



LEGACY



Director's Letter

As Bitterrooters, we've experienced another year of growth and change. The pandemic brought lots of new faces to the Valley and, at times, the change has been intense. Land and home prices have skyrocketed, commodity markets have been extremely tough on local ag. producers, and, as a result, open lands are getting converted to developed uses at an unprecedented rate.

Despite growing pains, a pandemic, war, and economic uncertainty, I believe that it's times like these that highlight how incredible our valley, our open lands, and our people truly are. Amidst continued uncertainty in the world, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to look inwards toward the land, water, and wildlife of the Bitterroot and take proactive, collaborative steps to protect this valley we all love.

And together, we have.

Over the past year your support has provided BRLT with the opportunity to work with incredible local landowners to conserve their local farms and ranches, adding to a legacy that ensures the Bitterroot will still be able to feed its community generations from now. Stories of the most recent, Yoder Angus Ranch and Sutherlin Farms, are featured within the pages of this edition of Legacy.

We worked with fantastic community partners to improve the C. Ben White Memorial Fishing Access Site in Conner and we are anxious to share the results (new trail, parking lot, and Ben's memorial) with anglers, hikers, hunters, bikers, and horseback riders in our community this spring.

The success of projects like these doesn't happen without multi-faceted support. As Bitterroot residents, we are extremely fortunate to have the voter-approved Ravalli County Open Lands Bond Program that provides resources directly to local landowners seeking



to conserve their farms, ranches, and critical wildlife and fisheries habitats, while also helping to provide funding for community recreation opportunities (like Skalkaho Bend Park in Hamilton). For more than 16 years, our Open Lands Program has been making conservation possible, and it has proven to be more important today than ever before.

While we were disappointed to miss the chance to gather with you last summer for our annual barn dance, we are delighted to share that it's finally time to dust off your dancing boots. You'll be able to see our most recent conservation easement for yourself and, most importantly, share in the success you've made possible as landowners Bob and Laurie Sutherlin welcome the community to their family ranch for the return of the barn dance on July 23 (more info coming soon!).

We're thrilled at the opportunities for lasting, community-supported conservation in front of us in 2022 and look forward to celebrating our 25th Anniversary with you, in-person, this year.

Regardless of who you are and how you love the valley, thank you for helping leave a legacy of water, wildlife, and working lands for future Bitterroot generations through your donations, your land stewardship, your business sponsorship, your advocacy, and your community spirit.

— Gavin Ricklefs
BRLT Executive Director

Take Care of the Land & It Will Take Care of You

This valley has a way of making you miss what you didn't know you had after you leave.

I was born and raised in Stevensville, right outside the city limits and it was only after moving away that I realized that I missed the slow pace of life, kind neighborly people, and casual lifestyle enough to return to the valley and call this place "home" for good.

Since returning and beginning my career as a local real estate broker, it has been challenging to witness how quickly this valley is growing. While I understand why people have a desire to move to this special place, it is difficult to watch such productive agricultural land be broken up and turned into small parcels. The rising property values also make it nearly impossible for younger people to pursue a dream of ranching, but for those who are really determined, there are ways to make it happen.

When I decided to get started with cattle on my own as a young adult, I was surprised and grateful to learn there were so many ranchers already established who were willing to help me get started. The time I spent as a young woman learning from experienced Montana ranchers – especially my Grandpa Corky – has helped to shape my appreciation for the ranching way of life today. Now that I have a daughter of my own, Annabelle, it worries me that the younger generation is growing up disconnected with the importance of local farms and ranches.

The old saying goes, "Take care of the land and it will take care of you." As a result of teaching these lessons early on, Annabelle has that same appreciation and love for the land that I started to develop around her same age. Thanks to her aunt and uncle, she

has started her own herd of registered Black Angus cattle. She has a flock of chickens who produce the eggs she sells for her savings account, and she helps with gardening and the harvest every fall. She has learned that the hard work she puts in will be rewarded come springtime.

I hope that my generation will continue to instill this certain type of work ethic in young people, the kind that you get by growing up working the land and that makes life for Bitterroot kids a little bit different than for those who live in urban areas. It's a rewarding life that allows us to witness new life every spring and the fruit of your own labor. It's full of tough lessons too, but, then again, that's just another part of our special way of life in the Bitterroot.

— Kelly Whitmoyer



Kelly Whitmoyer is a local real estate broker with Glacier Sotheby's International Realty. She serves as a member of BRLT's Next Gen Committee and is secretary for the Bitterroot Stockgrowers Association, donating her time as a volunteer and a portion of her real estate commission back to both organizations each year.



YODER ANGUS, STEVENSVILLE

Reunifying What Was Once Lost

Situated on an oasis of open countryside in the Illinois Bench neighborhood of Stevensville and surrounded by clusters of neighboring homes, the fate of the 150+ acre Yoder Angus ranch would be unknown if one Bitterroot family hadn't stepped in to conserve the property in November 2021.

The newly conserved property rests on valuable Bitterroot agricultural ground and is home to a cow-calf operation, as well as to a variety of wildlife including elk, fox, geese, ducks and hawks. The ranch is operated by Jake and Fannie Yoder who cherish the opportunity to continue a traditional way of life working in

After relocating to Stevensville from St. Ignatius where they ran a cow-calf operation, the Yoders originally purchased 80 acres of what was, at one time, part of a larger ranch, nearly double in size. The "missing" 70 acres, owned by neighbors, was purchased by the Yoders in an attempt to reunify the original ranch.

"I never dreamt that in five years we would have been able to put this farm back together."

"I never dreamt that in five years we would have been able to put this farm back together. I think about that every day when I come home over the top of the hill and look around," says Jake.

Located in the Illinois Bench area of Stevensville, the ranch is located in an area that has been heavily developed over the years. Leading up to the completion of the conservation easement, the Yoders received phone calls from multiple developers inquiring about purchasing the land.

"They told me, 'Mr. Yoder, we can help you do something with your property.' To me, that was a rude awakening."

Thanks to the vision of the Yoder family and the newly completed conservation easement, Yoder Angus will continue to serve as agricultural ground and wildlife habitat for years to come.

"I know this is the way it will stay now," says Jake. "If I die tomorrow, there's no threat that it will be sold and developed."



Photos by Sage Burgess

agriculture and look forward to passing the ranch down to their children someday.

"There is something about being respectful to your ground," says Jake.

"There's nothing wrong with a little cow manure and a little bit of green grass and being outside on your saddle horse."



Where History Lives On

PRESERVING AN ORIGINAL BITTERROOT HOMESTEAD

Just over a century ago, John Jacobson saddled his horse and rode five hours to Hamilton, the county seat, to register his claim for Bass Creek water to irrigate the meadows on his 80-acre homestead. Fast forward more than one hundred years, Bass Creek Ranch is home to landowners Brooke and DonnaRae Thompson who were some of the first Bitterroot landowners to partner with BRLT to conserve their family land. Thanks to their vision, the same historical agricultural setting that has characterized the land for more than a century will remain the same as it has always been, forever.

BASS CREEK BEGINNINGS

One of the few intact homesteads that remain in Ravalli County today, the 80-acre property was settled in the early 1890's by the John and Sannalisa Jacobson family, Finnish immigrants who moved to the area to start a farm. The property was patented as a homestead in 1904 signed by President Teddy Roosevelt, documentation that remains on the ranch today. Many of the original structures, along with equipment and other remnants of historic land use, still stand on the property and date back to 1890. Over the years, several families operated the ranch and the land has a rich history of varied uses, including:

- Dairy farming
- Raising livestock
- Dude ranching and commercial outfitting
- Farming (hay, small grains, potatoes)
- Orchard production (apples, pears, apricots, plums, etc.)
- Timber harvests
- A learning site for teaching responsible use/management of natural and agricultural resources

"Knowing that we played a part in preserving this ranch and its history forever so it can bring more joy to others is what is important to us."

Located at the base of the Bitterroot Mountains near Bass Creek Trailhead, the area can best be categorized as where farmland and forest meet. Bounded by the Bitterroot National Forest, the area is an important movement corridor for numerous wildlife species moving from higher elevations to the Bitterroot River and across the river to the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge.

Thompson became the most recent owner of the ranch in the early 1970's when he was working for the US Forest Service's Wildland Fire Department, a career which he retired from after more than thirty years. His wife, DonnaRae, was no stranger to the ranching lifestyle as she also grew up just west of Missoula and spent years packing horses and mules in the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

"We're all gifted differently," says Brooke. "Neither DonnaRae nor I were gifted to want to live in big cities."

THINKING FOR TOMORROW

Keeping the history of the land in mind, when the Thompsons made the decision to place a conservation easement on the property in 2004, they did so to ensure the setting of the ranch would always remain. They knew conservation was the key to protecting the long history of agricultural use and wildlife habitat.



Photos by Eric Ian Photography

"When we worked with BRLT founder Steve Powell to conserve the ranch back in 2004, it was before the Open Lands Bond program passed to provide funding for landowners like us who wanted to place easements on our properties," said Brooke. "It's great to see today what Open Lands Bond funding has made possible for so many more families across the county to conserve their own unique bits of history."

While the vision of what early life on Bass Creek Ranch looked

like may be different than what it is today, thanks to the vision of the Thompsons, the legacy of the land and those who loved and lived it before our time will be preserved for many more years to come.

"One hundred years from now, what will the Bitterroot Valley look like without open space like this? No matter what happens, knowing that we played a part in preserving this ranch and its history forever so it can bring more joy to others is what is important to us."



TOP: Members of the Lappi family, owners from the 1920's - 30's.
BOTTOM: The property was once known as "Bar 93 Dude Ranch" from 1947-1951 when owned by Earl Johnstone, complete with a lodge and guest cabins.





SUTHERLIN FARMS, STEVENSVILLE

A Different Look at the Land

Lifelong Bitterroot Valley farmers and ranchers, Bob and Laurie Sutherlin, have spent decades establishing and growing Sutherlin Farms with a goal in mind: to keep their land in agriculture for generations to come.

Bob was only a teenager when he first started buying cows, and until they could afford to buy their own land, he and his wife Laurie rented ground to run their cattle and farm.

“When you grow up not having ground and have to put it together yourself, you take a different look at that land,” says Bob. “It’s something you worked your whole life for and wanted.”

Thanks to your support and funding from Ravalli County Open Lands Bond Program and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Sutherlin family conserved Sutherlin Farms, located along the Eastside Highway in Stevensville in December 2021, forever protecting 377-acres of immensely productive and prime Bitterroot farmland.

Sutherlin Farms rests on some of the richest soil in all of Ravalli County. The farm is primarily used for irrigated crop production, including hay, alfalfa, grain and silage corn, all of which are grown to feed their cow/calf operation and herd of Red Angus that has seed stock all over the world.

“It takes good productive ground to raise enough hay to winter these cattle. You can’t just let it go away,” says Bob.

Nearly all of the farm, 99% to be exact, is identified by NRCS as “agriculturally important soil.” In addition to prime farmland, the property’s open space provides valuable wildlife habitat as well as areas for wildlife movement, especially for locally important species such as elk, deer, sandhill crane, bald and golden eagle, and other raptors. With several other conservation easements close by and directly adjacent to the farm, the newly conserved Sutherlin Farms has added to the area’s preservation of open space near the Bitterroot River.

“Bob and Laurie making the decision to keep this ranch intact gives their grandkids the opportunity to carry on the family’s tradition of ranching when they grow up if they choose,” says daughter-in-law Lacey Sutherlin. “As parents, knowing they have the option to contribute to that legacy in agriculture is really special for us.”

Thanks to the decision to conserve their farm, the Sutherlin family has guaranteed the preservation and enhancement of one more piece of open space in western Montana – forever.



Creative Ways to Conserve the Valley You Love

As landowner and community demand for Bitter Root Land Trust's conservation services continues to grow, financial support from members of our community is critical in keeping up with the increased pace of conservation. Recently, several Bitterroot community members got creative in how they support BRLT.

ORIGINAL ARTWORK

BRLT was recently gifted several collections of artwork, including nine pieces of western fine art original oil paintings and bronze sculptures. All proceeds from art sales will go directly to benefitting our local water resources, wildlife habitat and working farms and ranches. BRLT has already sold three pieces, with six remaining available for sale. To view the artwork, stop by the BRLT office or contact us for a brochure with more information.

LIVESTOCK DONATION

During a routine sale of their cattle, Maki Farms in Corvallis gifted one cow to BRLT. Donating agricultural commodities is more efficient than donating cash, as the farmer or rancher can utilize the deductible business expense, the reduced income, and the full standard deduction. Local farmer and rancher Alan Maki says of the donation experience:

"BRLT gives much needed hope that many of the very things that make our valley special will still be thriving in the future. Particularly, for family farmers/ranchers like ourselves – it is so important to know that agriculture will still be an important component. So, although we are happy to give time and/or money as a spoke of the wheel that turns land conservation in this valley, upon researching numerous ways to donate to non-profits more efficiently (i.e., pre-tax donations instead of after-tax donations) we became aware of some of the multitudes of ways to stretch a donation, such as donating a cow. Upon researching various methods, this was one that worked well for us."

Article by Lauren Rennaker, BRLT Development Director. Lauren enjoys exploring creative partnerships and learning how your love for the Bitterroot Valley can make a difference for all of us now and for the future of this special place. If you have any gift questions or donation ideas, please contact Lauren at 406-375-0956 or lauren@bitterrootlandtrust.org.

GIFTS THROUGH WILLS OR TRUSTS

Some supporters choose to leave gifts to BRLT in their wills or estate plans. One local Bitterroot couple has decided to gift their home to BRLT in their estate plan. The proceeds of the sale of their house will leave a legacy of conservation long after they are gone.

"My husband and I were working on our estate plan, and avoiding probate was at the top of our list. Doing a Transfer on Death (TOD) for the big assets like our home and investment accounts was a simple way to do just that with a single sheet of paper to sign and no attorney. TOD's are revocable, meaning you can change your mind at any time, but we were clear that we wanted to choose the Bitter Root Land Trust to leave our home to when we die. As we get older, we think of what legacy we want to leave behind, and preserving areas in the beautiful Bitterroot and supporting wildlife are what we believe in very strongly. We want to walk the talk, and what better way than to leave something behind for future generations of people and animals here in our valley?"

— B.L., Bitterroot Homeowner



Photo by Eric Ian Photography

2021 BUSINESS PARTNERS



Albertsons	First American Title Company	Latitudes Outfitting
Alex Rogger Construction	First Security Bank	Leffingwell Foundation
All Trails	G & C Farming	Opportunity Bank
Art Focus Fine Art & Framing	Good Food Store	Paper Clip
Ashley J Photo	Go West Outfitters	Payne West Insurance
Bitterroot Frames	Grounded Resources Yoga	Peterson CPA Group
Bitterroot Laundry/EASI Cleaners	Hamilton Marketplace	Red Barn Bicycles
Blacksmith Brewery	Ill Branches Law	REI Missoula
Bob Ward's Sports & Outdoors	Joe's Studio	Runners Edge
Boyle, Deveny & Meyer, P.C.	Jones Korman Insurance	SG Long Financial
Chapter One Bookstore	Lakeland Feed & Supply	Simply Savory Art
Companion Pet Clinic	Maki Farms	State Farm - Marc Spear
Daly Hospital Foundation	Michael J Connell Foundation	State Farm - Taylor King
Davis Group PLLC	Mikesell's Fine Jewelry	Super1
Edward Jones - Joshua Loveless	Mineshaft Pasty Co.	Trail West Bank
Fishs Eddy O	Missoula Community Foundation	Weber and Vanorio CPAs PC
	National Forest Foundation	Wigen Construction

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

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Cover: Bob and Laurie Sutherlin with grandkids. Photo: Two Sisters Photography.

Save The Dates!

Burnt Fork Poker Run

Saturday, May 21, 2022

Presented by: BRLT's Next-Gen Committee

Barn Dance

Saturday, July 23, 2022

Sutherlin Farms, Stevensville
Ticket sale info coming soon!

Find out more at bitterrootlandtrust.org

