UNDAAUNTED IN CHALLENGING TIMES
We are a community of people who love the outdoors and champion wild places.

MISSION
We work with communities to protect Montana’s wilderness heritage, quiet beauty, and outdoor traditions now and for future generations.

VALUES
We value innovation, integrity, collaboration, stewardship, and tenacity.

VISION
We envision 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.
I began working as MWA’s executive director just one month before we started celebrating the organization’s 60th anniversary. It was humbling – and a bit nerve-wracking, frankly – to take the helm of an organization with a history as illustrious as MWA’s, a history that includes the likes of Senator Lee Metcalf, Cecil Garland, Doris Milner, and several other legendary conservation leaders.

Little did I know that just one week after I started my job, MWA would face one of the biggest challenges the organization has ever faced in its 60-year history.

On December 7, 2017, Senator Steve Daines introduced a bill to strip protection from the Big Snowies, Middle Fork Judith, West Pioneers, the Blue Joint, and Sapphire Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Three months later, the assault nearly doubled in size, as Congressman Greg Gianforte introduced a companion bill in the House of Representatives mirroring Daines’ Senate bill and another bill eliminating an additional 24 WSAs, including the Centennial Mountains, the Terry Badlands, and six WSAs within the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

All in all, these three bills threatened to strip protection from more than 800,000 acres of our wildest and most beloved public lands.

We responded as the country’s oldest grassroots wilderness organization should: we galvanized and activated thousands of Montanans, who rose up in opposition to these bills and in support of the wild places at serious risk of development.

And it worked – we defeated all of the bills, proving that we can stare down the biggest of threats and still keep our magnificent state of Montana wild. And that happened because of you and your love of Montana’s wildlands.

Our ability to stop these bills is a testament to the power we share and hold when we unite on behalf of our public lands.

The following pages in our 2018 annual report offer a number of other testaments to that power, and to the phenomenal work MWA staff have accomplished over the past year.

Among those accomplishments is shoring up local support for an agreement forged by the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition, of which MWA is a leading member. The agreement proposes adding 180,000 acres of new Wilderness in the Cabinet Mountains, the Scotchman Peaks, and the Yaak Valley. We also increased support for the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act, which would add 80,000 acres to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Mission Mountains Wilderness Areas.

We can stare down the biggest of threats and still keep our magnificent state of Montana wild... because of you and your love of Montana’s wildlands.

We laid a solid foundation of support for the Musselshell River breaks country near Lewistown, some of the last intact prairie wildlands in the Great Plains, as the Bureau of Land Management drafts its management plan for the area. We also engaged thousands of Montanans in support of protecting wildlands in the ongoing drafting of three national forest plans – the Flathead, Helena-Lewis and Clark, and the Custer Gallatin.

As we head into the organization’s 61st year, MWA is as strong as we’ve ever been, and that’s because of your love of Montana’s wild public lands, love you’ve expressed by investing in MWA.

As always, we can’t thank you enough.

– Ben Gabriel, executive director
A FIGHT EQUAL TO THE THREAT

2018 was the year we successfully fended off the biggest attack Montana’s wildlands have ever faced.

The end of 2017 and beginning of 2018 was a challenging time for all of us who love public lands.

In December 2017, President Trump signed a proclamation shrinking Bears Ears and Grand Staircase National Monuments in Utah. Three days later, Senator Steve Daines dropped a bombshell of his own on Montana.

He introduced a bill to eliminate the Big Snowies, Middle Fork Judith, West Pioneers, and Sapphire Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), as well as half of the Blue Joint WSA. The bill threatened the biggest rollback of public land protection in Montana history.

Three months later, this assault on our wildlands nearly doubled in size, as Congressman Greg Gianforte introduced a companion bill in the House of Representatives mirroring Daines’ Senate bill. At the same time, Gianforte introduced another bill eliminating an additional 24 WSAs. That bill targeted the likes of the Centennial Mountains in southwest Montana, the Terry Badlands in the eastern part of the state, and Bitter Creek on the Hi-Line.

All in all, these three bills threatened to strip protection from more than 800,000 acres of our wildest and most cherished public lands, lands that form the foundation of our wilderness heritage, provide us with clean drinking water, and support healthy fish and wildlife populations.

When Daines introduced his bill in December 2017, we knew that our response had to be commensurate to the threat we faced. After all, his bill struck at the core of our mission. That’s why we hustled to organize a group of Montanans dedicated to celebrating and defending our state’s 44 WSAs and other wildlands. The group came together as Our Land, Our Legacy and included the likes of Lewistown city commissioner and MWA Wilderness Walks leader Dave Byerly, who stood up for his beloved Big Snowies WSA; Miles City resident and Wilderness Walks leader Karen Aspevig Stevenson, who championed the Terry Badlands WSA; and backcountry horsewoman and substitute school teacher Kathy Hundley, who defended the Blue Joint and Sapphire WSAs.

On February 7, MWA held a teleconference with reporters around the state to announce the launch of this group. That afternoon, stories about Our Land, Our Legacy appeared in news outlets across Montana and around the country.

Two days after the launch of Our Land, Our Legacy, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on Daines’ bill. Our junior senator claimed he had the support of Montanans for the bill, even though he hadn’t held a single public meeting or provided any opportunity for Montanans to weigh in on the legislation.

It wouldn’t take long to prove him wrong. As the Senate hearing was wrapping up, a Ravalli County Commission meeting was just getting underway in Hamilton, the topic of which was Daines’ bill, which targeted two WSAs in Ravalli County – the Blue Joint and Sapphire.

Over the next few hours, one Montanan after another testified in opposition to the bill. By the end, around 80 percent of those who testified and signed in to the meeting expressed opposition.

From there, opposition to Daines’ and Gianforte’s bills continued to build and spread across the state – all thanks to the passion and energy of MWA’s members, volunteers, and a dedicated staff that never once rested or backed down from this fight (see sidebar on facing page).

Montanans’ displeasure with Daines’ and Gianforte’s bills became undeniable in May, when the University of Montana released its bipartisan 2018 Public Land Survey, which revealed that 81 percent of Montanans opposed the legislation and a scant 11 percent supported it.

By December 2018 and the end of the 115th Congress, none of the anti-WSA bills had gone any further than a committee hearing. They hadn’t even come up for vote – thanks to the outpouring of opposition to them within Montana.

Fueled by the passion of our members, volunteers, and supporters, MWA has come through these unprecedented attacks on our public lands stronger than ever before, poised not just to defend our public lands against any future dangerous legislation, but to build off the momentum of our WSA campaign and find ways to bring Montanans together in support of solutions that permanently protect our vulnerable wild places.

– John Todd, deputy director
Over the course of 2018, MWA galvanized Montanans to express their opposition to Sen. Daines’s and Rep. Gianforte’s bills in a myriad of ways. Over the course of several months:

- **Nearly 3,000 Montanans** signed an open letter to our Congressional delegation calling for a balanced, bipartisan, and collaborative approach to our WSAs that includes a diversity of interests.

- Montanans made well over **1,500 calls** to the offices of our Congressional delegation in opposition to Daines and Gianforte’s WSA legislation.

- Montanans submitted **more than 100 op-eds** and letters-to-the-editor to Montana’s newspapers in opposition to the legislation.

- **Governor Steve Bullock** sent Daines and Gianforte a letter in April requesting they change their approach to the resolution of our WSAs. “I am particularly troubled by the lack of public engagement used to formulate these [WSA] proposals,” the letter states.

- The cities of Whitefish and Helena, Missoula County, and the joint city-county commissions from Butte-Silver Bow and Anaconda-Deerlodge all sent letters to Daines and Gianforte expressing concern with the legislation and requesting public meetings.

- **110 of the 182 people** who attended a Beaverhead County Commission meeting in July voted in opposition to the WSA bills in a straw poll held at the meeting.

Fueled by the passion of our members, volunteers, and supporters, MWA has come through these unprecedented attacks on our public lands stronger than ever before.
THE ROCK STARS OF RAVALLI COUNTY

Our members and supporters in the Bitterroot Valley went above and beyond in defending our wildest public lands

We drove past the long dirt driveway three times before we decided to take a chance on it. Cell service fades quickly in this corner of western Montana’s Bitterroot Valley, miles off Highway 93, so we did the only thing we could and turned onto the dirt road, eyes alert for some hint that we were headed in the right direction. Eventually, the road dead-ended at the home we were looking for. We knocked on the door and spoke to a very supportive couple who were understandably shocked at finding us on their doorstep.

“You came all the way out here to invite us to this meeting?” they asked. “Nobody ever knocks on our door! But you bet we’ll be there.”

This encounter on a dead-end Bitterroot road epitomized our outreach in Ravalli County. Door by door, phone call by phone call, and email by email, we rallied dozens upon dozens of Ravalli County residents to attend a county commission meeting in February of 2018. At issue was a letter that the commission had sent to Senator Steve Daines in support of his bill stripping protection from the Blue Joint and Sapphire Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Daines would point to this letter as proof of support for his bill, which attempted to remove protection from five WSAs totaling nearly a half-million acres of our wildest public lands.

The county commission had sent its letter of support to Daines without first giving county residents a chance to weigh in, and the residents weren’t having it. After several MWA members challenged the commission’s decision to send the letter, the commissioners were forced to scheduled an open meeting to discuss Daines’ bill.

Arriving at the courthouse for the meeting, we were promptly redirected to the fairgrounds, because the crowd was already much too large for the regular meeting room.

Later, while standing at the back of the new venue, we were amazed to see over 250 people file into the room and fill every seat. We waited nervously to see whose side each was on.

The commission meeting commenced just moments after Daines’ anti-WSA bill had received a hearing in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, during which Daines had claimed widespread public support for his bill, even though he hadn’t given Montanans a single opportunity to provide input.

It quickly became apparent that the senator was sorely mistaken, and that our work making phone calls and knocking on doors had paid off. Of the 200 people who signed in to the meeting, over 150 recorded their opposition to Daines’ bill. Of the 72 people who testified, 52 expressed opposition to the bill.

This meeting set the stage for a year of organizing in Ravalli County in opposition to Daines’ and Congressman Greg Gianforte’s anti-WSA bills, which together sought to strip protection from 29 WSAs comprising more than 800,000 acres across the state.

Later in February, 60 of our volunteers showed up with less than two days’ notice to meet Daines in Hamilton during a promotional tour of the 2018 tax bill. Having caught wind of the crowd, he arrived an hour early and left just as the crowd was gathering.

In May, six of our supporters agreed to have their pictures plastered on a billboard and hundreds of yard signs calling on the Ravalli County residents who stood up on behalf of Montana’s wildest and most cherished public lands.

Sadly, Butch passed away this fall. His commitment to defending our wild places was unwavering, and it was a true gift to serve alongside him. We miss him dearly.

Ultimately, all three of Daines’s and Gianforte’s anti-WSA bills failed to pass. For that, we owe a debt of gratitude to the Ravalli County residents who stood up on behalf of Montana’s wildest and most cherished public lands.

— Kayje Booker, policy and advocacy director

The fight in Ravalli County has required tremendous courage and dedication from our members and supporters. In an area where wilderness has not always been popular, our volunteers have been visible and outspoken in an effort to defend our WSAs.

We felt compelled to recognize some of these incredible volunteers by awarding them MWA’s Brass Lantern. They include Kathy Hundley, Marilyn Wolff, Pat Tucker, Micki Long, and Butch Waddill. We’ve dubbed all of them “the Ravalli County Rock Stars.”

Our members and supporters in the Bitterroot Valley went above and beyond in defending our wildest public lands.
Driving into Libby one gray autumn day, I did a double take as I passed the local auto shop to make sure I hadn’t misread the shop’s sign. It read, “Kootenai Harvest Festival, Riverfront Park, September 15.”

I hadn’t misread the sign. Libby’s local mechanic was actually promoting an event MWA was organizing.

In that moment, I knew we were getting somewhere, and that our work was being woven into the fabric of this community.

My work in the Kootenai was filled with little moments of gratification like these in 2018. Early in the year, a Troy resident called me to learn more about our Wilderness Walks after hearing about our program from a friend in her local yoga class. At a summer presentation about wildfire safety in the Troy High School gym, the audience erupted in applause when the presenter discussed the importance of collaboration within the community. Later in the year, the Libby Chamber of Commerce nominated the Kootenai Harvest Festival for its “Event of the Year” award.

Perhaps the most profound of these moments occurred in December when the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition (KFSC) presented our agreement to the Libby City Council. The KFSC is a collaborative group of diverse voices dedicated to improving forest management in northwest Montana. In 2015, the group hammered out a unanimous agreement defining common ground between timber, local business, outdoor recreation, and conservation values on the 2.2 million acre Kootenai National Forest.

As MWA’s representative, I proudly explained to the council that our agreement included 180,000 acres of Wilderness in iconic landscapes of the Kootenai, including the Cabinet Mountains, the Scotchman Peaks, and the Yaak Valley. Not a single person in the council or audience questioned it. The council then voted unanimously to issue the KFSC agreement a letter of support.

In a place where merely saying “wilderness” could elicit hostility in most crowds just a few years ago, we’re successfully promoting a 180,000-acre Wilderness proposal. And it’s gaining momentum. The KFSC proposal has the support of over 65 local businesses, organizations, and elected officials. In 2018, we earned valuable letters of support from the Bull Lake Rod and Gun Club, the Sanders County Commissioners, three local Chambers of Commerce, and the Economic Development Corporations of both Lincoln and Sanders Counties. When the KFCS agreement was addressed in each of these meetings, our partners in the timber industry and from the local snowmobile club stood staunchly by our side.

A few decades ago, it would have been unthinkable for conservationists, timber mill operators, and snowmobilers in northwest Montana to get along, much less agree to a cohesive proposal for public land management. Today, we’re doing more than getting along; we’re getting things done. We’re now in the final stages of completing a legislative proposal for a bill that incorporates the three major components of the Kootenai Stakeholders’ Agreement – conservation, recreation, and timber. We hope to present our proposal to the entire Montana delegation in early 2019.

With the growing groundswell of support for the KFSC agreement in northwest Montana, we’re hopeful the new year will bring us closer to permanently protecting vulnerable roadless wildlands in the Kootenai.

– Grete Gansauer, northwest Montana field director
**“SO MUCH OF THE EARTH SO BEAUTIFUL”**

Support of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act grew in 2018, bringing us closer to permanently protecting Norman Maclean’s Blackfoot

Huddled around a deep blue hole within chatting distance isn’t the best way for three people to catch fish, but that’s how my parents and I decided to enjoy the stunning waters, multi-colored geology, and native trout that are characteristic of the North Fork of the Blackfoot River. Our catches might have been few that day, but they are ones I’ll never forget.

I’ll also never forget watching a pair of mating harlequin ducks or riding horses along a trail flanked by fireweed so bright and colorful that it glowed within the dust kicked up by the pack string ahead.

These are just a few of the many experiences I’ve had in the Blackfoot that inspire me in my new role as MWA’s western Montana field director and in my work to advance the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (BCSA).

The BCSA will add 80,000 acres to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Mission Mountains Wilderness Areas and provide permanent protection to the tributaries of the world-renowned Blackfoot watershed, including the North Fork, Monture Creek, and the West Fork of the Clearwater. The bill will also open up 2,000 acres to snowmobilers, preserve prized mountain biking opportunities, and help maintain the healthy outdoor recreation and natural resource economy the Blackfoot currently enjoys.

The BCSA is the product of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project (BCSP), a 12-year-old collaborative that MWA has been part of from the beginning. The group also includes other conservation groups, timber mill operators, ranchers, business owners, outfitters, sportsmen, and others who came together in hammering out a legislative proposal for keeping this iconic part of the state the way it is. The BCSP was featured at the 2018 annual Montana Forest Collaborative Network Conference as an example of effective collaboration and media storytelling.

Numerous businesses and sportsmen’s groups from across the state joined the BCSA effort in 2018 as endorsers and supporters of the bill. The extra support paid off, as demonstrated in the 2018 bipartisan University of Montana Public Lands Survey. The survey showed that 73 percent of Montanans support the BCSA, with 68 percent of Republicans, 74 percent of Independents, and 78 percent of Democrats all in favor.

In 2018, we also worked on gaining support from Senator Steve Daines and Congressman Greg Gianforte, a process that will continue in 2019 as we work closely with Senator Jon Tester on reintroduction of the bill in the 116th Congress.

The BCSA enters 2019 with tremendous momentum. Soon, we’ll release a video highlighting the importance of this bill for protecting the entire Blackfoot watershed.

In his *A River Runs through It*, Norman Maclean writes, “When I looked, I knew I might never again see so much of the earth so beautiful.”

Passage of the BCSA will help ensure that this piece of beautiful wild earth remains as Norman saw it and as we see it today.

— Erin Clark, western Montana field director
TURNING FOREST PLANNING INTO WILDLANDS PROTECTION

Our members and supporters showed up for the wild places at stake in the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest plan

Just looking at the three-volume draft management plan for the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest (HLCNF) made me want to take a nap when it was released in 2018. The 2,000-page tome covered everything from weeds to watersheds to various conservation designations on this 2.8 million-acre national forest spread across a giant swath of Montana, from the Continental Divide near Helena to the Big Snowy Mountains near Lewistown.

Trying to make sense of the draft plan’s government jargon is taxing enough. But then there are all the maps, graphs, and tables to digest. It can leave you feeling like you’re swimming in a soup of details – some important, some not.

To bolster myself for the chore of reading and analyzing the draft, I recalled hiking along the middle ridge of the Big Snowy Mountains, exploring the narrow canyons of the Middle Fork Judith Wilderness Study Area, or strolling across the lush, open meadows in the Tenderfoot/Deep Creek Roadless Area.

These are just a tiny few of the experiences that are at stake in this forest plan, experiences that underscore the primary reason MWA invested so much time and energy in the HLCNF planning process last year – to protect the last remaining wild places on the Forest.

The decisions made in this Forest plan will remain in place for decades to come. They will provide opportunities to permanently protect wildlands within the Forest, places like the Big Snowies, Middle Fork Judith, and Tenderfoot/Deep Creek, as well as Nevada Mountain on the Continental Divide and the Badger-Two Medicine area near Glacier National Park.

The key to getting people involved in forest planning is to clearly connect the details of the plan with their experiences in the places addressed the plan. Over the years, we have been making a concerted effort to help our members and supporters become as knowledgeable as they can about these places (taking them on guided hikes through our Wilderness Walks program, for instance), and to help them use that knowledge in standing up for those places in the HLCNF planning process.

In preparation for the HLCNF plan revision, we held training sessions for our members and supporters in Great Falls, Lewistown, and Helena. These sessions helped our members and supporters understand the plan and prepared them to offer workable and realistic proposals for specific areas. These trainings also helped our members and supporters become advocates and spokespeople for wild places in the HLCNF and boosted their credibility when talking to Forest Service staff or speaking up at public meetings.

During the draft plan comment period, we also made countless phone calls and sent out scores of emails encouraging our members and supporters to comment on the HLCNF draft plan. As a result, comments that MWA generated accounted for almost half of all comments the Forest Service received in response to the HLCNF draft plan.

We probably won’t know for another year whether or how the Forest Service will adopt our recommendations and proposals. But the many thoughtful and substantive comments that our members and supporters submitted will provide the kind of public support that will enable the Forest Service to make good decisions and avoid bad ones.

– Mark Good, senior conservation advisor
Sitting on a rock with a mangled peanut butter sandwich in one hand and a GPS unit in the other, I was blown away by the expanse of the Custer Gallatin National Forest. On that blustery late summer day, I had scrambled through scruffy desert-dwelling pinyon junipers in the Pryor Mountains, a small isolated range in southeast Montana. But just days before, I stood on the shore of an unnamed alpine lake in the Crazy Mountains, looking up at mountain goats hopping from ledge to ledge on the cliffs above. And earlier that same week, I sat in two cirques, one in the Absarokas and another in the Beartooths, where I watched a black bear hightail it into the woods. In the span of ten days, I experienced four completely unique mountain ranges and four beautifully diverse landscapes, all managed by the Custer Gallatin National Forest.

The Custer Gallatin stretches from near West Yellowstone all the way to South Dakota. With that geographic diversity comes countless opportunities to experience the best of what Montana has to offer: mixed grass prairies, sandstone bluffs, and craggy high alpine peaks.

This Forest is currently revising its management plan, presenting us with our best opportunity to protect the forest’s wild places for decades to come.

In 2017, MWA and our partners in the Gallatin Forest Partnership (GFP) forged an agreement that honors our values of wilderness, wildlife, clean water, and recreation. This diverse coalition of wilderness advocates, local businesses, and both mechanized and quiet recreation interests found common ground to advance a plan that will resolve the status of the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area and chart a path towards permanent protection of this outstanding wild area.

Our proposal protects prime wildlife habitat by designating two wildlife management areas totaling 56,000 acres. It also encourages the Forest Service to recommend 100,000 acres of Wilderness within the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn WSA and 25,000 acres of Wilderness within the Madison Range, including Cowboy Heaven and lands adjacent to the Taylor Hillgard unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness. With the designation of a 70,000-acre Hyalite watershed protection and recreation area, our agreement also protects the clean water that Bozeman depends on. We are pleased that the Forest Service has been receptive to our work and has adopted the GFP’s agreement in its range of alternatives for the most recent draft of the Custer Gallatin Forest plan.

Over the past year, MWA has been working with partners in the GFP to gather endorsements for our proposal to demonstrate widespread community support to the Forest Service. As of January 2019, the agreement had close to 350 endorsements from individuals and 30 endorsements from businesses and organizations, including Big Sky Mountain Resort and REI Bozeman.

Throughout the Custer Gallatin, we continue to work with the Forest Service to offer real solutions to protect Wilderness-quality lands in the Crazies and the Pryors. Further east into the grasslands and prairie, we continue to advocate for the ecological, cultural, and historic values tied to the Tongue River Breaks, the Chalk Buttes, and Capital Rock.

Last fall, we hosted a series of Forest Planning 101 events throughout communities near the Custer Gallatin National Forest. These events outlined how forest planning works, why this revision process is so important, and how citizens can most effectively use their voice in the process.

The draft plan comment period represents a powerful opportunity to shape the management of all of these places for the coming decades. MWA is seizing the opportunity, to help ensure that these special places remain they way they are for generations to come.

– Aubrey Bertram, eastern Montana field director
TAKEN TO MONTANA’S WILD HEART

We’re ensuring that people know about, appreciate, and fight to protect the Musselshell Breaks country of central Montana

It’s 4:30 a.m. on the banks of the Sacagawea River, a tributary that meanders through the rolling hills, cascading plains, and craggy breaks of central Montana on its way to the Musselshell River. In the dim light of dawn, the area is alive with sound – birds chattering, insects buzzing, and coyotes yipping and barking.

I’m in one of the most remote landscapes in Montana with a small film crew and several researchers, documenting the hypnotic beauty of Montana’s vast grasslands and breathtaking river breaks as part of our campaign to protect these overlooked but profoundly wild places managed by the Bureau of Land Management’s Lewistown Field Office.

We’re filming three videos that we’ll use to show people just how wild this area is, and how deserving of protection.

The sunrise and vast array of vegetation are so beautiful that I almost forget about the coyotes. I hear barks from the direction of our camp: it’s one of our researchers returning the coyotes’ calls. The pups reply, joined by several adults. From the hills to the north, we soon hear more yips and barks. Three packs – two genuine, one imposter – call and respond several more times before the real coyotes decide to continue on with their mornings.

The three videos we produced feature four young wildlife researchers who share their love for and unique perspective of this landscape. Tens of thousands of people from across the country viewed the videos on social media, which helped generate nearly 650 signatures on an open letter to the BLM, requesting the agency protect the Musselshell Breaks country in its next resource management plan, which will determine how this area is managed for the next 20 to 30 years.

This place, like many public lands managed by the BLM, is under attack by the Trump administration’s “energy dominance” policy, conducted at the expense of meaningful and balanced protections for crucial wild places. The comment period on this draft plan is essential to reinforce the messages we sent last summer to the BLM through the videos and the open letter: these grasslands and river breaks, crucial habitat for some of the healthiest big game herds in North America, should not be sold out to industrial development.

When people say “wilderness,” towering mountain peaks, crystal-clear glacial lakes, and soaring stands of pine and aspen are what usually come to mind. But these peaks have to rise from somewhere, and the prairies, grasslands, badlands, and river breaks of central and eastern Montana that foreground our mountain ranges are just as wild. These places – Montana’s wild heart – require a little more time to unveil their beauty. You have to be willing to sit and watch the grass ripple in the prairie winds like waves on the sea, and the clouds above lazily meander across the wide-open sky. Just be careful not to sit on the prickly pear.

Montana has some of the last remaining intact and most diverse grasslands in all of North America, and MWA is doing its best to ensure that these places remain wild and free at a time when they are under assault.

– Aubrey Bertram, eastern Montana field director

Watch our Musselshell videos at wildmontana.org/musselshell

Film crew on location in the Musselshell Breaks
I pulled into the driveway, my headlights illuminating a couple dogs loping towards me. Seeing the promised porchlight cutting through the thick darkness, I parked and stepped out into the nipping cold of an early October morning. The screen door whined open, and I saw the silhouette of John, standing on the porch that had welcomed visitors to the Anderson Ranch in Alder, Montana for generations.

“Are ya hungry for breakfast?” he asked.

John and I had a long day ahead: leave the ranch by 5 a.m, drive to the Centennial Valley, oversee the weaning and shipping of the calves, test the cows for pregnancy, and return to Alder by dark, after which I would drive back home to Bozeman. Having breakfast was a good idea.

In much of the American West, there’s the perception that conservationists and ranchers are at odds over public lands. But in my time at MWA, I have discovered that isn’t always the case, nor does it have to be.

John and I are partners in the Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance (RVSA), a group working to find solutions to land management issues in the Ruby Valley. RVSA members don’t always see eye to eye on every issue, but we make a concerted effort to understand and respect one another’s views. We all bring different perspectives – as conservationists, small business owners in the Ruby, or as ranchers with generational knowledge of running cattle in this part of the state. Those different perspectives are what give our group its strength. When we reach an agreement, we know we have a solution that works for Montanans across the spectrum.

Conservationists have a stake in ensuring that working ranchlands remain intact. Without these large parcels of private land, the open valleys that characterize much of southwest Montana would be threatened by subdivisions and other development. Private ranch land supports populations of big game and other wildlife during the winter when these animals move down into the valley bottoms. Their ability to travel through the landscape with minimal development pressure is a benefit to all of us who hope to see the wild character of Montana remain.

Before the RVSA was formally established, those who are now members of the group forged an agreement around the Snowcrest Mountains, which form the western side of the Ruby Valley in the southwest corner of the state. The agreement would provide Wilderness protection for 80,000 acres of outstanding wildlife habitat and water resources in the Snowcrest. The agreement also includes a special management area in the range, which would protect 21,000 acres from further development while enabling ranchers to continue their operations without hindrance.

In 2019, the RVSA will work towards expanding the Snowcrest agreement, setting the stage for the Snowcrests to be included in future Wilderness legislation and for the RVSA to expand the partnership to address other landscapes within the Beaverhead National Forest.

As we drive back to Alder that evening, John points out landmarks along the way that connect back to his family and the many others who have relied on this land. To our left, the Snowcrest Mountains rise out of the valley bottom as the Upper Ruby River winds its way through russet willows and pastures spotted with black angus. This is a special place, and MWA will keep on proudly working with our partners in the RVSA to make sure it stays that way.

– Emily Cleveland, southwest Montana field director
GETTING OUT THE VOTE MEANS GETTING OUT ACROSS THE STATE

We swept across Montana to achieve our goal of inspiring 8,000 young Montanans to vote on behalf of our public lands.

In the four months leading up to the 2018 mid-term elections, MWA’s team of get-out-the-vote student volunteers traveled the state with one goal in mind: inspire 8,000 young people to pledge to vote for public lands.

We achieved that goal, and then some.

To do it, we traveled to a public lands rally in Whitefish, to music festivals in Bozeman and Missoula, to Raptorfest at Bridger Bowl Ski Area, to the Billings Harvest Festival, and to art walks and farmers markets across the state. We traveled to Montana State University - Bozeman, Gallatin College, Montana State University-Billings, University of Montana, University of Montana-Western, Bitterroot College, Carroll College, and Helena College.

As a result, 8,000 young Montanans ended up voting on behalf of our beloved hiking and camping spots. On behalf of our wild rivers and favorite fishing holes. On behalf of our treasured hunting grounds.

As the team leader of our get-out-the-vote campaign, I met thousands of young Montanans and found one common theme: our state’s young people care deeply for our public lands and outdoor way of life. No one I met exemplified this more than one of our volunteers, Dan Paparella. Dan volunteered countless hours from August to November and collected over 1,500 pledges from his peers, more than any other volunteer in the history of our organization. He embodied what MWA is all about – working tirelessly on behalf of our wild places and public lands.

Hitting the 8,000-person mark reflects the power and growth of our get-out-the-vote campaigns over the last few years. During the 2018 election cycle, we collected 3,000 more pledges than we did in 2016 by constantly reminding young voters that public lands are what unify us as Montanans, and that they are what make our outdoor way of life possible.

– Noah Marion, policy and advocacy manager

Voters pledged to vote for public lands by filling out one of these postcards, which we mailed back to them as the election approached.
The 2018 Volunteer Trail Crew season was set to start with a bang. The first trail project of the year was scheduled for the Pryor Mountains, and it would signal the MWA Stewardship Program’s new commitment to landscapes beyond the Continental Divide.

But as is known to happen in May, it rained. A lot. Roads in the Pryors turned to impassable gumbo, and two days before our project was set to start, it became clear that we needed to cancel the project altogether or find another location.

I was bummed. I had been excited about exploring the Pryors, and I worried that some of our volunteers might back out once we told them that we were changing locations.

As it turned out, I needn’t have worried. The Beartooth Ranger District was in need of some help with a project they had planned. So, instead of maintaining some trails in the Pryors, our crew would construct a section of the Nichols Trail, a new multi-use trail outside Red Lodge. For a last-minute project, Nichols checked a lot of boxes: it was in a beautiful location, the work would be rewarding and, once completed, the new trail promised to be an economic boon for a local community.

The Beartooth Ranger District had picked a winner, but I was still prepared for some volunteer attrition after the last-minute change.

I called all of our volunteers to let them know about the switch. Not only did all ten volunteers remain committed, they were enthusiastic about the new challenge. That weekend, our crew would go on to construct a quarter-mile of new trail. We sawed out downed trees, ripped stumps from the trail, dug the tread to spec, and had a damn good time doing it. Once again, I found myself in awe of our volunteers.

Our work on the Nichols Trail set the tone for our 2018 Volunteer Trail Crew season. Over the course of fifteen projects, our volunteers consistently busted their butts to improve trails across Montana’s public lands. We maintained and constructed trails in the Swan Range, North Fork of the Blackfoot, the Centennials, and other landscapes we’re working to protect.

By the time the whistle blew on our last trip of the season, MWA’s 171 volunteers had contributed over 4,000 hours of service valued at $88,270.

We, of course, thank the U.S. Forest Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks for the generous financial support they provided that made all of this amazing work possible.

The commitment and enthusiasm of our volunteers this summer is a testament to the passion of our grassroots membership. MWA’s members aren’t armchair advocates; they’re the soot-covered, blister-heeled, Pulaski-toting champions of our public lands. Increasingly, our partners at the Forest Service and BLM know this to be true. They view us as crucial stewardship allies and are counting on us to continue protecting and enabling access to Montana’s public lands.

– Sonny Mazzullo, stewardship coordinator
**Keeping Our Public Lands Infrastructure Intact**

We’re working hard to pass our public lands heritage on to the next generation

After two full days of sweat and toil, our volunteer trail crew finally reached the end of the trail at the summit of Moose Peak, in northwest Montana’s Cabinet Mountains. On a clear day, the summit offers a spectacular view of the Vermillion River drainage and its surrounding craggy peaks. But on this day, the crew was socked in by low-hanging clouds, and all we could see was each other – exhausted, but satisfied and in good spirits. We had worked on three miles of trail, digging over 900 feet of new tread and clearing 20 downed trees, some as large two-and-a-half feet in diameter.

On the way down from Moose Peak, I stopped several times to snap a half-dozen “after” photos to document the work our volunteer trail crew had accomplished. Those photos revealed the cut-ends of massive Douglas firs, blown across the trail by wildfire. They also showed new tread construction (the length of three football fields!) through an area where the fire had eroded the former trail into oblivion. Together, the photos captured a clear new path up the mountain.

We had, in effect, re-opened access on a multi-use trail that had been rendered nearly unusable by wildfire the previous year.

Unfortunately, not many trail users know how much time, effort, and investment goes into keeping public lands accessible and our public land infrastructure intact. Like our view that day from Moose Peak, the work that goes into building trails often goes unseen by the public.

That’s why MWA partnered with the Montana Trails Coalition to produce the Trails In Crisis report. The report shines a light on the mountainous maintenance backlog staring down Montana’s trails, and on the infrastructure re-investment needed to clear a path up that mountain of work. The report also calls attention to the fact that, as demand for trails continues to grow in Montana, it’s essential that the funding to build and maintain trails increases to keep pace.

It’s no accident that all of those who live in and visit Montana have access to world-class recreational opportunities on our public lands. Montanans who came before us worked together and made the necessary investments in order to ensure that their outdoor heritage was passed on to the next generations – us.

It’s our turn now to do the same for those who will come after us, and MWA is stepping up.

In 2018, we enlarged the scope of our trail maintenance efforts to include important and under-served landscapes across the state while continuing to help complete the Montana section of the Continental Divide Trail. Along the way, we partnered with other public land advocates on trail projects, which enabled us to maintain and build more miles of trails and set an example of how Montanans should be uniting around the care of our public lands.

For example, we partnered with Backcountry Hunters and Anglers on the Kootenai National Forest for a full weekend of trail work. We also partnered with the Salish Kootenai Upward Bound program in the Jewel Basin and with some of our Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project partners on the North Fork of the Blackfoot.

Moreover, we launched the Adopt-A-Trail program, intended to empower and turn out more stewardship volunteers across the state. Our Madison-Gallatin Chapter piloted two Adopt-a-Trail projects, one on the Lava Lake Trail in the Madison Range and another on the Cliff Creek Trail in the Gallatin Range. These projects drew 44 extremely enthusiastic volunteers, who helped maintain the trails and served as Wilderness Stewards, which entailed educating hikers on Leave-No-Trace principles, helping obliterate illegal campfire rings, and collecting important visitor-use data for the U.S. Forest Service.

We aim to build upon this grassroots stewardship model and launch similar ventures with other MWA chapters across the state, all in an effort to ensure that the next generation can enjoy the public lands heritage that previous generations of Montanans worked hard to hand down to us.

– Matt Bouser, stewardship director

We enlarged the scope of our trail maintenance efforts to include important and under-served landscapes across the state.
THANK YOU...To each and every champion of our wild places, for your commitment to our public lands and your investment in the quiet beauty that makes Montana, Montana.

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In 2018, 84 percent of expenses went directly to conservation programs.

**2018 FINANCIAL SUMMARY**

On September 30, 2018, Montana Wilderness Association had:
- Total assets of $4,674,493, liabilities of $875,759, and net assets of $3,798,734.
- $2,794,859 unrestricted and $367,104 temporarily restricted assets.
- $721,909 in fixed assets.
- $636,771 in permanently restricted endowment funds.

Revenues for the year were $2,510,328 and expenses were $2,348,443.

Notes to Financial Statements:
- 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 Junkermier, Clark, Campanella, Stevens, P.C.
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