

## OLT Assumes Ownership of Its First Property!

As you may be aware, OLT's portfolio of conserved properties is comprised of lands on which property owners grant a conservation easement to OLT but retain ownership of the property. Except in temporary situations, OLT has not owned property outright—until now!

Sometimes treasures are generously bestowed by surprising benefactors. Such an occasion transpired this year when the Malott Improvement Club (MIC) donated a small piece of ground along Loup Loup Creek in the town of Malott to OLT. And what a lovely gift this spot is!!

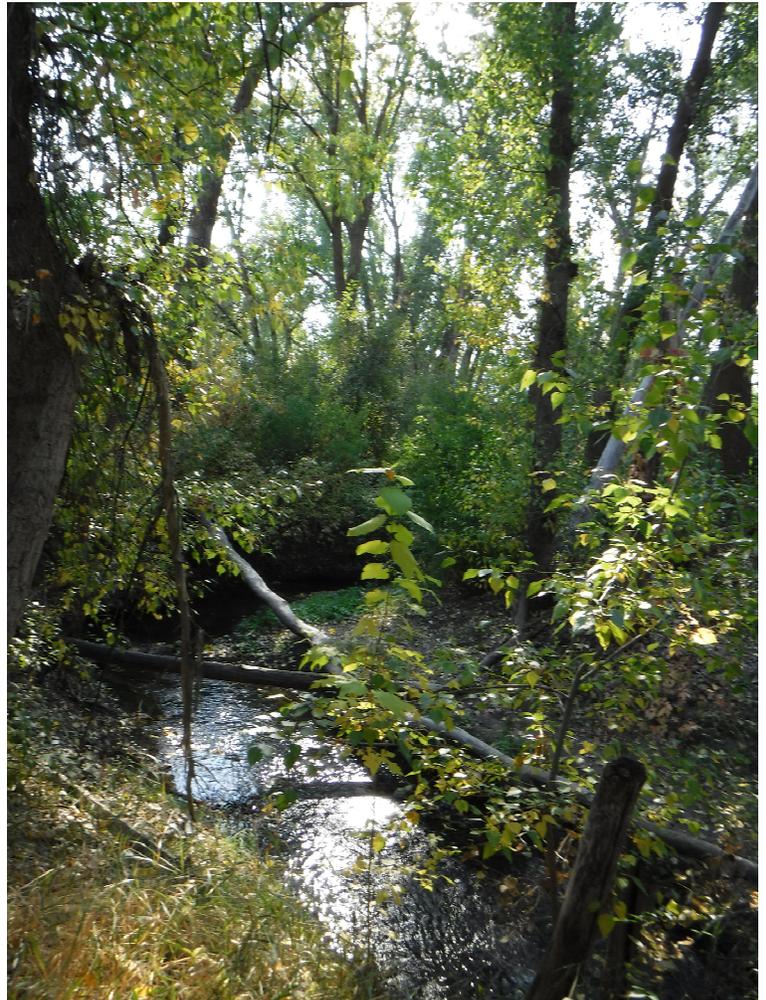
The creek flows through a mature cottonwood gallery with an understory of native shrubs. Past beaver works are visible, but little sign of recent human intervention meets the eye. Herons and kingfishers hunt for fish, amphibians, and reptiles. Coho salmon were spotted in the creek last fall. Small birds search the trees and ground for insects. A visitor can feel miles away from the trappings of civilization.

According to climate modeling, in fifty years Loup Loup Creek will be one of only a few creeks in the Okanogan River watershed with the right conditions to support salmon and steelhead during their spawning and rearing phases, making it a critically important piece of the future.

After careful consideration, OLT has decided to retain ownership of the property, with the goals of expanding our stewardship capabilities and having a potential spot for volunteer events and small gatherings. OLT is extremely honored to have an opportunity to steward a small length of the creek and its riparian zone.

As a tax exempt organization, OLT could forego paying property taxes on the parcel. However, the OLT Board of Directors has elected to continue paying the property taxes, in order to contribute our fair share to county services and infrastructure.

Thank you, MIC! The community certainly has been improved thanks to your many efforts. OLT will forever be grateful to the MIC for this precious gift.



Article and Photo by Gert Webster

### About the Malott Improvement Club

The Malott Improvement Club was founded in 1924 with the goal of improving community spirit and promoting moral temperance of youth. Today's members maintain the Malott Cemetery and the Malott Park, host dinners, golf tournaments, and other fundraisers, and award the Boyd Sheets Memorial Scholarship to a graduating senior of Okanogan, Omak, or Brewster High Schools or a Wenatchee Valley College Omak student.

## Message from OLT's Executive Director

One of the very first things Jerry DeBacker said to me at our first meeting was that it's easy to get caught up in the unending nature of this work; to focus on the next unfinished project and forget to pause, take stock, and celebrate the achievements and the milestones. Well, 2022 has been a year of milestones, from the 20th anniversary of OLT's founding to the retirement of Jerry himself, who has been with OLT since 2016. (See the back page to learn about his many achievements in land conservancy.) So, with the year's end, let's take Jerry's advice and reflect!

OLT has taken on a lot of new challenges in recent years. After a multiyear process we were accredited by the Land Trust Alliance in February 2022. This status affirms that OLT conducts itself and its transactions in accordance with rigorous national standards.

2022 also saw major progress on a pair of conservation easement projects being carried out in partnership with the Methow Beaver Project under a new program from the Department of Ecology that supports the protection of stream corridors made vulnerable to flooding and ecological damage in the wake of wildfires. These projects offer the chance to combine tools and approaches of conservation with those of restoration, and we eagerly look forward to more opportunities of this kind!

Between April and September of this year, OLT partnered with The Nature Conservancy to co-steward TNC's Barker Mountain Preserve. OLT assisted with mapping, fence repair and removal, weed control, and annual monitoring activities at the preserve, gaining valuable insight and experience that will help the organization plan for future opportunities to acquire and steward

lands of its own. And such an opportunity has come along sooner than expected—in 2022, OLT acquired the first property it plans to hold and manage itself: a small but enchanting stretch of Loup Loup Creek located in Malott. (See the front-page article.)

We've also renewed some longstanding projects and relationships this year. After two-plus years of the Covid-19 pandemic limiting in-person events, OLT joined forces with the Okanogan Highlands Alliance in April to host Eric Wagner's in-person talk on ecological recovery after the Mt. Saint Helens blast. In June, volunteers joined OLT to remove derelict fencing at Barker Mountain. And in May, OLT joined the Oden Road Fire Study field day for the first time in three years. Initiated in 2010, this collaborative study enables Okanogan High School students to gather and analyze data on post-fire ecological succession. It was good to be back on the ground!

And finally, in September, OLT hosted its first in-person Ponderosa Dinner since 2019. The warmth, camaraderie, and love for the land among those present were palpable. Rancher Bob Barnes grilled up his justly-famous tri-tip and speaker Mary Koch got us all reflecting on the places and stories that connect us to this beautiful landscape we call home and to one another.

The continual generosity of our supporters, undaunted even in tumultuous times, makes all of this possible. For a newcomer to this place and this work like yours truly, it was a remarkable calling in and calling home. I can't wait to see what 2023 will bring, and to celebrate with you all next year!

*-Kate Miller*

### OLT Events 2022-2023

As 2022 winds down, OLT is hard to work to bring you more community and educational programs into 2023. And, while we have enjoyed presenting virtual programs these past couple of years, we are excited to reconnect with you all in person at several upcoming events!

December 6, 2022, 5:30 pm: [OkaKnowledgy](#) event featuring DNR wildlife biologist Ken Bevis, who will discuss the value of dead trees in the landscape. Join us for "Dead Wood in the Environment." In person at Okanogan PUD Auditorium.

January 18, 2023, 5:30 pm: Jason Shira will discuss hydrogeology of the region. Location TBD.

Other great events are still in the works for Spring 2023. More information coming soon!

### Stay in the Loop on More Great OLT Events!

For all the latest info, visit our **Facebook page** ([facebook.com/okanogan.landtrust](https://facebook.com/okanogan.landtrust)) and our **website** ([www.okanoganlandtrust.org](http://www.okanoganlandtrust.org)). If you'd like to join our **mailing list**, email us at [info@okanoganlandtrust.org](mailto:info@okanoganlandtrust.org)

## Ask a Woolly Bear

*By Gert Webster, OLT Board President*

As long as there has been communication, people have felt a need to predict the future. Whatever the time span in question, we have sought signs and portents that might tell us what is coming. In northern climes as autumn begins, our minds turn to the next season and we look for forecasts of the coming winter.

In the past, people observed the world around them from year to year and came up with some wonderful ways to learn what winter would bring. Were hornet nests close to the ground or high? Was an animal putting on a thick coat of hair? Thick onion skins and corn husks, bushy squirrel tails, ants marching in a line, and leaves falling late all meant a cold and snowy winter was coming.

My favorite winter predictor is the woolly bear caterpillar. According to folklore, if the orange band on a woolly bear is wide, the winter will be mild but if the black bands are wider, the winter will be cold and snowy. Seems like a lot of responsibility for such a harmless, unassuming little caterpillar.



Photo Eric Yuen from FreerangeStock

These handsome caterpillars are the larval stage of the Isabella Tiger Moth, who can be found across North America. Woolly bears

hatch from eggs laid by Tiger Moths in the summer and go through a series of instars, or molts, as they grow. Although they begin life almost fully black, with each molt their orange band becomes wider. So really, the orange band tells us how much the caterpillar has grown, indicating availability of nutrition and age.



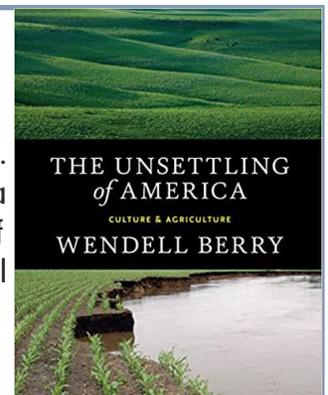
Photo Steve Jurvetson, Wikimedia Commons

Although woolly bears can't predict the winter, they can do something much more amazing. Woolly bears freeze solid during cold weather and thaw in spring to pupate and become Tiger Moths. As cold weather approaches, woolly bears stop eating and all intestinal contents are voided. Their bodies produce an "antifreeze" called glycerol, a combination of sugars, proteins, and alcohol that is circulated in their bloodstream. Next the heart stops beating, and the body slowly freezes. They winter over in this state under leaves or wood, able to survive temperatures as low as -90 degrees Fahrenheit. What a cool adaptation!!

Did you see a woolly bear caterpillar this fall? What did her color bands say about the kind of winter 2022-2023 would be? Is the prediction coming true so far? It would certainly be fabulous if this winter brings lots and lots of snow and cold to the west. Fine weather for a woolly bear.

## Book Review: *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* by Wendell Berry

In this classic, Wendell Berry argues that good farming is a cultural development and spiritual discipline. Today's agribusiness, however, takes farming out of its cultural context and away from families. As a result, we as a nation are more estranged from the land- from the intimate knowledge, love, and care of it. This book and its companion *The Gift of Good Land* will show you why it is imperative to support small farms and especially those that practice good stewardship of the land to which they are connected.



## Cometh the Hour, Cometh the Man

In 2016, at a time when OLT was experiencing a lack of dynamic leadership due to staff vacancies and program inconsistencies, Jerry DeBacker assumed the role of Executive Director and really turned things around for land conservancy in Okanogan and Ferry Counties.

Putting his land trust experience and contacts to work, Jerry re-invigorated OLT by following his mantra of “conserve land,” focusing on the future, aligning conservation easement projects with funding and grant cycles, and recognizing acres that provide big conservation values.

At the end of 2022, OLT will say good-bye to Jerry when he moves on to a well-earned retirement.

Over the course of his 6 years with the organization, Jerry attended to the two pillars of OLT’s mission:

**Connecting People to the Land:** Through Jerry's gentle nudging, the OLT Board of Directors increased its commitment to and involvement in community education and outreach programs. Both OLT’s annual Spring Forward event and its OkaKnowledgy educational programs began from ideas that sprang from Jerry’s fruitful mind.

**Conserving Land for Generations to Come:** While Jerry has been with OLT, both as Executive Director and as Senior Conservationist, OLT has worked with landowners to place 7,100 acres under permanent protection from development, effectively doubling OLT’s conserved acreage total. There are several additional easement projects that were begun by Jerry which are still working toward completion. These are huge accomplishments achieved by a true land conservation advocate.



Photo courtesy of Jerry DeBacker

Prior to his time with OLT, Jerry served as the founding Executive Director of the Prickly Pear Land Trust in Helena, Montana. He was heavily involved in the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, working with the Nez Perce Tribe, the University of Idaho, and Lewis and Clark State College. He also directed the Whatcom Land Trust in Washington and the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust in

Southeast Idaho before coming to OLT in 2016.

OLT will miss Jerry and will always be grateful for his work that set us on a path toward success. All of those who value land conservancy and recognize the critical need for protection of waters, soils, open space, wildlife, and food production will surely join OLT in recognizing and appreciating the work of this conservationist, who has done so much for all of us.

Happy trails, Jd. Have fun shooting the rapids.

## Mission

From the Cascades to the Kettles, Canada to the Columbia, Okanogan Land Trust is a local nonprofit organization connecting people to the land and conserving and sustaining our working farms and ranches, wildlife habitats, and water resources for generations to come.

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This work is only possible with YOUR support! Please consider sending a check or donating securely through our website. OLT is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization: EIN #94-311-2454 State charities #25668