Dear Friends of GVLT,

Chet is so right that this Annual Report is foremost a reflection of you. On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you for supporting GVLT’s work in times that undoubtedly included significant hardship for you. Your generosity to us — and countless others — amid so much challenge is the epitome of community and we will never forget it. With your help, GVLT accomplished big things in 2020. Together, we:

• Protected wildlife habitat and a popular hiking trail in the Bridger Mountains by purchasing 160 privately owned acres in Middle Cottonwood Canyon, now to become part of the Gallatin National Forest.
• Permanently conserved an additional 1,200 acres of open land, supporting local farming, viewsheds, wildlife and water quality through six new easements.
• Inspired significant new investments in local land conservation by county and federal governments.
• Championed trail planning in the fastest-growing portions of our valley to assure safer, easier, more enjoyable walking and biking.

Our Board and Staff have marveled at your impact. We hear seemingly from everyone: “Being outdoors on the trails and having open land and beauty around has been my salvation this year!” Never before have we heard so many fellow residents extol their reconnection with friends and renewal of spirits, and say explicitly how grateful they are to live in a community that places high priority on these values. Hear, hear!

From all of us at GVLT: Thank you!

Jon Catton

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear GVLT Supporter,

Thank you for welcoming my family and me to the Bozeman community and the GVLT family. I have enjoyed meeting and getting to know many of you over the past few months as we have hiked trails and conversed over the ubiquitous Zoom calls. I look forward to getting to know you better over the coming months and years, hopefully face to face.

I remain humbled to take the helm as GVLT’s Executive Director. Over the past decade, GVLT has grown to be one of the strongest, most respected Land Trusts in the nation. Your support has made that possible. As I learn more about the challenges and needs of this growing community and our strategic vision as an organization, I am grateful to be supported by such talented staff and such a dedicated Board. As you’ll read in this report, this was an exceptionally successful year at GVLT. From what I have seen since I started in May, I have no doubt that we will persevere and continue to excel in our mission.

During the COVID-19 pandemic we have discovered that our conserved lands and trails are critical infrastructure for supporting physical and mental health. We have all been so lucky to weather the storm here, in the Gallatin Valley, where we have wide open spaces and access to the outdoors.

Your annual support has buoyed us through uncertain waters and allowed us to press on with our mission when our community needs us most. The stories in these pages are yours; we hope you’re proud of what we’ve done together this last year. I look forward to being your partner on more stories like these in the coming years.

Thank you.

Chet Work

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Jon Catton
The challenges of a growing community shaped our recent strategic plan. As we reflect on year two of that three-year plan, we see that those same challenges are mounting and our work has become simultaneously more important, and more difficult, than ever. Still, despite a leadership transition and a pandemic, GVLT had one of our most successful years yet. As you will see through the pages in this report, our foot remained firmly on the gas pedal, moving us toward our strategic goals.

INTRODUCTION

The recently conserved Visser Ranch has been home for the Visser Family (and lots of critters) since the 1940’s.

OUR GOALS: 2019-2022

- Working within our geographic focus areas, complete high quality & enduring LAND CONSERVATION projects that provide significant community benefit.
- Ensure appropriate CONSERVATION easement STEWARDSHIP & compliance by maintaining, enhancing, & protecting conservation values.
- ADVOCATE for LAND conservation tools & the importance of connected TRAILS in land use planning processes.
- DEVELOP new conservation and trail-building FINANCE TOOLS.
- BUILD more high quality, accessible, connected TRAILS.
- STRENGTHEN strategic trail PARTNERSHIPS.
- BUILD an inclusive COMMUNITY of informed, engaged, & caring individuals who will steward & respect our open lands and trails.
- Maintain & STEWARD community TRAILS.
- STRENGTHEN strategic trail PARTNERSHIPS.
2020 was one of our most successful and busiest years ever for land conservation projects. We strategically conserved 1,239 acres with six easements and purchased 160 acres in our conservation focus areas throughout the Gallatin and Paradise Valleys.

An additional 86 acres were added to an existing easement for a total of 186 acres conserved along the East Gallatin River.

313 acres of prime farmland near the East Gallatin River, Spring Family Farm.

160 acres purchased, protecting access & wildlife habitat in Middle Cottonwood Canyon.

779 acres of native grasslands & pasture along Norris Road, Visser Ranch.

30 acres of Gallatin River frontage & wildlife habitat, Kurland-Gadd Property.

10 acres along a quarter-mile of the Yellowstone River, Legacy Lookout — Paradise Valley.

21 acres of secure habitat near the West Fork of the Gallatin River, Andesite Reserve — Big Sky.
This spring, we purchased a 160-acre property in Middle Cottonwood Canyon permanently protecting the Middle Cottonwood trail corridor and surrounding wildlife habitat from development forever. This achievement marks the completion of a strategic goal — to execute a project that weaves together our dual mission of trails and conservation. The scenic property is located in the West Bridger Mountains, approximately six miles northeast of Bozeman. The entire parcel is critical winter range for elk and mule deer and also contains the first half-mile of the popular Middle Cottonwood Trail. The purchase secured perpetual public access to the trail and the public lands which surround the property on three sides. We are currently working to transfer the property to the care of the United States Forest Service, which already manages the Middle Cottonwood Trail and the surrounding lands.

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP

Our Stewardship staff visit each of our 114 conservation easements annually to ensure compliance with the conservation easement and connect landowners with resources to enhance the conservation values of their land. These partnerships with landowners cover over 49,000 acres throughout our service area in Gallatin, Park, Madison, and Meagher counties.

This year, we received a $50,000 donation from The MySun Charitable Foundation to plant trees over the next five years. The trees will be planted in honor of Penelope Pierce, former GVLT Executive Director, so that her legacy will take root and support the landscape she loves in the years to come. This summer we planted trees along the Sourdough Trail near Tuckerman Park to address erosion and restore the stream bank.

LAND CONSERVATION
In 2015, GVLT and 17 partner groups received a $3.8 million Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) award from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The funds were used to help 7 local families place conservation easements on their family farms and ranches totaling over 2600 acres and to complete 6 land stewardship projects on fertile farmland across Gallatin County. This funding was leveraged with dollars from the Gallatin County Open Lands Program and landowner donations and produced $21 million in total conservation value. Based on the success of the program, GVLT was awarded a full $3.8 million renewal of the RCPP award. This funding will allow GVLT and partners to continue focused and strategic conservation efforts in the rapidly developing Gallatin Valley. We’re excited to continue working with local farmers and ranchers to secure important agricultural lands and reduce urban sprawl.

The conservation of the LF dairy farm was made possible by funding from the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

Great trail systems don’t happen by accident—they require an inspiring vision, thoughtful planning, community input, and collaboration. Through our participation in local government planning, GVLT identified an opportunity in the rapidly developing triangle between Bozeman, Four Corners, and Belgrade. This area is becoming more and more residential but has no plan for future trail connectivity. Without a plan, trails develop in fragments that are challenging, costly or virtually impossible to connect in the future. This year, GVLT partnered with Gallatin County to develop a Triangle Area Trail Plan. The planning process is just beginning and will rely on community input to envision how people will move safely through this area for recreation and transportation. It will guide non-motorized infrastructure development in this Area and will be implemented as development continues.

The process begins with an evaluation of existing trails in the Triangle Area.
Our trails staff, along with two seasonal AmeriCorps interns serving through Montana Conservation Corps, worked diligently to improve trail conditions and mitigate impacts. We worked safely with 50 groups and 230 volunteers on trail rehabilitation projects at Triple Tree, Painted Hills, and Highland Glen. We continue to add and maintain trailhead kiosks and totem wayfinding signage on the Main Street to the Mountains trail system.

In newer areas, on Bozeman’s west side, paths lead people through beautiful neighborhoods but also lead to busy streets with no crosswalks or bike lanes, or they dead-end at curbs or across undeveloped properties. Without clear signage, trail users struggle to find existing trails that can safely take them to destinations like schools, parks, playgrounds and commercial centers. This year we launched the East/West Connector Trail project to ensure that trails on the west side are connected safely to each other and help move people to the existing trails and parks on the east side of town. We have identified the small connections, safety improvements, and signage needs that will put the finishing touches on a robust, off-street pathway system for Bozeman’s west side.
This year made clear that trails and open space are critically important infrastructure for resilient communities. When the pandemic reached our state and residents were asked to stay at home, our community turned to the trails as a respite for their physical and emotional health. We quickly partnered with the City of Bozeman, US Forest Service, Gallatin Health Department, and other land managers to install signage and share messaging about social distancing outdoors. We continue to regularly emphasize the importance of fresh air, movement, and a smile from a fellow trail user to manage these stressful times.

Springtime is normally a flurry of events to encourage the community to get outside. Knowing COVID-19 would draw people to nature more than ever, we quickly adapted our community activities into virtual and socially-distanced experiences. We produced Discovery Walk videos on birding and outdoor science for kids. Our NextGen Advisory Board’s Pop-Up Picnic became a Picnic with Your People social media campaign encouraging picnickers to patronize our local growers and restaurants. To bring smiles to kids and families stuck at home, we partnered with Random Acts of Silliness, a children’s theater company, to host safe and socially distant family improv in the park and Flutterby Thicket, a magical fairy house village along the Gallagator Trail.

STRNGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

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BUILD COMMUNITY
We have learned from experience that working together is what matters most.

Our diverse partnerships are critical to the success of our mission. Thank you to all our partners.
The Montana Community Foundation manages an additional endowment of $221,890 on behalf of GVLT.
Unfortunately, space limitations prevent us from listing the hundreds of supporters who contributed.

The following landowners dedicated significant land funding to the GVLT Scarp Foundation to help preserve their property in conservation.

Admiral (William) Fall
Glencoe, Gary & Dee Baker
Emily Gadd
Kari, Tim & Scott Kamps
Betty & Bill Kamps
Mary & Dick Pohl
Patricia Simmons & Ed Verry
John & Gail Richardson
Jenna Jennings
Pam Merrell & Bill Seymour
Maddie & Chris Pope
Mary & Dick Pohl
Janie & Ken Younger
Gary & Tuti Skaar
Marguerite
Rachel & John Day
Sharon Tudor Isler
Eva & Duncan Patten
Sunny & Doug Mavor
Susan & John Schimek
Betty & Doug Mavor
Sunny & Doug Mavor
Mary & Dick Pohl
Patricia Simmons & Ed Verry
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Jenna Jennings
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Maddie & Chris Pope
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Eva & Duncan Patten
Sunny & Doug Mavor
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Betty & Doug Mavor