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FROM THE PRESIDENT

A BEAUTIFUL DAY ON THE BLACKFOOT

For well over ten years now, I’ve been a member of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project (BCSP), a coalition of ranchers, outfitters, conservationists, timber mill operators, snowmobilers, business owners, and outdoor recreationists from the Ovando and Seeley Lake area. We came together to forge solutions to the challenges we were facing on the public lands in our backyard.

At the time I joined the BCSP, of which MWA is a founding member, I owned and managed Rovero’s, an all-in-one hardware store, gas station, and deli and pizza stop located in Seeley Lake, a community not far from the Blackfoot River. Day in, day out, a wide range of customers bought supplies at my store. They included hikers, hunters, anglers, backpackers, loggers, snowmobilers, cross-country skiers, ranchers, outfitters, and mountain bikers – from Seeley and around the U.S.

The success of my business depended on that wide spectrum of people and interests. I believe the success of our communities and our state depends on that same diversity of interests, a diversity that defines what the BCSP, and the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (BCSA), is all about.

Crafted by the BCSP, the BCSA provides something for everybody, while protecting critical habitat for grizzly bears, mountain goats, and elk, as well as westslope cutthroat and bull trout.

On June 7, Senator Jon Tester reintroduced the BCSA at the Kettlehouse Brewery in Bonner, located appropriately enough along the banks of the Blackfoot River. With MWA’s deputy director John Todd serving as the emcee, the event featured speakers who represent the hard work, respect, and compromise that went into this bill, including MWA members Connie and Mack Long from Bob Marshall Wilderness Outfitters and Loren Rose from Pyramid Mountain Lumber.

Adding nearly 80,000 acres to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Mission Mountains Wilderness Areas, the bill will permanently protect the wild Swan Front, Grizzly Basin, and the four most vital tributaries of the Blackfoot River – the North Fork, MONTURE Creek, Morrell Creek, and the West Fork of the Clearwater. Protecting these tributaries is critical for ensuring that the Blackfoot River and its native trout populations remain healthy for generations to come.

On behalf of MWA and the BCSP, I thank Senator Tester for championing our proposal. And I thank you, as always, for lending your support to this bill and for everything else you do to protect wild places throughout this great state!

– Addrien Marx, MWA president

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On June 7, more than a hundred Montanans packed KettleHouse Brewery in Bonner to hear Senator Jon Tester announce that he was reintroducing the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (BCSA).

KettleHouse’s location, along the Blackfoot River, was a fitting place to announce legislation that will permanently protect the key tributaries of the Blackfoot, including the North Fork, Monture Creek, Morrell Creek, and West Fork of the Clearwater. Protection of these headwaters will ensure that the Blackfoot watershed and its native trout populations – as well as the outdoor recreation economy that depends on the river – remain healthy.

“We need to get this bill passed because we don’t find ecosystems like this anywhere else in the world,” Tester said to the packed house. “It’s on us, it’s on me, it’s on you to make sure that we keep this area for the next generation. We have an opportunity to show our kids and our grandkids that we can do something right by them.”

MWA Deputy Director John Todd emceed the event, which was organized by MWA. In his introduction, continued
Todd highlighted the virtues that went into crafting this legislation.

“Respect and perseverance are part of what make Montana so special,” he said. “These two things are also what the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act is made of.”

Todd introduced four other speakers, members of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project (BCSP), before Tester took the stage.

Organized in 2005 with MWA as a founding member, the BCSP is a collaborative of local loggers, ranchers, outfitters, conservationists, snowmobilers, business owners, and outdoor recreationists from the Ovando and Seeley Lake area who have stuck together for more than 12 years. The BCSA is the fruit of the project’s labor.

Loren Rose, chief operating officer of Pyramid Mountain Lumber and a member of the BCSP steering committee, explained that the BCSP is part of the project’s “three legged stool,” representing timber, recreation, and wilderness. He said that Pyramid “stands by this legislation wholeheartedly.”

The BCSA will add nearly 80,000 acres to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Missions Mountains Wilderness Areas, permanently protecting Grizzly Basin, the Swan Front, and the four key tributaries of the Blackfoot River.

The BCSA also includes provisions that will help sustain the tremendous work the collaboration has already accomplished through its offshoot, the Southwestern Crown of the Continent Collaborative (SWCC). As of 2018, the SWCC has created or maintained an average of 140 jobs, brought $19 million in federal investments, and led to overall investment of $36 million in the local economy. The SWCC has resulted in noxious weed treatment of 52,214 acres, the restoration of 172 miles of stream, and the maintenance of 2,000 miles of multiple-use trail. Moreover, the BCSA will open 2,000 acres of high-quality snowmobiling near Ovando and preserve prized mountain biking access on Spread Mountain.

Ben Horan, executive director of MTB Missoula, spoke at the event about the importance of Montana’s outdoor recreation economy and the mutual respect required in developing durable public land solutions for places like the Blackfoot.

You can help get the bill passed by calling Senator Steve Daines at 202-224-2651 and Congressman Greg Gianforte at 202-225-3211. Request that Daines co-sponsor the BCSA and that Gianforte introduce the bill as companion legislation in the House of Representatives.

“Respect and perseverance are part of what make Montana so special. These two things are also what the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act is made of.”
—MWA Deputy Director John Todd

“We are bound by a common love for this place,” he said.

Tester paid tribute to Horan and others in the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project who have put aside their differences to pass a bill that 73 percent of Montanans support.

“A lot of people have been working on [the BCSA] for over a decade and it makes me feel good,” Tester said. “We just need to get everybody in the delegation on board pushing for this. If that happens, this will pass.”

A T R A D I T I O N  O F  S T E W A R D S H I P

A few weeks before the reintroduction of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act, MWA’s Volunteer Trail Crew added to the backcountry tradition steeped in the Blackfoot.

The crew improved the first two miles of Hobnail Tom Trail, which runs along the lower section of North Fork of the Blackfoot, an area that will become designated wilderness once the BCSA passes. The crew also added a spur trail within the existing wilderness to allow trail users to ford the North Fork, something that will become necessary when the Forest Service replaces an old bridge this summer.

—Erin Clark, western Montana field director

Rivers, creeks, peaks, and alpine meadows, like this one in the southern Swan Range, would be permanently protected by the BCSA.
Dunn Ridge, in the Mussellshell Breaks, is one of the areas jeopardized by the Lewistown Field Office’s draft resource management plan.

At risk are lands which offer rich habitat for moose, elk, deer, bear, and other wildlife.

IN MAY, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released two draft management plans, one covering 160,000 acres in western Montana overseen by the Missoula Field Office and the other covering 650,000 acres in central Montana overseen by the Lewistown Field Office.

Both appear to have been concocted in a backroom at the Department of the Interior as a gift to the timber and oil and gas industries, paying little regard to what makes these lands special to Montanans and other Americans.

It’s vital you speak out, because these plans could be in place for the next 20 to 30 years. Visit wildmontana.org and submit your comments to the BLM before August 15.
MISSOULA FIELD OFFICE
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

At risk of being logged and roaded are 17,000 acres of lands MWA has identified as having wilderness characteristics, including some of the last remaining roadless areas of the Garnet Range, which offer rich habitat for moose, elk, deer, bear, and other wildlife.

Also at stake are two areas currently designated as “areas of critical environmental concern” (ACECs) – Limestone Cliff and Bear Creek Flats – as well as three wilderness study areas, including Hoodoo Mountain (located between Drummond and Lincoln), Quigg West (east of Hamilton), and Wales Creek (south of Ovando).

For more information about the Missoula management plan, contact Erin Clark at eclark@wildmontana.org.

Hoodoo Mountain WSA (above) and Quigg West WSA (left) are both at risk in the draft resource management plan.

LEWISTOWN FIELD OFFICE
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

This plan prioritizes oil and gas development above all else in the wild heart of Montana, where the Rocky Mountain Front gives way to vast, unbroken grasslands, the rugged Musselshell river breaks, and numerous island mountain ranges, all supporting some of the healthiest elk and mule deer herds in North America.

West Crooked Creek, Dovetail, Cottonwood, Carter Coulee, Horse Camp Trail, Dunn Ridge, and Chain Buttes are just a few of the places the BLM has identified as having wilderness characteristics, but still refuses to protect in this plan.

This plan would also strip protection away from Square Butte, Collar Gulch, Acid-Shale Pine Forest, Ear Mountain and other places currently protected as areas of critical environmental concern.

For more information about the Lewistown management plan, contact Aubrey Bertram at abertram@wildmontana.org.

Looking out over Collar Gulch, one of the areas that would lose protection in central Montana.
MWA GENERATES HUNDREDS OF COMMENTS IN SUPPORT OF A WILD CUSTER GALLATIN

June 6 marked the end of the comment period for the Custer Gallatin National Forest’s draft forest plan revision. The 90-day comment period was our chance to show land managers that Montanans believe in a wild future for this 3.1-million-acre forest, and we’re pleased to announce that, with the help of our members and supporters, we were able to make our voices heard loud and clear.

By the close of the comment period, we had assembled nearly 400 unique comments on our digital comment page, in addition to the dozens of comments that we recruited at in-person commenting workshops in Billings, Bozeman, and Red Lodge. The Forest Service is obligated to review public comments and incorporate relevant information into their planning process, and we’re confident that the input supplied by MWA members and supporters will support long-needed conservation measures in the final plan.

The Custer-Gallatin stretches from South Dakota to the Madison Range, encompassing a breathtaking array of wild prairies, tall peaks, and wild rivers. During the comment period, we recommended that supporters submit comments advocating that the Forest Service maintain and add recommended wilderness in the Pryor Mountains, Lionhead area, Tongue River Breaks, Cook and King Mountains, and Absaroka-Beartooths; implement the recommendations of the Gallatin Forest Partnership; preserve wilderness and cultural values in the Crazy Mountains in close consultation with the Crow Tribal Nation; and maintain restrictions on motorized and mechanized recreation in the Chalk Buttes.

The comment period may be over, but we’re not sitting on our hands until the final forest plan is released. We’ll continue to encourage the Forest Service to implement the broadly supported recommendations of the Gallatin Forest Partnership and work with our Apsáalooke (Crow Tribe) partners to ensure that the Crazies are protected in the new plan. The Crow have taken a strong stance on protecting the cultural and ecological significance of this island range, and we’re proud to stand beside them in defense of one of Montana’s most special wild places.

I’d like to thank everyone who took the time to submit a comment, attend a workshop, or otherwise be a part of the forest planning process. It can feel like shouting into the void, but comments really do matter. We expect the final forest plan to be released in late 2020. If you have any questions in the meantime, please contact me at ecleveland@wildmontana.org.

– Emily Cleveland, southwest Montana field director

TESTER GOES TO BAT FOR THE BADGER

The week after he reintroduced the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act, Senator Jon Tester turned his attention to protecting another vital piece of the Crown of the Continent.

He introduced a Senate resolution calling on Interior Secretary David Bernhardt to uphold the Interior Department’s commitment to the Blackfeet Nation and defend its cancellation of an oil and gas lease in the Badger-Two Medicine.

Sacred to the Niiitsitapi (Blackfeet), the Badger-Two Medicine is an area bounded by the Blackfeet Reservation, Glacier National Park, and the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Home to grizzly bears, wolverines, westslope cutthroat trout, and so many other species, the Badger is as wild as any area on the Crown of the Continent and is the last unprotected wildland along the Rocky Mountain Front.

It’s also an area the Blackfeet have been using for thousands of years. As John Murray, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Blackfeet Tribe, says, the Badger-Two Medicine is “a cornerstone of our history and our culture.” Tester introduced the resolution because the Department of the Interior under David Bernhardt reneged on a commitment that Secretary Sally Jewell and later Secretary Ryan Zinke made to the Blackfeet to keep oil and gas development out of the Badger.

In 2016 and 2017, the Interior Department cancelled all remaining oil and gas leases in recognition that the government had violated the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and other bedrock environmental laws when it issued the leases in the 1980s. One of the largest lease holders in the Badger, Devon Energy, voluntarily relinquished its leases in 2016, stating “it was the right thing to do.”

Solenex LLC and Moncrief Oil challenged the cancellation of their leases in a Washington, D.C. district court. In 2017, the court ruled in favor of both companies. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke afterwards vowed to appeal the decision of both cases.

Days before his confirmation hearing as Interior secretary, Acting Secretary David Bernhardt pulled the department out of its appeal of the Moncrief decision (though not the Solenex decision). Sen. Tester’s resolution calls on Bernhardt to continue with the appeal.

We can’t thank Senator Tester enough for standing up for the Blackfeet and for all Montanans.

MWA has been fighting to keep oil and gas development out of the Badger for well over 30 years now. We won’t stop until this revered place is permanently protected. If you’re interested in joining the fight, please contact me at joffer@wildmontana.org.

– Joe Offer, central Montana field director
When we kicked off the Montana state legislative session with the 2019 Rally for Public Lands on January 11, we were hopeful that a public lands funding bill would become law, but we knew passing such a bill through the current legislature would be a challenge.

Nearly four months later, we celebrated as Governor Steve Bullock signed HB265 into law. HB265 will provide sustainable long-term funding for our public lands – for chronically underfunded state parks, public land trails, and fishing access sites. We were joined in that celebration by motorized and non-motorized public land users, hunting and fishing groups, business associations, and civic organizations, all of whom had come together in support of SB24 with the understanding that our public land heritage unites Montanans of all stripes. Of course, dedicated supporters like you played a key role in passing SB26. Thanks to your phone calls, emails, and in-person testimony, we were able to secure funding that will help protect our outdoor heritage for generations to come. We also couldn’t have passed SB26 without the support of Montana’s legislators, especially Senate Majority Leader – Senator Terry Gauthier (R-Helena). Three Democrats and three Republicans co-sponsored the bill, and it passed through both chambers by a margin of two-thirds majority. Estimates suggest that SB26 will generate $2 million every year for the maintenance and protection of critical public lands. While this is a huge win in the right direction, our public lands are still facing a real funding shortage that needs to be addressed.

During the 2019 session, we also defeated bills attempting to undermine federal authority over roads through public lands (HB207), bills that would have resulted in massive cuts to our State Parks budget (SB102 and SB242). We’re also pleased that Governor Bullock vetoed HB265, a bill that would have given the Montana Land Board authority to approve or kill conservation easements funded through the Habitat Montana program. Habitat Montana uses a portion of out-of-state hunting license fees to protect critical wildlife habitat through voluntary conservation easements and private land acquisition. HB265 would have put important conservation decisions in the hands of elected officials, rather than leaving them up to experienced fish, wildlife and Parks personnel. The bill added an unnecessary obstacle that would limit Montanans from enjoying more access to our public lands and hinder our ability to protect critical wildlife habitat.

The final big development in the 2019 session was the passage of Senate Joint Resolution 20, which calls for a statewide study of the seven Montana wilderness study areas (WSAs) managed by the U.S. Forest Service. While we support an effort to bring Montanans together to develop a permanent solution to WSA management, we opposed the resolution because it includes some troubling language regarding wilderness that sends the message that some voices and opinions may not be heard.

Though the session is over, we’ll remain working with state legislators to ensure that any effort to decide the future of WSAs is truly bipartisan, includes all interests, seeks a publicly supported middle ground, and reflects the fact that WSAs support Montana’s outdoor heritage.

— Noah Moran, policy and advocacy manager

Take a moment today to enter the 25th annual Montana Shares Raffle. By entering, you’ll be supporting Montana Shares, a partnership of local nonprofits striving to improve the quality of life in communities across Montana.

The members of Montana Shares, including MWA, address important community issues like healthcare, sustainability, conservation, the arts, community well-being, and animal welfare. Together, we can make Montana a better place, and we’d love your support.

To view all the available prizes and enter the raffle, visit montanashares.org/mt-shares-annual-raffle/ or call 406-442-2210 with questions.

Best of luck and thank you!
WILDFEST IS BACK!
Join us for two days of hiking, trail stewardship, live music, and family fun just outside Glacier National Park. With hikes of all difficulty levels, gear demos, skills workshops, and local food and ice cream, there’ll be something for everybody. WildFest is free to attend, and all are welcome.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6
8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Start the weekend off by joining our trail stewardship team on a one-day project in the beautiful Jewel Basin. We’ll be clearing and maintaining the Clayton Lake Trail. Space is limited, so please reserve your spot at wildmontana.org/vtc-wildfest.

3 – 8:30 p.m. Join us at Cedar Creek Lodge to mingle with fellow wilderness enthusiasts, hear about MWA’s recent work, and hear from guest speakers Vernon Finley, director of the Kootenai Culture Committee, and Doug Chadwick, renowned author, conservationist, and wildlife biologist. Heavy appetizers will be served.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7
On Saturday morning, join us on one of seven volunteer-led hikes across the Flathead Valley. You can learn more about the hikes and register at wildmontana.org/wildfest. Space is limited, so don’t wait.

3 – 8:30 p.m. Join us at The Coop for an afternoon of family fun, including gear demos from REI, horse packing demos from Back Country Horsemen of Montana, presentations from Montana Wild Wings raptor center, and live music from Whitefish’s own Jameson and the Sordid Seeds. There will also be a knot-tying workshop with our very own Backcountry Bob, and food and ice cream from local food trucks.

Volunteers needed!
To volunteer, please contact Courtney Wantink at cwantink@wildmontana.org or 406-443-7350 x 111.

Find all the details and registration information at wildmontana.org/wildfest