

NORTH FORK PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

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

Volume XXXI

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Where Are We? The Year in Review

By John Frederick

The two biggest environmental and preservation events impacting the North Fork this past year were the formation of the Whitefish Range Partnership and the now bi-partisan effort to implement the North Fork Watershed Protection Act.

The Whitefish Range Partnership

A new group has been formed called the "Whitefish Range Partnership." The WRP consists of twenty-five plus members of widely diverse interests, joined together to provide guidance for the Flathead National Forest Plan. Members include Montana Logging Association, Flathead Back Country Horsemen, National Parks Conservation Association, Flathead Snowmobile Association, Montana Wilderness Association, Stoltze Lumber Company, Montana Wilderness Association, Flathead Fat Tires, Winter Sports Inc. (Big Mountain), North Fork Compact, North Fork Landowners Association and North Fork Preservation Association.

The facilitator for the WRP is Bob Brown who was Montana Secretary of State from 2001 to 2005 and for 26 years the representative for the entire Whitefish Range including Whitefish, Columbia Falls and the North Fork.

Agreement on each issue is by consensus, not a simple majority vote. Everyone at the table has to go along.

The Whitefish Range Partnership has reached agreement on timber, trails and a host of other issues regarding the National Forest. Only one subject is left. Unsurprisingly, that is wilderness, on which there is one holdout on resolving this issue.

The participants expect to have the entire agreement finished before hunting season.

The North Fork Watershed Protection Act

Congressman Steve Daines has introduced H. R. 2259, a North Fork Watershed Protection Act, in the U.S. House of Representatives and he deserves much credit for doing so.

Democratic Senators Baucus and Tester had earlier introduced virtually identical legislation (Senate Bill 255) in the U.S. Senate. It passed out of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee on June 18 of this year.

The legislation withdraws federal minerals from future leasing on Forest Service land in the North Fork (and a slice of federal land in the Middle Fork along the river) not currently under a valid existing lease. More than 200,000 acres of leases have been voluntarily relinquished representing 80 percent of the leased land.

When this legislation is enacted it will complete a gentleman's agreement between British Columbia and Montana to not allow leasing of minerals in the Flathead of B. C. and the North Fork of the Flathead because of concerns about wildlife and clean water. The Canadians were considerably faster to do their part of the agreement.

Steve Daines is a Republican. He has not let partisan politics get in the way of working toward a worthwhile goal. His efforts will ensure quicker action on the legislation.

Treasured People

Ellen Horowitz is retiring from the NFPA board. She has been treasurer for at least eleven years and on the board for over twenty. We lost count.

Thanks to Donna Harrison for being temporary treasurer until we could find a more permanent one. We need a volunteer to serve as treasurer. Who's game?

Thoughts of a Wilderness Traveler

By Frank Vitale

Editor's note: At the Whitefish Range Partnership meeting where wilderness was first discussed, Frank stood up and read the following aloud to the assembled representatives and observers. The whole room burst into applause when he finished.

For those of you who know him, try to imagine Frank's delivery, rhythm and passion as you read this. – Bill Walker...

It's lost on me that some people feel wilderness locks them out and locks up the land.

I've spent the better part of my life traveling through wild country, both on foot and horseback. When I was younger I got angry with those who would oppose wilderness protection for the last of the wild country. But as I get older and a bit more gray around the muzzle my perspective has changed. I sort of feel sorry and even feel a bit of pity for those who feel wilderness is a bad thing. Perhaps they are afraid, intimidated or just insecure to venture beyond their comfort zone.

For me, wilderness is the greatest freedom I've ever known. I'm not alone in these feelings. Just ask anyone who has spent time traveling in wild country. There's a feeling that's hard to describe – a sort of magic when I cross the line. It's the key that unlocks the universe. Ian Tyson says it so well in song:

It's way out back and the back of beyond
Where the nights are dark as coal,
Where the circle stays unbroken,
Where the rocks begin to roll.

The mules feel it too. The whole string's cadence of hoof beats picks up; their ears stand erect and forward as if they can read "Wilderness Boundary" on the old Forest Service sign. I can breathe a whole lot easier.

In this fast, crazy world of computers, cell phones, gigabytes, megabytes, YouTube and all this cyberspace stuff, I have my doubts all this technology has really set us free. For me, the sound of well-shod hooves on the rocks, the creaking of saddle leather, the pungent smell of good honest mule sweat tempered with the sounds and smells of the wilderness – That's Freedom!

I'll go as far as I need to go to make camp where there's good water, good grass. I'll turn the stock out, hobble a few so they don't stray too far. I'll hit the bedroll under the biggest, brightest mantle of stars you could ever put your eyes on. I'll wake early; jingle the mules in; sip stout coffee while feedbags are flipped for the last of the grain.

While saddling up, the hard reality sinks in. We're about at the end of this gig . . . Riding down through the Front Range I'm thinking . . . A hundred years ago, Charlie Russell wrote in his memoirs, *Trails Plowed Under*,

"They ain't making wild country anymore. We stole most of it from the Indians for a dollar a day. That was cowboy pay in them days."

As the trail winds its way east through steep, narrow, limestone canyons the wind begins to pick up as it usually does in this country . . . Wait, I thought I heard some far-off distant singing; a chanting sound fading in and out with each passing gust . . . Must be my imagination . . . No, there it is again . . . Listen . . . A chill runs through me . . . Is it the spirits of the “old ones” who passed this way a long time ago?

I’m still riding and I’m still thinking . . . When I get too old to put my foot in the stirrup and swing into the saddle I’m going to make one request . . . Just wheel me up to the edge of the wilderness so I can look in one more time to a place and a time where I found true freedom.

North Fork Hiking

By Debo Powers

For those who love the North Fork, hiking the trails in the “north end” is the best way to see and experience its wild beauty. There are six major peaks with trails in the northern Whitefish Range that are some of the wildest places that a person can hike. I call these “the wild jewels of the North Fork” and they exist right out our back doors! The wild jewels are Tuchuck, Hefty, Review, Thoma, Thompson-Seton, and Nasukoin.

The trails to these “wild jewels” can be found on any good Forest Service map of the area. However, finding the trails themselves, especially when you get above tree line, can sometimes be a struggle. This is partly due to low maintenance and partly due to the small numbers of people that use some of these trails on a regular basis. On your first trip up to Hefty or Tuchuck, for instance, you may want to go with someone who has been there before so that you don’t lose the trail.

These are the places that generations of people have fought to be included in a designated wilderness area. That fight still continues. Although the area is presently protected by the Forest Service’s commitment to protecting grizzly habitat, one of the costs of delisting the grizzly may be the loss of protection for these wild lands.

If you decide to hike “the wild jewels,” be sure to take bear spray because this area has one of the largest concentrations of grizzly bears in the lower 48 states. Also, be sure to take water since most of the trails and all of the high country are very dry. Hiking these trails is a strenuous activity and many people start the hiking season on shorter trails first, like Cyclone Lookout.

North Fork hiking is one of the best ways to experience wilderness and see the wild country that we are working so hard to protect. When you get to the top of the major peaks, you can see a sea of peaks in all directions and feel like you are the only person for hundreds of miles. This experience is well worth the strenuous climb.

If you would like to receive e-mails announcing upcoming day-hikes in the North Fork, contact me at debopowers@gmail.com. These will be strenuous, day-long, high mountain hikes on designated North Fork trails usually 10-14 miles long for those in excellent physical condition. You will need hiking boots, water, lunch, and bear spray. Also, mark your calendar for a hike to Nasukoin on Saturday, August 24. Meet at the intersection of North Fork Road and Red Meadow Road at 8:30 to carpool.

Editor's note: Debo Powers has been hiking North Fork trails since 1979.

Wolves Dominate Web Site News Over Past Year

By Bill Walker

The web site continues to do well, with a range of visitors interested in environmental matters, as well as quite a few visitors searching for information about the area. As in past years, we also drew quite a few views from people interested in our Wildfire and Flood Information pages.

The web site was dominated by wolf news. The second year of the Montana wolf hunt, lawsuits, the struggles in other states with an expanding wolf population, wolf trapping and the overarching debate about wolf hunting and wolf quotas supplied better than half the posts since this time last year. In contrast, the infamous North Fork Road, a chronic irritation in past years, received no more than a passing mention.

The fastest trending story is wolverines. A successful effort to ban wolverine trapping followed by a likely federal recommendation to place them on the endangered species list generated vigorous debate and a lot of news coverage.

Next year? Expect the wolf hunt to continue as a hot-button topic, we should hear more about wolverines and bears and expect to see some action on trails rehabilitation.

As usual, we're always on the lookout for contributions – photos, articles, pointers to useful material and so forth. Suggestions are always appreciated, as is the occasional compliment.

The NFPA web site is at <http://www.gravel.org/>.

North Fork Preservation Association Summer Events — 2013

Saturday, July 27. North Fork Preservation Association annual meeting and potluck. Potluck at 5:00 p.m., business meeting at 7:00 p.m. At 7:30 research biologist Rick Mace of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and Trail Creek Road landowner talks on “Information gained from trapping grizzlies in the North and South Fork”. For more information call 888-5084.

Other Activities

These events are sponsored by the North Fork Landowners’ Association. See their web site (<http://www.nflandowners.com>) for further details and listings of more activities.

Tuesday, July 30, Fourth Annual Robin Cox Memorial Weed Roundup. Meet at the Hall. Lunch will be served.

When: 10AM and should end around 3PM or so.

Host: Valerie Cox, John Frederick, Tris Hoffman, and Dawn LaFleur.

Saturday, August 24, Hike to Nasukoin. The highest peak in the Whitefish range. This is an all-day hike of 12 miles and is very strenuous. Bring lunch, water, and bug and bear spray. Meet at intersection of North Fork Road and Red Meadow Road to carpool.

When: 8:30AM.

Host: Debo Powers.

These hikes are sponsored by the Montana Wilderness Association (MWA). They are fielding a number of hikes in the Whitefish Range this summer. Download the MWA Wilderness Walks guide for full details (<http://wildmontana.org/our-work/programs/wilderness-walks/>). Here is a sampler of hikes related to the North Fork:

Saturday, August 17, Moose Peak hike and BBQ. Moderate.

Saturday, August 24, Nasukoin Mountain. Strenuous. (This is the same as the Debo Powers-led Nasukoin hike mentioned above.)

Sunday, September 22, Huntsburger Lake. Moderate.

A Gentle Reminder: Time to Pay Your Dues!

If you have not yet paid your NFPA membership dues for 2013, it's time!

Regular membership dues are \$20/year; \$25/year for the whole family.

“Living lightly” (students and such like) dues are only \$10/year.

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

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

If you have paid your dues for 2013. ***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. _____

Mail check or cash to: North Fork Preservation Association
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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.

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

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Please remember to pay your dues!