

The Wilderness Voice

Newsletter of the Madison Gallatin Chapter



MONTANA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

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Is Anyone Listening to Us? by Barbara Geller

When you get involved with a non-profit like Montana Wilderness Association that regularly comments on proposed actions by federal and state agencies and asks its members to submit comments, it is easy to question whether those comments are effective. Are our voices being drowned out by opposition voices? Are we just a drop in the bucket? Is anyone paying attention? Is there any hope that our position will be adopted?

Recently, our local Madison-Gallatin Chapter board of directors has commented on several local proposals:

- over-snow travel plans in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest,
- proposed bike trails in BLM's Revenue Flats north of Ennis,
- logging by DNRC in the Limestone Creek and Triple Tree areas south of Bozeman, and
- BLM's 3-county travel plan, which includes proposed bike trails in Copper City.

Are our efforts efficacious? Does MWA's name carry any weight? Is it worth our time?

Absolutely.

When Sally Cathy, MWA's southwest Montana Field Director, met with the BLM on another topic, out of the blue her contact thanked her for the comment letter we had submitted 12 months previously, endorsing the Revenue Flats bike trails. That proposal ran into opposition, but it meant something to him that MWA had supported their efforts.

This November, BLM approved 15.7 miles of new bike trails at Copper City and closed nearly half of the miles of existing roads in their new Travel Plan for Park, Gallatin and Broadwater counties.

Clearly, there were many others advocating for the bike trails besides us, so we can't take sole credit, but we're very happy to know that bikers will finally have a great venue for biking during the times of year when mud – and the risk of erosion - plagues many other area trails. Although we actually advocated for even more extensive closures, we were pleased that BLM chose to close 40 miles of roads in these 17 parcels of BLM lands scattered across the three counties. In addition, BLM heard us when we pointed out that off-road Over Snow Vehicle (snowmobile)

usage wasn't addressed in the proposal. The Record of Decision outlaws cross-country OSV travel, protecting plants and habitat.

Sure, we didn't get all that we wanted, but we feel our comments were heeded and made a difference. Psychologists will recognize that as enough positive reinforcement to motivate us to submit more comment letters, urging a balance between recreational use and protection of Montana's wild places.

When MWA asks you to submit a personal comment letter on a wilderness issue, we hope that you'll conclude it is worth your time, too.



Someday soon, bike trails will ride the ridge lines at Copper City, north of Three Forks. MWA supported BLM's proposal for new trails in this arid area.

Find Your Next Winter Hike Using hikewildmontana.org

Winter hiking offers special delights. Animal tracks meander across the paths. Sunlight twinkles off snow crystals. Fewer people are on the trails and the snow muffles sounds, creating a greater sense of solitude.

All one needs is a destination and special footgear. Cross-country skis, snowshoes or “grippers” like Yaktraks or Kahtoola microspikes can make a winter hike easier. Tuck a thermos of hot Tang, tea, or cocoa into the backpack for a special treat.

For a destination, use MWA’s online hiking guide at hikewildmontana.org and, under “Seasons”, check “Winter”. The resulting list is screened for accessibility in the winter. In southwest Montana, the list includes:

- Pine Creek Falls, Ousel Falls and Grotto Falls – Icy waterfalls have a special beauty in winter.
- Lava Lake – Easier to hike when the rocks in the trailbed are covered by snow, yet the lake is still stunning.
- Bacon Rind, Fawn Pass, and Bighorn Pass – Level terrain makes for easy XC skiing. Bring your National Park pass.
- Bear Trap Canyon – Winter is the best time to be in this Wilderness area, as the trail is usually free of snow and of summer’s hazards of rattlesnakes, ticks and poison ivy. In fact, all the trails in the Madison Valley tend to be snow-free through most of the winter.
- Storm Castle – Moderate summit hikes can be hard to find in winter, when the going is slower and roads are closed, but the gated road only adds 2 miles of level hiking to the Storm Castle ascent. The views from the top include the Gallatin Crest and the Spanish Peaks.
- Hogback Ridge – Find a calm day and get a brisk workout by climbing Hogback to big views of the Absarokas and east Gallatins.

When you finish a winter hike, do your fellow hikers a favor: go back to hikewildmontana.org and file a trip report, describing the conditions you encountered.



Lava Lake glistens in winter, photo by Barbara Geller

Upcoming Events!

Wilderness And... The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

Wednesday, January 25, 7:00 p.m., Large Community Room, Bozeman Public Library

Michael Fiebig , Associate Director of the Northern Rockies Office of American Rivers, will present our program. While free-flowing rivers are the acknowledged lifeblood of our most cherished ecosystems, nearly 79,000 dams impound roughly 600,000 miles of river in the U.S. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is America's most powerful yet little known law for permanently protecting wild, free-flowing rivers. Come learn about the history of the Act, what it means for a river to be designated as "Wild and Scenic," and how wild river conservation is being done 50 years after the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was passed.



Alsek River, photo by Michael Fiebig

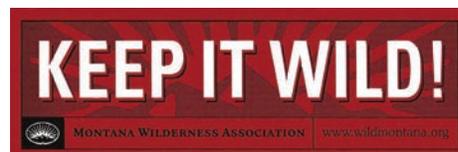
Wilderness And... The Wild and Sacred Pryors

Wednesday, February 22, 7:00 p.m., Large Community Room, Bozeman Public Library

Eastern Montana Field Director Charlie Smillie will join us for a tour of the Pryor Mountains, an utterly unique landscape in its ecology, geology, and spiritual significance. The Pryor Mountains are home to towering spires, deep limestone canyons, ice caves, and one of the biggest wild horse ranges in the United States. Located just an hour-and-a-half south of Billings, you'd expect the Pryors to draw crowds, yet their flora, fauna, and beauty don't draw the attention you might expect. This lack of crowds, however, might just be the Pryor's best quality. You won't want to miss learning about this wild place on the eastern side of the state.



Cave in the Pryors, photo by Forrest Theisen



2017 Madison/Gallatin Chapter Winter Walks

To sign up for a winter Wilderness Walk visit wildmontana.org/walks

Saturday, January 28: Cascade Creek to Lava Lake

Miles (round trip): 6 miles

Difficulty: Strenuous

Elevation Gain: 1,600 ft

Leaders: Tom Ross and Bob Bayley

This hike in the northern end of Gallatin Canyon will take us on a rocky and sometimes steep, wooded trail into the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area to a beautiful alpine lake located below Jumbo and Table Mountains. The trail is mostly in the shade, so dress warmly in layers and bring winter hiking boots in case the conditions are not suitable for snowshoes. Bring water and food, and plan on having lunch beside the frozen lake. Round trip from trailhead should take about five hours.

Saturday, February 4: Lick Creek Loop

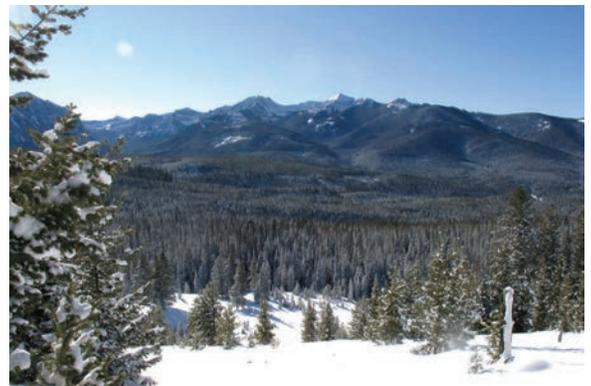
Miles (round trip): 4.5 miles

Difficulty: Moderate

Elevation Gain: 800 ft

Leaders: Kenneth Hapner and Ron Brekke

The trailhead for the Lick Creek Loop hike is located 8 miles up the Hyalite Canyon road. The hike snakes mostly east through both open and dense forest on a gradual climb with spectacular views of surrounding mountains. The air will be pristine and permeated with the piney smells of the unperturbed and resting forest. Hopefully, we will see the tracks of passing snowshoe rabbits, weasels, fox, deer, elk and maybe a large cat. It is difficult to predict snow conditions. Come dressed for the weather in layers and bring lunch, water, snacks, sunglasses and a yearning for the smells, sights and sounds of the winter forest.



View from Lick Creek, photo by Susie McDonald

Saturday, February 11: Mill Creek

Miles (round trip): 6 miles

Difficulty: Moderately Strenuous

Elevation Gain: 1,400 ft

Leaders: Bob Bayley and Tom Ross

Our destination is a wild, roadless, and remote parcel of land in the Madison Range. We will access this land from a trailhead near Mill Creek, a tributary of Jack Creek. If conditions are favorable, we will enjoy spectacular views of Lone Peak and Fan Mountain as we climb through moderately steep terrain on a seldom used trail.

More Winter Walks

Saturday, February 18: Climbing Snowbank

Miles (round trip): 6 miles

Difficulty: Moderately Strenuous

Elevation Gain: 950 ft

Leaders: Roger Jenkins and Susie McDonald

A steady but not steep climb above the Mill Creek drainage in the Absaroka Range will offer increasingly sweeping views of the Mill Creek Valley, the Bridger Range, and into the depths of the Absaroka Range. On a clear day, you will want to go further than your legs can carry you, but we will limit our travels to a superb viewpoint.



Lunch with a view on Snowbank walk, photo by Roger Jenkins

Saturday, March 18: The Hogback

Miles (round trip): 8 miles

Difficulty: Strenuous

Elevation Gain: 1,000 ft

Leaders: Karen Williams and Roger Breeding

This is a hike up to and along the spine of a hogback ridge that runs east and west from the Trail Creek area to the Paradise Valley, with great views of the Gallatins to the west and the Absarokas to the east. Given that the trail is commonly on bedrock, the trail surface is rocky and uneven and not commonly snow-covered. It generally can be hiked (rather than snow-shoed) in from mid to late March. This is a great early spring hike, but with significant elevation gain.



Climbing steeply up the Hogback, photo by Roger Jenkins



View from the Hogback, photo by Susie McDonald