MEET ALLISON HURCOMB
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Born in Colorado and raised by parents who were geologists, Allison developed an environmental ethic early in her childhood. Summers at camp helped shaped who she is today. “I spent 13 years at the same camp, four of those as a counselor,” she says. “That time outdoors generated an interest in nature that eventually influenced my education.”

Hurcomb holds a degree in Environmental Studies, with a minor in Geology, from Fort Lewis College and is certified in GIS mapping. Last year, she completed a women-focused fire training course in New Mexico and finds herself particularly drawn to this work. “I’m excited that I might be part of efforts to restore fire to its natural role in maintaining forest health here in Montana.”

Once Hurcomb’s internship is complete, she plans to continue down a conservation career path. “Maybe I can become part of a burn crew and apply what I learned with TNC to other landscapes.”

TNC is grateful to Allison and other AmeriCorps team members who are making a measurable difference in local conservation efforts while developing their own professional experience. “This wonderful program has really boosted our ability to manage public uses and land, says TNC’s Western MT Land Steward, Steve Kloetzel.

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We plan to conduct more burns on our land, creating conditions for healthier forests and lessening the severity of future wildfires.

FRONT PAGE Clearwater-Blackfoot Project land © Kenton Rowe; Allison Hurcomb© Peyton Weigel; Prescribed burn © Bebe Crouse PAGES 2-3 Montana Forests © Kenton Rowe; 2020 Montana Forest Projects Map © TNC THIS PAGE: Hikers © Bebe Crouse; Revive and Thrive © Seeley-Swan Pathfinder

The Nature Conservancy in Montana
32 S. Ewing, Suite 215 | Helena, MT 59601
406-443-0303 | nature.org/montana

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Montana Forests News
Spring 2020

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MONTANA FOREST LAND RESTORATION

A Bold Vision for Montana Forests

No one enjoys seeing a “No Trespassing” sign cutting off access to their favorite hiking or fishing spot. In the fall of 2019, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have ensured that won’t happen on nearly 24,000 acres of former Plum Creek Timber land. Transferring that land to public ownership also preserves access to hundreds of thousands of additional acres of public land in the Blackfoot Valley.

That was one big reason that TNC took a bold leap of faith when we began buying land from Plum Creek in 1997. In the ensuing years, we took ownership of more half a million acres. But we never planned to hold onto it forever.

Our vision was always to see this land conserved for public use – for recreation, habitat and its economic benefit to local communities. It’s a vision forged in collaboration with the many citizens and community groups who have lent their ideas and energy to crafting plans for a future that enables both people and nature to thrive here.

Erasing the Checkerboard

This land was part of the so-called “checkerboard” – millions of acres that had been carved into alternating 1-mile-square parcels and divided between the railroads and the public during the settlement of the West. Over time, the land had various owners and was logged heavily in the decades prior to TNC’s purchase. But that intermingled public-private ownership remained, making it difficult to manage effectively.

Over the years, TNC has moved the lion’s share of the land to the public domain. As often as possible, we rehabilitated poorly located roads, treated noxious weeds and restored forests coming back after their industrial past, passing on the land in better shape than we’d received it.

Today, TNC remains the caretaker of about 125,000 acres of the old Plum Creek forests. We’re continuing to place land in the hands of the public and collaborate on its restoration, with more sales planned this year.

2020ontana Forest Projects

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PROJECTS

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Partnership Builds Community Trail

In August 2019, TNC partnered with local groups in the Seeley Lake area to build the 2-mile lakeview trail on TNC property above the north shore of Placid Lake. A unique collaboration of local organizations working with TNC secured funding and built the trail.

Seeley Lake Regional Center for Kinetic Sports (ROCKS) developed the project proposal in conjunction with the Western Conservation Project and submitted a successful grant application to the Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks Recreational Trails Program. ROCKS contracted with MTB Missoula to design and construct the Trail, which was built by the locally owned Phat Trak Trail Company.

TNC’s 2019 Revive and Thrive kicked off the project by building an initial trail segment. ROCKS and the Placid Lake Cabin Owners Association donated over 800 hours of volunteer labor toward the project.

“This amazing trail and community asset would not have been built without the support and collaboration between TNC and the local organizations,” said ROCKS project manager Alan Davis. “It’s a real testament to TNC’s commitment to public access and providing local outdoor recreation opportunities.”

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