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Welcome to the Flathead River to Lake Newsletter.

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue 27 | May 2016

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Conservation and Restoration

Brenneman Slough property protected

Another property was recently added to the network of conserved lands along the Flathead River. River to Lake (R2L) Initiative partner Montana Land Reliance worked with Clifford and Shirley Brenneman to protect their 155-acre property, which includes 56 acres of wetlands and river channels associated with the Flathead River plus the Brennemens' working family farm.

The property, along with adjacent conserved lands, creates a large block of protected farmlands,



wetlands, and riparian forests. This conservation easement was purchased in part with a North American Wetlands Act (NAWCA) grant, which the R2L Initiative helped secure last year, and was matched by a significant donation in value from the Brennemens. A big thanks to the Brenneman family!

Darrow family protects farm and wetlands near Creston George Darrow's family recently placed a

conservation easement on their 200-acre farm near Bigfork in honor of their father. The property is between the Flathead and Swan Rivers, and is part of an important migration corridors for wildlife. George Darrow was a geologist, farmer, Montana legislator, business owner, and active community member. His legacy is profound and far-reaching in Montana. He authored the Montana Environmental Policy Act, which helps protect air and water quality, and volunteered for numerous community groups and activities. The Flathead Land Trust, which holds the easement, secured a Travelers for Open Land grant, to help cover project closing costs. [Click here](#) to read about it in the Daily Inter Lake.

New Big Sky Watershed Corps Member hits his stride Big Sky Watershed Corps Member James (Jamie) Dillon joined the Flathead River to Lake (R2L) Initiative's River Steward Program in January and he is off to a roaring start. He hit his stride this spring with a full schedule of riparian restoration projects. Jamie collaborated with Fish, Wildlife & Parks' new Restoration Ecologist Franz Ingelfinger to plan and conduct several riparian planting projects throughout the valley.

Jamie and a crew of volunteers planted 2,600 trees and shrubs and constructed almost a mile of deer fencing to help restore riparian buffers and promote aspen regeneration along the Flathead River and Ashley Creek.

R2L partners thank the participating landowners and our volunteers, including Flathead Valley Community College students and Montana Conservation Corp members, who helped make these projects possible. Check out this [video](#) clip to see our projects in action.

Jamie and Franz began experimenting with methods for augmenting understory diversity in established



cottonwood and aspen stands where a history of grazing and persistent deer browse have limited shrub cover and diversity. This spring, they are also experimenting with live-staking cottonwood poles – auguring 10-12 foot-long cottonwood poles deep into the ground so that their stems intersect the ground water. This approach has been used successfully throughout the Intermountain West. It may provide another way to restore and rejuvenate cottonwood forests along the dam-influenced section of the lower Flathead River.

These initiatives are part of continued efforts to expand riparian restoration and find effective ways to restore riparian buffers and the many functions and benefits they provide.

These projects received funding and technical assistance from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Montana Department of Environmental Quality 319 Grant Program. To learn more about restoration projects and volunteer opportunities, or to inquire about restoration on your property, contact Jamie Dillon at 752-4242 ext. 109, or flatheadriversteward@gmail.com. For more information on live-staking cottonwood poles, check out this [Technical Bulletin](#) and [Video](#).

Flathead Land Trust releases new Conservation Plan

The Flathead Land Trust recently completed a new conservation plan to guide the organization's future land conservation work in northwest Montana. The plan identifies lands with significant conservation, farming, and recreation values within four focus areas as priorities for future conservation efforts. The four focus areas outlined in the plan are: Flathead River to Lake Initiative, important farmland in Flathead Valley, important migratory bird habitat, and community projects that enhance public access and recreation. The new conservation plan can be viewed at www.flatheadlandtrust.org or by contacting the Flathead Land Trust at 752-8293 or info@flatheadlandtrust.org.

CSKT conservation accomplishments

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) have a strong conservation and restoration program in

the Flathead Watershed to protect native fish and wildlife of cultural significance for the Tribes. Last year, CSKT programs protected over 361 acres and 1.2 miles of stream in-perpetuity through land acquisitions, primarily in the Jocko River watershed, a tributary to the Lower Flathead River. These projects increase the Tribal lands managed for fish and wildlife to over 18,000 acres and help protect over 60 miles of stream, both on and off the Flathead Indian Reservation.

Flying from the Flathead Valley north of Flathead Lake to the pothole wetlands of the Flathead Indian Reservation, one gets a bird's eye view of the land. The lands and waters at both ends of the valley are connected by the birds that depend on healthy habitat during their migratory flights, stopping to feed in the north and to breed in the south. Trumpeter Swans, re-introduced 20 years ago on the Reservation, are now expanding their territory to nest in the Flathead River sloughs north of the lake. Conservation work at both ends of the valley is paying big dividends in sustaining clean water, healthy habitat, and iconic fish and wildlife, much to the delight of everyone who appreciates seeing swans on the wing or cygnets paddling in a pond.

Education & Outreach

Over 40 people participated in River to Lake Initiative McWenninger Slough-Fairview Marsh Bike & Bird Tour
Our bike and bird tour this spring quickly filled up with over 40 participants. Our tour visited two of the most magnificent wetlands in the Flathead: McWenninger Slough and Fairview Marsh.

Landowner Pete Fisher, our host and bird guide, shared stories about the teaming wildlife that use McWenninger Slough. His property, which includes 412 acres of this wetland slough, has a conservation easement on it held by the Flathead Land Trust.

R2L Initiative partners helped the land trust secure funding and complete this and two additional conservation projects, protecting over 1,000 acres near the Flathead River. This project was R2L Initiative's first significant accomplishment and became the model for working with landowners and securing funding for conservation of wetlands, floodplains, and associated farm lands.

Fairview Marsh, another wetlands treasure east of the Flathead River, is also a bird haven. With permission from the landowners, we biked along a dirt road to the edge of



open water, where Flathead Audubon bird expert Denny Olson described the mating and nesting ritual of red wing black birds that flood the marsh in spring. Special thanks to the landowners for graciously sharing their special places for our tour. R2L partner and Flathead Land Trust Land Protection Specialist Laura Katzman organized this fun and educational event, and Costco provided lunch.

“This is Why...” story features Ashley Creek restoration project

The Flathead Lakers April e-newsletter “This is Why...” story featured Richard Siderius, a landowner who is helping restore Ashley Creek. With help from Flathead Valley Community College volunteers, the R2L Initiative’s Flathead River Steward Program planted 275 trees and shrubs in April to create a native plant riparian buffer on the



Siderius property that will help reduce nutrients and keep water cool in the creek. Ashley Creek, a tributary of the Flathead River, is impaired due to nitrogen, phosphorus, and high temperatures. Native fish cannot thrive in warm water temperatures. Cooling the creek by planting trees that will provide shade will help restore the fishery. Plants also help reduce runoff from farm fields, which helps prevent nutrients and algae from reaching the creek. A big thanks to the Siderius family.

Volunteers needed to monitor plants and wildlife

Flathead Audubon is looking for volunteers to continue the 10-year monitoring program at the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area along the Stillwater and Flathead Rivers. Volunteers will collect data on bird, wildlife, and plants to help inform management and maintenance needs. Contact Linda Winnie at lindawin@centurytel.net or 755-1406 to sign up. More information and the Volunteer Form can be found here: [OSNA Volunteer Monitoring Program](#).

Flathead Audubon honor former R2L partners Dan & Susannah Casey

Flathead Audubon recently honored Dan and Susannah Casey for their numerous conservation accomplishments, including helping Flathead River to Lake Initiative partners quantify how conservation projects benefit birds and helping secure funding for projects. You can read the full press release on [Flathead Audubon’s website](#).



New link to River to Lake Initiative Facebook page

Spring planting and riparian restoration projects featured in our R2L Facebook page reached thousands of viewers! Visit our Facebook page for local news, events, and stories at www.facebook.com/FlatheadRivertoLake.

Please update your old link if you already “liked” the page. We welcome your suggestions and photographs.

Events

June 8

Flathead River to Lake Initiative quarterly meeting

The next R2L Initiative meeting will be held Wednesday, June 8, from 9:00 am to noon at Lone Pine State Parks west of Kalispell. For more information, contact Constanza at 883-1341 or criticallands@flatheadlakers.org

June 19

Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge field trip

Join U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service wildlife biologist Beverly Skinner on June 19 to tour this wildlife refuge west of Kalispell and its incredible wetlands and grasslands. You will drive and walk on often-closed roads to some of the best viewing sites. For more information or to sign up, contact Beverly at 858-2286 or Beverly_skinner@fws.gov.

July 14

North Shore Flathead Lake boat tour

Join Flathead River to Lake Initiative partners the evening of July 14 aboard the Far West tour boat to celebrate conservation success and learn about ongoing projects on the North Shore and the Flathead River. Tickets may be purchased for \$20 by contacting the Flathead Land Trust at 752-8293 or the Flathead Lakers at 883-1341.

July 27

Flathead Lakers annual meeting

Join the Flathead Lakers on July 27 at the Flathead Lake Biological Station at Yellow Bay to celebrate clean water, learn about the Lakers’ projects and issues, and learn about plans for the Flathead Lake Biological Station from new Director Dr. James Elser. For more information, contact Robin Steinkraus at 883-1346 or lakers@flatheadlakers.org.

August 20

Explore Owen Sowerwine Natural Area's big island

Join retired biology professor Jeanette Oliver on a leisurely walk at the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area on August 20 from 9 am to noon. Learn about the plants typical of floodplains and birds that visit the area. There is a limit of 20 participants on this tour. To learn more or sign up, contact Jeanette at jopjoliver74@gmail.com or 755-8622. For additional birding events visit [Flathead Audubon’s website](#).

September 17

Flathead Land Trust annual barn bash

Join the Flathead Land Trust on September 17 at 5:30 pm at the Diamond B. Ranch, a 190-acre conservation property along the Flathead River. The bash includes a local farm-to-table dinner and music. Call the Flathead Land Trust at 752-8293 for tickets and information or [click here](#) to purchase tickets.