Gallatin Valley Land Trust is 25. This ripe old age finds the organization strong, vibrant, nimble, and humble.

We are strong because of a talented professional staff that works from its heads and its hearts.

We are vibrant because of a mission focused on conservation lands, trails, and community.

We are nimble because we work with a wide range of partners with a rich capacity to get things done.

We are humble because we must be. Our work depends on effectively engaging the full range of community assets; we are humble as we remember our continuing need for financial support; and, lastly, the challenge in front of us is humbling.

The inventor Charles Kettering observed “We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there.” Regardless of background – Montana native or big city newcomer – we are drawn to the open spaces that reach for the sky, plentiful and cool water, and a community of people who share that common bond. We may be diverse in our opinions, politics, and even dance steps, but we share a commonality built on the land. We should all be concerned with the future as we will spend the rest of our lives there. How that future appears in our piece of Montana is the focus of the Gallatin Valley Land Trust.

The Board and Staff of GVLT are proud of the accomplishments presented within these pages. We are tremendously grateful to the broad range of supporters who share our passion and commitment to open, productive, conserved lands and to a community connected to the outdoors and to each other with trails. We are eager to continue our work with a great community behind us and capable partners alongside.

From Our President: thank you all

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Director of Land and Wildlife Conservation for The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation

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The Leep Ranch – conserved with GVLT in 2008 – has some of the best agricultural soils in the state.
I am delighted to report that, thanks to the generosity of our supporters, the Gallatin Valley Land Trust ended its most successful year in Fiscal 2015, its 25th Anniversary.

Revenues for the year were a record $1,261,495, reflecting strong fiscal leadership and wonderful community support. Importantly, contributions increased 65% to $638,954 and grants grew 31% to $404,335. Total expenses were $967,786, shown broken down by program on the left. We ended the year firmly in the black with a surplus of $293,709. (Note: GVLT hosts its Evening on the Land fundraiser every other year; the results of our August 2015 event, which raised over $250,000, will be reflected in Fiscal 2016.)

GVLT’s total assets grew to $2,345,098, with liabilities of $44,365 and net assets of $2,300,733. GVLT’s largest asset is its Stewardship Fund totaling $1,146,906, which helps fund the monitoring and stewardship of GVLT’s conservation easement portfolio – now over 43,000 acres – in perpetuity. GVLT’s financial stability and program accomplishments this year are impressive.

We anticipate another productive and successful year in Fiscal 2016. Projects will be funded in part through the $3.8 million RCPP (Regional Conservation Partnership Program) funds secured by GVLT to help purchase conservation easements and implement stewardship projects in the Gallatin Valley. Like many projects in GVLT’s 25-year history, this impressive funding allocation does not pass through GVLT’s financial statements, instead going directly to implement projects on the ground. In Fiscal 2016, GVLT also anticipates completing trail connections with the Path to the M, at Bozeman Pond, and at Front Street with funding through the Trails Open Space and Parks Bond and other grants.

Copies of our audited financial statements and Form 990 are available at www.gvlt.org.

Thank you again for your support. GVLT’s work would not be possible without you.

Signe Farris, Board Treasurer
**The GVLT Family: welcoming new faces**

GVLT supporters gathered in April to celebrate the organization's 25th Anniversary.

**Program Specialist**

The Bozeman trail system and GVLT’s conservation portfolio are growing; so too is the GVLT staff. We have shifted a seasonal position into a full-time Program Specialist, responsible for trail maintenance, volunteer coordination, and monitoring a portion of our conservation easement portfolio. Luckily, Lucas Cain was already part of the GVLT family, serving as an intern with our lands program and volunteer on the trails. Lucas brings a B.S. in Earth Sciences from MSU and extensive experience working with local farmers and ranchers. He is an avid trail user and outdoorsman with a passion for Montana’s open spaces. Naturally, he fits right in!

**Events & Development Coordinator**

Our annual fundraising events are not only a major source of income for the organization but a way to engage and educate new people who are interested in trails and conservation. Thanks in part to funding from the Heart of the Rockies Initiative, Laura Prindiville joined the staff as a part-time Events and Development Coordinator in the spring of 2015. She brings over 20 years of experience in nonprofits and has worked with local organizations such as the Bozeman Public Library Foundation, Children’s Museum of Bozeman, and most recently, Family Promise of Gallatin Valley.

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**Finance Committee Members**

- Signe Farris, chair
- Sten Anderson
- Valorie Drake
- Rick Keller
- Mike McCormick
- Meghann McKenna
- Bob Sands
- Hal Stanley
- Lisa Tuckerman
- Priscilla Wisner

**Mission**

Gallatin Valley Land Trust connects people, communities, and open lands through conservation of working farms and ranches, healthy rivers, and wildlife habitat, and the creation of trails in the Montana headwaters of the Missouri and Upper Yellowstone Rivers.

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Land Conservation: protecting special places forever

Opportunities for Open Space: Millions Secured for Conservation

It was a monumental year for conservation in the Gallatin Valley. In January, a GVLT-led partnership of 17 organizations was awarded $3.8 million to fund on-the-ground conservation projects through the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The RCPP program uses partnerships between public and private entities, local communities, and non-government organizations to invest in conservation efforts. The Gallatin Valley Partnership projects focus on conserving farms and ranches and implementing stewardship practices on private land in the Gallatin Valley. Our proposal was one of 600 submitted, one of just 110 selected in the country, and the only one chosen in Montana. All of this funding will go directly to private landowners who wish to voluntarily implement conservation practices or place a conservation easement on their land, limiting the development of that property forever.

“Before this grant, our conservation easement proposals had to compete statewide for NRCS money. Now we have a pot that’s dedicated to just the Gallatin Valley, which gives us more of a guarantee to offer to landowners,” said Brendan Weiner, GVLT Project Manager. “This will allow us to accelerate the pace of conservation at a time when growth in the Gallatin Valley is picking up again.”

The Partnership has five years to spend the money on conservation projects with a focus on soil health, water quantity, and water quality. Stay tuned to hear about all the great projects that are made possible with this new funding.
The Arts/Flynn Farm consists of 185 acres near the Gallatin River just south of Belgrade. The property has been farmed by the family for four generations and 67 percent of the soils on the farm are designated as agriculturally significant. This project was partly funded by the Gallatin County Open Space Bond.

A Lasting Legacy: Four New Conservation Easements
As the real estate market booms and development pressure continues, conservation projects in the area are gaining steam. This year, we worked with four families to conserve 469 acres, representing over $2.8 million in land value.

The Fink Ranch, 188 acres on the Madison River, is upstream from Headwaters State Park. More than 100 species of birds have been observed on the ranch, which is adjacent to an Audubon designated Important Bird Area. It boasts abundant wetlands, over a half-mile of Madison River frontage, excellent wildlife habitat, and healthy agricultural soils. The Gallatin County Open Space Bond and the North American Wetland Conservation Act contributed funding to make this project possible.

“It meant a lot to me to safeguard a piece of Montana — to honor the family that went before me — and to preserve it for our family’s future generations.”
- Nikki Fink
Conservation Easement Donor

The Fink Ranch is home to a number of small streams that feed into the Madison River.

The Fink Ranch

The Arts/Flynn Farm
Just north of Belgrade is the **Kehke Property**, 86 acres of river corridor habitat including a half-mile of the East Gallatin River. Reducing residential development along the East Gallatin can help protect water quality in this blue ribbon fishery.

The final conservation easement completed during this fiscal year was the **Foster Property**, 10 acres in the Mount Ellis area at the northern end of the Gallatin Range. The property is part of an important wildlife corridor that connects summer habitat with productive lower elevation lands that are used as winter range and calving grounds for a number of species. The land also protects a beautiful and productive perennial spring that serves as the primary source of Canon Creek.

“The I don’t think any farmer comes to the end of their career and says I’m done now, I want to sell the ranch and get what I deserve. I don’t think there’s a farmer that thinks that way. The land becomes a part of you and you don’t want to see it split up and divided.”

- Joe Skinner, *Conservation Easement Donor*

Each of these conservation projects help protect our valley’s scenic views, wildlife habitat and corridors, blue ribbon fisheries, productive agriculture, and rich western heritage. These generous landowners are ensuring that this region remains scenic and open, forever.
Main Street to the Mountains: championing the vision

Mile by Mile: New Trails Added at Snowfill
We are always looking for ways to improve the experience on Bozeman’s trails by adding routes and mileage to existing trails and parks. This year we worked with the City of Bozeman and the State of Montana’s Recreational Trails Program to add ¾ mile of trail at Snowfill Recreation Area, a dog paradise. The new trail creates a figure-eight loop for dogs and humans to enjoy. More improvements, including an expanded parking area and toilet, were completed in the fall of 2015.

Find Your Way: New Totem Signs and Trail Map
We don’t just build trails, we make them better. With over 80 miles of trails, it can sometimes be hard to find your way. This spring we replaced over 500 directional signs on the wooden totems that mark trail intersections or crossroads. With a fresh new look, the totems are consistent and easy to recognize. We also updated our printed trail map, now available for $3 in our office and at retailers around town. The map includes new trails that have been added since 2012, mileage, amenities, and descriptions of some of our favorites. We are excited to announce that we will be releasing a digital trail map on our website in 2016.

94 Conservation easements
80 Miles of trail
1,319 Acres of public access created
$26.8 M Funding secured for private land conservation

Snowfill – one of Bozeman’s popular off-leash dog areas – got an upgrade with the addition of a new trail.
Final Touches: Triple Tree Trail and Sourdough Canyon Trailhead

Many of GVLT’s most important accomplishments happen behind the scenes. This year we put the final touches on two important trail projects, the Triple Tree Trail and Sourdough Canyon Trailhead. In 2013, GVLT rerouted the Triple Tree Trail to ensure its sustainability, improve safety, and reduce erosion. This year we wrapped up the project by facilitating and purchasing a trail easement with the State of Montana and Gallatin County. This trail easement allows the public to permanently access the trail corridor, which was previously only allowed by users with a Montana State Land Recreation Use Permit.

In addition, GVLT gave six acres at the Sourdough Canyon Trailhead to the US Forest Service for long-term stewardship, after years of owning the property and funding extensive improvements, including a parking area, toilet, and stream restoration.

Both transactions are the legal underpinnings providing permanent trail access for the public. They may be behind the scenes, but they were the final steps on two important GVLT-led projects that memorialize our unique partnerships and unified vision for community trails.

After years of investment, the trailhead at Sourdough Canyon has been drastically improved.

“I am tremendously grateful for the work done by GVLT and the impact they have had on our community. Because of their efforts, I can enjoy year-round, car-free trail running that starts within a mile of my home and goes on for as long as I can physically run.”

- Dee Metrick, Trail User
Under the Watchful Eye of Trail Ambassadors

As the population in our area grows, trail use at Bozeman’s most popular trails will grow with it. This past winter, GVLT and nine partners launched the Trail Ambassadors program. Volunteer Trail Ambassadors patrol area trails and trailheads ready with information, maps, dog poop bags, and a smile. Trail Ambassadors serve as a reminder that good trail etiquette and an entire community of respectful users is what will keep our trail system safe and enjoyable for everyone as our community grows. Since its inception, Trail Ambassadors have completed 225 hours of patrol on area trails and spoken with 2,748 users. Say hi next time you see an Ambassador on the trails!

Discovery Walks: Guided Trail Exploration Series

This summer we started a guided trail walk series called Discovery Walks. Over 260 people joined us for these free one-hour educational walks on trails through the Main Street to the Mountains trail system. Many attendees were first-time trail users or exploring a new trail outside of their regular routine. Some just wanted a group to walk with or a fun way to encourage their kids to engage with the natural world. Others wanted to learn something new. Walks engaged participants in topics like yoga, bird watching, wildflower identification, natural history, local history, and more. Watch for more Discovery Walks next summer!

Jen DuCharme, GVLT volunteer, leads a group to the top of Peets Hill for a ‘Hike to Yoga’ Discovery Walk on a sunny summer afternoon.

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It is clear that our corner of Montana is growing and changing. Over the next year we have big plans to continue to help protect and enhance the quality of life we all treasure. Interest in private land conservation continues to rise swiftly, and we already have a number of excellent projects in the pipeline. The recent RCPP funding (see page 4) will help immensely in our ability to secure conservation easements with families throughout the valley. With development pressure high and renewal of enhanced tax incentives on the horizon, voluntary conservation agreements will continue to be an important tool for landowners to safeguard wildlife habitat, working farms and ranches, and healthy rivers.

On Deck: ready to launch

Our community trails program has already laid the groundwork for a number of exciting projects that will begin in our 2016 fiscal year. Additional improvements at Snowfill, including an expanded parking area, vault toilet, and new entry gate, were completed in the fall of 2015. At the expanded Bozeman Pond Park, GVLT will build trails and install a natural playground in the spring of 2016, in partnership with the City of Bozeman. We will also celebrate our founder Chris Boyd and GVLT’s 25-year history with a new bridge at the base of Peets Hill in Burke Park. The bridge will be a beautiful entry to one of Bozeman’s most iconic parks and an important safety improvement on a heavily used, narrow crossing. We have secured funding to build a ¼ mile trail on the Front Street right-of-way, which is critically important for safety and connectivity as trail users get from the west side of town into trail systems in the northeast, and we continue work with partners on preparations for the 2.1-mile path to the “M” and Drinking Horse Mountain trailheads, with construction planned for 2017.

In partnership with local medical providers, GVLT has launched TrailsRx, a program to promote good health through walking. The program encourages prescriptions of trail walks for patients who could benefit from outdoor exercise. We believe trails are an integral part of a healthy, active community.

As you can see, we’ll be busy. That’s what we do. We work tirelessly on behalf of the passionate supporters who share our vision for this special place. Thanks to your support, we will continue to protect open spaces and enhance our community trails so that they may be enjoyed for generations to come.
Contributions: Your investment in Gallatin Valley Land Trust makes it possible for us to create a lasting legacy of conservation and community trails. We are a membership-based organization and we deeply appreciate the broad-based support we receive from individuals and businesses throughout our region. Unfortunately, space limitations prevent us from listing the hundreds of supporters who contributed membership gifts below $250.

Thank you to all of our supporters!

$30,000+: Anonymous · Heart of the Rockies Initiative · Kendeda Fund · Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation · Mysun Foundation

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Donor listings reflect contributions above $250 received between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015. If your name is missing or incorrect, we apologize for the error. Please contact us with corrections at 406-587-8404 or info@gvlt.org.
Storms over the Bridger Range as seen from the Crawford Property - 310 acres conserved with GVLT in 1997
www.gvlt.org