DEAR FRIENDS,

I’d like to begin this letter with some good news. As you know, our search committee has been working for almost a year to find the right leader for The Nature Conservancy in Montana. After a highly competitive process with an incredibly talented applicant pool, I am thrilled to announce that Amy Croover has accepted the position as state director. Amy brings more than a decade of leadership in policy, government relations, and economic and resource strategy. She is a visionary leader with strong ties to Montana’s landscapes and people. Amy, who most recently worked at Business Oregon, the state’s economic development department, brings a strong understanding of what drives economies and what role TNC can play in supporting a healthy and resilient nature-based economy. You can learn more about Amy in a short interview on page 12.

As always, this was a busy and productive year for the chapter. It included the first prescribed burn on our Montana forest land, progress on an exciting partnership with the Blackfeet Nation and a sighting of the first beavers in a section of Long Creek that we restored. We also had a record turnout at our Matador Ranch Science Symposium, a forum that is really cementing TNC in Montana as a leader in grassland conservation research.

We are grateful to all of you for being indispensable members of this team. Without your support, none of our conservation success would be possible.

Thank you!

Dave Hanna, Crown of the Continent Program Director
Protecting Blackfeet Lands  Moisskittsiipa’piyiistukii (Heart Butte) Partnership Project

The forests, grasslands and waters of the northern Rockies have been home to the Blackfeet Nation for millennia. Their long tenure of stewardship strengthened these natural systems and enabled nature to thrive. Historically, U.S. policies limited Blackfeet ownership, access to and control over their homeland. We are working closely with the Blackfeet to increase their self-determination, well-being, and connection with the land. By increasing Blackfeet authority, the Nation can better manage land to meet community needs and cultural values.

Our first big step toward realizing that shared vision was TNC’s purchase of a 7,400-acre property within the Blackfeet Reservation. It’s an extraordinary piece of land, encompassing broad grasslands, lush wetlands and critical habitat that sustains both wildlife and people. More than 20 years ago, Blackfeet leader Elouise Cobell and the Blackfeet Indian Land Trust identified this parcel as land that is critical to the Nation. Through our partnership, the Blackfeet will guide the future use and stewardship of this land with TNC as the short term owner.

One vision for the land is the creation of a formal conservation area controlled, owned and managed by the Blackfeet Nation. The designation would originate from community values and contribute to strengthening Blackfeet control over the land. Ultimately, the property TNC purchased will be returned to the Nation to fit into this vision of Blackfeet stewardship and protection of traditional lands.
A Legacy for the Future

The Huntley and Hansen ranches in the High Divide Headwaters are extraordinary places. Each is a haven for a wealth of wildlife, including greater sage-grouse, pronghorns, wolves, wolverines, elk, moose and mule deer. Those great natural assets also make them the kind of properties highly sought after by second-home developers drawn to the world-class hunting and fishing opportunities nearby. That’s something neither family wanted to see. So, finalizing conservation easements with The Nature Conservancy just made sense.

By agreeing not to subdivide their Big Hole Valley ranch, the Huntleys are protecting a critical migration route for wildlife, including grizzlies, pronghorns and sage-grouse, as well as preserving habitat for dwindling populations of Arctic grayling. The 9,163-acre easement also provides resources to strengthen the family ranch and pass it on, intact, to the next generation.

The Hansen family has been on their ranch in the Medicine Lodge Valley for more than a century. Like the Huntleys, they chose their 13,535-acre easement not only to protect extraordinary wildlife habitat but, as Eric Hansen puts it, to make an investment in the future.

“I want my daughter to run the ranch some day, and her kids,” he explains. “Even if something happens and we can no longer do it, I want this to be a working ranch and stay the way it is.”

TNC is thankful for conservation-minded ranchers like the Huntleys and Hansens, who are helping us sustain a rural way of life and keep the High Divide Headwaters a whole and thriving place for wildlife—a working wilderness.

Partial funding for these easements was provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.
Restoring Balance

In early May, crews in hard hats and yellow Nomex shirts worked a fire on The Nature Conservancy’s Baldy Mountain Forest Reserve near Greenough. This time, the fire was no accident. The crews intentionally set it in order to prevent much more severe wildfires from occurring in the forest. This was the first prescribed fire on our land in the Blackfoot Valley and is part of TNC’s ongoing forest restoration work, which also includes ecologically based timber harvest and thinning.

Why Fire?
For thousands of years, fire was the major force shaping Montana forests. In the dry, low-elevation ponderosa pine forests, frequent, low-intensity fire regularly cleared out smaller, fire-susceptible trees. That reduced the amount of flammable material near the ground and enabled larger, more fire-tolerant trees to have the light and moisture they needed to thrive.

About a century ago, people started to see fire as the enemy and rushed to fight any and all blazes. Ironically, snuffing out these periodic burns put forests at greater risk for severe, large-scale fires. Today, many drier, low-elevation forests are much more crowded than they were historically, making it easier for insects and wildfire to spread from tree to tree. The dense growth can make fires very severe, killing large, old trees, as well as dangerous and costly to fight. Climate change is magnifying the problem. With hot dry conditions lasting longer each year, the cost of firefighting grows, along with the threat to water, lives and property.

This prescribed burn reduced the amount of hazardous fuels and helped protect nearby communities. Burns like this promote healthy, resilient forests dominated by large trees and improve the quality and amount of wildlife forage, such as bunchgrasses, shrubs and berries.

As conditions permit, we plan to use more prescribed fires to improve the health of our forest lands.

Trained fire crews from TNC, the Bureau of Land Management, University of Montana, Fish Wildlife & Parks Department and Department of Natural Resources and Conservation worked on this fire.

675
Acres thinned in 2019 using federal grants

52
People employed in our 2019 forest restoration work
We know the American West is arid country, but would it surprise you to know that less than 2 percent of the region is considered even moderately moist or “mesic?” These mesic areas, or wet meadows, are considered “green grocery stores” for both wildlife and livestock, and they are essential in storing and replenishing groundwater.

But many wet meadows have disappeared or are at risk of drying up. This loss is especially troubling in the face of our climate crisis, when wet areas are ever more critical.

The main difference between a wetland and a wet meadow is how long water sticks around and what type of vegetation grows. Wetlands are dominated by water for most of the growing season and support rushes, sedges and willows. A wet meadow may only see flowing water from snowmelt or high rainfall, but its connection with shallow groundwater supports grasses and small, non-woody plants that stay green longer into the summer. These moist environments are also rich with insects, a vital food source for young sage-grouse and songbirds.

Wet meadows’ demise began a century ago. Old two-track roads, cattle trails and wagon ruts captured and concentrated water and increased its erosive power, cutting deep channels or gullies through many wet meadows. When that happens, instead of spreading across the ground, soaking into the soil and replenishing groundwater, water is channeled off the land. Groundwater levels drop and the wet meadow is drained. The green groceries and abundant insects disappear as the meadow is swallowed by plants, such as sagebrush, from the surrounding dry hillsides.

Fortunately, there is a low-tech remedy for this problem: literally, sticks and stones. Led by The Nature Conservancy, the Southwest Montana Sagebrush Partnership is using these abundant natural materials, along with good old-fashioned muscle, to create small structures across deep gullies that slow down or spread out water, allowing it to soak into the soil. Since sagebrush don’t like wet feet, there is plenty of room for nourishing grasses and meadow plants to thrive. Keeping rain and snowmelt on the land longer also feeds groundwater, naturally storing that moisture for drier times. And as climate change brings more drought, holding every precious drop is essential.
They’re Back!

Beavers have been spotted in sections of Long Creek where they hadn’t been seen for decades. For years, TNC staff and volunteers have been planting willows along the Centennial Valley creek, which had been stripped away by year-round grazing over the past century. We’ve also been building beaver mimicry structures to help slow and hold water in the ground so it’s available in the dry summer season, when it’s needed most. This water storage used to occur naturally as a result of beaver dams, before the large rodents were trapped to near extinction.

Now, we’re seeing beavers expanding the structures we built with their own architecture. With the willows we planted providing the food and building materials they need to thrive, these natural engineers are taking over the task of storing water for people and nature.
A Leg Up for Young Ranchers

For Ted and Katie Brown, it’s a graduation day of sorts. They are marking a milestone with the purchase of their first piece of land. The Browns are the first members of the Matador Grassbank’s Beginning Ranchers Program to transition into land ownership. They joined the grassbank in 2015, thanks to a program initiated at the suggestion of TNC’s ranching partners. The title is a bit of a misnomer, though, since most of our “beginning” ranchers have been busy building herds since their teens, and Ted and Katie are no exception.

But buying cattle is a bit easier than building the collateral to purchase land. According to Katie, “Being young ranchers, it can be very difficult getting started, especially around our area where land prices are being forced up by large outside organizations.”

Both Ted and Katie are Phillips County natives and children of multi-generational ranching families. Katie says that their children have already been bitten by the bug: “Ranching is in their blood, it’s just who they are.” Although they are still young, the kids will be the fifth generation to continue the family tradition.

Ted is still active in his father’s operation, and both work the ranch with Katie’s father, who is a grassbank member. Ranching presents daily struggles, be it weather, market prices or high operating costs. Their grazing lease at the Matador has helped relieve some of those pressures, according to Katie. “Between working with my dad and having a reliable grass lease with TNC, we have both been able to grow our herd, and that has made it possible to buy land. We are really grateful to have an opportunity like this in our area.”

The Browns say that raising cows and taking care of the land are central to their lives. They learned at an early age what it means to care for animals, work hard, respect life, and feel the pride that comes from not only being able to feed yourself, but also the world. The Browns hope that by purchasing land they can keep this rewarding ranching tradition alive for their kids, so they will also grow up with a deep appreciation for the land and nature.
“Ranching is in their blood, it’s just who they are.”

Katie Brown
Meet
Amy Croover
Our New State Director

Our new state director, Amy Croover, joined the chapter in mid-October and has been busy meeting partners, donors and staff, and getting up to speed on all our projects. She took time to answer a few questions so you can get to know her better, as well.

Tell us a little about your background. Where did you grow up?
Hinjkaragin’ (I greet you). I grew up on the Kitsap Peninsula in Washington state and spent almost every weekend hiking in the Olympic Mountains.

What drew you to The Nature Conservancy in Montana?
It feels great to be back in Montana. I fell in love with Montana when I moved here to attend Salish Kootenai College on the Flathead Indian Reservation. I learned about the state’s landscapes from scientists and I learned traditional ecological knowledge from tribal elders. The land is one thing that unites Montanans. Whether they are newcomers, fifth-generation Montanans or have been part of the landscape since time immemorial, Montanans have a deep connection to place. It is my job to listen to those voices, and to understand how we can work together, as Montanans, so that people and nature all thrive under the Big Sky.

What experiences in your life connected you with nature?
As a member of the Winnebago Tribe from Nebraska, I grew up with a deep connection to place. I relate to the natural world through the lens of my cultural identity. Deep in my bones, I know the responsibility I have, that we all have, to the landscapes that give us life. The traditional name for my tribe is Hochunk, which translates into English as a “People with a Big Voice.” My role at TNC will be to ensure that nature and people have a big voice in the conservation opportunities and challenges we have ahead of us.

After college, I went to work for U.S. Senator Jon Tester. In that role, I developed a sense of how to navigate the geopolitical landscape. It takes deep listening with the intent to seek understanding. We all want a brighter future, and the path to get there is shaped by us working together.

During my time in Oregon, I helped lead Business Oregon, the state’s economic development agency. I understand the driving factors in large-scale and regional economies and what this means for the role TNC will play to support a healthy and resilient nature-based economy.

What aspect of TNC’s work particularly drew your attention?
I have watched with enthusiasm how TNC’s work on the Crown of the Continent has grown to include the Blackfeet Reservation. I have spent a lot of time exploring the Rocky Mountain Front and, thanks to strong leadership and vision, TNC is creating key connectivity throughout the region. I am humbled and honored to join this team of dedicated conservationists.

I look forward to meeting all of our valued partners and stakeholders and getting to know and understand your perspective and priorities.
Donor Profile
Mel and Max Baucus

Mel and Max Baucus have deep connections with the land. Max grew up on a fourth generation ranch near Helena, while Mel’s family descended from homesteading farmers in Iowa. Those family histories fostered their early connections to nature. “I love the solitude and beauty of the outdoors,” says Max. “It’s part of my DNA.”

A former U.S. Senator from Montana, Max was instrumental in passing legislation that ensures Montana’s lands and waters remain for his children and grandchildren to enjoy. Since 2017, Mel has served as a trustee for The Nature Conservancy in Montana, giving her time and energy to advance our conservation vision. “The work is exciting and creative, and I want to be part of it,” she says.

The couple also donate to TNC projects across the state, citing our science and focus on community as reasons why. “We want to give back,” says Mel, “and we want to do so in a way that leaves the world better than we found it.”
FINANCIAL RESULTS

(July 1, 2018–June 30, 2019)

WE CARRY OUT OUR WORK WITH A DEEP COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY.

MONTANA ACRES IN PERMANENT CONSERVATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>FY 19 Transfers In</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservation Easements</td>
<td>46,259</td>
<td>426,471</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservation Buyer Properties</td>
<td>11,713</td>
<td>163,392</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperative Conservation Projects</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>598,081</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preserves</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>49,698</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL ACRES</strong></td>
<td><strong>58,762</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,237,642</strong></td>
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THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN MONTANA STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>At June 30, 2019</th>
<th>At June 30, 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash and Investments</td>
<td>$34,482,592</td>
<td>$36,862,729</td>
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<tr>
<td>Endowment Investment</td>
<td>$14,886,232</td>
<td>$14,595,704</td>
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<td>Conservation Lands</td>
<td>$12,073,310</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservation Easements</td>
<td>$138,905,855</td>
<td>$113,357,055</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservation Preserves</td>
<td>$15,477,185</td>
<td>$13,025,393</td>
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<tr>
<td>Property &amp; Equipment- Net of Depreciation</td>
<td>$744,930</td>
<td>$815,076</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Assets</td>
<td>$2,116,776</td>
<td>$2,578,148</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Assets</strong></td>
<td><strong>$218,686,878</strong></td>
<td><strong>$191,295,376</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Liabilities                          | $7,826,647          | $6,228,300       |

Net Assets                           | $210,860,231        | $185,067,077     |

**Net Assets**                       | **$218,686,878**    | **$191,295,376** |

These financial results are unaudited, program specific and rounded to the nearest dollar. Please check nature.org for TNC-wide audited financials that are GAAP compliant.
The Legacy Club is a group of special supporters who have made a life-income gift with The Nature Conservancy or named us as a beneficiary in their estate plans. Members receive exclusive benefits such as a semiannual newsletter, TNC’s annual report and invitations to trips and events. But the real benefit is knowing you’ve helped keep Montana a place where people and nature thrive.

We thank all our Legacy Club members for your gifts to future generations.

For more information:

Alison James
ajames@tnc.org
(406) 532-4473

nature.org/legacy

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For more information:

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(406) 532-4473

nature.org/legacy

The Nature Conservancy cannot render tax or legal advice. Please consult your financial advisor before making a gift.

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The John Roe Conservation Leadership Endowment
John Dale
Henry and Cindy Poett
Sandra Roe
Gil Crain Memorial Fund
Chad Farrington

For information about these endowments, please contact:

Teri Wright
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(406) 443-6728
Your generosity makes our work possible. Please consider a donation to Montana and provide much-needed support to our science and conservation efforts—from wildlife studies to plants for streamside restoration.

CONTACT:
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