BITTER ROOT LAND TRUST | LEGACY

Newsletter | **FALL 2026**

Why do we **love** the Bitterroot Valley?

My answer is probably similar to most: the wildlife, the fishing, the hiking, skiing, the wide open spaces, family farms and ranches, the mountains, the views and our Bitterroot River and creeks. This valley offers it all. My answer, and I imagine yours too, leads to another question: **How do we keep the Bitterroot, "The Bitterroot?"**

I like to take my grandchildren for walks when they visit in the summer and fall. My granddaughter enjoys hunting for frogs on the creek while her older brother and cousin work to hone their fishing skills. They can hardly wait to return to this special valley each summer. **How do we make sure our valley will always have these places left to explore and play?**

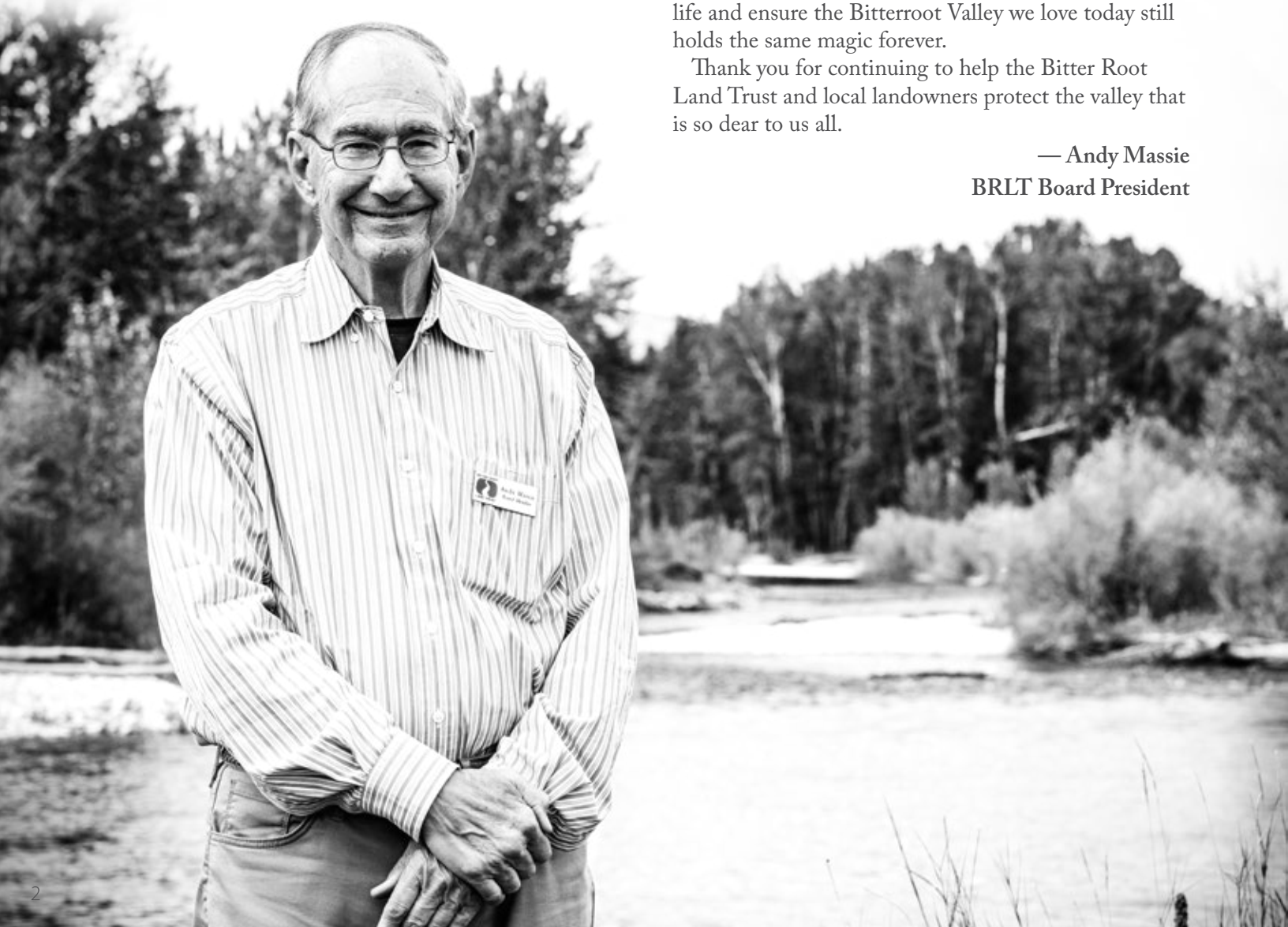
We have the privilege of sharing this valley with some of the most amazing wildlife on our planet. I am fortunate to see elk with some regularity but still stop to admire them when they come into view. Such striking creatures. **How do we safeguard the habitat our wildlife depend on, to ensure they still have a home?**

Every year, we get to experience new life as we drive by fields dotted with grazing cattle and their newborn calves in the spring. In the summertime, the sea of hay bales is endless, and the produce collected at harvest time overflows truck beds as our farmers head to the market. **How do we ensure we always have the healthy soils and open lands needed to grow the food that feeds our community?**

Protecting this place matters. Not only for today, but for future generations of land stewards hundreds of years to come. With your support, the Bitter Root Land Trust has been committed to partnering with Bitterroot families and our community to deliver critical conservation to our valley for nearly three decades. Together, we can maintain our valley's way of life and ensure the Bitterroot Valley we love today still holds the same magic forever.

Thank you for continuing to help the Bitter Root Land Trust and local landowners protect the valley that is so dear to us all.

— Andy Massie
BRLT Board President



The Character of the Valley is Special

Why a community member is choosing to protect the Bitterroot.

"I always thought of Montana as home," Greg McClellan says. After growing up in Billings, Greg had a 36-year career with the United States Fish & Wildlife Service that took him to Alaska, Texas, and Michigan. He always wanted to come home to Montana, and found his way to Stevensville in 2022. Now, he takes his two rescue dogs out most days to enjoy the valley's trails including the river trails, at Hamilton's Skalkaho Bend Park, created by BRLT and opened to the community in 2020.

Greg met BRLT in his first fall in the Bitterroot, when the Ravalli County Open Lands Bond Program went before Ravalli County voters for reauthorization in 2022 (and passed with 71% of the county's vote). That year, Greg heard long-time BRLT Executive Director Gavin Ricklefs talk about the importance of conservation at a community open house in Stevensville. This spoke to Greg, who was familiar with conservation easements and the importance of conservation for wildlife habitat from his time with the Fish & Wildlife Service: "The more I learned about the Bitter Root Land Trust, the more I wanted to find ways to help."

Greg found that BRLT's conservation aligned with what he loved about his home. He puts his thumb on how conservation protects the things that make this valley so special to him, saying, "The mostly rural character of the valley is special, with a significant amount of open land and natural habitat. With the help of BRLT, the openness and naturalness of the valley can continue into the future."

That love of the Bitterroot, understanding of the need for gifts that support technical conservation that can leverage funding like the Open Lands Bond, and understanding of working land's benefits for wildlife and the Bitterroot community is why Greg generously chose to join BRLT's Forever Bitterroot planned giving program. Members of the Forever Bitterroot community have elected to leave gifts to BRLT in their will or trusts, creating a conservation legacy that will live forever in the Bitterroot Valley.

"In my career and personal opportunities, I have been very fortunate to observe many species of wildlife and many spectacular landscapes," Greg says. "My hope in leaving a legacy with BRLT is that I will be giving future generations the opportunity to observe at least some aspects of the same scenes that I have been fortunate to experience throughout my life."

If you would like to be recognized as a member of the Forever Bitterroot Program, would like more information about the Forever Bitterroot program, or would like to discuss how BRLT may fit into your estate plan, please contact BRLT Philanthropy Director Owen Yager at owen@bitterrootlandtrust.org or (406) 375-0956.

Your Bitterroot Conservation Legacy

Alongside joining the Forever Bitterroot program, BRLT's community members support conservation in the Bitterroot Valley through a number of giving options:

- **"Community Roots" Monthly Giving Program**
- **One-Time Gifts**
- **Gifts of Land, Property, Livestock, or Stock**
- **Donor Advised Funds (DAF's)**
- **Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD's)**

For more information about ways to support Bitterroot conservation, please contact BRLT.

"Our whole valley is a rare place, and I think we need to preserve all we can. And maybe people will appreciate it later," said Jeane. "Just being a part of this is important to me, it makes me feel like I'm contributing to conserving part of the agricultural area and the land."

It's Good for Your Soul

LIPPERT CONSERVATION EASEMENT, VICTOR

When 93-year-old Victor rancher, Jeane Lippert, approached the Bitter Root Land Trust to inquire about protecting her 70-acre ranch in perpetuity, her motivations were clear.

"I fell in love with the ranch when I moved here in 1964, and I've lived here ever since. It's beautiful…. it restores my soul when I can sit and look out and feel the warmth of the land. I wanted to preserve it."

The ranch is located on Victor's west side and is near 2,040+ acres of agricultural land and wildlife habitat conserved by landowners in partnership with BRLT. The property features a combination of timbered area, pond, spring, riparian area, and irrigated and dry agricultural land, which Jeane continues to work with her tractor.

"I got a tractor when I turned 80," Jeane remembered. "I still irrigate with it in the fields. I use a backhoe now instead of tarps, but I still get out and work it. I think it's good for your soul."

The property provides a diverse habitat for wildlife including elk, deer, fox, Canada geese, ducks, sandhill crane, bobolink, great horned owls, great blue heron, golden eagle, Lewis's woodpeckers and pileated woodpeckers. The culturally significant Bitterroot flower can also be found growing there.

"Our whole valley is a rare place, and I think we need to preserve all we can. And maybe people will appreciate it later," said Jeane. "Just being a part of this is important to me, it makes me feel like I'm contributing to conserving part of the agricultural area and the land."

The project was made possible in part by landowner donation; funding from the Natural Resource Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) (a grant awarded to the Bitter Root Land Trust that provides funding to open lands of smaller acreage that would not otherwise qualify for traditional federal funding sources); and the Ravalli County Open Lands Bond Program, a $10M bond that was renewed by Ravalli County voters in 2022.

In addition to the peace of mind that comes with knowing a beloved property is protected forever, conservation easements can offer several financial benefits to help landowners achieve their conservation goals while providing economic incentives. "When we first started talking about the conservation easement, I was concerned that I would have to mortgage a place in order to pay to conserve my property," said Jeane. "I didn't realize that I was going to financially benefit from it, and it really took me several meetings to realize it."

Thanks to Jeane's desire to protect her property, one more piece of the Victor agricultural puzzle will remain forever unchanged for future generations to enjoy. "The comfort that I feel from saving it now is a benefit," Jeane said.

"I think that every person needs to do something in their life to contribute to what we've got here. And I feel like I've got a little bit of it done."

Photo by Eric Ian

RORY R RANCH, VICTOR

For the Future Farmer

Tucked in against the Bitterroot Mountain range on Victor's west side, between the Bitterroot National Forest and the Bitterroot River, a 193-acre ranch that has been used agriculturally since the late 1800s has been protected, helping to maintain Victor's rich tradition in ranching and agricultural heritage forever.

Thanks to the vision of landowners Gary and Robin Beadle, the newly conserved Rory R Ranch's Victor cattle ranch contributes to the quality and quantity of wildlife habitat and water resources in Victor's agricultural neighborhood. The area has historically been, and continues to be, a center for agriculture. However, over the last several decades it has experienced increasing rural residential development.

"We recognize the need to continue preserving this land for the next generation rancher so that they, too, will have the opportunity and freedom to work the land and raise cattle," said Gary and Robin.

Gary grew up on a small cattle farm and worked on a larger ranch as a young man in northwestern Illinois, before economic pressures led him to leave a rural life. He moved to Chicago and witnessed over the next 40 years the urban sprawl of suburban Chicago where he met his wife, Robin. In 2007 they discovered the natural beauty and peaceful way of life of the Bitterroot Valley, reigniting their love of land, animals, and ranching.

"As soon as we purchased the ranch, we started to repair the irrigation ditches, clean up the 70+ treed apple orchard, replaced existing fences and leased the land to local cattle ranchers, Drew and Kaci Lewis, as grazeland."

In 2022, the Beadles partnered with the Lewis family to expand their ranching operation while working with BRLT to conserve a 1,260-acre ranch in Stevensville's historical Rosemont neighborhood, as well as nearby 420-acre Skyline Angus in the Burnt Fork conservation neighborhood.

Today, Rory R Ranch's Victor ranch marks the third property conserved by the Beadles and adds to the growing block of protected agricultural lands in the area conserved by BRLT in partnership with

"Conserving this property, its grasslands, stunning unobstructed viewsheds, its wildlife habitat and agricultural use are goals we wanted to accomplish"

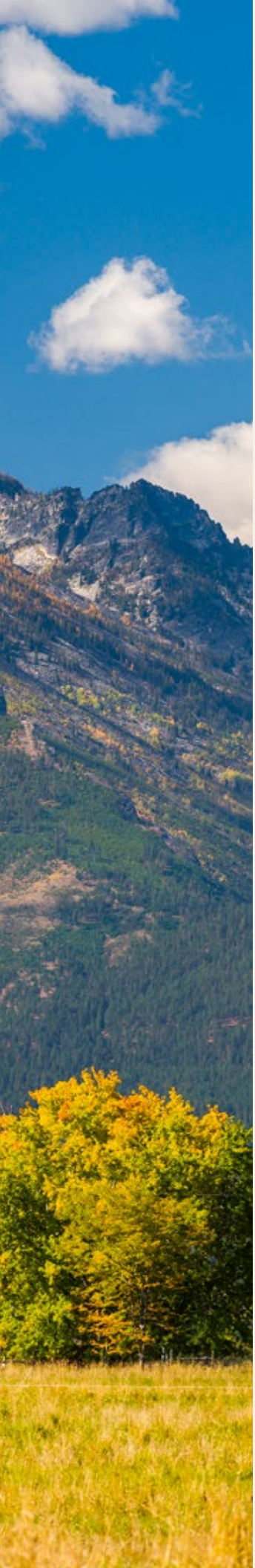
landowners, including Groff Farm, Groff Timber Ranch, Buker Ranch, Roy Ranch, Lifeline Produce, and Graze & Roam conservation easements.

In addition to supporting cow-calf pairs, the property's grassland and riparian features make it an excellent habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. The location is within several important habitat areas, including Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks-designated Elk and Mule Deer Winter Range, and supports other native wildlife including black bear, white-tailed deer, Sandhill crane, American kestrel, great horned owls, great blue heron, bobolink, and western toad.

"Conserving this property, its grasslands, stunning unobstructed viewsheds, its wildlife habitat and agricultural use are goals we wanted to accomplish. This will be an important piece of land in the

Sweathouse Creek watershed for future farmers and ranchers, not to mention the vast wildlife that call this property home."

As a reflection of the Beadles' commitment to preserving our valley's irreplaceable farm and ranchlands, and your support of landowner-driven conservation, Rory R Ranch will continue a legacy of agriculture and wildlife for the future stewards of our beloved Bitterroot Valley.



Chesebro Ranch, Corvallis

It's Been Our Whole Life

A plump tabby cat lazily saunters through the living room in the old white farmhouse at Chesebro Ranch in Corvallis. Landowners Bruce and Joan Chesebro give credit to their ranch hand. "Her name is 'Kitty;' she's a good mouser. She misses one here and there, but she usually gets most."

Bruce and Joan have lived on the ranch since 1971. It's where they raised their three children, Annemarie, Eric, and Brian. Through all of it, they've always enjoyed the property's scenic beauty and wildlife. Today, a conservation easement placed on the 252-acre ranch ensures the property will remain intact for future decades, fusing together the property's five individual parcels that are now forever protected from subdivision.

Situated just east of Corvallis on Willow Creek Road and Coal Pit Road, the iconic barn and farmhouse, open space agricultural lands, mountain views, and frequent wildlife that call the ranch home are visible and enjoyed by passersby heading to and from town or the nearby Soft Rock Recreation Area. The ranch is near already conserved lands in the Corvallis area.

Almost 15 years after their first meeting with BRLT, the family decided that it was the right time to conserve their property and began the conservation easement process.

"We wanted to preserve the open space aspects of the land for our kids and grandkids, the possibility of continued use of agricultural lands for ranching, and prevent high density subdivision which would destroy the open space and habitat values of the land," Bruce and Joan said about why they wanted to protect what makes their land so special. "It's hard to narrow down one favorite moment or aspect of the ranch; it's been our whole life."

Upon purchasing the ranch, the Chesebros were eager to try their hand at raising cattle after hearing friends share experiences from the ranching lifestyle. Without much farming experience, Bruce and Joan turned to their neighbor Quentin Brown who helped them learn.

"We learned how to ranch from Quentin and his kids during those early years. Cutting hay, irrigating, working with cows. They were good neighbors." Bruce smiled and added, "We enjoyed all of the years we had cows."

> "We've had out of town visitors tell us 'This is the best place I've ever been in my life' as they sit and look out to the Bitterroot Mountains,"

Today, the ranch is leased to a local rancher who runs cow-calf pairs and hays the pastures, keeping the land in active agricultural production. The property also features a Ponderosa woodland, grasslands, wetlands, and sagebrush shrublands, as well as unique rock formations dating back to the Missoula Floods. The irrigated grassland pastures provide a mosaic of habitat types for wildlife including elk, mule deer, fox, badger, bear, ducks, great blue heron, Lewis's woodpecker, and western toad.

This project was made possible with funding received the Ravalli County Open Lands Bond Program, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE), and landowner donation.

"We've had out of town visitors tell us, 'This is the best place I've ever been in my life' as they sit and look out to the Bitterroot Mountains," said Joan. "That's just the kind of place it is."

Bob Lewis Ranch, Stevensville

Rooted in Connection

A cowboy hat sits tall atop a lone fencepost on the Bob Lewis Ranch. Broken in by the ranch's namesake, the late Bob Lewis, the hat is more than an accessory. It's a symbol of 50 years of hard work, sweat, and dedication that has gone into improving the land for crops, for cattle, and, ultimately, for conservation.

"He (Bob) loved the ranch and wanted to see the land preserved," said Robert, Bob's son, who purchased the ranch after his passing in 2021. "We're continuing to operate it in the same manner that he did."

Ranching in the Bitterroot isn't new for Robert and wife Monica. Robert grew up on the ranch helping his dad with farming and ranching operations. Monica also grew up in the Bitterroot Valley, on a farm in the Three Mile area of Stevensville. Over the years, the growth the valley has experienced has altered the landscape they once knew.

"Fields we passed for years are now covered with homes," said Monica.

Located on the corner of Pine Hollow Road and Logan Lane, the 230-acre property is directly adjacent to the Astle's Runnin' Bear Ranch conservation easement (222 acres) and the Severson's Flying E Ranch conservation easement (365 acres), tying together 8.5 miles of contiguous, conserved, private working land in the Burnt Fork conservation neighborhood of Stevensville. The block of conservation easements, which have been protected in partnership with local landowners, BRLT, and partner organizations, now spans from the Bob Lewis Ranch to the Sapphire Mountains across 7,500 acres of protected land.

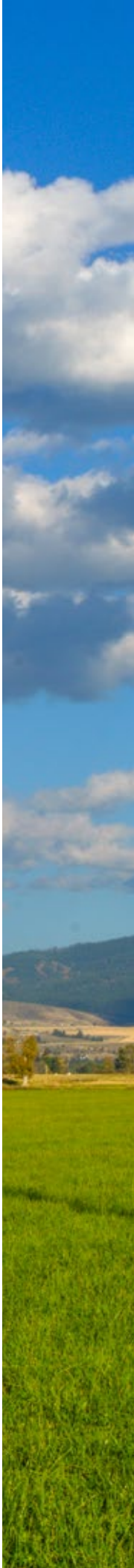
The ranch is a mix of irrigated grassland and hayfields for cattle, and sub-irrigated habitat containing riparian life and deciduous trees. The property is within the Burnt Fork Creek/ South Swamp Creek watershed and both provide habitat for wildlife and facilitate wildlife movement across the Bitterroot valley between adjacent and nearby conserved lands. The ranch includes foraging areas for species like elk, deer, fox, Sandhill crane, great blue heron, bats, bald eagle, golden eagle, Lewis' woodpecker, and bobolink.

The area surrounding the ranch has historically been a center for agriculture, but over the last several decades, it has experienced increasing rural residential and ranchette-style development.

The Lewises believe that preserving the land adds to the valley's beauty, protect a way of life rooted in connection to the land, and provide places to grow food.

The conservation easement was made possible with funding received from the Ravalli County Open Lands Bond Program, NRCS Agricultural Land Easement Program-Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE), and landowner donation.

Thank you to the Lewis family for choosing conservation to maintain the open, agricultural character of the Stevensville area, ensuring this working landscape remains intact for future generations.



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BRLT'S FALL MILES CHALLENGE
October 1-31, 2026

Get moving for conservation! BRLT invites you to join your community to log 5,000 recreation miles together over the month of October. Log your miles now and win prizes at **bitterrootlandtrust.org**

Front and back covers by Wide Angle Photography.