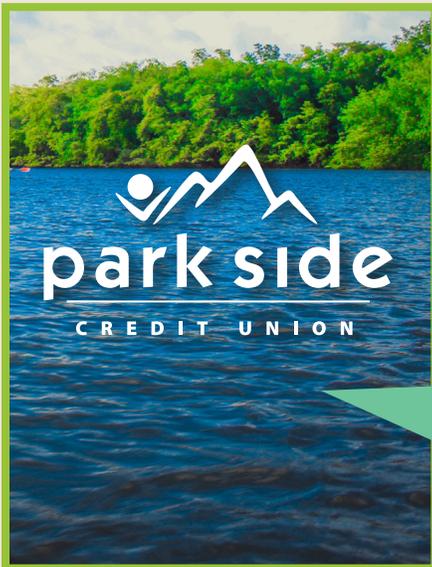
The conservation easement on the Darrow property will truly continue a legacy that George was dedicated to protecting for all Montanans. Many years into the future, the open space and wildlife habitat that may have otherwise been lost to development, will continue to greet highway travelers with its scenic beauty, and provide opportunities to continue traditional agricultural practices on the land. For that, we can all be thankful.

To help complete this conservation project, the Flathead Land

Trust was awarded a Travelers for Open Land grant. Travelers for Open Land was launched in 2009 and since then has awarded close to \$220,000 to help fund 35 private land conservation projects throughout Montana. Thanks to the Darrow family, the Travelers grant and the support of our generous members, this special piece of land and its agricultural heritage will be protected in perpetuity and enjoyed for years to come.



George and Elna Darrow in 2006 on the Paladin Farm. Daily Interlake photo.



## WHY WE GIVE



“

Flathead Land Trust is working hard to preserve and protect Montana, and we consider that an incredibly smart investment in the future.

Our staff and members live here for all of the great recreational opportunities that our open spaces afford, and we continue to support land conservation in the Flathead Valley, especially since the people at FLT are so great to work with. We will always value strong community relationships, and Flathead Land Trust represents a terrific beacon of cooperation.

– JOSH KROLL, VP OF MARKETING, PARK SIDE CREDIT UNION

“

We feel privileged to be part of the Flathead Land Trust that is so diligent and inventive in its conservation work. We also appreciate the congenial networking that the trust does.

– JAN AND EUGENE PETERSON, FLT MEMBERS



# 2015 DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

Because of you, amazing things are happening. Thank you to our generous members and supporters for 2015.

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 Swan Mountain Outfitters  
 Tamarack Brewing Company  
 Third Street Market  
 Whitefish Theatre Co.

**STEWARDSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS**

Valerie Beebe  
 Iron Horse  
 Pete Wade  
 John Weaver

**2015 ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL SUMMARY**

Your wonderful support goes a long way to conserve and celebrate our beautiful land and water here in the Flathead. In 2015, you helped us conserve 300 acres of bird and wildlife habitat and open space while also protecting rich farmland and clean water. Thank you!

**THREE DECADES OF CONSERVATION SUCCESS**



**53 TOTAL**

Conservation Easements  
(1988-2015)



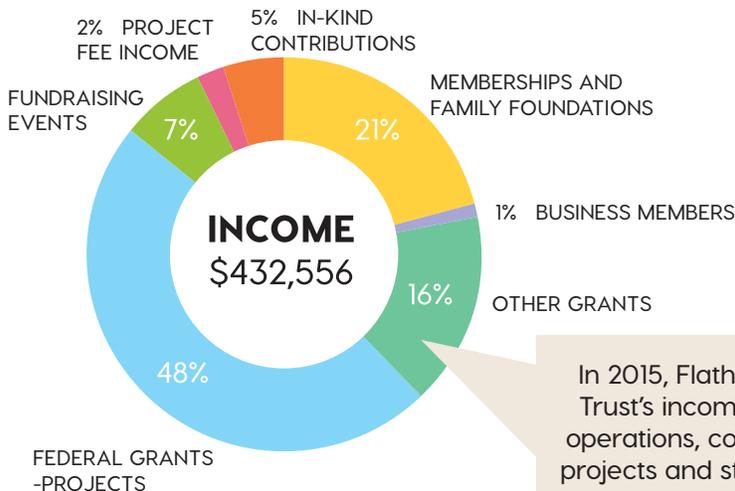
**15 TOTAL**

Partner Projects  
(1987-2015)

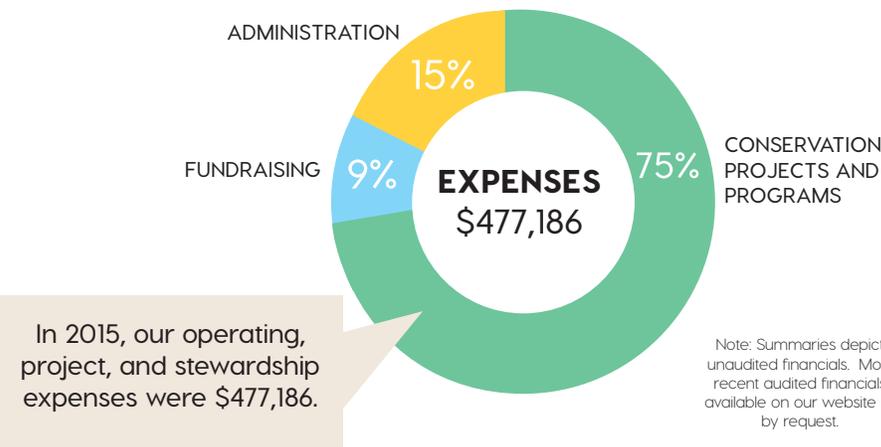


**13,565 TOTAL**

Conserved Acres  
(1987- 2015)



In 2015, Flathead Land Trust's income was for operations, conservation projects and stewardship.



In 2015, our operating, project, and stewardship expenses were \$477,186.

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



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

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## UPCOMING EVENTS



### MAY 14

**Bike and Bird – McWenneger Slough and Fairview Marsh**

Join us for our next bike and bird tour of McWenneger Slough and Fairview Marsh on Saturday, May 14, from 9 am to noon, hosted by Flathead Land Trust, Flathead Audubon, and the Flathead River to Lake Initiative. For more details or to RSVP, contact Laura Katzman of Flathead Land Trust at 752-8293 or lkatzman@flatheadlandtrust.org.



### JULY

**Montana Open Land Month**

Join us for this home-grown, month-long celebration of Montana's outdoor heritage! Celebrate what open land means to our way of life, the Montana landscape, and our economy. Honor the places and experiences we love. And have FUN doing it! More at [openlandmt.org](http://openlandmt.org).



### JULY 14

**North Shore of Flathead Lake Tour aboard the Far West**

Celebrate Montana Open Land month and the incredible conservation of the north shore of Flathead Lake by joining us and the Flathead River to Lake Initiative partners for a charter boat tour on the Far West from 6-9 pm. Tickets may be purchased for \$20 by contacting us at 752-8293 or darw@flatheadlandtrust.org.



### SEPTEMBER 17

**The 2nd Annual Barn Bash**

**OUR BIGGEST EVENT OF THE YEAR!** Experience a true Montana-style celebration on the banks of the Flathead River at the Diamond B Ranch and celebrate with two of Montana's premier singer/songwriters - Rob and Halladay Quist. Go to [flatheadlandtrust.org](http://flatheadlandtrust.org) or call 752-8293 for info and to purchase tickets. Don't wait as this fun event is likely to sell out.



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