

FALL/WINTER 2020

VIEW *Points*



Spring creek on the Bad Rock Canyon property. Photo by Dean Marsh.



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

*"The grizzly is a symbol of
what is right in the world."*

- Charles Jonkel



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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.



Hope IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

These past nine months have tested all of us as we struggle to adapt to the effects of a world-wide pandemic. Flathead Land Trust is no different and we feel for everyone as we all attempt to navigate these challenges and find new ways to engage with you.

But even in a year with a lot of uncertainty, we've been fortunate to be able to conserve more land and better serve our amazing Flathead community. It's been a banner year for conservation. Plus, it's clear just how important open spaces and wild places are to all of us as they offer respite, places to recreate, as well as physical and emotional health. This growing realization and support from people like you has helped propel our work to meet a greater demand for new conservation and public access projects. In this issue of *ViewPoints*, we want to share these stories of success with you as we prepare for what we hope will be an even bigger 2021.

In April, we completed the Robbins conservation easement which now protects a family homestead in lower valley along with rich bird habitat on Wiley Slough. It also connects to another 1,235 acres of adjacent land already conserved for bird and wildlife habitat and farming.

In May, we completed the well-known Flathead River Conservation Project in partnership with the Danford family. This easement now protects 155 acres of agricultural open space in the heart of our valley and water quality of the Flathead River and Flathead Lake. It adds a critical puzzle piece of protection to 725 acres that is already conserved, securing a much larger connected piece of our landscape along the lower Flathead River.

We also completed a 37-acre conservation easement along Goodrich Bayou near the Flathead River in September, and expect to complete a 50-acre conservation easement of forested and wildlife rich land near Kila in November. Check out the stories in this issue to find out more about these properties and their amazing landowners.

We continue our partnership with the Sliter family to conserve the well-loved "Somers Beach" property on the north shore of Flathead Lake in order to secure recreational access for the public as a Montana State Park. With this project, we have an opportunity that is rare to save this beloved piece of shoreline for the public on what is considered the crown jewel of the Crown of the Continent ecosystem.

The Bad Rock Canyon Conservation Project is our biggest effort right now as we work to purchase almost 800 acres of phenomenal wildlife habitat near Columbia Falls with our partner Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and create a new public accessible Wildlife Management Area. For many years, we have placed a high priority on conserving this property and now we finally have the opportunity to do so. It's hard to fully comprehend the conservation impact this project will mean for wildlife, the Flathead River and our communities as it easily could've been lost to development. Your help will be critical in our ability to cross the finish line and see this property protected forever and I hope you'll join us. Find out how by reading the feature story in this issue and visiting our website.

Finally, I just want to say thank you. Even in tough times, you are the difference maker in our conservation success and give us hope. Together, we're building a lasting legacy of land and water that we can all be proud of. The future is looking bright! Enjoy this issue of *ViewPoints* and I hope to see you (in-person) soon.

Paul Travis, *Executive Director*





New Conservation Completed **ALONG GOODRICH BAYOU**

Chrysta Bourne loves animals, so after inheriting a 37-acre farm along Goodrich Bayou – a back channel of the Flathead River – she was committed to protecting the wildlife habitat on the property in perpetuity. In September, Flathead Land Trust partnered with Chrysta to do just that by placing a conservation easement on her beautiful property.

The often crystal clear waters of Goodrich Bayou are frequented by geese and other waterfowl and are used by trout, herons, river otters, beavers and other critters. It is flanked to the east by a mature and relatively undisturbed cottonwood forest where one might find an occasional bear hiding or coyote or fox moving through.

The bulk of the property lies to the west of the Bayou and consists of rich farmland, 64% of which are designated as prime soils if irrigated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Chrysta intends to improve the habitat along the western shore of the Bayou by working with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to revegetate a riparian buffer protected by the conservation easement with funding from the Conservation District. Once established, this vegetative buffer will teem with migratory birds and other wildlife, allowing Chrysta to enjoy the sights and sounds of a thriving habitat just a few feet from her own residence. Thanks to her generous donation, she will also have the peace of mind that it will be forever protected with the help of Flathead Land Trust.



When asked about her decision to conserve the property, Chrysta said she reflected on a Charlie Russell quote in which he says, “Guard, protect and cherish your land, for there is no afterlife for a place that started out as Heaven.” She added that “it was such an easy decision. A real no-brainer.” Nevertheless, we’re so glad she made the decision. Our valley and future generations will be better for it.

Protecting a Wild Place



Magnificent, iconic, awe-inspiring – all words that describe grizzly bears. Grizzly bears symbolize wild places. There is something compelling about seeing a grizzly bear that connects us to the natural world. It's a connection that is a vital part of our human spirit and gives us hope. Protecting what remains wild for future generations fulfills a primal need enriching our lives.

The Bad Rock Canyon Conservation Project is a rare opportunity to protect such a wild place in the Flathead Valley. The project aims to conserve almost 800 acres of exceptional and strategically important habitat for grizzly bears and other wildlife of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem. The property is located at exactly the right place for wildlife connectivity, a geographic pinch point at the mouth of Bad Rock Canyon where the Flathead River flows through a narrow canyon between the Swan and Whitefish mountain ranges. It provides landscape connectivity to a stronghold of millions of acres of public lands including the Flathead National Forest, Glacier National Park, and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and adds to a 12,000-acre network of conserved riparian lands along the

Flathead River downstream of the project. Conservation of this land will protect 700 acres of riparian forest along 1.6 miles of the Flathead River including 120 acres of healthy cottonwood gallery forest as well as 80 acres of wetlands and a mile of a warm spring creek. It provides a moist, productive refugia needed by grizzly bears and other wildlife as they struggle to adapt to a warmer, dryer climate. Additionally, this property is part of a buffer area that was identified in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2018 Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bear in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem as vital habitat for female bears and necessary to sustain a recovered population within the federally-designated recovery area.

This fall, a grizzly bear sow and its cub were seen using the project property and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks radio collar data show grizzly bear activity on the property in past years. Grizzly bears rely on the property's healthy, low elevation habitat for foraging in spring after they first awake from hibernation. In late summer and fall, bears fatten up for winter on berries and other food found in the lush riparian habitat on the

and a Part of Us



Photo by MT FWP

property especially in dry years when berry crops at higher elevations fail. The property has also been shown to be a critical travel corridor and important connection for bears between the Swan and Whitefish mountain ranges and helps connect the eastern and western sides of the Flathead Valley to provide a link to the Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bear ecosystem.

In addition to grizzly bears, the Bad Rock Canyon Conservation Project protects habitat for 43 Species of Greatest Conservation Need as identified by the State Wildlife Action Plan including fisher and wolverine as well as other wildlife including black bears, mountain lions, wolves, coyotes, foxes, river otters, elk and deer. The property helps safeguard habitat in the Flathead River and Flathead Lake used by bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout and other aquatic species. It also helps ensure larger landscapes stay connected for migrating birds and protects high quality habitat for 192 bird species including 59 species prioritized for conservation.

We are so excited to have an opportunity to protect this phenomenal property for the mighty grizzly bear,

its biodiversity and important landscape connectivity as it easily could have been lost to development with its proximity to Columbia Falls. We're working with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to purchase the property for it to become a future Wildlife Management Area that would be open to the public. Because the project property is near Columbia Falls it could provide an easily accessible wildland experience for people.

The current landowner, the Columbia Falls Aluminum Co., has given Flathead Land Trust and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks until Dec. 2021 to achieve a conservation outcome for the property. A total of \$5.3 million has been raised so far for the project through federal and state grants. Another \$1.8 million is needed to complete the project including \$500,000 in non-Federal matching funds. We are thankful to our fundraising partners, including the Flathead Lakers and Flathead River to Lake Initiative, as we work together to raise this non-Federal match by August 2021 to make this important project happen. You can donate to the Bad Rock Canyon Conservation Project at www.flatheadlandtrust.org

THANK YOU TO OUR *Amazing* GREAT FISH COMMUNITY CHALLENGE AND RAISE THE SKY FOR CONSERVATION DONORS

From July 30 to September 18, we raised a \$44,809 from 136 generous donors through the Great Fish Community Challenge making this by far our best year yet. These donations, combined with the Whitefish Community Foundation Circle of Giving match of \$11,200 for a total of \$56,009. Donations will be used to conserve critical open spaces and wild places near our growing Flathead Valley communities, create new public access on our lakes and open lands, and connect young people to nature through our middle school bird education program. In the past four years, Flathead Land Trust has raised over \$173,000 with the Great Fish Community Challenge which has directly made a huge impact in the amount of conservation work we do while also positioning us to better serve you and our communities in the midst of our increasing growth and development in the valley.

On August 13, we held our first-ever virtual fundraising event Raise the Sky for Conservation. In lieu of our Land Affair annual fundraising event, we still wanted get together with our friends and supporters to celebrate conservation. And Raise the Sky for Conservation was a success - thank you to all who watched, supported and celebrated with us. The Raise the Sky virtual paddle raise brought in just over \$6,400 with corporate matches and will help fund our ongoing conservation efforts. You can check out the video of the online event at: www.flatheadlandtrust.org/raise-sky-conservation/.

Thank you to our amazing Raise the Sky corporate sponsors Fun Beverage, Glacier Bank, Park Side Credit Union and Freedom Bank. Stay tuned next year as we hope you'll join us (this time in-person) for our annual Land Affair fundraiser on August 19, 2021.



Smith Lake Bike & Bird, June 20. Photo by Glenn Marx.



Thousands of snow geese and Canada geese at West Valley Wetlands during fall migration. Photo by Dan Casey.



NEW FLT BALL CAPS

Show your pride in protecting our beautiful Flathead open spaces and wild places with a Flathead Land Trust ball cap. We have three brand new styles to choose from including: blue trucker with mesh back, green trucker with mesh back, and a brushed cotton low profile cap. All are adjustable and one size fits all.

Get yours while they last for \$20 by emailing us at info@flatheadlandtrust.org or call 406-752-8293.

PROTECTING A WILDLIFE OASIS

Coon Hollow



Coon Hollow is a special place with fairy-like, mystical qualities. Walk through its spruce, fir, larch, and pine forest and out of nowhere a spring bubbles out of the ground. Suddenly the ground beneath your feet becomes spongy wet and sedges and other water-loving plants emerge. Trees tower above you and a moist aroma fills the air even though it is a hot summer day. You wander further and the sunshine penetrates the thick forest and another spring appears and then a wetland. This seemingly enchanted wonderland is full of surprises and natural marvels. Animal tracks and established paths show how important these year-round water sources are to the wildlife using the surrounding area. Coon Hollow is an oasis in an area surrounded by dry forested hillsides used by black bear, elk, deer, and other wildlife.

Joe Mann and Becky Hughes fell in love with this land and recognized its natural values. They have enjoyed

their piece of heaven for the past 40 years and wanted to ensure it was cared for in perpetuity. A conservation easement was the tool to do this so in November they will protect their special part of Montana forever. As part of Becky's commitment to protecting additional pieces of land like hers, we are thrilled that she has accepted our offer to join Flathead Land Trust as our newest board member.

"FLATHEAD LAND TRUST HAS BEEN A KNOWLEDGEABLE AND ENTHUSIASTIC PARTNER IN HELPING US ACHIEVE OUR GOAL TO MAINTAIN AND PRESERVE THE NATURAL STATE OF OUR 50 ACRES IN COON HOLLOW. THE WILDLIFE HABITAT, THE OLD GROWTH FOREST AND THE ABUNDANCE OF WATER REMIND US DAILY THAT IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO DO WHATEVER WE CAN TO PROTECT OUR WILD SPACES."

- JOE MANN AND BECKY HUGHES

Numbers at a Glance

YOUR INVESTMENT IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR CONSERVATION

- ➔ 15,032 total acres conserved in the Flathead Valley and NW Montana.
- ➔ 65 conservation easements and 18 cooperative projects completed so far.
- ➔ 1,928 acres of new public access secured.
- ➔ 3,867 acres- largest conservation easement.
- ➔ 5,700 acres conserved along the main stem of the Flathead River and north shore of Flathead Lake with the River to Lake Initiative.
- ➔ 2,070 acres expected to be conserved in 2021 with your help!

Help sustain our ability to continue important conservation and public access projects with your tax-deductible Year End Gift and you can double your impact. Your year-end gift will be matched this year on the first \$10,000 donated. **Give your Year-End Gift by December 31st at www.flatheadlandtrust.org or by mailing to PO Box 1913, Kalispell, MT 59903.**



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You're Invited!

VIRTUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING AND HOLIDAY PARTY, DECEMBER 10

Even though you're probably thinking, "not another virtual event", we have a lot of conservation success to celebrate and share with you this year. Plus, we are excited to announce this year's Conservation Leadership Award recipients. Everyone is invited to join us for this virtual celebration to cap off a big year and spread a little holiday cheer.

Please RSVP at ptravis@flatheadlandtrust.org or call 406-752-8293.



Photo by Harley Mumma