



BITTER ROOT



LAND TRUST

LEGACY

*"Our community needs these lands.
It would break my heart if we, as a
community, lost the special quality
of the river, the open spaces."*

Patti Eldredge



It's about neighbors, the land, and community

When I was a kid, fall was always my favorite time of year.

There were lots of reasons why: My birthday (all-important as a child) happens to be in autumn; returning to school each year was an annual rite of passage; and the onset of fall always meant Halloween was right around the corner. And then there was the annual family trip to the pumpkin patch and checking out the local farms for pies, fall veggies, and hot apple cider.

Fall also meant the first snows of the year and the coming transition to winter, which is always my favorite season for outdoor recreation.

Now that I have the privilege of raising my kids here in the Bitterroot Valley, we carry on these traditions as part of our family heritage—as well as my commitment to ensure that all kids, no matter where they live, get to slow down and experience the wonder of the outdoors and a community who cares.

Crisp, pale blue autumn skies, bugling elk, high mountain larch turning the peaks of the Bitterroots gold, and the tart, crisp flavor of our local Macintosh apples. These are now the sensory experiences that highlight the beauty of this place we live and the bounty that comes from those working the land every day.

And that brings me to you. One of the special parts about living here is how welcoming people are. Neighbors help each other out, invite each other to community programs, share in the work of ranching and raising kids, and hunker down together when the weather gets rough.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME

We at the land trust take this culture of welcoming seriously, always working to improve our sense of community, striving to ensure that everyone, no matter who they are or where they come from, feels welcome out on the land, here in the Bitterroot Valley.

That's one of the reasons I'm so grateful to you and our community at large for realizing that now is the time to conserve these special places—before they vanish over time. It's why I'm delighted we are working with families to protect their ranchlands and wildlife habitat and assisting local efforts to create amazing places for kids and families to experience the magic of the seasons, along rivers and trails, close to home.

None of that would be possible, without you. Thank you.

—Gavin Ricklefs, Executive Director

It Was Everything to Us

COMMUNITY EXCITEMENT FOR THE FUTURE PARK GROWS

Wayne looks up at the skyline of the Bitterroots, then down to the bend where Skalkaho Creek meets the Bitterroot River. The sun's rays create a warm glow over his shoulder as he talks about his daughter, Whitney, how she would ride her horse to the river as a child.

"It was everything to us: to watch our children grow up here, near the river," he explains. Wayne Hedman, born and raised in Montana, believes raising his children here on the outskirts of downtown Hamilton with his wife, Helen, was the best decision they ever made.

THE FUTURE OF THE RIVER

"Being near the river, it's the best place for a kid to be, but that won't happen by accident. As our community grows we have to make sure that families have access to it in the future. You know, we didn't have much money, but we were so lucky to have the river" says Wayne.

In the 40 years Wayne and Helen raised their kids here, Hamilton has seen 150% growth. Other areas in Montana have seen more, sometimes losing their connection to their own rivers.

That's why we are working to conserve special places with communities and local landowners along the Bitterroot River. Wayne lives right next door to one such project: Skalkaho Bend Park, opening in 2019. Just as Steve Powell Park did in 2014, this new park, in partnership with the City of Hamilton, will ensure people of all ages and abilities can enjoy the river.

When Wayne hears this his face lights up. "For kids to love the land and Montana, they need to live it. They can't just read about it. They have to get out from behind those computers and be able to bring home tadpoles, bugs, and cool rocks. Even rural kids. We have to make sure we act now, while there's still a chance."

NOW IS THE TIME

As Wayne speaks, his voice cracks as he looks up from his hands, aged from years in the Montana sun. "Imagine how amazing it will be to conserve land so close to the center of town that it will keep the wild close to home. Everyone needs to see it, feel it, smell it. I know the wild, because it was so close to me, even this close to town. It means everything to me and Helen."



"Any kid can be around water. Don't worry, they'll be bringing home tadpoles, bugs, and cool rocks. They don't just get to read about it in books, they get to live it." — Wayne Hedman

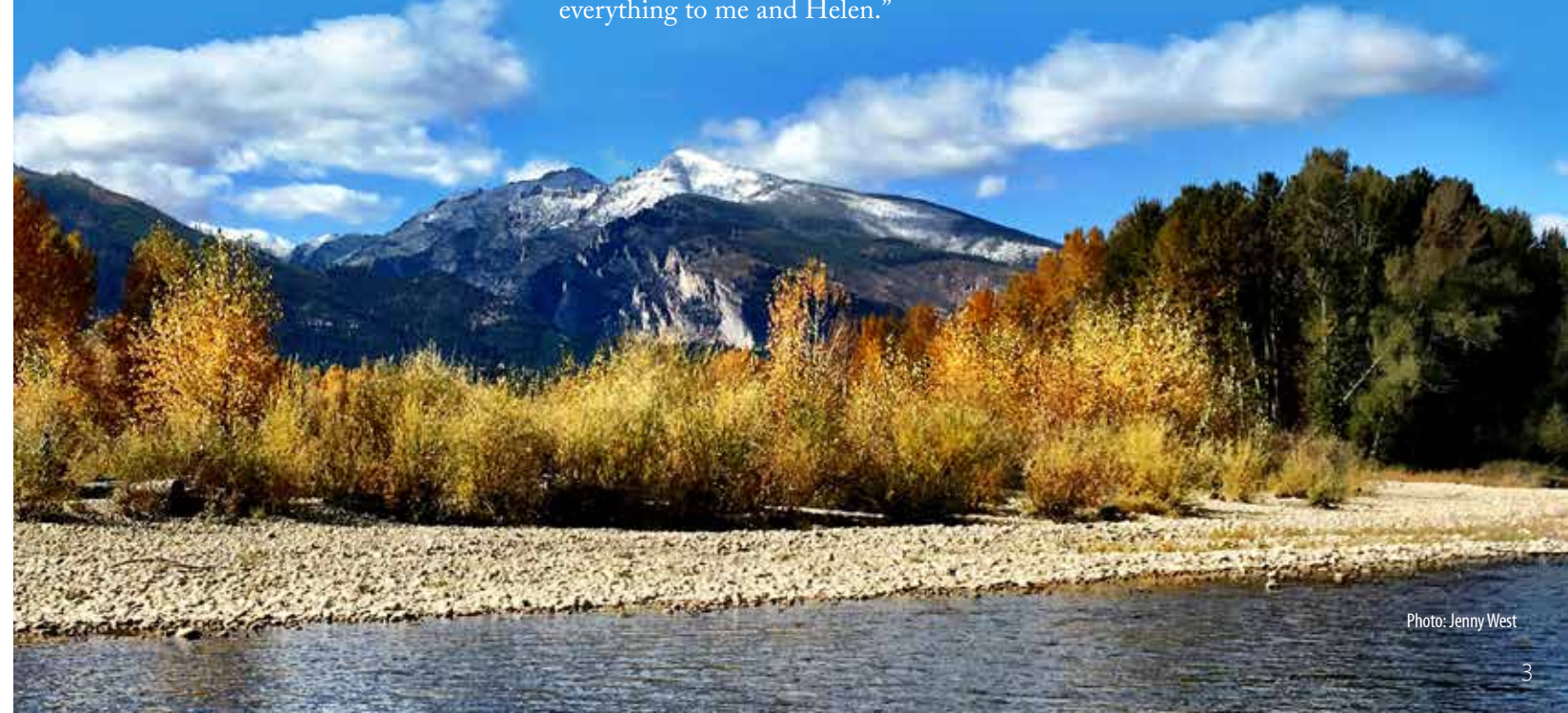


Photo: Jenny West

The Surprising Benefits of Flash-Grazing

It's a cool September morning on Lazy Burnt Fork Ranch. There's still frost on the barn roof, untouched by the early morning sun. The air's crisp as Steve Peckinpaugh leans up against the barn, smiling as he looks over at the cows.

"They seem so much happier grazing when they are closer together," Steve says. "I never thought I'd say that, but it's true, that's a benefit I didn't expect."

Steve and his wife, Catherine, along with fellow rancher Dan Kerslake, are raising Angus cattle together on the Peckinpaugh's conserved Stevensville ranch—which also hosted the land trust's Barn Dance in June. After attending a forum in Missoula on grazing innovations a few years ago, they decided to modify how the cows graze.

"We were looking for ways to maximize the grass resource, address weeds, improve soil health, and provide healthier pastures for the cows," Steve explains. Now they "flash-graze," also known as "intensive grazing." Small sections of pastureland are grazed, and then left to rest for at least 45 days, sometimes longer. "It ensures all the forage is eaten, not just the "good stuff" and in turn the weeds have all but disappeared," says Steve.

There is a lot of science that backs up the benefits of flash-grazing.

GOOD FOR RANCHES, GOOD FOR WATER

The Natural Resource Conservation Service has been collecting data for years. The grasses are taking the carbon out of the air and putting it back into the soil, where they get absorbed back into the grasses, increasing their nutritional value. Increasing carbon levels in the soil allow for greater water retention.

"There's more organic matter in the soil, which means more nutrient-rich grass for cows. It's a natural cycle that helps ranches like ours weather the changing times," notes Lee Severson, another rancher utilizing flash-grazing.

Lee manages Flying E Ranch, one of the larger conserved ranches in the area. "We adapted this grazing strategy a little over 10 years ago. The



Photo: Steve Peckinpaugh

biggest difference I've seen is that I can feed our cows natural grasses for longer, instead of hay. If you can feed them grass instead of hay, not only are the cows better off, it saves money and water."

This technique helps protect the watershed and enhance ranch operations. It also promotes even, consistent grazing. As a result, in combination with increased water retention, pastures become better habitat for increasingly threatened pollinators, like bees and butterflies.

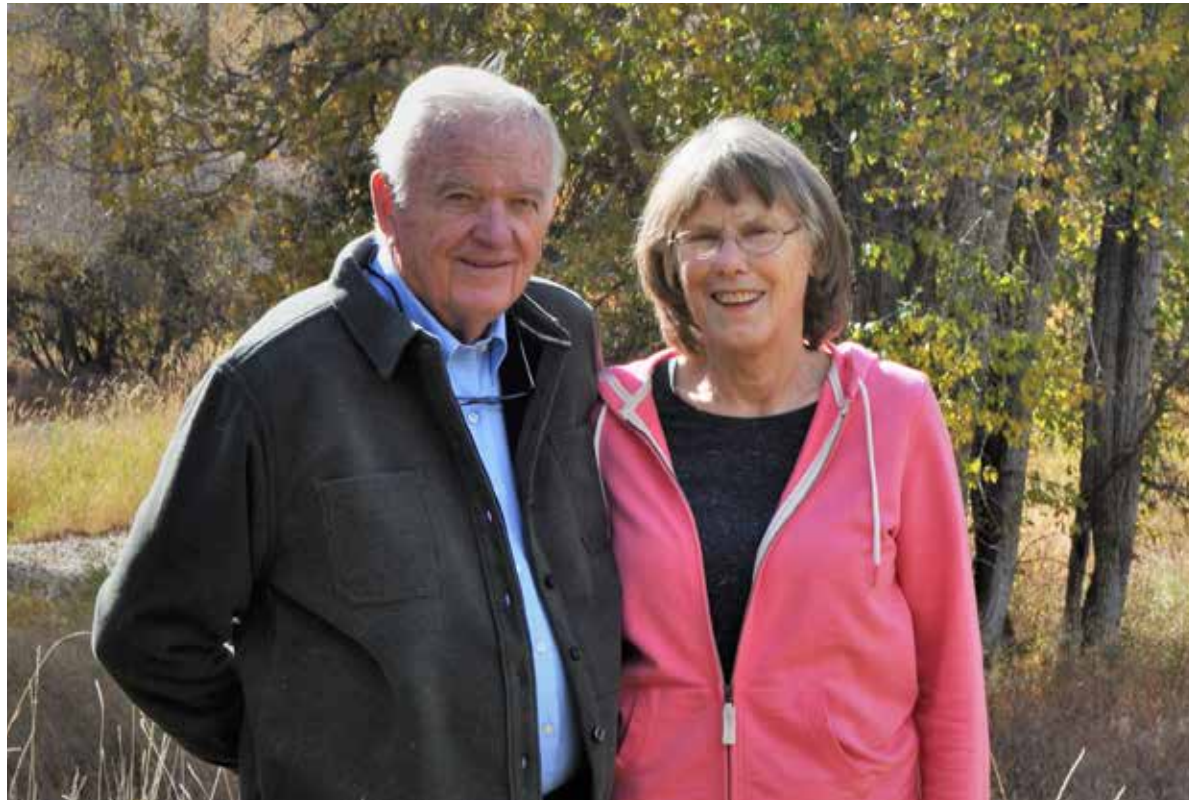
STRONGER COMMUNITIES

The fact that the land is also supporting pollinators makes Steve smile again as he watches the cows. "Ranchers have long been stewards of the land," observes Steve. "Conserving our land, and investing in our soils, makes our community stronger too."

"If you can feed them grass instead of hay, not only are the cows better off, it saves money and water."

— Lee Severson, Flying E Ranch Manager





It's something our family feels good about

Patti Eldredge didn't start off to become a leader, let alone a conservation hero. Soft spoken, with wind tussled hair and a bit of whimsy in her smile, she and her husband Howard had lived on their land for years. The land's not far from the Bitterroot River, in the town of Victor. The sweeping views stretch out over Sweat House Creek—home to blue herons, eagles and white tail deer.

“When we conserved our land, almost twenty years ago, we did it because we really loved this place,” she explained. What Patti and Howard didn't know at the time is that they would end up inspiring more than 35 other families like theirs to conserve their own special lands. In total, it's 7,300 acres of some of the Bitterroot Valley's important ranchlands, wildlife areas, and water ways.

OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS THESE LANDS

“Our community needs these lands,” Patti says. “Enjoying nature, hiking, camping— it's important to our spiritual, mental, and physical well-being. It would break my heart if we, as a

community, lost the special quality of the river, the open spaces.”

That sense of connecting to the land has become part of the Eldredges' conservation ethic. Over the years they have hosted ecology field trips for elementary students on their place along the creek, so “the kids get a chance to love it, like we do,” she says.

“Conserving your land is a big decision, and for us, we are so thankful we did.” – Patti Eldredge

“Too often folks think that you don't own it, or manage it, when you protect your land, but that's not the case,” says Patti. “Conserving your land is a big decision, and for us, we are so thankful we did. It seemed like the right thing to do at the time, and it still feels that way almost 20 years later. It's something our family feels good about. If you treasure this valley, the working lands, the water, the wildlife habitat, then this is the best thing you can do to protect it.”



Is Conservation Right For You?

EVERYONE CONSERVES THEIR LAND FOR DIFFERENT REASONS

But each share something in common: they love their land. By discussing your cherished property with you, we can assess the conservation tools that best fit you and your property's resources, your financial or charitable objectives, and your vision for the future of your land.

We are here for you! If you have questions, please **call Conservation Director, Kyle Barber at 406.375.0956** to learn more about how to protect your land, or land in your community, and be a part of keeping the Bitterroot Valley special for future generations.

Top: Howard Eldredge (in red) pointing to the Bitterroot River.

Left: Elementary students on an ecology field trip learning about the Bitterroot River, Sweathouse Creek, and wildlife habitat on the conserved Eldredge property in Victor, Montana



otos: Kate Stone

Ensuring Eagles Thrive

BITTERROOT WINTER EAGLE STUDY

Soaring above, it glides to a tree overlooking the Bitterroot River, its white cape flashing against the blue sky. Its mate circles above... Once rarely seen in our area, the bald eagle, and its cousin, the golden eagle, have been making a comeback.

“It’s always a breath-taking experience, no matter how many times you see them,” comments, Kate Stone, biologist and project lead from MPG Ranch, “but the interesting thing is we don’t know as much about what they need to survive—or thrive—in the Bitterroot as you might think. We have realized we need a better understanding of their winter habitat needs and behaviors to ensure they remain part of our country’s heritage.”

Now local organizations like Bitterroot Audubon, Raptor View

Research Institute, as well as ranchers and citizen-scientists who volunteer their time, are doing just that.

For the past two years, and extending into this winter, the project has used roadkill deer to track the behavior of eagles using trail cameras and the observations of local people. A number of locations are on lands conserved with Bitter Root Land Trust from the West Fork to Stevensville.

It’s a fascinating project that’s helping to connect people to the importance of conserving land and water, in addition to the eagles. With more open ranchland lost each year, the timing of the project is even more important, as Kate notes that “one of the things we have instinctively known, but now know because of the science, is that eagles

need open, virtually undisturbed, tracts of land to rest and feed especially in the winter. That makes conserving working lands, as well as wildlife habitat, critical for their survival.”

THE MORE WE KNOW

The more we know, the better off these eagles will be.

The project includes a variety of Bitterroot residents—ranchers, farmers, biologists, retirees, and people of all ages and backgrounds from across the valley.

If you’d like to be part of the project as a citizen scientist check out “Western Montana Wildlife” on the projects page at www.zooniverse.org. Together, we are conserving lands for the vitality of our region—and the survival of our national bird.

His love of the land changed me

I have always been drawn to open and expansive spaces. Growing up in the high desert of California, I relished the road trips to my grandparents in Morro Bay, and exploring the caves of nearby Los Osos.

As a family, we backpacked and fished the high Sierras, took Saturday hikes near Tehachapi, and rafted the Colorado River. The amazing geology and promise of these and other destinations filled me with anticipation and wonder.

“It’s up to us to make sure kids have a chance to play in nature and the outdoors, close to home.”

I know I was lucky, and it wasn’t by accident. It was because of my Dad—he was intentional in guiding this aspect of my childhood, instilling my love of the outdoors, and encouraging my passion to protect it.

He had a post-it note on his fridge, quoting John Muir, one of the country’s earliest wilderness advocates and conservationists: “Of all the paths you take in life, make sure some of them are dirt.” I can truly say this was his life motto.

A LOVE OF PLACE

It reminds me of those road trips where he’d inevitably say to us kids, “Stop that bickering, and just look at that view, will you!”—always with the promise of an adventure to come.

He was passionate in support of his ideals, especially on the importance of wilderness protection. He was proud that I volunteer for the Bitter Root Land Trust. An ardent

supporter for the conservation of special places, he enjoyed hearing about the land trust’s efforts to protect the Bitterroot Valley’s waterways, wildlife, recreational, and agricultural treasures.

A SENSE OF PEACE

Then, after a lifetime of hiking, fishing, and road trips we shared, he passed away this June. I found that post-it note of his, shortly after he passed. As I held it in my hand, it gave me a sense of peace that he lived by that quote every day. And I see how it affected me.

That’s why I volunteer, to honor my dad and our shared love of the land. It was his love of the land that changed me.

— Kathie Messer



You are conserving the special waters, ranchlands, & wildlife habitat for future generations.

We're pleased to know we've made a difference

A GIFT THAT LIVES FOR GENERATIONS TO COME

Do you love the wide-open vistas, historic ranches, and the clear flowing Bitterroot River? Perhaps it's the elk in the fall as they migrate through or the eagles that fly overhead each winter.

Join others with a gift through your will to ensure that the lands and waters you love will be here for generations to come. For conservation to withstand the test of time we

need to connect people from all walks of life to these special places—and you can make that happen.

Your compassion and vision for the Bitterroot Valley will make a difference, every day, with a gift through your will. No gift is too small and your generosity will be remembered for generations to come.

For conservation to stand the test of time, we need to connect people from all walks of life to these special places—and you can make that happen.

Local residents, Pat Tucker and Bruce Weide, encourage other to include the Land Trust in their will.

"It's a way for anyone to continue to preserve what we all love about the Bitterroot Valley well into the future," says Pat. "It's easy to do, and we're pleased to know we've made a difference."

For confidential discussions related to planned giving options that include gifts of land, naming the land trust in your will, trust, or other estate plan, please contact Gavin Ricklefs or Lauren Rennaker at 406-375-0956.

If you have already included us in your estate plans, let us know so we can thank you for your leadership.



Photo: Heather Riley



Photo: Joe Rimensberger and Kit Tilly

You Make it Happen

EVERY MONTH CONSERVATION CAN GET STRONGER

The ponderosa groves and river land of KBK Ranch were protected forever in 2013 thanks to Bea and Keith Evans' leadership and supporters like you. And now, five years later, these river otters that

Now imagine waking up each morning knowing that, once again, you've made a difference conserving another working farm or ranch that grows local food or creating a special park or natural area for families to enjoy.

"Every month my donation to the land trust happens no matter where I am, or what I'm doing—I love that I can give a little bit each month and at the end of the year, I feel like I've had an impact." – Carolyn Weisbecker

live here (pictured above) still have a home to raise their family near Lost Horse Creek. That's how conservation works in the real world: conversations with local families and our communities, finding the path that feels right to them.

With as little as \$5/month you can make conservation happen every day. It's easy to do and makes a world of difference. You can become a monthly donor by heading to our website at www.bitterrootlandtrust.org. Feel free to call Lauren Rennaker if you have any questions at 406.375.0956.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

*Serving the community to protect
the farms and ranches, rivers and
streams, wildlife habitat, and
recreational opportunities of the
Bitterroot Valley for all generations.*

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Cover photo: Perry Backus. Above image: Karen Savory

You're invited...

A SPECIAL TREAT AWAITS YOU

Are you looking for the perfect gift? We might just have the very thing.

Bring your family and friends and enjoy art inspired by the beauty of our local waters, wildlife, and working lands. Eight talented artists from around the Bitterroot Valley will display paintings, pottery, textiles and jewelry at the third annual Art and Conservation Open House to raise funds for local land conservation. A portion of art sales will be donated to the Land Trust by the artists.

This is a free, community event. You can hang out and chat with us too. We'll have hot cocoa, holiday treats, and live acoustic music to warm your heart and soul while you admire how these artists have captured what makes our region so special.

Where: Bitter Root Land Trust Office, 170 S Second St, Suite B Hamilton, Montana.

When: Friday, December 14 from 5pm to 8pm and Saturday, December 15th, from 11am to 2pm

For more details, visit our Facebook page or call the office.