



| 2025 Winter Newsletter



Open Lands

Community Strength

One of my favorite recent evenings came on the longest night of the year. Each winter, the Jackson Hole Land Trust celebrates the winter solstice with a celebration at R Park. The evening serves as an opportunity to bring community together on the land. No matter the weather, every year, people show up to spend time outdoors sledding, enjoying the lantern trail, and drinking hot cocoa.

With winter in full swing, I am reminded of the power and importance of community. Much like the elk of the region, which instinctively form larger herds during the winter months, we, too, find comfort and resilience in coming together this time of year. While the days may be long and cold, this season offers a moment to reflect on the progress we have made and the work that

lies ahead to protect this amazing landscape.



In this issue, you will read about the power of community. We explore Trail Creek Ranch, the historic big winter and the strength of farming and ranching communities, and the importance of resilience in conservation planning, especially in relation to water.

Our work is a reflection of the conservation ethics of the communities where we work. Each acre we protect reflects the strength of our community. As we take a moment to reflect this season, we are inspired by both the land and its dedicated stewards. Thank you for your role in ensuring that Northwest Wyoming's landscapes continue to thrive for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Max Ludington
President

| Former Board Member Tribute

In Memory:

Johnny Becker

Johnny deeply loved Jackson Hole and the people who live here, and he was strongly committed and loyal to both. His service on the board allowed him to protect the land and the community he cared about so much. As a board member he was a great listener, funny, and loving. Deeply respected within the community, Johnny brought numerous landowner and donor connections to the organization.

Frank Ewing

As a founding board member, Frank brought a love for Jackson Hole and the Snake River to the organization. Frank was widely known as one of the valley's pioneering boatmen and was instrumental in the Snake River's Wild and Scenic designation. Frank recognized the need to take action to protect the valley he loved and worked passionately through the organization's early years.

Mission

Our mission is to protect and steward Northwest Wyoming landscapes for current and future generations.

Vision

We envision a legacy of resilient open spaces, wildlife habitat, working lands, and community places, forever protected across Northwest Wyoming.

62,361

Acres conserved in partnership with families across Northwest Wyoming.

Photo: Alexandra Munger



Senator Herb Kohl

As a founding board member of the Jackson Hole Land Trust, Senator Kohl brought a passion for wild spaces, particularly in the Gros Ventre drainage, where he had a home for many years. Senator Kohl was the first major donor to the JHLT and helped to establish the credibility of the organization in its early years. His conservation legacy in Northwest Wyoming is highlighted by the gift of his Gros Ventre ranch to the American people.

Vince Lee

Vince was both a founding board member and an emeritus member at the JHLT. Vince helped to develop the original plans for the JHLT, and during his tenure he chaired the board and worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make the organization successful. He was widely known around the valley as an architect, and he remained an ardent supporter of conservation throughout his life.

Rod Moorhead

Rod served two terms on the board before being elected an emeritus board member. Rod was the original inspiration for the Forever Our Valley Campaign and led the effort that resulted in some of the organization's iconic easements and community spaces. Rod was incredibly influential as a board member and widely respected for his thoughtful approach to conservation.

A Hidden Gem

Few places in the valley merge the worlds of Nordic skiing and ranching. A historic Wilson guest ranch offers just that. At the end of the Old Pass Road, tucked below Teton Pass, is Trail Creek Ranch. Surrounded by a big timber forest, it has been a favored retreat since the days of its first pioneer woman, Betty Woolsey. An alpine Olympian and founder of the ranch, Betty's legacy lives on today in many ways, including the Betty Woolsey Classic ski race held at the ranch. Through her deep love for the ranch and a partnership with the Jackson Hole Land Trust, Betty had a conservation easement placed on the ranch at the time of

her passing to protect it from development. The easement ensures the ranch remains an iconic property with open space, wildlife habitat, agriculture, guest ranching, and, of course, Nordic skiing.

In 1967, Betty granted Johnny Curtis, the director of JH Ski and Snowboard Club (JHSC), permission to groom the ranch's roads for Nordic skiing in the winter. To this day, the Trail Creek Nordic Training Facility is a collaborative effort between the JHSC and Trail Creek Ranch. This gives the community an opportunity to use the facility. The club's mission is to inspire and develop student-athletes through innovative and accessible ski and snowboard programs that provide opportunities to pursue personal excellence in snow sports and life. The club brings a community aspect to the ranch; kids crowd the tracks after school for lessons, while races held throughout the winter draw competitors from across the region.

In the late 1980s, the ranch became a major draw for backcountry skiers. Back then, skiers were the majority of the ranch's guests. They would leave their cabin's doorstep after their morning cup of coffee with their skis in hand to make their way up Teton Pass. Skiers enjoyed multiple runs of untracked powder before heading back down to the ranch for lunch. Then, up and at 'em for more skiing.

Gliding along the Nordic tracks, skiers might catch a glimpse of the historic, bright red vintage Imp snowcat chugging along in the deep snow. In the driver's seat, Alex, the ranch manager, navigates the pasture with bales of hay in tow while horses begin to crowd around. Hay bales fly off the back of the flatbed trailer as Jules, Alex's right hand, tosses the horses their breakfast. The Imp disappears in the distance as the two women head inside to tackle their day's to-do list before

squeezing in some fresh powder runs from a recent snowstorm.

Today, the ranch is open year-round, offering guest stays in its original cabins, which are minimally decorated with cozy accommodations and original artwork by Betty Woolsey herself. It's a magical place to be, providing a sense of seclusion that feels almost exclusive!

With access to the Bridger-Teton National Forest right out the back door, the town of Wilson just down the road for a burger and sloshe, proximity to Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, and the town of Jackson close by, there's little reason for guests to stray far from the ranch. All four seasons have something to offer on the 270-acre stretch and beyond, whether it's fishing, hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, or powder skiing.

Throughout the years, Alex and Jules have maintained the ranch's charm, balancing their many roles as mothers, cowgirls, social media gurus, cabin maids, and more. They have kept

it running the same way since the early 1990s: women-ran and owned. Yet, their dedication as land stewards is the most essential thread tying all these roles together.

Trail Creek Ranch truly represents the best of both worlds, offering a welcoming experience that starts at the end of the road.

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Photo: Alexandra Munger



Photo: Alexandra Munger

The Blizzard of 1949

The following story comes from JHLT Conservation Project Manager Emily Reed's grandmother, Linda Nichol.

In a small homestead cabin outside Lusk, Wyoming, Linda Nichol huddled around a wood-burning stove with her two older siblings as the infamous blizzard of 1949 swept across their family ranch. The children were alone as their parents had been visiting friends nearby when the storm struck, and they couldn't make it back to the ranch safely.

Hurricane-force winds howled at 80 miles per hour, whipping the snow into blinding whiteouts. Roads and railways vanished beneath massive drifts, cutting off the ranch and nearby towns from the outside world. As temperatures plunged to 20 degrees below zero, the siblings decided to close off the east end of their cabin and huddle together in the kitchen by the cook stove. Linda remembers sitting in her snow suit with her feet pressed against the cook stove door to keep her toes warm. The deadly cold seeped through every crack of the uninsulated homestead house.

When Linda's uncle arrived from his house a mile away, he and the two oldest children ventured out through the deep snow to try

to tend to the livestock. They dug tunnels through the drifts, making their way to the outhouse, barn, and poultry house. Digging through the drifts felt like shoveling concrete, as the cold temperatures and wind had turned the heavy snow into a solid mass. Linda remembers them bringing half-frozen ducks and chickens into the house in wooden boxes where she would hold them and warm them by the cook stove. They ushered some of the family's cows and horses into the small barn,

but not all made it in. It took nearly four days for Linda's parents to dig their way back to the ranch.

Wyoming's governor, A.G. Crane, took swift action, mobilizing the Wyoming National Guard and the Civil Air Patrol to clear roads and deliver much-needed food and medicine. Linda recalls being in awe as planes soared over the ranch. In a desperate attempt to communicate, people wrote messages in the snow, hoping that a passing pilot would spot their distress messages. The blizzard transformed into a relentless weather system that lasted for weeks, stretching the state and local resources to their breaking point.

In 1949, there was no formal emergency response plan at the federal level. Governors recognized the overwhelming need for assistance, calling on President Truman for help. In response, Truman declared Wyoming, South Dakota, and Nebraska disaster areas and authorized \$700,000 in emergency aid, with \$125,000 designated for Wyoming. The U.S. Air Force launched "Operation Haylift" to deliver 550 tons of hay across the prairies, dropping life-saving bales to stranded cattle herds.

Ranchers faced an unimaginable crisis as their cattle, sheep, pigs, and horses—the lifeblood of Wyoming's economy—lay buried beneath massive drifts, where they suffocated or starved to death. Other livestock had to be put down. In some cases, families discovered that their milk cows' udders had frozen off. Fortunately for Linda's family, their cow stayed warm enough in the barn. When the spring came, livestock were still very weak, and many of the bulls had become sterile due to the frigid conditions.

In the aftermath of the devastation, stories of courage and community came to light. Stranded travelers found shelter with strangers, neighbors shared what little they had, and local radio stations filled the airwaves with messages of hope. The people of Wyoming displayed remarkable grit and resilience—not only during the blizzard of 1949 but in the years it took to rebuild their ranching operations. Their unwavering spirit serves as a reminder that even today, in the face of unpredictable hardships, rural communities continue to stand strong, leaning on each other to overcome whatever challenges come their way.



Photo: Wyoming PBS



Photo: Wyoming PBS

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Resilient Lands

Wyoming, like many parts of the western United States, has experienced more widespread and frequent droughts in recent years. In five of the six counties where the Jackson Hole Land Trust (JHLT) holds easements, portions are now classified as being in “extreme drought,” according to the National Drought Mitigation Center. Climate experts predict that these conditions are a harbinger of what will be our new normal, with widespread drought, lower stream flows, and higher incidence of wildfires. These conditions will have an outsized impact on both the agricultural operations and critical wildlife habitats that make this region so unique.

Climate resilience refers to the ability of communities and ecosystems to withstand and recover from effects brought on or exacerbated by changes in the earth’s climate. In 2023, the JHLT added the word resilient to our vision statement, affirming and catalyzing the organization’s resiliency efforts. The shift is more than symbolic—the JHLT is developing

science-based tools to better prioritize protections for land that is more likely to retain conservation significance in hotter and drier conditions.

When evaluating potential conservation easements, the JHLT strives to prioritize agricultural lands and wildlife habitats that are the most resilient or expand landscape connectivity. The JHLT is working with scientists and natural resource managers to better understand which lands are most resistant to rising temperatures and prolonged drought. One of the key tools guiding the JHLT’s conservation work is The Nature Conservancy’s Resilient Land Mapping Tool, which identifies landscapes likely to sustain biodiversity and ecological functions in the future. In Northwest Wyoming, the dataset reveals:

- 87% of Sublette County has recognized biodiversity, containing intact habitat with rare species
- 60% of Fremont County is climate resilient land, meaning it’s local connectedness and landscape diversity will help to buffer climate change impacts
- 71% of Teton County is a climate corridor, allowing the movement of species in response to a changing climate
- 69% of Park County is within the Resilient & Connected Network, identified among all U.S. habitats for having at least two of three: high resilience, high connectivity, and recognized biodiversity

Prolonged drought has an enormous impact on our farming and ranching community. Much of the water in Northwest Wyoming is managed by private landowners through private water rights. To better understand

which water rights are most resilient and vital to sustaining agriculture and wildlife, the JHLT recently partnered with the University of Wyoming on a Sublette County-focused study. The results will help the JHLT prioritize partnerships with landowners whose water resources play a key role in helping to buffer anticipated impacts of a changing climate.

The Nature Conservancy’s Resilient Land Mapping Tool identifies nearly two-thirds of the JHLT’s Northwest Wyoming focus area as climate resilient land. By expanding conservation efforts and promoting climate-adaptive practices on protected landscapes, we can maintain the incredible landscape connectivity and diversity of wildlife species that is iconic to Wyoming.

The JHLT remains committed to working alongside farmers, ranchers, scientists, and conservation partners to ensure that these lands are not only protected but also prepared for the challenges ahead.



Photo: Rob Tolley



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Meet Bettina

Meet Legacy Society member Bettina Whyte, a nationally recognized financial and operational restructuring leader. As one of the first women in this male-dominated field, she has led a successful career managing domestic and international corporations in almost every industry. She is passionate about making a real difference with wildlife and conserving critical habitat. See what inspired Bettina to consider a legacy gift to the Jackson Hole Land Trust.

Jackson Hole Land Trust: What is your connection to Jackson Hole?

Bettina Whyte: When I was 18 years old, I saw the Tetons for the first time, and I was overwhelmed by their rugged beauty and majesty. At that moment, I knew I had to live here in this magnificent valley, which I have been fortunate enough to do for almost three decades. I was first introduced to the JHLT over 20 years ago and was very moved by its mission to protect critical open spaces. I want to help the JHLT accomplish permanent protection of wildlife habitat and migratory corridors.

JHLT: What do you love most about Northwest Wyoming?

BW: All of the wildlife! It is such an incredible privilege to be able to experience a herd of elk as they migrate, a mother moose giving

birth to twin calves, a grizzly bear with four cubs teaching them how to cross a river, a pronghorn grazing on the grasslands, or a bison jump a six-foot fence! Just look at the expressions of wonderment on the faces of guests in this area when they see these extraordinary animals in their natural habitat. And, what better way to teach our children about God's creatures, great and small?

JHLT: What do you hope to accomplish through your planned gift?

BW: I hope to help preserve not only the beauty and majesty of our valley, but the wildlife that live or migrate through our area. To accomplish this, I feel it is imperative to have open lands and pathways permanently protected to ensure that all these animals can continue to flourish now and beyond our lifetime, for our children and their children. I believe that the JHLT is doing exactly this.

JHLT: Why would you encourage others to make a planned gift to the Jackson Hole Land Trust?

BW: To help the JHLT accomplish its vision of a legacy of forever protected open space, working lands, and community places. Achieving this goal has become ever more challenging as we are faced with growing pressure to build and further develop. I encourage anyone who has any connection or appreciation of our region to make a legacy gift to help the JHLT permanently conserve what we love most.



Photo: Alexandra Munger



“I want to help the JHLT accomplish permanent protection of wildlife habitat and migratory corridors.”

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Photo: Rob Tolley