



FIELD JOURNAL

Integrating science, community and education in the conservation of rural landscapes

Winter/Spring 2011

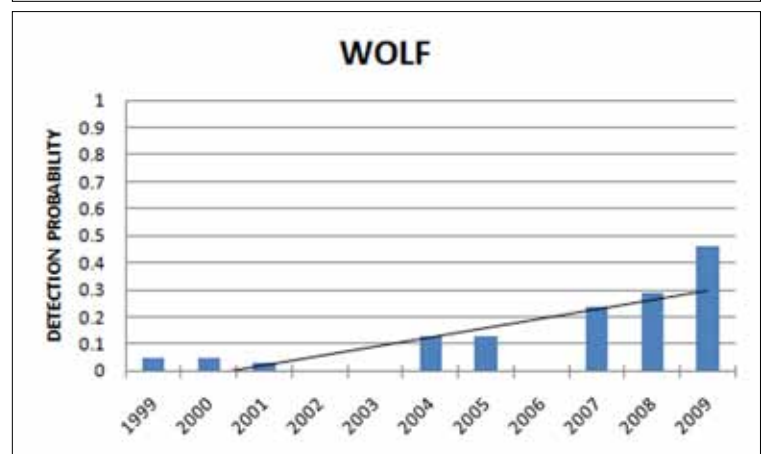
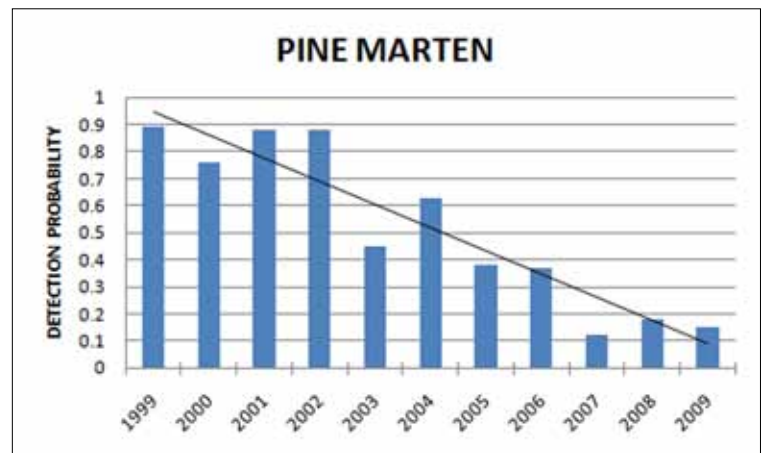
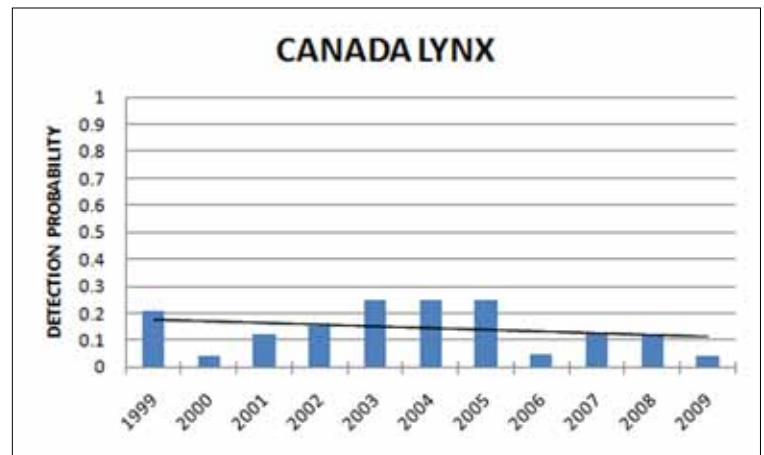
Vol. II/Issue 1

Carnivore Trends: A Look at the Last Decade

By Adam Lieberg

Over ten years ago we launched an effort to involve students and local residents in monitoring rare carnivores in the Swan Valley. At the time, there was a significant need to develop site specific information on lynx, fisher, marten and wolverine. We aimed to demonstrate the power of snow track surveys, conducted by local trackers, for monitoring these forest carnivores. What began as a pilot project in 1997 with our Winter Field Studies course and a few dedicated local outdoorsmen, ended up growing into a systematic effort to collect and catalogue data on all of the large and mid-sized carnivores across the managed landscape of the Swan Valley. This year we took time to summarize the past 11 years of survey effort and to report some of the trends we have seen.

The following graphs show how the probability of detecting each species has changed over time. Right now we are presenting this data to all of our local and regional partner organizations. Where significant trends seem to be occurring, we are facilitating discussions about whether or not specific conservation strategies need to be initiated. For instance, we do have concerns about both marten and fisher in the Swan Valley, and hope to see strong collaborative efforts emerge on behalf of these forest carnivores.



INSIDE	
Happenings	2
Workforce Assessment: Opportunities for Local Contractors	4
NwC 2011 Fall Field Semester	5
Montana Legacy Project Update	6
Field Notes: New Wolf Arriving New Staff - Dave Morris	7
2011 Upper Swan Valley Wolf Track Survey	8
Why Does Rural Matter? Notes and Policy Implications	9
Native Fish Conservation Education Update	10
Agnes Beck Memorial Scholarship Fund 2010 Expenditures by Program Area	11
Tribute to Bud Moore	12

- Continued on page 3 -

Happenings

By Melanie Parker

Wow, so much is happening around this place right now, it's hard to know where to begin. I can say that the past several months have been a very challenging and exciting time. Northwest Connections is taking a giant step back from itself and asking how the world has changed since our founding almost 15 years ago. We sponsored a "Future Visions Committee" that conducted interviews and focus groups and made some recommendations to our staff and board about our future direction. Currently we are chewing on all this information with the goal of having a **new strategic plan** written for ourselves by June, 2011.

We recruited some great new staff and board members. **Dave Morris** has come on board as a full time Educational Program Manager. He is designing curriculum, coordinating classes and recruiting students right now. Moreover, he is a strong team member who brings with him a breath of experience in education and a keen interest in community based conservation. **Nathan Richardson**, of Euchre Mountain Logging is joining our board. He was quite possibly one of our Landscape and Livelihood students favorite speakers last fall. I remember one student remarking, "I never thought I would think a logging project was beautiful" after visiting Nathan's work in the woods. **Scott Tomson** is also joining the NwC board. Scott is the wildlife biologist on the Seeley Ranger District, a long time member of the Clearwater Resources Council, and does property management here in Condon for a large land owner. And **Ben Thompson**, co-owner of RBM Lumber in Columbia Falls, is returning to the board after a short break. We are so glad to have such good minds and hearts helping to guide us.

Northwest Connections is building out its **internships**. We offer alumni the opportunity to come back to Northwest Connections to help either with conservation projects (summer) or educational programs (spring and fall). Last year we were fortunate to have returning alumni **Colleen Ferris**, **Ali Pons**, and **Brooke Stallings** working all summer on bear and fish projects. **Ashton Fink** also came on board as the Landscape and Livelihood intern, which turned out to be so much more as we found ourselves short staffed for a few months. All these women rock and we thank them for their efforts!

We continue to offer a number of workshops. We hosted two **workshops for contractors** in order to better link our local workforce to new and existing natural resource based jobs across our working landscape. **Mo** is leading this effort, as well as our collective work to prioritize investments coming into the Swan Valley as a result of the **Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program**. **Adam** and **Tom** are leading workshops for several state and federal agencies and local conservation groups on **animal tracking**, augmenting our own NwC tracking clinics.

Andrea completed our first successful season of native fish monitoring in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service and



Outlet of Holland Lake

the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. We are already planning more work in 2011, all of which is leading to a restoration plan for native westslope cutthroat trout. This project is not only creating benefits for fish, it is an excellent project for our students and interns to assist with, and gain field skills related to aquatic wildlife monitoring.

Adam has completed the synthesis of a decade of **carnivore surveys** in the Swan Valley, and is busy presenting our findings to all willing audiences. He and Tom are also working to convert our efforts into a standardized approach across the Lolo and Flathead National Forests.

I got to travel to Atlanta, Georgia last year to receive an **award** from the Rural Sociological Society for our work over the past many years. There I met a young professor from Brown University who is actually from the lower Swan Valley. She is now hosting me as a speaker at her university in April to give a talk on "Conserving Large Landscapes in the West... Working from the Bottom Up."

If I had to put words to the feel around this place, I would say we are turning the page and moving from one chapter to the next. We are working hard to wrap up large endeavors and translate them into change, while at the same time putting on the drawing board a whole lot of big exciting ideas to co-create with our students, staff, board, and partners in the future. We hope you will follow our ramblings on the "**Barn Blog**" and watch as we put **Wildlife in the West** into motion later this spring, travel to this nation's capital to advocate for rural working landscapes, initiate our summer field work on native fish, whitebark pine and grizzly bears, and lead the charge on making sure that all the investments in conservation in the Swan Valley translate into clear benefits to our rural communities.

Happy Winter-into-Spring! ~

Canivore Trends: A Look At The Last Decade

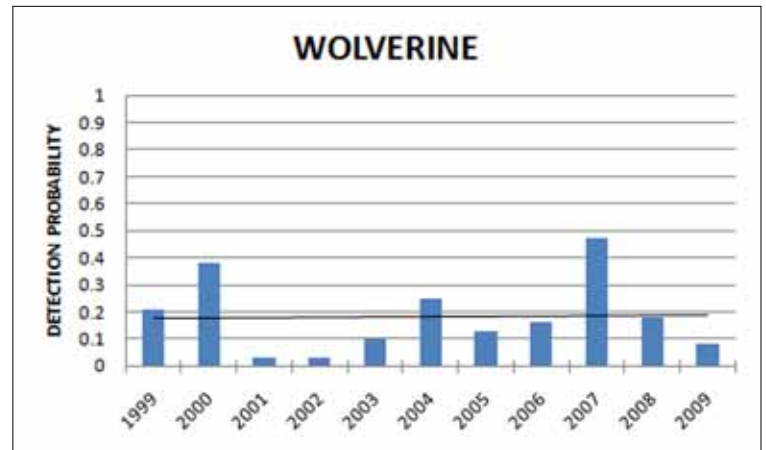
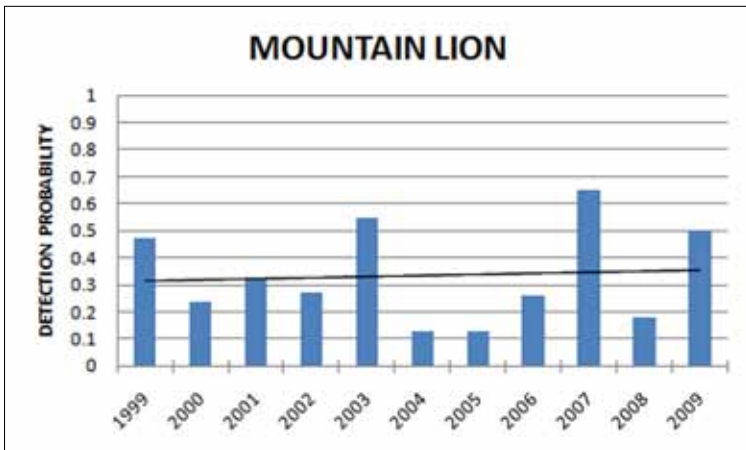
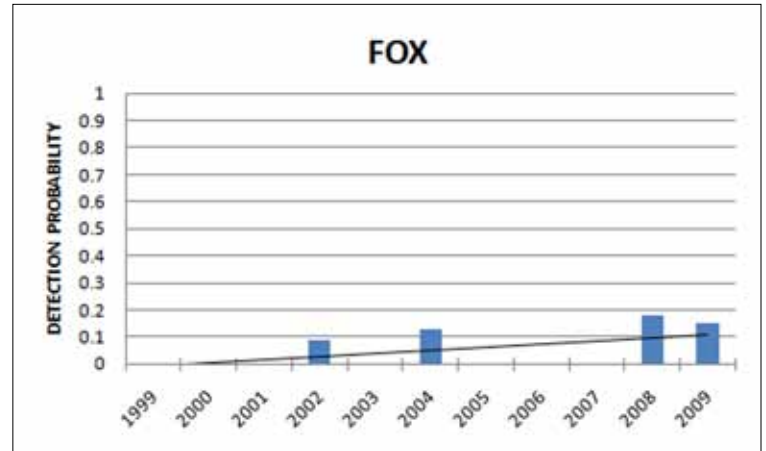
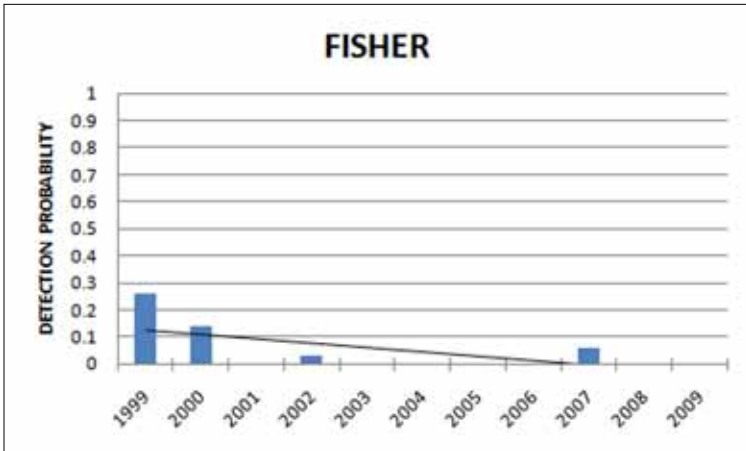
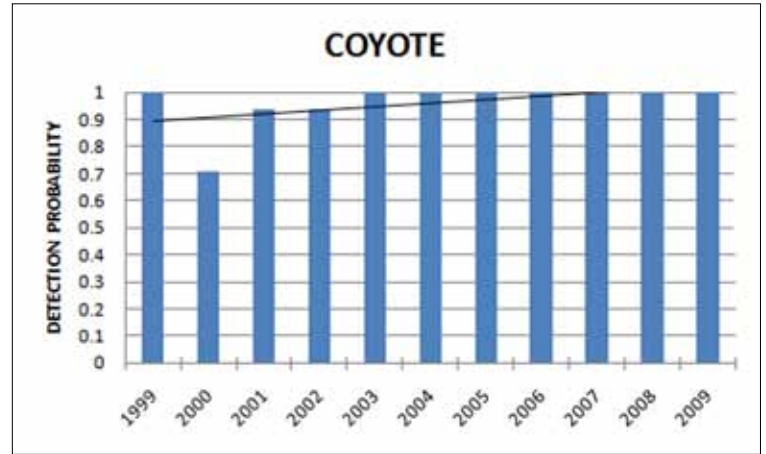
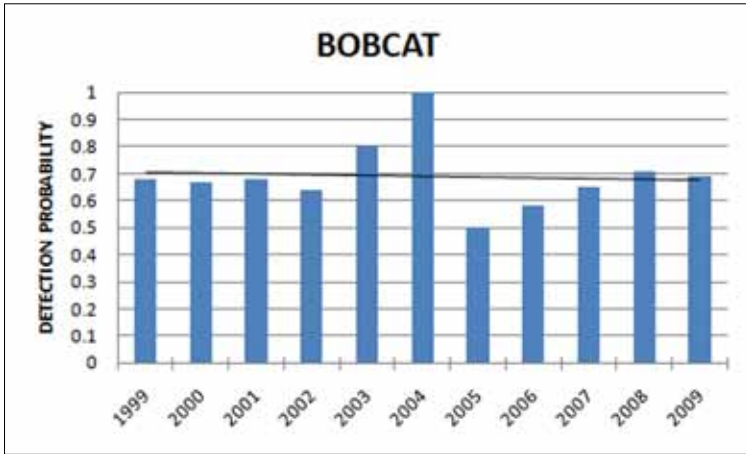
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In addition to detecting wildlife trends across our landscape, we also feel strongly that this project has clearly demonstrated that snow track surveys provide a good low-cost technique for monitoring large and mid-sized carnivores. We hope that it further illustrates that local residents with strong track identification skills and a working knowledge of the terrain can be successful at conducting these surveys.

Moving forward, we are working with wildlife biologists in the Forest Service and the Montana Department of Fish,

Wildlife and Parks to adapt our efforts to a large, integrated monitoring effort across Western Montana.

A big thanks to our NwC track survey team, over 150 students, a dedicated core of local volunteers, and all who have supported this work through the years. Northwest Connections would like to express special thanks to the Liz Claiborne Art Ortenberg Foundation for supporting this work from its inception. A complete report can be viewed on our website. ~



Workforce Assessment: Opportunities For Local Contractors

By Mo Bookwalter

The nature of forest contract work in the Swan Valley is transitioning. Northwest Connections is committed to helping to make sure that as new types of work emerge both on private and public lands, that our local contractors have the ability to access that work. Some of that work is in fuels reduction and forest restoration, some of it is of the more conventional timber sale variety, and much of it is focused on the restoration of roads, streams and native plant communities.

Last summer and fall, we conducted a workforce assessment to gauge the Swan Valley's local capacity for these kinds of work, and to make recommendations to land management agencies on how to better contract work with local businesses in mind. We conducted informal interviews with several local contractors as well as with contracting entities to inform this assessment.

As a direct result of what we heard, Northwest Connections hosted a workshop in January titled: *Finding more Jobs, Winning more Bids*. Forty five people attended the workshop. Representatives from the Forest Service, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, The Nature Conservancy, Swan Ecosystem Center and the Procurement and Technical Assistance Center were on hand to share information with contractors about upcoming work opportunities, how to best access this work, and provide information on bonding

“The workshop was awesome... I'm looking forward to the next one.”

- local contractor at *Finding more Jobs, Winning more Bids*

and insurance requirements. Trout Unlimited and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation also provided information on their program of work to share with contractors.

The day began with a facilitated discussion about what is working and what is not for providing local access to Swan Valley work-in-the-woods. The afternoon included a formal training session on how to access federal lands contracts. The event was designed to be a cross learning opportunity. Many of the contracting entities that attended, including the Forest Service, mentioned that they took a lot away from the day.

We tried to focus our efforts on local needs, but we did receive calls from all over western Montana, and from as far away as Oregon, demonstrating to us, at least, that these kinds of events are needed. As efforts ramp up with the 10 year program of work with the Southwest Crown's Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project we will be partnering with other regional groups to host a second workshop that is more tailored in scope so that contractors have the information they need to harness these upcoming opportunities on Forest Service lands across our region.



January workshop attendees. Photo by Marnie Criley.

Other outcomes from our assessment include specific recommendations we will be sharing with contracting entities:

- Build in contract criteria that include factors other than price to ensure that the projects provide local benefits and value the expertise in the local workforce. Be clear about these criteria when soliciting bids.
- Provide future trainings that match the work demand. For contractors to invest time in trainings to gain new skills or purchase new equipment they need to see that the work will be available. The contracts and agreements will determine investment.
- Contracting entities need to be clear about which certifications matter when awarding bids.
- A diverse outreach strategy needs to be developed to advertise work on federal lands. The traditional means of mailings, e-mail and personal contact are helpful and should be continued. Federal contracting websites can be a deterrent unless understood better.
- The Forest Service should offer a wider variety of contracts (timber, service and stewardship), small and large in scope, so that contracts best fit the local workforce capacity.
- Utilize the services of our local Procurement Technical Assistance Centers and ask them to hold trainings in our local area specific to federal contracting, as needed.

We are still in the process of building out an action plan from our assessment and welcome input from all interested parties. A big thanks to all of the contractors and contracting entities who took the time to talk with us.

We hope these, and future efforts, will be useful in enhancing natural resource jobs within the region's working landscape.

For copies of the entire Workforce Assessment report, please contact Mo Bookwalter. ~

NwC 2011 Fall Field Semester

Now Accepting Applications



Landscape & Livelihood August 29 - October 27

An outdoor field semester focusing on ecology and community based conservation.

Base camp is a historic homestead on the Swan River, nestled between two wilderness areas 50 miles south of Glacier National Park.

Priority application deadline - April 1st.

15 University of Montana credits in:

- Biogeography of Northwestern Montana
- Watershed Dynamics
- Forests & Rural Communities
- Conservation & Community Research Project
- Field Skills for Conservation Work



"It is a completely life-changing experience that opens your eyes not only to issues in Northwest Montana, but around the country as well... Combining both studying the environment and understanding local opinions really makes this semester an incredible experience."

- Emily Gamm, Iowa State University

"There is no better place to live and study place-based conservation of working landscapes than Landscape and Livelihood in Condon, Montana. I just wish all of our Resource Conservation undergraduates could benefit by participating in this outstanding course."

- Stephen F. Siebert, Professor and Program Director, Resource Conservation, College of Forestry & Conservation, University of Montana

"(Northwest Connections) takes resource conservation concepts and grounds them... literally. I learned more in 2 months in the Swan Valley than 2 years in classrooms."

- Krista Kaarre, University of Montana



For program details visit www.northwestconnections.org or contact

Dave Morris, Education Program Manager

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Montana Legacy Project Update

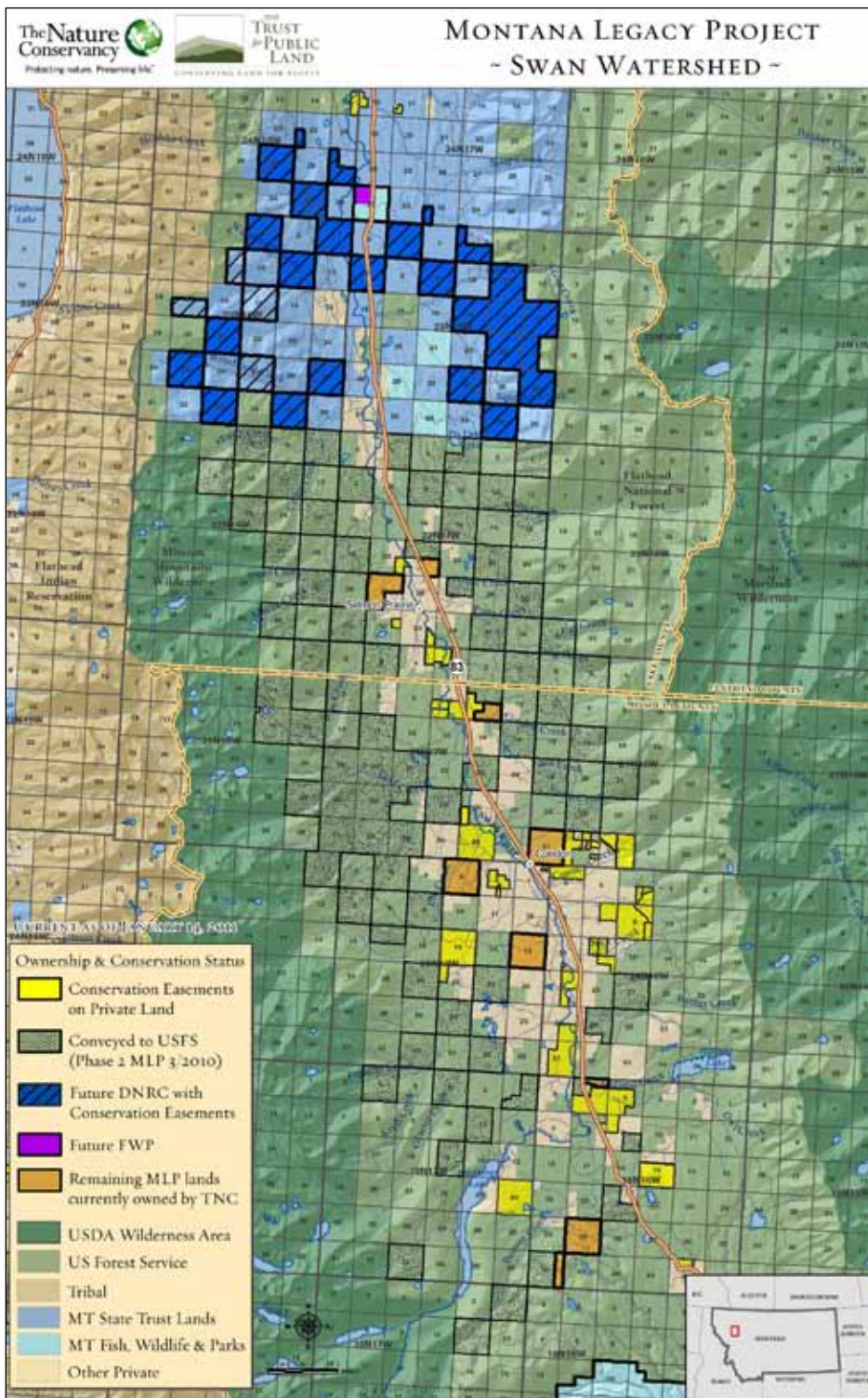
By Melanie Parker

As of December 2010, Phase 3 of the Montana Legacy Project has closed. What that means for the Swan Valley is this:

a) Plum Creek Timber Co. (REIT) no longer owns any acres in the Swan Valley.

b) Former PCTC lands intermixed with the Swan River State Forest are now owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The goal for these acres is to block up the Swan River State Forest into DNRC ownership. However, in order to make that possibility more affordable to DNRC, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has purchased the development rights, lowering the total cost of lands intended for long term timber harvest. So the current status of those lands is TNC ownership, with a FWP conservation easement. Long term, they will be owned in full by the state.

c) Scattered parcels around Condon totaling around 2,500 acres are currently now owned in full by The Nature Conservancy, with plans in motion to convey them to the Flathead National Forest.



Northwest Connections has a keen interest in seeing a subset of these latter acres converted into a community forest and a site for community facilities hosting demonstrations of sustainability. We are currently scoping the possibilities for this outcome.

The Nature Conservancy is actively managing their phase 2 lands (currently owned by the Forest Service with a timber reserve to TNC) to meet the intent of the Fiber Supply Agreement.

I think it is important to step back and consider that just a few short years ago we were told that there was no chance for a large scale answer to the divestment of corporate timber lands in the Swan Valley, and that we should be glad that a few parcels were being conserved and work hard to accommodate the growing footprint of private lands across the valley: Cooney Creek, Rumble Creek, Barber Creek, Glacier Creek, Metcalf Lake, Piper Creek, Owl Creek, etc.

Thanks to our partnerships with The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land, and many other local and regional partners, we have succeeded at keeping the Swan Valley rural and wild.

In 2011 we plan to sponsor celebrations of this good work, and focus our efforts on securing the benefits of this project to our local communities. ~

Field Notes: New Wolf Arriving

By Tom Parker

A friend and long time supporter of work in the Swan, Ted Smith, asked if we could do some tracking one recent afternoon. It was one of those rare bluebird days during a La Niña winter that is dominated by the constant influx of precipitation. We decided to hike on snowshoes in the Buck Creek/Rumble Creek area since I had discovered wolf tracks on our wolf survey the previous weekend.



Wolf tracks discovered during an NwC tracking class.

On the survey I had found a lone animal coming from the south which appeared to be a female heading north. The day Ted and I went out we picked her up headed south but in the company of a courting male. We tracked them and a number of other creatures including many coyotes, ermine, snowshoe hares, tree squirrels, grouse and voles for about a mile. We could not help but appreciate the role of forest complexity and diversity in providing key habitat elements to virtually all sign of creatures we observed.

We left the wolf tracks as they bounded off together, developing the bonds they need to mate, and knowledge of place to survive and raise young. My hunch was that this female is new to our area and will mate with the male in her company. I am unsure if he is new to the area or the Alpha male from the small pack that makes forays here. One of the most important needs we have for most wildlife in our part of the larger ecosystem is restoring functional connectivity and canopy cover in the winter range areas which make up much of the valley floor and Swan Range foothills. This serves the key winter habitat needs of deer, elk, and moose, from a wide area including the Mission Mountains and a significant part of the Bob Marshall, as well as the predators that hunt and follow them. This holds true for the human hunters as well.

Tracking conditions have been fleeting this winter as one weather system after another erases the track evidence in short order, so if you see a little tracking window put on the snowshoes or skis and go for it, they never last long in a La Niña weather cycle. ~

New Staff - Dave Morris



Dave, Northwest Connections' Education Program Manager, graduated from Evergreen State College with a degree in Environmental Studies, then earned his M.S. in the same field at the University of Montana. Dave has instructed and guided for many outdoor education programs

in the U.S. and abroad since 1990. He also has worked on diverse field biology and conservation planning projects, and has a particular interest in the relationships between local and global conservation issues.

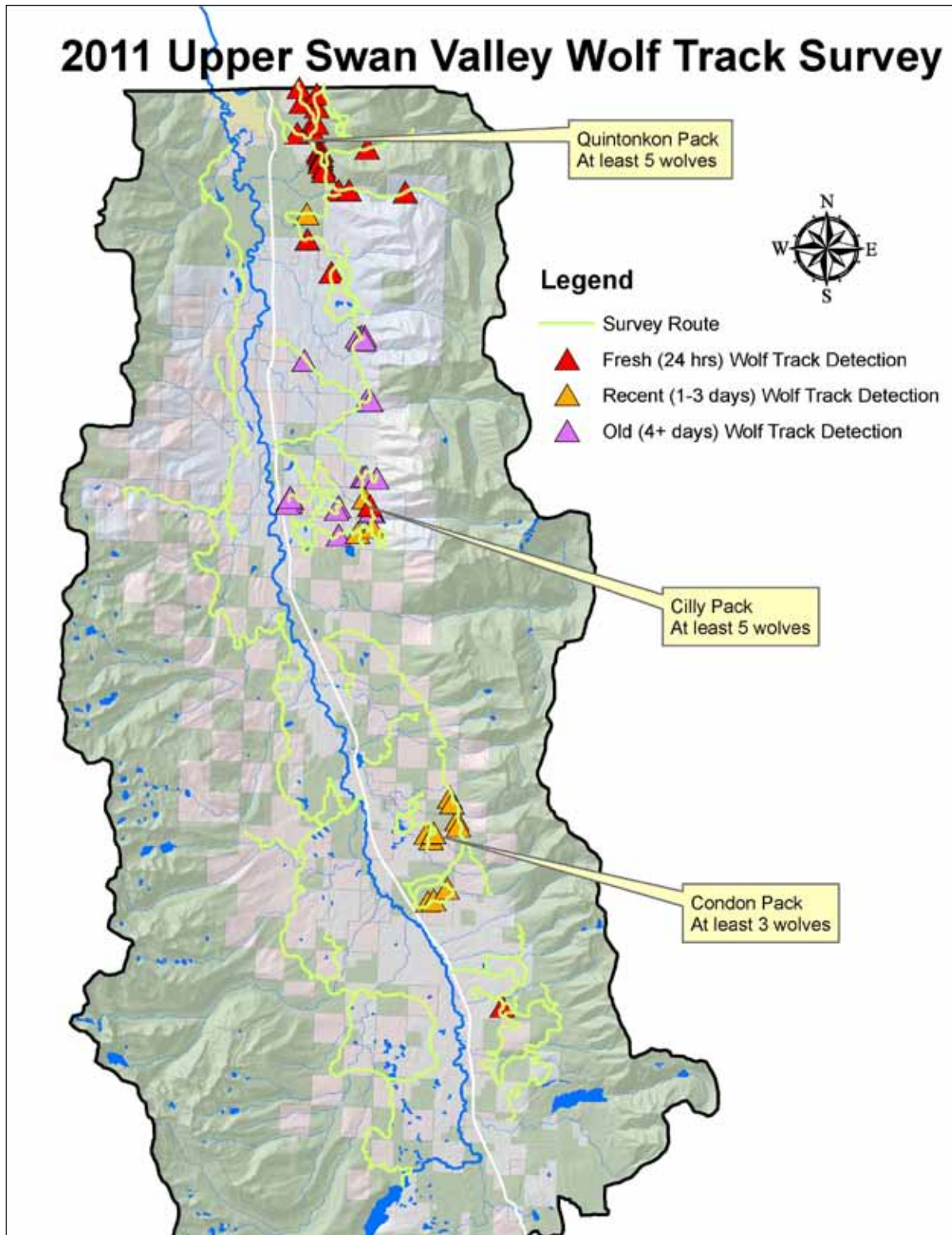
Dave loves teaching at the college level and offers Northwest Connections students a wealth of knowledge about resource issues, civic engagement, and ecology.

When not working, Dave is most often found skiing, mountain biking, taking photos, or reading *High Country News*. ~

2011 Upper Swan Valley Wolf Track Survey

By Adam Lieberg

Northwest Connections organized our 3rd annual community wolf track survey on Saturday, January 29th. The objective of this survey is to increase our general knowledge of wolf activity by saturating the valley with volunteers searching for wolf tracks via snowmobiles, vehicles, skis and snowshoes. Saturday's survey included about 20 different people ranging from local hunters, trappers, outfitters, University of Montana college students, wildlife biologists, foresters, and a backcountry ranger. Despite the mild temperatures and recent rain events, tracking conditions were fairly good across the survey area. Most places in the valley were holding 3 days of unobstructed tracks in the snow. A special thanks to everyone who participated! ~



Why Does Rural Matter? Notes and Policy Implications

By Melanie Parker

I think rural matters... a lot. But I am in the minority. With 80% of Americans now dwelling in urban or suburban environments, the ability to talk about rural lands and rural communities as if they count is getting harder and harder. It's getting harder in the halls of congress, it's getting harder inside this nation's universities, it's getting harder in the media, and it's getting harder around the holiday dinner table. And yet, never has it been so important to invest in rural lands, rural communities and rural infrastructure. Why? In my opinion, the ability to innovate our way into a more sustainable future depends upon forging new and stronger alliances between urban and rural neighbors.

Mostly what I hear is how important those non-urban environments are for recreation. Americans need to 're-create' themselves while hiking, boating, biking, and skiing amidst scenic grandeur. A whopping 90% of all lands in America are rural. With urban areas increasingly sourcing their food, fiber and energy from overseas, those open lands have been relegated, it seems, in the American consciousness to oversized playgrounds. In fact, when I look at the trends across the intermountain states I see this set of values playing out leaving growing towns and cities surrounded by vast protected areas, with very little actual productive rural land in the mix at all. While I value a good city and a good wilderness as much as anyone, I am very concerned about this trendline. We at Northwest Connections are advocating for the value of productive rural lands, healthy rural communities, and working relationships between rural and urban constituents. Why?

We see rural as central to the future of conservation. If you care about sustainability, then you have to want America's urban centers to start transporting all the stuff they buy a lot fewer miles. And, you should want our urban neighbors to have access to healthy, locally grown food. And you'd like to think that the homes they build are constructed from locally sourced wood and materials. And you can sort of imagine a lot of the energy they use being produced locally and not hauled across several oceans, or pumped from over a mile deep just off shore. So, first and foremost, we see the productive capacities of rural communities as key to the future of the sustainability movement.

Secondly, and maybe more importantly, we advocate for rural because we see something really important being lost as fewer and fewer families extract their daily resources directly from the earth. I think that the disconnect between people and the harvest of natural resources is rapidly accelerating the expansion of unsustainable technologies around the world.

The ability to have daily contact with natural systems and natural principles inherently informs a person as to what is realistic in this finite world. Certainly it is possible to be clueless anywhere, but disregarding nature as a farmer, a rancher, a miner or a logger can be costly, or even deadly, so there are built in incentives to pay attention to nature and learn from her. That attention to natural detail, is imperative as a human skill set anyways, but all the more important in the context of global climate change.

Over the past several years, I have had the great opportunity to advocate for the conservation of "working landscapes" here in Montana, and across the West. The idea for me is that it is unfeasible, and undesirable, to put

90% of America's landscape into protected areas, but that well managed forests, farms and ranches provide tremendous conservation benefits. Moreover, if they are well managed and they are operating in a favorable national policy environment, they don't cost the taxpayer money to acquire or to steward, but actually support themselves while creating necessary by-

products for the American consumer.

We are advocating for new environmental movement... one that values working landscapes and rural communities. In the 1980's we used to hear a lot about bioregionalism. For some reason it sort of disappeared from the scene, but I think it's time to dust off the concept and promote it as core to our environmental messaging. Last year I learned about a program where the city of San Francisco passed an ordinance to procure 90% of its food from within a 100 mile radius. What if Missoula, Kalispell, Helena, Spokane, Seattle, you-fill-in-the-blank, did the same? And what if we worked to expand the movement beyond food into wood, fiber and energy? And what if in so doing, we began to heal the deep political, cultural divide between urban and rural peoples? And what if America, through this experience, began to actually value it's rural communities and invest in their health and well being? Now that is the movement I want to sign up for.

I hope rural matters to you, and if it doesn't, I hope it will soon. ~



Native Fish Conservation

By Andrea Stephens

In the summer of 2010, we initiated a fish monitoring project in partnership with the Flathead National Forest (FNF) and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The work was the initial phase of an ongoing effort to determine distribution and relative abundance of westslope cutthroat trout populations in tributaries of the Swan River.



*This is a cutthroat trout, notice that they have a red slash on the jaw.
Photo by Brooke Stallings.*

We are lacking a clear picture of cutthroat populations in many of the Swan's tributaries but the recent transition from Plum Creek ownership of the Cold Creek block to USFS management helped push this piece of the valley to the top of our priority list. Our coalition of federal, state, tribal and non-profit entities is well aware that the persistence of cutthroats within the Swan River watershed requires a more detailed understanding of where genetically pure populations

Our field work helped solve one piece of the cutthroat puzzle.

currently exist and what threats those populations face. Along with our stellar summer interns and a group of high school volunteers who worked for a week on the project, we spent 22 field days surveying all the major tributaries in Cold Creek with electrofishing equipment loaned by the FNF. Adam and I attended a MTFWP electrofishing training session prior to the field season and spent a fantastic week in the field with Beth Gardner, our amazing, dedicated fish biologist on the FNF, to get up to speed on technique and identification.

Our field work helped solve one piece of the cutthroat puzzle. We were able to map out where cutthroats exist in Cold Creek. The results of our genetic samples should be returned within a year. We are planning more cutthroat survey work in the valley next summer, continuing our efforts to provide "boots on the ground" and reliable field data for wildlife managers. ~

Education Update

By Dave Morris

I am new to the NwC crew, and I have been getting to know the people, the place, and the culture of the Swan over the last month. This is an amazing place, and as lively and insightful a group of co-workers as I could hope to find. I feel very fortunate to have landed here.

In my previous teaching in field-based education programs, I consistently heard about how Landscape and Livelihood affects the life choices of students. Whenever I brought students to the Swan, I was impressed with the connection to place and the thoughtfulness of the teaching Northwest Connections' instructors provided. It is great to be working directly with those instructors now, and to be helping develop and further refine NwC's educational programs.

I also have been learning loads from an exceptional crew of NwC alumni. Brian, Krista, Alissa, Leah and Cassie have told me about their adventures in Northwest Connections courses and they have been helping recruit the next classes of students for Wildlife in the West and Landscape and Livelihood. We have been brainstorming new recruiting strategies, and planning ways to involve alumni in upcoming courses. They definitely inspire me to expand on the great educational work that this organization has done so far.

Last week I wondered aloud about where all these students came from. Susan Novosel, our Marketing Coordinator, overheard me and quickly created an online map highlighting the source points for our alumni to date. They are all over the map – in a good way! I hope to expand the number of places our students come from.

If you know of a college student who would benefit from a NwC course, please have them contact us! The priority application deadline for our 2011 courses is April 1st. ~



Where past NwC students come from. Google map.

Agnes Beck Memorial Scholarship Fund

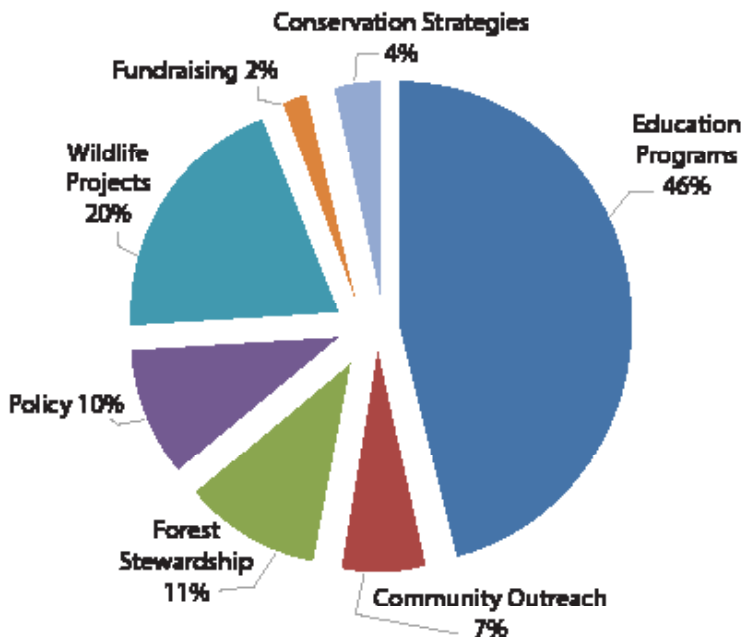
The Agnes Beck Memorial Scholarship Fund underwrites students who would not otherwise be able to afford a field course with Northwest Connections. Northwest Connections' educational programs have been fundamental in the educational and professional endeavors of many of today's conservation leaders. Our educational philosophy is to immerse students in an interdisciplinary study of complex conservation issues and let them sort things out for themselves. By engaging our students in on-the-ground conservation projects alongside local residents, they gain a fundamental understanding of the community, ecology, and economy surrounding environmental issues. This opportunity – to live, work, and learn in a real place, alongside local residents, finding collaborative solutions to today's conservation problems – is one that we hope is not limited to students based on their finances.

“You have afforded me the opportunity of a lifetime!”
 - Sean Donovan, scholarship recipient for Landscape and Livelihood, 2010.

Northwest Connections generally provides \$8K-\$12K annually in scholarships to students. Please consider making a donation and supporting our students now and in the future! ~

NwC 2010 Expenditures by Program Area

Total: \$349,862.97



NwC Wish List

- 2 Spotting Scopes
- 4 Pairs of Binoculars - prefer 8 x 40 optics
- 2 snowmobiles - Skandic Skido utility models preferred
- TDS Recon 400x – Series Data Collector (Forestry Suppliers Inc.)
- Picnic Table
- 4 Water Jugs - 5 gallon
- Subscription to *High Country News*



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All things are connected: the LAND, the ANIMALS and the PEOPLE

Tribute to Bud Moore

By Melanie Parker

As many of you know, Bud Moore passed away this early winter. Bud was our friend and our mentor here at Northwest Connections. He served on our initial board of directors and was a speaker for almost every class. Bud was a regular supporter and a great advisor. We will miss him so much.

One of the many things Bud did for Northwest Connections was to donate his 1985 Ford Ranger to us. For over ten years, we drove it to meetings, field tours, out on projects and back and forth on the Swan Highway. These days the Ranger is relegated to our 'ranch rig' and is used primarily for Tom's weed management work around the homestead. But every Monday morning we fire it up and load up the bear-proof garbage container to haul out to the junction of Cold Creek Road and the highway. On those cold mornings when I am on garbage detail, I can always feel the grit and grease that I know Bud



Bud Moore, 1917-2010. Photo by Ted Wood.

Moore's hands put on that steering wheel and I think about him driving the backroads of the Lochsa while writing his book, or traveling into Missoula for a speaking engagement, or for spare chain saw parts.

Bud Moore made more impact in his world than most of us will ever dream to make. He had the ability to inspire, and he had the ability to set you straight if you needed it. He would listen to anything and anyone, but had a firm sense

of his own convictions. He was a man of the world and a man of the woods. Just before his death, he asked Tom and I to read the books of Lester Brown and to consider our role in the evolving sustainability movement. He just never let up.

So it is that we pay our respects to Bud and to his family and choose to do more than just remember him. We choose, here at Northwest Connections, to find new ways to honor Bud's vision and make it a reality. ~



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