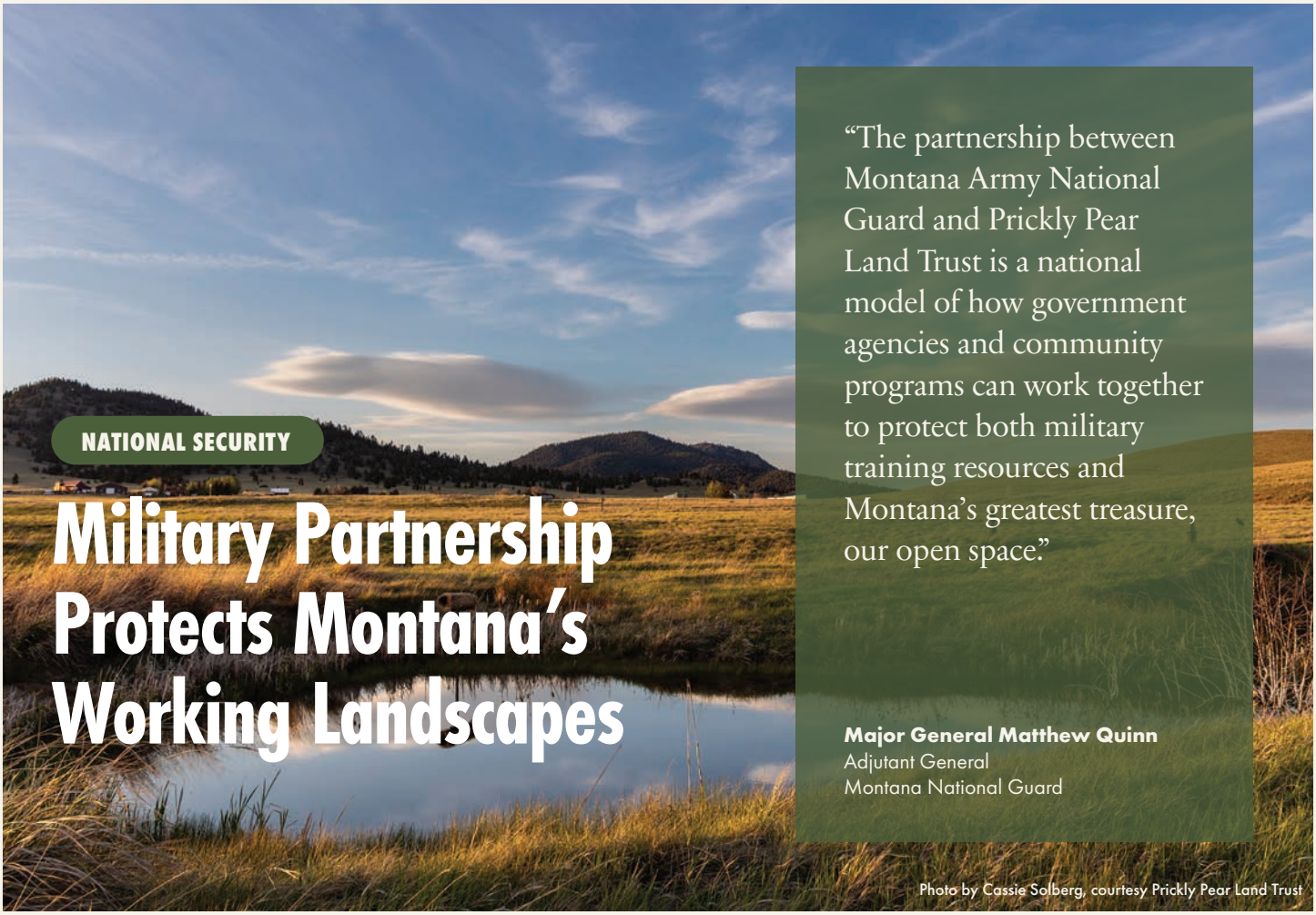

NATIONAL SECURITY

Military Partnership Protects Montana's Working Landscapes

"The partnership between Montana Army National Guard and Prickly Pear Land Trust is a national model of how government agencies and community programs can work together to protect both military training resources and Montana's greatest treasure, our open space."

Major General Matthew Quinn
Adjutant General
Montana National Guard

Photo by Cassie Solberg, courtesy Prickly Pear Land Trust

The Montana Army National Guard, much like other industries across the state, requires wide open spaces to operate and train. Land trusts, like Helena's Prickly Pear Land Trust (PPLT), specialize in maintaining such open spaces and have partnered with the Department of Defense to strategically deploy conservation easements to secure military installments like Helena's Fort Harrison.

The partnership took flight in 2016 when PPLT and the National Guard joined forces. Fort Harrison is a vital Montana Army National Guard facility with an annual economic impact of nearly $42 million to Helena's economy. Residential development of all or part of the land adjacent to the facility threatened to diminish the military training and operations mission at Fort Harrison and reduce the significant economic contributions of the base.

PPLT and the National Guard first partnered in 2016 to purchase 205 acres of pastureland adjacent to Fort Harrison and Tenmile Creek, an important acquisition that ensures training at the base may continue in perpetuity. This collaborative momentum quickly extended across the valley, fueling the conservation of an additional 358 acres along Sevenmile Creek.

For the National Guard, the strategy is a matter of operational readiness. High-density residential development right next to Fort Harrison creates compatibility conflicts that restrict vital military training. By utilizing military funding alongside the Lewis and Clark County Open Space Bond,

WHY THIS MATTERS

Supports annual economic benefit of $42 million to local economy

Protects military training resources

Provides crucial wildfire breaks

Provides scientific study opportunities

this partnership successfully established an open space buffer zone around the Fort. This keeps the military fully operational while ensuring the historic valley landscape remains intact.

"The partnership between Montana Army National Guard and Prickly Pear Land Trust is a national model of how government agencies and community programs can work together to protect both military training resources and Montana's greatest treasure, our open space," said Major General Matthew Quinn, Adjutant General for the Montana National Guard at the time of the project.



Photo by Cassie Solberg, courtesy Prickly Pear Land Trust

The benefits of this partnership stretch far beyond national security; the properties act as a natural defense system for the community. Every spring, the conserved lands at Tenmile and Sevenmile absorb floodwaters and recharge groundwater. In the summer, they serve as crucial wildfire breaks. This natural mitigation was put to the test in 2020, when the Birdseye Road Fire swept toward residential areas. The restored streambed, wetlands, and managed grasslands at Sevenmile Creek acted as a natural dampener, stopping the fire in its tracks. With wildfire suppression costing four times more than proactive mitigation, this open-space buffer provides an invaluable economic safeguard.

Today, these properties prove that conservation works for a wide array of Montana industries. Tenmile Creek Park hosts over 75,000 annual visits for recreation, while Sevenmile Creek serves as a living laboratory for local students studying water conservation. By protecting these floodplains and keeping the land functional, PPLT and the National Guard ensure that Montana's military heritage, agricultural roots, and natural resources can thrive side by side for generations to come.



Photo courtesy Prickly Pear Land Trust



WEST CENTRAL MONTANA
Lewis and Clark County

PARTNERING LAND TRUST
Prickly Pear Land Trust

BY THE NUMBERS

Montana & National Security

85,871

VETERANS

Living in Montana

SOURCE: Montana Veteran Affairs Division. 2025. Fort Harrison, MT. https://veterans.mt.gov

9%

VETERAN POPULATION IN MONTANA

Third-highest percentage in the country

SOURCE: Montana Veteran Affairs Division. 2025. Fort Harrison, MT. https://veterans.mt.gov

97%

OF MONTANANS

Say outdoor recreation is important to their quality of life

SOURCE: Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks. 2025. Montana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Helena, Montana. https://fwp.mt.gov/binaries/content/assets/fwp/stateparks/scorp/scorp-2026-2030-digital-version.pdf