

SPRING 2024

VIEW *Points*

Celebrating Our
75th Conservation Easement



**FLATHEAD
LAND TRUST**
Conserving Our Legacy of Land and Water

"A farm is more than land and crops - it is a family's heritage and future" - Unknown



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OUR MISSION

Flathead Land Trust is dedicated to the conservation of northwest Montana's land and water legacy through voluntary agreements with private landowners



Celebrating Our 75th Conservation Easement

In January 17, we were fortunate to partner with Charlie and Renate Jaquette to place Flathead Land Trust's 75th conservation easement on their beautiful 497-acre farm in the Creston area. Containing some of the richest topsoil in the valley, the easement adds to an existing network of more than 14,500 acres of conserved lands along a 50-mile stretch of the Flathead River and north shore of Flathead Lake. The Jaquettes have been farming their land for multiple generations beginning with Charlie's grandfather who first settled here in 1907. It's incredible to think how much has changed in the Flathead Valley in that span of time and how much farmland and open space we've lost. As farmers, the Jaquettes realize the importance of keeping their land intact and undeveloped as the best way to sustain a productive agricultural operation. Conservation is also vitally important to a growing community to ensure we will continue to have rich farmland, local foods, wildlife habitat and open spaces that we can pass on to future generations. In the past four years, we have been witnessing a growing interest from landowners to voluntarily conserve their land. This has resulted in more conservation in critical areas like the Creston Bench, including the 731-acre Mast conservation easement and the 318-acre de Yong conservation easement completed by our friends at Montana Land Reliance.



In February, we added another critical easement with the permanent conservation of the 405-acre Owen Sowerwine property east of Kalispell. Protection of this beloved area along the braided section of the Flathead River has been a dream for 50 years and I applaud all our partners and donors who helped make it possible. For the rest of 2024, we expect to complete eight more conservation easements and protect an additional 1,295 acres making this our busiest year yet. As we look to the future, Flathead Land Trust is laser-focused on making the investments needed to build our capacity and meet the growing need for conservation in the Flathead Valley and throughout northwest Montana. This includes hiring more staff and expanding our resources so we can do more. We want to do everything we can to capitalize on opportunities before they are lost and increase the pace and quantity of conservation. That's where your support continues to be so important as we look forward to completing our next 75 conservation easements.

We are embarking on a new era for Flathead Land Trust. Next year, I'm excited to announce that our community-based organization will turn 40 years old and we are gearing up to celebrate this major milestone with you all. Stay tuned for more info soon. As always, I invite you to stay involved, join us at our events, volunteer, attend a guided hike and continue to support our efforts. Your involvement makes all the difference in the world for conservation and the future of the Flathead.

Paul Travis, Executive Director



Owen Sowerwine IS FINALLY PERMANENTLY PROTECTED!

Nearly 50 years ago, a man named Owen Sowerwine dreamed of safeguarding a 405-acre community treasure near Kalispell. This year, that vision blossomed into reality.

The stage was set a quarter century ago, when Montana Audubon lobbied lawmakers to enact a statute allowing a conservation easement to be placed on this specific parcel of state land by a nonprofit. After years of collaboration with Flathead Audubon Society, Flathead Lakers, and Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, Flathead Land Trust is proud to be that nonprofit. A conservation easement now permanently protects this incredible place.

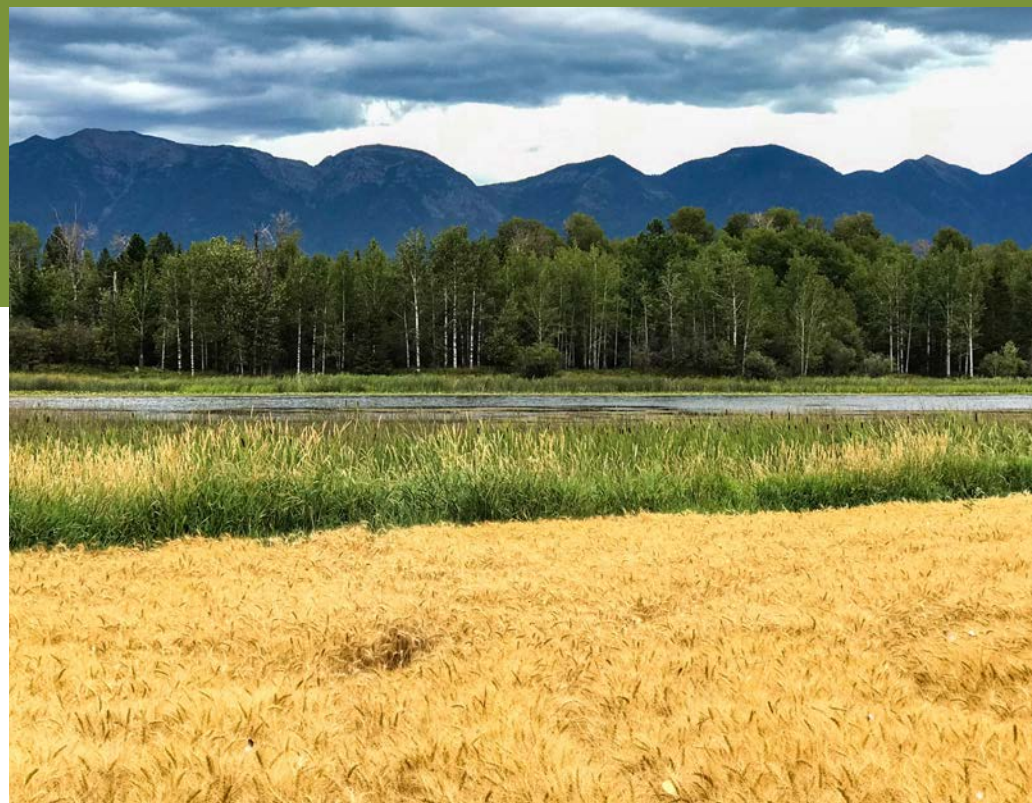
"We would be wise to assume that in some not distant, but unpredictable future, our valley will have 100,000 to 200,000 residents – and that additional millions will pass through every year. On that assumption, we who live here today can help determine what this valley will be like when that day comes." – Owen Sowerwine, 1974

Owen Sowerwine, with its mosaic of wetlands, riverine forests and meandering waterways, including the Flathead and Stillwater Rivers, is critical habitat for diverse wildlife and an "Important Bird Area." It also plays a vital role in safeguarding water quality in the rivers and downstream.

Owen Sowerwine's dream for this land has become a lasting reality – a vibrant haven for wildlife and a cherished community resource. Ownership will remain with the state, while Flathead Audubon Society will continue its passionate stewardship of resources and educational programs, as it has for many years. Public access will continue, and Owen Sowerwine's legacy will live on.

Thank you MAJOR DONORS, GRANTORS AND PARTNERS TO THE OWEN SOWERWINE PROJECT!

- | | | | |
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Honoring a Milestone Conservation Easement: JAQUETTE FARM JOINS GROWING CONSERVATION NETWORK

The Flathead Valley has much to celebrate with the recent permanent protection of the 497-acre Jaquette farm east of Kalispell. The preservation of this agricultural and ecological stronghold marked the 75th conservation easement completed by Flathead Land Trust since its inception in 1985. What an incredible property to commemorate this important milestone! Not only does this parcel add to the growing conservation network in the highly productive Creston area, but it also allows Charles and Renate Jaquette to continue to own and farm their land, honoring the history and heritage of the Jaquette family.

The family legacy stretches back to 1907, when Charles Jaquette's grandfather first settled the land. Boasting some of the richest topsoil in the valley, the farm has supported a diverse range of crops and livestock over generations. The conservation easement ensures that the farm will remain intact, while limiting residential and commercial development into the future.

Continuing to farm land in the Flathead Valley requires commitment and persistence, while other options may offer quick financial gains. High development pressure drives up land prices and threatens prized places such as the Creston area, which harbors prime agricultural soils so valuable to





our region. Solutions such as purchasing a conservation easement through funding from the Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program, through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), can allow families to continue farming. Landowners may subsequently pass their land on to future generations or sell it to another generation of farmers while retaining cash for retirement, paying down a mortgage or a myriad of other options. The Jaquettes chose a unique approach, using proceeds from the purchased conservation easement, made possible through funding from the NRCS ALE program, to do a "1031 exchange". Through this approach, they bought 425 acres of agricultural land in the Palouse region of Idaho that was slated to be split up if sold to a different buyer, and kept it in farming.

Other families in the Creston area have also recently chosen a conservation outcome for their farms. The Mast and de Yong families have honored their agricultural heritages and futures by placing a collective 1,050 acres under perpetual conservation easements with Montana Land Reliance (MLR) in the past few months, also made possible through funding from the NRCS ALE program. As scenic vistas and open space become more valuable to the public, the foresight of landowners working to protect this suite of lands gains added significance.

While easements like this greatly benefit the people of Montana, wildlife habitat also gains vital protection from this interwoven landscape of protected properties. The Jaquette easement cradles a mile of Egan Slough, adding to a mosaic of waterways and adjacent lands along of 50 miles of the Flathead River and north shore of Flathead Lake. Collectively, over 14,000 acres are conserved within this swath. Situated amid a vital migratory bird flyway, the property serves as critical stopover habitat for a multitude of avian species to feed and refuel on their long migrations. Bald eagle nest on the island on Egan Slough and over 150 bird species utilize the area, including 24 species of concern. Grizzly bear and other wildlife travel this important corridor, which is so crucial to their survival.

We are grateful to the Jaquette family as well as to all the other landowners, agencies, partners and supporters, whose forward thinking has allowed the Creston region to remain an agricultural and ecological refuge!

**FLATHEAD LAND TRUST'S
Land Protection Snapshot:**

			
76 Conservation Easements	14,845 Easement acres protected	20 Partner Projects	19,285 Total Acres Protected



MANY THANKS TO OUR 2023 DONORS & SUPPORTERS

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\$100,000 PLUS

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- Community Grant Program

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2023 ANNUAL REPORT and FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Your support makes our community-based conservation work possible. Here are highlights from 2023.

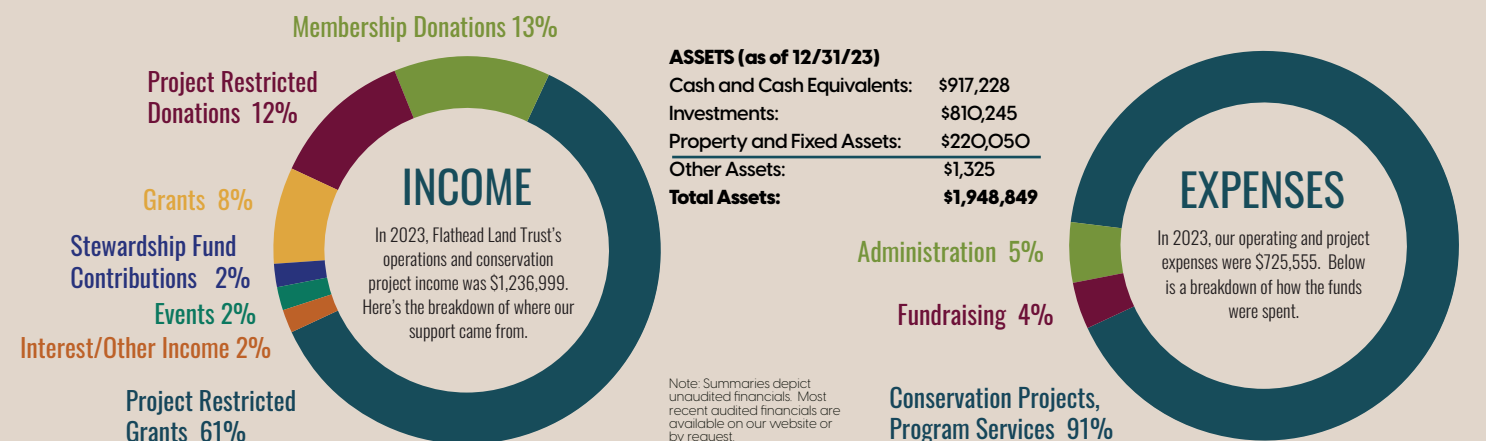
➔ In January, Pat Nissen and his son Jake partnered with us to permanently conserve their 24-acre property near the Stillwater River northwest of Whitefish. The property is adjacent to and compliments another 27-acre property already conserved with a Flathead Land Trust easement. This block of protected open space serves as a wildlife movement corridor for bears and other animals between the Whitefish Range and the Stillwater River.

➔ In May, Ed Goldberg conserved his 40-acre property along the Swan River near Bigfork with Flathead Land Trust. The protected parcel contains a mosaic of riparian forest and wetlands supporting a myriad of birds and wildlife. The property's natural, largely intact riparian forest provides quality wildlife habitat for grizzly bear, black bear, mountain lion, coyote, fox and deer that visit the area, along with at least 114 species of birds.

➔ On September 22, Flathead Land Trust, in partnership with the Trust for Public Land and Montana Land Reliance, opened the Harrell Forest Community Trails to the public. The 238-acre recreational oasis near Bigfork, which is owned and managed by Flathead Land Trust, was permanently protected through a conservation easement in 2022. Since its opening last fall, community members have enjoyed access to over 6 miles of new hiking and biking trails, a new trailhead and awe-inspiring vistas overlooking the pristine waters of Flathead Lake and the majestic Swan Mountain Range. For more info and a trail map, visit our website at flatheadlandtrust.org.

➔ We continued working with partners Flathead Audubon, Flathead Lakers and MT DNRC towards the permanent conservation of the 405-acre Owen Sowerwine property east of Kalispell. In November, we reached our fundraising goal and received approval of the conservation easement from the MT Land Board, which finally led to the completion of the project in February of 2024.

FLATHEAD LAND TRUST'S FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN FOR 2023:





FLATHEAD LAND TRUST

Conserving Our Legacy of Land and Water

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Upcoming Events



Harrell Forest Guided Wildflower Walk - Thursday, May 9

Join Flathead Land Trust's Jen Guse on a guided wildflower walk through the beautiful new Harrell Forest Trails in Bigfork (1017 Bigfork Stage Road) on Thursday, May 9th, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Discover the diverse wildflowers blooming in the forest, learn about the history and development of the Harrell Forest Trail system and experience the scenic views and tranquility of the forest. This will be a slow-paced walk, allowing plenty of time to admire the wildflowers and ask questions. Space is limited, so please register in advance by contacting info@flatheadlandtrust.org.



Harrell Forest Guided Geology Tour - Tuesday, June 18

Join Flathead Land Trust's Executive Director, Paul Travis, for a Guided Geology Tour of the Harrell Forest Trails in Bigfork on Tuesday, June 18th from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Learn about the ancient bedrock of the Harrell Forest, formed over a billion years ago, discover the impact of glaciers that sculpted the landscape during quaternary ice ages, see evidence of glacial till and glacial erratics deposited by retreating glaciers, enjoy breathtaking views of the Swan Mountains and Flathead Lake and learn about the history and development of the Harrell Forest Trail System. Space is limited, so please register in advance by contacting info@flatheadlandtrust.org.



Owen Sowerwine Celebration - Wednesday, July 10

Together with our partners, Flathead Audubon, Flathead Lakers and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, we will celebrate the newly conserved 405-acre ecological oasis just east of Kalispell. Stay tuned for details! (Photo of braided section of Flathead River containing Owen Sowerwine courtesy of GravityShots.com.)

For more upcoming events, please make sure you are on our eNews mailing list and check the website for new events. To sign up for e-News, email us at: info@flatheadlandtrust.org.