

Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup Newsletter

Spring Newsletter

April 2010

PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE AND STEWARDSHIP OF LOCAL WILDLIFE AND HABITATS WITHIN THE COMMUNITIES AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE NINEMILE, HUSON, AND ALBERTON REGION.

Edited by Kylie Paul

Photo by Krist Hager

NWW UPDATES

We have a website! Please check it out at www.ninemilewildlife.org. It highlights various projects we're working on, connects you with the Bear Alert program, and sends you to great resources. If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments about the website, please go to the "Contact Us" button and send us a message!

We've made some changes to the newsletter! You may have noticed some changes to our newsletter, including the addition of a whole new page. We are excited to use some of our funding from the Cake Auction, memberships, and grants we have received to enhance this outreach tool.

We have new fantastic board members that add great energy and expertise to our organization! Genevieve Fix (Sixmile landowner) is our events planner. Chelsea Pennick McIver (Sixmile landowner) assists with fundraising. Cindy Gilbert (Ninemile landowner) works on member outreach.

We also have further dedication from continuing board members. Pat Sweeney now serves as our Director. Rebecca Shoemaker continues to work on finances. Surry Latham remains our administrative coordinator, and Kylie Paul continues working on the newsletters and outreach. We have split many of the other important tasks amongst ourselves to continue our efforts on wildlife connectivity issues.

NWW relies on other great volunteers. We greatly appreciate the continued support from several volunteers. Rickie Van Berkum has effectively led the annual lecture series for several years. Krist Hager has offered his design help to work on the newsletter. Numerous folks are part of the Bear Alert program (and hopefully more will join!), with Pat Sweeney, Rickie Van Berkum, and Melissa Reynolds-Hogland as block leaders. Dale Chik continues to act as highway cleanup coordinator. While we receive essential energy and assistance from these great volunteers, we always need more help planning activities and brainstorming and working on projects!

This year's board is revising our mission statement and goals to better explain the work we seek to do. The revised mission statement of the organization is: to promote knowledge and stewardship of local wildlife and habitats within the communities and public lands of the Ninemile, Huson, and Alberton region. We are in the midst of finalizing our vision and goals.

The 2009 Cake Auction was a blast once again. Thank you so much to all who volunteered their baked cakes, attended, and purchased cakes! The money raised helps us continue and enhance our projects that promote knowledge and stewardship of local wildlife and habitats!

Additional events will be coming up over the summer and early fall. Please check out our website www.ninemilewildlife.org or join our email list (email us at ninemilewildlife.com) to hear about these new events!



Photo by Pat Sweeney

NINEMILE WILDLIFE UPDATES

*Fawns, calves, cubs, pups, and kits will soon be here! Drive slower and keep an eye out for them along the roadways.

*Bears are out and about! One black bear learned last year that the dumpsters in lower Sixmile and homes nearby are a great source of food, and it is back for more this year. It is important for neighbors to secure all attractants so the bear is not drawn nearer to homes—bird feeders, salt blocks, pet food bins, and trash cans should all be removed and secured within your closed garage. A bear-resistant structure around the dumpsters would also prevent the problem with this and future bears. To get updates about bear activities around your home, check out www.ninemilewildlife.org/bear_aware.html. To rent or buy a bear-resistant trash or feed container, contact us.

*Livestock carcasses also attract wildlife to residential areas and lead to conflicts. Removing them from the area reduces the risk of attracting animals such as bears, wolves, coyotes, and lions from approaching your property. Jamie Jonkel with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks will pick up and dispose of livestock carcasses or will let you know how to do so without charge. Please contact him if you need assistance at JJonkel@mt.gov, 406-542-5508 or 406-544-1447(cell).

Tree swallow



Photo by Ronni Flannery



Photo by Krist Hager

BEAR SPRAY: GIVE IT A TRY!

While seatbelts save more than 15,000 lives annually, another 42,000 people die in vehicle accidents every year. Does this mean you shouldn't wear a seatbelt? Of course not. Similarly, bear spray is an important way to reduce your chances of injury while out in the woods. Why not include it as an option? The active ingredient in bear spray is an extremely strong irritant that turns the tables on an aggressive bear. Of course bear spray isn't 100% effective, but nothing is, not even a gun. In fact, bullets can escalate the severity of a bear encounter, while bear spray defuses most situations without an attack.

Researchers reviewed bear-human encounters in Alaska from 1985 to 2006 and found that bear spray effectively stopped bears' undesirable behavior without human injury



90% of the time for both black bears and grizzly bears (Smith et al. 2008, "Efficacy of Bear Deterrent Spray in Alaska." *Journal of Wildlife Management*, Volume 72, Issue 3, pp 640-645). In contrast, data from US Fish and Wildlife Service law enforcement agents showed that people defending themselves against grizzly bears with firearms experienced injuries about 50% of the time.

Bear spray, like a gun, is not a substitute for common sense and proper stewardship when in bear country. When spending time in the woods, whether it's your backyard or a wilderness trail, take measures to avoid encountering bears and lions. Make noise, hike with someone else, and be aware of your surroundings. For hunters, making noise isn't an option when stalking game. Detecting signs of a bear, avoiding interaction, and understanding bear behavior, like bluff charges, are therefore

the best ways of escaping injury. Yet, some encounters are unavoidable. In these cases, use your best judgment and consider this: bear spray is usually more effective at deterring an attack, it is easier to hit your target than with a gun since it sprays and spreads wide, and it works instantly.

Please include bear spray as a "tool in your toolbox" to resolve encounters or conflicts with wildlife. But remember: you have to carry it in an easily accessible location and know how to use it. Did you know that you should always aim bear spray slightly below your target? Be aware of wind direction, hold the nozzle for 6 seconds, and avoid spraying yourself. Spray a test spray in a large open area outside to see what your bear spray can do. It's pretty cool to see. For more information about bear spray and how to use it, you can visit this website: www.centerforwildlifeinformation.org/BeBearAware/BearSpray/bearspray.html.

And PLEASE take advantage of our Reduced Cost Bear Spray Program. We believe both humans and bears are better off with more people in the woods carrying bear spray, so we are providing residents of our area with effective bear spray for only \$20 a canister. Retail cost runs from \$30-40, so this is quite the deal! For more information, visit our website at www.ninemilewildlife.org, email us at ninemilewildlife@gmail.com, or call Will Hamilton at 626-0679.



Photo by Sarron Sweeney

Pat Sweeney refining his bear spray technique

By Rebecca Shoemaker, NWW Financial Coordinator

NINEMILE WOLF REPORT

By Liz Bradley, Wolf Management Specialist, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

In early 2010, there were 10 wolves in the Ninemile wolf pack: three adults and seven pups from the previous year's litter. In March, wolves from this pack were confirmed to have killed one calf and injured another calf in the upper Ninemile. In response, two wolves were removed shortly thereafter. No further problems have been reported. April is denning season and Montana Fish Wildlife Parks will be monitoring the pack to determine if and where they den. There is currently one radio-collared gray adult male in the Ninemile pack. Public reports are extremely useful to help track the wolf population. Report any sightings at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf>.



Coyote - close cousin and competitor of the wolf



CAUGHT IN THE ACT! NWW WILDLIFE CAMERA PROJECT

The results are in and the numbers crunched. The NWW had 7 remote-sensing cameras set up in the Ninemile area from spring through winter in 2009 to learn more about animals in the region. No attractants were used to draw animals to the cameras



but they were set up in areas we expected animals to pass. Three of the cameras were in the upper Ninemile Valley and four were within the I-90 and Clark Fork River corridors, placed on enthusiastic residents' or public land. The cameras

were functional for 1,405 camera days and captured 1,938 images of various wildlife species. Some of the images were of the same individual animals but they were not counted if they were caught in sequential pictures and appeared to be the same animal.

So, what did we see? Not a surprise, white-tailed deer led the list with 1,688 individuals noted. The next most numerous animal was coyote with 56 images. We also had photos of 44 elk, 1 moose, 33 red foxes, 17 black bears, 5 mountain lions, 2 wolves, 2 skunks, a raccoon, and 92 other wildlife species, which was a mix of birds, mostly turkeys. The surprise animal of the year was a badger near Cayuse Hill. Also worth noting was that two moose were not caught on camera. Tracks showed that one walked just to the side of the camera and another walked in front of a camera with dead batteries.



Certainly there were other misses as well.

All our images are still photos but there were some action scenes worth noting. There were several images of a doe nursing its fawn. A night scene showed the bright eyes of a coyote in the camera flash as he chased a fleeing deer waving its tail in alarm. A sequence of images told the story of a buck going to bed, only to get up two hours later to go into battle with an opponent buck, before one of them conceded.



What did we learn? One, we have a rich and varied wildlife presence in the Ninemile Valley (I think we all knew that...). Two, camera placement is very important and adjustments were made at several sites to try to get more or better quality images. Three, seasonal use varies quite a bit with a lot less activity in the winter. Four, dead batteries, equipment malfunctions and operator errors are part of the process.

Soon, you can see some of last years' images on our web site at <http://www.ninemilewildlife.org>. If you would like more information, or have any questions on the camera monitoring project you can contact Pat Sweeney at 626-1610.

By Pat Sweeney, NWW Chairman



All uncredited photos on pages 2 & 3 are from the wildlife cameras.

CITIZEN-SCIENCE FUN!

Are you interested in wildlife and the outdoors but don't know how to channel it? There are many options to assist with science around the region and country. Within Montana, you can report wildlife sightings in any part of Montana to a state-wide online data source, the Montana Natural Heritage Tracker (<http://mtnhp.org/tracker/NHTMap.aspx>). This helps biologists better determine current ranges of species and provides other useful information. Note that it requires a relatively fast internet connection, only works on PCs, and only works on Internet Explorer. But there are a variety of data entry tools to help with it! There are other web-based wildlife observation data collection forms at (<http://mtnhp.org/observations.asp>) for Montana. More of a plant person? Head to Project Budburst (www.windows.ucar.edu/citizen_science/budburst/) to document when you first see plants and trees budding, leafing, or flowering, to help scientists understand changing trends in budding times. And as always, contact the NWW with any wildlife sightings you have and/or join the NWW Bear Alert Program to share information with neighbors about bear and lion sightings around our neighborhoods.





Photo by Ronni Flannery

OUR PIECE OF CAKE

When I was a youngster, elders of the family were especially fond of proverbs, those pithy arrangements of common, ordinary words that express some generally accepted truth. “You can’t have your cake and eat it too” is particularly memorable, probably because it was often deservedly directed at me. I could also easily understand it since I loved cookies and cake and often was the one who ate the last cookie in the jar, then complaining because there were none left.

No proverbs of any kind were in my mind as I signed the purchase documents for land on Josephine Creek in 1972, nor were there any when I added perimeter and cross fences, or built equipment sheds or a house or a lane to the house. These changes to the land were all a part of the “living in the forest” experience, which we all enjoyed. After all, I only occupied a little piece of the many square miles of forested land in the Nine Mile Valley. What difference would a few fences and buildings make?

Fortunately, the “improvements” made to the property had little impact on the presence of valley wildlife. Deer, elk, bears, and coyotes all continued to use the land for food, water, shelter and transit. But would this still occur if my children and grandchildren also built houses here, or if our land was sold and subdivided? Suppose this happened to our neighbors’ land also? Would we collectively destroy the very reason most of us moved here? Would we have eaten the cake that we also wanted to have?

Maybe the family fondness for proverbs like “you can’t have your cake---“ suggested that we might be consuming something irreplaceable. Perhaps we shouldn’t eat that last cookie in the jar. Well, we thought about it, decided against further development, looked into obtaining a conservation easement but still took a few years to finalize things.

Why so long? Number 1 reason—it took a lot of planning. Number 2 and more difficult—it required some personal, psychological sorts of changes by everyone involved. Changes like losing a degree of control of decision-making about our own property, like accepting things we couldn’t do because of the easement. We had to give up part of our potential future financial security because profitable subdivision was no longer possible with the easement. Would we need that income after retirement? Would the children unanimously approve? That was important to us. Would the land be useless for them and subsequent generations because of easement limitations?

In the end, the potential negative impacts of a conservation easement were overwhelmingly outweighed by the long-term conservation and environmental values of an easement. Over the last dozen or so years, we have had no regrets. Our appreciation of this decision has grown more positive and is continually reinforced when a herd of elk wander through or a fox pair dens in one of our culverts or we see wolf tracks in the snow. Now, like my parents, aunts and uncles, I like proverbs too—but maybe land is not quite like cake. Perhaps we can enjoy it a lot and still have it if, we just take good care of it as we go. - By Jim Gouaux, NWW member and volunteer

NWW EVENTS

THE NINEMILE WILDLIFE WORKGROUP WILL BE HOSTING THE 3RD AND 4TH OF ITS FREE-ADMISSION LECTURES.

April 22—7-830pm— at the Alberton Community Center—Laurie Yung, “Weeds, Wildlife, and Ninemilers.” Laurie Yung is a Research Assistant Professor at the University of Montana and the Director of its Wilderness Institute. Her teaching and research focuses on the social and political aspects of conservation, with an emphasis on rural communities in the Northern Rockies. More specifically, she is interested in knowing how private landowners cooperate across property boundaries on conservation issues such as weeds and wildlife, especially in the context of changing landownership; how volunteer monitoring and citizen science programs change community involvement in public land management; and how local community views and interests are integrated into protected area planning and management.

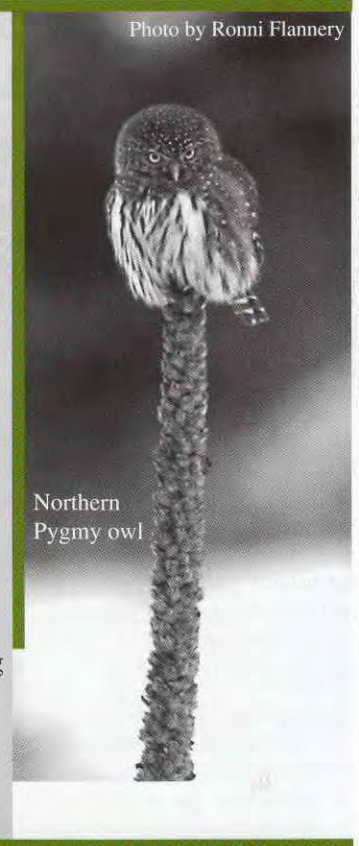
May 20—7-830pm — at the Alberton Community Center—Julie Chapmann, wildlife artist, “From the Field to the Gallery: How a Wildlife Painting is Made.”

Photo by Krist Hager

Join nationally-recognized, award-winning animal artist Julie T. Chapman - who lives here in our own Ninemile Valley - as she discusses the journey involved in creating her artwork, from fieldwork to inspiration to finished piece. Julie’s artwork has been juried and invited into many national and international exhibitions. Paintings and drawings of hers can be found in a number of museum and public collections, and her work is represented in galleries throughout the West. She has been drawing since she was old enough to hold a pencil, and is enthralled with her animal subjects.

June 26 Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup. Want to meet some Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup members while getting some fresh air and a little exercise? If so, bring your gloves and meet at Dale and Kandy Chik’s home on June 26. They live along the river at 29221 Old US Highway 10 W. Be there at 9 AM and you can help out by picking up some roadside litter while walking near the Clark Fork River. A BBQ at the Chik’s house will be provided afterwards!

Photo by Ronni Flannery



Northern Pygmy owl

Horses and Mules at the Ranger Station



Photos by Krist Hager

MEET CHAD W. BENSON: New District Ranger in the Ninemile Ranger District of the Lolo National Forest.

We asked Chad a few questions about himself so we can all get to know him a bit better.



Why do you enjoy working for the Forest Service? I was raised in a Forest Service family which gave me a deep appreciation for our National Forests that I ultimately want to pass on to my children and grandchildren. Being a steward for the National Forests and keeping it healthy for many generations to come is what I embrace about my position the most.

What do you like best about the Ninemile? The Ninemile is very rich in history, culture and wildlife. It's this diversity that makes it a great place to work and live. Every day is different. It is these unique and daily challenges that keep it interesting.

What efforts will you be working on into the future? Ecosystems, wildlife and watersheds will continue to function and go about their business whether we as humans are here or not. Unfortunately, more times than not, it's our actions that disrupt this functionality. My ultimate goal for the Ninemile Ranger District would be to help foster a sense of pride and respect for our back yard around the Ninemile Ranger District. If people think about how their actions will affect the future sustainability of their national forests, then they might think twice about how they treat it. I realize everybody wants to do what they please on national forest, but if we all have that attitude (considering where populations are trending), our national forests will not sustain. Ultimately it takes a community, working together, to change an attitude of what's acceptable on "their" national forests and what's not.

Is there any way people can get involved in helping out Ninemile natural resources? Yes! Get out there. Be a guardian. Don't drive by the same litter day after day. Hold kids, neighbors, visitors and ourselves accountable for their actions on the forest. Help spread the word that abusing our resources isn't acceptable. Monitor activity around your area. Inform the forest service or county law enforcement of suspicious activity. Maybe through these actions we can change an attitude.

Thanks Chad!

TROUT UNLIMITED AND USFS MINE RECLAMATION WORK UP THE NINEMILE



St. Louis Creek - Joe Waillit mine



Trout Unlimited is working on two major mine reclamation projects with the US Forest Service in the Ninemile Valley this summer. The first project is on Mattie V Creek, a tributary to Ninemile Creek. The lower reaches of Mattie V Creek have been heavily altered by past mining activities, with placer tailing piles up to 40 feet high dominating the landscape. These impacts have blocked any functional connection with Ninemile Creek. Restoration of this connection will begin in July or August of 2010.

If you have any questions about these projects or are interested in volunteering this summer to participate in fisheries monitoring, macroinvertebrate collection, or revegetation efforts, please contact Rob Roberts at 406-543-1192 or rroberts@tu.org.

The second project is on St Louis Creek. St. Louis Creek was part of the larger Ninemile mining district and was periodically mined between 1874 and the 1970s for copper, gold and silver. The impacts of mining at the Joe Waillit site cover an area roughly 15-20 acres and include 68,000 cubic yards of waste rock. Significant environmental effects exist at the site, including a large open, eroding cut in the hillside and a settling pond with standing water. Furthermore, the middle portions of the waste rock dumps are being actively eroded by the East Fork of St. Louis Creek, and the lower edges of the waste rock dumps are being eroded. Waste rock will be removed and backfilled to reestablish a natural contour and the stream channel will be reconstructed. Work will begin in July of 2010.