

NORTH FORK PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

"...to champion the exceptional biodiversity and wildness of the North Fork of the Flathead River watershed in Northwest Montana."

Volume XLIII

Summer 2025

Number 1

NFPA Annual Meeting

August 23, 2025, at Sondreson Community Hall
Whale Creek Bridge & North Fork Road

For this year's annual meeting we will focus on the Flathead watershed, with special attention given to the North Fork, by welcoming Flathead Rivers Alliance Executive Director Sheena Pate as our guest speaker.

We would love for you to be among our honored guests.

5:30pm: Potluck supper

6:45pm: Short business meeting to elect officers and members of the Board of Directors and report on the work of NFPA

7:30pm: Speaker

We are excited to spend an evening with all of you, share with you what we've been up to, and look forward to a great presentation.

From the President . . .

By Flannery Freund, NFPA President

At this year's annual meeting we will focus on the Flathead watershed, with special attention given to the North Fork, by welcoming Flathead Rivers Alliance executive director, Sheena Pate as our special guest. Over the last few years many NFPA members and fellow North Fork residents did what we always do when given the opportunity: make the long trek to town (even in winter blizzards over icy roads) to

be a part of land management conversations. Decades of relationship building between the NFPA members, the Polebridge community and agency decision-makers has resulted in a healthy, informed and engaged decision-making process as we all continue to work together on how to best preserve the 97% public land and watersheds in the North Fork that we are lucky enough to call home.

For those of you new to the North Fork Preservation Association, our work for over 40 years has focused on championing the exceptional biodiversity and wildness of the North Fork of the Flathead. Over the last few years our organization and our community have been showing up to talk with Forest Service and Park Service officials about the aforementioned Comprehensive River Management Plan that expired many years ago. Why? Because river use and visitation on all three forks of Flathead watershed have exponentially increased and the climate is changing; the management plan needs to catch up. The Flathead River system was the inspiration behind the Wild & Scenic River Act of 1968 that created the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System and now all three forks (219 miles) are designated and protected as Wild & Scenic Rivers. The draft plan is proposed to be ready for comment this August. It's time to get together and chat about the North Fork River over a potluck meal and alongside our fellow stakeholders and stewards. We look forward to learning and laughing alongside you and we hope you can join us on August 23rd at the community hall. For more information visit our website: <https://gravel.org> and thank you for being a part of this important work.

Wild Public Lands in Jeopardy

By Debo Powers, NFPA Vice President

Pressure from bipartisan conservation-minded voters convinced Montana's Congressional delegation to stand against attempts to include selling off public lands in the recent federal budget bill. While we breathe a sigh of relief that this catastrophe was averted, our public lands are still in jeopardy. Rather than selling off public lands (since that is so unpopular), the administration wants to just give them away in the form of inexpensive leases to fossil fuel companies. This will lock up public lands from recreation, wildlife conservation, and solitude in favor of oil and gas exploitation.

In addition, the administration intends to roll back the 2001 Roadless Rule which would jeopardize 58 million acres of undeveloped backcountry National Forest land and open it for industrial purposes. The Roadless Rule is a 25-year old commitment to not build roads and protect these wild lands for wildlife, municipal water supplies, and outdoor recreation.

Roadless National Forest land in the North Fork is where our clean water comes from. It's where we hunt, fish, hike, camp, and seek solitude. These wild lands protect imperiled species that make the North Fork special like grizzly bears, bulltrout, lynx, and wolves. Building more roads in national forests would be a drain on taxpayers. The forest road infrastructure is already so big that it can't be maintained properly.

Call your U.S. Representative and both Senators and ask them to oppose and condemn this latest attack on public lands and to co-sponsor the Roadless Area Conservation Act (which would codify the roadless rule).

Understand and Protect

By Steve Gniadek, Chair of the NFPA Wildlife Working Group

Glacier Park has a relatively intact ecosystem, with nearly all of the plant and animal species present at the time of European settlement. The North Fork is particularly noted for an abundance of wildlife. All of the large carnivores occupy the North Fork, with grizzly bear densities among the highest in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. After an absence of 50 years, the gray wolf now plays a prominent role in the predator-prey community, and the North Fork provided the foundation for natural wolf recolonization of northwest Montana. The North Fork also provides important habitat for other wildlife. Some of the most productive habitat in Montana for the common loon is found in the North Fork; a significant proportion of all the loon chicks produced in the state come from here. Tracking the remarkable recovery of the bald eagle in Montana, known nesting pairs in the North Fork have nearly doubled in 50 years, with nests along the river and on the larger lakes. The first documented nesting of the northern hawk owl and solitary sandpiper in Montana came from the North Fork. Other bird species like sandhill cranes and trumpeter swans have returned to the area. It is an important part of our wildlife heritage.

However, until the 1990s there were nesting colonies of great blue herons along the river. There are no known heron colonies there today, perhaps related to an increase in bald eagles (that can prey on nestlings) or increasing floater traffic (that could limit foraging efficiency), or a combination of both. The woodland caribou once inhabited the North Fork with rare sightings into the mid-20th century. Did habitat changes (fire or fire exclusion?) contribute to their demise? Mule deer were once more common in the North Fork and have declined throughout their range. Elsewhere, habitat changes, weather/climate, disease, harvest and less so predation have been implicated in mule deer declines. Do any of those factors apply to the North Fork? What of the porcupine? They were considered common throughout Glacier, including the North Fork. By the 1980s they were functionally (effectively) extirpated from the Park, and other parts of their range.

One approach is to investigate landscape-level ecological interactions, like trophic cascades, how the loss or recovery of one species, like the wolf, affects large ungulates like elk and deer (not to mention other predators and scavengers, like coyotes, cougars, ravens), that in turn affect vegetation like aspen, that influence a host of other species. If all or most of the components or species are still present, how have their population numbers and distributions, as well as the complex interactions among them changed? Consider the beaver. Nearly exterminated from the Rocky Mountains during the fur trapping boom of the early 1800s, beavers are now back in the North Fork. But are they as abundant as they were during pre-trapping times? Do we even know how widely distributed they were historically? Can local geomorphology, like incised streams, tell us something about past conditions? Beavers are famous landscape engineers, affecting ground water as well as surface water, creating extensive wetlands beneficial to an abundance of critters, from moose and otters to our native fish. John Muir reminded us that when we try to pick out something by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe. Do we know enough about landscape ecology to determine what is natural, what is an intact ecosystem?

It's best to approach these questions with humility. We don't have all the answers; there's so much we don't know. Aldo Leopold, the "father" of modern wildlife management, advised: the first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the parts. Save the parts and learn what we can from the interactions among them. Terms like natural, pristine, intact should be considered not as absolutes, but in a relative sense. The North Fork is still a relatively natural environment. Let's continue to do our part to understand and protect it.

Polebridge Bear Smart Report Spring 2025

By Suzanne Hildner, PBBS Chair

By now, many of us will have seen bears out and about. It is therefore time to make sure electric fences around gardens are ship-shape and to take down bird feeders. Polebridge Bear Smart (PBBS) has been busy over the winter on several projects that we are ready to implement this summer.

North Forkers can now recycle emptied/expired bear spray cans through PBBS!!!!!!

Now is a good time to review your collection of bear spray. Things to note:

- Store in a cool place and if carrying in your car it is recommended to carry bear spray in a secure container such as an ammo can or bear spray container available for purchase online rather than loose or in the glove compartment.
- Check expiration date. Consider writing expiration date on the outside and bottom of the can at the time of purchase.
- Shake can every couple of months to mix capsaicin and propellant.
- Familiarize yourself with first aid in case of accidental spraying. Wash affected body parts with soap and COLD water (NOT HOT!!).
- To recycle; make sure can is empty. You can do this by spraying the can WITH THE WIND AT YOUR BACK until empty. Then puncture the can at the top with a hammer and nail. Make sure you do this with gloves and preferably a mask. Puncturing the can inside a plastic garbage bag is also recommended to contain any contents that may dribble out.
- You can recycle on your own at Pacific Steel and Recycling or contact Suzanne Hildner at sdhildner@icloud.com for drop off locations. *Also, there is a drop-off location in a labeled container on the front porch of Sondreson Hall.*

PBBS has partnered with People and Carnivores to provide bear resistant food storage and garbage containers for Polebridge businesses' employee housing. Containers were delivered in mid-June. Funding for this project was completely provided by P & C. THANK YOU PEOPLE AND CARNIVORES!!!

PBBS will continue to provide Bear Smart training for seasonal employees in and around Polebridge. This was our fourth year offering this training.

We will continue our Initial Response Program whereby PBBS can rapidly provide trail cameras and scare devices to property owners who have had a bear incident and who wish to identify and/or deter

their visitor. This program is offered in conjunction with Montana FWP; landowners must agree to notify FWP they have had an incident.

Finally, NFPA/PBBS is again offering Kodiak brand 96 gallon bear resistant garbage containers for loan or purchase at a reduced price. This opportunity is being made to the Polebridge community at below market cost with the help of grants and private donations. Purchase price per canister is \$300. Cans are available now! Please contact Suzanne Hildner at shildner@icloud.com or (406) 253-3263 to purchase or rent.

Help the Polebridge Community be BEAR SMART! If you wish to help us with a donation, join the NFPA at gravel.org.

Road Stuff

By Randy Kenyon

The Flathead National Forest Service's Resource Allocation Committee (RAC) is a unique federal grant program emanating from somewhere deep in Washington's byzantine funding maze. It, presumably, falls under another obscure federal program named "Securing Our Schools". In any case, it provides annual funding for local forest-related projects. This year's funding tops \$400,000. The Forest Service, conservation groups, the county and other organizations apply for grants that promote in sustaining watershed, roads, trails, research, and various other outdoor recreational projects and events. Typically, North Fork benefits include road maintenance, water quality monitoring, and river usage programs. Fortunately, two North Forkers are committee members, enabling the North Fork to be well represented when grant applications are reviewed.

After members of our board of directors noticed the pathetic condition of our founder John Frederick's "unpaved highway" sign at Square Peg Ranch, it was decided that replacement was long, long overdue. Our executive board committee was delegated to undertake this seemingly mundane task. As committees are wont to do, it became charmingly complicated: one-sided or two? budget? design? Who can make it? Well, as summer became fall, it became imperative to act. A budget was decided, a local North Fork woodworker was found willing and able, and a design was agreed upon. A plan! Over the winter the sign was completed and in spring the sign was in place. It is wonderfully done, a touching tribute to John. Alack and alas, it was brought to the county's attention that the sign was situated very slightly in the county "right of way" and ordered moved. It was, and the saga is now complete. When driving by Square Peg take a look!

The Flathead Rivers Alliance Update

By "LJ" McClellan

As I commence my fourth summer as a volunteer river ambassador for the non-profit Flathead Rivers Alliance, I am reminded of what a rewarding experience it is to educate recreationalists on river safety and stewardship. Ambassadors provide a variety of information on safety, ethics and etiquette on river use, fishing, camping, and bears, as well as provide loaner life jackets, and gather data on river users at

key access points on all three forks of the Wild & Scenic Flathead River System. The Flathead Rivers Alliance also recruits volunteers for their Citizen Science River Recreation Water Monitoring program, and the non-profit has been instrumental in the public outreach and input on the Comprehensive River Management Plan update, which is currently in the NEPA analysis phase.

Remember to keep in touch with the FRA and NFPA and be sure to participate in the next public review and comment period planned for the end of summer.

Be sure to sign up for the Flathead Rivers Alliance weekly river and weather forecast for all the latest information.

For more information, sign up to volunteer, or to make a contribution, go to flatheadrivers.org, or contact Executive Director Sheena Pate at 406-407-0421/ info@flatheadrivers.org.

Calling all North Fork Landowners! Get to Know Your Noxious Weeds!

By Kylie Heikkila

Curious about noxious weeds and how to manage them? The North Fork Preservation Association is working to provide landowners with the tools and information they need to stop the spread and protect our wild and working landscapes.

Noxious weeds are pushy, destructive invaders that don't play well with others. They threaten native species, harm wildlife habitat, impact agriculture, and disrupt the ecosystem we all depend on.

Knowing how to identify, report, and manage these plants before they establish themselves in your yards and pastures is key.

Missed our noxious weeds talk at the Community Building on May 18th? No problem! Reach out to Kylie Heikkila at kylieheik@gmail.com for more info and resources.

Why Are Noxious Weeds a Big Deal?

Some of our weeds may look attractive and friendly, but noxious weeds are bad news for the North Fork.

They push out native plants: These invaders grow fast and spread aggressively, taking over the landscape and leaving little room for our native wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs that belong here.

- They're no good for wildlife: Most noxious weeds offer poor forage or shelter for wildlife and some can even be toxic. Native wildlife depends on native plants to survive.
- They mess with soil and water: Noxious weeds can alter soil health, increase erosion, and interfere with the way water flows through the land.
- They make wildfires worse: Some invasive grasses dry out fast and burn hot, fueling more frequent and intense fires.

Part of protecting the North Fork means keeping noxious weeds in check. Thanks for doing your part to keep this wild place healthy and happy!

Legislative Update

By Representative Debo Powers

Protection of public lands and conservation fared well in Montana's 69th legislative session. Legislators worked in a bipartisan way to defeat attacks on our public lands, including public land transfer, and attempts to rob millions from conservation funding. Without bipartisan efforts, this could have been a disastrous session for public lands and conservation.

Here are some of the highlights:

HB 932 established the Habitat Legacy Account which funnels marijuana tax money into conservation, wildlife crossings, outdoor access, and wildlife improvement projects. This bill passed both the House and the Senate on bipartisan votes and was signed by the Governor.

HB 537 would have provided funds to FWP to study usage on major recreational rivers throughout Montana, including all three sections of the Flathead River. This bill passed both the House and the Senate on bipartisan votes but was unfortunately vetoed by the Governor.

HJ 24 was a resolution supporting Utah's lawsuit to declare federal public lands unconstitutional and give those lands back to the states. Such a move would be the first step in selling off our public lands because the state does not have the resources to manage them. This resolution failed in the House on a 34-66 vote.

SJ 14 was a resolution to Montana's congressional delegation to eliminate all Wilderness Study Areas in Montana. This resolution failed in the Senate Energy Committee.

SB 307 would have removed all conservation and recreation funding from the marijuana revenue account. This bill failed to get to the Senate after being defeated in a tie-vote in the Senate Finance and Claims Committee.

Probably the most important thing that happened during the session is that the numerous bills to turn our independent judiciary into a partisan judiciary were defeated. What does this have to do with conservation? Very simply, when you need to go to court to protect public lands, wildlife, or a clean environment, you want an impartial judge who will decide the case based on the state constitution and the law, not on political ideology. Defeating these bills was a win for conservation.... and the rule of law in our state.

One thing that I learned while serving in the legislature is that defeating bad bills is as important as passing good ones.

Kintla Kölsch: A North Fork Partnership Benefiting Local Conservation

By Jonathan Munroe, Graduate Teaching Assistant
Haub School Environment and Natural Resources, University of Wyoming

This summer, Northern Lights Saloon and Home Ranch Bottoms are teaming up with Bias Brewing of Kalispell to launch "Kintla Kölsch," a specialty beer exclusively available in the North Fork. This community-focused beverage will directly support three local organizations: Flathead Rivers Alliance, North Fork Preservation Association, and the North Fork Landowners Association.

For each pint sold during the summer 2025 season, \$1 will be divided equally among these three conservation groups. Additionally, special pint nights will be held throughout the summer where \$2 per beverage will benefit the featured organization. These events will give each group an opportunity to promote their mission and work in the North Fork community.

The project features custom artwork by local artist Sydney Boveng, which will be available on stickers for purchase. Jonathan "Jono" Munroe, a North Fork seasonal worker and University of Wyoming graduate student, leads this initiative.



Kintla Kölsch represents a model for breweries to partner with gateway outdoor recreation communities, creating "destination beverages" that encourage repeat visitation while giving back to local environmental organizations. Based on this summer's success, the beer could become an annual North Fork tradition. Munroe plans to present this model to the Montana Brewers Association as a template for similar community partnerships across the state.

Visit the North Fork this summer to enjoy Kintla Kölsch and support these vital local organizations!

Visit the CSKT Bison Range

By Flannery Freund

Well-known for its incredible wildlife viewing and photographic opportunities, [the Bison Range](#) is a great place to experience nature in western Montana and learn about the Séliš, Ql'ispé, and Ksanka's millennia-old relationship with buffalo and the other plants and animals found on the range.

The Bison Range is the center of the Flathead Indian Reservation and consists of 18,766 acres. Many plants and animals can be found on the range, including Bison, Elk, and Pronghorn Antelope. Through the Public Law 116-260, Congress restored the Bison Range to federal trust ownership for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. So, after more than a century of dispossession, this land is once again under tribal management, and the CKST's award-winning natural resource managers are caretakers of the Range's wildlife, plants and land. You will experience not only the heart-stopping beauty of this place and its vibrant plant and animal communities but also millennia-old historic and cultural ties to buffalo and to the Bison Range.



[The Bison Range](#) is located at 58355 Bison Range Rd, Moiese, MT 59824. Funding and grants for their annual operations are uncertain at this time. NFPA is encouraging our members and their friends and family to visit the Range and support them by paying a day use fee that goes directly to helping them continue their mission.

University of Montana Volunteers Pull Weeds at Ford River Access

By Kathy Heffernan, Smith River Weed Volunteers

Since 2013, the Smith River Weed Volunteers have dug, clipped, and bagged seedheads of biennial weeds, principally musk and bull thistle, houndstongue, and burdock, in boat camps on the Smith River. Later, contract sprayers treat perennials, including leafy spurge and Canada Thistle. This year, the snowpack melted early and spring rains were inadequate. Stream flow plunged and the volunteers formulated a Plan B.

On June 23, fourteen volunteers arrived at Ford River Access to attack knapweed in the beautiful meadow there. The group included a botanist, a swift water rescue technician, an EMT, and several natural history experts. In subsequent days, the volunteers weeded Ford, Sondreson Meadow, Coal Creek River bar, and a few random river edges of knapweed and oxeye daisies. Floating from the Border to Bog Creek in 3 rafts and 4 kayaks, they camped at Ford, a wild river island, and Big Creek. Finally, the group joined the 22nd Middle Fork Weed Rodeo and gleefully ended their weedy adventures at the Grand Weed Party.



Several of this year's volunteers hail from University of Montana's Wilderness Institute. WI leader Andrea Stephens is always seeking service projects for her students. They will likely be back to the North Fork!!

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 2025. ***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
PO Box 1602
Columbia Falls, MT 59912



Visit us & support our work
at gravel.org

North Fork Preservation Association

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<https://gravel.org/>

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, hats and bear bags are here!

NFPA has a new t-shirt! The cost is \$20 and they will be on sale in all sizes at the Home Ranch Store, the Polebridge Mercantile and at our annual meeting. Also freshly available are hats and bear bags! Show your support for the exceptional biodiversity and wildness of the North Fork by wearing and using our great merch!