

FALL 2015

# VIEWPOINTS



FLATHEAD  
LAND TRUST  
Conserving Our Legacy of Land and Water



"If we want to save some of the natural features and preserve them for our offspring, I think we need to make efforts individually and as a community to try to achieve something in the way of conservation." - Glenn Johnston



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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.



# 30 YEARS OF COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AND YOU

KEN SIDERIUS OVERLOOKING MCWENNEGER SLOUGH, A PROJECT HE AND HIS FAMILY HELPED MAKE HAPPEN FOR THE COMMUNITY.

In 2008, Ken Siderius and his family, together with help from the Flathead Land Trust, made McWenninger Slough a place that our community can enjoy forever. The acreage was originally donated to Flathead Land Trust and then transferred to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to become a public fishing access site, with the Siderius family donating construction of the boat launch, parking area, and restroom. The project became a gift to the community, enjoyed by hundreds of anglers, bird watchers, and families year-round. The public access site is dedicated to the memory of the family's parents, Pete and Louise Siderius, due in part to instilling in their children a strong love for the natural world. As Ken says, "It always has been important [to maintain these things] because I've always had the opportunity to relate to nature. I have an obligation I think to make sure these kinds of things happen for other people."

Ken and his family are just one of many examples of how people who love the Flathead have come together to protect places that matter to all of us; places that we can be proud to pass down to our kids and grandkids. This dedication and spirit of benevolence has made a lot of conservation happen the past 30 years and we have you and this community to thank for making it possible.

As we look to the next 30 years, I see many opportunities because of this dedication. By working together, we can make sure we are not missing those opportunities to conserve our important places before we lose them. Because of your support, this year we will complete two conservation projects that will protect over 250 acres of prime wetlands, farmland, and wildlife habitat - one adjacent to the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area west of Kalispell, and the other near the National Bison Range in the Mission Valley. As we expand focus areas to include protection of migratory bird habitat, conservation along the Whitefish and Stillwater Rivers, and projects that enhance recreational opportunities, we're excited for what the future holds. I hope you are as well.

In this issue of ViewPoints, we share some personal stories of how community conservation is making a difference. As we find inspiration in each of these stories, we must remind ourselves that we all play a part in making that difference whether we're conserving our own land, contributing as a member, or helping to spread the word. That's how community conservation works...all thanks to you!

Paul Travis, Executive Director

# SANDHILL CRANES

## An Epic Spectacle of the West Valley

**H**undreds of elegant, long-necked birds standing five feet tall with wingspans of over six feet grace the West Valley each fall. These greater sandhill cranes are gathering in a staging area of about four square miles of the West Valley to rest and feed before migrating south. They are attracted to the unique pothole wetlands and neighboring agricultural fields in this special part of the Flathead we are working to protect.

In September, 43 people were able to witness this spectacle as part of a bike and bird tour of the area with Flathead Land Trust, Flathead Audubon, the West Valley Naturalist's Association, and Bike Saturdays program. In the glow of the setting sun and golden colors of autumn, the group watched about 70 sandhill cranes from their bikes and enjoyed dozens of other cranes while enjoying hors d'oeuvres and drinks at the home of a member of Flathead Land Trust.

These magnificent birds are quite vulnerable to habitat changes because they are long-lived and use the same nesting, staging and wintering areas each year. Sandhill cranes typically live

over twenty years and mate for life. They don't breed until up to age eight and produce relatively few young, only one nestling typically survives to fledge. Both parents raise the young which stay with their mother and father for the first nine months of their lives to learn about feeding strategies, survival tactics and migration.

As fall approaches, cranes gather in large groups at staging areas to rest, feed, and socialize for several weeks before beginning their journey south to wintering grounds in the southern U.S. and northern Mexico. A portion of the West Valley is one of these extraordinary staging areas.

This past year, because of your support, Flathead Land Trust has been working with private landowners in this part of the West Valley in an effort to protect this special habitat. This unique area used by these incredible birds is critical to a vulnerable portion of their annual migration. Through this work and more like it, we can keep unique and special places like this intact in the Flathead Valley, and can continue to enjoy these magnificent birds with our friends and families well into the future.

**"AS FALL APPROACHES, CRANES GATHER IN LARGE GROUPS AT STAGING AREAS TO REST, FEED, AND SOCIALIZE FOR SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE BEGINNING THEIR JOURNEY SOUTH TO WINTERING GROUNDS IN THE SOUTHERN U.S. AND NORTHERN MEXICO.**

**A PORTION OF THE WEST VALLEY IS ONE OF THESE EXTRAORDINARY STAGING AREAS"**

A DANCING SANDHILL CRANE. HUNDREDS OF THESE MAGNIFICENT BIRDS CONGREGATE EACH FALL IN THE WESTERN PART OF THE FLATHEAD VALLEY.



# LAND IS NO LONGER BEING MADE

**T**he Sanders family has been farming and enjoying the open beauty of the lower Flathead Valley for over four generations. Ray Sanders has lived on his farm near Wiley Slough since he was 3 years old, working some of the most productive soils in the Flathead. At the same time, he and his family have built a deep appreciation of their large, open expanse of farmland in the lower valley, and how important this land is to wildlife and water. Ray enjoys the peaceful, extraordinary setting of his land and is proud his son-in-law and daughter who live next door are taking up farming.

In the 70 years or so that Ray has been around, he's seen a lot of change in the Flathead. The continual loss of farmland and open space has been hard to ignore and is concerning to him. So he and his wife, Darlene, decided to do something about it. In 2004, they placed 307 acres of their farm in a conservation easement with Flathead Land Trust, forever keeping the land intact. "We chose to place part of our farm into a conservation easement because we feel it is a way to save the Valley from being totally consumed by housing developments," said Ray.

Why does this protection matter? In addition to conserving our scenic open land, over half of the Sanders farm has some of the most productive soils in the nation, and the crops produced on these soils do well even during droughts like this past year. This is because most of the land is sub-irrigated by waters of the Flathead River and the depth to groundwater is quite shallow. So the Sanders farm not only produces food for us – it also protects our water quality, the Flathead River, and Flathead Lake. The same shallow aquifer that keeps the soils moist during drought years for agricultural crops is quite vulnerable to development. If the lands over the shallow aquifer are paved or developed for commercial use or high density housing, the groundwater can be polluted; this groundwater can travel into Flathead River and flow down to Flathead Lake, one of the cleanest, large freshwater lakes in the world.

The agriculturally productive land also provides important fish and wildlife habitat as it borders 1.4 miles of Wiley Slough and Ashley Creek and includes 47 acres of wetlands. This habitat is especially important to waterfowl, migratory birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, and deer, turkeys, pheasant, eagles, and occasional black bear that also live on or visit the property.

Ray knows the value of his land as he has seen many parts of the United States by small plane. Being a farmer gave him spare time in the winter to build and restore planes. Over the 40 years Ray flew he owned 12 planes. He built one of his planes, a biplane, from scratch and restored most of the others including a 1932 Curtiss and Wright Travel Air biplane and 1946 Fairchild 24, versions of which were fitted with bombs and used to fight the Germans in World War II. He participated in national air tours with companion Hank Galpin, known for flying the ALERT air ambulance in the 1970s before Kalispell Regional Medical Center got its own helicopter. One air tour involved flying more than 4,000 miles stopping in 20 midwestern and eastern cities and circling the Wright brothers' monument in Kitty Hawk. Ray and Hank combined the air tour with the special delivery of the Montana state flag to the "50 Flags to Kitty Hawk" program.

Ray's strong ties to the land have continued through retirement. About 10 years ago, Ray began wood carving. His most recent artistic creations are spirit houses he carves from the thick bark of a 150-year-old cottonwood tree. This year Ray donated one of his carvings to be auctioned off at the "Barn Bash," Flathead Land Trust's 30th anniversary celebration and fundraiser, furthering his long-time support of our conservation efforts.

As Ray points out – "Land is no longer being made. If it is at all feasible to protect your land through a conservation easement, I would highly recommend it as a way to preserve the land for wildlife, birds, and families for generations to come."



RAY SANDERS ON HIS FARM WITH WILEY SLOUGH BEHIND HIM. RAY'S LAND INCLUDES CRITICAL BIRD AND WILDLIFE HABITAT, PROTECTED THROUGH A CONSERVATION EASEMENT. PHOTO BY KAREN NICHOLS



PHOTO BY HARLEY MUMMA



BIG, OPEN VIEWS ON THE SANDERS FARM THAT ARE PROTECTED FOREVER. PHOTO BY HARLEY MUMMA

# HIGHLIGHTED BUSINESS SPONSORS

## D.A. DAVIDSON & CO. Long Term Supporter

We are so appreciative of over 10 years of financial and partnership support the Kalispell branch of D.A. Davidson & Co. has given Flathead Land Trust. Not only do we receive generous support each year, but we are fortunate to have Tyler Bebee as a financial advisor, guiding our organization toward a financially sustainable future through the management of our stewardship and endowment funds. Help us thank Tyler and DAD for their loyal support over the years by dropping by – they're conveniently located just across the street from our office in the KM Building.



## PARK SIDE CREDIT UNION Event Supporter

Thank you to brand new support from Park Side Credit Union as a Barn Bash Land & Water Sustainer sponsor. We're so pleased to be partnering with a financial institution that is investing every day in the Flathead community, making this a better place to live, work and play. Park Side is also celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Make sure to drop by a branch and let them know you appreciate their support to protect our Flathead natural heritage, for us and for the benefit of this community for years to come.



## THE HEALTH CENTER Highlighted Supporter

We are fortunate to have new community support from the Health Center as a Barn Bash Land & Water Sustainer sponsor this year. The Health Center is a joint venture of local physicians and Kalispell Regional Healthcare that provides a modern, relaxing, and healthy environment for those needing diagnostic imaging or specialized surgery. Thanks so much to the Health Center for support of our work and for investment in this community.



# THANK YOU FOR CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF CONSERVATION WITH US IN 2015

You helped make the Barn Bash fundraiser and our conservation tours our most successful yet.



BARN BASH FUNDRAISER IN SEPTEMBER. HARLEY MUMMA PHOTO



PHIL AABERG AND JACK GLADSTONE PERFORMING AT THE BARN BASH. HARLEY MUMMA PHOTO



FLATHEAD RIVER FLOAT AND CONSERVATION TOUR IN SEPTEMBER

●● Check out more photos from events and tours this year on Flickr

# APPRECIATING THE LITTLE THINGS New Landowners Find Their Eden

**E**sther Barnes and Joe Brega recently purchased a property on the Stillwater River protected with a Flathead Land Trust conservation easement. In their search for property they did not know much about conservation easements or seek out a property with a conservation easement. However, as they learned more they realized that the property and the land it protects was where they were meant to be.

Both grew up in small communities. Esther hails from Susquehanna, Pennsylvania while Joe is from Mansfield, Victoria, Australia, both communities having populations under two thousand people. They enjoy the fellowship, camaraderie, and accountability that are part of living in a small, close-knit community such as that found in the Flathead. The ability to hike, bike, and fish without having to drive too far, if at all, and to experience beauty which most have to travel many miles and take vacations to witness, drew them to the area.

While they had recently been living elsewhere in the Flathead, Esther and Joe began looking earlier this year for property that provided peace, quiet, beauty and solitude. When they came across the 27-acre property on the Stillwater River conserved with a Flathead Land Trust conservation easement, they fell in love with the river and the water fowl that it brought. Esther and Joe have always been proponents of conservation and felt the conservation easement was the perfect way by which to protect the wildlife that exists and thrives on the property. It only made sense, they believed, that one of the most beautiful places that exists, this stretch along the Stillwater River, be conserved in perpetuity.

Since buying the property, Esther and Joe appreciate the peace the property provides after a long day of work and the opportunity to enjoy watching the ducks, beavers, otters, deer, turkeys, bald eagles and other wildlife on the property. The property has encouraged



JOE BREGA AND ESTHER BARNES - APPRECIATING THEIR PROTECTED LAND ALONG THE STILLWATER RIVER

them to take in and appreciate the simple things... the crickets, the leaves blowing in the wind, the stars at night or the sunrises in the morning. It's a gift to just sit outside and enjoy nature. It's also a gift to the Flathead community as the open space, wildlife and scenic values have been protected forever. These are qualities that drew Esther and Joe to northwest Montana to begin with and are what keep this such an incredible place to live for us all.

"We feel that conservation easements are a great means by which private landowners can contribute to preservation and conservation of this beautiful place we call home, one of the most beautiful and pristine places there is, the Flathead Valley and Northwest Montana," Esther said.

We couldn't agree more!



JAN WASSINK PHOTO

## YOUR GIFT CAN SECURE THE FUTURE

Honor your love of our special places in northwest Montana, and ensure we pass this legacy to future generations through a tax-deductible planned gift to Flathead Land Trust. No matter the size or type of gift, you'll be making a lasting difference. Here are several options:

- Leave a bequest in your will
- Give gifts of stocks/bonds or other assets
- Name us as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy
- Set up a deferred or charitable gift annuity to support our permanent endowment fund and you may qualify for the Montana Charitable Endowment Tax Credit.

Businesses can qualify for the Montana Charitable Endowment Tax Credit by making an outright gift to our endowment. Find out more at [www.mtnonprofit.org/AboutTaxCredit](http://www.mtnonprofit.org/AboutTaxCredit).

For more information or to make a planned gift, contact Paul at Flathead Land Trust 406.752.8293.



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

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## IT'S YOUR LEGACY OF LAND & WATER... LET'S CONSERVE IT!

Every day we are losing more prime farmland, open space, and rich wildlife habitat in the Flathead. Yet we still have opportunities to make sure we conserve this landscape for the future, but we need your help!

Your donation assures we are ready to meet opportunities by creating new conservation of our open lands and clean water where they are the most at risk.

And now you can double your impact. New donations made before December 31st will be matched by a generous grant from the Sustainability Fund.

Join us in giving your gift of conservation this year at [flatheadlandtrust.org](http://flatheadlandtrust.org)  
or by calling us at 406.752.8293.

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**STAY IN THE KNOW...**  

Keep up to date on our new projects, family-friendly programs, field trips, and exciting events. Sign up for our monthly E-News updates and Facebook at [flatheadlandtrust.org](http://flatheadlandtrust.org). It's easy to do.