

Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex

2017 Newsletter

VOLUME 26

Invitation from your lead Ranger

On Saturday March 18, 10 am – 3 pm at the Seeley Lake Community Hall in Seeley Lake, Montana, we are hosting the annual “LAC” or Bob Marshall Complex public meeting. For those not familiar with “LAC” it stand for Limits of Acceptable Change – and this meeting has been occurring for over 30 years! **I'd like to hear from any that have been involved since the inception- there are becoming fewer and fewer and you are very special participants!. That said ALL of you interested in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex are key for us as managers to stay current on the ground concerns, wilderness issues, and just overall input. Your feedback on agenda topics, areas of interest, what is working or what is not is appreciated!** The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex managers (Forest Service representatives from the Lolo, Lewis and Clark, Helena and Flathead National Forests, and Fish Wildlife & Parks representatives from Regions 1, 2 and 4) are planning on being present.

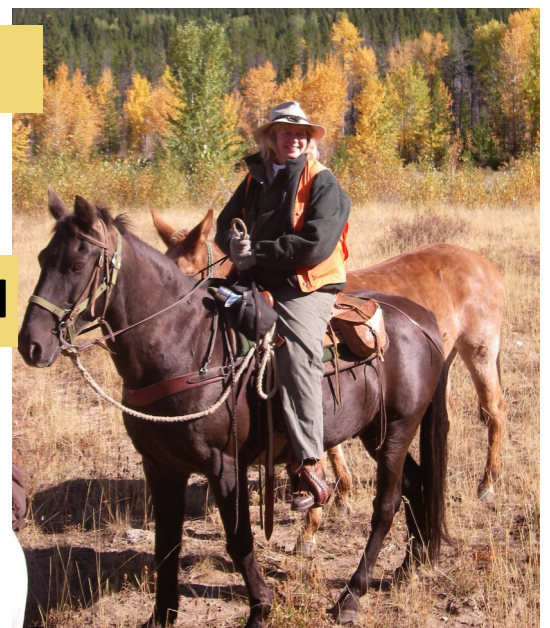
- Deb Mucklow

SATURDAY, March 18th

10:00 a.m. — 3:00

Seeley Lake Community Hall

The Seeley Lake Community Hall is located just north of the town of Seeley Lake on the east side of Hwy 83 near mile marker 15. It is a couple miles south of the ranger station.



Deb Mucklow at Schafer Meadows

Invitation continued...

By Deb Mucklow, Spotted Bear District Ranger



The Bob Marshall Wilderness complex is comprised of the Bob Marshall, Great Bear and Scapegoat designated wildernesses and also has ties with adjacent lands that provide the access and trailheads to the wilderness. We the managers really value the opportunity to meet and talk with wilderness users, supporters and advocates.

2016 – what can I say, on the west side of the divide we experienced more widespread blowdown and difficult trail conditions than most of us have ever encountered and confirmed by long time wilderness visitors. Thanks for the patience as we got routes open and then came back and got more down fall cleared. As I prepare this (Feb 2017) the piles of snow are more at the 1996/1997 levels, lots of ice on the roads and driveways. There is some very high avalanche conditions and not just human caused but susceptible for natural starts. We expect there could be some avalanche debris out there that you may find before any of the Forest Service crews, partners or volunteers. Please share immediately if you were to encounter an area with lots of down fall, debris, or wash outs from high water events. The same goes if you find weeds or something else that you have questions on – the extra eyes and ears are very important.

For those not able to participate in this year's BMWC Public Meeting, we will be posting the agenda and any meeting notes, on the Flat-head Forest WEB page under Special Places following the meeting and will welcome further discussion by anyone interested.

Topics we have lined up at this time include:

- ◇ Kate Kendall presenting the preliminary result from the rub tree DNA project and what does that add in information about the grizzly bears that are utilizing the complex as all or a portion of their home range.
- ◇ Information on Wilderness Stewardship Performance and what is going on this coming season and how it ties to the original LAC monitoring. For those tracking this is year 5 in a 5 year monitoring period – the 6th monitoring period (or more simple) – the managers will then have completed monitoring and having consistency for 30 years to evaluate the trends that are occurring on the landscape.
- ◇ Snow surveys data to date in 2017.
- ◇ Planned projects and priorities for 2017. (Forest Service and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks)
- ◇ Sharing current planning projects that could occur in the future.
- ◇ Many of you have asked about the Trails Stewardship Bill passed in November 2016 – we will have a great discussion to hear your thoughts on if the BMWC should be considered for a priority area. I can hear some of you now, saying what is she rambling about – come to the meeting so we can explain and get your thoughts.
- ◇ Break out time with each ranger and districts staff.

I have the privilege to facilitate this upcoming meeting, present and share info – this is very special to me as having been fortunate to have been active in the complex since 1995. This will be a time to celebrate the accomplishments, and what we hope to accomplish and how this coming season. Following this meeting my role will be changing as occurs with all of us, whether with transfers or retirement. I am planning on being more of a wilderness user and interested public as I retire and have the opportunity to have a different set of adventures. A personal thank you for the engagement – you make more difference in what and why we do things than you might realize.

Thanks in advance for the current interest and participation of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex – there remains a wide range of interests and users. Looking forward to hearing what you have to say! Please contact me at 406-387-3851 or dmucklow@fs.fed.us to share agenda requests. Happy trails and hope to see you soon!

Trail Study Available: Rocky Mountain Ranger District

Credit: Chateau Acantha, reported by Nancy Thornton

After nearly a year of analyses and public involvement, the U.S. Forest Service has released the Final "Non-Motorized Trail Improvement Study" document for the Rocky Mountain Ranger District (RMRD).

This study was directed as part of the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act (RMFHA), which was signed into law under the National Defense Authorization Act of December 2014. The study is not a decision document.

"I appreciate and want to thank everyone who shared their thoughts, suggestions, and comments with us while we walked through this process," Rocky Mountain District Ranger Mike Munoz said. "The public's input has been invaluable in helping us identify some priority recreational improvements that we would make should the funding become available."

Earlier this year the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest conducted a study to improve non-motorized recreation trail opportunities and trailhead facilities on non-designated Wilderness land within the RMRD. In February the district asked members of the public to share their suggestions regarding what could be done to improve non-motorized trail opportunities and trailhead facilities on the district for summer/fall/winter activities. Multiple public meetings were hosted across the district and an innovative web-mapping tool was designed specifically for the four-month comment period.

"Although this is the final version of the study, it is a 'living' document so some priorities may change based on continued public engagement" Munoz said. "We will continue to seek the public's involvement on how we would manage and improve recreational opportunities in this area."

The Non-Motorized Trail Improvement Study, which is posted online at www.fs.usda.gov/helena/ under the "features" section, does not replace travel management decisions that were completed in 2007 and 2009 on the RMRD. The RMFHA designated a Conservation Management Area (CMA) which permits motorized use only on existing routes and areas that were allowed as of the date of the enactment of the Act; implementation of the 2009 Badger-Two Medicine (BTM) Travel Plan has similar requirements, but is not within the CMA.

This study is not a review of the CMA or travel management decision for the BTM. No changes will be made to the current travel management designations. For more information, contact the RMRD at 466-5341.

WILDERNESS STEWARDSEHIP PERFORMANCE UPDATE

By Colter Pence, Hungry Horse Ranger District

For our work to improve our wilderness stewardship performance, last year the BMWG worked to update our Wilderness Education Plans. We use these plans to guide our key wilderness messages and to help us reach key audiences.

This next year, we plan to complete another 5 year cycle of our solitude monitoring program, with additional field work, followed by data analysis

back in the office. We also plan to work on an integrated invasive species management plan to help guide our work as the challenge of managing invasive species becomes more challenging.

If you want to get engaged with our work with Wilderness Stewardship Performance, please contact your local ranger district office.



MEDICINE SPRINGS BRIDGE REPAIR

by Ian Bardwell, Rocky Mountain Ranger District

Repairs were completed on the Medicine Springs Pack Bridge this past field season. The bridge is a full span suspension bridge over the North Fork of the Sun River. It is located near the head of Gibson Reservoir on a trail easement that runs through the K-L Guest Ranch. The Bridge is located outside of the Bob Marshall Wilderness approximately ¼ mile.

In June the replacement timbers and hardware were helicoptered on-site. Once the river receded work began in mid-August. Work included the repair of the concrete pedestals, the replacement of the towers and caps, replacement of the deck and its sub-surface structure, and repair of the railing.

Work was completed by a contract with Medved Global and Great West Engineering. Forest Service Professional Engineer Jacob Noland served as the Contracting Officer Representative.

The repaired bridge looks much the same as the old one, but now has an adjusted life expectancy of another 50-75 years without major repair.



North Fork Blackfoot Trail Bridges Project

by Katie Knotek, Seeley Lake Ranger District

The Lolo National Forest is proposing the **North Fork Blackfoot Trail Bridges Project** located in the Scapegoat Wilderness on the Hobnail Tom Trail #32 on the Seeley Lake Ranger District, Lolo National Forest. The project area is situated within the upper reaches of the North Fork Blackfoot River watershed and is located entirely on National Forest System Lands.



There are many substantial trail bridges in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. The Hobnail Tom Trail crosses the North Fork of the Blackfoot River via a pack bridge at milepost 3.1 (T16N, R11W, Sec. 12), just inside the Scapegoat Wilderness, as well as milepost 6.3 (T17N, R10W, Sec. 29), just before the North Fork Cabin administrative site. Each bridge is a native log stringer bridge supported by native log crib abutments and two intermediate piers filled with rock ballast. The lower bridge is approximately 95 feet in length, and the upper bridge is approximately 89 feet. A complete engineering bridge inspection was performed on each bridge in September 2013. Inspection of each bridge showed the native log crib abutments and piers to be in very poor condition with significant decay, settling, and crushing, indicating the support structures are failing. If these conditions are not addressed, they will cause alignment issues and eventual collapse of the bridge superstructures. Bridge failure or closure would restrict access and disrupt established use patterns along the mainline trail system.

The proposed action is to replace the two existing bridges with a new bridge design that would span the river crossing from abutment to abutment and outside the ordinary high water level (Q2 level). The existing bridges would be deconstructed in the same field season the replacement bridges would be constructed. The replacement bridges would be built in the same location of the current bridges. Bridge work will likely need to occur in two separate field seasons with work beginning as early as summer 2018. Bridge removal and replacement would be accomplished in an estimated 11 weeks per bridge.

Implementation of this project would allow for continued historic, administrative, and recreational use of the area as trail access across the North Fork Blackfoot River would be maintained and Trail #32 would continue to be used as the primary access route into the southern portion of the BMWC.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts about this project. Please send us your comments by March 3, 2017. Please submit written comments to Rachel Feigley, District Ranger, Seeley Lake Ranger District, 3583 MT Hwy 83 North, Seeley Lake, Montana, 59868. The office business hours for those wishing to comment in person or by phone are: 8:00am – 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays (phone 406-677-2233). Comments may be faxed to (406) 677-3902. Electronic comments should be submitted in rtf, MS Word, or Word Perfect format to comments-northern-lolo-seeley-lake@fs.fed.us. Please include the name of the project in the subject line.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered, but will not be eligible for objection per §218.5. For more information, please contact Katie Knotek at the Seeley Lake Ranger Station (406) 677-3924 or visit our website at fs.usda.gov/lolo.

Seeley Lake Ranger District and MCC Wildland Restoration Team

by Geoff Bogie, Seeley Lake Ranger District

During the 2016 field season Seeley Lake Ranger District - working with Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) Missoula Chapter Crew Coordinator Mario Colucci - utilized an MCC Wildland Restoration Team (WRT) for the first time. It was an effort to use a smaller crew to facilitate the completion of the district's five year LAC campsite monitoring and as a wilderness invasive species strike team. By all measures the 2016 MCC WRT team field season was extremely successful, accomplishing 110% of assigned LAC campsite inventories and doing an outstanding job of identifying and mitigating invasive species targets.

The MCC WRT program was founded in 2010 with the cooperation and support of Gil Gale, Bitterroot National program leader for invasive species, botany wildlife and range and was funded through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Act. The team - consisting of an 8 person crew of 2 crew leaders and 6 AmeriCorps members and initially known as an "Invasive Weeds Strike Team" - spent its first season conducting invasive plant surveys in the Sapphire Wilderness Study Area.

The scope of work for the MCC WRT teams expanded in 2011 to include herbicide application with backpacks and early detection rapid response (EDRR) throughout the Bitterroot National Forest and Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area. After the 2011 field season the modern arrangement of a 4 person crew (1 crew leader and 3 AmeriCorps members) was adopted to create more mobile and efficient teams. The MCC WRT program also added the Nez-Perce-Clearwater National Forest and Nez-Perce Tribal Watershed Division as project partners. In 2015 MCC's Greater Yellowstone Region started a WRT program focused on work in Yellowstone NP, Gallatin NF and various National Park sites throughout Eastern MT, WY, ND and SD.



2016 MCC WRT Crew Member Next to Yellow Toadflax Site—Lake Creek near NF Blackfoot TH

The 2016 season saw the expansion of the MCC WRT program 4 crews and the addition of Seeley Lake RD and Helena-Lewis and Clark NF as project partners focusing on work in the Scapegoat Wilderness.

The MCC WRT team is a 4 person crew with broad capabilities that offers the Forest Service Recreation or Wilderness program manager a lot of flexibility in implementation. The WRT teams cost less than a full-size MCC crew and are easier to support in back country and wilderness locations. In addition to normal MCC crew skills, the WRT teams have a greater knowledge of invasive species, operate under a licensed State herbicide applicator and come with their own herbicide equipment. In addition, the Missoula based MCC WRT program was very willing and amenable to adapting the team to our program needs when we requested LAC campsite inventory support.

As the Seeley Lake Wilderness and Invasives program manager, I found the MCC WRT team to be a great fit as a project partner to meet the needs of my program. It's a small, cost efficient, easily supported, adaptable team that conducted LAC and invasive species inventories, herbicide application and site re-revisits to ascertain efficacy. Seeley Lake will be utilizing another MCC WRT team during the 2017 field season and I look forward to working with the WRT teams into the future. I honestly cannot recommend the MCC WRT program enough.

Lincoln Ranger District Update

Forest Moulton, Lincoln Ranger District

The Lincoln Ranger District plans to have a similarly busy wilderness program as we did in 2016. We will hire several trails and wilderness folks, and will also have an active summer working with our partners: the Montana Conservation Corps and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation.

The Forest Service trails program will operate a little less in the wilderness compared to prior years, as we anticipate being able to start implementing front country trail construction and decommissioning authorized by our new non-winter travel plan. However, similar to last year, we should be able to accomplish the initial wilderness trail opening by mid-July. The major wilderness trails project we have on the docket is focused on the Arrastra Creek Trail #482, with some work also done on the Dry Creek Trail #483. A smaller project will focus on the Sheep Creek Trail #438. On the facilities side of things, Webb Lake Cabin is set to receive a new foundation.



Webb Lake Cabin, where Lincoln Ranger District will be replacing the foundation

The wilderness rangers will be heavily focused on invasive weed treatment and continuing the invasive inventory that was started last year. They will also be focused on solitude monitoring by tracking trail encounters, and will make a strong effort to disseminate Leave-No-Trace education through visitor contacts. This is one area that could definitely see improvement as we saw many visitors last year with little backcountry camping experience, particularly during hunting season.

With this wilderness education emphasis, we also plan to start implementing a rehabilitation plan for the Heart Lake area. This is the Lincoln Ranger District's most heavily used area in the Scapegoat Wilderness and has seen much degradation to wilderness character due to overuse and a lack of LNT being practiced at the lake. We hope to start a volunteer working group that can help us rehabilitate the area and educate visitors on how to better protect the lake's wilderness character. We are partnering with the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation to help do some rehab for the next 2 summers, which will include planting trees and shrubs in some of the more impacted areas around the lake.

Lastly, we will again be partnering with the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation to host a National Trails Day event at the Indian Meadows Trailhead on June 3, 2017. There will be a variety of trails projects to participate in, as well as some wilderness education and traditional skill demonstrations. If folks have an interest in volunteering on National Trails Day or the Heart Lake rehab trip please contact the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation or the Lincoln Ranger District at 362-7007. We appreciate all the help we can get!

Learning from a Legacy of Wilderness Fire in the BMWC Workshop, July, 2016 *by Seth Carbonari, Spotted Bear Ranger District*

BMWC Managers partnered with the Northern Rockies Fire Science Network to host a Learning from a Legacy of Wilderness Fire in the BMWC Workshop in July, 2016. The over 70 participants were hosted by the Spotted Bear Ranger District, Flathead National Forest included past and present District Rangers, staff and fire managers from across the BMWC as well as regional and national fire leadership and many representatives from the scientific world.

Some participants joined in a 3-day backcountry field trip in the South Fork of the Flathead River Drainage where they could see the impacts of multiple different fires while many more attended a ½ day front country field trip that focused on the Bear Creek Fire from 2015. The main workshop was a full day of discussions and presentations on the history of the wilderness fire management program, lessons learned, past and current challenges, ongoing scientific research and findings, how research can support local units.



***Since 1980, over 638,000 acres of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (approximately 41%) have been impacted by fire.**

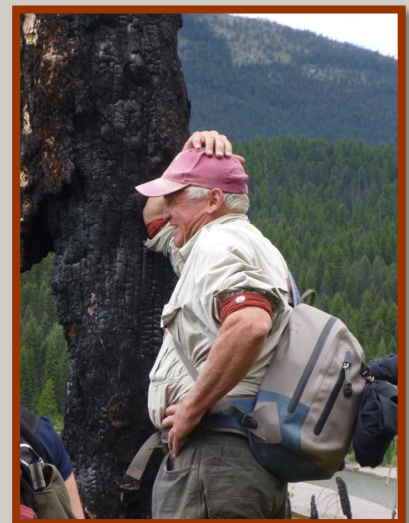
***Over 481,000 acres (approximately 31%) since 1990.**

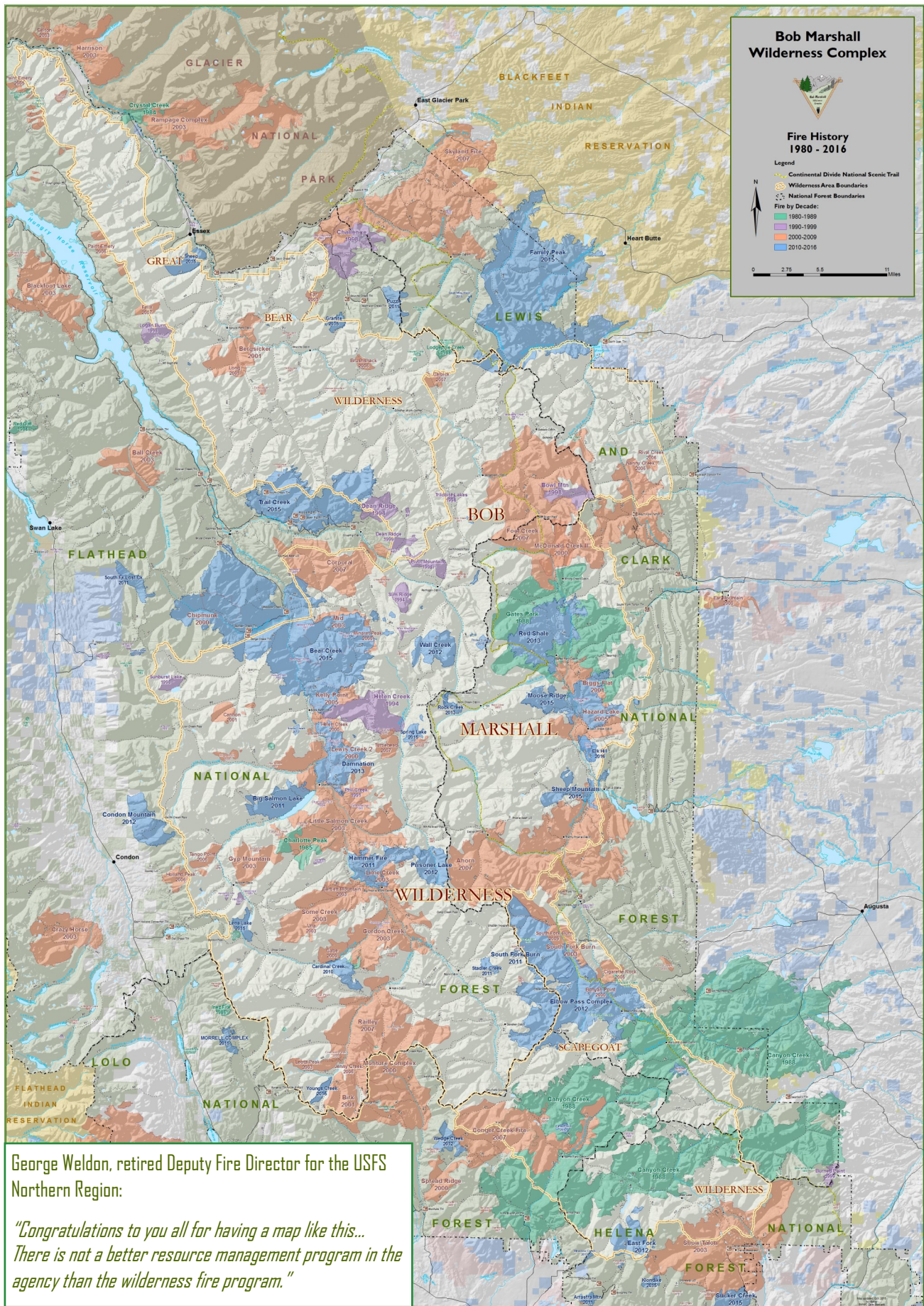
***Over 72,000 acres (almost 5%) have been impacted twice, and over 5,000 acres (approximately 0.33%) have been impacted three times.**

To many, the most valuable aspects of the workshop were the personal interactions and discussions between the passionate wilderness managers and wilderness fire program managers of the past, passionate wilderness managers and wilderness fire program managers of the present, passionate wilderness managers and wilderness fire program managers of the future and the passionate scientists, researchers and educators.

scientists, researchers and educators.

Workshop presentations and short re-caps of the backcountry and frontcountry field trips can be viewed on this page in video and pdf formats. Thank you to the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute and High Plains Films for recording the workshop presentations. <http://nrfirescience.org/event/wilderness-fire-workshop-and-field-trips>





The Packer Apprentice Program

Contributed by Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation

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“We don’t see a whole lot of young people packing anymore, and a lot of us are starting to get a little gray around the muzzle. Wouldn’t it be really neat if an organization like the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation had a kind of apprenticeship to start teaching them?”

In the past year an exciting new program was born from the efforts of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation and Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead, and a cadre of legendary Montana Packers. The Packer apprentice program was the brain child of Frank Vitale who came to the BMWF Board of Directors with a convincing proposal that went something like: “We don’t see a whole lot of young people packing anymore, and a lot of us are starting to get a little gray around the muzzle. Wouldn’t it be really neat if an organization like the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation had a kind of apprenticeship to start teaching them?” Well that’s exactly what we did.

The first ever Packing Apprentices spent a week at the Ninemile Wildlands Training Center learning packing skills from legendary packer Smoke Elser and Casey Burns followed by six pack trips under the supervision of Master Packers in support of BMWF volunteer crews. Master packers Frank Vitale, Ralph Hopkins (Flathead BCH), and Ian Bardwell (USFS) helped them hone their skills and tracked their progress to becoming fully competent to prepare a string for an extended backcountry trip. It wasn’t all diamond hitches and



Kristina Gillispie loads a pack onto a mule as Ian Bardwell, packer and Trails Manager with the USFS Rocky Mountain District, gives advice. Kristina and Ian packed gear and tools for the BMWF #3 Bennie Hill trip in support of 8 volunteers who spent 5 days clearing and maintaining the North

tying manti; along the trail the apprentices also picked up valuable lessons like: “You know Krissy, to a mule all the world is just a tossed salad” or “Krissy, don’t you know cowboys don’t drink water.” Congratulations to our first two Packer Apprentice graduates: Krissy Gillispie and Harold Herring!

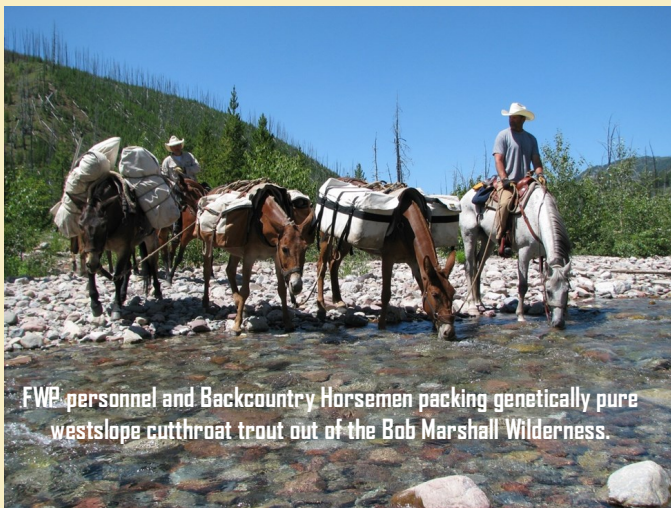
Applications for the 2017 Packer Apprentice Program are being accepted until **March 15**.

Visit <http://www.bmwf.org/jobs> to learn more and download the application.

Conserving Westslope Cutthroat Trout Populations in Bob Marshall Wilderness Lakes *By Sam Bourret, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks*

The alpine drainages of the South Fork Flathead River in the Bob Marshall Wilderness are some of the most awe inspiring and pristine settings in the United States. To conserve the native fish community of the mountain lakes, along with the downstream creeks and mainstem South Fork Flathead River, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) in collaboration with the US Forest Service (USFS), and the Backcountry Horsemen, initiated the South Fork Flathead Drainage Westslope Cutthroat Trout Conservation Program in 2007. The objective of this multi-year, landscape scale, project is to remove sources of nonnative trout in 21 lakes and reestablish these fisheries with westslope cutthroat trout.

The removal of non-native trout (e.g. rainbow, and yellowstone cutthroat) is accomplished with the application of rotenone, which has been used throughout the world in fisheries conservation and management applications for nearly three decades. Pre-and post-treatment surveys of amphibians, aquatic invertebrates, and zooplankton are conducted to document that these species have not been impacted prior to reestablishing genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. Since substantial genetic differences exist among westslope cutthroat trout populations in the South Fork drainage, FWP is using multiple within-drainage stocks for restoration efforts. This approach helps conserve unique and locally adapted westslope cutthroat trout populations in the South Fork Flathead drainage.



FWP personnel and Backcountry Horsemen packing genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout out of the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

In an effort to conserve genetic variation among westslope cutthroat trout populations, FWP developed the Sekokini Springs Research and Isolation Facility to raise wild westslope cutthroat trout and create short-term within-drainage broodstocks for restoration in the South Fork Flathead drainage. Danaher and Youngs creeks, located in the Bob Marshall Wilderness at the headwaters of the South Fork Flathead River, were selected as the first two donor populations and Sullivan and Quin-



FWP personnel working to load juvenile westslope cutthroat trout in coolers before the pack out of the backcountry. These juvenile fish were spawned at the Sekokini Springs Research and Isolation Facility the following spring. The progeny were stocked into the Bob Marshall Wilderness Lakes to establish a population after rotenone treatment.

tonkon creeks, tributaries to Hungry Horse reservoir, are also being used as donor sources to be used in wilderness mountain lakes.

To capture and transport fish from wild populations, FWP biologists backpack electrofish juvenile westslope cutthroat trout from donor streams in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The fish are held in coolers with ice blocks and oxygen loaded onto mules, and packed to the trailhead where a hatchery truck is waiting to transport the fish to the Sekokini Springs facility. All fish in the facility are genetically tested and held until they are spawned the following spring using techniques that maximize survival and conserve genetic variation in the offspring. Fry from the spawned westslope cutthroat trout are then stocked via helicopter or horseback into the South Fork Flathead drainage mountain lakes to create self-sustaining conservation populations of Montana's native state fish.

Given the threat that invasive species pose to our water bodies, landscape scale projects that work to conserve native species are critically important. The last lake to be treated for this project is scheduled for September 2017, with additional monitoring and evaluation planned until 2020. The South Fork Flathead Drainage Westslope Cutthroat Trout Conservation Program has been successful because of the collaborative effort between MFWP, USFS, and Backcountry Horsemen. This project seeks to maintain wilderness character in the backcountry, while providing angling opportunities for anyone that chooses to venture into the breathtaking and stunning Bob Marshall Wilderness.