



Flathead-Kootenai Chapter Newsletter: Spring 2018

Field Notes from Northwest Montana Field Director, Amy Robinson

I recently read Brene Brown's new book, *Braving the Wilderness*. Brene is a social scientist who explores uncomfortable topics like courage and vulnerability. In reading her book, I was reminded that right now, more than ever, it's important we climb out of our comfortable bunkers and brave the great unknown. This unknown land is what she appropriately calls the Wilderness. Brene speaks of the need for a strong back, soft front, and wild heart. I think this is beautiful language to describe the incredible presence, and difficult work, that we all must step into if we want to be a part of carving change.

In December, the Flathead National Forest released their Draft Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement. This means we're almost through the entire planning process. After nearly five years, it is positive to see strong wilderness recommendations for the Whitefish Range, Swan Front, and Jewel Basin, and the Forest Service is lining up to manage these places to maintain their wild character. We are disappointed, however, that the agency did not recommend more protection for places in the interior of the Swan Range, including Sullivan Creek, a vital stream for endangered bull trout.

We're currently in the final stages of what's called the "objections" process, and we have raised two objections: One, about the boundaries being proposed in the Swan Range for Bunker Creek; and two to refine and clarify the management of recommended wilderness. After the objections meetings, the U.S. Forest Service will work to finalize and sign the forest plan and grizzly bear management plan for the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) population. The grizzly bear management plan will be applied to the final Flathead Forest Plan; and the Kootenai, Helena-Lewis and Clark, and Lolo National Forest Plans will be amended.

In the Kootenai National Forest, we're continuing our work with the Kootenai Forest Stakeholder Coalition. Thanks to Grete's work and persistence, we've provided presentations and gathered additional support for the Coalition from businesses and individuals such as the Eureka and Libby Chambers of Commerce, the Sanders County Commissioners, and the Bull Lake Rod and Gun Club. It has been inspiring work to witness the common ground we all have for public lands management, which of course includes protecting more wild country.

In other news, I suspect you may have seen our statewide, integrated effort to push back on three bills introduced to Congress that strip protection from 29 different Wilderness Study Areas totaling over 800,000 acres of land across our state. If you would like to take action, please go to ourlandourlegacy.org and sign your name to a letter asking our delegation to take a different, bipartisan and balanced, approach to these special areas. Let's carve a new solution that includes our value to protect and preserve Wilderness.

As always, please reach out if you have questions or would like to be involved. It's the wild west out here, and we need to stick together.

-Amy Robinson



Big Snowies Wilderness Study Area. Photo by Dexter Hale.

**OUR LAND,
OUR LEGACY**



Flathead-Kootenai Chapter Newsletter: Spring 2018

FKC offers scholarships to NW MT High School Seniors

By Amy Pearson

The Flathead-Kootenai Chapter of MWA kicked our Scholarship Program into overdrive this season. High School students in Sanders, Lake, and Lincoln Counties were invited to submit essays regarding the centrality of public lands in Montana. We received 33 entries! It was hard to decide, but three \$500 scholarships were awarded to Laurel Bitterman of Polson, Erynn Thier of Eureka and Payton Frields of Thompson Falls. We also awarded three runner-up \$250 scholarships to Russell Smith of Polson, Sarah Hepner of Eureka, and Stacy Gray of Hot Springs. One \$500 scholarship was also awarded to Flathead Valley Community College student Austin Latter who is a Natural Resource major and Forest Service employee. Austin wrote a winning essay regarding the necessity of the Antiquities Act, and read a portion of his essay at MWA's Spring into Summer Event on April 13.



Amy Pearson presents Austin Latter with his scholarship (top). Austin Latter reads his winning essay on the Antiquities Act (right). Photos by Donald Dodge.



FKC President's Update from John Repke

So, what has your Chapter Board been up to? Well, for starters, in 2017 we initiated a scholarship program for high school seniors in our chapter area.

The students applied by writing an essay about public lands and wild places.

Our primary source of funding for the scholarships is the Winter Wildlands Backcountry Film Festival (BCFF). The Board plans and runs the BCFF and I am proud to say that we sold out again this year. I hope you were able to attend!

The Board is also engaged in outreach to promote the work of MWA. Again this year we co-sponsored the Wilderness Speaker Series (WSS) at FVCC. WSS continues to be very popular and it gives us a chance to reach a broad audience.

We also hosted informational tables at several events and visited a MCC crew out on the trail (with snacks, of course) to show our appreciation for their hard work.

Several board members have helped make the Wilderness Walks program a success by helping co-lead the hikes. In addition, we have sponsored the book '100 Days of Solitude' and the re-printing of the NatGeo Crown of the Continent map – both of which encourages folks appreciate the wonderful public and wild lands in NW Montana.

As a MWA member in the FK Chapter, a portion of your dues help provide funding for the activities mentioned above. Your personal involvement is also welcome – and needed. Special thanks to those of you who helped us run Wilderness Walks, BCFF and the scholarship program. We are fortunate to have Amy Robinson, our wonderful, dedicated Field Director carrying the MWA flag here in NW MT. The Board supports the efforts of Amy and her team, but we can always use more ideas, energy and resources. If you are interested in volunteering in any way, please reach out to myself or one of the board members. We would love to hear from you!

Devi Morgan





Flathead-Kootenai Chapter Newsletter: Spring 2018

Wilderness Walks: 58 Years of Adventure

Last winter, the Flathead - Kootenai Chapter offered six free hikes across northwest Montana. Hikers learned about winter survival skills, avalanche safety, and discovered new winter trails with us. We are looking forward to hitting the trail for the 58th summer of Wilderness Walks, with 14 hikes planned across northwest Montana and more than 100 across the state. New this year, Grab a shovel and give back to the trails you love on a Volunteer Trail Crew project, learn to identify birds or wildflowers, or challenge yourself to summit a new mountain with MWA this summer. Registration is open at wildmontana.org/walks



Winter hike to Ross Creek Cedars with Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness. Photo by Donald Dodge.

FKC Wilderness Walks 2018

May 31: Wildflowers Wilderness Walk (Columbia Falls)

June 3: Smith Lake Bird Watching Wilderness Walk (Whitefish)

June 9: Kootenai Archaeology Wilderness Walk (Libby)

June 29: Stanton Lake Wilderness Walk (Essex)

July 8: Cube Iron-Silcox Wilderness Walk (Thomson Falls)

July 16: Little Spar Lake Wilderness Walk (Troy)

July 21: Coal Ridge Wilderness Walk (Polebridge)

July 26: Rock Lake Wilderness Walk (Noxon)

August 1: Cedar Lake Ladies Wilderness Walk (Condon)

August 11: Canyon Peak Wilderness Walk (Thompson Falls)

August 17: Bluebird Lake Wilderness Walk (Eureka)

August 25: Jewel Basin Yoga Ladies' Wilderness Walk (Bigfork)

September 15: Review Mountain Wilderness Walk (Polebridge)

September 16: Mount Henry Wilderness Walk (Yaak)

Volunteer Spotlight: Bret Luedke



Sonny Mazullo

Our thanks go out to Bret Luedke, vice president of the Flathead-Kootenai Chapter, for being a dedicated volunteer. Bret spearheaded organizing the Backcountry Film Festival, which raised over \$3000

for MWA this year. In the past year, he has also led Wilderness Walks, helped with FKC's scholarship program, joined a Volunteer Trail Crew trip, and volunteered for numerous events. Bret will move into the role of Flathead-Kootenai Chapter President in 2018. Hats off to you, Bret!