Greetings Island Range Chapter members,

I cannot believe we’ve already reached the end of August. What a year we have had thus far. Montana Wilderness Association rebranded and is now Wild Montana. We have a new look and new mission and vision, but the same drive to protect and preserve Montana’s wild public lands and waters that we all love so much. Our very own Island Range Chapter held our first in-person board meetings and events in over a year these past couple of months, but with the rise in cases of Covid-19, we have recently reverted to online Zoom meetings, webinars, and events. Traveling across the country has increased, fires are still ravaging our state, and it all just seems like a roller coaster ride of highs and lows. One thing is certain though, we still all have each other and the great outdoors to lean on and continue our hike out of the pandemic. There is a light at the end of the tunnel, we have seen it and now we just need to buckle down, continue safe social practices and continue our trek to the new normal.

The Island Range Chapter does not currently have any scheduled events for September, but Wild Montana is hosting Virtual WildFest 2021 on Thursday, Oct. 7, and it will be our goal to host a webinar or event at the end of October. Whether it is virtual or in person I do look forward to seeing you all there! Our July in-person event was small but successful thanks to Mike Munoz and his expertise on wildfires (learn more about Ranger Munoz’s talk on page 5). We followed that with another enlightening webinar in August about the American Prairie Reserve thanks to the expertise of Corrie Williamson. I hope you were able to attend these events, they were certainly educational and the passion each speaker has was on full display, but if you were not stay tuned for recaps in this newsletter and future newsletters.

With all that said, I hope this newsletter finds you enjoying the last bit of summer, and the beginning of fall, in good health. We at Wild Montana certainly appreciate all your continued support and hope to see you at an event or in the wild soon.

Stay safe and KEEP IT WILD!
Conservation Conversations:
An Interview with Wayne Chamberlin

My interviewee this month is Wayne Chamberlin, co-editor of “A Wild Land Ethic – The Story of Wilderness in Montana.” Wayne resides in Helena, is a retired physician, has been a volunteer with Wild Montana for years, and is a charter member of Montana Conservation Elders.

Wayne Chamberlin grew up in urban Memphis, Tenn., among family members who were not outdoor enthusiasts. However, he came to savor spotting the jagged silhouette of the Rocky Mountains as the family crossed the eastern Colorado plains on their annual summer trip to his mother’s home state. By high school, Wayne found cave explorations and canoeing with friends in the Ozark Mountains to be liberating and fun.

And during college and medical school, both in Tennessee, he relished backpacking treks in the dense forests of the Appalachian Trail out of Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Wayne resided in Memphis until he finished formal education. Eventually, he got his wish and left the South with Helena as his final destination.

With his growing environmental consciousness, he quickly joined state environmental organizations such as Wild Montana (at the time Montana Wilderness Association) and Trout Unlimited. He learned a lot from friends and conservation groups about not only Montana’s landscapes but also its culture and history; it’s all connected like an ecosystem. He backpacked, day hiked, fished, camped, skied in the Helena area and beyond with family and friends. He loved it. Wayne learned of the importance and values of designated Wilderness: merit beyond recreation; a haven for America’s magnificent wildlife and botanical diversity; a place for spiritual enlightenment; places removed from human noise, industrial activity, and human-caused scars on the land; a place to nurture the all-too-lacking but sorely needed humility of Homo sapiens. Doug Ferrell (Wild Montana President 2010-2012) suggested the Wild Montana history project at a Council meeting and soon asked Wayne to run the project.

Feeling honored, Wayne accepted without hesitation, beginning the interviews in late 2013 using video

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equipment Doug had donated to Wild Montana. Ultimately he did 45 interviews, traveling all over Montana and even into Utah, there to do interviews with Cecil Garland and Fred Swanson. His only regret is that the project was not initiated ten years earlier, missing the voices, feelings, motivations, and passions of the earlier giants of the conservation movement. He is concerned about what we are leaving for the generations that follow us; he believes that ideally, each generation should leave the planet in no worse condition than what we inherited from our ancestors. It’s like “leave no trace” camping on a big scale. We should clean up our messes, and we are not.

Of course, the most obvious and monumental threat is climate change. As a pragmatist Wayne believes that all of us need to face problems looking for solutions, that diverting attention away from truth, toward fantasies of all sorts, is escapism of the worst sort. And by teaching the glorious history of conservation in our state we can create and motivate the next generation of leaders of the magnitude of Jim Posewitz, Dale Burk, Guy and Stewart Brandborg, Gerry Jennings, Dale Harris, Smoke Elser, Bob Anderson, Cecil Garland, Lee Metcalf and many more. If we don’t do what we can to foster the future leaders of conservation in Montana, we are not doing our duty – the duty of managing our state and planet so that it is livable for all creatures in the natural world.

Wayne and his co-editor, Dale Burk, published the book, “A Wild Land Ethic- The Story of Wilderness in Montana,” featuring both prose and poetry, 42 stories written by the conservation leaders in Montana along with photos from 32 photographers. Wayne says, “We wanted the book to be more than just facts and figures cataloging Montana conservation history; we wanted our book to appeal to the readers’ emotions as well as their curiosity.” In writing the title, Dale suggested the word “Ethic” for it “defines a set of moral principles, especially ones relating to or affirming a special group, field or form of contact.”

Again, from Wayne: “Dale and I strongly pursued this goal; we both felt that our book was to be one of the premier declarations of the value and necessity of Montana’s wild landscapes; these public lands, in the highest category of protection, are a generation-to-generation birthright to the entire American public.”

At present only 3% of Montana’s acreage is Wilderness; it could be and should be 6%. We must keep up the fight.

The book was published in February 2020, then the pandemic began, and then last fall Dale Burk died.

Wild Montana’s seven chapters are promoting the book to their members and the public. The Island Range Chapter is working with Great Falls Public Schools and other schools in the region to have it become part of the history and social studies curriculum. These stories will help children learn about the preservation of the land we call Montana.

Keep It Wild!

JOIN US FOR VIRTUAL WILDFEST 2021
Thursday, Oct. 7, from 6 to 7:15 p.m. MST
Online silent auction: Sept. 29 through Oct. 9
Learn more and register at wildmontana.org/wildfest
A Holistic Approach: 
Managing Wildfires for Healthy Forests and Reduced Risk for Firefighters

MICHAEL ENK
Island Range Chapter Board Member

Having served over three decades with the Forest Service, including the last 22 years as District Ranger on the Rocky Mountain Front, Mike Munoz has seen wildfire management policies evolve from full suppression of every fire to a more ecological approach today. Fire is one of nature’s most powerful forces that has always shaped our North American forests, and it will continue to do so regardless of our efforts to control it. Those efforts cost many millions of dollars and the lives of fire personnel. With so many people building homes in the wildland-urban interface and the hotter, drier conditions of a changing climate in the West, the challenges of managing wildfire are daunting and complex. But a policy of suppressing all fires is simply not sustainable and in the long run, self-defeating with the build-up of fuels that we have now seen in much of the mountainous West.

In the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (BMWC), however, we have an opportunity to allow fire to play a natural role and achieve many long term benefits, such as enhancing soil with organic matter (recycling trees), increasing the amount of water retained from snowmelt, recharging groundwater aquifers, creating firebreaks for adjacent private properties and communities, improving wildlife habitats and even boosting fisheries when released nutrients increase stream productivity. Prescribed burning is also an important tool to help create favorable conditions for managing wildfires and reducing risks to private property.

Munoz gave us an interesting history of his own observations of the beneficial effects of fires like Canyon Creek, Skyland, Ahorn, and Fools Creek. He is starting to see more of those benefits as second and third entry fires bring burned trees into contact with the ground and break down more organic matter. The overlapping polygons of multiple fires were quite visible on the map that Mike displayed to the audience. The mosaic patterns indicated a diversity of soil/watershed conditions and forest succession. It is that landscape diversity, created by fire, that provides resilience to the ecosystem. In fact, Munoz was able to show that one area of the BMWC where new wildfire strategies have been applied is returning to its pre-suppression era mosaic of vegetation condition and forest age structure. New research is confirming the benefits of wildfire and helping us better understand fire’s role on both fine and broad ecological scales.

It is easy to view wildfire as simply a destructive demon to be fought with all available resources. But this is a far too simplistic perspective on a force of nature that has a complex but fundamental influence on the national forests we work and play in. Ranger Munoz’s presentation illuminated the need for a more holistic approach to managing wildfire to sustain healthy forest ecosystems while reducing suppression costs and risks to firefighters. He emphasized that wildfire on a large landscape scale remains a keystone ecological process for land, water and air. We must learn to adapt to this reality. It’s a timely message as wildfire rages across Montana and the human inclination is to see only devastation in its wake.
Hiking the Middle Fork Judith Wilderness Study Area

SARA BULEY
Island Range Chapter Secretary

On July 8, Dave Wilsey, Mike Enk, Rick Kerr, Bill Boyer and I headed out to the trailhead in the Middle Fork Judith Wilderness Study Area near Utica to scout the hike we planned to lead for our upcoming Wilderness Walk.

It was a beautiful sunny day and we started off under the direction of Mike, who knows the area well. He explained that the Middle Fork Judith WSA is a fragile riparian system whose fish spawning areas have been ravaged and abused by motorized recreationists who drive their off-road vehicles through the river at multiple crossings, leaving in their wake stream water clouded by sediment that should not be disturbed. Sediment so stirred up takes days to settle after just one crossing, but this goes on day after day all summer long. Because of this, fish spawning is not possible in these areas of the river.

As we hiked along the trail where the ATVs travel, we encountered a large caravan of them as they rode along and splashed through the river. They were very friendly and waved at us as they drove by, yet I don’t think they realize the damage they are doing to the fisheries and the river in general. It was shocking to see how much mud was stirred up as each ATV rode through. We managed to escape the ATV trail and hike along some horse trails above the fray.

We made four river crossings on foot, the not-too-cold water reaching above our knees on one crossing. What a beautiful river that begs to be restored to its full potential!

Good news – major steps are currently being implemented to change routes used by ATVs and to restore the health of the streambed. We are proud to announce that Wild Montana’s Island Range Chapter is contributing to that restoration in partnership with the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, Trout Unlimited, and Great Falls Trail Bike Riders Association.

Unfortunately, the July 24 hike had to be canceled due to heat and smoke, but there will be more opportunities to see this outstanding wilderness study area. The photos here give you a taste of the outstanding views that await and you can find details on hikewildmontana.org to explore this trail yourself.
This summer we have seen scorching temperatures, early season fires, smoke, and very little moisture. Climate change has made its presence known in the west. Forest closures, hoot owl restrictions, low stream flows, and campfire bans have changed how we connect with the outdoors.

Luckily, in Montana, we have an opportunity to do something about it. Just in “our backyard” we have millions of acres of wild and intact public lands that can help our natural world and our communities remain resilient in the face of climate change—something Wild Montana is dedicated to.

Wild Montana’s work to confront climate change involves safeguarding wildlands from development, securing existing and potential wildlife corridors, and keeping headwaters and streams running cold, clear, and connected. It also involves conserving large, intact, and interconnected landscapes across Montana that will help plant and animal species to adapt and move as they must to continue their existence.

Protecting wild places not only helps to protect biodiversity, prevents uses that emit greenhouse gas, and keeps carbon sinks intact; it also provides conditions for natural ecosystems to adapt to the changing climate.

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Here’s what we’re doing in the Island Range Chapter to help:

**Lincoln Prosperity Proposal**

We are working to see the Lincoln Prosperity Proposal introduced as legislation. The proposal will protect the upper tributaries of the famous Blackfoot River. Many tributaries to the Upper Blackfoot begin in areas protected in the proposal as Wilderness and conservation management areas. Many of the 39 significant tributaries host native populations of Westslope Cutthroat and/or Bull Trout. The Lincoln Prosperity landscape is also a critical link between important habitat to the south and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex to north. This link will become more important in the future for grizzly bear, wolverine, lynx, and other predators, as well as for big game species such as elk, moose, and mule deer. This includes the proposed 40,000 acre Nevada Mountain Wilderness, which is home to all of the above species.

Please consider endorsing the Lincoln Prosperity Proposal today at [wildmontana.org/lpp](http://wildmontana.org/lpp)

**Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act**

The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act would expand the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Mission Mountains Wilderness Areas by nearly 80,000 acres and thereby protect the Blackfoot’s most important tributaries from any development that could obstruct or undermine their cold, clear flow into the main stem. Like the Lincoln Proposal, the BCSA would protect important aquatic and wildlife habitats that are important to many of Montana’s iconic species.

The BCSA as well as the Lincoln Prosperity Proposal will help ensure the health of both, securing some of the finest trout habitat in western Montana and protecting the outdoor recreation economy that sustains the Blackfoot’s communities, from Lincoln, Helmville and Ovando to Seeley Lake to Missoula.