

# NORTH FORK PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION



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

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## **Thirty-Three Years of NFPA**

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By John Frederick

In March of 1982 the North Fork Preservation Association was created by over a dozen local residents meeting at the North Fork Hostel. There were two serious threats that year: a move to pave the North Fork Road and a proposed mountain-top/open-pit coal mine just across the Canadian border.

The Federal Highway Administration was considering paving the North Fork Road ten miles from pavement out of Columbia Falls. If allowed to proceed, the whole road would eventually be covered with asphalt to the detriment of wildlife as a result of greatly increased human activities (development), not to mention a huge change of residents' lifestyles. NFPA and its allies deluged the FHA with comments for their Environmental Impact Statements, with letters and with petitions.

The other problem facing the North Fork of the Flathead River and waters to the south in 1982 was that Rio Algom, a Canadian company, wished to have an open-pit coal mine at the confluence of Howell and Cabin Creeks seven miles from Glacier National Park. The lagoons to settle silt from the mine were badly designed and were almost certain to be breached in spring by melt water from the heavy snow load (more than ten feet annually at that time). This would force many tons of silt into the river, triggering extensive fish kills and long term damage to habitat. NFPA attended hearings, gathered almost two thousand signatures on a petition against the mine and sent letters to anyone even remotely connected to the project. The time spent fighting this issue paid off.

The Rio Algom mine was referred to the International Joint Commission (IJC) comprised of Canadians and Americans to oversee transboundary water disputes. Eventually, after about six years of study and many scientific publications, the IJC decided the mine should not be built as designed and Rio Algom quickly lost interest.

The Rio Algom fight was by no means the last threat to the transboundary Flathead. Other resource extraction activities, including coalbed methane development, gold mining and additional coal mine proposals interested developers until the premier of British Columbia and the governor of Montana signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on February 18, 2010. The MOU stated that the Flathead of British Columbia and the U.S. North Fork south of the border, including parts of the Flathead National Forest would have only minimal

development. This was formalized by legislation in both British Columbia and at the federal level in the United States. In the U.S. it led to the North Fork Watershed Protection Act preventing future mineral leases, a result the NFPA had long been working toward.

Back in 1985, NFPA also took on the Montana Board of Oil and Gas for permitting an oil well without public participation at Home Ranch Bottoms. NFPA won their point. In the future, any oil well of “significant interest” would have a hearing. “Significant public interest” was roughly defined as three letters of concern to the Board of Oil and Gas. The North Fork had the first public hearing on an oil well in Montana. (The well ultimately went 11,000 feet without finding any oil, by the way.)

A few years ago NFPA joined the Whitefish Range Partnership along with thirty-some other members representing a broad variety of viewpoints all relating to the North Fork in some fashion. The goal was to provide guidance to the proposed Flathead National Forest Plan. There is an excellent chance that most of the common sense proposals put forth in the final Whitefish Range Partnership recommendations will be adopted, including 80,000+ acres of Wilderness in the North Fork.

The most important long-term accomplishment was keeping the North Fork Road unpaved from 1982 until today. The issue of road paving came up again and again. NFPA had lots of help or we would not have succeeded. However, NFPA led the charge.

In the early years of the NFPA, all the participants at annual meetings could sit around a picnic table. Even so, a state representative attended. Now the attendance fills the Community Hall. For a small group, we have always been influential locally, whether with Forest Service activities or land planning.

Every year for the last twenty years, NFPA has hosted stimulating speakers from the U.S. and Canada to educate people on a variety of subjects, including grizzly bears, wolves, various wildlife studies, history and archeology.

The North Fork Preservation Association can sometimes appear to be a sleepy organization, but it is very active when needed.

### **John Frederick Retiring**

John Frederick, after many years as president of the North Fork Preservation Association, is retiring this year and passing the torch to a new president to be elected at the annual meeting on July 25.

## The Year for the Badger-Two Medicine

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By Frank Vitale

Hopefully many of you have taken notice this past year of publicity about the oil and gas leases in the Badger-Two Medicine. It's been on the front pages of every major state newspaper as well as many national publications, headline news on local radio stations and posted on numerous websites (including NFPA – thanks to Bill Walker).

The Badger-Two Medicine is some of the wildest country left in the Northern Rockies. It sits between Glacier National Park, The Bob Marshall and Great Bear wilderness areas. It consists of one of the largest roadless areas in the state at 165,588 acres. The Badger-Two Medicine is the cornerstone of the Blackfeet creation story and the spiritual connection, referred to as the "Backbone of the World." If you take a trip through the Badger you will understand why. It's a rugged, pristine, untapped ecosystem, home to grizzlies and black bears, wolves, mountain lions, wolverines and lynx, moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, whitetail and mule deer and one of the largest herds of elk on the Northern Rocky Mountain Front.

I made my first pack trip through the Badger about 1990, starting our trip from the Summit Trailhead and ending the 100-mile loop back at Summit. Back then we did not know we were following the route of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

Since then I've had opportunities to pack volunteer crews from the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation (BMWF) and the Montana Wilderness Association working on weed eradication projects. I'll have another opportunity to spend time in the Badger later this month packing gear and supplies for the BMWF Wilderness Conservation Corps.

It's time for NFPA members to help out and support the protection of the Badger-Two Medicine. After all, it is part of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem of which the North Fork is also part.

Please write to the congressional delegation, Secretary of Interior Sally Jewel, and President Obama. (See below for addresses.)

Call for complete withdrawal of the remaining oil and gas leases. The Blackfeet Nations in both the US and Canada have taken the lead and a large circle of conservation and sportsmen organizations have joined in solidarity to support the Blackfeet and the Lewis and Clark National Forest to protect the Badger-Two Medicine.

Let's help make this the Year of the Badger.

The President The White House 1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW Washington, DC 20500	Secretary Jewell Department of the Interior 1849 C Street, N.W. Washington DC 20240	
Sen. Steve Daines 1 Russell Senate Courtyard Washington, DC 20510	Sen. Jon Tester 724 Hart Senate Building Washington, DC 20510-2604	Rep. Ryan Zinke 113 Cannon House Office Bldg Washington, DC 20515

## **North Fork NOW! . . . and forever**

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from Richard Jeo, Montana State Director, The Nature Conservancy

We are thrilled to share the news that the North Fork Watershed Protection Act has officially passed the U.S. Congress and was signed by President Obama. This landmark act permanently protects the North Fork of the Flathead River Watershed by barring future mining or drilling on 430,000 acres adjacent to Glacier National Park in the Crown of the Continent, one of the world's most extraordinary natural areas.

This legislation makes good on 30 years of work by organizations on both sides of the United States/Canada border. Legislation to prevent mining and energy development on the Canadian side of the Flathead was enacted in 2011. The North Fork Watershed Protection Act now extends this protection across the United States portion of this wild river system.

The fight to permanently protect the North Fork has involved a monumental bi-national effort by communities, conservation organizations, scientists, recreationists, and public officials. Together, we are creating better habitat for species like bull trout, Canada lynx and grizzly bears, and ensuring the clean water that is essential to the economies and human communities in two countries. The Conservancy is honored to have been part of this endeavor.

Your support throughout this process has been invaluable. The Flathead River marks the western boundary of Glacier National Park and carves through the Bob Marshall wilderness. Wildlife that have all but disappeared in the rest of the country still thrive here. Thanks to you, this wild and pristine watershed will stay wild, protected from the threat of mining in perpetuity.

Thank you!

## **North Fork Protection**

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By Debo Powers, NFPA Vice President

This was an important year for North Fork protection.

First, the news that the U.S. Congress passed the North Fork Watershed Protection Act with the support of the entire Montana Congressional Delegation was cause for celebration. This important legislation protects the North Fork from mining and geothermal leasing. NFPA was active in voicing its support for this legislation.

Second, the draft Flathead Forest Plan was announced which included the recommendations of the Whitefish Range Partnership for 80,000 acres of recommended Wilderness in the northern Whitefish Range. This includes Tuchuck, Hefty, Review, and Thompson-Seton. It will, hopefully, include Nasukoin in the final plan. Although the North Fork is one of the most remote places in the lower 48 states and is home to one of the largest concentrations of grizzly bears, there has never been a single acre of designated Wilderness here. The "recommended Wilderness" in the draft forest plan is an important step toward legislation that will preserve this wild, undeveloped area for future generations. Several NFPA board members served on the Whitefish Range Partnership, a collaborative group representing diverse viewpoints, which reached consensus on the proposal that was submitted to the Flathead National Forest. After

the draft forest plan was presented, NFPA communicated our support for Wilderness designation during the public comment period.

Our work is not done. The North Fork has been discovered. As more and more people build cabins and/or come here for recreation, there is continual pressure to “modernize” the North Fork. NFPA will remain in opposition to these pressures in order to preserve the plethora of wildlife and the rustic lifestyle of our beloved North Fork.

## **Bills, Bears and the Badger**

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By Bill Walker

This year, website coverage was just about evenly balanced between wildlife and landscape issues.

The big news toward the end of 2014 was the long-delayed passage of the North Fork Watershed Protection Act and the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act. Both bills had substantial environmental benefits and very broad bipartisan support but took forever to push through the system.

The Badger-Two Medicine region got a lot of press, in no small part because the Blackfoot nations in both the U.S. and Canada began a concerted campaign to block oil exploration in the area. See "The Year for the Badger-Two Medicine" by Frank Vitale earlier in this newsletter for more information about this head-butting contest between the tribes and a Louisiana-based oil exploration company.

As usual, there was bear news. Grizzlies continued to expand their range out into the high plains and bear managers continued to drop off some of their wayward bears in the North Fork.

Efforts to protect the sage grouse kicked into high gear as states with high sage grouse populations tried to develop conservation plans that would forestall federal intervention. The jury is still out on this one.

And, finally, we had a wimpy winter, a dry spring and an early fire season. The Glacier Rim blaze, the only wildfire worth mentioning so far, re-burned 100 acres of the old 2003 Robert burn before it was brought under control. The web site tracked this one carefully and apparently struck a nerve. We had our all-time biggest traffic spike during that fire.

*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 — 2015

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**Saturday, July 25.** North Fork Preservation Association annual meeting featuring Vernon Finley, Chairman of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe and Keeper of the Kootenai Language, speaking on topics relating to Kootenai history. He is well known for being an engaging speaker. Mr. Finley begins his talk at 7:30 p.m. Potluck dinner starts at 5:00 p.m., followed by the business meeting. For more information call 406-888-5084.

### Other Activities

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*The North Fork Landowners' Association sponsors a number of hikes, river floats and bicycling events. See the "recurring events" notes near the bottom of their calendar page (<http://nflandowners.com/calendar>) for details and listings of more activities.*

*The Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) offers several hikes each year in Northwest Montana. See the MWA website for full details and to pre-register for any of these hikes (<http://wildmontana.org/our-work/programs/wilderness-walks/2015-wilderness-walks>). Here is a sampler of hikes related to the North Fork; click on the location name for more information about individual hikes:*

**Saturday, July 25,** Link Lake. Moderate difficulty.

**Saturday, August 15,** Cyclone Peak Lookout Geology Tour. Moderate difficulty.

**Sunday, August 23,** Tuchuck Mountain. Strenuous.

#### **A Gentle Reminder: Time to Pay Your Dues!**

If you have not yet paid your NFPA membership dues for 2015, 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 2015. ***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.

_____	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  
80 Beaver Drive  
Polebridge, MT 59928  
(406) 888-5084

## **North Fork Preservation Association**

80 Beaver Drive  
Polebridge MT 59928

Return Postage Guaranteed

***Please remember to pay your dues!***

### **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.

Don't forget to keep an eye on our web site! – [www.gravel.org](http://www.gravel.org)

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