

Swan View's News

Summer-Fall 2011



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"Nature and human nature on the same path."

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Mile-Markers and Guideposts!

This issue of Swan View's News takes a hard look at recreation on public lands. It provides guideposts which we can follow to insure our enjoyment of public lands is not marred by our own actions. It also notes important mile-markers in our efforts to insure public recreation does not conflict with the needs of fish and wildlife.

Our Swan Ranger hiking club celebrated its 300th outing on August 27, marking nearly six years of folks sharing and practicing sound recreation ethics with one another (page 2).

In late summer, we launched our new web site (page 2) and our new Code of Responsible Recreation for America's Backcountry (page 3) to better communicate these guideposts.

The dark side of mountain biking reared its ugly head this summer. We documented illegal mountain biking in Jewel Basin Hiking Area, the illegal clearing of breakneck biking trails on Crane Mountain, and the unauthorized building of breakneck bike jumps and ramps on existing, historic trails on Crane Mountain (pages 4 and 5)!

Nature issued her own injunction against the Swan Crest 100-mile foot race this year with a record-setting snow pack

that is still melting as fall arrives! The late-July foot race was cancelled due to the lingering deep snow pack (page 5).

An April 2011 report by the Wildlife Conservation Society gives high marks to Swan Range public lands deserving Wilderness designation and road removals - a clear signal we've been headed in the right direction the past 27 years (page 6)!

In sum, we are working hard to secure habitat for fish, wildlife and responsible recreation by limiting motorized vehicles. And we are working hard to insure the impacts of motorized vehicles are not simply replaced by the impacts of extreme sports and careless recreation!

We are happy to announce Cinnabar Foundation has once again issued us a \$4,000 Matching Grant. So please help us continue our work by making a donation today - and see your donation doubled by Cinnabar Foundation (page 7)!



Strawberry Lake and mountain ash berries. *Keith Hammer Photo*

Keith



You'll find the above masthead logo, breaking news, slide shows, and much more on our new web site at our same address: www.swanview.org! We now have the ability to manage our own web site content, so you'll be seeing new and relevant postings there most every week, if not every few days!

You'll still find all the important reports and resource materials from our old site, though we're now be able to better guide you to it and dovetail our email alerts with our web site articles. We'll be revamping our sister web site at www.swanrange.org this fall, so you'll also be able to better track the Swan Rangers and our articles about the natural and cultural history of the Swan Range. Check it out and stay tuned!

Swan Rangers Celebrate 300th Outing!

Sixteen Swan Rangers celebrated the Rangers' 300th outing with a hike to Elk Springs on August 27, 2011, where they enjoyed a sip of champagne, non-alcoholic sparkling apple cider, Pam's Morning Glory muffins, and each others' fine company!

The Swan Rangers' first outing was also to Elk Springs and took place on November 12, 2005.

Over the years, the Swan Rangers have packed plenty of trash out of the woods, doused a half-dozen abandoned campfires, helped each other learn about native plants and animals, and practiced safe travel in bear country

- by hiking in groups, carrying bear spray, and avoiding the hours of dawn, dusk and darkness.

The Swan Rangers continued their 300th outing celebration with burgers, pie and ice cream at the Mountain Brook Homestead Foundation's Pie Social that evening. A number of Swan Rangers performed music for the Pie Social as the Swan Range Jammers!



Celebrating the 300th Swan Ranger outing on Broken Leg Mountain!
Keith Hammer Photo

The Swan Rangers currently meet at Echo Lake Cafe on the Swan Highway for breakfast at 7:30, leaving at 8:30 for a partial day outing in the Swan Range within a few minutes drive. Those not wishing to join the group for breakfast can join them by 8:30 to carpool to the trailhead from

the Swan River School parking lot next door. More information can be found on the "hiking" page at www.swanrange.org.

The Code of Responsible Recreation For America's Backcountry

This summer we drafted a Code of Responsible Recreation for America's Backcountry and fine-tuned it with the help of a number of other conservation organizations and individuals. Here it is (and you can find it at www.swanview.org):

The wild is being driven out of America's backcountry by ultra-marathon foot races, biking, motorized vehicles, and other frontcountry sports run amok. We therefore offer the following code of conduct:

Responsible backcountry recreation remains rooted in quality, not quantity.

It is measured by depth of appreciation, not by fastest speed or longest distance.

It minimizes haste, hardware, competition, and intrusion.

It engages people in conservation through mindful practice of minimal impact.

It reserves the backcountry for traditional, contemplative recreation that can't be had in the frontcountry.

Conservation of fish, wildlife and America's backcountry requires people acting more responsibly, not more people pursuing cheap thrills and extreme sports.

Adherence to this code of conduct would prevent and reverse the current outward expansion of thrill-seeking recreation from urban areas and ski resorts into backcountry public lands. It would help minimize impacts to fish, wildlife and other people.

At a time when more people are wanting to recreate on public lands, it falls upon all of us to reduce our individual impacts.

Increasing the area we impact and the degree of our impact by moving with ever-increasing haste takes us in the wrong direction and puts us and wildlife at risk!

Studies show biking has greater impacts on elk than hiking. Researchers believe it is likely due to the speed. Similarly, researchers and land managers recommend people hike in bear country in groups in order to reduce the likelihood of surprise encounters and reduce the number of parties interrupting bears.

This is not to say that running and biking can't have their place in the frontcountry. But bicycles and competitive trail running in the backcountry have immediate impacts on wildlife and other people. And they have long-term impacts when race/bike advocates oppose Wilderness designations that provide the greatest protections for quality recreation, fish and wildlife - in part by banning such uses. Read more related to this issue on page 5.



Stopping to photograph glacier lilies on the Swan Crest! Keith Hammer Photo

Crane Mountain: Forest Service Partners Up with Breakneck Bikers

In May 2009 Flathead National Forest law enforcement caught Ron Cron, the ringleader of some breakneck bikers (extreme downhill mountain bikers) that had cleared a new, unauthorized trail on the east slopes of Crane Mountain near Bigfork. But he was not fined for that first illegal trail until April 2011, after several more unauthorized trails were cleared and we complained.

Thinking a \$300 fine was enough to set matters straight, the Forest Service left the illegal east slope trails open for bike use and signed the ringleader up as a volunteer to "maintain" three historic hiking and horseback trails on the west slope of Crane Mountain.

Organized on Facebook as "Crane Mountain Trail Supporters," the group shot a promotional video of breakneck biking on the unauthorized trails, raised funds by raffling off four \$3,000-\$5,000 downhill bikes, and bragged on Facebook about building at least one jump of the several we found along the historic west slope Beardance Trail.

After obtaining a slew of incriminating emails and other public records via the Freedom of Information Act, we took the matter to the District Ranger and Forest Supervisor. They agreed the jumps and ramps along Beardance Trail were not proper "maintenance" and promised they will be removed. They have refused, however to close the illegal trails on the east slope of

Crane Mountain, which are mixed in with illegal ATV trails as well.

The Forest Service also refused to issue a press release to set the record straight, so we provided the public record to area newspapers. Their coverage includes admissions by Ron Cron that he knew building an unauthorized east-slope trail was illegal but did it "because we knew once the trail was established it would never be removed."

This Crane Mountain issue is precedent-setting. We need your help to make sure renegade breakneck bikers aren't rewarded for illegal behavior that threatens wildlife habitat, family-friendly recreation, and denies the public its right to have a say in the matter.

Please write a short note today! Tell the District Ranger and Forest Supervisor you want all unauthorized trails, jumps and ramps removed from Crane Mountain!



Jerry Sprunger Cartoon

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rkehr@fs.fed.us

Flathead Forest Supervisor Chip Weber
650 Wolf Pack Way
Kalispell, MT 59901
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Learn more at www.swanview.org!

Unsettling Trends and Partnerships

Ultra-marathon trail races and mountain bike races have become commonplace in places like Leadville, Colorado, where grizzly bears disappeared decades ago. But is that what we want in the Flathead National Forest, a strikingly important last refuge for grizzly bear, lynx and wolverine?

"Kudos on your ongoing fight for the trails," Monica writes us. "We lost it all in North Vancouver, BC Canada because of the very aggressive nature of the mountain bikers to keep their illegally built trails. . . You have a fan in BC Canada!"

While the Flathead lacks the human population center of a Vancouver, BC, it nonetheless is feeling pressures to expand thrill-seeking recreation from ski areas into the backcountry. And conflicts with wildlife and other trail users are sure to blossom if such behavior is not checked.

The Forest Service in Missoula, Montana, has had to remove illegal breakneck biking ramps and jumps from its Blue Mountain Recreation Area and post speed limits for mountain bikes in its Rattlesnake Recreation Area. A month ago, a US Olympic ski team member was swatted by a black bear as she jogged in Pattee Canyon near Missoula's outskirts, when she surprised the female bear and her cubs. Last year, a woman had a black bear thrash the ground on either side of her when she literally ran into it while jogging at dusk near Bigfork.

Hikers are not immune from bad encounters with bears. Agencies advise folks

to hike in groups, not run on trails, carry bear spray, and avoid dawn, dusk and darkness. Neither of the two hikers killed by bears in Yellowstone National Park this summer were carrying bear spray.

In Banff National Park, Canada, a mountain biker was charged by a grizzly sow with two cubs this summer, hikers are required to hike in groups on some trails, and visi-

tors are being fined for not carrying bear spray. Glacier National Park fortunately does not allow mountain biking on its trails and also advises against trail running.

This article certainly is not intended to scare folks out of the woods. It is intended to urge folks to travel slowly in bear country, carry bear spray, and pay far more attention to their surroundings than to their goals and gadgets.

Fortunately, organizers of the Swan Crest 100-mile foot race this year cancelled the event due to a lingering, record-set-

ting snow pack. We believe their concerns for safety should also result in not running the race on trails in bear habitat overnight. We urge them to pattern their event after the Flathead's Le Grizz 50, which sends runners down wide Forest Service roads during daylight.

An underfunded Forest Service is moving to forge partnerships that help with funding and work. In doing so, however, it needs to insure it is rewarding lawful behavior that is also in line with agency policies to travel safely in bear habitat, to "tread lightly," and to "leave no trace."



Let's keep public trails free of speed and family friendly. *Keith Hammer Photo*

Wildlife Society Report Recommends Wilderness Designations and Road Reclamation in the Swan Range

On behalf of the Wildlife Conservation Society, Dr. John Weaver has issued a new report that gives high marks to the Swan Range for its essential contribution to the conservation of fish and wildlife. His April 2011 monograph "Conservation Values of Roadless Areas for Vulnerable Fish and Wildlife Species in the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, Montana" ranks the ecological value of lands throughout the Crown Ecosystem. Here we highlight his assessment of the northern Swan Range and foothills (all parenthesis are the author's):

"Suitable primary and maternal habitat for wolverine occurs throughout much of the Swan Range and southern Flathead, where relative density of grizzly bears is also high . . .

Several areas in the Swan River and Southern Flathead River basin scored very high (especially the Swan Range) or high in composite conservation value for these vulnerable fish and wildlife species. Accordingly, I recommend that 253,554 roadless acres (67.3%) of high-priority lands be designated as Wilderness [including the] Swan Range from Holland Lake north to Inspiration Point [and] higher portions of the Swan Range from Bunker Creek north to Columbia Mountain . . .

Areas recommended for Backcountry designation include . . . lower slopes along the west side of the Swan Range from Swan

Lake north above Lake Blaine (note: an argument could be made that because the northern part of the Swan Range is fairly narrow, wilderness designation for this roadless section along the western slope would augment recommended wilderness on the east side) . . .

I recommend that 65 miles of primitive roads be considered for wildland restoration (de-commissioned or otherwise permanently closed and returned to more natural condition). These include roads in Silver Run Creek in upper Doris Creek."

While we still have a lot of work to do, we've already accomplished some of the work Weaver has detailed and laid the groundwork for the rest. As the photo on this page shows, we got the road into



Doris Creek and wildlife security restored by removal of Silver Run road. *Keith Hammer photo.*

Silver Run Creek removed last summer, following years of litigation and our complaints that the old bridges over Doris and Lost Johnny creeks provided late-season snowmobile access into habitats of denning grizzly bear and wolverine!

And our proposal for the Swan Range in the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, now being reintroduced in the U.S. House, would designate all roadless lands in the northern Swan Range as Wilderness and remove all roads except the Westside Reservoir Road from its eastern slopes!

You can find Weaver's full report at <http://www.wcsnorthamerica.org>.

Make a Donation and See it Doubled By Cinnabar!

Swan View Coalition relies in large part on member donations to fund its work protecting habitat for fish, wildlife and people.

Your donation this Fall will help insure we meet a challenge/matching grant from Cinnabar Foundation, effectively doubling your donation!

You can help us broaden our membership base by giving Gift Memberships at \$25 each, either on-line or using the donation form below!

1. Send a check to Swan View Coalition at 3165 Foothill Road, Kalispell, MT 59901 - or -

2. Use your credit card securely on-line at www.swanview.org or www.swanrange.org, by clicking on the Donate Now button!



Groundspring/Network for Good handles your transaction for us and informs us immediately via email of your donation by credit card. If you have other info you want to get to us, such as the names, addresses and greetings you choose for your Gift Memberships, simply email them to keith@swanview.org or mail them to the address in #1, above.



If there is pink on your mailing label, it means you haven't donated in nearly a year or more. Please make a donation so we can keep sending you our newsletter and continue our work!

- Here's \$25 to cover my minimum dues, newsletters, alerts, and Swan Ranger Reports.
- Here's \$50 to help restore a bit of peace and quiet to America's public lands.
- Here's \$100 to help keep forest roads from ending up in America's bull trout streams.
- Here's \$_____ to help secure grizzly, lynx and wolverine habitat for future generations.
- Here's \$_____ for _____ Gift Memberships at a minimum of \$25 each. I've included each recipient's name, mailing address, email address, and my greeting on separate paper.
- As a gift of appreciation for my donation, please send me the Swan/Flathead history booklet "The Lineage of Chief Aeneas: A History of People and Place" and/or a Swan Ranger patch (circle "hang-loop" or "sew-on").
- Save paper! Email my newsletters to _____

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