

Swan View's News

Winter-Spring 2011



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"Nature and human nature on the same path."

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Watershed Moments!

We stopped the spraying of 50,000 gallons of deadly pesticide on old-growth forests in the Swan Valley recently! This was just one of a blizzard of projects proposed on the Flathead National Forest this winter, with most looking to use an environmental shortcut known as a categorical exclusion. We continue to challenge these shortcuts where they are clearly not allowed (pages 2 and 4).

We convinced the Forest Service last year that it needed to prepare an environmental assessment and consult with Fish and Wildlife Service before permitting the Swan Crest 100-mile footrace, and FWS has since openly criticized the event. Organizers, however, are attempting again this year to end-run the permitting and consultation requirements (page 3). We have similar concerns over a proposal to construct downhill mountain bike racing trails on Crane Mountain (page 4).

We got another 55 miles of road decommissioned on the Flathead last year and are now working on the FS's initiative to downsize its road system nation-wide to protect public natural resources, including bull trout critical habitat designated last year! (Page 5).

We're also reviewing and will comment on the Forest Service's rewrite of its Forest Planning regulations, which it will use to update the Flathead and many other Forest Plans across the nation. We've included addresses and suggestions to help you comment on the proposed regulations in a few moments time (page 6).



Snow bridges along Krause Creek. *Keith Hammer Photo*

We earned a spot as a primary authority on Responsible Recreation in the Flathead Watershed Sourcebook and we're in the process of reworking our web sites to better articulate the importance of keeping healthy recreation non-commercial and non-competitive in order to conserve wildlife habitat.

A big THANK YOU to all of you that helped us meet our Cinnabar Foundation Challenge Grant and our budget last year. Thanks to your generosity and faithful support, we are able to continue our work and make giant strides in the protection of quiet habitat for fish, wildlife and people!

Keith

Poisoning of Old-Growth in Swan Averted!

Flathead National Forest in January proposed to spray some 50,000 gallons of the deadly pesticide carbaryl (common brand name Sevin) on some 10,000 old-growth ponderosa pine trees in the Swan Valley in an attempt to deter mountain pine beetles. And it proposed to "categorically exclude" the project from analysis in either an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement!

We successfully argued that the Forest Service Manual allows the "categorical exclusion" shortcut only for the very limited application of pesticides and herbicides in campgrounds and administrative sites - not the broad-spread application over the 2,500 acres proposed! With Friends of the Wild Swan, we provided research showing carbaryl would kill other insects, spiders and small animals in these old-growth forests - including other insects and woodpeckers that naturally feed on mountain pine beetles - causing the ecosystem to quickly unravel.

We also showed carbaryl harms the ability of plants to photosynthesize, grow and reproduce. Carbaryl also harms nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the soil necessary to the health of soil and plants.

As the Forest Service brochure photo on this page shows, high-pressure sprayers are needed to drench the tree trunk upwards of 50 feet, which results in drift of the poison off-target and onto lower-lying vegetation, if not nearby waterways. And all this to treat trees that may not get hit by mountain pine beetles in the first place!



Forest Service Carbaryl Brochure Photo.

We convinced the Forest Service to instead post the trees with packets of the harmless, pheromone-based verbenone, which deters mountain pine beetles by sending the false signal that the posted tree is already occupied by pine beetles! Our hat is off to new Swan Lake District Ranger Richard Kehr for listening to our concerns, respecting the research and advice of his specialists, and agreeing to limit his application of carbaryl to only two small sites already experiencing beetle attacks.

We too are concerned with saving big old-growth trees. Though less effective than carbaryl, nontoxic verbenone will help

protect the entire old-growth ecosystem.

If you'd like to read our letter to the Forest Service on this issue, simply email keith@swanview.org. You can read more about abuses of "categorical exclusions" on page 4 of this newsletter.

Swan Crest 100-Mile Footrace "Human Arrogance"



Spectators dominate the horizon during the 2010 Swan Crest 100 Run.

Keith Hammer Photo

Fish and Wildlife Service Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator Chris Servheen publicly criticized competitive trail running in November and January. The Hungry Horse News reports he called its disregard for wildlife "human arrogance," likened it to skateboarding in the Sistine Chapel, and emphasized it's a bad idea: "It's likely to lead to injury to the runner and the bear . . . It's contrary to what we tell everyone" about how to travel safely in bear habitat.

The Bigfork Eagle in September published the story of a local woman that literally ran into a black bear while running at dusk and wanted her story told to help others avoid such an encounter. The bear did not maul the woman, but let her know who was boss as it "stood up and then pounded its front paws a few times" on either side of her as she lay still. The article repeated agency advice that people not run on trails and not hike or run in the dark.

Swan Crest footrace organizers, however, are ignoring the advice and planning another 100-mile overnight race for July 29-30, 2011. They are encouraging such nonsense by telling applicants "You are a superbly conditioned athlete capable of feats that most mortals would not consider." While Servheen's bottom line message was that death or injury to a runner will harm public sentiment toward grizzly bears, the Swan Crest 100 web site instead selfishly warns an encounter "might mean no more SC100 in the future."

The Forest Service told organizers it needed to apply for a Special Use Permit (SUP) in December in order to complete an environmental assessment by July. Organizers instead are again circumventing the permit and environmental review processes. We are consulting with our attorney, who has won two SUP cases for us, and will continue monitoring the situation.

Reining in Abuse of "Categorical Exclusions"

The Forest Service persists in trying to avoid environmental analysis of its actions. While regulations do list certain categories of activities that don't need analysis in an Environmental Assessment or Impact Statement (EA or EIS), such as painting the Ranger Station or maintaining a campground, the agency consistently abuses these regulations to allow logging, broad use of pesticides and herbicides, competitive racing events, and more.

When we intervened in planning of the Swan Crest 100-mile footrace last year, the FS was set to issue it a Special Use Permit (SUP) using a "categorical exclusion" (CE) from environmental analysis. We and various wildlife biologists, however, convinced the FS it must first prepare an EA.

We also reported to the FS last year that mountain bikers were preparing to flag and clear downhill-run trails on Crane Mountain, apparently without a SUP or prior environmental analysis. While the FS says it reined in the proponents and put the project "on hold," we recently had to report proponents are now raffling off mountain bikes to fund the trails - which the FS was unaware of! Research shows that mountain bikes have impacts greater than hiking and more on par with ATVs due to their speed, so we'll be helping insure such extreme sport trails are not simply given a CE!

As reported on page 2, we recently prevented the spraying of 50,000 gallons of deadly pesticide on old-growth forests

in the Swan Valley, which the FS had proposed under a CE. The FS will now use non-toxic verbenone pheromone instead to deter mountain pine beetles!

We also objected to the use of a CE to conduct a controversial prescribed burn using helicopters inside the Mission Mountain Wilderness. The FS is now preparing an EA which will then be available for public review and comment.

We've also had to object to the use of a CE to thin and reduce forest fuels on 3,700 acres across the Flathead National Forest, in part because over 2,000 of those acres are in "critical habitat" for lynx (where thinning is largely taboo) and regulations don't allow for the use of CE's where such "extraordinary circumstances" exist. Moreover, the regulations expressly prohibit the use of CE's for "hazardous fuels reduction" until the regulations have been corrected to conform to a court order!

We can expect more abuse of CE's in light of the new Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, through which Congress funds logging as "restoration," but doesn't allow the funds to be used for its planning and environmental analysis. The Southwestern Crown Collaborative (www.swcrown.com) won some of the first decade-long funding under the program, so we'll need to remain vigilant to insure the money is not misused in the Swan Valley and other parts of this SW corner of the Crown of the Continent.



Wildlife?

Steve Bennett Photo

Downsizing the National Forest Road System

After building over 375,000 miles of road in our National Forests, enough to circle the equator fifteen times, the Forest Service has finally announced it plans to remove some of them! A pair of agency-wide directives issued last fall direct each forest to assess the conditions of their watersheds and determine which roads the agency can actually afford to keep, both environmentally and fiscally.

The agency currently can afford to maintain only about 20% of its road system, resulting in only 17% remaining open to passenger cars as the remainder have been abandoned, closed, decommissioned, or left open only to high-clearance vehicles as their condition degrades. While some roads have been properly closed or decommissioned to restore water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, it's finally time for the agency to devise a plan that considers the harmful effects of roads system-wide and get to work on alleviating them.

The system-wide directives issued by Deputy Chief Joel Holtrop require that each Forest complete Watershed Condition Assessments by March 31, 2011 and to complete a Travel Analysis Report by October, 2015. The TAR is to recommend a minimum road system and, conversely, list unneeded roads for decommissioning.

Holtrop, who issued Flathead Forest Plan Amendment 19's road closure and decommissioning program in 1995 while Flathead Forest Supervisor, is no stranger to the

why and how of removing roads. Amendment 19, while decommissioning roads primarily to secure grizzly bear habitat, also requires that all stream-bearing culverts be removed from decommissioned roads to restore watershed and fisheries by preventing inevitable wash-outs of those culverts.

It is imperative that we and other conservationists keep the pressure on the agency throughout this downsizing process, however. The agency (along with industry and a disappointing number of "conservation" groups) is

well-known for calling logging "watershed restoration" and then arguing the roads are needed to conduct the "restoration." This even though the agency recognizes roads and logging as the primary culprits in watershed degradation!

We've already met with Regional Forester Leslie Weldon and her staff. We provided them with copies of our "Watersheds at Risk" and "Off the Charts" reports that summarize agency data showing substantial miles of roads must be removed from watersheds on the Flathead, Bitterroot and Lolo National Forests. This is especially so in bull trout watersheds that have now been designated "critical habitat" and cannot be damaged.

You can find these reports on our Reports page at www.swanview.org. We'll be holding the agency's feet to the fire to accomplish a true and adequate downsizing through this process and through the pending revision of Forest Plans.



Watershed trashed by roads and logging.
Keith Hammer Photo

Please Take a Few Minutes to Secure Better Forest Planning Regulations!

The Forest Service has issued its fourth attempt since 2000 to revise its 1982 Forest Planning regulations, after openly hostile revisions proposed under the Bush administration were successfully challenged by conservation groups. Unfortunately, while the Obama administration's proposal looks better on the surface, it on careful reading falls far short on legal requirements for the protection of water, fish and wildlife.

We urge you to take a few minutes and comment on the proposed "planning rule." Your comments must be received by May 16! Here are some suggested comments:

1. Wildlife species must be maintained and "well distributed in the planning area," as in the 1982 regulations, not just maintained somewhere in the area!

2. The Forest Plan must maintain and restore the health and resilience of all ecosystems, not just maintain those that have somehow managed to remain healthy!

3. Lands determined "not suitable for timber production" must be off limits to all logging, including logging done under the guise of thinning, fuels reduction, wildlife enhancement, watershed restoration, and other misleading euphemisms!

4. Plans and projects must be "based on best available scientific information," not simply issued after such information is halfheartedly "taken into account!"

4. Similarly, Plans must include legally required and enforceable standards for the management of water quality, fish and wildlife, that are based on the best available science, not simply discretionary guidelines that merely consider the science!

5. For example, Plans must include non-discretionary and enforceable road density standards that fully protect and recover all native fish, wildlife and the watersheds they depend upon!

6. The public needs several times the non-extendable 30 days provided to formally obtain and object to Plans and Plan amendments, which may include lengthy Environmental Impact Statements and supportive documents! How about an extendable 90 days like the FS proposes to give itself to respond to the objection?

Please take a few moments by May 16 to submit these or your own comments!

You can comment on-

line by visiting www.govcomments.com. Alternatively, you can submit comments by addressing them to Forest Service Planning DEIS, C/O Bear West Company, 132 E 500 S, Bountiful, UT 84010; or via facsimile to 801-397-1605.

Please identify your written comments by including "planning rule" on the cover sheet or the first page. More about the Planning Rule is available at fs.usda.gov/planningrule.



If you were a moose, you'd want better Forest Planning regulations!

How to Make a Donation or Give a Gift Membership

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

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.

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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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Watershed Moments: Key Junctures in Protecting Wildlands!

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Recent Key Successes and Challenges! | page 1 |
| Poisoning of Old-Growth in Swan Averted! | page 2 |
| Swan Crest 100-Mile Footrace Called "Human Arrogance!" | page 3 |
| Reining in Abuse of Environmental Shortcuts! | page 4 |
| Downsizing the National Forest Road System! | page 5 |
| You Can Help Secure Better Forest Planning Regulations! | page 6 |
| How to Make a Donation or Give a Gift Membership! | page 7 |