Newsletter
OF THE EASTERN WILDLANDS CHAPTER

Fall 2021

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Photo by Mary Southworth
Greetings! We hope you have had a wonderful summer enjoying public lands. In June, the Montana Wilderness Association became Wild Montana. As part of Wild Montana, the Eastern Wildland Chapter will continue to support the mission of uniting and mobilizing communities to keep Montana wild. We hope you’ll join our board in welcoming two of our newest board members, Trish Tonn and Doc Woerner, and get to know them a little better after reading their articles in this newsletter.

The chapter has been busy this summer with a few Wilderness Walks and a wonderful workshop. We’ve got two stories of these events in this newsletter. We’re currently making plans for our annual meeting and planning future projects.

Hopefully, you’re a member of Wild Montana. If not, please consider doing so by visiting wildmontana.org/givenow. With a $10 a month recurring donation, you can help power our work. Plus, if you join as a monthly donor before Sept. 20, you get a sweet “Keep it Wild” T-shirt!

Sample of Pryor Mountain Foothills moth diversity. Learn more about the study at wildmontana.org/ewc. (photo by Marian L. Kirst)
Native Plants: Northern Cheyenne Ethnobotanist Shares the Historical and Present-Day Use of Plants Native to Eastern Montana

History, humor, and humility seemed to be the themes of our June ethnobotany presentation by Linwood and Randall Tallbull. The two members of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe spent the better part of a day teaching participants about medical, religious, and cultural significance of the plants around the Chief Plenty Coups State Park.

Linwood spoke of the many varied uses of berries. Uses included nourishing puddings, healing teas, and ceremonial smudging. There also was treasured camaraderie and storytelling that evolved when families gathered for the picking season.

Randall also spoke of all the many uses of the yucca plant and how the Tribes utilize the entire plant. Some of these uses included using the root to remove lice from children’s hair and fiber to make strings for bows and moccasins.

Linwood also shared historical stories of the area.

The event was so well received, we hope to host it again next year. More photos and videos of the event are available on the Eastern Wildlands Chapter’s webpage, wildmontana.org/ewc.

Yellowstone River Hike – Basic Plant Identification Tips and Tricks

Anthony Sammartano, land stewardship coordinator at the Montana Audubon Center, led an educational Wilderness Walk in partnership with Wild Montana. The diversity of our landscape offered participants a variety of plant species to learn about. Through taste, smell, touch, and sight, the mysteries of plant identification were dissolved! Certain common plant families have simple tricks and tips that allow for easy identification, and the information shared during this wilderness walk will allow participants to identify these plant families across the Rocky Mountains. Most of our fruiting plants provided small berries for participants to safely try, and our fragrant species were able to provide sweet fragrances to guide our inquisition. Our walk took advantage of the cool morning along the Yellowstone River and folks were able to return home in time to hide from the heat. Next year we hope to expand such a walk to other areas around Yellowstone County, and potentially venture into the nearby mountains.

Thanks to those who came and those who come next year! Learn more about our Wilderness Walks and how to get early access to sign-ups next spring at wildmontana.org/walks.
Noxious Weeds on Public Lands
The spread of invasive species, facilitated by climate change, poses ecological and economic tolls

TRISH TONN
Eastern Wildlands Chapter Board Member

Wild Montana envisions a Montana where people and wildlife flourish because public lands and waters are wild and connected. Part of what keeps our lands and waters flourishing are healthy soils and native plant life. Soil quality is another aspect of our ecosystems that is affected by drought that is less commonly discussed but is just as detrimental to the overall health of public lands. Invasive and noxious weeds can spread easily when soil quality is stressed. Many in the West are aware of what drought brings – lower crop and hay yields, poor hay quality, low levels in stock ponds, and an increased danger of fires that leave the air quality poor, but the growing number of invasive and noxious weeds on public lands can be linked to the climate conditions as well. June 2021 was the second driest year on record in the past 127 years according to drought.gov. In fact, 98.7% of Montana was experiencing severe drought.

Landowners in eastern Montana have noticed a considerable increase in noxious weeds due to the climate conditions during 2021. Some of the most reported were kochia (Bassia scoparia), lambsquarter (Chenopodium album), field bindweed (Convolvulus arvensis), Canadian thistle (Cirsium arvense), and bull thistle (Cirsium vulgare), to name a few.

Beyond the ecological costs that come along with noxious and invasive weed infestations, there is a large economic cost, too. The top three strategies for controlling established weeds are chemical control, grazing, and biological control. Often management involves utilizing more than one control.

But what can we do as individuals who want to keep our public lands thriving? We can:

- Remove plants or mud from our gear, boots, pets, and vehicles before entering public lands.
- Stay on designated roads and trails.
- Only use certified or local firewood and hay.
- Clean any gear before and after leaving a recreation site.
- Look for local projects that need volunteers to help remove invasive species.

Learn more about our 2021 grant recipient projects at wildmontana.org/ewc and potentially venture into the nearby mountains.
Last September as a veterinarian, I was fortunate to participate in health inspections and disease certification for “buffalo graduates” of this new transfer program. We inspected and certified 40 animals at the Fort Peck Bison Phase 3 Assurance Testing facility north of Poplar, Montana.

We all worked as a team and ultimately distributed the qualified animals to 16 InterTribal Buffalo Council member tribes across nine states. One group of bison got to fly by FedEx jet to Anchorage, Alaska. Once there, they boarded a landing craft and ultimately were off-loaded on a beach to join an existing tribal herd on a remote island near Kodiak!

Seeing these Yellowstone animals live and knowing they will contribute valuable genetics to various Tribal herds across the United States was a very enriching experience. Enjoying the work, the fun, and sharing the good will with all the people of our team was totally unforgettable. Following up later with the various Tribal herd caregivers to find out how the transfers adapted to their new homes was also quite rewarding. I loved this job and want to see it expand in future years.

Where the Buffalo Roam

DON “DOC” WOERNER
Eastern Wildlands Chapter Board Member

It is encouraging to have people across our nation and around the world who are so fascinated with the American bison. I have been in private veterinary practice for over 50 years and have always held special appreciation and respect for the unique and valuable North American buffalo. Yellowstone National Park is only a few hours away from where I live and work. Yellowstone is so special because that’s the place where 23 wild buffalo survived in a remote area of Pelican Valley. These bison are also special because they were always forever wild and never experienced captivity by humans.

Now in Yellowstone, the descendants of these unique animals (along with a few later additions) have grown into a herd of over 4,000 individuals. However, there have been problems along the way and livestock disease is one of the primary concerns. At the turn of the last century, domestic beef and dairy cattle infected our healthy Yellowstone Park wildlife including bison and elk with an exotic livestock disease called brucellosis. Because of this disease, bison population control by capture and shipment to slaughter has been deemed necessary. Capture and slaughter is not a respectful process for wild Yellowstone bison to endure.

The Yellowstone Bison Conservation and Transfer Program was recently developed and implemented as a valid alternative to capture and slaughter. This three-phase process identifies brucellosis-free animals through quarantine in a facility located near the northern park boundary. Once certified brucellosis free, they are transferred for the last phase to the Tribal facility for final assurance testing prior to distribution. This process saves buffalo lives and provides them a lifelong future home on Tribal or other select public lands.
Save the Date:
Eastern Wildlands Chapter Annual Meeting

Save the date! The evening of Oct. 19, the Eastern Wildlands Chapter will hold its annual meeting. It’s always a worthwhile event. We elect the new officers and board for the next year and have a speaker we are all so excited about. There will also be drawings for prizes, and the chance to connect with other members you may or may not already know in attendance. Again, this year, the event will be online. We had hoped to be with you in person but maybe next year.

We’re so happy to have Franco Littlelight as our featured speaker this year. Franco Littlelight is an educator, artist, musician, singer, composer, poet, and storyteller. Considered a voice for the Apsáalooke (Crow) People, he is asked to speak on behalf of many in a traditional way.

Franco will discuss the history, oral stories, archeology, and the humanities (story songs, poetry, music, and art) relative to the landscapes in and around the Crow Tribal lands. Eastern Wildlands Chapter Board Member Rita Harding attended a seminar led by Franco this summer and she really loved it. The Eastern Wildlands Chapter Board encourages you to attend our annual meeting on Oct. 19 to hear from your local chapter and our talented guest speaker, Franco Littlelight.
Hello, everyone!

I am excited to join the passionate Wild Montana team and meet our Eastern Wildlands Chapter members. I found my enthusiasm for conservation through hiking, camping, and skiing on our public lands near my hometown of Boise, Idaho. That interest continued to grow as I received a B.A. in Environmental Studies and Public Policy from the University of Oregon. After spending a summer working in St. Mary and a few years in Jackson, Wyoming, I wanted to become more involved in protecting wild public lands and waters, in addition to finding collaborative approaches to land management. I went on to earn a Juris Doctorate and certificate in Environmental and Natural Resources Law from Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, Oregon.

Prior to joining Wild Montana, I worked as a law clerk for the Oregon Natural Desert Association and Earthrise Law Center, focusing on natural resources issues across diverse ecosystems like the sagebrush steppe and lush Pacific Northwest forests. In my free time, you can find me out looking for wildflowers, swimming in mountain lakes, or playing with my cat Tater Tot. I can't wait to get to work amplifying the voices of our community and diving deep into the issues facing wild public lands in our chapter area. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time.

Cheers,
Maddy Munson
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