

Swan View's News

Winter-Spring 2012



Swan View Coalition
3165 Foothill Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

"Nature and human nature on the same path."

www.swanview.org
www.swanrange.org
swanview@swanview.org

Grizzly Bears Help Restore Bull Trout Habitat On Flathead National Forest!

The Forest Service and Montana Department of Environmental Quality recently announced they've succeeded in restoring the Big Creek watershed in the Flathead's North Fork, a key bull trout spawning stream. This is the first stream in Montana removed from DEQ's list of "impaired waters" and it is truly good news!

While the agencies deserve credit, grizzly bears and bull trout deserve credit too! It's the bears that insisted over 60 miles of logging roads be decommissioned in Big Creek to provide them with adequate habitat security. And it was bull trout and other fish that insisted all stream-bearing culverts be removed from those old roads to help restore the entire watershed!

That may sound a bit tongue-in-cheek, but giving voice to fish and wildlife is part of the role of both science and advocacy - and it is absolutely essential to conservation. This newsletter is dedicated to telling "the rest of the story" behind the restoration of Big Creek.

In the following pages, you will read about a handful of fish and wildlife biologists trying to do right by fish and wildlife, and about the grass-roots conservation groups that stood up for them when the agencies and others, including "collaborators," turned their backs on them.



Bull Trout.

*Joel Sartore - National Geographic Stock
with Wade Fredenberg*

The story of Big Creek is about how advocacy, public education and often litigation are necessary to lay the foundation upon which a success story can be built. It begins with listening to the needs of fish and wildlife and ends with people also benefiting from the protection of their habitat.

We are here to speak up for fish and wildlife. This story of Big Creek teaches a lot about the interplay between science, litigation, politics, and collaboration. We guarantee you'll learn a lot in the following pages!

Keith

Griz Influence Flathead Forest Plan

Grizzly bears have been speaking out against forest roads for decades, by either dying near them or giving them the cold shoulder. Wildlife biologists studying bears use statistics to rephrase it this way: bears that linger near roads are at greater risk of being killed by people and those that avoid roadside areas to avoid people give up considerable habitat they need for survival. For bears, it's damned if you do and damned if you don't when it comes to roads!

The Flathead National Forest, the majority of which is occupied by grizzly bears, nonetheless issued its Forest Plan in 1986 to build another 75 miles of road each year until its already abundant 4,000 miles of road spanned 6,000 miles. It then helped fund a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks ten-year study of "Grizzly Bear Ecology in the Swan Mountains" and set about ignoring the results.

The study found that grizzly bears not only avoided roads open to motor vehicles but also avoided roads closed to vehicles with just a gate or berm because of the substantial amount of human use they still received. Swan View Coalition and Friends of the Wild Swan asked the Flathead to develop standards limiting the total density of roads in bear habitat and, when it refused to work with U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to do so, they turned to the federal courts.

These groups put the USFWS wildlife biologist that was being ignored by the Flathead on the witness stand and won

their lawsuits. As a result, the Flathead issued Amendment 19 to its Forest Plan in 1995, laying out a ten-year plan to reduce total road densities through the "reclamation" of an estimated 650 miles of road.

Bull trout and other native fish harmed by road sediments washed into streams also got their say in Amendment 19. Fisheries biologists with the Flathead and FWP included in Amendment 19 the requirement that all stream-bearing culverts and all road fill near them must be removed when roads are "reclaimed" or "decommissioned." Otherwise, the culverts would inevitably wash out and flush entire chunks of road downstream, as they often do even on roads patrolled by motor vehicles.

Amendment 19, though initiated out of utmost concern for threatened grizzly bear, was written to benefit other wildlife like elk, as well as fish and water quality. USFWS, anticipating objections from folks

that may not understand the harm forest roads cause to fish and wildlife, required the Flathead National Forest to "develop and implement a public information program on the positive effects of road closures for fish and wildlife, water quality, and other Forest resources."

The Flathead fell flat on its public education program and three of its former employees got themselves elected to lead Montanans for Multiple Use in its steadfast opposition to Amendment 19. (Story continues on next page).



Grizzly bear sow and cub. *Keith Hammer Photo*

A Bumpy Road on the Way to Big Creek!

To help get Amendment 19's road decommissioning off on the right foot, Swan View Coalition, Friends of the Wild Swan and Wildlands CPR hired Pacific Watersheds Associates in 1996 to present a public three-day road decommissioning workshop at Big Creek. Though re-contouring of the entire road is preferred, the workshop focused on the more cost-efficient decommissioning method of removing stream-bearing culverts from the road and re-contouring only the stream-side area so the stream is returned safely to its native streambed.

Montanans for Multiple Use (MFMU) and others held a protest at Big Creek, objecting to the workshop and the removal of culverts. But a dedicated FS engineer attended the entire workshop and the Flathead embarked on its program of "hydrologic decommissioning" aimed at providing the effective closure of roads for wildlife security while protecting fish and water quality from the inevitable washing out of culverts.

Meanwhile, however, Defenders of Wildlife, National Wildlife Federation, and the Intermountain Forest Industries Association launched a collaborative effort to combine logging with road decommissioning along the west side of Hungry Horse Reservoir. Though MFMU was a part of the Flathead Common Ground collaboration, it would later object to and appeal the

planned decommissioning of 116 miles of old roads in the resulting Paint Emery Project.

To make matters worse, DOW, NWF and IFIA insisted on calling their logging plan "ecologically driven," even though the scientific peer review they had asked for concluded in 1997 "the desire to harvest timber products should be explicitly recognized here as the driving force." The peer review also stated it was "unclear the extent to which road closure entails gating only, gating plus culvert removal, or reclamation/obliteration."

A legitimate concern indeed. The Flathead in May 1999 would attempt to thereafter leave stream-bearing culverts in decommissioned roads because it would save money while allowing the Flathead to "consider the road reclaimed."

This "let's not and say we did" shortcut on road decommissioning was unfortunately supported by National Wildlife Federation!

Swan View Coalition and Friends of the Wild Swan filed their intent to file a lawsuit, reminding the Flathead that Amendment 19 requires removal of the culverts not only to protect water quality and fish, but to also provide more effective road closure for wildlife security. After consulting its attorneys, the Flathead abandoned its end-run, concluding SVC and FOWS "were right." (Story continues on next page).



Culvert wash-out on Flathead National Forest. *USFS Photo*

From Paint Emery to Big Creek!

The Paint Emery “let’s not and say we did” road decommissioning scam was an outright denial of the needs of fish, wildlife and the Forest Plan standards established by agency biologists to protect them. It was made all the more egregious with the complicity of “collaborators.”

Though the Paint Emery Project was issued as a pilot “forest stewardship project,” it nonetheless failed to fund and accomplish in a timely manner the promised decommissioning of 116 miles of road, though the logging was completed in several years. Denied a quick yet hollow claim to getting those roads “decommissioned,” Flathead Common Ground collaborators walked away from the task.

SVC and FOWS dogged the Flathead for a dozen years and saw the true decommissioning finished in 2011 with “stimulus funds” provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. As a result, wildlife have better security due to roads rendered absolutely impassable to motor vehicles via culvert removals and streambed restoration, rather than a simple earth berm to be driven over or around. And both water quality and fish benefit from the removal of roads at all stream crossings!

It is Amendment 19’s integrated improvements to wildlife, water quality and fish that would come to the rescue in Big Creek, which was listed by Montana Dept.

of Environmental Quality as having impaired water quality in 1996. The reasons for the listing were logging and road building that led to increased soil erosion and sediment in Big Creek, including sediment in its bull trout spawning beds.

Watershed restoration plans for Big Creek and other watersheds on DEQ’s “impaired” list languished, however, until a lawsuit filed by Friends of the Wild Swan and others set a time table for establishing the plans. The Big Creek restoration plan was finalized in 2003 and the watershed

was removed from the “impaired” list in 2012, following considerable restoration work.

Key among the restoration work was the decommissioning of 61 miles of roads to provide grizzly bear security under Amendment 19. This, as though we need to repeat it again, required all stream-

bearing culverts removed to protect and restore water quality and fish! Had the Flathead gotten its way in 1999 and later simply dozed these roads shut with a berm, the effort would not have contributed to the restoration of Big Creek.

Indeed, from 1995 to 1999, 70% of the Flathead’s road decommissioning was paid with watershed improvement funds while wildlife funds paid only 1%. Because Amendment 19 benefits both fish and wildlife, it can draw from multiple funding sources. (Story continues on next page).



Properly removed culvert in Big Creek. *USFS Photo*

Big Creek in the Big Picture

Big Creek's restoration and removal from Montana's list of "impaired" waters is a success story largely because Flathead Forest Plan Amendment 19 remains largely intact. Though compromised from the outset in allowing road decommissioning to require only the re-contouring of stream-side areas after culvert removals, rather than re-contouring the entire road bed, it accomplishes the majority of watershed restoration objectives at a fraction of the cost.

The Flathead's failed attempt to gut Amendment 19's culvert removal requirements under political cover of the Flathead Common Ground I collaborative is a harsh lesson in underhanded political hardball. And it was thwarted only by our threat of a lawsuit that government attorneys agreed we'd win.

Amendment 19 in 1996 also came under threat from the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, which initially supported its approach to road decommissioning. It's panel of interagency biologists proposed returning to the use of road

gates closed seasonally for grizzly bear security, setting standards it noted "deviated from those suggested by an objective application of research findings."

This biased attempt to gut Amendment 19 was roundly criticized by conservation groups and independent biologists alike. The attempt was not abandoned until a formal peer review by three independent wildlife biologists faulted it in 2000, con-

cluding "the simplicity of A19 and its ability to permanently secure areas for grizzly bears makes it a powerful tool in the conservation of the grizzly bear."

Had the IGBC succeeded in stifling the voice of grizzly bears that were being expressed through sound research and independent peer review, all the road gates in the world would not have restored the Big Creek watershed for bull trout. That required decommissioning 61 miles of road, removing 47 culverts, replacing 19 culverts, improving 89 miles of roads to decrease storm-water runoff; re-vegetating 25 acres of eroding uplands, and improving the amount of large wood in headwater streams that feed Big Creek.



Culvert removed, streambed restored. *Paul Harvey Photo*

At this juncture we need to recognize the dual definitions of "collaboration," which are either "working with someone to create something" or "traitorous cooperation with the enemy." Government agencies are not the enemy, until they attempt to stifle the voices of fish and wildlife,

pressure their scientists to ignore or misuse research, or use collaboration as political cover under which to violate the law.

The restoration of Big Creek was more than a simple collaboration between the Flathead and DEQ. Citizen action, public education, litigation, and scientists maintaining their integrity were needed to insure the needs of fish and wildlife were met. (Story concludes on next page).

Epilogue: Big Benefits to Fish, Wildlife and People

Restoring water quality in Big Creek benefits not only fish, but wildlife and people too. Road decommissioning in Big Creek not only removed or stabilized 61 miles of road fill in the watershed, it continues to provide increased habitat security for threatened grizzly bear and big game species like elk. And increased habitat security for fish and wildlife benefits not only people who like to fish and hunt, but people looking for quiet places away from motor vehicles to hike, take photographs, swim, or soak their feet in a cool stream!

People who do watershed restoration work also benefited in Big Creek, as did the local people from whom they buy groceries, hardware and fuel for their crews, pickups and heavy equipment. While it has yet to tally the total costs of restoring Big Creek, the Flathead estimates the road decommissioning contracts alone were worth some \$600,000.

Contractors and the people they depend on also benefited, of course, from the work provided improving drainage and stream crossings on another 89 miles of road in Big Creek, re-vegetating 25 acres of eroding uplands, and carefully placing tree trunks in headwater streams to restore and re-stabilize them. These efforts and investments are what was necessary to repair the excessive damage that logging and road building did to Big Creek.

When Big Creek was first listed as "impaired," the watershed contained 188 miles of logging road compared to its 150 miles of streams. Unfortunately, this situation is not uncommon on the Flathead. Forest-wide, over half of the Flathead's watersheds that contain any roads at all contain more miles of road than streams!

Thank goodness that restoration programs like Amendment 19 simultaneously benefit fish, wildlife and people. And thank goodness Amendment 19 has thus far with-

stood the worst of the threats it has received from the Forest Service and its collaborators that would have us believe watersheds suffer from too many trees instead of too many roads - and that all those roads and more are needed to get those pesky trees out of the watersheds!

True watershed restoration programs will persist only if we listen to the voices of fish and wildlife, protect the integrity of the research that translates those voices into scientific findings, stand up for biologists when their work is being ignored or misrepresented, and challenge their bosses when they attempt to break the law and make fish and wildlife sit in the back of the bus.

That's the lesson learned from the long road that runs through the success of the Big Creek restoration process. We hope you'll continue to support our work as we speak up for fish, wildlife and people.



Montana contractor removing stream-side road fill on the Flathead National Forest. *Paul Harvey Photo*

Your Donations Will Again be Doubled By Cinnabar Foundation!

We've again been issued a \$4,000 Challenge Grant by Cinnabar Foundation, meaning \$4,000 in our members' individual donations will be matched by Cinnabar. So be among the first to donate and see your money doubled!

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

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

Swan View Coalition, Inc.
3165 Foothill Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

Printed on Recycled Paper

Swan View's News

Winter-Spring 2012



Big Creek Watershed Restoration: A Case Study

Grizzly Bears Help Restore Bull Trout Habitat!	page 1
Grizzly Bears Influence Flathead Forest Plan!	page 2
A Bumpy Road on the Way to Big Creek!	page 3
From Paint Emery to Big Creek!	page 4
Big Creek in the Big Picture!	page 5
Big Benefits to Fish, Wildlife and People!	page 6
Your Donations Will Again be Doubled by Cinnabar Foundation!	page 7