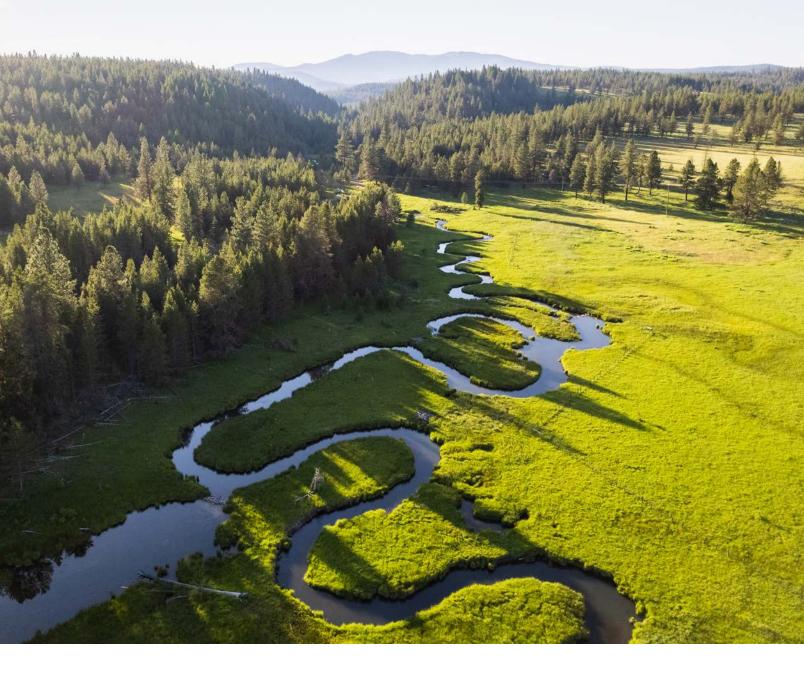
BLUE MOUNTAIN LAND TRUST

2021-2022

IMPACT REPORT







Blue Mountain Land Trust is a nonprofit organization that collaborates with communities and landowners to conserve the scenic, natural, and working lands that characterize the Blue Mountain region.

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COVER IMAGE
Headwaters of the

Middle Fork John Day River at Phipps Meadow.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATT FRANKLIN



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The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

Critical shifts, collective action.

This past year was full of change, review, and growth at Blue Mountain Land Trust (BMLT). As I step into a new role as the Executive Director, I'm reminded of how far we've come in our 20+ years as an organization to protect what matters most.

When I joined BMLT in 2017 as the first remote employee in the newest part of our service area — the John Day Basin in Eastern Oregon — we had big goals. We set out to grow our conservation program in a new region, create relationships with local organizations, landowners, and partners, and learn about unknown places. Opportunities brought exciting changes, difficult conversations, internal reorganization, and our greatest successes. I'm confident this transition will lead to similar growth for our organization and deeper connections with you and the beautiful Blue Mountain places we all care deeply about.

In the past year, with community and partner support, we made great strides:

- Phipps Meadow our first purchased property of 278 acres on the Middle Fork John Day River is home to 200+ species and one of the longest free-flowing waterways in the west.
- We completed our largest conservation project to protect farmland and habitat. The Secret Valley Ranch conservation easement in Unity, Oregon, permanently protects 8,877 acres of sagebrush steppe habitat, a population of Greater sage-grouse, over 15 miles of creeks and streams, and a working cattle operation.
- Our team increased our total protected acreage of land from 13,259 to 22,652 with three new conservation easements.
- We expanded community reach and relationships through environmental education programs, volunteer trail stewardship opportunities, and networking events.

The effects of climate change continue to dominate our headlines. But despite these challenges, I am repeatedly reminded of the places we can find common ground. The places within our region that matter to us all for their clean water, healthy forests and grasslands, productive soils, and plant, animal, and human inhabitants. The unique combination of farm and natural lands that make this part of the world so special.

Protecting these places through local conservation efforts is climate change work. Action at the local level is more important now than ever. It is up to our communities to safeguard our water resources, farmland, fish and wildlife habitat, and migratory corridors essential for species survival. By supporting our work, you're supporting a more climate-resilient future.

I hope you enjoy taking a look at these highlights and more from our work together over the past year. I am excited about the future of our community and encourage you to join us for the important work ahead.



Amanda Martino / Executive Director

YEAR IN REVIEW

Together, we're making a big impact.

Since our start in 1999: 22,652 ACRES OF LAND protected across the Blue Mountain region

SERVING 11 COUNTIES IN WA & OR -



18 conservation easements & 1 purchased property

CONSERVATION FOCUS:



Habitat & river restoration projects



Working lands: farms & ranches



Mixed-use properties: habitat & agriculture



IN THE PAST YEAR:



Conservation easements

on two family farms & one river restoration project



Acres of critical salmon habitat purchased on the Middle Fork of the John Day River at Phipps Meadow

9,392



ACRES SPECIES

OF PROPERTY, FARMLAND



DOCUMENTED AT PHIPPS



ACRES OF HABITAT PROTECTED FOR GREATER SAGE-GROUSE





13.5 MILES TREKKED 17 Monitoring Visits





in National forests, state parks, and county lands



>> North Fork Touchet River at Empey Orchards

PHOTOGRAPHS BY







RESTORING A RIVER

Since 2014, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) have worked on restoring a section of the North Fork Touchet River in Dayton, WA. As part of the CTUIR River Vision to protect First Foods and fish species, the project greatly improved the channel, riparian, and floodplain conditions. BMLT worked with the Empey family and CTUIR to place a conservation easement to permanently protect this stretch of river. Due to the river restoration work, flooding did not occur on the farm this year a strong indication of a successful project plan.

>> Learn more about CTUIR's River Vision: www.ctuir.org

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Small actions add up. How are you involved with climate action work? Let us know! Tag us on social media: @bluemountainlandtrust

Climate action starts at home.

Why is protecting landscapes for fish, wildlife, and communities important to you?



The world is an awesome and beautiful home to all of us, but it must be stewarded to remain life-sustaining for our children and future generations. Blue Mountain Land Trust works to protect crucial elements of our environment, and I am honored to be an active participant in that effort.

- ROBIN FITCH

BMLT Board President & Supporter

"The times when I have felt connected with the land—growing food, tending animals, backpacking, climbing, sailing—have been the most rewarding and healing experiences of my life. I am passionate about protecting those opportunities for everyone else for years to come."



BMLT Development Director





"We're at a pivotal point in history to change systems that benefit both people and the planet. I want to be a part of solutions where nature, agriculture, and communities thrive together."

- ALYSSA MARTINEZ NEUMANN

BMLT Communications & Marketing Director

"Through collaboration and partnerships, we can work towards a multi-use landscape hosting healthy watersheds, native plant & wildlife species, and a resilient local economy."

—KRISTEN WALZ

Executive Director, North Fork John Day Watershed Council





"Preserving the beautiful and productive farmlands, the open spaces, and the vibrant natural areas with abundant wildlife is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children."

- LINDA HERBERT

BMLT Board Secretary & Immediate Past President

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When you step outside in Unity, Oregon, the smell of sage permeates the air. The surrounding hillsides seem to move on their own as bunchgrasses and sagebrush wave in the breeze. Tucked in a valley along West Camp Creek, the Secret Valley Ranch stretches from the Wallowa Whitman National Forest on its southern border to Higgins Reservoir in the north. The Elkhorn Mountains rise on the distant skyline, which seems to go on forever. And now, so will Secret Valley Ranch.

Earlier this year, the Blue
Mountain Land Trust
completed a conservation
easement in partnership
with the Bennett family to
permanently protect one of
the greatest ranches in
Eastern Oregon.

The Blue Mountain Land Trust (BMLT) completed a conservation easement on the Secret Valley Ranch, after more than four and a half years of project development. A conservation easement is a voluntary, legal agreement between a private landowner and a land trust that places permanent restrictions on the land to limit certain activities, development, or subdivision of the property. It may also require stewarding the land in a particular way, leading to greater conservation benefits for fish and wildlife, agricultural viability, and other important resources.

BMLT first met the Bennetts in the fall of 2017 at their home on the vast 8,877-acre ranch. For more than five years, Mark and Patti Bennett searched for a land trust partner to help secure their ranch's future. They were invested in finding a way to protect the property's resident Greater sage-grouse population while also maintaining the working cattle and haying operation.

As landowners, they had been stewarding their property for decades to improve the grassland conditions for birds and cattle. For the Bennetts, conservation and agriculture go hand in hand. Their tireless efforts to restore, protect, and improve the fragile ecosystem have built a model for other landowners to follow.

"We wanted to protect the land for the following generation. We went through the process with the family and realized they weren't going to come back and run the ranch, and we realized the ranch would be really vulnerable. There was the potential that the property could be segmented," said Mark Bennett. "One of the goals that we set was, not only would there be conservation protections, but that it would be an economically viable ranching operation."

Throughout the years, the Bennett project completed many improvement projects across Secret Valley's vast landscape. Their goals were two-fold: safeguard the property's sage-grouse population, improve its habitat as populations drastically declined throughout the Western United States, and maintain their family's cattle operation and agricultural business. As they worked to remove invasive plant species, treat encroaching juniper, plant riparian vegetation along five miles of West Camp Creek, and install wildlife-friendly fencing, they realized the mutual benefits of improved ecosystem function.

"The connection with the land and the sagebrush sea we live in is so important. The protection, enhancement, and strengthening of the land are just as important. Conservation practices really made us more efficient and better producers," said Bennett.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF NRCS OREGON



The Bennetts' approach to rotational grazing, consistent rangeland monitoring, and adaptive management techniques are obvious indicators that Mark and Patti have led both their business and land stewardship models with future generations of animal and human inhabitants in mind.

The conservation easement protects both sides of the ranch, recognizing its high-quality sagebrush steppe habitat and redband trout and sage-grouse inhabitants and its economic and social importance as a holistically grazed working cattle ranch. The project was funded by funding agencies representing both interests—the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The easement blends ecological protections and habitat goals with the operational needs of a ranch, incorporating a grazing management plan, and continuing the rangeland monitoring at sites Mark established years ago.

This conservation project is the largest and most complicated in BMLT history. Besides its staggering size, the project's complex grassland and riparian ecosystems, extensive restoration work, and the dynamics of an agricultural business required hundreds of hours of driving and hiking around the ranch and conversation with the Bennetts.

Protecting the interconnectivity between conservation and agricultural values requires building trust and an ongoing partnership between the Bennett family and the organization. BMLT will continue to monitor the conservation easement annually in perpetuity, ensuring compliance with the conservation easement and maintenance of the property's high-quality resources.

"I'm really excited about the partnership with BMLT. They support our goals for the ranch," said Bennett. "We believe we need to be good stewards of the landscape that we were entrusted with. We've worked hard to make what we feel is one of the best ranches around here, better." As he and Patti look toward the future and the promise of another family one day taking ownership, they can be assured their efforts will leave a Secret Valley Ranch with bountiful resources for the next generation of ranching.

Secret Valley Ranch was one of the first properties Amanda Martino, BMLT Executive Director, visited when she joined the conservation team in 2017. She spent four and a half years working with the Bennetts to complete the project.

"There's a particular ranch road that leads up to the western boundary fence line. From that vantage point, sage-grouse leks are visible on the adjacent property and you can look over the nesting grounds on Secret Valley Ranch. Turning north, you can see down into the hay ground and pasture along West Camp Creek. The forested hills of the Wallowa Whitman National Forest rise on the right and Murray Peak towers on the northern side of the property on the left," said Martino.

"I've had a lot of conversations with Mark at that fence line, talking about his family's history on the ranch, their hopes for its future, stories about various parts of the property you can see and all of the people they've worked with out there. We've taken funders, partner organizations, and legislators to that fence line.

"For me, that view encapsulates the magnitude of the choices the Bennetts have made over decades. You can see how many critical resources they impact with their stewardship. The landscape is always moving in that view, whether it be animals, sagebrush, or shadows on the rock formations. The Bennetts put so much energy, time, and thoughtfulness into every management decision they make. Looking out across the results of that stewardship, it's breathtaking."

>> Learn more about the Bennett family project and more conservation stories at www.bmlt.org







LANDS & WATERS STEWARDSHIP

Strengthening climate resilience.



The Blue Mountain region is like no other. From rolling farm fields to flowing rivers and sagebrush seas, these landscapes hold what we value most: clean water, open spaces, vital habitat, healthy soils, and livelihoods for agricultural communities.

When BMLT completes a conservation easement, we are responsible for regularly monitoring and reporting on the properties to ensure they are being stewarded responsibly, leading to greater conservation benefits for the environment and community. This ongoing land stewardship is what we mean when we say, "We protect the land you love. Forever."





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>> Our stewardship team visits every protected property to monitor changes and successes over time. Pictured above: holistic grazing training with Andrea Malmberg in Eastern Oregon, fields at Patit Creek outside of Dayton, WA, and Canyon Creek Ranch outside of Mitchell, OR.

A commitment to the future

Our work is built on relationships — ones that stand the test of time with landscapes and the people that care for them.

When BMLT conserves a property, we commit to caring for the land in perpetuity. We mean it when we say forever, and long-term stewardship helps us achieve the commitment we make to each property we protect, including the native habitat, creeks, wildlife corridors, and productive farmland that make it so special.

Every year, our team visits each protected property to document changes on the ground, confirm that no prohibited development has occurred, and ensure management plans are followed and updated as needed. The information is compiled and shared with the property owners to reference in upcoming years. Here we notice the changes from year to year and improved conditions, whether it's reduced flooding from river restoration projects or rebounding native plants across a grassland.

Change is constant and we're here to provide assistance for climate-smart practices. When a property has a potential project or issue, such as riparian tree planting or invasive plant removal, BMLT works with landowners and conservation agency partners to help connect project funding or other technical assistance the property needs.



"The natural world is a gift and it's our responsibility to take care of it."

— GENEVIEVE PERDUE

BMLT Stewardship Director

Deep roots, new growth

Over the past year, BMLT purchased our first property of 278 acres on the Middle Fork John Day River, completed three new conservation easements, and increased our total protected acreage of land from 13,259 to 22,652. In light of these big wins, we've dedicated staff capacity to support this critical work. This year, we grew our stewardship program and are excited to build our goals in support of the permanently protected land under our care. We look forward to future community collaboration to help us monitor and preserve the critical landscapes of the Blue Mountain region.

"I've enjoyed
working with
landowners and
seeing how BMLT
connects people
from different
groups to agree
on common goals
like conservation."



— LEANDER SWAN
Whitman Student &
Stewardship Intern

Stewardship in action

This past summer, we were fortunate to have Leander Swan, a senior at Whitman College, join the conservation and stewardship team. He provided invaluable help and joined us in monitoring over 13,260 acres to collect annual data for landowners and project funders. He hiked over 113 miles of protected lands, captured monitoring photos, talked with landowners, and created reports of collected data to identify any areas of concern.

Where the river flows free

Last year, BMLT purchased our first property, Phipps Meadow, with the support of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), and financing from Craft3. Located near Prairie City, OR, Phipps Meadow is an ecologically diverse 278-acre property composed of wetland meadow, pine forest, sagebrush steppe, and 1.58 miles of the Middle Fork John Day River, an important feature for fish and wildlife. Phipps Meadow is nestled in the headwaters of the Middle Fork John Day River — the place where it all begins.

200+

Species call Phipps Meadow home

according to the 2022 ESA baseline documentation

A hub for biodiversity

This summer, we worked with Environmental Science Associates (ESA) to document the baseline conditions of Phipps Meadow. ESA observed the presence or evidence of over 200 species frequenting the property, including over 70 bird species, and numerous mammal, invertebrate, and native plant species. Documentation of the current species composition at Phipps Meadow will help inform future restoration efforts, and record changes over time.

» BIODIVERSITY ROUNDUP:

NOTEWORTHY FISH, MAMMALS, & BIRDS AT PHIPPS MEADOW



Bull trout

Salvelinus confluentus

Columbia River steelhead
Oncorhynchus mykiss

West-slope cutthroat

Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi

Chinook salmon

Oncorhynchus tshawytscha



Townsend's big-eared bat

Corynorhinus townsendii

Spotted bat

Euderma maculatum

American beaver

Castor canadensis

Elk Cervus canadensis

Northern river otter

Lontra canadensis



Wilson's phalarope

Phalaropus tricolor

Black-chinned hummingbird Archilochus alexandri

Northern harrier

Circus hudsonius

Evening grosbeak

Coccothraustes vespertinus

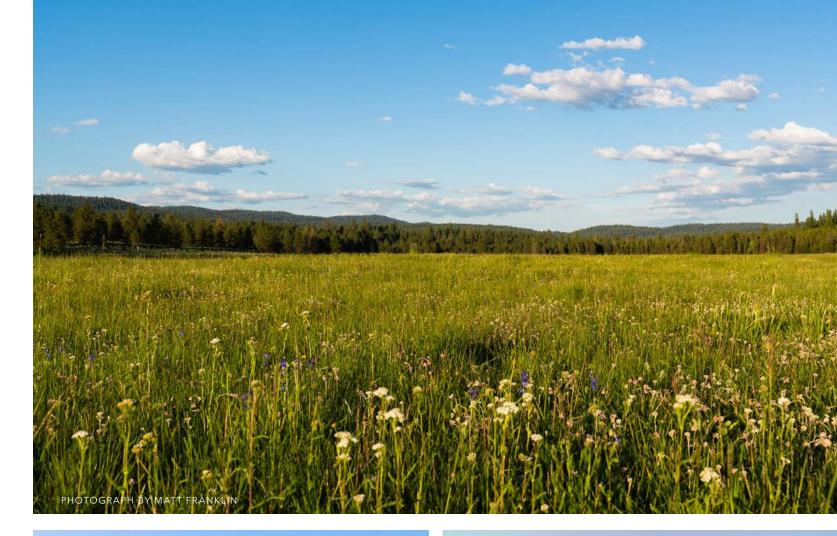
White-headed woodpecker

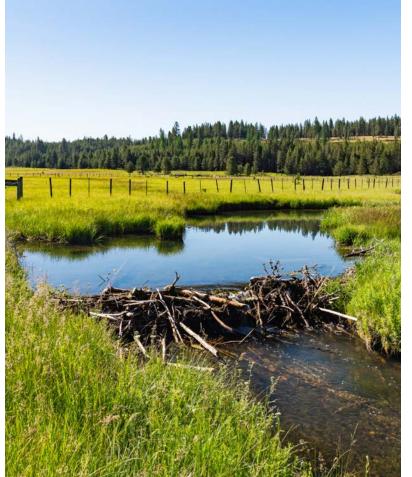
Dryobates albolarvatus

>>> Phipps Meadow is located in the headwaters of the Middle Fork John Day River.

Right: Wildlife spotted via trail cameras on the property.

Sign up for volunteer stewardship events: www.bmlt.org/volunteer











Oregon Land Justice Project

Excerpt from Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) 2022 State of the Lands report:

In 2021, the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts launched a year-long Learning Journey to support a cohort of 65 land trust staff and board to focus on land reparations to tribal communities and sharing conservation resources to support Indigenous sovereignty.

The purpose of the Oregon Land Justice Project is to learn how to partner with Indigenous people in their effort to reclaim and reconnect to their traditional landscapes and first foods. ◆

The Blue Mountain Land Trust joined the community of conservation organizations in the Oregon Land Justice Project, a commitment to expand land access and align our work with Indigenous priorities. Through a collective learning journey, land trusts move toward developing and practicing equitable principles for engagement, repairing relationships, granting legal access, and sharing and rematriating land to tribal communities.

There is a diverse human history of how we've supported ecosystems, access, and management of lands. To grow in our conservation movement, we must first relearn the history and impacts of Indigenous land loss. Our awareness is a responsibility to make amends, repair, and be an ally in building Indigenous capacity and prosperity.

>> Reflections in watercolor by Katy Rizzuti during a Learning Journey site visit with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR).





As part of the Learning Journey, we met with tribal members across Oregon and witnessed firsthand how collaborative efforts in conservation and restoration benefit plants, wildlife, land, and ultimately all humans.

"Land management needs to be in harmony with nature and attuned to the migration of animals and waterways. Who better to lead the way than the First Nations, the original stewards of the land. Their traditional ecological knowledge has been used for thousands of years, and we have already witnessed the benefits of collaborative restoration." said Katy Rizzuti, BMLT Education Director.



When we create a relationship with a place, we start to care about it. Care turns into love, and love turns into action to ensure the longevity and abundance of gifts it has to offer.

At the Blue Mountain Land Trust, our focus is more than just preserving land. It is about creating community connections, relationships, and experiences with the natural world. Moments become memories, forging a newfound kinship with the outdoors.

We're committed to sharing positive environmental education experiences for all. Our programming is designed to help you find community, pathways, and purpose with the land and fellow conservationists.





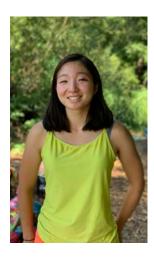


Learning should be fun

Classrooms are home to desks, chalkboards, and lengthy curriculum. It's a place to share knowledge. But, maybe more importantly, it holds hope for the future. Our youth environmental education programs go beyond the classroom and are designed to encourage curiosity, creativity, and investigation outside in the field.

Since 2017, our Nature Kids and Farm Kids educational series encourage children to explore, play, learn, and take action for the environment. Built from the ground up, these series help local youth understand food systems, the importance of waterways, and the diverse ecosystems within the Blues Mountain region. Through partnerships with the Tri-State Steelheaders, Walla Walla Conservation District, U.S. Forest Service, Welcome Table Farm, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, we can make a bigger impact and reach the ultimate goal: learning should be fun.

"I believe that environmental education, especially in the youth, is a super important part of changing our attitudes for the environment and ultimately creating change."



- ALLYSON KIM Whitman Student & Farm Kids Intern



"Every day, I think about how we can connect the next generation to nature."

— KATY RIZZUTI BMLT Education Director

Future changemakers

This summer, we hosted the Blue Mountain Field Science (BMFS), a week-long course for students interested in learning about the natural sciences through hands-on field study. While out in the field, instructors and students made sense of the nearby river habitat and discussed the need for cooler temps, meandering pathways, and areas of slow pools for fish to spawn and feed.

At the beginning of the week, students' reactions started with 'Ugh, not biology class?!' and quickly changed to excitement of 'YES! Do we get to collect insects?!'.....the doorway now opened to the world of possibilities.

When students walk away from experiences with a fresh perspective, it provides the hope we need for the future. BMFS and our youth programs inspire students to explore the possibility of a career in environmental sciences and natural resources – a profession that will increase in need to ensure the longevity of the land, plants, animals, and people.

>> Professor Heidi Dobson shares why native bees are important and how to safely collect and view under the microscopes at Farm Kids Camp at Welcome Table Farm.



The Blue Mountains are home to hundreds of miles of trail. The type with views for days, wild flowers galore, and a surplus of solitude. We know a day on the trail provides moments of growth and wellbeing. And we want to make sure these experiences are available for everyone.

The trails in the Blue
Mountains need our help and
care. That's why the BMLT
Blues Crew is dedicated to
improving the quality and
accessibility of trails on public
lands. Whether you hike,
ski, bike, or bird watch, our
volunteers make sure the
trails are ready for outdoor
pursuits and Type 1 fun.

We welcome anyone who wants to lend a hand and help out for a fun and rewarding way to give back to the places you love.







Stronger together

Outdoor opportunities help a community thrive. The BMLT Blues Crew volunteers work hundreds of hours each season to improve and build the trails in the Blue Mountain region. From restoring flood damage at Camp Wooten outside of Dayton, WA to helping build a mountain bike trail network at Magone Lake near John Day, OR, our volunteers make a positive impact on trail accessibility and recreation opportunities for communities.

We're stronger when we work together. In the past year, our trail stewardship volunteers have worked over 4,000 hours. This year, we had the opportunity to collaborate with partners to create a bigger impact, including the Confluence Project, Umatilla National Forest, Malheur National Forest, Port of Columbia, Whitman College Outdoor Program, Eastern Oregon Trails Alliance, WA State Parks, and more. We strive to promote a culture of inclusivity and leadership development. Every season, we offer sawyer certification and trip leader training to help build the skills of our community of responsible trail stewards.

4,010+

Volunteer trail stewardship hours

27+

trails in National forest, state parks, and county lands



1,175+
HSP Volunteer hours

471+Grooming hours

100+

Blue diamond markers installed

Powder days at Horseshoe Prairie

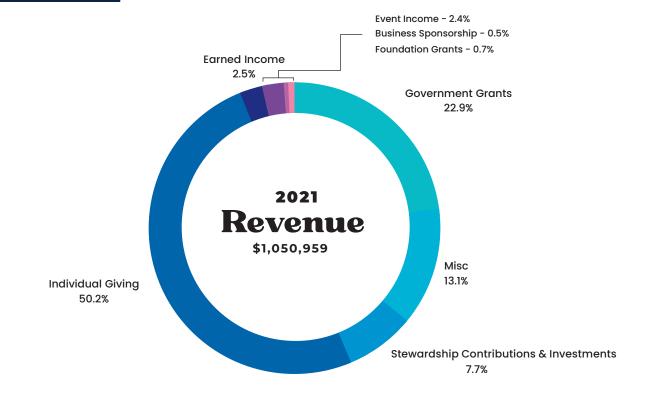
How can a group of skiers bring back winter trail access? Through planning, hard work, and perseverance, the BMLT Blues Crew improved trails, signage, and conditions at this overlooked winter recreation area in the Blue Mountains.

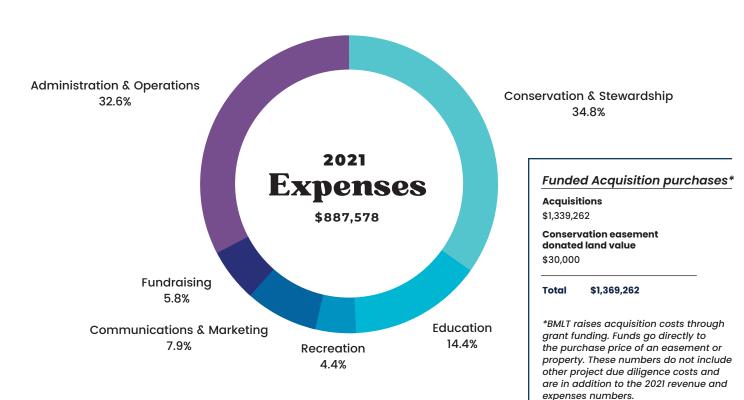
Since 2019, the Blue Mountain Land Trust volunteer-led trail crew has provided access to Horseshoe Prairie Nordic Ski Area in partnership with the Umatilla National Forest. Bordered on the north by the North Fork Umatilla Wilderness, the area provides an opportunity for Nordic skiing and snowshoeing on both groomed and non-groomed trail systems. With approximately 10 miles (16 kilometers) of marked trail, Horseshoe Prairie is the perfect place for outdoor ski adventures all winter season.

The crew is working long hours to prepare HSP for the upcoming ski season, including an expanded trail network and container to house grooming equipment onsite. We're looking forward to the upcoming winter season, regular grooming of trails, and expanded recreation programming opportunities.

"The Blues Crew is a connected group of individuals bringing their skills and passion to create and rebuild recreational trails in our region." —Greg Brown, BMLT Blues Crew Founder Want to join the fun? Sign up: www.bmlt.org/volunteer

FINANCIALS





POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

Community is everything.

When you support the Blue Mountain Land Trust, you are a part of the conservation of precious farms, ranches, and natural habitats in the Blue Mountain region, from Dayton, WA to John Day, OR. That's a service area the size of West Virginia.

Since 1999, over 22,600 acres in the Blue Mountain region have been protected in perpetuity from development, subdivision, and extraction of natural resources. This could not have happened without you and the community of BMLT supporters that you are a part of.

Keeping the Blue Mountain region healthy, sustainable, and beautiful is a community effort. BMLT's supporters are at the heart of our work, and we're committed to maintaining the highest level of accountability. We are grateful for our relationships with individuals, businesses, foundations, colleges, and organizations that support our mission to drive positive impact in the region.

We always want to know what matters to you and there are many ways to get involved. Please consider giving a gift, signing up for a regular monthly donation, or including us in your estate plans. Businesses can sponsor a BMLT event with a financial gift or an in-kind donation, such as a venue, gift certificate, or retail item.

Contact us if you are interested in becoming part of our community of supporters that help drive our work forward for the people and places we call home.

>> Join our community of supporters: www.bmlt.org/give

THANK YOU

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Outdoor Program

Sara Todorovich-Ballas:

Pro Poser Photo

Digital Heroes

Inland Octopus

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Confederated Tribes of
Warm Springs
Confederated Tribes of
Umatilla Indian
Reservation
U.S. Forest Service
Bonneville Power
Administration
Oregon Watershed
Enhancement Board
USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service
Washington Recreation
and Conservation Office
John Day Basin

Foundations

Partnership

Cape Flattery Foundation Bella Vista Foundation Port of Walla Walla No Child Left Inside Land Trust Alliance



Blue Mountain Land Trust is a nonprofit organization that collaborates with communities and landowners to conserve the scenic, natural, and working lands that characterize the Blue Mountain region.

OUR WORK IS MADE POSSIBLE BY SUPPORTERS LIKE YOU. GIVE A GIFT TODAY:

WWW.BMLT.ORG/GIVE

