

Montana Forests News

Spring 2020

MEET ALLISON HURCOMB

The Montana Forests team is getting a helping hand from our newest team member, Allison Hurcomb. An AmeriCorps member working through the Big Sky Watershed Corps program, Allison will be helping patrol and steward our forest lands and educating summer users on our open lands policy.



Born in Colorado and raised by parents who were geologists, Allison developed an environmental ethic early in her childhood. Summers at camp helped shaped who she is today. “I spent 13 years at the same camp, four of those as a counselor,” she says. “That time outdoors generated an interest in nature that eventually influenced my education.”

Hurcomb holds a degree in Environmental Studies, with a minor in Geology, from Fort Lewis College and is certified in GIS mapping. Last year, she completed a women-focused fire training course in New Mexico and finds herself particularly drawn to this work. “I’m excited that I might be part of efforts to restore fire to its natural role in maintaining forest health here in Montana.”

Once Hurcomb’s internship is complete, she plans to continue down a conservation career path. “Maybe I can become part of a burn crew and apply what I learned with TNC to other landscapes.”

TNC is grateful to Allison and other AmeriCorps team members who are making a measurable difference in local conservation efforts while developing their own professional experience. “This wonderful program has really boosted our ability to manage public uses and land, says TNC’s Western MT Land Steward, Steve Kloetzel.

FIRE AT BALDY MOUNTAIN

In early May 2019, a crew in hard hats and Nomex shirts set a fire on The Nature Conservancy’s Baldy Mountain Forest Reserve near Greenough. Our goal was to prevent more severe wildfire through techniques such as prescribed burns and thinning. As TNC’s Western Montana Land Steward Steven Kloetzel explained, successful prescribed fires are all about teamwork. “Our partners truly came to our aid and we are deeply grateful! We received support from Montana DNRC & FWP, the University of Montana Fire Center, BLM, USFS, Paws Up Ranch, Blackfoot Challenge, and Swan Valley Connections. We could not have done this burn without them, and it came off without a hitch.”

We plan to conduct more burns on our land, creating conditions for healthier forests and lessening the severity of future wildfires.



MONTANA FOREST LAND RESTORATION

A Bold Vision for Montana Forests

No one enjoys seeing a “No Trespassing” sign cutting off access to their favorite hiking or fishing spot. In the fall of 2019, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have ensured that won’t happen on nearly 24,000 acres of former Plum Creek Timber land. Transferring that land to public ownership also preserves access to hundreds of thousands of additional acres of public land in the Blackfoot Valley.

That was one big reason that TNC took a bold leap of faith when we began buying land from Plum Creek in 1997. In the ensuing years, we took ownership of more half a million acres. But we never planned to hold onto it forever.

Our vision was always to see this land conserved for public use – for recreation, habitat and its economic benefit to local communities. It’s a vision forged in collaboration with the many citizens and community groups who have lent their ideas and energy to crafting plans for a future that enables both people and nature to thrive here.

Erasing the Checkerboard

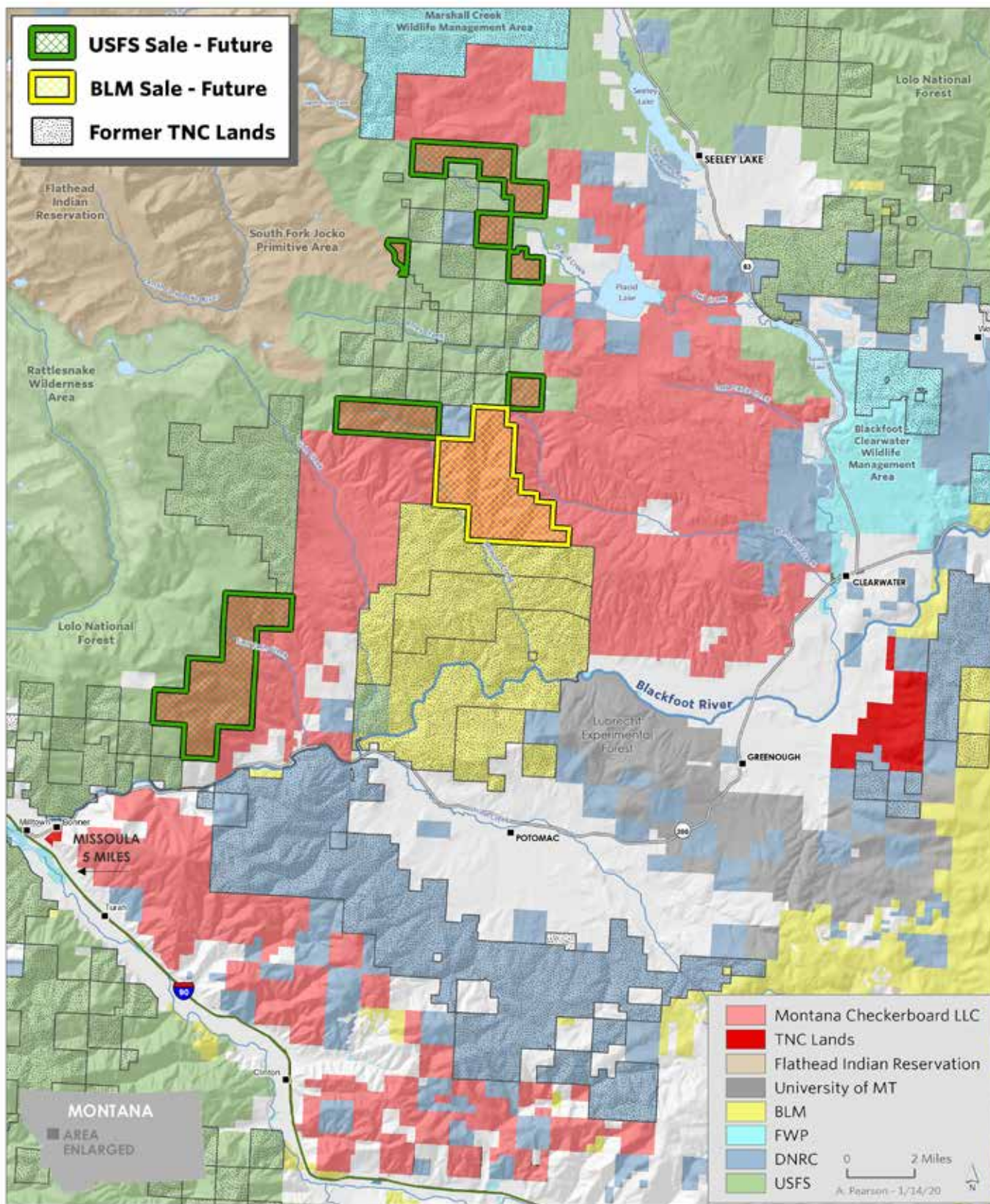
This land was part of the so-called “checkerboard” – millions of acres that had been carved into alternating 1-mile-square parcels and divided between the railroads and the public during the settlement of the West. Over time, the land had various owners and was logged heavily in the decades prior to TNC’s purchase. But that intermingled public-private ownership remained, making it difficult to manage effectively.

Over the years, TNC has moved the lion’s share of the land to the public domain. As often as possible, we rehabilitated poorly located roads, treated noxious weeds and restored forests coming back after their industrial past, passing on the land in better shape than we’d received it.

Today, TNC remains the caretaker of about 125,000 acres of the old Plum Creek forests. We’re continuing to place land in the hands of the public and collaborate on its restoration, with more sales planned this year.



2020 Montana Forest Projects



RECREATION IN OUR MONTANA FOREST LANDS

Partnership Builds Community Trail

In August 2019, TNC partnered with local groups in the Seeley Lake area to build the 2-mile Lakeview trail on TNC property above the north shore of Placid Lake. A unique collaboration of local organizations working with TNC secured funding and built the trail.

Seeley Lake Regional Center for Kinetic Sports (ROCKS) developed the project proposal in conjunction with the Western Conservation Project and submitted a successful grant application to the Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks Recreational Trails Program. ROCKS contracted with MTB Missoula to design and construct the Trail, which was built by the locally owned Phat Trak Trail Company.

TNC's 2019 Revive and Thrive kicked off the project by building an initial trail segment. ROCKS and the Placid Lake Cabin Owners Association donated over 800 hours of volunteer labor toward the project.

“This amazing trail and community asset would not have been built without the support and collaboration between TNC and the local organizations,” said ROCKS project manager Alan Davis. “It’s a real testament to TNC’s commitment to public access and providing local outdoor recreation opportunities.”



Join Us! Revive & Thrive 2020

Over the past six years, through our Revive and Thrive volunteer event, we’ve helped prepare an old growth Ponderosa pine stand for prescribed fire, improved the health of a camas meadow, helped restore an aspen stand, and filled (too) many bags with knapweed. We’ve also built trails in three Montana Forest locations, a bridge in one and a “beaver deceiver” in another! We are grateful to the hundreds of volunteers who have contributed their time and energy to our conservation work.

Our 2020 Revive and Thrive event will build on the momentum of last year’s work. We’ll be returning to the Seeley Lake-Placid Lake area on Sunday, July 12 and will have plenty of trail and forestry work to complete and some new projects to begin. Keep your eye out for more information at nature.org/events. Hope to see many of you there!



The Nature Conservancy in Montana
32 S. Ewing, Suite 215 | Helena, MT 59601
406-443-0303 | nature.org/montana