



Sheridan  
Community  
LAND TRUST

Annual Report and Highlights July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020





## Building opportunities ‘Wyoming hasn’t seen yet’ Soldier Ridge loop closed; 15 miles coming at Red Grade

If there’s one thing that’s certain these days it’s this: there’s no better place to be than outdoors.

Thankfully, because of people like you, going from your front door to the outdoors in Sheridan County is easier than ever before!

And while that may seem like an overstatement, the efforts we’ve made together to connect more people to our Wyoming Wonderland through a growing network of community trails will mean even more to more people thanks to the addition of two new trails on the west edge of Sheridan and more miles quicker than we ever thought possible at Red Grade Trails.

### ***Closing the loop***

In September, the final touches were put on Kicking Horse Trail and The Link - two new trails that will connect Hidden Hoot Trail to Soldier Ridge Trail. By doing so, visitors will have an opportunity to enjoy a loop of 9.2 miles conveniently located on Sheridan’s west edge. The Link was SCLT Trail Builder Ronnie Wagner’s first opportunity to break ground and he

created a gem that’s perfect for new bike riders.

“It’s flowy and fun,” Ronnie said of The Link, adding that with plenty of steady grades “it can be ridden downhill both ways.”

Runners and walkers will enjoy it, too. As will anyone who wishes to experience a whole lot of solitude and plenty of nature.

“There’s tons of wildlife out there,” Ronnie relayed, saying that pronghorn, mule deer, and pheasants were regular coworkers on build days.

The same is true for Kicking Horse Trail, which extends from The Link to the midpoint of Soldier Ridge Trail. A burrowing owl, a “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” in Wyoming, was spotted flying in and out of prairie dog dens along the trail. It’s one of 10 raptor species known to inhabit Sheridan Heights Ranch, which, along with Black Tooth Ranch, host the trail.

Both ranches worked with SCLT to enact voluntary conservation agreements. That ensures





Above: Volunteers from First Interstate Bank paint “KH” on rock cairns that will mark Kicking Horse Trail as it connects to Soldier Ridge Trail. A prairie dog was not a fan of volunteers at a recent work day. Be sure to keep an eye out for burrowing owls while enjoying Kicking Horse Trail. Left: This fall, SCLT received two “game-changing” grants that will bring people more views like these at Red Grade Trails very soon.

the open space and wildlife habitat remains intact while the working land remains working. The trails are an ideal corridor for people of all ages to experience and appreciate conservation in action.

Kicking Horse will be open to horses, which means equestrians now have nearly 6 miles of trail to ride close to town!

Next year brings a trailhead and more trails at Kendrick Golf Course. Once complete, there will be 16.4 miles in the Soldier Ridge Trail System!

### **‘Game changers’ for Red Grade Trails**

But that’s not it, there’s even more new opportunities for people coming soon. Grants from the Wyoming Business Council (\$500,000), USFS (\$100,000) and National Forest Foundation (\$18,000) will be combined with more than \$130,000 people like you helpfully raised to develop the entirety of Red Grade Trails planned in the Bighorn National Forest!

That’s right - *the entirety!* That’s 15 new trail miles and 3 parking areas. And most of it’s coming soon.

“Thanks to our community and the funds they helped us secure, the majority of what was

originally envisioned as a decade-long project will be built in 2021!” said Executive Director Brad Bauer.

In fact, work’s already underway in the Poverty Flats area. And Ronnie’s pretty excited for what’s in store up the mountain. “These won’t be ‘just your normal trails.’ Hopefully, they’ll be something Wyoming hasn’t seen yet!”

What’s that mean? New ways to connect with nature open to all: hikers, mountain bikers, runners, walkers, equestrians, photographers, yoga practitioners, birders, wildlife watchers, flower fanciers, fungi finders, plant peepers and more. Some trails will be single use too, with some routes dedicated specifically to pedestrian, bike or horse use.

Working with schools, community groups and programs like Discovery Sessions and Unplug, trails also serve as ideal classrooms for history, ecology, recreation, art and more!

With more than 20,000 visits to SCLT’s community trails last year, these new trails will ensure there’s no better place to be than outdoors. And the best way to enjoy the outdoors is close to home in our beautiful Bighorns backyard.





Grandmas Mountain (center) as seen from PK Lane. The story of how Grandmas Mountain got its name is one of many historical stories that will be on interpretive signs we'll be adding along SCLT trails in 2021.

## All right, what's all this, then?!

### New signs will tell stories of Bighorns' history from the trails

Have you ever walked along Soldier Ridge Trail, looked out at our beautiful Bighorns and wondered which peak was which? Or where something like the Tie Flume actually was? That's exactly what SCLT Historical Educator Carrie Edinger wondered the first time she was on the trail. And it inspired her to create a way to tell our region's history while answering the same questions many trail visitors have.

Soon after joining SCLT as an AmeriCorps intern, Carrie began doing the legwork - field visits and a whole lot of time in the Wyoming Room at the Sheridan County Fulmer Library - to learn about and flesh out many of the stories she will tell through these signs.

Some of the stories are quite quotidian, like including the name and elevation of peaks on a panoramic view of the Bighorns, which will be placed on The Link Trail this coming summer. However, even getting peak names correct wasn't an exact science as she often had to cipher between sources that had differing names for the same mountains.

To solve some of those problems, Carrie turned to the super sleuths of the internet, who helped solve some mysteries - like how Grandmas Mountain was named.

Another sign features place names and history drawn from Plains Indian Tribes. She said no story of the Bighorns would be complete without stories from the mountains' first settlers. After all, it was the Apsáalooke Crow who first recognized the Bighorns as being "exactly the right place" as No Vitals led his band around the Mountain West from Devils Lake in search of a place to plant his sacred tobacco seeds.

Much of the Plains Indian history came courtesy of Little Big Horn College, Sheridan College's Donovan Sprague and Big Horn's own Greg Nickerson.

A third sign will highlight history along Red Grade Road. Trail users will experience what the area was like for early travelers who visited the high mountain near Spear O Wigwam and TP Ranch. It will include a historical photo taken by Jessamine Spear Johnson courtesy of Tempe Javitz.

This winter, the sign designs will be finalized. You'll see them in the summer of 2021. For those unable to make it to the trails, a video version will be added to our website soon after. A Wyoming Cultural Trust Fund grant supported the signs.

Beyond that, the Big Goose Walking tour is complete, with some sites included in Downtown Sheridan Association's "WY Sheridan" TravelStorys tour. Live and virtual presentations of Human Migrations of Southeast Sheridan County will begin this fall and a Tongue River Water Trail history project will follow.

Carrie would love to hear your stories of Sheridan County's special history. Please email [history@sheridanc.lt.org](mailto:history@sheridanc.lt.org) or call (307) 673-4702.



# Because you built it...they done came!

"If you build it, they will come." It's an iconic line from an iconic film, and an apt rejoinder for Sheridan in 2020 is "Because you built it, they done came."

That sure was the spirit in the air in August as folks from all around Wyoming and beyond gathered at Red Grade Trails for the first-ever Dawn to Dusk Trail Run.

Why willingly run all night? Among the answers: "It's a good, fun environment to be in." "It's a chance to see how far I can go." "These trails are super convenient."

Or, as Justin Kinner told us, "Given the state of the world right now, it's nice to see something that's going. That's why I support the Dusk to Dawn Trail Run and that's why I support the Sheridan Community Land Trust."



The Dusk to Dawn Trail Run was the first of six non-SCLT events this year to use trails you helped build - putting the community in community trails!

Five more events were held on community trails this fall, with some donating a portion of registration or proceeds to help us build and maintain your community trails.

One of those events was The Dead Swede. Organizer Jordan LeDuc said Red Grade Trails was used to showcase what the community has helped build to more than 500 riders. He said Red Grade Trails "adds a little spice and it's a way easier climb."

LeDuc explained why some of each rider's registration was donated to SCLT. The trails "have created a better quality of life, and we're strong advocates of that. We feel it's a necessity to give back to that organization."

And that's how you've helped put the community in community trails!

## You belong among the wildflowers

Tom Petty was right (when wasn't he?): You belong among the wildflowers.

Now, thanks to the efforts of David Haile and Susanna Meyer, you'll be able to identify those beautiful wildflowers you're seeing when you're out on Prairie Loop or sitting on the bench at Red Grade Overlook.

This past summer David and Susanna took time to photograph all the flowers - and many of the plants - they could find along Red Grade Trails and beyond.

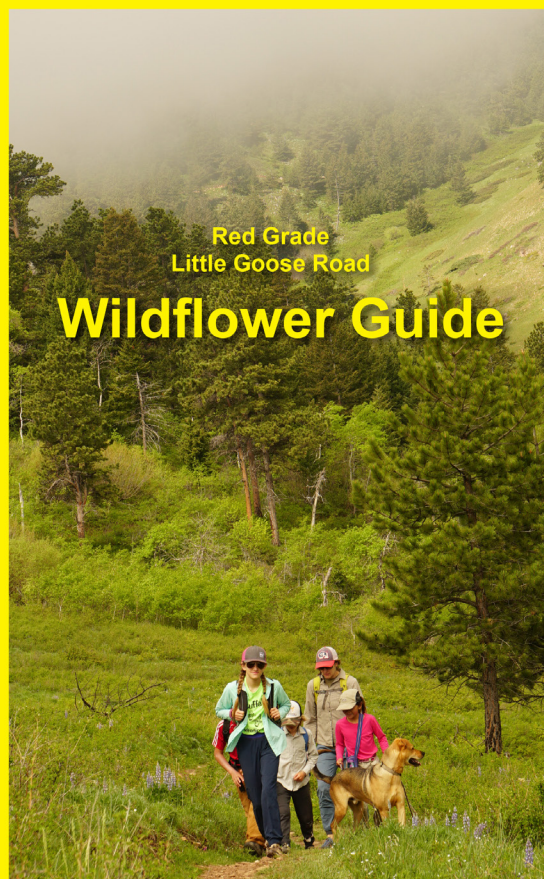
The inspiration? Families on trail and a desire to learn.

"I see flowers and I want to know what they are and what they're about and the best way to learn something is to write it down," David relayed. He then used the guide as a way to learn how to use Adobe InDesign, a graphic design program. He thought he'd share the guide with fellow trailgoers. "There were a lot of kids up there early in the spring. This guide is something for families to do."

David says he'd like to do a second guide - this one on insects, but he'd like some help. "They're hard to take pictures of unless you can catch them."

You can find several printed, laminated copies at Red Grade Trails trailheads courtesy of Yellowstone Trail Systems, LLC. Be sure to grab one; please return it when you're done.

You can also download the guide at [sheridanclt.org](http://sheridanclt.org).





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recognition you've earned.





**Kenny Osborne of EMIT removes the first piece of rail from “The Impaler,” an old diversion structure made from railroad iron and ties in Big Goose Creek on Sheridan’s west edge during a workday this spring. SCLT helped organize a project with local landowners who worked together to remove the structure which had long been a dangerous place for water recreationists. EMIT and Steady Stream Hydrology donated equipment, expertise, and volunteer muscles to ensure the removal went off without a hitch.**

## At long last, ‘The Impaler’ meets its match

### Teamwork on the ground makes getting on the water safer

Creaks, clangs, slaps, smacks and a big whoosh filled the air along the banks of Big Goose Creek this spring. For most of a morning, Kenny Osborne, with the help of his mighty excavator, methodically freed iron rail after iron rail from the creek. Finally, after nearly 90 years, “The Impaler” - an old diversion structure that once sent water for the railroad all the way to Sheridan’s historic downtown - met its match.

The removal of this dangerous stream obstruction was made possible thanks to a whole lot of teamwork from landowners and residents at the site and two local businesses - EMIT and Steady Stream Hydrology - that donated equipment, expertise and volunteer muscle to ensure water recreationists have safer access to the stream.

Prior to removal, Richard and Kathy Woods allowed a portage site on their land so recreationists had a safe way around the dam. They, too, supported efforts to remove the dangerous “Impaler.” As a bonus, removal of the dam will improve stream health and likely reduce the impact from flooding when the waters rise.

“My grandchildren play in it. We enjoy the waterfowl and wildlife.” Casey Osborn, Sr., an upstream landowner, relayed. As he spoke, a nesting mother goose watched the proceedings from a small island just upstream.

“For a long time, it had been accepted to dump a lot of things in the stream. Now, we’re cleaning it up,” he added.

With each rail removed, Casey and a cadre of other helpers were quick to hop in the water and load debris in the excavator’s bucket. Raleigh Whalen, another landowner, said he’s eager to see what fish swim in.

That’s something Tina Krueger, owner and principal hydrologist at Steady Stream Hydrology, said should happen as the stream begins to heal itself. She worked with SCLT to prepare permits, collect data, and oversee the project before, during and after removal.

She explained that the channel will soon begin to return to a more natural state - narrower, deeper - from its wide, shallow condition caused by nearly a century of





Removing “The Impaler” was the definition of true teamwork. Raleigh Whalen (left), a landowner at the site and Casey Osborn, Sr., (center), an upstream landowner, were among several volunteers ensuring the dam removal was done efficiently. All the while, Tina Krueger (right), owner and principal hydrologist at Steady Stream Hydrology, made sure the project was done with the stream’s health in mind before, during and after the removal was complete. Thanks to their efforts, Big Goose Creek is a much safer place for everyone who wishes to enjoy a fun day floating or paddling the stream.

impoundment. “That will make the stream deeper and cooler which will let it support the life it can support.”

That will likely mean more trout for Raleigh and a nice cool pool for his dogs and Casey’s grandkids to swim.

In late summer, Tina joined SCLT to check in on the site. She was quite pleased with the progress, saying that the stream looked in very good shape thus far. Some vegetative and shaping work may be needed in the spring, but, in the

big picture, the stream’s healing itself.

“Clean up efforts like this enhance our outdoor resources in Sheridan County. Ecologically, it creates a more sustainable habitat for all riparian and terrestrial life,” she concluded.

And that’s what projects like this are all about. Thanks to everyone’s efforts, the Tongue River Water Trail now has two, rather than three, portages to go with 14 access sites thanks to partnerships with public and private land owners.

## Water trail showcases Tongue Valley as ‘community treasure’

For an Oregon gal who learned to swim as she learned to walk, the lack of access to waters to swim, float, fish and just get outdoors was something Hesid Brandow described as a “culture shock.”

“Sheridan did not have good public access to waterways when I began coming here, which was a huge cultural barrier for me,” she said.

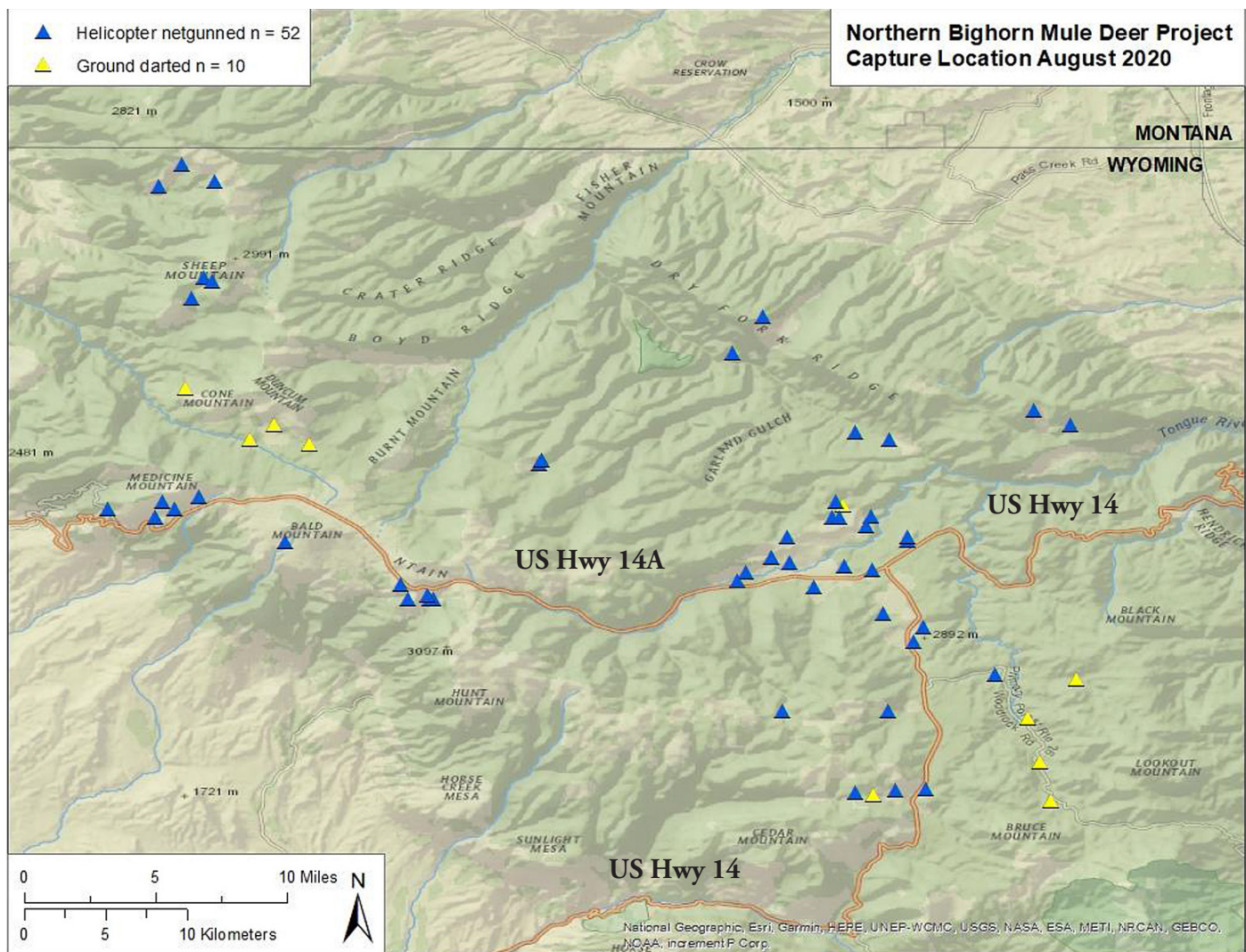
That barrier began to lift as SCLT began working with private and public landowners to create the Tongue River Water Trail (TRWT). Brandow’s family uses the Tongue Valley “almost daily during the warm season” and frequently, though less often, in the winter. That’s fishing and swimming, hiking and cross-country skiing - even an annual father-son canoe trip!

Brandow credits the creation of the TRWT for the dramatic change she’s experienced in and around the Tongue Valley. “In our decade living here, we have watched as the area has been cleaned up,” she explained. “Our family benefits daily from the well-maintained creek bank and we are constantly reminded of just how fortunate we are to live in a community with a land trust!”

This summer, Brandow and her husband, Kevin Knapp, created a video documenting a group float down the TRWT. She said it was a way to thank SCLT for helping establish “this free, amazing recreational opportunity that exists right here in town.” “I hope sharing my family’s experience will get the word out so more families can share in this incredible community treasure,” she said, concluding, “For me, water will always be the center of my world, so being able to access it has helped make Sheridan a true home.” You can watch Hesid’s video at [sheridanc.lt.org](http://sheridanc.lt.org).







Locations where 62 mule deer were captured and collared (below) in the Bighorn National Forest this summer.

## Doe, a deer. A whole lot of collared deer!

by Carrie Kyle, Graduate Research Assistant, Kauffman Lab, Wyoming Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit

Healthy mule deer herds are essential to sustaining the ecological, economic and cultural values of our western landscapes. The productivity of these herds depends on their ability to move seasonally across vast expanses of public and private lands. In the Bighorn Mountains, mule deer movements have not been studied with GPS collars, thus their movements and seasonal ranges are largely undocumented. That is, until now.

A multi-agency and organization collaboration has undertaken work to close that data gap to help stakeholders identify mule deer movements in the northern Bighorn Mountains, evaluate seasonal range and habitat use, identify habitat improvement and conservation opportunities and document vital rates for the herd.

In August, 62 mule deer does were captured and collared on summer range in the northern Bighorn National Forest, in addition to 25 does collared on winter range in March. Though there were several mortalities due to predation, natural causes and capture, 83 collars are successfully transmitting locations. A winter capture event will allow researchers to deploy a goal of 130 collars by March 2021.



### How has SCLT helped?

SCLT has worked with project partners to make this tremendous project possible in a number of ways. SCLT has secured \$20,000 in funding and the efforts of citizen scientists this summer through the iNaturalist app aided collaring efforts. Going forward, our hope is that the data will help direct future SCLT conservation projects.



### OUTDOOR RECREATION

more than

20,000

visits have been made to the Soldier Ridge Trail System, Red Grade Trails and the Tongue River Water Trail this past year.

### CONNECTING CHILDREN YOUNG & OLD TO NATURE

more than

850

people who learned new ways to enjoy our beautiful Bighorns backyard at Discovery Sessions, Learn Outside and other events.

### HISTORIC PRESERVATION & STORYTELLING

currently creating

6

tours, programs and interpretive signs that will preserve and tell the story of Sheridan County's unique history to people near and far

### RANCHES, WILDLIFE & WATER

more than

3,475

acres across Sheridan County have been conserved by local families, with three more families closing in on conserving 640 more acres.

## Fiscal Year 2020 Financial Data (July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020)

Revenue



**Donor Contributions - \$515,710 - 79%**  
**Investment Income - \$97,079 - 15%**  
**Government Grants - \$43,198 - 7%**  
**Other - \$332 - 0.1%**

Expenses



**Program Services - \$249,123 - 67%**  
**Administration - \$77,966 - 21%**  
**Fundraising - \$44,221 - 12%**






Sheridan  
Community  
LAND TRUST

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**sheridanc.lt.org**

 Sheridan Community Land Trust

*Sheridan Community Land Trust works to preserve our heritage of open spaces, healthy rivers and creeks, working ranches, wildlife habitat and vibrant history, while expanding non-motorized recreation opportunities to connect people with the places they love.*

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Cover photo courtesy Nikki Ulug.

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## Volunteers log 3,400+ hours!!!

There are many ways to measure the impact people like you have made in our community by working with Sheridan Community Land Trust. Acres voluntarily conserved by local landowners, families and children connected to nature, historic stories told, trail visits...and the list could go.

Among the most rewarding is how many volunteer hours people have shared. We're pleased as punch to announce an extensive network of more than 250 caring people kindly logged more than 3,400 hours volunteering with SCLT this past fiscal year! At trail builds, serving on committees, researching local history, leading Discovery Sessions or building outdoor culture as a Trail Ambassador, that's an incredible gift so many have shared with us. Thank you!

Would you like to help? Sign-up at our website. Want to schedule a workday with your business or community group? Call Chris at 673-4702 or email [chris@sheridanc.lt.org](mailto:chris@sheridanc.lt.org). We'll help you help make Sheridan County a truly special place to live, work, play, stay and grow!