

OWEN SOWERWINE

CONSERVATION PROJECT

SAFEGUARD
>400 ACRES
OF CRITICAL
LANDSCAPE
CONNECTIVITY



PROTECT
HABITAT FOR
168 SPECIES
OF
BIRDS



SECURE
**PUBLIC
ACCESS**
FOR
RECREATION



Why Protect the Owen Sowerwine Property?

Owen Sowerwine is a more than 400-acre haven in one of the most complex sections of the Flathead River. It contains important habitat for birds, fish and wildlife adjacent to other protected lands that together provide an interconnected network of open space and quality habitat at a landscape scale. It also helps safeguard water quality in the Stillwater and Flathead Rivers and Flathead Lake. In addition, it provides public access for outdoor activities such as walking on trails, birdwatching, hunting, fishing, and conservation education for over 20 local schools.

Owen Sowerwine is State School Trust land administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). As State School Trust land its purpose is to generate revenue for Montana K-12 public schools. Thus, its future as natural habitat with public access is not secure. In order to generate revenue for schools, Owen Sowerwine could be used for cabin sites, agriculture, grazing, timber sales, or residential or commercial uses. **A purchased conservation easement would protect the property's vital habitat, ensure public access, and provide revenue for Montana schools.**



CONSERVATION VALUES

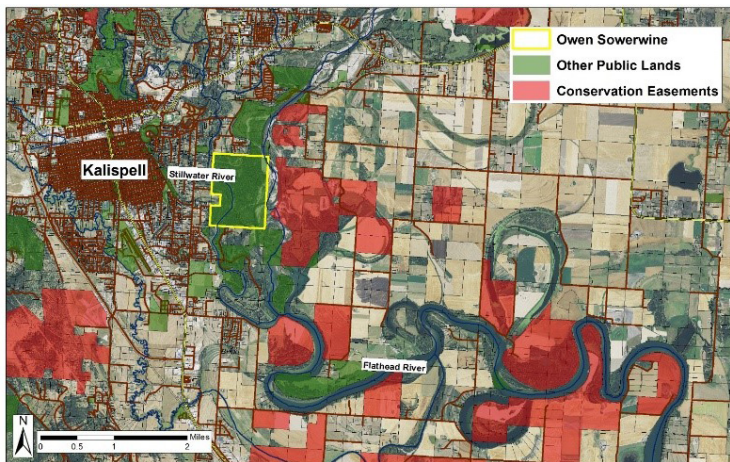
Owen Sowerwine is in the heart of one of the most complex sections of the Flathead River, a braided area including islands, sloughs, wetlands, and gravel bars.

The project protects **over 400 acres** of diverse forested riparian and wetland habitat including large cottonwoods as well as a large island and portions of nearby islands. It borders a mile of the Stillwater River, over a mile of the Flathead River, and at least 1.3 miles of braided channels connecting the two rivers. It is used by federally listed grizzly bear and bull trout as well as black bear, fox, coyote, mountain lion, white-tailed deer, westslope cutthroat trout, and **168 bird species**. It has been designated an **Important Bird Area** critical for the conservation of birds by Montana Audubon.



8th graders from Evergreen Jr. High at Owen Sowerwine

Owen Sowerwine is adjacent to **protected land** that together help provide an interconnected network of over 12,000 acres of conserved land along 50 miles of the Flathead River and north shore of Flathead Lake. In addition, it provides public access for outdoor activities and conservation education for local schools.



In the 1970's, local citizens recognized the Owen Sowerwine property's natural values and tried to protect it as a natural area under the Natural Areas Act of 1974. The effort was led by Owen Sowerwine, an avid outdoorsman, dedicated conservationist, and community leader, for whom the area is named.



Pileated woodpecker young, photo by Danny Brown

Although it was never officially designated as a Natural Area, Owen Sowerwine has been managed as a natural area since 1978 through leases and licenses held by the Flathead County Parks Board, Flathead Audubon Society, and Montana Audubon. These provided some revenue for Montana schools, but a long-term solution for Owen Sowerwine has been sought for years.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Flathead Land Trust has proposed to purchase a conservation easement on Owen Sowerwine as that long-term solution. The proposed conservation easement would provide significant funding for schools as well as ensure the land's natural values continue to be protected and open to the public for recreation and conservation education. This proposal to DNRC received a lot of support from the public through a recent scoping process. Thus, Flathead Land Trust and its partners including the Flathead Audubon Society and the Flathead Lakers have begun fundraising in earnest to raise an estimated \$775,000 needed to complete this important project. Over half of the needed funding has been raised and we have until September 2023 to raise the remainder.

**YOU CAN HELP PERMANENTLY
PROTECT OWEN SOWERWINE AT:**

**flatheadrivertolake.org
and designate your donation to Owen Sowerwine**

FOR QUESTIONS CONTACT FLATHEAD LAND TRUST AT
406.752.8293