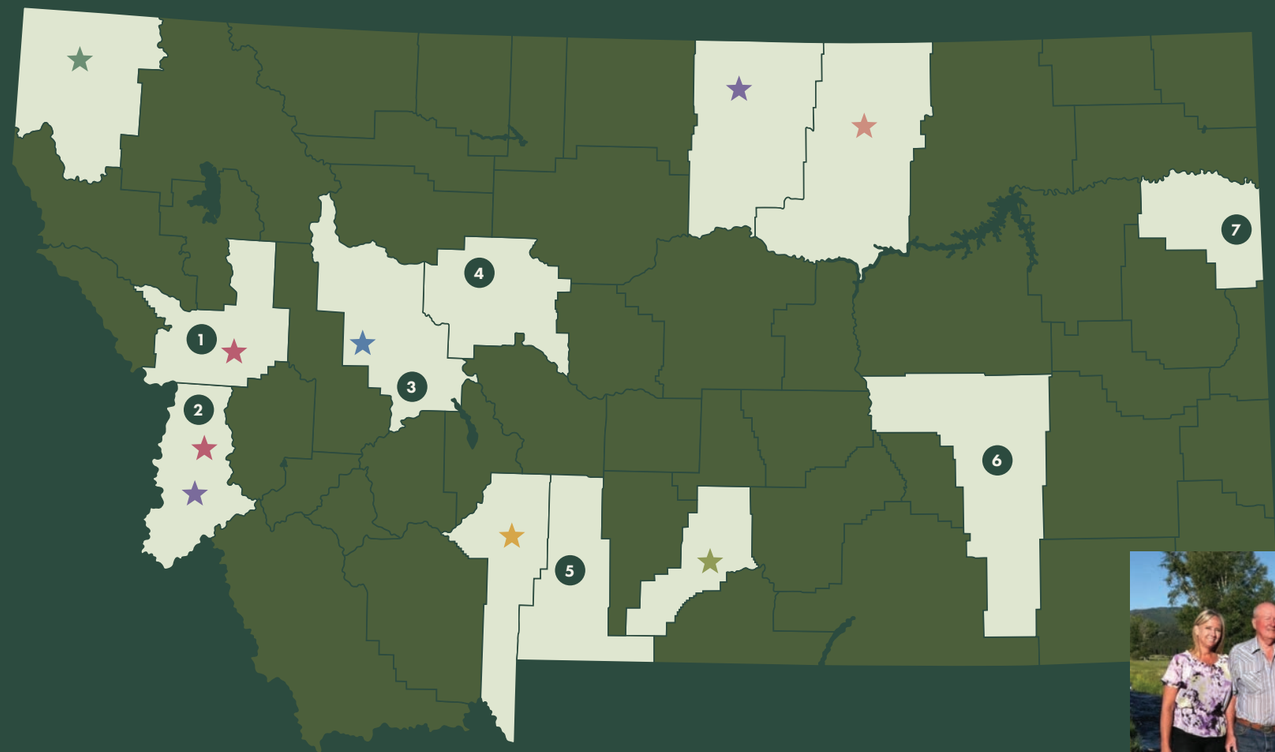


Also featured in this report

- Barthelmess Family Ranch, Phillips County (p. 8-9)
- Leep Hay & Grain, Gallatin County (p. 10-11)
- Stimson Lumber Company, Lincoln County (p. 12-13)
- Lazy J Cross Conservation Easement, Ravalli County (p. 14-15)
- Elloam Grazing Association, Blaine County (p. 14-15)
- Montana National Guard, Lewis and Clark County (p. 16-17)
- Open Space Bonds in Missoula & Ravalli Counties (p. 18-19)
- Stillwater Mining Company, Stillwater County (p. 20-21)

1 Indreland Family

Missoula County, MT

FIVE VALLEYS LAND TRUST

"I realized that it might not be here forever," Rory Indreland says, of the ranch his family has operated near Missoula for over 80 years. "Ever since, I've asked, 'What can we do to save it?'" One of the tools that the family is using to ensure the legacy of Indreland Ranch for future generations is a conservation easement. In 2025, they permanently conserved 1,667 acres of the property, which will continue to support cattle, hay, and timber production and remain important habitat for elk, deer, bears, and other wildlife.


Photo by Anastasia Wilde, courtesy Five Valleys Land Trust

2 Sutherlin Family

Ravalli County, MT

BITTER ROOT LAND TRUST

Lifelong Bitterroot Valley farmers and ranchers Bob and Laurie Sutherlin have spent decades establishing and growing Sutherlin Farms with a goal in mind: to keep their land in agriculture for generations to come. Resting on some of the richest soil in all of Ravalli County, Sutherlin Farms is primarily used for irrigated crop production, including hay, alfalfa, grain and silage corn, all of which are grown to feed their cow/calf operation and herd of Red Angus that has seed stock all over the world. "It takes good productive ground to raise enough hay to winter these cattle. You can't just let it go away," says Bob. Thanks to the decision to conserve their farm, the Sutherlin family has guaranteed the preservation and enhancement of one more section of open space in western Montana – forever.


Photo courtesy Bitter Root Land Trust

3 Birdseye Ranch

Lewis and Clark County, MT

PRICKLY PEAR LAND TRUST

Prickly Pear Land Trust acquired Birdseye Ranch with funding from the National Guard, the Lewis and Clark County Open Space Bond program, and the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust. The 1,472-acre property adjoins Fort Harrison, making it a key area for the military and the Helena community. The site was prioritized as open space due to its proximity to a military training area and its valuable natural landscapes, which encompass one of the last large tracts of native grasslands in the Helena Valley and provide habitat for birds, pronghorn, deer, and the occasional elk and moose.


Photo by Kevin League, courtesy Prickly Pear Land Trust

4 Hastings Family Ranch

Cascade County, MT

THE MONTANA LAND RELIANCE

For generations, the Hastings family has adapted their ranching operation while remaining committed to responsible stewardship of the land. What began as a small farm has grown into a nearly 6,000-acre cow-calf operation southeast of Ulm. Matt Hastings returned to the ranch after college and military service, eventually purchasing it from his parents and building on his father Hugh's legacy of careful stewardship. Matt partnered with The Montana Land Reliance and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to place 4,266 acres of the ranch under a conservation easement, permanently protecting intact grasslands and upland bird habitat overlooking the Smith River Valley. Today, Matt works alongside his son Preston to enhance fencing, water systems, and ranch infrastructure.

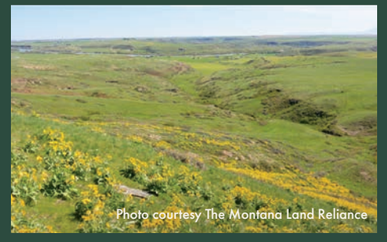


Photo courtesy The Montana Land Reliance

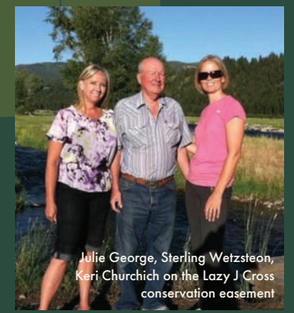
5 Warfield Ranch

Park County, MT

GALLATIN VALLEY LAND TRUST

Alan and Laurie Redfield know Paradise Valley's stunning landscapes, prime agriculture, and iconic Yellowstone wildlife well. Laurie's parents bought Warfield Ranch in 1947, and she and her sister, Sarah, grew up ranching. Laurie and Alan, a fourth-generation Montanan, raised their twin daughters, Katie and Jodi, there as well, as they continued to steward the family operation. As pressure to sell and subdivide in Park County continued to grow, the family chose to protect their ranching legacy through a conservation easement. Redfield says the decision was an important part of planning for the future of the family and the land. "It's part of a transition plan," he says. "A lot of ranches have to look at this. It makes us feel better that it's taken care of."


Photo courtesy Gallatin Valley Land Trust


Julie George, Sterling Wetzsteon, Keri Churchich on the Lazy J Cross conservation easement

"We wanted to honor the vision and dream of our father, Sterling Wetzsteon, to provide hunting on this property forever. It was incredibly important to him."

Julie George and Keri Churchich
Sibling Landowners
Lazy J Cross Conservation Easement

6 Dahlman Family

Rosebud County, MT

THE MONTANA LAND RELIANCE

The Dahlman conservation easement protects an important working ranch outside of Forsyth, helping ensure the land remains intact and available for agricultural use. By conserving the property's open space, wildlife habitat, and ranching heritage, the easement provides long-term certainty that the land can continue supporting both the Dahlman family and the surrounding landscape for generations to come.


Jean and Floyd Dahlman / Photo courtesy The Montana Land Reliance

7 Thiel Ranch

Richland County, MT

THE MONTANA LAND RELIANCE

In Richland County, the Thiel family donated a conservation easement to The Montana Land Reliance on 2,286 acres to prevent the land from being developed and conserve its agricultural future. The property supports a dry land farming operation and provides grazing for a family producer. The tax benefits were an important factor in the family's decision to pursue the perpetual protection of the property. Today, the land remains privately owned, productive, and protected from development.


Photo courtesy The Montana Land Reliance