Connecting the Wild

When a corridor of protected land connects elk winter feed grounds to calving grounds, wildlife numbers multiply. It’s wild math, literally. To this, add bald eagles, black bears, mountain lions, mule deer, and the people of Wyoming. Balance this equation with ranchers leading the charge on this wildlife protection, and you have a winning formula: a new 236-acre conservation easement on private ranch lands, protecting a corridor for over 200 elk cows that will forever link key habitat along the Snake River to their calving grounds on Munger Mountain. This new project is the capstone on more than twenty years of conservation work by the Jackson Hole Land Trust and a ranching family.

The Snake River Ranch family, comprised of the Resor, Hauge, and Laughlin families, owns land at the south end of Jackson Hole rising from the Snake River on the northern flanks of Munger Mountain. The upper part of the mountain is Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF) land. Locals know Munger Mountain as the backdrop to South Park that provides a kaleidoscope of vibrant fall colors each September. Don’s Draw – named after an early valley homesteader – is a deep, funnel-shaped valley draining the north side of the mountain. Filled with the protective cover of aspens, shrubs, and conifers, it is the centerpiece of the Munger Mountain Corridor Project.

Family patriarch Stanley B. Resor bought the first piece of the Snake River Ranch in 1929, sight unseen, at the enthusiastic recommendation of his eleven-year-old son, Stan, who had visited Jackson Hole with the Huyler family. The next year, the senior Resor began expanding the ranch holdings and operations, which by 1940 totaled over 5,000 acres, split between the Upper Ranch, the iconic ranchlands lining Highway 390 around Teton Village, and the Lower Ranch, which encompasses meadows along Fall Creek Road and pastures on Munger Mountain.

The Snake River Ranch family has protected almost 3,000 acres under twenty conservation easements with the Land Trust over the past thirty years, demonstrating their dedication to conservation. The family liaison and driving force for new protection projects has been Bill Resor, one of the seven sons of that eleven-year-old visionary and his wife, Jane Resor. One of Bill’s fondest memories of the Lower Ranch is of riding to the summit of Munger Mountain with his aunt Ann Laughlin when he was twelve.

Bill has an incredible memory and knowledge of the land spanning all things great and small, from conservation finance and legal intricacies to fencing and seasonal wildlife and plant observations. Bill recalls when the family first considered conserving the Lower Ranch parcels in the 1990s. A 25-acre parcel bordering the Snake River on the ranch’s northeast side at the mouth of Don’s Draw was proposed for development as a high-density dude ranch resort – which would have completely changed the character of this remote area. Bill approached the Land Trust, which led the charge on a series of transactions to protect the parcel, supported by one of the owners. The Resors became the take-out buyers, purchasing the newly conserved 25 acres from the Land Trust.

This successful project – a great relief to the Resor family – started a conversation between them and the Land Trust about protecting
more acreage on Munger. The Resor, Hauge, and Laughlin families donated easements on five additional parcels, protecting over 500 acres with the Land Trust from 2002 to 2008 on both sides of upper Don’s Draw adjoining the National Forest. The parcel that would become the Munger Mountain Corridor Project (Munger Project) was left for last, strategically, because it had greater development potential – to keep options open. Bill doesn’t know if the family would have ever actually chosen to sell or develop the land, but thankfully, the success of the Munger Project made that decision unnecessary.

In 2010, Land Trust staff approached Bill and his brother John with an innovative proposal. If the Land Trust were able to secure funding to purchase some of the value of an easement protecting ecologically significant acreage around Don’s Draw, would the Resors be willing to donate the rest as part of a bargain sale easement? Bill and John were immediately on board to work with the Land Trust and other interested stakeholders that would soon emerge. A major potential funding source was identified through the US Forest Service’s Forest Legacy Program (FLP), and the Munger Project was officially created in partnership with the Wyoming State Forestry Division, which acts as the FLP’s lead agency in Wyoming.

The conservation values of the land had always been known, but excitement and energy grew as they were analyzed for the proposal to FLP. The Munger Project represents the completion of a landscape-scale corridor of protected lands extending from the BTNF lands on Munger, across the adjacent Lower Ranch easements, north to the Wyoming Game & Fish Department’s (WGFD) South Park Elk Feed Ground just across the Snake River from the mouth of Don’s Draw, and to more BTNF lands on the east side of Highway 189/191. The diversity of habitats include the ecologically-rich Snake River Corridor, rolling sagebrush, and mixed forests. These provide migration, feeding, and calving for elk, moose, and deer, which supports predators including bears and wolves. Birds include everything from raptors to neotropical migrants. The corridor is especially critical for the valley’s elk and bald eagle populations. It is visible from numerous public vantage points, to travelers on the highway and tens of thousands of Snake River users floating from Wilson to South Park. It’s also an important piece of the ranch’s yearling cattle operation. It is the trifecta of wildlife, scenic, and ranching values, and then some: landscape in scale, national and international in significance.

The Resor family and the Land Trust knew that the FLP funding was a “long shot” when the project was created, or at the very least, a long process. Wyoming had just been approved to participate in FLP in November 2009, and was allowed to submit only three projects for consideration at the national level annually – a highly competitive process. But the Munger Project made the cut from the Wyoming side in its first year, in 2010, and all the way through to the official national list of proposed FLP projects. However, budgets only allowed for some of the listed projects to be funded, and the Munger Project was not one of them.

The momentum and broad support for the project – and the collective experience of the partnership – warranted resubmissions for FLP funding. Teton County Commissioners, the regional WGFD office, BTNF, Jackson Hole Trout Unlimited, and the Snake River Fund rallied to submit official letters of support. The 2012 submission was ultimately successful, and the project was awarded $3 million in 2013 – Wyoming’s first Forest Legacy Project award. Also in 2013, the project was awarded a $600,000 matching grant from the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust. “The project’s wildlife values are particularly strong, and its strategic location as an elk migration corridor and connectivity to other protected lands gave this project special significance. The property’s visual prominence, proximity to the Snake River, and access it provides to the Jackson Hole valley and the internationally-important national parks beyond are also distinguishing features,” said State Forester John Crisp of the project’s national appeal.

With funding successfully secured, the project partners worked to navigate the due diligence required by the FLP, including signing on the WGFD to act as the government-entity easement owner. Bill saw it as an opportunity to take a new approach to the easement and management plan for the project, tailored to the land and its foreseeable future uses and incorporating lessons learned from >>
operating the ranch through changing times under the various previous easements. “Thirty years ago, our family didn’t anticipate the kinds of uses on the ranch that would make it work in today’s world,” says Bill. “I wanted to build this new easement from the ground up, to protect elk and wildlife habitat and agricultural uses while also specifically allowing for guided outdoor recreation, including hunting, trail rides, and hiking. People and economics are integral parts of land conservation.”

This December, all the pieces came together at last to complete the project. The new Munger Mountain Corridor easement protects 236 acres of the Lower Snake River Ranch for wildlife, ranching, forestry, and private or commercial outdoor recreation. WGFD holds the easement in accordance with FLP guidelines, and the Land Trust acts as the nonprofit partner that will conduct annual monitoring and management of the easement. “This represents the culmination of a long process, and it is gratifying to see the hard work of so many bear fruit,” adds John Crisp.

“The success of this project is an incredible win for Jackson Hole’s wildlife and the public. We are grateful to the Resor family and all of our partners for their incredible commitment to the Munger Mountain Corridor Project,” said Land Trust executive director Laurie Andrews.

On any given day, Jackson Hole Land Trust board member Scott Pierson estimates that he spends about an hour of his time involved with some aspect of R Park. For anyone that knows Scott and the work that he does in the valley, this figure is very noteworthy. As principal and founder of Pierson Land Works, Scott leads a successful firm that is entrusted with a diversity of land deals and land projects across the valley. He is also dedicated to serving on a variety of boards and committees – his expertise and experience is sought after. A minute of his time is precious, so an hour of his time, pro bono, is extraordinary.

Scott is accustomed to wearing multiple hats, and in the case of Rendezvous Park (a.k.a. “R” Park), he wears three: Land Trust board member, Rendezvous Lands Conservancy board member, and Design Team leader. He’s been a supporter of the R Park concept since it was first on his radar as a JHLT board member in 2011, when the Land Trust and LOR Foundation partnered to purchase the property with the assistance of a bridge loan from The Conservation Fund – and transform it from a gravel pit into a 40-acre natural park for the community. Scott recognizes that the R Park project is unlike the majority of the Land Trust’s easements, which protect wildlife, agriculture, and scenic views on private land, but typically do not offer public access. This is what set R Park apart and appealed to Scott from the outset. “I believe that our board and community want the Land Trust to be involved with certain projects like R Park that enable respectful, balanced public access to the land. The Land Trust and LOR Foundation conceived this park so that the community could enjoy this area along the river bottom and have family-friendly access to open water. It has a natural feel to it and public access at the same time.”

Since 2011, Scott has had a hand in creating R Park from its initial vision to what is today, nearly every step of the way. When the Land Trust and LOR Foundation created the Rendezvous Lands Conservancy (RLC) as a 501c(3) to own and manage the park, it was stipulated that 2 members of the Land Trust serve on the RLC board until the park design was complete and the easement on the land could be finalized. Scott stepped up to fill this role alongside Land Trust executive director Laurie Andrews and Hal Hutchinson from the LOR Foundation. When an independent selection panel was formed to choose a design team for the park, Scott assembled an interdisciplinary team of experts from Pierson Land Works, Biota...
Research & Consulting, Flitner Strategies, Gilday Architects, Harmony Design & Engineering, and the Hood Design Studio, and won the bid.

The road from gravel pit to community park has had many variables to negotiate along the way – responses and adaptation to community and stakeholder input, county permitting and approvals, roads and pathway placement, location and management of uses. This summer, the major earthwork was completed, including one of Scott’s favorite design features, the “knolls” – an idea conceived by landscape designer Walter Hood that mimics the grassy buttes found across the valley. “The knolls turned out as a real plus, because they enable people to get above the flat valley floor, see the mountains and the river, and get a sense of the breadth and space of the whole park. People really enjoy them.” He adds, “They may also be useful for sledding.”

In August, R Park secured approval from Teton County to move forward with its final design plan and open later in the fall. From that point onward, it was all hands on deck to prepare for the park’s opening celebration – a celebration held in conjunction with opening of the freshly-minted Snake River Pathway Bridge – with Scott’s team pouring gravel for pathways and planting trees right up until a few days before the opening.

Held on September 21st, a beautiful fall day, the celebration was hosted by the Rendezvous Lands Conservancy, Land Trust, LOR Foundation, Jackson Hole Community Pathways, Friends of Pathways, and other community groups. Over 1,000 community members from all walks of life attended, including many families – proof positive that the original vision for the park appealed to the next generation. Anna Sullivan, Land Trust board member, attended the R Park opening with her husband, Steve, and their children Pryor, Stewart, and Harriet. “What an incredible resource for the community,” said Anna. “It is a visionary effort by different groups that collaborated to take advantage of a truly unique open space for the enjoyment of all ages. The success of this project will enable the community to experience the benefits of a riparian area ‘close to home’. It is wonderful for my family to have R Park, which offers many activities we love, within biking distance of where we live.”

Scott was thrilled with the turnout and energy at the celebration. “I get really positive comments about the park all the time. People tell me that what we’ve done with the park and where it’s headed is really awesome. They appreciate that it is in the middle of the valley and that everyone can get to it, with the pathway systems, new pathway bridge, and START bus. At the opening celebration, it was this same positive feedback, all at once. I was overwhelmed by public support and enthusiasm.”

The new pathway bridge over the Snake River now links R Park with Emily’s Pond, another Land Trust protected property and natural park on the other side of the river. Madeline Carlman, Journeys School senior, spoke at the ribbon cutting for the bridge, noting that, “it’s likely that seeing this bridge, empty, in broad daylight, will not happen a lot in the future. This bridge, in just a few minutes, will no longer be just a bridge. It will be the sustainable connector between Rendezvous Park on the west bank of the Snake River and Emily’s Pond on the east bank, between Wilson and Jackson, between Teton Village and Moose, between home and work.”

September was considered the “soft launch” for the park, with more work still ahead before it is fully open to the public next summer. On the Land Trust side, the conservation easement will focus on protecting the natural characteristics of the park into the future. On the construction side, two big pieces to be completed by next spring include replacing the silted-in siphon that brings water in from the Snake River to the park’s ponds and streams, and reconfiguring the entrance road into a shared entrance for the park and Wilson Boat Launch, directly across from the Stilson Ranch. Once June arrives, the hydroseed planted on the knolls and throughout the former gravel pit area will be a vibrant green, and the water will be flowing in.

In five years, Scott envisions that R Park will be coming into its own as a treasured community fixture. The native grasses will be tall, and trees planted this year will be well-established. There will be more wildlife using the park than now (and more than when the land was a gravel pit), as vegetation grows in to create more screened areas and sanctuaries. By then, Scott may be down to just one hat – a community member enjoying the park, “possibly volunteering to pick up trash” – time will tell.
Save the Date
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11TH
VIEW22 Reception and Mix’d Media
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WILDLIFE ART

VIEW22 IN 2014
We invite you to explore the second year of the View22: Painting Jackson Hole’s Open Spaces Project. Launched last summer by the Land Trust and Trio Fine Art, the goal of View22 is to highlight the role that land conservation has played in shaping our valley through the eyes of local landscape painters. We aim to raise awareness of the scenic, wildlife, and ranching conservation values of Land Trust protected properties through place-based art—providing a rare and unique glimpse of these diverse protected lands and allowing a connection between land conservation and what our community and visitors see out their windows every day. The 2014 project welcomed three new artists to View22—Kay Northup of Whistle Pik Galleries & Trailside Galleries, Lee Riddell of WRJ Design, and Travis Walker of Altamira Fine Art joined returning Trio Fine Art artists Jennifer Hoffman, Kathryn Turner, and Bill Sawczuk.

New this year, the View22 exhibit will be on display at the National Museum of Wildlife Art from December 6th - 21st and viewable online at view22.jhlandtrust.org beginning December 1st. Join the artists of View22 at a special Mix’d Media event at the Museum open to the public from 7 to 10 pm on Thursday, December 11th. A portion of proceeds from the View22 show will benefit the Jackson Hole Land Trust. Works will be available for purchase off-site through the Land Trust office at 307-733-4707 – please contact us to inquire about available works and art sale details.
WHAT’S IN A SKYLINE? In urban environments, a skyline is the visual identity of a city, its unique pattern of buildings and skyscrapers punctuating the horizon. In Teton County, Skyline refers to an iconic place in the valley, one of Jackson Hole’s first subdivisions that forms two-thirds of a horseshoe around The Nature Conservancy’s Skyline and Crane Creek Ranch easements – the first conservation easements in Wyoming, visible from Highway 22 just east and south of the Snake River. Rather than skyscrapers and buildings, the Skyline Ranch subdivision is known for being a quiet neighborhood of homes tucked into a rolling hillside, with incredible views of open space and mountains in all directions.

To board president Fred Staehr, Skyline means something closer to home: he and his wife Jeanie bought their home there in the 1970s/1980s. Both schoolteachers at the time, they raised their two daughters in the neighborhood and became intimately familiar with its seasonal rhythms of wildlife and foliage, and views from their deck overlooking the Nature Conservancy easements as well as the Land Trust’s expansive Walton Ranch easement just to the north.

So when the Land Trust received news that a lot in the Skyline Ranch subdivision had been bequeathed to the organization by Ms. Mary G Kadlec in the spring of 2014, Fred could picture the lot in question and its conservation benefit. Located at the end of one of the neighborhood’s roads, Meadowlark Lane, IT IS HIGHLY VISIBLE ON THE SKYLINE RIDGE HILLSIDE, JUST SOUTH OF THE RECOGNIZABLE “NOTCH”. Rather than being tucked away in the aspens and evergreens, it is covered by open sagebrush and aspen, part of an ecological transition zone between the conserved meadows and wetlands to the east and Snake River cottonwood forests to the west – providing habitat and connectivity for wildlife including moose, bats, raptors, and waterfowl. “I was surprised to hear that we had received the property as a gift from Ms. Kadlec,” says Fred. “I guess I’m always surprised and grateful when people have that kind of vision and generosity, because my first instinct is to think of my family.”

While the 3.25 acre lot is small, it has a big visual impact, especially when seen from one of Highway 22’s most prominent...
curves. This summer, the Jackson Hole Land Trust board made the decision to protect the undeveloped lot, placing a new conservation easement on it that extinguishes all development rights and ensures that the natural and scenic conservation values of the property will be protected in perpetuity. The conserved property will be sold to an adjoining Skyline Ranch neighbor through a sealed bid process. “In keeping with the spirit of Ms. Kadlec’s gift and her love for the open spaces of the valley, we felt that this was the best decision,” says Fred.

Valley Visionaries

The harmonic rhythm of this valley is an expression of the collective conscious of the Jackson community. Together, we have identified and protected priority conservation land here. Together, we have taken action on all of the reasons you love Jackson Hole to safeguard our open spaces. The Jackson Hole Land Trust is acting for you, and we are depending on your support.

Every gift to our Annual Fund moves us forward in our journey to uphold the standards we have set for keeping this valley pristine. Gifts to the Annual Fund provide a strong foundation on which to build and implement a successful land protection strategy. The Valley Visionaries has been designed to recognize a group of principal Annual Fund donors who generously commit an annual gift of $2,500 or more. Members of the Valley Visionaries have established themselves as true leaders who share in our passion and collective vision for preserving the Valley’s pristine open spaces.

Individuals, families, and family foundations may receive recognition as members of Valley Visionaries. Through this membership, donors benefit from activities and communications that provide a direct and meaningful connection to the land that their dollars are helping to protect.

The Impact of your Annual Gift:
- 225 properties monitored by the Land Trust stewardship team every year
- More than 24,000 acres protected in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem
- Critical riparian and wildlife habitat protected

Valley Visionaries Membership Includes:
- Recognition in our Annual Report
- Semiannual, exclusive field trips to protected properties and areas
- Invitations to special Land Trust events throughout the year
- Regular updates from the Executive Director about the positive impacts of your contribution to conservation

We depend on your generosity for a solid foundation. By becoming a member of the Valley Visionaries with a gift of $2,500 to the Annual Fund, you can help ensure that the Land Trust will be poised to act on your interests and priority protection initiatives in the valley. Together, we can continue to make a difference.

“We give to the Annual Fund as a way of expressing our gratitude to those who came before us. We are so grateful for all of the easement donors who have entrusted their land to the Land Trust. We want to do our part to ensure our valley remains unspoiled for those who will come after us.” – Pam & Phelps Swift, Valley Visionaries members.

“I was surprised to hear that we had received the property as a gift from Ms. Kadlec. I guess I’m always surprised and grateful when people have that kind of vision and generosity.”
-Fred Staehr, board president
Taking the Long View

At Long Ridge, the Wind River Valley narrows considerably, and the Wind River runs along the base of the colorful Dubois Badlands. The striated ridges and draws of this formation are critical winter habitat for bighorn sheep, mule deer and antelope – evidenced by the crisscrossed wildlife paths on the property made by animals moving between the river and the windswept uplands during this time of year.

This stretch of the Wind River is also treasured by anglers making use of a Wyoming Game and Fish access easement which runs the length of the property. The lush vegetation along the river, with towering cottonwoods, dense shrubs, and tall grass, contrasts vividly with the red badlands in the backdrop, and is stunning in any season but particularly in autumn. It can be viewed and enjoyed from the highway about 6 miles southeast of Dubois.

This October, the Wind River Program of the Jackson Hole Land Trust permanently protected the 79-acre Long Ridge property with a donated easement by the Brigham family, ensuring that the scenic and wildlife values of this special place will benefit future generations of residents and visitors to the Dubois area. Dave and Jean Brigham approached Wind River Program Director Ellen Vanuga as experienced conservation landowners – their property in Weston, VT is protected with an easement held by the Vermont Land Trust. “They have been coming to the Dubois for a long time and have a real soft spot for this part of Wyoming, its wild open spaces and wildlife,” says Ellen. “WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THE BRIGHAM FAMILY FOR THEIR FORESIGHT AND GENEROSITY IN PROTECTING THIS BEAUTIFUL PLACE.”

“We love the open rugged natural landscapes of the Wind River Valley. It is one of the last frontiers of America. For those who come after us we want it to be the same,” said Dave and Jean Brigham of their inspiration for the easement.

Save the Date

35th Anniversary Picnic • Sunday, August 9th

Thank you to the 600 community members and partners that joined us at this year’s Annual Picnic at the 4 Lazy F Ranch. It was a beautiful afternoon with many highlights – including a program honoring Bert Raynes for his many contributions to the valley’s wildlife, five View22 artists creating plein air paintings, stories from Harry Oliver about the history of the family ranch including its infamous nickname, the “Poodle Ranch”, and music by Jess Camilla O’Neal and the Neversweat Players.
From the President

Fall in the valley has meant many things to me over the years. When I was a younger man, I would look forward to tracking elk through the forest during this special time of transition. These days, it’s the fall colors that I enjoy the most. Viewed from Teton Pass or the Snake River, the valley is filled with yellows and browns against the dark green of evergreens. But my favorite way to seek out fall colors is the Snake River Canyon by boat, to see the vibrant shades of red that you just don’t find anywhere else in the valley – a vision of nature’s glory.

This newsletter issue, Valley Visions, takes a look at the many different kinds of vision (and imagination, thought, planning, and dedication) by individuals, families, and organizations needed to take projects and ideas from seed to success. The Munger Mountain Corridor project was first considered by the Resor family in the 1990s, and through creative financial planning and partnerships, became a reality this year. R Park, born as an idea and a dream in 2009, took shape over the past 3 years to become a wonderful natural park for and by the community. The Skyline Ranch project is an incredible example of thoughtful generosity and the long view – a planned gift that also contributes to scenic views along an iconic stretch of highway – as is the gift of the Brigham family’s donated easement in the Dubois area. The View22 artists contribute their perspectives and talents to the Land Trust and in doing so, remind many landowners of the original vision they had when protecting their properties. And of course, we could not accomplish this without the dedicated support of our Valley Visionaries annual fund donors.

These are the yellows, oranges, browns, and reds of a diverse portfolio of projects and community of supporters that enable the work of the Land Trust to be lasting and forward-looking at the same time. Behind the scenes, the day-to-day, year-to-year hard work of the Land Trust staff are the steadfast parts of this landscape – seeing projects to completion while even more are in the works, and stewarding our protected lands through time. While many trees in the valley have dropped their leaves, I am already looking forward to the vibrant reds of the year ahead.

– Fred Staehr

The Jackson Hole Land Trust is a private, non-profit organization that was established in 1980 to preserve open space and the critical wildlife habitat, magnificent scenic vistas, and historic ranching heritage of Jackson Hole. By working cooperatively with the owners of the area’s privately owned open lands, the Jackson Hole Land Trust has ensured the permanent protection of over 24,000 acres in and around Jackson Hole and the Greater Yellowstone Area. For more information please visit jhlandtrust.org.
Announcing TravelStorysGPS v2.0

There’s never been a better time to download and enjoy TravelStorysGPS – now with an intuitively easy interface showcasing beautiful new images, never-before heard stories, and all new tours in and around Jackson Hole and Wyoming. This free app offers GPS-based stories about local history, geology, wildlife and more including a fun channel tailored just for kids. The Land Trust’s Highway 22 tour has been completely re-imagined for version 2.0, with updated and new stories, new photos, and an optimized user experience.

The Jackson Hole Land Trust has been a partner of the TravelStorysGPS app since its inception in 2012, when it was created in partnership with the Jackson Hole Land Trust, Grand Teton National Park Foundation, and one of the country’s leading conservationists, Story Clark. In addition to re-imagining these original “beta” tours, version 2.0 comes with three new tours – the Historic Downtown Jackson Self-Guided Walking Tour, the Jackson Hole Airport Info & Public Art Tour, and the Indian Wars of Early Wyoming Tour – with more tours slated to be added soon.

Keep up with our work and sign up for our email list at jhlandtrust.org.

Image by TravelStorysGPS.