
TRANSFORMING LAND, TRANSFORMING PEOPLE

Jeff Laszlo, Granger Ranches, Madison Valley, MT

Norman Mclean wrote, “Eventually all things merge into one, and a river runs through it.” Restoration is about reconnecting water to land, living things to their former habitats and people to each other. The O’Dell Creek Headwaters Restoration project is a collaborative multi partner effort to restore wetlands and degraded stream channels from O’Dell’s headwaters to its confluence with the Madison River 12 miles downstream. The project began in 2005 on The Granger Ranches with funding provided by PPL Montana (now Northwestern Energy). The results were immediately apparent and the work accomplished in the Phase 1 project quickly gained support from Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Ducks Unlimited, Trout Unlimited and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The potential for this project as well as its public benefits have led to an extensive and growing public private partnership that continues to evolve. Nonprofits such as The Trust for Public Land, The Montana Land Reliance and The Madison River Foundation along with neighboring ranches and The Patagonia Company have also become highly engaged partners. Regular visits from

student groups, agency personnel, the ranching community and wounded veterans fishing organizations have been an integral aspect of reconnecting people to the land and have provided important educational benefits from both the project's outcomes and its partnerships. A decade since the project's inception all the major drainage canals have been closed and the restored wetlands now host over 200 plant species including 6 listed by the state of Montana as "Species of Concern". Monitoring by the University of Montana's Avian Science Center has documented an increase from 10 bird species to approximately 130. Water temperatures in the restored stream channels have been substantially reduced and stabilized. Efforts to re-introduce threatened Trumpeter Swans and Arctic Grayling are ongoing. One thousand Greater Sandhill Cranes have been observed staging along O'Dell prior to fall migration. Simultaneously, the Granger Ranches has grown into livestock operations, demonstrating that healthy and diverse habitat can coexist along with sustainable ranching. The O'Dell Project has succeeded beyond anyone's expectations.