



Welcome to the Flathead River to Lake Newsletter.

A Quarterly Newsletter

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Conservation and Restoration



Green ribbons for our rivers

Flathead River Steward Program partners and volunteers planted over 1,500 trees on three properties along the Flathead River to restore riparian buffers this year. The plants are looking great, forming a nice new green ribbon of native trees and shrubs. These plants are not only appreciated by the numerous birds that flock to them for food and nesting, but they help keep the water clean and soils and groundwater moist, and, partners hope, slow down river bank erosion. To read more about these efforts click on [Flathead Lake Monitor](#) (then go to page 4).

While partners discussed many of the challenges associated with establishing new buffers, from voles to beavers to deer, all trying to get a piece of this new green real estate heaven, participants during a fall Restoration Tour were impressed by how tall the new trees already were and couldn't help but jest "These are only one-year old trees? You have no problem!" *Special thanks to landowners, volunteers, Big Sky Watershed Corps members and program, funders, and partners for making this year's projects so successful!*



New permanent River Steward Program position established

The River Steward Program pilot project was so successful that MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks established a restoration position. Starting in January 2016, Franz

Ingelfinger, Restoration Ecologist, will be working with us to sustain and expand the program. We are thankful for having both Megan Stockfisch, our 3rd Big Sky Watershed Corps Member (2nd from right), and Aaron Clausen, our previous Corps Member (3rd from left), working with landowners and volunteers to plant riparian buffers this year.



Despite arriving during the worst snow storm of the winter last January, Megan, who is originally from the California desert, is staying in the Flathead to work for the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Aaron accepted a job in Great Falls with Pheasants Forever to continue helping landowners restore riparian buffers. River Steward Program partners wish them good luck with their future endeavors!

Interested in learning about the River Steward program, getting help for your stream, attending a tour, or volunteering? Contact Constanza von der Pahlen, Flathead Lakers, at 883-1341 or criticallands@flatheadlakers.org.

North Shore Wildlife Management Area Proposed Expansion

MT Fish Wildlife and Parks proposes to purchase 76.7 acres to add to its North Shore Wildlife Management Area, which already protects 349 acres of wetlands and farmland between Bigfork and Somers. These public lands help protect groundwater and Flathead Lake water quality, provide habitat for thousands of birds (over 200

species), increase recreational opportunities on the north shore, and maintain the beauty of this unique area. This project builds on past efforts to protect lands on Flathead Lake's north shore.



Photo by Karen Nichols

Funding for the land purchase comes from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act which places an excise tax on purchases of firearms and ammunitions.

Public comments on the draft

[environmental assessment](#) are being accepted through December 5. Or you can attend a presentation by FWP on Nov. 24 at 6:30 pm at the [Somers Middle School](#) (315 School Addition Rd.) to show your support. *For questions contact Kris Tempel at 406-751-4573 or ktempel@mt.gov.*

Proposal will protect 15,000 acres of Whitefish headwaters

Plum Creek Timber Company is working with The Trust for Public Lands and MT Fish Wildlife and Parks to protect 15,000 acres north of Whitefish Lake through a conservation easement and land purchase. This property provides clean water for the City of Whitefish, Whitefish Lake and River, and waters downstream. The project will provide and maintain a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, working forests in timber production, and treasured native fish and wildlife – including bull trout, cutthroat trout, elk, grizzly bear, wolves, and lynx. FWP is seeking Forest Legacy Program funding for the Whitefish Lake Conservation Project. To read more about it click on this article in the [Flathead Beacon](#).

Effort underway to reestablish the Land and Water Conservation Fund

Bipartisan efforts are underway in the Senate to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a major federal source of funding for the development of fishing access sites and state and local parks and for critical habitat conservation. The fund, which directed a small portion of money from off-shore oil-drilling royalties toward conserving land, water and recreational access, was allowed to expire by Congress in September. Senators Tester and Daines and Congressman Zinke are strong supporters. We appreciate their efforts. To learn more, visit the Land & Water Conservation Fund Coalition's website: www.lwcfcoalition.org.

Education & Outreach

Floating the river for conservation

Flathead River to Lake Initiative partners hosted a fun new event this fall to showcase the beautiful riparian lands that protect the Flathead River and some of our conservation projects. Five rafts floated from Pressentine Bar to Old Steel Bridge Fishing Access Site, getting a

magnificent view of 1,400 acres of conserved riverfront lands that help protect clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, productive farmlands, and scenic views. The Flathead Land Trust did a great job spearheading this new event with the help of R2L partners. Special thanks to the Montana Raft Company for their significant contribution.



Photo by Keith Hammer

Bike and Bird Tours a success

The birds really know how to show off. The Bike and Bird tours to view our valley's wetlands and the birds that flock around them were a great success again this year. Eighty people enjoyed the beautiful feathered visitors, from Sandhill Cranes to Swans and ducks of all feathers that key in our valley's wetlands – peppering these little water-jewels with their many colors and songs.

In the spring, we toured the 1,600-acre Smith Lake wetland complex bordering Ashley Creek. Following the Great Northern Historical Trail that borders the wetland on one side, bike and bird enthusiasts saw and heard over 46 species of birds with identification help from Audubon bird expert Craig Hohenberger. The fall tour participants were lucky to see over 100 Sandhill Cranes in the west valley wetlands and farmlands. Participants visited with local landowners who protect the wetland, while farming around it, and learned about the birds from Audubon volunteer Denny Olson. *To receive information about future tours, contact Laura Katzman, Flathead Land Trust Land, at lkatzman@bigsky.net or 406-752-8293.*



Photo by Owen Deutsch, VIREO

River to Lake website back up

The River to Lake Initiative [website](#) is back up after it was hacked this summer. Apologies for any issues you still encounter visiting the site, since a few issues still remain to be resolved, including our ability to post new information. Partners are seeking funding to bring the website up to date, which will also allow it to be viewed in multiple formats (iPads, smart phones, etc.). Check our [Facebook page](#) for news updates and send [Constanza](#) information you wish to post and share!

Events

Flathead River to Lake Initiative quarterly meeting. The next Flathead River to Lake Initiative meeting will be held Wednesday, December 16 from 9:00 am to noon at Lone Pine State Park near Kalispell, followed by a River Steward Program meeting. For more information, email or call Constanza at 883-1341 or criticallands@flatheadlakers.org.