

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 XXXVIII

Summer 2020

Number 1

NFPA Annual Meeting

July 25, 2020 at the Sullivan Cabin, 9305 North Fork Road

6:45pm	Arrive and get settled
7:00pm	Business Meeting and Elections
7:30pm	Presentation: "The Geologic Story of Glacier National Park" by Teagan Tomlin, Executive Assistant, Office of the Superintendent, Glacier National Park

Traditionally, NFPA has held its annual meeting at the Community Hall on the last Saturday in July. We start with a potluck supper, follow up with a short business meeting where we elect board members and officers, and end with a guest speaker. The evening is a fun time to be together, pay our annual membership dues, get a sticker, and buy t-shirts.

In these times of COVID, we will be making different plans.

If infection numbers have not increased by late July, we will be following these precautions at our annual meeting:

The meeting will be held outside where we can easily social distance.

- ❖ Masks will be required.
- ❖ We will not be sharing a supper.
- ❖ We will have a meeting and speaker and will use a PA system so that everyone can hear.

The meeting will be held at the property of NFPA board member Roger Sullivan. He is located 3.5 miles south of Polebridge at 9305 North Fork Road. (My campaign sign is posted at his driveway.) Bring a lawn chair and your own beverage

If the COVID infection numbers are on the rise again by late July, we will NOT be holding the meeting in person. Rather, it will be held on Zoom. An annual membership meeting is required by our bylaws so that board members and officers can be elected. Please check the NFPA website in late July to get the current details, including a Zoom link, if necessary.

Debo Powers, NFPA President

Changes All Around Us

By Debo Powers, NFPA President

The North Fork has been a great place to hang out during the COVID crisis. The wild world has gone about its business oblivious to what is threatening the humans. Winter has turned to spring. The snow in the mountains is melting and the whole world is turning green. Birds are busy building nests and singing about it. Bears and ungulates can be seen foraging for food. Meanwhile, we humans practice social distancing and try to avoid trips to town, if possible.

While this virus has had devastating consequences on the economy and individuals, it has actually been good for the natural world—less carbon is going into the atmosphere for one thing.

NFPA is undergoing some changes too.

Board member, Rachel Peura, and her husband, Alan, moved from the North Fork to New Mexico in the past year and Rachel resigned from the board.

In May, we welcomed Diane Boyd to the board. Renowned wolf expert and former employee at FWP, Diane is now retired and eager to be involved with NFPA. Diane has agreed to be the Chair of the Wildlife Working Group after the former chair, Steve Gniadek, resigned from the board.

Last October, I was appointed to fill a vacancy in the Montana Legislature when Zac Perry resigned. I am now the Representative for HD3 which includes the gateway communities on the western side of Glacier Park—Polebridge, Columbia Falls, Hungry Horse, Martin City, Coram, West Glacier, and Essex. As a result of these new responsibilities, I will be stepping down as President of NFPA at the annual meeting in July. Our Vice President, Flannery Coats, has agreed to succeed me. I will remain on the board as the Past President.

At our annual meeting, we will be saying good-bye to Frank Vitale—the longest serving board member in the history of NFPA! Frank was in the original group that formed NFPA with John Frederick and he has continued to serve all these years. We will miss his energy and the passionate dialog that he brought to board discussions!

This spring, NFPA took the lead in opposing proposed commercial special use permits in the North Fork. (See the following article for more details.)

Our annual meeting will be held on July 25 and we will be taking all precautions to protect everyone's health. (See the article for more details.)

Please renew your membership to NFPA. Your support helps us to continue to be the watchdogs over the North Fork WATERSHED, WILDERNESS, and WILDLIFE!

NFPA Takes Lead in Opposing Commercial Permits in North Fork

By Debo Powers

In May, North Forkers learned that the Flathead National Forest was considering the approval of Commercial Special Use Permits throughout the forest. The ones that concerned the NFPA were the ones in the North Fork, especially for commercial ATV use in areas that have a high density of wildlife. There is a lot of concern that some of these types of motorized vehicles are not meant to stay on roads and can cause great harm to the backcountry and streambeds, and well as harass wildlife.

In addition to NFPA, members of the North Fork Community were very upset about these proposed Special Use Permits. A plethora of letters of opposition descended on the Flathead Forest. You can read

NFPA's official comments on our website at www.gravel.org under "Reference & Archives>Official Comments."

In my role as Representative for HD3, I contacted District Ranger Rob Davies about the reactions in the North Fork and requested that he meet with the North Fork Community on Zoom to answer questions. He enthusiastically agreed and the meeting was set for Tuesday, May 5 at 7:00pm. I facilitated the meeting and over 50 North Forkers attended by computer or telephone. District Ranger Davies answered questions from community members for an hour and a half.

A follow-up meeting was organized on Monday, May 11 between Davies and a small group of landowners with experience in collaboration and the NEPA process, including Roger Sullivan from the NFPA board. The exchange was positive and productive.

We are awaiting the Forest Service decision on the Commercial Special Use Permits which we have heard will be announced in June.

Watershed Currents

By Randy Kenyon, Chair of the NFPA Watershed Working Group

Flathead National Forest has developed a new and interesting paradigm: collaborative endeavors with user groups and the public in general. This has led to a new group, Flathead River Alliance. In formal association with the American Rivers organization, this group is in embryonic stages of program development and obtaining 501(c)(3) recognition. Their mission is to protect and enhance the three forks of the Flathead River. More later!

The Flathead Forest continues their deliberate progress on the updated Wild and Scenic Comprehensive River Management Plan. They have completed reviewing three years of video data on the North Fork revealing, not surprisingly, very heavy use, and will be critical in establishing future limits. They are expecting to wrap up an Environmental Assessment in August, which will trigger a second round of public input, including open houses. The goal of this updated plan is to protect river values while maintaining positive experiences.

The Forest is also in the early stages of undertaking a major restoration project in the North Fork/Whitefish Range. They are addressing wildland/urban interface fuel loading, diversification of plant and tree communities, provide local economies with forest products and lastly, improving aquatic ecosystems. This long-awaited project will focus on the Red Meadow, Whale and Trail Creek watersheds. The latter will consist of culvert replacements properly sized and maintained to allow fish upstream passage and prevent flooding, which causes sediment invasion. These drainages are vital to the endangered bull trout. Our preservation association has been active in providing input into this project that will be, hopefully, implemented in 2021.

Glacier Park's Aquatic Invasive Species program implementation will be different this year, very much in consideration of Coronavirus. All boats must be inspected, thoroughly cleaned, with personal items removed by owners prior to inspection so that inspectors can avoid touching those items. Social distancing will be in effect. Staffing will be reduced, so patience is appreciated. Prior to boating please contact Glacier Park and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to gain information on their rules and inspection protocols.

Wildlife Corner

By Diane Boyd, Chair of the NFPA Wildlife Working Group

Green-up is upon us, wildflowers are blooming, and wildlife is suddenly everywhere.

Springtime means bears are out and hungry after not eating for five months and may have cubs to defend. Put away your bird feeders, dog food, and other temptations. Tim Manley, FWP, is a fabulous resource for bear management so give him a call if you have concerns.

June is the time of year that most wildlife species have babies and adults are protective. Carry bear spray. Mama moose with a new red fuzzy calf can be fiercer than a grizzly bear. If you find a fawn crouched down, leave it alone. The doe is not far away, and if you touch the fawn you have set the stage for its death.

The migrating birds have returned, and we can enjoy their melodic songs and the flashy colors of the western tanagers and yellow warblers. Take a walk with binoculars and a bird guide and you will be amazed at what birds you have in your back yard. Hummingbirds zip by like miniature buzzing Volkswagen beetles. I'll know summer has arrived when I hear the "peent" of the nighthawks circling high overhead, one of the last migrants to return to the North Fork.

Wolves, coyotes, and foxes gave birth in mid-April and have a swarm of hungry pups playing near their den. Canid parents may bark or howl a warning if you are too close; if you hear this simply leave the area.

Morning cloak and other beautiful butterflies and moths are flitting about. Fishing the river is more challenging for the trout to detect your fly or lure in the *café au lait* colored water with trees floating by. Ticks are very bad this year so check for them after you've been out hiking. Three of my friends have gotten sick from tick bites in the past month.

Wild asparagus and mushrooms are up now, delish!

Enjoy Mother Nature in her green finery.

North Fork Wolves: An Overview

By Diane Boyd

Maybe you've seen the impressive paw print of a wolf or heard them howl in the North Fork. Wolves live throughout the North Fork area now, but this is a fairly recent event. Wolves were effectively extirpated from the lower 48 states by the late 1930s. There are a few historical records of wolves in the North Fork, including those killed by eradication efforts in Glacier National Park (GNP) through the 1920s, a black wolf shot on the McFarland Ranch in GNP in 1953, and a wolf shot near Polebridge in 1970. After 1970 the North Fork remained wolfless until 1979 when a silver, female wolf trotted south into the North Fork from Canada. Her arrival into the area was subtle and novel. Ranger Jerry DeSanto told me about seeing wolf tracks near the Kishinehn Patrol cabin at the very northwestern corner of GNP, a first for this seasoned backcountry ranger. Who could know that this female dispersing wolf would become the springboard to launch the natural recolonization of wolves in Montana?

A male wolf joined that first female wolf and they produced a litter of seven pups 10 miles north of GNP in 1982. The next litter was born in the same area of British Columbia in 1985. In 1986 a litter of pups was born in GNP, approximately halfway between Polebridge and Kintla Lake, and was named the Magic Pack. This was the first time in 50 years that a wolf pack had been documented denning in GNP. The trickle of wolves from Canada continued and more packs were eventually established in the North Fork both north and south of the international border. By the year 2000, there were 3 packs in GNP (Kintla, Akokala, and Dutch packs) and 1 pack west of the North Fork River (Whale Creek pack). The wolf population has remained stable in this area for the past 20 years despite changes in prey populations, changing densities of other competing predators, major wildfires, significant habitat changes, climate change, wolf harvest by humans, canine parvovirus which is lethal to wolf pups (contracted from dogs), and numerous other challenges. The reasons that wolves are resilient in this area are: 1) the low density of humans and open roads, 2) an adequate and diverse prey base, and 3) vast wild places to live and raise pups without persecution. An average wolf pack requires 230 square miles to make a living, and they will defend this territory to the death. The success of a pack's survival depends on it.

The University of Montana's Wolf Ecology Project monitored wolf recovery in the North Fork from 1979 – 1997. Concurrently, several graduate student research projects also monitored black bears, grizzly bears, mountain lions, coyotes, deer, elk, and moose. It was an interesting time to learn how wolves, lions, and grizzlies interacted and competed for the same prey and space; how prey populations responded to wolf presence; and how little conflict there was with human residents. Wolves, to the best of my knowledge, did not cause livestock losses with Rachel Sweet or Tom Ladenburg who were raising cattle in the North Fork, directly across the river from the GNP wolf dens for several years. Some people appreciate the chance to see or hear a wolf howl in their neighborhood. However, other people express concerns about potential impacts of wolves on our big game populations. In years when game populations are down the wolf packs likely respond with reduced pup survival, increased dispersal out of the area, and decreased adult survival. Wolves and prey species have coexisted for hundreds of thousands of years before we were around to manage any of them. Wolves will remain part of our North Fork wildlife heritage for a long time to come, unless deliberate efforts are made to eradicate them once again.

Website: Tracking Events

By Bill Walker, NFPA Media

The website did some good work this year, getting out the word on several issues. The most prominent on a national scale was the ongoing saga of oil and gas leases in the Badger-Two Medicine. Just as we went to press, word came in that the remaining leases had been terminated – nothing like ending on a high note! See the website for news on this and other events.

As usual, we are 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>.

**NFPA t-shirts are on sale at the Polebridge Mercantile
and at the annual meeting on July 25!**



North Fork Preservation Association Summer Events — 2020

NFPA Annual Meeting on July 25 at Roger Sullivan’s Cabin (see page 1 for details)

- 6:45pm Arrive and get settled
- 7:00pm Business Meeting and Elections
- 7:30pm Presentation: “The Geologic Story of Glacier National Park” by Teagan Tomlin, Executive Assistant, Office of the Superintendent, Glacier National Park

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 it's been more than a couple of years since you last paid dues, this may be your last newsletter.

If you *have* paid your dues for 2020. **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!

If it's been more than a couple of years since you did so, this may be your last newsletter.

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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.

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 25. Show your support for watershed, wilderness, and wildlife by wearing this great shirt!