

AUTUMN 2019

VIEW *Points*



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

*"To be whole. To be complete. Wildness reminds us what it means to be human,
what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from."
- Terry Tempest Williams*



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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 Beauty OF COMMUNITY FOCUSED CONSERVATION

In my line of work, I am fortunate to come across many interesting and benevolent individuals who deeply love the Flathead and have done something to help protect it. They all have a personal story, a story that is most often rooted in and deeply connected to the land itself. The stories are as diverse as the people who share them. From the Danford family who have been farming in lower valley for four generations, to the Coolidge's who have been appreciating wildlife at their North Fork property for two generations, to newcomers who have fallen in love with the scenic open vistas and natural bounty that the Flathead offers. Yet, another compelling story transpired this summer of how hundreds of generous individuals and community members helped to achieve something remarkable.

Last year, our organization set out to raise a considerable amount of money in order to conserve 155 acres of ecologically-rich and scenic land along the Flathead River with the Flathead River Conservation Project. **We set a goal of raising \$128,250 by September of this year, not sure if we could or not. But once again I'm happy to say my expectations were greatly exceeded.**

The Flathead Lakers, one of our longest conservation partners and an effective advocate for clean water in Flathead Lake, really stepped up to the plate. In fact, the organization was critical in helping us host the Summer Solstice Party on June 21st where we raised over \$15,000 for the Flathead River Conservation Project. The Lakers staff and board didn't bat an eye in offering more help with a direct mailed appeal as well as three house parties, all raising substantial funding for the project. Their efforts broadened our audience and helped heighten awareness by showing why conserving this property mattered not just for saving exceptional habitat and open space, but also for sustaining our clean water in Flathead Lake. In mid-August, we couldn't have been more excited to learn that a very generous Flathead Laker's donor offered to pay off the remaining \$21,000 of the campaign, officially making the project a reality.



Danford Barn on the Flathead River Conservation Project. Photo by Tom Mallon.

In all, hundreds of individual donors, foundations and businesses came together to help make the impossible possible so we could permanently protect this remarkable piece of land along the Flathead River. This is the real beauty of community focused conservation. We all have personal stories of why we love this place and why we want to protect it. But what really matters is that we all continue to do something about it. Thank you so much to our partners and supporters for continuing to set the bar higher each year for conservation.

Paul Travis
Executive Director

Grizzly bear on Coolidge property.

Leading By Example

THE COOLIDGE CONSERVATION EASEMENT & THE PROTECTION OF THE NORTH FORK

Linda and Del Coolidge's property at Polebridge in the North Fork has been in Del's family since 1969 when Betty and Pep Coolidge first acquired the original ten acres. Bears, wolves, elk and other wildlife travel through and use the open space land the property provides. Now, through a generous donation of a conservation easement to the Flathead Land Trust this June, Linda and Del have ensured that the now thirty-acre property will be protected in perpetuity for the benefit of all of us.

This newly conserved property adjoins 31 acres placed into a conservation easement with Flathead Land Trust in 1996 by John Frederick as well as national forest lands. Together, these properties help to better ensure that the North Fork Flathead River valley remains one of the most ecologically intact and wild river valleys of the lower 48 states. Protecting and connecting important wildlife corridors is of vital importance as it stitches together the landscape, keeping it intact and whole - an important characteristic for wildlife like Grizzly bears and elk who need room to roam. The North Fork contains some of the best native wildlife habitat in the lower 48, showing the critical importance of protecting its private lands in the valley bottom between the federally protected lands on each side. With the strong conservation ethic and actions of many of its private landowners like the Coolidges, this is why the North Fork is still such a special place, and will be well into the future.

"Betty and Pep Coolidge strongly advocated protection of open space for wildlife. They would be proud to know that the property is now protected by a conservation easement with the Flathead Land Trust. Hopefully our modest contribution will inspire other landowners to protect part or all of their land with a conservation

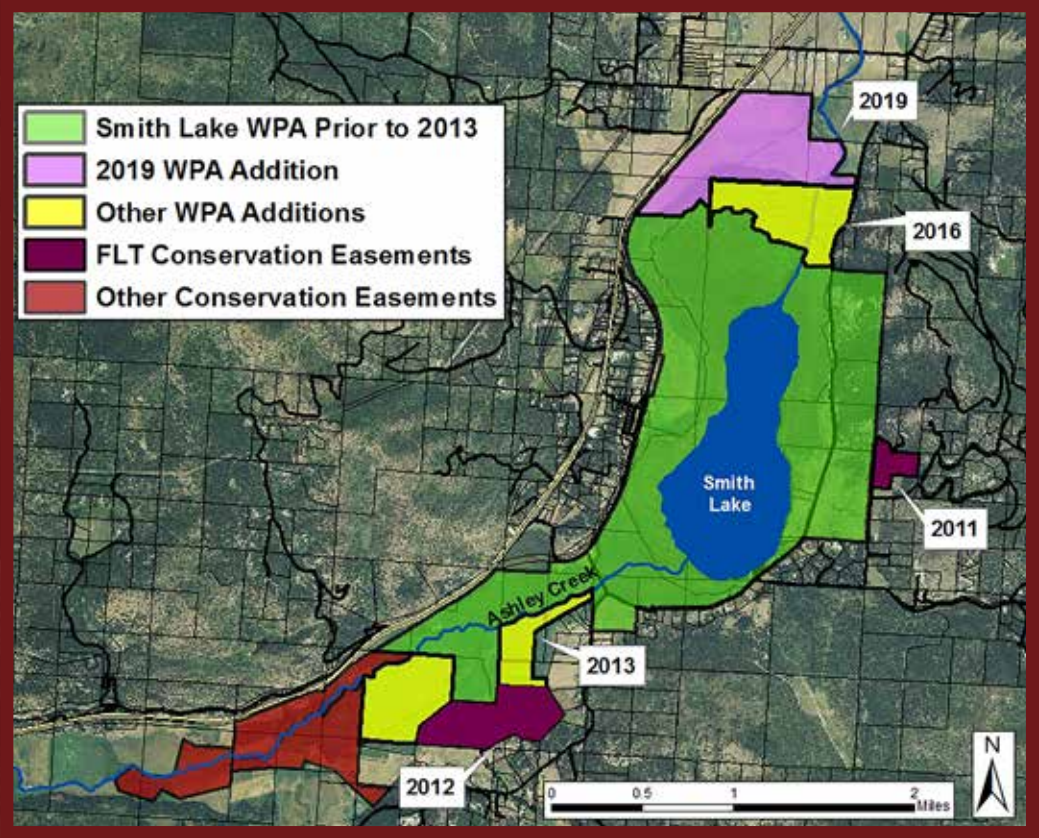
***easement that benefits future generations by preserving a unique ecosystem."* Linda and Del stated.**

Completing this project adds to Flathead Land Trust efforts to conserve the open space wildlife habitat in the North Fork. The Flathead Land Trust has 416 acres of private land in the North Fork conserved through conservation easements and has helped to conserve an additional 1,112 acres in the area through partnerships.



Del and Linda Coolidge at The Land Affair event in August.

Flathead Land Trust received generous grants from Vital Ground Foundation, a nonprofit land trust that conserves habitat for grizzly bears and other wildlife in the northern Rocky Mountains, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to help pay for expenses associated with the project.



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Years of Conservation in the Smith Valley

This September, Flathead Land Trust facilitated the addition of 257 acres of mostly wetlands to the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area near Kila. This was Flathead Land Trust's fifth conservation project in the past 10 years to help protect the Smith Valley wetland complex, one of the largest and most productive wetland complexes in the Flathead.

The Smith Valley wetland complex is located west of Kalispell with Smith Lake in its center and Ashley Creek flowing through it. Each spring, the Smith Valley floor fills with water and provides an important refueling stop for tens of thousands of migratory waterfowl and other birds during their epic migrations.

Today, the block of conserved lands safeguarding the large wetland complex in the Smith Valley totals almost 3,000 acres in size. Flathead Land Trust has conserved 732 acres of this block in the past 10 years. We have helped add 588 acres to the approximate 2,000-acre Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) surrounding Smith Lake. The most recent 257-acre addition to the WPA

was purchased from Larry and Maureen Baer, private landowners who wanted to sell their land. In 2016, Flathead Land Trust facilitated the donation of 142 acres of land to the WPA; and in 2013, Flathead Land Trust received a grant from the North American Wetland Conservation Act to purchase a 189-acre property that had gone into foreclosure and owned by a local bank. This property was then added to the WPA. Flathead Land Trust has also worked with private landowners who wanted to keep their land in private ownership but protect its conservation values to conserve an additional 144 acres of private land adjacent to the WPA with conservation easements. Other conserved lands safeguarding the wetland complex include almost 300 acres of private lands with conservation easements held by Montana Land Reliance and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The new addition to the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area is thanks to a partnership between private landowners, Flathead Land Trust, The Conservation Fund, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). For the past six years,

Flathead Land Trust has been working with Larry and Maureen Baer to achieve conservation for their 257 acres of primarily wetland habitat adjacent to the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area. The Conservation Fund bridged a funding gap by purchasing the property in July to hold it until the USFWS could obtain the funds to add the land to the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area, a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System. In September, the USFWS obtained funding to purchase the property from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund which is congressionally-authorized to provide grants to protect migratory bird habitat throughout the USFWS National Wildlife Refuge System.

We are thrilled that such key bird habitat is now permanently protected and another special place in the Flathead Valley will be available for future generations to enjoy in perpetuity. Flathead Land Trust will celebrate the conservation of bird habitat in the Smith Valley with a bike and bird tour of the area next spring – stay tuned for details early next year.



Connecting You TO LAND & WATER WORTH PROTECTING

Grand opening of the Rivers Edge Community Pond in Columbia Falls.

Thanks to everyone who attended our kayak and boat tours, house parties and fundraising events in 2019. We hope you had fun while developing a greater knowledge and appreciation for the value of conserving our vital open spaces and wild places throughout northwest Montana.



The Land Affair at Cypress Yard in Whitefish.



Summer Solstice Party at the Oldenburg/Hormuth barn



Flathead River kayak tour in July.

THANK YOU GREAT FISH COMMUNITY CHALLENGE DONORS!



We are totally WOWED by the huge show of support this year with the Whitefish Community Foundation's Great Fish Community Challenge. Wrapping up on September 13th, the 2019 Great Fish Challenge brought in \$2.8 million for 53 nonprofits, giving a significant boost to the participating local charities who provide essential services to the Flathead. This is a record year for the campaign with more money raised and more donors than ever before.

A big thank you to the 101 donors who donated to us through the Challenge this year helping to raise a total of \$48,500 which includes a generous percentage match from the Whitefish Community Foundation Circle of Giving donors. Funds will be used to conserve scenic open space and wildlife habitat near our growing communities, protect water quality of our rivers and lakes, and enhance public recreational opportunities.

New Bird Educational Program

CONNECTS YOUNG PEOPLE TO BIRDS & OUR BACKYARD ECOLOGICAL TREASURES

Flathead Land Trust, Flathead Audubon, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks are partnering to provide a new bird education program for 7th graders in the Flathead Valley. The goals of the program are to introduce students to the diversity of birds and their unique adaptations, and the importance of natural habitat to their migration journeys and survival. The program also aims to show the kids that there are many accessible and nearby places that have special value to birds and are fun to visit especially during migration.

The bird education program started this fall with kids from Evergreen Jr. High. A presentation was given to each 7th grade class on the unbelievable feats of birds and their unique adaptations. The kids were amazed when comparing themselves to birds. For instance, students flapped their arms as fast as they could for 10 seconds and then learned that hummingbirds flap their wings 700 times in 10 seconds. They then thought about how long they would have to flap their arms before they were tired and learned



that bar-tailed godwits fly non-stop for 8 days across the Pacific Ocean from Alaska to New Zealand, a distance of more than 7,000 miles. The kids learned that some birds increase their body weight by 5% in a single day before migrating and if they wanted to gain as much weight as many birds do before they migrate they would have to eat

70 burgers in a day. After gaining an appreciation for migrating birds, each class then went on a field trip to the West Valley Wildlife Viewing Area to see migrating waterfowl and sandhill cranes. One group of students was thrilled to see over 80 sandhill cranes up close and hear their distinctive calls. The students also saw waterfowl and birds of prey on the field trips.

Later this year the program will involve more classroom presentations, a visit from Kari Gabriel and her live birds of prey during winter, and field trips to the new North Shore Wildlife Viewing Area in spring. In the future, the partners hope to expand the bird education program to involve more schools and 7th graders in Kalispell and the surrounding area.

Make a Bigger Difference For Conservation!

Give now until December 31st and make your gift count even more with our End-Of-The-Year Matching Challenge! Help us raise \$20,000 in order to receive a generous matching challenge and double your gift for conservation.

YOUR YEAR-END GIFT WILL HELP...

- Complete the 155 acre Flathead River Conservation project by next summer.
- Create new public access around Flathead Lake.
- Continue our partnership with Whitefish Legacy Partners to conserve and connect land near Whitefish with the Smith Lake Legacy project.
- Increase our efforts to protect prime bird habitat and wetlands in the Flathead, as well as critical land along our rivers, streams and lakes.
- Sustain our ability to steward our 61 conservation easement properties (11,437 acres) throughout northwest Montana.
- Provide bird educational programs for local elementary schools at the West Valley Wetlands Bird Viewing Area.

**Give your End-of-the-Year Matching Challenge Gift at
www.flatheadlandtrust.org or by mailing to PO Box 1913, Kalispell, MT 59903.**



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LAND TRUST**
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You're Invited!

JOIN US THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12 FOR OUR HOLIDAY & MEMBER APPRECIATION PARTY

We want to Thank You for an amazing year of conservation! Join us for a celebration and recap of our year and learn what we have lined up for 2020. Complimentary appetizers, holiday treats and drinks will be served.

The party is from 6-9 PM at our office building located at 690 N. Meridian, Kalispell.

RSVP to ptravis@flatheadlandtrust.org or 406-752-8293.

