

Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup Newsletter

Fall Newsletter

September 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

Board Elections - WE NEED YOU!

Our annual board election is coming up November **2nd** at 7pm at the Ninemile Ranger Station. If you are interested in volunteering with NWW in a more formalized fashion by joining the board, please contact Rebecca Shoemaker at rebecca.shoemaker@cfc.umt.edu. We welcome anyone to throw your hat in for election! Working on the board provides the rewarding opportunity to work on great issues with great folks. It takes a minimum of a 2-hour meeting once a month and participating in your role as much as you are able! So please either add your name to the ballot or come to the meeting on **Nov 2nd** to vote—please note you must be present to vote.

Membership News

We appreciate all of you who have joined or renewed your membership with the NWW this year. We value your interest and participation! Dues are used to cover expenses for events, such as the upcoming cake auction, and our wildlife movement research. See the back of this newsletter to view the membership/renewal form. If you are interested in participating in any events, joining the board, or helping with any of our many projects, please let us know at ninemilewildlife@gmail.com.



Photo by Pat Sweeney

YOUR INPUT is NEEDED for a Wildlife Survey!

NWW has developed a questionnaire that puts to use your knowledge of wildlife, roadkill, and wildlife management. We aim to use this information to help guide management in the region. Additionally, we hope to gain insight into your perspectives on wildlife and natural resources to help us become a more effective organization. **Please** head to our website at <http://ninemilewildlife.org/projects/projects.html> to download a survey. This can either be emailed or mailed back to us. If you'd prefer a paper copy sent to you, please email ninemilewildlife@gmail.com. We would love to have your completed survey as soon as possible!

We Have Revised Our Mission, Vision, and Goals!

We strive for connected landscapes and connected communities. NWW's mission 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 a community-based group that works with citizens, agencies, and organizations to:

- Promote healthy wildlife populations by working to decrease human-wildlife conflicts in our neighborhoods and roadkill on our roads.
- Maintain and enhance the ability of wildlife to move freely and securely through the mixture of public lands, private lands and transportation routes.
- Nurture interest in wildlife and provide information about wildlife through meetings, lectures, workshops, newsletters, and a website.
- Maintain the quality of life, rural character, healthy habitats and recreational opportunities.

POSSIBLE CONSERVATION EASEMENT

Ninemile landowners Keith and Linda Ward, owners of Checkpoint Ranch, have stepped up and offered to complete a conservation easement with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. This 1,100-acre property is valuable elk and wildlife habitat, open space, and an important component to keeping the Ninemile Wildlife Corridor intact. The Elk Foundation will be applying for Missoula County Open Space Bond funding to complete this project. If you would like to support this project send a letter of support to Missoula County Rural Initiatives, Attn: County Commissioner, 200 W. Broadway, Missoula MT 59802. Or if you have questions or would like more information, contact Mike Mueller, RMEF Lands Program Manager, at 493-6650 or mmueller@rmef.org.



Photo by Kylie Paul

Bald eagle. Photo by Krist Hager



WHAT CAN WE DO TO IMPROVE WILDLIFE CONNECTIVITY?

Biologists and residents alike know that the Ninemile, Sixmile, Petty Creek, and Fish Creek valleys are important movement areas for multiple species of wildlife for survival and dispersal. Wildlife movement within our Valleys may be compromised by the fast rate of residential development occurring in these areas.

Along with increased numbers of people comes more traffic that is potentially fatal to wildlife and people. There is an even greater risk on paved roads where reaction time is reduced as a result of higher speeds. Although there are no immediate plans to move forward, the Ninemile road is on a list of possible roads to be developed into a paved Forest Highway road, which could increase traffic and residential development in the Upper Ninemile. The Petty Creek road is also slated to be paved through the Forest Highways Program. Increasing traffic volumes on Interstate 90



American Robin. Photo by Kylie Paul

constrain wildlife movement between the large blocks of high-quality wildlife habitat in the Ninemile Valley and Petty and Fish Creek drainages to the south. The Cayuse Hill area has one of the highest roadkill rates on the interstate between Missoula and Lookout Pass. Although the threats to connectivity are high due to the presence of a growing human population, there are several opportunities to restore and protect current movement opportunities for wildlife through our area. These include being involved in National Forest Land Management Plans, transportation planning, county policies, voluntary conservation easements, and learning how to safely coexist with wildlife.

There are opportunities for highway wildlife mitigation on Interstate 90 near Sixmile Creek if private lands on both sides of the highway are committed to maintaining this movement area for wildlife.



Mountain cottontail. Photo by Pat Sweeney

Conservation easements provide an additional tool for landowners wanting to direct the future development of their lands to be compatible with both wildlife and human health concerns such as water and air quality. Many Plum Creek lands in the Ninemile and Petty Creek area have been purchased by the Montana Legacy Project partners and then dispersed to the state or Forest Service for management. This allows for public use of these lands while reducing costs to the counties such as snow plowing, road maintenance, police, fire, and school bus services, and possibly sewage infrastructure when septic systems become too high-density to maintain water quality for residents.

One of the greatest opportunities to maintain wildlife connectivity is change your household habits so that we you can help prevent conflicts and coexist with wildlife. The NWW provides many resources to achieve this goal including reduced cost bear spray, electric fencing guides, wildlife-friendly fencing guides, wildlife-resistant garbage bins, and a Bear Aware and Neighborhood Network alert system for different areas within the Upper and Lower Ninemile and Sixmile Valleys. Check out our website to get more information about these community resources available to you: <http://ninemilewildlife.org/resources/resources.html>.

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE, & PARKS

This encouraging and supportive note was sent to us all in the region by Jamie Jonkel, MT Fish, Wildlife, and Park Bear Manager/Wildlife Management Specialist.



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Hello Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup:
Just wanted to say thanks again for all the good work up in Ninemile and Sixmile Areas. The Ninemile Country is a smooth running machine. The communication that is going on between neighbors is outstanding and that goes a long way. Conflicts with bears have been constant—but more and more folks seem to be tuning in to the overall efforts of the NWW's Bear Aware Program. The bears are looking, seeking—and showing us where the problems are—that is, uncontained garbage and bird feeders. Good job!!! Just so you know—a few of the more food-conditioned bears may elevate their attempts in order to access garbage—that is, breaking and entering—and these are the bears we are targeting for management.
Take care, JJJ.



Black bear - our frequent neighbor. Photo by Genevieve Fix



2ND ANNUAL COMMUNITY APPRECIATION PARTY

It was beautiful summer Sunday in the Ninemile Valley made even better by the coming together of neighbors to share a meal, make some new friends, and to learn a bit about weeds and mountain lions. The murmur of conversation steadily increased in volume as the Ninemile Community Center filled with close to sixty people of all ages and from all corners of our community.

Bob Wiesner, a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks mountain lion expert, captivated us with a primer about lion biology and behavior while passing around skulls, skins, and track castings. He shared stories about his experiences managing mountain lions over his long career and described how to act if you find yourself face to face with a mountain lion—maintain eye contact, stand tall, talk in a calm voice, and look as though you're ready to fight. Have bear spray ready, and never, ever run away.



Photo by Pat Sweeney

We then had an animated discussion about weeds presented by Steffany Rogge-Kindseth and Lindsey Bona from the Missoula County Weed District. They stopped along the way to the Community Center gathering samples of some of the weeds we have in the valley. They tested and enhanced our knowledge and offered special assistance to any community that organizes a weed committee.

We held our door prize raffle and 50-50 drawings. The most treasured prizes were stuffed teddy bears won by two cute little girls who held tightly onto their new toys for the duration of the party.

We ended the evening with a demonstration of Coonhounds trained as lion dogs presented by Bob and his houndsman assistant, Orwan Smith. Earlier in the evening Bob and Orwan trailed an old lion skin with fresh scent across the back of the property and hung it high in a tree. Once the dogs were freed, they enthusiastically and accurately coursed after the "mountain lion" baying the whole time. It was an amazing spectacle to see the hounds nearly climbing the large ponderosa pine to get at the "treed lion." Thanks to everyone who came out to share in our celebration and special thanks to the presenters for educating us in an entertaining fashion. We hope to see you at next year's celebration!



Photo by Pat Sweeney

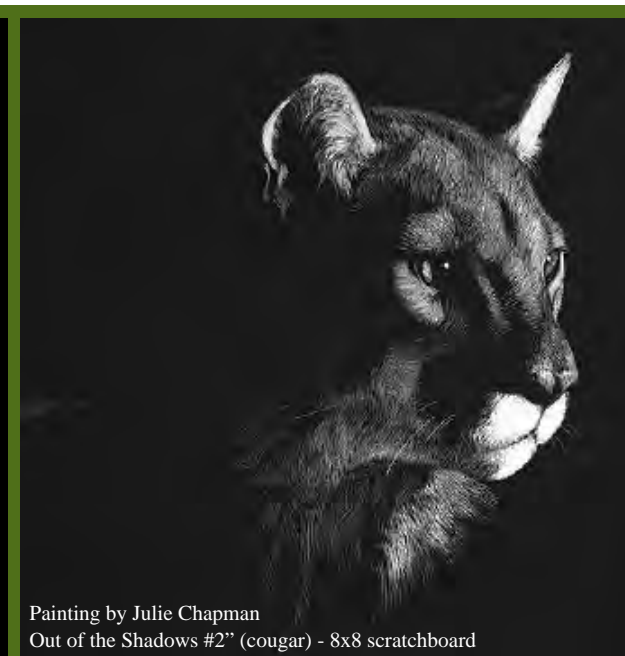
ANNUAL LECTURE SERIES

The 2010 NWW Lecture Series

brought experts on a wide range of wildlife-related topics to Ninemile residents. This year we learned about wildlife and road crossings, wolf monitoring, weed control, and wildlife art.

Dr. Marcel Huijser spoke on his research making roads safer for wildlife and for humans driving on the roads. His involvement with the recent upgrade on Route 93 north of the Wye was particularly relevant to the Ninemile area. *Dr. Mike Mitchell* spoke on the challenges of monitoring wolf population levels with limited funds. He spoke on methods he developed and tested using hunters' reports of wolf sightings, which gave quite accurate population estimates. *Dr. Laurie Yung* has worked on invasive weed issues in the Ninemile area and discussed a range of weed control strategies for rural communities. *Julie Chapman* spoke on how she develops and creates dramatic wildlife art. Her hands-on demonstrations of art techniques made for a lively and fascinating presentation. (Her painting shown to the right will be included in the National Museum of Wildlife Art Western Visions sketch show in September; please contact the museum to bid on it. You can see more of her work at www.JulieTChapman.com).

We hope to see you all at the lecture series next year!



Painting by Julie Chapman
Out of the Shadows #2" (cougar) - 8x8 scratchboard



Photo by Ronni Flannery

CHICKENS, BEARS, PEOPLE, OH MY!

We live with bears, but can we get along? Generally, yes, but it takes education and a bit of effort on our part. For many of us, seeing a bear or other animal provides a sense of wildness and wonder. Unfortunately, they can also be a source of frustration when bears do what they sometimes do—find food left out by people. This could be garbage, bird feed, pet food, or something that just smells interesting. Once a bear has learned to associate a location or object (such as a garbage can or bird feeder) with a food reward, the bear returns to that location or searches for similar objects to help satisfy their boundless appetite, often causing property damage. To avoid problems, we need to work together so bears don't associate our decks and yards as a source of food.

Most of us keep potential food sources away from bears. Some of us use bear resistant garbage cans purchased from the Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup. These can be especially important if you don't have a secure garage or outbuilding to store bear attractants. Bears may investigate and tip those cans but get no food reward for their effort. Some of us keep our garbage securely stored until the morning of collection. Those of us with small livestock may have to do a bit more to stay secure in bear country.



Bear solution! Photo by Bobbe Almer

One resident of the lower Ninemile Valley who went the extra effort to eliminate a bear problem is Bobbe Almer. Early this spring she was sharing her chickens with some unwelcome bears (see bear problem photo). She had a pretty stout chicken house but not stout enough to keep bears from breaking into it and eating her chickens. So Bobbe first gathered information from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on how to build an effective electric bear fence. Then the work began. Erecting the fence was not an easy step as she and her husband live on rocky ground and had to be creative to get posts to stay up using buckets, rocks, concrete, and existing trees. Then they bought an electric charger strong enough to repel bears.

Now she and her chickens can rest easy as the bears can no longer get into the chicken coop (see bear solution photo). Visit our website www.ninemilewildlife.org to get information about setting up your own electric fence.

Bear problem! Photo by Bobbe Almer's remote camera



NWW EVENTS

THE NINEMILE WILDLIFE WORKGROUP WILL BE HOSTING THE 4TH ANNUAL CAKE AUCTION!

The 4th Annual Cake Auction will occur on Thursday, October 7 at the Ninemile Ranger Station. Doors will open at 6pm, for the tasting of the many delicious treats donated by generous volunteers. The auction will start at 7pm. Last year we had 25 different cakes and pies. This year besides the cakes and pies, we will also be accepting other homemade treats: cookies, breads, jams, jellies, pickles, and anything else you'd like to share!

For those of you who have not yet attended, a volunteer makes two of their selected treat - one for taste-testing by us all (yum!), and one for the auction. The fantastic live auctioneer J.R. Strand then gets us started on the bidding, sometimes leading to some friendly competition. Each year, J.R. has delighted us with cowboy poetry after the auction. We've had great fun these past years and hope you can come join us to help raise funds or just to eat lots of tasty treats!

If you are interested in making a treat, please contact Genevieve or Surry. Deadline for commitment to bake is October 3rd. (Genevieve Fix at 626-4776 or blackedelweiss@dishmail.net, Surry Latham at 626-4304 or surry@montana.com).

Additional events will be coming up, including our annual lecture series with exciting presenters starting in January or February. 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 Krist Hager

Northern pygmy owl



Photo by Ronni Flannery



U.S. HIGHWAY 93 WILDLIFE MITIGATION: POSITIVELY AFFECTING OUR WILDLIFE!

Just to the north and east of the Ninemile region, wildlife highway mitigation has been constructed. It is important to be familiar with these conservation measures.

In the early 1990s, with US Highway 93 accident percentages above national highway levels, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) proposed a 56-mile highway expansion of US93 to a four-lane undivided highway. This area was entirely within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation (FIR), home to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT).

The Tribes objected to the original plan, fearing increased traffic volume, damage to tribal cultural and spiritual sites, and adverse effects on wildlife and wetlands through wildlife mortality and increased fragmentation of the reservation's wildlife habitat. In December 2000, a compromise was reached in the highway reconstruction design and a memorandum of agreement (MOA) was signed between the CSKT, MDT, and Federal Highway Administration (FWA). The MOA enabled the construction of sections of partial two-lane highway and partial four-lane divided highway, and it accounted for wildlife mitigation.

What is mitigation?

Mitigation, in relation to highway reconstruction efforts, describes projects or programs intended to reduce known impacts to wildlife species or their habitat (such as a stream or wetland). The US 93 wildlife mitigation efforts aim to mitigate the impacts on the natural environment including fish, wildlife, and their habitat, specifically to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and provide safe crossing opportunities for wildlife.



Mitigation measures on US 93 include 41 fish and wildlife-crossing structures, including 40 underpasses of various dimensions and types, as well as one overpass. Seventeen miles of 8-foot high wildlife fencing keeps wildlife from entering the highway and directs them towards crossing structures. Dozens of "jump outs" allow wildlife to jump to the other side of the fence safely should they somehow be caught in the fenced road corridor. Wildlife crossing guards modeled after cattle guards or "Texas gates" discourage deer and other hooved mammals from entering the fenced road corridor at access roads.

Why is mitigation important there?

The FIR is home to a rich diversity of wildlife species, including large mammals such as deer, elk, moose, black bears, and grizzly bears, and a range of amphibian, reptile and bird species, many of which have been hit by cars. Between 1998 and summer 2010, four grizzly bears were killed on US 93. Crashes with deer are the most common wildlife-vehicle collision along this stretch of road. Western painted turtles have also suffered

high mortality (300-400 killed annually) with breeding and feeding ponds located on both sides of US 93.

Does the mitigation work?

Between May 2008 and December 2009, 11 underpasses were monitored for wildlife use. These preliminary data show that wildlife use of the structures was substantial with 3,000 deer crossings, 1,500 coyote crossings, 300 bobcat crossings, 200 raccoon crossings, and 200 black bears. Other species that used the crossings include mountain lion, elk, grizzly bear, moose, badger, river otter, muskrat, beaver, skunk, rabbit, and various bird species.



For the wildlife mitigation measures to be considered successful, goals have been set by the CSKT, MDT, and FWA, and more data need to be collected and analyzed before the researchers can conclude whether the mitigation measures have indeed reached those goals.

How were the locations selected?

Crossing structures were placed in areas with a history of wildlife crossings and wildlife mortality, and/or locations where the surrounding landscape and land use was best suited for the structures. Surroundings considered included stream crossings and areas with protected habitat on both sides of the road.

Were they expensive?

Wildlife mitigation measures cost money. However, a goal of the mitigation is to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions; beyond the value of enhanced human safety, collisions can be very expensive. A mitigation measure is an investment that may pay for itself over time in reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions.

Is mitigation used elsewhere in the world?

The most recognizable wildlife crossings in the world are found in Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada, where dozens of wildlife crossings were constructed since the 1980s. Numerous European countries have been using crossing structures to reduce wildlife and roads conflict for several decades, and many other countries around the world have built structures.

In the United States, hundreds of wildlife crossings have been built in the past 30 years in over 13 states. The US 93 mitigations have the most structures in the shortest stretch of highway - making it the most densely mitigated stretch in the US.

For more information on US 93 mitigation, please see www.cskt.org/wlc.htm.

Photos from US 93 motion cameras. Photos courtesy of CSKT, WTI, and MDT.

Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup



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