A BANNER SEASON FOR OUR TRAILS
Montana Wilderness Association works with communities to protect Montana’s wilderness heritage, quiet beauty, and outdoor traditions, now and for future generations.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STANDING STRONG WITH OUR TRIBAL PARTNERS

It’s now been well over 30 years since MWA committed itself to preventing oil and gas drilling in the Badger-Two Medicine, and that sort of decades-long commitment is what we mean when we say our work is all about the long game.

Our dedication to the Badger-Two Medicine is as solid today as it was in the 1980s, when the Reagan administration riddled the Rocky Mountain Front with oil and gas leases. Over the last few decades, we have helped eliminate all of those leases and permanently protect the entire Rocky Mountain Front from the threat of industrial development — except, that is, in the Badger-Two Medicine, located adjacent to Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and the Blackfeet Reservation in north-central Montana.

In early 2017, we celebrated as the Interior Department canceled all remaining leases in the Badger-Two Medicine. Unfortunately, two of the leaseholders challenged those cancellations in court and won, which resulted in the reinstatement of their leases. We immediately joined with the Blackfeet Tribe and other conservation groups as intervenors on behalf of the Interior Department in its appeal of that decision.

Thankfully, one of those leases is now gone. In late September, Moncrief Oil and Gas Master LLC reached an out-of-court settlement with the Wilderness Society that permanently retires the company’s lease. That leaves one last remaining lease, held by Solenex. We’re confident that the U.S. Court of Appeals will side with the Interior Department, which acknowledged under both President Obama and President Trump that the Solenex lease, like all other leases in the Badger, was illegally issued in the 1980s and should therefore be canceled.

For MWA, permanently protecting the Badger is not just about ensuring that grizzly bears, wolves, Canada lynx, westslope cutthroat trout, and other wildlife have the habitat and connectivity they need to thrive.

More importantly, it’s about standing with the Pikuni (Blackfeet) and other Indigenous people in helping protect places that are paramount in their histories and cultures, as the Badger is to the Blackfeet and as the Crazy Mountains are to the Apsáalooke (Crow).

That’s why, in addition to our work in the Badger-Two Medicine, we’ve partnered with several members of the Crow Tribe to persuade the Forest Service to recommend Wilderness protection for the Crazy Mountains in its revision of the Custer Gallatin National Forest plan.

Likewise, we’re pleased to be partnering with Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes to protect areas that are significant to their cultures and histories. The confederation recently sent a letter to our congressional delegation in support of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act, a bill that will add thousands of acres to the Mission Mountains Wilderness, which adjoins the Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness.

Of course, none of our work would be possible without you. So thank you as always for your abiding love of Montana, love that inspires and makes possible our work to safeguard the cultural and ecological diversity that we are so fortunate to have in our state.

– Ben Gabriel, executive director

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
As darkness was falling on our second night backpacking in the Badger-Two Medicine, my friends and I had just managed to set up our tents in an alpine meadow and gobble down our freeze-dried dinners when we heard the rumbling of a thunderstorm advancing toward us.

As the rain started to fall, we scrambled across the meadow for cover under some Douglas firs. In a matter of minutes, a series of blinding lightning strikes illuminated, for a split-second each, the stand of conifers that grew at the far end of the meadow. When the light rain turned to a downpour, I sprinted for my tent, got inside, and bundled up in my sleeping bag as the rain pounded my rain fly and the lightning continued to illuminate the sky.

continued
Howver, Solenex LLC and Moncrief challenged the cancellation of their leases in a Washington, D.C. district court, and in September 2018 the court ruled in favor of both companies and reinstated their leases.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke immediately vowed to appeal the decision of both cases, having earlier touted the Badger-Two Medicine as a good candidate for national monument designation.

But Zinke resigned just several months after the appeal decision, and new Acting Secretary David Bernhardt, days before his confirmation as Interior secretary, pulled the department out of its appeal of the Moncrief decision (though not the Solenex decision).

Accordingly, the retirement of Moncrief’s lease was welcome, but we recognize that there remains much to be done to permanently protect the Badger-Two Medicine.

We stand by our tribal partners when they say that they will see the last of the Badger-Two Medicine leases retired. We too are more determined than ever to establish permanent protection that ensures no industrial development ever comes to this sacred place.

Thankfully, we have a powerful champion in Senator Jon Tester.

Earlier this summer, before the settlement between Moncrief and the Wilderness Society was negotiated, he introduced a resolution that called on the Interior Department to defend the cancellation of Moncrief’s lease.

When news of the settlement broke, Sen. Tester said, “Today’s agreement is a recognition that there are just some places too sacred to dig or drill. This is a huge victory for the Blackfeet Nation and everyone who loves our public lands, and we’re going to keep the pressure on until the Badger-Two Medicine is protected from development for generations to come.”

We’re committed to bringing permanent protection to the Badger-Two Medicine. If you want to join us in this effort, please contact me at arobinson@wildmontana.org.

– Amy Robinson, conservation director
STEWARDING A PUBLIC LANDS LEGACY

This summer marked our eighth season of trail stewardship, and it produced the largest annual accomplishment numbers to date: 269 volunteers from across the country improved 63 miles of trail and contributed $133,000 in volunteer labor.

MWA volunteers broke ground alongside the mountain bikers and equestrians of the Montana High Divide Trails coalition on a trail reroute project near Kading Campground outside Helena. We restored a well-used fisherman’s trail in Sluice Boxes State Park, which was our first project ever in a Montana state park. Moreover, our chapter-based stewardship efforts continued to expand in Butte and Bozeman.

Checking off new projects and generating great numbers reflect well on our efforts to chip away at the mountainous backlog of deferred maintenance needs on our public lands. But what really counts are the meaningful minutes that comprise each of those 5,500 total volunteer hours, and the relationships we build with volunteers and land managers along the way. Every project was filled with the sweat, care, and laughter of the volunteers who donated precious summer days to stand alongside their Montana neighbors and wield a Pulaski, lead the pack animals carrying our gear, and cook us hearty meals. Without these dedicated people, this program would not exist.

The trails we enjoy today are the result of the efforts made by far-sighted individuals who came before us and those who volunteered this summer, and we hope to see both new and familiar faces next year to continue in that proud Montana tradition.

COMMITTED TO THE CDT

MWA completed six stewardship projects on the Continental Divide Trail in 2019, including near Johnson Lake in the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness, pictured. Volunteer crews worked 22 miles of trail on the Anaconda, Lincoln, Centennial Mountains, and Badger-Two Medicine sections of the trail.
The trails we enjoy today are the result of the efforts made by far-sighted individuals who came before us and those who volunteered this summer.

The Southwest Wildlands Chapter helped the Bureau of Land Management monitor solitude and wilderness character in southwestern Montana, while the Madison-Gallatin Chapter’s Wilderness Stewards program logged over 300 volunteer hours in efforts to document impact and educate forest visitors.

We partnered with the Montana Youth Challenge Academy, Piikani Lands Crew, and the Salish Kootenai College Upward Bound program on trail projects, passing on appreciation of public land stewardship to the next generation. Left: brushing trail in the Jewel Basin.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

MWA’s Madison-Gallatin and Southwest Wildlands Chapters both hit the trails in force this summer, together maintaining over 10 miles of trail.

CHAPTER-BASED STEWARDSHIP

Trail projects in the Centennial Mountains and Big Snowy Mountains Wilderness Study Areas (above) brought attention to two areas whose wild futures are uncertain.

WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS
MWA GOES NATIONAL ON PBS NEWSHOUR

Since the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released a draft of a plan for how its Lewistown Field Office will manage 650,000 acres of public lands in central Montana, we’ve shone a bright spotlight on the agency’s increasing prioritization of oil and gas drilling and sidelining of conservation.

In the aftermath of the Lewistown draft plan’s release, we generated numerous stories in local and national media outlets that made clear that the plan prioritizes oil and gas development while offering virtually no protection for the intact grasslands and prairie wildlands that make this part of the state so stunning and so crucial for wildlife. That media resulted in a barrage of op-eds, editorials, and letters to the editor calling on the BLM to change course.

The outcry caught the attention of PBS NewsHour. In August, NewsHour sent a team to Montana to interview two MWA volunteers, Rob and Katy Beattie of Lewistown. They spoke eloquently and passionately about what central Montana’s wildlands mean to them and their way of life, and why protecting these wild places is so critical. (The PBS team also happened to interview yours truly.)

We hope that all of the negative attention the BLM received over this draft of the Lewistown resource management plan, and the 350 comments we generated to the agency in response to the plan, will persuade the BLM to reconsider their one-sided agenda in central Montana and act to protect the wild prairies, breaks, and badlands that make this part of the state so special.

– Aubrey Bertram, eastern Montana field director

THE DRUMBEAT FOR THE BCSA GETTING LOUDER

Since Senator Jon Tester reintroduced the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (BCSA) in June, we’ve been busy building the grassroots support he needs to get the bill passed.

Over the summer, we launched an intensive social media ad campaign that helped generate 300 calls to Senator Steve Daines’ office requesting that he co-sponsor the bill. That campaign also helped generate 200 calls to Congressman Greg Gianforte, requesting that he introduce companion legislation in the House of Representatives.

We followed up our social media campaign by distributing 350 yard signs throughout the state, especially in Daines’ and Gianforte’s hometowns of Bozeman. Then in September, we co-sponsored the Last Best Outdoors Fest in Missoula, highlighting Montana’s $7 billion outdoor recreation economy.

Sen. Tester hosted the event and used the occasion to tout the economic benefits that would come with the BCSA and its permanent protection of the North Fork of the Blackfoot, Monture Creek, Grizzly Basin, and other places that would be added to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Mission Mountains Wilderness Areas. The event generated glowing press across the state.

Most recently, a surge of support for the BCSA came in the form of an endorsement letter from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, sent to our entire Congressional delegation. “From the Tribe’s perspective,” the letter reads, “the legislation’s benefits for bull trout are a key consideration. We also support the addition to the Mission Mountains Wilderness Area, which borders, and therefore benefits, our own Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness.”

If you’d like to help us keep building support for the BCSA, please contact me at eclark@wildmontana.org.

– Erin Clark, western Montana field director

TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE IN THE RUBY VALLEY

In July, I took part in a field trip hosted by the Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance (RVSA), a coalition of landowners, conservationists, business owners, and local officials who, in recognition of our shared values, came together to find creative new ways to conserve the spectacular landscape of southwestern Montana. MWA is a proud member of the RVSA.

About 30 ranchers, conservationists, agency representatives, elected officials, journalists, and rangeland specialists piled into vehicles and rumbled down the Upper Ruby Road, which runs along the Ruby River between the Gravelly Mountains and the Snowcrest Range.

We stopped along the Ruby to discuss areas addressed in the RVSA’s Snowcrest Agreement, which calls for an 80,000-acre wilderness area in the range, as well as for restoration of 20,000 acres of grasslands.

The Snowcrest Agreement is an example of the solutions that can be developed through thoughtful—and often difficult—conversations. Ultimately, the agreement is the first step in securing strong conservation protections that will preserve wilderness character while supporting the outdoor livelihoods that are intertwined with our wild places.

– Emily Cleveland, MWA senior field director

THE UNTHINKABLE BECOMES REALITY

In July, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt appointed William Perry Pendley director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), despite Pendley’s longtime and outspoken advocacy for selling off all national public lands—lands he now oversees—across the West.

Pendley is the former president of the Mountain States Legal Foundation, a property rights group that regularly sues the Department of the Interior, which houses the BLM, on behalf of extractive industry companies. In this role, he served as the former lead counsel for Solenex, the Louisiana oil company that is suing the federal government for the right to drill in the Badger-Two Medicine.

As acting director of the BLM, Pendley now oversees the management of approximately 8 million acres of public land in Montana, including the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, the Centennial Mountains, and Terry Badlands.

While Pendley could not single-handedly sell off the lands he now oversees, he is in a prime position to severely damage the BLM’s ability to do the job of caring for our public lands on behalf of all Americans.

That’s why we launched a social media campaign a few days after his appointment to generate calls into Sen. Jon Tester’s and Sen. Steve Daines’ offices, asking them to call on Bernhardt to remove Pendley immediately from his position at the BLM. In September, Tester joined 11 other senators in calling for Pendley’s immediate removal. Daines, on the other hand, responded to Montanans’ concerns about Pendley by calling them “overblown.”

If you haven’t already, please call Daines’ office at 202-224-2561 and tell him that if he truly is a defender of our public lands, he too needs to call for Pendley’s immediate removal.

– Kayjie Booker, advocacy and policy director
FINDING FUNDING SOLUTIONS FOR PUBLIC LANDS

In late 2018, MWA joined a coalition of conservation, recreation, and working-lands groups called the Montana Outdoor Heritage Project, the goal of which is to find critically needed and sustainable funding for our public lands, waters, wildlife habitat, and working lands.

This September, the project concluded a year-long information-gathering campaign, which encouraged Montanans across the state to share their concerns about the threats facing our outdoor way of life and their ideas about how to protect it. Over 11,000 Montanans completed our Outdoor Heritage Survey.

Members of the coalition also organized 50 community conversations across the state, hearing from hundreds more people in person. During that same time, coalition members recruited 42 business and organizations as supporting “voices” and identified 40 committed local ambassadors, while also tabling at events and knocking on doors.

Currently the results of the survey are being assessed, and we are preparing to share them far and wide across the state. Stay tuned at wildmontana.org.

— Jacob Foster, public lands field organizer

DONATE ON GIVING TUESDAY DECEMBER 3, 2019

Giving Tuesday is the global day of charitable giving. Will you be a part of it? Your donation helps us build and maintain trails, hold our legislators accountable, and protect Montana’s wild places.

To see exactly where your donation can help us accomplish, visit bit.ly/GiveMWA.

#GivingTuesday

MEMBERS MAKE OUR WORK POSSIBLE

Thanks to the new members who joined Montana Wilderness Association from July 3 to October 16, 2019.

SOUTHWESTERN WILDLANDS CHAPTER
Chad Lacey
Kristi Petersen-Overtom

WILD DIVIDE CHAPTER
Gertrudyn Aldrich
Timothy Baker
Raymond & Joyce Brown
Mark Cadwell
Tim Callison
James & Elly Driggers
Debbie Dupree
Kendal Edin
Fairbank
Megan Funk
Tom Furting
Geeta Gaur
Lucile Gordon
Donna Hansen
Donovan Heyden
Ryan Hazen
Kyle & Jamie Helmer
Kim & Vio Lavigeri
Patricia & Ken Loucks
Kim Luskath
Christine Lustik
Barbara Middeit
Vicki Moore
Elise Nelson
Robert Dettlinger
Douglas & Manha
Dikand
James Dit
Tim & Pattie Peterson
Karen Renee
Becky Richards
Eric Schiele
Larry & Carol Gaskill
Frank & Ann McArthur
Nicole Jeff & Peggy Stickney
Donald & Andrea Sterle...
Sign up for Wild Winter Adventures

Don’t let winter trap you inside. Explore our winter wildlands on a Wild Winter Adventure!

These free guided snowshoe outings will show you the best of what Montana has to offer in wintertime. And for the first time ever, we’re excited to announce that cross-country skiing adventures are also available.

See the full list of Wild Winter Adventures and sign up starting December 9 at wildmontana.org/walks.

Gene Sentz