



**GROW
WILD**

2023
Annual Report

OUR STORY

Grow Wild began in 2004, when two local fishermen witnessed spotted knapweed taking over Gallatin Canyon and decided to take action. Ever since, we have been a proactive force in combating the ecological threat of invasive species throughout the Gallatin Watershed.

Our mission has always been more than managing invasive species. We conserve native plants and improve vital habitats. We educate the community about invasive species and how to manage them. And we inspire our neighbors to be stewards of the land.

After 20 years of protecting Montana's wildlands, we have rebranded our organization to embrace the growth that has inspired us since the very beginning. Growing native plants. Growing a community of responsible land stewards. And growing our positive impact on the critical habitats that surround us.

Mission

To conserve native species in the Upper Gallatin Watershed through education, habitat restoration, and collaborative land stewardship.

Vision

Functional and healthy ecosystems sustained by an informed and engaged community.



We have also shifted how we think about the challenges facing our community. We now will be focusing on the healthy aspects of our ecosystems, rather than emphasizing only the threats.

Our new logo features an aspen leaf and an elk, two keystone species in Montana. If our keystone species are thriving, so is our ecosystem. We aim to keep it that way.

It's all connected. From bluebunch wheatgrass to bighorn sheep, from the quiet trail to the crowded lake. Together, we can conserve the landscapes we all love.



WE'RE MOBILE

We built an education trailer!

For over ten years, our nonprofit borrowed the Southwest Area Education Trailer to use at our annual Ophir School Invasive Species Field Trip. The long drive to return the trailer had us thinking . . . what if we had our own? We quickly began planning and fundraising, then built out our trailer in the spring of 2023. We'll continue to improve the trailer in 2024, adding more educational and interactive materials.



The interactive education trailer includes information, graphics, and materials on:

1. Terrestrial & aquatic invasive species
2. Clean recreation practices (Clean.Drain.Dry. and PlayCleanGo)
3. Crail Gardens & native plants



The education trailer was used **39 times** this year at community and youth education events, farmers markets, and other partners engagements.





We had a feeling that our trailer would be well received - but when this email came in, we knew we hit our mark!

Dear GROW WILD Board,

On Wednesday, June 21st, I had the privilege of touring the GROW WILD display at the Big Sky Farmers Market. It was absolutely phenomenal. As a guest to your community, an educator, and one who is familiar with eradicating noxious weeds in my own community, I feel qualified to give the highest of accolades!

INVITING...INTERACTIVE...OBVIOUS: The display and materials made GROW WILD's mission and purpose very obvious. Conserve-Educate-Inspire around native vs invasive species and conserving the watershed ecosystems.

EDUCATIONAL: Through conversation and incredible displays, the visit to the Farmers Market Booth was very educational. As a visitor, I learned about native plants and was given a special invitation to visit the Crail Garden. There were other resources specifically for Big Sky Residents to aid in educating them to support GROW WILD's mission.

IMPRESSIVE: Let me just say, "Wow!" The trailer display was so carefully crafted and designed to make fabulous use of the space and every inch was professional, engaging, and educational. The content met the needs of a diverse audience. I can see toddlers enjoying the bright colors and textures and adult and seniors enjoying the opportunity to read and learn. The free stickers would capture a teen's eye and the items used to raise funds were enticing!

GROW WILD was the highlight of my Farmers Market experience at Big Sky. **AMAZING** and **PASSIONATE** staff with great resources to carry out your mission.

Sincerely, K. Douglass Stevenson, WA



EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Through classes and events, we inspire our community's youth and adults to become champions of conservation and stewards of the land.



2023

1,891 Kids

2,947 Adults

56 Classes & Events

Lifetime

16 Years

14,418 Kids

5,417 Adults

263 Classes & Events



Events

Big Sky Farmers Market · Camp Big Sky · Jack Creek Preserve Outdoor Skills Camp · Gateway Youth Group · Earth Day Summit @ Flying D Ranch · Gallatin Valley Land Trust Trail Ambassador Training · Gallatin Conservation District Summer Stewards · Gallatin Valley Farm Fair · Ophir School 2nd Grade Field Trips · Eat, Learn, Landscape Workshop with Gallatin River Task Force · Crail Garden Open Houses · Birds & Blooms Guided Hike · Ruby Valley Conservation District River Resource Day · Jack Creek Preserve Noxious Weed Teacher Training · 6 Speakers at our Big Sky Wildflower Festival · Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited's Madison River Cleanup · Presentations to Montana Native Plant Society Valley of Flowers Chapter, Gallatin Gardeners Club, & Gallatin High School · Wildflower & Weed Hikes

CLEAN RECREATION

Recreationists spread invasive species, both by land and by water. Since 2016, Grow Wild has promoted nationally adopted campaigns to protect our lands and waters.



Our new billboards in the Gallatin Canyon

2016-2023

7 PCG Trailhead Signs
617 PCG Kids Kits Distributed
7.6M Media Impressions
11.8M Billboard Views
18.9K PR Items Distributed



LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE

We provide landowners with the tools and resources to sustainably manage their lands while addressing invasive plants using best management practices and adaptive strategies.

Praise from S. Willert:

I didn't know much about lawn care. I bought a lawn mower & thought I would be set. But after a few years, our backyard was taken over by spiky weeds (which I now know are called Canada Thistle). Yikes! I did some online research & tried out a few different weed killer suggestions, all without any success.

I had known superficially about Grow Wild for a few years. But it wasn't until I attended one of their workshops during the Big Sky Wildflower Festival where I truly understood what they did. As I'm walking through the Grow Wild trailer with Jen, I realized that I have multiple types of noxious weeds in my yard & my DIY attempts to kill them were never going to work. I needed help. Thankfully, Grow Wild was both willing & excited to offer that help.

Grow Wild has provided me with a wealth of information and helped me create a plan of attack. Using their booklets, I was able to identify the various noxious weeds in my yard. Using the website, I was able to figure out what method to use to kill the weeds. During the site visit, we were able to outline a realistic plan of attack. Their stand at the Farmers Market & their quick response to email provided an avenue to ask any additional questions I had.

Overall, the help provided from Grow Wild was comprehensive - from providing basic knowledge on the noxious weeds all the way to combating them in my yard.



2023

53 Site Visits

332 Acres Inspected

1 Weed-free Properties

Lifetime

16 Years

1,002 Site Visits

12,392 Acres Inspected

HOA PROGRAM

Habitat fragmentation and loss are fundamental threats to wildlife survival. Development on wildlands creates disturbance, leading to invasive plant and noxious weed establishment and spread.

Noxious Weeds and Wildlife Habitat

Noxious weeds are invasive plant species that are able to establish easily, grow quickly, and spread to the point of disrupting biological communities or ecosystems.

In response, **Grow Wild initiated our HOA (Habitat Owners Association) program**, partnering with homeowner associations and the Gallatin County Weed District to manage invasive plants in open space for the benefit of wildlife. The three-year effort provides HOAs the tools and knowledge to improve wildlife habitat.

2023 Partner: Porcupine HOA

56 Treatment Hours
51 Acres
\$5,805 Value to HOA

Lifetime

10 Years
5 HOAs
315 Acres
\$95,525 Value to HOAs

**All land is habitat,
and all habitat is critical.**



BIGHORN HABITAT

Since 2010, Grow Wild has been working to improve the Spanish Peaks bighorn sheep herd's habitat by managing noxious weeds and experimenting with native plant restoration.

Compromised Habitat

The area northwest of Lone Mountain Trail and Highway 191 is well-known bighorn sheep range, considered critical habitat by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. This critical wildlife habitat is compromised by invasive species (houndstongue, musk thistle, cheatgrass, spotted knapweed, and others) that initially established on private property and quickly spread to adjacent public lands.

Abundant native forage is the critical factor in bighorn sheep survival during winter months, and the presence of noxious weeds results in fewer resources and space for critical native grass and forb production.

Noxious Weed Management

For 13 years, the Grow Wild team has led an annual effort to manage invasive species on the steep, rocky bighorn sheep winter range.



Spanish Peaks habitat

Lifetime

13 Years

8 # Partners

\$14,644 Our Investment

\$156,507 Matching Funds

FIELD TRIAL #2

Treated sites from our first field trial (2015-2018) showed low establishment of native species and were dominated by cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), a winter annual, and biennials common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) and musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*) at an estimated 70% canopy cover.

Partners looked to test a new pre-emergent herbicide, Indaziflam (Esplanade 200 SC), to help deplete the winter annual and biennial seed bank of these invasive plants so that natives could compete. Indaziflam's mode of action inhibits cellulose biosynthesis in seedlings, making it an effective pre-emergent herbicide for annuals such as cheatgrass.



Cheatgrass is the most widespread invasive plant in the western U.S. and is problematic for many range managers throughout Montana (MSU Extension Invasive Plants Monthly Weed Post, September 2021).

As cheatgrass spreads, it replaces the native perennial grasses that sustain wildlife. It also disrupts the fire cycle, leading to more frequent and more intense burns.

Trial Partners

- Dr. Jane Mangold, Montana State University Professor & Extension Invasive Plant Specialist
- Monica Pokorny, Plant Materials Specialist USDA-NRCS
- Mike Jones, Senior Assistant Coordinator, Gallatin County Weed District
- Danielle Jones, Assistant Coordinator, Gallatin County Weed District
- Larry Holzworth, retired Plant Materials Specialist USDA-NRCS

In 2022, project partners laid out test plots with different percent canopy cover of cheatgrass (1 – 5%, 6 – 25%, 26 – 50% , and 51 – 100%). They then treated these plots with Indaziflam to determine the maximum percent canopy cover of cheatgrass that can regenerate a desirable native population to meet our land use objectives.

Our partners will evaluate these sites for three years (2022-2024) to assess the desired species response to the control of cheatgrass with Indaziflam.

Will the desired species fill in after the cheatgrass is controlled, or are there no desired species remaining to fill the gaps that cheatgrass occupied? In the latter situation, revegetation by artificially seeding adapted native species may be required.



CONSERVE OUR CANYON

Conserve Our Canyon cooperative project aims to facilitate effective management of noxious weeds in the Gallatin Canyon and protect its natural resources for the benefit of all who enjoy and rely upon them.



2023 Treatment Locations

Shenango Helibase
Indian Ridge Trailhead
Twin Cabin Trailhead
Greek Creek Campground
Deer Creek Restoration Area
Moose Creek Campground
Portal Creek FS Road
Bighorn Range

Why?

The Upper Gallatin Watershed encompasses some of the most ecologically and economically important resources in our county. It provides vital habitat and water for fish, plants, wildlife, and the people who live and recreate in the area.

How?

We secure and provide funding to Custer Gallatin National Forest to hire the Montana Conservation Corps Wildlands Restoration Team to manage noxious weeds. We identify areas of concern and work closely with our partners to treat heavily used public lands such as trailheads, fishing access sites, campgrounds, national forest system roads, and river restoration sites.

2023

8 # Sites
37 # Acres Treated
102 # Acres Covered
\$3,750 Contributed Funds
\$7,168 Matching Funds

Lifetime

5 Years
74 # Sites
410 # Acres Treated
1,458 # Acres Covered
\$19,950 Contributed Funds
\$78,744 Matching Funds

WEED PULLS

For 15 years, we've inspired the community to help us remove noxious weeds from public lands and parks, trailheads, and river access sites — all in an effort to protect the places we love.

The Power of Volunteers



2023

86 Volunteers

180 Hours

1,960 Pounds of noxious weeds



Lifetime

15 Years

47 Weed Pulls

1,450 Volunteers

22,809 Pounds of noxious weeds

CRAIL GARDENS



In 2019, Grow Wild built a demonstration garden at Crail Ranch using native plants that are wildlife friendly, water wise, and preserve the historic landscape.

This is our garden's story four years later.



Garden #5

We built a new garden of sedums, pussytoes, and thyme on the south side of the big cabin.

- Sedums are among the most versatile, drought-tolerant, and easy-to-grow perennials.
- They actually decrease work for a gardener as they increase in square footage over time.
- Renowned for their ability to spread quickly, these low growers keep weeds from taking hold.
- Note: only 2 of the 10 species in garden #5 are native. Because site conditions were limited, we opted for diversity of species vs pure natives.

Sugar, our 2023 Most Valuable Gardener

Sugar helped us build this garden in 2019, and she's been back every year, monitoring progress and enjoying the new native lawns.



Establishing Native Grass

2020-2023 We began in the fall of 2020 by removing non-native smooth brome, adding topsoil and seeding with Idaho Fescue, a native bunchgrass. Spring 2021 was the driest on record and the seeding failed. We began again with a temporary irrigation system and erosion mats. Grass slowly established, and with regular and timely weed control, we have been successful. Revegetation takes time, patience, and diligence - especially in mountain environments.

IT STARTS WITH THE SOIL

Soil filters and purifies our water, reduces flooding, regulates the atmosphere, and plays a crucial role in driving the carbon and nitrogen cycles.

Healthy soil is a dynamic living ecosystem: a complex combination of minerals and organic matter containing air, water, and life. Worms are not alone in the ground. Just a gram of dirt can contain as many as 50,000 species, all interacting with each other to keep their soil habitat healthy and productive.

Why so excited about fungi?

2023 marked our first year seeing mushrooms in the garden!

Mushrooms are indicators of a functioning ecosystem. They improve soil structure, increase drainage, and help decompose organic matter, which in turn feeds all of the living things in the soil food web.



Building habitat and community!



GARDENS ARE A PLACE TO GATHER

"The garden suggests there might be a place where we can meet nature halfway."
— Michael Pollan



2023



33 Volunteers



93 Hours



105 Wildflowers



6 new species



20 Events



493 People

Big Sky Wildflower Festival

Our annual, 5-day summer festival offers workshops in wildflower expertise each July, including sustainable landscaping, pollinators, scavenger hunts, wildlife habitat improvement, photography, flower arranging, or leading hikes in Big Sky country. Join us next year to celebrate and learn about Big Sky's unique flora!



BIG SKY WATERSHED CORPS

This year we welcomed our first Big Sky Watershed Corp member. Sean Simpson planted, educated, built, weeded, and SO much more!

From Sean:

During my time with Grow Wild I have learned an extensive amount about what it means to be a steward of the land. Healthy lands and sustainable ecosystems are rooted in our choices and actions. Small acts of conservation, such as adding one native plant to your landscape, often lead to other acts, resulting in greater impacts. Knowledge is the most essential part to stewardship.

I've been impressed with how many community members are open and willing to take steps to create healthy lands, starting in their own backyards. It can be a daunting task for anyone, as it takes time, commitment, and patience. Once invasives are controlled and native plants are established, butterflies and bees have the wildflowers they need, birds have the food and shelter they need to raise their young, and elk have the native grasses that will sustain them.

The journey is not only worthwhile, it's our responsibility as stewards of this unparalleled landscape. I've seen first-hand that shift, and my work with Grow Wild this summer helped me understand what exactly can be done to protect the land we love.

Next summer I will be hiking the Pacific Crest Trail, exploring new landscapes, and creating experiences that will last a lifetime. I will take with me the experiences and knowledge I have gained from being able to serve with such an incredible team of individuals.



Sean's Contributions to Our Partners

21 Volunteer Events
9 # Nonprofit Orgs
171 Volunteer Hours



Thank you, Sean, for your service and commitment to conservation! Safe trekking the Pacific Crest Trail and may you find many novel wildflowers along the way.

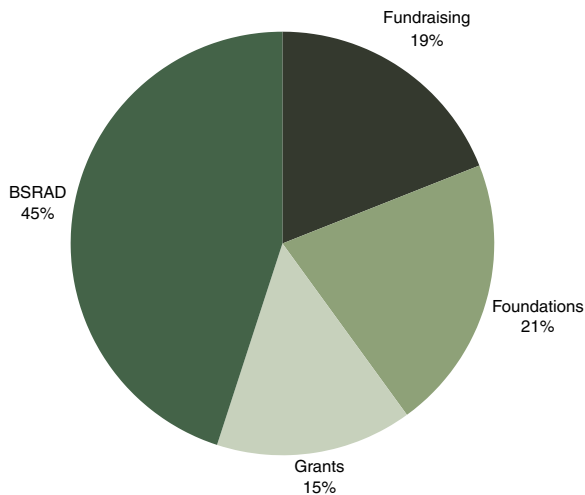
1.1.23 - 12.31.23

58 sponsors · 146 donors · 122 partners
161 volunteers · 374 hours · 8 canine conservation ambassadors

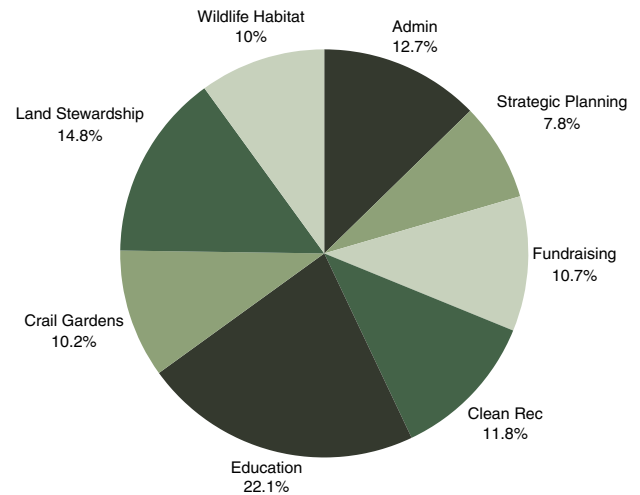
Thank you for helping us conserve and restore our natural resources!



Total Revenue: \$301,449



Total Expenses: \$247,385



Not included in the revenue or expenses are:

- \$96,543 of In-Kind Donations
- \$3 average project match to every \$1 of Big Sky Resort Tax grant funding

Net \$54,064 are allocated to:

- Replenish reserve funds that were depleted during COVID
- Projects that will be implemented in 2024

Grow Wild is a 501c3 Charitable Nonprofit. Donations are tax-deductible.
Tax ID # is 46-5544351

Thank you!

Conservation is possible because of our funders & donors:

Abigail King · Ace Hardware · Adam Johnson · American Bank · Amy & Steve Wisniewski · Amy Whitaker · Ann & Brian Cook · Anne Fetzer · Anonymous · Beehive Basin Brewery · Big Sky Build · Big Sky Conoco · Big Sky Farmers Market · Big Sky Landscaping · Big Sky Owners Association · Big Sky Resort Tax · Big Sky Water & Sewer District · Bill Moyer · Bobbie Gilbert · Bozeman Brewing · Bozeman Chronicle · Bridger Scientific · Bud the Wonder Dog · Carol Collins · Carolyn & Steve Jones · Cathy & Mark Gunther · Cindy Pickens · Cinnabar Foundation · Claire Thayer · Coffee Pot Bakery Café · Corinne Casolara · Custer Gallatin National Forest · Cyndee & Stan Button · Danielle Jones · David Sands · David Walsh · Deb Lewis · Donna Baird-Horne · Doug & Catherine DeVries · Ece Zeyli · Elizabeth Connaughton · Elizabeth Harrison · Erica Pearlman · Esther Campbell · Fallon Grant · First Security Bank · Fish Eye Guy Photography · Four Corners Saddlery · Gallatin Conservation District · Gallatin County · Gallatin County Weed District · Gallatin Empire Garden Club · Gallatin National Forest Resource Advisory Committee · Gallatin River Task Force · Gallatin Valley Land Trust · Great Bear Native Plants · Hammond Property Management · Historic Crail Ranch · Hollis Shaw · Holly Pippel Photography · Hungry Moose Market & Deli · Jacquelyn Klehm · James Byrne · Janet and Jonathan Kempff · Jason Delmue · Jessica Olson · Joanna McCoy · John Ansley · John Councilman · Kathleen Story · Katie Alvin · Katie Colman · Katie Daughenbaugh · Kristin Kern · Krisy Hammond · Larry Holzworth · Laura Seyfang · Lisa Knorr · Lone Mountain Land Company · Lucky Dog Ranch · Madison County · Madison County Weed District · Madison Gallatin Trout Unlimited · Marianne Filloux · Marjorie Jordan · Mary Connaughton · Montana Conservation Corps · Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation · Montana Native Plant Society · Montana State University · Moonlight Community Foundation · Native Plant Patrons · Outlaw Partners · Outside Bozeman · Patrick & Ann Linn · Peak Photography · Porcupine HOA · Quint Drennan · Rhonda and Stephen Karl · Robbie Shelby · Rocks Tasting Room · Rollin & Kristy Reiger · Rosemary Volosin · Sandra Young · Sarah & Whitney Tilt · Sian Hunter · Simms · Singing Sky Photography · Sotheby's Realtor Lisa Knorr · Spanish Peaks Community Foundation · Tim Kent · Two Suns Consulting · Visit Big Sky · Westscape Nursery · Yellowstone Club Community Foundation · Yeti

Ending on a high note!

Especially in a year when noxious weeds (like oxeye daisy) look to be taking over everywhere, we must celebrate hard won progress.

Kudos to Big Sky Resort for being a great partner and steward!





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