



United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

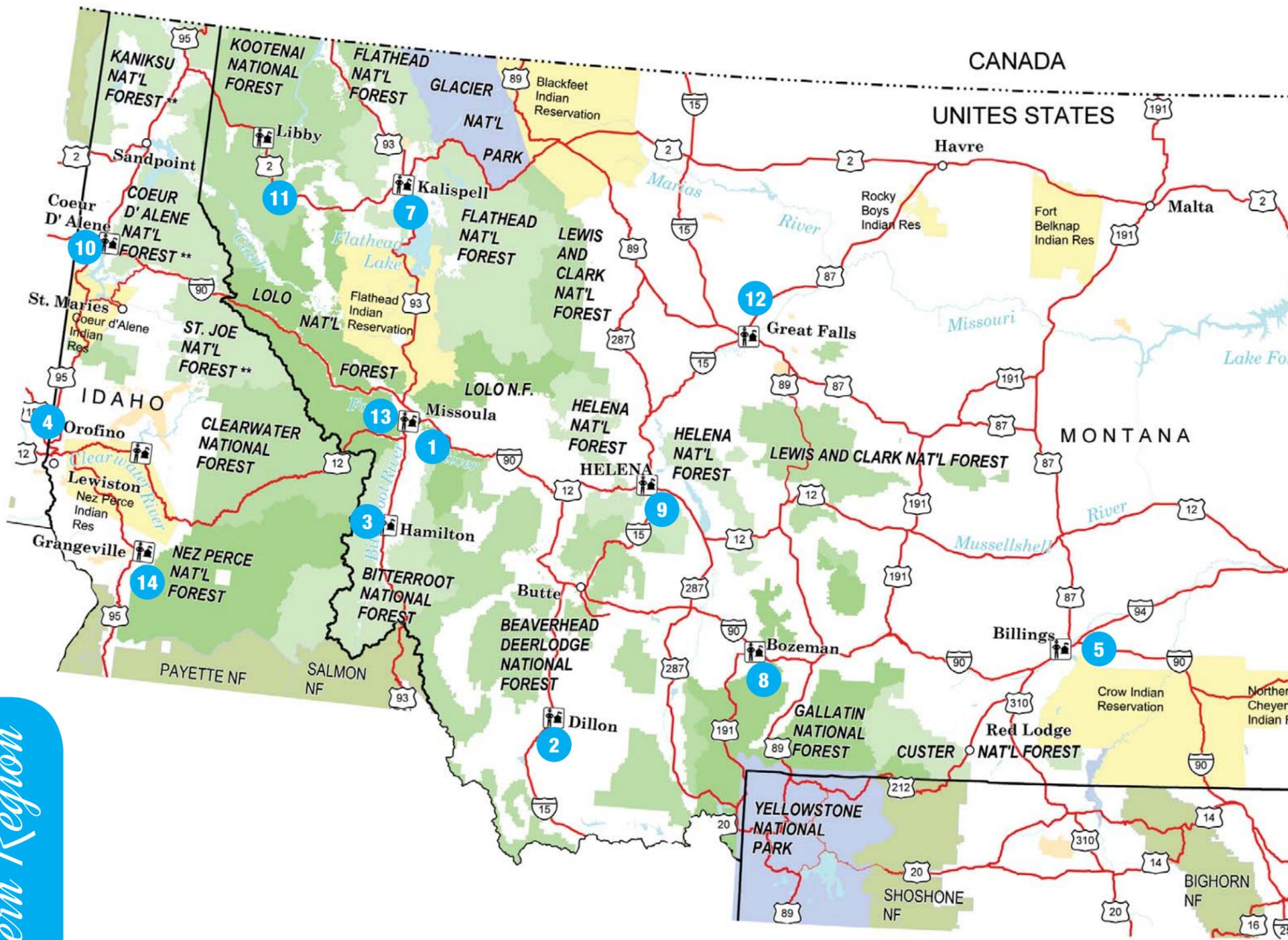
The Northern Region 2013 Year in Review

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Along the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, at
Bannock Pass on the Montana/Idaho border

Northern Region



1



Region One Forest Contact Information
200 East Broadway
Missoula, MT 59802
Info: (406) 329-3511

6



Dakota Prairie Grasslands
1200 Missouri Ave.
Bismarck, ND 58504
Info: (701) 989-7300

11



Kootenai National Forest
31374 U.S. Highway 2
Libby, MT 59923
Info: (406) 293-6211

2



Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
420 Barrett Street
Dillon, MT 59725-3572
Info: (406) 683-3900

7



Flathead National Forest
650 Wolfpack Way
Kalispell, MT 59901
Info: (406) 758-5200

12



Lewis and Clark National Forest
1101 15th Street N
Great Falls, MT 59401
Info: (406) 791-7701

3



Bitterroot National Forest
1801 North First Street
Hamilton, MT 59840
Info: (406) 363-7100

8



Gallatin National Forest
10 East Babcock Ave
Bozeman, MT 59771
Info: (406) 587-6701

13



Lolo National Forest
Building 24, Fort Missoula
Missoula, MT 59801
Info: (406) 329-3804

4



Clearwater National Forest
12730 Highway 12
Orofino, ID 83544
Info: (208) 476-4541

9



Helena National Forest
2880 Skyway Drive
Helena, MT 59601
Info: (406) 449-5201

14



Nez Perce National Forest
104 Airport Road
Grangeville, ID 83530
Info: (208) 983-1950

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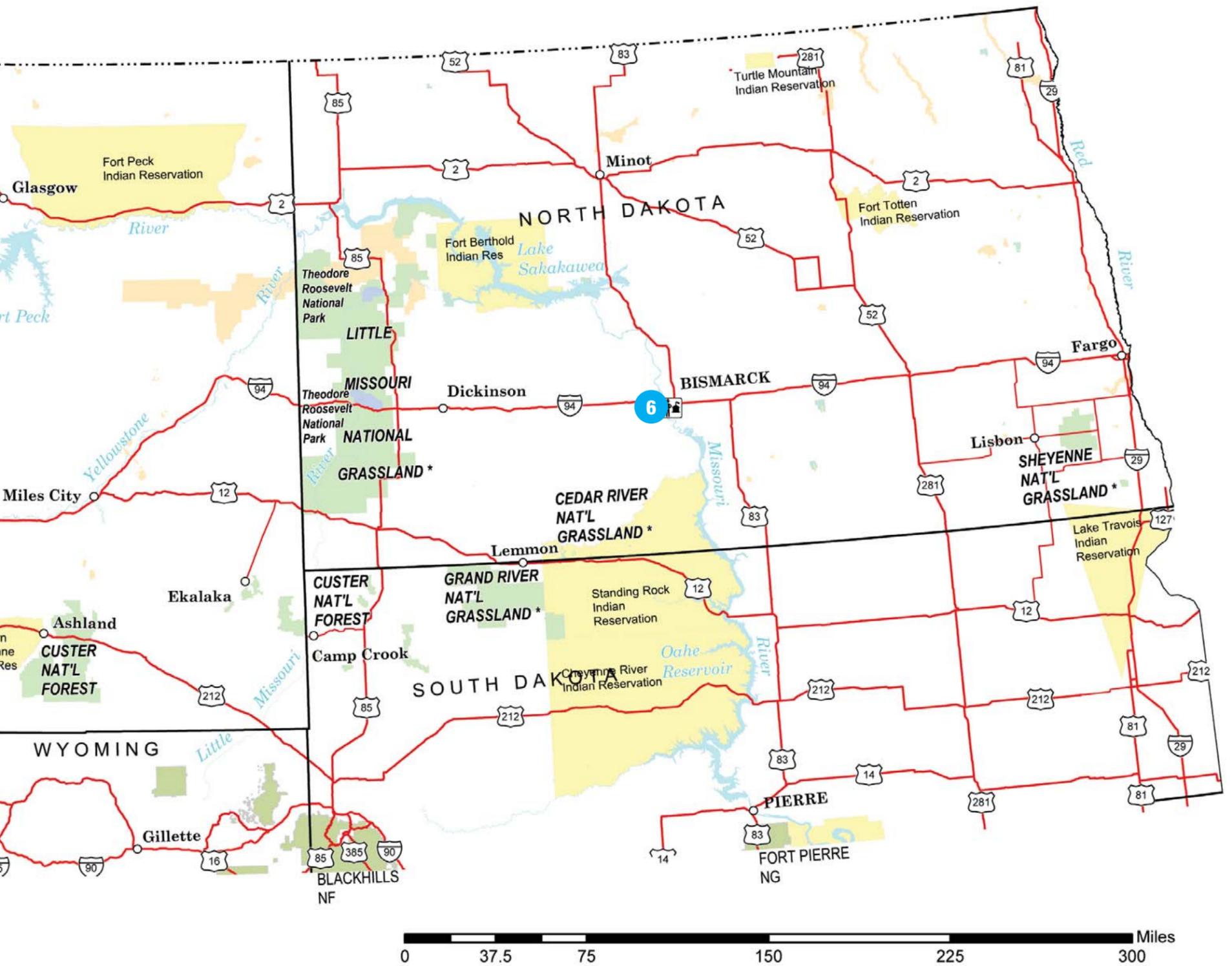


Custer National Forest
1310 Main Street,
Billings, MT 59105
Info: (406) 657-6200

10



Idaho Panhandle National Forest
3815 Schreiber Way
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83815
Info: (208) 765-7223



Notable Numbers and Information

Northern Region



Thank you for taking time to look over this Year in Review for the Northern Region. I am proud of the accomplishments that occurred across our Region this past year. I am particularly grateful for the passion, dedication and professionalism displayed by our Forest Service employees throughout 2013.

There are four main themes in this Review: Conservation through Partnerships and Collaboration; Restoring and Creating Resilient Landscapes; Wildfires and Safety; and, Sustaining Local Communities. Each theme is reflected in the features, news stories, reports and photographs from the forests and grasslands. And in each section, you will find a brief overview from me reflecting on our 2013 successes and what the Northern Region will focus on in 2014.

Managing our National Forest System lands (NFS) natural resources is best accomplished – and the collective benefits shared most widely – when we involve our communities, partners, collaborative groups, state and federal agencies. Our stellar employees, strong partners and involved collaborators all contributed to a positive 2013. I thank all for their commitment. Peruse the Northern Region's 2013 Year in Review and you will be impressed.

Faye L. Krueger
Regional Forester
Northern Region, US Forest Service

Fire & Fuels:

- The Region experienced 1,064 wildfires (103% of 10-yr average) affecting 140,717 acres (52% of 10-yr average).
- We had a 98% attack success rate.
- We managed 88 wildfires for resource objectives on 62,541 acres.

Climate Change: The Region made improvements in our Climate Change Scorecard through FY13, with all units working to increase employee awareness of climate change issues and adaptation options for planning. We partnered with the Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station in Vancouver, Wash., to conduct a climate change vulnerability assessment, provide specialist education workshop(s), and identify adaption options Region-wide. As part of their Plan Revision, the Nez Perce-Clearwater engaged EcoAdapt, a climate change consulting team, to conduct vulnerability assessments and draw up potential adaptation options.

Local Economic Support: Through a number of contracting, partnerships, Grants and Agreement opportunities and general purchasing, the Region invested more than \$40 million in procurements to small businesses. Across the Region we completed \$15m in credit card purchases, and finalized 493 grants and agreements to leverage and invest 49% from non-federal sources.

Region-wide Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Reductions: For the FY14 budget proposal, the Region formed a special-led team to identify ways to reduce its \$1.8 million leasing costs for the offices we occupy in the GSA facility in downtown Missoula. The result is a plan to reduce the amount of office space we lease within the GSA building, and to relocate employees to facilities the Forest Service already owns. This move alone will save close to \$1 million over the next two years, sparing further cuts at the unit level and supporting the agency's mission and objectives in more direct and tangible outcomes.

Regional Forester's Honor Awards

Regional Forester Faye Krueger awarded her 2013 Regional Forester's Honor Awards on November 19, 2013 at the Missoula Children's Theater, honoring Forest Service employees for their accomplishments and actions over the past year. Krueger has carried on an annual tradition to recognize exceptional performance and/or outstanding contributions and accomplishments to improve the efficiency and quality of Forest Service administrative and resource programs in the Northern Region.

Employees from all program areas in the Forest Service were recognized for their outstanding achievements. In all, 14 employees were selected for the following awards:

- **Sustaining and Conserving National Forests and Grasslands Award:** Regional Office, Renewable Resources – Gene DeGayner.
- **Meeting American's Needs Award:** Helena Ranger District, HNF – Mandy Alvino.
- **Conserving Open Space Award:** East Side Lands Zone, Bozeman, MT – Robert Dennee.
- **Promoting Recreation Award:** Cabinet Ranger District, Kootenai National Forest – Joel Sather.
- **Leading in the Business Environment Award:** Missoula Ranger District, Lolo National Forest – Samantha Reindersma.
- **Engaging Urban America Award:** Regional Office, Public & Governmental Relations – Joni Packard.
- **Excellence in Science and Technology Award:** Rock Mountain Research Station – Dr. Mark Finney.
- **Cultural Transformation Award:** Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests – Nancy Peak.
- **Creating a Safety Culture Award:** Bitterroot National Forest – Keith Hackbarth and Ted Hayes.
- **Heroism and Emergency Response Award:** Medora Ranger District – Dakota Prairie National Grasslands – Jack Dahl (USFS) and Jeff Printz (NRCS).
- **Heroism and Emergency Response Award:** Ninemile Ranger District, Lolo National Forest – Brian Campbell.
- **Law Enforcement and Investigations Award:** Three Rivers Ranger District, Kootenai National Forest – Dave Helmrick.

Photos of the awardees and a brief summary of the award are available on the Northern Region's website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r1/home/?cid=stelprdb5441717>



Gene DeGayner (left) receives the Regional Forester's Award for Sustaining and Conserving National Forests and Grasslands award for his efforts in leading Regional Office, forest and grassland resource specialists and staff through numerous high-profile national initiatives and collaborative efforts.



Lolo National Forest Ninemile Ranger District employee Brian Campbell (left) listens as Bill Smith describes the circumstances of Campbell's efforts working with Frenchtown, Mont. emergency responders that saved his life during a cardiac arrest.

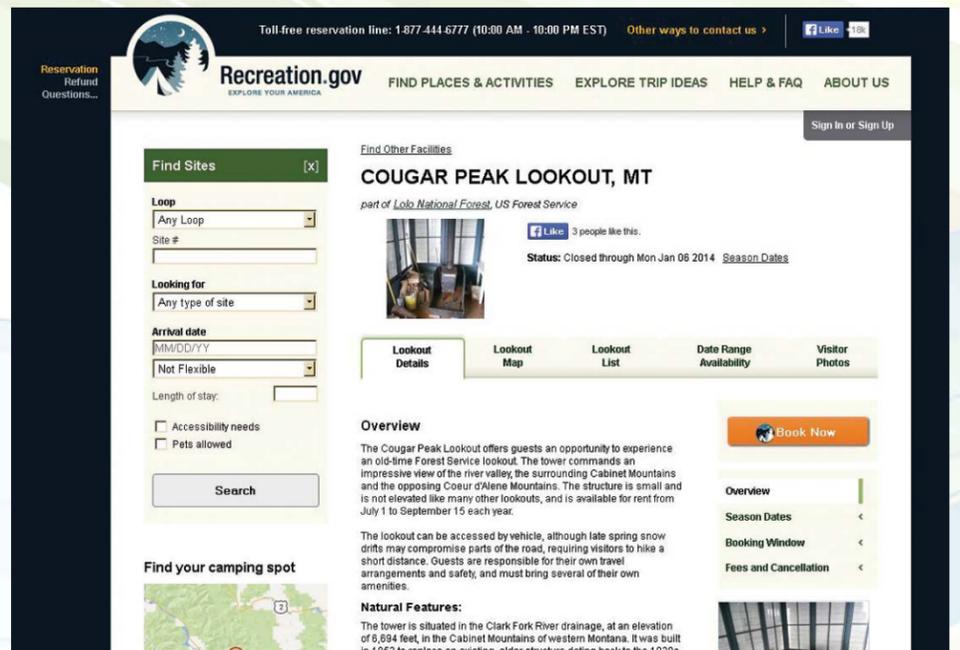
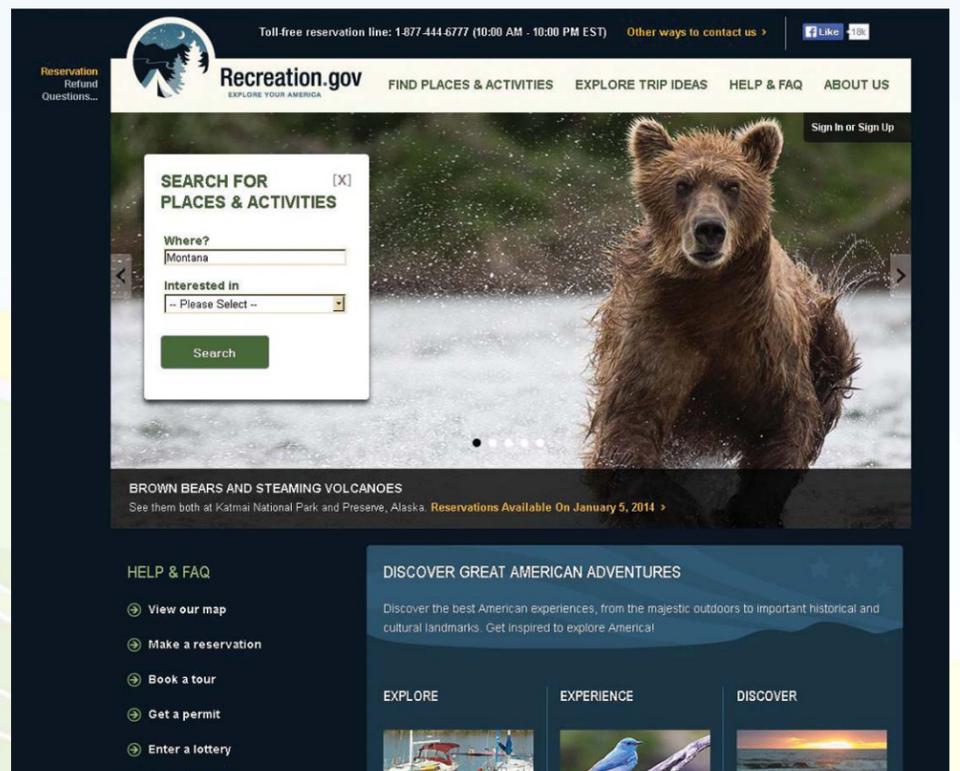
Recreation.gov – Your Gateway to Northern Region Adventures

With hundreds of locations for tent camping, trailer and RV sites, plus cabins and lookout accommodations, your Northern Region adventure is only a few clicks away at www.recreation.gov! Virtually every camping site, cabin or fire tower lookout that can be reserved is available online through this destination-oriented website.

Using easy-to-follow pull-down menus and selections, you can browse campgrounds, camping areas, cabin and lookout tower locations to find the one that fits your ideal Northern Rockies adventure on a national forest or grassland. Just about every site or location has its own information page with details on getting there, what you will need, what is already supplied, and attractions and features nearby to fit just about every recreational opportunity and pursuit.

If you are not sure what location might best suit your interests, you can call one of the 13 national forest or grasslands in the Northern Region to find out some general information about a range of options, and then follow up on the website to make your reservations. It is fast and easy to set up your account and make your reservations any time.

We look forward to your visit soon!



Conservation through Partnerships and Collaboration



While many discussions about the federal government focused on budget concerns and issues, the forest and grassland staffers, seasonal workers, volunteers and our partners forged ahead undeterred by distractions. In project

after project, program after program, and across every unit in the Region, we achieved remarkable successes by working together.

We are fortunate to work with so many partners and collaborative groups under three separate Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration programs (CFLR). I am amazed by the progress each group has made to make their program benefit the land.

Our collaborative efforts also included the Forest Plan Revision on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. The 2012 Planning Rule calls for concerted in-depth and up-front efforts to engage people in building a guiding blueprint. The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests embraced its role as 'early-adopter' and is using town-hall forums, virtual meetings and social media-based sessions to involve people far and near in planning its future. The Flathead National Forest began their Plan revision also. They too are implementing additional interactive strategies as noted in this section to engage the public in an up-front and proactive approach.

Next year the Helena National Forest and the Lewis and Clark National Forest will be starting their revision. I expect their communities to be welcomed and involved in similar fashions. The end product will be better because of public involvement.

I am energized by the grass-roots support, vitality and enthusiasm I see from others.



Huckleberry Monitoring Partnership

When most people think of partnerships with the Forest Service, they tend to visualize timber projects, recreation sites, trails work, or stream and watershed restoration projects. Huckleberries come in a distant... well, a distant thought to say the least!

But not so on the Kootenai National Forest where the Three Rivers Ranger District established a partnership with the Yaak Valley Forest Council (YVFC) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to implement a long-term (25 years or more) huckleberry monitoring program. Forest Service employees, with help from the USFWS, designed the monitoring protocol, trained the field crew, provided some of the equipment and assisted with the plot measurements. The YVFC secured a grant to fund the plot measurements and provided a field crew. The focus of this partnership is to evaluate impacts to huckleberries from burning and timber harvest treatments within the Sparring Bulls project area, as one of the objectives of the project is to improve huckleberry habitat.

Huckleberries are a primary food source for bears and other wildlife, though many people enjoy picking and eating them too. There are five different species of huckleberries on the Kootenai National Forest. These plants vary in size and shape, with berries coming in various shades of blue, red and purple depending on the species and where they grow.

Decades of fire suppression have been very effective at stopping most of the low to moderate severity wildfires that are started by lightning. Without intervention by fire fighters, many lightning-caused fires would have burned slowly across the forest floor, killing the tops of most brush, grass, and forbs and killing some trees. These fires were a benefit to huckleberry plants, which grow very well even when partially shaded by trees. The plants re-sprout from live roots and, along with the extra nutrients made available by the fire, grow vigorously and produce huckleberries for many years until they are completely shaded out by other vegetation and trees.

Celebrating 50 Years of The Wilderness Act – A Youth and Wilderness Collaborative Film Project

The Northern Region, in collaboration with a wide range of partners, will debut a Wilderness experience film highlighting the impacts of Wilderness on a select group of young adults, as they relate their experiences to other youth.

The concept for the film came from discussions between the Back Country Horsemen of Montana and the Forest Service as a way to expose more youth to the dynamics and needs for Wilderness. Final editing during the winter in early 2014 will lead to a Spring 2014 debut at an as-yet undetermined site.

The film's focus is youth speaking to youth about the value, beauty and transformative power of Wilderness and the passing on of this legacy to new generations. Perspectives and commentaries from adults who already have a deep appreciation for Wilderness share their personal history and impressions. The film follows three separate groups of youth embarking on their first trips into a Wilderness -- two groups of Missoula area and Flathead area high school students, traveling by horseback/pack trip into the Scapegoat Wilderness; and one group of University of Montana college students traveling by foot on an 80-mile trek through the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Footage from the film project will also be used to support a new Wilderness curriculum being developed by the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center and short YouTube "clips" on Wilderness for the 50th Anniversary.

The film project grew to incorporate the efforts of the Northern Region, Back Country Horsemen of Montana, Bob Marshall Wilderness Outfitters, the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, the University of Montana Wilderness Institute, the Montana Wilderness Association, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Missoula County Public School District, and Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation. Additional support has also been provided by the Sierra Club Montana Chapter, The Wilderness Society, and Wilderness Watch.

The film is a Forest Service produced film that will be in the public domain. A special thanks to the Lincoln Ranger District, Helena NF, Rocky Mountain Ranger District, Lewis & Clark NF, and Spotted Bear Ranger District, Flathead NF, who also were key partners in the production of this film.



Youth participating in the film project return back to camp after a day hike to Parker Lake, Scapegoat Wilderness. Photo by Brandan Schulze.

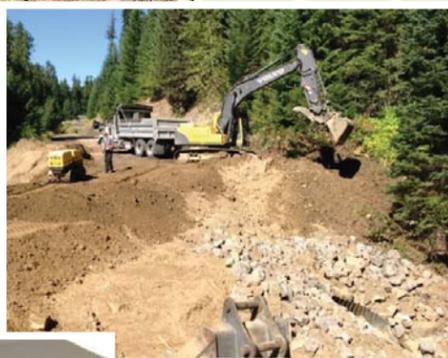
Nez Perce - Clearwater National Forests Collaboration Efforts Lead to Greater Successes

As the Forest Service emphasizes the importance of partnerships, stewardship and collaborative engagement, the Selway-Middle Fork Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) project continues to be the foundation of the relationship between the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests and the Clearwater Basin Collaborative (CBC). Generating increased interest and successes in other project areas, the Nez Perce-Clearwater program has been recognized by many CBC members and other organizations for exemplary public land management in which collaborative engagement has led to increased outputs. So far the Forest has invested more than \$12 million in CFLR funds.

Beyond accomplishing critical work across the Forests, the Collaborative has created employment opportunities, enhanced relationships and attracted other potential partners. During a site visit by staffers and leadership from the Forest Service's Washington, D.C. Office, the forests received comments and accolades reflecting that their efforts were true to the intent of the legislation. The forests continue to meet or exceed accomplishments and expectations outlined in the Collaborative's original proposal, a trend which is expected to continue. Significant achievements for Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 include:

- Published a draft EIS for the Clear Creek Integrated Restoration Project which would restore landscape resilience; improve forest health; reduce fuels; provide forest products and improve watershed conditions across almost 10,000 acres;
- Nearing competition on the Interface Fuels timber sale (sold in FY 11), which will reduce fuels around the communities of Lowell and Syringa;
- Initiated work on the Lodge Point commercial thin project (sold in FY 12), designed to improve forest health and utilize small diameter forest material;
- Signed a Decision Notice (which was affirmed on appeal) for the Iron Mountain Vegetation restoration project. This project will yield as much as nine million board feet of timber by removing insect and disease-affected trees to reduce fuel loadings, and improve long term landscape resilience after the harvested areas are replanted with early successional vegetation;
- Ambitiously continued to complete restoration work, to include road decommissioning, culvert replacement, road maintenance and stabilization, weed treatment and inventory, wildlife habitat improvements and trail maintenance;
- Continued support of the Idaho Youth Conservation Corps program and initiated the first year of the CBC's youth corps program;
- Improved our existing partnerships with the Nez Perce Tribe, Montana Conservation Corps, Selway Bitterroot Foundation, various universities, Back Country Horsemen and others.

Collaboration and the process of engaging new partners, place-based groups and the public is rapidly emerging as a viable means to achieve common ecosystem and conservation goals that span across National Forest System lands to the broader landscape-scale visions the Forest Service shares with its partners and neighbors.



Lolo National Forest Wildlife Monitoring in the Southwestern Crown of the Continent



Monitoring and evaluation guidance, in conjunction with methods that follow established scientific measures and protocols, are necessary to gauge whether or not a forest is achieving the stated goals, objectives or desired conditions of the Forest Plan or associated projects. These monitoring activities are regularly conducted with collaborative groups and partners across larger landscapes, giving a wider range of definitive information that not only benefits the current Plan or project but also informs decisions on future program direction. The wildlife monitoring effort on the portion of the Lolo National Forest (NF) that is covered by the Southwestern Crown of the Continent (SWCC) is an example of the effectiveness and value of these monitoring activities.

In the case of the SWCC and the Lolo NF, monitoring the distribution and range of forest carnivores provides baseline information on their habitat and behaviors, as well as providing insight into how that particular ecosystem is working before a project begins. Monitoring continues long after restoration work is implemented to determine whether the restoration efforts are effective and if they modify carnivore distributions, behaviors or populations.



The information gleaned from these monitoring activities is also used to increase the public's awareness of and appreciation for these rare, elusive creatures that call the forests home. Across the SWCC's 1.5-million-acre landscape, a variety of mid-sized carnivores roam, including animals in the cat family (mountain lions, lynx, bobcats), the dog family (wolves, coyotes, foxes), and the weasel family (wolverines, fisher, marten, ermine). While some of these species are fairly abundant and have widespread distributions across the state, others are rarer or less is known about their distribution and abundance.

Although monitoring can validate the success of a project, it can also point to modifications that will improve habitat conditions and move the results toward the desired future conditions.



How We Monitor

In 2013 wildlife biologists with the Lolo National Forest continued to work with partners like Northwest Connections, as well as adjacent National Forests, to gather data on the distribution and relative populations of carnivores in the SWCC area. The area forms the southern boundary of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex in western Montana and encompasses forests and communities in the Blackfoot, Clearwater, and Swan River valleys.



Technicians measure and photograph these tracks, and followed them for 3/4 of a mile until they found a spot where the lynx brushed up against a tree and left behind a clump of hair.

The monitoring in 2013 included the use of baited hair-collection stations, as well as over-snow tracking to gather scat and hair samples. Wire gun brushes were used at the stations to non-invasively gather hair of animals attracted to the station. Highly trained and skilled technicians conduct snow-track surveys, traveling by foot or snowmobile in a systematic fashion and recording the precise locations of any carnivore tracks they detected. For focal species (lynx, fisher, and wolverine), they also backtracked the animal and attempted to collect genetic samples (hair or scat) that had been left behind. The scat and hair samples will be used to assemble a DNA database so that detailed information can be used to identify and monitor species and individuals. The animal "waste" actually provides scientific verification of the species, including additional information about the individual animal and ability of the habitat to support the animal's range.

Multi-party monitoring increases public awareness and appreciation for the species we monitor. It not only builds trust and transparency, but it also increases the Forest Service's capacity and results in a better product in the end. The bulk of the monitoring work is currently being conducted by Northwest Connections, a Swan Valley-based organization dedicated to ecological monitoring, field based education, and collaborative conservation in partnership with the Forest Service (participation from wildlife biologists and technicians from the Flathead, Lolo and Helena National Forests). Genetic samples are analyzed by the Rocky Mountain Research Station, with support from the Northern Region of the Forest Service.



Additional cooperation, funding, and/or participation have come from a variety of other organizations, including but not limited to: Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Montana Department of Transportation; Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; the Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station; the Nature Conservancy; and Wildlands CPR.

All that remains of this bait station is a partial bone (once a whole deer leg), and 12 wire brushes covered with hair that will be sent to a genetics lab to determine which animal(s) ate the bait.



Participants on bus ride to key Forest Area



Talking recreation at the Hungry Horse Reservoir

Forest Plan Revision

Natural resource management involves complicated and long-term management planning. It is the foundation of how the Forest Service supports the things people love about National Forest System lands, including the Flathead National Forest: places where people can camp, hike, ride, ski, hunt and fish, observe wildlife and flora, and gather firewood and Christmas trees. Some enjoy the developed areas, while others venture deep into the wilderness and many explore the areas in between.

What many people may not know is how much effort goes into developing, finalizing and approving the management plan (Forest Plan) for the Flathead National Forest's 2.4 million acres of public lands. The Forest Plan is what determines how the forest's lands will be managed to accommodate the various activities the public enjoys.

The Flathead's Forest Plan has not been revised since 1986. The forest was well into plan revision in 2005 when a court case found the rule under which the planning effort was happening was not legal. With the new 2012 Planning Rule in place, the Flathead National Forest has once again started the first phase, called the assessment phase, of a multi-year planning process to revise the Forest Plan. The intent of the planning framework is to create a responsive planning process that informs multiple use management and allows the Forest Service to adapt to changing conditions, such as climate change, and improve management based on new information and monitoring.

As the Flathead gets underway on their Plan revision effort, they have begun a coordinated, collaborative effort to provide stakeholders (members of the public and local communities, businesses, organizations and interest groups etc.) with information about the Plan revision process. Such information includes ways to comment on the substantive issues covered in the Forest Plan, ways to participate in collaborative discussions about the most controversial topics, and opportunities to engage in collective problem solving, such as how to develop recommendations that address multiple interests.

As part of the collaborative effort and assessment phase, over one hundred people got to know more about the management of the forest during four field trips held in the summer of 2013. Each trip focused on areas important to plan revision, while also visiting parts of each of the four unique districts that make up the Flathead National Forest. The field trips, while part of the assessment, were also designed to start the public involvement and collaborative process by building relationships and helping to provide some base knowledge about the forest.



On the Swan Lake district talking lynx



North Fork of the Flathead River talking wild and scenic rivers



Discussions on Wild and Scenic River issues along the South Fork of the Flathead River



Swan Lake district talking threatened and endangered species



Spotted Bear talking established wilderness.

Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests Administratively Combine

In February 2013, closing out a five-year decision process, the Washington, D.C. Office of the Forest Service announced the decision to administratively combine the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests in Idaho.

The process began back in 2008, with the intent of generating savings of \$2 million per year. That goal was met and the savings were applied to other program areas to maintain on-the-ground-management and service to the public. The consolidation has better prepared the two forests for reductions in budget due to overall reduced federal spending, as well as the recent federal sequestration. The financial savings resulted from a reduction in workforce, eliminating duplicate positions and realigning staff duties. The reduction in the work force has largely been accomplished through attrition as employees have retired or moved on to other jobs, as well as the streamlining of some program workloads. No employees were required to move as a result of this decision, providing additional savings.

Due to its central location and Forest Service-owned facilities, the official headquarters (Supervisor's Office) is in Kamiah, Idaho. There are three buildings at the old Ranger Station that have been, or are in the process of, being remodeled to accommodate employees. When the remodeling is complete in February 2014, there will be enough space in the Kamiah Forest Service buildings to accommodate 45 employees.

From Cornerstone to Foundational – Expanding the Effectiveness of CFLR

The Northern Region capitalized on the efficiencies and effectiveness of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) with substantial gains built off our 2012 successes. Our collaborative partners and groups are providing resources, funding, and in-kind services, combined with their own passions and expertise across three CFLR sites in the Region, with exciting results and promising futures.

The Kootenai River Valley Initiative (KVRI), spanning watersheds in northern Idaho and far northwestern Montana, began implementing on-the-ground projects in 2013. The KVRI was chosen for a CFLRP proposal because the restoration needs were substantiated through Tribal, Federal, and State assessments. These assessments identified this area as a high priority for restoration and provided the foundation for effective treatments that would enhance ecosystem function and resiliency. The proposal's strategy uses this science to ensure balance between social and ecological needs such as watershed and ecosystem health, wildfire use and protection, recreation and public access, and economic sustainability for local communities.

The KVRI proposal was funded at \$399,000 for FY2013. The collaborative set high goals for the initiative: prescribed burning (1035 ac), invasive plant management (400 ac), culvert upgrades (5), fish passage/culvert replacement (1), road decommissioning (1.5 miles), road maintenance (38 miles), timber harvest (893 acres, including biomass utilization), and reforestation/timber stand improvement (TSI) (69 ac).

In addition to the NEPA approved project implementation targets, significant work was accomplished through numerous collaborative meetings and field trips during 2013 regarding the Kreist Creek and Hellroaring projects. The purpose and need, as identified by the KVRI collaborative group for Kreist Creek and Hellroaring are to:

- Improve and maintain forest health in the ecosystem composition, structure, and diversity of the landscape by providing for tree species and stocking levels similar to historic levels which will better resist insects, diseases and wildfire,
- Improve habitat and forage for big game through vegetation treatments and broadcast burning,
- Enhance the scenic integrity of the area by softening the boundaries of previous harvest units and avoiding straight lines and hard edges when designing treatment areas within these projects, and
- Maximize opportunities to utilize forest products and provide economic opportunity through restoration work.

KVRI Collaborative took part in field trips to Kreist Creek and Hellroaring this year and gave their continued support to the Forest Service as it moves forward with decisions that will allow implementation of many components of these two projects in 2014 and 2015.

The Selway-Middle Fork CFLR project continues to be the foundation of our relationship with the Clearwater Basin Collaborative (CBC) from which many other successes have grown. Our program has been identified by many CBC members and others as an exemplary model of public land management - where collaborative engagement has led to increased outputs without resorting to the divisive solutions being pursued in other areas. The Nez Perce – CBC were excited to be the first CFLR project visited by Associate Deputy Chief Jim Pena; National Restoration Planning Group Lead John Crockett and other representatives from the Washington and Regional Offices in July, in 2013. The trip was well attended by Forest Staff and members of the Clearwater Basin Collaborative.

On-the-Ground Accomplishment Summary

Invasive species:

- Significant advances in the treatment, inventory and mapping of noxious weeds. This year we treated almost 3,600 acres both in the wilderness and front country. Preliminary monitoring results continue to show a 90% to 95% reduction of invasive weed densities within the treated corridors;

Watershed Restoration:

- One of the highlights of our project is our ability to use funds to complete watershed restoration work such as upgraded stream crossings, road maintenance and upgrades and road decommissioning. In FY 2013 we decommissioned more than 24 miles of unneeded roads, replaced three culverts, and maintained and/or improved almost 170 miles of road and more than 700 miles of trails. State-of-the-art geotextile materials and design were used in many areas that produce a durable long-lived solution to the persistent problem of sediment delivery into watershed from eroding roadways.

Forest Management:

- The Interface Fuels project is nearing completion. When finished, it will have reduced fuels on over 1,200 acres surrounding the communities of Lowell and Syringa as well as contributed over 8 million feet of timber to local mills.
- Work began on the Lodge Point commercial thinning project (Purchased by Idaho Forest Group in FY 2012). This project generated interest during the WO site visit since harvest activities are

occurring in plantations which were a result of 1950's and 60's era clearcuts. Approximately 3 million board feet of small diameter trees and biomass will be produced by the project as a result of improving forest health reducing fuels across nearly 600 acres.

- On the Selway Winter Range improvement the collaborative completed 200 acres of wildlife habitat improvement, accomplished with chainsaw slashing decadent brush to release conifers and rejuvenate forage for wintering wildlife.

NEPA Projects

The Forests continue to pursue an ambitious NEPA program of work both in and out of the CFLR project area. Our ability to successfully move projects forward is due to committed Line Officers, a dedicated and talented Interdisciplinary Team and strategic decisions made early in the CFLR program to increase our long-term capacity. Our partners in the CBC remain committed to ensuring the Selway-Middle Fork Project remains a sound investment. The following 2013 NEPA accomplishments support our proposal:

- A Draft EIS was released in April 2013 for the Clear Creek Integrated Restoration project. Its size is ambitious for our area (approximately 44,000 acres of NFS lands). The project represents a shift from traditional management practices and seeks to maintain or restore a comprehensive set of ecological conditions across the watershed.
- A decision was signed in June for the Iron Mountain Vegetation Restoration project (EA). One appeal was received for the project and the decision subsequently affirmed by the Appeal Deciding Officer. The sale is currently in the pre-advertisement phase and is expected to produce approximately 6.7 million board feet of timber.
- Project development continued for the Middle Fork Vegetation Management project (EIS). Draft proposed actions would treat up to 2,300 acres through a combination of commercial timber harvest and prescribed fire to increase the representation of early successional habitats, reduce fuels in the WUI and shift species compositions to more resilient species. An NOI is expected to be published and scoping initiated in December 2013.

On the Southwestern Crown of the Continent (SWCC) CFLR program, trail restoration has been a tremendous, and accomplishments continued to outpace projections, largely due to our enthusiastic partners. The Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) is partnering with the FS in the maintenance of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) and MWA contributed 27% of the cost of the restoration effort.

Volunteers cleared trail corridors of trees, brush and rocks to maintain trail tread and maintained drainage structures to prevent soil erosion. Volunteers spent days locating priority points for new trail signs and installed the signs to clearly denote the trail route for users to safely enjoy and explore the nationally renowned CDNST while not further damaging resources.

“The CDNST is more than just a trail, it's also about connecting people,” said Shannon Freix, Continental Divide Trail program manager for MWA. “MWA's CDT Montana trail program is fueled by volunteer passion which means we are privileged to work with volunteers from around the country, and sometimes internationally. It's amazing to see horsemen, conservationists and mountain bikers swinging a tool side-by-side for a common recreation and restoration effort.”

While MWA and its volunteers worked to enhance recreational experiences on the CDNST, several other SWCC partners spent their time designing a trail realignment project on a trail that has existed within the Stonewall Mountain motorized trail system for several decades. The National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC) has enlisted the help of local motorized groups, including the Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association and Great Falls Trail Bike Riders Association, to implement a trail realignment and resource protection project. When fully implemented, the rerouted trail will serve many purposes including: restoring the damaged resources and land where riders by-pass the currently damaged portion of the trail; improving and maintaining proper drainage for water; and simultaneously providing visitors with a motorized trail system that is enjoyable for residents and visitors alike. Ultimately 45% of the restoration costs will be contributed by the non-profit group.

“We think that the new design of the trail will be more sustainable and help protect the soils and resources from damage by ensuring a well-designed and enjoyable route,” said Russ Ehnes, Executive Director of NOHVCC. “Our goal is to restore the land to a healthy standard. We want to help make this even more of a ‘destination location’ to entice new riders to visit our trail and our community.”

The Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited (BBCTU) has undertaken 12 priority projects with the Forest Service to restore native fish habitat on the Seeley Lake and Lincoln Ranger Districts in the Blackfoot River watershed under the CFLR program. Fish cross ownership boundaries readily – and the benefits of BBCTU's restoration efforts will match that dynamic habitat feature. The projects include removing undersized culverts that are barriers to aquatic species, removing unnecessary or resource-impacting roads, restoring stream channels and restoring vegetation along stream banks to provide shade and cover which are critical to the survival of native aquatic species. Some projects have been even broader in scope – necessary to restore areas where roads or past activities more heavily impacted the landscape.

The Cottonwood Stream Restoration project on the Seeley Lake Ranger District of the Lolo National Forest is one such project. Cottonwood Creek is a bull trout core area stream. The stream is critical bull trout habitat and supports a population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. Funding allocated in FY 2013 will contribute toward restoring a section of stream channel that currently is out of sync with its natural, historic state. The project will take approximately two years to complete and will be supported with \$137,000 in funding from CFLR and an additional \$43,000 in matching funds.

America's Great Outdoors –

Shared Goals, Shared Responsibilities, Shared Benefits

Throughout 2013, the Northern Region actively supported and engaged other federal and state partners in developing and promoting a series of benchmarks for the Crown of the Continent and its part in the national America's Great Outdoors (AGO) initiative. Moving into its third year since it was initiated by President Obama, AGO is focused on promoting and supporting innovative community-level efforts to conserve outdoor spaces and to reconnect Americans to the beauty of our nation's rich natural resources.

Working with a number of agencies in the Department of Interior, plus the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Council on Environmental Quality, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the multi-agency AGO effort across the Crown of the Continent outlined its progress over several place-based and programmatic Action Items and supporting benchmarks.

Central to the AGO precept is connecting public and private lands through easements and land purchases and exchanges to provide more diverse and increased accesses to explore, experience and relay the benefits of America's public lands and recreation opportunities. Through allocated funding, partner agencies were able to invest more than \$31 million for these acquisitions and easements. Part of this total included the addition of more than 11,000 acres to the Lolo and Flathead national forests from The Nature Conservancy at a cost of about \$12.3 million as part of the Montana Legacy project.

As part of these additional acquisitions for access, the AGO members are continually reviewing and planning for road and trail access to ensure that the natural resource functions in watersheds, and for wildlife habitat and forest health are improved over time. Parts of these efforts include studies and research to reduce the number of wildlife-vehicle conflicts that become more frequent as access is increased.

Another Action Item that has become more critical as access across landscapes and boundaries increases is the prevention of invasive weeds and plants moving into new areas. Invasive plants generally overtake native vegetation and change the makeup and composition of natural flora. These potential changes to watershed areas, recreation sites and wildlife habitat alter the landscape's ability to provide healthy habitat for aquatic animals and wildlife, destabilizing ecosystems and altering watershed functions. All partner agencies focus on efforts, techniques and monitoring to continue to reduce this risk.

One key Action Item that is an umbrella focus for all other actions is the desire and need to maintain and increase the coordination and collaboration of natural resource issues across federal agencies and nonfederal partnerships throughout the Crown of the Continent landscape. As AGO progresses into 2014, current partner agencies will actively seek out more local, place-based support from community groups and organizations to further deliver the benchmark actions that support the goals of AGO across the Crown of the Continent. The Northern Region and its forests and grasslands will remain integral to the success and promotion of these Actions and benchmarks.



Three representatives of the Northern Rocky Mountain Grotto (from left) Michael McEachern, Bob Bastasz, and Ian Chechet, formalize the group's agreement with Regional Forester Faye Krueger, along with Eric Johnston and Jolyn Ortega.

Northern Rocky Mountain Grotto Partner to Help Bats

In August, the U.S. Forest Service Northern Region finalized an agreement with the Northern Rocky Mountain Grotto (NRMG), a recognized chapter of the National Speleological Society, to work to conserve and protect cave resources in Montana.

White-nose Syndrome (WNS) was discovered in 2007 and has killed millions of bats in the eastern United States. Cave closures were put in place on federal lands to attempt to slow the spread of the disease. With the threat moving westward, the Forest Service and NRMG share a mutual interest in working to prevent the introduction of the disease in the region.

Eric Johnston, deputy director for watershed, wildlife, fisheries and rare plants in the Northern Region, says the agreement with NRMG is a tremendous benefit for the Forest Service and the public.

"The grotto's ethical caving principles and knowledge about WNS, proper decontamination procedures, along with their experience educating the public about these issues are vital to being proactive in dealing with WNS," says Johnson.

With cave closures in place in the eastern U.S., one of the biggest concerns the two groups share is the threat of out-of-state cavers visiting this part of the country and bringing equipment that has been in a contaminated cave. While decontamination of equipment has proven to be effective, it's recommended that cavers from parts of the country affected by WNS do not transport their gear to other parts of the country.

With financial assistance from the Forest Service, NMRG will help provide out-of-state cavers with equipment that has only been used in Montana and that has also been properly decontaminated. NMRG will also continue their efforts to educate recreational cavers about the dangers of WNS and the importance of following the current recommendations for decontaminating all caving equipment.

Cavers with NMRG have the experience and equipment to get into caves most people aren't aware of or do not have the necessary equipment to survey, which makes their volunteer efforts critical in bat conservation efforts. NMRG has agreed to identify potential hibernacula sites for winter protection from outside disturbances and alert the Forest Service if there are any indications of WNS spreading to Montana caves.

By working with partners such as NMRG, the Forest Service expands its capability to participate in conservation of caves and bats through stewardship, research, and education.

National Trails Day a Success on the Bitterroot National Forest

The Bitterroot National Forest celebrated this year's National Trails Day (NTD) by partnering with four local groups on trails maintenance projects. Participating groups included the Bitterroot Backcountry Cyclists, Ravalli County Off Road Users Association, Selway-Pintler Wilderness Back Country Horsemen, and Bitterroot Back Country Horsemen. Events took place on three districts on the forest. More than 60 volunteers spent the day clearing downed trees, cutting back areas of heavy brush, picking up litter along trails & roads, and doing general trail maintenance and clean up.

This was just one of many numerous trail maintenance projects completed across the forest. In 2013, volunteers contributed more than 10,000 hours of labor and helped clear 656 miles of trails, many of which are located in wilderness. Additional partners included the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation, Montana Conservation Corps, Montana Wilderness Association, and the Wilderness Institute. To see photos of the NTD events visit www.facebook.com/DiscoverTheBitterroot and click on "albums".



Volunteers clear trees from forest trails



Selway-Pintler Wilderness Back Country Horsemen volunteers



Volunteers working on National Trails Day on Bitterroot NF

Restoring and Creating Resilient Landscapes



The concept of “improving” or “restoring” continues to drive our program of work.

In order to facilitate restoration, the Northern Region continued its participation in the Pilot program for Integrated Resource Restoration. Primarily an accounting function, Integrated Resource Restoration gives managers flexibility to fund priority resource needs, long- and short-term issues and situations, and our partners’ available resources and contributions. It helps make it more practical for managers to shift and focus funding across their designated resource areas to yield a number of advantages: it allows them to better match needed funds to critical resource work in a given project or landscape; it provides more leverage to match our funding with our partners; and it helps increase the results of our collaborative efforts for a wider range of benefits.

As a result, we are better able to increase the amount of acreage we treat in larger landscape areas and watersheds. In turn this makes our forests and grasslands more resilient to invasive plants and insects, disease and other climatic changes.

Woven into these restoration efforts are programs and opportunities to engage a wide range of volunteers and youth. These restoration projects and recreational opportunities introduce a whole new generation to the values and benefits that come from taking care of our nation’s lands. Through these efforts, communities and partners become vested in the restoration efforts, and realize the local benefits of their participation directly.

NFRR Pilot Authority Strong Compliment to Collaborative Projects

Again in 2013 the Northern Region was part of the Integrated Resource Restoration Pilot Authority for budget allocation, known as NFRR. The application of the Authority continued as an important tool to address long-term restoration plans and objectives, particularly with respect to watershed conditions and aquatic and wildlife habitat. Across the Region, the Authority was applied judiciously to those program or resource areas and projects where the Region and the units identified the most potential in terms of target accomplishments, beneficial outcomes not traditionally captured through hard target numbers, and where the Authority could be used to leverage partner or other program funding and opportunities. Regional planners followed an 11-step process that melded top-down and bottom-up approaches to allocate funding.

Combining the top-down strategic planning with the bottom-up desired conditions, each unit could more directly see the effects of differing levels of funding based upon anticipated FY13 budgets at the beginning of last year. Through the process, units were able to more accurately allocate desired outcomes and outputs along resource needs that increased those desired future conditions for the most impact across landscapes and boundaries.

This process resulted in Forest’s proposing their priority work and the Region, in turn, funding it within fiscal constraints. The Region tended to fund work that met national goals that was supported by a strong collaborative, which could also leverage additional funding and gain the interest of other potential partners.

The region asked the field units to define their niche based on the intersection of social, economic, and resource considerations. Field units then proposed their priorities based on the unit’s niche and on refined recent information on opportunities identified by partners and collaboratives. In general, our increasing use of collaboratives played a stronger role in setting on-the-ground priorities than the IRR approach. The IRR concept, however, empowered the collaboratives to provide input to the forests and region as to the appropriate mix of activities go a given landscape. The IRR approach complemented our increasing use of collaboratives, which is reflected in the Case Studies and in particular when combined with other large landscape-scale programs such as the CFLRP.

The authority was used to focus on the appropriate mix of critical habitat, watershed, and vegetation projects already in place, with the goal of subsidizing allocated funding, or leveraging partnership contributions that would move project efforts toward the intended desired conditions and associated resource accomplishments.

As we noted in last year’s Regional Report, application of the Authority did not change or impact the expected project and application outcomes. It did, however, provide an opportunity to engage in more discussions with partners to determine the appropriate mix of land stewardship over a given landscape. It provided line officers and RO staff more opportunities to approach potential partners with future opportunities for their involvement to generate increased accomplishments and on-the-ground results of their investments.

The Bridging Cultures Conservation Corps

Meeting the needs and requirements of natural resource management can lead to meeting the needs of people and communities, as has happened with the Northern Region’s *Bridging Cultures Conservation Corps* (BCCC). In 2013 the Northern Region established a partnership with the Montana Conservation Corps to target underserved youth in natural resource programs. Combining funding support from the Washington Office of the Forest Service, the Region launched the BCCC. The goal of the program was to foster students’ interest in pursuing natural resource careers with the Forest Service, as well as provide background and training to successfully compete for future natural resource positions with the agency. It is one of the first programs in the agency using the new Public Land Corps authority, which allows participants to qualify for a limited-time, non-competitive hiring status.

Forest and district staffs from the Kootenai, Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Gallatin/Custer, Idaho Panhandle, Lewis & Clark and Flathead National Forests were key in bringing this program to life. They provided a wide array of work experiences, as well as interactions with professional resource specialists.

This year’s crew members were both ethnically and geographically diverse, aptly reflecting the BCCC moniker. Participants hailed from communities ranging from rural to metropolitan, from the East coast to the West coast (Brooklyn, NY; Ohio; Montana; Arizona; and Washington State). The crew truly bridged a variety of cultures in the largest sense of the word!



What Bridging Cultures Meant to Me

If there was ever any doubt that a program like the Bridging Cultures Conservation Corps could be successful and reach its participants in meaningful, life-changing ways, this testimonial from one of the participants erases that notion.

“My experience here at MCC [Montana Conservation Corps] was like nothing I had ever been a part of before. It was great or maybe more than that. It was very illustrious. I will never forget this for the rest of my life, given that I am not stricken with Alzheimer’s or any other memory depleting deficiency.

I met a lot of awesome people and it’ll be a shame that I am not going to see them multiple times throughout the week. I will especially miss the ones that have been here since the beginning of the season. We’ve had laughs, ups, downs, and shared stories from our lives. Some I may have forgotten, but some I will remember forever.

I’ve come to realize that some of the best things in life are completely by chance. You couldn’t organize people to come together the way we have it happened by chance. You couldn’t organize people to have the same experience we had as a crew it happened by chance. You couldn’t organize the obstacles and circumstances we’ve had to go through it happened by chance.

To this day of my life I have never been so proud of myself for seeing this program through and not giving up when I was so sure I was going to. This experience has changed my life. It will continue to influence the way I live my life and the decisions I make for the rest of my life.

I hope that this program will continue to do what it does so that others can be transformed into much more of themselves. Thank you.”

- Jonathan Limpy Jr.

On the trail with the Bridging Cultures work crew, Jonathon Limpy, Jr. looks ahead along the next part of their work day during his participation in the Bridging Cultures experience.



Bridging Cultures Conservation Corps crew members, along with MCC and Forest Service staff, work side-by-side with Montana Senator Max Baucus (second from right) on the Glacier Mountain View Trail of the Hungry Horse/Glacier View Ranger Districts on the Flathead National Forest, in August 2013.

Pine Beetle Treatments at Bass Creek Recreation Area on the Bitterroot NF

The Bass Creek Recreation Area on the Bitterroot National Forest is a popular area for horseback riding, mountain biking, and hiking. It's visited by more than 50,000 people annually; therefore, when recent surveys by Forest Service entomologists indicated mountain pine beetle populations in the area had grown from "moderate" to "high hazard," the forest knew it had to take immediate action.

"Many areas of the Bitterroot, especially the southern end, were experiencing epidemic levels of tree mortality from the mountain pine beetle," said Forest Supervisor Julie King. "We knew the situation at Bass Creek was critical and we needed to act quickly, before it was too late."

The Larry-Bass Project included 1,200 acres in the Larry and Bass Creek drainages in the Bitterroot Mountains, west of Stevensville. The project was designed to improve overall forest health and resiliency while also protecting the area's large and distinctive pine trees from mountain pine beetles. The project included:

- Ø Commercial timber harvest (logging) on 765 acres
- Ø Non-commercial thinning to reduce tree densities on 41 acres; and
- Ø Removing conifers that were encroaching on 58 acres of aspen trees to improve vegetation diversity

Pyramid Mountain Lumber of Seeley Lake began logging operations in March 2013 and the project was completed in October 2013. The timber harvest provided 4 million board feet (1,100 truckloads) to Montana sawmills, along with helping boost the local economy and create jobs. The project also added four miles of existing trails to the National Forest trail system.



Logging operations get underway at Bass Creek Recreation Area. Photo By: Perry Backus, Ravalli Republic

Restoring Resilient Landscapes

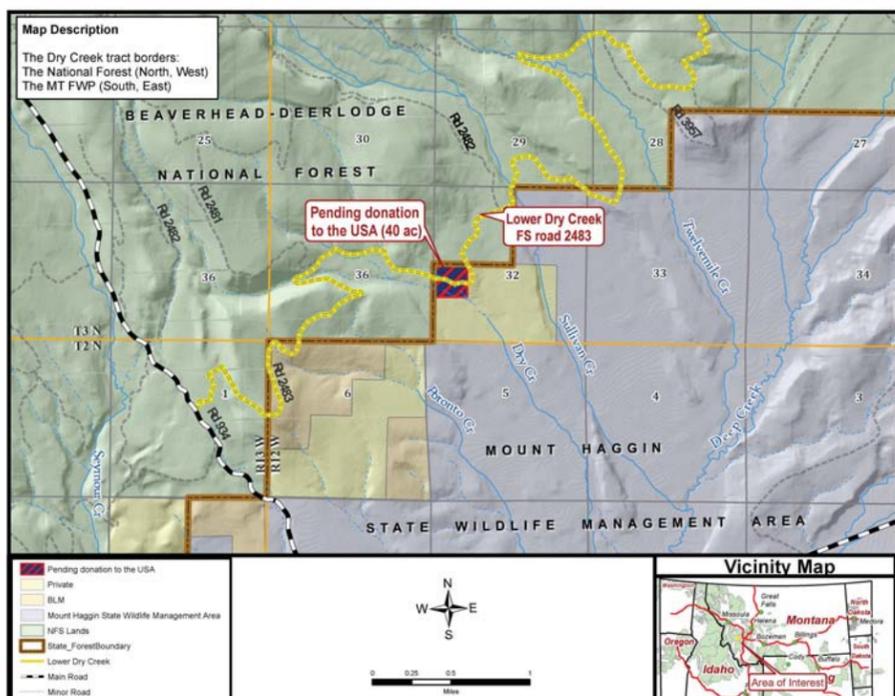
Nature Conservancy Donates Land to Forest Service

In October 2013, The Nature Conservancy of Montana donated approximately 40 acres of private land to the Forest Service to be added to the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. The donated land, located in the Dry Creek Area approximately 10 miles northwest of Wise River, adjoins other National Forest System lands on two sides and is in close proximity to the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area. The goal of the donation is to help in providing better natural resource management and recreational access there.

"We are excited to receive this generous donation from the Nature Conservancy as it will allow us to manage our public lands more effectively," said Acting Forest Supervisor Tim Garcia.

"This is a really beautiful part of the Big Hole Valley and an important piece of a broader mosaic of public and private land that's being conserved for wildlife and local ranching. The Conservancy is happy to place it under the good stewardship of the Forest Service," said Jim Berkey, Program Director for The Nature Conservancy.

The donation will help the Forest Service to protect important wildlife habitat for a variety of species; maintain visual quality and open space; improve recreation opportunities; improve public access along approximately one half mile of Forest Road #2483; add approximately 25 acres of timber lands and 15 acres of range lands to the national forest; conserve approximately one half mile of riparian area along two forks of Dry Creek; and improve management of permitted livestock grazing.



Kootenai National Forest Volunteer Hours for 2013

The Kootenai National Forest had a total of 31,640 volunteer hours for 2013. The value of a volunteer hour has been calculated at \$22.14 an hour, giving the forest a grand total of \$700,509.60 of work done for free. These volunteers provided a valuable benefit to the forest's program of work and to the resources, especially in an era of declining budgets.



The volunteer breakdown is as follows:

- Campground Hosts: 27,748.25 hours — 19 hosted campgrounds;
- Experience Works: 978 hours — A program for older, more experienced Americans;
- Heritage Work: 658 hours — Projects include Fairview Ranger Station's Meadow Peak Lookout and Mt. Baldy Buckhorn Lookout where volunteers painted, performed general maintenance and laid a new floor;
- Trail Work: 1910.75 hours — Rec tech, first aid trainer, district maintenance, and hydrology;
- Misc. Work: 345 hours — Individuals and school groups.



Volunteers Continue to Staff Forest Service Fire Towers

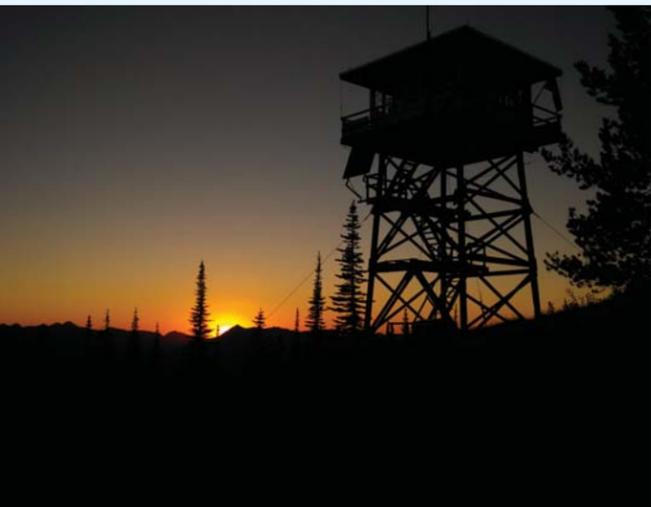
When you look out from a fire tower over the mountains of western Montana, there is a sense of nostalgia and a harkening back to the days of the old West, when times were simpler. These iconic structures, dating back 100 years or more across the West, symbolize man's efforts to care for, manage and work through the struggles of living in the forested lands across the Northern Region. Over the years, however, staffing the valuable fire towers (also called lookouts) has been difficult and challenging due to emerging technologies that can and have replaced some towers, as well as budgetary constraints that have reduced staffing and forced the closure of some towers.

But not all fire towers are empty. For some people, fire tower work is as much a relaxing hobby and lifestyle as it is a job. So much so that the Hungry Horse-Glacier View Ranger Districts of the Flathead National Forest found stalwart volunteers to staff two fire towers through 2013. This effort built upon a program started in 2012 by the Hungry Horse-Glacier View Fire Management team for the Baptiste and Firefighter Lookouts, located on the Hungry Horse Ranger District on the east side of Hungry Horse Reservoir. Not only do the volunteers (also called lookouts) provide a valuable set of eyes, they also contribute greatly to the maintenance and restoration of the towers, accomplishing some much needed deferred maintenance on these historic fire management tools.

For instance, Baptiste Lookout was staffed annually until 1971 but received minimal maintenance thereafter. In 2005, due to vandalism and liability concerns, the lower stairs were removed. In 2010 the Forest Service conducted a site assessment and started rehabilitation work in 2011. Annual volunteer staffing started in 2012 and by the fall of 2013 almost all of the restoration was completed. Firefighter Lookout was in better shape as it was staffed annually through 1997 and as needed until 2012, when it was placed in the volunteer program and returned to annual staffing.

There are approximately 15 volunteers in the program and they staff the towers from mid-July through mid-September. Leif Haugen, a Flathead National Forest lookout at Thoma Lookout, organizes and provides the training for the volunteers. Each volunteer is required to attend annual training and learn lookout standard operating procedures. These volunteers work and interact with dispatch, firefighters and fire management and staff the fire towers for up to two weeks at a time, just the same as the paid lookouts.

The secret to the success of this volunteer organization is that both the volunteers and fire managers are very passionate about these structures and wish to maintain, utilize and preserve them. This program is a great example of matching the personal interests of individuals with needs that benefit public lands.



Top: Standing Watch
Middle: Baptiste Fire Lookout
Bottom: Sunset at Baptiste

Lightning Creek Treasured Landscapes Campaign

The National Forest Foundation (NFF), in partnership with the Idaho Panhandle National Forest, kicked off the Lightning Creek Treasured Landscapes campaign in 2013. The Lightning Creek drainage north of Clark Fork, ID was ravaged in 2006 by a severe flood. The flood damaged access to the national forest and popular trails, as well as impacting wildlife habitat and the overall health of the drainage, triggering the need for a focused restoration campaign in Lightning Creek.

The campaign kicked off in Sandpoint, ID on March 1st with Pend Oreille Arts Council artists showcasing several works of art focused on the Lightning Creek drainage. The kick off gave partners and members of the public the opportunity to learn what NFF Treasured Landscapes are about and how they can get involved.

Being the first year of implementation, some might think the project started off slow and gained speed through the year. On the contrary, Lightning Creek restoration had several projects occurring throughout the summer field season, to include a road-to-trail conversion, botanical surveys and trail maintenance.

Washed out during the 2006 flood, Mud Creek road #340 was impassable. The road has since been converted to a trail to allow public access once again up the Mud Creek tributary to Lightning Creek. Old drainage features were removed along the roadbed to help restore natural drainage, making it less likely to fail in the future and reducing future maintenance issues for the trail. Eleven culvert channels were re-contoured and 14 cross drains removed, while 14 water bars and 6 rolling dips were installed to ensure longevity of the trail. Final trail tread was constructed by hand on National Public Lands Day in September 2013.

NFF led the effort in organizing the National Public Lands Day volunteer effort. In addition to the Mud Creek Trail conversion, 12 volunteers also brushed and maintained the Morris Creek trail system. Two volunteers have also been surveying and laying out a Scotchman Peak trail reroute to decrease the grade of the trail, thereby decreasing erosion and making it more sustainable in the future.

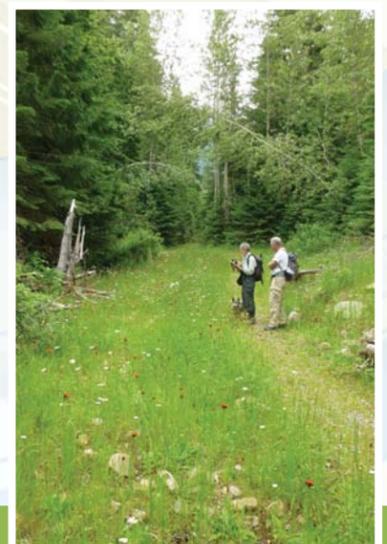
Several types of botanical surveys were completed in 2013 through the Treasured Landscape project. Jennifer Costich-Thompson, Forest Service botanist, led a cooperative effort to survey noxious weeds, high mountain lake rare plants, and Whitebark pines at various locations within Lightning Creek. The purpose of the surveys was to help identify potential needs for rare plant habitat restoration, determine treatment needs to enhance restoration opportunities, and determine locations for Whitebark pine restoration. When all surveys were complete, a total of 2,555 acres had been surveyed thanks to help from the Kinnikinnick Native Plant Society, Priest River Valley Backcountry Horsemen and Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness.



Whitebark pine surveys, conducted by volunteers, help ensure the success of planned restoration projects for the species and will be a great benefit to the hungry Grizzly Bears who use the trees as a food source.

The steep terrain across the landscape of Lightning Creek presents great diversity and challenges ranging from wet cedar bottom lands up to high alpine creeks.

An enormous piece of the work accomplished in the Lightning Creek Treasured Landscape comes from volunteers like these, conducting botany surveys with their 4-legged assistant.



Land Acquisitions Extend Public Land Values and Access

As the music of this past autumn's bugling elk faded into the snow covered mountains of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, those who care about the long-term conservation of wildlife habitat and public access to public land had something more to sing about.

Thanks to additions to an ongoing land acquisition project located within the Tenderfoot Creek watershed in central Montana, the Lewis & Clark National Forest's White Sulphur Springs Ranger District added almost 3,000 acres to its management responsibility. The additional 2,975 acres raises the total land acquired to 6,335 acres since the first phase was completed in July 2010.

These lands were formerly owned and managed by the Bair Ranch Foundation, a philanthropic Montana foundation that granted the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation an exclusive option for sale in 2009. This option for sale came with the strong desire that the lands become publicly owned to guarantee permanent public access, as well as conserve the area's natural resources and traditional land uses. A total of 8,220 acres of private land near the Smith River were optioned for sale by the Bair Ranch Foundation. An additional 1,885 acres remain to be acquired - and hopefully will be in 2014 if funding is available. Conserving these lands as National Forest System lands guarantees public access and more focused protection and management for wildlife habitat values.

The Tenderfoot lands span 3,200 feet in elevation - from sub-alpine mountains to grass meadows and riparian areas. The lands provide high-quality water and fisheries habitat for species such as west slope cutthroat trout, as well as habitat for elk, moose, deer and a multitude of other species. Furthermore, the lands host scenic views and extraordinary opportunities for many forms of recreation, including hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, managed ATV (all terrain vehicle) use, snowmobiling and more.

The groups working in partnership to conserve these lands include the Bair Ranch Foundation, Tenderfoot Trust, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), Cinnabar Foundation, and US Forest Service. The funding came from the Land and Water Conservation Fund through support from the Montana Congressional Delegation and funds contributed by RMEF, the Cinnabar Foundation and Tenderfoot Trust.



Restoring Resilient Landscapes

Nez Perce Trail "Challenges" and Accomplishments

Using the authority under the National Nez-Perce National Historic Trail (NPNHT) Challenge Cost Share Program, the Trail Administrator approved funding for several projects along the Trail. These projects included work, clearing, and marking and identifying GPS coordinates Moon Saddle to Indian Post Office in Central Idaho. Other projects included work to build horse corrals and watering facilities along with a turn out pasture at the Wallowa Band Nez Perce Homeland site near Wallow, OR, and local museum exhibits in western Montana.



One of those new exhibits was unveiled at the Blaine County Museum in Chinook, MT, which was also made possible by the NPNHT Challenge Cost Share program. This display features 150 items found at Bear Paw Battlefield and Cow Creek. Pistols, salmon hooks, rusted rifle barrels, and a brass trade ring are some of the items found in the Nez Perce camp area between 1880 and 1969.

It was also a tragic year for the NPNHT landscape with two large fires destroying the Nez Perce Longhouse and Tribal Headquarters in Nespelem, WA. Our hearts are with the members of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Chief Joseph Band of the Nez Perce.

The National Trails System Administrators have worked with their trail non-profits and the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS) to develop a Collaborative Landscape Proposal for the 2014 Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). This is the first time that an effort has been made to look at the National Trails System as a whole network for the purpose of land acquisition as envisioned by Congress when the National Trails System Act was signed into law in 1968.

The NPNHT has recently started to plan for and potentially acquire land

since the National System Trails Act was amended in 2009. This is the first effort to acquire lands that have historical significance to the Trail. The NPNHT worked with its federal partners, local interest groups, land owners, and non-profit groups along with the Nez Perce, Umatilla, and Colville tribes to identify potential parcels to be considered for acquisition. The Nez Perce Trail Foundation assisted with the development of this acquisition proposal. Several NPNHT parcels were selected for submission under Land and Water Conservation Funding in the 2014 President's Budget to Congress.

To learn more about the NPNHT visit www.fs.usda.gov/npnht / or follow us on Twitter @npnht.



New display at the Blaine County Museum, funded by the Nez Perce National Historic Trail.

Whitebark Pine Blister Rust Management Report Released



In August 2013, scientists from the agency's State & Private Forestry, Forest Health Protection program released a comprehensive report on the history, impacts and recovery efforts for native Whitebark Pine trees (WBP) from blister rust disease in the Northern Rockies. Scientists working out of Regions 1 and 6 (Northern Region and Pacific Northwest Region, respectively) and the Rocky Mountain Research Station (located in Region 1) contributed to the comprehensive report, which comes

at a critical time for restoration efforts for WBP as potential tolls from climate change compound the devastation created by blister rust.

The report details the history and pathology of blister rust, starting with its introduction to forests in western North America in the early 1900s from infected white pine trees brought in from France. In the early parts of the 1900s, WBP accounted for more than 400 million board feet of timber harvests each year (1925 – 1934); however, it also proved to be highly susceptible to blister rust disease. With a mortality rate of 90 percent, WBP has suffered a great loss of natural range, impacting ecosystems and wildlife habitat all across its high-elevation ranges in the Northern Rockies.

The report serves as a guide for management and restoration of WBP habitat and coverage across the Northern Rockies. Such efforts include an aggressive identification, analysis and treatment regimen of pruning back trees that can be saved, as well as identifying areas for replanting with blister-rust resistant saplings. Although the mortality rate runs 90 percent, there are specimens that have a natural resistance to blister rust. At the Moscow, Lone Mountain and Coeur d'Alene nurseries in Idaho, saplings are grown from these specimens and replanted as seedlings.

The Custer and Gallatin National Forests play an active part in WBP reforestation efforts on the forests that are within the natural range of WBP. One crew of Forest Service employees and volunteers ushered in the new Little Bear Whitebark Pine Seed Orchard, planting 440 "blister rust resistant" seedlings in a five-acre plot southwest of Bozeman. The WBP is a key component of the ecosystem throughout the Greater Yellowstone Area, providing an important food source to wildlife and providing other essential ecological services. The seed orchard is a result of 13 years of identifying promising rust resistant trees in the field. The seed orchard will serve the Greater Yellowstone Grand Teton whitebark pine seed zone and was developed by the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee.

Forest Service researchers, along with their non-profit and private partners across the Northern Region, are hopeful that their efforts will pay off in the long run to stem the advance of declining WBP range and reverse the current mortality trend to expand the tree's natural range. You can read the full Management Guide and Report at www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5415080.pdf.



Biomass Still a Hot Issue in 2013

Northern Regional Forester (RF) Faye Krueger attended the Secretary's Forest Health and Western Utilities Summit in April 2013. As Montana was the only western state not represented at that meeting, RF Krueger reached out to the state's Public Service Commission (PSC) and major utilities. She and Steve Marshall, Assistant Director of Cooperative Forestry, made a presentation to Montana's PSC in August, initiating a constructive dialog on shared issues of forest health, wildfire risk and system reliability. (A meeting with Northwestern Energy is pending.)

Meanwhile, Montana's first biomass energy facility to sell electricity into the grid was completed in Columbia Falls at F.H. Stoltze's sawmill. In 2013, the company successfully competed for an additional Forest Products Lab grant to engineer a more efficient system for fuel delivery and conveyances, enhancing their ability to use slash from forest management activities. The 2.5 megawatt biomass plant at F.H. Stoltze provides enough electricity to power 2,500 homes, while supplying all of the heat needed for the sawmill's industrial operations - including kiln-drying dimensional lumber.

The Northern Region continued to display leadership in biomass utilization in 2013, as Idaho was one of only five states selected to receive funding for a State Wood Energy Team. This follows on the success of the Fuels for Schools Initiative and the momentum of several ongoing regional efforts in wood-to-energy production and development.

Forest Legacy Expands Public Access, Lands Management Reach

The Forest Legacy program closed two outstanding projects in Montana to provide regulatory protections and management to more than 37,000 acres:

The Stimson Project brought 28,000 acres of highly productive corporate timberland near Troy, Montana under regulatory management. Montana's State Assessment of Forest Resources rated this land as Montana's highest priority for forestland protection. The project area contains some of the best wildlife habitat in Montana, supporting eight species of federally-listed Threatened and Endangered species (or candidates for listing under that classification), as well as other rare, sensitive, or game species.

Despite its many noncontiguous parcels, the project lands function as a single unit with an extensive network of public roads providing easy access and allowing timber management activities to be conducted in an efficient and cost-effective manner. With Stimson now in the process of liquidating much of its remaining Montana land holdings, the lands have high potential to be developed commercially and are at risk of being converted to non-forest uses. The proposed conservation easement would allow Stimson to retain these core timberlands, preclude development, ensure continued timber management, sustain local wood-product jobs, protect incredible wildlife habitat and key landscape connectivity, and provide permanent public access to extraordinary recreation lands.

The Murray-Douglas Forest Legacy Project protects 9,594 acres of forested land within the Garnet Mountains in the south-central Blackfoot River watershed of Montana. The Murray-Douglas Conservation Easement is part of the disposition component of the larger Blackfoot Challenge Blackfoot Community Project for the south-central Blackfoot watershed.

Plum Creek Timber Company reorganized as a Real Estate Investment Trust in 1999. The company had identified thousands of acres in western Montana as having "higher and better uses" than commercial forestry and was actively marketing timberland in the Blackfoot for private development. The Challenge initiated the Blackfoot Community Project in the fall of 2002 as a proactive response to the progressive parceling of these timberlands, as well as to allow the Blackfoot community a voice in guiding their future ownership and use. Local landowners and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks hosted a joint celebration to honor partners and to acknowledge all the hard work that went into the successful outcome of this project.

BLACKFOOT COMMUNITY PROJECT: Murray-Douglas Easement

Conservation of the Murray-Douglas project is a victory for wildlife and family ranching. It's also a study in the kind of partnership and perseverance that epitomizes The Nature Conservancy in Montana. The nearly 11,000-acre conservation easement prevents subdivision of a mosaic of healthy forest and grassland that sustains bears, elk, and two important tributaries of the Blackfoot River. It also allows the Manley and Coughlin families to continue a ranching tradition that, for the Coughlins, goes back 150 years. Fortunately, it didn't take quite that long to pull together this project – but it was nearly a decade in the making.

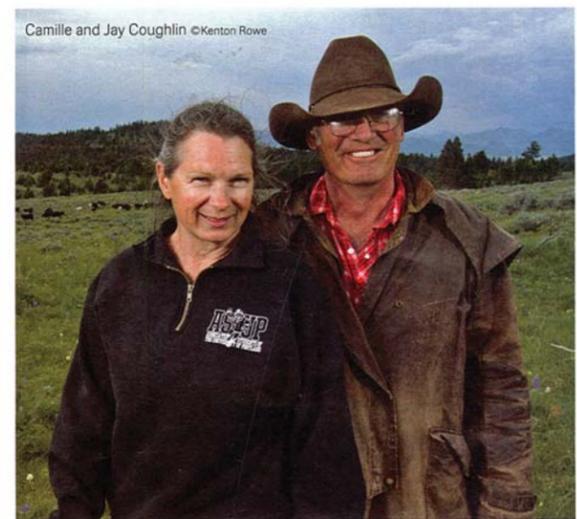
History

The Conservancy's roots in this valley go back to 1976, when we placed the state's very first conservation easement on 1,800 acres alongside the Blackfoot River. Over the years, development pressure and our partnership with the Blackfoot Challenge led us to the purchase of more than 100,000 acres of former industrial timber land slated to go on the open real estate market. Land within this Murray-Douglas easement is part of one of those purchases, known as the Blackfoot Community Project. While the Conservancy took the financial risk in buying the land, decisions about its future are up to the community, guided by the Blackfoot Challenge. So far, most of the land has been transferred to surrounding public and private landowners.

Partnership is Key

With this project, public and private partnership was the key to success. Montana's Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks bought the easement on land owned by the Conservancy, the Coughlin's Blackfoot River Ranch, and the Manley Ranch. The families donated 30 percent of the value of the easement and were compensated for the remainder by the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program. Those funds then allowed them to purchase some of the Conservancy-owned land that is adjacent to their ranches. "That was a big help," says Jay Coughlin. "The mountain acres we acquired are important pasture for our cattle, and the conservation easement terms ensure that the way we operate today as good stewards of the land will continue into the future."

Conservancy Land Protection Specialist Chris Bryant says that's usually the case. "Conservation easements are a tool to help ranching families stay on the land and pass their way of life on to their children, while preserving the natural value of the land and water. The Conservancy is extremely pleased to have played a role with our good partners in making this opportunity available to these ranches."



The Manley family: Sheila, Tracy, John, and Cody ©Kenton Rowe

Volunteers Work Together to Maintain a Special Trail and Restore a Unique Fire Lookout

There is a long history of collaboration in the Blackfoot, Swan and Seeley Lake valleys. It's common for people—all representing various interests and values—to work across fences to protect the integrity of Montana's rural communities, maintain sustainable livelihoods and conserve the natural resources along the Blackfoot watershed. While the people and projects have changed over the years, the commitment to collaborative work remains strong - especially as it relates to today's efforts by the members of the Southwestern Crown Collaborative (SWCC). Partners of the SWCC are working across boundaries to restore ecosystems within the Southwestern Crown of the Continent, as well as improve economies of local rural communities.

The Southwestern Crown of the Continent was selected as one of the first national Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) projects in 2010. The SWCC, representing numerous groups and individuals, lead the planning and implementation for a myriad of innovative restoration projects across the Swan, Clearwater and Blackfoot valleys.

Lincoln, Montana is known as a destination location for a multitude of outdoor recreation opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized uses. To achieve its goals for restoration and further enhance some recreational activities, members of the SWCC, Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) and numerous volunteers are working on a variety of projects on National Forest lands near Lincoln.

In 1978, Congress designated the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) for hiking, horseback riding, recreation and conservation of natural and historic resources. The ultimate goal is to connect a trail from Mexico to Canada for 3,100 miles along the spine of the Rocky Mountains. The CDNST is only 75% complete, and the portion within Montana and Idaho (980 miles) is only 58% complete. Little by little, however, volunteers and the MWA, with support from the SWCC, are making progress on the CDNST trail maintenance and resource enhancement needs.

In 2011, the Helena National Forest and the MWA established a partnership for trail maintenance of the CDNST. Through a formal agreement the MWA received SWCC funds to promote trail maintenance along the CDNST. In that time, MWA volunteers spent several days last summer improving conditions and maintaining portions of the CDNST near Stemple Pass.

Volunteers cleared trail corridors of trees, brush and rocks to maintain the trail tread and maintained drainage structures to prevent soil erosion. Volunteers spent days locating priority points for new trail signs and installed the signs to clearly denote the trail route for users to safely explore and enjoy while on the nationally renowned CDNST.

"The CDNST is more than just a trail, it's also about connecting people," said Shannon Freix, Continental Divide Trail program manager for MWA. "MWA's Continental Divide Trail Montana trail program is fueled by volunteer passion, which means we are privileged to work with volunteers from around the country and sometimes internationally. It's amazing to see horsemen, conservationists and mountain bikers swinging a tool side-by-side for a common recreation and restoration effort."

Along with trail construction projects, many volunteers have spent the past two summers (2012 and 2013) restoring the Granite Butte Fire Lookout, which sits atop the CDNST and is planned to eventually be added to the Forest Service Cabin Rental Program. The MWA has successfully received funding from a variety of sources - including the Missouri River Resource Advisory Council, Montana Recreation Trails Program and the Firefighter Lookout Association - to lead the restoration efforts at Granite Butte Lookout. Over the last two years, under a partnership agreement with the Helena National Forest, volunteers have helped restore the interior of the structure by sanding, scraping and painting; installing a sub-floor, and tile and wood flooring; installing custom-made replica furniture for the Lookout; and repairing damage by vandals to the front door, window and window shutters.

Through MWA's volunteer program, Freix and nine volunteers spent more than 50 volunteer hours working on the Granite Butte Lookout. Forest employees assisted throughout the summer and provided some technical expertise, funding and materials to make this project a success.

"The CDNST is special to many people, and we are very fortunate to have this partnership with the SWCC and the MWA that allows us a different way to help connect people to these wild places," Lincoln District Ranger Amber Kamps said. "We are working to improve the CDNST that literally will lead people to the Granite Butte Lookout, which can offer people a glimpse into the life of a fire lookout and provide them with a unique recreational opportunity."



Volunteers clear and improve portions of the CDNST on the Lincoln Ranger District near Stemple Pass.



Volunteers sanding the wood flooring for Lookout.



Volunteers moving in the custom-made replica furniture into the Lookout.

Restoring Resilient Landscapes

Land Purchase Through LWCF Funding Provides Public Access

In partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Northern Region completed a significant land purchase in Western Montana that will integrate private holdings into the surrounding national forests to better conserve wildlife and public use. The 11,600-acre acquisition is one of the first projects implementing the Collaborative Land Protection appropriations of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a new approach initiated by the secretaries of Interior and Agriculture. The landscape approach to acquisition projects is tied to the Obama Administration's emphasis on America's Great Outdoors.

The purchase lies within the Flathead and Lolo national forests, and part of the 18-million-acre Crown of the Continent, which is a key intersection connecting vital habitat across western Montana. This acquisition will broaden the effectiveness and increase the amount of conservation work that can be accomplished across this combined landscape, directly supporting one of Vilsack's goals for forest management in the US.

The purchased acreage was part of The Montana Legacy Project, comprised of 310,586 acres purchased by The Nature Conservancy from Plum Creek Timberlands, which is being transferred into surrounding public and private ownership.

Richard Jeo, the state director for The Nature Conservancy in Montana, praised the acquisition as a safeguard for future land purchases and conservation efforts.

"This sale epitomizes the vision we had with The Montana Legacy Project, and directly supports the great investment that Americans have made for generations in conservation on the Crown of the Continent," Jeo stated. "By re-stitching these once privately-owned parcels with the surrounding Forest Service holdings, we're restoring the natural integrity of the land, securing habitat and links to the places animals need to feed, breed, and rear their young, and where people have worked and played for generations."

Montana Governor Steve Bullock resonated Jeo's sentiments, "For nearly two decades, a broad coalition of Montanans, organizations, user groups, tribal governments, and local, state and federal agencies have worked under a shared vision to endow future generations with a true Montana legacy. This is a legacy made up of magnificent

landscapes set aside for public enjoyment, cold & clean-flowing waters, and world class wildlife habitat. This vision was based upon a once-in-a-generation opportunity that became available in the form of Plum Creek Timber lands...". The State of Montana has already invested more than \$100 million to conserve this landscape for the benefit of residents of Montana as well as national and international visitors.

By consolidating ownership to eliminate historic checkerboard patterns of management, the Forest Service and our partners will have more latitude to better manage for:

- wildlife habitat enhancement and connectivity for threatened and endangered species (lynx, grizzly bear, bull trout);
- more consistent landscape-scale natural resource management across public and private land ownership;
- ability to implement watershed scale management actions such as vegetation management for fuels reduction;
- ability to address wild land fires in different ways through the elimination of potential inholding residential development;
- improved public access;
- increased recreational opportunities contributing to AGO efforts to provide public access for hunting, angling, biking, and all-season opportunities; and
- reduce strain on local communities and counties by precluding expansion of water and sewer services, fire and police protection to remote locations.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund was established by Congress in 1964 with the purposes of "assisting in preserving, developing, and assuring accessibility to all citizens of the United States of America of present and future generations and visitors... such quality and quantity of outdoor recreation resources as may be available and are necessary and desirable for individual active participation in such recreation and to strengthen the health and vitality of the citizens of the US...." A separate fund was created out of a variety of receipts, mainly from the royalties of off-shore oil and gas development and motorboat fuels taxes. Although \$900,000,000 is authorized annually for appropriation, it rarely is fully appropriated. The authority for the Fund expires September 30, 2015.

The Nature Conservancy has been a longstanding partner with the Forest Service in land conservation in Montana. Recent acquisitions are located in the Swan Valley, Marshall Canyon, Pattee Canyon, Petty Creek, Lolo Creek and Mill Creek areas of Missoula and Lake Counties. This purchase was finalized in late August and the lands are now available to the hunting and recreating public.

Wildland Fires and Safety



This was a tragic year for the firefighting community, punctuated by the loss of 19 members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots, from the city of Prescott, in the Yarnell fire in Arizona. This loss was devastating and had a profound and striking impact on all firefighters from any agency, as well as our country.

This type of tragedy reaffirms the commitment to safety among all agencies involved in wildland fire suppression. Nationwide there has been an increase in research and development within the science of fighting wildfires: in the tactics and logistics we employ; in the equipment we develop and use; and in the priorities for every individual fire and the landscape types on which they occur. The loss of even a single firefighter strengthens the resolve of leadership in the decision-making processes to identify and reduce the inherent risks that come with fighting and suppressing wildland fires.

Within the Northern Region we had a slower than normal year in terms of the number of acres that burned on National Forest System lands. But we did experience several large fires that provided two prime examples of the destructive and restorative powers of fire on the landscape. In these two examples, we see that the paramount focus on safety and safeguarding human lives provided sound decision-making parameters to reach successful outcomes in both. I am reminded that the safety of the public and of wildland firefighters in every situation is the most critical decision parameter we consider.



Team members wrap Gardiner Peak Lookout on the Bitterroot NF



Team members wrap Blue Mountain Lookout on the Lolo NF



Team Protects Historic Fire Lookouts

In 2013, members of the Northern Region Structure Wrapping Team deployed to numerous wildfires on the Bitterroot, Nez Perce-Clearwater and Lolo National Forests with the assignment of protecting some of the region's most historic facilities. The team protects cabins and lookouts by wrapping them with a commercial aluminized fire-resistant wrap. Team members consist of fire, facilities, and cultural resource specialists who are fall-protection qualified to use ropes, harnesses and other means to climb and wrap structures. Team members are also experienced with minimal impact structure protection techniques.

In July, the team spent several days on the Bitterroot National Forest working in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness to protect the Gardiner Peak Lookout. The lookout, a 1953 frame L-4 (four-room) structure on 10-foot legs, is located 18 miles from the nearest trailhead, requiring the team to be flown in by helicopter. The lookout was threatened by the lightning-caused Bad Luck Fire. The team also assisted during the Lolo Complex Fires by wrapping the lookout on Blue Mountain.

To see more photos of the team in action visit www.facebook.com/DiscoverTheBitterroot and click on "albums".



Lolo Complex Fires

Some time during the afternoon of August 18th, 2013, lightning started two separate fires about 10 miles west of Lolo, Montana on either side of US Highway 12. Named the West Fork II Fire and the School house Fire for reporting purposes, the dry conditions allowed the fires to spread within their initial areas. Extreme fire danger and Red Flag conditions hampered initial attack efforts and the fire experienced rapid growth and expansion on August 20th. By that afternoon winds estimated at between 40-50 miles per hour pushed the West Fork II Fire rapidly to the northeast. The fire crossed the highway and merged with the Schoolhouse Fire, burning four homes and more than twice that many outbuildings. The incident command teams made the decision to close Highway 12 and to consider evacuation orders for residents along Highway 12, as the fire had grown from 60 acres to over 5,000 in a single day.

With the merging of the two fires the Lolo NF and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) jointly managed fire suppression. The Missoula County Sheriff's Office had called out all available officers to locate and notify homeowners that were in the path of the fire. Every local and nearby city fire department was fully engaged in structure protection within a matter of hours. The number of fire engines responding to the incident to aid in structure protection was soon in the dozens.

By the next day, August 21, the fire had grown to almost 9000 acres and was threatening hundreds more homes along Highway 12, and two subdivisions along the north side of the highway. In addition, more than 50 homes in the Sleeman Gulch area (also called Sleeman Creek Road) were in the fire's likely path. Firefighters and Sheriff's deputies were successful in identifying threatened homes, making contact with residents, escorting them out of the fire area, and in the end credited with saving potentially hundreds of lives and dozens of homes.

Over the next 24 hours, as more than 1200 residents were evacuated, fire crews and engine crews, supported by heavy equipment on the ground and up to nine firefighting helicopters, established fire lines and worked to develop structure protection plans and safe zones around structures in the path of the advancing fire. The crews established and held fire lines along the north side of Highway 12, and to the west of Sleeman Gulch, leaving the fire to slowly move to the north and away from populated areas west of Lolo.

At its largest, the Lolo Creek Complex was measured at almost 11,000 acres. By the time it was declared fully contained and then completely out, the cost of the firefighting effort reached \$13 million. For several of the first days of the fire it was the number one priority fire in the nation, and was supported by more than 880 firefighters, close to 50 fire engines, water tenders, several pieces of heavy equipment and helicopter support. By Saturday, August 24th, residents along Highway 12 and up Sleeman Creek Road were allowed to return to their homes, although they were still under a provisional evacuation order in the event the fire made a move back toward the south or east.

To the credit of the incident command team and the firefighters on the ground, after the first 48 hours of the blaze and including the day that it grew from a few hundred acres to more than 5000 acres, no more structures were lost and no members of the public were harmed by the fire's spread. Two firefighters were taken off fire lines because of injuries they sustained in fighting the fire: one for respiratory issues and another who suffered a broken arm in a tree falling incident.



The Red Shale Fire When Fire Works in Your Favor

Fire is a natural part of the landscape in the West. It has worked as a function of regeneration for millennia, until man began to suppress fires on a large scale. As a result there have been few large-scale examples in the Northern Region that demonstrate the natural, uninterrupted function and benefits of wildfire. While the observations of prescribed fires are well-documented, those are usually done over much smaller areas.

On July 18 a lightning strike within the Bob Marshall Wilderness on the Lewis and Clark National Forest's Rocky Mountain Ranger District ignited a fire in the Red Shale Creek Drainage. The fire was first observed and reported by the Beartop Lookout in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area. The fire ignited within the 52,000 acre footprint of the 1988 Gates Park Fire, one of the other large fires that had burned in Montana the same year as the historic 1988 Yellowstone fires.

As a result of the 1988 fires, the area was characterized by heavy lodgepole pine regeneration, numerous standing dead snags left from the 1988 fire, and wide-spread accumulation of ground fuels and fallen dead trees scattered like pick-up sticks and frequently two to four feet deep. These fuel conditions made it virtually impossible to walk through parts of the area in which the fire started. The site's remote location, high densities of standing snags which had been dead for 25 years and heavy fuel accumulations on the ground made it unsafe for fire fighters to engage in initial attack.

Forest managers immediately recognized that they had hazardous conditions that made it impossible to safely insert fire fighters for an initial attack. However, they also realized that they had an excellent opportunity to manage this fire for the resource benefits of reducing heavy accumulations of fuels and creating a mosaic of different age classes and developmental stages of plant growth and communities. The reentry of fire within this footprint created a unique opportunity to achieve these ecological benefits on a large scale.

To gain the maximum benefits and information, the forest assembled a small group of fire behavior specialists to develop a long-term strategy to manage the fire. This plan focused on a strategy to benefit the wilderness while providing for public and firefighter safety and resource protection. Fire specialists planned specific natural barriers to limit the spread of the fire, and designated firefighting resources such as water or retardant drops to help prevent the fire from moving out of the Wilderness.

The Incident Command Team stationed fire management personnel at the Gates Park Administrative Site in the Bob Marshall. They monitored fire behavior and set-up structure protection at the Gates Park, Wrong Creek, and Rocky Creek administrative cabin sites. Sprinklers and fire-resistant structure wrap were used to help protect the structures at these sites. Throughout the incident two helicopters assisted with fire management. Additionally, to provide current information on the effects of smoke, the Team installed smoke particulate monitoring stations at the Ear Mountain Guard Station east of Choteau, and in Augusta at the Forest Service office.

Much of the fire's growth occurred within the first 10 days, and was largely driven by the availability of ground fuels with topography and weather playing much lesser roles. Throughout the fire, occasional rain helped to keep conditions moderate. While focused helicopter water drops were conducted several times, the moderate conditions experienced throughout most of the incident helped to minimize the need for more active fire management.

When the fire was finally extinguished by seasonal Fall precipitation, 11,200 acres had burned within a 12,400 acre perimeter. A majority of the fire burned with a low to moderate intensity, resulting in a mosaic pattern of fire intensities ranging from unburned to high burn intensities. The higher intensity fire behavior was largely limited to the 25-year-old regeneration of lodgepole pine and areas of heavy fuel accumulation.

Across the burned area, much of the down fuel was heavily consumed and the previously wide-spread dense stands of lodge pole in which all of the trees' canopies were touching the canopies of the trees growing next to them will now be broken up with interspersed meadows and young stands of trees.

The Red Shale Fire's legacy leaves behind close to 20 square miles of forest that will be much more resistant to future extreme fire behavior. Fire behavior specialists also believe the area will act as a natural barrier that will limit rapid growth of future wildfire events that burn into the area. They also expect to see a rich and diverse range of plant communities in differing stages of development and growth, and the associated enhanced wildlife habitats this landscape provides.



Wildland Fires and Safety

Firewise – Prevention and Awareness so You Won't Learn from a Burn

Until 1985, most homeowners thought of wildfires and the loss of their homes to them as a California, or western US problem. But in that year and in 1986, more than 1400 homes were destroyed by wildfires, including some 600 in Florida alone. The thought of wildfire as a western US problem dissipated like the smoke from those fires.

Over the next 12 years, federal and state agencies and private research groups went to work on the issue of improving homes and communities from the threat of wildfires. The first Firewise website was launched in 1994 with the goal of reaching homeowners everywhere and raising the awareness of the potential for wildfire losses to homes, communities and human life.

Today the program encompasses active planning among more than 700 communities in 40 states. Working in conjunction with national firefighting entities comprised of federal and state agencies, plus local fire departments and volunteer fire units, the program has documented some \$76 million in local and individual prevention actions since 2003.

Follow the links in the photos below to find out more about individual actions you can take, and how to engage your neighborhood and community in a Firewise campaign today.

<http://www.firewise.org/wildfire-preparedness.aspx>

<http://www.firewise.org/wildfire-preparedness/firewise-toolkit.aspx>



Homeowners working with the Sustainable Fire Community Project and Hebgen Basin Fire in West Yellowstone prepare fuels mitigation work on their private property close to houses. Photo courtesy of Scott Waldron, Hebgen Basin Fire.



Burn piles as part of fuels reduction work on private property working with Hebgen Basin Fire and the Sustainable Fire Community. Photo courtesy of Scott Waldron, Hebgen Basin Fire.

Sustainable Fire Community Project

The two small communities of West Yellowstone, MT and Island Park, ID are intimately familiar with wildland fire. In the calm of the 25th anniversary of the 1988 wildland fires, which swept through much of Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding landscape, these two communities are working across boundaries - local, state and geographical - on the Sustainable Fire Community Project. At the doorstep to Yellowstone National Park, West Yellowstone and Island Park host thousands of tourists a year who come to enjoy the wide range of year-round recreational opportunities. The natural resources and landscapes surrounding the two communities support these opportunities and the local economies, making their management and planning vital to the area's vitality and futures.

These two communities are glued together by the landscape they share and are quickly becoming a model to follow for sustainable community wildfire preparedness. Their efforts are bringing together a wide range of local, state and federal agencies, plus local residents and businesses, community organizations, insurance and utility companies, the Chamber of Commerce, and local rural fire departments. The Sustainable Fire Community Project kicked off with special funds from the national Cohesive Strategy framework. It includes evacuation plans, fuels mitigation and reduction (on both private and public lands), education and most importantly creates a dialogue about wildland fire and its role across the landscape. As the project and dialogue continues, the communities are beginning to see a paradigm shift in the thinking toward wildland fire in the community.

The project group meets once a month and is currently writing plans for high priority areas. Another project includes the Missoula Fire Lab creating a landscape risk map and future risk modeling to help with fuels reduction on the landscape that the community can work with in the future. The West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce is pivotal in providing public information through larger email lists and social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter.

Sustaining Communities



While the resources on NFS lands are a national asset, the impacts that resource decisions have to local communities cannot be overstated. So many communities across the Northern Region are adjacent to or surrounded by

NFS lands. I am keenly aware that the management decisions we make have direct impacts on local economies, potential job development, and quality of life benefits. We have invested in a number of projects that have direct economic benefits to these local communities, providing both jobs and long-term recreational and tourism opportunities through restoration and recreational projects.

We have made those same strenuous efforts to invest in our youth through some innovative and highly successful volunteer and partner programs that produce multiple benefits for the resources and for those participants. Their stories are encouraging and uplifting, reading about how much those young people have given of the time, energies and passion to work on projects across the Region. I will continue to invest in this area. Connecting youth with natural resources and seeing that spark of interest grow is necessary for the future of our National Forests.

Forest Service employees don't just work on the forests and grasslands – they live in and are part of their communities. What happens on NFS lands and the management decisions we make has impacts on our employees and their families just as much as it has on their neighbors. Investments in local communities are investments in our own communities, and helps sustain the quality of life we all enjoy across the Northern Region.

Carrying Flathead NF Experiences to an International Audience

A personal interest in local caves not only resulted in Bigfork High School student Sandi Baker finding both a mentor and advocate for her spelunking hobby at the Hungry Horse Ranger District, but also allowed her the opportunity to present her school's cave club and its partnership work to an international audience in Russia in 2013.

The Flathead National Forest has a strong partner in the Bigfork High School Cave Club. Members of the Club regularly provide information on their trips, discoveries and observations as part of their activities. This in turn helps the District maintain and monitor the health and conditions of the area's caves, popular among western Montana spelunking enthusiasts.

Caves manager Colter Pence, also Baker's mentor, said the work the club does is top notch. "The student group gave us detailed inventory and descriptions of the cave resources, which we did not have the ability to produce ourselves," Pence noted. "This information helps us now better understand the special values of the cave system. Those of us who assisted the club learned so much about caving, caving etiquette, and cave inventorying techniques, which are highly specialized skills and difficult to acquire in formal training." Pence added that the District will improve the management of the forest's caves based on the information and experience provided by the Club.

Pence felt that the work Baker and the Club had done was worthy of recognition from a broader audience. With Pence's guidance, Baker applied for and was selected to be part of the 10th Annual International Junior Foresters' Competition in Moscow, an annual event hosted by the Russian Federal Forestry Agency. The competition promotes and rewards young scientists for their interest and efforts in the environmental community, and furthermore encourages dialogue about forestry issues on an international level. The U.S. participated in this event for the first time in 2012.



Sandi Baker doing cave work with her teacher Mr. Hans Bodenhamer



Students' projects (a written report and a 10 minute presentation) are judged by an international panel of fifteen forestry experts. Baker's presentation documented much of the work she and the Cave Club had done on the Flathead National Forest, including the Club's recommended actions for the forest to take in order to preserve the caves.

Baker says that when she got to Russia the hosts were very nice and informative, making sure she knew where she needed to be and what the day would look like. The first couple of days focused on getting through the presentations and participating in various forest-focused activities. At night they learned about other cultures and had a chance to have some fun, like going bowling and having a dance party. She found the other students' projects to be very interesting. Baker placed well but just missed out on finishing in the top two and receiving one of the top awards. While she may have missed out on an award, Baker said she got much more from the experience.

"I got to meet many new kids from many different countries. I became great friends with a girl from Malaysia," the high school student beamed. "She had never seen snow and that blew my mind because winter is my favorite season!"



Hanging with new friends



Planting a larch while in Russia

Winter Trails Day on the Lewis & Clark National Forest

For the past seven years the Lewis and Clark National Forest (LCNF) has hosted the annual celebration of Winter Trails Day. The first public event of the year, Winter Trails Day is sponsored by Get Fit Great Falls, a local collaborative group made up of interested individuals and businesses, as well as city, county, state, and federal agencies – to include the LCNF.

This event, located in the Kings Hill region of the Little Belt Mountains on the LCNF's Belt Creek Ranger District, has grown from a relatively modest start in 2007 to an event that in 2013 provided more than 20 guided snowshoe hikes and several guided cross country ski tours within the Silver Crest winter trails area. Most of the participants were first-timers on snowshoes that enjoyed this event as an accessible way to explore the forest in winter.

Originally scheduled for early January 2013, the event had to be postponed until early March due to a severe blizzard; however, blue skies, temperatures in the 20's, and ample snow greeted participants when the rescheduled event rolled around. More than 250 participants and 40 volunteers enjoyed the beautiful day and the experience of moving through a mountainous winter wonderland on snowshoes or cross-country skis.

Hungry hikers and skiers consumed: 265 hot dogs; 12 gallons of chili; multiple gallons of hot chocolate, coffee and water; cookies; and finally marshmallows roasted on an open campfire. All supplies were provided through donations, making the event free for everyone. Those enjoying the day's events traveled from as far away as 200 miles and included organized groups such as the Great Falls Big Brothers/Big Sisters group, a number of scout troops, and groups of friends and families.



Volunteers and participants of all ages gear up for a snowshoe trail tour at the entrance point to the trails. Groups departed every 15 minutes over a five-hour period throughout the day.



One of many groups of snowshoers makes their way around the trails, taking in the beauty and expanse of the winter landscape that unfolds before them.

Where the Rubber Meets the Road:

Budget Controls and Project Support

In every business and organization there is necessary work, though not always glamorous work, occurring behind the scenes. Take, for instance, the work of the Acquisition Management staff, or AQM. In the Northern Region the AQM staff plays a critical role in making sure that on-the-ground project work can occur. These on-the-ground projects - such as trails and recreation projects, campground maintenance, wildlife habitat improvements, road decommissioning or timber harvest – cannot happen until AQM has finalized the budget and cost functions for payments and accountabilities. Once the project is started, AQM further ensures it adheres to the defined budget and any contracting obligations.

AQM is comprised of four primary sections: Asset Management; Grants & Agreements; Procurement; and the Purchase Card program. The Northern Region's AQM staff works with counterparts in the Intermountain Region (Nevada, Utah, southern Idaho and western Wyoming) as part of the Northern Intermountain Acquisition Team (NIAT).

Asset Management includes Personal Property, Real Property, Quarters, and Leasing program areas. Asset Management personnel contribute and are responsible for the acquisition, management, and disposition of assets owned or managed by the Forest Service. They also play a role in providing and communicating policy, oversight, and guidance to relative to asset management to various program areas at all levels of the organization.

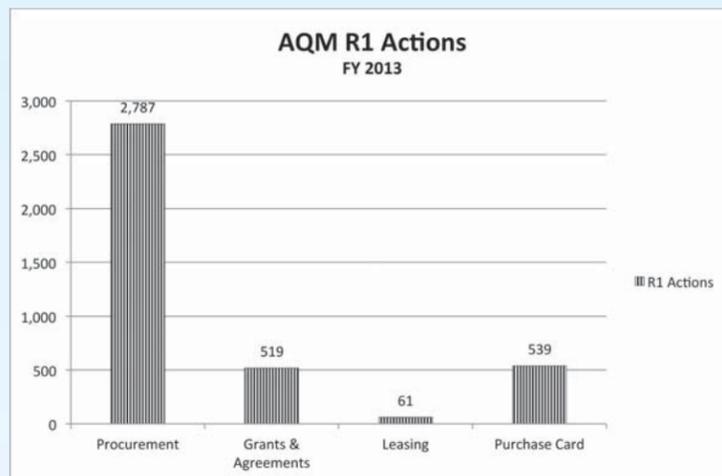
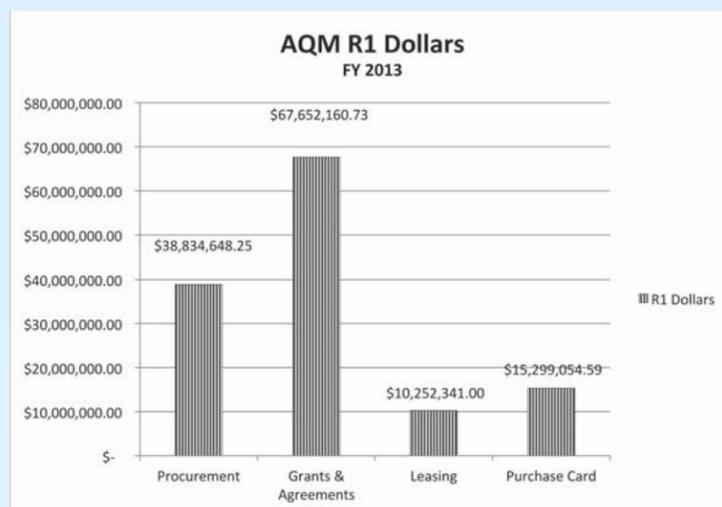
Grants and Agreements (G&A) are budgetary and fiscal accounting methods used to combine federal money with other funding mechanisms (e.g. non-profits and other partners) to accomplish a multitude of projects. The federal government, including the Forest Service, is authorized under several laws to collaborate and work with partners to carry out these projects. It takes detailed and coordinated efforts between project planners on the forests and grasslands and the AQM staff to make sure every aspect of the proposed G&A-supported project is accurately delineated for budgetary controls.

The G&A program assists the forests and grasslands in meeting their mission and objectives through a wide range of grants and agreement instruments that support National Forest System land management activities, as well as the mission of our many partners.

Procurement is the process by which the Forest Service awards contracts to private companies to perform numerous projects and necessary maintenance on public lands. Certain goals for awarding these contracts are driven by percentages that have been established through federal regulatory guidance to target various categories of disadvantaged companies. As the name implies, procurement is the mechanism by which the Northern Region provides local economic and employment support across the 25 million acres of National Forest System lands.

Purchase Cards, similar to credit cards, are used to better accommodate the short-term and immediate acquisition of needed supplies, equipment and services. Purchase cards are issued to certain employees across the Region to support and accommodate emerging and changing needs or issues. This system undergoes tight scrutiny to ensure there is little chance of duplicate spending on projects and therefore maintain the integrity of the system and the individual cards. This process is a critical component that gives staffs at all levels (district, forest and regional) the latitude to respond to changing situations while still meeting project and agency goals.

The following graphs depict the dollar amounts managed by the four primary sections of the Northern Region's Acquisition Management staff, as well as the number of actions required to process these dollar amounts.



Sustaining Communities



Partnership Pride with PPL-Montana/Coulter Campground



Partnership Pride with PPL-Montana/Coulter Campground Boat Launch



Partnership Pride with PPL-Montana/Hebgen/Quake Bald Eagle Monitoring

AQM – Grants & Agreements Projects

The Forest Service has enjoyed a unique partnership with PPL Montana and the Missouri-Madison River Fund for many years. Each year Region 1 East Side Forests - Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Custer & Gallatin, Helena, and Lewis & Clark national forests and the Dakota Prairie Grasslands. – joined with PPL Montana in a wide range of diverse partnership projects addressing wildlife, fisheries, recreation, weed management needs, plus many others. The collective results from these partnerships are integral to the mission success of both parties. Our agreements are often multi-year, long-term projects requiring a great deal of program time and effort. In 2013, through the support of PPL Montana, the East Side Forests leveraged a little more than \$500,000 in the pursuit of our mission goals. Some of the highlights include:

- **Operation & Maintenance of Mystic, Fisherman's Point & Hebgen Lake Rec Sites, Meriwether Picnic Area & Coulter CG** – PPL funds allow the forest service to continue the oversight and management of these facilities and land resources enabling us to reach our goals of enhancing public recreation opportunities. In addition, this year the crew at Hebgen Lake constructed and installed 27 public information signs around the lake. Interpretive and instructional signing is critical due to the nature of the environment and wildlife presence. Previous signing had been less organized. The site is now more orderly and visually appealing, ensuring the public is more likely to read and heed the information posted;
- **Hebgen Lake Area Weed Treatment** – For the 2013 summer season, the Hebgen Lake Ranger District purchased the equipment, herbicide, backpack sprayers, and personal protective equipment to hire a Montana Conservation Crew for two weeks. The crew used the backpack sprayers to treat 248 acres of weeds near Earthquake Lake visitor center, Beaver Creek boat launch, Ghost Village, fishing access below Hebgen Dam, recreational access sites along the North Shore of Hebgen Lake, the road from Horse Butte to the narrows, and two orange hawkweed sites. Based on ocular estimate the treatment killed 80-90 % of the weeds within the treatment area;
- **South Fork Sixteenmile Creek Barrier** - Funding assisted with 1) the construction of a concrete upstream fish passage barrier to prevent non-native trout from invading upstream habitat; 2) treating upper South Fork Sixteenmile Creek and unnamed tributaries with a registered fish toxicant to remove non-native trout; and 3) restocking treated stream habitat with genetically pure Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

AQM — Procurement/Contracting Projects

The Earthquake Lake Visitor Center Remodel and Addition project featured the renovation and expansion of the existing Visitor Center at Earthquake Lake. The original facility opened in 1967 following the August 17, 1959 earthquake that claimed 28 lives. The earthquake measured 7.5 on the Richter scale (revised by USGS to 7.3), causing an 80-million ton landslide, which formed a landslide dam on the Madison River.

Renovation included the expansion of the lobby and waiting area, a new bookstore, an administration office and a private restroom. Project site changes were marked by a reconfiguration of the existing parking lot to include ADA-compatible accessibility, interactive displays and sculptures, two new trails providing access to Memorial Boulder and viewpoints of the landscape, and the installation of new handrails throughout.

The site received a new interactive interpretive sculpture installed under a separate contract. The \$1.1-million contract was awarded in August 2012 to R&R Taylor, Inc. of Bozeman, Montana. Much of the design planning came from the Gallatin National Forest Landscape Architect. The remodeled facility will provide a new generation of citizens the opportunity to learn about this event in a new facility that will increase energy efficiency, user accessibility and reduce maintenance costs.

The District will host a Grand Opening celebration Memorial Weekend 2014, kicking off on May 23, and highlighting Earthquake Lake and the historical, cultural and geological significance of the area. The Yellowstone Association will also have a beautiful bookstore opening next year.



Earthquake Lake Visitor Center - Before



Earthquake Lake Visitor Center - After



Custer-Gallatin National Forests ADA Fishing Pier

Another way that Gallatin NF partners work to support and sustain recreational opportunities to a wider range of the visiting public was the joint construction of the ADA-compatible fishing pier. With the support of PPL Montana, the Beartooth Ranger District, Custer and Gallatin National Forests, completed the fishing pier at West Rosebud Lake. This is a great example of partner efforts providing direct support for special projects that serve visitors to the Custer & Gallatin national forests.

Selway Road on the Magruder Corridor Blocked by Mudslide

Selway Road, part of the historic Magruder Road Corridor that crosses the Bitterroot NF, was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The 101-mile primitive road provides motorists with the unique opportunity to drive between the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church wilderness areas on the Bitterroot National Forest.

In the summer of 2013 the road was blocked by a 60-foot long mudslide and debris flow that covered the road with rocks and sent debris into the Selway River. The slide, which was large enough to uproot trees and expose underground culverts, was likely triggered by heavy rains from thunderstorms.

Clearing the mudslide was just one of numerous summer projects for forest road crews. They also replaced six culverts and repaired several sections of Magruder Road that were deteriorating and in danger of washing out. In addition to the Magruder projects, crews also replaced a forest bridge, maintained or improved 255 miles of roads, and completed 67 miles of road decommissioning and storage.

Note the “doughboy” style ranger uniform on M.E. Brown – one is currently on display at the Darby Historic Ranger Station museum and visitor center. (mw)



Mudslide covers Selway Road near Paradise Campground



Traffic blocked by mudslide



Slide uprooted large trees and rocks
Photos by Stephen Hardin

Winter Wonderland Abounds on Custer-Gallatin NFs

The Custer and Gallatin National Forests, spanning more than three million acres, work with a wide range of local government bodies, businesses, community organizations and non-profit partners to help people learn about and explore their public lands. Through these formal and informal partnerships and collaborative efforts, the Custer and Gallatin National Forests enjoyed the efforts of more than 22,000 partnership and volunteer hours in 2013. These groups and their support are integral to local recreational opportunities that draw thousands of tourists, especially in winter months, bolstering local businesses and economies.

By mid-December the Hyalite Canyon is abundant with snow, and winter enthusiasts are eager to sink into a variety of winter activities. Hyalite Canyon welcomes approximately 10,000 visitors a month during the winter and boasts growing winter use, making it one of the premier winter destinations in Montana. Over the past several years Friends of Hyalite, a local non-profit, has been working with Gallatin County and the Forest Service to plow the road. In recent years the project has been funded by the Gallatin County Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) as part of a reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools program. Each season winter enthusiasts participate in world class ice climbing with the Bozeman Ice Festival. Additional activities include ice fishing, snowshoeing, Nordic skiing, as well as access to the Gallatin Crest for backcountry skiing.

With the start of each New Year, the Beartooth Ranger District teams together with local community groups, including the Beartooth Recreational Trails Association and the Red Lodge Nordic Center, to host full moon walks throughout the year. In January and February of 2013, the groups hosted two full moon ski trips that not only highlighted avalanche safety and awareness, but also explored wolves and their habitats with Howling Full Moon.

In March the trails are teeming with wide-eyed, heart-pounding Nordic skiers out to test their limits on the Rendezvous Ski Trails and against upcoming racers at the Yellowstone Rendezvous Races and Equinox Snow Challenge. With more than 50 kilometers of world class ski trails and a biathlon range, the West Yellowstone Ski Education Foundation, West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce and the Hebgen Lake Ranger District of the Custer and Gallatin National Forests welcome thousands of skiers from around the continent. A Challenge Cost Share Agreement with the Forest Service reimburses partners for grooming and trail maintenance throughout the winter season. With trail quality, grooming and snow second to none, the partners in the West Yellowstone community are dedicated to the success of this homegrown, small town ski trail system.

Oil Development Still Rising in North Dakota

Development of the Bakken oil play has taken on worldwide significance and the production has made North Dakota the second highest producing oil state in the U.S. While most of the drilling has occurred on private and tribal lands in North Dakota, workloads have increased for the Dakota Prairie Grasslands (DPG). Permits for pipelines, roads and utility lines are in high demand by large and small developers.

This has created numerous consequences for the DPG's workforce; however, they are not standing still as production continues to progress. Over the last few months the DPG has hired seven new Mineral Area Managers to help with the increased workload and backlog. The DPG has struck agreements with oil companies to use third party entities to complete the NEPA analysis and documentation for well pads and special uses, reducing employee stress and improving timeliness for approving facilities and permits.

In an attempt to meet the housing demands for the incoming oil development workforce, a huge construction boom is occurring in North Dakota - resulting in a housing market that is overpriced in comparison to Federal employees' salaries. In an effort to continue to recruit qualified Forest Service employees, the DPG has taken a proactive approach to provide reasonably-priced and adequate housing. In Watford City the DPG brought in three full-sized mobile homes and a FEMA temporary trailer for new employee use. Additionally, the DPG struck a deal with the owner of their current office space in Bismarck, negotiating the construction of a new office and converting the old office building into a nine-unit apartment complex for affordable employee housing. North Dakota's "Housing Incentive Program" will help with the cost of converting the old office building, decreasing the eventual leasing costs. In the Dickinson area, the DPG is also working with the Bureau of Land Management on housing opportunities.



Sustaining Communities

Florence Receives a Facelift!

In the summer of 2013, the Heritage Program for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests completed several building enhancements at the old town site of New Florence, located 40 miles south of Grangeville, Idaho.

Florence sprang to life around 1895 as the result of a lode-mining boom in the Florence Basin, quickly boasting a population of approximately 1,000. Today, only two structures remain from the actual town site. These buildings, consisting of the Canfield cabin and the jailhouse, received a variety of historic preservation treatments made possible by the Northern Region's Heritage Stewardship Enhancement Program.

The eight-day project involved Forest Service employees from both the Forests and the Northern Region's Historic Preservation Team, supported by a contractor and two volunteers. The crew succeeded in replacing several log purlins on the Canfield cabin, along with a total replacement of the building's special double layered roof. Additionally, the inside of the cabin was cleaned and its logs treated with a preservative. The New Florence jail had its perimeter re-excavated and new boards added to the base and ceiling.

The 2013 work is a continuation of other Heritage Program enhancement work recently conducted in the Florence Basin, which includes recording the New Florence and Old Florence town sites, signage, installation of an interpretive kiosk, and research associated with the Chinese mining sites. Work will continue in 2014 to install several new sill logs and a new floor for the Canfield cabin, plus a new protective structure over the jail building.

Two brochures, "Florence Tells Her Secrets" and "Florence - The Lure of Gold", are available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/nezperceclearwater/maps-pubs/?cid=stelprdb5103759>.

Montanans Enjoy the "Summer of Lee"

30th Anniversary of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area, visitors and partners from across southwest Montana took time to reconnect with and work in their local Wilderness Area. Together with the Bureau of Land Management and local, non-government partners, the Gallatin and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests hosted a summer-long anniversary party, aptly named the Summer of Lee. Fifty-five volunteers turned out for six trail projects to improve and maintain wilderness trails, working with Forest Service staff to help train crews and serve as guides.

Working under a cooperative challenge cost-share agreement with the Forest Service, partners Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Montana Wilderness Association, and The Wilderness Society led the charge on a number of public information outreach efforts. These efforts included posting Summer of Lee information at trailheads, taking the Lee Metcalf informational display (known as the "pop-up tent") to community events and festivals, leading guided hikes, and running an active Facebook page and photo contest. In all, more than 750 people were personally and directly reached by Summer of Lee activities. You can visit the Facebook page, which was active all summer long, at www.Facebook.com/SummerofLee and their website at www.summeroflee.com.

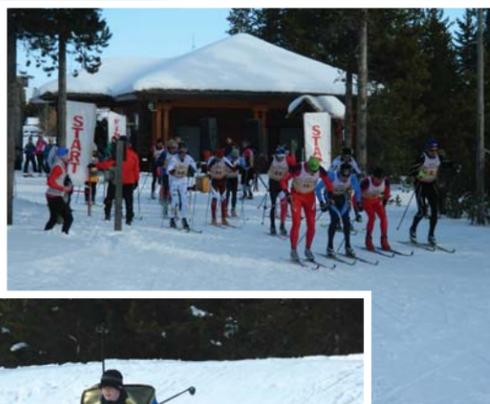
The Summer of Lee Facebook page became a busy and fun crossroads for people to share their photos and experiences from the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, including being a place where we could say "thanks for keeping the Metcalf wild!"



Photo and post courtesy of facebook.com/SummerofLee.



Volunteers clean out a water bar during a Summer of Lee trail volunteer day on the Bacon Rind Trail in the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, September 2013. Photo courtesy The Wilderness Society.



SPAM Racers Take to the Trails!

In 1997, the SPAM Cup race series was developed by two local West Yellowstone businessmen to give skiers of all ages and abilities the opportunity to try Nordic ski racing at a low cost and with as little stress as possible - the focus is on the fun and excitement of Nordic skiing. The originators chose the name SPAM because, well - for the fun of it and to inject a little humor into the event to keep it light-hearted and fun for competitors of all ages and abilities.

It is such a popular event that West Yellowstone Ski Education Foundation (WYSEF) added the SPAM Series to its roster of events and now hosts 3 SPAM Cups a year (December, January, and February). The winners of each distance win a one-of-a-kind trophy - a hand-crafted SPAM can decorated by the West Yellowstone Ski Team.

You can get more info on the remaining 2014 events at <http://www.rendezvouskitrails.com/spam-cups/>

Duckbill Dinosaur Leg Found on the Custer and Gallatin National Forests

It is not the typical discovery that most families make on their lunch break. But for volunteers Roy and Rhonda Fore and their granddaughter, their curiosity about an odd formation of rocks with a white protrusion lead to a great paleontological discovery near Redig, South Dakota.

Passport In Time (PIT) is an archaeological and cultural program that identifies and documents historic sites, culturally-significant findings and archaeological digs of all types on national forest system lands.

The trio was volunteering on a PIT project in 2012 when they first noticed the white, oblong object. After climbing up to the ledge, they discovered several long dinosaur bones stacked on top of each other. The bones on top were bleached by the sun. The discovery and site were marked during that project and the family was able to return for this year's PIT project to further explore and excavate their awesome discovery.

In June 2013, a group of 20 volunteers gathered there to examine, excavate, document and remove what turned out to be the complete leg, from the femur to the toes, of a duckbill dinosaur. It took the volunteers five tedious days of excavation before the specimen could be safely removed and transported to the Paleontology Resource Lab at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. There other volunteers, adhering to scientific and archaeological best practices, spent another five days removing a matrix of encrusted soils, rocks and debris from the Late Cretaceous Hell Creek Formation and preparing it for display.



Roy and Rhonda inspect the condition of the femur, after removing the top portion of the plaster jacket. After the wet burlap and plaster are applied to fossil bones; it hardens to protect bones during transportation.



A metatarsal bone, located just below the ankle, of the Edmontosaurus (duckbill dinosaur).



Kinsey is removing the matrix from one of the Edmontosaurus ankle bones.

Restoring the Past to Make a Better Future - Miller Cabin Restoration Project



Before any restoration work was done on the cabin.



Recreation is the biggest attraction for most people who visit National Forest System lands. A great recreation opportunity enjoyed by thousands of people every year is the Forest Service cabin rental program, featuring hundreds of cabins sprinkled across wilderness, backcountry and other recreation areas. The Northern Region is home to hundreds of these cabins, both newer and historic. One particularly popular cabin is the Miller Cabin, located on the Townsend Ranger District of the Helena National Forest.

Tucked away in Confederate Gulch, Miller Cabin was originally built by two miners on their unpatented mining claim. In 1935 it became a recreational cabin and was later acquired and improved by George Miller in 1982.

In 2011, Broadwater County Development Corporation (BCDC), a non-profit organization in Townsend, sought funding to restore Miller Cabin to Forest Service standards - with the goal of eventually including it in the agency's cabin rental program. Since that time, many Townsend District employees, BCDC members and volunteers donated their time and skills to improving the cabin.

"We've been fortunate to have the opportunity to partner with BCDC on a project that can have such a positive impact on the public," said Beth Ihle, Minerals Program Leader for the Helena National Forest. "The help we've had is amazing - from working with our partners to help purchase materials, to the on-the-ground workers - and is invaluable to the success of this project."

As part of the structural improvements, BCDC secured funding to replace an interior log wall that had rotted, as well as the entire roof for both the cabin and wood shed. The foundation for the cabin's addition was also lifted and replaced to ensure stabilization and a new wood stove was installed in the cabin. Further improvements included the replacement of sub and wood flooring, doors, several windows and window shutters and much more. Forest employees helped improve the site by removing hazardous trees, ensuring proper drainage and demolishing the old bathhouse and outhouse. In 2012, BCDC secured additional funds to build a new vault toilet, which has been installed and is operational.

"Over the past two years we had volunteers, retirees, forest employees and even employees' families come out to help with the cabin," said Mary Smith, Civil Engineer for the Helena National Forest. "Without this level of support from the community and the District - especially the Townsend fire crew - we wouldn't be where we are today."

Due to the additions and modifications by George Miller, the cabin is not eligible for the National Historic Register; however, it is undoubtedly a special place that will offer forest visitors a secluded place to enjoy the Helena National Forest.

"Although the cabin wasn't eligible for the National Register, we worked to maintain the integrity of the original cabin," Smith said. "We did this by using similar exterior colors for stain, roofing and trim, and a similar type of flooring inside the cabin."

While restoration is not yet complete, project partners are excited for all that has been accomplished at Miller Cabin and they look forward to when the cabin is fully restored and people can begin to visit it.

"Miller Cabin can offer people a quiet, natural hideaway in a beautiful location on the Forest," Ernie Forrey, with BCDC, said. "And along their way to the cabin, people can travel through Townsend, enjoy the community, and even spend some time at Canyon Ferry along the Missouri River."

Diane Johnson, Townsend Ranger District employee, July 2012



Photo taken after a lot of the restoration work was done, freshly stained, new roof, new foundation. Picture taken in July 2012

Photo taken in July 2013 with grass grown in



One of the volunteers helping restore cabin, July 2012



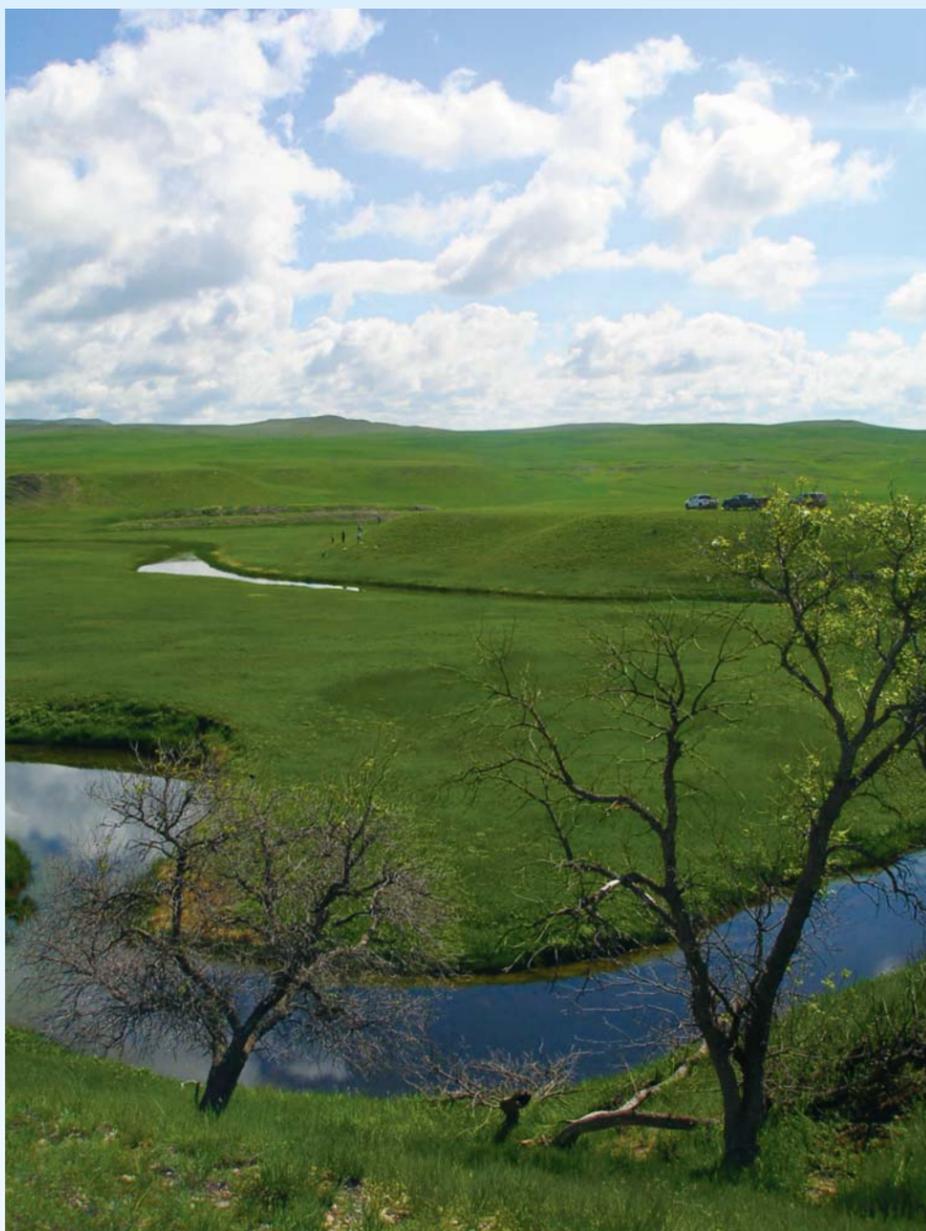
Watershed Improvement on Giles Creek

Watersheds support a wide range of ecosystem needs and habitats, making watershed restoration a focal point for the Forest Service. The agency's best watershed work occurs through integrated partnerships with non-profits and other groups and organizations working together on collaborative projects.

On the Dakota Prairie Grasslands (DPG), the Giles Creek watershed encompasses about 16,593 acres in the northwest corner of South Dakota. This watershed is notable for its cap rock buttes and provides unique mixed-grass prairie habitat for several sensitive species, such as the Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing Owl, Ottoo Skipper, Sharp-tailed Grouse and Dakota Buckwheat.

The DPG identified this watershed for restoration in order to move it to "Proper Functioning" condition under the Watershed Condition Classification Criteria, which was instituted by the Forest Service in 2011. In particular, the project sought to provide enough late-seral native vegetation to support habitat to meet the following DPG Land Resource Management Plan objectives: expand the presence of desired native grass, shrub, and tree species; reduce noxious weeds; and maintain and improve working relationships with partners.

With the help of the Wild Turkey Federation and the Grand River Cooperative Grazing Association, the DPG built fences, established a crested wheatgrass pasture, planted shrubs and installed pipeline and a livestock tank to improve the Giles Creek watershed located on the Grand River Ranger District. Through the project, the DPG and partners were able to create a 140-acre riparian pasture and assign a prescribed grazing strategy that eliminated grazing use during the heat of summer. Installation of the pipeline and livestock tank provided water to the newly-created wheatgrass pasture, eliminating the need for livestock grazing along the creek. Shrubs planted on the banks of Giles Creek stabilize the banks and provide habitat for the watershed's wildlife.



Giles Creek in the summer of 2013. The crew planting shrubs can be seen in the background, to the right.

Rebuilding Bitterroot NF History –

Restoring 1930s Ranger's Residence

Constructed in 1933, the log ranger's residence at the West Fork Ranger Station on the Bitterroot National Forest (NF) is one of three log buildings on the compound eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Forest Service and Civilian Conservation Corps crews constructed the residence under the direction of master log craftsman Ole Tangen.

The two-story residence was one of three "R-3" standard plan dwellings (a zoning designation for multiple dwellings in close proximity) constructed on the forest in the 1930s, the other two being the log residences at Magruder and Moose Creek Ranger Stations. (Moose Creek district was then administered by the Bitterroot NF.) In 1954, the West Fork residence was remodeled to accommodate Ranger Dick Baldwin's growing family. The front porch was enclosed to enlarge the living room and create an additional first-floor bedroom. This necessitated removal of the first-floor front wall logs, pouring a concrete foundation under the porch enclosure and moving the main entry to the south side of the building. The residence has remained in this configuration to the present, with a metal roof added sometime in the mid-1990s. After construction of a second ranch-style ranger residence in 1960, the 1933 log dwelling served as quarters for seasonal or year-round employees as needed.

The current restoration project began in early 2013 as mitigation for water and mold damage caused by a leaky pipe. The gutting of the building for mold abatement and asbestos removal provided a "clean slate" and a unique opportunity to repair the water damage, improve essentials like plumbing and wiring, and restore the house to historical and architectural configuration (1933-1945). Under the leadership of Kirby Mathew, Region 1 Exhibits Specialist, the Northern Region Historic Preservation team and Bitterroot National Forest engineers have nearly completed the project, which is funded by a 2013 Heritage Stewardship Enhancement grant.



Photo of Ranger's Residence on West Fork in 1938. Photo by K.D. Swan c. 1938



Facility engineer Zac Hiedeman peels logs to be used in cabin renovation. Photo by Perry Backus, Ravalli Republic



Forest Service officials review some of the work to be completed inside historic cabin. Photo by Perry Backus, Ravalli Republic

Minimum Tool Use in the Wilderness = Hard Work!

Small grass airstrips seem to be a contradiction in designated Wilderness areas. While The Wilderness Act of 1964 prohibits any motorized or mechanical uses, the airstrips that are still maintained and used in Wilderness areas predate the Act. They are grandfathered in because of historic Forest Service and private use, as well as for the support they can provide for a variety of management and emergency uses.



One such airstrip, the Shearer Airstrip within Idaho's Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, was laid out and established in 1934. The land it occupies today (111.01 acres) was originally homesteaded by Phil Shearer in 1917. By 1933, the Forest Service realized the advantage of air travel and air support for these remote areas and conducted a survey of potential landing sites along the Selway River, between Bear Creek and Running Creek. The only suitable location for a landing field turned out to be on Phil Shearer's ranch. Shearer did not want to sell his ranch but finally conceded to selling the Forest Service 20 acres for a landing site for \$3000.00.

On February 13, 1934, the Forest Service asked for authorization to expend \$12,500 for the purchase of Shearer's land and improvement for use as an airstrip. That original letter stated that \$3000.00 would go to the purchase of land and the remaining \$9,500 would be used for draining, leveling, fencing and construction of a storage building. Later that year, the funds were authorized and Shearer conveyed a 19.84-acre parcel of his homestead to the Forest Service for an airstrip, allowing the agency to begin construction of the airstrip soon after.

The airstrip provided both private and Forest Service support for remote recreational access and management needs. By 1943, Shearer decided to sell all of his land to the Forest Service with the exception of a small tract he wanted to keep for himself to live on. He asked the agency to pay a lease of 500.00 per year for 10 years and requested

it not be paid in a lump sum, intending to live the rest of his life on that annual income. The terms were that the Forest Service would lease the 91.17 acres for 10 years with the option to purchase it at the end of the lease with no additional payment. Shearer died two years later and his estate was held until 1954 when the Forest Service completed the purchase.

The Forest Service then moved into the Shearer homestead, turning it into the Shearer Guard Station. Using the original airstrip, regular flights were flown to supply the Bear Creek Ranger Station (later moved to Shearer) and the Shearer Guard Station; however, over the subsequent years the Forest Service used the airstrip less and less. Today, much of the use is from private pilots.

Regular maintenance was abandoned and much of the strip became overgrown as the years progressed. Potholes were also becoming a problem and most of the airstrip, which was only 16 feet wide, was rutted and sloping to the east. Numerous comments and safety concerns from the Forest Service Aerial Depot and Idaho Backcountry Pilots Association prompted the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests' personnel to initiate a plan to repair the airstrip sometime in 2013.

Willie Acton (Grangeville Aerial Depot), Susan Graves (Facilities Engineer), and Stephan Frazier (Engineer, Central Zone) were in charge of the project for the Forests. Because the airstrip was located within the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, there was a mandate to use minimum tools, with little to no mechanized devices. Stephan was tasked with assessing the condition of the strip and determining the necessary equipment for the repairs.

Since motorized equipment was not allowed by the Wilderness Act, it was decided that the minimum tool would translate into a team of horses or mules, including horse drawn farm equipment suitable for the job. With recommendations from Doug Hunt (Powell Ranger Station Facilities Maintenance) on horse drawn equipment and what would be needed, Stephan put a contract together for a teamster to supply a team and harness, single bottom plow, harrow, forecart, and Fresno (or slip, which is a horse-drawn scoop to transport dirt). All equipment needed would also have to break down into smaller components and fit inside a Forest Service Otter aircraft, then be reassembled onsite. The only mechanized equipment that had to be used was a gas powered water pump to facilitate the rolling and packing of the airstrip to create a safe surface for planes to land on. The team had to request special authorization to use the equipment, which was approved.

Prior to the start of the project, the team conducted onsite inspections and gathered input from pilots to develop and finalize an approved plan. The final design improved about 600 feet of the total 2,100 feet of the airstrip, all of which needed to be plowed. The southern end of the strip would need to be widened from 16 feet to 36 feet and the overall strip needed to be leveled east to west. A low wet area that had been problematic for many years also needed to be filled in and have drainage installed. Other major work included removing sod and rock from the plowed site, grading, leveling, harrowing, watering and packing of the soil and finally seeding with native grasses.



Boone Jones, retired Montana brand inspector and lifelong teamster, was awarded the contract. Two crews with the Montana Youth Conservation Corp (MYCC), totaling 13 people, were enlisted to help. Stephan and Doug acted as the onsite supervisor and inspector. All equipment and tools - including six wheelbarrows, shovels, and rakes - were flown in the week before.

Boone and Doug trailered their stock to the Paradise Guard Station on June 16, 2013. The next day they packed 15 miles, with six head of stock, to the Shearer Guard Station. Once they got there they began assembling the farm equipment and wheelbarrows. On June 18, Stephan and one of the MYCC crews flew into Shearer, while a second MYCC crew hiked into Shearer from Moose Creek Ranger Station some 15 miles downriver. Stephan, Doug and Boone set up the transit and marked elevation points along the strip, providing Stephan with the calculated amount of soil to be moved.

Later that same day the project got into full swing, lasting 12 days. In all, 16 people and two draft horses worked the project, moving an estimated 800 wheelbarrow loads of dirt and an additional 225 yards with the horse drawn slip. The sod that was removed from the strip was laid off to the side to establish itself in the future. The workers dug a 5-foot deep, 4-foot diameter hole as a soil source and then filled the hole back in with rock and sod from the airstrip. The final steps included seeding with native grass seed that was gathered from the area prior to the project's start.

The airstrip will continue to support private planes for recreational uses, as well as Forest Service and other management aircraft needs in the remote Wilderness, continuing the history and legacy of Wilderness airstrips across the Northern Region.

USDA Non-Discrimination Policy

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To File an Employment Complaint

If you wish to file an employment complaint, you must contact your agency's EEO Counselor (http://www.ascr.usda.gov/doc/EEO_Counselor_List.pdf) within 45 days of the date of the alleged discriminatory act, event, or in the case of a personnel action. Additional information can be found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_file.html.

To File a Program Complaint

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at program.intake@usda.gov.

Persons with Disabilities

Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities and you wish to file either an EEO or program complaint please contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339 or (800) 845-6136 (in Spanish). Persons with disabilities who wish to file a program complaint, please see information above on how to contact us by mail directly or by email. If you require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) please contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).