

MONTANA

Landmarks



WHERE WE WORK

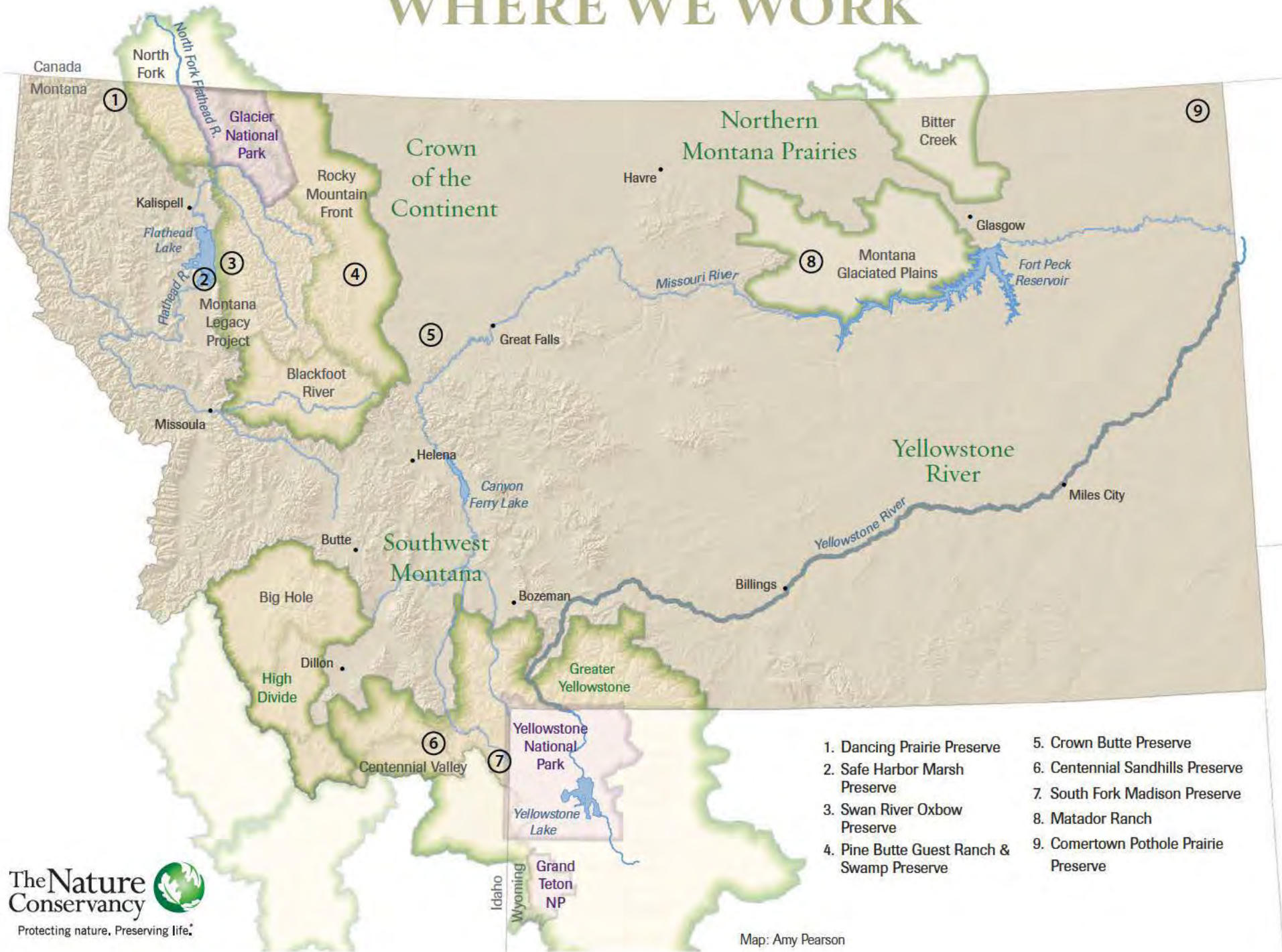


- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Dancing Prairie Preserve | 5. Crown Butte Preserve |
| 2. Safe Harbor Marsh Preserve | 6. Centennial Sandhills Preserve |
| 3. Swan River Oxbow Preserve | 7. South Fork Madison Preserve |
| 4. Pine Butte Guest Ranch & Swamp Preserve | 8. Matador Ranch |
| | 9. Comertown Pothole Prairie Preserve |

The Nature Conservancy
 Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

Map: Amy Pearson

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Map: Amy Pearson

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Blue eyes ©Scott Randall



Letter from the State Director



Richard Jeo © Bebe Crouse

It's easy to forget the change of seasons in places like the Great Bear Rainforest in Canada where I spent the better part of the last decade. It's a place where the rain and the dark are interrupted by a brief, fleeting few months of summer, which is quickly forgotten. Or Southern California where I went to graduate school, where the Mediterranean springtime seems to last all year long.

Here in Montana, where we just moved, the changes are a bit more dramatic. We're wearing shorts one day but then the next, the dog is thirsty because his outside water bowl is frozen solid. Then six inches of snow overnight sparks an early morning search for winter clothes, mittens, and boots from as yet unpacked boxes, for my daughter's walk to school.

Maybe this is part of why Montanans feel we're more linked to nature than the rest of the country. It's impossible not to be at some level. That may even explain why some polling we recently conducted shows 72% of Montanans say that a strong economy and a healthy environment are not in conflict.

Even so, it's a challenging time for the conservation movement in Montana and around the world. Federal programs that fund conservation are being rolled back or eliminated on a scale not seen before. This means that things Montanans care about – access to wild places, clean water for drinking and trout streams, well-managed public lands and parks – face unprecedented threats. It makes our special places, and our work to protect them, all the more important.

It's been a busy and productive year for our team, and we're pleased to provide this summary of some of our work to save these special places around Montana. We are working hard to keep Montana great – for bears and birds and for our families and communities.

SOUTHWEST MONTANA

Our Southwest Montana program's expansion got off to a brilliant start with the completion of a 2,013-acre conservation easement on the spectacular Steel Creek Ranch in the Big Hole Valley. The land sustains a great diversity of wildlife, from such iconic animals as wolves, moose, and elk, to Greater Sage-grouse and pygmy rabbits. Conservation of the ranch also protects a last, narrow migration route – less than a half-mile wide – for pronghorn that must move between summer and winter ranges. Encroaching development in the area had threatened to pinch off this vital lifeline.

Steel Creek Ranch ©Turner & Fitch



©Nathan Korb



©Bebe Crouse



©Jeremy Bailey



©Bebe Crouse

(top left) LEAF interns thinning forest. (top right) NPR's Christopher Joyce interviews TNC's Nathan Korb and Jim Berkey. (bottom left) Nathan Korb torches a test fire in advance of a controlled burn.

Focus on the Centennial

Restoration and stewardship continue to be on the agenda big time in the Centennial. The flow of volunteers willing to help thin forests, rip out bad barbed wire fences, plant willow plugs, and pull stones from icy water to monitor stream processes is impressive by any standard. Our work also captured some national media attention. Plans for a controlled burn on our Patchtop Ranch brought NPR Science Correspondent Chris Joyce to the valley. The burn had to be postponed because of weather conditions, but Joyce was so impressed by our staff and their work that he filed a three-part series on conservation in the Centennial that aired nationally this summer. A PBS film crew also spent a couple of weeks in the valley filming for a documentary series slated to air nationally in 2015.

Wigeon Pond, Centennial Valley ©Jim Berkey



Cabin Creek in the Big Sheep area of the High Divide ©Jim Berkey

On to the High Divide

These days, our vision is bigger than just the Centennial or Big Hole Valleys. Our goal is to advance real conservation across the broader region known as the High Divide. This broad mix of remote wild lands and working ranches is home to a remarkable diversity of native plant and animal life. It's also a vital wildlife connection between the Crown of the Continent, the Idaho wilderness, and the Greater Yellowstone. The long-term viability of wildlife in all three areas depends upon these connections. It's especially important that new generations of wildlife have the ability to disperse into areas where they have more genetic exchange and avoid inbreeding.

The area also encompasses extensive, intact sagebrush and wetlands. These high mountains and valleys drain into hundreds of streams that give rise to the mighty Missouri River.

Our Southwest Montana program's expansion got off to a brilliant start...

FORGING NEW PATHS: ON THE ROAD WITH JIM BERKEY

As with all the places we work, our decisions are first based on what the science tells us and where we see the best opportunity to achieve the greatest conservation success. Yet, ultimately, that success depends upon the partnerships that we forge with local communities, landowners, public agencies, and other organizations invested in each place. Building those relationships takes time, good tires, and gallons of coffee.

Southwest Montana Program Director Jim Berkey lost track of the number of meetings he had this summer, but it easily numbered in the hundreds. Sometimes it was more of an extended game of telephone... one person who knew the cousin of a landowner who might be worth approaching to hear their views on conservation. There were plenty of bumpy drives up washboard two-track roads just to introduce yourself, not even broaching the concept of conservation.

“It’s a bit disheartening to drive 300 miles, 60 of them on dirt roads, to meet with someone, only to find no one home, ‘cause something unexpected came up,” says Berkey.

But sometimes, great things happen simply by chance.

“Some of the most valuable meetings happen spontaneously... at the gas station, or along the road while offering to help a landowner get a bull back in a pasture.”

In his pursuit of relationships, Jim has helped folks brand cattle, buck hay, move cows, fix flats, and spray weeds.

“You just have to keep showing up and demonstrating that you both mean well and hold some common interests. The people who do know TNC think highly of us, and this can go a long way when you are in a group of both friends and strangers.”



Jim Berkey and rancher Yvonne Martinell take a meeting Montana style ©Bebe Crouse

GIVE US A PIECE OF YOUR MIND!

We know that, as members, you receive regular messages from us, but we don't have a great way to get *your thoughts* on what we do.

You're always welcome to call, write, or email the chapter.

But, we are hoping to make it a little easier for you to tell us how we're doing.

PLEASE FILL OUT THE MEMBER SURVEY THAT ACCOMPANIES THIS REPORT.

We've included an envelope with our address.



Killdeer protecting the nest ©Kenton Rowe

Where Are Montana's

MOOSE?

Bull moose on the Conservancy's
Pine Butte Swamp Preserve
©Dave Hanna

Moose are big, graceful animals that are always a thrill to see in the wild. But they're also becoming increasingly rare, and scientists aren't completely sure why. The quest for answers brought Nick DeCesare, a biologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to the Conservancy's Pine Butte Swamp Preserve.

"People are really concerned about the decline in our moose population," says DeCesare, "the problem is that we don't have enough data to figure out the cause and what, if anything, we can do about it."

Locals have reported seeing a lot more moose than ever before around Pine Butte – not a surprise given the ideal moose habitat on the preserve. So, it has been included among three locations where FWP has begun a ten-year study of the animals. The other two are the willow flats in the Big Hole Valley and forested areas of the Cabinet Mountains.

The goal is to collar animals in these representative landscapes and track their movements and condition over the course of the study.

While only in the first year of the study, DeCesare said he did encounter one surprise. "The animals on Pine Butte were really covered with ticks, with much less body fat than we would want to see during the winter."

These winter tick infestations are theorized to be one of the causes for moose decline. Another is changing climate.

Moose came relatively recently to North America (10,000-15,000 years ago). These winter ticks hadn't been a problem in their original Eurasian habitat. Unlike deer, which have coexisted with the ticks for many millennia, the moose don't seem to have yet evolved the grooming behaviors that keep the parasites under control. A single moose can have

as many as 50,000 ticks on its body. They not only weaken the animals by drawing blood, but moose start rubbing against trees when the infestation gets really big, scraping away huge patches of their hides. Without their coats, they burn up more fat stores to keep warm.

Climate comes into the picture as well. Typically, the female ticks engorge themselves in the winter and then fall off in the early spring to lay eggs. If the eggs are laid in snow, a lot fewer will be viable. But, as climate change leads to earlier spring snow melt, more of those eggs will produce young. Warmer temperatures, themselves, are also a stress factor. Moose are cold-weather creatures. They can suffer heat stress when temperatures climb above 23°F in winter and 57°F in summer.

So far, DeCesare's team has placed radio-telemetry collars on 34 female moose and hope to increase that number this winter. They're also studying the impact of hunting and growing wolf and grizzly populations on moose. As with all wildlife, understanding their movement, behavior, and threats are key to our goal of ensuring the right habitat in the right places to improve the odds that they will thrive and continue to thrill us for generations to come.



Nick DeCesare installs a collar on a female moose
© Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

CROWN OF THE CONTINENT



View on the Murray-Douglas easement ©Kenton Rowe

BLACKFOOT COMMUNITY PROJECT: *Murray-Douglas Easement*

Conservation of the Murray-Douglas project is a victory for wildlife and family ranching. It's also a study in the kind of partnership and perseverance that epitomizes The Nature Conservancy in Montana. The nearly 11,000-acre conservation easement prevents subdivision of a mosaic of healthy forest and grassland that sustains bears, elk, and two important tributaries of the Blackfoot River. It also allows the Manley and Coughlin families to continue a ranching tradition that, for the Coughlins, goes back 150 years. Fortunately, it didn't take quite that long to pull together this project – but it was nearly a decade in the making.

History

The Conservancy's roots in this valley go back to 1976, when we placed the state's very first conservation easement on 1,800 acres alongside the Blackfoot River. Over the years, development pressure and our partnership with the Blackfoot Challenge led us to the purchase of more than 100,000 acres of former industrial timber land slated to go on the open real estate market. Land within this Murray-Douglas easement is part of one of those purchases, known as the Blackfoot Community Project. While the Conservancy took the financial risk in buying the land, decisions about its future are up to the community, guided by the Blackfoot Challenge. So far, most of the land has been transferred to surrounding public and private landowners.

Partnership is Key

With this project, public and private partnership was the key to success. Montana's Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks bought the easement on land owned by the Conservancy, the Coughlin's Blackfoot River Ranch, and the Manley Ranch. The families donated 30 percent of the value of the easement and were compensated for the remainder by the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program. Those funds then allowed them to purchase some of the Conservancy-owned land that is adjacent to their ranches. "That was a big help," says Jay Coughlin. "The mountain acres we acquired are important pasture for our cattle, and the conservation easement terms ensure that the way we operate today as good stewards of the land will continue into the future."

Conservancy Land Protection Specialist Chris Bryant says that's usually the case. "Conservation easements are a tool to help ranching families stay on the land and pass their way of life on to their children, while preserving the natural value of the land and water. The Conservancy is extremely pleased to have played a role with our good partners in making this opportunity available to these ranches."



The Manley family: Sheila, Tracy, John, and Cody ©Kenton Rowe

MONTANA LEGACY PROJECT

We continue to transfer land purchased in the landmark project to our public partners. Our sale of 2,189 acres to the U.S. Forest Service has helped connect some of Missoula's more popular local trails. The land at the lower end of Deer Creek Road and around the base of University Mountain has long been valued by Missoula-area hikers, bicyclists, runners, picnickers, and folks just looking for a scenic getaway close to town.

Legacy land also added 14,624 acres to the Swan River State Forest. The acres were sold to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, with a conservation easement in place with the state's Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks. The easement will permanently limit permanent development of the land while allowing it to remain a working forest.

Lupine in their glory ©Kenton Rowe



Grizzly bears ©Steven Gnam

ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT: *Yellow Bird Woman Sanctuary*

Under a brilliant blue sky, in the face of the notoriously buffeting winds of the Rocky Mountain Front, the Yellow Bird Woman Sanctuary was dedicated, this September, in honor of the late Eloise Cobell. Cobell, whose Blackfeet name is Yellow Bird Woman, became a heroine for native people by waging a 15-year legal battle over the federal government's management of billions of dollars in Indian trust funds. The funds came from payments for mining and



Montana trustees, staff, and Blackfeet partners hike on the sanctuary
©Bebe Crouse

oil extraction, grazing, logging, and other uses of tribal land dating back to the late 1800s. After repeated trials and appeals, a settlement was reached, in 2009, for \$3.4 billion dollars.

Before that massive legal fight consumed her energy, Cobell was a founding member of the Blackfeet Indian Land Trust (BILT), the first Native American land trust in the nation. The trust is a collaborative, private effort between Blackfeet tribal members and The Nature Conservancy. Purchase of the biologically rich sanctuary was the first project between BILT and the Conservancy.

The ceremony was conducted by Marvin Weatherwax, Sr., a Vietnam-era POW and highly respected member of the Blackfeet nation. After blessing the land in the four directions, he prayed that, "All those who walk on this ground feel its warmth." He called on everyone to continue the dream that Elouise held for this land and the Blackfeet people.

Cobell's son, Turk, has picked up the work of the trust, which his mother had hoped to reinvigorate before her untimely death in 2011. The Nature Conservancy also is renewing its commitment. In the coming year, we expect to bring on a new staffer to work with the trust on the Blackfeet Reservation.



Eloise Cobell ©Ted Wood



Marvin Weatherwax, Jr. ©Dave Hanna



Marvin Weatherwax, Sr, Terry Tatsey, and Turk Cobell ©Dave Hanna



Preparing to burn an offering during the honoring ceremony ©Bebe Crouse

Montana's NORTHERN PRAIRIES

Our Matador Grassbank and member ranchers have truly come into their own as a showcase for innovation and neighbor-to-neighbor conservation success. By now, many of you have probably seen the feature story about the grassbank in the Conservancy's national magazine, but interest in the project extends far beyond our own organization. A television crew from Dan Rather Reporting visited with some of our ranchers this spring and the project has drawn a stream of visitors interested in seeing what we're up to out on the windswept prairie.

This spring, the grassbank was the highlight of a workshop on sustainable beef practices that included numerous global food industry representatives, ranging from

giants such as Walmart, McDonald's, and Cargill to Panera Bread, the Natural Beef Cooperative, and the National Beef Checkoff. Participants hailed the grassbank as "one of the most eye-opening aspects of the workshop" and "an inspiring example of collaboration." Follow-up calls indicate that the idea has captured some serious attention.

The notoriety hasn't gone to our heads; there's too much boots-on-the-ground work to do. Staff and volunteers continued our campaign to remove and modify fences making them safer for wildlife, restore waterways on the ranch, and study and test the best grazing regimes to maintain and improve conditions for birds and other wildlife. It was also the first year the Matador

Branding day on the Northern Prairies ©Bebe Crouse



Big sky over the Barthelmess ranch ©Bebe Crouse

hosted a group of LEAF interns (Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future). They pitched in on the fence projects and spent some time mapping prairie dog towns. Our annual Matador Ranch Grassland Science Symposium drew its biggest crowd yet, with attendees travelling from across Montana, Alberta, and Saskatchewan.

In the spring, we completed a 7,004-acre conservation easement on the Hinsdale Livestock (Carroll) Ranch, which directly connects with the Bitter Creek Wilderness Study Area. We are also hoping to secure additional easement acres on the ranch. What's more, every private dollar we raised to purchase these easements was leveraged by an additional \$3.30 in public funds or discounts!

Pronghorn ©Jolynn Messerly



Fencing marked to make it more visible and, in turn, safer for wildlife ©Bebe Crouse



Land under easement on the Carroll ranch near Bitter Creek © Amy Pearson

Swift fox kits ©John Carlson





LEARNING THE ROPES - Branding day at the Barthelme ranch is a big event for friends and family and a chance for the next generation to learn the business ©Bebe Crouse



Northern Pygmy Owl ©Gail Moser

CONGRESS WATCH

NORTH FORK Montana Congressman Steve Daines has introduced legislation that would restrict new mineral development around the North Fork of the Flathead River. Daines' North Fork Watershed Protection Act of 2013 joins similar legislation introduced in the Senate by U.S. Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester. The Conservancy worked hard to protect the Canada side of the river from dangerous mining and energy development. If you want to see the U.S. extend this vital insurance on this side of the border, please contact your Congressional delegation and let them know how you feel.

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established by Congress in 1964 using, primarily, the royalties from offshore oil and gas development on federal property. Hundreds of thousands of acres have been conserved in Montana with LWCF support. Although \$900,000,000 is authorized annually for the fund, rarely is it fully appropriated. What's more, authority for the Fund is set to expire September 30, 2015. Montana Senators Max Baucus and John Tester have co-sponsored a bill that would authorize permanent and dedicated funding of the LWCF. Loss of the LWCF would be a big blow to conservation in Montana. If you support renewal and permanent funding for LWCF, please contact your Congressional delegation and urge them to make it happen.

UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

AT A PINE BUTTE WORKSHOP

We've all experienced the inertia that follows overindulging in a great meal. So, we can imagine the plight of a young Golden Eagle that had feasted a little beyond her capacity one fall day on Montana's Rocky Mountain Front. Unlike those disciplined among us who immediately head out to walk off the extra portion of mashed potatoes and gravy, this magnificent raptor was more like those who opt, instead, for a nap on the couch. Unfortunately, a sluggish eagle sitting in the middle of a field is a prime target for predators.

As luck would have it, this bird was spotted by a group headed back to the ranch from a Pine Butte Photography Workshop. Professional photographer Kenton Rowe and ranch manager Scott Randall are both trained in wildlife rescue. After observing the bird struggling to regain flight, they decided to take action.

Following the guidance of Lisa Rhodin at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks wildlife rehab center (Montana Wild), they captured the bird and swaddled her securely for a trip to the facility in Helena.

Once at the center, blood was drawn to check for any disease, parasites, lead poisoning, or causes of the bird's distress. It turned out to be a much simpler problem. When an eagle feeds too much, too quickly, it can develop a condition known as crop stasis – or “sour crop.” The crop is a muscular pouch near the birds' throats that allow them to temporarily store undigested food. When it really gorges on something, an eagle can become quite inactive as it slowly digests. But sometimes the food begins to ferment and become infected with bacteria. That's what had happened to this eagle. With a really bad case, the condition itself can be fatal. Rhodin says they see birds that are attacked by predators or hit by cars while in that sluggish state, because they don't get off the ground high enough. In this case, medication and rehydration was all that was needed to bring the eagle back.

On a blustery Friday afternoon, just a week after her rescue, the eagle was released near the Conservancy's Pine Butte Swamp Preserve and she didn't miss a beat in her transition from the confines of the plastic carrier into the brilliant blue skies over the Rocky Mountain Front.

– Thanks to Jodi Schellenger for helping report this story.

NOTE: We don't encourage people to pick up wildlife that appears to be orphaned or sick. The best action when you spot an animal in distress is to contact a local wildlife agency or rehabilitation center. They'll provide guidance and, when necessary, send a trained specialist to handle the situation.



Photos of the rescue ©Kenton Rowe and the release ©Jeff Van Tine

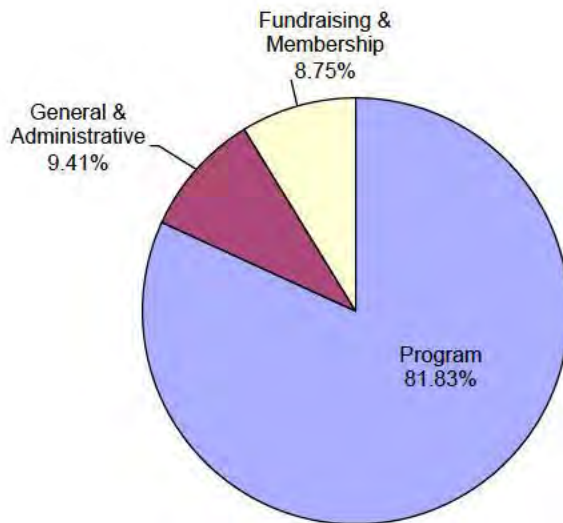


FINANCIAL SUMMARY

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2013

Acres in Permanent Conservation

	Added in FY 2013	Total
Conservation Easements	9,017	321,853
Conservation Buyer Properties	-	95,682
Cooperative Conservation Projects	21,232	521,970
Preserves	-	49,678
TOTAL	30,249	989,183



Programmatic Efficiency in FY 2013

SUPPORT & REVENUE		
	2013	2012
Dues and contributions	5,104,059	9,600,494
Government awards	1,426,579	1,029,643
Private Contracts	2,162	-
Investment income or (loss)	978,020	(126,019)
Other income	1,429,316	1,381,550
Gifts of Conservation Land & Easements	(93,060)	688,000
Land sale proceeds	10,885,385	17,308,681
Support (to)/from other TNC Units	(5,848,964)	(5,924,205)
Total Support & Revenue	\$13,883,497	\$23,270,144
EXPENSES & CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS		
Purchase of Conservation Land & Easements	1,529,500	3,489,800
Conservation programs	4,414,495	4,414,060
Total conservation program expenses & capital allocations	\$5,673,995	\$7,903,860
General & Administrative	652,738	728,410
Fundraising	606,757	709,690
Total Administration & Fundraising	\$1,259,495	\$1,438,100
Total Expenses & Capital Allocations	\$6,933,490	\$9,341,960
NET RESULT		
Support & Revenue over Expenses & Capital Allocations	\$6,950,007	\$13,928,184
ASSET, LIABILITY & NET ASSET SUMMARY		
Conservation land	87,108,503	104,917,774
Conservation easements	95,742,285	93,479,345
Investments held for land acquisitions	9,132,171	9,688,735
Endowment investments	11,642,588	11,279,124
Property & equipment (net of depreciation)	923,223	646,524
Current assets	979,592	989,763
Other assets	16,454	2,921
Total Assets	\$205,544,816	\$221,004,186
Total Liabilities	\$120,104,994	\$127,061,099
Total Net Assets	\$85,439,822	\$93,943,087

Note

The figures that appear in the Financial Summary are for informational purposes only. The complete audited FY 2013 financial statements for The Nature Conservancy can be seen at nature.org/aboutus/annualreport or can be ordered from The Nature Conservancy at (406) 443-0303.

Enjoying nature takes gear!

How much have you spent gearing up?



90' floating fly line -----	\$60
Starter fly rod -----	\$150
Polarized sunglasses -----	\$120
Field guide to birds -----	\$20
Mid-range binoculars -----	\$300
2-burner camp stove -----	\$70
Hiking boots -----	\$100
Full day lift ticket -----	\$100
Back country skis -----	\$500
Thermal cycling tights -----	\$100
Bike panniers -----	\$130



Self portrait ©Steven Gnam

Conserving nature also has a price.

How much will you spend on the *places* you love?

The experience of seeing a family of grizzlies ambling through a meadow or watching your child pull her first trout from a spring creek may be priceless ... but making those experiences possible is not. When you sign up for monthly giving to The Nature Conservancy in Montana, you help us conserve the land and water that make life good. No big dent in the budget since payments are spread over the year. No paper statements. Deductions and renewals are automatic. You can use the envelope in this report, or go online at nature.org/montana and select Ways of Giving.

Sign up for monthly giving today. You'll feel *much* better about buying that new fleece!

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to the many donors
who made gifts to our
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