



Protecting Montana's Open Landscapes

NEWS  
WINTER 2023



A BIG WIN FOR  
GRASSLAND  
CONSERVATION  
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## FROM ONE TO ONE THOUSAND

**The Montana Land Reliance Set to Close its 1,000th Conservation Easement, Looks Back at First Easement in 1978**

**T**he Montana Land Reliance (MLR) is on track to partner with 32 land-owners this year to conserve 45,000 acres of critical wildlife habitat, iconic open spaces, and agricultural lands across Montana. This year's work will include closing MLR's 1,000th easement and forever protecting over 1.3 million acres. MLR doesn't pause long to celebrate milestones, but the 1,000th easement

sparks reflection on just how much the organization's model of working family by family to protect Montana ranches for future generations has stayed exactly the same.

Forty-five years ago, **Ed Rosenthal** turned to MLR when looking for ways to protect his beloved ranch near the Blackfoot River in western Montana. Ed bought the Double R Ranch after Fanny Steel, famous bronc-busting cowgirl, had operated it as a guest ranch in her "retirement days." Ed's partner Orville Hoover was a teacher and outfitter who helped Ed preserve the Fanny Steele cabins, maintain the health of the forest, irrigate the hay meadows, and work with neighbors to manage livestock grazing.

In 1978, land trusts were relatively new and unknown, but Ed was looking for a tool to protect the incredible asset he and Orville cared deeply about for future generations.

Ed entrusted the fledgling Montana Land Reliance to write its first conservation easement conserving his property.

"I never considered that I might be taking a risk in being the first person to donate a conservation easement," said Ed. "What was important to me was that I loved the land. I never felt like I owned it, but that I was borrowing it from future generations and needed to protect it for them."

Ed's conservation leadership and trust in MLR made him the perfect recipient for MLR's 1999 Conservation Award.

As development pressures mount and MLR accelerates its work to help families conserve more properties, the first easement on the books and the 1,000th soon to be closed in December hold equal importance for the future of Montana.





## MIDDLE FORK LAND & LIVESTOCK

# A 38,000-acre Grassland Conservation Win

**Drivers along Montana Highway 39** between Forsyth and Colstrip see sweeping grasslands and breathtaking open space, where cattle far outnumber county residents, and miles stretch on between houses.

That's just how Brent and Lori Salmond and their sons Emmet and Elliot prefer things to be. The Salmonds have been ranching in Montana their entire lives, first along the Rocky Mountain Front, and for the past thirty years, in Rosebud County.

Wanting to keep commercial development from encroaching onto the ranch, the Salmonds partnered with The Montana Land Reliance (MLR) to conserve 38,000 contiguous acres of

grasslands and timbered country, which includes habitat for elk, deer, upland birds, and livestock.

With support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS)

Agricultural Lands Easement (ALE) program, the first easement on Middle Fork closed in 2022, conserving 22,000 acres. The Salmonds are currently working with MLR Eastern Manager,

Brad Hansen, on a second easement to protect an additional 16,000 acres, with an anticipated completion date in Spring 2024.

The opportunity to preserve eastern Montana's prairie landscapes and keep a multigenerational Montana ranching

family on the land is core to MLR's mission. The Middle Fork Land & Livestock conservation easements are a great example of the MLR model, which continues to be partnering with private landowners to see their good intentions forever tied to the land. Thanks to the Salmond family, a significant portion of Montana will remain as working lands and wildlife habitat into the future.

The demand for purchased conservation easements through the NRCS ALE program is at an all-time high. MLR is raising funds to increase organizational capacity to complete more of these projects in critical areas across the state. Please consider supporting this work at [mtlandreliance.org/donate](https://mtlandreliance.org/donate) or in the enclosed envelope.



*Thanks to the Salmond family, a significant portion of Montana will remain as working lands and wildlife habitat into the future.*

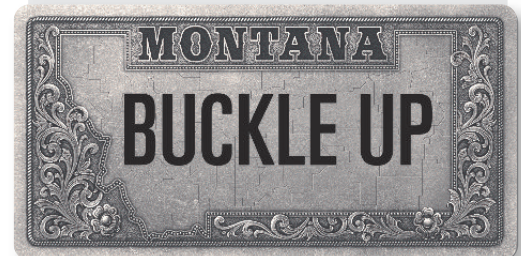
## FUTURE MONTANA COMMITTEE HELPS RUBY VALLEY RESIDENTS IN NEED

Seven volunteers on MLR's Future Montana Committee, joined by staff Melanie Brock, Chad Klinkenborg, and Dave Delisi, volunteered on November 2 at the Firewood Bank of the Ruby Valley in Sheridan, MT. The nonprofit purchases logs that are split into firewood on the

Barnosky ranch and then delivered to low-income families and seniors throughout the area all winter long. The afternoon was spent chainsawing, splitting, and loading the trucks followed by swapping stories and talking about conservation goals in the valley.



To support the Firewood Bank, contact Frank Ford at 406-842-7539



When registering or renewing your Montana vehicles, please opt for the **MLR Belt Buckle License Plate** celebrating our ranching heritage.

MLR raises over \$50,000 annually through license plate sales as a portion of each MLR-design license plate ordered at County Treasurer offices or the MT Motor Vehicle Division is donated to further our efforts protecting Montana farms and ranches from development. Please order yours at your next renewal.



## LAND STEWARD SPOTLIGHT

# Cathey Hardin

**Cathey Hardin had a 32-year career** as a U.S. Forest Service forester specializing in vegetation management before joining MLR's stewardship team 6 years ago. Cathey's experience working within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem has made her a valuable member of the team monitoring Madison County and Centennial Valley easement properties.

The Centennial Valley ranches Cathey stewards each year, by way of driving through Idaho, are among her favorites as the remote southwestern corner of Montana has been spared from the rapid development seen near her home in Ennis. Cathey credits the intact rural ranchlands of the Centennial Valley to MLR, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and other conservation groups that have successfully partnered with landowners to protect most of the region with conservation easements.

As for the Madison Valley, development and an increase in population have had a big impact since Cathey and her husband Gene arrived in Ennis 16 years ago.

"When you drive through the Madison Valley, it's really obvious where there are conservation easements," Cathey said. "Most of the remainder of the land has been subdivided and I don't doubt that the ranches MLR holds easements on would probably be subdivisions now if we didn't work in this part of the state."

Cathey proudly shares the news of the good work that easement landowners



have done to improve the valley, including the Granger Ranch's rehabilitation of Odell Creek to support the reintroduction of trumpeter swans and the consistently exemplary management of the Jumping Horse Ranch in Ennis.

The most challenging facet of Cathey's job occurs when easement property ownership changes hands.

"In many cases, ranches are bought and sold to non-agricultural enthusiasts who want to build on their new property," Cathey said. "It takes time on our part to educate new landowners and bring them up to speed on the conservation values of the easement. It's important for us to build a bridge with as much information as we can on what new landowners own so they can make the right decisions on managing the property."

Cathey looks forward to visiting MLR easement properties each year to continue the forever partnership that stays with the property and welcomes in the next generation of landowners.



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|                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
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| Don Carroll    | Tom Maxwell    |
| Andrea Darling | John Moorhouse |
| Pat Flanary    | Brian Neilsen  |
| Cathey Hardin  | Dan Reinhart   |
| Ron Hvizdak    | Jim Roscoe     |
| Jerry Iverson  | Kevin Suzuki   |
| Skip Kowalski  |                |

[mtlandreliance.org](http://mtlandreliance.org)



## A HOME BASE FOR CONSERVATION

MLR broke ground in September on the construction of its new statewide headquarters. Named in honor of ranchers and dedicated conservationists Cathy and Sara Campbell and their family, and MLR volunteer and Board President George Olsen, the new **Campbell-Olsen Building** will better accommodate MLR's growth and provide a lasting home for the decades of conservation work ahead. The expected grand opening is Fall 2024 and fundraising efforts are currently underway to complete the project.



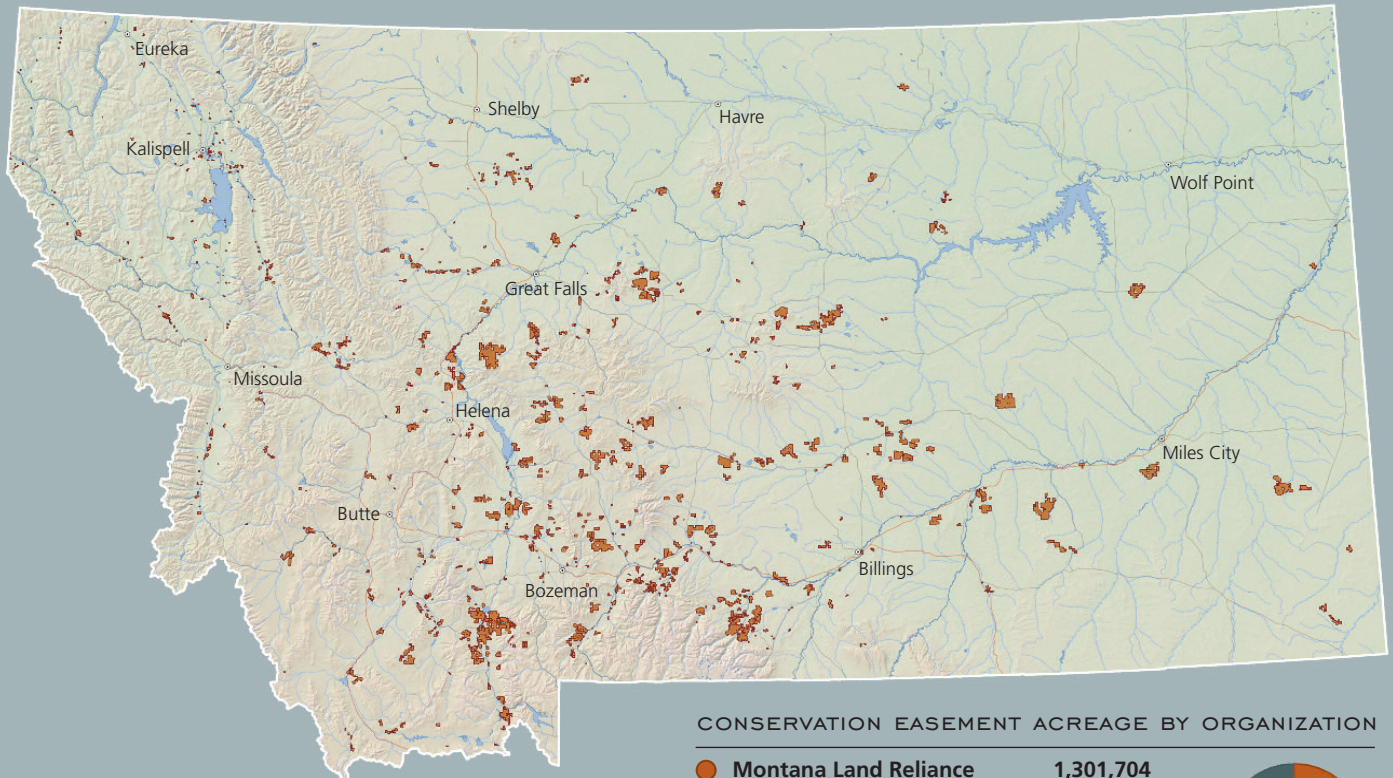
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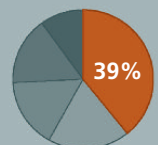
# NEWS

## WINTER 2023



### CONSERVATION EASEMENT ACREAGE BY ORGANIZATION

|                                  |                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| ● <b>Montana Land Reliance</b>   | <b>1,301,704</b> |
| ● Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks | 621,670          |
| ● The Nature Conservancy         | 530,435          |
| ● US Fish & Wildlife Service     | 527,191          |
| ● All others                     | 330,768          |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>3,311,768</b> |



Montana Land Reliance  
Conservation Easements

Source: MT Association of Land Trusts