

# BLUE MOUNTAIN LAND TRUST

SUMMER 2015

3,000 ACRE EASEMENT ACQUIRED

SHERWOOD TRUST AWARDS CONSERVATION GRANT

LEARNING ON THE LAND EXPANDS TO 14 EVENTS

CONSERVATION PLAN GUIDES OUR WORK



Blue Mountain Land Trust  
POB 1473  
Walla Walla, WA 99362  
509-525-3136  
bmlt@bmlt.org  
www.bmlt.org

Sue Parrish  
President

Andrea Burkhart  
Immediate Past  
President

Gwen Dildine  
Secretary

Justin Rodegerts  
Treasurer

Directors  
Doug Bickerstaff  
Tim Copeland  
Linda Herbert  
Carl Scheeler  
Eileen Smith

Tim Copeland  
Executive Director

Tom Reilly  
Conservation Director

Photo credits  
Esther Wofford  
Bill Rodgers  
Greg Lehman  
Tod Crouter  
Heather Ibsen  
J Franklin Willis

## Cunha Easement Adds 3,000 Acres in Union County to Blue Mountain Land Trust's Conservation Portfolio

**By Tom Reilly**  
**Conservation Director**

Imagine a place in the Blue Mountains where springs and streams run clear, cold, and pure. Where steelhead spawn and are reared along with juvenile Chinook salmon. Where elk live and roam almost year round. Where three miles of important tributaries to the Grande Ronde River are conserved in an undeveloped state forever. Where lack of development or subdivision provides spectacular scenic views of the surrounding mountains and countryside. The Cunha

Ranch is just such a place, and it is now conserved forever by a conservation easement held by the Blue Mountain Land Trust.

Known officially as the Dark Canyon Conservation Easement, nearly 3,000 acres of a working cattle ranch is our latest conservation easement acquisition. The property is nestled in the foothills near Starkey, Oregon southwest of La Grande, where Meadow Creek enters the Grande Ronde River. The property contains two river miles of Dark Canyon Creek, a major tributary to Meadow Creek, one mile of

which winds through the property. Over 250 acres of wetland and riparian habitat are found on the property. In addition to the abundance of natural resources, the property will remain in private hands as a working cattle ranch, providing economic benefit while remaining on the tax rolls of Union County.

The Dark Canyon easement meets many conservation values and public benefits important to the Blue Mountain Land Trust including:

- Preservation of juvenile rearing and migration of Snake

- River spring-summer Chinook salmon listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.
- Preservation of spawning and rearing habitat of threatened Snake River summer steelhead.
- Preservation of wildlife habitat including important big game winter range.
- Opportunity to protect and enhance water quality.
- Extinguishment of development rights on the property, thus preserving the scenic beauty and open space of the land by preventing subdivision, fragmentation of habitat, and development.
- Protection of the property from intensive grazing; timber harvest except for forest health and improvement of habitat; stream channelization; or road construction.

The landowners retained a 3-1/2 acre building site on the property for a single residence but no development or construction will be allowed on the rest of the land.

Partners in this project include the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), which funded the acquisition, and the Confederated Tribes of the

Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), which identified the project opportunity and initiated the acquisition and brought in Blue Mountain Land Trust in 2013 to complete the transaction.

The funding was committed by BPA for use by the CTUIR in the *2008 Columbia Basin Fish Accords Memorandum of Agreement* between the Three Treaty Tribes and the Federal Columbia River Power System Action Agencies for the benefit of fish and wildlife. Both BPA and the CTUIR retain rights of enforcement of the easement, and the easement will be held in perpetuity by the Blue Mountain Land Trust.

BMLT assumes long term stewardship and defense of this easement, and will conduct annual monitoring to ensure that the conservation easement is followed as agreed by the landowners.

Current property owners Joe and Patti Cunha are excited to be partners in conservation. As Patti is fond of saying, "everything the land trust wants for the property we want as land owners." The property has been in the Cunha family for generations.

The original Cunha family ranch encompassed 12,000 acres in the Grande Ronde Valley. Joe Cunha is the last family member

owning part of the original ranch. In recent decades nearby ranches have been sold and subdivided. Land use in the area has been transitioning from ranching to residential/recreational.

The Cunhas want to keep the property in the family and to continue its traditional use for well-managed cattle grazing during summer months and for fishing, hunting, and overall enjoyment year round.

This acquisition marks a major milestone for the Blue Mountain Land Trust. For years we have wanted to acquire conservation properties in Oregon to fulfill our commitment to the two states we serve. Our first success is a major one in furthering our mission.

This project came about through a solid collaborative working relationship with a major conservation partner, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. And this property certainly represents the scenic, natural, and working lands that characterize our region.

With this acquisition, our twelfth conservation easement, we now have stewardship of 3,800 acres of land in two states!





## Blue Mountain Land Trust Awarded Accreditation from Land Trust Alliance

By Gwen Dildine  
Secretary and Board Member

Last December, we achieved land trust accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance.

Accreditation means the Land Trust Accreditation Commission recognizes that we operate professionally, follow best practices, and are committed to fulfilling our responsibility of protecting lands forever. Thanks to the accreditation process, we've implemented high standards of governance, management and operational excellence.

Accreditation with the Land Trust Accreditation Commission is something our board and staff worked to obtain for over three years. We could not have accomplished such a significant achievement without our many supporters and friends like you.

We are especially appreciative

of the leadership and encouragement that Tom Dwonch provided as our executive director when we launched the accreditation process. Without his vision and drive to initiate this achievement, we would not be accredited now.

Special thanks are also gratefully extended to Tara Lord, who was the unquestioned captain of this project, and to Tom Reilly and Allison Green, the executive and conservation directors, respectively, during the accreditation process. These three leaders devoted over 400 hours to this project. Their contributions were magnificent.

We are now one of 285 land trusts in the United States that has been awarded accreditation. There are over 1,700 land trusts in the nation.

## Outdoor Recreation Opportunities Explored

Our friends at the Community Council recently released its study group's report on enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities in the Walla Walla area. After a year of research and inquiry, the group presented a report with 12 recommendations of how recreational opportunities could be increased and improved. The study group was chaired by Adam Kirtley. Sue Parrish, our president, was a member of the study group.

During the study, conservation director Tom Reilly and development director Heather Ibsen presented summaries of our land trust's work and mission. As a result of their participation, we have been encouraged by the Council to explore how BMLT might assist with the implementation of some of its recommendations.

Toward that end, we engaged Mitchell Cutter, a junior at Whitman College, to begin cataloging the opportunities in our region for hiking, bicycling, fishing, bird watching, water recreation, camping and exploration by car. The goal is to develop a website and a companion e-book that will be guides to the many recreation options we have in Blue Mountain country.

The Community Council has formed an implementation task force. We look forward to helping this task force with its important work over the next two years.



## Sherwood Trust Awards a \$195,000 Grant to Sustain Conservation Department

The Donald and Virginia Sherwood Trust awarded our land trust a \$195,000 grant on June 4. The grant provides funding for our conservation department for three years beginning in January, 2016.

BMLT's conservation activities depend heavily on the expertise and hard work of our conservation director. Providing the director with appropriate compensation and financial support for other conservation expenses is critical to the fulfillment of our mission. This award will help us meet this requirement through 2018.

The award provides us an opportunity to make the conservation department sustaining and self-sufficient through the generation of income from its activities. We will explore a number of income-producing opportunities that the conservation department

may implement with the goal of making it self-sustaining before 2019.

In awarding the grant, the Sherwood Trust's representatives noted our innovative conservation department plan, the board's high level of involvement in the governance of the land trust and the quality of our programs and outreach as reasons for their positive decision.

"This is wonderful news," said executive director Tim Copeland. "It affirms that we have many great opportunities and encourages us to take innovative actions. We are very thankful to the Sherwood Trust's trustees for their great diligence in approving our grant request and to Donald and Virginia Sherwood for the creation of this trust which has helped so many organizations in our community."

## Whitman Interns Jumpstart our Summer Activities

We are delighted to have Mariah Bruns and Mitchell Cutter, two interns from Whitman College, with us this summer.

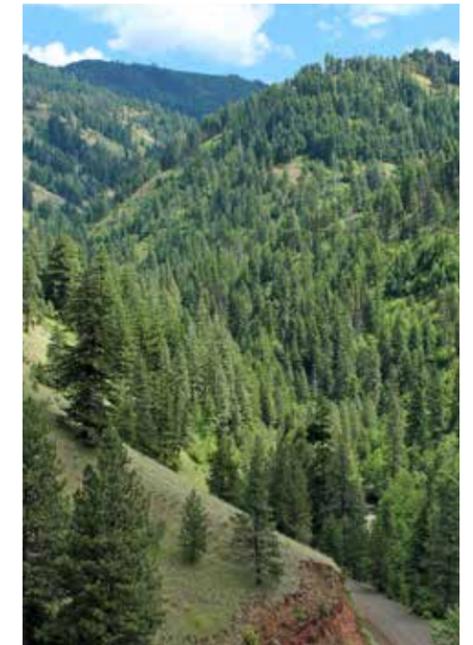
Mariah is a junior majoring in geology and lives in Portland. She is a life-long outdoor enthusiast and especially enjoys hiking and orienteering. She is serving us as a development and marketing assistant and primarily directs our *Learning on the Land* events.

Mitchell is a junior majoring in biology and lives in Bend. He, too, is an avid outdoorsman.

Last year, he spent three months exploring eight western states in Whitman's Semester in the West. Mitch serves us as an outdoor recreation program developer. During this summer, he will develop an online guide to many of the outdoor recreation opportunities of our area.

"Mariah and Mitch are doing tremendous work," said executive director Tim Copeland. "They've brought a great deal of energy and creativity to their jobs, and we are very fortunate to have their help. The sad part is that their internships will end all too soon."

The internships are funded by Whitman College through its environmental studies department. This is the sixth year we have received summertime interns from Whitman.



## Comprehensive Plan Guides Land Trust’s Conservation Work

The Blue Mountain Land Trust’s service area includes Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield and Asotin counties in Washington, and Umatilla and Union counties in Oregon. This area is over 4,700,000 acres. In an area this large – bigger than some states – it’s a huge challenge to identify the lands that are most important to conserve and protect.

To focus on the most critical properties, we are now guided by a conservation plan prepared by Erickson Consulting. The plan identifies properties that have one or more of the following resources:

1. Privately owned land at an elevation above 2,000 feet.
2. Bird habitat conservation area.
3. Critical fish habitat.
4. Elk winter range.
5. Elk summer range.
6. Grasslands.
7. Shrub/scrub ecosystems.

The table below shows the number of acres that have one or more of these seven features.

This helps us understand the locations of the most important “needles” that require preservation in our Blue Mountain “haystack.” With this information, we have embarked

on a rational, focused plan to evaluate the feasibility of creating more conservation easements with the Blue Mountain Land Trust.

Now we know where the most important 1,500 acres to protect are located in the Blue Mountains. Then the next 33,000 acres. And the next 263,000 acres. It’s pretty clear we have a lot of work left to do.

For a copy of our conservation plan, go to [www.bmlt.org](http://www.bmlt.org) and click the Conservation Plan link.

County	1/7	2/7	3/7	4/7	5/7	Total
Walla Walla	13,020	19,627	20,618	7,020	783	61,068
Columbia	50,491	45,711	44,222	21,216	780	162,420
Garfield	132,161	58,571	845	0	0	191,577
Asotin	61,426	114,050	28,081	712	0	204,269
Umatilla	142,319	350,478	147,913	0	0	640,710
Union	71,082	70,868	21,374	4,945	0	168,269
<b>Total</b>	<b>470,499</b>	<b>659,305</b>	<b>263,053</b>	<b>33,893</b>	<b>1,563</b>	<b>1,428,313</b>

## Learning on the Land Grows to 14 Events, Showcases Rural Diversity

By **Andrea Burkhart**  
Immediate Past President

From its inception, *Learning on the Land* (LOL) has served to spotlight the variety of ways in which human experience interacts with the Blue Mountain landscape. Originally conceived as a way to connect nature enthusiasts with the unique places and experiences our service area has to offer, in 2015, LOL has grown to fourteen events that provide a unique perspective on what it means to call the Blue Mountain region home.

Our first event, the *Wild & Scenic Film Festival*, looked at the universal experience of being touched by nature through a series of short films highlighting special places, the gifts they offer, and the threats they face. *Biking the Blues* offered the chance to see the foothills from a new perspective and to cycle some of our favorite routes in the Walla Walla valley. *Peas on*

*Earth* took us to see the Rea family’s pea harvest in action and follow green peas from the field through the Smith Frozen Foods processing plant. *Valle Lindo Day* offered children a chance to visit the unique and pristine Walla Walla watershed and learn about where our drinking water is sourced, made potable, and treated. *To Bee or Not to Bee* invited us to an alfalfa seed farm to see the husbandry techniques used to raise leafcutter and alkali bees for crop pollination. *Super Hero Trees* took kids on a walk through Pioneer Park to explore our heritage trees, then introduced them to some of the raptors that call those trees home. We enjoyed a special tour of the Earl Brown family’s apple orchards and their Blue Mountain Cider Company. And Bob Berger fascinated us all with his walking tour of Walla Walla’s beautiful and historic trees.

Over 400 guests have enjoyed our *Learning on the Land*

programs as of August 1.

*Learning on the Land* programs are possible only through the strong public support we’ve received and the generous support of our sponsors. We are especially grateful to Columbia REA, Peak Fitness, Banner Bank, the American Association of University Women, Inland Family Dentistry, Wenzel Nursery and the Walla Walla Foundry for making our first eight LOL events such incredible successes.

Don’t miss the remaining *Learning on the Land* programs and the chance to broaden your experience of what the Blue Mountain region has to offer! Information about all BMLT programs is available on our website at [www.bmlt.org](http://www.bmlt.org). Like us on Facebook to get event previews, photos, and more.

We’ll be planning LOL 2016 soon, so please share your feedback and your ideas for future events.

## New Faces at the Blue Mountain Land Trust

**By Andrea Burkhart**  
**Immediate Past President**

Blue Mountain Land Trust is proud to welcome our newest additions to the board and staff!

After three years of dedicated service and many conservation accomplishments, **Tom Reilly** stepped down as Executive Director last fall to begin his retirement. Fortunately, Tom stayed on staff as Conservation Director to complete the excellent conservation work that has been initiated under his leadership. Tom will wind up these projects early this fall.

Taking over as Executive Director is **Tim Copeland**, who emerged from an exhaustive search as the unparalleled choice to lead our organization. A Walla Walla native from a farming family, Tim is a proven leader with a track record of fearless strategic planning, a creative perspective on conservation opportunities, and a clear and focused vision for the work of the organization.

In just a few short months, Tim achieved many critical goals for the land trust, including growing the *Learning on the Land* program in size and scope, organizing and implementing new marketing and fundraising measures, and playing an instrumental role in securing a three-year grant from the Sherwood Trust to fund our conservation work. We are incredibly impressed with Tim's leadership and anticipate many great achievements with his guidance!

Our Board welcomed three new faces this year:

**Doug Bickerstaff**, a retired educator and outdoor enthusiast. Doug grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, spending countless weekends at a 220 acre farm outside the city. Memories of playing in the creek, catching fish and snakes (but not the copperheads!), and – of course – farm chores motivate Doug to help other children have their eyes opened to the wonders of

the natural world. Doug is a member of our Marketing and Conservation committees.

**Linda Herbert**, a retired nurse at St. Mary Medical Center. An avid outdoorswoman and long-time Walla Walla resident, Linda has volunteered with many local non-profit organizations including Walla Walla 2020, Sustainable Walla Walla, Blue Mountain Foothill Preservation Committee, and Habitat for Humanity. Linda is a member of our Marketing and Development committees.

**Dr. Eileen Smith**, a practicing dermatologist and the owner of Eastern Washington Dermatology. Eileen connected with the land trust through the *Learning on the Land* program as one of its most dedicated attendees and brings the experience of private business management to the board. Eileen is a member of our Finance and Governance committees.



Post Office Box 1473  
Walla Walla, WA 99362

Non Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
99324  
Permit # 44