



Transfer of 322 Acres to Prickly Pear Land Trust Puts East Helena Greenway Project on the Path to Reality

Contact:

Mary Hollow (PPLT), 406-240-4907, mary@pricklypearlt.org

Mayor Jamie Schell (City of East Helena), 406-227-5321, mayorschell@easthelenamt.us

Ron Whitmoyer (East Helena Public Schools), 406-227-7700, rwhitmoyer@ehps.k12.mt.us

Cindy Brooks (METG), 617-448-9762, cb@g-etg.com

Betsy Burns (EPA), 406-457-5013, burns.betsy@epa.gov

East Helena, MT (December 31, 2020)—The East Helena Greenway Project, which was first envisioned by the community 10 years ago, is now on the path to full-fledged reality as a result of the transfer of 322 acres of former ASARCO lands to Prickly Pear Land Trust (PPLT). On December 30, after years of multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration, the Montana Environmental Trust Group, LLC (METG) conveyed title to 242 acres along the reconstructed Prickly Pear Creek (PPC) corridor south of Highway 12 and approximately 80 acres along PPC near Kennedy Park in East Helena to PPLT for development of an 8-mile trail system on remediated and revitalized former ASARCO lands. PPLT will work with the State of Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NDRP) on design, construction and maintenance of the Greenway recreational access and educational amenities, using the \$3.2 million allocated to the Greenway Project in the NRDP East Helena Natural Resource Restoration Plan that Governor Bullock approved in 2019.

As 2020 comes to a close, the Greenway Project offers a new beginning for lands and waters in East Helena. The Greenway Project exemplifies how a community can honor its industrial past while positioning itself for economic opportunity, community health and quality of life. The former smelter lands near the newly constructed East Helena Public Schools (EHPS) elementary and high schools will be transformed into a trail system that will connect East Helena to Montana City. Once the Greenway trail and amenities are fully developed, PPLT will transfer the 322 acres to the East Helena Public Schools (EHPS) that has agreed to serve as the long-term steward of the Greenway land. Where possible, the trail will be Americans with Disabilities Act- (ADA) accessible to encourage people of all ages and abilities to enjoy this community asset.

The land transfer to PPLT culminates a 10-year partnership between local, state and federal governments—including the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Montana NRDP, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), Lewis and Clark County and the City of East Helena—as well as PPLT, EHPS, METG and the private sector.



"I want to congratulate the City of East Helena, the East Helena School District, the Prickly Pear Land Trust, and the Montana Environmental Trust Group on this significant milestone in the redevelopment and conservation of the former ASARCO smelter site and Prickly Pear Creek corridor," Governor Steve Bullock said. "This land transfer helps position the Greenway project for success in what will no doubt be a tremendous asset to East Helena citizens, students and businesses for decades to come."

Mary Hollow, PPLT Executive Director, said that, "Ten years ago, the City of East Helena asked Prickly Pear Land Trust to help envision trails and public access on this land. It's incredible to celebrate this project coming to life. This community - with new schools, businesses, and now the Greenway Trail - is poised for a strong future. A project of this magnitude only happens with incredible partnerships, I commend those who have made this possible. With access to 322 acres of new outdoor space, we know that when kids achieve a greater connection to the outdoors, they experience happier and healthier lives. What an incredibly smart move for this forward-thinking community."

East Helena Mayor Jamie Schell believes that "The Greenway project honors the hard-working, proud and dedicated people that built this community. The effort and dedication it took to make this project come to fruition by so many organizations and stakeholders cannot be understated. In an area where tales of trespass and memories of a few can be environmentally transformed and enjoyed by so many is a wonderful achievement. Leaving the Greenway for generations of families and visitors to safely enjoy for decades to come is something to be really proud of and I thank all of those that made it happen. History should never be forgotten, only built on. The legacy of the ASARCO smelter stands tall here in East Helena; it always has and with projects like this, always will."

EHPS Superintendent, Ron Whitmoyer said that "EHPS is thrilled to see this project moving forward - what an awesome educational resource this will be for our community."

METG Managing Principal Cindy Brooks said "The Greenway Trail is the centerpiece of the future redevelopment of the former ASARCO lands in East Helena. PPLT's willingness to assume responsibility for land ownership and trail construction and management is a testament to the leadership of a small, but powerful organization and its commitment to ensuring that this revitalized land will be an asset to the community of East Helena for generations. The Greenway Project reflects the strong partnership formed by PPLT, the City of East Helena, the East Helena Public Schools, EPA, the State of Montana and METG."

Betsy Burns, EPA Project Manager for the East Helena Superfund site, said "the transfer of this land to PPLT for the Greenway Trail represents the culmination of more than ten years of



shared vision, partnership and community collaboration. In 2010, PPLT first visited the East Helena site to explore the possibility of a trail. The following year, at an EPA-hosted design charette, the community's vision for future redevelopment of former ASARCO property included a trail along PPC. With the support of all three levels of government, as well as METG, East Helena Public Schools, private land owners, local businesses and PPLT, the community's vision is becoming reality."

Kicking off in 2021, the Greenway project will be the latest and most ambitious project in Prickly Pear Land Trust's Community Conservation portfolio. "The Greenway trail will provide public access to the reconstructed PPC corridor – which has not been accessible to the public in over 100 years – and another reason to celebrate East Helena's heritage and encourage recreation, tourism and outdoor learning opportunities," said Burns.

Next steps will be outlined by PPLT in early 2021. PPLT is a non-profit community land trust committed to the belief that open space is essential to the well-being of all communities. Spacious views, abundant wildlife, and recreational opportunities renew and revitalize its spirits. Maintaining traditional agricultural lands preserves Montana's cultural heritage. PPLT seeks to preserve and protect the rural character of the Prickly Pear Valley and adjoining lands in Lewis and Clark, Jefferson, Broadwater and Powell counties through voluntary and cooperative means. Further, PPLT strives to connect people to their natural surroundings through trails and access to public lands. Sign up for PPLT's newsletter to watch this project unfold by visiting www.pricklypearlt.org.

For more information or questions, contact Mary Hollow (mary@pricklypearlt.org).

METG is Trustee of the Montana Environmental Custodial Trust. For more information about METG and cleanup of the former ASARCO smelter, see: <https://www.mtenvironmentaltrust.org>.