

NORTH FORK MOUNTAIN PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

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

Volume XXVI

Summer 2008

Number 1A

Flathead Coalition Confronts BP Management in London

The Flathead Coalition is a Kalispell-based organization that has successfully protected the Flathead River of British Columbia (an extension of the North Fork) for thirty-three years from unacceptable developments. These include activities such as mountain-top removal coal mines and coalbed methane exploration that would adversely affect us to the south.

The most immediate threat to the Flathead and Kootenai drainages is the "Mist Mountain" coalbed methane project that would destroy a world-quality wildlife habitat by a flurry of development activity, including heavy truck traffic and runoff damage to streams. Potential water pollutants include heavy metals, such as barium, copper and iron, and selenium. These are often combined with high concentrations of ammonia. All of this is toxic or fatal to fish and results in significant and long-term degradation in overall water quality.

Far away London is headquarters for British Petroleum-Global which controls its operations in other countries such as BP-Canada and BP-America. Dialog with BP in Canada or America has not worked well so far. Hence, the Flathead Coalition decided to go to the top.

Dave Hadden, President of the Flathead Coalition and Executive Director of Headwaters Montana Inc. (a new Montana environmental group), Kat Hartwig, program manager for the environmental group Wildsight in British Columbia, and Bart Naylor of Capital Strategies, Inc. visited British Petroleum world headquarters. Bart Naylor arranged for this and other meetings in London. First, the trio met with nine fund managers who control billions of dollars of other people's stocks. Dave Hadden wrote: "These managers now regard the Mist Mountain Project as a worrisome component in BP's plans and promised to discuss it with the BP board of directors."

The three also spoke at the annual meeting of British Petroleum which may be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1zySS4yFDw>. The group met with the new CEO, Tony Hayward, who said BP would comply with its own environmental standards.

Next, the Coalition will meet with BP-Canada's CEO, Randy McCleod, followed by BP-America in Washington, D.C. and continued dialog with fund managers. If British Petroleum still wants to continue the Mist Mountain Project, the Flathead Coalition will return next year with a shareholder motion in April to discontinue the Project.

There is a catch, however. The budget for the Outreach Campaign is \$37,000 and the Coalition has raised \$14,000 (\$1,000 from NFPA) so far. More money needs to be in the bank and this is where you can help. The threat of ill-advised developments in the Flathead of British Columbia is one major reason that the North Fork Preservation Association exists. Two NFPA board members, Rachel Potter and John Frederick, are also on the board of the Flathead Coalition. Please send the Flathead Coalition some money. Keeping the North Fork of the Flathead River and the Kootenai River unpolluted may depend on your donation.

In order to take a tax deduction for your contribution, make your check payable to Headwaters Montana Inc. and write "Flathead BP Campaign" in the memo line. Mail to: PO Box 4310, Whitefish, Montana 59937.

A Short History of the North Fork Road

By John Frederick

Marias Pass south of Glacier Park was one of the last major passes to be officially discovered and surveyed in the Continental United States. This occurred in December, 1889, which meant the railroad and civilization came late to this part of the world.

In the early days, the way to get to what is now Polebridge was through the present-day Belton (West Glacier) entrance to Glacier National Park and then up what is now called the Park North Fork Road by Apgar. This road was completed about 1901 in order to access an oil well near Kintla Lake that never produced much of anything. Glacier National Park was created in 1910.

Belton was not easy to reach from Columbia Falls. Until the 1930s, when a road (Route 2) was completed through Badrock Canyon, it was necessary to put a car on the railroad or winch it up the haul road above Berne Park.

A story about Charlie Wise, a homesteader in the Polebridge area, illustrates how difficult travel was in the early days of the last century. In about 1917, the year of a horrible influenza epidemic in the United States. Charlie's baby swallowed a button or pin and Charlie carried the baby to Columbia Falls in his arms. This took two days. He likely spent the night at Junkin's Corner – the present-day turnoff at Blankenship Road – which was a day's travel from Polebridge at the time. Charlie's baby died. When he returned home, he discovered his wife had died of influenza.

Until about the 1950s, the route to Polebridge through Glacier Park was the better one. Parts of the Forest Service road that was built on the west side of the river were only six to eight feet wide on a side-hill. Someone had to back up a ways if two vehicles met on these sections. The narrow road was not much of a problem if

one had a horse, which many North Fork homesteaders had in the early days when cars and roads were not reliable.

In 1947, the North Fork Improvement Association was born to improve the North Fork Road and other conditions in the North Fork. In those days, the road really needed work.

The Forest Service road was slowly improved until it was better than the one in Glacier Park. In 1978, Forest Service North Fork Road 210 was signed over to Flathead County. The thought was that Flathead County could do a better job of maintaining it.

The last time the road was oiled for dust control by either the Forest Service or the county was about 1979. Used motor oil could no longer be used by public agencies because of all the nasty carcinogens. After this, people living on the North Fork Road either paid someone to apply a dust abatement treatment in front of their property or lived with the dust. The only exception was in the case of major fires, such as those in 2003 and 2004, when fire money paid for some kind of dust control.

Consequently, there was a move every so many years to have the road paved, starting about 1980. In that year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a jeopardy statement on the North Fork Road. It said that Federal money could not be used for paving the road because it would violate the Endangered Species Act. Any major action involving the Federal government would require the preparation of a Draft and a Final Environmental Impact Statement.

In 1982, a plan was put forth by the U.S. Department of Transportation to pave the North Fork Road, preceded by a Draft Environmental Impact Statement. At a hearing on March 17, the majority of people wanted the road well maintained, but unpaved. In the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the decision was that the road not be paved, but that the roadbed be rebuilt based largely on the input of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its jeopardy opinion.

Also in 1982, the North Fork Preservation Association (NFPA) was formed in response to the threat of an open pit coal mine in the Canadian section of the North Fork watershed and the issue of paving the North Fork Road. NFPA believed then – and now – that the North Fork Road needed better maintenance. However, NFPA felt paving the road was inappropriate for a very thinly populated area and one of the last regions in the Continental U.S. still home to all its native species. This balance was unlikely to survive the increased development and higher traffic speeds and volumes resulting from a paved road.

From the start, Flathead County was always short of money for maintaining the North Fork Road, a project that involves grading forty miles of gravel and up to two and a half weeks of effort. As far as dust coating, forget it – there was never any money for that once they lost the option of applying inexpensive, used motor oil. Increasingly warm, dry summers made the road dustier than ever before. The development and popularity of the SUV, as well as improvements to modern pickup trucks and other rough-road capable vehicles, also resulted in higher speed travel on the road and contributed to dust volumes. The volume of complaints rose, too, of course.

In 2006, the North Fork Road Coalition for Health and Safety was formed over concerns about dust levels along the North Fork Road. They funded a dust study during July and August of 2007 that showed unhealthy levels of dust near the road in a couple of locations north and south of Polebridge.

Flathead County has approximately 700 miles of gravel road. Recently, the county has made some serious moves towards improving the quality of gravel road maintenance. These include speed limit enforcement in those areas with the biggest problems and highest numbers of complaints, and investigation of ways to improve the quality of the roads themselves and implement more aggressive dust abatement. How all this will affect the condition of the North Fork Road remains to be seen, but the trend is encouraging.

Wolfanoia Unfounded

By Brian Peck

Despite the fact that wolf packs have been present in NW Montana since 1986, and in Central Idaho and Greater Yellowstone since 1995, recent public hearings on wolf recovery and delisting show that among some wolf opponents, levels of concern, fear, and hatred remain strong.

The good news is that 50 years of research and field experience show that most of the fears are either unfounded, or can be addressed in a number of effective ways. Here then are some of peoples' top concerns, and what we know about solving them:

1. People are afraid that they or their kids will be attacked or killed by wolves. A half-century of repeated fact checking has repeatedly discovered that, "There are no documented cases of healthy, wild wolves attacking and killing humans in the U.S. in the last 400 years."

There are perhaps ten cases of people being bitten – some involving habituated, food-conditioned wolves, and others where people were defending a pet or hunting dog – but zero deaths. In contrast, domestic dogs kill 20-22 people per year and send 800,000 to emergency rooms.

2. Livestock producers are concerned over depredations to their cattle or sheep. While most wolves seem to concentrate on natural prey, some, particularly those close to livestock operations, do take cattle and sheep.

For example, in the three state region around Greater Yellowstone where depredations are the highest, losses over the last decade have averaged 0.13 cattle/1000 available, and 0.22 sheep/1000. Fortunately, ranchers may kill wolves in the act of killing or injuring their livestock, and in 2006 federal and state agencies killed 53 Montana wolves, and 142 region-wide to resolve depredations.

In addition, since 1987, Defenders of Wildlife has compensated ranchers for confirmed losses at 100% of fall market value, and probable losses at 50%. Compensation paid

over the last 20 years has totaled \$966,332, including \$287,724 in Montana. Average annual losses across Montana in the past decade have been 21 cattle and 42 sheep.

3. Some sportsmen are concerned that wolves will substantially lower big game herds, impacting hunting opportunities. Perhaps we should recall that in 1804-06 when Lewis and Clark poled up the Missouri there was no predator control, yet the explorers repeatedly noted "vast herds" of bison, elk, deer, antelope – and large packs of wolves.

Whether you look at Alaska, Canada, or the Great Lakes States with 4000 wolves, game managers and wolf biologists have consistently noted that wolves, by themselves, are seldom able to significantly lower big game numbers and hold them down. Such reductions can occur, however, in the presence of high human harvest, other predators, severe winter weather, or prolonged drought, as we've seen with the Northern Yellowstone elk herd.

In addition, Wyoming Game and Fish reports its elk herds are 17 percent above objectives, Idaho harvests are at or above historic averages, and Montana, with 130-160,000 elk recently asked sportsmen for ideas on how to lower herd numbers. Wolf predation has been shown to move elk around their home ranges more widely than they did in the last 60 years, wolves aren't likely to wipe out their own food supply anytime soon.

As many sportsmen know, a fatal brain illness called Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been moving north and east from Colorado threatening to decimate deer and elk populations, and has been called by some "the number one threat to big game and hunting in the U.S." But CWD, by making its victims lose coordination and stagger around, makes them incredibly vulnerable to predators. Recently, CWD and wolf researchers have raised the possibility that because they attack vulnerable prey first, wolves may help check the spread of the disease.

4. Many wolf opponents believe that an excessive amount has been spent on wolf recovery in the Rockies. In fact, since wolves were listed as "Threatened" (1973), the total cost of recovery has been \$26 million, or 23.4 cents per taxpayer (0.7 cents/taxpayer/year).

Interestingly, a 2006 economic study by John Duffield of the Univ. of Montana found that wolf-related tourism brings in \$35 million per year for the three states around Yellowstone National Park, and those dollars turn over in local communities for a total impact of \$70 million per year. Thus, the wolves of Yellowstone alone more than pay back the total recovery bill – every year.

When all the myths, fears, and fairytales are addressed, it becomes clear that we have ample opportunity, and reason, to coexist with this native American carnivore. It remains to be seen whether we'll summon the generosity of spirit to do so.

Brain works on wolf conservation and education programs for the Natural Resources Defense Council, Livingston, MT.

North Fork Preservation Association Summer Schedule – 2008

Wednesday, July 9, 6:30 p.m. Inter Local at Sondreson Hall, hosted by the North Fork Landowners Association. Preceded by a potluck at 5:00 p.m. Meat cooked by Glacier Institute. Bring a side dish.

Saturday, July 12, about 8:00 a.m. Help NFPA vice president Frank Vitale build a new porch on the Community Hall. Phone Frank Vitale first for details, (406) 752-2909.

Wednesday, July 23, 8:00 p.m. at Sondreson Hall. The North Fork Compact will host a Q&A session about conservation easements with Mark Shiltz of the Montana Land Reliance.

Saturday, July 26. North Fork Preservation Association annual meeting. Pot luck at 5:00pm. Business meeting and elections at about 6:30 p.m. 7:30pm program features Dr. Brian Reeves of the University of Calgary with a PowerPoint presentation titled "Glacier and the North Fork Before the White Man." All are welcome.

Monday, August 11, 8:00 p.m. North Fork Compact meeting at Sondreson Hall. Bring a snack.

Saturday, August 16, Hornet Lookout maintenance. Overnight at this remarkable, historic lookout. NFPA will put preservative on the logs. The lookout was built in 1922 at a cost of \$719.38. Phone Frank Vitale evenings at (406) 752-2909 or John Frederick at (406) 888-5084 for directions.

Sunday, September 14, Thoma Trail Maintenance, 8:30 a.m. at the trailhead. Frank Vitale will pack chainsaws, gas and sometimes people. We need lots of help. Phone John Frederick at 888-5084 or Frank Vitale evenings at 752-2909.

Get Your Water Rights In Order!

While working on the water rights paperwork for my well on the North Fork, I asked Wes McAlpin of the Kalispell Water Resources Office why the U.S. Park Service was involved in the final approval process. He told me,

"About 10-12 years ago the MT Reserved Compact Commission negotiated a compact with the Park Service which basically reserved an amount of water near and around the park which they felt would adequately supply the park's needs for the next 50-100 years. Every time someone drills into or taps into that supply, we contact the park service and they deduct that amount of water from the compact. Much the same as writing a check on your bank account. Once this pool/supply of water is used up, the area will be closed for new development forever. You could still build a cabin, but you'd be hauling water from town or buying an exist water right in the area and filing a change application to move it to your place of use."

In other words, if you've been putting off establishing your water rights, you'd better get moving on it.

- Bill Walker

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

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

If you have paid your dues for 2008. ***Thank you!***

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	_____

		Phone	_____
		Email	_____

I want to join the NFPA. Here is my membership fee of \$20.00/year _____
family membership of \$25.00/year _____
living lightly membership of \$10.00/year _____

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

Please remove me from your mailing list. _____

NFPA is a 501(c)(3) organization. Your contribution is tax deductible.

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

NFPA OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS

John Frederick, President (406) 888-5084 john@nfhostel.com
Frank Vitale, Vice President (406) 752-2909 horowitz@centurytel.net
Randy Kenyon, Secretary (406) 257-4362 randyk@centurytel.net
Ellen Horowitz, Treasurer (406) 752-2909 horowitz@centurytel.net
Alan McNeil (406) 758-8191 alanmcneil@mac.com
Cameron Naficy (406) 721-3431 cameron@wildrockies.org
Mitch Burgard (406) 387-5477 mitchburgard@hotmail.com
Annemarie Harrod (615) 269-3992 harroda@mail.belmont.edu
Rachel Potter (406) 892-2446 jrpotter@digisys.net

Bill Walker, Web Master/Newsletter Editor wkwalker@nvdi.com

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

Don't forget to keep an eye on our web site! – www.gravel.org

North Fork Preservation Association

80 Beaver Drive
Polebridge MT 59928

Return Postage Guaranteed

Please remember to pay your dues!