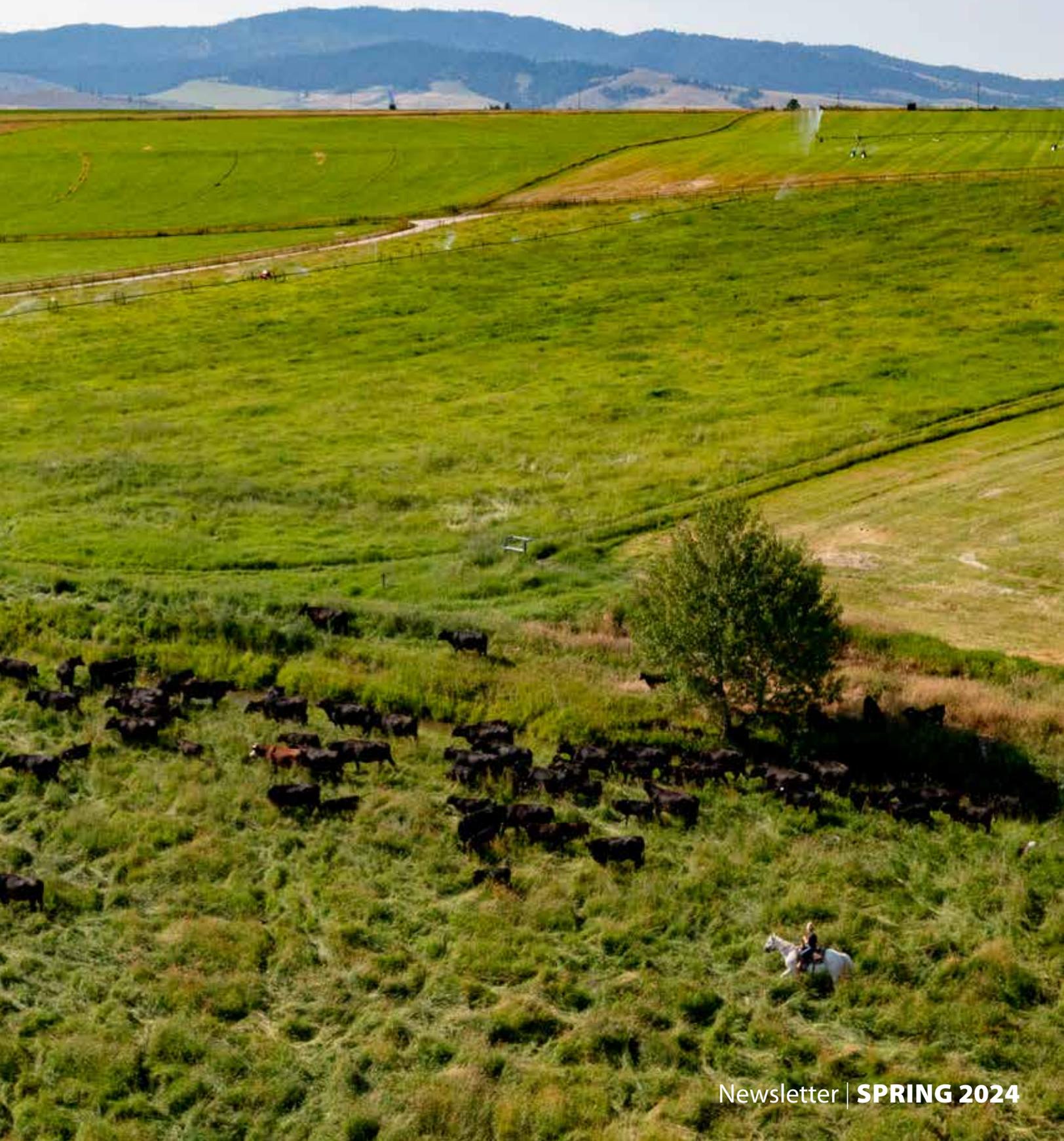




BITTER ROOT LAND TRUST | LEGACY



Director's Letter

Spring is in the air in the Bitterroot Valley—Scalves in pastures, the annual skwala hatch on the Bitterroot River, and the unmistakable sound of Black-capped chickadees welcoming the morning sunrise. Here at the Land Trust, it feels like we're putting the "new" in spring's renewal theme: Great new conservation projects completed and in the queue; new partnerships connecting our community to the land; and passionate new members of our staff and board. I hope you enjoy reading more about all of these new beginnings in this edition of the Legacy.

Thanks to your support, the vision of local landowners, and our community's long-term commitment to the valley's water, wildlife, and working farms and ranches, conservation is flourishing in the Bitterroot. Today, the Land Trust is hard at work, collaborating with sixteen local families from Florence to Darby on conservation projects that will preserve nearly 3,000 critical acres throughout the valley. Given the incredible growth and change we are all experiencing as the Bitterroot has been discovered, this surge in interest in conservation couldn't come at a more important time.



I'm thrilled about each of these opportunities but want to highlight the incredible power when momentum builds among neighbors in important conservation areas of the valley. If you're a long-time supporter or attended last year's Barn Dance, you'll be aware of the amazing, landowner-driven conservation momentum in the Burnt Fork, east of Stevensville. Since 2011, the Land Trust has partnered with eighteen local families to conserve over 7,000 acres of working farm and ranchland, and over seven contiguous miles of wildlife habitat. The Burnt Fork is a national model of collaborative conservation and we are honored to be a partner as landowners leave a legacy for future generations in this important part of the valley.

This example of neighborhood conservation momentum has taken hold west of Victor. In the following pages, you will read the stories of our two most recently completed projects in the area and the landowners who conserved their life's work—Lifeline Produce and Roy Ranch.

In this edition of the Legacy, we've also highlighted some exciting new partnerships to help connect you with conservation. On the facing page, we're excited to announce our July 27th community event, Concert in the Wild. This is an incredible opportunity for our community to experience concert pianist, Hunter Noack, while celebrating the incredible beauty of the Bitterroot on conserved land atop Sunset Bench. We can't wait to celebrate with you.

These are the stories of a community coming together around shared values and a love of the Bitterroot's open lands. Thanks for all you do to make these conservation stories a reality.

— Gavin Ricklefs, BRLT Executive Director



Photo by Arthur Hitchcock

Concert in the Wild

Music is transmitted to concert-goers via wireless headphones, providing a live soundtrack to their experience in secret glens, sunny meadows, mountain vistas, and old growth forests.

PACK YOUR PICNICS... WE'RE HEADING TO SUNSET BENCH!

Saturday, July 27, 2024 | Doors open at 4:30 PM, Concert starts at 5:30 PM

What do the Bitterroot Valley, a 9-foot Steinway grand piano, and a community that cares about conservation have in common?

The Bitter Root Land Trust is delighted to bring *In a Landscape: Classical Music in the Wild* to the Bitterroot for a one-time, "Concert in the Wild" special benefit concert on Saturday, July 27, 2024!

The piano concert will be held outdoors at the beautiful Sunset Bench Conservation Easement in Stevensville—160 acres of agricultural land, wildlife habitat, and open space conserved by local landowners in partnership with BRLT in 2019. Concert goers will listen to the sounds of classical music by talented musician Hunter Noack while you wander the land to

explore open hay fields, a timber forest, and a secret sagebrush meadow, all while streaming the concert through a pair of provided wireless headphones.

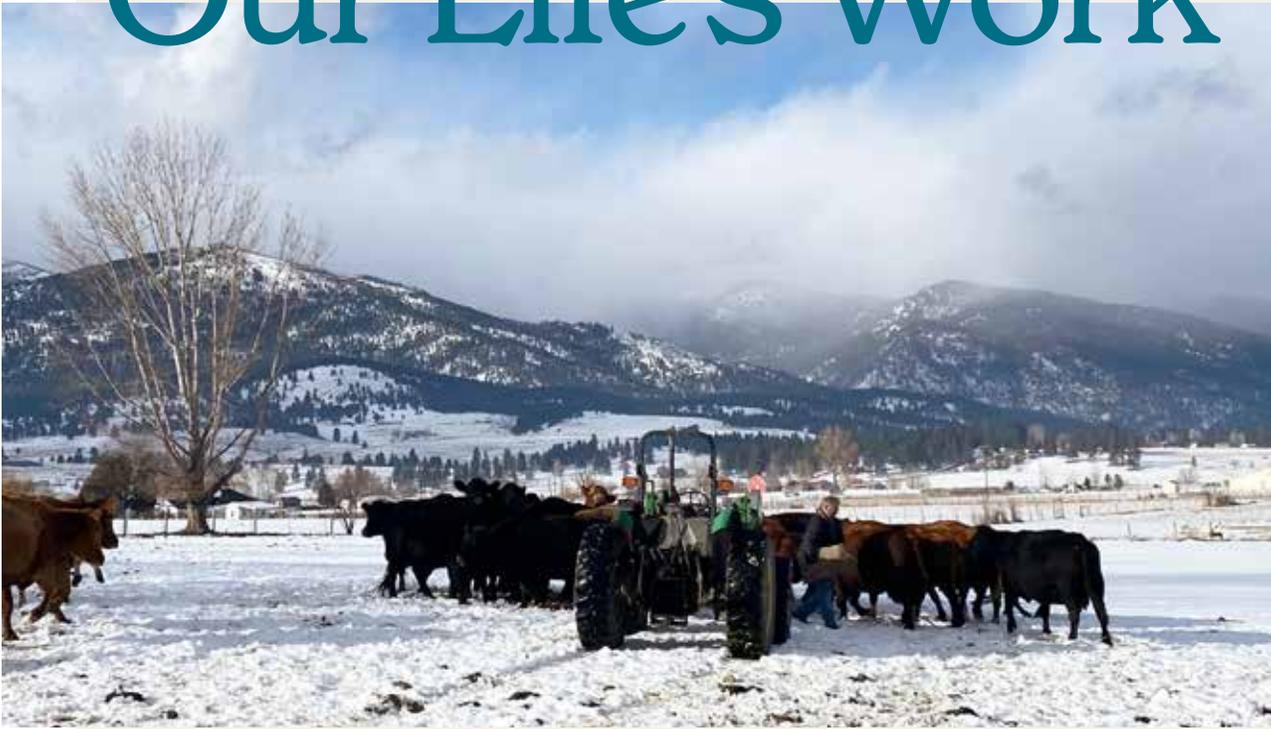
Bring a picnic with your favorite food and beverages to enjoy during the concert, as well as a chair, blanket, or other seating arrangement of your choosing. After the concert, you will have the opportunity to gather with friends—old and new—to learn more about BRLT projects, browse the silent auction items, listen to live music, dance, and celebrate conservation until sundown!

All event proceeds will be donated to BRLT and our mission to conserve the water, wildlife, and working lands of the Bitterroot Valley.

Tickets cost \$40 and will go on sale May 1st on the Bitter Root Land Trust website, bitterrootlandtrust.org. Tickets for this event are limited - be sure to get yours before they're gone!

To learn about sponsorship opportunities for this event, please contact BRLT Communications and Outreach Manager, Stephanie Sipe, at stephanie@bitterrootlandtrust.org or 406-375-9056. For more information about *IN A LANDSCAPE: Classical Music in the Wild™*, visit inalandscape.org.

Our Life's Work



Sitting across the kitchen table from Luci Brieger and Steve Elliot inside their Victor farmhouse on a cold, clear Bitterroot morning in January, one is quick to note the years of hard work that show on their folded hands atop the table's surface. Handmade sheepskin rugs of all shapes and sizes dot the hardwood living room floor that is weathered by the years of early morning and late-night footsteps traveling to and from the never-ending demands of the farm outside.

“We learned that it really doesn't take that long to return your landscape to a better condition than when you found it”

The quiet crackle from the wood burning stove that warms the house on this cold morning makes one feel grateful for the warmth – though not nearly as grateful as knowing that Luci and Steve's farmland,

known across the valley as Lifeline Produce, has been protected forever through a conservation easement completed in partnership with BRLT in December.

Luci breaks the silence.

“This is our life's work. When we got here, the land was in bad shape.... The ground was stressed, the dam was leaking, fences were busted down, and there wasn't a tree on the property. The original home was lost in a fire, so we lived in a teepee for years while starting to rebuild the farm and the house... It was a fantastic shelter, but we sure appreciated living indoors after that!”

The pond, originally dug out by a mule dragging a “Fresno Scraper” (a machine used for constructing canals and ditches in sandy soil), was full of sediment. They discovered the tool buried at the bottom of the pond underneath 20 dump truck loads full of mud while restoring it for irrigation use.

“Over the course of 30 years, we've been able to rebuild this farm from the ground up. We rebuilt the dam, repaired fences, planted hundreds of trees, and worked hard to make

the soil productive again. The time has gone by fast, but we learned that it really doesn't take that long to return your landscape to a better condition than when you found it... We just had to give it a little bit of help."

The farm's newly conserved 78 acres spans over two properties – one along the Eastside Highway in Stevensville that serves as the farm's main crop production area, and the farm's headquarters located off McVey Road in Victor that includes a home, hoop house, green houses, land used for crop production and rotational livestock grazing, and a historic barn that dates to the 1800's.

Luci and Steve grow all their own hay and feed to support enough cattle and sheep to provide enough manure to make the compost that builds soil for crops. The farm grows potatoes, beets, carrots, parsnips, lettuce, zucchini, and onions, among other things. They also produce their own biodiesel fuel to operate farm vehicles, using waste cooking oil from local restaurants. Most of their electricity is solar.

In addition to organic crop production, the farm also supports an apprenticeship



program in which they have trained two farmers every year for many years.

"We need more farmers, and somebody needs to train them. We wanted future farmers to have the opportunity to operate this farm someday and knew that meant

we'd need to permanently lower the land's value by removing development rights through the conservation easement. Because if those farmers had to pay development prices, this land would certainly not stay in ag production."



And thanks to Luci and Steve, the land will undoubtedly be here for future farmers.

The morning visit ends with an invitation from Steve and Luci to walk outside by the pond (a favorite neighborhood ice hockey rink in the winter for family and friends) and to feed the cows and sheep their favorite treats – homegrown potatoes and pumpkins. Hearing the sheep bleat in delight at the sight of Luci coming their way as the cows gleefully chase Steve and the tractor (its loader chalked full of potatoes), one can't help but take it all in and smile.

The mountains, the land, the farmers, the food, and the livestock that make it possible.

This is conservation.

Community members can purchase Lifeline Produce at the Good Food Store and Orange Street Food Farm in Missoula and Super One in Stevensville. The Western Montana Growers Co-Op also purchases and distributes Lifeline's produce across Montana and into Northern Idaho and Eastern Washington.

Meet the New Faces at BRLT!

Please join us in giving our newest team members a warm welcome.



Jake Blessing | *Project Manager*

Jake joined BRLT as a project manager in March 2024. In his role, he relishes working with private landowners to meet their conservation goals. He feels fortunate to be part of a team committed to a collaborative approach to protecting the working lands and wildlife habitat of the beautiful Bitterroot Valley.

Jake's career in private land conservation started as an intern with the stewardship team at BRLT in 2017. In the years after that he worked at an education nonprofit in western Montana and at land trusts in Michigan and Tennessee.

He holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Williams College and a master's degree in Ecology from Cornell University. When he is not at his desk or visiting landowners, he enjoys gardening, home improvement, and learning about natural history. He and his wife, McCullough, have three young boys who love reading and digging in the dirt.

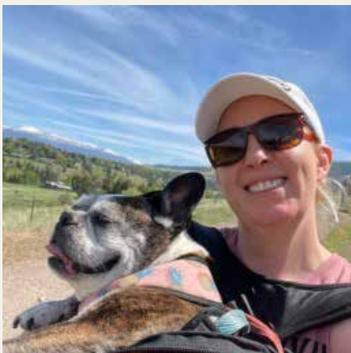


Laura DeRocher | *Development Coordinator*

Laura first became involved with BRLT as a volunteer member of the organization's Next Gen committee, before recently joining the team as Development Coordinator where she will be working closely with Lauren Rennaker, BRLT Development Director. Raised in a Forest Service family, Laura grew up splitting her time between Missoula and a small rural town in Northern California where she developed her passion for conservation and public recreation.

After a 15-year career in finance in western Washington, where she attended the University of Washington, she heard her Montana roots calling and moved to the Bitterroot to be close to her family where she has lived happily for the past decade.

Today, Laura enjoys the balanced quality of life that comes from living that "Montana Way" she so deeply values. She spends her free time traveling, visiting her family's memorial forest in the Bitterroot National Forest, on the river kayaking and fly fishing, hiking, camping, or cross-country skiing with her significant other, David, and her scruffy dog, Sweet Pea.



Morgan Weber | *Board Member*

Morgan was born and raised in Corvallis and is a third generation Montanan. She left Montana for college at Gonzaga University and law school in Indiana, moved to California, and returned to Montana in 2009 to be closer to family and friends.

Morgan is now a partner at Browning, Kaleczyc, Berry and Hoven where she practices insurance defense and family law.

Although she has been around the world, she still believes that the Bitterroot Valley is one of the most beautiful and special places that she has been. Additionally, Morgan's family's property, Weber Ranch, was conserved in partnership with BRLT in 2016. She's thrilled to be helping the BRLT to further its mission and preserve this special place she can once again call home.



Dave and Sandy Burner, BRLT Supporters

THE POWER OF QCDs FOR CONSERVATION

Rooting for Retirement

As we embark on another year of Bitterroot Valley conservation, we want to share with you an exciting opportunity to make a significant impact on land conservation through your retirement savings. Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) offer a powerful way to support the work of BRLT while maximizing tax benefits for yourself.

What exactly is a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD), and how does it work?

A QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your Individual Retirement Account (IRA) to a qualified charitable organization, such as BRLT, without incurring income tax on the distribution. This means that if you're over 70½ years old, you can donate up to \$105,000 per year from your IRA to support conservation without paying income tax on the withdrawn amount.

“The Bitter Root Land Trust is doing some of the most important work that’s being done. By giving through QCDs, we can help with a larger donation than we could otherwise.” —Sandy Burner, Darby resident

Why should you consider a QCD?

A QCD provides a tax-efficient way to contribute to BRLT. Instead of taking a taxable distribution from your IRA and then making a charitable

donation, a QCD allows you to skip the taxable income altogether, potentially reducing your overall tax liability. Unlike traditional charitable donations, QCDs from IRAs offer distinct advantages - particularly for retirees.

“QCDs are a common tax planning technique we share with our clients. Many taxpayers get no tax benefit from making charitable contributions - QCDs are a great tool for getting this tax benefit back.” —Wade Weber, CPA, Weber & Company CPAs, PC, Stevensville

Not only do you avoid paying income tax on the distributed amount, but they may also satisfy your required minimum distributions (RMDs) for the year, potentially reducing your overall taxable income.

How will BRLT benefit from your QCD?

By supporting BRLT through your IRA, you can ensure that the landscapes you cherish are protected for future generations to enjoy. The support through QCDs allows BRLT to acquire and protect critical habitats, maintain and complete conservation easement projects, and engage in community outreach and education initiatives. Every donation makes a difference in our efforts to safeguard the natural beauty and ecological diversity of the Bitterroot Valley.

For more information, contact BRLT Development Director, Lauren Rennaker, at Lauren@bitterrootlandtrust.org or 406-375-0956. BRLT does not provide tax advice. Contact your financial advisor or accountant to determine if a QCD is right for you.

ROY RANCH, VICTOR

It's the Only Home I've Ever Known

Danny Roy pulls up to his family's farmhouse driving a 1936 Chevy – the same pickup his uncle drove from the ranch to attend Victor School in the 1940's. It's a small glimpse into the window of what life looked like on the ranch when Danny's family started what would become a long-standing legacy in Bitterroot agriculture, and what is being honored today by Danny through his decision to conserve the land in perpetuity.



The original 1890's farmhouse, a herd of cattle quietly grazing in the forefront of the stunning Bitterroot Mountains, and the open land that surrounds it all are what make this place home to Danny – just as it was for his grandmother, father, mother, aunts, and uncles that worked the land before him. It's the place where thousands of calves have taken their first steps in the snowy spring, where endless tons of hay have been baled in the summer heat, and where wildlife find ample habitat in the meadows and timber year-round. And, thanks to the vision of the Roy family and our community's support for local conservation, it's the place that will be able to continue a long-standing legacy of Bitterroot agriculture for many years to come.

"This ranch means the world to me. It's the only home I've ever known," says Danny. "The dream of my father, Ivan Roy, was always to keep the entire property preserved for farming and wildlife. I've always vowed to honor that dream."

Conserved in partnership with BRLT in January, the nearly 80-year-old family ranch is primarily used for agricultural

production, including hay and pasture for cattle. The property's diverse landscape of timber, wetlands, and open meadows provide exceptional habitat for wildlife, including elk, white tailed deer, sandhill crane, moose, and turkeys. Located in

close proximity to several nearby conservation easements, both completed and in-progress in partnership with BRLT, the open space provides a corridor for wildlife to travel safely from the cover of the Bitterroot National Forest to neighboring

ranchlands below.

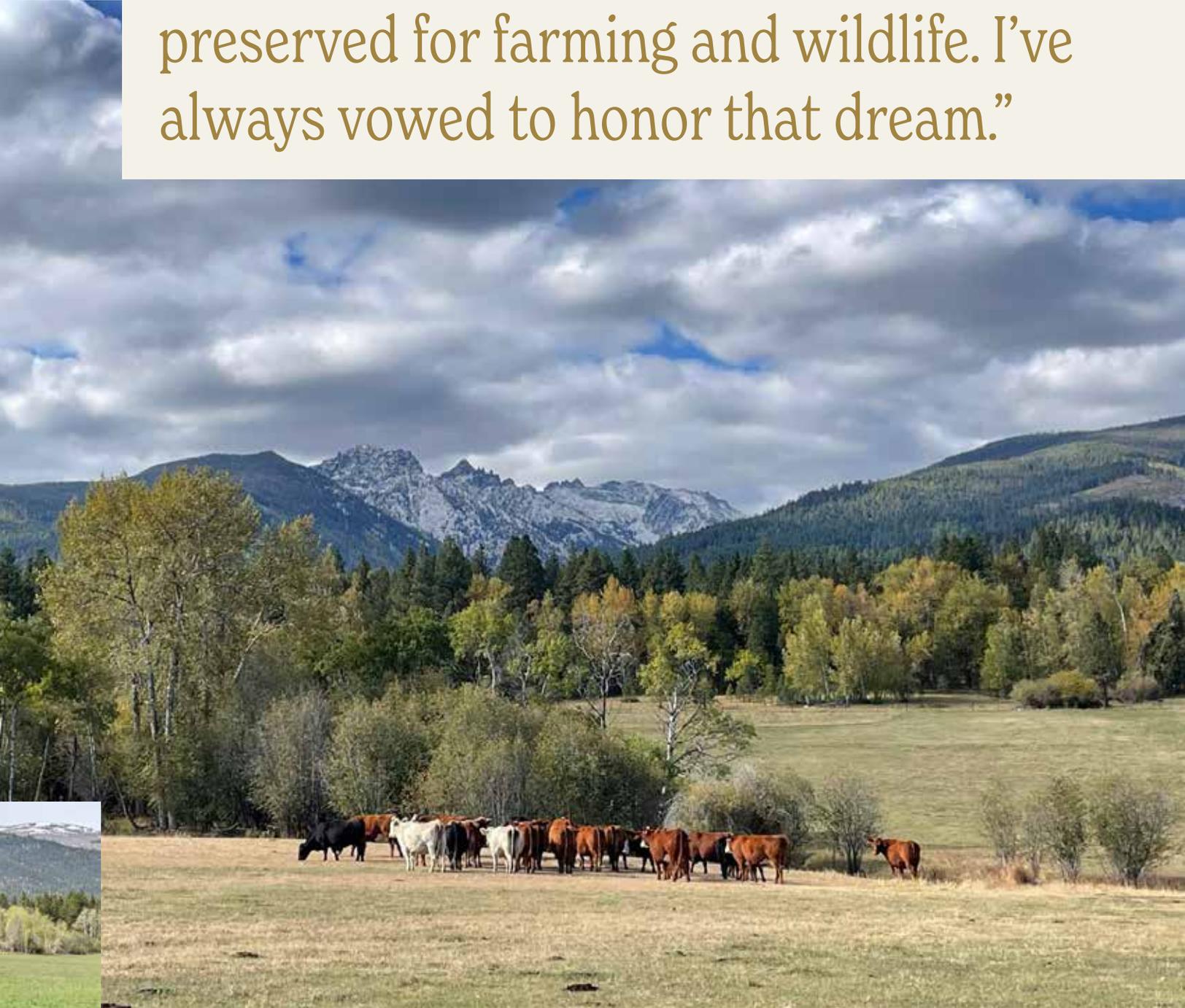
"I love this property for its history and the beauty. Many people stop along the side of my meadow to take pictures of the view of Bear Creek Canyon to the west," says Danny. "I can't imagine this property ever being split or subdivided."

The Roy Ranch conservation easement was funded in part by the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), as well as the Ravalli County Open Lands Program, a local conservation funding program first approved in 2006, that was renewed with a 71% passage rate by Ravalli County voters in November 2022. The Open Lands Program provides funding to support landowners who wish to voluntarily conserve their land.

Thanks to the vision of the Roy family, the Bitterroot Valley community, and supporting programs like the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program and the Ravalli County Open Lands Program, 176-acres of critical Bitterroot Valley agricultural land and wildlife habitat will remain forever intact.



“The dream of my father, Ivan Roy, was always to keep the entire property preserved for farming and wildlife. I’ve always vowed to honor that dream.”



To learn more about the Ravalli County Open Lands Program, visit the Ravalli County website at [Ravalli.us/189/Open-Lands-Bond-Program](https://ravalli.us/189/Open-Lands-Bond-Program). To learn more about the NRCS RCPP program, visit nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/rcpp-regional-conservation-partnership-program

**A COLLABORATIVE
COLLECTION**

Legacy of the Land

By Meg Dowaliby,
Cassens Fine Art

This past November, renowned Montana-based artist Lois Keister invited the Bitterroot Valley community to experience the history and lore of the West through her evocative kiln glass art in her exhibition, “A Love Letter to the West.” After reading about her passion for the west, and viewing her work up close at the reception, the Bitter Root Land Trust was captivated by the way Keister and her living artifacts embody the sweat and faith of generations who carved out a life in the West’s rugged landscapes.

This April, Cassens Fine Art in Hamilton welcomes Keister back with a new online collection titled “Legacy of the Land,” in partnership with the Bitter Root Land Trust, highlighting the unique landscapes of the Bitterroot Valley—the place we call home.

“Lois’s anecdotes and artwork invoke a feeling that we at the Land Trust are so fortunate to experience every single day through working with our valley’s

“Our quality of life and economy is directly related to maintaining our wild places.”

landowners and our community, who share an irreplaceable love for this land and this place,” says Stephanie Sipe, BRLT Communications and Outreach Manager. “We couldn’t be more excited for Lois to tell the story of some of the Bitterroot’s conserved family ranches through her beautiful art.”



Bass Creek Ranch piece from the Legacy of the Land collection, available for purchase at Cassens Fine Art.

The inspiration behind each of the pieces in this collection is derived from local landmarks and cherished homesteads that symbolize the importance of protecting the wide-open spaces and places we love, to maintain the integrity of our beloved Bitterroot Valley and the peace it offers for generations to come. From Bass Creek Ranch to Flying E Ranch in Stevensville to Trexler Ranch in Corvallis, and down to Paddock Ranch in Darby, each of these pieces features scenes of open landscapes, barns, trails, waterways,

and ways of life, aiming to serve as a reminder that the work of the Bitter Root Land Trust isn’t just to ensure a lasting legacy for landholders, but for everyone.

“It amazes me who is touched by my work, and even more so when they see my medium as a way to help tell

their own stories,” says Keister. “To see familiar places drawn out from the past, knowing that I am in a lucky line of generations to see these places, is something I hold very dear.”

Keister believes that art has the power to raise awareness for causes such as protecting the valley’s open spaces, beauty, economic vitality, and quality of life. “Art in itself is a way of creating a permanent moment, a solid and unchanging image of an ever-changing place. I believe that seeing the love and affection of an artist, and then an art collector for a specific place, is a way of bringing attention to those places to a new group of people.”

“Our quality of life and economy is directly related to maintaining our wild places, without them we would just be another stretch of bumpy Montana highway, and if I can be even a small part of keeping those wonderful places alive and cared for, I am a happy woman.”

To learn more about the collaboration, visit cassensfineart.com.



**BITTER ROOT
LAND TRUST**

Thank You to BRLT's 2023 Partners!

1,509 acres of family farms & ranches, river & stream frontage,
wildlife habitat or public recreation access conserved forever in 2023.



3 C Cattle, LLC
406 Lumber Sales, Inc.
Albertsons
Alex Rogger Construction
Alpine Grove Real Estate
American Public Land Exchange Co.
Bauder Home
Berkshire Hathaway
Big Sky Eye Care
Bitter Root Brewing
Bitterroot Disposal
Bitterroot Health Foundation
Bitterroot Laundry/EASI Cleaners
Bitterroot Performing Arts Council
Blacksmith Brewing LLC
Blodgett Canyon Cellars
Boris and Bernie, LLC
Boyle, Deveny & Meyer, P.C.
Brigand Event Center
Brothers Mortuary & Crematory
Choice Aviation, LLC
Davis Group PLLC
Double H Custom Hats
Evans Ace Hardware

EXIT Realty Max Coleman
Fins Taphouse
First Security Bank
Fishes Eddy O
Five Valleys Land Trust
Freestone Fly Shop
GlaxoSmithKline Foundation
Good Food Store
Graze & Roam Ranch
Hamilton Golf Club
Hamilton Packing Co.
Henderson & Associates, PLLC
Higher Ground Brewery
House of Ferments
Infinity Health P.T. & Wellness
Jessi's Wine & Goods
Joe's Studio
Jones Korman Insurance
K & S Greenhouse
Kestrel Hammer + Tine
Kokanee Inn Bed & Breakfast
Lakeland Feed & Supply
Lifeline Creamery & Farm Store
Little Smith Creek Ranch
Lost Trail Ski Area

Mikesell's Fine Jewelry
Mineshaft Pasty Co
Mission Bistro
Mountain West Appraisal, P.C.
Nicholson Dairy
OnX Maps
Peterson CPA Group
Rainbow Bar & Poker Room
Riverside Radiology
Roger Gantz Realty
S G Long Financial
Sapphire Barn Quilts
Sawmill Saloon
Sculpt Aesthetics
State Farm - Marc Spear
State Farm - Taylor King
Tammany Veterinary Hospital
The Cupboard
The Hops
Trail West Bank
Turner Vinson
Valley Bicycles & Ski
Valley Pet Clinic
Weber and Vanorio CPAs PC
Wide Angle Photography

**To learn how your business can partner with the Bitter Root Land Trust, contact:
Stephanie Sipe, BRLT Communications & Outreach Manager, at stephanie@bitterrootlandtrust.org**



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

US POSTAGE
PAID
NON-PROFIT ORG
GREAT FALLS, MT
PERMIT NO. 151

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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

**Board of
Directors**

- Bret Young**
President
- Meghan Hanson**
Vice President
- Andy Massie**
Treasurer
- Tonia Bloom**
Secretary
- Mike Bradt**
- Roger Gantz**
- Meghan Hanson**
- Sari Kerslake**
- Kathie Messer**
- Tori Nobles**
- John Ormiston**
- Heather Menning**
- Jean Steele**
- Lynn Thurber**
- Morgan Weber**

Staff

- Gavin Ricklefs**
Executive Director
- Kori Anderson**
Operations Director
- Lauren Rennaker**
Development Director
- Melissa Odell**
Lands Director
- Rhiannon Klingonsmith**
Stewardship Director
- Jake Blessing**
Project Manager
- Stephanie Sipe**
Communications and Outreach
Manager
- Laura DeRocher**
Development Coordinator
- Megan Euclide**
UM Assistantship Graduate Student
- Jenny West**
Bookkeeper

Cover: Triple D Ranch, Stevensville by Firefly Imageworks

BRLT is celebrating Leave Your Legacy Month this April!

Become a member of our Forever Bitterroot program and leave a lasting legacy on the valley you love by including BRLT in your will and estate plans.

Visit bitterrootlandtrust.org or contact BRLT Development Director, Lauren Rennaker, at Lauren@bitterrootlandtrust.org or 406-375-0956



Photo: Youth Field Trip to Graze & Roam Ranch, Victor