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Inside:

Welcome to the WildWest Institute

Solutions at Work

Ecosystem Defense Update

WILDWEST INSTITUTE



WildWest Institute

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On the Cover: Hanson Meadows,
in the heart of the Kelly Creek
roadless area on the Clearwater
National Forest, Idaho. Photo by
Chuck Pezeshki.

Welcome to the WildWest Institute

Following nearly two years of planning, the Native Forest Network and the Ecology Center have merged into the WildWest Institute. On behalf of the board of directors, staff and volunteers of the WildWest Institute it's my pleasure to share with you some information about our organization, including our vision for the management of our public forests and wildlands in the Northern Rockies and beyond.

Simply stated, the WildWest Institute is a leading public lands watchdog organization in the Northern Rockies. We monitor and participate in the public land management decision processes on nearly twenty National Forests, while bringing a combined 32 years of organizational experience to the table to help find positive, proactive solutions that will benefit our forests, wildlands, watersheds, wildlife and communities.

Unlike other parts of the country, the Northern Rockies is blessed with some of the best remaining pristine roadless wildlands, old-growth forests and wildlife habitat in the nation. Like most Americans, we believe it would be shortsighted and irresponsible to open these ecologically important areas to more logging, roadbuilding and development. However, we fully support jobs in the woods and policies that promote sustainability by putting people to work restoring forests and wildlands degraded by past – and in some cases ongoing – systemic mismanagement.

We also believe that it's key to have meaningful public participation in the management of our public lands, something that's been quickly eroding away over the past five years. After all, these public forests and wildlands belong equally to all Americans – not just to a certain industry or special interest.

Most people I talk with also don't think it's too much to ask for the government to follow the laws of this nation when conducting industrial logging and roadbuilding projects on our public lands. Sometimes it's necessary for the WildWest Institute to file a lawsuit in order to ensure government compliance with the law. Our success rate in the courts, especially considering that the Bush Administration and Congress have tilted the scales heavily in favor of more logging, development and privatization, is testament that our lawsuits have merit and are preventing the government from breaking the law – something I think we'll all agree is a good idea.

So as you can see, while the WildWest Institute will continue to ensure that the government follows the law, we're also working with diverse interests to find common sense solutions that will benefit our forests, wildlife and communities and help put the Northern Rockies, and our country, on a path towards a more ecologically- and economically-sustainable future. If this is a vision you share, I'd love to hear from you and please consider becoming a member of the WildWest Institute!

— Matthew Koehler
Executive Director



What is the WildWest Institute?

The mission of the WildWest Institute is to protect and restore forests, wildlands, watersheds and wildlife in the Northern Rockies Bioregion. We achieve our mission by participating in public land management decision processes. We encourage citizens to appreciate – and empower citizens to defend – native biodiversity in the Northern Rockies. We also advocate solution-oriented policies that promote ecological and economic sustainability through restoring naturally functioning ecosystems degraded by systemic mismanagement.

Our geographic area of focus is the Northern Rockies Bioregion, which is defined as the U.S. Northern Rocky Mountains proper, plus adjacent and/or ecologically-related wildlands. We also participate in national policy efforts as they have implications in the Northern Rockies.

Ecosystem Defense Program

Our Ecosystem Defense Program develops and implements strategies to ensure that the government follows the law when managing our public forests and wildlands. With the assistance of WildWest's biologist and forest ecologist, we stay abreast of, and seek out, the latest scientific research on forest and fire management, biological diversity and ecologically-based restoration. We also strive to get on-the-ground and monitor all project areas to gather site-specific information. We then provide this research and information to specialists within government agencies so that the best-available science and site-specific information is incorporated into public land management decisions.

Watershed & Wildland Fire Restoration Program

Our Watershed and Wildland Fire Restoration Program gets our organization, volunteers and other conservationists involved with on-the-ground restoration and/or community fuel reduction projects in the Northern Rockies. At the WildWest Institute we believe the sooner that we can help move bona-fide, ecologically beneficial restoration and community fuel reduction work forward, the better off our forests, wildlife, watersheds and communities will be. We are currently involved in a number of efforts in the region to help build some trust and find solutions. Our goal is to work together with diverse interests to help be a catalyst for the establishment of a new, sustainable restoration economy in our region for the 21st Century and beyond.

Roadless Rockies Program

America's last, best wild places lie deep in the heart of the Northern Rockies. These wild, roadless jewels – alive with wildlife, pristine forests and clean water – remind us what a paradise this whole country once was. Millions of



Forward Looking: The WildWest Institute is working with a diverse coalition to ensure that our roadless wildlands - such as the Gravelly Mountains and Madison Range just outside of Yellowstone National Park - remain protected for wildlife, solitude and future generations. Photo by Matthew Koehler.

acres of public land are at least somewhat protected under the Wilderness Act and in national parks, but millions more – some of America's finest wild, undeveloped places – are unprotected and vulnerable to industrial development. The Northern Rockies Bioregion hold more unprotected roadless areas than any other region of the country, outside Alaska, with over 15 million acres of unprotected roadless wildlands in Montana and Idaho alone. The objective of our Roadless Rockies Program is to protect all roadless wildlands in the Northern Rockies from development. We will continue playing an essential role within the broader roadless wildland and Wilderness protection movement by providing regional and national education and outreach in support of local, grassroots efforts to permanently defend all roadless wildlands in the Northern Rockies.



WildWest ecologist Cameron Naficy (center) talks bark beetles and forest health with Ph.D. faculty members from the University of Montana's School of Forestry and Conservation on a field trip to the Middle East Fork "Healthy Forest Restoration Act" project on the Bitterroot National Forest.

WildWest Institute's Ecosystem Defense Update:

Logging-for-watershed-restoration paradigm disingenuous, ineffective

— By Jeff Juel, Ecosystem Defense Director

Responding to their own well-deserved bad PR following decades of unsustainable logging and road building on national forest lands in the Northern Rockies and elsewhere, the U.S. Forest Service has been attempting to redefine the terms of the debate so the public will accept more industrial logging and roadbuilding on our public forests.

These days, as we pore over the governments' environmental documents, rarely are timber sales offered up solely for economic purposes. In almost every proposal, we read that "vegetation restoration" (i.e., logging) is needed, ironically enough, in order to compensate for the negative consequences of earlier logging and fire suppression, the latter of which was often done at the behest of the logging industry.

But whereas there is a vigorous scientific debate over whether industrial logging can actually restore our forests, there is simply no debate over the immediate need to restore watersheds – with stream ecosystems unraveling and native fish habitat choked by sediment following decades of road building and logging. The watershed restoration needs here in the Northern Rockies are immense with Forest Service estimates indicating that nearly 85% of the fish-passage culverts in our region are currently impassable to fish coupled with a road maintenance backlog of over \$1.3 billion on the 67,000 miles of roads that crisscross our forests and watersheds.

Unfortunately, Congress has yet to appropriately prioritize and adequately fund genuine watershed restoration for our national forests. Perhaps this is due to the fact that since 1990 the logging industry and their lobbyists have given members of Congress \$39 million in campaign contributions, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

In recent years, the Forest Service has been displaying the disturbing tendency to utilize industrial logging as a way to raise funds for watershed restoration through something given the positive sounding name of "stewardship contracting." One such example is the Fishtrap logging project located twenty miles north of Thompson Falls, within a remote corner of the forest. The Fishtrap project calls for 3 ½ square miles of industrial logging in unroaded wildlands, old-growth forests and important habitat for grizzly bears and bull trout.

The Forest Service wanted to "...implement the Fishtrap project through stewardship contracting in order to accomplish as much of the identified restoration opportuni-



WildWest Institute's Ecosystem Defense Director Jeff Juel (left) talks about the importance of maintaining ecological integrity on a field trip of a proposed logging project with Lolo National Forest officials while Jake Kreilick, WildWest Institute's Restoration Coordinator, looks on. Shortly after this field trip, the Forest Service canceled the logging project. Photo by Chad Harder.

ties on the ground as possible. Stewardship contracting ... facilitates land restoration and enhancement efforts by using value of the traded goods (timber) for important work on the ground..."

In some ways, this seems almost like extortion, forcing the public to permit logging in what are usually heavily logged watersheds so that some watershed restoration can be achieved. Obviously, this begs the question: how many timber sales would the agency have to hold in any given watershed, in order to get the excessive roads removed, the sediment sources fixed, the streams and streamside zone fully functioning, the fish populations recovered and the weeds controlled?

The WildWest Institute raised this question in the case of the Fishtrap project. The answer we got back was a tacit admission that the Forest Service's logging-for-watershed-restoration paradigm won't net nearly enough money to restore all the identified road and watershed problems in Fishtrap Creek. The Lolo National Forest stated, "Because road management and watershed restoration opportunities...far exceeded anticipated revenues, only the highest priority road treatments" were included in the decision, thus other watershed restoration needs were put on indefinite hold until funds might be found. However, the 3½ square miles of industrial logging are fully funded by the decision.

Another, perhaps more insidious, form of extortion involves the Bitterroot National Forest, where the agency is resorting to a different sort of propaganda. In recognition of a legitimate need to reduce fire risk to a narrow stretch of private land along the East Fork of the Bitterroot River, the agency offered up the Middle East Fork logging project, under the auspices of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

However, instead of focusing limited fuel reduction resources along the ownership boundary, the Bitterroot National Forest also proposed to log nearly 4,000 acres of unlogged, old-growth forests far from the community. In response to agency scientists and other researchers who indicate that fuel reduction must be more narrowly prioritized, and to counter the Forest Service's unfounded claims that logging old-growth would "restore fire-adapted ecosystems," the WildWest Institute and Friends of the Bitterroot – together with retired Forest Service rangers, loggers, hikers, hunters and local residents – proposed a smaller, more focused alternative that, according to the Forest Service, would have reduced fuels on 1,600 acres, created 45 jobs and pumped \$1 million into the local economy.

Our alternative was also in recognition that the Middle East Fork project area is still recovering from past Forest Service mismanagement including clearcutting, terracing and excessive roadbuilding, which was so egregious that it lead to Congress passing the National Forest Management Act in 1976. In fact, a third of the analysis area has already been logged and the roads in the project area are currently dumping over 150 tons of sediment into streams annually.



Results of logging near the Lewis and Clark Trail on the Clearwater National Forest in Idaho as part of the Wendover "Healthy Forest Initiative" logging project.

We also requested that the Bitterroot National Forest create a list of all needed watershed restoration actions for the Middle East Fork project area, so that the Environmental Impact Statement would inform the public how much money it would take – and how many jobs would be available for local workers – to restore the badly damaged watersheds in the project area.

Unfortunately, Bitterroot Supervisor David Bull refused to provide such information, saying, "The Healthy Forests Restoration Act ... does not address or authorize such unrelated activities ... for watershed improvement purposes." If the HFRA is truly about restoring healthy forests, we wonder just how in the world that goal is accomplished without bona-fide, ecologically-based watershed restoration work. And what good is a "Healthy Forests Restoration Act" if the best that can be provided to the imperiled bull trout is an impaired status quo?

In order bring to light our federal government's disingenuous and ineffective logging-for-watershed-restoration paradigm – and due to other illegalities within both the Fishtrap and Middle East Fork logging projects – we have initiated the checks and balances provided by the third branch of government, by filing suit in U.S. District Court, in order to hold the Forest Service accountable and make sure that this government agency follows the law.

As the old saying goes, "When there's a will, there's a way." In the case of restoring our national forests, the WildWest Institute is working with diverse interests on many levels to find alternatives to the current, dysfunctional paradigm. We believe the opportunities are nearly endless and bona-fide restoration work could provide jobs for generations. Unfortunately, until Congress and the Forest Service demonstrate the same willingness to make watershed and ecologically-based restoration activities a top priority, our public watersheds, forests and wildlife will continue to be compromised.



The WildWest Institute has built a diverse coalition of local residents, former Forest Service rangers, Ph.D. scientists, WW II veterans, restoration workers, hunters and anglers to help defend these old-growth forests on the Bitterroot National Forest in Montana from industrial logging under one of the nation's first "Healthy Forests" projects. Photo by Matthew Koehler.

Solutions at Work: Working to keep a community safe from wildfire

In mid-May, the WildWest Institute and the West End Volunteer Fire Department in DeBorgia, MT joined forces for the DeBorgia Community Wildfire Protection Work Weekend. By all accounts, the work weekend was a tremendous success!

The goal of the work weekend was to bring people together to create defensible space on private land around the DeBorgia community through education, action and fellowship. Special emphasis was placed on improving defensible space around the homes of elderly members of the community, along key roads in the community and establishing a safe zone near the firehouse and community center.

The fellowship component of the community work weekend included a community potluck barbeque at the DeBorgia Schoolhouse – which, ironically, was one of the few buildings in the entire area to survive the 1910 wildfires – and live music at Billy BigRiggers courtesy of JT and Travelers.

In addition to lots of volunteer help, the community work weekend was supported by a grant the WildWest Institute secured through the National Forest Foundation and the Liz Claiborne and Art Ortenberg Foundation. The grant money was used to hire a local fuel reduction crew through Wildland Conservation Services, which helped put some money into the pockets of local workers.

The WildWest Institute, West End Volunteer Fire Department and others local residents, businesses and conservation groups are currently engaged in a collaborative process through the Healthy Forests Restoration Act with the Lolo National Forest to develop a common sense plan for fuel reduction work on Forest Service land directly around the greater DeBorgia area. These collaborative meetings and field trips have brought together a total of 115 people, demonstrating a great deal of public interest.



The DeBorgia Community Wildfire Protection Work Weekend.

While the WildWest Institute is supportive of fuel reduction work around the DeBorgia area to help protect the community from wildfire, we do have serious concerns with the Forest Service's proposal as it now stands. We have let the Forest Service and community know that our concerns center around issues related to old-growth forests, soils, water quality, roads and endangered species such as lynx and bull trout.

The Forest Service has informed the collaborative group that fuel reduction work on the Forest Service lands around the DeBorgia area will not be implemented until at least 2009 due to the HFRA process and Forest Service budget issues, making the WildWest Institute's DeBorgia Community Wildfire Protection Work Weekend all the more important for keeping the community safe from wildfire. If you'd like to learn more about Solutions at Work from the WildWest Institute, please visit our website: www.wildwestinstitute.org.



Helping to Restore the Headwaters of Lolo Creek

WildWest Institute is currently working with the Lolo National Forest, the community-based Lolo Watershed Group and fellow conservation groups on a road removal and watershed restoration project for the Upper Lolo Creek watershed west of Lolo, MT. We're really excited to get involved with some bona-fide restoration work everyone agrees needs to be done. This project calls for permanently closing 63 miles of roads and "jammer" roads, removing or replacing 21 fish-passage culverts

to improve native fish habitat and decommissioning 17 miles of unneeded old logging roads. Unfortunately, Congress only provides the 2-million acre Lolo NF will a paltry sum of \$50,000 annually for this type of restoration work, so we are currently working with the Lolo NF to help find funding for this common-ground and common-sense restoration project that will employ local workers improving forest and watershed health.

WildWest Action & Events

➤ Help Keep Montana Montana

Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer is going through a process to help determine if 6.4 million acres of Montana's pristine, undeveloped roadless wildlands on national forests should remain protected or if these wildlands should be opened to industrial development such as roadbuilding, oil and gas development and logging. Keeping these wildlands free from new roads and development is simple common sense. The Forest Service already has a \$558 million maintenance backlog on existing roads in Montana and nearly a \$10 billion backlog nationally. Montana's roadless wildlands provide clean water and critical wildlife habitat. Strong wildland-dependent jobs such as outfitting and guiding, and a wide array of traditional outdoor opportunities such as hiking, fishing, hunting and horseback riding also take place in our roadless wildlands. Please write Governor Schweitzer and ask him to protect Montana's legacy of clean water, wildlife habitat and unsurpassed opportunities to hike, explore, hunt and fish in wild places. Tell him we like Montana the way it is! Write to: Gov Brian Schweitzer, PO Box 2000801, Capitol Station, Helena, MT 59620. Email: governor@mt.gov. For more information: www.bigskylegacy.org.

➤ Take a Wild Weekend for the Wild Rockies!!

The WildWest Institute is helping to organize the 2006 Wild Rockies Rendezvous, which will take place September 22 to 24 at the Birch Creek Center near Dillon, Montana in the beautiful Pioneer Mountains of the Beaverhead-Deer Lodge National Forest! The Wild Rockies Rendezvous is a gathering of wildland and forest advocates sponsored by environmental groups from throughout the Wild Rockies region of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Oregon and



Montana's roadless Swan Range. Photo by Chad Harder.

Washington. The purpose of the Rendezvous is to learn about and discuss issues related to wilderness protection, ecosystem defense, forest restoration and the critters and people who call the Wild Rockies home. This year, the Wild Rockies Rendezvous will be held in conjunction with the National Forest Protection Alliance's National Convention. Join fellow wildland and forest advocates from the Northern Rockies and across the country for a weekend of solidarity, education and inspiration for public lands protection! For more info, contact WildWest at 406.542.7343.

➤ Summer Wilderness Rendezvous

A summer campout gathering will be held in the Gallatin Range near Bozeman, MT the weekend of August 5 and 6 to talk about Wilderness protection in the Northern Rockies. This will be a fun get together to explore various Wilderness proposals and ideas for expanding Wilderness designation in the northern Rockies, and for protecting existing Wilderness. For more information, contact Phil Knight, WildWest's Roadless Rockies Coordinator at 406.586.3885 or pknight@wildrockies.org.

Stand Up for Wildlands - Join the WildWest Institute

YES! I want to help the WildWest Institute protect and restore forests and wildland in the Northern Rockies! Your generous tax-deductible membership contribution will be an important part of our success in 2006 and beyond.

I would like to become a member:

☐ \$35 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$500 ☐ Other

☐ My Check or money order is enclosed.

☐ Please charge my: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

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Please make checks payable to "WildWest Institute"

Mail to: P.O. Box 7988, Missoula, MT 59807



The Rocky Mountain Front on the Lewis and Clark National Forest in Montana is home to some of the wildest country in the lower 48 states. The Front contains the top 1% of wildlife habitat in North America and it's the only place in the U.S. where grizzly bears still roam the Great Plains. Careful and quite hikers can stumble upon herds of elk and bighorn sheep of such immense size that most 21st century Americans wouldn't think still possible. Looking skyward one is likely to see bald eagles, peregrine falcons and goshawks. The Front is also home to the densest golden eagle flyway in the world. Unfortunately, this majestic, wild landscape is threatened by oil and gas development, off-road motorized use and a power generation proposal, which would result in nearly thirty miles of new power lines. For more information about the Rocky Mountain Front, contact the WildWest Institute at info@wildwestinstitute.org or 406.542.7343. Photo by Cameron Naficy.



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