

"When my neighbors tell me, 'I'm happy that you kept the land a farm,' that means everything to me. My parents worked so hard for that land. And someday a new family will build their life on this farm."

— Mary Rodriguez, Curdy Farm



A Deep Connection To Place

Growing up near the coast, the ocean was always what captured my imagination. When—almost 20 years ago—I moved to the Bitterroot Valley, I fell in love with rivers for the first time.

The Bitterroot River captivates each one of us for different reasons. It's a means of marking time, setting family traditions, marking the passage of seasons each year, and clarifying our connections to the valley and one another.

For me, the river means many things and evokes many memories, like learning to fly fish on the West Fork as a newly-arrived 20-something, sharing a fly-rod with my wife, snowy winter walks with my kids to examine ice formations on the Bitterroot's banks, annual Father's Day floats with my father-in-law, solo expeditions to the headwaters of the East Fork on hot summer days—or watching the Big Ditch fill every spring, signaling the beginning of the irrigation season; walking through golden-tinged cottonwoods at River Park with my daughters; and taking one final walk with an old friend prior to his death, promising to continue working collaboratively to conserve the valley he loved.

THE HAPPINESS IT BRINGS

That's how the Bitterroot River makes me feel, deeply connected to my family and friends, and the happiness we share because of it.

Just as the Bitterroot River is central to our lives here in the Valley, the Bitterroot and its tributaries are central to conservation here at the Land Trust. Farms and ranches protected by our visionary neighbors, Troy and Deana Griffin, Tad Hancock, and siblings Mary Rodriguez and Willis Curdy, each rely on water from the Bitterroot River and tributaries to grow local foods.

Native trout and wildlife on the West Fork of Bitterroot River will continue to thrive in habitat protected by Mark and Pam Smithers. Our community will have a place to walk, fish, and connect with nature and each other at the new Skalkaho Bend Park in Hamilton.

These stories, and many more, are highlighted in the following pages and provide a unique glimpse into our community's connection with the river, its tributaries, and their impact on our daily lives.

—**Gavin Ricklefs**, Executive Director

It Will Always Be Here

GRIFFIN RANCH, STEVENSVILLE

Not too long ago, a couple hundred acres of hay ground and wild meadows lay tucked away in the Burnt Fork area of Stevensville, with an unclear future.

The land was neglected, fences falling down, and the landowners who stewarded this land long ago were a distant memory.

That was until Troy and Dena Griffin found this diamond in-the-rough, and spent a number of years breathing life back into the soil and grasses, repairing fences and irrigation infrastructure.

The dream to bring this ranch back to life, some would say, came from an unlikely place. At a young age, the Griffin's son, Garrett, joined 4-H and fell in love with raising animals and working the land. It became his passion to have his own ranch someday.

More often than not, young people are seeking out careers outside of agriculture, creating uncertainty for many long-standing Montana farms and ranches.

That's not the case with the Griffin family.

IT'S NOT ALWAYS A SURE THING

"It's my son's dream to have a ranch. The odds of that happening are low. He started 4-H, kept steers at the neighbor's, and showed them in competition. We wanted

that for him. We want to help him fulfill his dream. With help from the land trust and the conservation easement funding, now we can," Troy smiles warmly.

Now, what was once a big unknown, is a sure thing. Garrett is a Bitterroot rancher, and Griffin Ranch is protected, forever.

"When we're gone, it's over. But if we can leave something that lives on—we'd know that it will always be here. That's a legacy to leave behind."

Not only does Griffin Ranch conservation easement fortify the ongoing conservation in the agriculturally and historically significant Burnt Fork neighborhood, it stands as a beacon of hope for the future of Bitterroot Valley farms and ranches, and the young folks who desire to work them.

With resolve in his voice, Troy Griffin softly says, "When we're gone, it's over. But if we can leave something that lives on—we'd know that it will always be here. That's a legacy to leave behind." water, the wildlife habitat, then this is the best thing you can do to protect it."



It's The Reason For Doing It

CURDY FARM, CORVALLIS

The cows are relaxing in the sunshine by the barn and there are a few deer browsing down in the draw, out of the wind. Brother and sister, Willis Curdy and Mary Rodriguez are quiet for a moment, gazing across the fields of their family farm in Corvallis.

Mary and brother, Willis, grew up farming with their parents Frances and Everett. There was always something to grow, tend, and prepare for market.

Over the decades, the family has seen its share of good times, hard times, and lots of honest work. Like many farms and ranches in the Bitterroot Valley, over time, it gets harder to continue working the land.

Years ago, mom and daughter ran quite the chicken egg operation, supplying markets, police and fire stations all over the Bitterroot and into Missoula.

Mary recalls, "We'd load the eggs the night before, then drive all over hill and dale the next day, delivering about 1,500 eggs. It's crazy to think we fit all those eggs in that old Dodge Dart station wagon."

A FAMILY DECISION

Many years later, family discussions centered around the future of the farm. Who would work the farm? What will happen to the land when we're gone? Frances and Everett knew they wanted it to always remain a farm. They knew it should be here for the next generation to work the land.

Mary and Willis carried out the family decision to conserve the farm with the land trust.



"We did this for them, saw it through to the end. It's something we know they wanted," says Mary. "And now, the farm will be here for someone else to farm in the future. That's the reason for doing it."

Families don't take these decisions lightly, and often it takes years to go through the conservation easement process. It starts with those early conversations, all the way up to the day it's complete.

Mary clears her throat, "When my neighbors tell me, 'I'm happy that you kept the land a farm,' that means everything to me. My parents worked so hard for that land. And someday a new family will build their life on this farm."

Love Your Land, Now and Forever

Everyone conserves their land for different reasons, and each share something in common: they love their land.

By discussing your cherished property with you, we can assess the protection opportunities that best fit you and your property's resources, your financial or charitable objectives, and your vision for the future of your land.

If you have questions, please call Conservation Director, Kyle Barber at (406) 375-0956 or email him at kyle.barber@bitterrootlandtrust.org 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.

It Brings Joy To Our Family

HANCOCK RANCH, STEVENSVILLE

Farmers and ranchers in the Bitterroot often take the long-view approach. They see change happening around them, and the working lands in Montana that are lost to other uses each year.

That's why ranchers like Tad Hancock and his family are leading the way by making the decision to protect these iconic and essential agricultural lands.

Not only do they want to conserve the land for the future, they care for the land so that it's passed on to the next generation in a meaningful way. "We began flood irrigating and over time, graduated to sprinkler irrigation to increase productivity and conserve water."

IT'S MORE THAN A RANCH

Ranchers also care about the wildlife that share their working lands. "We have the pleasure of witnessing an abundance of wildlife who also call the ranch home

including eagles that nest in our trees, whitetail deer that browse in our fields, and quail and pheasants that forage the grasses."

The 74 acre Hancock Ranch lies in the Lolo-Clark Fork Connectivity Area, which is designated as an area of "greatest conservation need" in the state. Many birds frequent the ranch and the nearby Bitterroot River Important Bird Area. The great blue heron, red-tailed hawk, Lewis' woodpecker, and Clark's nutcracker are just a few of the species Tad and his grandkids enjoy seeing at the ranch.

"Because of this and the joy it brings to our family, we desire that the property remain as open space land."

And so it will. The Hancock Ranch will forever remain in agriculture, and a home for wildlife. Thank you for making it possible.

"We have raised our children and grandchildren on the land. And now our great grandchildren are able to enjoy it." – Tad Hancock



Our Small Part

NEZ PERCE CONFLUENCE

It's a big sky kind of day. The clouds are on cue, floating overhead in dreamy fashion.

In front of landowners Pam and Mark Smithers, the blue and gold sparkle of the West Fork River tumbles by. Behind them, the rich velvet green forest is in repose. And all around is the song of birds—the rumble of grouse, bald eagle chatter, and honks from Canada geese.

“My volunteer work with other land trusts has shown me how powerful conservation easements can be in protecting wild lands for future generations.”

Pam and Mark can't help but smile at each other. They just recently protected 33 acres of open land at the confluence of Nez Perce creek and the West Fork of the Bitterroot River.

They raised their two boys, Ryan 30 and Will 26, hiking and exploring the wilderness, instilling a love of the outdoors. The natural world has always played a role in the Smithers' lives, and Montana is where they wanted to be.

“This place in particular, with its views up the Nez Perce drainage, is very special.

It was love at first sight! My volunteer work with other land trusts has shown me how powerful conservation easements can be in protecting wild lands for future generations,” says Pam Smithers.

The development potential is high due to the desirability of the area with its blue-ribbon fishing and middle-of-nowhere feel.

The good news is conservation is making a difference.

This stunning half mile of river frontage—with its lush evergreen, cottonwood and aspen forest, beautiful meadow, and wildlife habitat—is protected forever.

Pam says, “We do worry a bit about the future, but many people are trying very hard to protect the Earth for future generations and we are grateful we can participate in our small way.”

There is still much work to be done. But with thoughtful families like the Smithers, and support from caring community members like you, a future full of beautiful, protected open lands is possible.



DO YOU WISH YOU COULD DO MORE?

A monthly gift makes all the difference

It's amazing to think that places like Steve Powell Park and Skalkaho Bend Park are possible because of people like you – people who care. Trails and access to the river close to home means conservation close to home.

This year, we will need your help to enhance these parklands, protect working farms and ranches, and conserve wildlife habitat so that children and families throughout the valley are served.

You can help make this possible with a monthly gift.

It's easy to set-up online, or feel free to call or email Lauren Rennaker, our Development Director at **(406) 375-0956** or **lauren@bitterrootlandtrust.org**. She's happy to help set up your monthly gift.



Building Community Around Conservation

“Along the river, places open to the public can be hard to find,” says Dan Kimzey. “That’s why I’m so excited this new park will be here for veterans like me to step out of isolation and begin to mend the emotional injuries, grieve those we’ve lost, and find our own paths, by walking here at Skalkaho Bend.”

It gives peace of mind to know that places like the future Skalkaho Bend Park—70 acres of river bottom, cottonwood galleries, easily accessible trails, flanked by views of the Bitterroot and Sapphire Mountains—can break barriers to nature and bring conservation to people.

AND YOU MADE IT ALL POSSIBLE

Thanks to you, and so many in our community, Skalkaho Bend Park will be that place for people of all ages and abilities to seek health, joy, and peace.

The campaign launched on May 1, and in just over two weeks, the \$30,000 goal to complete the purchase of the park was surpassed. Congratulations! We look forward to celebrating this new public space with you when the land trust transfers it to the City of Hamilton and it’s open for all to enjoy.



First Veteran's Walk with Dan Kimzey and fellow veteran's during the Skalkaho Bend Park campaign in May.

Engaging All Ages

In the next 20 years, Americans, age 65 and older, are projected to outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history. In Ravalli County, elders already comprise nearly 24 percent of the local population.

Doctors and caregivers know that continuing joyful experiences, and staying active later in life, is important for maintaining cognitive, emotional, and physical health.

Our community elders want to be in nature, hiking, biking, or to simply sit outside and watch birds and other wildlife. As people age, the outdoors can be even more helpful to health and well-being.

But it's not always that easy or that simple. Feelings of loneliness, or lack of access to nature, can be barriers to enjoy these human experiences.

The good news is conservation can help.

Recently, the land trust and Sapphire Lutheran Homes partnered together to host nature walks for residents at Steve Powell Park, and now Skalkaho Bend Park in Hamilton.

It's only with you, that we can continue programs like this and connect elders to nature and the joy that it brings. As one resident puts it, "My husband and I used to look for bald eagles together—to see who could spot the first one. We had so much fun. I used to feel so alone, and now I look forward to walks with my friends. Being so close to the [Steve Powell] park, I get to see the eagles, and a lot more animals like ducks and geese."



Did You Know?

What we've instinctively known about natural, outdoor spaces for play and socialization is that they are good for children's emotional health—and science backs it up.

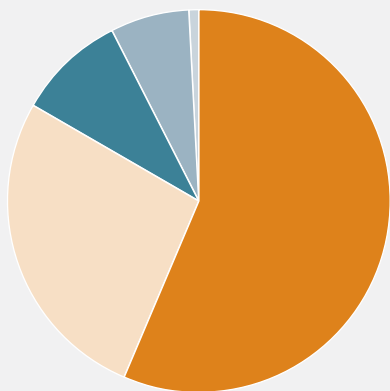
A recent study published in the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, found kids who spend time outside in green spaces, like forests, help build resilience despite experiencing emotional adversity.

And now these protected park lands can provide this much needed space—thanks for making it possible.

"Being in the forest with my mom, away from the yelling and overall stress at home, calms me down."

—Hamilton High School Student

IN 2018, YOU MADE AN IMPACT



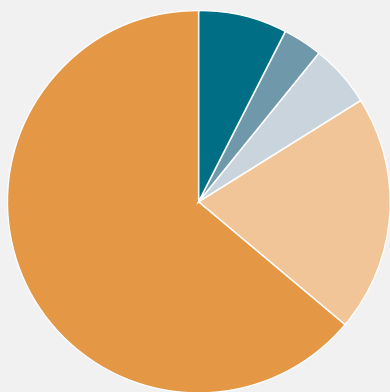
INCOME SOURCES

- Conservation Project Funds: \$872,436*
- Individual Donations: \$413,800
- Private Foundations: \$141,144
- Funds Raised in 2017 for Projects Completed in 2018: \$102,477
- Investments: \$12,442

Total: \$1,431,768**

*Conservation Acquisition Funds

- USDA Farm Bill
- Ravalli County Open Lands Bond Program
- Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund
- State of Montana Recreational Trails Program



EXPENSES

- Education and Outreach Programs: \$110,190
- Administration: \$47,006
- Fundraising: \$76,610
- Land Stewardship Programs: \$283,869
- Conservation Acquisitions: \$914,093**

Total: \$1,431,768

**A majority of these funds pass directly to private landowners at closing and do not appear in BRLT's independent Financial Review or 990.

What a Difference You've Made

Thanks to you, conservation in the Bitterroot has taken big steps forward:

- Working farms and ranches like Curdy, Griffin, and Hancock will be here for future generations, a success which keeps working lands in working hands.
- Access to nature and the Bitterroot River will be enhanced, opening an additional 70 acres of wildlife habitat, over a mile of river frontage, and trails for all ages and abilities at Skalkaho Bend Park.
- New programming that connects children, families, elders, and veterans to the outdoors is now available and providing a means for people to connect with nature, building happier, healthier, and more resilient communities.
- An additional half mile of West Fork River frontage at the mouth of Nez Perce Creek, 33 acres of forest and moose habitat, and prime native trout fisheries were safeguarded for the future.

Together, we are connecting families and children to the water, wildlife, and working lands of the valley to ensure this place we call home will be here for generations to come.

As our community grows and changes, your commitment to local land and water is more important than ever. Together, we leave a legacy of local food production and open spaces that will provide experiences and memories for new generations of Bitterroot residents.

That's a result we can all be proud of.

A LOOK BACK **23 YEARS** OF CONSERVATION

42

families
conserved
their land



29

miles of
rivers &
streams
protected



4,471

acres of winter
habitat for elk and
mule deer protected



5,844

acres of working lands protected

7,737

acres total
protected
to date



170 S 2nd Street,
Suite B
Hamilton, MT 59840
406.375.0956

US POSTAGE
PAID
NON-PROFIT
HAMILTON, MT
PERMIT NO. 203

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

*Conserving the Bitterroot Valley's
water, wildlife, and working lands
for all generations, with you.*

Board of Directors

Jean Steele
President
Peggy Ratcheson
Vice President
Andy Massie
Treasurer
Tonia Bloom
Secretary
Roger Gantz
Gail Goheen
Kathie Messer
Tori Nobles
John Ormiston
Heather Riley
Lynn Thurber
Brett Young

Staff

Gavin Ricklefs
Executive Director
Kori Anderson,
Operations Manager
Kyle Anderson
Stewardship Coordinator
Kyle Barber,
Conservation Director
Grant Carlton
Conservation Project
Manager
Lauren Rennaker,
Development Director
Emy Royce
Communications Director
Jenny West
Bookkeeper



You're Invited...

TO THE LAND TRUST BARN DANCE

Saturday July 27, 2019

from 5:00pm to Sunset

Trexler Ranch

Corvallis, Montana

Join this fun event and celebrate the
legacy of working farms and ranches in
the Bitterroot Valley.

You won't want to miss this family friendly,
good time event!

**More details and tickets available online
at bitterrootlandtrust.org and Facebook**

Do you want the latest updates on conservation projects,
volunteer opportunities and events? Sign up for eNews at:

bitterrootlandtrust.org  