MIKE OKMA/COURTESY OF GTRLC

Sailor's Apron, part of the beautiful Michigan frontage that Betty Jean Murray has protected with Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy

One Family, Three Land Trusts

When Susan Lackey heard the news that Montana Land Reliance had just protected a ranch known as the Oxbow, quite famous in that area, she felt elated. Why was the executive director of Legacy Land Conservancy in Ann Arbor, Michigan, so delighted to hear about a project some 1,700 miles away? Because John Smith, one of the Oxbow's earliest owners, cared deeply about his land and made sure it was sold to those who would care for it in the days before land trusts. He instilled that respect for our natural heritage in his daughter, Betty Jean Murray, who, in 2007, protected two beautiful parcels with Legacy Land Conservancy: an 86-acre farm and a 23-acre riparian parcel. Betty Jean and her husband also protected, in that same year, a piece of important Lake Michigan frontage with another Michigan land trust, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.

"This story is one of commitment to the land across generations and across the country," says Susan. "Glen Chown of Grand Traverse, Rock Ringling of Montana Land Reliance and I were thrilled to find such a connection through one family."

"It is extraordinary that this family has demonstrated their land ethic in three locations, all possessing amazing natural features," says Glen. "Their commitment to land conservation and this enduring legacy is a testimony to their love of the land."

Rock says, "This family shows through their actions that the gift of land conservation does not stop at one generation but is instilled in future generations as well. Truly, they understand the importance of place."