

The logo for Blackfoot Challenge features the word "Blackfoot" in a bold, dark blue sans-serif font. Below it, the word "CHALLENGE" is written in a smaller, all-caps, dark blue sans-serif font. A stylized blue wave graphic is positioned between the two words, curving under "Blackfoot" and extending to the right.

# Blackfoot CHALLENGE

The year "2019" is displayed in a large, white, bold sans-serif font with a subtle drop shadow, centered in the lower half of the image. The background is a scenic landscape featuring a calm lake reflecting the sky, surrounded by green grass, shrubs, and evergreen trees. In the distance, a range of blue mountains is visible under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

# 2019

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*Cover photo by David Schmidt*

## A Message from the Chair

I know that many of you have heard me say that conservation is all about people. That it's about community, collaboration, and pulling together during uncertain times.

None of my thinking on that has changed—in fact, when I look back at 2019 and what we are going through today, I am convinced more than ever that the people who collectively choose to take part in the Blackfoot Challenge are our greatest asset.

In 2019, our staff and Board of Directors stepped up, cinched their belts, rolled up their sleeves, and went to work to maintain our programs, find a new executive director, and keep our organization strong during a time of transition. I'm thrilled to say that we have accomplished all of those critical tasks. Our new executive director, Seth Wilson, has hit the ground running and our team has cemented its chemistry. Our timing was critical, as we now confront a global pandemic and another time of uncertainty and transition. But again, the people who are drawn to and take part in the Challenge respond successfully to change time and time again.

This organization and our relationships as friends, neighbors, colleagues, and partners represent a truly special group of people who have chosen collaboration before conflict and conversation before quarrel.

I am honored to take part in the Blackfoot Challenge and welcome you to this family of people who make conservation and rural livelihoods possible.

**Thank you as  
always for your  
support.**

*Jim Stone*

**Jim Stone**





In 2008, rancher Denny Iverson and his neighbors in Potomac began hearing rumors that Plum Creek Timber Company was planning to sell 34,000 acres south of town. If sold, the future of the intact landscape that bordered their community was in jeopardy – 10,000 acres had been prioritized for subdivision. “That would have really changed the face of the valley, the quality of life, everything,” said Denny. “We were really concerned and wanted to find a solution.”

Only a few years before, the Blackfoot Challenge partnered with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to purchase 89,000 acres of Plum Creek land in the Blackfoot and transfer those lands into permanent conservation ownership. TNC was ready to team up again, and Denny was ready to bring his community together through the Blackfoot Challenge process to ensure these lands continued to produce timber, be grazed by neighboring ranches, provide wildlife habitat, and be open to public access for generations to come.

“Our community trusted the Blackfoot Challenge to get it right. To involve them, not just bulldoze through it knowing what was best. That’s not how we operate. When people see how well this process can work, it’s infectious.”

***“Our community trusted the Blackfoot Challenge to get it right. To involve them, not just bulldoze through it knowing what was best.”***



**DENNY IVERSON**  
RANCHER, POTOMAC

When the legislative session began that winter, Denny and his neighbors were ready to campaign for the State of Montana to purchase the land. “We had about 70 people from our community and the logging community show up for the hearing. They had to move it to a bigger room to get everybody in. It was impressive.” With such strong and diverse local support, the funding was quickly approved.

When it comes to an intact landscape, the sum of the parts doesn’t necessarily equal the whole. As Denny explained, “A healthy watershed that has the ability to hold snow, to keep the creeks flowing, to support forest health – it keeps me on the land.”





**F**or Steve and April Woodhouse, wildfire and invasive species threaten two things they most enjoy about living in the Blackfoot – the forests that surround them and the clear, healthy waters of the lake they live on.

Ever since buying their property on Cooper's Lake, the Woodhouses have been cutting dead, dying, and hazard trees near their house but hadn't thought much about overall forest health. Then April and a neighbor took a forestry stewardship class together. "We learned so much," said April. "We realized we needed to get on it, we needed to do more."

With assistance from the Blackfoot Challenge, the Woodhouses treated the forest surrounding

***"Everything we do has effects downstream. It all comes down to cooperation and communication, working together and doing what you can for others. I'm glad to do what we're doing."***



Photo by Lindsey Mulcare



BEFORE THINNING



AFTER THINNING

Photos by April Woodhouse

their home to improve its health and reduce wildfire risk. "We feel much better about our surroundings. The ground looks healthier. If a fire comes through, we can likely defend our home and it won't be as devastating for us or for the lake."

When the Blackfoot Challenge began monitoring for invasive mussels on Cooper's Lake a few years ago, the Woodhouses stepped up to volunteer their boat and their time to the effort. When asked why, Steve and April replied, "Why wouldn't we? How could we not?"

Over the years, the Woodhouses have realized just how important the health of their immediate surroundings is for the health of the entire Blackfoot watershed.

"Everything we do has effects downstream. It all comes down to cooperation and communication, working together and doing what you can for others. We're glad to do what we're doing."

**STEVE & APRIL WOODHOUSE**  
HOMEOWNERS, COOPER'S LAKE





Photo by Brad Weltzien

## BLACKFOOT COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AREA

Continued to implement and refine three rest-rotation cattle grazing leases across more than 5,000 acres.

## CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

Hosted annual gathering for 30 conservation practitioners in the Blackfoot to share info and leverage efforts.



Photo by Eliza Wiley



Photo by Anthony Pavkovich

## SWANS

Eight pairs of trumpeter swans nested and fledged a total of 17 cygnets.

BONNER

*"Four years ago, my neighbors and I approached the Challenge about restoring a series of beaver ponds along Chimney Creek. Jennifer provided incredible support, including all permitting and paperwork. **Dozens of volunteers came together last June to build dams, and we are all thrilled with the results, hoping we'll soon see beaver return.**"*

—VIRGINIA CAUSEY GARNET MOUNTAINS LANDOWNER



Photo by Cindy Super

## FORESTRY

Initiated collaborative, cross-boundary prescribed burn planning across thousands of acres for implementation in 2020.

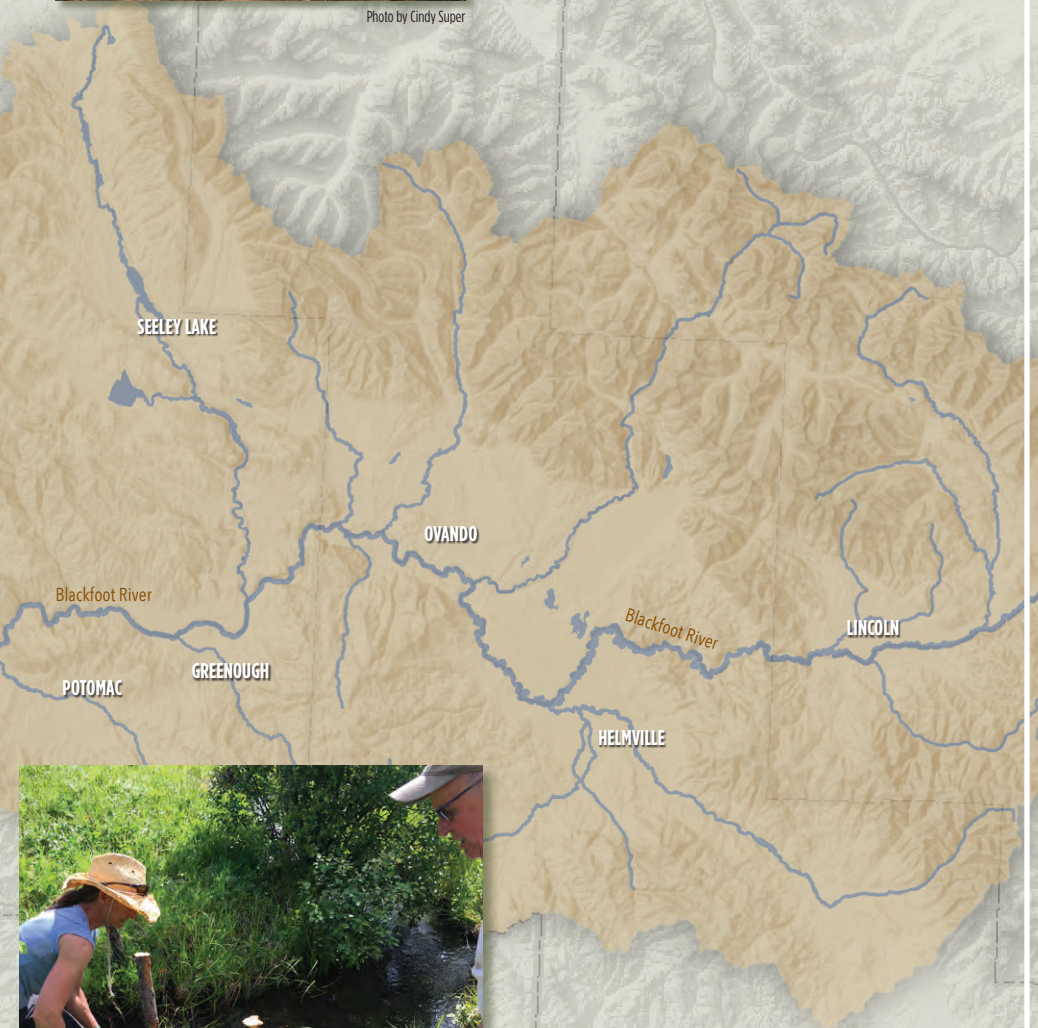


Photo by Jennifer Schoonen

## WATER

Installed first beaver dam mimicry project to improve wetlands, floodplain, water quality, and stream habitat.



## EDUCATION

Naturalist Speaker Series brought presentations on bears, pollinators, beavers, and birds to 250 watershed students.



Photo by Elaine Caton

## LAND STEWARDSHIP

Provided 40 landowners with advice on topics including drought-tolerant crops, no-till farming, grazing management, and aspen enhancement.



Photo by Brad Weltzien

***"The Challenge has been such a valuable resource for us. On the neighboring agricultural land we acquired, Brad did a capacity study, proposed a stocking and rotational grazing plan, and helped us relocate and improve the stocktanks. We loved working with him."***

**—THE PERKINS FAMILY LINCOLN LANDOWNERS**

## WILDLIFE

Installed three electric fences in the Helmsville area to reduce conflicts with grizzly bears.



Photo by Eric Graham

## VEGETATION

Treated weeds across 2,090 acres plus 96 miles of Blackfoot River shoreline.



Photo by Karen Laitala

# DONORS

We can't thank our 2019 donors enough. This work wouldn't be possible without your support. **When you donate, you make a difference.**

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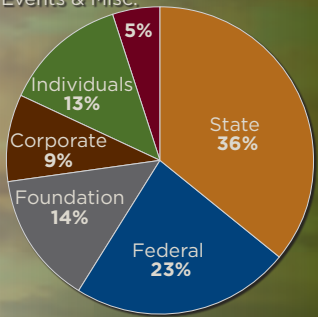
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SOURCE OF FUNDS

Programs \$993,205

Unrestricted \$224,573

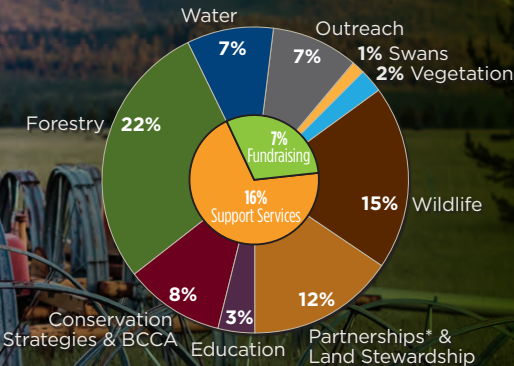
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USE OF FUNDS

Programs \$938,801

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\*Blackfoot Challenge is the fiscal agent for Montana Forest Collaboration Network.

**Blackfoot Challenge, Inc**

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