

NORTH FORK PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

"...to champion stewardship of the natural resources and protection of the exceptional biodiversity of the North Fork of the Flathead River watershed in Northwest Montana."

Volume XXXVII

Summer 2019

Number 1

NFPA Annual Meeting

July 27, 2019

North Fork Wildlife: Past, Present and Future

Sondreson Community Hall

5:30 Potluck supper

6:45 Election of Officers and Board Members

7:30 Program: North Fork Wildlife: Past, Present, and Future

The speaker will be Tim Thier, recently retired wildlife manager at Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

NFPA t-shirts will be on sale!



Our Mission Extends Beyond the North Fork

By Debo Powers, NFPA President

Many of us love the escape that our North Fork valley gives us. Surrounded by the beauty of hundreds of thousands of acres of undeveloped public land, we can find peace and solitude that is lacking in the busy world of towns and cities. However, we cannot hide. The effects of a rapidly warming planet find us even in our lovely little valley.

Those of us who have been in the North Fork for decades cannot deny the fact that our summers are hotter and drier than ever before. Ninety degree days that were unheard of in the past, are now a common part of our summers. Fire season is much longer and we spend many days (sometimes weeks) choking on smoke from distant and nearby forest fires. This smoke obscures our mountain vistas, impacts our health, decreases our recreational opportunities, and worries us about the safety of our families and our property should a fire move our way. This year, we experienced our first smoky days as early as May due to huge fires to the north in Alberta.

We love the remoteness of the North Fork, but we cannot hide in our lovely valley ignoring what is happening in other places. The focus of NFPA's work is protecting the watershed, wilderness, and wildlife of the North Fork. In order to do that, NFPA has taken stands on issues beyond our remote valley because those issues impact us here.

Never before has it been more important to keep public lands in public hands. Never before has it been more important to create Wilderness areas that sustain wildlife habitat and connectivity between animal and plant populations that are stressed by a warming climate. This is why we stand in solidarity with the Blackfoot Nation to keep oil and gas out of the Badger-Two Medicine. This is why we send in comments on every Forest Plan in the state of Montana. This is why we decry the extraction of fossil fuels on public lands that have wilderness characteristics. (Our public statements can be found on our website at gravel.org)

Join us to continue the fight to preserve the North Fork and the healthy, resilient planet that sustains us all.

Watershed Currents

By Randy Kenyon, Chair of the NFPA Watershed Working Group

I just received news that the first stage of the Wild and Scenic River proposed Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP) has been completed and it is now officially a "scoping document". It will be available in June. The next step will be to schedule a series of "open houses", opportunities for users and agencies to review the document and provide feedback. I encourage all to review this by going to the Flathead National Forest web site to become familiar and give them your input. Believe me, it can make a difference! This plan will be finalized and implemented sometime during early 2020.

Speaking of the Forest Service, in particular, the Glacier View Ranger District, there are some very early rumblings of implementing a permit system for river users on the North Fork River. This is in response to what we already know: our river has been found and overuse has become obvious, including not just the number of floaters, but pressures on put in/put outs, camping, sanitation and traffic. Despite the very early stages of this idea, we will keep folks informed as they unfold.

Aquatic Invasive Species remain a concern, although state, federal and local measures have so far been able to avoid traumatic consequences of the mussel invasion. Unfortunately there have been some admitted agency inspection lapses. A new watchdog organization has been developed to assist in ensuring measures are implemented to continue these so far effective efforts. Politics, as one would

expect during season of a legislative session, have entered the foray, but so far have not seemed to impede progress. For those of you planning on enjoying our rivers and lakes this summer, make sure you contact appropriate authorities for inspection information and compliance. Unfortunately, no inspections are available in the North Fork area.

Wonderful Wildlife

By Steve Gniadek, Chair of the NFPA Wildlife Working Group

Grizzly bears, and their relationship with people, played a prominent role in the history of the North Fork. There was the famous cabin-raiding Geifer Creek grizzly in the 1970s, and Dr. Jonkel's long-term Border Grizzly Project in the 1970s and 1980s. Chuck's project was about educating people in how to live with bears as much as it was about ground-breaking bear research. His project produced many in the next generation of bear researchers and managers.

During the 1990s a wildlife photographer was discovered baiting bears near his NF cabin. His thoughtless and selfish actions created chaos for residents up and down the valley, as those bears raided cabins in search of food. It also precipitated an intensive effort in bear-human conflict management. The North Fork became a crucible for testing and implementing non-lethal aversive conditioning techniques. This work in the NF helped lead a paradigm shift in bear management worldwide. Cracker shells, rubber bullets, and Karelian bear dogs became important tools, and usually received the most media attention. But central to the work in the NF and elsewhere in the NCDE was public education. People learned that bear conflict prevention was not the sole responsibility of Montana FWP, but was the shared responsibility of everyone living and recreating in bear country.

It required many years of concerted effort to reduce bear-human conflict levels, and until recently the North Fork has experienced relatively little bear-human conflict. All that changed dramatically in 2018. The situation was probably evolving over several years, but events in 2018 resulted in the deaths of two grizzlies and the relocation of at least one other bear. It was a wake-up call to those who care about grizzly bears, prompting questions of what went wrong. Was it caused by a few thoughtless individuals who left bear attractants out, or maybe purposefully baited bears, or was it a result of more widespread complacency?

We all know the importance of securing substances that could attract bears, but have we done enough to inform our guests and other visitors to the North Fork? We know from experience that when bears become habituated or accustomed to people in close proximity they are at greater risk of endangering people and ending up as dead bears. Have we done enough to police those who watch grizzlies at close range, let alone dangerously approach bears? Do we need to revive the annual spring bear newsletter that helped remind residents and visitors of bear safety? Do we need more frequent Bear Fairs that have been so popular in the past? Do we need to be more self-critical of our own behavior that may contribute to conflicts?

We believe the North Fork is a special place. Living or recreating in the North Fork bestows a collective responsibility to practice proper bear etiquette. Grizzly bears have been part of this environment since before recorded history. Let's do our part to keep them in the wild and keep us safe.

Wilderness Matters

By Frank Vitale, Chair of the NFPA Wilderness Working Group

As I write this report, spring is rapidly turning to summer. All the mules are shod. I look forward to long days in the saddle on wilderness trails packing gear, tools and supplies for crews clearing and maintaining trails on our public lands.

One of the greatest parts of this work, besides being in some of the most beautiful country, is meeting new people and seeing old friends. What better place to meet, than in some of Montana's wildest places?

In the last 2 years, we have seen significant threats and challenges to our wildlands and attempts to weaken many of our long-standing environmental protections.

For the most part, conservation and environmental organizations, along with many Native American tribes have partnered into strong coalitions to push back against those that only see exploitation and profit.

We've been lucky here in Montana where grassroots collaboratives have worked to find solutions to the management challenges facing public lands. The NFPA, for example, played a major role in the Whitefish Range Partnership (WRP). The WRP influenced the Flathead National Forest (FNF) in its newly revised Forest Plan which now includes about 83,000 acres of new wilderness in the northern Whitefish Range. For over 50 years this area has been proposed for wilderness. Now it's up to congress to act.

Many other groups from around the state have also been involved in similar efforts trying to find common ground in land management and wilderness protection. Some examples in our region include the Blackfoot-Clearwater Stewardship project, the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition, Friends of the Scotchman's Peak, and the Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance who along with the Blackfeet Nation are working on oil & gas withdrawals and permanent protection for the Badger-Two Medicine area.

Our Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) remain intact, at least for now, after defeating two bad bills that would have deleted or weakened protection in these wildlands. Many of the WSA are critical wildlife habitat and are important wildlife corridors. They are also important for clean water as many of these WSA are in the headwaters that are vital to Montana fisheries and agricultural economies. A majority of the public wants these WSA to be managed as wilderness and to keep these wildlands non-motorized. They also showed strong support for public hearings. With few public hearings held, these bills became very unpopular and died.

One of our biggest challenges for protecting or designating new wilderness comes from a portion of the mountain biking community that is opposed to any new wilderness. Some groups are even pushing to change the language in the 1964 Wilderness Act to allow bikes in existing wilderness. Studies have shown wildlife officials and land managers that mountain biking in many of these wildlands is detrimental to wildlife and degrades the wilderness experience. Human safety is also a big concern.

So it's time to get out on the trails and enjoy the wild country that surrounds us. The high country snows are rapidly melting and the passes will be opening up. The mules are waiting at the gate telling me to hurry up 'cause they're ready to go.

Citizen Science in the North Fork and Beyond

By Suzanne Hildner, NFPA Citizen Science Coordinator

The NFPA has participated in a huckleberry phenology project for the past 3 summers; collecting data on huckleberry productivity every week or so (depending on fire closures) throughout the summer. This year that project is coming to a close and the data is being analyzed by Dr. Tabitha Graves and her team at USGS. Thus, there will be no organized huckleberry monitoring on the the North Fork this year. However, there are multiple other opportunities to participate in Citizen Science in Glacier Park this summer. These include a continuation of the huckleberry monitoring, with a Huckleberry Hike Project designed for hikers who have an extra hour to spend counting on whatever hike they might have chosen to do. To participate in this or other citizen science projects email glac_citizen_science@nps.gov. Other projects are under design. If you would like to participate as the opportunity arises, please email me (Suzanne Hildner) at shildner@icloud.com. Hope to see you all on the trails.

Please take the online survey about conservation in Montana!

A note from the NFPA President...



The Montana Outdoor Heritage Projects (MOHP) wants to hear your opinions on important conservation topics. The MOHP is a state-wide effort to survey Montanans about their conservation priorities, including wildlife, state parks, access and recreation, and private land conservation. Please take a few minutes to complete the short survey. Go to: <https://montanaheritageproject.com/>

"You can find the survey on the MOHP home page. Once you have completed the survey, please forward the MOHP link to your Montana friends. The MOHP has a goal of 10,000 completed surveys by September this year. We hope you'll help spread the word!

Website: New living Quarters

By Bill Walker, NFPA Media

It has been a little over a year since the website was forced to find a new, more reliable home. Despite the hassle, the move was worth it. Everything is working smoothly, and we are enjoying our nice, new, up-to-date facilities.

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 <https://www.gravel.org/>.

There is also a Twitter feed at <https://twitter.com/nfpanews>.

And a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/nfpreservationassociation>.

North Fork Preservation Association Summer Events — 2019

NFPA Annual Meeting on July 27 at Sondreson Hall

5:30pm Potluck Supper

6:45pm Business Meeting and Elections

7:30pm Presentation: **North Fork Wildlife: Past, Present and Future**

Speaker: Tim Thier, recently retired wildlife manager at Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Other Activities

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/discover-the-wild/join-a-hike/>).

The North Fork Trails Association (NFTA) has quite a few trails-related activities throughout the year, some in conjunction with other organizations. See their online calendar (<http://nftrails.org/calendar/>) for more information.

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

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

If you have paid your dues for 2019. ***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	_____

Save a tree! I wish to receive the newsletter by 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 _____

I wish to receive occasional email alerts about important issues! __

Please remove me from your mailing list. __

Mail check or cash to: North Fork Preservation Association
77 Moose Creek Road
Polebridge, MT 59928
(406) 752-5935

North Fork Preservation Association

77 Moose Creek Road
Polebridge MT 59928

Please remember to pay your dues!

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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.

New NFPA T-shirts are Here!

For the first time in many years, NFPA has a new t-shirt! The cost is \$20 and they will be on sale in all sizes at the annual meeting on July 27. Show your support for watershed, wilderness, and wildlife by wearing this great shirt!