

Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup Newsletter

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Fall Newsletter

November 2013

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.

UPDATES

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

Our free-admission **Wildlife Lecture Series** will begin again soon! Keep an eye out for a postcard in your mailbox, or check out our events list on our website or Facebook page.

Not Just Cake Auction Update

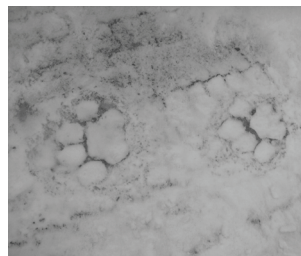


It was a very nice fall evening on October 12th when around 40 people gathered at the Historic Ninemile Ranger Station for our auction. Everybody socialized, ate some good food, and looked at all the fantastic donations. Then Pat Sweeney talked about the Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup, introduced the board members and our returning auctioneer JR Strand. JR started with a cowboy poem and went on doing a great job at auctioneering all the great items, he ended with more

cowboy poetry. We raised \$2440 in auction purchases, \$804 in donations and after expenses paid we have \$2676.76 to use for our programs. A very big thank you to the members and friends who participated and spent/donated money, to all the generous donors (members, friends and businesses) and to JR Strand. Your support is greatly appreciated, you made our auction a success. See you next year!



Check out this Great Short Video: Craig Boddington, hunter, journalist, and TV personality, demonstrates how and why hunters (and anyone else) should use bear spray while they're afield in bear country. Produced by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee and Wildlife Management Institute. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmbECUT8hG8&feature=youtu.be>



Highway Wilding is a documentary for teachers, non-profits, transportation planners, and people like you who are interested in getting wildlife across highways safely. Highway Wilding has been an audience favorite during 2013's Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour with 95 screenings across North America.

To view and/or download the film and trailer, head to: http://highwaywilding.org/hw_movie.php

Build them and they will live. That is the simple message of Highway Wilding, a 22 minute documentary exploring highway-wildlife conflicts and the pioneering solutions that are preventing roadkill and reconnecting landscapes in Western Canada. Here in the Rocky Mountains we have a unique opportunity to maintain a fully functioning mountain ecosystem, but highways remain a significant barrier to ecosystem health and connectivity. Everything from grizzly bears and wolverines to ducks and salamanders need to cross roads safely to meet their life needs, and these critical connections are increasingly threatened by highway expansion. After seeing Highway Wilding, you will never look at highways the same way again.



Moose family in the Ninemile Photo by Bobbe Almer



LETTER TO NWW FROM MONTANA FISH WILDLIFE & PARKS' JAMIE JONKEL

Hello Ninemile Wildlife Working Group:

It has been quiet in the Ninemile and Sixmile drainages. The only call I have had came in last week. A small black bear came into a chicken coop in the Sixmile area and attempted to get into some feed. I checked out an electric fence kit and Erin Edge (Defenders of Wildlife) is working with them on a permanent solution.

I wish I could say the same for the Alberton and Frenchtown areas. We have had continual issues around Alberton since mid May. We trapped and relocated three bears and received 40 plus calls. Also, it has been pretty crazy east of Frenchtown up Touchet Lane, with seven to ten different bears getting into garbage, chicken coops and one house entry. We did discover a dump truck load of garbage at one residence and gave them a warning ticket--hopefully things will get better. But I am guessing that bear issues in that area will escalate because the bears have been "trained-up."

We very much appreciate all the hard work, education and outreach your group has done---it has made a huge difference. Take care and keep up the good work.



by Pat Sweeney

GRANT MONEY WILL REDUCE WILDLIFE CONFLICTS

The NWW has been working to reduce bear conflicts in our area for several years through the following activities:

- * *Selling low cost bear spray to encourage the use of bear spray which is more effective than a firearm to deter a charging bear.*
- * *Hosting public meetings with bear experts discussing how to behave in bear country.*
- * *Sponsoring fence construction to protect crops and livestock through Defenders of Wildlife. We have provided up to half the cost of constructing bear resistant electric fences, with the owner providing the remainder of the cost and Defenders of wildlife providing the administrative and technical support.*
- * *Maintaining a website with links to information on coexisting with bears as well as publishing two newsletters per year with additional information.*
- * *Three bear aware coordinators in the Nine Mile and Six Mile Valleys work with Jamie Jonkel, the bear manager with Region 2 of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP), to inform a network of neighbors about bear and mountain lion activity.*
- * *Providing low cost bear resistant containers to area innovators for storing bear attractants such as garbage or animal feed.*

In part, because of these efforts along with cooperation of neighbors following bear safe practices, the Nine Mile and Six Mile Valleys have had few bear related incidents in recent years. But we need to remain diligent to stay that way.

So What Do We Need to Do?

Garbage is a common attractant for bears. Once a bear receives a garbage “food reward,” they often return to that site and seek similar awards from other garbage cans. This leads to bears coming into conflict with people. Consequently, this is dangerous for both people and bears. Keeping bears from human provided food sources allows us to coexist with the wildlife we enjoy.



Currently the Lolo National Forest has a food storage order reducing human food sources for bears on the Lolo Forest; the Ninemile Ranger Station has bear resistant containers for garbage that could attract bears; and the Elk Meadows Homeowners Association in the Six Mile Valley has a bear resistant storage area for their garbage, eliminating a past problem.

The Missoula County Secure Rural Schools Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) recently awarded a grant to the NWW that will further reduce garbage being accessible to bears. The NWW coordinated this effort with the Lolo National Forest, Republic Services of Montana, MFWP, and Defenders of Wildlife to implement this project.



With a limited number of cans available for our area, the coordinators decided to place them where they would be the most effective. Prioritizing a single general area for garbage containment is more effective than scattering bear-resistant garbage containers across the landscape. Priority for placement of these containers was based on protecting the important Nine Mile wildlife corridor and where there has been recent grizzly bear activity and black bear conflicts. The group decided that the Six Mile area best met those selection criteria and will be the epicenter for placement of the bear resistant containers. With the funding generously provided from the RAC grant and our cooperators, existing containers serviced by Republic Services will be replaced with bear resistant garbage containers. This will result in keeping most garbage sources in the Six Mile area secured and bears will not learn to associate garbage as food. Residents receiving containers will be given a packet of information that explains the process.

This opportunity would not be possible without the support of all the cooperators mentioned above. Please thank them for making this project possible. Special acknowledgement needs to go to Max Bauer of Republic Services. His leadership and concern for wildlife made this effort successful. Not only did Republic Services contribute many bear resistant containers to this effort, but they are storing, distributing and servicing the containers. They also volunteered to copy and distribute educational materials with the delivery of the cans.

We fully expect that this cooperative project will be an excellent example for others on how we can coexist with wildlife in bear country. With these new bear resistant containers, bears (and other critters) will no longer have ready access to garbage, and thus human-wildlife conflicts will be reduced.



MPG RANCH: MONITORING AND RESTORATION ON PRIVATE LAND

By Jim Gouaux

On June 25th the NWW board was treated to an enjoyable and educational tour of the MPG Ranch in the Bitterroot valley a few miles northeast of Florence. Our personal host was Joshua Lisbon, the ranch's Education and Community Outreach Manager.

What is this ranch and why did we go there? It is an expansion, to about 10,000 acres, of land originally homesteaded by the Schroeder family in 1881. After many years of sheep and cattle ranching the Schroeders sold it in 2009 to a private individual interested in a science based restoration of the land. Not a restoration to a pre-native American or pre-Caucasian immigration status but intended to approximate the features of the land prior to intensive grazing, reduction of native shrubs and grasses and invasion of aggressive weed species. What it may have resembled a century or so ago.

Our interest was in the extensive research and investment to accomplish the ranch's restoration goals which include an inventory of the local flora and fauna, strategies to reduce invasive weeds, restoration of native grasses, forbs and shrubs and support and training of the next generation of conservationists. At any given time there might be a couple of dozen researchers there and another few dozen staff and volunteers providing support services and the hard physical work need to translate theory into on-the-ground reality.



With Josh at the wheel we spent several hours cruising narrow, steep roads around the ranch's forested mountain (Baldy) and grassy open lands. We saw a sample of the wildlife such as mule and white-tailed deer, elk and hawks but missed the more reclusive coyotes, bears and wolves. Josh pointed out fields where weeds had been picked or sprayed and native grasses and trees re-introduced. One of the most beautiful areas was a ponderosa and cottonwood grove on the west boundary of the property, adjacent the Bitterroot River.

MPG has an extensive network of remote video cameras to see what is going on at the ranch. They share their video feeds and other great wildlife information on their website (<http://www.mpgranch.com/>) and facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/MPGWildlife>). The live feeds

are taken down during hunting season, however, but will back again soon!

Was our afternoon a success, enjoyable, educational? The simple and obvious answer is---you bet! Perhaps more important are some questions that our venture generated. Any knowledge gained that we might apply to wildlife conservation in the Nine Mile, Six Mile, Petty Creek and Alberton areas? Is the microclimate of MPG Ranch, lots of south and west slopes in an area slightly warmer and drier than the Nine Mile/Alberton region, what we may experience in the next century? If so how will our wildlife and forests adapt to this change? Are there individuals or groups (adults or students) in our region who would, like us, like to visit MPG Ranch and learn more about conservation issues? Or volunteer to help with one of their projects? If so please contact me, another NWW board member or Joshua Lisbon at MPG Ranch.

FEEDING BIRDS RESPONSIBLY IN BEAR COUNTRY

From: www.fvaudubon.org/bird-of-the-month/feeding-birds-responsibly-in-bear-country/

Done right, bird feeding can be good for the birds and not cause undesirable side effects.

Winter is the most desirable time of year to feed birds – natural food is more difficult for the birds to obtain in winter, and bears are generally hibernating from mid November to mid March. If you feed the birds in winter you should commit to feed the birds all winter. The birds need to have a reliable source of food, or they waste their energy coming to your yard. If you want to help birds this is very important.

Water – birds need water for drinking and bathing, both in summer and in winter. You'll need a submersible thermostat/heater in the winter. Water is more valuable to birds in summer than food, since food in the form of insects and seed is naturally quite plentiful.

Bird feeding in *summer* requires more planning and responsibility in bear country – bears are generally active from mid-March thru mid-November. It's important to make sure a bear doesn't get a reward if it discovers your bird feeder. TIPS: Hang feeders 10ft high, and at least 4ft from any supporting post or tree. Or put them behind electric fencing that is at least 6ft high. Or take your feeders down and bring them in at night, or if you leave town. Only put a small amount of food in the feeder – this reduces the reward if a bear finds your feeder. Clean out the area under the feeders regularly with a broom or rake.

Hummingbird feeders need the same separation from bears as seed feeders. Change the sugar water at least weekly (see sidebar). Also check daily for signs of mold, and if you find any then clean the feeder and refill it with fresh sugar water.

Keep your *cats* in the house. House cats are deadly to birds, causing in excess of 20% mortality of local wildlife (birds, small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles).

Store all *bird food indoors* in sealed containers to avoid conflicts with bears, raccoons, and rodents.



By Rickie van Berkum

RELEASING PETS FROM TRAPS - TIPS FROM FWP

I, NWW Board member Rickie van Berkum, attended a clinic to learn how to release pets from traps this past year. This was an extremely informative hands-on clinic. We got a chance to open all of the kinds of traps that are used in MT. Below are the main messages I took home from the clinic. Since I knew nothing about trapping before I attended, I learned lots!



1) Foothold traps are designed not to damage the trapped animal. Your dog (and probably you) will be very stressed by being trapped, but will unlikely have any serious injury as long as you are nearby and can release the dog promptly. If you cannot release your pet, or need help, call FWP 1-800-TIPMONT and they will come as quickly as possible to help.

2) Review 'Tips for Avoiding Traps' for information on setbacks, trapping seasons, different kinds of traps, tools for opening traps.



3) Trap setback rules apply to 'designated trails.' Designated trails have signs or numbers marking them. They include trails marked with diamonds, and marked roads that have not been plowed. Any road or trail without such a sign is not 'designated' and not subject to setback rules.

4) Private land is not subject to setback rules, but trappers must obtain permission to trap on private lands. Check with the property owner before walking your dog on private lands.

5) If you find a trap that you think is set illegally, call FWP at 1-800-TIPMONT. They will investigate and remove the trap if it is illegally set. It is illegal for you to tamper with any trap. This rule is not enforced if your dog gets caught in a trap.

6) Conibear traps are designed to quickly and humanely kill trapped animals. The conibear traps for beavers are a serious danger to your pet. The beaver traps are only placed near beaver lodges, so avoiding these should keep your pets safe.

7) Tools to carry in case your pet gets trapped: see the document 'Tips for Avoiding Traps' and Youtube video 'Removing Pets from Traps' (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DtkPjd_cx4). I collected these tools and put them in a small backpack and easily carried them on walks with my dogs.

- a. Two 6" vise grips will allow you to release your pet from all coil-spring foothold traps. I (age 55+) found it easy to open a wolf foothold trap using the vise grips.
- b. Bar clamps and cable ties for longspring traps.
- c. Cable cutters for snare traps.
- d. Leashes for restraining dogs if you see trap signs or if one dogs gets in a trap. Also 2 leashes for opening conibear traps.

8) Even the gentlest dog will bite and snap if trapped. Put a coat over the dog's head to help calm him. You can put his muzzle in a coat sleeve (keeping nose free to breathe) to prevent biting.

9) If your dog gets caught in a foothold trap, you have time to stop, calm yourself and evaluate the situation. First leash remaining dogs. Then calm the trapped dog and prevent bites. Then work to remove the dog from a trap.

10) There is nothing like hands-on experience with releasing traps to prepare you in case your pet gets trapped. Attend a clinic if you possibly can. Second best is watching the aforementioned Youtube video, Removing Pets from Traps.

11) The trapper education classes that all wolf trappers must attend emphasize that it is in the trappers' best interest to avoid trapping you, your dog (or your child). If it is obvious that a trail is regularly used by people and dogs, most trappers will avoid that area. The snow is your friend: it is easy for trappers to see where you regularly walk, and it is easier for you to see if a trapper has been by.

12) Trappers are allowed to use scents and other lures. Keep your dogs close enough that you can see if they catch a scent and start heading for it.





WILDERNESS IN MIND: WILDLIFE FRIENDLY FENCING. FIRST PRINTED IN BIG SKY SMALL ACRES, WINTER 2008

BY JOE WEIGAND, MT FWP

According to a recent study in Utah, researchers found, on average, one ungulate (hoofed mammal) tangled and dead for every 2.5 miles of fence. Additionally, 70% of all mortalities were on fences higher than 40 inches. The deadliest fence type was woven-wire topped with a single strand of barbed wire, just like the type along many of our highways. If you own property along a highway, Montana Department of Transportation may install a different fence the next time they replace it...if you ask.

Wildlife-human interaction probably occurs more in Montana now than any time in the last hundred years. Human sprawl has swept across the state, with increasing modern development alongside traditional farming and ranching. This, in turn, has increased the miles of fence in Montana, creating additional problems for wildlife. Fences can be wildlife traps and barriers. Most large mammals like elk and deer are fully capable of jumping over fences. However, elk calves and deer fawns are frequently reluctant to try jumping for the first time, and subsequently get separated from their mothers. Similarly, pronghorn antelope will usually try to go under a fence and rarely try to jump over. The Wyoming Department of Game and Fish has documented large numbers of antelope that have perished during winter when an impassable fence blocked their travel route to quality winter range. Some fences such as "sheep fence" form a complete barrier to animals that are unwilling or incapable of jumping over.



Unfortunately, even animals that do try to jump over fences aren't always successful. Wild ungulates, like deer and elk, bring their back legs forward as they jump. This can result in their hind legs going between the top two wires, which can twist and trap one or both legs. Sometimes animals are able to get free. Other times they remain trapped and starve to death or become an easy meal for predators and scavengers. *What kinds of fences cause problems for wildlife?* Fences that: are too high to jump; are too low to crawl under; have wires spaced too closely together; have loose wires; are difficult for fleeing animals or birds to see; create a complete barrier.

There are a number of things we can do as good land stewards to help avoid these unfortunate circumstances. Often it only takes a little ingenuity. A Landowner's Guide to Wildlife Friendly Fences: How to Build Fence with Wildlife in Mind is an easy-to-read, colorful guide; written by Christine Paige and funded by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP); that gives readers ample information on how to construct wildlife friendly fences or cost-effectively modify existing fences. Here are a few tips from the guide: *When you design your fence, consider:* the purpose of the fence; topography – hills, gullies, streams, and wetlands; species of wildlife present; daily or seasonal wildlife movements in the area; presence of water, food and cover for wildlife; presence of young animals.

Jeff Laszlo, a Madison Valley rancher, had this to say about wildlife friendly fences: *They really are a benefit from two perspectives... they allow game animals to pass over or under them with greater ease, which is good for allowing natural movement and migration of these animals. From a ranching perspective, they are a real plus as well. With the traditional style of fence, built exclusively to contain livestock, game animals have a much bigger impact. Elk, antelope, moose and deer will, under the right conditions, literally tear these old style fences down as they move through an area. Consequently wildlife friendly fences, in the long run, are much more cost efficient for the rancher as they require much less annual maintenance.*

Of course, the best alternative is no fence. If you must have a fence, think, "less is best." If you're just marking your property boundary, use one or two rails for a wood fence or no more than three strands of barbless wire on a metal fence.

For the ideal wildlife friendly fence where livestock is present, FWP recommends: a top wire or rail no more than 40 inches above the ground, and absolutely no more than 42 inches; at least 12 inches between the top two wires; at least 18 inches between the bottom wire or rail and the ground; smooth wire or rail for the top, smooth wire on the bottom; no vertical stays; gates, drop-downs or other passages where wildlife concentrate and cross.

For areas of high livestock use, there are additional options including simple modifications or wildlife crossings. *Wildlife crossings can include:* individual sections built to wildlife friendly standards; drop-down or rail fence designs; lay-down fence; extra gates, opened for wildlife; PVC modification of wire fence.

When it comes to wildlife friendly fencing, a little creativity goes a long way. Simple changes in design or inexpensive modifications are all it usually takes. It doesn't have to involve the whole fence either. A person can simply concentrate on areas that wildlife use the most. You might find that a wildlife friendly fence not only benefits wildlife but also meets your own property needs. It can yield many rewards including fewer wildlife injuries and fatalities and reduced fence maintenance costs.



For more information and ideas on alternative fence designs that are intended to be wildlife friendly, yet functional, contact Joe Weigand at (406) 444-3065 or joweigand@mt.gov and request a free copy of the Landowner's Guide to Wildlife Friendly Fence: How To Build Fence With Wildlife In Mind.

Photo by Krist Hager

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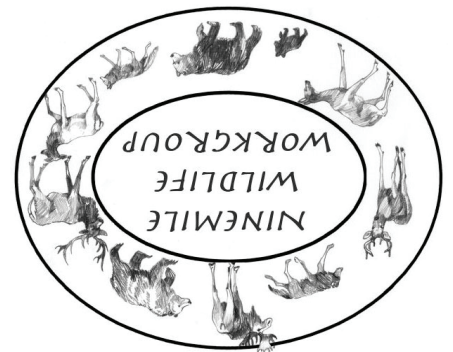
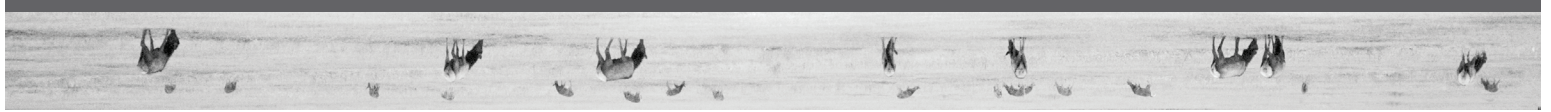
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