

2022 INDUCTEES

CHRISTINE TORGRIMSON

1950 –

BARBARA RUSMORE

1950 –



Christine Torgrimson and Barbara Rusmore founded the Montana Land Reliance in 1978.

Since then, with more than 1.2 million acres of working agricultural land, wildlife habitat, and open space permanently protected under conservation easements, MLR is one of the nation's largest state-based land trusts.

Those acres encompass partnerships with nearly 1,000 Montana farm and ranch families, and more than 1,870 miles of permanently protected river- and streambanks.

Christine was born into a western Montana ranching family. At the University of Montana in the early 1970s, her land development research led to collaboration with the Montana Environmental Information Center, revealing that half a million agricultural acres in Montana were being subdivided into 20-acre and smaller lots.

Christine's work led stunned ranchers in the Blackfoot Valley, along with MEIC and others, to seek legislation to safeguard the economic viability of Montana's agriculture communities. Their efforts culminated in the "Montana Open-Space Land and Voluntary Conservation Easement Act of 1975," crafted to deter residential development of agricultural lands.

By 1978, Christine collaborated with newcomer Barbara Rusmore. Barbara had worked on West Coast private-land conservation issues, as she witnessed her own California valley transform from productive orchards to real estate developments.

With their shared interest in curbing the fragmentation of agricultural lands and families, the women sought to take advantage of the new law by creating MLR "to establish a renewable

and equitable agricultural way of life in Montana."

Christine and Barbara opened MLR as co-directors, recruited the first board of directors, and hired economist Bill Long. From the beginning, MLR concentrated on providing expertise on conservation easements to permanently protect agricultural lands.

The endeavor also protected watersheds critical to fish and wildlife, and that protected private land increased space for wildlife—and people—to roam. For example, MLR holds 16 easements along the Smith River, including 32,000 acres and 69 miles of streambank available for public use as a permit-controlled Montana State Park.

MLR is among the most respected land trusts in North America. The lasting benefits of MLR's work harken back directly to Christine and Barbara's imaginativeness and Bill's dedication, skills, and perseverance. Their alliance aimed to establish a land trust to nurture a lifestyle and economy that relied on responsibly managed private land, increasingly valuable fish and wildlife habitats, and Montana open landscapes.

By 1981, though Christine and Barbara moved on to create, implement, and guide many other Montana, U.S., and Canadian conservation initiatives during the following four decades, their MLR vision endured.

In the United States, only the Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Nature Conservancy, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hold more acres in conservation easement than MLR—and all MLR partnerships are in Montana. For that, there are many to thank, but perhaps none more than Christine Torgrimson and Barbara Rusmore.

