

Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup Newsletter

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Fall Newsletter

October 2012

Edited by Kylie Paul

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

EVENTS

Please check out our website www.ninemilewildlife.org or join our email list (email us at ninemilewildlife.com) for event updates!

Not Just Cake Auction 2012 coming SO SOON!

Our annual auction will be held on **Saturday, October 20th** at **6pm** at the historic Ninemile Ranger Station. It is always a blast! There will be tasty treats and the live auction will once again be conducted by cowboy poet JR Strand. We hope you can make it. *We would love to receive donations for this fun event.* Thus far, we have received a golf getaway vacation package to Mexico (Mazatlan), a Monte Dolack poster, gift certificates for restaurants in Missoula and Alberton, home decor, jewelry, gift baskets, pictures, clothing accessories, books, and of course, delicious cakes! Please contact Genevieve Fix at 626-4776 or email blackedelweiss@dishmail.net to dedicate your donation ahead of the event. *Please join us for a fun evening* and help the NWW raise funds to continue its mission promoting knowledge and stewardship of local wildlife and habitats in the region.

Our free-admission **Wildlife Lecture Series** is back! Please attend and bring friends and family. If you don't know: the NWW sponsors a lecture series each year consisting of four monthly talks from February through May. The topics are most often related to wildlife of the area. This year our lineup is....

February 28, 7pm Sheryl Gunn, US Forest Service will discuss **'Optimizing Forest Structure to Support Wildlife'** at Ninemile Ranger Station

March 28, 7pm Carly Lewis with the US Forest Service will present **'Fishers in Montana'** at the Ninemile Ranger Station

April 25, 7pm Beau Larkin with MPG Ranch will present **'Monitoring Wildlife and Restoring Habitat on Private Conservation Properties in Western Montana'** at the Alberton Senior Citizens' Center

Saturday, May 18, 2pm **Exhibit of local and exotic wildlife** by Jessie Castaneda (Animal Wonders); because of anticipated attendance by children this is scheduled for Saturday at 2:00PM. Alberton Senior Citizens' Center.

This past 2012 spring series began with James Brown, representing the Five Valleys Audubon, describing the important bird populations in the Grass Valley region west of Missoula where many species of either resident or migrating birds have been documented. Other 2012 talks included wildlife crossings over or under U.S. Hwy 93 North, by Whisper Camel-Means (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes wildlife biologist) and Kylie Paul (Peoples Way Partnership); post-mining creek restoration in the Ninemile valley by Heather Whiteley (Trout Unlimited); and gardening with native plants by Kathy Settvendemie (Blackfoot Native Plants, Potomac Valley).

Wildlife-Resistant Cans for Sale...REAL CHEAP

Wildlife ranging in size from mice to grizzly bears as well as the occasional dog like to get into our garbage. They also like other attractants such as animal feed. If you would like to safely store your garbage or animal feed, now is the time to purchase a bear resistant and mouse proof container that can be used as a garbage can or simply to store your bird feed, dog food or grain. Animals looting stored attractants means not only a big, ugly mess and destroyed property, but also that the animal has learned where the easy treats occur and will come back again to your place, or your neighbors, while possibly teaching their young bad habits as well.

Avoid the hassle, be a friend to wildlife, be part of the solution. For a limited time, buy wildlife resistant containers at greatly reduced prices--this is a screaming deal!

95 gallon residential roll-out carts: \$60! These are similar to the curbside roll-out carts currently provided by Allied Waste Services, and they are fully accepted by Allied Waste but you must manually unhook the snaps the morning of pickup.

30-gallon screw-top containers: \$15! These are ideal for storing pet food, bird seed, grains, and so on. It is still best to keep these inside a building if possible.

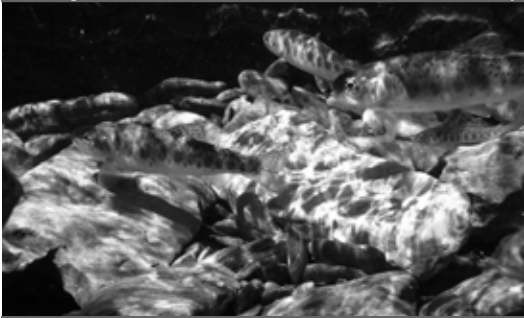
For more information or to buy a container, please call Pat Sweeney, 626-1610.



Ninemile mountain lion Photo by Bobbe and Roger Almer

THAT'S CHEAP BEAR SPRAY!

Please also take advantage of our **Reduced Cost Bear Spray Program**. Because we believe that the more people in the woods carrying bear spray, the better off are both bears and humans, we're providing residents of our area with effective bear spray for only **\$25 a canister**. Retail sells at about \$45, so this is a screaming deal. For more information, visit our website at www.ninemilewildlife.org, email us at ninemilewildlife@gmail.com, or call Pat Sweeney 626-1610.



by Pat Sweeney

NWW BIRDING TRIP ON THE CHECKPOINT RANCH

In 2010 and 2011, the NWW partnered with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and others to successfully support a conservation easement on the Checkpoint Ranch located in the Sixmile Creek drainage near Cayuse Hill. This easement protects over 1,000 acres of wildlife habitat that includes several large ponds, timber, grasslands and riparian areas that supports the full range of wildlife in our area. Locals commonly drive by the ranch on Ninemile Road to view the elk which are found here year round and calve here in late spring. The property is within a wildlife linkage area that connects the vast wild lands of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem with the Selway-Bitterroot Ecosystem.

Keith and Linda Ward, owners of the Checkpoint Ranch, were kind enough to allow our members to go bird watching this past June 2. Eight hardy members went out on a cool and very wet Saturday morning and were rewarded with noting 49 bird species in about 3 hours. Highlights of our trip included: watching two young sandhill cranes tended by their parents; seeing 5 of the 6 possible swallow species from one spot; watching a large flock of young Canada geese foraging separately trailing behind most of the adults; we saw one calf elk (mostly its ears) hidden in the grass, while a large elk herd grazed nearby; another lone cow elk was spotted in the brush that was probably getting ready to deliver her calf; a bald eagle repeatedly called while flying and perching by the upper pond exciting both the birders and the abundant waterfowl. Some of the group were happy to watch a muskrat going about its business and of course we saw plenty of deer. But the focus was on birds and here is a list of the bird species detected on the Checkpoint Ranch (in the order they were listed):



- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Eastern Kingbird | Chipping Sparrow | Ring-necked Duck |
| Black-billed Magpie | Northern Flicker | Redhead |
| Mourning Dove | Bufflehead | Eared Grebe |
| European Starling | Cliff Swallow | Black Tern |
| Vesper Sparrow | Barn Swallow | Common Nighthawk |
| Brewer's Blackbird | Bank Swallow | Red-tailed Hawk |
| Black-capped Chickadee | N. Rough-winged Swallow | Northern Shoveler |
| Common Yellowthroat | Violet-green Swallow | Sora |
| Mallard | Canada Goose | American Coot |
| House Finch | Western Bluebird | Rock Pigeon |
| Red-winged Blackbird | Spotted Sandpiper | Cinnamon Teal |
| Western Meadowlark | Yellow-headed Blackbird | Yellow Warbler |
| Wilson's Snipe | Barrow's Goldeneye | Tree Swallow |
| Western Wood-Peepee | Bald Eagle | Pygmy Nuthatch |
| American Robin | Pied-billed Grebe | Red Crossbill |
| American Kestrel | Sandhill Crane | Red-breasted Nuthatch |
| | Ruddy Duck | |

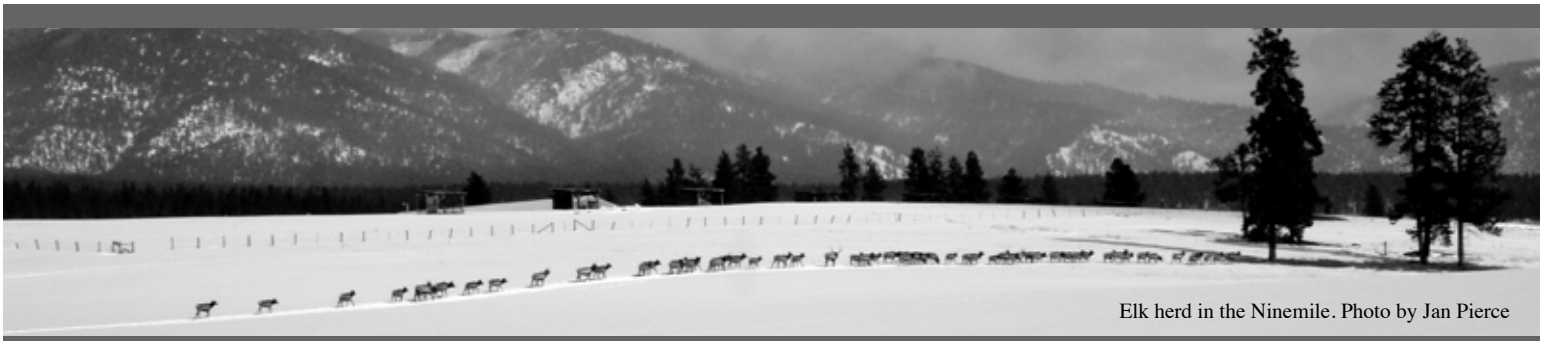
REMOVING UNNEEDED BARBED WIRE HELPS WILDLIFE

by Tim Stauffer, USFS. Deteriorating fence from old grazing allotments and pastures is prevalent on private and public lands alike and is a danger to many of the larger animals in our forests. In order to reduce the possibility of injury to our local wildlife, the NWW and the Ninemile Ranger District partnered together for a project to tear down old fence in the Butler Creek Drainage.

On the morning of July 14th, 2012, Mark and Becky Colip, Chris and Jeannie Siegler and Pat and Sharon Sweeney from the NWW met Laura Johnson, Nick Manuele, Leigh Wexler, and Tim Stauffer from the Ninemile Ranger District up Butler Creek Road. The plan was to pull parts of the old 4-strand barbed wire fence and the t-posts along with it. After a brief safety discussion, the crew broke out into groups and went to work. Two folks led the way by removing fence clips, and they were followed by the fence post pullers. After the wire was free we pulled it out of the forest onto the road where it was rolled. Over the course of the morning, the group was able to accomplish more than expected removing around two miles of barbed wire and around 260 t-posts. All of the fencing material was hauled out of the forest and recycled or stockpiled.



The fence removal project up Butler Creek is still ongoing, but the work that was done that morning and afternoon was a great start. Recognizing the problem, breaking the work up into small chunks and creating partnerships with other interested parties allowed us to cover much more ground than planned. We also got to meet some great, hard-working people dedicated towards making Montana's forests safer for wildlife.



Elk herd in the Ninemile. Photo by Jan Pierce

FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON: PARTNERSHIP

Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup and Five Valleys Audubon Society have started a partnership to increase our knowledge of bird populations in the Ninemile region. Both groups would like to build a database noting birds that breed, migrate, and winter here. They both wish to promote better understanding and appreciation of birds and promote conservation measures for birds.

This past summer, four teams of experienced bird watchers met to conduct breeding bird surveys on several private properties in the upper Ninemile Valley. All birders and landowners had an excellent time learning more about the wildlife and habitats that the birds occupy and that we enjoy. Each group spent a little less than 4 hours walking, listening, and listing the number of birds of each species as well as any breeding behavior such as defending territory or direct evidence such as young or nests. Most of the groups found about 40 species of birds during their outing.

Afterwards, the birdwatchers and some of the landowners met during lunch to get to know each other, compile their lists, and share their experiences. One of the highlights of our group was finding an active red-tail hawk nest with the adults having two different color phases.

The NWW appreciates the time and effort of our Audubon partners and would like to especially thank Pat Little and Jim Brown who not only joined the birders but did a lot of the preparation needed for the successful outcome. We hope to continue with this effort in the future. If you would like some more information on the surveys or would like to be involved in future surveys, please feel free to contact Pat Sweeney at 626-1610.



Fledgling great-horned owl. Photo by Aubree Benson

UPDATES ON FUN EVENTS

ALBERTON RAILROAD DAYS

Volunteers from NWW set up a table at the Alberton Railroad Days in July to share information about the ongoing projects with the community. Several people took interest in our joint efforts with the Forest Service on the fisher survey. We also discussed the opportunity community members have to participate in the electric fence incentive we have collaborated on with Defenders of Wildlife. We enjoyed visiting with people who stopped to see the pictures from our remote cameras and our members who came to see themselves in the pictures from the bird outings, bailing wire, and roadside cleanup days. We all look forward to the celebration again next year.



NWW'S ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY

Twelve hearty NWW members joined together at Dale and Kandy Chiks' home on a beautiful June morning to make our adopted two miles of Highway 10 a bit cleaner. As usual, we 'carbed' up with bakery treats washed down with coffee, put on our sunscreen, had our safety talk, then hit the road. With twelve people participating, we finished pretty quickly. We did get our usual assortment of beer cans going into the recycle bags which were contributed to the Alberton Senior Center. Also of note, we packed an old mattress and a discarded television to the side of the road to help fill the county truck when it picks up the other bagged garbage. Special thanks to Dale and Kandy for again running the event and thanks also to Barbara Gaut, Morris and Kristi Eisert, Mick and Gerry Hines, Rod and Lynn Kruckenbug, Jeannie Siegler, and Pat and Sharon Sweeney who donated part of their weekend to make our area a little bit nicer.

COMMUNITY APPRECIATION DAY potluck and presentation

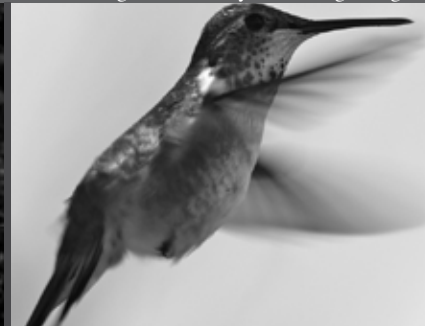
Once again, we had a great and delicious time at this event. Around 40 people attended on August 19th at the Ninemile Community Center. Chuck Bartlebaugh (Center for Wildlife Information) gave a talk about bear behavior, avoiding conflicts with bears, how to act if you find yourself close to a bear, and how to use bear spray. His entertaining presentation was very successful in raising awareness and enjoyed by the audience. We had tasty homemade food, prize drawings, and we voted on the photo contest. Beverley McGown's black bear series of pictures won grand prize. Other winners were Charles Janson, Aubree Benson, and Sharon Sweeney. Many of the photos within this newsletter are from entries to the photo contest. Please consider sending entries to us year-round for the future (ninemilewildlife@gmail.com), as we'd love even more photo entries for the contest! Thanks to all of you for making our Community Appreciation party a success!

JOIN OUR BOARD!!! Each year we are looking for more board members - its that time again! If you are interested in any way, please email us questions, etc at ninemilewildlife@gmail.com, or call Pat Sweeney 626-1610 to see how fun and easy it is to be a board member!

Fairy slipper orchid. Photo by Charles Janson



Hummingbird. Photo by Kevin Vogelzang



Upper Martina Creek. Photo by Aubree Benson



ELECTRIC FENCING INCENTIVE COMES TO THE NINEMILE

When you think of the Ninemile, you likely consider it a place of lush green valleys, forested lands, and abundant wildlife. For wildlife this is true...yet the Ninemile area is also a maze of human activity that they must carefully navigate, including roads, neighborhoods, livestock, and attractants such as fruit trees, chickens, birdseed, and garbage. For bears, this can be a maze that ends in their death. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks often has to euthanize bears that have gotten too habituated to humans, too comfortable spending time around human structures and presence. In 2012 FWP euthanized 5 black bears in Heron, MT after uncovering a wildlife feeding operation that is still under investigation. While not everyone intentionally feeds wildlife, having a birdfeeder accessible

to bears or leaving garbage out all week is essentially doing the same thing.



So is it possible to “coexist” with wildlife? Yes —and electric fencing is an excellent tool to deter bears and other wildlife from getting into household attractants such as garbage, apples, chickens, and other livestock. Habituating bears to people by giving them “food rewards” near homes can become a human safety concern. Hence, securing attractants reduces human safety concerns and minimizes the number of bears dying due to human behaviors.

In 2010 the conservation organization Defenders of Wildlife created an electric fencing incentive program to combat the conflicts surrounding grizzly bears and chickens in

Peek-a-boo! This series by Beverly McGown won grand prize at the Community Appreciation Photo Contest

Montana. The program reimbursed small livestock owners \$100 towards the cost of an electric fence that would secure their livestock from grizzly bears. From 2010-2011, 18 electric fences were installed. Due to increased interest and popularity of this program, in 2012 Defenders decided to expand the effort. It reimbursed 50% of the cost of an electric fence around any bear attractant such as a chicken coop or garbage, up to a total reimbursement of \$500. Plus, Defenders hired a contractor to provide technical assistance for people interested in installing an electric fence or maintaining an existing fence.

During the summer of 2012, Defenders found the need greater than the funding for the electric fencing incentive program, and that’s where the Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup stepped in. The NWW helped fund 4 electric fences in the Ninemile and Alberton area. Electric fences provide a solution to the growing issue of human-bear conflicts in the urban/wildland interface, and the incentive program is creating open dialogue and unique partnerships between feed stores, electric fencing supply companies, federal, state and tribal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and landowners. For more information about electric fencing for bears check out Montana Fish Wildlife and Park’s Electric Fence Guide for Bears www.fwp.mt.gov. For more details regarding Defender’s electric fencing incentive program go to www.defenders.org or contact Erin Edge, Rockies and Plains Associate, 406-728-8800 or email, eedge@defenders.org.

RAC FUNDS FOR THE NINEMILE

The Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup, Allied Waste Services, Lolo National Forest, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, and Defenders of Wildlife have successfully joined together in a proposal that resulted in securing funding to purchase new fully automated bear-resistant garbage containers to be used in problem areas in the Ninemile and Sixmile area. Once we have the cans in place and more landowners secure their garbage from wildlife, we should experience improved safety for humans, pets, and livestock by reducing or preventing encounters with habituated bears.

Missoula County’s Resource Advisory Committee (RAC), created under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, approved \$10,000 to purchase bear resistant containers for this project. Several other projects were also approved and funded by the RAC that will benefit wildlife and habitat in our area with trail improvements, riparian planting, monitoring, and patrols.

If you would like to learn more what RAC is and what Missoula County RAC has done, visit this website: https://fsplaces.fs.fed.us/fsfiles/unit/wo/secure_rural_schools.nsf/Web_Projects_by_RAC_Restrict?OpenView&Count=1000&RestrictToCategory=Missoula



Bluebird. Photo by Sharon Sweeney



NINEMILE WILDLIFE: THE FISHER

by Kylie Paul

Not a whole lot of folks know what to envision when they hear the word ‘fisher’ or ‘fisher cat.’ The word doesn’t mean ‘one who fishes’...it is in fact an animal, and one that occurs in Montana though few of us will ever see one due to their solitary natures and their dense forest habitats...and it is not actually a cat.. The fisher is a forest-dwelling carnivore in the weasel family (which includes 57 species across the world, including mink, marten, wolverine, otters, ferrets, badgers, and yes...the honey badger). Their habitat tends to include moist, low- to mid-elevation mountain forests of conifers and hardwood with high amounts of downed trees, and they occur only in North America. Despite their name, fishers do not eat fish. They eat small mammals such as snowshoe hare, voles, and other rodents and are known to be porcupine-hunting specialists. They are adept at tree-climbing; they have retractable claws and can turn their back feet almost 180 degrees. They are dark brown to black, pointy faced, about the size of a house cat, with a long, narrow body and a long, fluffy tail. They differ from their close relatives, the pine marten, in that they do not have a yellowish-orange blaze on their chests, and fishers are substantially larger (5 lbs for females, 10 lbs for males, versus 1-2 lbs for male and female marten).

The fisher’s pre-European distribution had ranged across the boreal forests of Canada, extending south into the United States in the Great Lakes area and along the Appalachian, Rocky, and Pacific Coast Mountains. But their luxurious coats made them a highly sought-after furbearer in the 1800s for coats and hats, such that they underwent dramatic reductions in range and populations in the 1800s and 1900s. Massive fires, logging, and predator control may also have negatively impacted their populations. By the early 1900s, they were considered extinct in the Rockies; furbearer records from 1930 to 1959 in Montana documented no fishers.

Meanwhile, their important role as a predator in forest ecosystems made fishers valuable for loggers; fisher eat porcupines, and porcupines girdle and kill trees. In the 1950s and ’60s, the desire to reduce porcupine numbers prompted some logging companies to bring fisher back to the Rockies by transplanting them from British Columbia and Minnesota into Montana and Idaho. Numerous subsequent introductions of fishers from various states occurred. In a fascinating twist, through recent DNA analysis of live and trapped fisher in the early 2000s, it turns out that the Rocky Mountain population of fisher was not fully extirpated. Now within our forests, genetics show us that Montana is home to fishers with ancestors from the Rockies, the Midwest, and from British Columbia. Today most of the native fishers are found along the Idaho/Montana state line from Darby to Lookout Pass west of St. Regis.

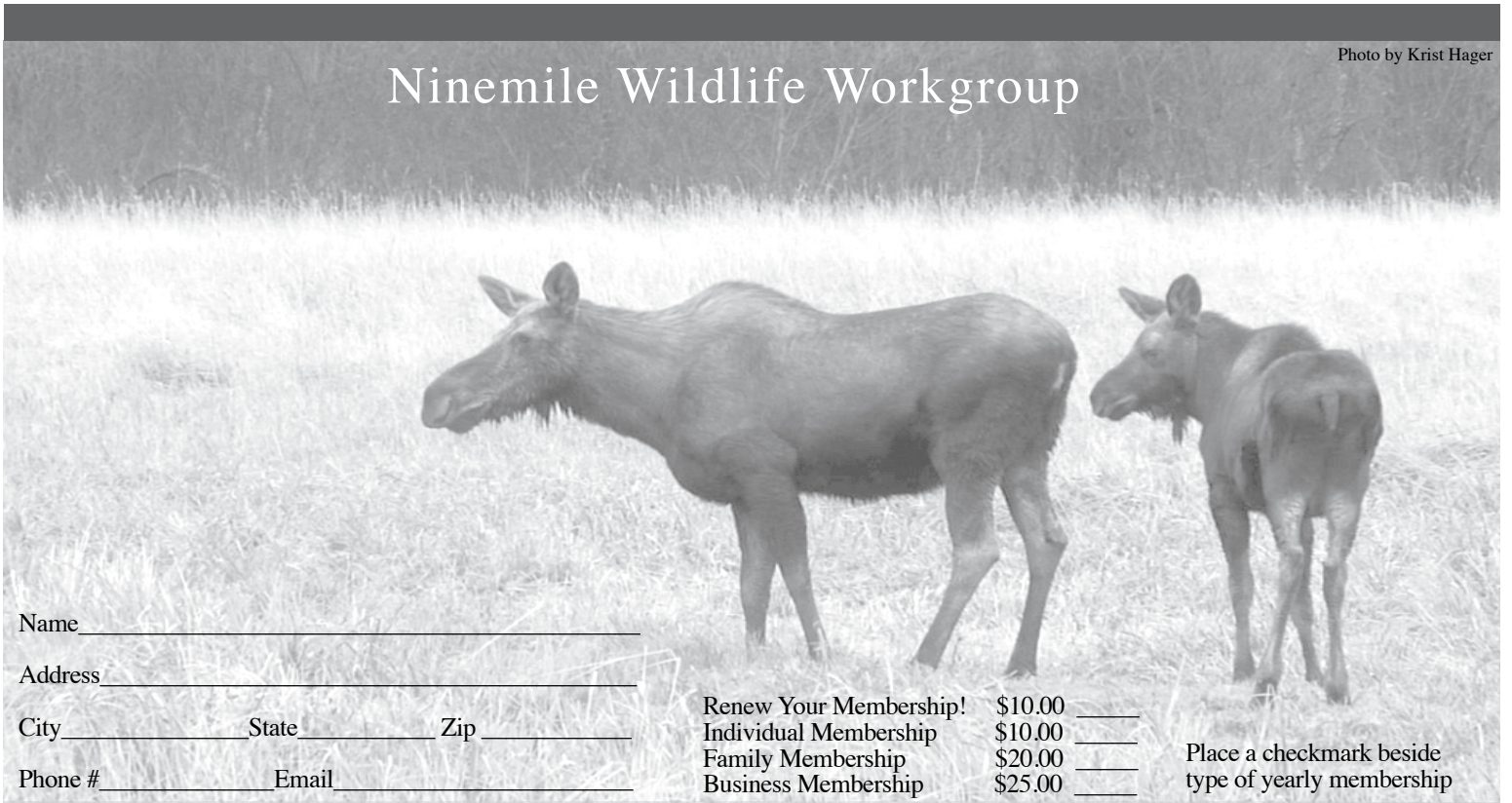
While fisher genetics in the Rockies have become better understood, there remains little information regarding their distribution and population status. It appears their population numbers are quite low and they exist in low densities—you’re not likely to find more than a few fishers running around an area the size of the Ninemile watershed. Between 1983 and 2011, 198 fishers have been legally trapped and reported in Montana. Today, the trapping quota for all of Montana is just seven fishers a year. The state of Idaho lists fisher as “critically imperiled.” Wyoming is the only other state in the Rocky Mountains that may contain fisher, although there has been no confirmed evidence of its presence there. Fishers in their West Coast range were determined in 2004 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to be warranted for listing under the Endangered Species Act but precluded due to higher priorities and lack of resources. In 2010, FWS announced it was considering fishers in the Rocky Mountains for protection under the ESA. They were subsequently not listed, in part because there is not sufficient data to show their population has declined historically...as there exists little data now or from the past.

Efforts have been ongoing since 2007 to help estimate the distribution and number of fisher in the Northern Rockies. Collaborators include Montana and Idaho state agencies, USFS, tribes, non-governmental organizations, and private corporations. Because of their elusive nature, fishers are best monitored using non-invasive DNA sampling. To do so, researchers at the USFS Rocky Mountain Research Station developed a protocol for systematically surveying for fishers, using a 5 x 5 mile grid as the sampling unit, and placing hair snares within probable habitat in those units to collect hair (and thus DNA) for genetic analyses. These surveys deploy baited boxes that lure a fisher into the box, and capture tufts of hair. DNA from these hairs is extracted at a genetics lab, and species and individuals are identified. The approach is fantastic: the methodology of the survey is relatively easy to implement, the field work does not require a high level of skill, the snares are cheap (about \$10 apiece) and they do not negatively impact the fisher in any way.

This brings us to the NWW. The relatively easy standardized protocol allows the use of ordinary citizens to assist in the surveys. The USFS is partnering with NWW volunteers to set up and take down fisher hair snares along Forest Service roads and trails throughout the Ninemile Watershed/Ranger District. This helps the Lolo National Forest, which conducts fisher surveys annually to monitor the distribution and relative abundance of fishers on the Forest and to contribute to the greater knowledge of fisher distribution and abundance across the Northern Rockies.

In early September of this year, thirteen hearty NWW volunteers were trained by USFS wildlife technician Carly Lewis and took to the roads to deploy the hair snares. The volunteers, working in pairs, each set out 6 to 10 hair snares roughly a half mile apart, along but not too close to forest roads. A hair snare is a triangular tube made of the waterproof posterboard similar to those used for real estate signs. Each side has bristle rifle brushes, and in between those brushes is an enticing raw chicken wing. Anything that wants the chicken wing has to squeeze past the brushes – thus leaving a few hairs in the bristles. To attract the attention of fisher in the area, a scent lure must be set up that is a liquid smelling of skunk, carcasses, and...well, one tries not to wonder too hard about its specific content. Yum. Three weeks later in late September, more NWW volunteers headed to those same snares to remove them and meticulously gather any hair samples that may have been left. It will take a few months to get the hair samples analyzed in the genetics lab. Species that are often detected in the snares in NW MT include skunks, bushy-tailed woodrats, red squirrels, Northern flying squirrels, snowshoe hares, bobcats, pine marten, the occasional wolverine, and, on rare occasion, a fisher! Since 2007 nearly 5,000 snares have been deployed in Montana and Idaho, with fisher being detected at just over 200 of those snares. A few of those detections did occur in the Ninemile in previous years. Fur trapping records from MFWP also show that the Ninemile has been home to fishers in the past. We’ll anxiously await the results of this year’s survey to see if these fascinating furry creatures are still calling the Ninemile home. Learn more about fisher at Carly Lewis’ NWW lecture series talk in March!

Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup



Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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Renew Your Membership!	\$10.00	_____
Individual Membership	\$10.00	_____
Family Membership	\$20.00	_____
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Place a checkmark beside type of yearly membership

Please become a member or renew your membership with the Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup! 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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