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Welcome to the Flathead River to Lake Newsletter.

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue 32 | Winter 2017

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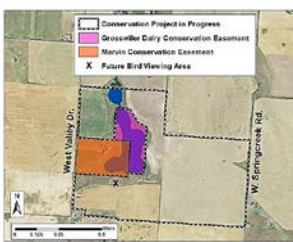
- * Christmas Bird Count in Bigfork and Kalispell
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Conservation and Restoration

Key stopover wetlands for Sandhill cranes protected



A secret discovered – pothole wetlands hidden northwest of Kalispell come alive at sunset in October as hundreds of sandhill cranes roost at a key feeding and resting site on their migration route. The Flathead Land Trust approached the landowners to discuss a way to protect the wetlands and surrounding farmland, the only known sandhill crane staging area in the north Flathead Valley. Although currently very common, they depend on these key stopover sites, which makes them vulnerable to habitat loss.



The Marvin and Grosswiler families have been enjoying the migration frenzy of hundreds of sandhill cranes and thousands of waterfowl and shore birds on their property for several generations. They are working with the land trust to protect 328 acres with conservation easements. This fall, the first 68 acres were protected, including most of a unique 45-acre pothole wetland. The Land Trust expects to complete the project in 2018. It will include a bird viewing area for the public and an educational site for school use. The Flathead Land Trust raised \$150,000 for the project from various organizations and individuals, which matches grant funding. MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks is working with the landowner to develop an easement for the public

viewing access area. Construction of the public viewing area may start next summer following public review and endorsement by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Columbia Falls community recreation project launched

The Flathead Land Trust partnered with the City of Columbia Falls to expand outdoor recreation opportunities, protect clean water, and promote quality of life. Partners convened a working group to discuss potential projects and decided to enhance the Rivers Edge Park along the Flathead River, which the City acquired in 2007. Partners will create a fishing pond and possibly a walking trail to access the park from downtown Columbia Falls. The LOR Foundation granted \$100,000 for the project. The City has already added walking trails, a community garden, and benches, and improved parking.

Volunteers plant native trees along Ashley Creek

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.” – Chinese proverb

Despite uncertain weather, seven volunteers and Flathead River Steward program partners planted 150 trees along Ashley Creek this fall. Landowners Dick and Joan Siderius are supporting this project to improve water quality and reduce the water temperature in Ashley Creek, which is too warm in the summer for native fish to survive and spawn. The trees will provide much needed shade during hot summer days and filter pollutants from runoff. Tiffany Martin, our Big



Sky Watershed Corps member, helped organize volunteers and logistics. Her 11-month term ended in November. We thank her for her dedication and hard work to make our collaborative riparian planting efforts a success.

Education & Outreach

West Valley Tour showcased Sandhill cranes and conservation project

On a cold windy October day, twenty-six hardy folks toured the West Valley Wetlands west of Kalispell, hoping to see the sandhill cranes that roost there. A few years ago, a bird study by MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the American Bird Conservancy noted the importance of this gem, a key stopover feeding and nesting site for these cranes. Tour participants were rewarded with the sight and sounds of more than 150 sandhill cranes flying in to roost for the night in the pothole wetlands. Participants also saw snow geese, trumpeter swans, pheasants, a harrier, a short-eared owl, ruddy ducks and many other waterfowl. Flathead Land Trust organized the tour with the West Valley Naturalist's Association and Flathead Audubon, whose Conservation Educator Denny Olson helped lead the trip.



New Flathead Watershed Sourcebook and Montana Lake Book editions

Flathead Watershed Sourcebook is a great place to start if you are an educator or simply want to become better informed about the Flathead's natural resources, land use, history, and culture. It is available at www.FlatheadWatershed.org/index.shtml and hard copies can be obtained from the Flathead Conservation District in Kalispell (752-4220).

The Montana Lake Book is a useful guide for lakeshore and other landowners who want to be good stewards. It provides information on major threats to Montana lakes and how to protect them while enjoying all they have to offer. Copies of the new edition can be picked up from several sponsoring organizations and agencies. Visit the website mtlakebook.org or email info@mtlakebook.org.

Historical and future stream temperature predictions for the northwest

Wonder which streams are cold enough, or will be in the future, for bull trout to survive? Two websites, [NorWeST](http://NorWeST.org) and [Climate Shield](http://ClimateShield.org), host data and maps (1-km resolution) showing historical and future temperature scenarios for streams throughout the northwest, a result of six years of work to combine 20 years of data from multiple agencies.

FCD Assistant Conservationist position open

The Flathead Conservation District is accepting job applications for the Assistant Conservationist position in

Kalispell through Jan. 19th, 2018. For more information visit the website flatheadcd.org.

NRCS District Conservationist Angel Rosario retires

R2L partner, Angel Rosario, District Conservationist, retires on December 29 after 32 years with the Natural Resources Conservation Service – 19 of which he worked in the Kalispell office. “*I enjoyed working with the R2L group all these years and I am proud of what we have been able to accomplish protecting private lands through education, easements, riparian restoration work, and the AmeriCorps River Steward members,*” Angel said. As a R2L partner, he helped fund and implement several riparian planting projects on the Flathead River. His green thumb will be missed. We wish him fun travels.



Events

December 16, 17, 30 and 31

Christmas Bird Count in Bigfork and Kalispell

This Flathead Audubon Society all-volunteer event helps assess bird populations along the Flathead and Swan Rivers, the North Shore of Flathead Lake, and other areas in the valley. For more information, contact Kathy Ross, 837-3837 or Cory Davis, 257-316, or visit www.FlatheadAudubon.org.

January 24

Flathead River to Lake Initiative quarterly meeting

Mark your calendars for the next R2L Initiative meeting to be held on Wednesday, January 24, from 9:00 am to noon at the MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks office in Kalispell. Jennifer Chutz, Ecologist with Montana Natural Heritage Program, will present about MNHP's new [wetlands' functions maps](#). These incorporate landscape position, landform, water flow path, and waterbody type (LLWW) associated with each wetland to assess potential wetland function. The information helps inform conservation and restoration strategies. For more information, contact Constanza at 883-1341 or CriticalLands@FlatheadLakers.org.

Jan. 31 - Feb. 1

Stream Gaging in the Flathead Basin Workshop

The Stream Gaging Workshop introduces participants to the basics of stream gaging, including data challenges, operation, maintenance, and funding, and brings agencies and organizations together to discuss how gage networks are distributed and opportunities to collaborate. The workshop is organized by the Flathead River Commission and the Soil & Water Conservation Districts of Montana. For more information, contact Samantha Tappenbeck, 406-291-6314 or stappenbeck@macdnet.org.