

THE CONFLUENCE

SUMMER 2022



— SWAN VALLEY —
CONNECTIONS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Back in 2010 or so, I had just reached Crystal Lake, at the time working as one of the Mission Mountains Wilderness rangers. The lake is accessible via three different trails, all of which are somewhat short (2-4 miles), and the most popular two are unique in that they lose a fair amount of elevation to reach the lake. This makes the descent to the lake somewhat of an enjoyable hike, but in my 12-year career as a ranger, I often found that it led people to abandon a lot of extra garbage and other items that they didn't want to pack back up the steep ridges to the trailheads when they departed. In all my years, I bet I packed more garbage and other items out of Crystal than all other lakes in the Missions combined.

As I rounded the last corner before the first major campsite (part of which is still closed off as a restoration site due to previous human impacts), I looked down to see a large piece of tin foil in the middle of the trail. People love to cook fish in foil over a campfire, and it's one of the most common pieces of garbage to find in the backcountry. People also think that if you throw it in the coals of a campfire, it will eventually burn up, but what actually happens is that it breaks down into hundreds of tiny pieces that some poor wilderness ranger fastidiously picks out. *Leave No Trace, folks.* Anyway, I digress.

As I bent over to pick up the large piece of tin foil, thinking that some critter like a bear had probably hauled it away from the campsite to clean the remaining morsels of fish stuck to the underside, I immediately dropped it when I saw what was underneath. A rather large log of unburied human waste lay under the foil, right in the middle of the trail, only 20 feet from the lakeshore. After fuming about the human race and some of the idiotic things we can do to places that deserve so much better, I took the time to haul the log with some branches off into the woods, away from the lake, and properly dug a hole and buried it. Sometimes life as a wilderness ranger felt like just a glorified backcountry janitor.

I did have to chuckle, as it was also obvious that the person had used the crinkly piece of tin foil to wipe, and I bet they regretted that decision as they waddled down the trail. While being a ranger was extremely rewarding and a great job overall, there were those days or moments like the one just described. There was also languishing in the monotony of pulling on a cross-cut saw thousands of times over the course of a day in hot, humid conditions, surrounded by a healthy population of blood-thirsty mosquitoes that were slowly sucking the soul out of you.

If you spend any amount of time recreating in the backcountry, or anywhere else for that matter, you've probably noticed an alarming trend over time, and in particular the last couple of years, as people re-discovered the outdoors during the Covid pandemic – some of our favorite places are getting loved to death.

I've watched the hordes of people trekking up to Glacier and Turquoise Lakes (the most popular area of the Missions) grow exponentially over the past 20 years. When I was a ranger as recent as 2014, it was considered over-crowded if the parking lot was full. Now, there is a string of cars lining the road for a half mile down from the trailhead on any weekend in July or August.



Swan Valley Connections

6887 MT Highway 83
Condon, MT 59826
p: (406) 754-3137
f: (406) 754-2965
info@svconnections.org

Board of Directors

Helene Michael, Chair
Mary Shaw, Vice Chair
Donn Lassila, Treasurer
Chad Bauer
Kathy DeMaster
Steve Kloetzel
Casey Ryan
Jessy Stevenson
Dan Stone
Greg Tollefson
Christian Wohlfeil
Tina Zenzola

Emeritus

Russ Abolt
Anne Dahl
Steve Ellis
Neil Meyer

Advisors

Kvande Anderson
Steve Bell
Jim Burchfield
Larry Garlick
Chris La Tray
Tim Love
Alex Metcalf
Pat O'Herren
Mark Schiltz
Mark Vander Meer
Gary Wolfe

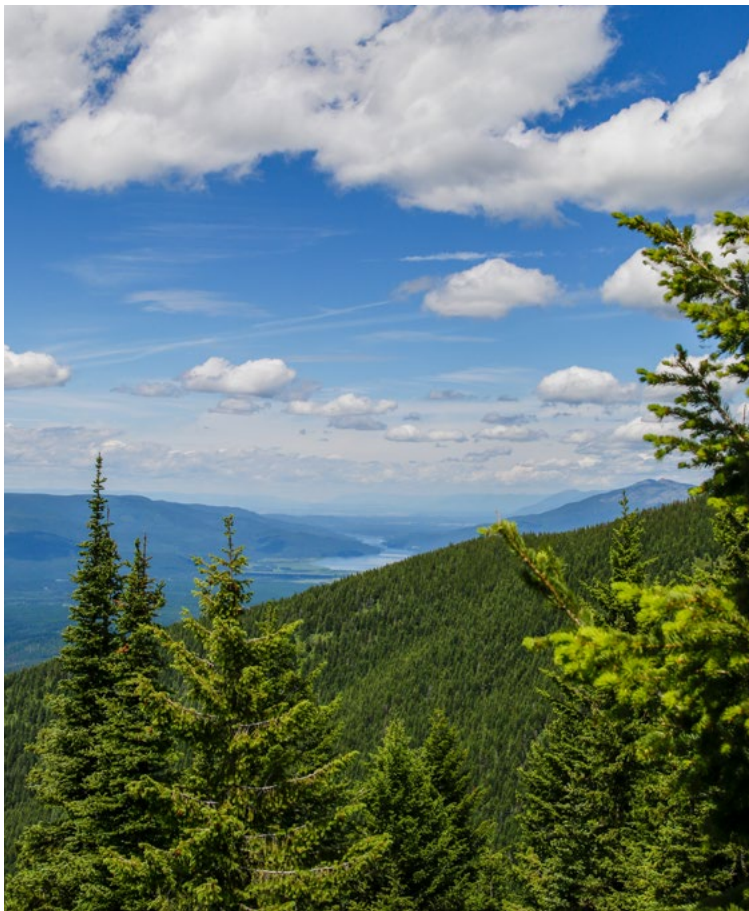
Staff

Rebecca Ramsey, Executive Director
Andrea DiNino
Eli Estey
Leanna Grubaugh
Luke Lamar
Sara Lamar
Mike Mayernik
Uwe Schaefer

The Confluence is published by Swan Valley Connections, a non-profit organization situated in Montana's scenic Swan Valley. **Our mission is to inspire conservation and expand stewardship in the Swan Valley.** Images by Swan Valley Connections' staff, students, or volunteers unless otherwise noted. All rights reserved to Swan Valley Connections. Change service requested.

SwanValleyConnections.org

Cover Image: Fly Fishing at Crystal Lake
Back Cover: Columbia spotted frog
Photos by Andrea DiNino



Given these trends, I often find myself pondering Aldo Leopold's quote in *A Sand County Almanac*: "...for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish."

Hopefully, with all of the recreational use of these areas comes a greater appreciation for the land and its conservation, translating into better stewardship, and even dictating who we elect to office. A recent University of Montana poll concluded that 45% of Montanans say conservation is a primary consideration in deciding who they'll vote for in elections. While that is a meaningful number, someday I'm hoping that percentage is more like the four out of five people who regularly visit and recreate on public lands, who say wildlife is an important part of their daily lives. In the meantime, this summer please pick up trash that others leave behind, pull weeds, thank your wilderness ranger (or any other land management professional) when you run into them, and let's try and leave this place better than we found it.

Happy Trails,

Luke Lamar, Conservation Director

BACKCOUNTRY MASTER NATURALIST

September 1-6, 2022

Spend four days and three nights in the backcountry, studying subalpine species such as whitebark pine, Clark's nutcracker, pika, and hoary marmots, while exploring Western Montana's Swan Mountains.

Backcountry tents, sleeping bags, sleeping pads all included if needed.

All group gear (water filters, cookware, stove, etc) provided.

Register at www.SwanValleyConnections.org/Montana-Master-Naturalist





REMEMBERING SALLY ALONG THE TOLLEFSON TRAIL

By Greg Tollefson

My sister, Sally Tollefson, was a lifelong summer resident of the Swan Valley. Our grandfather, George Sollid, a Norwegian immigrant and homestead locator in the Golden Triangle country north of Great Falls, had come upon the valley and Swan Lake while on a hunting trip sometime in the early 1920s. He was immediately taken with the place. It reminded him of the mountain and lake country in Telemark, his birthplace in Norway. The birches crowding the southern shore of the lake were especially reminiscent of the birches so common in that part of Norway. So he bought a small parcel on the south end of the lake and built a summer cabin there. He called the place “Birchwood.”

Sally and her siblings (myself included), were part of the third generation of an ever-growing family fortunate enough to experience the beauty and wonder of the Swan from childhood on.

Every summer, no matter where life took her, Sally returned to the Swan. In college, she found summer work at the Alpine Café (now the Laughing Horse Café) in Swan Lake. She was especially fond of hiking the trails and climbing the mountains of the Swan and Mission mountain ranges and exploring the sometimes almost impenetrable Swan River bottomlands. And, of course, she was a relentless huckleberry picker. The valley was a place of spiritual and physical renewal for Sally. For the

rest of us, Sally was something of a human embodiment of the spiritual beauty that the Swan Valley held for family and friends alike.

So, not long after Sally passed away in a tragic automobile accident on her way home from her summer stay at Swan Lake, family and friends decided they would like to create a lasting tribute to Sally that would reflect her love of the valley she had eagerly shared with many throughout her life.

The Nature Conservancy of Montana (TNC) had recently acquired a 392-acre parcel of land adjacent to the Swan River Wildlife Refuge and designated it their Swan River Oxbow Preserve. The name derives from the long U-shaped former main channel of the river that served as its centerpiece. Now cut off from the annual river flows, it continued to be fed by springs recharged by subsurface flows from nearby Lost Creek, and became a richly diverse wetland harboring many plant and wildlife species, and including a number of rare plants.

The most notable among those rare species is water howellia, *Howellia aquatilis*, the first plant in Montana to be listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as threatened. The plant grows in marshy areas next to the oxbow. An annual plant with white flowers, howellia requires very specific conditions for its survival. Two hundred eighteen of the 304 known populations of howellia in its historic range (Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon) are located within the Swan River drainage.



Sally and her mother, Helen Tollefson

• • •

The trailhead is located off Porcupine Creek Road, 2.5 miles south of Swan Lake. The first unsigned forest road heading north will take you to the parking lot where the trail begins at a closed gate. The kiosk is located approximately ¼ mile from the gate. The trail is best explored after July 1, unless you're wearing something waterproof on your feet.

Conversations with TNC resulted in an agreement to plan and build a trail that would terminate at a viewing stand on the edge of the oxbow. Peter Lesica, a good friend of Sally and coincidentally, the botanist who had first identified howellia in the oxbow, agreed to help plan a trail that would pass through a wide variety of vegetation, to demonstrate the rich diversity of the preserve.

With wonderful cooperation from TNC and the U.S. Forest Service, and help from the Montana Conservation Corps and many volunteers, the trail was completed in 1994, with an informational kiosk at its beginning and a viewing platform and an interpretive display at its terminus on the oxbow. The project was funded by donations from friends and family of Sally, and a fund for long-term stewardship of the trail was established with TNC.

Fast forward to 2019, when TNC transferred the Oxbow Preserve lands to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) as an addition to the Swan River National Wildlife Refuge. When the FWS assumed ownership, they recognized that the Sally Tollefson trail was a unique asset. A beautiful new sign was installed by FWS at the trailhead, but lacking field staff to conduct necessary trail maintenance activities, it became apparent that arrangements were necessary to transfer the trail stewardship funds to another non-profit with the interest and capability to maintain the trail. It soon became clear that Swan Valley Connections was the logical resting place for the fund, as it fit nicely with SVC's trail maintenance activities throughout the Swan Valley. The Tollefson family and TNC agreed to transfer the funds, and now SVC has assumed responsibility for the care and keeping of the trail.

On behalf of the Tollefson family, I can attest that we are pleased that what we call the "Sally Trail" is now under the sensitive and competent stewardship of SVC.

*Create your legacy
Please remember us in your will*

Donors are invited to become part of SVC's conservation legacy by including SVC in your will or as part of your estate plan. By doing so, you ensure the lasting impact of SVC's mission for generations to come and empower us to responsibly protect one of the last best, wild places on earth.

A legacy gift is more than a donation.
It is an expression of your desire to make a profound difference in the stewardship of all lands in the Swan Valley of Montana.

For further information, please contact Rebecca Ramsey, SVC's Executive Director at rebecca@svconnections.org.

WHERE THERE IS ALSO WILDNESS

By Sofia Fall, Wildlife in the West Alumna

Before I came to Montana, when I thought of the West I thought of wildness. And I know that wildness is such an empty word, but what I mean is wild landscape, veined with rivers instead of roads, mountains scraping skyline, populated by both animals and human beings that didn't seem able to thrive in my own lower, middle-country home. It makes no sense, but I also thought of preservation here as somehow inherent: the West was wild, and it could contain wild things that nowhere else could.

There is something so logical about creatures like elk and bull trout on this landscape. Wolves seem meant to howl in the mountains, as they do not in the flat lands of my home. A west bereft of grizzlies and wolverine seemed a west also bereft of ferocity, of the essential mythology that surrounds this region still. In a place that's wild, it seemed to me, wildlife management must be more important, more understood, than in the small city, fringed in pasture, where I'm from. I always felt that management was a matter of biology combined with education, that with enough research, funding, effort, outreach, recovery for any species was possible, that coexistence with large carnivores was a question of *how*, and not *what for*? I did not really know ecology, and I was not a scientist, but I knew how human beings can love and desire a landscape, and I thought I understood how complicated that desire could turn out to be.

I've always thought wildlife management was complex, that no biology was undeniable, and I have a conviction that human systems and natural systems should be seen as intersecting and combined, instead of inherently separate. But before I came here, I thought there were obvious ways to manage nature and the creatures in it. I thought the largest obstacles existed in the lack of public information, funding, and failed implementation. And those are no small hurdles, but I didn't understand how much more intricate was the question of what the management itself should even be. I thought that natural things had more of a right to use the land than humans did. I thought we should be trying to freeze ecosystems, to reset them, take them back to where they used to be before we ever wandered into them. And I thought that all the species we would learn about were fundamental pieces of the West's wildness, which did not exactly make them invincible but seemed like it could or should protect them from ordinary human desiccation and greed.

Even now, I don't think it's wrong to say the West, at least the West of these jagged mountains, this Crown of the Continent, contains so small amount of wildness. I've seen a little of it: black bears on the roadside, deer in every meadow, bull elk from a mountaintop, antelope on a green range. At home I think about the water, how everything that's alive seems to lead back to the Great Lakes. But here at night before I fall asleep I think of the way the wolves howled back on a Tuesday evening. And I have never been in a cathedral before, but I think that with the choir singing it must sound lonely and large and low like that. That's a wild sound, if such a thing exists. But mostly, the West is just another landscape, peopled with families and cities and

communities no more wild than anywhere else. It's a mistake to believe otherwise. And I understand better now how it is difficult to be human among wild things.

Because I have seen the wildlife, and it's astounding, and I'm amazed and thrilled by it over and over again. But I have also met so many people here, and it's their voices I keep replaying in my mind. What I will most take away is the importance of their communities, how much the people who live here influence and matter to the management of their ecosystems.

At home it was so easy for me to denounce the beef industry, but now I've seen a ranch where cattle grow, and I've spoken to the family who raises them, and I'm not sure who's right anymore, but it isn't me.

I understand more ecology and policy than I ever have. I could draw a map of this watershed on a coffee shop napkin, but the more I know of these things, the less sure I am of what to do with them.

I know so many ways to manage wolves, but I couldn't tell you which is the best one. I think the Endangered Species Act is a good law, and I think it's a bad one. I think grizzlies should be hunted, and I think they shouldn't. I think lake trout should be extirpated, and I understand why they should not be. I don't think that we should stock the streams with rainbow trout, but I understand the reasons why we do. I've been to the Rocky Mountain Front, and I can tell you it's windy there, but I couldn't say how to learn to love grizzlies or how many wires to string your electric fence with.

There are words I keep coming back to: riparian, restoration, litigation, easement, landscape, home. I thought I knew these words, but now I understand them differently. I understand how you can want wolves to exist, but not where you do. How you can think them at once cunning, lovely, fearsome, good. I understand why grizzlies shouldn't be where backyards are. I understand what constitutes a livelihood, and how much it matters to people when the natural order changes.

I think science is opaque. Facts on their own don't mean anything if there is no one to interpret them. I've changed my mind. I think humans have a right to this land as much as the lynx or grizzlies do, but I think we also have an obligation to use it well, to cut timber but not all of it, take the brook trout but not bull trout, and listen, and pay attention to the ecosystems, be more careful than we've ever been. I don't think it makes sense to try to return the world to how it was before humans interrupted. Because we did interrupt, and we should try to build infrastructure that allow us to coexist with ecosystems instead of only coincide.

I've learned this: wildlife management is human management. And that means humans must decide what is best for creatures and the environment we share with them, and that's terrifying, because we do not often choose correctly. But I hope that means what we do to this earth can be infinitely more remarkable too. Because I've seen culverts now that cup instead of choke the water, and roads closed to let cubs grow, a stretch of Owl Creek running deeper than before, forests left to burn, mounds of carcasses kept safe, ranchers who smile when you say the word "wolf." These are remarkable things.

Some lessons remain simple. If you asked me what I've learned I can say this:

BE A GIRL IN MICHIGAN WHO LIKES THE WOODS. HEAD WEST.
STOP BEYOND THE BIG SKY, BUT BEFORE YOU REACH THE SEA.
DISCOVER A THIN VALLEY WHERE IT'S NEVER DARK.
IN THE MOUNTAINS, LOOK AROUND YOU.
LEARN TO RECOGNIZE THE WOLF SCAT, BEAR TRACKS, ELK RUBS,
EVERY CLAW MARK ON THE ASPEN TREES.
LIKE THE LARCHES AND THE RAGGED LANDSCAPE.
SMELL STICKY NEEDLES OF EACH GRAND FIR.
STAKE YOUR TENT ON A STORMY HILL.
WHEN YOU'RE IN THE WOODS, THINK WOLF, COME CLOSER.
HOWL BACK.

KILL TEN MOSQUITOES EVERY DAY.
DIG EARTHWORMS FROM THE GARDEN, TAKE A BEARING, RECORD SPECIES
IN A NOTEBOOK AS YOU'RE GOING-TO-THE-SUN.

REMEMBER EVERYTHING.
REMEMBER NEW GULO TRACKS IN OLD SNOW, YELLOW MOUNTAIN LION EYES IN DARKNESS,
SILVER WHITEFISH FLASHES IN A FREEZING STREAM.
REMEMBER SKELETONS OF WHITEBARK PINE ON AN ARCHED HORIZON,
WINDY PINE BUTTE, BANDED FENS, AND ALL THE RIVERS
RUNNING GREEN WITH GLACIAL FLOUR.
REMEMBER CLIMBING.
REMEMBER EVERY PERSON YOU HAVE MET
AND HOW AND WHY THEY MAKE THIS EARTH INTO A HOME.
IMAGINE A LIFE LIKE THAT.

WHEN I GO BACK, IT WILL BE TO AN ENDLESS FRESHWATER HORIZON,
BUT THE MOUNTAINS WILL BE MISSING FROM THE SKY,
AND WHEN I'M IN THE WOODS I'LL FEEL A HUNGER FOR THE ANIMALS
THAT USED TO ROAM THERE AND A DARKER, DIFFERENT SKYLINE
THAT'S REMEMBERED BY THE NEW ONE STILL.
I'LL BE A SCIENTIST. I WILL WRITE ABOUT RANCHES AND WOLVES.
WHEN I THINK ABOUT PLACE AND WILDLIFE, I WILL ALSO THINK ABOUT COMMUNITY.
I'LL SEE THE FOREST DIFFERENTLY.
NOW THE WOODS AND NOT JUST WATER ARE ALIVE TO ME.
I FEEL CONFUSED ABOUT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT, BUT I'M EXCITED AT THIS CONFUSION.
THE ISSUES I SEE ARE MORE COMPLICATED,
BUT THEIR ANSWERS HAVE MORE POSSIBILITY.
I WILL NOT ASK SIMPLE QUESTIONS.
I WILL TRY TO BUILD A LANDSCAPE THAT HAS SPACE FOR HUMAN BEINGS
WHERE THERE IS ALSO WILDNESS.

HOME TO A GLOBAL RARITY

By Sara Lamar

Those of us lucky enough to live, work, and play in the Swan Valley know what a special place it is. Pointing a finger at exactly what makes this place special, however, can sometimes be difficult. If you were to mill around the Mission Mountains Mercantile on a Saturday and ask tourists and locals alike, “What makes the Swan Valley so unique?” you’d likely hear answers such as “the stunning views” or “diversity of wildlife” or “rural character.” While all of this is true, what you likely won’t hear is that the Swan is home to one of the rarest aquatic plants in the world. Rare aquatic plants don’t normally inspire the same level of excitement from the public as rare charismatic mammals, such as grizzlies and wolverines, but just wait until you hear about water howellia.

Howellia aquatilis, or water howellia, is a member of the Bellflower family (Campanulaceae), and is endemic to the Pacific Northwest, with about two-thirds of known occurrences in Montana. This means that the Swan Valley is home to about seventy five percent of the global population of water howellia. It’s no coincidence that this aquatic annual has an affinity for the wettest watershed in the state. Water howellia depend on vernal pools, which are seasonal wetlands that hold rain and snowmelt in the spring and recede or completely dry up in the late summer or fall. These vernal pools are found within “glacial kettles,” or depressions carved into the valley floor by a retreating glacier around 12,000 years ago. This glacial history lends to an uncommon life history.

Water howellia have two types of flowers. The first are “cleistogamous,” which means they remain closed and self-pollinate, in this case underwater. The second are “chasmogamous,” which are flowers that open and allow for pollination. These white flowers are about half the size of a pencil eraser and bloom at the water’s surface in mid-July. The resulting seeds from both types of flowers germinate once the pool dries up and they are exposed to the air and variable fall temperatures. These germinated seeds then overwinter underneath the snow and wait for the pools to fill with water the following spring. The number of plants in a particular wetland is determined by how much the pool dried out the previous year, as seeds cannot germinate under water.

Due to this highly specific habitat association and threats of wetland degradation, water howellia was listed as a threatened species in 1994 under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). After nearly two decades to conserve wetlands, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) removed water howellia from the ESA on June 16, 2021. Upon delisting, USFWS must work cooperatively with Montana (and other states where water howellia is found) to monitor water howellia for at least five years to ensure the species is self-sustaining. To achieve this, a proposed monitoring program has been put together by the Montana Natural

Heritage Program (MTNHP) and the U.S Forest Service (USFS) Flathead National Forest (FNF). In this proposal, MTNHP and the FNF will survey at least 30 water howellia ponds for two consecutive years to establish baseline population information. If approved, the monitoring will take place once in the summer and once in fall, and survey data collected will include water howellia abundance, water depth, photographed conditions, and ambient temperature. In addition to MTNHP and FNF staff, Swan Valley Connections will join these surveys, along with a group of tribal high school students from the Mission Valley known as the Mission Mountains Youth Crew. Through this collaborative monitoring project, we hope to increase awareness about this unique plant and celebrate the little things that make our valley special.



Water howellia, Photo by Maria Mantas

TO RECOGNIZE, TREASURE, AND INSPIRE: HONORING THE ELK CREEK CONSERVATION AREA

By Patrick O'Herren

Compared to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Missoula County came late to efforts to conserve the valuable resources found across western Montana that the Tribes have treasured since time immemorial. However, in the early 2000s, Missoula County created an Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee (OLC), composed of rural landowners, to help elected officials address the conservation needs of rural communities, and to find ways to honor the efforts of rural landowners who are committed to protecting the resources that make what-is-now-called Missoula County so special.

Shortly before Covid struck, the OLC, of which I am fortunate to chair, unanimously suggested to the county commissioners that there was a long overdue and pressing need to acknowledge the efforts of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and local Swan Valley residents, who have protected and now steward a section of land known as the Elk Creek Conservation Area. On May 10, 2022, the commissioners adopted a proclamation and presented to the Tribes and to Swan Valley Connections (SVC) an award commemorating the efforts of these two special entities, one a sovereign nation and one a non-profit. It is equally significant to note that the commissioners also later placed a copy of the award in public view in the Sophie Moiese Room of the Missoula County Courthouse.

Tribal Council members and staff, together with SVC staff and board members, gathered with the county commissioners and members of the OLC for a communal meal and honoring on

the 10th in the Swan Valley. The purpose of that gathering was threefold:

First, to officially and publicly **recognize** the tremendous efforts of people like Anne Dahl of the Swan Ecosystem Center and Tom McDonald of the Tribal Council and the Tribal Natural Resources Department, as well as others, for their efforts to reacquire these ancestral lands, and to protect and steward this land, the air, water, amphibians, fish, and other wildlife encompassed in the ECCA;

Second, to acknowledge and **treasure** the partnership of the Tribes and SVC for their acquisition and ongoing stewardship of the land;

Third, and perhaps most importantly, to **inspire** those, who come after the many of us with more yesterdays than tomorrows, to continue or even accelerate efforts to protect our threatened natural resources, so coming generations can have celebrations similar to the one we experienced on May 10th.

For future generations, the Tribes and SVC have committed through a conservation easement to protect in perpetuity the ECCA and the critters who call it home. For that, we should all be eternally grateful. Please read on to discover the many reasons why the Commissioners recently celebrated the work of the Tribes, SVC, and Connections' precursor, the Swan Ecosystem Center.



From left to right: Missoula County Commissioner David Strohmaier, SVC Executive Director Rebecca Ramsey, CSKT Council Chairman Tom McDonald, Missoula County Commissioner Juanita Vero, Missoula County Commissioner Josh Slotnick



ELK CREEK CONSERVATION AREA



Riparian Restoration Fencing Workday



Noxious Weed Pull Workday



Mission Mountains Youth Crew +
University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab



PROCLAMATION

MISSOULA COUNTY, MONTANA

WHEREAS, Missoula County is located within the homelands of the Confederated Salish, Upper Kalispel and Kootenai Tribes; and

WHEREAS, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and Missoula County have a longstanding, mutually respectful and supportive professional and personal relationship; and

WHEREAS, Missoula County has long supported community organizations such as the Swan Ecosystem Center and its successor Swan Valley Connections that actively maintain and protect conservation resources for generations of human and wild inhabitants of the County; and

WHEREAS, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Swan Ecosystem Center partnered in a unique and challenging purchase of lands important to the partners and to the health of the Swan Valley watershed now known as the Elk Creek Conservation Area; and

WHEREAS, this partnership has protected hundreds of acres of valuable ancestral forests, wetlands, riparian and riverine lands that are unique in Missoula County; and

WHEREAS, the partnership has placed these lands under a conservation easement that will protect the lands, waters and wildlife habitat in perpetuity; and

WHEREAS, the partnership provides valuable local educational opportunities for indigenous and nonindigenous students to learn the history of the land and its value for future generations; and

WHEREAS, the partnership provided an opportunity for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Bonneville Power Administration to advance their resident fish protection objectives, as well as to help protect ancestral lands important to the history and future of the Tribes and tribal/federal conservation objectives; and

WHEREAS, The Nature Conservancy, Montana Land Reliance, Vital Ground Foundation, United States Forest Service, Clark Fork Coalition, American Public Land Exchange Company and neighboring landowners all support the partnership and its acquisition and stewardship of the Elk Creek Conservation Area and encourage Missoula County to recognize this award-winning project; and

WHEREAS, the Missoula County Open Lands Citizen Advisory Committee unanimously recommended that the Missoula County commissioners recognize the outstanding work of the partnership in acquiring and managing the Elk Creek Conservation Area; and

WHEREAS, the Elk Creek Conservation Area is truly a community partnership and success story that took years to develop and bring to fruition; and

WHEREAS, Elk Creek is typically the single most important bull trout spawning stream in the Swan River Valley; and

WHEREAS, the Elk Creek Conservation Area partnership helped launch the Montana Legacy Project, which protected an additional 80,000 acres of land in the Swan Valley; and

WHEREAS, the Elk Creek Conservation Area partnership has helped neighbors protect an additional 1,000 nearby privately owned acres under conservation easement; and

WHEREAS, the Elk Creek Conservation Area partnership inspires others to build meaningful and necessary relationships with communities and organizations stewarding this land since time immemorial.

Now therefore, we, the Missoula Board of County Commissioners, hereby recognize and highly praise the work of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Swan Ecosystem Center and its successor, Swan Valley Connections, for their joint efforts to sustain valuable natural resources in the Swan Valley through their partnership in acquiring and managing the Elk Creek Conservation Area of Missoula County. We further urge all Missoula County residents and visitors to recognize the efforts of the partnership to work together for the benefit of critters large and small to make the Swan Valley a place that future generations will continue to appreciate and treasure.



— SWAN VALLEY —
CONNECTIONS

6887 MT Hwy 83
Condon, MT 59826-9005

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
CONDON, MT
PERMIT #16

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

JULY 16

Landowner Stewardship Fair

JULY 30

Swan River Wildlife Tracks, Sign, & Ecology

AUGUST 3

Watershed Ecology

Zoom Presentation with Nathan Korb

AUGUST 5-10

Montana Master Naturalist Course

AUGUST TBD

Swan River National Wildlife Refuge Tour

AUGUST 13

Huckleberry Festival (SWAN LAKE)

AUGUST 19-26

Summer Wildlife Tracks & Sign

College Credit + Certification Course

AUGUST 27

Swan River Cleanup

Volunteer Opportunity

SEPTEMBER 1-6

Backcountry Master Naturalist

SEPTEMBER 7

Ungulates and Chronic Wasting Disease

Zoom Presentation with Jessy Coltrane

SEPTEMBER 10

Subalpine Wildlife Tracks & Sign

SEPTEMBER 30

Elk Creek Conservation Area Workday #2 - Riparian Restoration

Volunteer Opportunity

OCTOBER 5

Fungi

Zoom Presentation with Tim Wheeler

OCTOBER 7

Community Firewood Day

Volunteer Opportunity

NOVEMBER 2

Rare Carnivore Monitoring Update

Zoom Presentation with Luke Lamar and Mike Mayernik

WWW.SWANVALLEYCONNECTIONS.ORG