A PIVOTAL MOMENT
FOR OUR PRAIRIE WILDLANDS
Montana Wilderness Association works with communities to protect Montana’s wilderness heritage, quiet beauty, and outdoor traditions, now and for future generations.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE ROADLESS LESS TRAVELED

Seeking the perfect getaway? Consider an adventure off the beaten path in eastern Montana.

First, make sure you take along Buttes, Breaks, and Badlands, MWA’s new geotourism map of southeast Montana and your guide to everything that makes this corner of the state special. Visit our online store at wildmontana.org to purchase your copy.

Second, speak up for the wild places you visit and be aware of how the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is managing those places.

In September, the BLM released its Record of Decision on the Hi-Line and Miles City Resource Management Plans (RMP), determining how the BLM will manage 5.2 million acres of public land in eastern Montana for the next 20 to 30 years.

The Hi-Line RMP included healthy protections for sage grouse that went a long way toward protecting other wildlife and wilderness values on the landscape, such as primitive recreation and the opportunity to enjoy the amazing solitude you can find on the Hi-Line.

That’s the good news. Unfortunately, of the 400,000 acres the BLM identified as having wilderness character on the Hi-Line, the agency plans to only manage 16,000 acres for their wilderness value. That will leave special places such as Carpenter Creek, Lower Grant Coulee, and Caravan Marsh Hawk Hills unprotected.

Out of more than 2.7 million acres covered by the Miles City RMP, the BLM has chosen a mere 5,200 acres to be managed for its wilderness characteristics. That’s a paltry 0.2% of the 2.7 million acres the BLM manages in southeast Montana.

So, get your Buttes, Breaks, and Badlands map and have an adventure in southeast Montana, but make note of your experiences and share those impressions with the BLM (the number of the state office is 406-896-5012). Tell your friends too! The more people who enjoy and appreciate eastern Montana’s wildlands, the more likely we and our children and grandchildren will continue to have wild places to experience in eastern Montana.

Enjoy, and Keep It Wild!

Lee Boman, MWA President
Brian Sybert, MWA Executive Director

WILD MONTANA
FALL 2015

SOUTHEAST MONTANA

A new geotourism map features this often-overlooked corner of the state.

UPDATES FROM THE FIELD

The latest from MWA’s on-the-ground work around the state.

PRAIRIE WILDLANDS

On the cover: Sun setting over the Frenchman Creek area, northwest of Glasgow.
There are precious few areas left in the Great Plains where you can experience the buttes, breaks, badlands, coulees, island mountain ranges, and open forests the way Lewis and Clark did in the early 19th century or as Charlie Russell painted these lands in the early 20th. Public lands in central and eastern Montana, home to some of the last unbroken prairie in all the Great Plains, offer that opportunity.

In September, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released the final drafts of three resource management plans (RMPs) that cover many of these lands, including those in the Hi-Line, Miles City, and Billings districts. In addition, we expect a draft RMP covering central Montana’s Lewistown District in early 2016. Together, these four plans will guide the management of several million acres of public lands across the eastern two-thirds of the state for the next 20 to 30 years.

MWA staff and volunteers have spent hundreds of hours in the field over the last several years collecting data that demonstrates the wildness of landscapes across these parts of the state. That data continued
has helped us make a forceful case for protecting our prairie wildlands. As a result of our work, the BLM has significantly increased the number of places it recognizes as “lands with wilderness characteristics,” a term the agency uses for places that are in a natural condition and provide opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

All in all, the three plans released in September are a mixed bag. The BLM made a concerted effort to protect sage grouse and to avert their listing as an endangered species but gave far less consideration to explicitly protecting areas with wilderness characteristics. Here’s a short overview of the plans for Hi-Line and Miles City districts:

**THE HI-LINE DISTRICT**

Covering more than 2.4 million acres, BLM lands in the Hi-Line District stretch from the Sweet Grass Hills north of Chester to the Bitter Creek Wilderness Study Area northwest of Glasgow. The BLM created a nearly one-million-acre “focal area” along the Hi-Line to protect core sage grouse habitat. Any kind of surface-disturbing activities—such as oil and gas drilling, mining, new roads, transmission lines, and pipeline lines—are now prohibited, with no exception.

These focal areas include Marsh Hawk Hills, Long Coulee, and Carpenter Creek to the north of the C.M. Russel National Wildlife Refuge, as well as Frenchman Breaks to the north of Malta. Offering exceptional habitat for deer, elk, bighorn sheep, raptors, and upland birds, these areas will remain as they are into the foreseeable future as long as there’s a concerted effort to protect sage grouse.

Unfortunately, the BLM has decided to manage only a tiny fraction of the Hi-Line’s public lands explicitly for their wilderness character. Carpenter Creek, Lower Grant Coulee, and Caravan Marsh Hawk Hills—all north of the C.M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge—are a few of the areas that didn’t receive protection as sage grouse focal areas or as lands with wilderness characteristics. These are places where mule deer, elk, and bighorn sheep thrive and where you can have a prairie experience that recalls Montana’s frontier history and culture.

**MILES CITY DISTRICT**

This BLM district includes 2.8 million acres of public lands scattered across much of the eastern portion of the state. Like the Hi-Line plan, protecting sage grouse was a priority, but the plan didn’t come close to including all of the areas that need protection. In fact, this may be one of the least protective RMPs the BLM has issued since the beginning of the Obama administration.

The BLM will protect 2.3 million acres as sage grouse habitat, though will still allow limited development on 1.4 million of those acres. The field office will manage only one area, Devil’s Creek, for its wilderness characteristics—a mere 5,200 acres, or .2%, of the entire district.

Left out were almost all of the wild and remote public lands in southeast Montana, including Rough Creek and Dry Creek, where buttes rise from rolling hills and unbroken grasslands, places that offer rare opportunities to experience profound solitude on our high and lonesome prairie.

**THE FUTURE**

The BLM has a duty to manage our lands for multiple values, and that means protecting sage grouse as well as wilderness.

MWA won’t give up on all the special places the BLM chose not to protect in its RMPs and will continue to hold the agency’s feet to the fire as it releases its draft RMP for the Lewistown district and the travel plans for the Hi-Line and Miles City districts. Working with our members and partners, we will work towards solutions that give wilderness the long-term protection it needs.
BUTTES, BREAKS AND BADLANDS:
OFF THE BEATEN PATH IN SOUTHEAST MONTANA

MWA’s new geotourism map of southeast Montana is your guide to everything that makes this corner of the state an adventurous and enriching destination.

National Geographic defines geotourism as “tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.”

Following National Geographic’s lead, MWA presents Buttes, Breaks and Badlands: Off the Beaten Path in Southeast Montana, a geotourism map of this beautiful corner of our state and the perfect companion for exploring its unspoiled landscapes, rich history, and colorful communities, including museums, eateries, and more. Here’s a sampling of the many fantastic destinations you can visit with our map as your guide. To learn more about the map or to order one, please visit wildmontana.org or call Amanda Hagerty at 406-443-7350.

Looking out over Chalk Buttes near Ekalaka

The map features a wealth of wildlands, eateries, and museums all the way from Bridger to Sidney, from the Pryor Mountains to Makoshika State Park.
The Carter County Museum in Ekalaka, a treasure trove of homesteading history, Native American artifacts, and paleontology.

Pronghorns in the Powder River Valley near Broadus.

The Tongue River Breaks near Ashland.

Capitol Rock National Natural Landmark near Ekalaka.
BUNKER & UPPER SULLIVAN CREEK — A LOGICAL ADDITION TO THE BOB MARSHALL WILDERNESS

Located in the Swan Range south of the Jewel Basin and adjacent to the treasured Bob Marshall Wilderness, Bunker and upper Sullivan Creek is one of those areas that not too many people seek out as a destination. It’s remote and it’s hard to get to. As such, it serves as outstanding wildlife habitat.

The U.S. Forest Service appears poised, however, not to recommend Bunker and upper Sullivan for wilderness in its forest plan. We need to change the agency’s mind.

In 1983 renowned biologist Doug Chadwick wrote about the importance of Sullivan and Bunker Creeks as travel corridors for mountain goats, grizzly bears, and wolverines. He highlighted the importance of protecting the North Fork of Bunker Creek, particularly near Bruce Ridge, which he describes as “a major travel corridor for goats, grizzlies, and elk moving from Bunker and Addition Creeks up toward Thunderbolt Mountain and across into Lost Creek.”

One year later, Gerald Stokes, the Recreation, Wilderness and Lands Staff Officer for the Flathead National Forest, concluded that this area should be added to the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

In 1985 The Wilderness Institute wrote, “There is no question in our minds that Bond/Bunker Creek has the prerequisite qualities necessary for consideration as wilderness. Bond/Bunker Creek provides outstanding opportunities for solitude as well as primitive and unconfined recreation…. The area appears primarily affected by the forces of nature.”

John Weaver, a biologist for Wildlife Conservation Society, recently described this area as being “especially important” for wildlife.

Today the Forest Service manages this area as grizzly core habitat, but still doesn’t think it should be managed as wilderness. To change course, the agency needs to understand that broad support for wilderness has existed for decades and exists today.

Please share your story, your heart, and your support for the protection of Bunker and upper Sullivan Creeks. Contact me today at arobinson@wildmontana or submit your opinions to Forest Supervisor Chip Weber at flatheadplanrevision@fs.fed.us.

—Amy Robinson, northwest Montana field director

UPDATES FROM THE FIELD

Sullivan and Bunker Creeks are important travel corridors for mountain goats, grizzly bears, and wolverines.

TEN YEARS STRONG IN THE BLACKFOOT

In 2005 snowmobilers and wilderness advocates in the Blackfoot set aside their differences and agreed to a proposal that added more wilderness in exchange for an established winter recreation area.

This year we celebrate the ten-year-anniversary of this collaborative effort that would go on to be called the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project.

Soon after that 2005 agreement, the group began attracting outfitters, wildlife advocates, community leaders, and timber industry representatives. By 2008, the group reached consensus on a suite of forest management goals, including the addition of 90,000 acres to the Mission Mountains, Scapegoat, and Bob Marshall Wilderness Areas, a move that would safeguard the West Fork of the Clearwater River (a stream crucial for bull trout) and the wildlife-rich slopes of the Swan Range above Seeley Lake.

A year later, Sen. Jon Tester stood in front of the Seeley Lake Chamber of Commerce and announced that he had selected the Blackfoot Clearwater proposal as one of three he would wrap into the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act. Though FJRA has yet to be passed, the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project is stronger than ever and has become the standard for collaborative efforts in the West.

Over the past six months, MWA has helped guide the collaborative through revisions to its proposal. The group will take its renewed agreement on tour this fall to showcase its strong support and encourage our congressional delegation to prioritize our proposal.

Join us this winter for events in Missoula, Ovando, and Seeley Lake to learn how you can help get this innovative effort across the finish line. Also, contact Sen. Tester at (202) 224-2644, Sen. Steve Daines at (202) 224-2651, and Rep. Ryan Zinke at (202) 225-3211 and let them know that you want to see ten-years of collaboration pay off in the Blackfoot.

For more information about the upcoming events in Missoula, Ovando, and Seeley Lake, visit wildmontana.org.

—Zack Porter, western Montana field director
A BUSY SEASON IN THE BADGER

The end of summer and early fall brought an abundance of changes to the Badger-Two Medicine area, including a landmark recommendation by a federal panel and the end of another trail-stewardship season for a group of Blackfeet youth.

This August, MWA expanded our commitment to the youth of the Blackfeet Reservation by creating two trail crews that each worked for two weeks. In all, 10 young people helped clear and maintain trails in the southern region of the Badger, near Swift Dam. The crews worked hard, had a great time, and learned about conservation issues and opportunities from camp guests. They also forged lasting connections with this sacred landscape, connections that will help them safeguard this important wild place as the work toward permanent protection begins.

On the heels of this successful summer program came an unprecedented field hearing in Choteau held by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (AHP). This federal panel came to Choteau to gather public input regarding proposed oil and gas development in the most up-to-date information.

–Casey Perkins, Rocky Mountain Front field director

MEMBERS MAKE OUR WORK POSSIBLE

Thanks to the new members who joined Montana Wilderness Association from July 8 to October 9, 2015.

MWA HIRES NEW EASTERN MONTANA FIELD DIRECTOR

MWA is pleased to welcome our new eastern Montana field director, Charlie Smillie. A third-generation Montanan, Charlie was born and raised in Billings. His grandmother Marie was a schoolteacher in Ekalaka before moving to Glendive, where she raised Charlie’s mother Margie and her five siblings.

Before departing for the University of Montana’s College of Forestry & Conservation, he developed a deep appreciation of eastern Montana. Both the vast, subtle beauty of the High Plains and the grandeur of the soaring Beartooths shaped his outlook as he worked on behalf of wilderness with the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation and Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards.

As a newly minted MWA field director back in his hometown, Charlie will work creatively to enrich the community of Montanans who value our prairie wildlands for their ecology, history, recreational opportunity, and, of course, their sheer beauty.

Why am I a member? Because we can’t afford to lose a single wild acre. There’s far too little wild land left. Plus, I love volunteering on the Continental Divide Trail, where you see no trail or poor trail at the beginning of the week and new trail at the end. I enjoy the accomplishment of doing something good for the wildlands and the people who want to traverse these places in a quiet way. And, of course, I really enjoy the people.

–Karen Porter, Butte, MT
Celebrate the diversity of Montana in all seasons.

Order your 2016 Picture Wild Montana Calendar today.
Visit our online store at wildmontana.org or call Amanda at 406-443-7350 ext. 108.