

# NURTURING COMMUNITY THROUGH NEIGHBORING

BY SARAH TILT

Hollywood created a myth that the West was won by the John Waynes of the world, but in fact the West as we know it today was created by cooperation and neighbors helping each other. This community spirit helped to nourish tribal communities and brought vitality to early settlements. It continues to be a foundational piece of our state's character and culture.

We all know that Montana is experiencing tremendous growth. Both our rural and urban communities are facing distinct changes in their populations and these changes are having profound impacts on the economic, social, and

people move to Montana with good intentions: to revel in the open spaces, be part of the agriculture community, hunt and fish, enjoy wildlife, and enjoy a wild landscape. All of us need to be welcoming and help each other continue to strengthen our communities and steward the land and natural resources. Newcomers as well as long-time residents have the opportunity to engage in their communities and deepen their understanding of what it means to call this place home. There is a delicate balance between growth and maintaining culture and resources, and it is up to all of us to decide how to invite people in and maintain that equilibrium. We all share a responsibility to be good citizens and good stewards of our land, water, and wildlife.

In future installments, this column will explore some of the challenges our state faces related to growing, preparing, and eating food. It will also highlight the creative, positive ways people are nurturing traditional social, economic, and environmental values, while finding potential solutions and strategies to increase our collective understanding of how to integrate into and support our communities more successfully. Our forthcoming column aims to inspire understanding, empathy, and excitement to live, work, and recreate together in Montana. 🍁



Photo by Emmie Sperandeo

One Montana's conservation project work days bring landowners and sportsmen together to learn from each other as a way of building relationships and demonstrating good neighboring. Here hunters are helping a landowner with weed eradication.

cultural fabric of our towns. Among other challenges, widespread population increases are causing housing scarcities and significant environmental impacts across the state.

At the same time, many positive changes are happening. Ranchers and farmers are mixing innovative ideas and technology with traditional water and soil conservation practices, which they hope will lead to healthier lands, waters, and communities. There are also dynamic young residents who are choosing to make homes in Montana's unique small towns, building lives and businesses, often bringing new knowledge that broadens our understanding of growing, cooking, and eating food.

It is incumbent on all of us to be part of sustaining healthy, profitable communities and working landscapes while illustrating good neighboring. Most

---

**Sarah Tilt** is the executive director of One Montana, a nonprofit working to support private land stewardship and working lands, sustain our cultural heritage, and connect our urban and rural communities. One Montana's campaign, The Montana Way, is an effort to educate and provide resources for newcomers, and to encourage longer-time residents to welcome their new neighbors and assist them in their transition.