

Changes ahead for land trust

By CAMERON RASMUSSEN Staff writer | Posted: Sunday, October 7, 2012 10:00 am

SANDPOINT — Big changes are happening at the Clark Fork-Pend Oreille Conservancy — including the name — but the nonprofit's mission remains the same.

Now known as the Kaniksu Land Trust, organization officials are changing gears to make the nonprofit a more visible and effective organization for the community. Originally started in 2002, the group retains its mission of working with willing land owners to protect their property through the principles of conservation. Since then, associates have completed 11 conservation projects ranging from the conservation of a mile and a half of frontage along Montana's Bull River to facilitating an easement for a 600-acre ranch in Selle Valley.

"We have a very specific mission," Kaniksu Land Trust executive director Eric Grace said. "Really the only thing that we do is work with private land owners who want to maintain and enhance their property."

After coming in recently as the organization's executive director, Grace worked with his colleagues to consider the best direction for the organization. One of the first things they settled on was a name change. As a group that operates primarily in northern Idaho and northwest Montana, organization associates felt the name best reflected their emphasis on both land and water conservation and geographic operation.

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"As a land trust we wanted to find a name that speaks to the region we live in and the work we do" said Kaniksu Land Trust President Kathy Cousins. "The Kaniksu National Forest is the name given to the combination of the Priest River, Pend Oreille and Cabinet National Forests – an area that corresponds very closely to the region that the Kaniksu Land Trust operates in."

However, the organization's goals haven't changed in the slightest, Grace said. The group still aims to protect property from development while retaining private ownership through conservation easements. They also provide community benefits by preserving the region's natural beauty and enhancing the natural habitat for the local ecosystem. The group always works with willing land owners who are interested in preserving their property's natural characteristics.

Grace said the organization is also investigating ways to increase their community presence beyond the name change. At the beginning of the year, members helped organize a film festival that was well-attended and are seeking means to broaden their services to more parts of the community.

“The goal for the next year or so is to show the community we’re here to work for them,” Grace said.