

VOICES FOR WHYCHUS CREEK

SKYLINE FOREST

TWELVE YEARS LATER

Geoff and Mary Crow moved to Sisters in 2002, purchasing a home on Whychus Creek. “The creek was little more than a trickle then; a damp place in the high desert that we could step across in the late summer without getting our feet wet,” says Mary. While the previous owner spoke of days when he could catch large fish in the creek, Geoff and Mary wondered if that little trickle could ever support fish and flow freely again.

The Crows first got involved with the Land Trust through friend and long-time Land Trust volunteer, Norma Funai. “Geoff and I have always believed the earth and our environment come first. Humans have the duty and power to protect and heal the fragile habitats which surround us, and the vision of the Land Trust is in line with these beliefs,” says Mary.

In 2014, the Land Trust’s Campaign for Whychus Creek was launched to finish protecting Whychus Creek—the Crow’s backyard creek and the heart of the Sisters community. Mary and Geoff joined the Campaign early, helping share the story on guided Land Trust hikes or with friends in town. Last summer, they attended a restoration tour at Whychus Canyon Preserve to personally see the work that had been done to heal the creek.

“Geoff and I were astounded and shocked,” says Mary. “The restored creek was truly one of the most beautiful sights I’d seen since I got involved with the Land Trust. To see what was accomplished in such a short period last summer was beyond inspiring.”

The tour also inspired Geoff and Mary to deepen their support of the Campaign for Whychus Creek. “We need to do whatever is necessary to protect the creek—for wildlife and the future,” says Mary. “The Land Trust has impressed us over the years with the way it approaches conservation through restoration and preservation.” —

It was 2005 when the Land Trust first announced we were working with Fidelity National Title with the goal of protecting Skyline Forest as a Community Preserve.

The goal: protect wildlife habitat, ensure an opportunity for sustainable forest management, and provide recreational opportunities for Central Oregonians. Twelve years later we are still working to conserve this 33,000 acre ponderosa pine forest—one of the largest swaths of private land in the area. **Here’s an update on what we’ve accomplished to date:**

Skyline Forest is not developed. This in itself is a huge success! In 2005, the forest was headed for the auction block, ready to be divided into multiple smaller parcels. The Land Trust’s efforts to create a Community Preserve helped demonstrate the property’s value to the community and removed the threat of an auction and bidding war. Today, the forest remains a productive working forest accessible to wildlife and our local community via hosted Land Trust tours.

Skyline Forest is still under threat. But we’ve outlasted a 9-year speculative investment gamble that included a bid for limited development, and established a working relationship with the current owner, Whitefish Cascade Forest Resources. Whitefish has indicated its long-term plan is for sustainable timber harvest, which is consistent with the Land Trust’s goals for protecting the property. We continue to believe permanent conservation of the property is in the best interests of both the landowner and the community, and remain optimistic that Whitefish will one day partner in a conservation project with the Land Trust.

Skyline Forest has many partners invested in its future. Since 2005, the Land Trust has developed and nurtured multi-year, multi-agency partnerships to protect Skyline Forest. And we’ve been successful. Among other things, these efforts resulted in the state’s purchase and creation of the Gilchrist State Forest—the first new State Forest in 60 years! We’ve also worked to create statewide legislation to help protect working forests like Skyline Forest, and we have twice secured federal Forest Legacy funding (\$4 million dollars!) to help purchase and protect Skyline. Today, we remain committed to leaving no stone unturned in finding a way to conserve Skyline Forest.

The end result: Skyline Forest is in a better position today than it has ever been. The current owner is interested in sustainable timber harvest, the community recognizes Skyline as an important resource, and the Land Trust continues to work towards its protection. —

Learn more:
deschuteslandtrust.org/skyline



PHOTOS: MALCOLM LOWERY

RYDER REDFIELD



PROVIDED PHOTO

Mary and Geoff live in the Sisters area and enjoy hiking, skiing, kayaking, biking, gardening, birding, socializing with friends, and the never-ending task of restoring an old house.

Join Mary and Geoff in conserving and caring for Whychus Creek via the Land Trust’s Campaign for Whychus Creek:
deschuteslandtrust.org/campaign