

SPRING 2025

# VIEW *Points*



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

*"In a time when things are divisive, land trusts are things that bring people together."*

- Susan How, Flathead Land Trust Executive Director, 1998 - 2003



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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



# A Letter From Our President

**F**orty Years! Four decades of our founders, supporters, staff and partners uniting to protect habitat and to conserve water and land resources, with a tremendous amount to show for these efforts – we have much to celebrate, and we look forward to doing so with you during this landmark anniversary year!

The history of the modern land trust movement is an interesting one, with deep historical roots, but which also really burgeoned in the 1980s, out of which era the Flathead Land Trust arose. We in the Flathead Valley are so fortunate that we had visionary founders who saw the need to proactively engage with conservation efforts, and we will highlight some of their accomplishments, insights and reflections in this issue.



We're not only celebrating the past forty years, however; we are very much rejoicing in the completion of four new projects since our last newsletter - the Davis, Gray, Guenzler and Sherman easements. It is important to note that in agricultural conservation easement funding, we very much appreciate and rely on federal funding through the Natural Resource Conservation Service Agricultural Land Easement program (NRCS ALE), which aims to keep rich American farmland in agriculture.

In thinking about what it took for these four projects to materialize, in what may appear to be a seamless manner as we read about the completed easements and enjoy the beautiful photos, it is worth pausing for a moment to list the ingredients that had to align to bring them to fruition. My list is probably only partial, but for projects like this to happen, it takes the beautiful, fertile and sustaining land itself (from farmland to riparian habitat, meadow to forest) and the vision of those who drove the growth of the conservation and land trust movement and supportive legislation in the 1980s. It also required the leadership of our Flathead Land Trust founders, a history of forty years of solidly committed staff and board members, solid partnership with other non-profits, as well as support through government-sourced funding. Most of all, it takes our stalwart supporters, without whom none of this legacy for the future is possible. Thank you all, and please do take a look at the included 2024 Annual Report to see what your support has generated.

And so, we celebrate!

We have a wonderful array of events scheduled throughout the year to help celebrate Flathead Land Trust's 40<sup>th</sup>, showcasing our conservation efforts over the years. We do hope you will join us for some or all.

Yours in gratitude,

Margaret Notley, Flathead Land Trust Board President



# The People Behind the Progress

In a 1988 article, JoAnn Speelman (Dramer) wrote, "The fledgling Flathead Land Trust is blessed with an almost readymade clientele eager to make things happen." That clientele was served by an even more eager group of leaders; on whose shoulders we stand today.

JoAnn Speelman Dramer was not only Flathead Land Trust's first Executive Director, but she also donated innumerable hours in the early years. The founders all held day jobs while they ran Flathead Land Trust on the side. "We could not have done it without a lot of – a LOT of – volunteer help," she expressed at a recent interview with Flathead Land Trust staff. JoAnn became the first part-time paid staff member years after Flathead Land Trust's founding. With passion in her voice and a tear in her eye, she reminisced, "I'm very proud of where Flathead Land Trust is. I'm amazed." She recalled the struggles of the early years, "People wanted things to happen, but we didn't have much money. We didn't have any money, let me be honest. Just to see what has developed has been wonderful."



The concept of Flathead Land Trust would probably never have materialized without the spark from Mike Connor. A key part of his distinguished career with the U.S. Forest Service was developing a conservation easement program for inholders through the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, a process that underscored the need for a nonprofit land trust partner. Mike was intimately involved every step of the way in creating Flathead Land Trust to fill that role. Over the years, Mike has contributed to the organization in nearly every capacity imaginable, including as a dedicated advisor and member of the advisory board, and even serving as executive director for a stint. His pride shines through, seeing where the organization is now after literally being run out of a shoebox. "It's exciting to have been a part of the beginning."

The clientele in our area is just as eager today as it was 40 years ago to protect our special places. Building upon the passion of our founders and early leaders, we are proud to continue the mission.

Photos; Above: Current Flathead Land Trust Executive Director, Paul Travis, with JoAnn Speelman Dramer and Mike Connor; Right: Ken Siderius; Lex Blood - courtesy of Lisa Flowers

# A Tribute to Ken Siderius & Lex Blood

The Flathead Valley conservation community recently said farewell to two extraordinary conservation champions: Ken Siderius and Lex Blood. Their profound impact on the region's natural landscapes and Flathead Land Trust will be felt for generations to come.



Ken Siderius, a beloved member of the Flathead Land Trust family, passed away on December 1, 2024. Rooted in the Flathead Valley through generations of farming, Ken embodied a deep respect for the community and its values. A man of action and unwavering optimism, he served on the Flathead Land Trust Board from 2003-2009, including six years as President. His leadership was pivotal in conserving over 5,000 acres, including key areas along the Flathead River and Flathead Lake. Ken's passion for preserving open spaces for public benefit drove the establishment of the McWeneger Slough Fishing Access Site and an addition to Lone Pine State Park. Recognized with the Flathead Land Trust's first Conservation Leadership Award in 2014, Ken continued to contribute his vast knowledge to the Lands Committee for over 20 years, playing a key role in projects such as Somers Beach State Park.

Lex Blood, a distinguished geologist, long-time Flathead educator, and influential conservationist, passed away on February 13, 2025. Instrumental in the formation of Flathead Land Trust in the early 1980s, Lex remained a steadfast friend, benefactor, and crucial advisor until his passing. His invaluable insights significantly shaped the organization's trajectory. A leader in numerous conservation and educational initiatives across the Flathead, Lex co-founded the Glacier Institute and established the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem Education Consortium. He also founded the Flathead Nonprofit Development Partnership and managed The Sustainability Fund, a significant supporter of Flathead Land Trust for over 15 years. His dedication earned him the Flathead Land Trust's Conservation Leadership Award in 2015.

They will both be profoundly missed, but their legacies will continue to inspire the preservation of this special place for future generations.





## MISSION VALLEY LANDOWNERS SAFEGUARD FARMING LEGACIES AND WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

The enduring agricultural heritage and vital wildlife habitats of the Mission Valley have been powerfully strengthened, thanks to the dedication of local families working with Flathead Land Trust. This spring, two long-established farming families, the Guenzlers and the Shermans, collectively protected nearly 700 acres of prime agricultural land through conservation easements. Separately, a crucial wildlife corridor, linking the Mission Mountain Wilderness to a vast network of conserved lands, was also secured through the conservation of the Davis' critical 40-acre puzzle piece.

Paul and Sharon Guenzler protected 290 acres west of Ronan, while Cody and Elizabeth Sherman conserved 387 acres west of Pablo. Both families are deeply rooted in the Mission Valley, farming for over a century, and operate successful cattle ranches on their properties. The cattle are fully supported by feed grown on-site, on soils classified as farmland of local importance by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on nearly all of the acreage. Both easements ensure the sustainability of the family farms while preserving their traditional ranching practices, and the Guenzler family continues to ranch on horseback. These wide swaths of conserved agricultural land also secure opportunities for future generations to farm. The Shermans' children intend to continue the family's agricultural legacy on this protected property and will maintain the ranching operation.

Beyond agriculture, both easements safeguard critical winter habitat for numerous birds of prey, as the Mission Valley has some of the highest concentrations of wintering birds of prey in the United States. The properties also harbor valuable wetlands, providing habitat for diverse bird and wildlife populations. The Guenzler easement also sustains a healthy population of a native bunchgrass, Great Basin wildrye, which is uncommon in the lowlands of the Mission Valley and grows to over five feet in height on the property.

These protected farmlands contribute to a growing network of conserved agricultural lands in the Mission Valley. Notably, the Sherman property borders nearly 2,200 acres of protected farmland, while the Guenzler property is adjacent to a conserved 160-acre farm and is in close proximity to an additional 500 acres of protected farmland.

**“ Conservation easements allow the opportunity for agriculture to persist for future generations while retaining our open space in western Montana.” - Paul Guenzler**

Adding to these conservation successes, Jim and Roxie Davis protected their vital 40-acre property early this year, maintaining a crucial wildlife corridor connecting the Mission Mountain Wilderness to over 18,000 acres of conserved lands. The property features a third of a mile of Mollman



Creek, which, together with pothole wetlands, provides essential water resources and riparian habitat used regularly by grizzly bear, black bear, deer and numerous other species. Situated near Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge, an Important Bird Area designated by Montana Audubon, and Kicking Horse Waterfowl Production Area, the property significantly enhances critical bird habitat. The conservation easement also supports a remarkable 116 bird species, including several of concern, such as Great Gray Owl. A unique skunk cabbage wetland and a rare plant species are also protected. The easement is important for habitat connectivity, as the Mission Mountain Wilderness is a grizzly bear stronghold. Grizzly bear use the 18,000-acre wetland complex in the Mission Valley as low elevation refugia and seasonal foraging habitat, and regularly travel through the property.

These impactful conservation projects would not have been possible without federal funding from the NRCS Agricultural Land Easement program and support from organizations including the Heart of the Rockies Initiative, Cinnabar Foundation, Vital Ground Foundation, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. The commitment of local families and conservation partners to preserving the rich agricultural lands and vital wildlife habitats that define the Mission Valley is underscored by these efforts.

## LOCAL ARTISTS PROTECT IMPORTANT WILDLIFE HABITAT

Driven by their deep commitment to conservation, local artists Darrell and Lael Gray have partnered with Flathead

Land Trust to protect their vital 20-acre forested property near Bigfork. Situated at the base of the Swan Mountains and in close proximity to the Flathead National Forest, the Grays' land harbors critical wet forest habitat, enhancing thousands of nearby acres of public land.

Once part of a larger parcel used for "Wild Kingdom" filming, the property boasts diverse woodlands, springs, creeks, and wetlands, attracting grizzly bear, black bear, mountain lion, moose and gray wolf. Its forest-wetland mosaic provides refuge for numerous birds, amphibians and insects, drawn to the ponds and network of creeks.

The Grays cherish the property's natural beauty, which inspires their art. Darrell's sculptures dot the landscape, occasionally visited by wildlife, while Lael finds endless inspiration for her paintings. The majority of the land remains undeveloped, ensuring undisturbed habitat within the forests and wetlands.

This conservation easement strengthens the ecological integrity of the region, protecting a vital piece of critical habitat within the Swan River watershed. By safeguarding this land, the Grays are ensuring the long-term health and water quality of the area, creating an enduring oasis for both wildlife and people. Darrell and Lael, who have prioritized land stewardship from the beginning, have cemented their conservation legacy, ensuring that its wild nature is protected for generations to come.

**“ From the beginning it was very important to be a knowledgeable and good steward of the land. We strive to integrate with the forest and keep our impact light.” - Darrell Gray**

# FUELING OUR MISSION: A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO OUR 2024 SUPPORTERS

## GRANTORS AND FOUNDATIONS

### \$100,000 PLUS

North American Wetlands Conservation Act  
NRCS Agricultural Land Easement Program  
Whitefish Community Foundation - Great Fish Community Challenge

### \$25,000 - \$99,999

Grace Fund of Park City Community Foundation  
Flathead Audubon Society  
Flathead Lakers  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

### \$1,000 - \$24,999

AGL Foundation  
American Online Giving Foundation  
Foundation for Montana History  
Heart of the Rockies Initiative - Keep It Connected Program  
Ila B. Dousman Fund  
Kramer Family Fund of the Whitefish Community Foundation  
Liz Clairborne Art Ortenberg Foundation  
SahanDaywi Foundation  
The Bibler Foundation  
The Cinnabar Foundation  
Whitefish Community Foundation - Community Grant Program

## INDIVIDUALS:

### \$50,000 PLUS

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Estate of Carol Clintworth Myhre

### \$10,000 - \$49,999

Page Anderson & Julie Burke  
Anonymous

Alan & Sallie Gratch  
Preston & Marjorie Spencer

### \$5,000 - \$9,999

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Bloom Family Fund  
California Nottley Foundation  
Markovich Family Foundation  
Leif & Amy Peterson  
Tom & Teresa Quinn  
James & Janna Shennan  
Two Bear Services Group  
Todd Votteler

### \$1,000 - \$4,999

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## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT and FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Your support has helped us gain ground and provide lasting conservation for places worth protecting. Here are highlights from 2024.

★ In January, we partnered with **Charles and Renate Jaquette** to place their 497-acre farm just east of Kalispell under conservation easement. Containing some of the richest topsoil in the valley, the easement adds to a growing network of conserved farms in the highly productive Creston area. Encompassing over a mile of Egan Slough, the property provides excellent bird habitat and is strategically located for both birds and wildlife at a landscape scale.

★ In February, we completed a conservation easement with Montana DNRC to permanently protect the 405-acre **Owen Sowerwine** property east of Kalispell. This beloved block of school trust land, with its intact forested river bottom and riparian habitat, has been a community treasure enjoyed by the public for decades. The dream to see it permanently protected has now been realized, thanks to help from our partners and community supporters who stepped up big to help us raise over \$970,000 for the purchased conservation easement.

★ In April, we partnered with **Luci Yeats** to permanently protect 76-acres of her family's agricultural land near the Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area east of Columbia Falls. The "Heart Rock Ridge" conservation easement safeguards a vital wildlife corridor as well as scenic open space and a long legacy of working farmland.

★ Also in April, a 122-acre ranch and wildlife haven in the Mission Valley, once platted for subdivision, was protected in perpetuity with a conservation easement. **John Weaver**, distinguished retired conservation biologist and land steward, partnered with FLT by adding this parcel along Mission Creek just east of the National Bison Range to his conservation portfolio. This parcel is adjacent to Dr. Weaver's other 159-acres of protected land, conserved with an FLT conservation easement in 2015.

★ In August, a 51-acre prime parcel of forested land was protected along Swan Lake. FLT partnered with **Paul Johnson and Candice Greene** to place the ecological gem under a conservation easement, forever protecting habitat for birds, wildlife and scenic views as well as the exceptional water quality of Swan Lake.

★ In November, FLT partnered with two landowners to protect a total of 66-acres of important riverfront land near Whitefish. **Sally Ericsson and Tom Garwin** placed their 36 acres along the Stillwater River under conservation easement, followed by **Mark Schmidt**, who conserved his 30-acre parcel along the Whitefish River. Both properties protect prime agricultural lands and riparian habitats, providing wildlife habitat security and connectivity.

★ Our **education and outreach programs** were especially popular and reached many across the Flathead Valley. The **Bird Education Program** helped to educate over 300 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders about birds and conservation from West Valley, Bigfork, Evergreen and Two Eagle River School in the Mission Valley.

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 Gary & Lynn Havens  
 David and Betsy Krehbiel

Dr. Tom Little  
 Frances McAllister  
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**\$500 - \$2,500**

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 Kehoe's Agate Shop  
 Forestoration, Inc.

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 Montana Raft Company  
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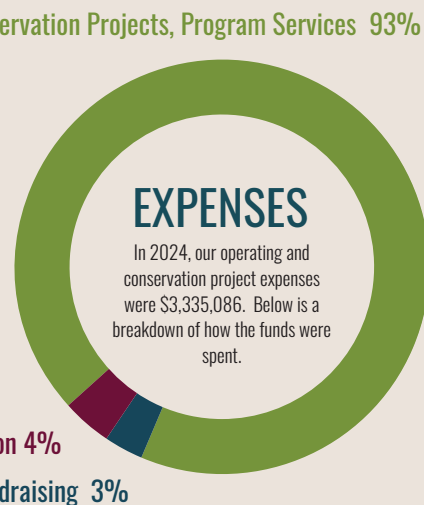
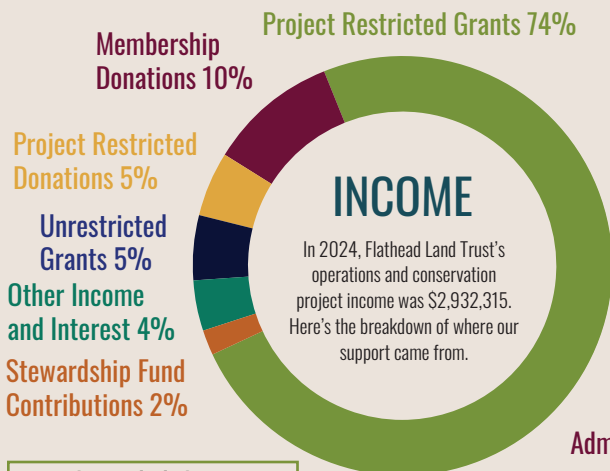
Sally C. Ericsson and Tom Garwin  
 Iron Horse  
 Charles and Renate Jaquette  
 Paul Johnson & Candace  
 Greene  
 Mark Schmidt  
 John Weaver  
 Luci Yeats

\*Preservation Partner Monthly Donor

♦ On behalf of Doug Chadwick in gratitude for his many years of excellent service to the Foundation's Advisory Board

\* In honor of Diane Conradi for her participation on a Swan Watershed panel

**FLATHEAD LAND TRUST'S FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN FOR 2024:**



**Land Protection Snapshot:**

	
<b>83</b> Conservation Easements	<b>15,899</b> Easement Acres Protected
	
<b>21</b> Partner Projects	<b>20,339</b> Total Acres Protected

**ASSETS (as of 12/31/24)**

Cash and Cash Equivalents:	\$165,805
Investments:	\$1,141,893
Property and Fixed Assets:	\$474,947
<b>Total Assets:</b>	<b>\$1,782,645</b>

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



# FLATHEAD LAND TRUST

Conserving Our Legacy of Land and Water

690 N. Meridian, Suite 207 · P.O. Box 1913  
Kalispell, MT 59903-1913

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## Upcoming Events



### Tails on the Trails - Dog Day at Harrell Forest- Saturday, June 7 (10:00 - 2:00)

Celebrate National Trails Day at Harrell Forest with your dog! Hit the trails together and learn tips for responsible trail use while enjoying the beauty of the forest. At 10:00 a.m., **Sarah Luna of Last Best K9** will lead a **free leash training workshop** to help you and your dog build good trail habits. Space is limited, so reservations are required (please email us at [info@flatheadlandtrust.org](mailto:info@flatheadlandtrust.org) to register). Throughout the day, dogs can bring their human by the Harrell Forest B.A.R.K. Ranger table and earn their very own Harrell Forest B.A.R.K. Ranger certification.



### Protect & Connect! Flathead Land Trust's 40th Anniversary Celebration - Saturday, June 21 (11:00 - 3:00)

Celebrate 40 Years of community-based conservation with Flathead Land Trust! We invite you to gather on the stunning **Kohrs property**, nestled along the Stillwater River just west of Whitefish, protected through a conservation easement with Flathead Land Trust. Enjoy live music by Mike Murray, a delicious picnic lunch by Uptown Hearth, refreshing beer and wine, family activities, fantastic raffle baskets, inspiring speakers, topped off with a opportunity to directly support our future conservation efforts through a paddle raise. Learn more and order tickets at: [FlatheadLandTrust.org](http://FlatheadLandTrust.org).



### Tour of Johnston Conservation Easement-Sunday, August 3 (10:00 - Noon)

Enjoy a morning stroll of this beautiful 682-acre property along the Flathead River, farmed by the family for over a century. This **free tour** will be followed by a few words from the landowners and a provided picnic lunch. Space is limited, so RSVP is required. Please email us to reserve your spot at: [info@flatheadlandtrust.org](mailto:info@flatheadlandtrust.org).

### Kayak Tour of Conservation Along the Stillwater River - Saturday, August 9

Please stay tuned to our eNews, website and social media for more details on this lovely float on the Stillwater River west of Whitefish. For more upcoming events, please make sure you are on our [eNews mailing list](#), follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and check our [website](#). To sign up for our e-News, email us at: [info@flatheadlandtrust.org](mailto:info@flatheadlandtrust.org).