



THE CONFLUENCE



— SWAN VALLEY —
CONNECTIONS

SUMMER 2018

Ah, the dog days of summer... Where does the time go? It's been nearly a year since I've moved to the Swan Valley and stepped in to my role here at Swan Valley Connections. Every day brings a new observation, a new lesson and a new adventure.

The landscape is ever-changing. Since our last newsletter, the snow melted and left seasonal streams and ponds – perfect habitat for mosquitos! While lamenting the 5:00 am buzzing in my ear, I was reminded by one of our brilliant Wildlife in the West students that mosquitos are a primary food source for bats, among other creatures. I was grateful to that young woman for reminding me we do indeed all have a place and a purpose.

All too soon, it seemed the season began to change again with the streams and ponds being absorbed into the soil and nourishing the wildflowers, tall grasses, and to my delight... morel mushrooms in the Rice Ridge burn, and soon to follow - the huckleberries! It is so exciting to harvest the bounty of the earth, by the cycles of the seasons. It is yet another reminder of place and purpose.

We've also continued to see change in the organization. We bid a fond farewell to Sara Halm as she heads off to pursue her graduate degree at Idaho State University, and we welcomed University of Montana graduate and Wyss Scholar, Lindsay Wancour to the team as our new Field Programs Coordinator. Additionally, we have welcomed Rob Rich into the Aquatic Programs Coordinator position and Andrea DiNino into the Recruiting and Marketing Coordination role. These young professionals bring with them talent, passion, and new perspectives! New people in a new place with new purposes.



Through the generous help of Mercedes Benz of Billings, who provide support for conservation, education, and communities in every corner of our great state, we bought two new vehicles for the organization. Also, through a very generous financial donation, we have been able to purchase new equipment for our watershed education programs that will allow enhanced study of our waterways and all who live in and around them. These additions will help us to better give a sense of place and purpose to our college students.

You too can help us maximize our purpose in this incredible place! We depend on your financial support, and in this issue, you'll find a wish list of tangible needs we have as well. Have an idea of something else from your place that helps our purpose? Give me a call, stop in for a visit, or email me and let's talk about it!

I continue to be overwhelmed with gratitude for my purpose in this beautiful place and for your continued support. I can't thank you all enough for your dedication to conservation and education here in the Swan Valley.

Warmly,

Rebecca Ramsey, Executive Director



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The Confluence is published by Swan Valley Connections, a non-profit organization situated in Montana's scenic Swan Valley. Our mission is to conserve the intact ecosystems within and surrounding the Swan Valley and to strengthen the connection between people and the natural world through collaboration and experiential learning. Images by Swan Valley Connections' staff, students, or volunteers unless otherwise noted. All rights reserved to Swan Valley Connections. Change service requested.

SwanValleyConnections.org

ANDREA DININO

RECRUITING & MARKETING COORDINATOR

Andrea grew up on the east coast where she attained a Bachelor's in journalism and explored her passion in film photography. She relocated to the west coast after school, working in branding and social media in San Diego for two and a half years. She has always had a love for travel, wildlife and adventure, and after somewhat randomly finding an off-grid cabin in Condon, MT on Craigslist, she packed her car three weeks later and traded the ocean for the mountains. It didn't take long for Andrea to fall in love and feel at home in Montana, where she has worked remotely in social media marketing and freelance photography for the past two years. She enjoys connecting to and learning as much as she can about her home in the Swan Valley and spends her free time being active outdoors and volunteering at a raptor rehabilitation center.



ROB RICH

AQUATIC PROGRAMS COORDINATOR

Rob first encountered Swan Valley Connections during a 2006 Winter Field Studies course. That experience helped forge his aims to be a naturalist, educator, and writer conserving biodiversity and ecosystem health. Beyond his work for watershed-based nonprofits that restore Atlantic and Pacific salmon (in Maine and Washington, respectively), Rob has been a citizen-scientist on the Isle Royale Wolf-Moose Project, and on phenology initiatives surveying forest songbirds, raptors, bumblebees, and native plants. A former board member of the Natural History Network, Rob has cultivated wonder and stewardship through his work with Whatcom Land Trust, the North Cascades Institute, and the 10,000 Years Institute, as well as through writing for *Earth Island Journal*, *High Country News*, *Camas*, and others. He is particularly devoted to beaver conservation, and served as a founding coordinator of Whatcom Beaver Partners, an independent citizens' group devoted to this goal. Rob is glad to be back in the Swan Valley, and can often be found exploring the area's abundant creeks and wetlands where he is most at home.



LINDSAY WANCOUR

FIELD PROGRAM COORDINATOR

As a result of a quarter-life crisis, Lindsay left her home state of Michigan to head west to Montana in 2013. She joined a conservation corps and spent the better part of two years backpacking and conducting trail work. Since her flight from Michigan, she has worked in several states working with youth in experiential education and conservation. Though, whenever she was away, she missed the beauty and community in Montana. Lindsay's solution to missing Montana was to attend graduate school at the University of Montana. Lindsay has a Master of Science in Environmental Studies, with a certificate in Natural Resource Conflict Resolution. Collectively, these experiences have exposed her to her true passion; community engagement in watershed health. Lindsay is excited to start the next chapter of her life in the beautiful Swan Valley working alongside an equally passionate team!



By Andrea DiNino

Growing up in Connecticut, I never really experienced public lands on the level I do now. Once I moved out to Montana two and a half years ago, I started to get it a little more. Being able to walk out of my cabin and into the woods without another soul around...that kind of opportunity became important to me. "Public lands" started to mean something more to me; I cared enough about them that I knew I didn't want them taken away, but if I'm being completely honest, I don't know that I felt connected enough that I'd take real action to fight for them. And then, this past month I hiked into the Bob...

Nine days of uninterrupted nature. Of trying to figure out what's making that sound, what kind of bird is doing that funny mating dance, why does this tiny tadpole look like he's smiling... Uninterrupted book reading. Uninterrupted thought and introspection.

Most folks just don't get these kinds of opportunities anymore in our ultra-connected societies.

At one point we wondered about what might have changed out in the world while we were gone for over a week, but truthfully, I didn't really care. I knew there would be some bad news, maybe some good news, but for the most part things probably stayed exactly the same and we had missed out on nothing.

It's easy to get caught up in this feeling of urgency, of not doing enough, not being enough (even in a remote town like Condon, Montana). It's so important to remove ourselves from that kind of environment and mindset every now and then.

Having lived in the Swan and spent time in the woods with my friends from SVC long before I started working here, I've been fortunate enough to learn a lot about our incredible landscape and its inhabitants. I feel so much more connected when I walk down a wooded path now. I notice things I would've surely overlooked in the past. I can find clues to help me create a story of what happened before I passed through. I'm (occasionally) able to decipher tracks and scat and guess what animal might have taken down the deer or elk scattered amongst the brush.



Floating down the South Fork of the Flathead River



Looking towards the Swan Range from the top of Haystack Mountain

The world starts to come alive more, and I'm able to better appreciate my place in it.

There are moments I'll never forget- from hearing wolves howling outside of our tent to being startled by the booming of a nighthawk zipping by as we hung our bear bag to doing yoga on a sandy riverside nook next to days-old wolf tracks. One of my favorite memories, though, was summiting Haystack Mountain (a deceptively challenging feat compared to what we perceived from our campsite over 4,000 feet below the peak). When we reached the ridgeline I commented on the plump, wolverine-sized marmots enjoying the view with us at the top only to be surprised by an actual wolverine loping by with the White River and surrounding peaks in the background while we sipped our instant coffee next to the Chinese Wall. It was a "someone pinch me" kind of moment.

It's sad that this kind of disconnection has to be forced sometimes (i.e. the option of cell service has to be taken away), but when it is, man does it feel good. And oh so healthy. Not once did I worry about what I looked like - it was all about how I felt, which was amazing aside from the annoyance of constant bug bites and a couple of toe blisters. But I'm a firm believer in having to suffer a little every now and then to really appreciate life anyway; it's all part of the adventure.

All in all, life along the South Fork was something out of a dream. I already miss the routine of leisurely floating down the river (with some exciting rapids here and there) and pulling over to have a snack or fish or set up camp wherever we saw fit. And I don't want to ever lose the opportunity to travel these miles in the woods, these places we're allowed to just be.

By Rob Rich

Jan Moore will never forget waking to the sound of a grizzly cub wailing with its mother thundering inside a culvert-shaped trap. It was the furious attraction of family denied freedom by inches of metal. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Grizzly Bear Specialist Tim Manley was trying to relocate the whole family together, and as the panicked calls reported the pre-dawn rage, he could only sigh and get dressed for another day on the job. It was but the latest reminder of the obvious fact: "easy" and "bear management" do not belong in the same sentence. Especially bear management after the problem, which for these bears was a humble chest freezer stashed outside a house. Though the freezer's walls and contents were hard, bears can smell through and open a latchless door, and an elk steak popsicle is apparently quite a treat.

Jan and her husband Chris had previously attended Swan Valley Connections' annual Spring Bear Wake-Up Social near their Ferndale home, and they knew that such "attractants" – freezers, livestock, birdfeeders, bees, fruit trees, and more – were enough to lure bears from miles away. A chance taste might not be of consequence were it not such an addictive habit, one that individual bears learn, pass on to others, and come to expect.

That's why US Forest Service (USFS) Wildlife Biologist Mark Ruby and SVC decided this vicious cycle – which so often led to dead bears and scared people – had to end. In 2008, they allied in a partnership called Swan Valley Bear Resources (SVBR), which quickly became a local beacon for the bear aware movement that's sweeping the West. A decade later, SVBR continues to meet real needs with real expertise including outreach for the public, technical assistance for private landowners, and conflict monitoring for agency wildlife managers. SVBR's free container/dumpster loaner program is among its most popular services, and at the end of last year there were 244 of these bearproof garbage cans throughout the Swan Valley, including on 12 percent of private lands with structures (and that's beyond what trash people store safely in garages or houses).

But for the non-trash attractants that can't be mashed in a container – say, the vegetables, fruit trees or compost of the Moore's immaculate garden – SVBR has another solution: the electric bear fence. Thanks to cost-share support from partners like Defenders of Wildlife and the US Fish & Wildlife Service, SVBR can economically reach private landowners with the consultation, design, and installation services to produce durable solutions that work. Robert Frost was being

wry when he quipped "good fences make good neighbors," but this kind of fence really does find success, and more as an instructor than an impervious wall. Bears learn best when they teach themselves, and an electric fence epitomizes the "passive aversive conditioning" that results in well-educated bruins.

As the Moores got to thinking about their neighbor's freezer raid, they wisely decided to install an electric fence as a preventative, nonlethal tool. The building process is deceptively simple, and a quality product demands common sense, strength, and finesse in the right place at the right time. The materials are few and basic – wire, insulated wire, plastic insulators, a grounding rod,

energizer, and power source – but when strung taut and linked they become an effective, even elegant, circuit of power. Wire tension (to keep the charge from grounding out on the base fence or vegetation) and connection (for charge to flow through all) are the keys to success. And since bears know the world best through their nose, SVBR typically designs fences with three to five wires; the lowest rung gets the sniffer, the uppers thwart climbers. It takes a whopping 8,000 to 10,000 volts to deter a grizzly – not enough to cause harm, but just the right jolt for dismissal from school.

With Luke, Mike, me and the Moores all working together, the fence turned into a wonderful masterpiece of



Electric bear fences are custom-built and adaptable to the particular needs of each site, and here Luke, Mike, and Chris explore the options for wiring the door. These fences are also extremely cost-effective investments that secure landowner attractants with practical methods, spare money required for expensive post-problem management, and save bears from needlessly losing their lives.

Continued on Page 9

By Jonathan Bowler

Swan Valley Connections (SVC) offers two field semester programs for college students looking to expand their knowledge of natural resources, wildlife, conservation, and collaboration beyond the walls of a traditional classroom. Both Wildlife in the West, a 9-credit summer field program, and Landscape & Livelihood, a 16-credit fall field program, are built upon a firm belief in the benefits that come from place-based, experiential learning. While the 8 courses that make up these programs require a strong understanding of the academic or theoretical basis for the current “best available science”, SVC’s programs apply this information as the starting point for a deeper understanding of the human and natural systems that interact in a shifting and dynamic relationship.

Place-based, experiential learning has no call to order, no signs to signal a stopping point. Although notebooks, field guides, pencils, binoculars, hand lenses, thermometers, measuring tapes, clinometers, GPS units, game cameras, VHF transceivers, or any number of devices may be used to enhance our ability to perceive or record the world around us, all that is truly necessary is a personal desire for understanding mixed with a good deal of curiosity. The environment of the Swan Valley offers more than enough subject matter to fill the 40 days of Wildlife in the West or the 70 days of Landscape and Livelihood.



Hands-on learning, like eDNA sampling with the Clark Fork Coalition, not only contributes to scientific knowledge but also builds comprehension

We are proud of the educational opportunities available in our region that come from both the human and non-human communities that share the landscape. We post glimpses of these on our social media platforms with #makethisyourclassroom, but I am beginning to think that #makethisyourteacher is a more accurate description.



Engaging with guest speakers brings place-based expertise and multiple perspectives to the classroom

In the first days of our programs, students are briefed on what to expect. We surprise them by saying “We won’t teach you anything while you are here” and are usually met with surprised or questioning expressions before giving the explanation that “we will facilitate opportunities to engage with the world around you, we will encounter situations where personal insight can be gained from people, places, or processes, and you will be challenged to think critically, make connections, and build personal relationships with the real teachers of these courses – the human and non-human communities of NW Montana.”

In the end it is our goal that each student comes out with the tools necessary to replicate this active learning anywhere they may choose to travel or call home. Ultimately, it is our goal that the students who visit us each year understand the current theory and application of the “best available science”, but more importantly, have the creativity, personal connection, and ability to think critically about what might constitute the “best possible science”.

As conservationists we represent a point in history, one that has been informed by those before us who had the foresight to consider the needs of both current and future generations as they relate to our natural resources. Names like Roosevelt, Pinchot, Muir, Leopold are known by many and there are many more that can be found at national and local scales. It is my hope that by allowing the Swan Valley to teach our courses, some of our students’ names will grace the list of conservationists who refused to accept the limitations of current knowledge, who can connect not only to their environments but to their neighbors, and further the tradition of building communities of people who know how to listen and learn from the world around them. To this end, we share information with these students concerning *what is*, but the landscape teaches *what is possible*.



Field journals allow students to combine research & field experience while making personal connections to their chosen subjects



It's always a 1:1 student/teacher ratio when you're learning from the landscape

EXPLORE MONTANA'S

SWAN VALLEY MAP AND GUIDE

Our Swan Valley Map and 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. Experience and learn about what makes this place so special. (\$7 + shipping and handling)



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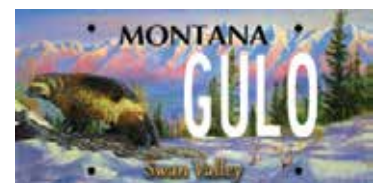
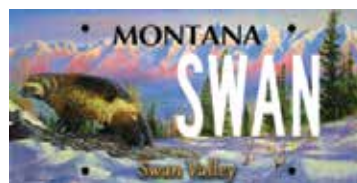


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creativity, resourcefulness, and sweat. The first time we thought it was complete and flipped the switch for a test, we groaned when a wire clicked against the steel post behind it, a sign of voltage sapping through the plastic padding we thought was a sufficient buffer. But Chris had the answer in an old punctured hose, which we promptly upcycled for triumph. SVBR is incredibly thankful for landowners like Chris and Jan, and not merely for the hose and the hospitality they offered, but also for modeling the willing, proactive engagement that transforms conflicts to coexistence. As of last year, SVBR has built 15 fences – 14 in the Swan Valley and one in the Blackfoot – and this year we've already tallied two more. Please be in touch when you're ready to help this number grow and take advantage of all that SVBR can offer. SVBR's fences and resources are here for good neighbors like you, and of course, the bears.



Even as Mike and Luke try to keep the tension around the challenging corners, their grins are apt proof that building a bear fence is also FUN!

Key Contacts:

SVBR:

Luke Lamar, Conservation Director, Swan Valley Connections
(406) 754-3137, luke@svconnections.org

Bear Conflicts:

Tim Manley, Grizzly Bear Management Specialist/Conflict Resolution Coordinator, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
(406) 250-1265

Eric Wenum, Black Bear & Mountain Lion Specialist, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
(406) 250-0062

HUCKLEBERRY DATA COLLECTION - SUN, AUG 26TH

Join USGS researcher, Tabitha Graves, to learn about and help out with data collection on huckleberries. The study's goals are to learn about what drives the timing and number of huckleberries and includes experiments to assess the impacts of drought, insects, and pollination on huckleberries!

We'll meet at 9 am at the Condon Work Center and will be out all day (returning around 4 pm), so please bring a lunch, wear long pants and sturdy boots. Location will be determined based on where the most help is needed and the number of volunteers. Participants will learn about how to count huckleberries.

A maximum of 8 volunteers can participate. RSVP at 754-3137 or info@svconnections.org by **Friday, August 24th**.



ANNUAL SPRING MEETING



Board of Directors, L to R. Front: Steve Ellis, Helene Michael, Pam Hamilton, Casey Ryan. **Back:** Scott Tomson, Mark Schiltz, Rich Thomason, Kathleen Richardson, Barb Raible, Alex Metcalf, Neil Meyer, Larry Garlick. **Not pictured:** Kathy DeMaster and Juanita Vero.



SVC Directors, L to R: Uwe Schaefer, Luke Lamar, Jonathan Bowler, Rebecca Ramsey

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WISH LIST

- Enclosed Snowmobile Trailer
- DJI Phantom 4 Drone
- Flight over the Swan Valley
- Reliable vehicle, preferably 4-wheel drive
- iPad, for front desk credit card transactions
- Field journal art supplies (ex: watercolor pencils)
- K-12:
 - Microscopes
 - Insect Field Guides
 - Water Quality Test Kits
 - Kid-sized waders
 - D-Frame Nets
 - Butterfly Nets
 - Plastic tubs (around 20"x10"x4")
 - Ice cube trays
 - Turkey Basters/Eye droppers
 - Clinometers
 - Measuring tapes
- Earthwatch:
 - Post-work entertainment!
 - Frisbees
 - Deck of cards
 - Board games
 - Yard games
 - Field guides
 - Bikes

If you have one of these items and would like to donate, contact Rebecca at (406) 754-3137 or rebecca@svconnections.org.

By Rebecca Ramsey

What does the word “gracious” mean to you? What do you think of when you hear the term “gracious space”? For me, when I heard of it the first time, my first thoughts were words like: safe, respectful, comfortable, sharing, beautiful and circular. Gracious Space was a central focus of the Leadership Montana program I participated in over this last year.

Gracious Space is a framework for collaboration that was created by the Center for Ethical Leadership in Seattle. The Center for Ethical Leadership defines Gracious Space as a spirit and setting in which we invite the stranger and learn in public.

Each of these four elements - spirit, setting, inviting the stranger, learning in public - are simple to understand, although not necessarily easy to put into practice. Frankly, it is a practice that I try to bring into both my professional work and personal life every day. Living Gracious Space requires a level of attention and intention that comes from either great heart or great mindfulness. It can be applied to every relationship, event or situation. Let's look at these four elements more in depth:

SPIRIT: Gracious Space has many aspects such as welcoming, compassion, curiosity, humor - aspects that we all have. When we bring these elements with us into relationships, we are “being” Gracious Space. This spirit of Gracious Space is what sets it apart from other communication or conflict resolution tools. This is about preparing ourselves to bring our best self into every interaction.

SETTING: Gracious Space has a physical dimension that supports our ability to feel productive, healthy and connected with our work and with others. Paying attention to simple hospitality (food, drink, temperature) and items that reflect the energy and personality of the group (art, music, natural beauty) contribute to a gracious environment. This element also has an aspect of time to it, like matching the agenda/design of a meeting to the time available so that people can engage with each other in a productive way.

INVITE THE STRANGER: The term “stranger” refers to any individual who is not typically involved in the conversation: someone with a different background, perspective, skin color, gender, geographic orientation, or any other quality that may make him or her seem different. We need the stranger when we are considering complex and new ideas; we need multiple perspectives to broaden our viewpoints before making decisions to prevent us from being too narrow-minded or make decisions that have only short-term benefit. Inviting the stranger strategically opens up more possibilities. It's good to remember that we are each the stranger to someone else and that diverse perspectives lead to durable solutions.

LEARN IN PUBLIC: To learn in public is to apply deep listening and learning to the diversity you have gathered into Gracious Space. Learning in public requires humility, a willingness to explore assumptions, letting go of the “right way” of doing things, to hold your opinions lightly and being willing to change your mind, keeping both an open mind and an open heart.

Gracious Space helps to develop the capacity for each person to fully show up and to make room for others to do the same. It supports group learning by addressing both similarities and differences among people and fosters an approach to understanding, so then we can move forward together. It creates a place where people can feel comfortable and not judged in sharing their perspectives.

In community change, there are many communities – not just one. Each of these communities within a community has a different story about what has happened to them and why. When people with very different stories come together, they often bump into each other and experience conflict, even when they agree on the shared goal of changing something that isn't working for anyone.

One great benefit of Gracious Space is that it invites people to look at themselves, others, and the collective in dynamic new ways. By recognizing your own perspective, you can be more empathetic to others' perspectives. It helps to develop trust. From these types of connections and relationships, transformative change can happen, helping to find vibrant new solutions rather than falling back on old habits or compromises.

Learning this method has certainly brought about transformative change for me personally, and I believe it is bringing positive change to our organization as well. I pay closer attention to the settings around me at the events and meetings I host, as well as in my personal space. I'm more aware of the spirit I bring with me into any given situation and try to always bring my best spirit forward. I am more aware of how the setting can affect the spirit of a situation as well. I hope we can continue to all move forward together with more graciousness in our professional and personal lives, and in our communities, to be the best we can be, together.

RESOURCES:

Hughes, Patricia M., (2004) *Gracious Space: A Practical Guide for Working Together Better*, Center for Ethical Leadership
Karma Ruder of the Center for Ethical Leadership.





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COMING UP

AUG 26

**Huckleberry Data Collection with
US Geological Survey**

AUG 27 - NOV 2

Landscape & Livelihood Field Semester

SEPT 5

**Community Potluck Dinner
*Presentation on Bears and Berries***

SEPT 19

**Swan Lands Coordinating Network
Meeting**

OCT 3

**Community Potluck Dinner
*Presentation on the History of Schools in the
Swan***

NOV 7

**Community Potluck Dinner
*Presentation on Avalanche Awareness***

DEC 5

**Community Potluck Dinner
*Live Music and Year-End Celebration***

For details visit SwanValleyConnections.org/events

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Make your check out to "SVC" and send to:
Swan Valley Connections, 6887 MT Hwy 83, Condon, MT 59826-9005
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