

PRIVATE LANDS PARTNERS DAY



Attendees at the Rolling Stone Ranch, learning from experts about grizzly bear conflict abatement and how to live and work in grizzly country.

**Missoula, Montana
October 3-5, 2023**

Partnerscapes held Private Lands Partners Day in Missoula, Montana on October 3-5, 2023. The incredible event celebrated the 15th Anniversary of Partnerscapes and Private Lands Partners Day. It was inspiring to return to the Blackfoot Valley for the field tour, which was the location of the inaugural Private Lands Partners Day, held in 2008.



Kansas landowner **Bill Sproul** speaking at the first Private Lands Partners Day in 2008.

HISTORY OF PARTNERSCAPES

Fifteen years ago, The Blackfoot Challenge and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program competed for and won an *Innovations in American Government Award* from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. As part of the award, they received funds to share keys to success of and lessons learned in community-based collaborative conservation with other places in the Nation. That award spurred Private Lands Partners Day and the formation of Partnerscapes (originally Partners for Conservation).

BLACKFOOT VALLEY FIELD TOUR



Land Lindbergh (left) and **Hank Goetz** (right), legends in the Blackfoot Valley.



Attendees at Private Lands Partners Day enjoying the beautiful fall day in the Blackfoot Valley.

OPENING RECEPTION

Private Lands Partners Day kicked off with a reception at the historic Wilma Theater in Missoula, a perfect venue to kick off the event. Everyone enjoyed dinner while viewing a series of professionally produced films depicting several community-based, collaborative partnerships from across Montana. The highlight of the evening was **Land Lindbergh** and **Hank Goetz**, two of the founding fathers of collaborative conservation efforts in the Blackfoot Valley, sharing their stories and introducing the Blackfoot Challenge film, *Landscape of Hope*.

The first day at Private Lands Partners Day was a field tour of four ranches in the Blackfoot Valley. Different themes were discussed at each ranch, with more than 30 speakers involved, including landowners and other collaborative partners with the Blackfoot Challenge. The major themes discussed by presenters during the field tour included:

- Preserving the rural way of life by bringing family members back to the ranch
- Conservation strategies through improving soil health
- Conifer encroachment and using fire and mechanical treatment as management tools
- Native fish habitat restoration and water conservation
- Grizzly bear conflict abatement, and
- Watershed education



David Mannix shares the history of the Mannix Brothers Ranch.

Mannix Brothers Ranch

The Mannix family shared their story of how they worked together to keep multiple generations on the ranch. The ranch had several challenges over the years, working through differences of opinion and financial struggles. Today three brothers operate the ranch collectively with additional family shareholders. They all work together to make decisions on how to manage large predators, share water, control weeds, and negotiate property boundaries.

Increased knowledge about soil health and improving the capacity of soil function has helped the Mannix family, as well as several other producers in the Blackfoot Watershed. Soil health has helped sustain and enhance the natural resources and the entire community.



Greg Neudecker, Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program State Coordinator, shares his knowledge and experience of over 30 years working in the Blackfoot Valley.

Copper Creek Ranch

Landowners and partners shared some of the success stories of water conservation, native fish habitat restoration, tools to protect instream flow and how working together



Jamie Stitt shared some of the history of the Copper Creek Ranch and the successful stream restoration project completed on her family ranch.

BLACKFOOT VALLEY FIELD TOUR *(continued)*



Ryen Neudecker, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, sharing the Nevada Creek habitat restoration story and how important private landowners are to the success of native trout populations in Montana. "It is because of the private landowners that we have a native trout restoration story to share."



Rolling Stone Ranch



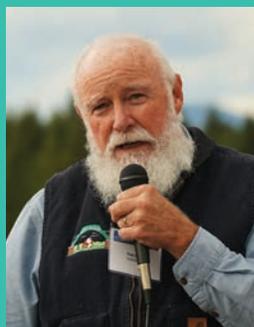
Eric Hull, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, shared some of the history of the tribes and water rights.

has created win-win solutions on working lands. There is no shortage of challenges when it comes to managing water, but working together has created some real successes in the Blackfoot Valley.

Collaborative efforts have focused on building resilience in native trout populations, looking at limiting factors tied to cool, clear, complex, and connected riverine habitats.

Geary Brothers Ranch

Private and Tribal landowners, working with many diverse partners, are finding ways to combat conifer encroachment throughout the Blackfoot Watershed. Agency partners, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program are assisting landowners with cost-share programs.



Tom Geary shared the story of his working ranch and some of the tools he is using to manage conifer encroachment on his ranch.



Scott Morford, the Associate Director of the Working Lands for Wildlife Science Team at the University of Montana, shared some of the new science-based tools available to private landowners, such as [Landscape Explorer](#) and a [Pocket Guide for Planning and Design](#).



Rolling Stone Ranch

We finished the day at Jim and Brady Stone's ranch, where we received an education on the Blackfoot Watershed and extensive lessons on grizzly bear conflict abatement involving electric fences, electric drive-over mats, and other tools. The Ovando schoolteachers also discussed how they involve the school



Danielle Oyler, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, does a bear spray lesson with the group, while Land Neudecker offers to be the volunteer for the demonstration.



Jamie Jonkel (Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks), **Hilary Cooley** (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), and **Brady Stone** (BS Fabrications/Rolling Stone Ranch) share their expertise on grizzly bear abatement, management, and new innovations.

children in conservation and wildlife lessons. Agency partners gave a bear spray demonstration, with a large cardboard bear on wheels and how to properly carry and use bear spray. The school children got involved in the demonstration.

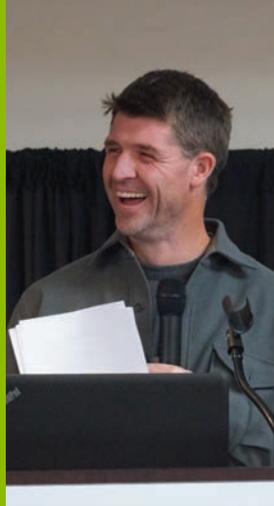


Brady Stone, BS Fabrications, shares his story at the family operation, Rolling Stone Ranch.

PRESENTATION DAY

The final day of the conference featured interdisciplinary presentations by landowners, Tribal leaders, and partners from across the Nation. Topics included Tribal partnerships, agency leadership perspectives, history of how Partnerscapes began, managing woody encroachment, the science and art of big game migrations and ranching, Mojave Desert conservation, Alaska salmon conservation education, innovations with a local Montana meat coop, inspirations from a Wisconsin landowner and photographer, and working forests in the Willamette Valley of Oregon.

Individual Presentations:



Cole Mannix shared his story about starting a new business, Old Salt Co-op. The meat coop sells all grass fed and grass finished meat that is raised, finished, and processed in Montana. The Old Salt Co-op currently has four family ranches involved from across Montana and 24 employees. It is exciting to see these types of innovations, keeping families on the land. His philosophy is "land is kin. Together let's leave it better."



The keynote speaker for the luncheon was **Juanita Vero**, rancher and Missoula County Commissioner. She shared stories from her family's Montana dude ranch as well as the challenges and successes she has faced in her capacity as Commissioner.



Tom McDonald, Chairman Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes gave an incredible presentation, sharing the history of the Tribes and his personal experiences, conservation ethic, and wisdom learned from the elders. Tom said "everything has a spirit and water is very important to the people."



Sarah Greenberger, Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior, shared inspirational words with the group, focusing on the accomplishments of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. The program has worked with private landowners for over 35 years to restore and enhance habitat for fish and wildlife, while supporting sustainable rural communities and viable agriculture.



Susan Sorrels shared her story of how her California community started as a small mining town but was then forced to look at new ways to survive. Hard work and perseverance led to her family getting involved in ecotourism and wildlife conservation. She shared with us "their business will always honor the people and the environment. We will save the land and the land will save us."



Marie McCarty, the Executive Director for the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust, shares her story about the power of partnerships and building trust with commercial fisherman and private landowners. She shared that salmon are very important to the local communities, and said, “everyone loves baby salmon”, using that as a connection to her outreach campaigns.



Kurt Waterstradt, Wisconsin Partners for Fish and Wildlife State Coordinator, presented with Laurie Smaglick Johnson, a landowner and conservationist committed to protecting and restoring her 75-acre farm. Laurie is an outstanding wildlife photographer and shared a series of incredible photos and videos with us from her private land in Wisconsin. The best part was the video she shared of hooded merganser ducklings leaping from the nest, having received over 3.6 million views on Facebook.



Jim Merzenich, an Oregon tree farmer from the Coburg Hills of Oregon, received the Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year Award from the Oregon Small Woodlands Association and Oregon Tree Farm Systems. In addition to having a Zoology and a Forestry degree, as well as over 30 years of experience, Jim is also extremely innovative. He has managed invasive trees using both fire and cattle as management tools while also diversifying his operation by distilling essential oils from conifer needles and running a broom manufacturing business.

PANEL ON THE SCIENCE AND ART OF BIG GAME MIGRATIONS AND RANCHING

Andrew Jakes, Smithsonian Institute, gave a presentation on assessing the influences of linear features to improve big game migration and landscape connectivity. Following that, **Simon Buzzard**, National Wildlife Federation, and **Bryan Mussard**, a rancher in Dillon, Montana, gave a presentation on fencing for wildlife and ranching and partnering to improve seasonal habitats and migration routes for big game in southwest Montana. Wrapping up the panel, **Leo Barthelmess**, rancher and Ranchers Stewardship Alliance member, and **Ty Roseberry**, with VENCE Corporation, shared their knowledge and experience with virtual fences and livestock



Leo Barthelmess, Montana landowner, and **Ty Roseberry**, Vence Corporation, share their experiences with virtual fences as part of a panel on big game migrations and ranching.



Lynn Scarlett gives the keynote address at the evening banquet, sharing her reflections on the two-day event.

EVENING BANQUET

Lynn Scarlett, retired communications expert with The Nature Conservancy and previous Deputy Secretary of Interior, gave the keynote address for the closing banquet. Her expertise, wisdom, humor, and vision inspired us all. She reflected on what is challenging and what is promising. Lynn stated, **“how we manage water and lands to work in partnership with nature itself presents among the greatest cross-cutting opportunities to secure a healthy planet, healthy people and healthy places.”**

CONCLUSION AND THANKS

Holding the 15th annual Private Lands Partners Day in its original location was extremely fortunate and allowed the attendees and Partnerscapes to thank the people and communities of the Blackfoot Valley. Thanks especially to the Blackfoot Challenge for their vision and dedication and for sharing what they have learned over the last 35 plus years about the importance of communication, trust,

embracing a shared vision of success, and getting things done on the ground when it comes to successful collaborative conservation at scale. Many thanks to all the individuals and organizations in the Blackfoot Challenge who were involved with the planning and delivery of the meeting, the great hospitality and for your enthusiasm for sharing your story. In addition, thank you to all the attendees, speakers, sponsors, and co-hosts that made Private Lands Partners Day a huge success.



A special thank you to **Jim Stone**, Rolling Stone Ranch, and **Greg Neudecker**, Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, for all they did to make PLPD 2023 a huge success.

SAVE THE DATE!!

The 16th Annual Private Lands Partners Day will be held in Redmond, Oregon - **October 7-9, 2024.**

Photos by Heather Johnson, H-Big Sage, LLC; others noted in the photo caption.

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