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.
For Montana Wilderness Association, 2020 was a year of innovation and creativity, all made possible thanks to the generous support of the members, donors, and foundations that invest in Montana’s wild future.

Behind the successes reported here are untold stories of staff working from kitchen tables, shifting plans to keep staff and volunteers safe, and finding creative ways to keep members and supporters connected.

Despite what has sometimes felt like a roller coaster of a year, we didn’t just ride it out, we brought innovative ideas to the table to rise to the occasion. We shifted resources to support staff to work from home and stay safe. In-person events shifted to online gatherings where hundreds of people joined at a time, hailing from across the state and around the country and extending our reach like never before.

We doubled-down on data analysis and digital organizing tools, enabling us to adapt our tactics to work more efficiently and effectively.

Making these changes not only allowed us to weather the storm but gave us space and strength to support our partners and supporters through this challenging time. Staff connected with small business owners in our coalitions to check-in and see how they’re doing, then launched a series of blogs to encourage people to support small-town businesses. We listened to the ranchers we work with to hear how they had to adapt to seasonal work crews and fluctuating beef prices, then shifted coalition meetings to meet their needs. And we reached out to our members directly, making hundreds of phone calls just to check-in and let our supporters know that we were thinking of them and to express our gratitude for all they’ve done for us over the years. In this time of isolation, we focused on building community.

Ultimately, as a result of these adaptations, innovations, and partnerships over the last year, we’re inspiring more people to take action on behalf of public lands and waters in Montana and beyond.

We built out teams of advocates 1,000-strong who are ready to speak up for legislation, new policy, and land management decisions that secure wildlife habitat and clean water. Our voices reached Sen. Jon Tester inspiring him to introduce a bill to eliminate noncompetitive oil and gas leasing.

Our voices helped move Montana’s entire congressional delegation to vote in favor of full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, an invaluable program that pays for trailheads, fishing access sites, and other outdoor recreation infrastructure. And we’re inspiring people to give. In December 2020 alone, more people joined as new members than in any single previous month.

2020 forced us all to adapt, innovate, and to focus on what really matters. For us, that’s our wild public lands and waters and our community of people that love them. We’re proud to have you by our side as partners in our work for a wilder Montana.

With gratitude for keeping it wild!

– Debo Powers, President
– Ben Gabriel, Executive Director

On the cover: Rainy Lake, Lolo National Forest
Left: Makoshika State Park

Tracy McGiffin
We’ve long believed that when we connect people with opportunities to experience our natural world at its wildest, they’ll join our movement to keep it wild.

This has been true since 1960, when Ken and Florence Baldwin invited 100 friends to join them on a walk into the Crazy Mountains, the first in more than six decades of Wilderness Walks.

And now we have even more ways to connect people with the wild – volunteering with our trail crew, learning about mushroom foraging or caves, or being a scientist for a day in a wilderness study area:

"I am a local outdoor recreation business owner who wants to support my local landscape."
She was supposed to be on the steppes of Mongolia with a trowel and a crew of volunteers, digging neat 1x1 meter trenches as director of NOMAD Science volunteer archaeology program. Instead, she joined our own crew of volunteers fixing up trails in her home state, wielding a pulaski to dig trail drainage and tread.

Julia was home visiting family in Glen, Montana, when the global pandemic halted international travel. Not one to waste a moment, she put herself to work with our Volunteer Trail Crew: removing downfall and fixing up water bars in the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness, building a Continental Divide Trail reroute near Flesher Pass, and keeping Sluice Boxes State Park’s main hiking and fishing access in great shape.

As if that weren’t enough, she helped out as a citizen scientist in the East Fork Blacktail Wilderness Study Area – just adjacent to the Snowcrest Range – helping collect on-the-ground data and photos to keep the area wild.

And now she’s using her voice to speak-up for the wild. Julia reached out to Sen. Steve Daines and asked him to support protections for the headwaters of the Blackfoot and Clearwater rivers. She called to thank Sen. Jon Tester for supporting the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and she asked Sen. Daines and then Rep. Greg Gianforte, now Montana’s governor, to support the bill.

Like Julia, our trail crew had to adapt plans in light of Covid-19. But with a little flexibility, we managed to do all the planned on-the-ground work. For five weeks, our team of two staff were out on the trail day-in and day-out bucking logs, fixing eroded tread, and brushing open corridors, and we were thrilled to welcome 48 volunteers to join us for five weeks. Together we worked hard by day to repair more than 60 miles of trail, and gathered around the campfire by night to swap stories and talk about the future of wildlands.

This summer, we have another 18 trips planned, each of which is an opportunity for volunteers to connect with one another and with Montana’s incredible wild places.

THANKS TO OUR MEMBERS, DONORS, ADVOCATES, AND VOLUNTEERS

- Our seven volunteer chapters hosted more than 1,000 people via virtual events to learn about grizzly bears, local trails, and how to support responsible recreation at popular trailheads.

- In southwest Montana’s Beaverhead County, volunteers walked BLM wilderness study areas and took note of sights and sounds, use and misuse. One of these areas is now under threat in the state Legislature, and volunteers are using their voices to speak up in the media and with state legislators to retain longstanding protections.

- We laid the foundation for a wilderness ranger to work in the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness, where she’ll be fixing trails, inventorying campsites, offering bear spray training, monitoring solitude, and providing a direct link between the Kootenai National Forest, local communities, and Montana Wilderness Association.

Julia (right) celebrates a job well done with “The 2020,” a social distance high five.
In the two-minute drive through the center of Lincoln you’re likely to see pickup trucks and ATVs parked in front of the Wilderness Bar, and logging trucks at the Mountain View Co-op filling up gas alongside Outbacks and RAV4s. Looking around, you might wonder how people with such a variety of outlooks and interests could ever find common ground when it comes to nearby wildlands. But leave preconceived notions behind, and you’ll see that most community members want the same thing: places to hike and hunt, jobs in the woods, and healthy forests.

Over the last few years, we’ve been working with Lincoln and surrounding communities to build on these shared values as we unite for the conservation of backyard public lands. The result? The community’s Lincoln Prosperity Proposal would permanently protect 120,000 acres of new Wilderness and conservation management areas off limits to development. This tapestry of protections would protect a crucial Continental Divide migration corridor for wildlife, while sustaining communities’ access to the outdoors.

As a first step towards this vision, we’ve been key advocates behind the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest’s management plan, mobilizing hundreds of our members and advocates to speak up and shape the plan. When released this spring, it will recommend additions to the Scapegoat Wilderness and Wilderness protections for Nevada Mountain.

Building on these 20–30 year protections, we’ve been working with partners to make these protections last. This year the group connected with a range of people – from neighbors to our congressional delegation – to present the makings of a bill that would designate Montana’s first new Wilderness in nearly 40 years. This is particularly appropriate near Lincoln, where decades ago, bulldozers and road graders were already in place when local hardware store owner Cecil Garland stood up to defend the wild, leading to preservation of the Scapegoat Wilderness, the first citizen-proposed Wilderness in the United States. Today, with our support these communities are again leading the way and charting a path forward for conservation.

Lincoln is one of a dozen communities where we’re on the ground getting to know friends and neighbors, listening to their dreams for their backyard wildlands, weighing what we hear alongside the needs of wildlife and waterways, and charting paths forward. We’re proud to unite communities around common sense conservation that’s good for wildlife and communities.
We’re working with community leaders from Hysham to Sidney on a project to add new state parks, public fishing and boat launch access, and campsites along the Lower Yellowstone River while protecting critical wildlife habitat. Today, the 175-mile stretch has public access points in desperate need of maintenance, with some gaps as long as 50 miles with no public access at all. Our work in the state Legislature will help fund this community-driven project.

As a result of our organizing, more than 800 people spoke up in support of the Awaxaawippiia (Crazy Mountains), uniting with Apsáalooke (Crow) to call on the Custer Gallatin National Forest to protect this sacred landscape.
In Doug Hale’s hometown of Oxford, England, wildlands are largely a thing of the past. Brown bears, lynx, and elk were extirpated 1,000 years ago, never to return. Growing up, an outdoor adventure consisted of ramblings across country lanes and networks of walking paths, largely across private lands. He covered his school textbooks with images of Montana’s peaks and rivers. Today, he’s made Montana his home, and not only is he taking every chance he gets to speak-up on behalf of Montana’s world renowned wildlands, he’s mobilizing others to join in the movement.

Doug first came across our work last summer, when an angling friend told him about efforts to protect the headwaters of the Blackfoot River via the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (BCSA). He jumped straight in, volunteering to drive a hundred BCSA yard signs to Bozeman, where he staked them out on lawns in neighborhoods frequented by our federal delegation when they are home from D.C. Just a few weeks later, he was standing on college campuses and street corners getting students and young professionals to vote with public lands in mind. Despite challenges of campus and street corner organizing in a pandemic, with the encouragement of Doug and four other organizers, an astonishing 98.7% of MWA’s members and supporters in Montana cast a ballot this year, well above the statewide average. Doug and our organizers’ energy and passion for public lands are infectious, making them the perfect ambassadors to mobilize the masses for public lands.

While our work to mobilize advocates has looked a little different in 2020 as we shifted community events to digital engagement. But thanks to our new, more powerful data analytics and digital engagement tools, we’re able to leverage individual connections in innovative ways, and build a broader, more engaged movement behind each of our campaigns.

Thanks to our members, donors, advocates, and volunteers

• When the Bureau of Land Management tried to classify electric motor bikes as non-motorized in the Pryor Mountains and Scratchgravel Hills, our community spurred to action. More than 400 people submitted comments with just a few days’ notice.

• Nearly 2,500 of our members and advocates spoke-up to shape management of our public lands. Together, we called on the Custer Gallatin National Forest to protect the headwaters of Bozeman’s watershed, asked the Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest to protect areas along the Continental Divide and island ranges, and told the BLM that opening up 95% of its land to oil and gas development is unconscionable.

• More than 1,200 people are part of a team of people keeping a close eye on BLM management plans and proposed bills to make sure the BLM manages for wildlife and recreation, not just corporate interests.

Montana Voter Turnout

in the 2020 Election

Turnout among MWA members in the general election was an astounding 99%.

Statewide voter turnout

Those who pledged to vote with MWA

18–29 year-olds

18-29 year-olds

68% 83%

A future voter adds color to our community-based get-out-the-vote efforts.

Doug Hale
Thanks to hundreds of conservation organizations, businesses, and community leaders nationwide who put their weight behind the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Congress enacted full funding for this landmark bill, the source of funds for conservation efforts ranging from community playgrounds to state parks to new public lands.

The headline news in Montana? The bill passed with the full support of Montana’s entire Congressional delegation.

This was a long time coming, with Sen. Daines and Rep. Gianforte initially opposed to the keystone conservation measure. We did our part to bring them round: We mobilized more than 300 people to contact our delegation, staged a rally in Bozeman at the LWCF-funded fishing access site where Rep. Gianforte had once threatened to block public access, and gained endorsements from communities as far flung as Big Horn, Belt, and the Bitterroot, ultimately earning our delegation’s full support.

To see more ways we’re leveraging our local, grassroots power for national change, see how we’re advancing the Leasing Market Efficiency Act on page 13.
Countless species – grizzly bears and wolverines, snow geese and mountain bluebirds, pronghorn and elk – rely on public lands and waterways.

We’re proud to champion protections for connected wildlands that wildlife need to thrive.

“I really appreciate the work MWA does, especially the information provided to be effective at forest plan meetings and other lobbying efforts.”
Following the trail up to the Gallatin Crest, the tracks alone were memorable—big pads with five round toe prints, claws out front. The family set up camp on the ridge, drew water from the last remaining snow melt, then got front row sunset seats. In the valley 500 feet below, they watched for a full hour of gloaming while a grizzly sow foraged for her dinner, digging grubs and roots with her long claws. She’d pause as she caught their scent on the air, then continue her evening forage. When they tucked into their sleeping bags that night, they said a prayer of gratitude to the grizzly sow, thankful to be visitors for a night in her wild home.

Here, just north of Yellowstone National Park, the wildness of the Madison and Gallatin ranges is palpable, and these stories of encounters with wildlife are not uncommon. Decades ago, this same area was eyed for development. Today, it’s on the cusp of permanent protections.

The Madison and Gallatin ranges are home to elk, moose, and grizzly bears. Especially in the face of a changing climate, thriving Yellowstone National Park wildlife will need to extend their habitat north, and Madison and Gallatin ranges’ cool peaks and forested valleys will be key corridors helping animals—and plants—to adapt.

The Gallatin Forest Partnership (GFP) joined together at the outset of the Custer Gallatin National Forest plan revision to develop a landscape-scale approach to conservation recommendations in the Gallatin and Madison ranges. Forest plan revision will determine how these ranges are managed for the next 20 to 30 years, by which time the population around the Gallatin Range could likely double in size. The ultimate intent of the GFP is to advance a legislative package of new Wilderness and a combination of permanent conservation designations, gaining permanent protection of these areas key to wildlife connectivity.

Today, thanks to our leadership and our network of members speaking up to shape the future of this critical wildlife corridor, just north of Yellowstone grizzly bears and elk will have more than 100,000 acres of newly-Recommended Wilderness in the Madison and Gallatin ranges. These protections, soon-to-be codified in the forests’ new management plan to be finalized this year, will last 20–30 years.

Looking ahead, we’re launching efforts to work towards legislation to make sure these protections endure and that this area is forever wild.

THANKS TO OUR MEMBERS, DONORS, AND ADVOCATES

- The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act would preserve the headwaters of the Clearwater River, one of the most productive lynx breeding grounds in the lower 48 states.
- Our Kootenai Critters campaign, a Covid-adapted digital engagement effort complete with an online quiz, wildlife stickers, and monthly giveaways identified more than 1,000 new public lands supporters ready to speak up in support of adding 180,000 acres of new Wilderness, which would protect habitat for the area’s bighorn sheep, westslope cutthroat, bald eagle, and grizzly bear populations.

Grizzly sow and cub in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem

Bighorn Sheep
The waters of Seeley Lake’s backyard sustain its wildness. Undammed rivers support breeding harlequin ducks and endangered bull trout that venture up the Swan Range’s mountain streams to spawn. Montana Wilderness Association, along with dozens of local organizations and businesses, has been working for more than a decade to keep these headwaters wild. The locally-crafted Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (BCSA), built in partnership with Pyramid Lumber, the former owner of Rovero’s, Jack Rich of Rich’s Montana Guest Ranch, Clearwater Resource Council, representatives from Blackfoot Challenge, and so many other community leaders, would enhance area recreation opportunities, support forest restoration, and designate Wilderness for 79,000-acres at Blackfoot River headwaters.

In August, an economic report showed that when this bill becomes law, it will protect the livelihoods of local outfitters who provide a combined total of 9,361 guided fishing days on the Blackfoot River each year, and add to the $919.3 million dollars anglers spend in Montana. Yet Sen. Daines continued to hold up the bill in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. We activated people across the state to display BCSA yard signs. We peppered the state with newspaper articles, billboards, and social media ads asking Sen. Daines to listen to the 3 in 4 Montanans who support the BCSA, successfully getting more than 2,800 people to share their support with Sen. Daines. Just a week later, the committee held a hearing for the bill.

While it didn’t make it through the 116th Congress, thanks to our work alongside stalwart partners, more than 160 businesses and community leaders endorse these conservation solutions – the local support needed to gain credibility in D.C. In this new Congress with new opportunities, we’re confident Sen. Tester will continue to champion protections for the area’s waters, wildlife, and wildlands.

Thanks to our members, donors, and advocates:

- We’re securing protections at the headwaters of the Yellowstone, Gallatin, and Madison rivers, the source of 80% of Bozeman’s drinking water supply and the site of world class angling in these renowned waterways.
- When the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest releases its new management plan, it’ll recommend Wilderness protection for the Big Snowies, source of some of the purest water in the world, feeding the Big Spring Creek blue ribbon fishery and flowing to thousands of homes in and around Lewistown.
- In Northwest Montana, mist rises into clouds from the rumpled valley of the Yaak, and the streams, rivers, and lakes feed into one of the most important watersheds in the Lower 48. Our advocacy on the Kootenai National Forest is rooted in the water that gives life to this unique ecosystem.
- In western states, more than 50% of the water supply comes from Forest Service lands. Our efforts to protect headwaters and fisheries via the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act, Lincoln Prosperity Proposal, and Gallatin Forest Plan will protect water resources and the people and animals that rely on them.

For Water

Our public lands provide fresh water to homes and critical habitat for spawning bull trout and native cutthroat trout.

They’re the destination for family hikes to waterfalls or lakes, places to cool off on a hot summer day, and where winter skaters enjoy glassy wild ice.

And they’re often the centerpiece of our communities, where the ebbs and flows of lakes and rivers are the rhythm of daily lives.

Harlequin Duck

Clearwater River near Seeley Lake
I am proud to be a member of a time-tested organization that I trust has the best interest for not only the people of Montana, but the unspoken ones of Montana – the landscape and all that lives on it.
As a child, a few times a year Shane Doyle would ride in the backseat of his family’s car, traveling more than three hours from their hometown of Crow Agency to Bozeman. Looking north out the window, the perfect pyramid shape of Awaxaawippiia, what many know as the Crazy Mountains, loomed mysterious on the horizon. His uncle and other Crow Elders would tell him stories of his people, Apsáalooke connections to the mountain going back millenia. It wasn’t until he was a teenager that Shane got to experience the power of these mountains himself, venturing into the backcountry for days of seeking, fasting, and connection with his ancestors.

Today, Shane and MWA are leading efforts to sustain the power of this sacred place. A legacy of railroad land grants has left the range with a checkerboard of public and private parcels. This creates challenges for public land managers and for the conservation of the range.

Beginning in 2019, we worked closely with Shane as he raised this issue with fellow Apsáalooke, leading to the Tribal Historic Preservation Office’s comments on the Custer Gallatin National Forest’s draft management plan: “It is with great concern for the protection of the forests, wildlife, sacred plants, sacred ceremonial sites, our ancestors’ gravesites, and hunting rights, that I support the decision of Alternative D for each of the Mountain Ranges in the Custer Gallatin National Forest Revision.” Decision D: no roads, no machines, no motors, 711,425 acres of Recommended Wilderness.

Elevating these voices, MWA worked with Shane to produce Awaxaawippiia: The Crow Nation’s Sacred Ties. In January 2020, we debuted the eight-minute film to packed-to-capacity audiences in Bozeman, Livingston, and Billings, where all-indigenous panelists shared why the Crazy Mountains matter and deserve to be protected. From there, their clear message grew. Multiple newspapers printed opinion editorials and articles featuring Shane Doyle, A.J. Not Afraid, and Adrian Bird Jr.

And our networks amplified the message; 430 individual, personalized comments on the Custer Gallatin National Forest’s draft environmental impact statement specifically called for the Crazies to be protected, and nearly all stated its importance to the Crow Nation. As a result of this effort, the public is beginning to see the Crazies as more than just a recreational playground, and calling on the forest to honor its cultural values.

While the final forest plan hasn’t been released yet, we’re confident that, in large part thanks to Shane and other Apsáalooke leaders, and our members amplifying their message, the forest has heard loud and clear that the Awaxaawippiia must be protected.
Not far from Lewistown, MT, Musselshell Breaks and Missouri River poplar galleries host pronghorn, mule deer, elk, and sage grouse. We’ve spent decades working to shape management of the area, and were appalled by the BLM Lewistown Field Office’s draft management plan, which eliminated critical environmental and cultural protections from beloved places like the Judith Mountains and Square Butte and failed to protect wild character. This was on our mind when, in those last few weeks pre-pandemic, we organized a town-to-town tour, an opportunity for neighbors to connect with neighbors and consider a future that celebrates the lands, wildlife, and waters families enjoy across generations, rather than the boom-and-bust cycles of oil and gas.

This conversation hit home with a couple new dads from Scobey and Plentywood, who had each made the two-hour trek from their family ranches to join our community conversations. They saw the effects of boom-and-bust Bakken first hand. And with new infants at home, they want to share camping, hunting, and hiking with their kids, and they aren’t so sure an oil-dominance agenda is right for nearby BLM lands.

They aren’t alone. Over the past year, they added their voices to the thousands of people we mobilized to speak up to shape the BLM’s Lewistown and Missoula management plans. Unfortunately, the final plans ignored the public and plowed forward to open 95% of the surface area to oil and gas development.

William Pendley Perry served illegally as acting director of the BLM, and voided all decisions Perry signed – including the Missoula and Lewistown management plans. Now we’re working to make sure the current administration revisits these management plans, and that they take into account the public calls for conservation of some of the areas’ standout wildlands.

On top of all this, noncompetitive leasing, a century old practice that lets corporations buy leases at less than $1.50 an acre, ties the hands of the BLM to proactively manage for anything other than oil and gas. In 2018 alone, the BLM leased more than 262,000 acres of Montana public lands for that absurdly low amount. To solve this problem, we laid the groundwork for Sen. Tester to introduce the Leasing Market Efficiency Act last summer, a big step toward reforming these outdated policies.

DID YOU KNOW?
- From FY 2009–2018, oil and gas operators reported venting 17 billion cubic feet of methane gas in Montana. Montana wasted more gas in that ten-year period than was produced by the state in all of 2018. We’re supporting legislation introduced by U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette (D-CO) to put an end to these wasteful practices.
- Intact grasslands and sagebrush steppes are among the best natural carbon sinks in the world. Via photosynthesis, they effectively convert atmospheric carbon dioxide into organic compounds, storing carbon via extensive underground root systems, and releasing oxygen back into the air. Our work for grasslands via efforts like the BLM’s Lewistown management plan and reforming noncompetitive leasing will help these natural services function long into the future.
Thank you... 

To each and every wildlands champion for your investment in the future of Montana’s public lands, waterways, and wildlife.

$50,000 +
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$10,000–$49,999
Anonymous (2)
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Public Land Protection and Defense Fund, a project of Resources Legacy Fund
Southwest Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC)
The L. L. Borick Foundation
Weeden Foundation
Western Energy Project, a project of Resources Legacy Fund
Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) Education Project

$1,000–$9,999
Anonymous (6)
A Better Big Sky
AGL Foundation
Stephen & Kathleen Anderson*
Lyssbeth Anderson
Darrell Biggs
Margaret Bailey

...continued
Thank you to those who made planned gifts in 2020

To learn more about how you can contribute to wildlands protection via a bequest, IRA rollover, or other planned gift, you can reach development manager Kate Geranios at (406) 303-4070.

A special thank you to all who support our work with payroll deductions and pledges through Montana Shares, as well as those who have donated time, goods, or services.
On September 30, 2020, Montana Wilderness Association had:

- $2,633,904 in unrestricted and $1,027,348 temporarily restricted assets.
- $772,494 in fixed assets.
- $1,022,991 in permanently restricted endowment funds.

Revenues for the year were $2,522,370 and expenses were $2,609,379.

### Revenue

- **34%** Individual Giving
  - $864,749

- **54%** Foundation Grants
  - $1,364,142

- **11%** Investments
  - $273,365

- **<1%** Businesses, Sales, Events
  - $20,114

**Total Revenue**
- $2,522,370

### Expenses

- **84%** Conservation Programs
  - $2,180,604

- **8%** Administration
  - $211,137

- **8%** Fundraising
  - $217,638

**Total Expenses**
- $2,609,379

### 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 JCCS.
A SPEcial Farewell to John Gatchell and Mark Good

**Last summer**, we bid fond farewells to Mark Good and John Gatchell, two Montana conservation legends, as they stepped into well-earned retirements.

We’re sad to see Mark and Gatch go, and we’re overwhelmed with gratitude for all that they’ve done for MWA and Montana’s wild places during their combined six decades of public lands advocacy. They’ve made indelible contributions to Montana’s conservation movement, and we’re indebted to them for the tireless frontline work that they’ve committed themselves to for decades.

Since 1994, Mark has been the driving force behind MWA’s efforts in central and eastern Montana. He played a key role in passing the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act, which permanently protected almost 300,000 acres along the Front. He was instrumental in the effort to secure national monument designation for the Missouri River Breaks, and he helped protect Montana’s wilderness study areas from what would have been the biggest rollback of public lands protection in Montana history.

Gatch began working at MWA in 1985 after years of volunteering at the chapter and state level. Since then, he’s helped build groundbreaking coalitions to advance conservation goals across western Montana. He worked with loggers to end Montana’s timber wars by signing the Lolo and Kootenai Forest Accords in 1990 and with snowmobilers to lay the groundwork for the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project. He’s supported the completion of the Continental Divide Trail and protected the wild and connected places along the Continental Divide.

Along the way, both Gatch and Mark built networks of conservation advocates and cultivated wilderness supporters in surprising places. These networks continue to play a key role in our work, and it’s thanks to Gatch and Mark that we can count on folks to stand up for wild places all across Montana.

And their achievements alone don’t do justice to the full impact that Mark and Gatch made on Montana’s conservation movement. They mentored a generation of wildlands advocates. They radiated a passion for wild places that was an inspiration to so many. And more than once, their jokes and stories had the entire staff crying tears of laughter during an all-hands meeting.

While we miss working with both Mark and Gatch, we’re proud to carry on their legacies.