



Faith Bernstein



Cory DeStine

THE CONFLUENCE



—SWAN VALLEY—
CONNECTIONS

FALL 2016

FROM THE BOARD

The fall is a special time of year in the Swan. The foliage colors are on display, the sky a sharper blue, the shadows longer, the light is crisp, polarized. There is a subtle sense of urgency, squirrels and bears are preparing for the lean months ahead, folks are buckling down back to school or re-focused on work. This season finds us scurrying to pack in all we can on sunny days, from last mountain bike rides to re-roofing houses before snow flies. And, regardless of weather, many are trying to honor that timeless tradition of filling elk and deer tags.

In early August our forester John Ingrebretson took a 20' fall from a ladder at home and suffered a broken wrist and multiple skull and facial fractures resulting in traumatic brain injury. He and his wife, Jane, are gamely managing the slow road to recovery. The constant pain, headaches, nausea, and dizziness subsided somewhat in late September so that they were able to enjoy a Glacier National Park day trip. John hopes to begin some work in November. It's a reminder of how fragile our health truly is and testament to John and Jane's strength and patience.

In October we celebrated the marriage of Conservation Practitioner, Adam Lieberg, and Education Program Coordinator, Rebekah Rafferty. Adam is an alumni of Landscape and Livelihood and Rebekah an alumna of Wildlife in the West, a nod to our college field programs' ability to cultivate conservation leaders. The gorgeous, quintessentially "Swan Valley" ceremony was officiated by SVC board member, Scott Tomson. It's bittersweet that Rebekah has been accepted for a PhD program at University of Montana's College of Forestry and Conservation under Libby Metcalf and will be leaving us January 1, 2017.

As we head into the final quarter, we're on schedule to meet our 2016 goals. We're pleased with the major gifts and grants that have been awarded while also keeping the pedal to the metal on the fundraising front. The "Explore Montana's Swan Valley Map and Guide" project is complete with Adventure Cycling's "Great Divide Mountain Bike Route" highlighted. The map will be available at various sales outlets. We continue to educate and provide resources for living with bears, from property consultations to bearproof garbage containers and electric fence installation. This last month we've had 13 landowners come to us seeking help to potentially complete fuels reduction projects on their properties. In December we hope to have our future facility plans in place.

We're looking forward to December's Strategic Plan Meeting and celebrating a year of being merged. It's truly a pleasure to work with such committed staff, board members and partners who believe so fiercely in the value and dissemination of experiential conservation. Happy Fall!



Juanita Vero, Executive Committee



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SwanValleyConnections.org

EXPLORE MONTANA'S SWAN VALLEY MAP AND GUIDE



In April of 2015, we initiated a project to inventory, showcase, and celebrate the Swan Valley's historic, cultural, natural, and recreational resources in the form of a beautiful and informative map and guide. The "Explore Montana's Swan Valley" Map and Guide is the result of the efforts initiated by Melanie Parker and Jessy Stevenson in 2014 and continued by Rebekah Rafferty and Maria Mantas to the project's completion in October of this year. The map is visually appealing, easy to interpret, and contains the same level of recreational use and access information available on the Swan Lake District Map along with interpretive content about the types of recreation experiences people can expect to have in different regions across the valley. The guide contains interpretive narratives accompanied by historic photos, watercolor artwork, and professional landscape and wildlife photos to showcase the valley's glacial legacy, its rich human history and culture, and the natural values that make it so special today. The map and guide is currently in the printing process and will be available for purchase on the SVC online store and in our office at the Condon Work Center shortly.

Special thanks to Gage Cartographics, Robyn Egloff Design, Steve Lamar and the Upper Swan Valley Historical Society, the Swan River State Forest, the Swan Lake Ranger District, and the LOR Foundation for making this project possible.

SVC TO PARTNER WITH USGS AND EARTHWATCH INSTITUTE TO STUDY HUCKLEBERRIES

Huckleberries are an important food resource for a number of native species. In western Montana, few are so dependent upon these fruits as grizzly bears who feed day and night on the berries in summer and fall in order to gain fat needed for the long winter months of hibernation. Climate change may affect the availability and production of these berries, which in turn may influence bear movements, reproductive success, and perhaps even behavior, as they search for food sources.

Swan Valley Connections will be teaming up with the U.S. Geological Survey and Earthwatch Institute to study environmental variables that influence berry production. Starting in June of 2017, teams of volunteers from the Earthwatch Institute will be working with SVC and USGS scientists to gather data at various locations in the Swan and Mission Mountains to help answer questions such as how do temperature and precipitation affect berry production? What other wildlife species feed on huckleberries? Which insects pollinate huckleberry flowers and how do weather patterns affect pollination? With Earthwatch volunteers, SVC will assist the USGS by overseeing the entire field project.



For the past 45 years Earthwatch Institute has supported scientific research around the world by providing volunteers to conduct fieldwork. We are excited to work with new partners and welcome the USGS and Earthwatch to our watershed.

WHAT IS THE WILDFIRE RISK REDUCTION PROGRAM?

...AND HOW DOES IT PROTECT YOUR HOME AND COMMUNITY FROM THE THREAT OF WILDFIRE?

The Forest Stewardship Wildfire Risk Reduction effort began in 2000, following a fire season where almost a half-million acres burned in the Bitterroot Valley, and nationwide a total of 6.6 million acres burned. Three years later, on a hot, dry, afternoon on August 10, 2003, on the flank of Red Butte in the Mission Mountains Wilderness, lightning sparked the Crazy Horse Fire, which quickly exceeded firefighter initial attack efforts and eventually grew to 11,300 acres. The result has been an increased local awareness and interest in fuel reduction and SVC's Forest Stewardship program. Since the inception of SVC's Forest Stewardship program, we have provided technical assistance to over 325 Swan Valley landowners and treated 2,014 acres to reduce hazardous fuel loads. This effort not only increased awareness and reduced the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire, but has employed 19 local contractors and put over one million dollars in cost-share funding towards on-the-ground projects!



Condon Mountain Fire, 2012

Swan Valley Connections works with private landowners to:

- Develop a personalized forest stewardship or management plan.
- Identify insects and disease on forested property and make treatment recommendations.
- Offer advice on wildfire prevention and defensible space around homes and structures.
- Provide cost-share funding to complete stewardship objectives.



**Fuels Reduction FUNDS
AVAILABLE for privately-
owned, forested lands**

For more information:

(406) 754-3137

SwanValleyConnections.org/Forest-Stewardship

Studies have shown we can help protect homes by reducing fuels around them, but will that same treatment have any effect at the community/landscape level? Yes! Research has shown that fuel reduction works well when it is achieved through a mosaic pattern of strategically designed treatments across the landscape, taking into account forest types, wildlife habitat, riparian features, and other considerations. Over time, this creates the patchwork pattern that we know existed historically across the Swan Valley. This strategy will help slow the escalation of large wildland fires that we have experienced in the last decade or two, and give us some options for protecting our communities and homes when that inevitable wildfire does occur.

BEETLE PHEROMONES

If you've travelled through the Swan Valley lately, it's hard not to notice red needled Douglas-fir trees scattered throughout the forest. In the last few years we have seen an increase of Douglas-fir Bark Beetle attacks on mid to large diameter trees, especially those that were stressed by drought from previous years. Once a tree is infested with beetles there is little that can be done, but there is a preventative measure that can keep healthy trees alive by helping them fend off attacks by the beetles. Beetle pheromone packets, or "bubble caps" can be placed on healthy trees early in the spring which send a "signal" to beetles as they are flying telling them to "stay away". Essentially, the pheromone is a chemical that informs the beetles that a tree is already infested and they should seek food elsewhere.

At SVC, we offer these packets for sale at a cost lower than you can purchase from other vendors because we work directly with the supplier. The pheromones aren't a solution to protect an entire forest, as it can be cost prohibitive. They also are ineffective once a tree has been "hit" by beetles. However, healthy trees near homes and structures or any tree you consider valuable can be protected by nailing a bubble cap on the bark in spring. We also offer a different kind of pheromone patch for the mountain pine beetle which can be used to protect ponderosa and lodgepole pines.

Packets must be installed in spring to be effective for the season. If you miss this window, you will not be able to treat your trees for another year, making them vulnerable to attack. If you are interested in placing an order, please contact us at SVC **before March 15th**.



FOREST STEWARDSHIP WORKSHOP

At SVC, we strive to help private landowners understand forest ecology on their lands so they can become better land stewards. In August, SVC hosted a three-day Forest Stewardship Workshop taught by Montana State University Extension Forestry. Twenty-four landowners from across Montana learned how to develop long-term stewardship plans for their properties. Participants were taught inventory techniques to ascertain the condition of their forests to help develop the best course for forest management. The class was also given a crash course on numerous forest

stewardship topics including: forest growth, tree health and vigor, succession, wildlife resources, range management, tree and plant identification, protecting water quality, legal issues, wildfire and fuel management, and silvicultural opportunities. Participants ultimately learned to not only inventory their property resources, but to set goals and priorities for their lands, analyze resource trade-offs to understand impacts of stewardship decisions, and develop their own Stewardship Plan. For more information, please refer to <http://www.msuextension.org/forestry/stewardship.htm> or to learn more about SVC's forest stewardship program please visit <http://www.swanvalleyconnections.org/forest-stewardship>.



MSU Extension Forestry's Cindy Peterson teaching plant identification skills.



DNRC Service Forester Allen Branine showing participants how to use an increment borer to age trees



SWAN VALLEY BEAR NEWS: 2016 Year In Review

FALL 2016

Male Grizzly Killed By Vehicle Collision

In the early morning hours of September 6, 2016 a large, adult male grizzly bear was hit and killed by a semi truck on Highway 83 in the Swan Valley near Buck Creek. This bear was found to have been one previously captured in the Swan Valley for research purposes. The male was estimated to be 11 years old and weighed over 500 pounds. Known as 19/18 due to its numbered green ear tags (19 and 18), this bear had originally been captured by tribal biologists in 2006 on the Flathead Indian Reservation on the west side of the Mission Mountains. In 2008, the male was captured for research in the Swan Valley, and was fitted with a GPS radio collar. 19/18 wore this GPS collar between May of 2008 and April of 2009.



Male grizzly 19/18 was usually observed to be dark black in color.

The movements of 19/18 are unknown for the summer of 2009, but in the fall of 2009, 19/18 was incidentally captured for research again. Once more, the big male was fitted with a GPS collar which he wore into the den, but dropped in the Swan Valley the following spring. During the fall of 2009, 19/18 spent his time in the Swan between Elk Creek and Holland Lake, but moved into the Swan Mountains in October and November back to the headwaters of Tango and Dart Creek. Additionally, hair collected opportunistically from a rub tree in Cold Creek in July of 2015 was determined to belong to 19/18 through genetic analysis.

The GPS collar collected coordinates on the bear's position every 30 minutes over the course of the year. In 2008, 19/18 spent the beginning of June in the Bob Marshall Wilderness just east of Holland Peak in the head of Tango and Dart Creek



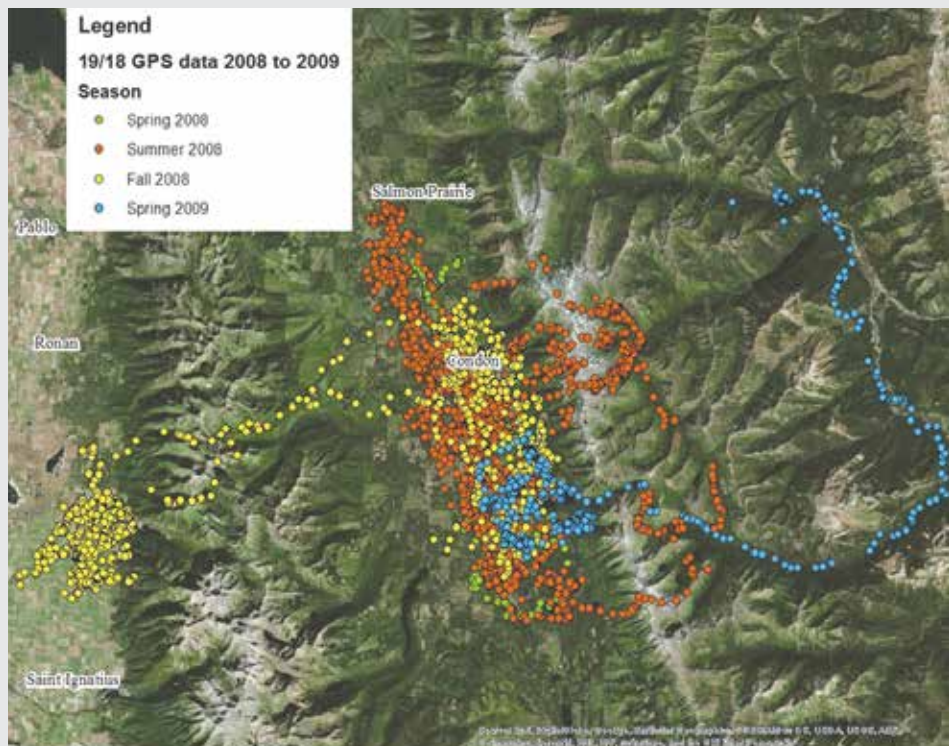
Drainages and then moved back to the Valley over the ridge south of Wolverine peak for the rest of the month. In July, 19/18 again moved into the Swan Mountains and walked south into Shaw Creek. In August, 19/18 spent his time back in the Swan Valley lowlands. In

the fall, the male exited the Swan Valley over the Mission Mountains by way of Elk Creek and spent time in the Mission Valley just west of McDonald Lake. At the end of October, 19/18 returned to the Swan Valley. It is unknown where the male denned for the winter between 2008 and 2009, however in April of 2009, 19/18 traveled down Gordon Creek to the South Fork of the Flathead River and shrugged free of the radio collar in the Little Salmon drainage. The GPS collar was found by hikers on the trail and returned to Fish, Wildlife and Parks in the summer of 2009.

Top - SVC remote camera photo of 19/18 at a bear rub. Left - Tim Manley, MT FWP Bear Management Specialist and Maria Mantas, SVC Executive Director pose with Bear 18/19 who was recaptured in the fall of 2009 in the Swan Valley. Right - Movements of 19/18 from spring of 2008 to spring of 2009. Each colored dot represents a GPS location collected by the radio collar. The GPS data is categorized by season and year.

Between 1995 and 2016, there have been seven known vehicle caused grizzly mortalities in the Swan Valley on Montana Highway 83. Three grizzlies were killed in the Swan Valley on highway 83 in 2015 and only one has been recorded in 2016. Vehicle related grizzly mortalities vary from year to year across the ecosystem. Mortalities from vehicle collision compose 8% of the total documented grizzly mortalities in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem between 2004 and 2014.

GPS radio collars and genetic analysis of bear hair provides valuable information to managers on grizzly bear habitat use, survival, population size and population trend. With these tools, managers have found that the grizzly population in the NCDE has grown beyond recovery goals and the population trend is stable to increasing.



Human/Grizzly Bear Conflicts In The Swan

Tim Manley, MT FWP Grizzly Bear Conflict Management

To date, 2016 has been a fairly quiet year in the Swan with regards to reported conflicts between grizzly bears and people. During the spring there were several reports of an unmarked subadult grizzly bear that was observed grazing on lawns in the area around Salmon Prairie. A trap was set just west of Hwy 83 for the bear, but the bear did not return to that area.

We also received a few reports of a larger grizzly with a green ear tag that was seen in the Salmon Prairie area. It is possible that this bear was bear #19/18 that was hit and killed on Hwy 83.

In the community of Swan Lake, a female grizzly bear with two cubs of the year may have killed several chickens. We responded by assisting the landowner with installing electric fence and putting up remote cameras. We have documented a grizzly bear and a female black bear with two cubs that checked out the chicken coop but didn't get through the electric fence.

The lower Swan drainage had the most reports of conflicts with grizzly bears. A radio collared female with two yearlings continued her activities at numerous homes in the Ferndale area. During 2015 and 2016, we know this family group killed domestic rabbits, chickens, and ducks. They also got into pet food, livestock grain, and apples. The entire family group was recaptured in July and the decision was made to remove them from the population. The adult female was killed and the two yearlings were sent to the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Wildlife Center in Helena. The two yearlings are currently at Zoo Montana in Billings and will eventually be at the St. Louis Zoo.

Landowners have also reported at least one other family group of grizzly bears in the Ferndale area in recent weeks, but we have not had any reported conflicts.



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Adult female grizzly with two yearlings in the Ferndale area.

We received reports of landowners intentionally feeding grizzly bears in the Ferndale area and game wardens are following up on those reports.

We appreciated all the efforts that landowners in the Swan have made to secure or remove attractants in order to reduce conflicts with grizzly bears. The work of Swan Valley Connections and Swan Valley Bear Resources has really helped landowners with education, bear resistant garbage containers, and electric fencing. We have seen that grizzly bears can be very adaptable and as long as they aren't receiving any food rewards at residences, conflicts with people can be reduced.

Bear Troubles? Contact:

To report grizzly bear conflicts you can contact Tim Manley at 406-250-1265 or tmanley@mt.gov

If you want more information on living in bear country you can visit the MT FWP website at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/beBearAware/default.html>

Swan Valley Bear Resources at: <http://www.swanvalleyconnections.org/swan-valley-bear-resources>

Defenders of Wildlife can also assist with electric fencing and they can be contacted at: <http://www.defenders.org/got-grizzlies>

LANDSCAPE AND LIVELIHOOD

Landscape and Livelihood (L&L) is a 16 credit, 2-month program studying the relationship between natural resource management and rural communities. We begin the semester by building a foundation in natural history and ecology. Our students hail from all over the country, so it is critical that we orient them to the Swan Valley and the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem. We then study the policies that dictate management. Once our students are well versed in how this place functions ecologically and politically, we meet the multitude of people passionate about working landscapes. This includes people who identify themselves as loggers, ranchers, farmers, recreationalists, scientists, managers, conservationists, hunters, wilderness advocates and more. In spending time with all of these stakeholders our students discover a common thread; there is a deep, powerful connection between the land and identity. We believe that an understanding of ecological processes combined with empathy for human communities leads to innovative and thoughtful stewardship.



Amber Alexander



Brian Parks

This is a field program. For our students to truly experience day in the life of a Condon local we send them home with a family for the weekend. “Homestays” have been a long standing tradition of L&L. Over the course of three days and two nights, students hike, hunt, garden, split firewood, grocery shop, watch football and cook with their host families. Sometimes they discuss natural resource politics, but mostly they are there to quite literally put themselves in someone else’s shoes and feel a sense of community. This is a mutualistic experience. Host families participate year after year, eagerly sharing their way of life in exchange for insights and perspective from the next generation. Students leave with a better understanding of sense of place. When alumni pass through the valley years later, it’s often their homestay family that receives the first call.

YOUTH EDUCATION



Eight campers, ages 9-13, joined us for Wildlife Explorer’s Camp this August. Huckleberry picking, swimming, tracking, hiking, frog catching and electrofishing were on the schedule this year. We see every conservation program as an opportunity for education, so you can imagine how excited we were to take the explorers with us to survey Cat Creek. With nets, waders, and safety gloves they dutifully followed a three-person field crew through 50 stream meters. The lead staff member operated the “shocker”- a battery powered backpack hooked to a probe that sends a pulse of electricity into the water and temporarily stuns fish. This creates a brief opportunity for the other crew members, or campers, to scoop up the fish and place it in a five-gallon bucket. At the end of each 50 meter reach we count, identify and record our total catch before returning them to the stream. This gives us a snap shot in time of what inhabits that particular stream, this is also known as relative abundance. The campers proved to be experienced netters, in total they caught twice as many fish as our crew members!



The second piece of information we’re looking for in these surveys is the genetic purity of westslope cutthroat trout populations. Native westslope and non-native rainbow trout can and do interbreed. Their offspring, referred to as “cutbows”, are fertile. Researchers and managers are interested in the genetic composition of these populations as we are rapidly losing genetically distinct westslope cutthroat trout. To collect this genetic information, we clip a small piece of the caudal (tail) fin and send it to the University of Montana Conservation Genetics Laboratory. Before we clip, we sedate the fish in clove oil, making them easier to handle and minimizing stress. After we clip, the fish need to recover in slow moving water before they can be released. The explorers were responsible for the recovery and release of each fish, building fortified pools and closely watching their charges.

PUTTING THE GARDEN TO BED

Cory Froning, Beck Creek Garden Manager

Yesterday, October 16th, was Putting the Garden To Bed day. As the rain poured down on my muddy overalls and big winter coat, I flexed my cold-slowed fingers and wondered how an entire growing season had passed since the skies were last dark like this and the soil bare, way back in May. Students gleefully tugged the last of the carrots, radishes, and beets out of the soil until our wheel barrels were filled to the brim with produce, reminiscent of the CSA members' jam-packed grocery bags this summer.

Beck Creek Gardens runs a Community Supported Agriculture program through the summer before our students get here in the fall. Members or shareholders pay a fixed price at the beginning of the season, and in exchange receive a full grocery bag of produce every week for the entire growing season. This is a very successful model for small scale farms because it eliminates the farmer's stress of finding a consumer, it allows the farmer to be flexible in terms of what they grow and when, and it gives the consumer the ability to see exactly where their food is coming from, how it is grown, and to create a relationship with the farmer they are supporting. Learning about this CSA program is a large part

of the Landscape and Livelihood students' Sustainability and Agriculture class. Not only do they have daily garden chores (which include harvesting food for their consumption), but they also engage in the social and economic aspects of Beck Creek Gardens. One of their first assignments was to attend and write about the CSA members' fall harvest dinner, where all shareholders came together to celebrate the bounty of the season and reflect upon what was done well this year and what could be improved next year.

The Condon community and the Landscape and Livelihood students are what make Beck Creek Gardens go 'round. This season was a huge success only because of the encouragement, trust, and loyalty of those who counted on me to provide them and their families with a week's worth of food every Thursday. From helping me build a hoop house, to greeting me on Thursdays with hugs and "thank you's", to helping me cover squash plants in frost cover by the light of our headlamps, the people who surround me have illustrated the power and beauty that comes from being so closely connected to a place, in this case, through agriculture and physically working the land.





Nathan Noble

SVC is proud to have once again partnered with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to provide backcountry trails and ranger services in the Mission Mountains Wilderness and Swan Front in 2016. SVC secures funding each year from the Recreational Trails Program to assist the USFS in completing these tasks. For the second year, Christian Mascho and Nathan Noble of Daughter of the Sun Backcountry Services were contracted to perform trails steward duties. Their tasks included clearing 94 miles of trails in the early summer, maintenance of trails and drainage structures, trailhead maintenance, campsite naturalization, and visitor education. Visitor education can entail a wide range of topics that may include: Flathead National Forest bear food storage orders, Leave No Trace principles, Wilderness management, wildlife encounters, or trail conditions just to name a few. As most who ventured into the high country this past summer probably noticed, the amount of blowdown from the previous autumn and winter's windstorms was impressive. Christian and Nathan worked feverishly to complete the opening of trails in a timely manner, and their effort is much appreciated! Those who have been on the end of a cross-cut saw for many long, hot, mosquito-infested days know why its nickname is referred to as the 'misery whip.' Throughout the summer, Christian and Nathan provide SVC with regular trail condition updates that you can find on our website <http://www.swanvalleyconnections.org/trail-conditions>.



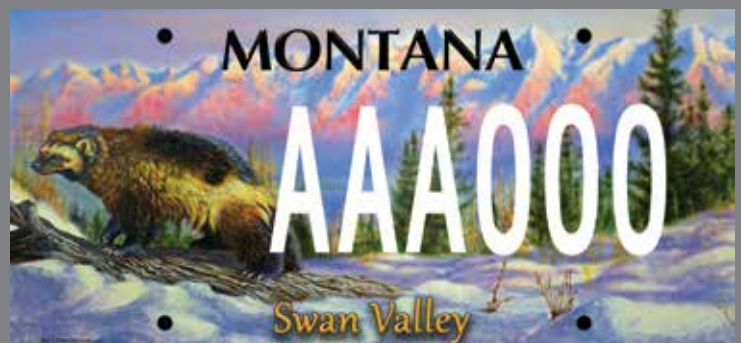
Christian and Nathan clearing the Lower Hemlock Lake trail in June



Nathan Noble

GET YOUR WOLVERINE! PURCHASE A SWAN VALLEY LICENSE PLATE

Support conservation and education efforts in Montana's wild and beautiful Swan Valley. The Swan Valley license plate features a spectacular painting of a wolverine in its natural habitat by renowned artist Ron Ukrainetz. For details on how to purchase a license plate visit SwanValleyConnections.org/Swan-Valley-License-Plate. Sample plates (not legal for use on a vehicle) are also available.





A CONFLUENCE OF CONSERVATION AND LEARNING

Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe it's been a year since I wrote to tell you of our plans to create a new organization from the merger of Northwest Connections and Swan Ecosystem Center. I asked for your support in helping us through this challenging endeavor, and you came through with your words of encouragement and financial contributions. We are so grateful! Your support helped us accomplish much to get on our feet. With your donations we were able to strengthen our infrastructure by purchasing badly needed equipment, transitioning two seasonal and temporary staff to permanent positions, and securing year-round housing for interns and temporary employees.

You may wonder, why are these things important? At Swan Valley Connections we challenge ourselves everyday with ways to improve our programs and provide better services. We continue to look for ways to work with partners, old and new, to address conservation challenges with creative solutions *and* to creatively communicate these lessons to students of all ages. Stronger support to our organizational infra-structure enables our staff to do this more efficiently, making your donations accomplish more.

And what are we accomplishing? Working with our partners, a great deal. Through agreements with the US Forest Service and MT Dept. Fish Wildlife and Parks, we conducted fish and wildlife surveys; working with the MT Dept. Natural Resources and Conservation we distributed funds to private landowners to reduce forest fuels on their properties; and with Missoula County Extension Service we directed funding for weed treatments on private lands.

We were equally successful with our robust education programs. We filled our Spring and Fall Semester Field Programs with two dozen college students from around the country, as well as reached out to elementary and high schools from Bigfork to Potomac to engage hundreds of youth in outdoor education programs and field camps. These are just a few of our accomplishments in conservation, stewardship, and learning over the last year.

It is because of your support we are able to do so much for the Swan Valley and its people. As we enter the giving season, please consider how much it is worth to have Swan Valley Connections conduct educational programs, support wildlife populations, restore streams and wetlands, and provide forest stewardship assistance to landowners. With your generous contribution we can continue these things and much more.

As I look out my window I see shades of gold emerging on the western larch in the Valley's forests and the bright white of the first snows on the Swan Range, I am reminded how grateful I am to be here and to have your help along the way.

Thank you!

Maria Mantas, Executive Director



Nathan Noble

SAVE-THE-DATES!



Steven Gnam

Crown of the Continent Traverse Evening Program - Fri., Nov. 18th, 7:00 pm Condon Work Center

Steven Gnam will share photos and stories from the 600 mile trek, from Missoula to Banff, that he documented last fall with friends Mike Foote and Mike Wolfe. The trip highlights the importance of connectivity within the Crown of the Continent for wildlife that make their home here.



Sharon Lamar

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE - Wed., Dec. 7th, 2:00-4:30 pm Condon Work Center

Be sure to stop in for our Holiday Open House to meet and greet SVC's staff and board. Refreshments provided!