

Message from the Chairman

s we celebrate 25 years of partnerships this year, I am inspired to reflect on how far we've come. A quarter century ago, the challenge facing us was how to weave together this remarkable landscape of mountains, wetlands, and wildlife with seven distinct communities. It is incredible to know that so much of that original vision to restore a river has been attained. It is a testament to a process that works.

This process is based on being inclusive, finding common ground, treating one another with respect, building trust, and giving credit—not taking it. It defies the prevailing logic of seeking quick success, and shows the value of taking the long view when it comes to what's best for communities and conservation.

In many ways, though, we have simply built a foundation for the work that lies ahead. Following ten years of Gary Burnett's strong leadership as the Challenge's executive director, we have a new director, Charles Curtin. With a background in collaborative conservation and rural development.

Charles sees opportunities for the Challenge in science and economics, and in creating greater synergy and integration across our existing programs.

This year, we are taking time to reflect and align ourselves for another quarter century of community-based outcomes in the Blackfoot. It is the process that got us here, and it's the process that will continue moving us forward.

As always, I am grateful and humbled to be able to work with all of you. Thank you for 25 years.



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shared knowledge and shared commitment.

- With the third summer of drought in a row, facilitated a "shared giving" approach to drought response, involving 90 landowner water conservation plans, reaching thousands of visiting floaters and anglers, and sustaining habitat for native trout.
- Conducted boater education and monthly testing on three local lakes with volunteers to help prevent invasive mussel introduction.
- Created weekly irrigation reports guiding 100 landowners on improving soil health and operating with limited water.
- Monitored 10 streams to better inform restoration and drought planning, including seven later burned by the Rice Ridge wildfire.



Vegetation

Integrated, locally-led approaches to invasive plant management across fence lines.

- Held two Vegetation Committee meetings connecting agencies and Vegetation Management Area landowners.
- Offered recommendations to landowners on plant identification, herbicide application, and seed varieties.
- Hired Trails and Weeds Liaison in cooperation with the Seeley Lake Ranger District for the third year in a row.
- Hosted presentations on weed control strategies in Ovando and Lincoln.
- Hosted two weed pulls at the Russell Gates Fishing Access Site for the 19th year in a row - the longest running Challenge event!





BCCA

5,600 acres managed cooperatively by community council for multiple uses.

- Completed forest treatments on 250 acres to improve forest health and wildlife habitat, while reducing hazardous fuels,
- Treated 200 acres of weeds across boundaries through biological and chemical controls.
- Managed two grazing leases on over 4,000 acres using innovative stewardship tools.
- Established a 5-mile fuel break along Fireline Road in preparation for Rice Ridge wildfire.
- Hosted volunteer day to dig up houndstongue, paint the Boot Tree kiosk, and build a new nature trail.
- Hosted annual field tour in June public welcome!







Reducing human-wildlife conflicts through proactive and preventative strategies.

 Picked up over 270 carcasses from 35 Blackfoot ranches during calving season to avoid attracting predators.

 Range Riders monitored predator activity and increased herd supervision on ranches and grazing leases in the Potomac, Ovando and Helmville areas from May through

October.

- Monitored carnivores, including wolverine and lynx, throughout the watershed during winter to inform forest restoration and management.
- Elk Hunt Coordinator continued to meet with interested landowners to schedule hunts and explore solutions to reducing elk use of private lands.
- Distributed free bear spray to Blackfoot hunters through a partnership with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.



Education

Nurturing watershed awareness and stewardship through place-based education.

- Over 350 students from seven schools attended Youth Field Days at Lincoln's Sculpture in the Wild.
- Rotating naturalist speaker series included avalanche awareness, animal tracking, fish biology, and bear safety.
- K-12 students monitored stream temperatures and flows in their communities.

 Over 60 students visited the bird banding station in Seeley Lake.

 Hosted family friendly presentations on avalanche safety, birds and native plants, and big game hunting.







Outreach

Sharing the community-based and partnership-centered approach with others.

- Reached over 3,600 individuals through workshops, tours, and presentations in the watershed and at regional and national events.
- Co-hosted a Trails Check-In in Lincoln in February for over 60 partners interested in recreation development.
- Over 60 members attended our annual meeting at Double Arrow in December.
- Launched the Economics Committee and hired an Economics Coordinator to facilitate community-based economic development in the watershed.



Land Stewardship

Supporting landowners through stewardship assistance one property at a time.

- Provided over 50 landowners with personalized natural resource management assistance.
- Initiated Soil Health Workgroup to identify and explore management tools and techniques for the Blackfoot.
- Helped landowners access private, state, and federal programs and funding to address their resource priorities.





Swans

Restoring trumpeter swans to their native habitat on Blackfoot wetlands since 2004.

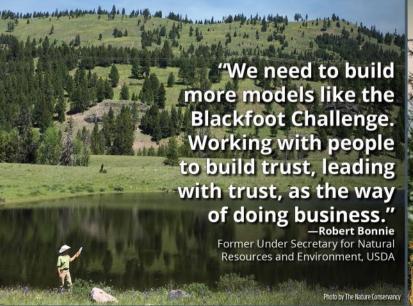
- At least 50 trumpeters returned to the watershed last summer.
- Five trumpeter swan pairs nested.
- A total of 19 cygnets fledged the most in a single year yet bringing the total to 60 since 2011.



Conservation Strategies

Coordinating land conservation and stewardship to keep working landscapes intact.

- Held annual meeting with landowners, agencies, and land trusts in April focused on sharing information and leveraging conservation opportunities.
- Hosted numerous Clearwater-Blackfoot Project Workgroup meetings in coordination with The Nature Conservancy.
- Coordinated discussions exploring the potential for community forests in Clearwater Valley and the Twin Creeks area.
- Three recreation interns monitored summertime use and interacted with visitors on the Clearwater-Blackfoot Project.
- Co-hosted the 3rd Annual Revive & Thrive at Fawn Pond.



Forestry Restoring forest health and reducing wildfire risk near communities. Provided on-site forest health and fuel reduction education to 50 landowners. Coordinated 350 acres of hazardous fuel reduction around homes to improve community and firefighter safety. - Supported local jobs and provided wood products to local sawmill and chip plant. Initiated the Prescribed Fire Workgroup. Helped organize "Era of Megafires" presentations in Seeley ake and Lincoln.

Financials

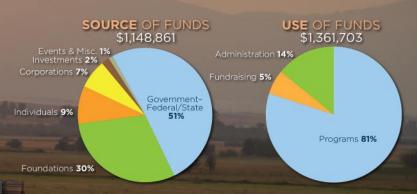
The Board of Directors approves an annual operating budget funded from secured private donations, public awards and agreements, and allocations from investments. Oversight is provided by the Finance and Endowment Committees.

TOTAL NET ASSETS

NET ASSETS	
UNRESTRICTED	\$ 396,688
BOARD DESIGNATED	\$ 395,952
PERMANENTLY RESTRICTED	
Blackfoot Stewardship Endowment Fund	\$ 697,825
BCCA Endowment Fund	\$ 432,662
BLACKFOOT COMMUNITY	to take at
CONSERVATION AREA (LAND)	\$ 1,891,284
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 3,814,411
TOTAL LIABILITIES	(\$ 69,772)
TOTAL NET ASSETS	\$ 3,744,639

"The Challenge has one of the most advanced record keeping systems for financials and grants that I've seen across the state of Montana. This greatly enhances both their efficiency and productivity."

—Dan Peterson Auditor, Peterson CPA Group



A heartfelt thanks to our many 2017 Annual Fund donors! For a complete list of supporters, please view our online annual report at www.blackfootchallenge.org.

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We extend enormous gratitude to our many 2017 donors! The majority of our projects are funded with public, private and foundation grants, while gifts from private individuals are critical to match and coordinate these project funds. Your support in 2017 made our work possible.

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