As I write this in late March, the COVID-19 virus has unsettled all of our lives in many ways and is having major impacts on many in our community. Our daily routines and priorities have changed suddenly and unexpectedly. Uncertainty seems to rule the day, and that is never comfortable. I wish the best for all of our readers and their families and hope we can reach deep to find a spirit of cooperation and assistance for our neighbors most in need. Let’s all be safe and kind.

MWA has taken actions to protect its employees and volunteers in response to the pandemic, canceling some events and in-person meetings and likely canceling more in the future, including perhaps some chapter events described elsewhere in this newsletter. Please watch your email for updates from MWA and possible changes in event schedules. We will do our best to keep you informed in this fluid situation.

Meanwhile our chapter has kicked off a new year with four new board members being seated in January for three-year terms, joining the seven existing members. We also elected the following officers to one-year terms: President, Tom Ross; Vice President, David Steinmuller; Treasurer, Roger Jenkins; Secretary, Doug Bartholomew; Representative to the Chapter Collaborative, Jeanette Hall. Unfortunately, David Laufenberg has resigned from the board as of March 23 due to his relocation to Virginia City and new job in Madison County. We wish David the best and look forward to future opportunities to work with him.

Our board has established two broad goals for 2020: increase the number and diversity of our chapter membership and increase the level of engagement of those members. These goals are intended to support the organizational priorities identified in MWA’s 2020-2024 Strategic Plan as being necessary to help us achieve our overall objective of protecting 2.4 million acres of public lands across Montana. In short, we will be more successful if we have more members that are more engaged in supporting MWA campaigns and efforts at the local level.

Our chapter events and initiatives are planned and conducted by the board working through one or more of our four committees: membership & events, stewardship, leadership, and wilderness essay. We have some ambitious plans in each of these areas that we hope will help us achieve our chapter goals while having some fun along the way. You will find more information about the work of some of these committees elsewhere in this newsletter and in future editions.

Continued on next page
We recently concluded our six Wild Winter Adventures for 2020, including two cross-country ski trips, three hikes, and a GPS training class. Our line-up of Wilderness Walks for this summer is truly impressive with a total of 16 events scheduled. These are already listed on MWA’s website, so be sure to check them out and be ready to register on May 4 for the early season hikes and on June 29 for the late-season hikes. A sneak preview reveals that those include bird watching, an artist meander, a state park tour, a trail run, a family hike and numerous treks to great destinations. Of course, the health of our community is paramount, and it's possible that some walks will be canceled or postponed due to COVID-19. I encourage you to sign up as you normally would, and your leader will contact you in the event of a schedule change.

We could not do these events without our volunteer leaders and co-leaders and they certainly deserve our thanks, and we especially welcome those new leaders and co-leaders who have not previously volunteered their time and efforts. Volunteers that support any of our activities provide great leverage for us to enhance the experience of our chapter members and to attract new members and supporters of MWA’s mission. You are greatly appreciated!

In closing, and in response to the black cloud of pandemic that is upon us, let’s remember that our public lands and especially our Wilderness are still here and still a source of solace, clean air, clean water and spiritual renewal for all of us to enjoy. If you do choose to enjoy public lands at this time, please stay close to home, keep groups small, and maintain the proper distance from your companions (and from the awakening grizzlies, of course).

**Wild Montana Action Fund by Patti Steinmuller**

In late February MWA launched the Wild Montana Action Fund to increase our political voice for protecting Montana’s public lands. After careful deliberation, and considering the challenges faced in protecting Montana’s public lands, MWA’s board decided to develop a partner organization with a wider range of tools, especially those relevant to the political arena. While MWA is legally defined as 501(c)(3) public charity organization, the Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization, which can conduct a broader range of activities than MWA to fulfill the mission of protecting public lands and wild places.

Now, more than ever, in the face of increasing challenges to public lands, having as many options as possible to protect our public lands is paramount. Wild Montana Action Fund was created to enable supporters of public lands and wild places to more effectively face these challenges and successfully defend and protect Montana’s public lands and wild places.

Read more about the Action Fund at [go.wildmontana.org/actionfund](http://go.wildmontana.org/actionfund).
Dust off Your Hard Hats by Dean Center and Richard Lyon, MGC stewardship co-chairs

The Madison-Gallatin Chapter's Adopt-a-Trail schedule for 2020 has been posted and sign-ups are starting to trickle in. This summer we will continue work on our two adopted trails, Lava Lake in the Gallatin Canyon and Cliff Creek in Paradise Valley, and at the Forest Service's request spend a day on a popular Big Sky Trail.

Our schedule will be:

**Saturday, May 30**, Lava Lake--general spring tune up, with brushing, clearing blow downs, cleaning drains, and whatever work our initial scouting suggests needs attention.

**Saturday, June 6**, Cliff Creek--we will continue identifying and clearing the trail, hopefully starting where we left off last year. There will need to be some treadwork done on the reroute the USFS started last summer, and on the side-hill section that we started a year ago.

**Saturday, September 12**, Beehive Basin--the USFS wants to address long standing problems on this high use Big Sky trail and has asked us to help. We will be addressing user-created trespass trails that braid across a meadow section, moving brush, closing out non-system trails, reseeding the closed sections, and creating drains as needed. We hope that this special work day will attract Big Sky area locals who have proven dedicated to their trails in the past.

**Sunday, September 13**, Cliff Creek--since things will have dried out over the summer, we anticipate more treadwork and less brushing/clearing deadfall on this outing, as we continue working our way up the trail toward the Gallatin Crest. With luck, we hope to have reached the 'corner' in the trail, where it bends to the west, so that next summer we can do an overnight trip in conjunction with the Backcountry Horsemen based out of an outfitter camp along the trail, or possibly a week-long MWA outing.

As we have learned, dates are subject to change if the weather is uncooperative. We will announce group meeting places as the dates approach and will supply volunteers with a list of items to bring with them. MWA supplies all tools.

We require no prior trail maintenance work experience, but you should be in good physical condition, as trail work can be strenuous. A typical day involves meeting at 8.00 am, drive to the trailhead, safety briefing, hike to the work site carrying tools, and 5-6 hours of manual labor. To paraphrase Shakespeare, it's a good day's work.

The USFS Volunteer Coordinator will be holding both a first aid/CPR class and a crosscut sawing class in April/May. We will let you know the dates for these as soon as we hear. While these are desirable skills for trail workers, neither is required.

If you are interested in one or more of these work dates, sign-ups are open. Please respond to mgadoptatrail@gmail.com

June 2019 Cliff Creek work crew, photo by Peter Bennett
Good Times on Our Winter Walks

Bear Trap Canyon, February 22, 2020

Hyalite Ski, February 9, 2020

Brackett Creek Ski, January 11, 2020

Lava Lake, February 29, 2020
Opportunities to Build Leadership Skills by Tom Ross, MGC president

It’s no secret that the current crop of leaders and active volunteers within our chapter are, on average, significantly older than the median age of our community. Our board has long recognized this and continues to search for ways to more effectively engage younger and more diverse volunteers to lead us into the future. MWA and our chapters are committed to the principles of justice, inclusion, equality and diversity in our recruitment of professional staff and volunteers. Our chapter, with a region that includes Madison, Gallatin and Park Counties has long sought a larger and more diverse membership, especially in Madison and Park Counties where we are not well represented. If you think you may be that new active volunteer or future leader, regardless of where you live, we encourage you to step up to this opportunity to further develop and practice those skills that will serve both you and MWA well in the coming years.

Our chapter board has undertaken several efforts designed to help us attract and develop future leaders, in addition to our on-going efforts to recruit younger board members. Beginning last year, we partnered with MSU’s Leadership Foundation to provide learning experiences for a group of undergraduates between August and December. We intend to continue this partnership in 2020, and we are currently evaluating the possibility of a similar arrangement with the Boardroom Bobcats program of the MSU Leadership Institute. This program would place an upper-level undergraduate or graduate student with our chapter board during the next academic year.

Another exciting opportunity being pursued is the creation of a next-gen advisory board, modeled after that in place at the Gallatin Valley Land Trust. GVLT has successfully engaged about 20 Millennials and Gen X-ers between the ages of 25 and 40 in their program. While we are just getting started down this path, we are very interested in hearing from anyone in that approximate age range willing to share their perspective on how this effort might be structured to both attract participants and help develop leadership skills through hands-on experience with our chapter board. We believe this will be a wonderful opportunity for young professionals and MWA. Please share this appeal with others, regardless of age, whom you think may be interested in helping MWA build the leadership necessary to continue our mission well into the future.

Interested individuals may contact Tom Ross at tom.ross51@gmail.com.

Hoping for better times to come!