SAVING MONTANA’S WILDLIFE AND PUBLIC LANDS
THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES

By Nick Gevock
MWF Conservation Director

There’s no way to sugar coat it – we’re in the fight of our lives for Montana’s wildlife and our public lands. The attacks on key wildlife habitat on our National Forests, Bureau of Land Management and other public lands mount by the day.

The many challenges we face makes the work of the Montana Wildlife Federation more important now than ever. And it means MWF will work closely with our conservation partners to defend the things we hold so dear – public lands, public fish and wildlife resources, and access to both.

Attacks on National Monuments

Over the past year, the federal government has been trying to roll back protections for several national monuments around the West. This undoes the work that previous administrations did to project special places – areas of our country that were set aside for permanent protection because of their historic and wildlife values. Most monuments also provide excellent hunting opportunity. It’s a big reason Montana has the longest hunting seasons of any Western state.

Last year the Trump administration ordered a review of national monuments designated in the past 21 years, including our own Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. Even though the Breaks was spared from any cuts -- for now -- the Interior Department proposed shrinking the Grand Staircase monument by half, and also took a hatchet to the newly-designated Bears Ears National Monument by 85 percent. That’s why MWF is part of a broad-based coalition of conservation organizations working to protect monuments and the Antiquities Act.

Defending Backcountry Lands for Wildlife and People

In addition to our national monuments, backcountry public lands are under attack. In December, Sen. Senator Daines introduced a bill to strip wilderness study area status for nearly 450,000 acres of national forest lands. And Rep. Greg Gianforte followed suit with a bill that added in Bureau of Land Management lands, and totaled more than 700,000 acres.

We know that these are important, secure habitat that provides excellent hunting opportunity. It’s a big reason Montana has the

MWF can’t do any of this without the support of the people who care about Montana’s wildlife and outdoor heritage. If you are reading this newsletter, then we need you to get involved.

Supporting Local Efforts to Protect Public Lands

Even as we work to maintain existing, hard-fought public land protections, MWF will continue working to support local efforts to improve public land management for wildlife and people. This includes Senator Jon Tester introduced the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act to implement a local conservation plan for the Blackfoot-Clearwater Valley (see page 10). The bill would provide additional protection to wilderness lands, expand public trails, and support forest restoration activities. We’re also working with a diverse coalition to secure protection for the Badger-Two Medicine area on the Rocky Mountain Front (see page 6).

In addition to working to secure protected status for special areas, we also need to stay involved in the planning processes that govern the “working” portions of our public lands to make sure that wildlife habitat and access values are protected. This includes participating in planning efforts like the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest (see page 7) and the Lewistown Bureau of Land Management plan in the Lewistown region (see page 4).

State-level Funding to Protect Public Lands

During the 2017 Legislative Session, MWF helped secure full funding for Habitat Montana, the state’s only program to purchase public land and conservation easements on private land. We are now working hard to make sure that Fish, Wildlife and Parks is able to move ahead with implementing the program and protecting important areas around the state (see page 7).

Protecting the Public Interest & Scientific Wildlife Management

We continue to closely monitor the Department Continued on page 5
PRESENTER’S MESSAGE

COLLABORATION WITH LANDOWNERS IS REAL FOR MWF

Collaboration is a term that gets kicked around a lot in the conservation business. At the Montana Wildlife Federation, it’s more than a buzzword. MWF works hard to find common ground with farmers and ranchers. In the long run, it will help Montana enjoy abundant wildlife.

In recent years, outdoor recreation has surpassed agriculture as the largest single sector of Montana’s economy, according to data released by the Outdoor Industry Association. Agriculture remains important to our state’s economy, and they also support our outdoor economy. Farms and ranches provide crucial habitat for wildlife, including winter range for deer, elk, game birds and waterfowl, and provide access and opportunity for hunters. Working agricultural lands are essential for numerous non-game species as well, including smaller mammals, songbirds and more.

All of that occurs while farmers and ranchers are trying to make a living producing crops and livestock. At times they have to deal with the adverse impacts that public wildlife can cause to their operations. Deer and elk can consume forage and crops, and predators like wolves and grizzly bears present challenges for livestock producers. It’s a delicate balancing act, because while hunters and wildlife enthusiasts would like more wildlife, we recognize that there is a limit to what landowners can tolerate.

That’s why MWF works hard to support collaborative solutions that address the issues on working farms and ranches while also protecting public wildlife and public access. Our efforts have resulted in real, tangible programs that are making a difference for our agricultural industry, as well as our valued public wildlife, and our hunting and angling heritage.

Last legislative session, MWF supported several bills that benefited farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners. Of course, our efforts to restore funding for Habitat Montana has helped provide crucial funding for easements that protect working farms and ranches. We also worked to increase the maximum payment available for the popular Block Management program, which pays landowners for the impact of public hunting on their land. Our work also included renewing the Unlocking State Lands program, which allows a tax credit for landowners who open up access to landlocked state school trust lands. Finally, we worked with landowner organizations to pass the Montana Public Land Access Network (MT-PLAN), a voluntary fund to purchase easements from landowners to improve public access to public lands.

Our work didn’t stop with land protection and access programs. We also worked to renew the state Livestock Loss compensation program, which pays ranchers for livestock lost to grizzly bears and wolves and for prevention work to keep predators from attacking livestock. It’s exactly the kind of tangible, on-the-ground effort that makes a difference for people and wildlife. In recent years, we’ve supported bills to give landowners more flexibility to manage wolves on their property, and fought to address feral swine and other issues that threaten agriculture as much as wildlife.

All of these efforts build on the principle that wildlife conservationists and agricultural landowners should work together whenever we can. That doesn’t mean we agree about every issue. Far from it! Even as MWF stands strong in our defense of public trust wildlife management and environmental protection, we will also look for opportunities to find common ground with farmers and ranchers. In the long run, our wildlife, public lands and outdoor heritage will benefit from working together.

PRIVATE DONATION TO SUPPORT NEW ACCESS

MONTANA LAUNCHES NEW “PLAN” TO IMPROVE ACCESS

Public access to public lands is a complicated challenge, and different stakeholders have different ideas about how to ensure that hunters, anglers, and other recreationists have access to public lands. Even when we don’t always agree, we can sometimes find common ground.

In the 2017 Legislature, the Montana Wildlife Federation worked to pass bills that addressed the issue of people illegally gating public county roads, a major problem across the state. That effort faced opposition and ultimately didn’t pass, but it certainly raised the issue and grabbed attention statewide.

One bill came in “under the radar” in the 2017 session that MWF was proud to support established a voluntary fund to help pay for easements that lead to public land. HB 597, sponsored by Rep. Alan Doane, R-Glendive, created the Montana Public Land Access Network (the Montana PLAN). The bill directed that any individual or organization could donate to the fund, which could be used to pay willing private landowners for easements to open up access to public lands that are otherwise landlocked or inaccessible to the public. Rep. Doane wrote the bill in close partnership with the state Department of Natural Resources Conservation (DNRC).

With a lot of controversial issues in the air, Rep. Doane’s bill didn’t attract a lot of attention at first. MWF, because of our daily presence at the Capitol, was one of the only organizations to speak up in support of the bill in both the House and Senate Committees. It is not often that lawmakers hear MWF testify alongside the United Property Owners of Montana, but we were glad to do so on this common-ground, common-sense proposal. The bill ultimately sailed to passage and was signed into law by Governor Steve Bullock.

The Montana PLAN was kicked off by Governor Bullock and Rep. Doane with an event last December. MWF joined several other conservation groups in making a donation of our own funds to the program. We believe that it is important that we backup our commitment to public access, and we hope that other organizations, businesses, and individuals contribute to the effort in the years ahead.

Funds in the Montana PLAN can be used to help pay for negotiated easements that will help public hunters and other recreationists reach public lands. Ryan Weiss, public access specialist with the DNRC, has announced that he is already in talks with a couple landowners on potential projects. These hold the promise of opening up hundreds and maybe thousands of acres of public land to access for hunting, fishing, and other recreation.

The Montana PLAN is not the only solution to all of Montana’s access issues, and it will take time to develop. But it represents the kind of collaborative solution that could help the public get more land, and ultimately increase recreational and hunting and angling opportunity. MWF is proud to have played a part in this program and we will be engaged as projects come forward. We will work diligently to see that the money is spent well to open up more public access.
By Alec Underwood  
MWF Western MT Field Representative

Sitting at my desk one evening last June, the realization was slow to sink in that I had drawn a moose tag. I would have the opportunity to hunt one of the “Big Three” – moose, bighorn sheep, or mountain goat – coveted by so many Montana hunters.

A few months later I found myself deep in the backcountry, sawing downed logs on a remote trail in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. It was tough work, especially in the hot and smoky days of August, but after two weekends of work and a little bit of scouting, I had the trail cleared for the horses to pack out the meat (if I were to be successful).

Accompanied by my friend Will, who had taken a nice bull in the same unit a few years prior, we planned to hunt during the rut in the hopes of calling in a bull to archery range. A few rakes on the branches with the paddle and the bull grunted below me, letting me know that this was his territory. I grunted back.

Almost falling through alder bushes with an arrow knocked, I could hear the bull grunt again and again. As I emerged from the bushes to a level spot, I saw the bull had come into the open. He was at about sixty yards and walking slowly away from me. I began to close the gap with the wind in my favor. At thirty yards, I still had no shot through the thick alder bushes. The bull was now heading toward me. At this point, we were grunting back and forth every five seconds or so. Heading for the thickest part of the alder bushes, I traversed across the uneven slope... twenty yards... then fifteen. I was so close I could hear the air being forced form the bull’s nostrils. It was now or never.

Still behind a bush, the bull began thrashing an alder with his antlers. I simply did not have a shooting lane. A quick glance to the left revealed a flat boulder five yards away. In five quick, low steps, I stepped up on the boulder, coming to full draw. I took the shot over the tips of the alder bushes.

The bull bolted uphill and stopped directly above me. Knowing my first shot had gone through both lungs but not wanting to take a chance, I shot again. The bull bolted toward the edge of the timber, and I could see that he was going to expire quickly. With a big crash, the bull fell only 80 yards from where I had shot him.

The emotions flooded in as I nearly fell to the ground in shock. It had happened so fast that there was no thinking, there was just doing.

After allowing myself to process what has just happened I hiked back up to my pack. I knew I wanted Will to be there with me when we walked up to the moose for the first time. However, Will was located twenty minutes down the drainage, and it required a sufficient amount of yelling to get his attention. After a while, Will appeared exclaiming, “you better have shot one with all the screaming you’re doing”. Walking up to the moose was one of the most memorable moments of my life. It is likely that he had seldom seen a human, living deep within the wilderness his whole life and most likely wintering on the even more remote Idaho side.

We began quartering and de-boning the moose around six in the afternoon. We were tired, but we had a long way to go. After almost four hours of cutting and a two-and-a-half-mile hike down the drainage in the dark, we reached camp around 1:00 in the morning. The pack out would take us another day and a half and two more trips with heavy packs of meat.

Finally seeing my friend Anthony show up with his horses was a huge relief as we realized we were on the home stretch of our hunt. Malnourished and sore from two days of carrying 80 plus pounds on our backs, Will and I knew that this hunt was one for the books. As we made our way down the pristine drainage, I felt sad that it was all over. Luckily the amazing memories of the hunt will never fade away.

Sharing the Wild Game Harvest

GAME NIGHT

By Steve Platt  
Helena Hunters and Anglers

Meat is one of the most important reasons that many of us hunt. Sharing the products of our hunting efforts with others who also value producing local food with their own hands is a natural way to build bridges with non-hunting neighbors in our communities.

Members of MWF’s Helena Hunters and Anglers affiliate carried their slow cookers, Dutch ovens and trays containing wild game dishes, into Emily Free-Wilson’s studio on Logan Street. Arriving at the same time and bearing a wide variety of locally grown foods were members of the Alternative Energy Resource Organization (AERO). As members of both groups, from octogenarians to young families with small children, stamped the snow off their boots and placed their dishes on folding tables, the rich aroma of homemade food filled the hall. It is hard to beat an old fashioned potluck.

Game dishes included moose, elk, mule deer, whitetail, antelope and goose. Garden carrots, homegrown potatoes, ancient grains, homemade breads and local honey graced the food tables. Delicately smoked rainbow trout from Canyon Ferry Reservoir lay on a handmade ceramic plate. The Ten Mile Creek Brewery on Last Chance Gulch donated a keg of their Queen City Pale Ale.

Packaging the meat of a deer, elk or moose out of wild country and butchering it at home takes strength, focus and work. So do tilling soil, planting seeds, nurturing young plants, watering, weeding, harvesting and preserving home-grown garden vegetables. The fruits of these efforts possess a certain significance and sense of satisfaction to those who accomplish them. Hunters and farmers, united in our love and appreciation for delicious and healthy local food. The meal was a labor of love for all involved, and the food tasted like home.
Growing Our Federation to Keep Pace with Changing Times

By Dave Chadwick
MWF Executive Director

This continues to be an exciting time to be part of the Montana Wildlife Federation! As you can see throughout this newsletter, we are working hard on wildlife management and public land issues all over the state. At the same time, we’ve also been continuing to improve our operations as an organization, streamlining our business practices, growing our membership, and expanding our lines of communication – all while helping move forward several significant conservation campaigns.

As the oldest wildlife conservation organization in Montana, and one of the oldest wildlife federations in the country, MWF has a long history of success because of our dedicated members. For eight decades, we have combined the grassroots strength of boots-on-the-ground members with the policy expertise and political know-how needed to navigate the Fish and Wildlife Commission, the Montana Legislature, and Congress. MWF members are passionate about the outdoors and dedicated to conservation – and our membership continues to grow.

In addition to our thousands of passionate individual members, a real strength of MWF over the years has always been our affiliate organization structure. When MWF was launched in 1936, we were born as a partnership of local rod and gun clubs from across Montana. Over the decades, our network of local affiliate organizations has provided the foundation for winning important fights in Helena and Washington, DC. Elected officials, agency managers, other conservation groups, and businesses listen when we collectively speak up on important issues.

Over the years, MWF’s affiliate structure has waxed and waned in size and strength. This has partly reflected larger social changes that have really shaken up the conservation community. Many local rod and gun clubs have disappeared or moved away from focusing on conservation issues. At the same time, a wide array of other local and statewide organizations have grown up to engage on wildlife issues.

Last year, the MWF Board of Directors voted to expand and reinvigorate our affiliate structure in order to keep pace with changing times. We have adopted several changes to make it easier for organizations to affiliate with MWF, with the aim of growing the collective power of Montana’s wildlife conservation community. As noted on page 3, we have already added two new affiliate organizations: the Western Bear Foundation and the Traditional Bowhunters of Montana. Over time, we aim to keep strengthening our existing affiliate network, while also bringing new allies into our Federation, and even creating new local organizations. Our staff in Helena, Billings, Missoula, stand ready to work with organizations and help them get involved in our work.

Bringing more organizations into our Federation will demand that we keep focusing on finding common ground. The diversity of opinions across Montana means that different MWF affiliates might not always agree with each other. And they often won’t agree with MWF! But just like our rod and gun clubs of the past, we can achieve great wins by working together around our shared commitment to well-managed wildlife, plenty of quality habitat, and public access to public wildlife.

Contact Dave Chadwick at dchadwick@mtwf.org.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS NEED YOUR INPUT

By John Bradley
MWF Eastern MT Field Representative

With threats to our public lands coming from our congressional delegation, now more than ever, it’s critical for Montana’s hunters and anglers to be engaged in the federal land management process. Public input from Montanans on the ground is needed to ensure that conservation measures find their way into the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Forest Service’s final plans. These plans dictate how our public land is managed for decades.

Right now, the Lewistown Field Office is drafting its resource management plan (RMP) that will impact thousands of acres of critical habitat for fish and game. The draft RMP, which was set to be released last year, has been delayed under the current administration. While citizens do not know when the draft will be released to the public, we do know that it will affect the management of over half a million acres of public land in the heart of Montana.

It’s important that hunters, anglers, and other recreationalists participate in the process and let the BLM know what’s important to them and their communities.

The planning area includes over 200,000 acres of undeveloped, wild habitat along the protected Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and the Charles M. Russell Refuge river corridor. One of the last intact river-to-prairie ecosystems, it consists of miles and miles of breaks, coulees, cottonwood draws, sagebrush, and short-grass prairie. The wild, unbroken character of places such as Chain Butte, Horse Camp Trail, and Dovetail Creek is an elk hunter’s dream. Hunters and wildlife enthusiasts also recognize the area as some of the world’s most unique and productive country for upland birds, mule deer, and bighorn sheep. These are some of the most unique backcountry lands found anywhere, and their future remains vulnerable to fragmentation and development unless safeguarded by citizens through the land-use plan.

The Montana Wildlife Federation, along with other Montana conservation groups, are working to implement a common-sense approach for conserving high-value public lands through Lands with Wilderness Characteristics and Backcountry Conservation Area designations. By utilizing these conservation tools, the BLM can safeguard large intact habitats from development, maintain and improve dispersed recreation opportunities, and focus management on restoration, conservation, and enhancement of key habitats, all while sustaining traditional uses of the land – such as cattle grazing –

Continued on page 11
ADVANCING WOMEN IN CONSERVATION

By Jessi Johnson
Artemis Coordinator and Public Lands Coordinator for the Wyoming Wildlife Federation

Sitting in my office I look out over a range of mountains that have captured my soul. This view keeps me inspired to keep working for the protection of these wild places and to ensure that future generations can gaze upon their snow-capped peaks and daydream of high alpine mule deer and the distant bugles of elk.

It is hard to stay inspired and optimistic when you work in conservation...so often I think the little and big losses we are so used to add up and we forget to take a breath and see the good.

A little while ago I had the chance to spend a week in Cambridge Maryland, (a place that is almost foreign feeling to a Westerner like myself) surrounded by 350 phenomenal strong women from all over the conservation spectrum. As I reflect on the few days spent at the Women in Conservation Leadership (WCL) Summit one specific interaction stands out.

Sitting down with Amelia Marchand (Conservation Northwest Board Member) in two rocking chairs in a secluded spot of a huge convention hotel, the conversation drifted to the essence and critical need of women’s voices in this time. Our strengths and passions, our way of storytelling, and most of all...the desire to build bridges.

Between indigenous people and current western conservation efforts, between women from all cultures... between hunters and their landscapes. We talked on the notion of being part of the ecosystem rather than stewards... to be family with nature. To not forget the wisdom within tribal history and culture....and to find the marriage of past and present. Highlighting the woman’s voice as a guide in all of this.

I left the conversation and the WCL summit inspired....optimistic.....hopeful. It reminded me that there are people all over this world who care, who see the importance in wild places, who place priceless value on wildlife, and who work for a better tomorrow. We are in an era that requires we all work together.

We must reach across invisible boarders and build bridges (both actual and metaphorical) to connect our work and support each other in our efforts to leave the world better than we found it. We must focus on what we agree on and work from a place of solution rather than reaction and outrage.

The extraordinary women working for this vision like the women of the Montana Wildlife Federation and my coworkers and sisters in the Wyoming Wildlife Federation and Artemis, paint a bright picture of the future. I returned to my desk with its view of the mountains refreshed, moved, and driven.

SAVING MONTANA’S WILDLIFE AND PUBLIC LANDS

THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVTES

We continue to closely monitor the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks work to implement shoulder seasons, which are rifle hunts for elk that fall before and after the general rifle season. The shoulder seasons are performance-based, and meant to increase access to public lands. MWF is continuing to lead efforts to monitor the shoulder seasons and hold the program accountable (see page 10).

Working Together, Speaking Up

These are just a few of the issues on MWF’s radar for the months ahead. How will we tackle so much? By focusing on common ground, building strong coalitions, and giving a voice to grassroots members all over Montana.

In today’s challenging political environment, the ability to build coalitions is more important than ever. MWF works with a diverse array of partners to advance our conservation agenda. Our ability to work with diverse interests depends on having a rock solid commitment to our core values and the flexibility to work around disagreements.

The other key to MWF’s success is the strong engagement of our members. For 80 years, MWF’s strength has come from having thousands of members who live all over Montana – and the nation – who hunt, fish, and enjoy the outdoors, and are passionate about conservation. This authentic membership base is what helps us defeat the well-financed special interests that are trying to undercut scientific wildlife management, public land protection, and multiple-use access to public lands.

When MWF members show up and speak up, decision-makers listen.

Relying on our membership means we have to balance a lot of different viewpoints within our Federation. Disagreements are the price we pay for being a democratic organization. In the long run it helps us advance good wildlife management, habitat protection, and public access.

We Need You

MWF can’t do any of this without the support of the people who care about Montana’s wildlife and outdoor heritage. If you are reading this newsletter, then we need you to get involved.

Join MWF – If you’re not already a member of MWF, join today by visiting our website. If you are already a member, consider increasing your donation to help us mobilize even more people to join the fight!

Take Action - Sign up for MWF’s email alerts and watch for ways you can speak up for wildlife, public lands, and public access. Join an MWF committee to help shape our agenda. A few minutes of your time can make a big difference!

Spread the Word – Follow MWF on social media and help us reach even more people with our message of common-ground, commonsense conservation. Working together, we can ensure that future generations experience the outdoor traditions that we enjoy today.
WHAT’S GOOD FOR THE BIRD IS STILL GOOD FOR THE HERD

By John Bradley
MWF Eastern MT Field Representative

In February, Secretary Zinke announced steps to assess, map, and conserve seasonal habitat that are critical to the survival of big game populations, including mule deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope. Zinke signed Secretarial Order 3362, directing agencies within the Department of Interior to work toward better conservation of critical big game habitat, including migration corridors, stopover habitat, and seasonal ranges.

The landscape of the western U.S. supports the ability of large animals to travel and find food as the seasons change, and this makes America’s abundant big game herds the envy of the world. Migration is tough on animals, and many barriers can threaten their ability to move freely. Fences, highways, housing developments, and oil and gas development can change movement patterns or close off migration corridors altogether. The Secretarial Order is a good first step in giving greater attention in land management and planning to areas where mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, and other species migrate, rest, or spend only a portion of the year.

Unfortunately, the Secretarial Order fails to address how this will overlap with sage grouse conservation and the decades of work that have taken place to keep the bird of the Endangered Species List. Three years ago, the bird was close to being endangered, but federal and state plans to protect sage grouse habitat staved off a listing. The decision was hailed as a successful collaboration between states, federal agencies and private citizens, particularly in places like Montana, where a listing would have had dire impacts on ranching, energy development, and recreation.

The sagebrush habitat that sustains greater sage-grouse is the same that big game populations cross during their migrations, as well habitat and winter range. In Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, elk, and sage-grouse share millions of acres of important sagebrush steppe habitat. Many hunters see sage-grouse as the canary in the coal mine when it comes to the viability of sagebrush lands.

With the new administration’s focus on energy dominance, Secretary Zinke is set on rolling back the 2015 Federal Sage Grouse Plan to make changes that loosen regulations for development. This decision looms, despite the overwhelming support for the original plans that were developed with vigorous public input from hunters, farmers, ranchers, industry and local land managers across the West. Multiple use land management that protects public input, wildlife habitat, and access is on the chopping block.

At the end of the day, the recognition in the Secretarial Order of the importance connectivity of landscape by protecting migration corridors and winter range for big game in the West is a good start—but only a start. Hunters and anglers are once again called upon to restore the West’s cherished species. Your voice in support of the 2015 Federal Sage Grouse Plan will ensure we are on the right path to fully protect these lands and all the species that rely on them. By standing up for sage grouse and big game and giving the plans a chance to work, we can protect Montana’s working lands, wildlife, and our western way of life.

PROTECTING THE BACKBONE OF THE WORLD

By Marcus Strange
MWF Central MT Field Representative

Looking south from highway 2, in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, nestled between the Bob Marshall Wilderness and Glacier National Park is a public land gem. Comprising one hundred and thirty thousand acres of Montana backcountry, the Badger-Two Medicine is one of the most incredible landscapes in the world, a sanctuary for the wildlife we cherish and a crucial piece of the wildlife habitat puzzle that is the Rocky Mountain Front.

The Badger-Two Medicine is one of the most incredible landscapes in the world, a treasure that Montanans are blessed to have in our backyard. This area holds historical, cultural, and spiritual significance for the Blackfeet Tribe and all Montanans. For hunters and anglers, the Badger is a chance to work, we can protect Montana’s working lands, wildlife, and our western way of life.

Photo by Alec Underwood

By John Bradley

Photo by MWF

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Photo by MWF

Contact Marcus Strange at mstrange@mtwf.org.

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HELENA-LEWIS & CLARK FOREST PLAN ADVANCES

By Marcus Strange
MWF Central MT Field Representative

In 2018, the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest (HLCNF) will undergo a revision of its forest management plan. The plan will determine future management for nearly 2.8 million acres of public land that is crucial to hunters, anglers, and other recreational users.

The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest spans the Rocky Mountain Front and the Big Belt, Little Belt, and Snowy Ranges of central Montana. These lands provide numerous recreation opportunities including hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, biking, snowmobiling, caving, and many other activities.

These areas are also home to numerous species of flora and fauna. Several of Montana’s most iconic rivers flow through the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, and vital water sources for surrounding communities have their headwaters in the Forest. The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest is truly one of the great treasures of the West.

The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan will provide general direction for the management of lands in the forest over the next fifteen years. The current forest management plan has been in place for over 30 years. In that time much has changed in and around the forest making this revision vital for the future of our wildlife and wild spaces. Several important issues are facing these treasured lands and the next several months will be critical to future hunting and fishing opportunity.

One priority for Montana hunters and anglers in the Forest Plan revision is the protection of large unfragmented blocks of public land. These areas provide security habitat for wintering elk and deer, as well as water for communities like Helena, Great Falls, and Lewistown.

Under Forest Service planning rules, the agency is required to identify Recommended Wilderness Areas to protect these large intact areas.

The forest planning process is especially important in light of recent efforts by Senator Steve Daines and Representative Greg Gianforte to strip protections from Montana’s Wilderness Study Areas (see page /ref to Alec’s article). Areas within the HLCNF are in danger of having this status removed, in particular the Big Snowies and Middle Fork of the Judith. To remove protections for these landscapes would not only hurt hunting and fishing opportunities but would also affect the overall well-being of Montanans.

Per the United States Forest Service (USFS), the new forest plan will be set by utilizing the 2012 forest planning rule, which emphasizes collaboration and local input. Now, more than ever, Montanans need to stand up for their public lands and wildlife. The Montana Wildlife Federation has been and will continue to be heavily involved in the collaborative process that will protect the HLCNF for future generations. If the HLCNF is important to you, now is the time to get involved.

Marcus Strange is MWF’s Central MT Field Representative. Contact him at mstrange@mtwf.org.

THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM – A BENEFIT FOR FARMERS AND THE HUNTERS

By John Bradley
MWF Eastern MT Field Representative

Sportsmen, farmers, and ranchers all over the country want to maintain abundant fish and game populations, and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in the Farm Bill is one of the most successful private land conservation programs in our toolbox. By incentivizing private owners to repurpose their land, CRP has helped restore wildlife habitat and improve thousands of stream miles across the country since the beginning. Unfortunately, there’s little room left in CRP for private landowners who want to join, and so fish and wildlife are also at risk of losing needed habitat.

CRP pays farmers annual rental payments to take land out of production and establish grass and woody cover. Originally a program to combat soil erosion, CRP has transformed into the nation’s largest habitat restoration program on private lands, primarily in the Midwest and Great Plains. Though CRP is now capped at 24 million acres, the program maintained an average of 32 million acres from 1990 through 2010. Whether CRP acres will increase in the 2018 Farm Bill is yet to be seen and sportsmen and women need to be concerned—for the sake of fish, wildlife, and our sporting heritage.

Traditionally thought of as pheasant and whitetail cover, CRP acres in the northern plains states make up a vital share of nesting habitat for more than half of North America’s waterfowl. CRP is helping landowners to voluntarily restore and supplement sage grouse habitat across the West, providing a much needed boost to a species in decline. Across the country, multiple species including quail, wild turkeys, and black bear have also been rebounding thanks to the conservation of millions of acres of grasslands and buffers through CRP.

Lands enrolled in CRP also have a positive impact on water quality. This improvement means cleaner drinking water and better fish habitat downstream of CRP fields. If improved habitat and clean drinking water weren’t enough, many farmers, ranchers, and forest owners also open CRP acres to hunters and anglers in their communities through the voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program. This is a competitive grant program that incentivizes state and tribal governments to pay landowners for public access to private lands for hunting, fishing, and other recreation activities.

Montanans need to be engaged in the 2018 Farm Bill program. Major decisions regarding CRP are going to be determined in the next several months. Let Montana’s congressional delegation know that the program should be fully funded and that the acreage cap should be removed. America’s farmers, ranchers, conservationists, hunters and anglers all benefit from a stronger Conservation Reserve Program. Farmers and ranchers get a bigger tool in their tool box to stabilize their income on acres that are less productive. Conservationists see the benefit in more habitat for wildlife and higher populations of animals. Hunters see the benefits of more game on the land, better access opportunities, and more filled tags. This is a program that everyone can get behind.
Top-down Attack on Montana’s Public Lands

SEN. DAINES AND REP. GIANFORTE PUSH TO REPEAL WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

By Alec Underwood
MWF Western MT Field Rep

In 1977, Congress identified several wilderness study areas (WSA) on national forest areas across Montana. Similar areas have been identified on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands around the state. The wilderness study area status protects public access and maintains the habitat values of these public lands while they await congressional action.

Wilderness study areas are real places that matter to real people. Visit these lands and you will see that they are amazing places to recreate and places where elk and deer thrive. Thousands of people hunt and fish these lands each year. I personally learned how to elk hunt in the Sapphire wilderness study area and have had some amazing hunting experiences there.

Unfortunately, Montana’s wilderness study areas are under attack. Senator Steve Daines and Congressman Greg Gianforte have introduced legislation to unilaterally remove protections from 700,000 acres of wilderness study areas around the state. Senator Daines’ bill (S. 2206) would remove protections on five study areas on Forest Service lands. Congressman Gianforte has introduced a House version of that bill (H.R. 5148), as well as another bill (H.R. 5149) that would release 24 different study areas on BLM lands. These bills would open up public lands to more motorized access, mining, and oil and gas development, impairing their habitat value and closing off public access. Together, these bills would be the largest rollback of public land protections in Montana history.

Removing protections for wilderness study areas poses a threat to the people who use these public lands and the wildlife that lives there. The science is clear that roads and motorized use negatively impact elk and deer. Responsible sportsmen recognize that without the secure habitat provided by these lands, we would not have the same great hunting that exists today. The vast majority of Montana’s public lands are already open to motorized use, mining and oil and gas drilling. We don’t need to force these uses into these last few areas.

Permanent wilderness designation and public land management can be complicated topics. Whether you hunt, hike, bike, or snowmobile, we can all agree that the best way to make decisions about public lands is to all come to the table and work together. Neither Senator Daines or Congressman Gianforte held one public meeting to hear from Montanans prior to introducing their bills. Since introducing these bills, they have refused to meet with local sportsmen’s groups and other stakeholders.

It’s time for our elected officials to include all Montanans in the discussion of what will happen to wilderness study areas. Instead of divisive, top-down legislation, Senator Daines and Congressman Gianforte should support local efforts to find real agreements.

Alec Underwood is MWF’s Western Field Representative. Contact him at alec@mtwf.org.

Celebrating Another Year of Fighting for Wildlife

2018 MWF ANNUAL CELEBRATION & BUSINESS MEETING

By MWF Staff

Are you ready to celebrate Montana’s bountiful fish and wildlife, public lands, healthy streams and rivers, and hunting, fishing and outdoor heritage?

Join the Montana Wildlife Federation and your fellow conservationists to celebrate another year of protecting public lands, public access, and our wildlife resources on Friday, April 20 from 6:00-9:00 PM at the Placer Hotel in downtown Helena.

The MWF Annual Celebration is a great chance to meet fellow passionate outdoor enthusiasts and dedicated conservationists. MWF members and affiliate leaders from across the state will be in attendance to swap stories, talk shop, and share in the fun. The celebration will include great local beer, appetizers, inspiring remarks from our Federation’s leaders, and exciting merchandise raffles.

Tickets for the MWF Annual Celebration can be purchased online at www.montanawildlife.org or by calling 406-458-0227.

The following day, Saturday, April 21, MWF will hold our Annual Business Meeting at the Radisson Colonial Hotel. The Business Meeting will run from 9 AM to Noon. MWF Board members and delegates from MWF’s affiliate clubs will consider policy resolutions and elect the 2018-2019 Board of Directors. Saturday afternoon will be the first meeting of the new board.

All MWF members are encouraged to attend our Annual Celebration and any portion or all of the Annual Business Meeting. Watch MWF’s website at www.montanawildlife.org and our facebook page at facebook.com/montanawildlife for details.

MWF Board of Directors Needs YOU

MWF depends on the engagement of a volunteer Board of Directors to help set our agenda and manage our Federation. Serving on the Board is a great way to share your talent and expertise while also getting an insider view on important issues. Board members are expected to participate in 4-5 meetings a year and serve on one or more committees.

Several Board of Director seats are open for nomination and election at the MWF Annual Meeting on April 21, 2018. It’s not too late to throw your hat into the ring!

If you are interested in joining the Board of Directors, contact Nominations Committee Chair Kevin Maki at 406-868 8613.
ADDRESSING SELENIUM PROBLEMS IN KOOCANUSA

The north in the headwaters of the Kootenai drainage, Teck Resources operates five open pit coal mines in the Elk River drainage and has proposed expanding the mines. The mines already violate pollution standards for selenium and nitrates (from blasting).

Selenium is a trace mineral necessary as a micronutrient but potentially toxic in higher amounts. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standard for selenium is 1.5 micrograms/liter (mcg/l) but discharges below the mines average 45 mcg/l and run as high as 70 mcg/l. As a result, concentrations of selenium meet or exceed EPA limits in Lake Koocanusa and tissue samples from fish show increasing levels of the mineral. High levels of selenium have been shown to affect the skeletal structure and reproductive systems of fish.

Bottom dwelling burbot, already hit hard by reservoir fluctuations, are particularly exposed to selenium precipitates. Gerrard or Kamloops rainbow trout - which exceed 20 pounds in downstream Kootenay Lake - seldom exceed five years of age and five pounds in Koocanusa. Top predators like Gerrards and bull trout bioaccumulate pollutants. Endangered white sturgeon downstream of Libby Dam are also particularly sensitive to selenium.

A treatment plant built by Teck Resources was shown to actually convert selenium to a more biologically degradable form, but the plant is now shut down. Treatment of discharge from waste rock will now need to essentially go on forever.

SPRING 2018 9

HABITAT MONTANA: MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

By Nick Gevock
MWF Conservation Director

Last year the Montana Wildlife Federation was a leader in building a sporting coalition to restore full authority for the Habitat Montana to protect critical wildlife habitat. This popular program uses a small portion of hunting license fees for habitat protection, through conservation easements, select land purchases and for fishing access sites.

Hunters worked hard over two decades ago to establish Habitat Montana. It followed decades of habitat protection by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks that helped put key tracts of winter range for deer, elk and other wildlife into public hands. It also bought easements that kept the lands private but ensured they wouldn’t be subdivided and degraded for wildlife. Habitat Montana provided a steady funding source to fund projects.

We look back now with gratitude that people before us had the foresight to see the value in protecting important lands. It has helped lead to the abundance of wildlife we enjoy today. There are more elk than there have ever been in modern times in Montana, and winter range is essential to maintaining those herds.

That abundance has resulted in Montana enjoying the longest general hunting season in the West. We have six weeks of archery hunting for deer and elk. And our rifle season lasts five weeks. Habitat protection has been a cornerstone of that. People talk about all kinds of issues when it comes to wildlife protection – disease, weather, and predation – the lists goes on. And those are factors. At the end of the day, if wildlife has traditional migration routes available, secure habitat to calve or fawn and to find food and water- it will thrive.

Montana’s system of Wildlife Management Areas, as well as protected private lands provide habitat for numerous wildlife species. These lands are important for more than game species. Smaller mammals, songbirds and other native wildlife species benefit from these projects.

Now that the program is renewed, MWF and our conservation partners have turned our attention to getting other projects approved. In recent months, the State Land Board has rejected one conservation easement (a key parcel on a private ranch south of Boulder that elk move through often) that would have protected from subdivision. That easement would have guaranteed public hunting access and helped keep the corridor open in perpetuity. Montana FWP is still looking at options to complete the project.

Just last month, the board delayed action on the Horse Creek Complex Conservation Easement in Wibaux and Dawson counties, south of Glendive. This project would permanently protect more than 15,000 acres of prime mule deer, antelope and upland bird hunting lands. Taken with the adjoining inholding public lands, it would have established nearly 20,000 acres of public hunting opportunity and Senedd Testeg should be commended for their work on engaging the State Department to act on this important issue. MWF will continue working with other conservation organizations in the region to protect this important fishery.

A resident of Kalispell, Jim Vashro is a retired fisheries manager and president of Flathead Wildlife.

Contact him at jsjvash@montanasky.us.
Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission Commits to Additional Year, Then Review
SECOND FULL YEAR OF SHOULDER SEASONS

By Nick Gevock
MWF Conservation Director

Montana has just completed the second full year of shoulder seasons for elk in more than 40 hunting districts. The data is still being collected, but already hunters are expressing some serious concerns with the long-running rifle seasons in addition to the five-week general season that is the longest in the West.

A shoulder season is a rifle season put in the hunting regulation booklet that runs outside of the standard five week general season. First implemented as a pilot project in a handful of districts in late 2015, it ran in 43 hunting districts throughout the state in 2016 and 2017. Shoulder seasons can span from Aug. 15 to Feb. 15, and are almost entirely centered on private lands and for cow elk.

They’re meant to supplement the harvest during the general season, and not replace it. A key element to the shoulder seasons, because experience from years past of late seasons proved that they were ineffective at effectively managing elk numbers.

Stepping back, it’s important to point out some other elements of shoulder seasons. They can only be held in districts that are well over the objective population laid out in the state elk plan. The “objective” is a target number of elk desired in any hunting district. It’s based on the habitat, but also strongly considers landowners’ tolerance for elk. The number is a social construct. It’s also a compromise. Hunters and wildlife enthusiasts like a lot of elk, because it means significant hunting and wildlife watching opportunity. Landowners in some cases suffer severe crop and fence damage when elk numbers burgeon. While landowners like elk, they also don’t like the significant damage that can result when herds grow too large.

Wedged in the middle is Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The agency has to balance the needs of everyone, and constantly walks a tightrope to keep every side of the issue engaged, and satisfied. It’s a balancing act.

Shoulder seasons were designed as years ago learned that late seasons alone could not get the job done to kill enough elk to meet our harvest objectives. Simply wasn’t working. Montana had elk hunting for nearly six months out of the year, and yet elk numbers continued in the vast majority of districts to go up.

It illustrates that effective elk management requires a broad harvest across the landscape to spread out the elk and spread out hunters.

It also illustrates three rules of elk management: we can’t kill a season’s worth of elk in one week; we can’t kill a district’s worth of elk on one ranch; and elk beget elk, meaning once they find a refuge they keep showing up and more follow.

Montana FWP has collaring data showing this. Elk in the Madison Valley were showing up on ranches earlier and earlier and staying later. Elk even started calving in the valley. They were responding to hunting pressure. It shows that elk management has to look at their distribution and not just the total number of elk in any district.

What does that mean for shoulder seasons? The Fish and Wildlife Commission in February approved the 2018-2019 shoulder seasons, and several districts were added. In some existing districts, the season was extended to Feb. 15.

Commissioners also made it clear that they want the data from how these are working. That doesn’t just mean how many elk are being killed, but also whether we’re meeting the criteria for general season harvest. If a district isn’t meeting that criteria, it will need to go away under the performance standards laid out in the shoulder seasons. FWP will have to continue to look at other management tools, including cow-only elk hunting in select districts to focus harvest exclusively on the reproducing part of the herd.

If we’re going to have effective elk management, we need that strong partnership between hunters and landowners. That will help us affect elk distribution and get the harvest we need, while maintaining our fair-chase hunting traditions.

Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act Sees Progress
SENATOR TESTER URGES MONTANA DELEGATION TO SUPPORT

Alec Underwood
MWF Western Field Rep.

On March 15th, Senator John Tester announced progress on his legislation the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (BCSA). The legislation received a hearing in the Energy and Natural resources sub-committee in early February where Tester made his pitch for the bi-partisan supported project that has maintained over 100 jobs and brought millions of dollars of federal investments to local communities like Seeley Lake.

Crafted by Montanans and a variety of different stakeholder groups, the project would help preserve almost 80,000 acres of high quality fish and wildlife habitat in the Blackfoot and Clearwater valleys while allowing for timber restoration and recreation areas for motorized and mechanized use. "The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act is a perfect example of what happens when Montanans work together," said Tester. "I’m excited to see momentum building for our bill. It’s a common-sense solution to break a decades-long forest management stalemate and protect some of the most special places in the country for our kids and grandkids."

A new poll sponsored by Montana Wildlife Federation showed continued shows continued strong support for the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project and collaborative efforts to protect wildlife habitat, recreational access, and timber jobs. The poll found:

Montanans continue to support the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project, which would protect wildlife habitat, ensure access to public land for hunting, fishing, and other recreation, and support timber harvesting to create jobs and improve forest health. 68% support the project.

Continued on page 12
**WELCOME MWF’S TWO NEW AFFILIATES**

By MWF Staff

MWF is excited to welcome two new affiliates, the Western Bear Foundation (WBF) and Traditional Bowhunters of Montana (TBM), to the federation family.

WBF is a wildlife conservation organization “dedicated to the protection & development of bears, bear habitat, & bear hunting in the Rocky Mountain West.” With a strong conservation ethic, a focus on scientific management, and a good neighbor attitude, WBF will provide support not only on bear related issues, but on many critical conservation issues facing the future of Montana’s wildlife.

The TBM is a group dedicated to the preservation and promotion of traditional bowhunting values in Montana and beyond. TBM promotes high ethical standards & values for the hunting & taking of wild game by the means of bow and arrow and provides fellowship to those who wish to pursue a traditional bowhunting lifestyle. TBM will be a strong asset in protecting Montana’s wildlife through the promotion of hunting ethics and conservation.

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**PLEASE WELCOME OUR NEWEST STAFF MEMBER**

Sonya Smith has joined the Montana Wildlife Federation as the new Outreach Coordinator. Sonya gained valuable knowledge working for the National Park Service as a Visual Information Specialist for over four years. She has a degree in Journalism from the University of Nevada, Reno and is working on her Master of Science in Environmental Studies, Writing and Communication. She is excited about using her experience and educational background to grow a strong outreach program for MWF.

Sonya is an outdoor enthusiast who enjoys hiking, rafting, climbing, and fishing. She is thrilled to be able to amplify the voices of those who care about the places and wildlife that make Montana such an amazing place to live.

You can reach Sonya at (406) 458-0227 ext.105 or at sonya@mtwf.org

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**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS DESERVE YOUR ATTENTION**

Continued from page 4

that help support local economies.

This planning process represents a rare opportunity to protect some of our last remaining undeveloped lands from fragmentation and development. Right now, we are expecting the draft to be released from D.C. in the coming months, but your opportunity to help safeguard one of the most unique and scenic landscapes in North America is now. Our public lands need strong voices, if we want future generations to have the same, if not better, opportunities to hunt, fish, hike, and explore the Missouri Breaks, every public land user needs to get involved. Contact the BLM Lewistown Field Office and urge them to conserve the best backcountry in the Missouri River Breaks by prioritizing conservation in the Lewistown RMP.

You can send comments to the Lewistown Field Office here: blm_mt_lewistown_rmp@blm.gov

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**WHAT IS THE MONTANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION?**

The Montana Wildlife Federation is a statewide conservation organization dedicated to promoting wildlife, wildlife habitat, and sportsmen’s interests. Our 5,000 members include Montanans and others around the nation.

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Public Land/Water Access Association
Rosedale/Tresa, Wildlife

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**JOIN TODAY! VISIT US AT WWW.MONTANAWILDLIFE.ORG**
CHALLENGES OF HUNTING WITH KIDS

By Amanda Morgan
MWF Member

I can relate to parents who just want to get away and do the things they did before kids. Things like waking up well before the crack of dawn, with a few hours of sleep on opening day because that’s all you’ve looked forward to for weeks; a well-constructed plan on where to go, what to bring, with only the road in your way. Making a quick cup of coffee, loading up the truck and just going; not a single care other than arrow meeting fur. Now as a new parent, it’s a massive circus plan to even have a half day hunt. Diapers, snacks, socks, blankets!!! And then making sure you’re out of the woods with enough time to meet up with everyone else’s schedule for who is watching the baby. It is hard and all I want to do is scream and ignore responsibilities once in the woods. I can relate to that resentment when the spouse has time and the means to go out and hunt for the day.

That panicking feeling that September is closing in and there is nothing done. The hunting pack is not put together, you hadn’t shot your bow nearly enough, you are not in shape to tackle the mountains to chase elk. The heartbeat of a beautiful mid-September day spent playing with jingle toys indoors. That fleeting season that seems like it literally just started, is now coming to an end and barely a full day was spent chasing a single species. Trust me, I get it.

The 2017 hunting season was extremely hard for us. The 2016 season wasn’t any easier on a very pregnant woman due in October. My 2017 hunting season was pretty much cooled off and there is nothing done. The 2017 season that seems like it literally just started, is now coming to an end and barely a full day was spent chasing a single species. Trust me, I get it.

The 2017 hunting season was extremely hard on this new mom. The 2016 season wasn’t any easier on a very pregnant woman due in October. My 2017 hunting season was pretty much cooled off and there is nothing done. The 2017 season that seems like it literally just started, is now coming to an end and barely a full day was spent chasing a single species. Trust me, I get it.

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