

FALL/WINTER 2025

# VIEW *Points*



  
**YEARS**



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

*"Guard, protect and cherish your land, for there is no afterlife for a place that started out as Heaven."* — Charles Marion Russell



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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 Next 40 Years: Growing Our Legacy Together

This year, we've had the privilege to celebrate the past 40 years; to honor our roots, recognize our growth, and thank the many people who have shaped Flathead Land Trust into the thriving organization it is today.

Like a young sapling, FLT began with humble beginnings, carefully nurtured by dedicated board members, staff, partners, and a community that believed in the power of conservation. Over time, that sapling grew strong, its roots reaching deep into the soil of Northwest Montana's land and water legacy.

Since 1985, our promise has remained steady: to protect the spectacular landscapes that define who we are. The land connects us – it sustains our livelihoods, inspires our adventures, and gives us a sense of place. Because of the passion and generosity of this community, Flathead Land Trust has safeguarded more than 20,000 acres of critical lands for future generations.

Now, as we step into the next 40 years, we are stronger, wiser, and more determined than ever to meet the challenges ahead and seize new opportunities for conservation.

Last October, our board and staff came together to create a new five-year strategic plan – a roadmap to guide our vision for the future. In times that can feel uncertain, this plan gives us focus, direction, and renewed purpose.

With strong leadership, growing resources, and unwavering community support, we're ready to enter a new era of service – one that builds on our past and expands our impact. Here's a glimpse at what's ahead:

- ◆ **A new conservation plan:** sharpening our focus on conservation projects that bring the greatest environmental and community benefit.
- ◆ **Enhanced stewardship:** working hand-in-hand with our partner landowners to care for the 86+ conservation easements on properties we've already helped protect.
- ◆ **Growing capacity:** with new staff and fresh energy, we're accelerating the pace of conservation and completing more meaningful projects than ever before.
- ◆ **Expanded outdoor recreation opportunities:** from our past work to help create Somers Beach State Park and Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area to securing access to Owen Sowerwine and opening the Harrell Forest Community Trails near Bigfork, we're now working to expand the Harrell Forest–Bigfork trail network. And that's only the beginning as we aim to create additional new opportunities for recreation across the Flathead Valley.
- ◆ **Deeper community engagement:** through partnerships, volunteering, and outdoor education, we'll continue to share the joy and purpose of conservation with everyone who calls this special place home.

Forty years of experience have taught us what's possible when a community comes together with a shared purpose. As we look to the next four decades, your belief in our mission, and your trust in our work, matter more than ever.

Together, we've already accomplished so much. But our story is still being written – one acre, one project, one partnership at a time.

Let's keep growing our ability to better serve you. Let's keep protecting what makes this place special. And let's work together to achieve a level of conservation we never would have thought possible before. We are grateful for what has been achieved so far...but I'm even more excited to see what we can do together in the next 40 years.

*Paul Travis*  
Paul Travis, Executive Director



## The People Behind the Progress

Building a land trust is akin to cultivating the growth of a deep-rooted tree, drawing strength and resilience from its base. In our last issue, we paid tribute to the dedicated founders of Flathead Land Trust, whose "blood, sweat, and tears" established the organization's foundational roots.

Now, we celebrate the next phase of development. This issue highlights two early Executive Directors—Susan How and Marilyn Wood—who tended those deep roots and grew the organization to unprecedented heights.

### Susan How: Guiding the Leap to Maturity

When Susan How arrived in January 1998, the volunteer-led Land Trust had already realized a handful of key accomplishments, including the Blasdel Waterfowl Production Area cooperative project and several donated conservation easements. While these achievements were impressive, hiring Susan marked a pivotal turning point, elevating Flathead Land Trust to a new level of executing large, funded projects.

In a labor of love, Susan dedicated countless hours to the organization's maturation, although she was technically part-time. Utilizing her talent, determination, and character, she successfully nurtured Flathead Land Trust into a credible organization, one highly trusted by foundations and funding sources.

#### Securing the Critical Breakthrough

Through Susan's dedication and leadership, Flathead Land Trust landed the first national farmland protection grant ever awarded in the state of Montana. This funding success was a testament to her grit and collaborative spirit.

Susan recalled the process: "I just got on the phone and called up anyone I could think of that might have a piece of the puzzle, asking people to help, asking people to share information and resources, and we all pulled together. No one said no to me. Everyone helped." This single achievement established a critical precedent for procuring funds that continues to benefit the land trust today.

#### A Vision Fulfilled

Susan's influence has been instrumental in Flathead Land Trust's enduring success. Her efforts during this highly productive time built the organization's reputation for getting visionary tasks accomplished.

"Yes, things were a little sparse when we started out," Susan reflected. "But the ecosystem of people existed. People dedicated

to a vision of what could happen—and now, we're beginning to really see what that looks like. It is far exceeding my own vision. It was a most rewarding chapter of my life and career."

### Marilyn Wood: Strengthening Strategy

Marilyn Wood arrived at the Land Trust in 2005 as Conservation/Stewardship Director, stepping into the Executive Director role in 2007. A seasoned wildlife biologist, she brought a deep skill set that expertly merged scientific rigor with community engagement. Her experience at Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and The Nature Conservancy had already resulted in the protection of thousands of acres—a mission she successfully continued at Flathead Land Trust.

#### The Power of Connection and Listening

Marilyn's colleagues consistently laud her gift for connecting with almost everyone. She skillfully wove this interpersonal ability into her professional relationships, using her "magic" to guide projects to the finish line. Marilyn attributes this power to being a good listener, which proved to be invaluable in closing several critical projects. Under her watch, several key collaborations materialized, including conserving large parcels along the north shore of Flathead Lake.

#### Strengthening Strategic Conservation

Through the Flathead River to Lake Initiative, a partnership she helped develop with Susan How and other conservation powerhouses, Marilyn was able to heighten and amplify the land trust's conservation work. This collaborative vision successfully guided the organization towards utilizing a more proactive, strategic approach, focusing on identifying and seeking out projects along critical conservation corridors.

Her focus on professionalism during her tenure led Flathead Land Trust to national accreditation, a rigorous standard that elevated the organization to a new tier of credibility and operational excellence. Marilyn credits much of Flathead Land Trust's success during that time period to the strength of board leadership, guided by icons such as Ken Siderius and Jim Regnier.

She remains grateful that the land trust continues to be a true community land trust for the Flathead Valley, maintaining a commitment to having "a local board and local people making local decisions."

Rooted in strong foundations, the highly successful endeavors cultivated by these two Executive Directors continue to flourish and grow today.





# Enhancing Conservation on a Landscape Scale

The work of Flathead Land Trust is defined by powerful interconnection; connecting people with each other and with the landscapes we protect. From landowners deeply connected to their land to our dedicated project partners, we all collaborate toward a shared conservation cause.

The concept of connection extends to the landscapes we protect. Our newest conservation easements add to a network of existing protected lands – bolstering the long-term connectivity and resilience of our intact ecosystems. Nestled among U.S. Forest Service Lands and existing protected properties, all three of these newly conserved parcels – 40 timbered acres just outside of Bigfork, a 52-acre woodland near Star Meadows and 140 acres of forested habitat on Big Mountain – help to maintain larger swaths of contiguous habitat. Ultimately, the resilience of our ecosystems and the future of our wildlife depends on fostering human connections as well as connected habitats on a landscape scale.

## BRIDGING PROTECTED LANDS NEAR BIGFORK

In July, Sally and Paul Bradshaw partnered with Flathead Land Trust to permanently conserve their beautiful property just outside of Bigfork, safeguarding 40 acres of healthy coniferous forest habitat. This foresighted effort added to a network of open space lands, helping to preserve a contiguous swath of forest that stretches from Swan Hill to the Swan River. The new conservation easement connects the 238-acre Harrell Forest

Community Trails, owned and managed by Flathead Land Trust, and the 173-acre Whitney property - both protected under Montana Land Reliance conservation easements – and abuts PacifiCorps open space land.

The property will be managed with minimal intervention, ensuring that it remains in its natural state. Conservation of this key parcel and light approach to management ensures the lasting protection of the area's beloved rural character and natural views. Mountain lion, white-tailed deer, black bear and numerous other wildlife and bird species find food, shelter and refuge on the property as they move throughout the landscape.

“Our hearts are in the Flathead. Supporting the land trust is our way of giving back – of ensuring its rivers, forest and wildlife endure for those who will walk these trails long after we’re gone.” - Sally and Paul Bradshaw

## LEGACY AND LANDSCAPE PROTECTED NEAR STAR MEADOWS

In September, family legacy and landscape connectivity merged, with the establishment of a new 52-acre conservation easement near Star Meadows. This protection is the culmination of a combined family effort that has assembled multiple parcels since the mid-1970s. The land, nestled within Forest Service acreage, has a rich history dating back to a 1920s homestead.

A clean, clear tributary to Logan Creek meanders for a third

of a mile through the property. Protection of this watercourse safeguards a vital part of the Tally Lake watershed. The mix of upland and riparian forest, featuring lush streamside vegetation, provides diverse wildlife habitat while maintaining the creek's water quality and ecological integrity.

The conservation easement directly borders Flathead National Forest land on three sides. Protecting this remote, forested property adds to an existing interconnected network of open space and quality habitat on a landscape scale, ensuring the long-term resilience of wildlife habitat across the region for future generations.

## BIG MOUNTAIN WILDLIFE CONNECTIVITY ENHANCED

A dedicated collaboration between local landowners, the Heart of the Rockies Initiative and Flathead Land Trust resulted in permanent protection of a critical 140-acre parcel on the flank of Big Mountain. In October, Flathead Land Trust placed a conservation easement on this vital property, accomplishing three significant goals: protecting essential wildlife habitat, safeguarding part of a landscape-scale travelway for free wildlife movement, and preserving the pristine water quality of Whitefish Lake.

With its extensive, mature Douglas fir and western redcedar forests, the property provides foraging opportunities and refuge for robust and diverse mammal and bird populations.

Directly adjacent to Flathead National Forest land on two sides and to a 100-acre conservation easement on a third, the easement adds security to an imperative passageway for grizzly bears and other wildlife moving from Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex to the Salish and Selkirk Mountains. The newly protected property falls in line with several large conserved areas, including the Trumbull Creek, Haskill Basin and Lazy Creek conservation easements, contributing to a belt of open space across the slopes of the Whitefish Mountain Range.

The property's hydrology – featuring at least seven springs and abundant seeps and subsurface water flow – is directly connected to Whitefish Lake. Protecting this large area from future disturbance is important for reducing the influx of nutrients and erosion-related sediments, safeguarding the ecological integrity, water quality, and clarity of the lake; enhancing ecosystem health on a landscape scale.

“This important project will ensure that one of the last undeveloped forested wildlife habitats on Big Mountain, strategically located between the Haskill Basin and the Lazy Creek conserved areas, will remain intact. It serves as both seasonal and a year round home to mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, black and grizzly bear, mountain lion and a host of other species. The family has worked tirelessly for decades to employ forest management practices to ensure that wildlife habitat and a partial watershed for Whitefish Lake was protected.” - Jim Williams, Partnership Manager, the Heart of the Rockies Initiative

## Major Milestones Over 40 Years:

1985

Flathead Land Trust incorporates April 29, 1985



1988

Flathead Land Trust places its first conservation easement - conserving the Sowerwine property



1998

Flathead Land Trust hires its first paid Executive Director



2000

Flathead Land Trust & Partners help launch Flathead River to Lake Initiative



2013

Flathead Land Trust receives Land Trust Alliance Accreditation



2018

Community fundraising helps protect the West Valley Wetlands and create public Bird & Wildlife Viewing Area



2021

Flathead Land Trust collaborates to help conserve Bad Rock Canyon & Somers Beach



2023

Harrell Forest Community Trails, FLT's first owned and managed property, opens to the public



2025

Flathead Land Trust celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!



## Remembering Mary and Gary Sloan



Mary and Gary Sloan were renowned for their quiet, yet highly impactful, leadership in conservation throughout northwestern Montana over many decades. That extraordinary legacy continues today.

Though Gary passed away in 2019 and Mary earlier this year, their deep commitment to protecting the Flathead Valley endures. Flathead Land Trust is profoundly honored to have been named one of the beneficiaries in their estate, and we extend our immense gratitude for this extraordinary gift.

Mary and Gary will be deeply missed in our community. However, their quiet, lifelong efforts have created an extraordinary legacy that will forever live on through the protected lands, environmental heritage, and inspired communities they helped to create.

## Planning Your Lasting Legacy

The incredible generosity of long-time conservationists like Mary and Gary Sloan reminds us of the power of legacy giving. "Planned gifts" are a special source of support where you can help secure a strong financial future for Flathead Land Trust. These enduring gifts help us to continue our vital work of protecting our region's most important natural areas, scenic open spaces, and water resources.

There are several ways to make a planned gift:

- ◆ Naming Flathead Land Trust as a beneficiary in your **will** or **living trust**
- ◆ Designating Flathead Land Trust as a beneficiary of your **IRA, Pension Plan** or **life insurance policy**
- ◆ Making a direct, tax-free distribution from your **IRA** to Flathead Land Trust
- ◆ Giving to one of our **Endowment Funds**

We invite you to join the Sloans in ensuring the future of conservation in Northwest Montana. For more information, please visit our website at [flatheadlandtrust.org](https://flatheadlandtrust.org) or contact Paul at [ptravis@flatheadlandtrust.org](mailto:ptravis@flatheadlandtrust.org).

## EVENTS, OUTREACH & FUNDRAISING

For 40 years, Flathead Land Trust has been working in collaboration to protect Northwest Montana's most cherished landscapes. This year has been a wonderful celebration of that four-decade commitment. Thank you for joining us in honoring this significant milestone!

### Events

#### Grand Opening of Danford Reed's Slough

We were thrilled to celebrate the grand opening of the new Reed's Slough Bird Viewing Area in the lower valley in April. This community asset is a true collaboration between Flathead Land Trust, who holds the conservation easement on the property, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), who administers the viewing area, and the generous Danford family, whose property hosts the birding hotspot. This public celebration featured honored guests, including Montana FWP Director Christy Clark and key partners.



#### Harrell Forest Community Day and Tails on the Trails

Once the warm weather hit, we hosted several events at Harrell Forest. Community Day in April offered adults guided hikes on tree ID and history, plus nature bingo and conservation cornhole for the kids. In June, we were thrilled to welcome Sarah Luna of Last Best K9 for Tails on the Trails, a fun and informative leash-training workshop that gave dog owners the skills needed to safely enjoy the Harrell Forest trails with their dogs on leash.

#### 40th Anniversary Celebration

June 21 was a fantastic day of connecting, protecting, and fun for all ages at the stunning Kohrs conserved property. Guests enjoyed a festive afternoon with a property tour and hay ride, prior to the downpour. Indoor festivities followed, with live music from Mike Murray, great food, activities, and cake. A highlight of the afternoon was honoring our roots. We were graced by the presence of several founders, advisors, and previous Executive Directors - on whose shoulders we stand today. It was a joy to celebrate 40 years of community conservation with so many of you!

### Tours

#### Kayak Tours of Conserved Areas on the Stillwater River

Twenty-one paddlers seized the opportunity to view conserved lands along the Stillwater River west of Whitefish with Laura Katzman in August. The morning and evening tours explored a rarely traveled six-mile route, where participants were graced by exceptional wildlife sightings of ubiquitous deer and many species of birds.

#### Conservation Easement Tours

In August, Mark Johnston and Paul Travis led a special tour of the magnificent 682-acre Johnston property on braided channels of the Flathead River, followed by a lovely lunch hosted by Mark, Jean and Hazel Johnston. The land, which Glenn and Hazel Johnston permanently protected in 2007, conserves over a mile of crucial riverfront and vital bottomland habitat.

In late September, a beautiful morning set the stage for a fantastic tour led by Rebecca Nelson and Ryan Hunter. The group explored the Nelson family's 300-acre conservation easement along Good Creek, southwest of Olney, a property protected since 2009. Lush forests, vibrant wetlands, and open meadows were showcased.

## Bird Education Program

Our Bird Education program was again popular and reached many students across the Flathead and Mission Valleys. The program has helped educate about 250 seventh and eighth graders about birds and conservation in Bigfork, Ronan, and St. Ignatius Middle Schools as well as the Two Eagle River School. The opportunity to expand the program to the Mission Valley, including field trips to see wintering birds of prey and waterfowl at Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge, has been engaging and rewarding for all.

## Great Fish Community Challenge

For the ninth straight year, Flathead Land Trust proudly joined the Great Fish Community Challenge. The campaign was record-breaking, raising \$8,098,663 for 85 local nonprofits. We hit our biggest year ever, raising a grand total of \$127,019! This success was driven by 235 generous supporters (donating over \$110,000) and an incredible \$17,000 matching grant from the Whitefish Community Foundation's Circle of Giving. Thank you to everyone who helped us make conservation history!



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LAND TRUST**  
Conserving Our Legacy of Land and Water

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*Please Join Us!*

**MEMBER & PARTNER APPRECIATION  
YEAR-END CELEBRATION -  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11 at 6:00 PM**

As a vital member and supporter, we want to celebrate with you! It's been another incredibly successful year at FLT for protecting places we all love in NW Montana, and you're to thank. Join us for appetizers and drinks at 690 N. Meridian Road in Kalispell (our office lobby) as we look back on 2025, ahead to 2026, and award our annual FLT Conservation Leadership Award to this year's recipient.

To RSVP and for more details, please contact Paul at:

[ptravis@flatheadlandtrust.org](mailto:ptravis@flatheadlandtrust.org) or 406-752-8293