

SPRING/SUMMER 2020

# VIEW *Points*



Summer evening on McWenreger Slough near Kalispell. Photo by Danita Dellmont.



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

*"Everything in nature invites us  
constantly to be what we are."*

*- Gretel Ehrlich*



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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 Message FROM THE PRESIDENT



I want to start by expressing a sincere “thank you” to the Flathead Land Trust members, the staff, and our board of directors. The last two months have been a challenge to say the least and we sincerely hope that you and your family are doing as well as can be expected during this unprecedented time.

Flathead Land Trust members and supporters make our conservation work happen. As a local land trust, we depend on support from people like you – those who share our appreciation for the incredible natural values of the Flathead Valley and want to preserve our “Flathead” way of life for future generations.

### ALL FLATHEAD LAND TRUST MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS RECEIVE:

- Subscription to our bi-annual newsletter ViewPoints.
- Informative email updates and news with our monthly E-News.
- Invitations to special events, field trips, and land trust activities.
- A Proud to Support Flathead Land Trust static-clip decal.
- An insider's scoop on our work and the satisfaction of knowing you are protecting our spectacular land and water legacy in the Flathead forever.

With cuts in grants and foundation donations, membership support is a most crucial element of the organization's success. Membership retention and new member recruitment is a never-ending project. Every year, members leave our organization—they retire, move from the area, forget to renew their membership, or just vanish for unknown reasons. As members go out the back door, we must keep new ones coming in the front. Research reports that “It costs 7X more to get a new member than to keep a current one” which is why focusing on existing members and growing membership is so critical. I would like to know from our members what they want from their membership experience. Why do members identify with our cause and align with our purpose? The answers to these questions are essential in determining whether our mission and purpose are clear and impactful, and influences member services and benefits. They are also a tell-tale of membership affinity. Let us know what we can do to improve and augment your membership experience.

The Flathead Valley has experience record growth and development. Flathead County is the second fastest growing urban county in the state. Consider what would happen if the Flathead Land Trust didn't exist. Sometimes it's better to think about what it would be like if the Flathead Land Trust didn't exist because that's where the real passion and the stories that need to be shared exist. Think about the proposed Somers Beach Project and imagine if that land sold for development.

### MY MESSAGE TO YOU, THE VALUED MEMBERS OF OUR TEAM,

- Let us know how we can enhance your membership benefits
- Why do you align with our cause?
- Remember to renew your membership, and
- Please help us to recruit new members.

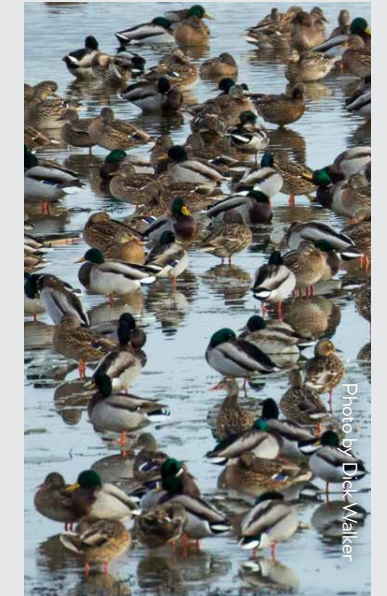
Thank you for all that you do for conservation in this amazing place we all love.

Bill Corwin, Board President



Over the past decade, the Sliter family and Flathead Land Trust have been working together to conserve and create public access at their property east of Somers that encompasses almost a half mile of Flathead Lake shoreline. This rare property has an expansive sandy beach at low lake levels and at higher lake levels its shallow waters provide a safe area for families to swim and recreate. It is also has amazing beauty with views of the Swan Mountains and miles of undeveloped shoreline. A state park has been proposed for this spectacular site and recently the Montana State Park and Recreation Board voted to have Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks complete its due diligence and further consider the site as a state park.

Thank you to many of you who provided input on the proposed state park. Over 250 letters showing overwhelming support for the property to become a future state park were received. This support was from many who have enjoyed Somers Beach, some for generations, and value its open space, beauty, and the simple outdoor recreation it offers. Supporters value its year-round opportunities for walking on its broad expanse of a beach in spring, playing in its sand, picnicking, kayaking, swimming, playing with dogs, birdwatching, and cross-country skiing. Support was also given because it would safeguard bird, fish, and wildlife habitat, protect water quality, and help the local economy. People voiced support in having an agency properly manage the high traffic Somers Beach receives and said a managed park would help with current problems such as litter, messes left by dogs, lack of bathrooms, off-road motorized use, uncontrolled campfires, and trespass on the neighboring Waterfowl Production Area. They encouraged the state to take advantage of such a rare opportunity as much of the lakeshore has already been divided into small parcels and developed with homes.



The Somers Beach project would add significant public access to Flathead Lake. Although Flathead Lake is the largest freshwater lake in the western U.S., there are currently only 13 public access sites along its 185 miles of shoreline. The new Somers Beach site would add public access to 106 acres (55 acres of land when the lake level is at full pool). It would also provide much desired year-round public access. Although much of the north shore is public land as part of the Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area, the Waterfowl Production Area is closed to human use between March and July each year to protect migrating and nesting birds.

Details for how a future park could look or be operated have not been proposed by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks at this time. There will be additional requests for public input and public comment periods to consider the details of a state park at the site. We'll provide updates as we learn more about the process and how you can continue to support the project.



Lazulli Bunting photo by Jan Wassink



Danford family farm along the Flathead River. Photo by @TorrenceSummits.

## Conservation Efforts FOR BIRDS NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER

Our birds are vanishing – new research shows that more than one in four birds have disappeared in the last 50 years. All told, the North American bird population is down by 2.9 billion breeding adults, with devastating losses among birds in every biome - declines that scientists call “staggering.”

The study published in Science in September 2019 says common birds represent some of the greatest losses. For example, fifty years ago there were more than 260 million red-winged blackbirds. Today, we have lost an estimated 93 million red-winged blackbirds—a 37% population decrease in a half century, possibly echoing the decline and eventual extinction of the passenger pigeon.

Habitat loss is a driving factor in these widespread declines according to the authors of the study. This highlights the importance of the work of land trusts across the country and their vital role in helping retain bird habitat. Land trusts have conserved more than 56 million acres across the U.S. - twice the amount of land across all national parks within the lower 48 states. According to the Land Trust Alliance and other conservation organizations, the number one step to help curb bird population losses is to protect vital habitat by encouraging landowners to put conservation easements on their property. The study also showed some groups of birds are doing well – those we have invested in saving. Raptor numbers are up 200% likely due to endangered species regulations and the banning harmful pesticides and waterfowl numbers are up 50% likely due to the funding of wetland conservation by the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) and others. These statistics show what’s possible when commitments are made to bird conservation.

Locally, Flathead Land Trust has been focused on bird habitat conservation for many years. We and our partners have received three different one million dollar grants from NAWCA in the past fifteen years for migratory bird habitat conservation helping to protect hundreds of acres of bird habitat in the Flathead and Mission valleys. Just this spring, we received two \$100,000 grants from NAWCA to protect key migratory bird habitat in the lower Flathead Valley. These grants will be used to purchase conservation easements on 53.4 acres of key wetland and riparian habitat along Mill Creek near its confluence with the Flathead River and 34.5 acres with a portion of Reed’s Slough an important wetland for birds near Wiley Slough. The Mill Creek Conservation project will protect 38 acres of wetlands and riparian habitat and 0.6 miles of Mill Creek, a warm spring creek which provides important migratory waterfowl habitat in spring when other areas are ice-covered and in winter for many birds. The Reed’s Slough Conservation Project will protect 12 acres of Reed’s Slough used by thousands of migrating waterfowl and over 100 species of birds;

the other half of Reed’s Slough is protected by a conservation easement and the project land is adjacent to about 1,300 acres of protected private land including Wiley Slough, a 200-acre important wetland.

The conservation easement donated earlier this spring by Dean Robbins to protect his 26-acre property on Wiley’s Slough also adds to the protection of this important wetland complex and critical bird habitat. And, the recently completed 155-acre Flathead River Conservation Project protected wetland and riparian areas along a third of a mile of the Flathead River and rich farmland all that provide key bird habitat as well. Flathead Land Trust will continue to dedicate our organization to protect vital bird habitat in northwest Montana and help curb declines in bird populations we’re currently seeing. We greatly appreciate your support which makes our bird habitat conservation priority successful.



**WE ARE VERY THANKFUL AND FORTUNATE TO WORK WITH THE FOLKS AT THE FLATHEAD LAND TRUST AND THEIR PARTNERS THAT HELPED US MAKE THIS ULTIMATE GOAL COME TRUE TO PERPETUALLY PROTECT AND PRESERVE OUR BELOVED FAMILY FARM AND ITS UNIQUE WETLANDS FOR THE FUTURE GENERATIONS TO COME.**

**-BOB DANFORD AND TERRI PETERSON**

## We Did It!

### YOU HELPED US CONSERVE THE HEART OF THE FLATHEAD VALLEY.

On May 8 in partnership with the Danford family, we officially completed the Flathead River Conservation Project. We couldn’t have done it without the support from many individuals, grantors, and organizations. Thanks so much to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Conoco Phillips Spirit of Conservation Program, Cinnabar Foundation, Horne Family Foundation, Charlotte Martin Foundation, Vital Ground Foundation, Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited, Montana Trout Unlimited, the Flathead Lakers, Flathead Wildlife, our Flathead River to Lake Initiative partners, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and over 100 individual donors for making this project possible. The Danford family also donated over a third of the value of the conservation easement through a bargain sale.

This conservation easement now protects open space and agricultural land in the heart of our valley, intact bird and wildlife habitat, and water quality of the Flathead River and Flathead Lake.

# THANK YOU TO OUR 2019 DONORS & SUPPORTERS

## GRANTORS AND FOUNDATIONS

### \$20,000 +

Great Fish Community Challenge –  
Whitefish Community Foundation

### \$5,000 - \$20,000

AGL Foundation  
The Bibler Foundation  
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The Sustainability Fund of the Flathead  
Community Foundation

### UP TO \$5,000

The Conservation Fund  
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## STEWARDSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

Linda and Del Coolidge  
Iron Horse Development

# 2019 ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL SUMMARY

## WITH YOUR HELP, WE MADE MEANINGFUL LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION HAPPEN IN 2019. THANK YOU!

→ In partnership with the Coolidge family, we **completed a 30-acre donated conservation easement** near Polebridge which protects wildlife, grizzly bear and elk habitat in the North Fork of the Flathead.

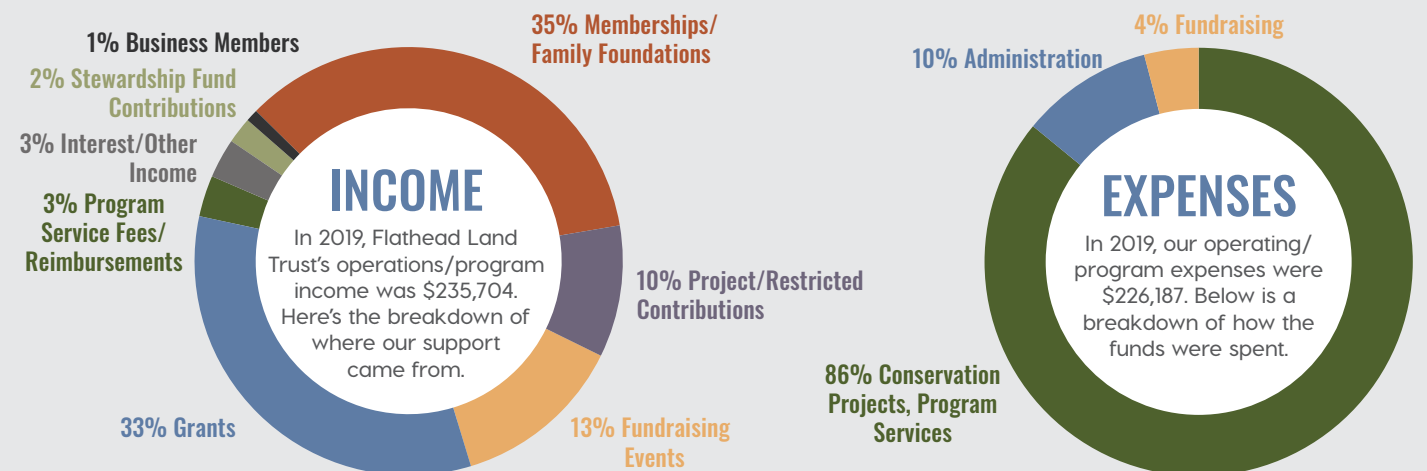
→ We partnered with The Conservation Fund and US Fish and Wildlife Service on the **purchase and conservation of 257 acres of wetlands and bird habitat** which adds significant habitat to the USFWS Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area near Kila.

→ **Rivers Edge Park community fishing pond was completed and opened to the public** in Columbia Falls in partnership with MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks, The City of Columbia Falls and local contractors and business partners.

→ Raised funding needed to purchase a conservation easement with the Danford family and permanently conserve the 155-acre **Flathead River Conservation Project**.

→ Connected young people to nature with our **bird education program** in partnership with Flathead Audubon and MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks. In the fall, we coordinated school visits and field trips with 7th graders from Evergreen Jr. High to the West Valley Wetlands Bird Viewing Area.

Flathead Land Trust holds 63 conservation easements and has partnered on 18 cooperative projects to conserve a total of 14,942 acres in the Flathead Valley and throughout northwest Montana.



\*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



Photo by Dick Walker

### LET'S PARTY FOR THE LAND *Virtual Style* AND RAISE THE SKY FOR CONSERVATION – AUGUST 13TH

Join us on **August 13th** to learn about and celebrate impactful conservation that's being accomplished in 2020! We'll be hosting an online celebration and program with a "raise the sky for conservation" **live drive** and **virtual cocktail hour**. You'll also get a chance to "virtually tour" some beautiful properties we've recently conserved as well as several we hope to conserve with your help. No ticket needed. We just want to celebrate with you this year, even if we can't do it in person. RSVP for your spot at [ptraavis@flatheadlandtrust.org](mailto:ptraavis@flatheadlandtrust.org). Save the Date and stay tuned for more details coming soon.



### WHITEFISH COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GREAT FISH COMMUNITY CHALLENGE JULY 30 – SEPTEMBER 18

We're so excited to be part of this innovative fundraiser again this year that inspires our community to give, raises awareness and helps local charities raise critical program funding. In the past three years, Flathead Land Trust has raised over \$117,000 with the Great Fish Community Challenge which has directly made impactful conservation and public access projects happen on the ground while also positioning us to better serve you and our communities in one of the fastest growing areas in Montana. Take part in virtual events and show your support this year by giving back to protect the land, water and places that give us so much. Find out more at [whitefishcommunityfoundation.org](http://whitefishcommunityfoundation.org).