OUR PROCESS

After identifying the most pressing challenges for trails and conservation work in our community, we brainstormed tangible solutions drawing on our unique skills, expertise, and perspective. The solutions outlined here lay out a road map for achieving our ambitious thirty-year vision. We’ll need a community coalition as diverse as the landscapes we seek to access and protect — this commitment to inclusion is woven throughout our new strategic plan.

THE GALLATIN VALLEY LAND TRUST BOARD OF DIRECTORS, STAFF, AND NEXTGEN ADVISORY BOARD SPENT MUCH OF 2022 DEVELOPING A LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN TO GUIDE THE WORK OF OUR ORGANIZATION THROUGH FISCAL YEAR 2028.
CONSERVATION

In 30 years, we will have conserved an additional 100,000 acres of the most critically important and threatened open land throughout Montana’s Greater Yellowstone region, in Gallatin, Park and Madison Counties.

WE ENVISION A FUTURE WHERE OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS ENSURE THAT ALL SPECIES IN OUR LANDSCAPE CAN THRIVE.

WHY TRAILS AND CONSERVATION?

Access to nature, connected trail systems, productive farms and ranches, wildlife habitat and clean water sustain our physical and mental health, and enable ecological sustainability, economic stability, and social connectedness. They define our quality of life.

Our 30-year vision:

**CONSERVATION**

In 30 years, we will have conserved an additional 100,000 acres of the most critically important and threatened open land throughout Montana’s Greater Yellowstone region, in Gallatin, Park and Madison Counties.

**TRAILS**

In 30 years, everyone in the greater Bozeman area will have convenient access to immersive experiences in nature and live within a 10-minute walk of a safe, connected trail system.
Growth in our region has exploded since our last strategic plan. Access to trails and the security of our open lands, agricultural heritage, and wildlife habitat are in peril. Gallatin County remains one of the fastest growing counties in Montana and Bozeman ranks among the fastest growing cities of its size in the country. Population increase across all of our service area is putting extreme pressure on our open lands and outdoor recreation infrastructure.

The threat to our quality of life is rapid and real, and our work must keep up with the pace.

By focusing on projects that match the highest need with our unique skill set, we can stretch our impact further.

**WE CAN MEET THE MOMENT**
Thanks to over 30 years of investment from supporters and volunteers, GVLT has deep land management and transaction expertise, extensive knowledge of trail design and maintenance, and a sustained capacity to deliver on-the-ground conservation and trail projects. This uniquely positions us to address the challenges and embrace the opportunities presented by growth.

**DYNAMIC, YET FOCUSED**
Our trails and conservation programs are constantly evolving to adapt to the swiftly changing landscape, climate, and community needs. Yet our mission remains steadfast — more focused, and more critical than ever.

**WE DO NOT NEED TO CHANGE WHAT WE DO, WE JUST NEED TO DO MORE OF IT.**
IN 2021, GVLT ACHIEVED A REMARKABLE MILESTONE:
50,000 ACRES CONSERVED IN THREE DECADES.

During the same period, 100,000 acres were developed in Gallatin County alone, more than any other county in Montana. The breakneck speed of land conversion is just one of the challenges we face — high property values, finite funding, legislative hurdles and a changing climate all present significant obstacles to our land conservation program.

Despite these mounting challenges, the conservation easement remains one of the most efficient and effective tools for permanently protecting high-quality wildlife habitat, working farms and ranches, clean water and scenic open space.

1 Triple our pace of conservation
Aiming to conserve an additional 25,000 acres over the next 5 years, we will nearly triple our average rate of conservation from the last decade. Focusing on properties with high conservation value that are adjacent to other protected or public lands will continue to amplify the impact of our work.

2 Build capacity for more proactive conservation
We will continue to shift our land conservation methods from opportunistic and reactive to strategic and proactive. Through partnerships with landowners we will seek out opportunities on properties that contain wildlife habitat, productive farmland, clean water, climate resiliency benefits, and/or public access opportunities.

3 Integrate community needs
In the next five years, we will identify social or cultural community needs that can be addressed through our trails and/or conservation real estate skill-set. While protecting property with historic and cultural value, we will put special emphasis on lands that have importance to indigenous peoples.

4 Expand capacity in Park County
The Paradise Valley holds some of the most high-quality and threatened conservation values in the state. We are adding a dedicated staff member and renewed organizational focus in Park County to capitalize on urgent conservation opportunities.
OPEN LANDS ARE PART OF MONTANA’S HERITAGE.

Our land conservation efforts are focused in the following areas:

**BOZEMAN PASS**
This ecologically diverse area serves as a key linkage for wildlife to move safely from Yellowstone to Glacier National Park. New conservation projects in this area will build on 30 years of success and keep the landscape open for our region’s most iconic and threatened wildlife.

**GALLATIN & EAST GALLATIN RIVER CORRIDORS**
Increased development along our rivers can impact the water quality needed for native species to thrive. Conserving river corridors safeguards our clean water, protects habitat and preserves blue-ribbon fishing for the future.

**AMSTERDAM-CHURCHILL**
The productive farmland just west of the Gallatin River boasts some of the very best soils in the state and is home to some of our valley’s oldest farming and ranching operations. Over the last 15 years GVLT has partnered with landowners in this area to protect 8,500 acres, ensuring that it will continue to grow food, not houses.

**GOOCH HILL**
The landowners in Gooch Hill have been farming these prime soils on the bench just east of Gallatin Gateway for generations. The panoramic views are breathtaking for the road biker and back-road driver alike. A more recent area of focus, GVLT and landowners have conserved key puzzle pieces and momentum is building.

**PARADISE VALLEY**
Park County holds some of the most historic ranching operations and best wildlife habitat and migration corridors in the state. While we’ve been partnering with landowners in the county for years, we are doubling down on our commitment to this community by adding a staff member to create lasting conservation impact in the northern gateway to Yellowstone National Park.

*While we are strategically focused in the areas above, our service area includes all of Gallatin, Park, and Madison counties. We will, of course, continue to advance impactful conservation projects with willing landowners throughout our service area.*
As we expand our portfolio of conserved properties beyond our current holdings, the need for our stewardship work will increase as well. GVLT is committed to the perpetual stewardship and long-term relationships that accompany all of our conservation easements.

1. Work smarter, not harder
We will implement remote monitoring technology that will create efficiency without sacrificing the personal connections that have long characterized our brand of conservation easement stewardship.

2. Share Expertise
We will continue to build trusting, value-added relationships with our landowners by listening to their needs, staying on top of current natural resource issues and connecting them with local experts and funding sources to enhance the conservation values of their land.
TRAILS SHOULD BE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE, FREE OF CHARGE AND ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE IN OUR COMMUNITY REGARDLESS OF PHYSICAL ABILITY.

Trails are critical infrastructure. They are essential to our physical wellbeing, our mental health, and our community’s social fabric.

Local population growth and the COVID-19 pandemic brought a surge in trail use. Overcrowding at trailheads and on the trails has adverse impacts on user experience and the natural environment.

New housing developments at the edges of town present critical and fleeting moments to connect existing trails and envision new routes from the get-go. Increased vehicle traffic is highlighting the need for alternative transportation with a safe and direct trail system to move people efficiently from home to work, school and play.

1. Create critical connections
We have identified twelve critical trail connections that will tie together the existing Main Street to the Mountains system and ensure all residents can safely and efficiently travel to schools, services, parks and work.

2. Plan alongside development
Seizing opportunities to work with cities and counties as well as real estate developers as subdivisions are approved, we will continue to lead the expansion of the trail system as our community footprint grows.

3. Expand access
We will advance three flagship projects in the next five years to diffuse pressure on existing trails and increase access to the outdoors for a variety of people including bikers, hikers, runners, walkers, dog lovers, bird watchers, families and people with limited mobility. These projects include recreation areas, pathways to public land, and trails within natural areas.
TRAILS ARE FOR EVERYONE.
We focus on developing trails in these areas because they hold the most pressing opportunities for connection, inclusivity, and convenient access to nature. We will concentrate on those areas currently under-served by trails.

BOZEMAN'S URBAN CORE
Over 100 miles of trail weave from downtown, south to the Montana State University campus, north to the Story Mill Community Park, west toward newer neighborhoods within the City and everywhere in between. Despite 30+ years of our diligent efforts building the Main Street to the Mountains system alongside our partners at the City of Bozeman, important gaps still remain. Completing our urban network of trails will remain a priority for GVLT.

GROWTH AREA
Through trail planning and partnerships with the City of Bozeman, Gallatin County, and the City of Belgrade, we can grow our world class trail system with each new development, ensuring critical connections don't fall through the cracks. We will ensure our trail system expands west and connects to Four Corners, Belgrade and south of Bozeman.

FOOTHILLS
You can travel Main Street to mountains on trails, to the top of Triple Tree Trail and the College M Trail directly from town. But we're not done yet. Our growing community needs additional opportunities to recreate outdoors away from our urban core. We will be developing pathways to our public lands in the Bridgers and Gallatin and new access points to those quiet natural experiences that are critical to our community.
OUR COMMUNITY IS STRUGGLING TO SHARE OUR OUTDOOR SPACES AND LOVING OUR FAVORITE TRAILS TO DEATH.

Increased use of the trails means more wear and tear. Crowding on trails in the Main Street to the Mountains system is driving an increase in conflicts and calls about poor stewardship.

1. Maintain trails
We are committed to protecting and enhancing the value of our trail network for safe transit and recreation. Our dedicated staff and volunteers will continue to maintain the high quality of our trails, particularly those we have an obligation or agreement to manage.

2. Invest in outreach
We will invest in our Trail Ambassador Program that trains and places volunteers at trailheads throughout the region. This initiative connects GVLT directly with community trail users, fostering personal connections as well as personal responsibility on the trails.

3. Expand etiquette education
We will continue our work educating users about trail etiquette as a founding partner of the Outside Kind Alliance. This coalition of outdoor user groups collaborates to promote a culture of kindness across all forms of outdoor recreation.
Our people are vital to our mission and our impact: a talented and professional staff is necessary to lead and implement all of the objectives of this plan.

DREAMS WITHOUT DO-ERS ARE JUST IDEAS.

1. Invest in our people
   To ensure sustainable and sufficient capacity to deliver on our vision, we are investing in the retention and longevity of our talented staff.

2. Grow our team
   To expand our impact and accelerate the pace of our work, we will be adding a team member to all three of our core branches: lands, trails, and fundraising.

3. Reflect our community
   We will recruit staff and volunteer advisors who bring diverse perspectives to our work.
Increase annual giving
We rely on annual contributions to fuel our programs, build deep relationships with landowners and partners, and keep our team actively developing a pipeline of impactful conservation and trails projects.

Grow our quick-strike fund
This board-designated fund, named in honor of Penelope S. Pierce, is designed to increase our ability to act on time-sensitive land transactions. Growing this reserve makes it possible for us to pounce when properties with conservation or recreational value become available.

Cultivate endowment support
Our conservation and trails commitments last forever, and we take that responsibility seriously. With our most devoted supporters, we will bolster the three endowments that support our trail and land stewardship obligations as well as our general operations.

OF COURSE, ALL OF THIS COMES AT A PRICE.
Our ambitious goals will require additional capacity, straining our existing resources. Quick-strike funds will be needed to seize on-the-ground conservation and trails opportunities in our fast-paced real estate market. As an organization with long-term obligations to both conservation and trail stewardship, it is imperative that we plan for financial sustainability.