



Photo by Gravity Shots

Welcome to the Flathead River to Lake Newsletter.

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue 26 | February 2016

In this issue

- Flathead Lake North Shore Wildlife Management Area grows
- 300 acres protected in the Smith and Mission valleys
- Flathead River Steward Program growing
- Look up in the skies for Trumpeter Swans
- Flathead Land Trust shares draft Conservation Plan
- Flathead Conservation District initiates watershed restoration planning project
- Conservation easement tax incentives now permanent
- Landowner stories
- Plant orders from DNRC Conservation Seedling Nursery due 2/29
- Events:
 - * Small Landowners' Weed Workshop
 - * Flathead River to Lake Initiative quarterly meeting
 - * Creston-East Valley wetland and birding tour
 - * Tuesday Toasts supports Flathead Land Trust
 - * Bureau of Mines & Geology presentation on Flathead Valley's deep aquifer
 - * Bike & Bird Tour -McWeneger Slough to Fairview Marsh
 - * Science on Tap

Conservation and Restoration

Flathead Lake North Shore Wildlife Management Area grows

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks purchased 77 acres along the north shore of Flathead Lake in February, bringing the North Shore Wildlife Management Area up to 426 acres.



This conservation project helps protect water quality in Flathead Lake expands conservation of habitat used by tens of thousands of migratory birds. FWP secured funding from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Grant program for the project in conjunction with a sale 25 percent below market value by the landowner.

"This project adds an additional puzzle piece of important conserved land to our beloved north shore of Flathead Lake that will greatly benefit waterfowl, wildlife, water quality, and public access. We are very pleased to have had a role in making this happen for the Flathead community," said Paul Travis, Flathead Land Trust executive director. Flathead Land Trust initiated and helped facilitate this conservation project.

300 acres protected in the Smith and Mission valleys

The Flathead Land Trust helped protect over 300 acres of land important for birds and other wildlife in the Smith and Mission valleys last December. The projects were funded by the North American Wetland Conservation Act grant, which R2L partners helped secure.

The two conservation projects will protect 180 acres of wetlands and one and a half miles of streams and associated wildlife habitat in perpetuity, and will conserve valuable farm land. The land donation around Smith Lake will soon be incorporated into the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area, managed by US Fish and Wildlife Service.



A conservation easement was placed on the Mission Valley property - one of two sites in northwest Montana where fire flies are present. A big thank you to the landowners and partners for protecting these special places in our watershed.

Flathead River Steward Program growing

We welcome two new River Steward team members this year, which will increase our capacity to restore riparian areas and wetlands in the Flathead watershed.

Franz Ingelfinger is the new Restoration Ecologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in Kalispell. He will be designing and implementing restoration projects throughout FWP Region 1. He will help expand on past successes in a leadership role with the Flathead River Steward Program. Franz has a Master of Science degree from the University of Wyoming and a long history working to manage and restore habitat for wildlife across Massachusetts, first as the Regional Ecologist for the Trustees of Reservations and recently as the Restoration Ecologist for the MA Department of Fish and Game Division of Ecological Restoration.



Franz brings a broad skill set and track record of successfully working with private landowners to help them realize their stewardship goals - from dam removal and tidal wetland restoration to invasive species and fire management. Franz is an outdoor enthusiast who enjoys nothing more than sharing his passion for ecology and the outdoors with family and friends. He and his family had been dreaming of moving back west. We welcome Franz and his family!

Jamie Dillon is the fourth Big Sky Watershed Corps member hosted by the Flathead Lakers to support the Flathead River Steward Program. He will help plan and implement riparian and wetland restoration projects, help recruit volunteers to plant, weed, and monitor projects, and provide education opportunities for landowners and others.



Jamie graduated from the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania with Bachelor of Science degree, majoring in Biology and minoring in Mathematics. He worked in Albany, NY and Vermont conducting land stewardship activities, including invasive species work and plant and bird surveys. He recruited and led volunteers in completing riparian restoration and stewardship projects. Jamie loves snowboarding, rock climbing, backpacking, camping, and simply being outside. Welcome, Jamie!

Franz and Jamie will be working together to continue and expand the Flathead River to Lake Initiative's River Steward Program Contact Jamie at 752-4242 ext. 109 or flatheadriversteward@gmail.com, to volunteer this spring and summer, join us on a tour, or just learn more about the program.

Look up in the skies for Trumpeter Swans

These majestic birds are coming back to northwest Montana and even nesting in Mission and Flathead Valley wetlands thanks to the persistent efforts of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The Tribes started reintroducing swans on the Flathead Reservation 20 years ago.

Despite their efforts, it wasn't until eight years later, in 2004, that a pair of swans first nested in the area. As of last year, 24 pairs successfully nested, giving birth to 72 healthy cygnets.



Early in the project, swans often met their demise by hitting overhead power lines. The Tribes and Mission Valley Power began hanging on lines reflectors near key wetland areas to make them more visible to flying swans. This helped and it appears that swans are now teaching their young how to avoid the powerlines, said Dale Becker, CSKT Wildlife Program Manager.

Swans raised in the Mission Valley are expanding throughout northwest Montana, including nesting in sloughs along the Flathead River. How many are actually nesting is still in question. If you see a nesting pair, inform Dale Becker— (406) 675-2700, ext. 7278 or daleb@cskt.org. And consider yourself lucky!

Flathead Land Trust shares draft Conservation Plan

Flathead Land Trust staff are in the final stages of completing a ten year Conservation Plan to guide its conservation efforts. The plan identifies areas with significant agricultural and shallow groundwater values, important areas for waterfowl protection, including wetlands and riparian areas along rivers, and community projects, such as trails as their primary focus for conservation. Now that comments on the plan have been received from the public and partners, the land trust will complete their plan.

Flathead Conservation District initiates watershed restoration planning

The Flathead Conservation District is initiating the process to develop a Watershed Restoration Plan based on the Flathead-Stillwater Total Maximum Daily Loads Study completed by Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The Conservation District is hosting Big Sky Watershed Corps member Sarah Bowman to initiate this endeavor. A kick-off stakeholder meeting will be held on Thursday, February 25, 1:00-3:00 pm at Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Kalispell. For more information contact the FCD at 406-752-4220.

Conservation easement tax incentives now permanent

If you ever considered donating a conservation easement on your land to protect its natural resource and cultural values in perpetuity, tax incentives can be an important incentive. In December Congress made these tax incentives permanent. It also raised the federal income tax deduction available to a donor for donating a conservation easement and increased the time over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to 16 years. These changes make conservation easement donations more feasible and attractive to many landowners. Check out news from the Flathead Land Trust to learn more at www.flatheadlandtrust.org/news-events/news.

Education & Outreach

Landowner stories

Two excellent videos produced by our land trust partners share the voices of landowners on why they placed a conservation easement on their land. You can view these stories, online: [Tom and Terry Siderius](#) by the Montana Land Reliance on one of the River to Lake Initiative's first projects and [Protecting Our Land and Water for the Next Generation](#) by the Flathead Land Trust, featuring several landowners.

Plant orders from DNRC Conservation Seedling Nursery due 2/29

Planning a planting project this spring? Expanding your riparian buffer? The Flathead Conservation District is now accepting seedling orders for native trees and shrubs. The deadline for orders is February 29. For more information call the Flathead Conservation District at 406-752-4220.

Events

March 3 & 9

Small Landowners' Weed Workshop

"Noxious weeds cannot be fought alone - it takes a village," said Grete Miller, Flathead County Weed Education and Compliance Officer. This workshop will help landowners identify noxious weeds and learn about various weed management techniques. The workshop will be held at the Flathead Valley Community College Arts and Technology Building, March 3 and 9 from 6:30 - 8:30 pm. For more information contact the Flathead Conservation District at 406-752-4220.

March 16

Flathead River to Lake Initiative quarterly meeting

The next Flathead River to Lake Initiative meeting will be held Wednesday, March 16, from 9:00 am to noon at MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks, in Kalispell. For more information, email or call Constanza at 883-1341 or criticallands@flatheadlakers.org.

March 20

Creston-East Valley wetland and birding tour

Join Craig Hohenberger, Flathead Audubon Society, to

learn about migrating birds and waterfowl visiting the wetlands near Creston on Sunday, March 20, from 10:30 a.m. until early afternoon. Contact Gael Bissell at 406-261-2255 or gbissell535@gmail.com to sign up. For more information about this and other field trips, visit the [FAS website](http://www.flatheadaudubon.org/activities-and-field-trips): www.flatheadaudubon.org/activities-and-field-trips.

March 22

Tuesday Toasts supports the Flathead Land Trust

Join the Flathead Land Trust on Tuesday, March 22, from 5-8 pm at Flathead Lake Brewing Co. in Bigfork to learn about their work. A portion of the proceeds from each pint sold goes to the land trust.

April 6

Bureau of Mines and Geology presentation on the Flathead Valley's deep aquifer

The Flathead River Commission is sponsoring *The Geology and groundwater of the Flathead Valley north of Flathead Lake* presentation by Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology hydrogeologists. They will report on a study to determine if current stresses are creating declining water levels in the deep aquifer, and) whether withdrawals from the deep aquifer affect surface water resources. The presentation will be at the Flathead Valley Community College Arts and Technology Lecture Room from 6:30 – 8:00 pm. It is free and open to the public. For more information contact Bob Storer, FRC Chair, at 406-257-0202.

May 14

Bike & Bird Tour – McWeneger Slough to Fairview Marsh

Join River to Lake Initiative partners on an 8-mile bike tour on Saturday, May 14, from 9 am to noon. Visit with landowner Pete Fisher, our host and guide, as we tour his property. Pete is a bird enthusiast, and he knew what he was doing when he bought this beautiful 412-acre property on McWeneger Slough. The land has a conservation easement, held by the Flathead Land Trust, which protects this bird haven. We will tour from the slough, along the Flathead River to Fairview Marsh to the west – another wetlands treasure in the valley, traveling along paved and gravel roads. A bicycle with fat tires, helmet, water, binoculars, and enthusiasm are required. For more information (including where to rent a bike) and to RSVP, contact Laura Katzman, Flathead Land Trust, at 752-8293 or lkatzman@bigsky.net.

First Tuesday of each Month

Science on Tap

The Flathead Lakers and Flathead Lake Biological Station sponsor an entertaining science program each month on the first Tuesday at the Flathead Lake Brewing Company in Bigfork. FLBC donates a portion of the proceeds from drinks sold to the sponsors. Check the [Science on Tap-Flathead](http://www.flatheadlakers.org) website for upcoming programs.