FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LETS MAKE OUR 60TH ANNIVERSARY OUR BEST YEAR YET

I can’t tell you how excited and humbled I am to be at the helm of one of the most effective and well-regarded grassroots conservation organizations in the country.

Before coming to MWA in December, I was the executive director of Friends of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, based in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Like the Upper Missouri River Breaks, Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument was subject to Secretary Ryan Zinke’s national monument review this summer. I had the privilege of working with diverse communities in defense of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks and other special public lands in southern New Mexico.

I look forward to employing the skills and knowledge I acquired in New Mexico on behalf of MWA and to helping our organization boost diversity among our members, supporters, and spokespeople. I also look forward to leading MWA further onto the national stage.

Making my arrival all the more special is that 2018 is the 60th anniversary of this amazing organization. We intend to celebrate later in the year. For now, we’re busy fending off one of the most dangerous pieces of public lands legislation we’ve ever faced—a bill Senator Steve Daines introduced in December (S. 2206) that would strip protection from five wilderness study areas (WSAs). Totaling nearly a half-million acres, they include the Big Snowies, Middle Fork Judith, West Pioneer, Sapphire, and Blue Joint Wilderness Study Areas. These places represent the heart and soul of our state, and MWA has fought, and will continue to fight, tooth and nail to protect them.

As part of our response to S. 2206, we helped launch Our Land, Our Legacy—a diverse group of Montanans banding together to celebrate and defend all 44 of our WSAs, more than a million acres of some of our wildest, most pristine public lands. This group includes folks from across the state who cherish and use our WSAs. Representatives of Our Land, Our Legacy will stand up for these places in videos, advertisements, and other media.

Even with the series of attacks that our national monuments, our wilderness areas, and our wilderness study areas have endured over the past year, I remain hopeful, and one reason for that is the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act. This bill took a big step forward through Congress in early February when Senator Jon Tester, who introduced the bill last year, presented his legislation in a Senate committee hearing. Ten years in the making, this truly collaborative proposal adds 80,000 acres to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Mission Mountains Wilderness Areas.

Our 60th would become one of our most challenging years yet, but I’m confident we will emerge more dynamic, better organized, and even more powerful by December 5th, the day MWA held its first meeting in 1958.

WILD MONTANA WINTER 2018

On the cover: Volunteer Trina Clausen at work on a trail in the Bob Marshall Wilderness below the Chinese Wall.

TIME, MUSCLE, AND SWEAT
Volunteers are the heart of MWAs statewide stewardship program

FIGHTING FOR THE WILD SOUL OF MONTANA
Senator Daines targets half-million acres of our wildest public lands with new bill

UPDATES FROM THE FIELD
The latest on our work standing up for public lands and wild places
On a Saturday night this past July, I sat around a campfire with six MWA volunteers atop the Continental Divide in the shadow of the Granite Butte Lookout Tower. We had spent the day swinging pulaskis in an effort to move three miles of the Continental Divide Trail off of a Forest Service road and onto a single track accessible to hikers, mountain bikers, and stock.

We were digesting a hearty dinner of “deluxe” backcountry burritos, swatting at the passing mosquito, and swapping tales of grizzly bear encounters when one of the volunteers looked up from the fire and said, “You know what’s great about this? Yesterday we were six strangers from all across the state, newcomers to trail work, and here we are sitting around the campfire sharing stories. Seems like we’ve known each other for ages.”

Volunteers are the heart of MWA’s statewide stewardship program. Without the dedicated individuals who give so much time, muscle, and sweat, this program would not exist. These volunteers include Backcountry Horsemens packers who help us get deeper into wild country, Wilderness Walks leaders who help their neighbors explore public wildlands, and, of course, the altruists who wield pulaskis and crosscuts on our volunteer trail crews.

Whether working in the smoky heat, wet snow, or under clear skies, volunteer crews always manage to have a great time. As one volunteer from this past season noted, “It felt good to give back with some trail work . . . Having some really good food in the backcountry and enjoying the fireside chats with the group made it feel like a vacation rather than work.”

Last year, 58 volunteers worked 2,217 hours, covered 26 miles of trail, and contributed $42,000 in value.
value. But they weren’t the only folks who supported our stewardship programs. In 2017, more than 100 Wilderness Walks leaders safely led more than 1,000 participants up mountainsides, through forests, and across our prairies.

As with our volunteer trail crew projects, we are also locating more of our Wilderness Walks within the places we’re working to protect. This offers participants and volunteers the opportunity to learn about current land management issues and become champions for conservation of our public lands and wild places.

MWA is a unique organization in that we both advocate as well as actively steward public lands in Montana. As a result, our stewardship program is the primary “hands-on” outreach and education tool that connects people with the places we’re working to protect and encourages them to become a voice for wilderness conservation. Underscoring every stewardship project or event is an effort to advance our mission by strengthening current campaigns, building support for priority landscapes, and working closely with a wide range of partners to ensure access to our public lands across our state.

**This collaborative** statewide approach to stewardship comes at a critical point for Montana’s public lands. Today, outdoor recreation on public lands is rapidly increasing while funding for public land management is declining. Every year, Congress reduces the annual budget for Region 1 of the U.S Forest Service, which manages 90% of trails in Montana. As a consequence, the U.S. Forest Service is increasingly turning to volunteers to address the backlog of deferred maintenance on nearly 14,000 miles of trail in the state.

These trails are arteries that feed the heart of Montana’s $7.2 billion outdoor recreation economy. They also feed the hearts and souls of outdoorsmen and women who live here because they love the great outdoors.

**Looking ahead**, we are determined to do our part to keep our public lands accessible, and we’re equally determined to monitor and protect the health of these lands. The long-term vision for our stewardship programs includes a commitment to offer more citizen science projects that provide meaningful experiences for volunteers and valuable data for land managers. For example, in 2017, MWA volunteers hiked into the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness to monitor solitude and wilderness character. Projects like this produce scientific data points that inform decisions and decrease the workload of our under-funded partners at the Forest Service.

In 2018, the stewardship of our public lands will remain a high priority for MWA. Our volunteer trail crews will continue work to maintain and complete the Continental Divide Trail. We’ll also venture into new areas that have backlogged trail maintenance projects and are in need of an extra hand. Our Wilderness Walks will continue to explore wild places, and citizen science projects will give us the information we need to protect these places.

Most importantly, our volunteers, who show up every year without fail, will remain a crucial part of our stewardship vision. We can’t thank them enough.

—Based in Whitefish, Matt Bowser is MWA’s stewardship director.

**BUILDING MORE THAN TRAILS**

While most of our volunteer trail crews are comprised of adult volunteers, we also partner with several youth organizations each summer to improve trails on our public lands. These youth crew partnerships are extremely valuable opportunities for teenagers to gain important life skills like communication and teamwork while also building their self-confidence.

In 2018, we have projects lined-up with the Montana Youth Challenge Academy (Dillon, MT), the Salish Kootenai Upward Bound Program (Pablo, MT), the Montana Academy (Marion, MT), and the Blackfeet Youth Crew (Browning, MT), pictured.
In December, Senator Steve Daines introduced a bill that would strip protection from nearly a half-million acres of our wildest, most pristine public lands. His bill would open the Big Snowies, Middle Fork Judith, West Pioneer, Sapphire, and Blue Joint wilderness study areas (WSAs) to industrial development and destructive off-road vehicle use. We’ve fought like hell against this bill and will continue to fight until Sen. Daines abandons the bill. Our response included bringing together a diverse group of Montanans who know, cherish, and use our WSAs, and not just the ones targeted in Sen. Daines’ bill. Dubbed Our Land, Our Legacy, this group will be standing up for these wildlands in videos, advertisements, and other media. To see the videos and sign a letter in support of our WSAs, visit ourlandourlegacy.org. Pictured are some of the places that Our Land, Our Legacy is defending.

Sign a letter in support of our WSAs at ourlandourlegacy.org
FIGHTING FOR THE WILD SOUL OF MONTANA

SAPPHIRE WSA
94,000 ACRES

JOIN WSA
32,500 ACRES

WEST PIONEER WSA
151,000 ACRES

Sign a letter in support of our WSAs at ourlandourlegacy.org

Zack Porter

Sally Carlson
A LONG-TIME GOAL FINALLY WITHIN REACH IN THE GALLATIN

Sixty years ago, a group of passionate wilderness advocates gathered in Bozeman to discuss the need to permanently protect the wild Madison and Gallatin ranges. This was the beginning of Montana Wilderness Association. Of course, the Madisons were protected as the Lee Metcalf Wilderness in the 1980s, but the Gallatin Range remains without permanent protection.

That could change with the next Custer Gallatin National Forest plan. Late last year, MWA and our partners successfully reached an agreement to protect what we love about the Gallatin Range—wildlife, solitude, and outdoor recreation. Composed of landowners, business owners, outdoor recreationists, natural resource professionals, and conservationists, the Gallatin Forest Partnership (GFP) convened over a year ago in effort to inform the Custer Gallatin forest plan. MWA is a proud member.

Here is a glimpse of the proposal we came up with:

Recommended Wilderness
The GFP’s agreement recommends approximately 125,000 acres of Wilderness in the Gallatin and Madison Ranges. The agreement protects 110,000 acres in the heart of the Gallatin Range along the Gallatin Crest and the Sawtooth Inventory Roadless Area—from Hyalite Lake south to the boundary of Yellowstone National Park. We also recommended adding 6,000 acres to the southernmost end of the Taylor Hilgard unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, as well as 16,000 acres in the Cowboys Heaven area, which connects two other units of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, the Spanish Peaks and Beartrap Canyon units.

Hyalite Watershed Protection and Recreation Area
This 70,000-acre area prioritizes watershed health in the Hyalite and Sourdough watersheds. Approximately 90% of Bozeman’s water supply originates from these drainages. This recommendation also maintains the diverse recreational opportunities found in the Hyalite drainage while protecting the wild, undeveloped character of the more remote peaks and alpine basins.

Wildlife Management Areas
The GFP recommends two areas in the Gallatin Range where wildlife habitat would be the priority. The proposed 31,000 acre Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wildlife Management Area would maintain existing recreation in the wild landscape. The West Pine Wildlife Management Area would protect migration routes while enhancing some quiet, non-motorized recreational opportunities.

For more information on the Gallatin Forest Partnership, visit gallatinpartners.org.

REP. GIANFORTE WITHDRAWS SUPPORT OF “WHEELS OVER WILDERNESS” BILL

In December, the House Natural Resources Committee passed House Resolution 1349, also known as the “wheels over wilderness” bill. This bill would alter the Wilderness Act to allow mechanized use in all designated wilderness areas, including 15 wilderness areas in Montana. Congressman Greg Gianforte voted for it.

In so doing, he turned his back on Montana’s time-honored backcountry values and traditions and on the places we hold so dear. He also turned his back on outfitters and guides, backcountry horsemen, hunters, anglers, hikers, backpackers, and even many mountain bikers who opposed this legislation, including the International Mountain Biking Association. All of these user groups oppose this bill because it harms our ability to find consensus over how we manage our public lands and fails to acknowledge that there’s room on our public lands to accommodate mountain bikers and preserve the places that Montanans hold so dear.

Not surprisingly, Montanans of all political stripes condemned Rep. Gianforte’s vote. The outpouring of opposition to the bill was enough to convince the congressman to withdraw his support of the bill and promise he wouldn’t vote for it again if it received a vote on the House floor.

60 YEARS OF FIGHTING FOR WILDERNESS

In 1958, Ken and Florence Baldwin organized their neighbors into a group dedicated to preserving wilderness and influencing public lands policy in Montana. Six years later, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the fledgling MWA, the Wilderness Act passed, and with a stroke of a pen the Bob Marshall, Anaconda-Pintler, Cabinet Mountains, and Gates of the Mountains were preserved as wilderness.

We’ve seen a lot in our six decades leading the fight for Montana’s wild places, but the challenges we’ve faced in the last year top just about everything we’ve encountered. In the coming year, we intend to celebrate, but we also intend to fight like hell. To do so, we need to grow stronger than ever. We need to take the movement for public lands and wildlife conservationists, the Gallatin Forest Partnership (GFP) convened over a year ago in effort to inform the Custer Gallatin forest plan. MWA is a proud member.

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Pledge to help defend our wild places. When everyone joins the movement, our collective voice will be too loud to ignore.
The Sanders County commissioners recently wrote a letter supporting the collaborative efforts of the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition. A rural county in western Montana, with a population of just over 11,000, the community of Thompson Falls is committed to working together to find common ground, and moving past old fighting tactics and onto new solutions.

Even in an area where state house representative Jennifer Fielder trumpets her public land transfer ambitions, community leaders and citizens are working in the broad-and-deep middle to tackle the tough challenges that rural areas in Montana face. This includes supporting timber, recreation and wilderness conversations in the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition. Thank you to Sanders County.

In December, we held a celebration in honor of our volunteers and handed out awards to a number of people who went above and beyond on behalf of our wild places and public lands. The 2017 Volunteer of the Year Award went to the Schram-Duggan Family, in recognition of their six years packing crews into the Scapegoat, Bob Marshall, and Anaconda-Pintler. Without their support, MWA would be unable to get crews into these areas to work.

The Monumental Award went to Shane Doyle for tirelessly and skillfully representing our national monuments and the Antiquities Act for Hold Our Ground.

The Brass Lantern Awards went to:

- Fran Galvin, Anaconda, for relentlessly leading wilderness protection efforts across the state
- Larry Epstein, Essex, for eloquently and passionately representing the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument for Hold Our Ground
- Mindy Ferrell, Trout Creek, for outstanding community organizing in Sanders County
- Hank Hudson, Helena, for his willingness to fill any role required with kindness and passion
- Patty and Doug Bartholomew, Bozeman, for their tremendous commitment to trail stewardship
- Julie Ellison, Missoula, for her tireless and wide-ranging public lands advocacy
- Susan Newell, Billings, for her longtime work fighting invasive weeds in the Pryor Mountains

The East Wildlands Chapter
Brian Henderson, Spencer Kuhn, Matthew Martin, John Potter, Stephanie Schilling

MWA Volunteer of the Year: The Schram-Duggan Family, Anaconda, for relentless wilderness protection efforts

Prairie Habitat Steward: Fran Galvin, Anaconda

Volunteer of the Year: Shane Doyle

Monumental Award: The Schram-Duggan Family

The Brass Lantern Awards recognize people who have gone above and beyond on behalf of MWA and public lands. They are named for the distinctive Old West lanterns that once gave Montana’s mining towns a unique glow.

The Volunteer of the Year Award is a special recognition for someone who has dedicated a significant amount of time to MWA’s work. The Monumental Award honors a person who has been instrumental to MWA’s success.

Special thanks to all our volunteers and donors who support our work.

Call for Board Member Nominations

The State Council is Montana Wilderness Association’s governing board. It serves MWA’s mission by assuming fiduciary responsibility for the association and ensuring the organization effectively serves its members and conducts the work of the association.

In January 2019 the State Council will transition to a governing board of directors. Current State Council members will serve their terms as members of the board.

Board members are outdoor enthusiasts who are committed to wilderness and wildlands in Montana and have gained skills and experience in governance by working and volunteering in their communities.

If you are interested in serving on our board of directors, please contact Daphne Herling at daphne.herling@business.umt.edu or 406-531-8347.
If the bill Senator Daines recently introduced is made law, Montana’s wild legacy will be sabotaged with the loss of almost half a million acres of protected public lands.

Stand by our side in defending these wilderness study areas so that these wild and pristine places are not irreversibly damaged by short-term interests. Your action is crucial now more than ever before.

Join the fight and make a donation today. Give securely on our website, wildmontana.org/donate, or by using the enclosed envelope.

It’s all boots on the ground to help stop this tragic loss of these pristine wild places.

PLEASE GIVE TODAY!