

the Montana Sierran

Published bi-annually by the
Sierra Club Montana Chapter

FALL 2019



100% Network field trip
participants overlooking
the Little Bighorn River.

What is a Just Transition?

Reflections from a Trip to The Center Pole on the Crow Reservation

BY **SUMMER NELSON**, Montana Chapter Director

Several years ago, I was a volunteer involved in organizing against plans to develop coal export terminals on the west coast. It was an issue that impacted me and the Missoula community directly and was also connected to various regional issues – from coal mining and rail transport, to the actual export and burning of dirty coal overseas. I had been an advocate and informal student of environmental justice, but in this case I wasn't putting it to practice very well. While we all spoke of a just transition – and sincerely wanted to see a transition that provided real support to impacted communities – we did not really pause to ensure our decision-making and advocacy included, listened to, and followed the lead of any frontline communities.

There were plenty of reasons (or excuses), the urgency of the climate crisis primary among them, along with lack of resources (we were a small group of

volunteers), our distance from some of the impacted communities, and a sense that we were doing the right thing to combat climate change for the sake of us all. Yet something did give me pause during that campaign, and it came back to me as I had the opportunity to visit the Crow Reservation this July on a field trip organized by The 100% Network. An acquaintance was working as a reporter and interviewing people about the coal export debate. She relayed to me that when she interviewed some people from the Crow Nation, one woman had tears as she noted her reaction to seeing “No Coal” signs when driving west towards Missoula. She explained to the reporter that no coal to her meant no economic opportunities and more hungry people on the reservation and surrounding communities. They were having trouble feeding schoolchildren, so how could they advocate for no coal when the mines and power plants offered some of the highest

paying jobs in the region? I wished we had a solution to the climate crisis that also helped us transition as a society in a way that ensured all communities would be supported and thriving. We are collectively responsible, I believe, for taking care of one another and making reparations for the historical trauma that continues to contribute to instability and environmental injustice in Montana's Indian Country.

Fast forward to 2019, and through our Ready for 100 work folks from the Montana Chapter are invited to attend a workshop field trip to the Crow Reservation, specifically to visit an organization called The Center Pole. I had the good fortune to attend, along with one of our Executive Committee members, Len Broberg. We drove across Montana to Billings and then to Garryowen, Montana, a small community on the Crow Reservation, expecting to learn about and be connected with people

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Bozeman “Clean Energy Triple Play” Adds to Momentum of Montana Renewable Energy Campaigns

BY **DAVID MERRILL**, Senior Organizing Representative, Beyond Coal Campaign

The Montana Beyond Coal campaign and the Montana Chapter teamed up for a three-event “Clean Energy Triple Play” in Bozeman in early August that netted several new volunteers ready to help move Bozeman towards an equitable, affordable, clean energy future. Bozeman, at 46,000 people, is the fastest growing city of its size in the country. It also lies in the heart of the NorthWestern Energy service territory and has a strong environmental ethic, partly due to its proximity to the splendors of Yellowstone National Park.

A “NorthWestern Energy Power Primer” was the first event. The primer is a porthole for ratepayers to see how their monopoly electric utility makes decisions, while empowering them to influence those decisions. This was the second NorthWestern Power Primer we’ve sponsored along with our close partner, the Montana Environmental Information Center (MEIC). MEIC’s Brian Fadie, who knows the utility backwards and forwards, made the presentation. The first two Power Primers were so well-received we scheduled more for this fall – in Helena, Great Falls, and Billings – and we will continue them indefinitely.

The Bozeman Power Primer was spiced up by the arrival of two PR people from NorthWestern Energy, who

raised some hackles during the Q & A when they said the utility has a deep commitment to clean energy. Sparks flew as Tom Woods, a Montana legislator, leapt to his feet and reminded the audience that he has introduced numerous clean energy measures in the Montana Legislature and NorthWestern Energy has opposed every one of them. Democracy in action!

The following evening we hosted an organizational meeting with an overview of how the Ready for 100 campaign has played out so far in Missoula, and what collective actions can be taken in Bozeman. We have heard the incoming mayor of Bozeman has said he wants Bozeman to steal the Montana environmental leadership crown (my words) from Missoula. Since Missoula passed their “100% renewable electricity by 2030” resolution earlier this year, we feel that Bozeman is fertile ground indeed to accelerate Montana’s progress towards 100% clean energy.

Our final event was tabling at the Montana Renewable Energy Fair, where we picked up more volunteers, as well as signatures on a petition calling on NorthWestern Energy to prepare for the closing of the Colstrip Power Plant, and for replacing that power with Montana-produced renewable energy. We are establishing a climate and energy team in Bozeman to put municipal pressure on NorthWestern Energy to commit to 100% renewable electricity and to power a campaign to move the entire city to 100% clean energy.

Bozeman may be hard pressed to take the environmental leadership crown with Helena now taking action. Following the Helena Power Primer and a Ready for 100 campaign meeting led by the Chapter, a team of partner organizations and Sierra Club volunteers picked up the clean electricity torch and started running!

Helena may just become the second city in Montana to join the clean energy transition revolution. ▲

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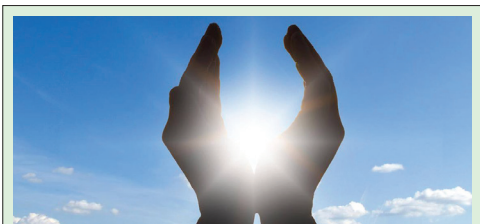
Bozeman Ready for 100 meeting in August.



A solar race car was on display at the Montana Renewable Energy Fair.



Signatures were gathered at the Renewable Energy Fair on a petition calling for NorthWestern Energy to prepare for the inevitable Colstrip closure and meet demands with renewable energy and energy efficiency.



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New Equity and Environmental Justice Team Hosts First Event

“Can Climate Justice Coexist with US Empire?”

BY **CAITLIN PISERCHIA**

Our Chapter’s new equity and environmental justice team recently organized our first event: a panel discussion with several Missoula-based grassroots activists and visionaries about climate justice and US imperialism, the domination of the US at home and abroad.

As the climate crisis intensifies in our air, water, and land, questions of who has the right to control space and movement affects how well we can collectively mitigate the crisis and who is most impacted. Who should control land, water, air, and movement in the age of climate chaos? How do those currently in power reflect or interact with greater systems of capitalism, colonization, and white supremacy? Can we effectively respond to the climate crisis without challenging the dominant power structures we live within?

Millions of students, young people, and workers around the world joined the global climate strike in late September. Many participating community members and students in Missoula (which was just one of the Montana communities taking part in the global strikes) sat in the audience as co-moderator Shalom Kristanugraha, an Indonesian graduate student in philosophy at UM, kicked off the panel. Referencing 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg’s success in inspiring large-scale turnout, they wondered: “why did it take someone from outside the US to lift this issue to this level?” The panel discussion was wide-ranging, from US immigration policy and our history of exclusion, the crisis of missing and murdered indigenous people, the failures and short-sightedness of industrial capitalism, to building community between diverse groups on the local level, farming, and continuing to question why things are the way they are.

Leticia Romero, a Missoula-based activist and UPS worker, helped organize the event and co-moderated along with Shalom. The



Pictured, left to right: Sesar Bonilla, Lauren Small Rodriguez, George Price, Laura Folkwein, Shalom Kristanugraha, and Leticia Romero.

panelists included: Lauren Small Rodriguez, a military veteran and community organizer with Missoula Urban Indian Health Center, George Price, a retired lecturer of African American Studies and Native American Studies and current organic farmer, Laura Folkwein, Chair of Montanans for Immigrant Justice and Associate Pastor at University Congregational United Church of Christ, and Sesar Bonilla, an Employment and Training Specialist at Rural Employment Opportunities.

Sesar pointed out that these industries that might seem so difficult to change were not built to last, and he encouraged students in the audience to keep questioning everything. “Kids question everything, but at a certain point, you stop questioning.” Bonilla also urged audience members to start thinking more strategically and further into the future: “don’t play checkers, play chess.”

To close out, all the panelists emphasized that there’s always a need for volunteers and more community building and involvement, from picking Flathead cherries alongside migrant workers, to volunteering at Missoula Indian Health Center. They urged us all to show up, connect, and move into action together. To get involved with our new Equity & Environmental Justice Team to further our own learning and build stronger community partnerships, contact Caitlin at caitlin.piserchia@sierraclub.org. ▲

A NOTE FROM THE CHAPTER DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

As we continue on the journey to becoming a more equitable and inclusive organization and movement, we will continue to hear from members with questions of why, how, and what does this mean. In this issue of the *Montana Sierran*, you’ll find some of the content you expect – analysis of pressing environmental and policy issues such as threats to the Endangered Species Act, assessment of climate change impacts on species like bison, and highlights from our outings and other events. You’ll also find articles exploring topics of environmental justice, just transitions, and how humans fit into the natural world. Should we have wilderness that excludes or limits human presence? How and why should our environmental work include partnerships with and support for causes traditionally seen as separate and outside our purview – issues like immigration, Indigenous sovereignty and community safety, and examination of the systems that impact all these issues along with those traditionally seen as “environmental.” Our new Equity and Environmental Justice Team will be helping us explore those questions in more depth. And we’ll continue building our programs to impact the environmental issues of our time, from tackling the climate crisis to protecting public lands. In fact, other new programs at the Chapter will work to directly influence the policies and policymakers that most impact our work. We have a new Political program in development, and there are some important political races in Montana in 2020 that we plan to engage in. Let’s work together to become more powerful and build the broader, stronger movement we need to make the change we need.

Summer Nelson,
MONTANA CHAPTER DIRECTOR



Welcome to our New(er) Sierra Club staff team members!

The Montana Sierra Club team has two newer organizers on board. Sarah Pawlowski is housed within the national Our Wild America campaign, working specifically as part of the Montana and regional Greater-Yellowstone – Northern Rockies Campaign that focuses on grizzly bear and habitat protection. Caitlin Piserchia works for the Montana Chapter on energy, climate and environmental justice through our Ready for 100 campaign. Caitlin will be working with the Chapter at least through the winter, so get in touch with her to join a local Ready for 100 team or to get involved in working on equity and justice issues. Reach out to Sarah to get involved with grizzly bear advocacy or other issues the campaign works on. Read their bios below.



SARAH PAWLOWSKI is the new(ish) Community Organizer for the Sierra Club’s Greater Yellowstone - Northern Rockies Campaign. Her role as an organizer is to build power within communities, to change our world for the better. Specifically, Sarah works on wildlife and public lands issues here in Montana and regionally, with a focus on grizzly bear protection. She was

hired on in January and says: “I am so excited to be able to work on issues that I am passionate about! I grew up in the Phoenix metro area but went to college in Flagstaff, Arizona where I had access to mountains, snow, and the Grand Canyon. Being able to spend time in these incredible landscapes shaped how I think about the world and is fundamental to who I am. It’s been several years since college but I’ve been lucky to continue to live in beautiful and wild places.” Currently, Sarah lives in Bozeman with her partner and their dog, and in her spare time she loves to hike, mountain bike, climb, and draw.



CAITLIN PISERCHIA lives near the Clark Fork River in Missoula and works as the Ready for 100 Community Organizer with the Montana Chapter. She is originally from New Jersey (as a descendant of Irish, Italian, and Swedish settlers), but was drawn West by the prospect of building trails in beautiful places and later rooted in Missoula in order to finish her environmental studies degree. During her time at UM, she co-founded the student fossil fuel divestment campaign and later worked as the Northwest Organizer for the Fossil Fuel Divestment Student Network. She is an alum of Montana New Leaders Council and the Anne Braden

program, and has worked as Forward Montana’s Conservation Outreach Fellow. After graduating in 2015, Caitlin has maintained an aggressively seasonal work life, primarily focusing on political and environmental organizing work in the fall, winter, and spring, while spending her summers leading trail crews or otherwise working outdoors. She spent this summer leading a Montana Conservation Corps crew in the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church wilderness and is excited to be delving back into politics and organizing. She hopes to help build ever-greater momentum towards a more equitable, just, sustainable world through powerful, linked community movements. ▲



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ELECTIONS COMING UP ONLINE

Our Executive Committee

(“ExCom” - the Chapter board) election will be online this year, as it was last year, with voting from November 18 through December 18. You must have a current membership on/by November 17 in order to vote in the Montana Chapter ExCom election. Members with emails in the database (and preferences allowing us to email) will receive an email in mid-November with voting instructions. If you are a new member or don’t get emails from the Chapter, check our website during the voting period, where you’ll find a link to the ExCom nominee statements and a ballot page. Thank you for participating in your local Sierra Club democracy by keeping your membership current, and then voting!

NOTE: If you want to join the ExCom ballot even though the nomination period has passed, members can petition to be nominated by submitting a letter with at least 15 members’ signatures no later than October 28. Contact our office for details.



on the Reservation who are organizing for clean, renewable energy. I was curious if attitudes toward coal had changed, or opportunities for clean energy projects and jobs had arisen; I hadn't heard of any active efforts.

What we found at The Center Pole is a community of people taking care of people, tackling the basic challenges of feeding their community and nourishing healing among those who have suffered immense historical trauma. Food is essential, yet not abundant or accessible to many on the Reservation and in surrounding communities. So those at The Center Pole have found a way to feed their own: with a small food bank that recovers food from Billings, an hour's drive away. They load up a horse trailer to bring back expired and other donated foods.

In Crow Country, where jobs are scarce, addiction issues prevalent, and historical trauma continuing to impact people and disrupt the social and governmental infrastructure, access to healthy food is a big deal. I realized that the expectations we came with — planning together for a speedy and just transition off fossil fuels — were out of touch. If most of the community is struggling to eat and work, there isn't much space available to think about dramatically altering the energy and economic infrastructure. Yet the work The Center Pole is doing is essential to a just transition. Any just transition must include secure access to healthy food, community support and connections, and economic empowerment. Their food bank, thrift store, radio station, and small gift shop and coffee roasting business are building blocks of a healthy, sovereign community, as is their sharing of Crow culture.

The Center Pole does work directly on energy issues as well, in terms of a community building they are working to create, which they want to be energy efficient and provide space for gatherings and growing food. And when I ask Peggy White Wellknown Buffalo (the

If most of the community is struggling to eat and work, there isn't much space available to think about dramatically altering the energy and economic infrastructure. Yet the work The Center Pole is doing is essential to a just transition.

founder of The Center Pole) about her thoughts on Colstrip, she comments that it really needs to be cleaned up. Other community members at The Center Pole share thoughts about the mine and power plant as well, sharing their struggle to come to terms with the need for a job and the impacts on the earth. One member took a moment to talk to us while we worked together to clean up and organize food at the food bank. He said he had worked at the mine and needed the job, but knew they “tore up the trees, scraped the earth” and it pained him to have to do that particular work. That conundrum is one we can't leave coal-dependent communities to grapple with alone or without the ability to support the basic needs of their communities.



Len takes a ride on horseback at The Center Pole.

Precisely how we accomplish a society-wide just transition, and especially in time to address the climate emergency, I still don't know, but I believe the way The Center Pole is approaching it is a really great example and a solid start. The solutions often are found in the wisdom and work of the most impacted communities as they take care of their people and places and build the foundation for a just transition. ▲

CHECK OUT THE CENTER POLE!

If you are in the area, we highly encourage you to stop in to visit The Center Pole (or go there for its own sake, even if you aren't in the area!). On any given day, you may find a group sharing a hot lunch, unloading a trailer of food, or sorting clothes for the thrift store. You can enjoy their other offerings as well – experience Crow culture, ride a horse along the Little Big Horn River, and stay in a tipi located next to the central building. Visit, donate, purchase coffee and gifts, and check out all their programs online at thecenterpole.org.



Hikers rest at the Sleeping Giant summit overlooking the Helena Valley and the Elkhorn Mountains.

Outings – A Connection to People and Our Work

This year the Montana Chapter made a concerted effort to start visiting Wilderness Study Areas along with other places that our volunteer outings leaders and members enjoy. Chapter outings leaders trekked into four different Wilderness Study Areas (WSA), including some among those that have been targeted for a downgrade in their protection status and that we are focusing on as part of our wildlands advocacy work: the Sleeping Giant WSA near Helena, the Great Burn WSA west of Missoula along the Montana-Idaho border, the Blue Joint WSA in the Bitterroot National Forest, and the Wales Creek WSA near Ovando. The latter was so remote and rugged, it inspired the outings leader to ponder whether some places like it ought to be protected even from human visitation. Read on for summaries of a few of these outings and Michael Jarnevic’s editorial exploring the idea of human-free super wilderness.

Hiking the Sleeping Giant BY PAT BIK, Chapter Outings Leader

On July 12, 2019, Montana Chapter members and outings leaders Teresa Brock and Pat Bik led a group of 11 intrepid hikers to the top of the nose of the Sleeping Giant at the north end of the Helena valley. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) identified the area as suitable for a wilderness study area (and recommended that Congress formally designate it as Wilderness) decades ago due to the wild untrammeled qualities of this primitive landscape, which is home to unique native plants, raptors, big horn sheep and occasional mountain goats. The Synness family provided the group special access



Hiker stands at pinnacle along the hike to the summit.

through the family’s historic homestead property and Curt Synness shared stories of the early settlers. A wonderful day was had by all. Each hiker scaled the final pitches to the top and enjoyed stunning views of the Helena valley, Elkhorn Mountains, and Big Belt range.

Hiking to Castle Rock in the Blue Joint Wilderness Study Area BY TERESA BROCK, Chapter Outings Leader

In early August, a group of 8 adventurous hikers gathered at the top of Nez Perce pass where we took in a magnificent view of the Selway Bitterroot and Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Areas before venturing into the adjacent Blue Joint Wilderness Study Area. We learned that the pass was the route taken by the Nez Perce people to their buffalo hunting grounds to the east and later used by gold miners traveling from Elk City, Idaho to the gold strike in Bannack. The Magruder Corridor Road that runs between the 2 wilderness areas was named after the gold miner Lloyd Magruder who was murdered on this route by his fellow travelers for his gold. Informational signs on top of the pass presented the history of these wilderness designations including successful efforts by wilderness advocate Doris Milner to enlarge them and add the corridor, thus earning her the name “Mrs. Magruder Corridor.”

The Blue Joint Wilderness Study Area comprises 61,000 acres in the southern end of the Bitterroot National Forest along the Montana-Idaho border. A bill sponsored by Senator Daines recommended removing WSA designation from 32,500 acres, but retaining

28,500 acres the U.S. Forest Service recommended adding to the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness in 1987. A 2016 Forest Service Travel Management Plan closed the area to mechanized access, however trail use by mountain bikes is still being considered by the Forest Service under pressure from Senator Daines. A handful of snowmobile, off-roading, and mountain bike advocacy groups filed a lawsuit challenging the Travel Plan and appealed the District Court decision to the Ninth Circuit. As it stands currently, bikes are prohibited in the Bitterroot National Forest's two WSAs (the second WSA is the Sapphire).

Our group hiked 2.5 miles along a forested

ridge and alpine meadows bordered by large whitebark pines to the base of Castle Rock, where some of the group continued to the summit. They were rewarded with a magnificent view of the surrounding wilderness. This perspective underscored why the Blue Joint WSA is of ultimate importance as a wildlife corridor for bighorn sheep, bear, and elk and worthy of protection and addition to the existing Wilderness. ▲



If you are interested in becoming an outings leader and exploring wild (or tamer) places in our state with other people, get in touch! We welcome new leaders to the team. Also get in touch to join a local team working to protect these and other WSAs.

Contact Chapter Director Summer Nelson, summer.nelson@sierraclub.org, or Outings Chair Michael Jarnevic, grossbison@gmail.com.



Beyond Wilderness: Should Some Areas be Set Aside that Allow No Human Intrusion?

AN OPINION AND REFLECTION BY **MICHAEL JARNEVIC**, Outings Chair

“Russian zapovedniks—from the Russian word meaning “commandment”—are some of the most highly protected areas in the world where human visitation, use and impacts are strictly controlled and limited.”

—Eve Conant

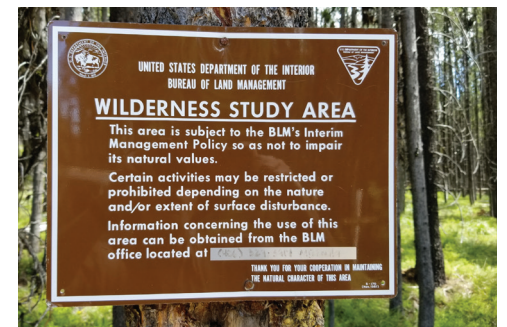
This last summer, I led a Sierra Club outing into the Wales Creek Wilderness Study Area (WSA)

not far from Ovando and it gave me pause to reflect on the true value of wilderness. Is it, as the Wilderness Act states, an area that: “shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people,” or, as others have suggested, should have a right to exist for its own sake? That is to say, not primarily for the enjoyment of people.

Wales Creek WSA is a small, very remote area of 11,580 acres atop the

Garnet Range at around 6500 feet elevation and is administered by the BLM. It is a considerable distance from both I-90 and Highway 200, has virtually no light and sound pollution, and is authentically wild. It has a couple of old, often overgrown dead-end logging roads that are not part of the WSA, but are somewhat of an intrusion into its torso. It differs from most wilderness areas in that *I could find no trails* anywhere into the interior. This means that if you want to get off the road, you will be bushwhacking into some extreme Montana jungle and a place where most humans would hesitate to venture. Because of this remote quality, the old road—which would normally be avoided—was jam packed with bear scat and obviously well-used by wildlife. It is, for the most part, wilder than wild.

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Bison graze in Lamar Valley with Cutoff Peak in the background.

DIANE RENKIN; FLICKR.COM

Opinion: Bison Conservation in a Hotter, Drier Yellowstone

MODIFIED FROM A LONGER PIECE BY **LANCE OLSEN** (2012), Guest Contributor

AS GLOBAL TEMPERATURES CONTINUE THEIR CLIMB, Yellowstone bison face assorted, escalating risks even within their currently restricted range. Many of these changes are already underway and will become increasingly conspicuous in the years and decades just ahead. To the extent that land use conflicts prevent the bison's movements, plausibly including poleward movements forced by need to track climate *beyond* its restricted range, much of the success or failure in conservation of this genetically unique herd will depend on its ability to shift about within its tightly restricted range, and plausibly not too far in the future. If changes in the ferocity and frequency of fire serve as a guide, the seriousness of emerging new risks for the bison will be obvious by mid-century. Relevant literature calls attention to key variables that will affect Yellowstone bison and their conservation as temperatures climb.

Wildlife conservationists have documented impacts of a warmer, drier climate on various species for several years already. Based on evidence available back in 2002, one research team concluded that, "Although we are only at an early stage in the projected trends of global warming, ecological responses to recent climate change are already clearly visible." (Walther et al. 2002). A subsequent, more exhaustive study of more than 800 scientific papers found that "A surprising result is the high proportion of species responding to recent, relatively mild climate change (global

average warming of 0.6 C)." (Parmesan, 2006). As temperatures continue to rise, the impacts will only become greater. Anticipated new extremes of heat caused Meehl and Tebaldi (2004) to warn that areas including the northwest United States could see "... increases of heat wave intensity that could have more serious impacts because these areas are not currently as well adapted to heat waves." The expected new intensity and duration of heat waves has to be watched for its impact on, among other things, the female's bison's capacity for lactation and energy for calf-rearing.

Another concern is range shift – movement of species is occurring now as a response to rising temperatures. Of some 1,700 plant, insect, amphibian and bird species examined in a review by Parmesan and Yohe (2003), 80% had already shown a poleward shift of 6.1 kilometers per decade. A subsequent analysis of poleward range shift found it occurring at a rate of 27-45 feet per day (Loarie et al. 2009). One team of investigators sums up the basic situation this way: "Under a changing climate, it is clear that the ability of a species to track climate change by range shift will be a major determinant of extinction risk." (Burton et al. 2010). The importance of this tracking underscores the importance of a finding that western U.S. national parks are too small to prevent extinction of their wild mammals (Newmark, 1987). That fact may weigh increasingly heavy on the bison as temperatures rise.

Decreased snow, replaced with more frequent rain, (Mote et al. 2005, Knowles et al. 2006, Barnett et al. 2008, Peterson et al. 2011), will potentially allow bison to remain concentrated on higher elevation range. Drought will also be a new pressure affecting bison range, and drought is of high interest because it has already been identified as a major cause of bison die-off in an earlier period of history (Woodhouse et al. 2002). While more rain might sound like more water (and thus, no drought), a decrease of snow will contribute to drought conditions nonetheless. Snow stores (i.e., “banks”) water that, as it melts, keeps springs and streams running all through the summer season. Rain relatively rapidly runs downhill in return to the oceans, leaving landscapes high and dry as summers unfold. (Mote et al. 2005, Knowles et al. 2006, Barnett et al. 2008, Peterson et al. 2011). This change of timing and structure of precipitation could force its own selective force for change at the bison’s food base – and should also reduce the variety and choice of places where bison can get a drink as the seasons unfold.

Yellowstone bison habitat may also see a shift away from forest cover, with uncertain impacts. Changes in forest cover have long been an anticipated consequence of rising temperatures, and recent research has uncovered evidence that forests are already shifting their range to higher elevations (Beckage et al. 2008) and that the Yellowstone region will, *by mid-century*, be “transformed” as increasingly fierce and frequent fires make it impossible for the current suite of trees to survive there (Westerling et al. 2011).

Does this mean that a decline in forest cover will permit an expansion of the grasslands that support bison? Maybe not, if shrubs encroach where the assorted grasses have existed. This trend is another one that’s already evident and may be, like rising temperatures, irreversible. For example, an Agricultural Research Service team found that shrubs are encroaching on the land base across the North American continent, and concluded that “These shifts in ecosystem structure clearly affect function across these biomes, with potentially dramatic and long-term regional implications given the extent of this phenomenon and the low probability of a return to dominance by herbaceous species in many of these ecosystems” (Briggs, J. et al. 2006).

Seasonal timing of heat and drought may have their own significant impact on grasses and grazing species such as the bison (Craine, et al. 2012). In fact, Craine’s team found that extreme precipitation, as well as extremes of heat and drought, can set grasses back. But their larger finding is that the extremes of heat and drought made their hardest hit on grasses, at least some grasses, when they showed up in spring and early summer, but that extremes of heat and drought mattered a lot less when they made their appearance in late summer and fall.

Success or failure of Yellowstone bison conservation will depend in large part on control of carbon emissions worldwide, because those emissions will control temperature increases and all that follows from rising and persistently higher temperatures. Although the various temperature-driven changes described above will vary in individual importance, they will combine to put cumulative pressure on a fragilely poised herd of Yellowstone bison. But the bison’s future also remains dependent on the extent of the herd’s access to the land. Given the force of now-familiar land-use conflicts, in combination with plausible new climate-driven change such as changes of food and water within the bison’s restricted range, there is room for doubt that the genetically unique Yellowstone bison can maintain viability throughout this century. ▲

Success or failure of Yellowstone bison conservation will depend in large part on control of carbon emissions worldwide, because those emissions will control temperature increases and all that follows from rising and persistently higher temperatures.

The author, Lance Olsen, was president of the Missoula-based Great Bear Foundation from 1982-1992, when climate issues were gaining prominence in the sciences. For the past 15 years, he’s run a restricted listserv on all things climate including risks for farm, forest, water and wildlife.

Because of its unique characteristics, I recognized the potential for areas such as this to be, what the Russians call “zapovedniks,” or areas that disallow human intrusion. At present, Russia has 101 zapovedniks encompassing 130,000 square miles—a massive set-aside—which here in the United States we could only dream of, but the concept of these human-absent wilderness areas is certainly intriguing, especially in view of some of the recent studies which show that human encroachment—just the act of walking into an area—impacts a variety of species, such as grizzly bears and elk. Could we, as a citizenry, tolerate truly locking up some of these areas for the benefit of nature as opposed to our somewhat selfish desires for recreation and pleasure?

This idea is controversial—no doubt about it. And the mere suggestion of this proposal would no doubt cause the heads of our Congressional delegation to self-ignite or perhaps detonate, but what of it? Radical thought generates ideas that become the seedbed for progress and an idea that once seemed radical might in time become a norm. Perhaps the future of some of these WSAs might best lie in a transition to a status that is advantageous to non-humans, but might very well end up benefiting all species on planet earth—including us. ▲





Resisting Trump's Rollbacks to the Endangered Species Act

BY **SARAH PAWLOWSKI**, Organizing Representative, Our Wild America Greater Yellowstone Northern Rockies Campaign

As you are likely well aware, our environment, and the species in it, face unprecedented challenges. The United Nations recently released a comprehensive study indicating 1 million species are at risk of extinction due to human activity.¹ The United Nations. Unsurprisingly, this has not been a priority of the Trump administration, which has been consistently stripping the environmental protections we rely on. To date, the Trump administration has rolled back 85 environmental rules to benefit extractive industry and unsustainable development.² *The New York Times*. One of the most recent and tragic rollbacks is to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), these rule changes will virtually gut implementation of a law that has prevented 99% of listed species from going extinct. If Trump's rollbacks remain in place, they will undermine the effectiveness of the law at a time when our nation's wildlife is trying to adapt to the significant and combined threats of climate change, habitat loss, and pollution.

The ESA is a bedrock environmental law that has been fundamental to the survival of threatened and endangered species in the US since it was passed in the 1970s. We have substantial proof this protection *works*. It is estimated that

without the ESA, approximately 227 species would not exist in the United States today.³ Imagine Montana without grizzly bears, bald eagles, or gray wolves. Those iconic animals are here today because of Endangered Species protections and recovery efforts. The recent rule changes would make achievements like these nearly impossible in the future. The three biggest changes to the law make it harder to list new species and to designate critical habitat; if species are newly listed it also weakens the protections they would benefit from. One of the most egregious changes is that economic factors would be considered when deciding whether to extend ESA protections to an imperiled species, instead of basing decisions solely on science — a clear attempt to allow politics to dictate whether to protect a species.

On the local level, these changes are detrimental to wildlife in the Northern Rockies and Greater Yellowstone area. Wolverines and the greater sage-grouse are two species which have been seriously considered, but have

not yet been listed under the ESA. The proposed ESA rule changes would create significant barriers towards protecting them and preventing their extinction.

Wolverines are elusive animals that travel incredible distances and excel at surviving in harsh conditions. These tough mammals need snow, as female wolverines require a stable snowpack of at least five feet in depth for their birthing dens.⁴ The US Fish and Wildlife Service has already resisted placing the wolverine on the ESA stating uncertainty about climate change data for the Northern Rockies. That decision was ultimately rejected by the courts, and wolverines are once again under consideration for listing. Unfortunately, the language of the new rule change makes it almost impossible to extend ESA protections to a species based on the threat of climate change, which is exactly what the wolverine needs.

The greater sage-grouse is a bird that is known for its plumage and elaborate mating dances. Though severely imperiled in many places, the greater sage-grouse has not been placed under the protection of the ESA because of a multi-year collaborative effort from state and federal agencies, private landowners, and nonprofits to create state plans that were supposed to protect the bird. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has since leased thousands of acres of sage-grouse habitat for oil and gas development and has slowly reversed on its commitments of protection. The population has been decreasing and the bird's status will be reevaluated in 2020. With Trump's ESA rule changes, it will be

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significantly harder to list the sage-grouse because now the economic impacts of listing can be considered alongside the science, which is a clear conflict

of interest when the bird's habitat also has potential for oil and gas development.

The Endangered Species Act has been incredibly successful. The Trump extinction plan undermines the spirit and purpose of the law and is a threat to all the species that might one day need it. These rollbacks allow species to slide inexorably toward extinction until it's too late. But there's hope. The Sierra Club and several of our conservation partners filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration immediately after the rollbacks were finalized to prevent them from being implemented. Together, we can continue to be the voice for these species and their survival. ▲

¹ (2019, May 06) *UN Report: Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates' Accelerating.*

² Albeck-Ripka, L. Pierre-Louis, K. Popovich, N. (2019, Sept. 12) *85 Environmental Rules Being Rolled Back Under Trump.*

³ Ketcham, C. (2017, May 19) *Inside the effort to weaken the Endangered Species Act.* National Geographic.

⁴ (2019, July 02) *Endangered Species, Mammals, Mountain Prairie Region, Wolverines.* US Fish and Wildlife Service.

MATTHIAS KABEL

Opposite page: greater sage-grouse
Right: wolverine

TAKE ACTION - SAVE THE ESA BY ASKING OUR CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO SUPPORT THE PAW AND FIN CONSERVATION ACT!

There's an opportunity for you to act to reverse the Trump rollbacks on Endangered Species Act regulations. ESA champions in both the House and Senate have introduced legislation that would do just that. This legislation, called the Protect America's Wildlife and Fish in Need of Conservation Act of 2019 (PAW and FIN Conservation Act), has 27 cosponsors in the House and 13 in the Senate as of October 8. Many more are needed to get the bill passed out of committee and to the floor in both chambers. **Please contact Senators Tester and Daines, and Representative Gianforte and ask them to cosponsor the PAW and FIN Conservation Act today!**

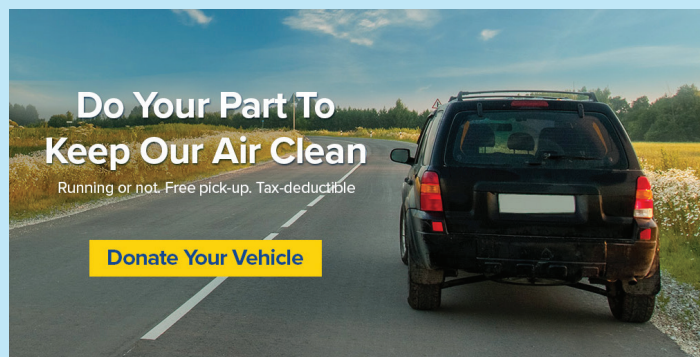


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Sierra Club Montana Chapter
P.O. Box 7201
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MONTANA CHAPTER • 2019 LEADERS

MONTANA CHAPTER DIRECTOR

Summer Nelson
summer.nelson@sierraclub.org
P.O. Box 7201
Missoula, MT 59807
(406) 544-4948

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Bob Clark, **Chair**
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& Secretary**
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LITIGATION

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FINANCE & OPERATIONS

NATIONAL SIERRA CLUB OFFICES IN MONTANA

MISSOULA
110 East Broadway, Suite 208
Missoula, MT 59802

Mailing Address
P.O. Box 7201
Missoula, MT 59807

STAFF
David Merrill,
Senior Organizing Representative,
Beyond Coal Campaign
david.merrill@sierraclub.org
(406) 549-1142

BILLINGS

2822 3rd Ave., Suite 209
Billings, MT 59101

STAFF
Mike Scott,
Senior Campaign Representative,
Beyond Coal Campaign
mike.scott@sierraclub.org
(406) 839-3333

BOZEMAN

424 E. Main Street, Suite 203C
Bozeman, MT 59715

STAFF
Bonnie Rice,
Senior Campaign Representative,
*Our Wild America Greater Yellowstone
Northern Rockies Campaign*
bonnie.rice@sierraclub.org
(406) 582-8365
Sarah Pawlowski,
Organizing Representative,
*Our Wild America Greater Yellowstone
Northern Rockies Campaign*
sarah.pawlowski@sierraclub.org



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The Montana Sierran is published twice a year – Spring & Fall – by the Sierra Club Montana Chapter,
a division of the National Sierra Club