

# Sierra Club Sees Opportunity In Forest Plan Revisions

— by Claudia Narcisco

In the Fall 2015 Montana Sierran, we reported on the importance of national forest management plans. Across the region, several Forest Plan Revisions (FPRs) are now in progress, including: the Flathead, Helena-Lewis & Clark, and Custer-Gallatin national forests in Montana, and the Nez Perce-Clearwater in Idaho.

Initially overwhelmed about how to cover this huge area and important work, we now see opportunity in viewing these not as separate plans, but connected landscapes. The 2012 Planning Rule guides Forest planning, with requirements for ecological sustainability including connectivity for wide-roaming species, within the context of climate change and the broader landscape. We plan to approach FPRs through the lens of connecting the Northern Continental Divide and Greater Yellowstone ecosystems. Each of the forests is critical to connectivity for grizzly bear recovery and other wide-roaming species.

Sierra Club has a longstanding commitment to working on FPRs in the Northern Rockies. In November 2014 we commented on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Proposed Action. In May 2015, we commented on the Proposed Action – Flathead National Forest Revised Forest Plan and Grizzly Bear Management Amendments. But much work remains; we plan to comment on the Flathead Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Plan, scheduled for release in April 2016. The Nez Perce-Clearwater has not yet announced a date.

The Sierra Club has participated for several years in the Gallatin Community Collaborative, which is seeking common ground among multiple constituencies on the fate of the Hyalite-Porcupine-Buffalo Horn (HPBH) Wilderness Study Area (WSA). The Custer-Gallatin initiated its forest plan revision in January with the assessment phase. Through forest planning it will decide whether to recommend the HPBH WSA and adjacent roadless lands for Wilderness and other permanent protections. The Sierra Club will engage in planning for the entire forest that spans from Bozeman to South Dakota.

The Helena-Lewis and Clark (HLC) initiated its FPR in May 2014 and plans to release its "proposed action" for public comment this fall. It recently released an Identification and Inventory of Areas that may be Suitable for Inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, on which the Sierra Club commented in regard to wildland and wildlife protection. The HLC is unique in that it includes Wilderness and forests along the Rocky Mountains as well as 'Island' units with distinct ecosystems to the east. The HLC has a history of mining with many abandoned mines and some superfund sites. We look to our members who live near these areas to let us know of special places for recreation, recovery, and wildland and wildlife values.

"Many hands make for lighter work". Montana Chapter volunteers and Sierra Club's Our Wild America representatives will continue to be involved in all of these forest planning efforts. But this work is not possible without you, our members. Please contact us with your interest and willingness to help with FPRs: Claudia Narcisco at cdnarcisco@gmail. com to help with the Flathead or Nez Perce-Clearwater; Bonnie Rice at bonnie.rice@sierraclub.org for Helena-Lewis and Clark, and Kiersten Iwai at kiersten.iwai@sierraclub.org for Custer-Gallatin.

# It's a Bird! It's a Plane!... It's a Scenic Tour **Overflight!**

by Claudia Narcisco & Mary Teresa McClelland

Scenic helicopter air tours over our national parks are disruptive to Park visitors and wildlife alike. Glacier National Park is a poster child for this problem. The Montana Chapter is working with Friends of a Quiet Glacier, a coalition to reclaim the quiet of the Park. The coalition includes the National Park Conservation Association, Sierra Club, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Wilderness Watch, and the Swan View Coalition, among others.

The issue surrounding scenic tour overflights has a long and complicated history. Both Senator Baucus and Representative Pat Williams introduced legislation to resolve the issue more than two decades ago, but these failed. Glacier National Park (GNP) was identified as a priority during the Congressional Hearings in 1987. The problem was acknowledged in GNP's 1999 General Management Plan, which required it to request that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) prohibit all commercial scenic air tours. Both the 1999 Plan and a 2000 law required GNP to develop a scenic Air Tour Management Plan.

These steps have not yet been taken and the situation continues to deteriorate. GNP still does not have an Air Tour Management Plan, even as the number of flights has increased many times over. Instead of phasing out scenic overflights, noise pollution has increased – negatively impacting Park visitors, the natural qualities of the Park, and wildlife.

Inaction is no longer an option. In honor of its centennial, the National Park Service has issued a 'call to action', and Friends of a Quiet Glacier are answering. We met with GNP Deputy Superintendent Eric Smith and Planner Mary Riddle, to discuss our concerns. They assured us of GNP's commitment to request that FAA eliminate all scenic tour overflights over the Park. They were optimistic that the timing is right and that FAA is now more receptive to recognizing and resolving the issue. We left hopeful that



Photo by Mark Huftstetler, pitamakan.com

we could work together to reclaim the quiet and provide visitors to the Park's backcountry the opportunity to experience peacefulness and solitude, without disruption of scenic helicopter air tours. The Coalition's goal is to celebrate this year's NPS Centennial with a promise of natural quiet and soundscape, and a definitive ban.

For more information or to help with this issue, please contact Mary Teresa McClelland at: marytreemcclelland@gmail.com.

#### **Newsletter Information**

The Montana Sierran is published twice a year by the Montana Chapter of the Sierra Club, a division of the National Sierra Club.

We welcome member contributions to the newsletter. Please send relevant articles and photos to tabrock123@gmail.com or Montana Chapter-Sierra Club, P.O. Box 7201, Missoula, MT. 59807

For more information about Montana Chapter activities and meetings, contact Jonathan Matthews at 406-447-4351 or visit montana.sierraclub.org



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the plates generate for the Montana Chapter will be used to safeguard the lands and wildlife we all love.



## **ENERGY**

# Otter Creek COAL Abandoned

- by Jonathan Matthews

Because it would be a disaster for Montana and for the health of our planet, the Montana Chapter of the Sierra Club has been working for years to prevent Arch Coal's planned Otter Creek coal mine and the Tongue River Railroad. It is with relief and joy that we celebrate the early-March announcement that Arch Coal is ending its efforts to develop what would have been the largest new coal mine in the

country. This follows similarly good news this past November, when the Tongue River Railroad Company asked the U.S. Surface Transportation Board to put its permitting request on hold. No massive new coal mine, no new railroad to ship the coal to Asia: the best possible outcome from our years of hard work!

The proposed Otter Creek mine site is a beautiful alluvial valley with a rich diversity of wildlife. It is the home to generations of

ranching families and even more generations of Northern Cheyenne. This land would have been torn open in a huge strip mine that would have extracted more than a billion tons of coal, which would have pumped more than 2.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide into an atmosphere that is already overburdened with the most heat-trapping CO2 in millions of years. How marvelous to learn that this won't happen!

Thanks to our efforts and those of other environmentally aware groups and individuals, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality refused to bow to Arch Coal's efforts to weaken water quality standards. The company was required to submit an adequate Environmental Impact Statement, which it didn't produce. Due to the increasing realization that our escalating climate crisis demands a switch from dirty fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy sources, coal companies are suffering financially, with Arch Coal declaring bankruptcy this past January. The fossil fuel industry is politically powerful, but informed and active people who are determined to work for positive change are even stronger. This good news will encourage our continuing efforts for the common good.

# Sierra Club Files Suit To Stop Additional **Powder River** Basin Mining

by Jonathan Matthews

Even though Arch Coal recently abandoned its plans to strip mine Otter Creek for coal, as the market for coal plummets, the Bureau of Land Management has recently released Resource Management Plans (RMPs) that call for keeping open more than 10 million acres of federal land for oil and gas drilling and coal mining in the nearby Powder River Basin. The RMPs make possible 11 billion tons of new coal mining and 18,000 new oil and gas wells. In response to this, the Sierra Club and other conservation groups have jointly filed suit, on the grounds that the RMPs violate the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to seriously examine the effects of the policy on the land, water, and air, and neglecting to consider effects on climate change.

# Badger Two Medicine Gas Leases Withdrawn!

by Jonathan Matthews

On March 17, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell announced that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has withdrawn all oil and gas leases from the Badger-Two Medicine area of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. The BLM ruled that the leases had been improperly issued during the administration of Ronald Reagan, in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historical Preservation Act. This is great news for the wildlife of this area, the Blackfeet Tribe, and all who enjoy and love wild lands.

## Wolves Under Pressure by Claudia Narcisco & Teresa Brock

For the Rocky Mountain Gray Wolf, 2011 was an eventful year. The minimum number of wolves in Montana peaked at 653 wolves, and protections under the Endangered Species Act were removed. Delisting came with U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) five-year oversight to ensure Montana

maintained a meager 150 wolves and 15 breeding pairs. That fiveyear oversight period is ending. But pressure to suppress the wolf population continues.

WILDLIFE

According to Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Montana Gray Wolf 2015 Annual Report, the minimum count of wolves fell to 536 with 32 breeding pairs. During the 2015 hunting and trapping season (September 15, 2015 to March 15, 2016), 210 wolves were killed (~137

by hunting and 73 by trapping) – compared with 206 in 2014. In addition, 39 wolves were 'lethally removed' in calendar year 2015 (35 by Wildlife Services, 4 under defense of property), 12 killed by landowner under SB 200, and 20 known deaths from other causes. This is down from 2014 when 57 wolves were lethally removed, with 37 known deaths from other causes, including 6 under SB 200 and 10 illegal killings.

Relief may be on the way. The Center for Biological Diversity, Western Watersheds Project, Friends of the Clearwater, Cascadia Wildlands and WildWest Institute filed notice of intent to sue FWS based on changes in state law and management that threaten gray wolf recovery in the Northern Rockies. As reported in Wildlife News, "Aerial gunning of wolves in remote areas, hiring professionals to kill wolves in federally designated wilderness, and leg-

islation in Idaho requiring use of significant amounts of state funding to kill wolves", prompted the action. The intent to sue follows a January 2015 petition for FWS to continue oversight of gray wolves for another five years.

Ballot initiative I-177 would also provide relief. I-177 would ban most trapping on public lands. Twenty-six thousand verified signatures are needed by the end of June in order to qualify for the 2016 ballot. To support or help collect signatures, contact: montanatrapfree@gmail.com or www. montanatrapfree.org.

The Speak for Wolves Rally is now in its third year. The Chapter plans to support this great opportunity to learn from wolf biologists and organizers from around the country. The Rally will be held July 15-17, 2016 at the Union Pacific Dining Hall in West Yellowstone.





Outings are free and open to the public. Each outing will have an educational feature about the wilderness or wildlife that you are visiting. Liability release signatures are required. Please sign up in advance through the contact person on the outing you are interested in. Most trips are limited in size from 10-12 participants. No pets are allowed. Bring your own food, water, and raingear. The outing leaders will email you more information after you have signed up.

#### May 22, Sunday, Hanging Valley Day Hike near Helena

The Hanging Valley hike has a huge pay-off midway, as we will peak out from the side of a massive limestone cliff, hundreds of feet in the air (don't worry, there is a railing). This wonder is caused by the Montana Overthrust Belt, in which sedimentary rocks buckled upward as the North American and Pacific crust plates collided 70 million years ago. The hike is moderately strenuous, with some steady, long climbs and some switchbacks. It is 12 miles of total walking, with no water along the way, so bring your own, and bring clothing appropriate for the potentially variable weather.

Contact Jonathan Matthews jmatthews@carroll.edu

June 11, Cold Lakes Hike north of Seeley Lake This easy hike in the Mission Mountains Wilderness Area is a 4 miles round trip with around a 1000 ft elevation gain. Learn about the impact of campers and fisherman on this well traveled area. Grandparents and grandchildren can manage it.

Contact Janet Fiero janetfiero77@gmail.com

## June 18, Saturday, West Pine Creek in Gallatin Mountains

This moderately difficult hike travels through spectacular wildflower filled mixed conifer and sagebrush/ grassland habitat for approximately 2.5 miles before entering an area burned in the 2001 Fridley Fire. Here we will take a break to enjoy the view of the surrounding area, including the Absaroka/Beartooth Wilderness Area across the Paradise Valley. Learn about the natural history of the Gallatin Mountains, fire ecology, and efforts to protect the Gallatin Mountains and the largest roadless area in the GYE without Wilderness Designation. Approximately 5 miles round trip.

Contact: Jeff Copeland jouzelcopeland@gmail.com

June 25, Saturday, Cinnamon Mountain Day Hike The destination for this hike is the old Forest Service fire lookout tower atop Cinnamon Mountain, high in the Madison Range south of Big Sky. This lightly used trail is one of the finest in the area, climbing through wildflower-filled meadows and prime grizzly habitat to a 9245' peak with exceptional views of the southern Gallatin and Madison ranges, as well as the Taylor-Hilgard area. The hike follows a well-engineered trail but should be considered moderately strenuous, with about 2,600' of elevation gain in an 8.5-mile round trip. Learn about the fire ecology of the area, as well as the conflict between wilderness values and the Gallatin Canyon's rapid recreational development.

Contact Mark Hufstetler pitamakan@mac.com

#### July 9, Grizzly Bear Tracking

This citizens' science effort is in partnership with Wild Things Unlimited, a local organization that has been studying grizzly bear presence and movements in the Gallatin Range. We need groups of 2-4 people who are willing to join us for a day-long training session on how to find, collect, and preserve grizzly

bear hair samples, and to commit to making at least two more outings in the Gallatin Range this summer.

Contact: Kiersten Iwai kiersten.iwai@sierraclub.org

July 20, Wednesday Learn to Survive in the Outdoors Class, Missoula: This class will cover the basics of survival, including the three priorities--shelter/warmth, water, and signaling--and putting together a survival kit. This class is something that everyone who utilizes the backcountry should attend. Missoula Public Library from 6-8 PM. The class may be taken alone or may be combined with the two-day outing.

Contact Mike Jarnevic jarnevic@earthlink.net

#### July 23-24, Saturday to Sunday

Learn to Survive in the Outdoors Outing, Missoula: Learn important Outdoors survival skills on this outing. This is a follow-up to the Learn to Survive class. We will hike into Welcome Creek Wilderness, set-up standard backpacking equipment, and then demonstrate survival techniques to include field-expedient first aid. Participants will be given the opportunity to sleep in an expedient shelter, construct a fire, and learn other techniques of survival. The outing may be taken alone or may be combined with the class on July 22.

Contact Mike Jarnevic jarnevic@earthlink.net

July 23, Saturday, Nasukoin Mountain Day Hike Nasukoin Mountain is the highest point in the Whitefish Range, and the route to it is among the most scenic in the area, with good wildlife habitat, a variety of landscapes, and considerable hiking above treeline. (The trail also summits Lake Mountain along the way, making this a two-for-one day for peakbaggers!) There will be great views of the Whitefish Range and western Glacier Park, and an optional side trip to Link Lake on the return. This is a strenuous on-trail hike, with about 3,500 feet of elevation gain in a 10-mile roundtrip, though options for a shorter day may be arranged. Learn about the varying land uses of the Whitefish Range,

and the planning processes that will guide the area's future.

Contact Mark Hufstetler pitamakan@mac.com

August 17, Light-weight Backpacking Class This workshop will introduce participants to the ultralite camping equipment and fastpacking techniques. The course and the overnight hike (below) up Sheep Mountain will be led by Michael Jarnevic, recently retired from US Army Special Forces. He is also a back country medic, survival instructor, and experienced guide. Missoula Public Library from 6-8 PM.

Contact Mike Jarnevic jarnevic@earthlink.net.

August 20-21, Light-weight Back Packing to Sheep Mountain Watch the nearly full moon rise and illuminate the trail and summit of Sheep Mountain. We'll camp overnight at the top with time to relax, eat, and explore. This hike

is approximately 12 miles roundtrip with a moderately strenuous elevation gain of 2000 feet. The area has wonderful views of the Missoula Valley to the south and the Rattlesnake NRA and Wilderness to the north. This will be the field portion of the Light-weight Backpacking workshop that demonstrated ultralight camping equipment and techniques. Limited to 8 people.

Contact Mike Jarnevic jarnevic@earthlink.net

September 10, Diablo Mountain Lookout Day Hike Diablo
Mountain Lookout is a 10 mile out
and back trail located near Elk City,
Idaho and is rated as moderate.
We travel through Horse Heaven
Meadows in the Selway-Bitterroot
Wilderness on the Clearwater National Forest. Elevation gain 1700'.
We will learn about history of fire suppression.

Contact Lori Rustvold lorie.rustvold@gmail.com

September 23-25, Friday-Sunday Little Rock Creek, **Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Backpack** Explore a beautiful and rugged part of the 1.6 million acre Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness (SBW). The SBW was established in 1964 with the passage of the Wilderness Act. Little Rock Creek is a tributary of Rock Creek and empties into Como Lake's southern shore. Participants will learn how to identify common conifer species and wildflowers. This 3-day backpack features awesome views of the Como Peaks, Lonesome Bachelor and El Capitan (2nd highest peak in the Bitterroots) from 3 high remote lakes in the headwaters of Little Rock Creek. Anticipate a fair amount of off-trail hiking. Moderately strenuous 15+ mile trip.

Contact Bob Clark bobclark1111@gmail.com

To receive updates on more outings, join Montana Sierra Club Outings on Meetup or go to montana.sierraclub.org.

# A Great Missouri River Float: September 2013

By Bob Hopkins -

I was nervous about spending five days on the Missouri River with 15 experienced water rats. Still, I was looking forward to the journey and hoping the scenery would make it worthwhile. The plan was to put in at Judith Landing and to extract ourselves at the James Kipp Recreation Area just past the Fred Robinson Bridge. The scenery was spectacular and I learned that bighorn sheep really can scamper across the face of a cliff (well, it looked like a cliff to me) and that after a cold rain it does help to huddle up with your fellow drowned rats. Seven of us stood together during and after a late afternoon downpour and it didn't take long for our body heat to help us stop shivering.

There were a number of moments that stand out in my mind. The first was sighting a bald eagle perched above the river on a cliff as we floated by him (or her). We saw a total of eleven bald eagles during the float. The second was watching the face of a fellow paddler as she gazed at the sunset our last night out. This lady is an artist so she must have been looking with her artist's eyes at the sun setting behind some isolated clouds.

The combination of clouds, sky, cliffs, and setting sun created a wide variety of colors ranging from subtle shades of red, to purple, to orange, and to pink. Her expression was rapt as she watched the colorful display in the twilight sky. The third was sitting around the campfire passing an odd shaped stone around our circle. The River Otter's Daughter had dubbed it the "omphalos" or the "Navel of the World" and explained to us all that the stone had great power. Whatever power the stone had, the shape compelled you to gently massage it and there was much laughter and joking about it as it was passed from hand to hand around the campfire. It was a delightful trip with many good memories.

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# In MEMORIAM

#### Ann Maechtlen 1960-2016

On Saturday, Jan. 23, 2016, Ann Maechtlen died in her beloved home immersed in the loving care of her family, friends and cats. Ann was an adventurer, healer and environmental advocate, who made friends wherever she traveled. Ann's philosophy was "think about what kind of future you want and get busy creating it." She was an avid supporter of the Sierra Club and we miss her.

### **Bob Hopkins** 1949-2016

Bob Hopkins, 67, of Missoula, passed away peacefully Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2016, with family at his side. He attended Western Washington State College, and joined the Air Force in 1973, and over the next 20 years was stationed around the world, earning the rank of master sergeant before retiring in 1993.

Bob moved to Missoula in 2011, becoming active in numerous local organizations as a passionate advocate for wild places and his Montana community. He was an Executive Committee Member of the Montana Chapter of the Sierra Club and led many hikes for us. These years were his happiest; he was well-loved and respected for his level of commitment to his volunteer work. His sense of humor, thoughtfulness and cheerful demeanor earned him many friends of all ages.



Bob enjoys dinner after a day canoeing down the Missouri River. The red duct tape on his shoes is an example of his quiet way in promoting good cheer to all around him.

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