



# Wallowa Land Trust

*Conservation Plan 2017*



# Introduction

Cover: View over Wallowa Lake from the West Moraine © David Jensen

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**W**allowa Land Trust protects the rural nature of the Wallowa Country by working cooperatively with private landowners, Indian tribes, local communities and governmental entities to conserve land. This Conservation Plan establishes and communicates specific goals for how we will achieve our mission and how we plan to preserve the character of the place we call home: Wallowa County.

Wallowa County is characterized by a stunning and diverse geography, including deep basalt-walled canyons, glacially-cut gorges, high mountain lakes, forests and prairie. Like the rest of the rural West, the area faces a number of challenges – a natural-resource based economy struggling to retain living-wage jobs, shifts in population demographics and a changing climate, to name a few. Whether our neighbors are ranchers, loggers, bankers, teachers, or retirees, how we respond to these challenges will determine the character of our home for decades to come.

Our Board of Directors and Lands Committee deserve a special note of thanks for their work on this Plan, which took more than a year and countless volunteer hours. Together

with staff, they recognized that how we do our work is just as important as why we do it. As an organization that promises to work with our community to protect land in perpetuity, it is vitally important we are strategic with finite resources and that we consider the larger ecological, political and social context in which we work. Ultimately, success means a Wallowa County where kids have opportunities to learn about their heritage and grow up with a natural world that keeps their bodies healthy, nurtures their minds and provides opportunities to make a living.



Child wades in creek © Leon Werdinger

# Goals of the Conservation Plan

**T**he Conservation Plan offers a framework that places Wallowa Land Trust projects in a broader conservation and community context, enabling the Land Trust to concentrate our efforts on the best projects and avoid those not directly aligned with our mission. It provides a robust structure to support decision-making to help us identify areas of highest importance and conservation value. While there will always be a balance between opportunity and strategy, if we focus on strategic priorities we can protect land more efficiently and raise more funds.

The purposes of the Plan are to help the Land Trust:

- ◆ Increase the pace and scale of conservation in Wallowa County;
- ◆ Identify the priority places that support a vibrant agricultural economy, functioning ecosystems and healthy communities;
- ◆ Decide when and where we commit our resources;
- ◆ Identify how our work fits into larger conservation and community priorities; and,

- ◆ Increase the public’s confidence in our organization.

It’s important to note here that our work takes place within the context of voluntary transactions with willing private landowners who use their lands in varying ways but all identify conservation and land protection as a mutual priority. Though we may reach out to landowners in a certain focal area, their interest and dedication is critical for each project’s success. Additionally, each project identified by this Plan is subject to approval by the Board of Directors.



Hiker on the East Moraine of Wallowa Lake © Leon Werdinger

Flowering lupine (Lupine sp.) © Leon Werdinger



Ponderosa pines (*Pinus ponderosa*) thrive on the Lola-Hasslacher Conservation Easement © Leon Werdinger

## Our Track Record

Since our incorporation in 2004, Wallowa Land Trust has secured important lands in Wallowa County by working with willing landowners to conserve their properties. We have worked collaboratively and creatively, using voluntary, non-regulatory tools to protect the places we love in our corner of northeast Oregon: natural areas, wildlife habitat, open spaces and working lands.

Driven by community support and direction, we formed the Wallowa Lake Moraines Partnership in 2011. This unique private-public alliance is dedicated to conserving habitat and working lands around Wallowa Lake, and maintaining public access on a unique geographical feature, the East Moraine.

To date, we have conserved almost 600 acres of land, providing permanent protection for:

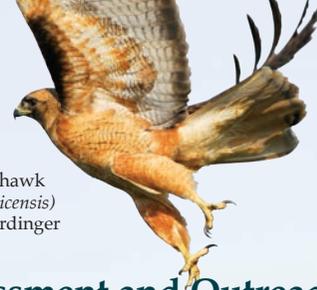
- ◆ A working family farm;
- ◆ Riparian areas along the Lostine and Wallowa Rivers;
- ◆ Shoreline on Wallowa Lake;

- ◆ Forested properties on the backside of the East Moraine and the west shore of Wallowa Lake; and,
- ◆ A traditional Nez Perce encampment.

In 2016, we became a nationally-accredited land trust, a seal of distinction that attests to our commitment to integrity, efficacy, and permanence.



Buffalo (*Bison bison*) © Leon Werdinger



Red-tailed hawk  
(*Buteo jamaicensis*)  
© Leon Werdinger

## Wallowa County

In order to complete this Plan, we must consider where we work. Wallowa County is bound by the deepest gorge in North America – Hells Canyon – to the east and Oregon’s largest wilderness area – the Eagle Cap – to the south. Diverse landscapes of bunchgrass prairie, wet meadows, dense forest and broad river valleys support irrigated farmland and upland ranches and a mix of families with deep roots in the area as well as newer residents. The area is the homeland of the Nez Perce people, including the celebrated Chief Joseph. A longstanding tradition of making a living from the land continues today; ranching and farming remain the cornerstone of our economy and lifestyle.

Though the census estimates a population of 6,856 residents, this figure swells dramatically with thousands of visitors to the county in the summer and fall. The majority of landowners live year-round in the county, but over a third are seasonal residents. Sixty-two percent of landowners are “production oriented,” growing agricultural or forest commodities, while the other thirty-eight percent are “amenity oriented,” favoring

scenic vacation home sites, hunting and fishing and other recreational land uses. With these differences in management goals, the Land Trust plays an important role in bringing the community together to preserve special places across this iconic county. Despite our differences, land is one of our most fundamental commonalities.

Wallowa Land Trust was founded in response to increased development pressure around Wallowa Lake and has responded to community interests since our inception. In 2015 it became evident that after ten years of building an organization from the ground up, it was time for us to move from being opportunistic to strategic and more carefully consider where we fit in the conservation picture in Wallowa County. Considering the following strategic questions helped us understand our position:

*How best can Wallowa Land Trust serve Wallowa County given the number of partners operating in the area? How can we respond to community interests more proactively? How best can we leverage and add to existing efforts? And, how can those efforts complement our work?*

## Assessment and Outreach

To develop this strategic Conservation Plan, we hired a consultant and mapping analyst to assist us. In the Fall of 2015, we began gathering input from partners, constituents, and stakeholders. The purposes of this participation were to:

- ◆ Inform key partners and the community about the Land Trust’s work.
- ◆ Understand the main conservation values in the region and their locations.
- ◆ Understand the threats to conservation values and the locations where these threats are imminent.
- ◆ Start to prioritize those values across Wallowa County.

The Land Trust held two facilitated workshops – one with natural resource professionals and the other with community partners. We also completed one-on-one interviews with key people who were unable to attend either workshop, launched a public online survey, and held a public forum in Enterprise. After all

was said and done, over 200 people provided input on the Plan. From their level of engagement and the input they provided, we feel that we have an enthusiastic base of support and are seen as having an important role in conserving land by our community.

## Conservation Goals

After we completed our outreach, and gathered and analyzed the information it provided, the Land Trust’s Board of Directors reviewed the findings and made critical decisions about what types of land to prioritize for private land protection. From that input, the Board defined

the Land Trust’s overarching conservation goals then drafted objectives that would address those goals. The Lands Committee refined those objectives and developed conservation drivers to represent them on the ground.

Our community provided input on the Plan which reaffirmed that the Land Trust should be committed to preserving landscapes that make Wallowa County unique. All of us agree that we live in an incredible place, and to make sure our work reflects the priorities of our community, Wallowa Land Trust defined goals based on our stakeholders’ input. Defining each

of these conservation goals enables the Land Trust to focus on specific properties with landowners who want to work with us. Our goals are to:

- ◆ Conserve working lands
- ◆ Conserve ecological and geological integrity
- ◆ Preserve community values
- ◆ Promote spatial integrity



Aerial view of Joseph, Wallowa Lake and the Wallowa Mountains © Leon Werdinger

To implement the Plan, the Land Trust will bring together landowners, public and private agencies, funders and community partners. We plan to measure our success not only in acres conserved, but also in partnerships forged, momentum gained and community involvement. Additionally, we plan to share the information in this Plan as a community resource so others can use it as broadly as possible.

We envision a future in which:

- ◆ Unique natural treasures, including the Wallowa Lake Moraines, are conserved for future generations;
- ◆ Working farms and ranches, forests and grasslands are economically and ecologically viable parts of our landscape;
- ◆ Fish and wildlife resources are abundant and supported by interconnected habitats; and,
- ◆ Stewardship and restoration activities improve the quality of our natural resources and support the economy.

## A few of our projects

### Ham Family Conservation Easement

Located on the iconic East Moraine of Wallowa Lake, this 52-acre conservation easement was donated to the Land Trust in 2017. The property contains native grasses and provides key winter range for mule deer. Future development and sub-division is prohibited. The Ham family will continue to own and manage the land.

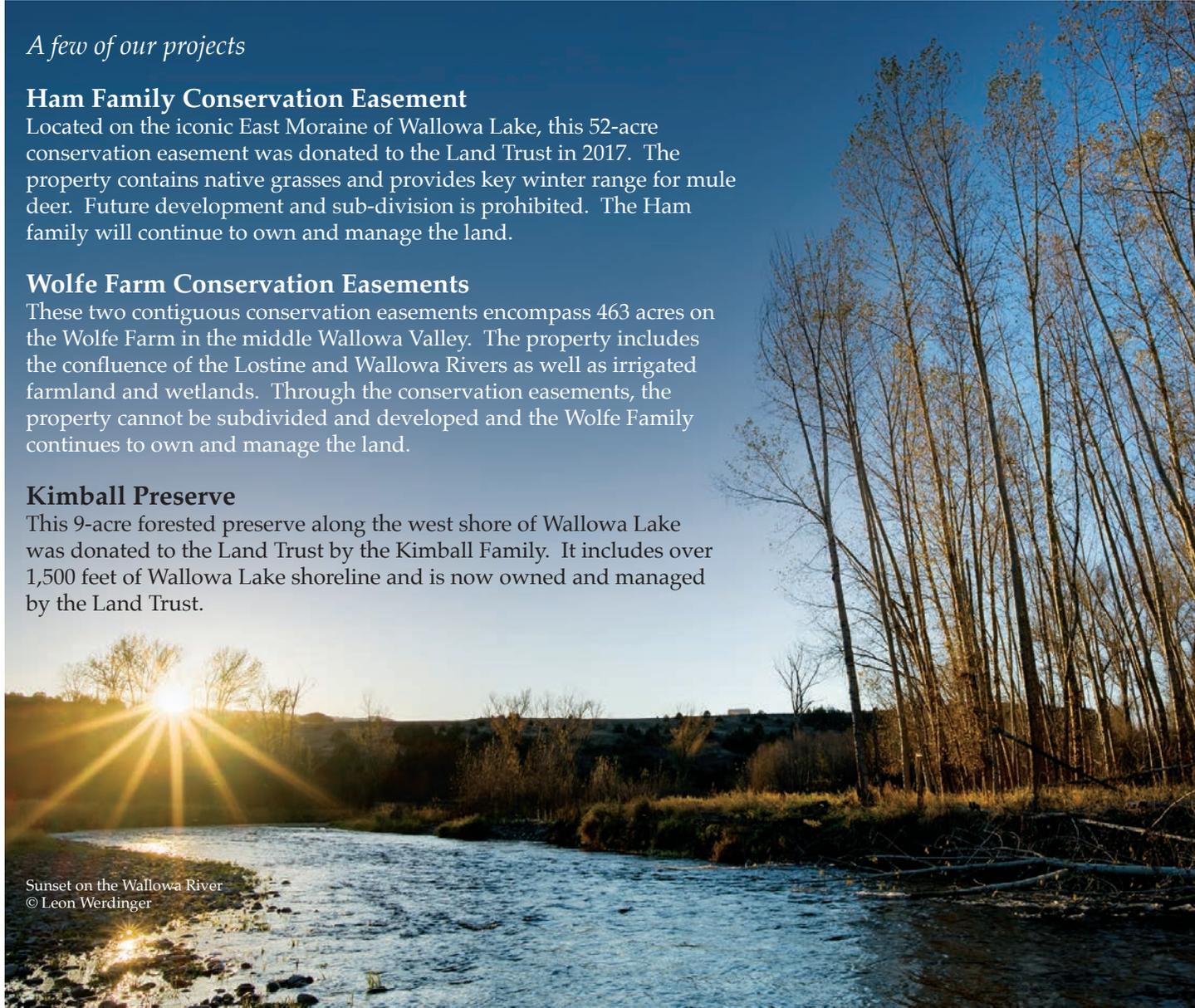
### Wolfe Farm Conservation Easements

These two contiguous conservation easements encompass 463 acres on the Wolfe Farm in the middle Wallowa Valley. The property includes the confluence of the Lostine and Wallowa Rivers as well as irrigated farmland and wetlands. Through the conservation easements, the property cannot be subdivided and developed and the Wolfe Family continues to own and manage the land.

### Kimball Preserve

This 9-acre forested preserve along the west shore of Wallowa Lake was donated to the Land Trust by the Kimball Family. It includes over 1,500 feet of Wallowa Lake shoreline and is now owned and managed by the Land Trust.

Sunset on the Wallowa River  
© Leon Werdinger



Long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*)  
© Leon Werdinger

## Conservation Tools & Strategies

Wallowa Land Trust uses two essential tools to fulfill our mission – conservation easements and fee-title acquisition. Conservation easements are the Land Trust’s primary tool for conserving land. Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements between landowners and a land trust created to protect certain natural and traditional values of the owner’s property in perpetuity. Development rights are extinguished forever and the owner continues to own and manage their land in a manner consistent with the conservation easement parameters. Conservation easements are recorded on the title of the property, and the land trust ensures the terms of the easement are permanently upheld. The terms of the easement preserve the owner’s intentions and important conservation values of the property.

Fee title, or full ownership, of land donated to or purchased by the Land Trust allows the organization to have full control over the use and condition of the property. Wallowa Land Trust also sometimes plays a role in facilitating conservation

transactions, ensuring land is protected but without the Land Trust owning the land or holding a conservation easement on it.

## Criteria for Selection of Projects

A critical element of implementing the Conservation Plan is ensuring Wallowa Land Trust’s project selection criteria match the Plan’s goals and objectives. We use project selection criteria to decide which conservation projects to pursue. The Board reviews the completed selection criteria before they approve a project. Based on the conservation priorities of the Plan, a new version of the criteria has been developed by the Lands Committee. Criteria include, for example, the parcel’s habitat quality; whether or not the parcel has farmland and, if so, is the farmland irrigated; and the parcel’s adjacency to fish-bearing streams.

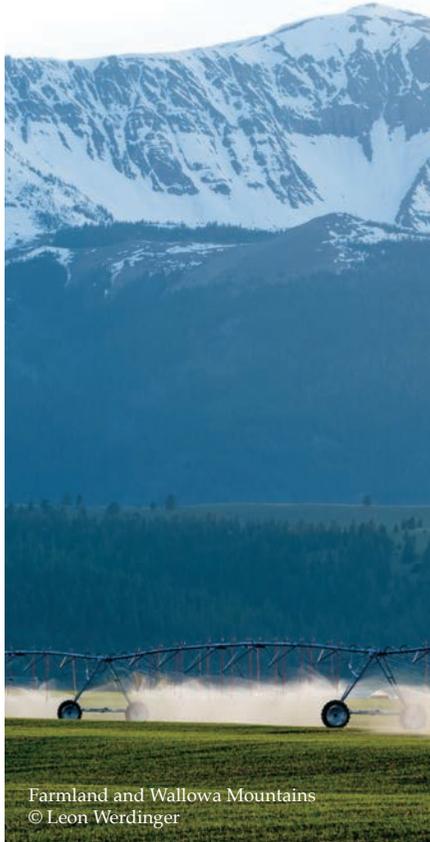
## Conserve Working Lands

### Vision

The Land Trust works to protect agricultural and forest lands from conversion to other non-productive uses. Specifically, we prioritize working lands that have high economic value and that provide important conservation benefits. Working lands can be defined in multiple ways and include farms, ranches, and timberlands actively managed by their owners. For the purposes of this Plan, the working lands that we prioritize are primarily productive, irrigated farmland in the Wallowa River Corridor between Joseph and Minam Canyon. We want to help families who have worked their land for generations continue to do so.

Additionally, we used productive grazing and forestland as conservation drivers. Some of these working lands provide scenic views, particularly in the Highway 82 corridor where land is zoned for development and has existing development pressure. Although forest lands did not emerge as a high priority in the outreach results, the Land Trust is interested in working with non-industrial timber landowners to conserve forestland

that has good wildlife habitat and other values. If the Land Trust can partner with other agencies and organizations, we may also support the conservation of large industrial timberlands for wildlife habitat, recreation and other community values.



### Priority Places

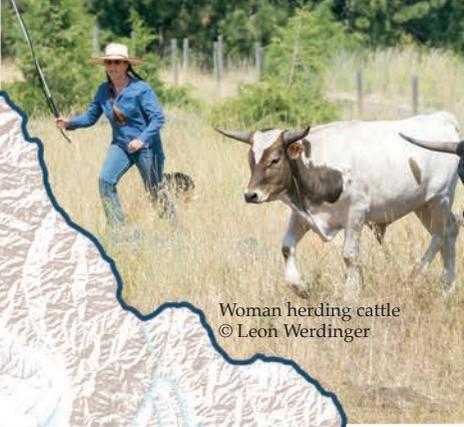
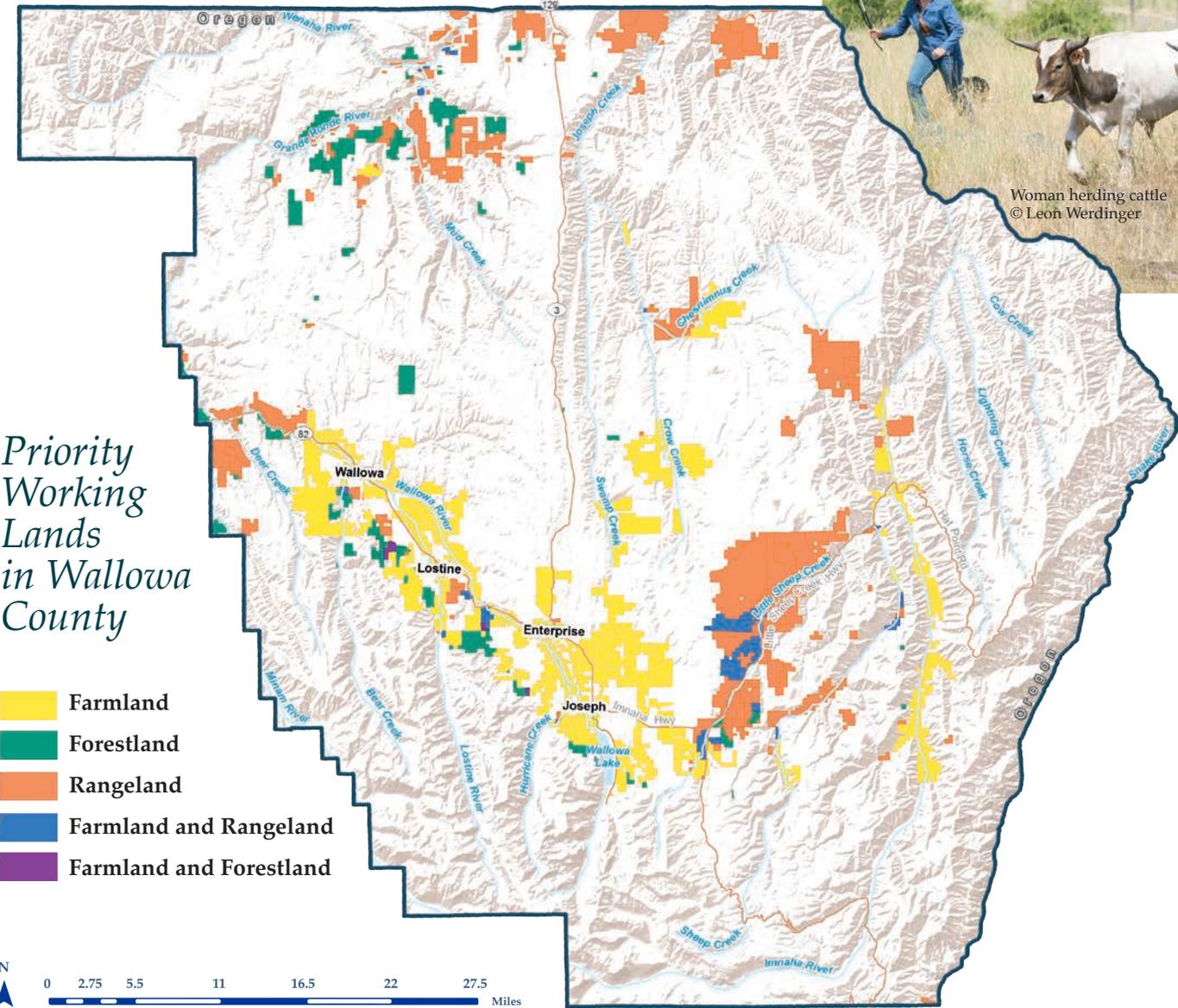
- ◆ Irrigated farmland with riparian areas and high-quality farmland soils
- ◆ Productive grazing lands
- ◆ High-value forestland

### Conservation Actions

- ◆ Collaborate with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and others to support farmers' and ranchers' efforts to conserve their lands, improve agricultural practices and benefit habitat
- ◆ Support working lands succession planning and incentives to keep working lands owned and operated by local families
- ◆ Support development of community-owned forests in Wallowa County
- ◆ Advocate for local, state and federal-level policies that directly benefit working lands conservation

## Priority Working Lands in Wallowa County

- Farmland
- Forestland
- Rangeland
- Farmland and Rangeland
- Farmland and Forestland



OBJECTIVE	CONSERVATION DRIVER
Conserve priority farmland	Farms with riparian areas, irrigated farmland, and high-value farmland soils
Conserve priority rangeland	Productive grazing lands zoned timber/grazing
Conserve priority forestland	High-value forestland zoned timber/grazing

# Conservation Priorities

## Conserve Ecological & Geological Integrity

### Vision

The Land Trust is concerned with fish and wildlife habitat in the county, and the water resources that support this habitat. These landscapes provide winter range for deer and elk, clean water for trout, steelhead, and salmon, and are often unique and worthy of preservation on their own. Such landscapes include the Wallowa Lake Moraines and properties along the county's major rivers and their tributaries.

specifically for wildlife corridors. This means, for example, ensuring mule deer have access to food and water from the high lakes in the Eagle Cap Mountains to the floor of the Wallowa Valley.

Currently, the Land Trust is concentrating on keeping the Wallowa Lake Moraines intact and undeveloped. In that effort, we are also working with landowners to allow public access on the moraines, particularly the East Moraine.

Priority habitats in Wallowa County include those at low elevation with riparian, wetland and shrubland ecosystems. These habitats are critically important not only to the diverse species that rely on them, but to the human population that depends on the services these ecosystems provide. From clean water to food production, conservation of these resources has broad, long-term benefits to the county. Species diversity cannot exist on small islands, however, and thus the Land Trust seeks to prevent habitat fragmentation by promoting connectivity across the land,



Glacial erratics dot the Wallowa Lake Moraines © Kathleen Ackley

### Priority Places

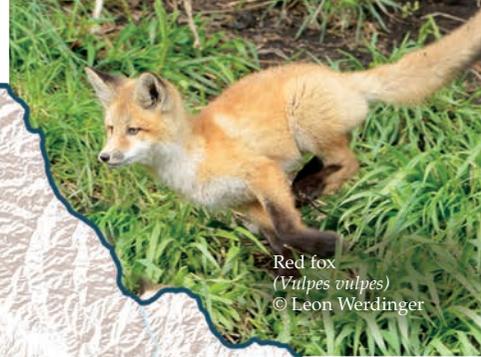
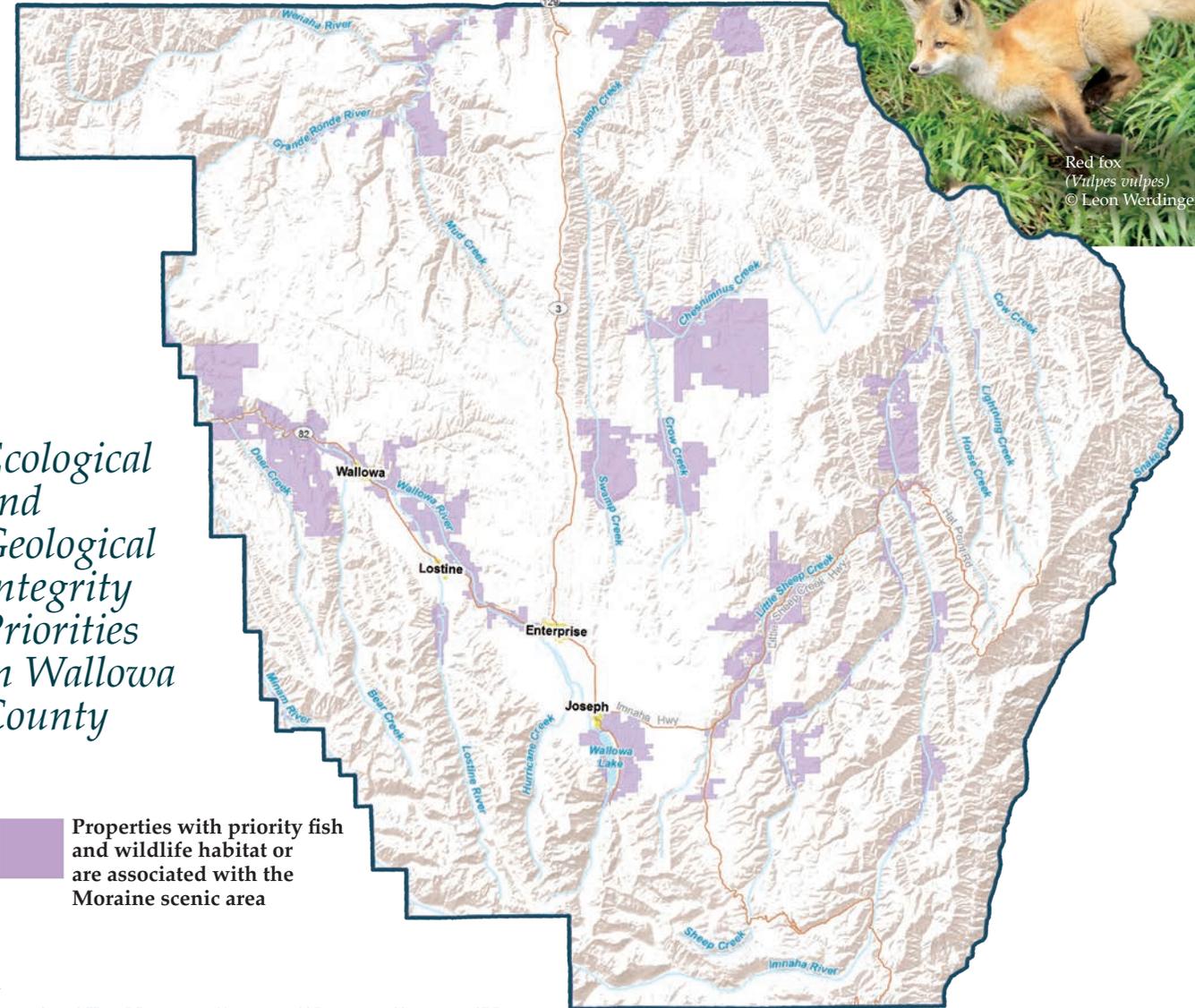
- ◆ Lands adjacent to critical fish habitat
- ◆ Lands with important wildlife habitat
- ◆ Wallowa Lake Moraines
- ◆ Lands with important riparian and wetland areas

### Conservation Actions

- ◆ Continue working with the Wallowa Lake Moraines Partnership to conserve the Wallowa Lake Moraines
- ◆ Collaborate with tribes, governmental agencies and other community organizations working on projects that benefit priority habitats in Wallowa County
- ◆ Support incorporating wildlife habitat conservation into working lands management
- ◆ Be strategic in conserving adjacent, large swaths of conserved lands for wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity
- ◆ Advocate for local, state and federal-level policies that directly benefit conservation of priority habitats

## Ecological and Geological Integrity Priorities in Wallowa County

Properties with priority fish and wildlife habitat or are associated with the Moraine scenic area



Red fox (Vulpes vulpes) © Leon Werdinger

OBJECTIVE	CONSERVATION DRIVER
Conserve fish habitat	Lands adjacent to critical fish habitat
Conserve wildlife habitat	Lands with important wildlife habitat
Conserve Moraines of Wallowa Lake	Lands within the moraines of Wallowa Lake
Conserve important wetland and riparian areas	Important riparian and wetland areas

## Preserve Community Values

### Vision

Our outreach process showed that residents wish to protect scenic views, conserve lands with historic significance and maintain access to recreational opportunities. Wallowa County residents love the landscapes that surround us and we want what we enjoy now to be available for future generations. We want the view from Highway 82 between Enterprise and Joseph to remain rural, we want to be able to hike the moraines, and we want to protect historic and cultural sites.

Supporting those priorities, Wallowa Land Trust seeks to help keep rural towns distinct, with open space and working lands between them. We also plan to prioritize properties visible from Highway 82, a scenic byway, toward the Wallowa Mountains. The valley and adjacent foothills provide much of the natural beauty that makes this region so unique.



Wallowa Land Trust also prioritizes corridors that can provide recreational access to residents and visitors. We seek to help conserve lands of cultural and historic significance regardless of where they are in the county. The Land Trust supports Native people's efforts to secure and protect those sacred geographies, and will assist them in doing so.

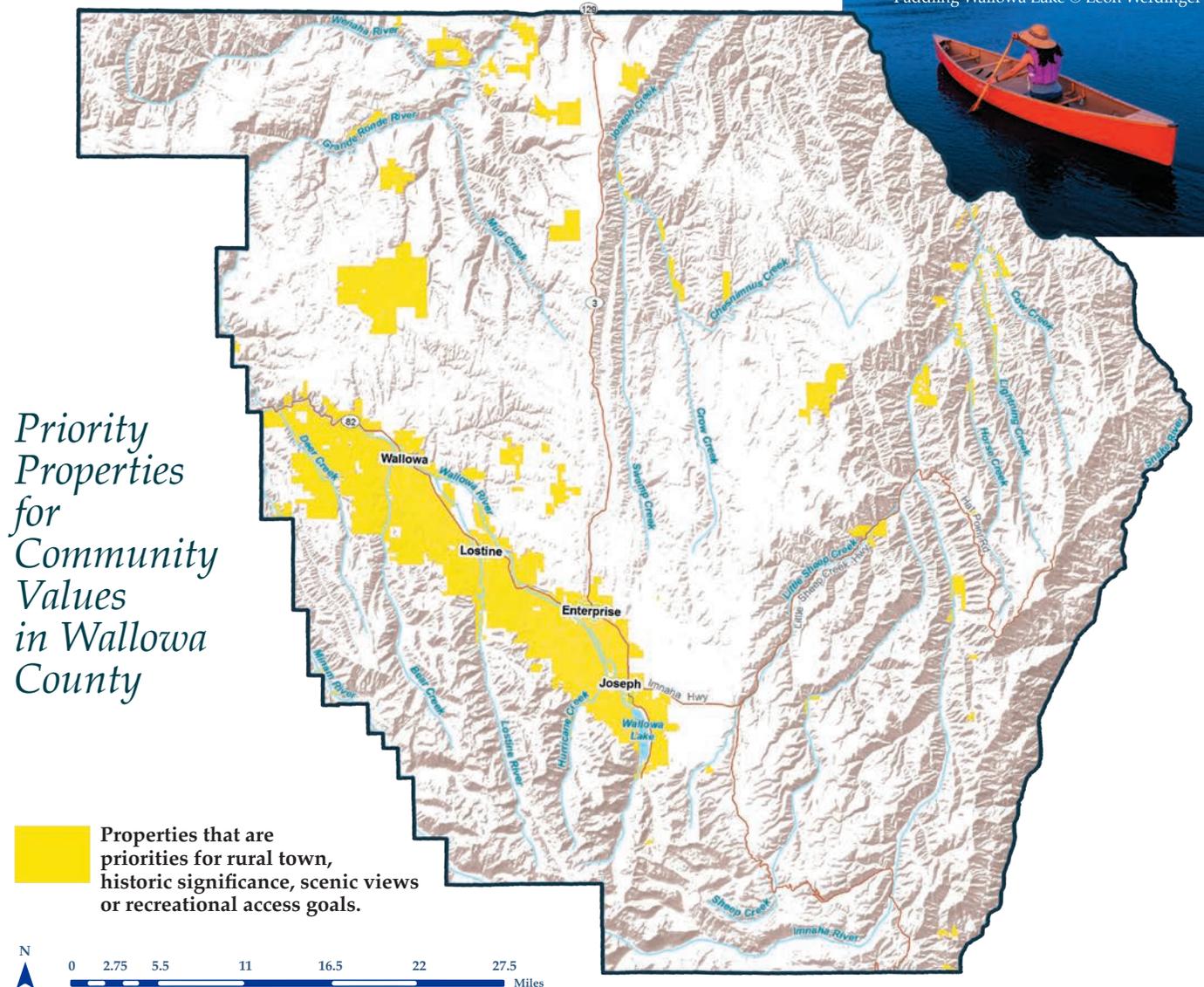
### Priority Places

- ◆ Large open areas adjacent to towns
- ◆ Lands with important scenic views
- ◆ Lands of cultural and historic significance
- ◆ Important recreational corridors

### Conservation Actions

- ◆ Support Native peoples in their efforts to secure and protect culturally important sites
- ◆ Support Forest Service (USFS) and other agencies' efforts to secure and maintain recreation trails adjacent to towns and to maintain access to public lands
- ◆ Identify and protect scenic and cultural landscapes that maintain the rural character of Wallowa County
- ◆ Advocate for local, state and federal-level policies that directly benefit preservation of community values

## Priority Properties for Community Values in Wallowa County



OBJECTIVE	CONSERVATION DRIVER
Keep rural towns distinct	Large open space areas between towns
Conserve lands of scenic significance	Lands with scenic views from Hwy 82 toward the Wallowa Mountains
Conserve lands of cultural and historic significance	Lands of tribal significance Lands of cultural and historic significance
Conserve lands with important access to recreation values	Important recreational corridors

Padding Wallowa Lake © Leon Werdinger



# Conservation Priorities

## Promote Spatial Integrity

### Vision

The first three goals – conserve working lands, conserve ecological and geological integrity, and preserve community values – relate to specific conservation resources. A fourth goal, promote spatial integrity, is concerned with the pattern of those resources across the landscape. This fourth priority applies across the three other goals.

Wallowa Land Trust seeks to promote spatial integrity by preventing fragmentation and promoting

connectivity. This means that we prioritize lands adjacent to existing conserved and restored areas for future conservation. For instance, the Land Trust could work with landowners who have completed restoration projects or who have established term easements on their properties. Furthermore, the Land Trust could seek projects with landowners whose property neighbors conservation easements or other protected land in order to achieve contiguous blocks of conserved lands.



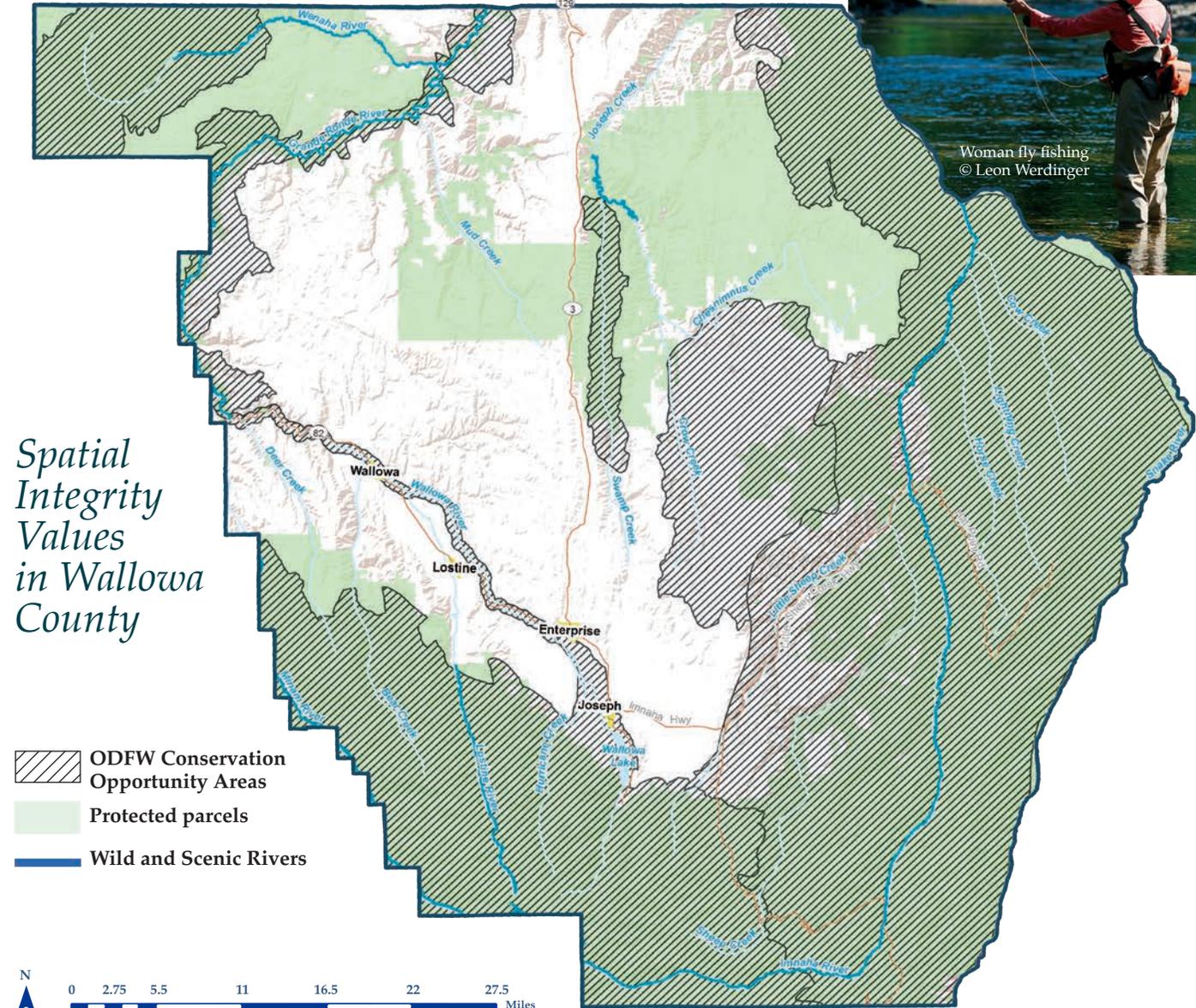
Boys explore the Lostine River © Leon Werdinger

### Priority Places

- ◆ Lands within Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife Conservation Opportunity Areas
- ◆ Lands adjacent to existing protected areas
- ◆ Lands with significant habitat improvement/restoration activities
- ◆ Lands adjacent to Wild & Scenic rivers

### Conservation Actions

- ◆ Collaborate with tribes, governmental agencies and other community organizations to build on existing conservation and restoration efforts
- ◆ Support landscape-scale conservation efforts across multiple owners



Spatial Integrity Values in Wallowa County



Woman fly fishing © Leon Werdinger

OBJECTIVE	CONSERVATION DRIVER
Promote expansion of existing conserved areas	Expansion of existing conserved /restored areas
Promote habitat connectivity (prevent fragmentation)	Wildlife corridors

## Conclusion

**A**s diverse as our community is, there is one thing that binds us together: the land. This land is our home and our actions today will determine the future of this place we share. This Conservation Plan defines how Wallowa Land Trust will be strategic and responsive to our community's conservation needs, making the most of limited resources for the benefit of multiple generations of people, plants and animals. This living, dynamic Plan will serve as a road map for how, when and why Wallowa Land Trust pursues land protection projects. Because our work is strictly voluntary, landowner interest will always be a primary driver of our work. We now have the tools to seek out high priority lands proactively and to channel our resources to those areas with the highest conservation value.

Thank you to all the individuals who gave their time, energy and expertise to provide input into this Conservation Plan, bringing our vision of a future with a vibrant agricultural economy, functioning ecosystems and healthy communities into sharper focus.

*Special thanks to the Land Trust Alliance, Oregon ACE Program and Yarg Foundation for making this publication possible.*

Wolfe Farm at the Confluence of the Lostine and Wallowa Rivers © Rick McEwan



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Kathleen, Eric and Heidi © Leon Werdinger

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*Wallowa Land Trust's mission is to protect the rural nature of the Wallowa Country by working cooperatively with private landowners, Indian tribes, local communities and government entities to conserve land.*

Keep It  
Rural!



Wallowa Land Trust

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Calypso orchid (*Calypso bulbosa*) © Leon Werdinger

