Swan View's News

Winter-Spring 2014

Swan View Coalition
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"Nature and human nature on the same path."

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Happy Anniversary:
Endangered Species Act, Wilderness Act, Swan View Coalition!

The Endangered Species Act turned 40 last December. This year, the Wilderness Act turns 50 and Swan View Coalition turns 30! We hope you'll join us September 20th as we and others celebrate the Wilderness Act's 50th birthday and our 30th at the Flathead County Fairgrounds (see page 6)!

While there's lots to celebrate this year, times are very sobering as well. In 1973, it was a Republican President Nixon who signed the Endangered Species Act and, in 1964 the Wilderness Act went to President Johnson's desk having received only one dissenting vote in the House of Representatives. A far cry from today's divided Congress!

Griz emerging from den. MDFWP Photo

But there is plenty that can be done to conserve quiet habitats for fish, wildlife and people. It starts, as in the 1960's, with people standing up for their principles and not letting the government con them into abandoning those principles through phony "collaborative" processes designed to help the government divide, conquer and simply have its own way (see page 2). To this end, we have worked with Friends of the Wild Swan and others to craft a Citizen reVision of the Flathead Forest Plan and are still signing people up as supporters of the reVision. It's time we all work together to protect the entire Flathead (see pages 3-5).

We've had some success getting snowmobiles away from grizzly bear dens and getting Backpacker Magazine to mention the need for Wilderness protection while promoting use of Swan Crest trails. But it takes constant vigilance to see that snowmobiles aren't simply sent elsewhere to harass other wildlife and to see that advocacy for non-mechanized recreation also includes adequate protections for fish and wildlife (see pages 3-6, the central theme of this newsletter).

The bears are out of their winter dens and we thank you all for meeting the Cinnabar Challenge and our end-of-year fundraising needs in 2013!

Happy Summer and Happy Trails,

Keith

Flathead Forest Plan Collaboration: Circular, Incestuous or Just Rotten to the Core?

The Forest Service cannot ask for a group's advice without firstly insuring the group represents a broad and fair public spectrum and publishes meeting minutes, per the Federal Advisory Committee Act. So the FS instead hires a contractor to ask for the group opinion, bypassing the FACA!

Flathead National Forest chose the federal Udall Foundation's Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution to design a collaborative process for its Forest Plan revision. Udall in turn contracted Meridian Institute in 2013, after presenting Meridian an award for facilitating the writing of the new Forest Planning Rule that urges the use of collaboration.

Meridian's initial $30,500 contract required it to interview folks in the Flathead, as Udall had done. Both concluded many of those folks "expressed skepticism about the notion of a single forest-wide multi-stakeholder collaborative group," in part because "there is considerable collaboration fatigue already" from other collaborative efforts.

Nonetheless, Meridian's contract was expanded by an additional $254,000 to conduct the process while also changing the contract to say Meridian would "determine areas of common ground," not the collaborative group - which undermines the entire premise of group collaboration!

Udall Foundation had been audited the year prior by the Department of Interior's Inspector General and its corrective actions were being audited by the General Accounting Office at the time the Meridian contract was awarded (see pull quote at center). Nonetheless, Udall chose to issue Meridian a contract it admitted was flawed and that diverted "from new protocol," rather than write a new contract "for which Meridian may not be eligible"!

The result is a contract awarded to a company whose lead facilitator refused to lower her $307/hour rate, instead reducing the number of hours devoted to the process. Meridian announced it "was selected as a third-party neutral through . . .Udall . . . to assist with . . . documentation of" the collaborative.

"[The Udall] Foundation had not appropriately assessed the effectiveness of its internal controls for at least 6 fiscal years . . . was missing key internal controls over its . . . contracting practices . . . had conflict-of-interest issues . . . was not in compliance with the [Federal Acquisition Regulation] when awarding [non-competitive] contracts [and] inappropriately modified some contracts to add additional funding, [to] extend the period of performance beyond the original dates, or a combination of these." (GAO Report 14-95)

Meridian has refused, however, to better document the meetings from which it is extracting "emerging themes." The American taxpayer is left with a Udall favorite "neutral" poised to pull a rabbit out of a hat with no substantial records to support its conclusions, at a price of $285,000!

We've notified Forest Supervisor Weber we will be attending fewer meetings and putting what we have to say in writing so it can't be omitted or misconstrued by Meridian. You can find our letter to Weber, which attaches a number of Udall/Meridian/FNF emails, the contract, and FACA guidance, on our Reports and Documents page at:

http://www.swanview.org

Join Our Citizen reVision of the Flathead Forest Plan!

We've sent a proposal to the Flathead National Forest that would create a Forest Plan favoring the conservation of fish, wildlife, wild lands, and quiet recreation over the excessive logging and mechanized recreation that have put many species on the path to extinction. Our Citizen reVision of the Flathead Forest Plan would promote human health and address climate change by leaving more carbon-storing trees in the forest and by cutting back on the miles of roads and motorized vehicles wasting fossil fuels.

We wrote the Citizen reVision with Friends of the Wild Swan and released it in late March. It already has the support of some 100 citizens, groups and businesses! And we welcome more!

Old-growth cedar. *Keith Hammer photo*

The Citizen reVision is based in scientific research that gives voice to the needs of fish and wildlife. Each section summarizes the needs of those species, provides our recommendations on how the Forest Plan can meet those needs, and then lists the research on which we base them - while also pointing to our more comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of the research.

The 60-page Citizen reVision includes maps showing where we recommend that mechanized uses of the Forest be disallowed and where we recommend old roads be decommissioned to restore wildlife habitat security and connectivity - two major objectives of our Wildland Recovery Areas. The Citizen reVision also recommends that all public roadless lands be designated Wilderness as benchmark protection of quiet habitats for fish, wildlife and people.

The Citizen reVision also provides a pair of maps illustrating how grizzly bear security core is restored and reconnected by the reVision's trimming back on motorized uses of trails and roads. These maps and text also serve as a bit of a primer to make sometimes complicated research and legal requirements accessible to the layperson.

In addition to the companion Annotated Bibliography, we've also provided on our web site KML map files so you can view our reVision maps at a much larger scale using Google Earth! To view or download the 60-page Citizen reVision, its 2-page summary, or the relevant Google Earth KML files, visit our Reports and Documents page at: http://www.swanview.org

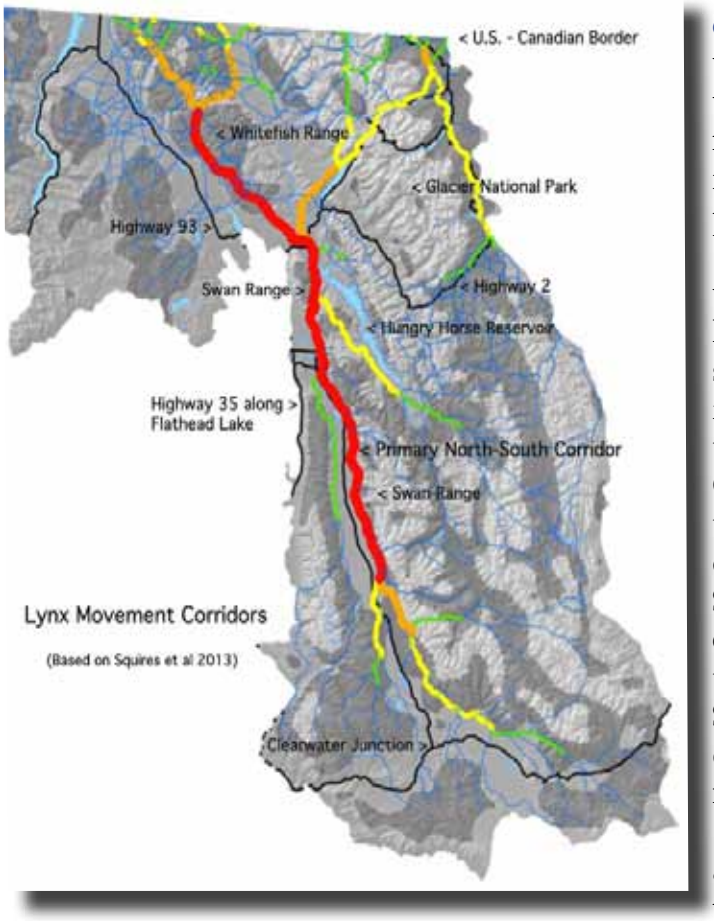
Won't you join with the many other folks supporting our Citizen reVision? Check it out, along with the list of its supporters, at the above link. If you'd like to add your name, your organization and/or your business to the list, simply send an email to keith@swanview.org!

We hope you'll be as excited as we are to finally give voice to fish, wildlife and the quiet, low-carbon-footprint recreation that makes room for all of us to thrive, not just teeter on the brink of extinction!

Time to Pull Together for the Swan Range, not Apart!

The map on the following page shows how the northern Swan Range has been used as a dumping ground for snowmobile use as snowmobiling has been trimmed back elsewhere. This, even though the entire upper elevations contain the persistent spring snow pack absolutely essential to wolverine and grizzly bears with cubs emerging from their winter dens, as well as being habitat deemed "critical" to lynx survival!

In 2002, Montana Wilderness Association settled its snowmobile lawsuit via a settlement agreement with the Flathead National Forest and the Montana Snowmobile Association. This agreement directed the Flathead to amend its Forest Plan to essentially shift significant snowmobile use from the Whitefish Range to the Swan Range and elsewhere.

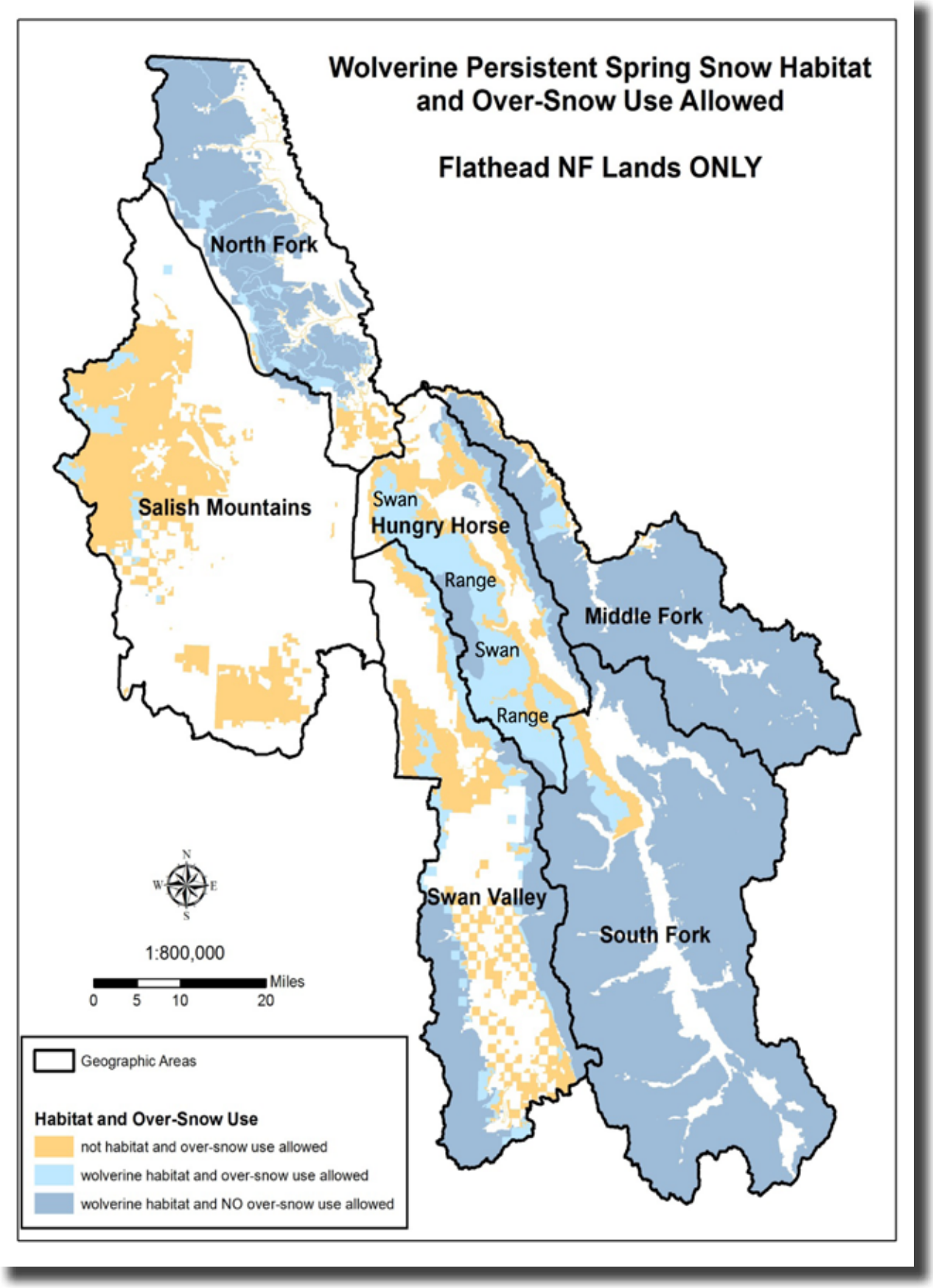


The Forest Service promptly reneged on the agreement by taking the unprecedented step of also allowing areas along the Swan Crest and Continental Divide to remain open to snowmobiles for up to two months after bears emerge from their dens - until as late as the end of May! MSA was still not satisfied, appealed Amendment 24 and withdrew in writing from the Settlement Agreement, leaving MWA on its own.

Snowmobiles have gotten more powerful while lynx and wolverine become more threatened. It's time for MWA to begin advocating for Wilderness designation of the entire Swan Crest, not just Jewel Basin and Bunker Creek areas - and we've invited them to join in our Citizen reVision of the Flathead Forest Plan, which would do so. Fish, wildlife and quiet non-mechanized recreation are depending on us!

And we invite the Whitefish Range Partnership to advocate for Wilderness for the entire Swan Crest as well. As this graphic based on research by Squires and others shows, both the Whitefish and Swan Ranges are critical to lynx movement!

Snowmobiles and the big pickups and trailers needed to haul them are trashing our future by unnecessarily spewing carbon in the name of "recreation" - while ironically melting the very snow pack they depend on by contributing disproportionately to global warming! Snowmobiles should be banned from public lands to protect public health the same way smoking tobacco has been banned from public buildings. (See related article on page 6 also).



To view this FNF map in color, visit http://www.swanview.org/newsletters/Winter-Spring_2014e.pdf

Snowmobiles Plague Grizzly Den Areas!

MDFWP Photo

Mike Madel, a Fish, Wildlife and Parks bear management biologist, has reported snowmobiles near a known grizzly bear den site in the Badger Two-Medicine to the Forest Service the past two springs. This year he got the issue placed on the agenda of an April 23 Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee meeting, so we brought a copy of the Flathead Forest Plan's snowmobile restrictions along to the meeting.

Madel presented the photo above, along with a few others showing snowmobiles near the den site, noting they were entering illegally into the Lewis and Clark National Forest via Flathead National Forest's Skyland area, where snowmobiling is allowed until May 15 - a couple months after grizzly den emergence, when females with cubs are likely still lingering near their dens.

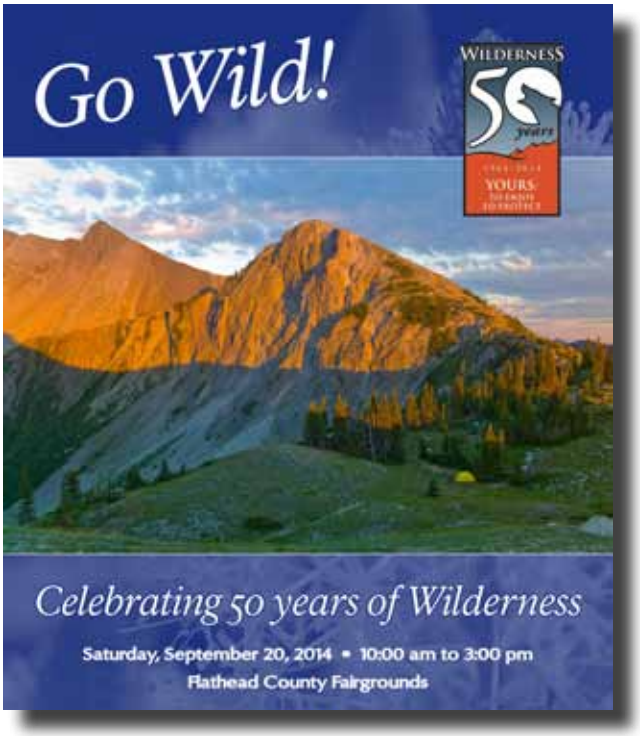
FWP biologist Rick Mace presented the photo shown on the cover of this newsletter, of a sow grizzly exiting her den in the Skyland area, and we made the case that Amendment 24 requires the area be closed when dens and snowmobiles are found in the same area.

The Flathead closed the Skyland area a week later but simply told snowmobilers to go to the Lost Johnny area in the Swan Range, where it is allowed until end of May though grizzlies den there too! We liken this to telling a child molester found in a playground to simply move on down the street to the next playground - and we are urging that the revised Forest Plan allow no snowmobiling after March 15!

Help Us Celebrate! September 20

We hope you'll join us September 20th at the Flathead County Fairgrounds to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act! Stewart Brandborg, who worked at The Wilderness Society alongside Howard Zahniser to secure passage of the Act, has agreed to be the keynote speaker!

We'll have a booth there and may do a bit of celebrating our 30th anniversary as well! The event is being cosponsored by Swan View Coalition, a number of other conservation and news organizations, Glacier National Park, and the Flathead National Forest.



Your Financial Support is Key to Our Work!

We rely in large part on member donations to fund our work protecting habitat for fish, wildlife and people. Thanks to your support, we met our budget last year and accomplished a lot. 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!

Network for Good handles your transaction securely for us and informs us immediately via email of your donation by credit card. You can also choose to give monthly, quarterly or yearly there to make it easier or more affordable (or change your mind anytime)! If you have other info you want to get to us, such as Gift Membership info, simply email it to keith@swanview.org or mail them to the address in #1, above.

We'll continue to carry the extra burden of Flathead Forest Plan revision over the next several years, so your support is extra critical to insure we can continue to monitor all projects on the Flathead, as well as work for a better over-arching Forest Plan!

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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.
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[ ] 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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