



PAVING THE NORTH FORK ROAD?

by John Frederick

There is a controversy today in Flathead County over paving of the lower ten miles of the North Fork Road between Canyon Creek and Camas Road. In 1982 an environmental impact statement (EIS) was done on paving this section of the North Fork Road, complete with a hearing. The majority of residents/landowners of the North Fork did not want the road paved for a variety of reasons, from adverse affects on wildlife to a possible change of lifestyles as more people visited the North Fork and more people bought land and moved in as a result of the new road.

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Today the ten-mile section of road "slated" for paving is not the horror it was in 1982, because in the mid-1980s the roadbed was rebuilt. It is relatively smooth today as the county has kept that section in good repair. If the county grades the road with occasional maintenance, it is smooth; but if the county does not grade the road it can be rough. It is as simple as that.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a jeopardy opinion on the North Fork paving in 1980 and it was expanded to a larger document in 1982, saying that the increased development associated with a paved road would harm the threatened grizzly bear and the endangered gray wolf. The wolf is doing better now, but the grizzly bear is doing worse with the loss of ten bears in the ecosystem last summer and several more lost a few weeks ago. The jeopardy statement will be reviewed when

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Paving the North Fork Road? (continued)

requested by the "action agency", probably the U.S. Department of Transportation. This decision will take five to six months and will be binding on the project.

The reasons for paving the road are obvious: cheaper long-term maintenance, dust abatement, and a smoother ride—but at what cost? Will it hurt the grizzly bears? Probably so, as more humans are pushing into prime grizzly habitat. Educating tourists and new residents is fine, but usually lags behind the problems created. In spite of the best efforts, bears in contact with people keep losing and few people want that. A primitive, gravel road keeps the status quo.

What else will happen to the North Fork of the Flathead River valley? Accelerated increase in river use and many more people will want to buy land and build homes (a realtor's dream). The travel time saved by the paved road will allow North Forkers to commute to Columbia Falls for work. In other words, the North Fork becomes more accessible in many ways, which includes increased hunting and fishing, increased firewood gathering and huckleberry picking, and increased use of the back country.

Two things seem to have been forgotten in the paving issue: a gravel road is safer than a paved road by virtue of slower speeds and, if the county commissioners are concerned about dust abatement, they could have used benign substances to dust-coat at least those places where dust may reach the river.

Is this paving necessary? No. Will it help Columbia Falls merchants along the way? Maybe, but it is often easier and shorter to enter the Park from West Glacier. Merchants at West Glacier are probably not thrilled with a new road that bypasses them.

What can you do if you don't like paving of the North Fork Road? If you are a resident and/or taxpayer in Flathead County, write Commissioner Dale Williams, 800 South Main, Kalispell MT 59928, or phone the County Commissioners' office at 406-758-5503 to register your dissatisfaction.

It was learned recently that Representative Rick Hill (R-MT) has arranged for an appropriation in the House and that Senator Conrad Burns managed to get money in the Senate for the amount of \$2.4 million. Both appropriations have come out of subcommittee, but not yet out of full committee. Hopefully, Congress is usually more open to giving the public information than it was this time. You may write, e-mail, or phone these congressmen, as well as Senator Baucus (D-MT). It would be good to send copies to other congressmen, as well.

It is not over yet . . . unless you do nothing.

Editorial

by Howard L. Harrod, NFPA President

The North Fork Preservation Association is a community organization that plays an important role in this special valley. In the past few years, social forces impinging upon the larger bioregion have increased in both number and intensity. As we enter the next century, these forces will need to be managed in a way that leads to preserving the values this organization seeks to embody.

The pressures generated by various human uses are often contradictory and sometimes lead in directions that must be resisted and sometimes opposed. Before resistance and opposition become our fundamental responses we need to continue the campaign to persuade people to find creative ways to live within rather than over against the rich environment that makes up North Fork valley.

Learning to live within our environment often requires painful modification of attitudes and behaviors that are more appropriate to living in cities and small towns. Such changes require that we develop sensitivities to the ways we construct and occupy our human spaces. For example, we must come to understand the deeper significance of our direct interaction with special plant and animal communities. Central to that significance is the responsibility to protect their habitats and, in some instances, to expand them. The North Fork Preservation Association has a role to play in fostering such attitudes and helping give shape to the behaviors that are required of all of us as we move into the new century.

More information on the North Fork Road paving issue is available online at <http://www.nfhostel.com/nfpa/nfroad/>

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Paving the North Fork Road? (continued)

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR MONTANA FEDERAL LEGISLATORS:

Senator Max Baucus, 511 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510.
Phone: 202-224-2651, Fax: 202-228-3687.
Kalispell office: 220 1st Ave E, Phone: 756-1150.
E-mail: max@baucus.senate.gov Web site: <http://www.senate.gov/~baucus/>

Senator Conrad Burns, 187 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510.
Phone: 202-224-2644, Fax: 202-224-8594, TDD: 202-224-8616.
Kalispell office: 575 Sunset Blvd., Suite 101, Phone 257-3360, Fax: 257-3974.
E-mail: conrad_burns@burns.senate.gov Web site: <http://www.senate.gov/~burns/>

Rep. Rick Hill, 1609 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515.
Phone: 202-225-3211, Fax: 202-225-5687.
Missoula office: 200 East Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802, Phone: 406-543-9550
E-mail: rick.hill@mail.house.gov Web site: <http://www.house.gov/hill/>

AND A LIST OF THE OTHERS INVOLVED . . .

Representatives:

Subcommittee on Transportation
2358 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515-6027

Frank R. Wolf, VA, Chairman
Tom Delay, TX
Ralph Regula, OH
Harold Rogers, KY
Ron Packard, CA
Sonny Callahan, AL.
Tod Tiahrt, KS
Kay Granger, TX

Martin Olav Sabo, MN.
John W. Oliver, MA.
Ed Pastor, AZ.
Carolyn C. Kilpatrick, MI.
José E. Serrano, NY
James E. Clyburn, SC
Robert Aderholt, AL.

Senators:

Subcommittee on Transportation
511 Hart SOB
Washington, DC 20510

Richard C. Shelby, AL, Chairman
Pete V. Domenici, NM
Christopher S. Bond, MO
Slate Gorton, WA.
Frank Lutenberg, Ranking Member, NJ
Robert Byrd, WV
Harry Reid, NV
Patty Murray, WA

Arlen Specter, PA
Robert F. Bennett, UT
Ben Nighthorse Campbell, CO

Barbara Mikulski, MD
Herb Kohl, WI

GRIZZLY MORTALITIES: RED FLAGS OVER GLACIER

by Brian Peck

(From *Bear News*, Vol. 14, No. 1, a publication of the Great Bear Foundation, P.O. Box 9383, Missoula, MT 59807)

If you were a grizzly trying to survive and reproduce in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) around Glacier, 1998 was not a banner year. By August 1, there were ten grizzlies dead at human hands, six of them females. The Endangered Species Coordinator for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks was quoted as saying he wasn't alarmed and that "it hasn't raised a red flag yet."

In a responding letter to the editor, I suggested, "With allowable mortality thresholds breached before August 1, a poor berry crop predicted, and big game season waiting in the wings, now might be an excellent time for state (and federal) wildlife officials to find their supply of red flags." It was not to be.

When the last of the bears turned in for the winter, the toll had reached 27 known human-caused grizzly mortalities, ten being female bears. One has to go back to 1974 before finding a worse year (37 mortalities – 17 from the then legal hunting season). If we exclude mortalities from such legal hunts, we find no years since 1967 with more dead bears than 1998. As many Great Bear Foundation (GBF) members know, the 1993 Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan sets allowable mortality levels for each year based on estimated minimum population levels. The assumption is that breaching these thresholds is to be avoided, and the Plan says that any ecosystem which does so for two consecutive years cannot be considered recovered. The 1998 deaths are nearly double allowable mortality and mean the NCDE has breached its allowable level for females in 1992, 1995, 1997, and 1998. (Yellowstone has broken its thresholds in four of the last five years.)

Grizzlies are one of the slowest reproducing large mammals in North America, perhaps sharing that status with the musk ox. Females around Glacier often don't breed until they are five or six years old, then reproduce on average every third year and don't replace themselves in the population until they are ten years old or more.

Reward!

The National Audubon Society is offering up to \$15,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the individual who shot and killed "Louie."

Given that few bears live (let alone reproduce) 25 years, the impact of excessive mortality becomes clear. Studies in the NCDE show even larger grizzly populations (440+) cannot sustain human-caused mortalities beyond six percent. The 1998 numbers easily exceeded that, and, unfortunately, figures from throughout the Northern Rockies indicated 85-94 percent of all known grizzly deaths are caused by humans.

So, what caused this year of unusual mortalities? While three of the first deaths were caused by spring black bear hunters (two mistaken ID, one self-defense), there can be little doubt the underlying theme in most cases was a near total failure of most berry crops, sending both black and grizzly bears into expanded "emergency habitat" in search of food. Such severe food failures, although natural, are probably infrequent, yet bears extending their home ranges in search of food are increasingly running into more roads, subdivisions, and people.

Given that such failure of bear foods will recur, here are a few GBF suggestions which could change the results:

1. Require anyone hunting black bears in the NCDE to attend a class on black bear and grizzly identification, and to pass a proficiency test. Those who kill grizzlies in any way should be subject to substantial fines.
2. Expand state and federal wildlife agency educational efforts aimed at encouraging all NCDE hunters to carry the proper bear spray . . . and to know how to use it.



"Stahr" and her cub, "Louie", in 1994.

Stahr lost three cubs in 1998 due to undetermined causes. Louie did not survive the year either. He was poached – shot from behind. (Photo by Becky Haag.)

3. Agencies should drop their public “ho-hum” attitude in the face of substantial grizzly mortalities, which sends the incorrect message to citizens that the bear deaths are no big deal.
4. Clear, specific management steps need to be instituted by all agencies as a consequence of approaching and surpassing mortality limits. These should include step-by-step standards in education, sanitation, access, facility management, and enforcement.
5. In the NCDE, many bears have been lured into settled areas where they are habituated, food-conditioned, and killed because of improper sanitation. It is imperative for both state and federal agencies to establish a zero tolerance policy for repeat offenders.
6. Severe food years remind us that the Recovery Zone boundaries in every ecosystem have more to do with politics than with the long-term habitat requirements of grizzlies. The US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee must realize “emergency habitat” will be vital in those years, and such habitat areas should be recognized and protected in the Recovery Plan as integral to grizzly recovery.

GRIZZLIES ON THE BRINK IN BRITISH COLUMBIA?

(From *Silvertip Tracks*, a publication of Brown Bear Resources, 222 North Higgins, Missoula, MT 59802)

“Unless steps are taken now to conserve grizzly bear populations in British Columbia, this animal could disappear from our landscape forever.” These are not the words of an environmental organization, but the words of the British Columbia Government in the introduction to its “Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy.” The BC Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy was launched in June 1995, with a large public relations campaign and a promise of “Grizzlies Forever.” Yet, over three years later, the most important ‘steps’ outlined in the Strategy are still a very long way from being implemented. In fact, in a recent independent scientific review, bear biologists concluded that, as it is, the BC Grizzly Conservation Strategy is very likely to contribute to the demise of grizzly bear populations in the province; a far cry from the Strategy’s first goal, to “maintain in perpetuity the diversity and abundance of grizzly bears and ecosystems on which they depend.”

“Southern BC grizzly bear populations are in an even more precarious state than that which led to populations extinctions in the United States.”

Grizzly bears in BC are considered ‘threatened’ or ‘at risk’ of endangerment by the Federal Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and the provincial government. Unlike their neighbors in the United States, there is no Endangered Species legislation in BC; the government maintains species protection is covered under the provincial Forest Practices Code (FPC), implemented in 1996. As such, the Ministry of Environment’s Conservation Strategy defers protection of grizzly bear habitat needs to the Ministry of Forests and the FPC. However, protection of grizzlies under the FPC is inherently problematic as its mandate is to establish “certainty around fibre flow,” and bio-diversity protection cannot impact existing logging levels by more than 4 percent. As an example of the extent to which the FPC’s emphasis on fibre flow takes priority over grizzly bear conservation, the Canadian portions of the Selkirk Mountains and Cabinet-Yak grizzly bear populations, both listed as threatened or endangered on the US side of the border, are designated under the FPC as “Low Bio-Diversity Emphasis”, which is assigned to areas

where primary management objectives are timber supply. In the recent review of the Conservation Strategy, bear biologists state, “Southern BC grizzly bear populations are in an even more precarious state than that which led to populations extinctions in the United States.”

Given the increasing threat of habitat loss and fragmentation in the province, a growing number of scientists and conservationists are concerned that the ongoing legal hunting of grizzlies could be pushing them to the brink. As far back as the 1970s, bear biologists were warning that the BC grizzly bear population was being over-hunted. In 1979, the BC Government promised to reduce the hunting quota to 200 grizzlies a year, but the promise was never delivered. Then, in 1990, came two reports, one by the BC Government’s own Wildlife Branch, the other by the COSEWIC. Both found that the annual allowable take had been exceeded in large parts of the province during the mid-to-late 80’s.

The BC Government promised to reduce grizzly bear mortality from all sources to 4 percent of the provincial population. This was achieved, however, not by reducing the actual number of kills, but by bringing in a new methodology for estimating grizzly bear populations. It led to a near doubling of the official population estimates for the province overnight, from 6-8,000 to 10-13,000. The new

methodology, which is still in use today, is based on a habitat suitability model that is an assessment of how many bears an area could potentially support, not how many it actually does support. Furthermore, the 4 percent quota does not take into account illegal or 'conservation' kills.

Recently, the BC government announced the closure of four East Kootenay management jurisdictions to grizzly hunting. Although this was welcome news indeed, it is not enough. A moratorium on all grizzly hunting in the province is needed in order to provide time for a comprehensive survey of bear populations, and for habitat protection measures to be implemented. The government has a long way to go before it can live up to its promise of "Grizzlies Forever", but enacting a moratorium on grizzly hunting would be a prudent first step in the right direction.

WHAT IS GOING ON WITH FORDING COAL?

In five to ten years Fording Coal planned to start production on a coal mine in Southeast British Columbia along waterways that flowed into the North Fork of the Flathead River. This could cause major siltation problems and bring development activities into a remote area.

According to Dan Miller, Minister of Energy and Mines and Minister Responsible for Northern Development and British Columbia, "There are no plans by Fording Coal Ltd., or any mining company, to open a coal mine in the Flathead Valley [of BC]." It sounds too good to be true.

And in a report from NFPA member Cole Milstead . . .

I have been researching and gathering more information on the potential mining by Fording Coal Ltd... I finally spoke with Andrew Whale, Regional Manager in Cranbrook, British Columbia...

He told me Fording was "less than enthusiastic" about recent exploration into potential mining in southwest BC. Mr. Whale says he knows of no plans for mining by Fording for the next few years. Apparently, Fording does not like the quality and quantity of the coal they have explored in the southwest region. Mr. Whale mentioned that, of course, Fording could perhaps change their mind several years from now. He then assured me that the BC government, the state of Montana, and any parks potentially affected by any proposed mining would meet and environmental research would be done on the potential impact on the area. He added that the British Columbia government would not "screw up the parks" in either Canada or the United States. He told me not to worry because there are no plans for mining operations from any mining companies for now or in the near future near northwest Montana.

BC BORDER STATION REBUILD UNDERWAY

U.S. Geological Survey engineers and technicians have completed the first phase of a two-phase project to rebuild the flood-damaged monitoring station at the international border on the North Fork of the Flathead River.

The agency has extended the data collection probe, left high and dry by the flood-altered riverbed, into the current channel. The work allows USGS, the U.S. Weather Service and other agencies to obtain real-time information on the river's elevation and flow.

The next phase will require construction activities on both sides of the river to establish a new cableway, which allows USGS to gather detailed information about the river's discharge and water quality data.

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has made \$10,000 available to fund water quality data gathering and analysis, a sum USGS matched.

Construction funds were made available by a Congressional appropriation sponsored by Montana Senator Max Baucus. Due to a lack of funding assistance from British Columbia, an additional appropriation request is now being considered by Congress.

(From *Basin Watch*, the newsletter of the Flathead Basin Commission, Vol. 7, No. 1, Spring 1999)

North Fork Preservation Association Summer Schedule 1999

Questions about the NFPA and its activities may be directed to nfpa@nfhostel.com

Saturday, June 5, 9:00am at the Logging Creek trailhead. National Trails Day, Logging Creek Trail maintenance with Glacier National Park Associates. About 7 miles (11 km) of trail. Opens up first North Fork trail in Glacier for the season. John Frederick at 888-5241 or Roger Sommerville of Glacier National Park Associates at 844-3667.

Wednesday, July 7, 7:00pm at Sondreson Hall. North Fork Improvement Association and NFPA jointly hosting an educational program by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks' bear specialist Tim Manley and his Karelian bear dog, Tess. Very special.

Monday, July 12, 7:00pm at hostel. Board meeting to discuss the Inter Local Agreement meeting on July 15 and the NFPA Annual Meeting on July 31. Talk to President Howard Harrod for details. Everyone welcome!

Thursday, July 15, 6:30pm, at Sondreson Community Hall at Whale Creek. Inter Local Meeting hosted by the North Fork Preservation Association. Make your voice heard to all government agencies. Be there. Potluck and barbecue at 5:00pm.

Saturday & Sunday, July 17 & 18, 8:30am. Thoma Trail maintenance, overnight at historic Thoma lookout. Trails #18 & #15. Need sleeping bag, pad, water, gloves and food. Forest Service provides food for evening meal. Bring a tent if you don't wish to sleep with the mice in the lookout. Frank Vitale will use mules to pack supplies. This trail needs lots of work. Phone John Frederick at 888-5241 or Frank Vitale, evenings, at 892-2909.

Saturday, July 24 & 25, 9:00am at Tuchuck Campground on Trail Creek Road. Will work on the Review Mountain Trail with the Backcountry Horsemen and the Montana Wilderness Association. You may wish to stay overnight at the Tuchuck Campground to have a campfire with Backcountry Horsemen and MWA. For more information call Frank Vitale, evenings, at 892-2909.

Saturday, July 31, 6:30pm at Sondreson Hall. NFPA annual meeting, potluck, and election of officers. Program begins at approximately 8:00pm. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator Chris Servheen with program on "Where will the Grizzlies be in one hundred years?" Everyone welcome. Come.

NFPA Treasurer's Report from Treasurer Rachel Potter

Checking account balance 6/1/98	\$3,422.98
Expenses:	
NFIA for hall rental and mailings	100.00
Newsletter copying and postage	406.93
Flathead Regional Development Office for NF Plan mailings	130.88
High Country News Subscription, 3 year	69.00
Secretary of State incorporation fee	10.00
	(716.81)
Deposits	
Dues and contributions from 43 members	1505.00
Account balance 6/1/99	\$4211.17

1998-99 NFPA Board Members

Howard Harrod, President
Frank Vitale, Vice President
Rachel Potter, Secretary/Treasurer
Marca Stickles, Board Member
Paul Mueller, Board Member
John Frederick, Past President

*Newsletter Editors: John Frederick, Bill & Lois Walker; General Nuisance: Tom.
Visit the NFPA web site at [http://www.nfhostel.com/nfpa/!](http://www.nfhostel.com/nfpa/)*

If you are interested in serving on the board please speak to a board member. Elections are Saturday, July 31, during the annual meeting at Sondreson Hall.

I want to help protect the North Fork of the Flathead River Valley at the western edge of Glacier National Park.

_____	New	Name	_____
_____	Renewal	Address	_____

		Email	_____

I want to join the NFPA. Here is my membership fee of \$15.00/year _____
family membership of \$20.00/year _____

I want to help. Here is my donation of _____ for _____

Mail check or cash to: North Fork Preservation Association
c/o Rachel Potter
P.O. Box 394
Columbia Falls, MT 59912
(406) 892-2446

North Fork Preservation Association

P.O. Box 4
Polebridge MT 59928

Please pay your dues!