

Montana

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



What We Do

The Nature Conservancy works right here in Montana to solve the biggest, most urgent challenges facing people and nature. We work locally in communities across Montana's vast grasslands, forests and sagebrush sea to advance our global mission to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

How We Get There

We protect land and water to build a connected network of large, intact landscapes that will help people, wildlife and native plants thrive for generations to come. We do this through voluntary conservation easements with private landowners and by acquiring and transferring land to achieve permanent protection for crucial wild lands.

We improve stewardship of lands and waters we own or manage through conservation easements. We do this by leading with science, by testing and modeling state-of-the-art conservation practices, and by engaging landowners and communities with respect and shared values.

We take action on climate change because we recognize that we have mere years, not decades, to find ways to help nature respond to hotter, drier conditions. We do this by protecting lands that are crucial to storing carbon and by conserving our precious freshwater supplies for people and nature.

We support conservation by Indigenous Peoples, who, as Montana's first stewards, have been caring for these lands and waters since time immemorial. We do this by supporting Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination, partnering to elevate their messages, and engaging Tribal governments and communities to promote rematriation of Tribal lands and assist with conservation on reservation land and treaty rights lands.

Where We Focus

In Montana, The Nature Conservancy focuses its efforts on regions that have an extraordinary diversity of life and the greatest potential for long-term benefits to nature.

The **Crown of the Continent** encompasses glaciated peaks, deep forest and valleys rich with trout.

The **Northern Great Plains'** rolling grasslands are a superhighway for migrating sage-grouse and host sandhill cranes and other birds traveling the Central Flyway.

The **High Divide Headwaters** lie at the heart of the Sagebrush Sea, a wild expanse of silvery shrubs and hardy wildlife in the crosshairs of climate change.

Why We Succeed

We can tackle projects beyond the reach of other organizations thanks to deep relationships with rural communities, Tribal nations, lawmakers and funders that are based on trust built over more than 40 years of working on the ground in Montana.

Where We Work



Conservation's Next Leaders Start Out on the Sage



The blue-green Sagebrush Sea may feel as vast as an ocean, but actual water is in short supply. As climate change further parches the landscape, pockets of wet meadow become essential for pronghorn, sage-grouse and other wildlife, as well as livestock, to find food and shelter as they raise their young.

So it's fitting that young people are leading the charge to restore these wet meadows and other crucial habitat in Montana.

In 2020, The Nature Conservancy partnered with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to launch a satellite office of the Youth Employment Program (YEP) in Dillon, Montana. The program hires teens and young adults from our local communities to work on restoration projects in the High Divide Headwaters. It also helps pass on the skills and knowledge necessary to work in conservation to the next generation. Many youth have taken a particular interest in wet meadow restoration and other work that will help them forge a career helping nature respond to an uncertain future.

For the past three years, YEP employees have worked alongside our staff to build rock structures in stream beds and depressions, along with log and branch dams that mimic the work of beavers. These structures slow the flow of water so it can spread out and soak slowly into the ground, preventing flooding during the spring and providing a source of water for wildlife into the summer. They're neither expensive nor complex to build, but they require hands-on

experience using chainsaws, mapping software, and other tools essential to conservation.

“I was looking for places to get experience—that’s why I applied here,” explains Colten Folts, a YEP employee from Laurel, Montana. “I need to network even further than what I did at college. Between meeting people and being able to put all this stuff on my resume, I’ve exceeded that goal.”

“It really allows you to realize what you want to do,” says 20-year-old Bella Glosser, a YEP employee who is in her second year with the program. “The certifications you build up are really helpful. I want to do fire and got my red card,” she explains, referring to the nationally recognized certification required to become a wildland firefighter.

To date, YEP teams have installed more than 1,500 of these wet meadow structures across the High Divide. The restoration of water-rich habitats has proved such a success that we are planning similar efforts in the Northern Great Plains. We recently secured five years of funding to expand our existing efforts in the High Divide.

And just as the meadows have been transformed, so have those who made the work possible. “I think it’s changed me for the better,” Bella reflects.

Thanks to our supporters, we’re able to continue offering youth employment opportunities that will impact conservation for decades to come.



WATCH
Meet Colten and Bella and
learn more about their
experience in a short video.
nature.org/youth-video-MT



Restoring Forests—and Rights—with Fire



On a bright autumn morning near Missoula, Mike Schaedel and Whitney Malatare are eyeing their handiwork: a line of fire, creeping along the forest floor and leaving a wake of black. Tendrils of fire climb up small trees, consuming their needles, before the flames drop back to the ground.

“See how the fire’s walking up into that previously burned area? That’s what we want,” explains Whitney, describing how fire crews use the wind, slope, and a carefully tended perimeter to keep the fire under tight control. The team, consisting of Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal fire/fuels specialists, Nature Conservancy staff like Mike and Steve Kloetzel, and Bureau of Land Management staff, uses drip torches to drizzle a line of fire along the next area to burn.

Whitney is the Reserve Treaty Rights Lands (RTRL) Coordinator for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. RTRL was designed to redress a long history of broken treaties with Indigenous Peoples within their aboriginal Territories. Among those failed promises are nation-to-nation treaties between the United States and Tribal Nations that commit the United States to keep forests healthy so Native peoples can hunt, harvest plants, and use the lands in other culturally important ways.

More than a century of industrial timber management and suppression of fires has yielded overly dense forests, where thickets of young trees shade out native plants and reduce forage for big game animals. And as conditions

grow hotter and drier, the risk of severe wildfire threatens lives and property in surrounding communities.

With the RTRL program, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have committed staff and money to help the Bureau of Land Management conduct controlled burns and thin forests using chainsaws. The Nature Conservancy has joined in that commitment, deploying our staff and contractors to restore forests on both federal lands and lands we manage.

“The partnership opens the door for Tribes to set the agenda and carry out our vision of stewardship on these lands on which we were the first stewards and maintain rights on today,” explains Whitney. “It has also invited our cooperators to more deeply understand our traditions and connection with our ancestral lands. This is just the beginning of RTRL.



As we continue to grow, learn and dream with our partners, the opportunities are endless.”

“We’re continuing the pattern of burning that the Indigenous Peoples who call this place home have been doing for thousands of years,” explains Mike. “It’s an honor to be part of that, and to know we’re improving critical habitat for wildlife and protecting the homes of people.”

Your support of The Nature Conservancy makes it possible for our staff to commit their time and to hire contractors from the local community to participate in forest thinning and controlled burns. You can further support the RTRL program by telling your congressional representatives that you would like to see its funding continued.



LEADING THE WAY: The Blackfeet Nation

Part of our commitment to supporting Indigenous-led conservation is helping elevate the stories and messages of Montana’s Native peoples. We’re honored to share news of two hard-won achievements by our Blackfeet Nation neighbors.

This year, after a forty-year battle with the U.S. government, the Blackfeet Nation successfully got the last remaining oil and gas drilling lease in the Badger-Two Medicine region retired, protecting culturally important lands from development that they had never authorized.

The Nation also released dozens of wild buffalo back near Chief Mountain to range free across lands adjacent to Glacier National Park.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations and deep admiration for the Blackfeet Nation’s leadership in conserving nature.





A Bird's Eye View Reveals a Future for Grouse

They shimmy. They shuffle. They turn springtime on Montana's Northern Great Plains into a giant party with custom dance floors built for showing off. They're sage-grouse and sharp-tailed grouse.

And much to the frustration of the biologists trying to gauge their species' health by counting the number of birds at the gatherings, they insist on partying in the dark. Biologist Jason Hanlon and his team once resorted to driving across the prairie in the early hours, hunkering down near the gathering spots (called leks) to catch sight of the birds before the sun comes up and the dancing declines.

In the past few years, the biologists have been taking to the skies themselves, with a suite of high-tech tools. Using drones equipped with night-vision cameras, the team can fly over the leks in the darkness without disturbing the birds. Once back at the office, they download the footage to a computer, where an artificial intelligence program identifies individual birds in the footage and generates a highly accurate count.

Why go to such lengths to count grouse? The number of birds reflects the health of their populations, which, reliant as they are on sagebrush for food in the winter and shelter for their nests in the spring, is an indicator of the health of the ecosystem as a whole.

Healthy numbers hold promise for other areas across Montana as well. Sharp-tailed grouse in particular were pushed out of western Montana almost a century ago. For the last two years, The Nature Conservancy has partnered with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to capture birds and return them to lands on the other side of the Continental Divide.

Now there's a good reason for a party.

Your support makes it possible for us to test new technologies and share what we've learned with local landowners and partners across Montana. Thank you for helping our grasslands thrive and benefit landscapes across our state.



Pioneering Grass Bank Yields Dividends for Nature

Here in Montana, The Nature Conservancy's first grass bank has helped ranchers get through lean times for more than two decades. At our Matador Ranch in north-central Montana, local ranchers pay a discount rate to graze their cattle in exchange for committing to wildlife-friendly practices on their own lands. The trust built through this unique exchange has paid off handsomely for everyone, including nature: to date, five participating ranchers have decided to place conservation easements on their land with us, ensuring almost 20,000 acres of grassland will be protected in perpetuity.

We're in progress on several more easements, and other ranches have entered into voluntary

conservation easements directly with land management agencies.

The easements help protect one of the most extraordinary wildlife corridors anywhere on the planet; the longest pronghorn migration on Earth passes through the Matador Ranch. Your gifts provide the leverage to make these easement purchases possible, and your policy support ensures that ranchers continue to have the choice to sell conservation easements—which are always voluntary—to protect agricultural lands for generations to come.



The Ranching Way of Life, Forever Protected

Ranching is a labor of love, and ranchers work hard to pass down what they've built to the next generation. But kids and grandkids can't always pick up the torch, and poor weather and lean markets can make it hard to keep the family business afloat. Selling a conservation easement gives a ranching family much-needed cash while providing a promise: that the land that is their life's work will remain in agriculture and its natural features will be protected, forever.

The Nature Conservancy works with ranchers who are interested in selling these voluntary

conservation easements, helping them access funds from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Agricultural Land Easement program. In collaboration with the landowner, we write proposals and compile reports that detail how healthy the land is. Once the easements are complete, landowners still run their operations as they have for generations, but people and wildlife are assured that this productive land and habitat will endure for the future.

To unlock these easement funds, however, the government typically requires a matching contribution. Gifts from our donors have made it possible to meet those matches. Indeed, we've become the leader in getting federal agricultural easement dollars to Montana and into the hands of ranchers, keeping rangeland protected for generations to come.

Your support is creating a future for Montana's ranching way of life and the wild species that thrive on healthy rangelands.



After 100 Years, A Fence Comes Down for Wildlife

On an autumn day in southwestern Montana's Ruby River Valley, you might see elk, deer and pronghorn all on the move. The Ruby is part of the High Divide Headwaters region, which lies at the crossroads of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the Crown of the Continent and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. As an intact landscape, the High Divide still supports a multitude of ancestral migration routes of big game animals.

The Ruby is also prime cattle country, and fences are part and parcel of the ranching business. But a poorly placed fence can be devastating for wildlife. One fence line in particular has been killing and injuring wild animals for almost a century.

"The fence was put in by my Grandfather Peck Tate at least 80 years ago, and over the years we have patched it together," explains landowner Donna McDonald, who owns Upper Canyon Outfitters with her husband, Jake McDonald. Mule deer, moose, elk, bighorn sheep and pronghorn have all been entangled in that stretch of fence line as they attempted to jump over it or slide under it in the decades since. This past summer, Donna partnered with TNC, the



Montana Wild Sheep Foundation, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and some hardworking volunteers to finally take a mile of that fence line down.

While removing obsolete fencing altogether is a boon for wildlife, we know that fencing is still needed for ranchers in many areas. Simple modifications to a fence line can have an extraordinarily beneficial impact to wildlife traveling across the landscape. For example, by eliminating the top rail and raising the bottom rail, landowners can help wildlife safely pass without compromising their ability to contain their livestock.

After the workday on the Ruby was complete, Donna and Jake thanked the team, saying, "Without all your help, replacing the fence was only something we hoped to do many more years from now. Because of all your hard work, dedication to wildlife and help for local ranchers, amazing things can be accomplished."

Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's Outdoor Fund supported the fence project in the Ruby, as did our individual donors. Thanks to your support, we can keep working to help people like the McDonalds and ensure that wildlife and ranching can thrive in tandem across Montana.

We've helped
protect
113,755
acres of
Montana's
agricultural
lands using
NRCS easement
funds since 2013.



The Nature Conservancy in Montana

Amy Croover
MT State Director-Bozeman

CONSERVATION

Chris Bryant
MT Conservation Director-Missoula

Rebecca Snider
Conservation Information Manager-Helena

Drew Sovilla
MT Land Steward-Helena

Jim Berkey
High Divide Headwaters Director-Missoula

Sean Claffey
SW MT Sagebrush Conservation Coordinator-Dillon

Erica Nunlist
High Divide Stewardship Assistant-Centennial Sandhills Preserve

James Waxe
High Divide Land Steward & Science Mgr-Centennial Sandhills Preserve

Dave Hanna
Crown of the Continent Director-Choteau

Nathan Birkeland
Rocky Mtn Front Land Steward-Choteau

Dylan DesRosier
Blackfeet Program Manager-Blackfeet Stewardship Office

Steve Kloetzel
Western MT Land Steward-Ovando-Blackfoot River Valley

Alex Romanko
Western MT Forestry & Stewardship Asst-Missoula

Mike Schaedel
Forest Restoration & Partnership Manager-Missoula

Brian Martin
MT Grasslands Conservation Director-Red Lodge

Joe Fitzpatrick
Matador Ranch Hand-Matador Ranch

Jason Hanlon
Northern Great Plains Land Steward-Matador Ranch

Cat Kelly
Matador Ranch Manager-Matador Ranch

Kelsey Malloy
Rangeland Ecologist-Malta

Sarah McIntire
Grasslands Research Coordinator-Malta

Amy Pearson
GIS Manager-Helena

DEVELOPMENT

Aaron Brock
MT Development Director-Missoula

Jennie Corley
Trustee Liaison/Event Manager/Development Coordinator-Helena

Alison James
Associate Development Director-Missoula

Andrew Kimsey
Associate Development Director-Bozeman

Katie Raclette
Development Writer-Anaconda

Amy Sheppard
Development Program Manager-Bozeman

Teri Wright
Development Coordinator-Helena

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Jennifer Shoemaker
Marketing & Communications Director, MT & WY-Bozeman

Paige Cohn
Senior Communications Manager, MT & WY-Helena

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Mark Agenes
MT External Affairs Director-Helena

FINANCE & OPERATIONS

Whitney Daniel
MT Finance & Operations Director-Helena

Marissa Lytle
People & Operations Manager-Helena

Julie Boehm
Executive Assisant/Operations Coordinator-Helena

GRANTS

Kim Doherty
Senior Grants Specialist, MT & UT-Schenectady, NY

Teri Stroeber
Grants Specialist, MT High Divide Headwaters & OR-Portland, OR

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Jan Portman
Chair

Amy Cholnoky
Vice Chair

Melodee Hanes-Baucus
Vice Chair

Karen Amero

Dale Bosworth

Conni French

Rachel Frost, Ph.D.

Lizanne Galbreath

Nancy Mackinnon

Allen Martinell

Yvonne Martinell

L. Scott Mills, Ph.D.

Bill Milton

Steve Running, Ph.D.

Jeffrey Schutz

John Teller, MD

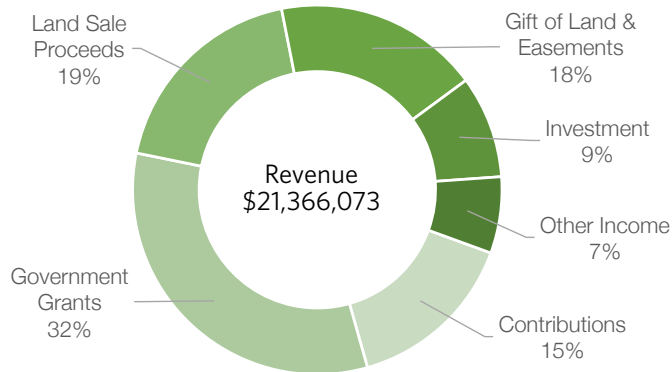
Amy Tykeson

Maud and Jeff Welles

FY 2023 TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE

July 1, 2022-
June 30, 2023

We carry out our work with a deep commitment to accountability and transparency.



MONTANA ACRES IN PERMANENT CONSERVATION

Assets	Added in FY 2023	Total Acres
Conservation Easements	7,824	512,752
Conservation Buyer Properties	—	103,626
Cooperative Conservation Projects	6,576	655,953
Preserves	—	54,480
TOTAL ACRES	14,399	1,326,812

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN MONTANA STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

Assets	At June 30, 2023	At June 30, 2022
Cash and Investments	\$35,630,582	\$32,222,815
Endowment Investment	\$16,453,024	\$15,702,409
Conservation Lands	\$6,561,794	\$8,710,685
Conservation Easements	\$195,034,853	\$185,008,853
Conservation Preserves	\$17,126,777	\$17,911,386
Property & Equipment- Net of Depreciation	\$1,101,066	\$899,287
Other Assets	\$1,331,521	\$1,830,968
	\$273,239,617	\$262,286,402
Liabilities	\$1,867,017	\$1,847,658
Net Assets	\$271,372,600	\$260,438,743
	\$273,239,617	\$262,286,402

These financial results are unaudited, program specific and rounded to the nearest dollar. Please check nature.org for TNC-wide audited financials that are GAAP compliant.

We sincerely thank everyone who has made a gift to The Nature Conservancy. You make our achievements for nature possible. We would like to acknowledge these gifts given to honor individuals and families. (Honoree in bold)

IN HONOR OF:

- Mark Aagenes**
Amy Croover
- Heidi Anderson**
Marian Anderson
- Jim Berkey**
Andrea and Michael Banks
Nature Fund
- Bryan Bodner**
Valley Bank of Helena
- Heather Boley and Family**
Suzanne Mallinson
- Aaron Brock**
Amy Croover
- Amy and John Chalnoky**
Amy Croover
Dorothy Chalnoky
Nancy Cammann
- Sylvie Coston**
Mark Aagenes
Amy Croover
- Sally Crouch**
Jeff Crouch
- Janet Karp**
Anne Karp
- Nathan Korb**
John Mills

Sigrid, Keith, and Sara Lewis

- Suzanne Mallinson
- Carla Pagliaro**
Anonymous
- Jeffrey and Antigone Parrish**
Andrea and Michael Banks
Nature Fund
- Robert & Elaine Suss**
Martha Haxby
- Heidi and Chandler VanVoorhis**
Suzanne Mallinson

IN MEMORY OF:

- John Allen**
Dr. Kathryn Allen
- Mark Bookhout**
Dona Cranston
- Alison W. Brett**
Ann Marie Hettinger
- Ken Christianson**
Anonymous
- Ivan Doig**
Carol Doig
- Dr. Arthur Eichlin**
Karyl Mose
Nancy O'Brien
Arlene Priest
Roy and Lynne Zimmerman

- Sanna S. Green**
Sanna Porte
- Finney Grimes**
Keenan Grimes
- Janet Henneford**
Shari and Robert Dayton
Martha Davidson
Rosemary Burriss
- Steve Hopkins**
Christine Pirog
- Dan Imming**
Susan Imming
- Carl James**
Colleen Shattuck
- Bruce May**
Elaine Snyder
- Benjamin Smith**
Barbara Rambo-Hartley
Sarah Olson
- Karen B. Tobin**
Nancy Reece Jones
- George A. Trigueros**
Carol Highland
- Scott Stadnik**
Jeanie Serido
- Daniel Young**
Christopher Fox

ENDOWMENT GIFTS

- John Roe Conservation Leadership Endowment**
Sandra Roe
Steve Kloetzel
- Gil Crain Memorial Fund**
Chad Farrington

As you can see, your support this past year has achieved success for nature across Montana. It's not easy to do in a landscape as large as ours and with the headwinds we face. But in Montana, we don't shy away because things are difficult. Together, we find a way.

As we look forward, I'm mindful of two of our state's biggest challenges. First, of course, is our increasingly unpredictable climate. The relatively forgiving weather we had this year across much of the region should not fool us into thinking climate forecasts are overblown. In fact, the changes we're seeing on the ground are outpacing even the more dire predictions. Even so, there's still time for us to turn things around. We need to act now to limit the amount of carbon going into our atmosphere while also helping nature adapt to changes set in motion in years past.

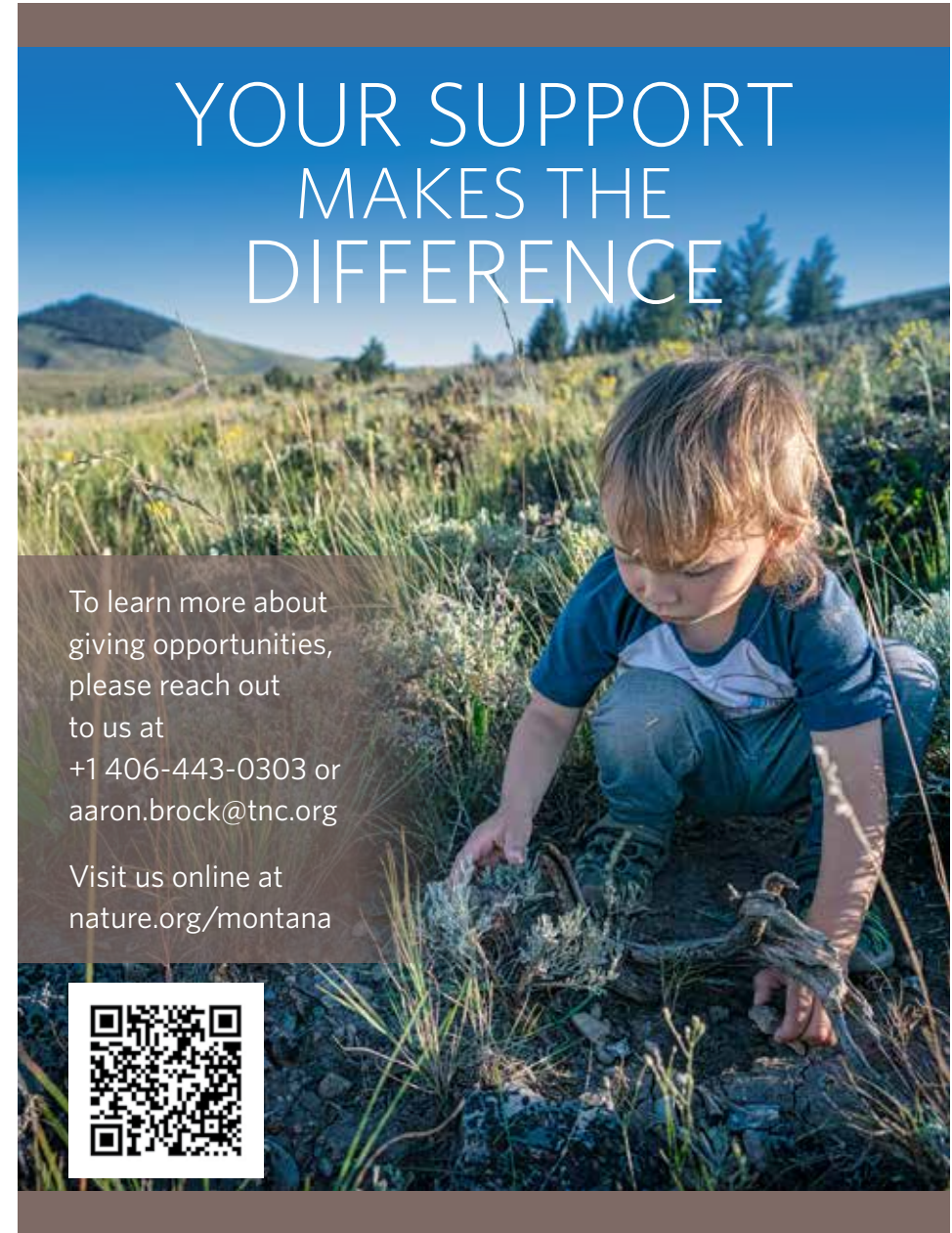
Second, as you've surely noticed, Montana has become extremely popular, and our lands and waters are feeling the strain. Our sense of neighborliness often is, too, and yet it's becoming more and more clear that the only way forward is together. Because of the care of previous generations, the land appears abundant to those new to our state. The best way to honor the knowledge we've been given of how to live here responsibly is to share it forward, compassionately, with our new neighbors.

One way you can do that? Pass this report on to someone who's new to Montana or The Nature Conservancy. Tell them why you support our shared cause. Invite them to join you in protecting the place we all love and in building a future our kids and grandkids will be proud of. Don't shy away.

Thank you for standing with us.




Amy Croover
Montana State Director,
The Nature Conservancy



YOUR SUPPORT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

To learn more about giving opportunities, please reach out to us at
+1 406-443-0303 or
aaron.brock@tnc.org

Visit us online at
nature.org/montana



PAYING A CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE FORWARD

Lizanne Galbreath

Lizanne Galbreath's love affair with Montana started in 1966 when she went on a two-week pack trip in Yellowstone National Park with her family. As a nine-year-old, she fell in love with the state, influenced in part by her own father's love of the outdoors and conservation, which he passed down to her. After traveling around much of the world during her life, she never forgot Montana and frequently returns to the state, continuing her own conservation legacy by serving on the board for The Nature Conservancy in Montana.

Lizanne most appreciates that the Montana chapter of TNC works to conserve the land in the context of the communities for which they work.

"There's no substitute for getting out and seeing the projects and the effects they have on the communities and the landscape. I'm just honored to be a part of it and get to know the Montana staff and see their passion at work. It's humbling and amazing."

She believes it is our responsibility to be thoughtful stewards of the land to conserve it for the generations to come and continue to instill the importance of conservation, much like her family did for her.

We are honored to be among the organizations that Lizanne supports, and we thank her for her confidence in our work.



Message From the Board Chair

Jan Portman

“ I'm proud to step into the role of Board Chair for The Nature Conservancy's Montana Chapter. This kind of honor doesn't come along very often in life. I am proud to roll up my sleeves and work with Montana's dedicated and thoughtful trustees, staff, and partners.

For 40 years, we have invested in the communities where we work—in conservation science and in opportunities for leverage to protect habitat and improve land and water management, all for nature and people. We can't reach our global goals for a healthier, more resilient world without learning from and supporting shared goals with Indigenous partners. Actions to mitigate climate change are woven into all of our work on the ground and in the policy arena.

I started volunteering for The Nature Conservancy 30 years ago. I remember it being love at first learning when I was introduced to The Nature Conservancy's focus on habitat protection for the birds navigating the North American flyways. I met smart people who cared deeply about solving some of the planet's most pressing conservation challenges—with nonpartisan, trustworthy, impactful actions. I came to TNC for the conservation, and I stayed for the amazing team of people I've met along the way. ”



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

-  facebook/nature.montana
-  twitter/X nature_MT
-  montana@tnc.org
-  @tnc_montana



OUR GLOBAL GOALS

*Together,
 we find a way.*

BY 2030, WE WILL CONSERVE:



1.6 BILLION
 acres of the world's land



9.8 BILLION
 acres of the world's ocean



74 MILLION
 acres of lakes and wetlands plus rivers



3 BILLION
 metric tons of carbon dioxide

WE WILL HELP:



100 MILLION
 people facing climate emergencies



45 MILLION
 people from local and Indigenous communities