

THE CONFLUENCE

SPRING 2022



— SWAN VALLEY —
CONNECTIONS

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Welcome to another eventful and exciting year for Swan Valley Connections (SVC)!

My name is Helene Michael, and I have the privilege this year of chairing the SVC Board of Directors as we continue to expand and align our organization's education and conservation strategies, while improving our surroundings together with our growing community.

First, I'd like to extend a special welcome to our newest employee, Eli Estey, and our three new board members, Steve Kloetzel, Christian Wohlfeil and Chad Bauer, who joined us this year. I'd also like to give a special thank you to our generous donors and supporters, and all our community residents, who make our valley the extraordinary place it is.

Secondly, I'd like to offer a heartfelt "Thank you" to Barb Raible, who chaired our board for the past 4 years, and to the outgoing directors, Rich, Larry, Alex, and Scott, who together spent hours and years learning, engaging, and teaching to ensure SVC's future success. Your passion for the Swan Valley is palpable, and you each made a huge difference for Swan Valley Connections!

We all want to contribute to leaving this incredible valley "a little better than we found it," whether you were born and raised here, have lived here for years, or are a new resident to this growing community. Talking to people over the years, I've found that we all desire a similar future for the Swan Valley: to have a productive, proud, and supportive community, and a healthy, accessible, and connected environment. We long for it to remain a place where we, and our children, can continue to explore, learn, and contribute towards a positive influence in this world.

What is it that I personally appreciate about living in this magical place? The people, the fresh air, the plentiful waters, the beautiful forests and magnificent mountains, and of course the incredibly diverse animal kingdom and rich plant life we are blessed with when we step out of our homes. This valley currently provides us with an exceptional and rare quality of life.

It also allows me to connect with myself, my family, our neighbors, and our wild surroundings. It teaches me what to do, what to be aware of, and what I should be concerned or cautious about; the lessons this land offers are endless and invaluable. This life is so precious, but it can be very fleeting, both for us as individuals and for our valley.

Nothing is for free, and nothing lasts forever, which is why I am so appreciative of being part of Swan Valley Connections' effort to help me and every landowner understand how to safely live with wildlife, and how to keep a healthy and thriving forest and watershed, which in turn creates a safer place for us all to live.

I also enjoy the opportunities to learn about wildflowers, tracking, and gardening, and those that allow me to be part of something greater than myself – cleaning up the roads, picking the invasive weeds, erecting fences to protect the aspen groves, or keeping predators out of our chicken coops and garbage cans.

The many facets of SVC's education and involvement in the community are far-reaching. So, together, let's learn and improve on what we have, and come to understand what it will take to preserve this wonderful place we call home.

Thank you for what you do in your own backyard; Swan Valley Connections and I look forward to working with you, so we can all "leave our valley a little better than we found it" year after year.

Thank you and take good care,



Helene Michael, Board Chair



Swan Valley Connections

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SwanValleyConnections.org

Cover Image: Drip torch used during Wildlife in the West brush pile burning

Back Cover: Rufous hummingbird,

Photo by Andrea DiNino

SAVE THE DATE

Summer Soirée IN THE Swan

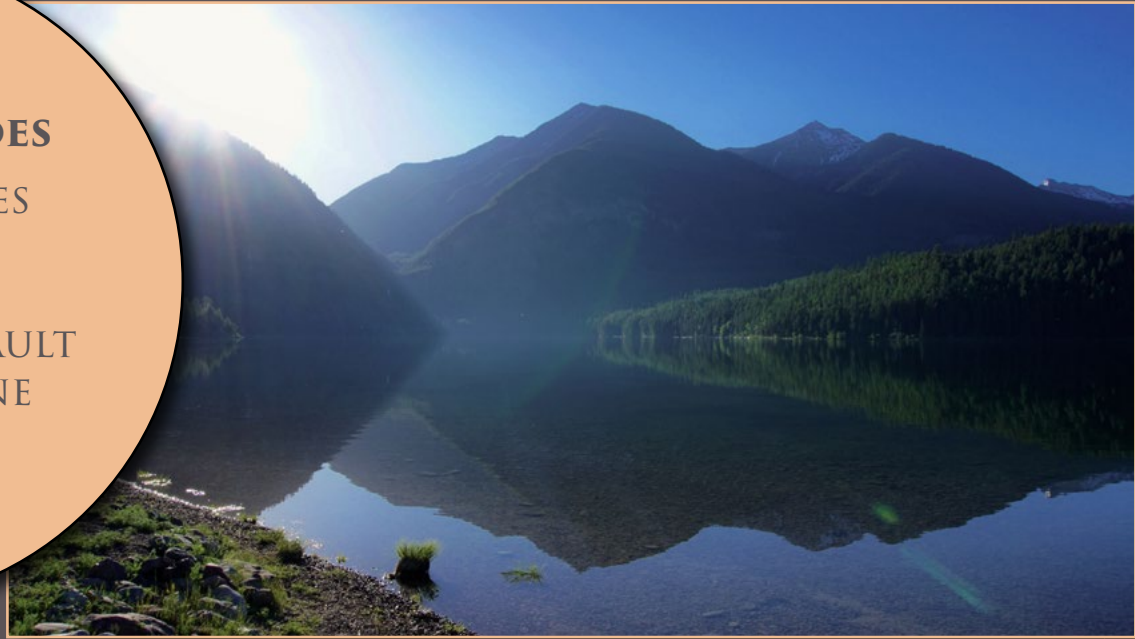
SUNDAY, JULY 10, 2022 • 3PM-6:30PM
HOLLAND LAKE LODGE • CONDON, MONTANA

\$50 EARLY BIRD TICKETS ON SALE MAY 1ST

\$75 EACH STARTING JUNE 1ST

TICKET INCLUDES

HORS D'OEUVRES
HOSTED BAR
LIVE MUSIC
BY JEFFREY FOUCAULT
SILENT + ONLINE
AUCTIONS



Registration information coming soon!

SPONSORED BY HOLLAND LAKE LODGE

ANNUAL REPORT

SWAN VALLEY CONNECTIONS SUMMARY BALANCE SHEET AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2021

SUMMARY PROFIT & LOSS 2021

ASSETS

Current Assets

Cash & Equivalents	509,510	508,566
Accounts Receivable	78,425	287,961
Inventory	4,698	4,864
Prepaid Expenses	11,513	14,748
Total Current Assets	604,146	816,139

Fixed Assets

Equipment	1,100	1,100
Vehicle	107,230	112,730
Land	282,000	282,000
Accumulated Depreciation	(56,711)	(77,559)
Total Fixed Assets	333,619	318,271

Investments

	37,075	42,476
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TOTAL ASSETS

	974,840	1,176,886
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LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

Liabilities

Current Liabilities

Accounts Payable	4,187	69,938
Payroll Liabilities	53,960	60,364
Tuition Deposits	10,700	16,390
Total Current Liabilities	68,847	146,692

Long Term Liabilities

Loans	87,957	48,893
Total Long Term Liabilities	87,957	48,893

Total Liabilities

	156,804	195,585
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Net Assets

Unrestricted Net Assets	593,870	696,283
Board Designated Net Assets	183,394	208,394
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	8,223	43,075
Permanently Restricted Net Assets	32,549	33,549
Total Net Assets	818,036	981,301

TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

	974,840	1,176,886
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Revenue:

	2020	2021
Government Agency Grants & Contracts	347,657	546,772
Tuition & Course Fees	4,720	135,235
Private Foundation & NGO Grants	159,600	89,709
Donations	177,033	242,796
Program Services, Events & Other	57,487	65,467
Investment Income/(Loss) & Interest	5,510	6,078
Total Revenue	752,007	1,086,057

Expenses:

Stewardship & Restoration	72,678	262,604
Education	80,498	121,751
Wildlife & Aquatics	126,900	151,648
Recreational Trails	49,667	56,712
Outreach & Communications	53,269	64,400
Public Info & Visitor Services	27,186	38,990
Conservation	44,698	17,123
Elk Creek & Swan Legacy Forest Mgmt	23,485	9,091
Total Program Expenses	478,381	722,319
Facilities	0	0
Administration & Fundraising	162,148	179,625
Depreciation	19,913	20,848
Total Expenses	660,442	922,792

Net Surplus/(Deficit)

	91,565	163,265
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Other Income:

Total Change In Net Assets	91,565	163,265
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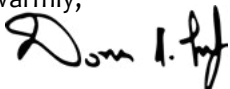
The financial position of Swan Valley Connections (SVC) improved in fiscal year 2021 despite tremendous challenges resulting from the COVID-19 global pandemic. SVC achieved multiple positive budget variances through prudent management of expenses, combined with Payroll Protection Program funds from Congress and the administration, and the continued generosity of private citizens, foundations, and business partners. SVC is a nonprofit organization exempt from federal income taxes under the provisions of the Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

As we turn our focus towards FY2022, SVC remains excited for its conservation efforts to be delivered via multiple channels.

A key project for this year includes the Swan River National Wildlife Refuge wetland restoration project. This is a prime example of how SVC expands the capacity of government agencies and other partners to achieve visible and impactful conservation work in the Swan Valley watershed. SVC's accredited collegiate programs continue to see steady enrollment. The Education Committee continues to refine the curriculum and address the learning appetite for private land stewardship best practices, water conservation, management of wildlife habitat, and community involvement for data collection to support agency management decisions. In summary, the board and staff seek to inspire conservation and connect a vibrant community of diverse peoples to invest in and benefit from our work.

Summarized financial information is shown above, and is a product of exceptional governance and oversight. SVC maintains and enforces financial policies and dual controls, ensuring the accuracy of reported financial condition and performance.

Warmly,



Donn Lassila, Treasurer

2021

landowners served and
projects completed
with SVC

FUELS REDUCTION



11 projects
179.5 acres

WETLAND/STREAM RESTORATION

1 project
1 acre

BEETLE REPELLENT



129 landowners
7170 packets
52 acres



SWAN VALLEY BEAR RESOURCES

43 containers
3 electric
fences

LAND STEWARDSHIP

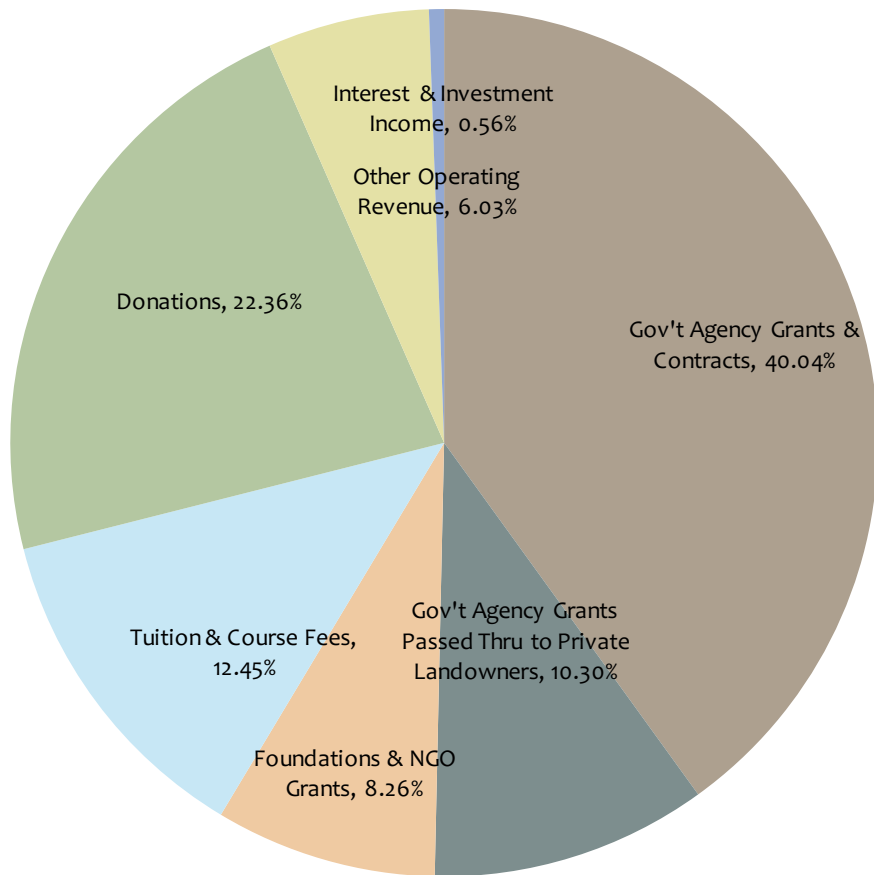
67 landowners
1492 acres

TOTAL

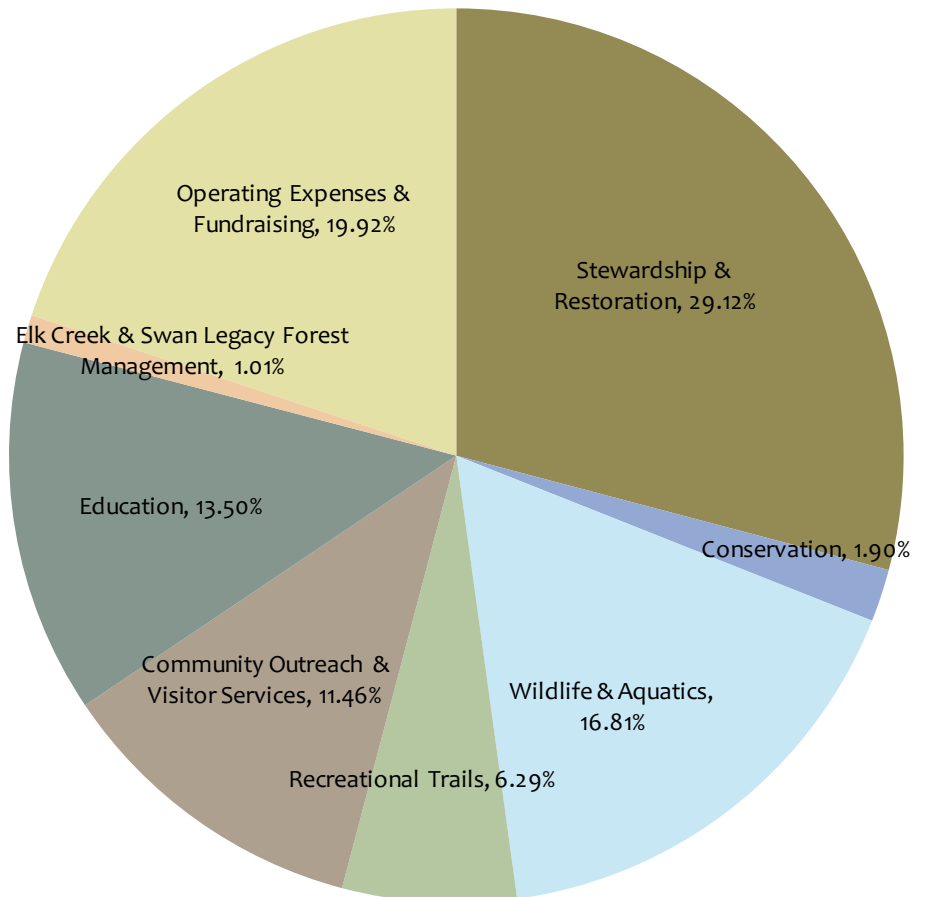
254 landowners
and projects

1725 acres
managed

2021 Revenue



2021 Operating Expenses



rare carnivore monitoring volunteers



wildlife tracks & sign class



wildlife in the west (forests & communities)



wildlife in the west with CSKT fisheries



native fish monitoring with USFS



swans and cygnet at glacier slough



summer soirée in the swan



community firewood day

2021 YEAR



wildlife tracks & sign
certification course



wildlife in the west (grizzly bear ecology)



arrowleaf balsamroot on swan legacy forest



mission mountains youth crew and
university of montana bird ecology lab



flight over the swan valley with ecoflight



landscape & livelihood backpacking trip



landscape & livelihood at the homestead



rare carnivore monitoring, photo by rob g. green

FOREST BATHING: MORE THAN A WALK IN THE WOODS

By Ellen Horowitz



Relaxed. Calm. Lighter. Refreshed. Energized. These are just a few of the words that people frequently use to describe how they feel following a forest bathing walk.

Also known as shinrin-yoku and forest therapy, forest bathing is a different way of experiencing nature than most people are used to. It's an opportunity to allow yourself to disconnect from everyday stressors, awaken your senses, and deepen your connection with the more-than-human-world. When you go out with a certified forest therapy guide, you learn how to slow down and tap into your senses, without any other goal or focus. Stress and concerns seem to slip away as you become present in the moment. You'll discover greater detail than you may have previously noticed in the objects you see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Slowing down allows your brain and your body to relax from the hectic pace it's used to. As simple as it sounds, it's remarkably effective.

Forest bathing is an evidence-based practice and part of a growing global wellness movement, backed by more than 30 years of scientific research on the physiological and psychological benefits of immersing yourself in nature. Research continues to reveal scientific evidence for what most of us already feel inside—that is, nature is good for us. Some would even say it's therapeutic.

The practice began in Japan in 1982, where it's known as shinrin-yoku. Shinrin means "forest" and yoku means "bath." It's a reference to taking in or (metaphorically speaking) bathing in the forest atmosphere. So, in case you were wondering, there's no need to bring a towel, just a willingness to slow down and engage your senses with the natural world. In Japan, the definition of shinrin-yoku has recently expanded to include "forest medicine," a form of preventative medicine.

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It's an opportunity to allow yourself to disconnect from everyday stressors, awaken your senses, and deepen your connection with the more-than-human world.

Among the health benefits associated with forest bathing are:

- Reduced blood pressure
- Reduced depression
- Reduced anxiety
- Reduced stress
- Improved mood
- Improved sleep
- Improved cognitive functioning
- Improved energy levels
- Boosted immune system functions

Interested in trying forest bathing? Ellen will be leading a three-hour session with us on Saturday, May 7th. Learn more and register at www.swanvalleyconnections.org/events

Not your typical walk in the woods

While forest bathing is inspired by shinrin-yoku, and most often thought of as a wellness practice, it's also about human connection to the natural world. During a forest bathing session, your guide will lead you on a slow, gentle walk or provide opportunities to sit quietly, while offering simple, sensory invitations to strengthen your awareness of and relationship with nature.

Invitations are similar to activities, except that you can adapt or modify them any way that feels comfortable to you. Each participant is free to follow their heart or body in that moment. An invitation might prompt you to observe what's in motion, to notice scents, or to sit with a tree or other being as if they're an old friend.

As we restore our connection with nature, we restore ourselves. In turn, as we deepen our relationship with nature, we often develop a greater appreciation and will to preserve the natural world.

Following each invitation, participants regroup to share some of the things they notice. These gatherings help to reinforce our experiences through social connection. There is no right or wrong way to share, no judgement, and silence is a perfectly acceptable response.

Expect to have fun, reawaken your sense of wonder and awe, experience the healing benefits of the forest, learn ways to incorporate forest bathing into your everyday life, and enjoy a cup of forest tea at the end of the session.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: Do I need to be a hiker to participate?

A: No. Forest bathing prides itself on not being a physically-demanding practice. Unlike many outdoor adventures, you do not need to be an experienced outdoors person or an athlete to take part in this practice.

Q: How far do you walk?

A: Some walks may cover one-half mile in distance. Often, we venture no farther than 100 to 200 yards from our starting place.

Q: Will you be sharing naturalist information during the forest bathing walk?

A: Forest bathing is not a nature walk, but rather, it's about your experience with nature. At the end of our session, there may be time for you to ask natural history questions.

Q: What should I bring for a 3-hour walk?

A: Bring a lightweight camp chair or stool, yoga mat or some kind of sit-upon. Bring water and a snack. Be prepared for any kind of weather – rain, sleet or sunshine. Dress much warmer than you think you need to, since we don't generate much heat while forest bathing. Carry some extra clothing layers (including hat and gloves) in a day pack or carry bag.



Opposite page and top right images by Antonio Ibarra-Olivares.
Bottom image by Ellen Horowitz

WHY CARE ABOUT WHITEBARKS? ALL ABOUT A SUBALPINE KEYSTONE SPECIES

By Eli Estey

As the progress of winter begins to slow and the snowpack recedes, the first chickadees sing their bright and simple songs in the valley. I step outside into a warmer-than-yesterday's predawn to be greeted by the squelch of mud beneath my boots and the high honks of Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*), the first of the season to fly overhead.

Beneath the snow, our valley's true hibernators grow restless and begin to emerge from the solace of their hibernaculum. Overwintering seeds prepare to sprout, and already-rooted perennial plants grow excited by the lengthening of the days. High above, in the still-harsh environment of the subalpine zone, the whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) reaches skyward and pumps its foliage full of fresh chlorophyll pigments in preparation of the sun-filled months to come.

As spring gives way to summer and the sun warms the slopes, the canopies of the whitebark pine offer shade to the rapidly dissipating snowpack. To some, the persistent snow fields of the subalpine zone offer nothing but an opportunity to post-hole through the mountains well into the summer. As frustrating as some may find these late-July snowpacks, for those of us who inhabit the mountainous Northwest, we appreciate how they shelter one of our most sacred resources: water.

The presence of healthy whitebark pine stands in the subalpine zone plays a key role in their preservation into the late season. This special tree species exhibits a characteristically broad, overarching canopy, a trait uncommon among other subalpine tree species such as the subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*). This canopy provides copious amounts of shade to our subalpine snowpack, allowing for a more gradual rate of snow melt. In turn, this can help to provide a reliable source of water, even in times of severe drought.

As spring turns to summer and the breeding birds have returned, dead whitebark pine trees, or "snags", serve

as excellent hosts for species such as the Northern flicker (*Colaptes auratus*). Flickers are known as a primary cavity nester, or a species capable of excavating their own cavities to be used as nests, a trait not present in all cavity-nesting species. In fact, the hollows excavated by Northern flickers are often utilized by species such as the mountain chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*) and mountain bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*), which are not typically capable of excavating their own cavities (making them secondary cavity nesters).

In addition to avian species, the cavities of whitebark pine stands may also be utilized by a variety of mammals. The Northern red squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) is one example of a mammalian species known to utilize whitebark pine cavities, though even mustelids such as the American marten (*Martes americana*) may utilize them in certain areas. Mammalian usage of whitebark pine cavities, however, has not been extensively studied.

On top of all of the ecosystem functions noted so far, these high elevation pines produce some of the most nutritious seeds of any conifer, and are especially high in nutritional value when compared to other species of the subalpine zone. These fat-rich seeds are utilized by a full suite of wildlife species ranging from the grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) and the Clark's nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*), to the Northern red squirrel. The production of this delicacy, however, does not only benefit those species which feed directly on the seed. This food source facilitates the flow of nutrients through the entire trophic system of this area. From bears to birds, and ground squirrels to badgers, whitebark pine holds together an important piece of our peaks. A piece that if removed, would have a cascading impact on the subalpine zone as we understand it.

White pine blister rust, a disease caused by an invasive species of rust fungus (*Cronartium ribicola*) is having a tremendous impact on the health and survivability of the vast



Above left: A fully mature whitebark pine cone before and after being foraged by an American red squirrel. Above right: The hind left track of an American badger on the lookout for Columbian ground squirrels, found beneath the canopy of a whitebark pine.



The bark of a young whitebark pine tree severely infected with white pine blister rust.

majority of whitebark pine trees. In addition to this disease, these trees are threatened by our rapidly changing climate, our history of suppressing wildfire (whitebark pine relies on wildfire disturbance), and the increase of mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) outbreaks; with the amount of challenges only rising, the future of the whitebark pine appears quite dismal. Currently, much research is being done to better our understanding of how whitebark pine is responding to these compounding threats, as well as how we can aid in this species' recovery through proactive management.

Humans have connected with whitebark pine, and the ecosystems which they support, for time immemorial. I hope that this article may inspire you to venture into the home of the whitebark pine and to take the time to observe—noticing the species interactions around you, searching out healthy and unhealthy trees, and beginning to form a stronger connection with this amazing and vulnerable species. Anecdotal observation and research can play a key role in bettering our understanding of these species, particularly in remote areas.

May you enjoy the coming of spring and find solace in facilitating new connections to your ecosystems.

THE DODGING DOGBANE

By Andrea DiNino

The dogbane tiger moth earned its name from its caterpillar-stage reliance on dogbane plants for food, along with its black-spotted yellow abdomen, which gives it a tigerish appearance as it flutters by you.

Also known as the Delicate cynthia, don't be fooled by its name (or its appearance) into thinking this dainty insect is a hopeless and defenseless morsel for birds and bats alike.

How do you stop the fatal attack of a predator who thrives in night hunting like the Big Brown Bat, when your own wingspan is only 30-40 millimeters?

When chemical signals fail to protect you, perhaps you learn its secret language to throw off its attack. Thought to use clicks similar to that of echolocation, dogbane tiger moths have been observed letting out these signals at the very last moment of a bat attack.

Whether they're actually interfering with the bat's frequency with their tiny, mighty clicks, or just sending out a convincing, self-slandering "You won't like me! I'm gross!" warning, they've found a way to deter their nighttime predators, allowing them to survive another day, so they can continue to flit around, climbing verdant blades of grass in the warmth of the setting spring and summer sun.

(Dogbane tiger moths are not extremely common in the Swan Valley, although this one was photographed here.)

2021 RARE CARNIVORE MONITORING RESULTS



Total Unique Wolverine Individuals: **13**
(7 male, 6 female)

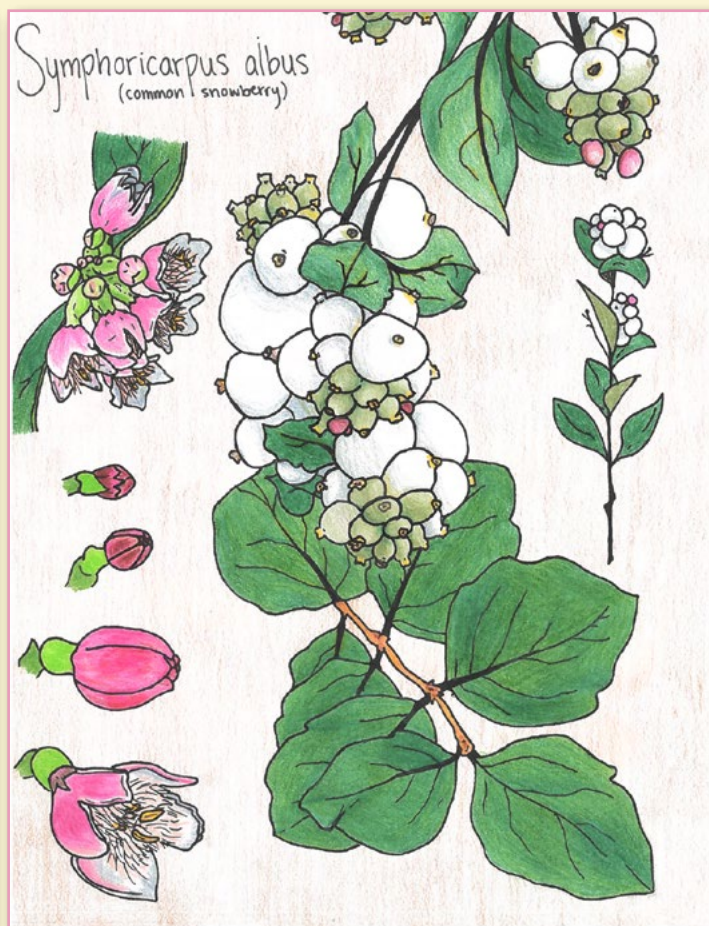
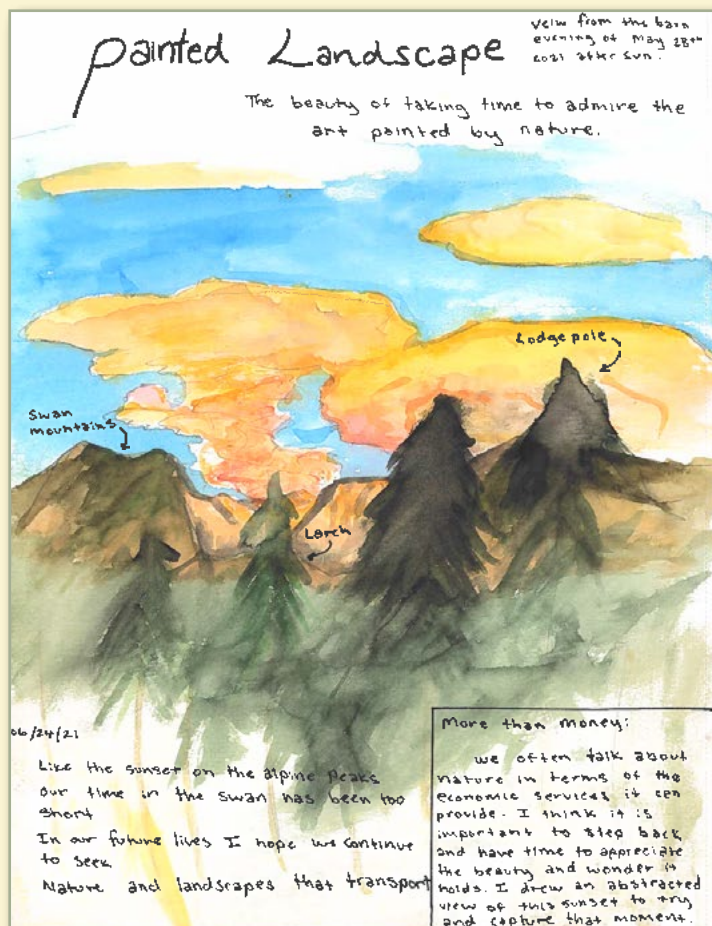
- One male wolverine was detected at different bait stations ranging about 40 miles, is nicknamed “Skunk Bear,” and was seen with a large chunk of fur missing from his back.
- Two wolverines were observed traveling together at a bait station

Total Unique Canada Lynx Individuals: **35**
(21 male, 14 female)

- We have seen a shift in distribution of lynx, finding them more established in the Swan and several ~15 year old burn areas throughout the SW Crown.
- No individuals from Rice Ridge Burn area showed up in any new areas.
- One male lynx crossed highway 83 in 2021

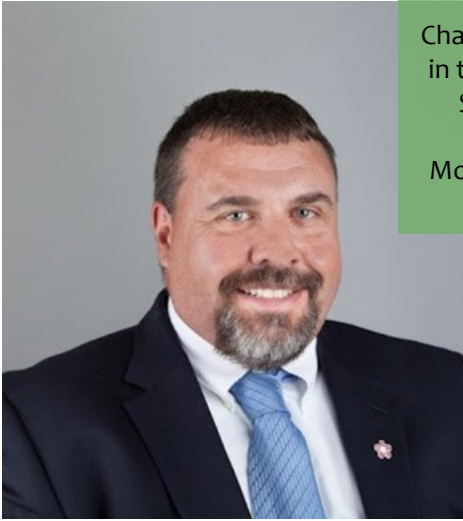
Thank you to all of our Southwestern Crown of the Continent Collaborative’s Rare Carnivore Monitoring Project partners-U.S. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy of Montana, Bureau of Land Management, and the Blackfoot Challenge—who help to make this monitoring work happen across ownerships and across a large landscape.

Flathead National Forest/GNAM



NEW IN 2022

We're thrilled to welcome three new board members and two new advisors to our team this year!
To learn more about them, visit www.swanvalleyconnections.org/board



CHAD BAUER

Chad has lived in Western Montana his entire life and has spent a tremendous amount of time in the Swan Valley for both recreation and work. Chad is the Municipal Manager for Republic Services, and further serves his community on the following boards: Montana Chamber Foundation Board, Missoula Chamber of Commerce, Missoula Education Foundation, Montana Solid Waste Contractor Association, and the Governor's appointed Water Pollution Control Advisory Council.



STEVEN KLOETZEL

Since April 2004, Steve has worked for The Nature Conservancy of Montana as their Western Montana Land Steward. Prior to joining TNC, he spent 10 years as a Restoration Ecologist with Bitterroot Restoration, Inc. of Corvallis, MT, and 3 years as Habitat Restoration Botanist for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation. Steve lives in the heart of the Blackfoot Valley, on a conserved 'ranchito' with his nature-immersed family



CHRISTIAN WOHLFEIL

Christian first came to Montana as a young teenager and moved for good to the Swan Valley in 1999. Christian has owned Holland Lake Lodge since 2002 and is awed by Montana's vast landscape and the fragility of the wilderness. He is a Leadership Missoula Alum who has volunteered with Defenders of Wildlife and as a judge with Blackstone's Ruffatto Business Startup Challenge. Christian currently serves on the Board of Directors of Youth Homes.

ADVISORS



GARY WOLFE is a lifelong outdoorsman and conservationist. His first professional natural resources job was as a seasonal ranger at Mount Rainier and Big Bend National Parks. Gary has also served as the second field director for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, executive director of Vital Ground and the Cinnabar Foundation, and as western Montana's representative on the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission.



TIM LOVE served as District Ranger for the Seeley Lake Ranger District on the Lolo National Forest for nearly twenty years. He is currently serving as Coordinator for the Montana Forest Collaboration Network & served as an adjunct, teaching forest planning at the College Of Forestry & Conservation at the University of Montana. Tim serves as a Public Information Officer with a Type 1 Incident Management Team.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR 2021 SUPPORTERS!

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MISSOULAGIVES

May 5 - May 6, 2022

Mark your calendars for a special 26-hour giving event! Missoula Gives is a one-day, online and live celebration of the Missoula community. It connects generous people with the causes they care about. It is a day to celebrate all that Missoula County is, and the role nonprofits play in making the community great. Your donations will support Swan Valley Connections by funding our monitoring, stewardship, and educational activities that enhance the resilience of the Swan Valley.

WWW.MISSOULAGIVES.ORG/ORGANIZATIONS/SWAN-VALLEY-CONNECTIONS

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

UPCOMING EVENTS

Please check our website or call (406) 754-3137 for the most up-to-date information, including COVID-19 protocols.

APRIL 22 (EARTH DAY)

Pile Burning Workshop on Swan Legacy Forest

APRIL 26 + 27

ECCA Blowdown Salvage
Volunteer Opportunity

APRIL 29 (ARBOR DAY)

Tree Planting Workshop on Swan Legacy Forest

MAY 4

Adopt-a-Highway and Grounds Cleanup Day
Volunteer Opportunity

MAY 4

Wildfire Preparedness
Zoom Presentation with Montana DNRC

MAY 5-6

Missoula Gives Community Fundraiser

MAY 7

Forest Bathing Workshop
with Ellen Horowitz

MAY 14

Global Big Day (Bird Count)

MAY 28

Wildlife in the West Begins!

JUNE 1

Zoom Presentation TBD

JUNE 4

Elk Creek Conservation Area Workday #1 - Riparian Restoration
Volunteer Opportunity

JUNE 11

Advanced Wildlife Tracks & Sign Class

JUNE 25

Annual Bear Fair (FERNDALE)

JULY 6

Zoom Presentation TBD

JULY 10

Summer Soirée in the Swan
Annual Fundraising Celebration at Holland Lake Lodge

