A CLEAR VISION
FOR MONTANA’S WILDERNESS

MONTANA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

2014 ANNUAL REPORT
MISSION
The mission of the Montana Wilderness Association is to work with communities to protect Montana’s wilderness heritage, quiet beauty, and outdoor traditions now, and for future generations.

VALUES
Innovation. Integrity. Collaboration. Stewardship. Tenacity. The values you cherish are our values, too.

VISION
The Montana Wilderness Association envisions a future where, from the rugged mountains to the vast prairies, Montana’s wild places are protected, connected, and restored, because Montanans value wilderness as essential to our heritage and way of life.
In September, more than 2,400 people traveled to the town of Seeley Lake for the Montana Wilderness Association’s celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act. It turned out to be the largest celebration of this landmark legislation in the entire United States.

In December, we celebrated again as President Obama signed the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act into law, a bill that permanently protects almost all of the Rocky Mountain Front and gives Montana its first new wilderness in 31 years! Because of your commitment and support, we made history.

The Heritage Act, like the Wilderness Act, came from a vision of how we can retain our wild natural heritage and pass it down to future generations. It is a vision that not only recognizes the essential value of wild places but the importance of people coming together, putting their differences aside, and finding a common ground that’s based on a love of place.

Thanks to your generous support and commitment to this vision, the Montana Wilderness Association made great strides over the last year towards protecting wild places that make Montana, Montana.

In 2014, guided by a vision that values both wild places and people, the Montana Wilderness Association:

• Deepened the connection local communities in Northwest Montana have to the Cabinet Mountains, Scotchman Peaks, the Whitefish Range, and the Swan Range.
• Engaged members of the Blackfeet Nation in a campaign to protect the 130,000-acre Badger-Two Medicine area from oil and gas development while providing Blackfeet youth with the opportunity to directly experience this special place the Blackfeet Nation consider the epicenter of its spiritual, cultural, and ceremonial heritage.
• Formed diverse partnerships and mobilized citizens to advocate for the protection of more than a million acres of wildlands on five Montana National Forests, setting the stage for future wilderness legislation.
• Conducted on-the-ground inventories of badlands, buttes, and prairies that will allow us to effectively advocate for protection of eastern Montana’s prairie wildlands.
• Partnered with the U.S. Forest Service, the University of Montana, and Montana State University to organize 166 volunteers to maintain and steward the Continental Divide Trail, spanning wildlands from Yellowstone National Park to Glacier National Park.
• Continued developing the next generation of wilderness advocates by providing opportunities for students and recent war veterans to experience Montana’s wild places and become a voice for their protection. Recognizing the power of wild places to help people heal, we've expanded our outreach to veterans with guided trips to backcountry areas, including the Great Burn and the Gallatin Crest.

By embracing a vision that recognizes the value of wild places and people coming together, the Montana Wilderness Association is blazing the trail for the next 50 years of wilderness in Montana. Thank you for your commitment and support as we bring people together from all walks of life to protect the wild places that provide for the majesty of the grizzly, the crisp air and cold water that sustains life, and the soothing quiet that calms the mind and renews the spirit.

Brian Sybert, Executive Director
Scott Friskics, State Council President
2014 HIGHLIGHTS

We believe life is rich and rewarding when people are connected to wild places.

PERMANENT PROTECTION
Thanks to the work of countless advocates, volunteers, and MWA staff, members and partners, Congress designated new wilderness in Montana for the first time in 31 years by passing the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act in late December 2014. This is a historic time for Montanans and for our outdoor heritage and lays a foundation for future protections across the state. The passage of the Heritage Act provides us with momentum to increase our efforts to promote the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act which has a remarkable outpouring of bipartisan support in Montana. MWA has been connecting with a varied cross section of Montanans like never before, searching for—and finding—the common ground that exists on both sides of the political aisle.

THE GALLATIN COMMUNITY
MWA is an active member of a collaborative intent upon finding community-based agreement for permanent protection of the Gallatin Range, including the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area. Enduring hours in conference rooms, on the trail, and over cups of coffee, MWA and others are building a process that includes everyone and protects this magnificent mountain range.

STRONG YOUNG LEADERSHIP
The Montana Outdoor Heritage Project (MOHP) collaborative project is dedicated to amplifying conservation voices through nonpartisan voter engagement. This robust get-out-the-vote work in 2014 garnered more than 8,000 pledges to vote by supporters of the great outdoors.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WILDERNESS ACT
The celebration in Seeley Lake, Montana, was the largest in the nation. MWA leveraged that excitement to build awareness, build collaborations, and build support for our programs. Attracting more than 2,400 people, including youth, veterans, families, and business owners from across the state and the political spectrum, the occasion offered us a vibrant and exciting model for how we can tell the wilderness story and how we can share the vision.

MWA also received a Regional Forester’s Award for participation in creating the film, Untrammeled, which celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act. The film chronicles the diverse experiences of high school and college students as they head into the wilderness.

OUR NEW HOME
The historic Bluestone House is the new home of the Montana Wilderness Association. We are pleased to be a permanent part of the Helena community and to have a collaborative space to make available for our work and that of the community. This year we have enjoyed hosting an open house, a Chamber of Commerce event, many collaborative partner meetings and community events in the conference room. Please stop in for a visit and take a tour the next time you’re in the neighborhood!
LOOKING FORWARD

PUBLIC LANDS IN PUBLIC HANDS
From helping to mobilize the 300+ people who showed up in a downpour to oppose privatization of public lands to the 75,000 viewers of the map that showed the extent of HB 1526’s attempt to turn our national forests into revenue areas, MWA recognizes and nurtures Montanans’ deep connection to our public lands. We remain committed to and focused on diverse collaborations and partnerships to protect our public heritage.

LEWIS & CLARK WILDLANDS
New leadership on forest planning provides exciting opportunities for landscape-level partnerships, especially along the Continental Divide. MWA will work to build broad-based support for future wilderness expansion in the Scapegoat, around Nevada Mountain, Electric Peak, the Sleeping Giant and elsewhere. Building off our previous work, we are focused on conservation management for all the roadless lands along the incomparable Continental Divide.

WILDERNESS INVENTORY WORK
With the big emphasis on forest plans right now, MWA is poised to hire a new staffer to take on statewide forest and travel planning needs, identify gaps in critical wildlands data, and engage citizen volunteers to conduct wilderness character inventories for priority landscapes. From the Pryors to Nevada Mountain, the Wildlands Field Coordinator will work to build local support for the protection of wild places, and help the USFS identify new areas to be considered as wilderness.

THE GREAT BURN
The Great Burn is one of the most important wildlife corridors in the Northern Rockies: 250,000 acres connecting the Crown of the Continent with central Idaho wildlands. New forest plans are underway; the Shining Mountains Chapter of MWA has gone to countless public meetings, engaged the Missoula community with a variety of events and education, led hikes, and, with the Great Burn Study Group and Backcountry Horsemen, produced a map that brings more attention to this wild chunk of roadless land.
The wild Badger-Two Medicine landscape has been the epicenter of the Blackfeet Nation’s spiritual, cultural, and ceremonial lives for centuries. It is also the sudden focus of a 2013 lawsuit to open the area for several oil and gas leases. Elected tribal leaders understand and value the importance of permanently protecting this unparalleled wild area from exploitation; the Blackfeet Confederacy recently sent a proclamation requesting that the U.S. government withdraw all oil and gas leases from the Badger-Two Medicine. MWA has been an active behind-the-scenes advisor this year, providing information and tools for reaching out to agencies and encouraging passionate tribal leaders to find their own voices for media campaigns. MWA also organized and led a week-long trail improvement project for Blackfeet teens working to reconnect young people on the Reservation with the landscape and to raise awareness of the current threats to this special place.

Recognizing that wilderness is more and more recognized nationally as a universal, irreplaceable value for society, MWA tried a new tact for the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act, crafting a radio campaign with a concurrent phone banking and social media effort that urged Heritage Act supporters to call the Montana congressional delegation.

“A Blackfeet teenager had never been camping before our Badger Creek trail project. At the end of the week, his face lit up while he explained he now felt connected to this sacred place, he wanted to do this for work, he wanted to live there all summer. He was aglow in pure joy.”

—Casey Perkins

And love it, they do. Katie, Kendall, Miki, and Charlie live out these words on the edge of the Badger-Two Medicine. Miki, age eight, can take you on a walk into her backyard mountains and name nearly every flower, bird, track, and tree along the way. What does she love most? “I like how the sunrise and sunset blend in with the mountains.” Rooted in this true love, conservation is a family affair. She says her parents volunteer and donate to protect these mountains so that everything is alive and safe. Katie adds, “Now that we have kids, I see the total uniqueness of where we live. The wilderness is our best teacher, able to calm, hide treasures, teach empathy, and provide constant adventure for our kids. Conservation work comes naturally because we can’t afford to not do it.”

Wilderness is more and more recognized nationally as a universal, irreplaceable value for society.

—John Lambing

“A trail improvement project reconnects Blackfeet teens with the landscape.

“"We have the world to live in on the condition that we will take good care of it. And to take good care of it, we have to know it. And to know it and to be willing to take care of it, we have to love it.”

—Wendell Berry

KATIE SAUK, KENDALL FLINT, MIKI, AND CHARLIE
Defending our quiet forests and trails

Five of Montana’s eight national forests are writing new forest management plans over the next three years. For the first time since the 1980s, the Flathead, Lewis and Clark, Helena, Custer, and Gallatin national forests will take a fresh look at outstanding Montana areas that can be recommended for future wilderness. New forest plans will govern management of forests, fish and wildlife, streams, and outdoor recreation for decades to come: which areas are managed for wildlife and wilderness, which for logging, off-road vehicles, and which for quiet recreation.

This year, the U S Forest Service was a leader in recognizing wilderness as one of America’s greatest conservation successes, proudly contributing to successful 50th anniversary celebrations of the 1964 Wilderness Act.

MWA member volunteers have been out walking Montana’s wildlands to record signs of wildlife, wild character, old roads, and other key field data that can aid forest decision-makers as they focus on restoration forestry and wildland stewardship.

Healthy communities are key to healthy wildlands. MWA staff belong to those communities around the state and spent the year organizing, seeking changes small or large, looking for new partners, and providing the nudges that get things done over the course of time. We are so much more effective when we work together.

This year, seven years of partnering with nine groups in the Montana High Divide Trails collaborative demonstrated the power of working together, as we watched many of our recommendations being incorporated into the Blackfoot and the Divide travel plans and the Beaverhead-Deer Lodge National Forest Plan.

Wilderness is no longer a marginal issue. It is mainstream, supported by Main Street: healthy communities and healthy wildlands go hand in hand.

“The challenge is to think out of the box, to be effective at not just what and how we ask, but to create the framework and the conditions to realize successes.”

–John Gatchell

GARY INGMAN

For more than 30 years, Gary Ingman has been leading efforts to preserve and improve wildlife habitat on the Helena National Forest and along the Continental Divide. Working with MWA and local conservation organizations in the 1980s, Gary helped to ensure the Helena National Forest’s management plan protected places like Nevada Mountain Roadless Area. Since then, with Helena Hunters and Anglers, MWA, and other groups, he has kept an eye on countless agency proposals and spoken up for improvements to travel plans, timber sales, and forest plans. Thanks to his longtime voice for wildlands, in recent years he’s seen all of the native wildlife along the Divide, including wolverines, wolves, cougars and grizzlies—each encounter a spiritual experience. What keeps him going after all these years? “I don’t get involved in the many statewide issues, but if everybody takes care of their home ground, collectively we’ll be successful. You’ve got to get involved and you’ve got to work to protect what you love.”
Our work in northwestern Montana grew wider and deeper this past year. We continued to nurture nontraditional partnerships around the region, seeking common ground, building trust, and educating the broader community. We elevated new voices and brought new people to our public events and education, from the new Cabinet Mountain Wilderness map pointing visitors to trails, events, and resources to a Native People’s tour out of Libby to 30 Wilderness Walks, from a naturalist-led hike to Huntsburger Lake in the Whitefish Range to several 50th Anniversary celebrations to a Christmas party.

We have also been working diligently on the Flathead Forest Plan, focusing on priority areas in the Swan Valley and the Mission Mountains.

MWA is also on the ground in the Seeley-Swan Valley greater watershed, focused on finding commonalities with residents. Clear evidence of this collaborative approach is found in the Clearwater Stewardship contract awarded to Pyramid Mountain Lumber, of Seeley Lake. Next up is continuing to engage the Flathead National Forest and the public in the forest planning process to secure wilderness and non-motorized protection in the Swan Range, Mission Mountains, and Whitefish Range.

“There is immense uncertainty and pressure on our public lands. Wilderness is a cause for all American people. It is important that we work together to secure and protect our wildest places, for all that we do not know and will never understand.”

–Amy Robinson

Protecting habitat for moose in northwestern Montana is critical for their survival.

“FRANK VITALE
Back in the early ’80s, Frank helped draw recommended wilderness boundaries in the Whitefish Range. And he hasn’t let up since then. As a participant in the Whitefish Range Partnership he sat at the table with stakeholders representing the timber industry, motorized and non-motorized users, stock users, land owners and people in the business community, among others. “When you get all these folks together talking through their differences and putting their prejudices aside you find there’s a lot of common ground there.” Thanks to the hard work of Frank and others, this year the Whitefish Range Partnership found that common ground, recommending wilderness protection for nearly 85,000 acres west of Glacier National Park. When Frank is not raising his voice for wilderness or shoeing horses, he’s in the backcountry volunteering with his mules to help keep northwestern Montana’s trails in tip-top shape.”
Grasslands and prairies worldwide are rapidly disappearing under oil and gas rigs. MWA’s Prairie Wildlands campaign has concentrated on reaching new people and communities in an effort to build a broad and diverse movement for identifying and protecting the wild areas, the wildlife habitats, and the historical/cultural values on important public lands in central and eastern Montana. To that end, we have diligently worked within BLM’s administrative processes, trained college students to conduct more wilderness inventories and make maps, co-hosted Wilderness Act celebrations, sponsored a wilderness lecture series, created a steering committee of residents, generated local press, and led Wilderness Walks.

The recent focus on sage grouse habitat provides good indicators of overall ecosystem health. With three of the four BLM Resource Management Plans close to being decided, we are heartened to see agencies considering MWA’s citizen inventories, slating some large acreages for protection, and thinking more about managing for conservation in valued landscapes such as Lena Creek, Long Coulee, and Carpenter Creek.

The geotourism map and guidebook project in southeastern Montana is taking off with the recent hiring of an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer. More than 100 potential sites have been identified, and MWA’s steady participation has led to conversations with local ranchers, business owners, and other influential constituencies who share a common love for this unique landscape.

Prairie Wildlands continues to be a grand example that wilderness is not a special interest, it’s a Montana interest. Wide, open spaces, clean air, and clean water are traditional Montana values.

“Our daily activities are a small piece in the wilderness puzzle. It’s the collective work that gets us there. We never give up.” – Cameron Sapp

FORREST THEISEN
As a kid, Forrest Theisen got to know the great outdoors by exploring the headwaters of the Mississippi in northern Minnesota. Today, his adventures bring him to southeastern Montana, where he has been exploring the buttes, breaks, and badlands that feed the Missouri and the Yellowstone. “I had heard of eastern Montana as being an expansion of the Dakotas—flat grasslands, grazing, agriculture, and not much else. But that changed after my first Wilderness Walk in the Chalk Buttes.” Now Forrest helps share the wonders of southeastern Montana every day. Drawing on his background in sociology and environmental studies, along with his photography and writing skills, Forrest is a driving force behind our Southeastern Montana Geotourism Project, an effort to boost economies from Ekalaka to Sidney to Crow Agency by attracting tourists eager to experience the area’s rich culture, vibrant history, and scenic wildlands.
The Continental Divide Trail (CDT) is not just the longest quiet trail in Montana, it is hands-down MWA’s best “boots on the ground” mobilization project. With the Forest Service’s budget for trail maintenance unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future, MWA’s CDT Montana stewardship program invites local communities to get involved with their public lands via a full slate of volunteer projects. There is nothing like sweat equity to develop a strong connection with the land, coupled with a personal investment in the condition of the trails and surrounding areas.

This year’s 166 volunteers hailed mostly from Montana, but people from around the nation stepped up to get involved with their public lands. Youth, retired, adults on vacation, tribal members, and at-risk kids completed 15 trail projects between Glacier and Yellowstone and made the final improvements to the Granite Butte Lookout. CDT’s volunteer labor and services were valued at $181,000. This year, 43 percent of our volunteer base clocked in at 30 years and younger. A new field coordinator boosted the overall output considerably. Two trail stewards worked in the Beaverhead-Deer Lodge backcountry, Boy Scouts hit the trails, and NexGen students from the University of Montana and Montana State University tackled projects in the West Big Hole and the Italian Peaks. We’re particularly excited that our CDT program was recently accepted into the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, which provide opportunities for 18–25 year-olds to engage in service related to conservation. CDT continues to focus on collaborations and stewarding our public lands via trail projects. All kinds of people like to romp around in the woods; MWA sits down with a map and figures out how to work for policies and laws that will protect our vital wildlands in perpetuity.

“Giving back is not about just the end product, it’s about the experiences you have in the backcountry. These special moments breathe life into our hurried society.”
–Shannon Freix

Kelly Hurston
As a Buttian, Kelly Hurston is surrounded by the Continental Divide. Like many Montanans, she took the rugged charm for granted until she signed up for her first trail project with our CDT Montana program. “I realized that I was going to work in my own backyard, yet other people travel from around the world to see this place; and sometimes it’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience for them. I’m so lucky to live in a place where I can see this kind of natural beauty everyday.” Three trail projects, 10 volunteer events, and 142 hours later, she keeps coming back because, “it’s important to do my part to give back to what I use and enjoy. If everyone who travels our trails would help out with one little piece it adds up to a big, long trail.” Her passion and hard work embody the dedication of all our volunteers who return year after year to maintain and complete the CDT. In appreciation, Kelly is our 2014 CDT Montana Volunteer of the Year.
Veterans Outreach

Montana has the nation’s second-highest number of veterans per capita. Knowing the immense value of wildlands to help people heal, MWA has been actively expanding its veterans outreach. Two dozen veterans joined six outings this past summer, going into places MWA is working hard to protect; later, several veterans wrote letters to the editor about the personal impact it had.

And speaking of impact, the White House selected Tristan Persico for the national “Champions of Change” award for Wilderness Conservation, in recognition of his exemplary work with MWA’s veterans outreach program. Tristan met with Montana’s congressional delegation in Washington and shared his view of advocacy that is unique to the veterans community.

NexGen

MWA launched NexGen in Missoula and it is going strong. This past year, the enthusiasm spread to Bozeman and Helena, and it appears to be headed next to Billings. MWA’s Faith Duty was the very first recipient of the NexGen Wilderness Leaders Award, for her exceptional leadership in creating a group of active and passionate young people in Bozeman.

Last year marked the first full year of the Wild Haus at the University of Montana, an intentional community focused on creating a home base for students who are passionate about wilderness and public lands. Routinely, 40–60 students showed up weekly for potlucks, work, and planning excursions. Groups in all three communities planned and led free or low cost outings into wild places, sponsored Wild Workshop experts who taught skills such as wilderness first aid and how to pack a backpack. In return for the memorable outdoor experiences, enthusiastic NexGen volunteers gave their time and energy to further MWA’s campaign work, via OpEds, letters to the editor, radio ads for the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act, get out the vote efforts, and more.

The collaborative Outdoor Explorers mentoring program is receiving national attention as a model program for underserved youth. Young people really understand the role they must play in the next 50 years. We are committed to them.”

—Zack Porter

VETERAN PROFILE

TYLOR WILLIS

After serving in Afghanistan, there was no question where Kalispell native Tylor Willis wanted to live—the mountains of western Montana. It’s our wildlands that brought him back home, and he’s committed to enjoying our public lands every chance he gets. “Having friends and fellow Marines who died fighting for our country, I feel like it’s our responsibility to go out and enjoy everything we fought for in the Marines—the land itself especially.” Living out this ideal, he joined us for six of the seven veterans trips MWA offered this summer.

Though he grew up hiking, fishing, hunting, and snowshoeing, this was his first time to the Swan Range, the Great Burn, the Rocky Mountain Front, and the Pintlers, all places MWA is working to protect. He describes his time in wilderness as a “personal religious experience.” After hiking with fellow veterans in the Great Burn, he took the lead to write a letter to the editor in support of the area because, “the pristine condition that we got to experience it in, I want that to be around for my kids and everyone else. It’s our responsibility to the next generation.”
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Anna Furshong
Gabe Furshong & Lauren Caldwell
John & Lynn Garberston

THANK YOU

to each and every member for your ongoing support and commitment
to protect the wild places that make Montana, Montana.
Thank you to the participants of the Wild Bunch monthly giving program.

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Joe Woodward
Laurie Yung & John Adams
Thank you to our committed members who are the foundation of the Montana Wilderness Association.

Thank you to all who support our work with their payroll deductions and pledges through Montana Shares.
On September 30, 2014, the Montana Wilderness Association had:

- Total assets of $4,310,963, liabilities of $650,449, and net assets of $3,660,514.
- $2,782,707 unrestricted and $258,681 temporarily restricted assets.
- $767,452 in fixed assets, and
- $697,467 in permanently restricted endowment funds.

Revenues for the year were $2,056,653 and expenses were $1,705,365.

Notes: The Montana Wilderness Association is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization under 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code.

This financial information is drawn from audited financial statements by the accounting firm Anderson Zurmuhlen.
MWA state council and staff gather at the B-Bar Ranch in the Tom Miner Basin near Emigrant for their annual retreat.
Montana Wilderness Association

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