

# NORTH FORK MOUNTAIN PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

“...to protect the natural resources that make the North Fork an unparalleled environment for wildlife and people.”

Volume XXIII

Summer 2005

Number 1

## Montana politicians don't want BC coal mine

by Dorothy Koisch, Mineweb

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*This material was published on May 27, 2005 in the online edition of Mineweb ([www.mineweb.com](http://www.mineweb.com)), a mining journal based in South Africa. We're using it here because it provides a good overview of the issues surrounding the proposed open pit coal mine in the Canadian section of the North Fork drainage. It also includes material not published by other news sources. See the end of the article for some additional information and commentary.*

Montana's Governor has asked U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to get the International Joint Commission involved in the fight between his state and the British Columbia Ministry of Mines over a proposed open-pit coal mine near Fernie, B.C.

This is the second time in less than a year that a U.S. state has gone to the International Joint Commission to resolve a dispute concerning alleged U.S. pollution generated by Canadian mining operations.

Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer, U.S. Senator Max Baucus, D-Montana, and the Montana Legislature have all expressed their objection to the proposed coking coal project near the BC/Montana border. Cline Mining Corp., whose major shareholder is The Mitsui Matsushima group of Japan, has ownership of the property which was originally explored by Rio Algom in the 1970s.

*Links to this – and many other – articles can be found on the NFPA web site ([www.gravel.org](http://www.gravel.org)).*

The Sage Creek Area is located within the Rocky Mountain Front Ranges of southeast British Columbia near Foisey Creek in the Flathead watershed. The nearby town of Fernie, BC, already has five operating coal mines in the area. However, the proposed Sage Creek mine site, which is based in the East Kootenay Coal District, is located near two national parks, Waterton Lakes in Alberta and the Glacier National Park in Montana.

The Sage Creek Area is considered to be a surface-mineable deposit, which has Montanans in an uproar because they believe the coal project would cause environmental problems downstream in Montana. Cline Mining has constructed roads for exploration drilling access, but would require additional permits for any open pit mining, BC's Assistant Deputy Minister of Mining told the Canadian Press. *(The Deputy is being disingenuous here – see the commentary following this article. – ed.)*

Consulting Professional Geologist Geoffrey R. Jordan of Northwest Corporation suggested that Sage Creek contains an in-place resource of 154.4 million tonnes of coal (measured and indicated) in potentially surface mineable portions. It is estimated that as much as 2 million tonnes annually could be mined from the area.

The Flathead Basin Commission, which is appointed by Schweitzer, is pushing for an inventory of the Flathead Basin's current conditions for water quality and wildlife as they cross the U.S./Canadian border. In a letter to BC Premier Gordon Campbell, Schweitzer wrote, "We support the concept of a comprehensive environmental and socio-economic baseline assessment of the transboundary region prior to new fossil-fuel energy development."

Meanwhile, Campbell and Montana's former Governor Judy Martz had previously signed an environmental cooperation agreement. However, the provincial government apparently failed to notify the Montana Flathead Basin Commission that it had granted a permit to Cline Mining to explore for coal in the Foisey Creek basin, a tributary at the headwaters of the North Fork Flathead River, which flows into Montana. *(continued on page 2...)*

(continued from page 1...)

Last February, David Thomas, a Fernie, B.C., City Council Member, complained to The Daily Inter Lake newspaper that the provincial government had not even notified southeastern B.C. residents of Cline's exploration. "There's an absolute lack of transparency in British Columbia with respect to oil and gas and mining. And it always gets them into trouble and I don't understand why they don't learn. It's hard to keep a bulldozer secret," he declared.

Schweitzer urged the U.S. State Department to ask the International Joint Commission to determine the environmental feasibility of open pit mining and methane gas extraction in the area. The commission prevents and resolves disputes between the U.S. and Canada, and rules on applications for approval of projects affecting boundary and transboundary waters between the two nations. It also may regulate such projects.

Just a few months ago, the International Joint Commission was asked to intervene in the dispute between Washington State and the B.C. Provincial Government concerning whether the U.S. Superfund law can be applied to Teck Cominco's Trail Smelter in B.C. for its alleged role in the pollution of Lake Roosevelt and the Columbia River in Washington.

*Since the above material was published, it has become evident that Cline Mining had already quietly begun permitting for initial small-scale mining operations. This is an accelerated process requiring only an internal environmental assessment by Cline. Significantly, even low-volume mining operations would eliminate any possibility of acquiring the base-line data needed for doing a proper full-scale environmental assessment of the impact of mining operations on the North Fork watershed.*

*The next two articles provide additional background. The first is extracted from an email received from Steve Thompson on June 14, 2005. The second is from an email posted by Cecily McNeil on June 21.*

## **Cline's Fast-track Flathead Mine Plan**

By Steve Thompson

B.C. Minister of Mines Richard Neufeld publicly stated... that Cline's proposed Flathead coal mine in the Foisey Creek headwaters will require a "huge... long and involved process." This statement conflicts with the fast-track development plans recently announced by Cline. In fact, Cline intends to exploit the very loopholes and streamlined review process that Neufeld himself has championed province-wide to fast track this mine through the permitting process by the end of 2005. Cline has announced intentions to complete a truncated, internal environmental review process and construct the necessary infrastructure to allow commercial production to begin by the end of next summer.

In a May 2 filing under the B.C. Securities Act, Cline said it intends to seek mining approval under B.C.'s Small Mine Permit process. This means annual production would be less than 250,000 tons/year. The document states that all of the necessary paperwork, including Cline's internal environmental review, would be submitted to the province by the end of 2005. A separate securities filing dated April 28 says the company intends to begin commercial production by the end of summer 2006.

The April 28 filing clearly outlines Cline's intention on page 2: Build infrastructure and the mine and begin modest production under the expedited permitting process, which does not require an environmental assessment. Once the mine is in place and cash flow has begun to recoup start-up costs, the company would seek to increase production up to 2 million tons/year... Once the mine is permitted and producing, the company can then initiate the environmental assessment process (roughly 2 years to complete) to ramp up production. Meanwhile, the mining continues and any baseline environmental information has been lost due to the infrastructure construction and mining start-up, which typically have the greatest impact.

At a meeting... in Sparwood, Cline Mining representative Gord Gormley repeatedly emphasized the company's interest in getting the mine into production ASAP to take advantage of the strong Asian market for coking coal. This also may help explain the push for fast-track approval.

Cline has also filed a 70-page technical report on the geology and resources of the Foisey Creek coal deposit, conducted for Cline by GR Technical Services... It concludes on page 63 that the coal deposit "appears to be suitable for open pit development under prevailing regulatory, economic and marketing conditions." It has become apparent that Cline is moving aggressively in this direction.

*Steve Thompson is the Glacier Park Manager of the Northern Rockies Regional Office of the National Parks Conservation Association.*

## PCI Coal: Bad News For the North Fork?

By Cecily McNeil

I've done some reading about PCI (Pulverized Coal Injection), the type of coal that has been found at the Cline Mine site, apparently.

Here is the relevant info summarized:

My research shows that finding PCI coal (Pulverized Coal Injection) is probably not good news for the North Fork.

PCI is in increasing demand; it is cheaper to use because easier to mill; *and* it reduces CO2 emissions in the blast furnace process. This is seen as important in the era of the Kyoto treaty. In view of this, the demand for PCI is going up – doubled since 1990. In comparison, anthracite is declining in imports.

PCI seems to be *the* coking coal of the future, and the mills of China and Japan are hungry for it. No more recession over there – which was all that saved us from the mine ten years ago.

Like other coal mines, PCI mines produce acid and dust. In New Zealand, a PCI mine polluted at least one river, the Ngakawau River, where water quality was acknowledged by the mine operators in 2004 to be “unacceptable at times.”

But PCI is the metallurgical coal of the future according to the market analysts of the coal industry, especially now that Asia is the steel producer of the world. Their suppliers are Australia and Canada. (You can find all this on the Internet under PCI coal.)

Sorry to send these ill tidings, but I think it is important that we see PCI coal for its true potential rather than being mistakenly optimistic. The world has moved on since the Sage Creek explorations.

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## The Kootenai Connection to the North Fork

By John Frederick

For twenty-five years, I've heard of the Indian trail that was under or near Trail Creek Road in the North Fork of the Flathead River valley near Canada. I visualized two or three people walking on the trail now and then. Instead, according to my reading, this trail was “The Buffalo Trail” for the band of Kootenai Indians in the Tobacco Valley near where Eureka is today. The trail was 66 miles long and took ten days by horse. Five to six hundred horses and eighty lodges made the trip twice a year. The trail went from the Canadian border above Eureka down to Grave Creek, across the Bald Mountain Pass into the North Fork valley along Yakinikak and Trail Creeks, across the North Fork of the Flathead River up Kishenehn, then (in Canada) Kishenehna Creek to South Kootenai Pass to buffalo country where they hunted and dried the meat into jerky. In winter, they went by snowshoe, branching south before South Kootenai Pass up Akamina Creek and Pass to find the buffalo. This route was shorter and took nine days.

The Kootenai did this for centuries until a few years after 1887, the first year when no buffalo could be found. A little later, in 1895, Waterton became a park and, in 1910, Glacier National Park was established, eventually ending the large hunting parties.

Well over a hundred years later there remain a surprising number of Kootenai names on creeks, passes and mountains in the North Fork area. They were recorded on maps by the U. S. boundary survey party that began work in the region in 1860 with the help of many Kootenai. (A British survey team later checked on the work for Canada.) Yakinikak, Tuchuck, Nasukoin (changed from Nasu'kin), Kishenehn, Kishenehna, Akamina, Kintla, Akokala and Numa are some of the Kootenai names in use today.

On Thursday, May 12, 2005, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal council endorsed the Winton Weydemeyer Wilderness, adopting a traditional Kootenai name, Ksanka Amakis, which they translated as Kootenai Territory.

If you are interested in the history of the Kootenai Trail, author and historian Darris Flanagan of Grave Creek will speak about the Indian trail that went along the Grave, Yakinikak and Trail Creeks at the annual meeting of NFPA at 7:30 pm at the Community Hall on Saturday, July 30.

Darris Flanagan's book, *Indian Trails of the Northern Rockies*, is available at Books West in Kalispell and the Bookworks in Whitefish. It can also be ordered through major online booksellers, such as Amazon.com. Much of the book centers on the Grave/Yakinikak/Trail/Kishenehn/Kishenehna Creeks trail.

## Progress On the North Fork Neighborhood Plan

After eight months of work, the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee has prepared a draft of the North Fork Neighborhood Plan. The draft will be presented to the Flathead County Planning & Zoning Office for their input as to any possible revisions to comply with the State of Montana Growth Policy Guidelines.

Following recommendations from the County Planning and Zoning Office, the document would then be presented to all North Fork landowners for review, comments and possible further revisions. Once the draft Neighborhood Plan has gone through the review process and any further revisions have been made, it would then be submitted to the County Planning Board for its recommendations, prior to submission to the County Commissioners.

The Neighborhood Plan itself would have no effect on current North Fork zoning, but would serve the dual purpose of acting as a guide for future planning decisions and to ensure that the planning process continues to be driven by all landowners.

## Commissioner Gary Hall Still Wants the North Fork Road Paved

In response to a caller, Flathead County Commissioner Gary Hall said the last week of May on KOFI Radio that he and a group of North Forkers were working toward paving the North Fork Road to Camas Creek Road. "People want it paved," he said. Gary Hall said letters were coming in wanting paving and he was working on this.

A North Forker phoned in to say, "Most people don't want it paved... I know, because I have lived here for thirty years."

Who would pay for this paving is unclear. The county doesn't have the money and the Federal Highway Department has many hoops to jump through, including an Environmental Impact Statement, before the feds would release any funds.

The County Commissioners are Gary Hall, Joe Brenneman and Robert (Bob) Watne. The address is 800 South Main, Kalispell, MT 59901. You could address a letter to Gary Hall, but be certain the other Commissioners have a copy.

Gary Hall's email address is [gHall@co.flathead.mt.us](mailto:gHall@co.flathead.mt.us) and Joe Brenneman's is [jbrenneman@co.flathead.mt.us](mailto:jbrenneman@co.flathead.mt.us). Bob Watne has an email address, but he doesn't check it often. Consequently, his email should be sent to [enelson@co.flathead.mt.us](mailto:enelson@co.flathead.mt.us), who will print the email and give it to him.

Gary Hall should have a few letters to counterbalance the pro-paving letters he has gotten and the influence of people Gary is working with to get it paved... Perhaps you could write one?

### Rally The Troops!

At its July meeting, the North Fork Improvement Association decided to hold a vote during their annual meeting, August 6, on whether the North Fork Road should be paved. The vote will be considered to be the decision of the North Fork. Consider paying your \$10 dues to: NFIA Secretary-Treasurer Pat Cole, 14405 North Fork Road, Polebridge, MT 59928. Then attend the meeting. Don't forget your NFPA dues as well.

## Volunteers Needed For New Expanded Common Loon Monitoring Program In Glacier National Park

Glacier National Park is in the process of developing a new citizen science program that includes organizing volunteers to assist in gathering better information on loons. We need volunteers to help us determine the use of lakes and nesting success of Common Loons in Glacier NP. Volunteers can help in one of two ways: (1) volunteer to determine if a particular lake has single loons, paired loons, or loons with young on Glacier Loon Day (July 16, 2005), and/or (2) monitor one lake periodically throughout the nesting season (May through August) to begin to elucidate factors affecting nesting success. Volunteers will count loons and document loon behavior. Participants will: (1) learn to discriminate between Common Loons and other waterfowl; (2) be introduced to the current state of knowledge about the distribution of loons in Glacier, loon breeding biology, the potential impacts of recreationists on loon population health, and management concerns for Common Loons at Glacier; and (3) be taught how to observe the birds to determine whether they are mated and have young.

We would appreciate the help of anyone who is interested. Volunteers are *not* required to have previous birding experience. **Training will be provided** and volunteers will be given a season pass into Glacier National Park. Volunteers are encouraged to provide their own binoculars and/or spotting scopes. Trail distance and difficulty varies with each lake. Lakes will be assigned according to individual skills and needs.

If interested in participating and contributing to the protection and management of loons in Glacier National Park, call Therese Hartman (888-7986) or Billie Thomas (888-5827).

## Baseball, Apple Pie and Predicting the Fire Season

by Mitch Burgard

On the leeward north slopes of the Apgar Range in Glacier National Park there is a persistent pile of snow that locals refer to as Firefighter's Drift. Its name comes from the decades of informal monitoring by firefighters who correlate its disappearance with the severity of the future fire season. If the drift is gone by July 4th, tradition says, it will be a 'good' fire season. 'Good' being relative in that seasonal firefighters typically welcome the action and label large memorable fire seasons with enthusiastic adjectives. Most North Fork residents, having had enough action for a while, would likely use a term synonymous with bad (while sprinkling in a few colorful epithets for good measure).

Like businessmen who engage in water cooler discussions about their projections for the World Series during spring training, rural Montanans have turned spring fire season predictions into something of a ritualistic local pastime. Not unlike baseball, a combination of mind numbing statistics from previous seasons and the use of gut instinct and observation can be used to predict the outcome of the fire season. As anyone who has tried to pick the winning team before the season starts knows, however, it would be unwise to bet the bank on the winning team before the first game is played.

One of many statistics for the 2005 fire season is in and, for what it's worth, it's unlikely that Firefighter's Drift will see Independence Day 2005. It turns out, however, that, despite tradition, the indicator probably is not worth all that much on its own. Weather data seems to indicate that snowpack is not a strong predictor of the upcoming fire season in our neck of the woods. In fact, it sometimes seems like there is an inverse relationship between winter snowpack and fire.

For those who remember the summers of 1993 and 2003, there couldn't have been two more diametrically opposed seasons; one of rain and one of fire. Ironically, the winter snowpack and spring moisture were completely opposite of what you would expect when considering each season's final outcome. In the style of Harper's Index here are some of the statistics:

- 0.33 — Glacier's record low snow water equivalent for the month of February in inches, 1993.
- 10 — inches of rain (rounded) received in July and August of 1993.
- 1 — number of wildfires in Glacier during the 1993 season.
- 0.10 — number of acres burned in Glacier in 1993.
  
- 4.82 — the 55-year record high for February snow water equivalent in West Glacier, 2003.
- 97 to 98 — percent of normal moisture and snowpack respectively as of June 2003.
- 0.10 — inches of rain (rounded) received in July and August of 2003.
- 25 — number of wildfires in Glacier during the 2003 season.
- 140,000 — number of acres (rounded) burned in Glacier in 2003.

Snowpack, though clearly a factor in fire seasons, is one of literally hundreds of variables. There are occasionally exceptions in the weather data but generally, West Glacier seems to get right around 28 inches of precipitation a year and, if it doesn't come in the winter, it often makes up for it in the spring and summer. Of all of the variables there are two factors (as seen in the 1993 and 2003 examples) that, more than any others, set us up for a significant fire season in Glacier and the North Fork.

- 1) A rapid and early curing of fuels due to a lack of moisture from late June through August combined with;
- 2) The ability for dry lightning storms to build and create an ignition source.

So what will 2005 bring in terms of fire? We have had several years of drought and saw a low snowpack winter, but we also had significant fall rains in 2004 and lots of good early June precipitation. The climatological forecast for the summer shows that we can expect average temperatures and a slightly higher potential for above average precipitation. All the past analysis and long term forecasting aside, however, we are still awaiting two of the most important unknowns and this data, unfortunately, doesn't come in until the start of the season.

Firefighter's Drift may be gone soon, but the first pitch of the opening game has yet to be thrown. Until sometime in July, our fire season predictions will be at the mercy of that pesky, unpredictable, unmanageable and stubborn local climatic phenomenon we call the summer weather. As much fun as it is to talk about the weather and enjoy the fire season prediction pastime, it's probably not a good idea to start calling your bookies until sometime in July. In the meantime, as homeowners, it is always wise to prepare for the worst and hope for the best. We will have many more "good" and "bad" fire seasons in the future; whose perspective wins over in 2005 is still to be seen.

*Mitch Burgard is a North Fork landowner and Prescribed Fire Specialist for Glacier National Park.*

## NORTH FORK PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION SUMMER SCHEDULE — 2005

*Questions about the NFPA and its activities may be directed to [nfpa@gravel.org](mailto:nfpa@gravel.org).  
A copy of this schedule is posted on our web site at <http://www.gravel.org>.*

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**Saturday, July 2**, Tuchuck Mountain Hike. Meet 8:00am Tuchuck Campground on Trail Creek Road. A 10-mile hike with an elevation gain of 3124 feet. Tuchuck Mountain is the third highest in the Whitefish Range, 7724 feet, and next to the Canadian Border. A Montana Wilderness Association Hike, Phone Melissa Sladek at (406) 360-6433.

**Saturday, July 9**, 6:30pm at North Fork Hostel with pizza provided. Board meeting to discuss the Inter Local Agreement meeting on July 13 and the NFPA annual meeting on July 30. Everyone welcome! Meet the board. Questions phone 888-5084.

**Wednesday, July 13**, 6:30pm at Sondreson Hall, Whale Creek, Inter Local Meeting hosted by the NFPA. Make your voice heard to all government agencies. Be there. Potluck at 5:00pm hosted by Glacier Institute. Questions: 888-5084.

**Saturday, July 16**, Coal Ridge Trail Maintenance. Meet at the end of Moran Basin Road, the second left (south) off of Hay Creek road at 8:30 am. Three miles one way. Phone John Frederick at 888-5084 or Frank Vitale evenings at 752-2909.

**Saturday, July 30**, 5:30pm potluck at Sondreson Community Hall, **North Fork Preservation Association potluck, annual meeting and elections**. Annual meeting begins at 7. Program begins approximately at 7:30pm. Historian Darris Flanagan will speak on the Kootenai Indian trail that went from the Tobacco Valley through the North Fork up to what is now Alberta. Questions: 888-5084.

**Saturday, August 20**, Tuchuck Trail 19 Maintenance. Turn north on Frozen Lake Road five miles up Trail Creek Road and the end of the road is about three more miles. Meet near the end of Frozen Lake Road on the little downhill section at 8:30 am. We will likely use mules to scout out the last mile since there are no trees until the junction with Trail 114 on Tuchuck Ridge. The trail we clear is a total of four miles. Phone John Frederick at 888-5084 or Frank Vitale evenings at 752-2909.

**Saturday, September 3**, Mt. Thompson Seton Hike. 8:00am Tuchuck Campground on Trail Creek Road. Consider camping on the campground Friday night. Mt. Thompson Seton is the second highest peak in the Whitefish Range at 7820 feet, with an elevation gain of 3220 feet, 12 miles. Phone Edwin Fields of the Montana Wilderness Association at (406) 862-9623 or [edwin@fieldsconstruction.us](mailto:edwin@fieldsconstruction.us).

**Saturday, September 17**, Mt. Hefty Hike. Meet at 9 am at the Polebridge Mercantile. Taking Forest Service Trail 18 off of Frozen Lake Road to Trail 15 almost to the Canadian Border. Lunch on Mt. Hefty (elevation 7585 feet). Incredible views. Phone Roger Sherman of the Montana Wilderness Association at (406) 249-0034 or [sherman@montanasky.net](mailto:sherman@montanasky.net).

**Saturday, September 24**, Nasukoin Mountain Hike. Meet 8:00am at the Polebridge Mercantile. Nasukoin is the highest peak in the Whitefish Range at 8086 feet. A strenuous 12 miles, but totally fantastic views in all directions. Leaders Roger and Susan Sherman of the Montana Wilderness Association. Phone (406) 249-0034 or [sherman@montanasky.net](mailto:sherman@montanasky.net).

# MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

***IF YOU HAVEN'T PAID YOUR DUES YET, IT'S TIME!***

If there is a green line on your mailing label, you have paid your dues for 2005. ***Thank you!***

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

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I want to join the NFPA. Here is my membership fee of \$15.00/year \_\_\_\_\_  
family membership of \$20.00/year \_\_\_\_\_  
living lightly membership of \$10.00/year \_\_\_\_\_

I want to help. Here is my donation of \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_

Interested in receiving the "North Fork Bear News"? See the note below.

Please remove me from your mailing list. \_\_\_\_

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Mail check or cash to: North Fork Preservation Association  
c/o Ellen Horowitz  
880 Blackmer Drive  
Columbia Falls, MT 59912  
(406) 752-2909

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The informative and unusual "North Fork Bear News" is published annually as a cooperative effort of North Fork residents, Tim Manley, grizzly bear management specialist for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the North Fork Preservation Association, and private donors. The editor is North Fork biologist Amy Edmonds with help from Gerry Wackrow and Ellen Horowitz. It is mailed to landowners. If you want a copy write NFPA, 80 Beaver Drive, Polebridge, MT 59928. Indicate donations to support Bear News on the membership/renewal form "I want to help" line.

## **NFPA OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS**

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Officers are elected for a one-year term; board members for two. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact a board member.

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### **North Fork Preservation Association**

80 Beaver Drive  
Polebridge MT 59928

*Please remember to pay your dues!*