

# NINEMILE WILDLIFE WORKGROUP

WWW.NINEMILEWILDLIFE.ORG  
 NINEMILEWILDLIFE@GMAIL.COM  
 WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/NINEMILEWILDLIFE

APRIL 2016

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

## FREE LECTURE SERIES THIS SPRING, COMING SOON!

### Long-term Bee Monitoring at MPG Ranch - Marirose Kuhlman

Thursday, April 14, 7pm, Alberton Senior Center

Restoration projects aim to return diverse plant communities and ecosystem function to disturbed landscapes. Native bees play a critical role to increase biodiversity because they are our main pollinators. In 2013, MPG Ranch in the Bitterroot Valley initiated a long-term bee monitoring program, in part to monitor how bee communities respond to habitat restoration treatments that are large-scale, intensive, and ongoing at MPG Ranch. For the last three years, we have documented thousands of bees and even added new species to Montana's bee species list. We have more exciting bee discoveries come to the lecture to find out the cool and interesting news!

### The Hills are Alive with the Sound of . . . Alarm Calls: Wildlife's Distant Early Warning Systems- Erick Greene

Thursday, May 12, 7pm, Alberton Senior Center

Dr. Erick Greene is a professor in the Division of Biological Sciences and in the Wildlife Biology Program. He grew up with twin passions for music and nature. Erick has been able to combine his interests in music and biology by studying how animals use sounds to communicate with each other. These studies in bioacoustics show that animals convey a fantastic amount of information with their vocalizations.

### WILDLIFE AND FENCING *by David Pontrelli*



Most of us are aware of the miles of degraded barbed wire fencing on private and public land in the Ninemile and all over Montana. For some of these fences, quickly fixing them with a couple metal T-posts and a few fencing staples still results in a fence that is still just barely standing and remains a danger to livestock and wildlife. Many times, we don't notice the problem, and the loose wires are hidden by vegetation and snag unsuspecting creatures (human and non-human).



These fences are a threat to wildlife. As the Landowners Guide to Wildlife Friendly Fences by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (found at [www.ninemilewildlife.org/resources.html](http://www.ninemilewildlife.org/resources.html)) notes, "Fences can block or hinder daily wildlife movements, seasonal migrations, and access to forage and water. Wildlife may avoid areas with too many fences to negotiate. When animals collide with or become entangled in fences they can be injured or killed. Young, pregnant, or winter-stressed animals" are particularly vulnerable.

So a landowner with a barbed wire fence should ask the question: Is this fence of mine ever going to be used again? Is it best removed now while still possible before the vegetation grows it in forever? Reasons for removing degraded fencing include: no other feasible use or function, a change of plans for property management, easier logging access, no plans for horses/cattle in the foreseeable future, reopen historic wildlife travel corridors, avoid future vet bills, and so on. If you think you'll need a stock fence again, you can purchase electric wire (easy, effective, and mobile to any location for the life of the system to any property).

*Note from the author:* If you have degraded fencing on your land, I and my business Streamside Services, LLC out of Huson, can help you remove it. Working with local landowners and neighbors, the Streamside Services, LLC wildlife crew has removed approximately 38,000 lineal feet of barbed wire in the winter months of 2015/2016 alone. I'm willing to provide assistance (or even advice) as to how to go about doing it. No job too small or too tall. Free estimates on time and removal costs. It may be more affordable than imagined and often a two-person crew can remove at least a quarter mile of fence material (4 wire fence) in an eight-hour day.

## WEST FORK FISH FIRE

by Lolo NF Assistant Fire Management Officer Jeffrey Hayes and Carly Lewis, Lolo NF wildlife biologist

You all likely remember the West Fork Fish Fire last year - it was a doozy. In 2015, there were several fires on the Ninemile Range District: West Fork Fish Fire (13,300 acres), Wildhorse Fire (150 acres); Siamese Fire (90 acres). The West Fork Fish Fire (let's call it WFFF) had high severity impacts on 3,500 acres (29% of the fire area) in the West Fork Fish Creek Drainage, Fire Creek, Straight Creek and Packers Gulch. A large portion of the fire experienced low to moderate fire severity, resulting in a mosaic burn pattern on 6,956 acres (64% of the fire landscape).

The WFFF was a frightening ordeal for the humans living in the area, and fortunately no major losses were suffered with the exception of the Clearwater Crossing Forest Service structures. For wildlife, however, the fire had many positive benefits, changing the complexity of the forest to support a diversity of species. Areas that burned at lower intensities will have refreshed, improved food sources for herbivores such as deer, elk, and wild turkeys, as there will be fresh, succulent grasses and shrubs re-growing at the ground level. Intermittent fire-killed trees in these areas will provide habitat for various species while they stand, and once they fall to the ground, the large downed logs will provide nice hiding holes for mice, voles, and other small mammals.



Black-backed woodpecker. Jeffrey Hayes



Western bluebird. Jeffrey Hayes

Areas that burned at high severity will provide habitat for species such as the black-backed woodpecker. These fire-dependent birds move in within months after a wildfire, chasing the wood-boring beetles that are attracted to high-severity burns. Black-backed woodpeckers only stay in a burned area for about 4-5 years after a fire before moving on to a newly burned area. Their impact on the land lasts much longer, however, as the cavities that they excavate in snags for nesting each year will remain important resources for many wildlife species into the future, housing a host of cavity-nesting birds and small mammals. These "architects" of the forest are identifiable by their solid black backs; the males sport a yellow cap. A hike up the West Fork of Fish Creek this April, May, or June may be great for detecting these cool birds. (But be alert for rolling debris, fire-weakened trees, and snags due to the severity of the fire. Efforts by the Ninemile Trails Crew will be ongoing to rehabilitate trails 99, 101, and 103.)

The WFFF will benefit fish in the West Fork and North Fork - as trees fall into the stream they begin to create a complex array of pools and spawning habitat for fish. The scour from the wood and pools will "sort" the streams rocky substrate into areas of gravel. Gravel is needed by spawning fish to deposit their eggs in the gravels to start the incubation process. Once the eggs hatch, tiny fish will emerge and spend their early lives in a nearby wood-created pool that provides a slower flow of water. Fisheries biologists with the Forest Service and MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks will continue monitoring bull trout breeding sites in the coming years to track those effects.

Fires Update for 2016: Prescribed burning is planned for several projects in the Ninemile Ranger District in Moncure, Owl, Lupine, Roman, Stoney, Sixmile, McCormick and the Butler Creek Drainages. Some of the objectives of these projects are to maintain and improve wildlife security and habitat, maintain water quality and fish habitat, maintain and improve forest health and reduce the risk of high severity fires and damage from insects while maintaining a natural appearing landscape.



Common loon. K. Paul



Black bear. Genevieve Fix.



Golden-mantled ground squirrel. K. Paul

# WILDLIFE MONITORING IN THE NINEMILE

by Carly Lewis, Lolo NTF wildlife biologist



Bait station installation



Bait and brushes

The Ninemile Valley is known to be an important area for wildlife connectivity, and it sits in the middle of core areas for two rare forest carnivores - the fisher and Canada lynx. The fisher is a member of the weasel family that has been highlighted in NWW newsletters in the past couple years (the NWW helped in a fisher monitoring project in 2012!). The core range for fisher in the Rockies lies to the west and south in central Idaho and along the MT-ID border, where the warmer, wetter maritime climate results in forests dominated by cedars and grand fir and wetter snows. Canada lynx, one of the few wild cats species in the US and often confused with the bobcat, are a threatened species on the Endangered Species Act. The Seeley-Swan, Flathead, and the Purcell Mountain ranges in Montana are known to be the core area for lynx in the Northern Rockies, where subalpine fir and Englemann spruce forests are prevalent, and the snow is deeper, drier, and fluffier. Situated between these two core areas, the Ninemile could be home and/or provide important connectivity for either or both of those species.

It is important to know whether these animals occur in habitat that is available to them. Various relatively small-scale efforts to survey for these species have been run over the past decade in the Ninemile and continued this winter with Forest Service biologists conducting track surveys and installing baited data collection stations in multiple areas. The bait stations consist of a chunk of road-killed deer nailed high in a tree and surrounded by bristly wire brushes. When a carnivore climbs the tree to eat the meat, the brushes snag some hair, which we then take to the lab for genetic analysis. That tells us what species, and even which individual, was in the area. It's basically like CSI Montana!

Combined with track surveys, in which skilled trackers systematically search miles of roads and trails for the tracks of carnivores, this method has proven to be a reliable way to detect multiple carnivore species, including the rare ones (lynx, fisher, wolverine) as well as more common species (wolf, mountain lion, bobcat, fox, marten). The Forest Service should get genetic results back from the lab this summer, so stay tuned for updates on the results in the fall NWW newsletter.



Wolf tracks found on track survey

Springtime basking painted turtles and a goose. Pat Sweeney.



## MORE TIDBITS

**Saturday, May 14.** Interested in finally finding out what bird is making that crazy call? What the heck the brown and black and white bird might be? Whether that one bird that hangs out in big flocks is native around here? Well come on out to the **NWW Annual Birding Trip**, aka SUPER FUN TIMES BIRDING IN THE NINEMILE! Meet at the Nine Mile Ranger Station at 8:00 am. This will be mostly a drive and stop trip but it will feature excellent bird habitat in the Nine Mile and Six Mile Valleys. No experience is necessary. Dress appropriately for the weather and bring some snacks and water, and binoculars and your bird guides if you have them. We will be done by noon. Bring your family and friends!

Late June - we'll have our **annual roadside trash pickup** along I-90. We haven't finalized the date but we'll notify folks by emails, Facebook, and on our website prior to the event. It will be the mos fun you've had with garbage!



Two strutting toms and one unimpressed hen. Pat Sweeney.



Coyote. K. Paul



Bighorn sheep. K. Paul

# NINEMILE WILDLIFE WORKGROUP

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Please consider supporting our organization so we can continue our mission! Tax-deductible donations can be sent to the Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup! Please fill out this section and mail it with your donation to:  
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