Update on Custer Gallatin Forest Plan, by Emily Cleveland, MWA southwest Montana field director

The Custer Gallatin Draft comment period came to a close on June 8th with over 11,000 public comments submitted. The overwhelming public response to the comment period shows just how important this area is to people, whether they live here or across the country.

The revised plan will replace the two plans that were created in the late 80’s for the Custer and Gallatin National Forests. The two forests were combined in 2012 and the new plan will be the first plan to cover the entire 3.1 million-acre Custer-Gallatin National Forest.

The current plans together include 33,741 acres of recommended wilderness. MWA is calling for over 518,000 acres of conservation protections, including over 377,000 acres of recommended wilderness in the new revised plan. We will continue to work to advocate for protecting the remaining wild places on our forest and ensure that the wilderness character that makes this part of the world so unique is protected into the future.

To all those who commented on the Draft Forest Plan and DEIS—THANK YOU! Your advocacy helped to show our land managers just how important keeping these places wild is to the community. This summer the Forest Service will be analyzing public feedback and developing their Final EIS and plan later this year. Be sure to stay engaged so we can make sure you are informed as the plan revision progresses. In the meantime, I hope you have a wonderful summer with plenty of time out enjoying our public lands!

Our Passion for Wilderness, by Tom Ross, MGC president

The recently closed comment period for the Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan Revision provided proof of at least of couple characteristics of our community: we take a strong interest in the management of our public lands and engage civilly when given the opportunity; and, we are passionate about wilderness. Very passionate. Despite the differences in the history of our involvement, our strategy to best accomplish our objectives, and our willingness to collaborate and consider the views of others, we remain a community that values wilderness and recognizes that today is the best time to protect that which remains, especially given the rapid growth of our population and its escalating user demands on our backyard forest. I’m grateful to live in a community that recognizes that our recreational enjoyment has to take a back seat to the watershed, wildlife and other ecological benefits provided by one of the nation’s more popular national forests. I’m also grateful that the management and staff of that forest worked to solicit comments and educate the public about the planning process and its implications for our future. But I’m probably most thankful for the fact that so many of us, so many of you, took the time to offer your comments, and that you are likely stay engaged in the planning process in the future. Thank you.
Bozeman REI Provides Big Boost to MWA’s Stewardship Efforts, by Tom Ross, MGC president

Last spring when our chapter was trying to get our new trail stewardship program up and running, one fundamental challenge we faced was how to equip our trail crews with the necessary tools, safety equipment and supplies to perform a diverse range of maintenance tasks. We had commitments to two trails through the Forest Service’s Adopt-a-Trail program, and they in-turn provided technical and supervisory support for our efforts, including allowing us to borrow their tools. Nevertheless, we knew that we would need to become largely self-supporting to accommodate growth and provide the logistical flexibility that we would need in the future.

We had to look no further than our local REI store for a helping hand. MWA’s staff applied for and received a grant from Bozeman REI that in turn provided our chapter about $700 in support of our new program. That seed money, accompanied by generous donations from some members of our stewardship committee, allowed us to make our first substantial tool purchase. We put those tools, and those borrowed from the Forest Service, to good use in 2018. Meanwhile, our Wilderness Stewards program was also launched with enthusiasm, and these volunteers also needed some supplies and clothing to help them accomplish their tasks.

Once again, Bozeman REI came to the rescue. Early in 2019 MWA staff applied for a grant to support our statewide stewardship efforts, and in May we were thrilled to learn that REI had awarded MWA $5,000, about half of which would be made available to our chapter to purchase additional tools and otherwise support our local Adopt-a-Trail and Wilderness Stewards programs. We are very appreciative of their generosity and commitment to local efforts to protect and enhance public lands and to support volunteerism.

In fact, our relationship with Bozeman REI goes beyond their grant program. They also like to get their hands dirty, with about ten REI employees taking part in a trail service day that is planned and directed by MWA’s stewardship staff each year. And our chapter has used the REI store as a venue for several community presentations over the last couple of years.

Needless to say, Bozeman REI is a great partner for MWA. All of our chapter members are encouraged to give them a big "Thank You" when visiting their store. Special thanks go to Teresa Larson, their Market Coordinator, Outdoor Programs and Outreach, who is most responsible for the grants received by MWA. Please let all of their staff know how much we appreciate their support and our growing partnership.
Wilderness Stewards June 2019 Update, by Roxanna McLaughlin

On Sunday June 9, I was joined at Colombo’s Pizza by Wilderness Volunteers Patti and Ann. Patti (along with Danielle, Alaric, and Jeff) were the Wilderness Stewards on Lava Lake trail on June 1, supporting the MWA trail crew as they worked on water mitigation along the trail. Earlier, Dean and his crew had cleared some recently fallen trees, and there was one new fallen tree spotted by our Stewards on this day. They also found a couple illegal fire rings close to the lake, and cleaned them up. Patti reported only a few pockets of snow along sheltered areas of the path, and that the lake itself is melted. The Stewards spent about 5 hours on the trail, and it sounded like they had a good day out there.

Come join us for the next Second Sunday … we meet at Colombo’s (on College St. in Bozeman) the second Sunday of every month at 5 p.m.. Casual and fun, attendees catch up on trail conditions and projects coming up. This summer we have several new opportunities to support the USFS.

1. We are on call and ready to help the USFS with their recreational survey. This involves counting people coming off the trail with a ‘clicker’ as one volunteer’s task. The second volunteer asks people coming off the trail if they’d be willing to take a short survey, and, if so, asks questions on a form accordingly. Richard Lyon and I have attended the training and will help anyone that wants to do this. I am compiling a list of volunteers willing to do this sort of thing (no hiking required) so please let me know if this interests you.

2. As spring warms into summer, we are adding Emerald Lake trail and Hyalite Creek trail to our present trails (Beehive Basin and Lava Lake) to monitor, so if you have a special spot in your heart for any of those places, please let me know.

On June 22 I will be helping David Steinmuller with our MWA table at the Farmer’s Market at the fairgrounds. Stop by to say hello to the nature nerd in the green shirt (me). I will have a sign-up sheet on hand, of course.

Summer is a busy time for everyone… traveling, weddings, camping, fishing, kayaking, and getting your feet on that favorite trail. Summer is the busiest season for our Wilderness trails, too, so remember to sign up for a day or two to give back (or as I like to say, help people to take less) from our priceless Wild places. We need your ideas and insights to be a presence on these trails.

Possible dates for future wilderness steward work days:
- July 6 or 7  Lava Lake
- July 13 or 14  Beehive Basin
- July 20 or 21  Emerald Lake
- July 27 or 28  Hyalite Lake

Roxanna will try to poll volunteers or contact her with your preference (Saturday or Sunday).
Lots of Summer Walks Still Remain

Chances are, not all of these walks are full. If you see one that interests you, go to wildmontana.org/walks for more information.

Saturday, June 29  Spanish Peaks Foothills
Saturday, June 29  Emerald Lake: Wilderness Ethics
Thursday, July 11  Specimen Creek
Saturday, July 13  Dailey Creek to Tepee Creek (off-trail)
Saturday, July 13  Twin Lakes Trail Run
Sunday, July 21   Windy Pass and Gallatin Crest
Sunday, August 11 Crater Lake on the Gallatin Crest
Saturday, August 31 Ramshorn Peak
Saturday, Sept. 14 Cottonwood Lake
Saturday, Sept. 28 Hyalite Viewpoint

Be Sure to Visit the MGC Table at the Farmer’s Market

Once again, as he has done for the last several years, David Steinmuller will be manning our Chapter’s table at the Saturday morning Farmer’s Market at the Gallatin County Fairgrounds in Bozeman. Don’t forget to stop by and say “Hi” while you’re out shopping for veggies and other goodies. The dates for the market this summer are June 22, 29; July 6, 13, 27; August 3, 10, 17, 24, 31; September 14.