

Swan View's News

Winter-Spring 2017



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"Nature and human nature on the same path."

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Technology, Commerce and the Politics of Denial!

It seems technology and denial have crashed at the intersection of our politics. We're not just talking about a tweet-happy president who capitalized on the false notion that a heartless "reality" show portrays the skills necessary to lead a compassionate government of the people.

Once reserved to honor someone risking their life to save another, the phrase "be a hero" is now used to promote the use of small video cameras to record increasingly risky behavior in mountain biking and other sports. The result is a focus on the ego and a devaluation of the sanctity of life within and around us.

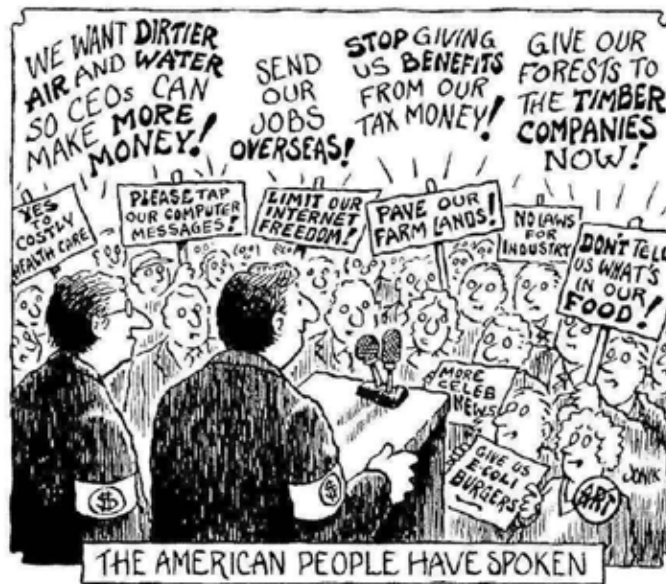
Ditto for the new presidency, Congress and the Montana Legislature. Denial of global warming is rampant and initiatives to gut protections for the health of people and the planet emerge like machine gun fire - as though life is cheap and it's what the public has asked for!

This newsletter will discuss the driving force behind this devolution - irresponsible commerce. It will suggest ways we can recreate our relationship to the earth rather than having it dictated to us by corporations and politicians wanting to privatize and sell us a piece of it.

By better recognizing when someone is trying to sell us a bill of goods, we can make better decisions about our future. Let's not take the bait when someone tells us we are inadequate and need their product to be worthy.

We have a long battle ahead of us. We

need to return to our roots, be mindful in our actions, and remain grounded in the truth that what is good for the earth is best for its people.



Keith

Reports Released on Bike-Bear Death of Brad Treat

Two reports were released in March on the June 29, 2016, death of Brad Treat when he struck a grizzly bear "at high speed" on his mountain bike. Both reports are based on an investigation by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks into the incident on the Flathead National Forest.

An [interagency Board of Review issued a report](#) on March 3. It found Treat was travelling at 20-25 miles/hr around a blind corner in the trail when he hit the bear, hurling him over the handlebars and bear, breaking both wrists and a shoulder blade upon hitting the ground.

According to a biking companion trailing behind, he heard the impact and the bear vocalize as though injured. He then came around the corner to find the bear intent on neutralizing Treat, who died of bites to the head. Neither biker carried bear spray or cell phone and the companion bushwhacked to Highway 2 for help.

The [BOR also issued a separate set of recommendations](#) for safer mountain biking and bike trails in bear habitat. It recommends that bikers be vigilant, slow down, carry bear spray, make noise, not ride alone, never ride at night or at dusk or dawn, don't think "it won't happen to me," and to "remember the bears live there and you are just a visitor."

For land managers, the BOR recommends that "before new trails are opened to mountain biking in bear habitat, particularly grizzly habitat, there should be careful evaluation of the safety and reasonableness of enhancing mountain bike access."

The BOR recommendations build on those issued previously for hiking, finding that "mountain biking is in many ways more likely to result in injury or death from bear attacks," and providing an appendix with seven examples of bike-bear incidents.

[Swan View Coalition issued a report in the matter](#) on March 15. It adopts a format used in snow avalanche safety, wherein incidents of death or injury are reported alongside current advisories. SVC's report goes one step further than the BOR report, recommending a concerted public education program for recreating in wildlife habitat similar to workshops offered for safe travel in avalanche terrain.

These reports, corrective actions and education come none too soon as the [Flathead National Forest foolishly proposes to adopt user-created, high-speed bike trails in areas near where Treat, a FNF law enforcement officer, died](#). FWP has

advised the Flathead to not create banked corners like the one pictured above and proposed for adoption. The BOR report finds that Treat died while riding user-maintained trails that he helped keep clear for biking and jogging, accessing them from nearby private land.

User created mountain bike trails have been built unlawfully in the Flathead area on state, federal and private forests. Local mountain bike clubs then advocate that the agencies and landowners formally adopt those illegal trails in spite of serious injuries sustained by bikers and ignorance of trail safety guidelines.



Flathead National Forest photo

Be a Hero: Ignore the Hype Be Mindful of Your Surroundings

Native cultures revere their elders because, among other things, they've lived a long time - indicating they pay attention to their surroundings, learn from them and survive them. Not so much with cultures hell-bent on valuing technology above life.

Just because you own a cell phone and a car does not mean you should text message while driving. Just because you own a drone doesn't mean you should fly it near an airport. Just because you own a GoPro camera does not mean you should risk your life for a few seconds of video making you look like a "hero" outdoors.

Indeed, [researchers are finding](#) that GoPro and other action cameras are upping the ante as users compete to outdo one another in what are otherwise personal endeavors. Conversely, some people are discouraged from endeavors they once loved because their videos of themselves simply don't measure up to the adrenaline-laced videos found in abundance online.

Perhaps it is time to again practice recreation as the re-creation of our connection to the earth rather than a competition against it. Perhaps it is time to help one another regain an intimate knowledge of our outdoor surroundings rather than push each other to instead speed past them. Perhaps it is time to look at our attachments to technology and the degree to which we allow gadgets to control our lives and boost our egos.

If we leave it up to advertising, we'll remain in a downward spiral of needing more stuff and more adrenaline to make us "happy." Most commercials, after all, are based in making us feel inadequate so we'll buy the next car, bike or gadget that will help us keep up with the Joneses.

So consumers move from one fad to the next, wanting to fly their drones in National Parks and wanting to ride their mountain bikes in Wilderness areas. They find themselves enemies of new wilderness proposals because they

can't detach their egos from their gadgets nor see the value in taking a break from their technology.

There is nothing heroic about riding your bike so fast you collide with [wildlife](#), [joggers](#), [horseback riders](#), or [hikers](#). Nor about building unauthorized trails that kill

or maim, be they for bikes, ATVs or snowmobiles - as has indeed happened in numerous instances in the Flathead area.

Let's reserve the term "heroic" for an act of risking one's own life in an attempt to save another's. It is high time we quit using "hero" to describe someone taking unnecessary risks in a selfish outdoor pursuit, putting others' lives at risk attempting to rescue them or retrieve their body.

We all make mistakes. We can minimize their magnitude by resisting the hype, avoiding unnecessary risks and being more mindful of our surroundings.



Jerry Sprunger cartoon

Irresponsible Commerce and a Better Path Forward!

When commerce views nature as little more than natural resources to be extracted for private gain, the stage is set for disaster. When big corporations hide or lie about the effects of fossil fuel consumption on global warming, it is clear that profits are regarded as having higher value than human life and the life of the planet.

Extractive industries are not solely to blame however, for reducing nature to tons of coal, barrels of oil, tons of precious metals, or board feet of lumber. Most of the economic systems around the world are built on the premise that more and bigger is better, which essentially pays lip service to the notion of environmental sustainability.

As tourism and recreation become a bigger piece of the economic pie worldwide, they too often get boiled down to commodity measures of hotel-stays, airline tickets and recreation visitor days. And the pursuit of "more is better" often leads to overcrowding that kills the goose that laid the golden egg.

There is hope on the horizon, however, as both government and business take a more holistic look at nature and the human landscape. New forest planning regulations, for example, require the Forest Service to assess "ecosystem services" that support life-ecological functions such as carbon storage, nutrient cycling, water and air purification, and maintenance of wildlife habitat.

The challenge for businesses is to align their mission and advertising to the conser-

vation of these ecosystem services. Mindful advertising can help educate the public about how to make their recreational pursuits more compatible with the conservation of wildlife, for example, rather than encouraging the careless pursuit of cheap thrills. We can't simply move urban pursuits into America's backcountry and expect all to turn out well.

Businesses can also be a strong voice for conserving public lands. Patagonia, an outdoor clothing business, is leading a campaign to protect the National Monument status President Obama bestowed upon Bears Ears in Utah, which is under attack by Utah politicians and Congress. [Patagonia and others are in the process](#) of removing their huge outdoor retailers trade show from Utah, sending the message that local governments need to be environmentally friendly rather than hostile to get their business.

It is a delicate task to balance business and advocacy with environmental and social responsibility. Simply encouraging people to get outdoors does not automatically create more advocates

for conservation, especially if those people are primarily pursuing the cheap thrills too often promoted in advertising.

Swan View hosts every-Saturday outings into the Swan Range, not to increase recreation visitor days but to help instill mindful habits among the willing. In daily life and business, we could use less hype, more attention to the big picture, and calm attention to our surroundings (see page 3).



Public-Private Partnerships: Back-Door Privatization of Public Lands

The government doesn't have to outright sell or give lands to private corporations to essentially privatize the management of those lands. Through local collaborations and public-private partnerships - both nice-sounding terms - public land management is being largely handed over to small groups of favored private interests.

In our [Winter 2015 newsletter](#), we reported on how the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) is being used as a booster club for Forest Service logging. In our [Summer-Fall 2015 newsletter](#), we detailed how federal CFLRP funds were being paid to private collaborators that are asking Congress to deal the rest of the public out of the game.

The Forest Service works to maximize its budget by trying to produce more logging, more trails and more roads. Congress, under past administrations and increasingly with Trump, then under-funds the bloated budget. This shortfall the agency tries to make up through public-private partnerships to accomplish logging, as well as road and trail building and maintenance.

The result is a cozy relationship with local sawmills calling too many shots in timber sale planning and local mountain bikers offering to maintain unlawfully built trails. We've seen the latter in the case of

the Flathead NF [failing to rein in unauthorized trail building on Crane Mountain](#) - and later proposing to instead designate a portion of the area a public-private "focused recreation area" for biking!

[More recently, the Flathead has proposed](#) to adopt unauthorized high-speed mountain bike trails by accepting a local mountain bike club's offer to maintain them. This, even though the trails were illegally built and violate interagency recommendations for safety in bear habitat (see page 2).



Photo by Flickr user "Kim," Flickr Creative Commons
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/kimrose/>

On a larger scale, U.S. Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) [has proposed legislation](#) implementing, in large part, the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project on the Lolo National Forest. Conservation collaborators gave up significant roadless lands firstly to snowmobilers and then more to mountain bikers, as concessions for promised Wilderness elsewhere.

Tester's bill mandates a 10-year schedule of "restoration" projects including logging and allows private groups to build motorized and mountain bike trails in sensitive wildlife habitats. [In the words of Pyramid Mountain Lumber](#): "We got logs on trucks. Our conservation partners got very little out of this . . . but they supported it wholeheartedly." The public lands pie is being carved up by local collaborators before the Lolo even gathers public comments for revision of its [National Forest Plan](#)!

Progress on the Flathead National Forest!

The Flathead recently announced release of its revised Forest Plan will be later than expected. Initially scheduled for April, the final EIS and revised Plan are now scheduled for June, 2017. While we don't yet know what the final Plan will look like, we do know [the vast majority of the 33,000 comments the Flathead says it received](#) on its draft EIS and Plan favored recommending all roadless lands for wilderness designation and the continuation of Forest Plan Amendment 19's road decommissioning program.

Citizens and groups that feel the Plan is inadequate will then have 60 days to file formal objections with an Associate Deputy Chief of the Forest Service in Washington, D.C. The final EIS for grizzly bear amendments to the four other Forest Plans in the NCDE is being run on the same time line.

Meanwhile, we've been making progress reining in the Flathead's habit of ignoring old logging roads as they degrade fish and wildlife habitat. After we filed a notice of intent to file a lawsuit, the Flathead agreed to remove the remaining culverts from the "long abandoned" Raghorn Road in the Coal Creek bull trout watershed (see our [Holidays 2016 newsletter](#)).

Raghorn, however, is only one of some 63 miles of old "impassable" logging roads the Flathead is now saying it will inspect

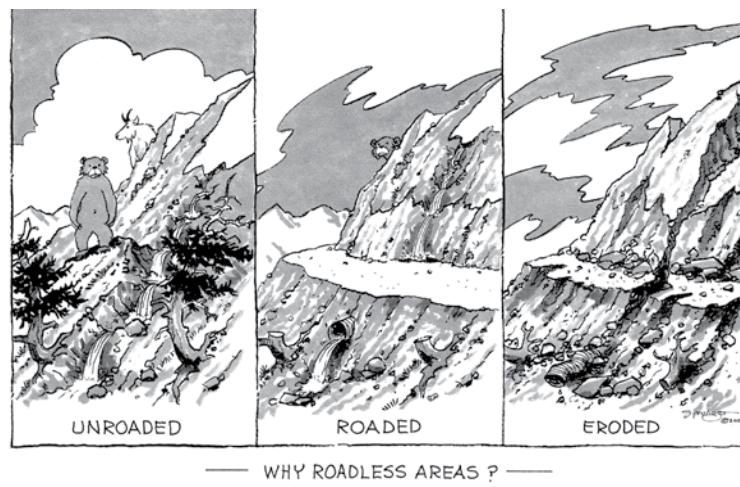
this summer to see if any stream-aligned culverts remain to inevitably wash out. We're making these bits of progress by working with Friends of the Wild Swan and WildEarth Guardians to apply our expertise and pressure - and by challenging the Flathead's recalcitrance both Forest-wide and on individual projects.

The Flathead, however, is trying to get Fish and Wildlife Service to withdraw its requirements for annual culvert inspections

on closed roads in bull trout habitat. The Flathead wants to instead monitor one-sixth of those roads every six years - as though that will prevent the clogging and washout of culverts and make its road management affordable!

The Forest Service admits it can't afford to maintain all of its logging roads and issued directives to arrive at a "minimum road system" that is ecologically and fiscally sustainable. Forests like the Flathead, however, simply refuse to reduce its road system to what it can afford.

In the case of the Flathead's bull trout watersheds, it appears it needs to remove about five-sixths of its roads so it can indeed inspect and clean the culverts each year! We'll be busy working to get this situation rectified and to get better road management and decommissioning standards into the revised Forest Plan!



Elmer Sprunger showing the too-common evolution of a road.

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We rely in large part on member donations to fund our work protecting habitat for fish, wildlife and people. **You can help us broaden our membership by giving Gift Memberships at \$25 each**, either on-line or using the form below! **It's easy to join with and help others support our work:**

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 found there (or at right)!



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THANK YOU for joining others in supporting our work through donations!



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 \$500 to help secure grizzly, lynx and wolverine habitat for future generations.

Here's \$_____ to help save the world, one mountain range and one river at a time!

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").

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