

Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup Newsletter

Burnt Fork to Three Lakes Peak on the Reservation Divide

Fall Newsletter

September 2008

Edited by Brad and Kathleen Miller

Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup (NWW) Goals. Maintain wildlife movement areas so that wildlife populations can move freely and securely through the mixture of public

lands, private lands, and transportation corridors;

- Increase driver safety on Interstate 90;
- Decrease roadkill;

- Decrease human-wildlife conflicts; and
- Promote healthy wildlife populations, open spaces, beautiful views and a rural feel in our community.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Eleanor Danesh

Early this morning I received a call that a downed whitetail doe was lying near the base of the I-90 median divider at the foot of Cayuse Hill—head up, panicked, but unable to stand. What to do? Again, that familiar helpless feeling—aside from calling MFWP, the truth is there is nothing we can do for an animal once it has been struck by an 80mph vehicle. What humans can do is prevent most of these collisions by installing wildlife crossing structures at heavily used game trails such as the trail at the base of Cayuse Hill. Two people and countless animals have gruesomely died there in the last couple years, and a heavy toll has been paid in motorists' injuries and vehicle damage.

And so, it's back to NWW's beginning—to the reason it all started in 2005. We know that the Ninemile Wildlife Corridor remains a vital link between the Northern Continental Divide, Cabinet-Yaak and Selway-Bitterroot Ecosystems. And this time we'll be armed with three years of field data when we meet with Montana's Department of Transportation early next year! We'll be representing a vital grassroots organization, NWW, which has

gained much in knowledge, membership and citizen support, and has earned the respect of local government and public agencies. And we'll be speaking for a community that has become largely living-with-wildlife savvy.

NWW has grown steadily—in membership and in the nature of projects undertaken—and our organization now demands much from its volunteer officers. It's no longer possible for me to wear the double hat of Chairperson and Wildlife Passages Coordinator, and my heart lies with the latter including the challenges mentioned above. Fieldwork badly needs extending into the Upper Ninemile and other areas. Further, as the Workgroup's founder, my influence has touched everything--it's time for a fresh wind to blow through our organization; new ideas, new visions! It will be exciting to see who picks up the mantle come November and NWW's first election of officers as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation. The future is limitless—everything you put your energy into is possible. Thanks, everyone, for all your support!

INVITING TROUBLE TO THE SIXMILE

Jeannie Stegler

Picking up trash on public lands has always been a given for committed Sixmile residents. However, volunteers have found it excessive in the last few years. Everything—from the usual beer cans to TV sets, cars, household trash, mail and even wrapped and unwrapped dogs—has been collected, many items either in or right beside streambeds. Truckloads of wildlife carcasses and plastic-bagged guts attract wild animals in search of food.

This assortment of garbage and carcasses brings out of hiding all manner of wildlife scavengers that are attracted to these human-made dumps. When the dumping areas are within a mile or less of human dwellings, then, of course, serious human-wildlife conflicts arise. As summer winds down and hunting season approaches, we're all reminded that wildlife in our area often retreat to the lower elevations to feed before winter. The Sixmile drainage has been an area of concern for years, and its close proximity to a county road makes it easy access for "getting rid of things."

Please help keep our local area free of dumping and encourage others to do the same. We all enjoy multiple uses for our local public lands, but abuse of those lands places us all at risk.

SECOND ANNUAL CAKE AUCTION

Shirley Hager

Heads—and spoons—up everyone!

Grab your apron, flour and sugar, butter, vanilla and – whatever. (Or do as I do, buy two cake and frosting mixes and then get creative).

The Second Annual Cake Auction for our wildlife group will be on Thursday, October 2 at the Ranger Station with 6:30 tasting and 7:30 auction.

We had a great turn out last year, had lots of fun, and made about \$1,500, thanks to the generosity of those who attended. A word to the wise: be sure to tell your spouse "One cake is for tasting, the other is for selling." (A mix-up last year made for a hilarious time!)

Please call Diane Krage with questions at 626-4592 if you are willing to bake two cakes or pies. Deadline for commitment to bake is September 29.

WILDLIFE REPORTS

ELK

This spring and summer NWW's motion sensitive cameras have been once again picking up elk movement at the Cayuse crossings of Interstate 90. While we are pleased to see so many elk moving again after last year's hiatus, it did cause our field crew some sadness. An orphaned elk calf, after apparently making it on his/her own for at least six weeks, was dragged and killed by an eastbound semi on I-90 at—you guessed it—the infamous "Cayuse kill zone."



Elk Calf

BOBCAT

Another "reality" of the rapidly increasing traffic volume on the Interstate, a mature bobcat, in the absolute prime of its life, was found road-killed early one morning on the south shoulder of Cayuse Hill. Few people have even seen a bobcat, no less up close—so it bears commenting here on the incredible beauty of its markings, and its unbelievably soft, silky fur. This freshly killed animal was buried high on a mountain.

BABY BLACK RHINO

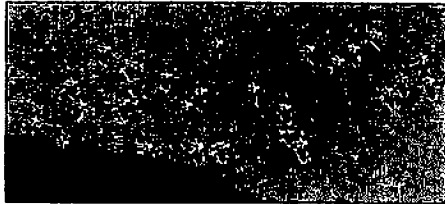
Although our intrepid exotic wildlife specialist (Ted S.) vehemently denied seeing Bigfoot recently, he did spot a baby black rhino near the Ninemile Creek on his place. Neighbors take note!

BLACK BEARS

Two young black bears, a black yearling and a cinnamon cub, were frequenting the upper West Ninemile Road area earlier this season. No one ever saw "Mama," an unfortunate circumstance, but the yearling seemed to be teaching the cub at least some survival techniques. By mid-summer they were gone, and area residents hope they made it up to the berries at higher elevation.

On the other hand, a large male bear was trapped by MFWP staff at the Ninemile Ranger Station after breaking into an RV housing seasonal volunteers—

twice! The first time, he encountered the half-asleep owners; the second time, he encountered the sunflower seeds they had stashed in the trailer. We lost this bear to the Upper Blackfoot.



Avocets' Airshow Photo by: Charles Janson

BEARS IN OUR BACKYARDS

Bear Presence Likely to be High this Fall in the Ninemile-Sixmile

Rickie van Berkum

On a section of highway 191 on the west side of Yellowstone Black bears are likely to be hanging around homes in the Ninemile-Sixmile in higher than usual numbers this fall. Due to the late snow this spring, huckleberries are sporadic, though serviceberries are abundant. Huckleberries are an important summer food for bears that might start the fall leaner than usual and be looking harder for food in order to bulk up before hibernation.

All those delicious smells around human habitations will be more tempting than usual. Bears will be trying hard to get at garbage, birdseed, pet food, livestock feed, fruit trees and other foods around our homes. Bears are no dummies, and they quickly learn that humans provide them with nutritious, easy-to-find food. All it takes is one or two people in the area who 'feed' them, and the bears start visiting every home they can find. Besides damaging property, bears too close to humans can be dangerous to both people and themselves. If they are trapped and removed before a person gets hurt, what happens to these bears? The lucky ones are released in a remote area. But as more people build homes in Montana, remote areas where problem bears can be released have become fewer and fewer—an

increasing problem for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks personnel. Their only alternative is to kill the animal.

What can Ninemile-Sixmile Residents do? First, make sure that your home does not provide any temptations to bears. Then talk to your neighbors and encourage them to take down bird feeders (even the few feeders that are truly out of a bear's reach drop nutritious seeds that bears love), put garbage in bear proof containers (see related article), store pet and livestock feed in a building where bears cannot access them.



Photo by: Kylie Paul

When you see a bear, make the experience as unpleasant for the bear as you can without pursuing it. Avoid the temptation to scramble onto the deck with your camera or to gather the family at a 'safe distance' to watch the bear, because these activities show the bear that people are harmless and can be ignored. Instead, clap your hands loudly and shout—better yet, grab a pot and heavy spoon and run out onto the deck making as loud a racket as you can. Scream, yell, clang, bang and frighten that bear off as quickly as possible. Clear message to the bear—humans and their buildings are scary! And the bear will teach that to her cubs. Good for people, good for bears! And remember that a bear that has visited a number of yards finding tasty treats and gawking humans is less likely to be deterred if only one neighbor tries to scare it off—bad for humans, bad for bears! So the more you can do to enlist the support of your neighbors, the more likely it is that no one will have an unpleasant bear encounter, and the less likely that a bear will have to die.

BEAR-PROOFING THE NINEMILE

Famous 9 Mile House helps Community

Rebecca Shoemaker

The Ninemile and Sixmile valleys are safer now for bears and people, thanks to the Famous 9 Mile House, Allied Waste Services, the National Wildlife Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, and members of the NWW. Because of her interest in being both a good neighbor and co-existing with wildlife, Randie Pringle, owner of the Famous 9 Mile House, will fund an increase in her monthly garbage bill in order to replace her current garbage dumpsters with user-friendly, bear-resistant dumpsters. By preventing bears from learning to associate human structures and residences with a free meal, the entire valley benefits.

Improperly stored garbage is the most common source of bear/human conflicts in the Ninemile and Sixmile valleys. Bears that learn to seek out human sources of food (garbage, pet food, chicken feed, bird seed, etc.) often have to be trapped, relocated, or killed by management agencies because they become a threat to human safety. By storing garbage and other unnatural foods in a secure way, either in a bear-resistant container or inside a secure building, you can prevent bears from getting into trouble around your house and your neighbors' houses. But everyone has to get on board for this to work!

If you're interested in preventing conflicts with bears and other wildlife, you have 2 options: 1) add an extra \$10 to your monthly bill at Allied Waste to "rent" a 95-gallon bear-resistant roll-out cart directly from them, or 2) use NWW's Bear-Resistant Container Loaner Program to try out a bear-resistant roll-out cart for free.

The Loaner Program provides residents with an opportunity to prevent or respond to conflicts with wildlife that are related to trash or other unnatural foods (bird seed, pet food, etc.). Residents of the Ninemile and Sixmile Valleys may check out our 95-gallon roll-out bear-resistant garbage containers for free for 3 months and if interested, then purchase them at half their retail price, for a total of

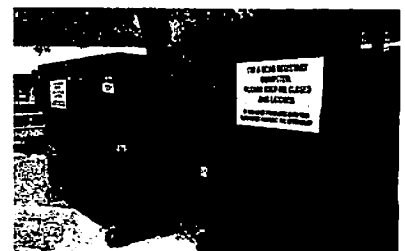


Photo by: Rebecca Shoemaker

\$110—Defenders will pay the balance. Also available at lesser cost (\$35) are 30-gallon screw-top containers that are ideal for storing pet food, bird seed, grains, etc. (although it is still best to keep these inside a building if possible).

If you'd like to check out a bear-resistant container for free through NWW's Loaner Program, please call Eleanor at 626-5675 for more information. And be sure to let the folks at the Famous 9 Mile House know you appreciate their efforts by helping them pay their increased garbage bill - stop by for dinner and drinks tonight!

SPOTLIGHT ON: FIVE VALLEYS LAND TRUST

Kathleen Clary Miller

Conservationist citizens of Missoula who witnessed unprecedented residential and commercial growth in their county banded together in 1972 when they realized that the natural landscape could change. They sought practical methods to protect their precious resources when they formed the Five Valleys River Parks Association that became the catalyst for creating the riverfront park system through Missoula.

In 1989 the group expanded into Western Montana and created the Five Valleys Land Trust, which expanded again in 1995 to include the Rock Creek Trust that focused on the creek's drainage—still one of their top priorities.

The Five Valleys Land Trust is a community-supported non-profit organization. Their mission is "to preserve and protect western Montana's natural legacy—river corridors, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, and scenic open spaces." They work with landowners, public agencies, and other organizations to solve conservation issues and to create an environment where Montana's natural resources can thrive and continue into future generations.

FVLT is a community-based land trust whose leadership role is visible in local and regional land protection initiatives. The dedicated group provides resources to individual landowners and helps them realize the importance of a conversationalist vision. They grant assistance to private landowners, community groups, government, and other conservation partners in order to achieve the goal we all share: conservation of the priceless and fragile beauty that is Western Montana's landscape. FVLT stewardship education programs foster and reflect commitment to the land, and with respect to it, our identity and quality of life.

For information about the FVLT phone (406) 549-0755 or e-mail office@fvlt.org.

A DAY AT EUSTACHE CREEK

Eleanor Danesh

"Your dog's gonna get gonorrhoea if she keeps drinkin' that water," calls Eve as my yellow Labrador slurps her way down Eustache Creek to greet the kids. "I don't think so—she's been drinking that water all her life, and she's nine years old," I respond. "I think you mean giardia, not gonorrhoea," fisheries biologist and project leader, Scott Spaulding gently corrects Eve.

Welcome to the Montana Conservation Corps' (MCC) spirited recruits, and to one of the Ninemile Creek's most beautiful headwaters on a gloriously cool, end of July morning. Set in the narrow "V" of steep hillsides luxuriant with greenery, this abandoned placer mine reclamation site is not what I had envisioned. It is serene and lovely—a tangle of conifers and undergrowth. But the damage done here by dredge mining for gold and other precious metals from 1874 to 1940 was serious: dead-end ponds, late season de-watered channel, a vertical channel drop of four feet and an undersized culvert with a three-foot drop—until this restoration project, there had been no fish above these two barriers for decades. Restoration work began two years ago with an excavator to remove or spread out huge piles of dredged rocks and dirt pushed aside by miners.

One of the most interesting techniques I witnessed that day was the use of huge coconut-fiber logs to help stabilize the new streambanks being carved out of the rocks by Pulaski-swinging MCC lassies! When they tired, Scott dug in—and just in time, too, because here came the giant log, hauled down the steep slope and thick brush by a couple of MCC lads looking distinctly exhausted by the effort.

Not too much interest in the cheatgrass plant I waved at them for Weed Identification 101, Lesson 1. I was there to inventory and remove weeds that day. But the coconut-fiber log had caught my fancy, and I helped pin it to the new bank with rebar. Later, the kids leveled it off by infilling with loose dirt and rocks. Come autumn, we'll take willow cuttings from healthier creeksides in the Ninemile, grow them out in greenhouses, and then plant the new seedlings on the new Eustache banks in the new Spring.

There's lots more work to be done, and few local volunteers to help. Call Scott at the Ranger Station (626-5424) or project co-leader, Rob Roberts of Trout Unlimited (543-1192), and spend a fun day in beautiful creek side surroundings with a lively crew, while healing some grievous old wounds to our homeland. Our wildlife will love you!

CREEK CLEANUP PROJECT RECEIVES 2008 RIPARIAN CHALLENGE AWARD

Kathleen Clary Miller

On July 29, John Cramer reported in *The Missoulian* that in 2004 Trout Unlimited joined forces with the U.S. Forest Service seeking affordable ways to restore poisoned and muddied Ninemile streams damaged by decades of mining and dredging. The Eustache Creek project is using public and private funds and staff along with volunteer laborers to restore such a damaged stream. The \$150,000 proof of success has hence "become a model for restoring other streams across the West," project officials were quoted in Western Montana's daily newspaper.



This project received the 2008 Riparian Challenge Award from the Western Division of American Fisheries Society. It has engendered five other restoration projects in the Ninemile. Trout Unlimited and the Forest Service are using the Ninemile project "as a blueprint" in order to restore troubled streams in Idaho and Colorado as well.

An advantageous run-off, if you will, of the Ninemile success is that our restoration projects are, in the process, helping to clean up the Clark Fork watershed. And there are many other creeks and streams that, as Cramer's article points out, "aren't in the public spotlight but really need some help." We are an example to them all.

The Missoulian went on to report that two years ago a 1.3-mile stretch of Eustache Creek had all but vanished under piles of decades-old mining debris. Workers excavated and restored the natural channel. Logs were added to stabilize the creek banks. Seven thousand native trees were planted. Restoration made use of a new structure known as a groundwater retention sill, which is a sheet of fabric that forces the stream to rise and return to its natural run. Workers hope to achieve the same success on St. Louis Creek where copper, arsenic and sediment are leaching into the water and overburdening the drainage. Work is also being done on the Mattie V Creek where placer mining altered the path of water near its confluence with Ninemile Creek.

All of our volunteer work on the Eustache Creek has paid off—not only in terms of the immediate need, but also for the future needs of the Ninemile and other valleys whose streams are a precious natural resource for both wildlife and human enjoyment. As *The Missoulian* headline reads, "CREEK WORK CALLED A MODEL." Thanks to all the volunteers who aided in the restoration effort.

Stay informed about what is happening with wildlife in your area

Fill out this coupon and mail it along with your membership payment to:
 Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup, PO Box 435, Huson, MT 59846

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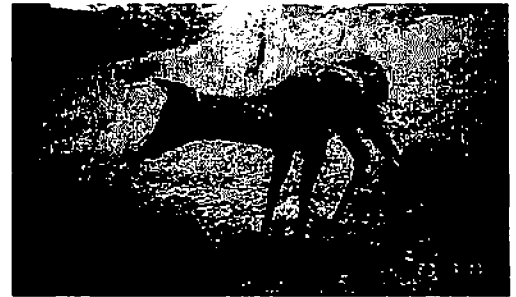
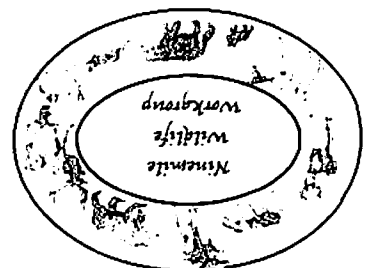


Photo by: NWW Motion Sensitive Camera

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