

NORTH FORK PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

"...to protect the natural resources that make the North Fork an unparalleled environment for wildlife and people."

Volume XXXIV

Summer 2016

Number 1

Watershed, Wilderness and Wildlife

By Debo Powers, NFPA President

After thirty-four years of activism to protect the unique biodiversity of our region, the North Fork Preservation Association is still going strong. This past year, the board of directors has been very busy. In August 2015, we organized our efforts into three working groups: Watershed, Wilderness, and Wildlife. (See reports in this newsletter.) Numerous letters have been sent in the name of NFPA to the U.S. Congress, the U.S. President, and various federal and state agencies supporting watershed, wilderness, and wildlife issues. In addition, we joined with many conservation organizations around the state and the country to support public lands, wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, clean air, and wildlife. We traveled to Choteau to stand in solidarity with the Blackfeet Nation for protection of the Badger-Two Medicine from oil and gas drilling. We attended meetings around the state about grizzly bears, participated on the Whitefish Range Partnership, and attended celebrations for the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act and the North Fork Watershed Protection Act.

On an organizational level, the board of directors is now meeting four times a year and has revised the bylaws and mission statement. We would like your approval of the revised bylaws at the annual meeting on July 30. You can read the proposed bylaws on the NFPA website at www.gravel.org. Go to the "Archives" section and click on "[NFPA Organizational Documents](#)".

We would like your support for NFPA in the following ways:

1. Be an active member by paying your dues on or before July 30.
2. Make sure that we have your current contact information for our membership list.
3. Attend the annual meeting on July 30 at the Community Hall.
4. Regularly read the NFPA website at www.gravel.org.
5. Join a Working Group and become involved in our work. You will get the chance to sign up at the annual meeting.

Bylaws Revisions

The bylaws have been revised by the Board of Directors in order to more accurately reflect how our organization operates. Please read the revised bylaws and send your comments and suggestions to NFPAPresident@gravel.org before the July 24 board meeting. These revisions will be voted on by the entire membership present at the annual meeting on July 30. The revised bylaws can be downloaded from the NFPA website at www.gravel.org. Go to the "Archives" section and click on "NFPA Organizational Documents".

Watershed Issues

By Randy Kenyon, Chair of the Watershed Working Group

The river is the lifeblood of our North Fork Valley. Dedicated as a Wild and Scenic Corridor in the early 1970s, this treasure, unlike so many others, remains free flowing and pristine. This past year has seen some important positive issues evolve, along with long-standing concerns.

The list of positive issues is encouraging. Last Summer our congressional delegation was able to unite and pass the long-awaited North Fork Watershed Protection Act. This act will provide a major piece in the long term protection of the river. The Whitefish Range Partnership, with our participation, continues to work closely with the Flathead National Forest in the development of their new forest plan. This draft plan, in its second version, is available and will hopefully address ongoing watershed protection. Last fall, NFPA became involved with another conservation advocacy group, American Rivers. They are proposing legislation to increase Wild and Scenic River designations across the state including Whale and Trail Creeks in their proposal. Our endorsement was included in their presentation to our delegation in Washington in December. In February, NFPA met with the Forest Service and a number of river users attempting to increase awareness and dialog regarding management of the three forks of the Flathead River. Lastly is the movement, led by Headwaters Montana, to complete Waterton-Glacier Park by extending Canada's Waterton Lakes National Park to the east shore of the Flathead River north of the border. This final addition will have positive impacts throughout the transboundary Flathead Watershed.

Along with these upbeat items, concerns remain. Development north of the border in the form of clear-cut logging and mining may prove detrimental to our river. Invasive plant and animal species could become problematic with dire results – the noxious Blue Flower is just north of the border and heading our way. Recent dramatic increase the use of the river brings multiple concerns, including sanitation, riparian damage, overcrowding and traffic. Increased development will continue to beleaguer the valley. Longstanding insufficient funding on behalf of both the Forest Service and Glacier Park could lead to diminished oversight with detrimental impacts.

All in all, our watershed is being well served by a wide range of dogged organizations (including NFPA) that have, and will continue to maintain and protect our watershed.

Wildlife Issues

By Steve Gniadek, Chair of the Wildlife Working Group

NFPA sent a letter to the US Fish and Wildlife Service in May opposing the proposed delisting of the grizzly bear in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). This generated a discussion among board members about delisting grizzlies in general, and delisting the bear in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) in particular. Point-counterpoint articles elsewhere in this newsletter explore alternative viewpoints on this issue.

NFPA continues to participate in the Whitefish Range Partnership, and the Flathead National Forest Plan revision, where wildlife issues, mostly involving grizzly bears and other threatened and endangered (T&E) species, are considered.

The board discussed how we might include a broader array of wildlife and habitats in our concerns. Since we support wild areas and intact watersheds, how can we incorporate the broader wildlife community, biodiversity, naturally functioning ecosystems, and ecosystem services into our conservation efforts? One way to do that is to help the Flathead NF and Montana FWP document the variety of wildlife inhabiting the Whitefish Range and adjacent areas of the North Fork. Plans to develop a wildlife reporting system, and even a bioblitz, have been largely unsuccessful. Your thoughts about how we might revive these efforts are welcome. One opportunity for NFPA to participate in wildlife-related monitoring is a partnership with Tabitha Graves, a USGS scientist, to sample huckleberry productivity. The NFPA point person on the huckleberry “citizen science” project is Suzanne Daniell.

Wilderness Issues

By Frank Vitale, Chair of the Wilderness Working Group

A flood of Wilderness activity occurred in our region in 2015 and the first part of 2016. The first wilderness in 31 years was designated with the passage of the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act. Over 67,000 acres were added to the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat wilderness areas. Another 208,000 acres were set aside as a new designation – a National Conservation Area.

The Flathead National Forest, in its new Forest Plan, recommended about 83,000 acres of wilderness in the Northern Whitefish Range. The Whitefish Range Partnership was highly influential in the forest decision. The FS now includes Nasukoin Mountain in the wilderness proposal. Other areas on the Flathead under consideration for wilderness are the Bunker Creek and Sullivan Creek areas in the Northern Swan Range.

On the Kootenai National Forest, the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area continues to be contentious. The Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition proposes 180,000 new wilderness acres. Amy Robinson and Dave Hadden, along with many other local conservation leaders, deserve a big thanks for all their hard work. The new wilderness proposals would include additions to the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness and Scotchman Peak.

Another citizen’s collaborative, in our region, the Blackfoot-Clearwater Stewardship Project, hopes to add 83,000 new wilderness acres to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat and Mission Mountain Wilderness areas.

Our neighbors to the east – Lewis and Clark NF and the Blackfeet Nation – are working to protect the Badger-Two Medicine. There is the potential of adding another 130,000 acres of wild country to the Rocky Mountain Front once the threat of oil and gas development is put to rest. The Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance has been working hard for many years to protect this “sacred land.”

The Castle Wilderness (located north of Waterton Lakes NP in Alberta, Canada) was designated last year. It adds to the protection of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem. Both the Castle Wilderness and the Badger-Two Medicine are critical linkages in the Yellowstone to Yukon initiative.

All this is great news, but the reality is that very few of these proposals have been voted on by Congress and become protected by law. Don’t expect much political will to get things done, especially during this bizarre election year.

On the bright side, people with diverse interests have rolled up their sleeves to work together. Eventually the political powers will take notice. So keep up the hard work, get out and explore the great diversity our state.

Room for Debate: Grizzly Delisting

There is considerable debate in the conservation community over the timing and advisability of removing the grizzly bear from the Endangered Species List. The membership of the NFPA reflects this range of opinions, as well. So...

Herewith, a pair of well-argued essays by board members Steve Gniadek and Frank Vitale presenting both sides of the issue.

Enjoy! – the editor

The NCDE Grizzly Bear Population Should Be Delisted

By Steve Gniadek, NFPA board member

Grizzly bears in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) should be delisted because the population has been recovered by all reasonable biological standards of recovery. I recognize, probably more than most, the social and political pressures brought to bear on biologists involved in threatened and endangered species management. I’ve worked with most of the biologists involved with grizzly bear research and management in the NCDE and, while motives and attitudes may vary among them, I trust the consensus is to honestly support the biology and not bend to other pressures. Population numbers are well documented, exceeding normal minimum viable population levels, and distribution and occupancy have expanded within and well beyond recovery boundaries. Recent population trend is either stable or slightly increasing, based on the best available research. Monitoring is in place for early detection of population declines. Regulatory practices will be maintained to safeguard habitat.

The credibility of our organization must be considered. If we oppose delisting when all the biological indicators clearly demonstrate a recovered population, we will lose credibility as an objective

organization. If we oppose delisting until bears that move out of the recovery zone are included in the recovery plan, we are changing the rules. It's not reasonable to defer delisting in the NCDE until bears have recolonized landscapes in the eastern prairies, mountain ranges and badlands. That will require a long-term effort. Having a sustainable population of grizzlies in the Missouri Breaks may be a desirable long-term goal, but we shouldn't burden the NCDE population with that issue. We can support it as a separate issue. Restoring other areas of the state to some wilderness status, with free-roaming plains bison and prairie wolves as well as grizzly bears, is just not a realistic short-term goal and not related to recovery of NCDE grizzly bears.

Connectivity between the NCDE and other recovery areas is desirable and already taking place between the NCDE and the Cabinet-Yaak. Connectivity between the NCDE and the Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) is not likely and not reasonable to expect, given the distance and (growing) human footprint in between. Genetic studies indicate connectivity with the GYE isn't necessary for sustainability of the NCDE population. Again, we shouldn't burden the NCDE recovery effort with an issue that is probably unattainable. The NCDE has connectivity with grizzly bear populations in Canada and we should support efforts to maintain that connectivity.

The state's proposal to open a managed hunt on grizzlies immediately after delisting is offensive to many of us. But unless it jeopardizes the population, we shouldn't use it to oppose delisting. That's an issue we can confront independent of the delisting process. We can express our concerns to Montana FWP. A recent modeling assessment of mortality suggested an annual harvest of a few bears would not affect the population status. A continuation of monitoring will be essential to detect any population level impacts, and if found, immediate management changes can be imposed. Allowing a limited hunt of grizzly bears will gain more support from otherwise adversaries of grizzly bears by providing an opportunity to hunt them. While this argument may garner little sympathy from many of us, the reality is it may be important for maintaining more widespread support for sustaining grizzlies on the landscape, and will provide FWP with a greater incentive to prosecute poachers.

The idea of using the status of the grizzly bear to restrain human expansion or activities in wild areas is understandable. But we shouldn't burden the grizzly with the yoke of "obstructionism"; that will only generate more animosity for grizzlies, and further affect bear sustainability, and our credibility. We should promote the goals of ecologically healthy, relatively intact wild areas, with the full suite of native wildlife in unrestrained conditions. This includes grizzly bears, even as a keystone or iconic representative of the broader wildlife community, but does not burden the bear as the sole representative of wild areas. We should support restrictions and restraints based on the broader wildlife community, biodiversity, and ecosystem services; that will provide more permanent protections for wildlife and wild areas. We need an ecosystem strategy that doesn't depend on a single species.

By opposing delisting in the face of all the biological evidence of recovery, we lose credibility that will affect future efforts to list and protect other deserving species. Those in positions to determine the fate of listing the wolverine, for example, will argue against it if the NCDE grizzly can't be delisted despite the biological evidence supporting it. If we oppose delisting now, what criteria are we proposing that would meet our approval for delisting? If we don't support delisting under any circumstances, there is a real possibility that Congress will act to delist the grizzly, like it did the gray wolf, further jeopardizing the

effectiveness of the Endangered Species Act. Opponents of the ESA will be emboldened to weaken the act, making it even less effective. There are serious consequences to consider.

Climate change is often invoked as an argument against delisting. Broad-scale changes are more predictable than local, short-term changes. Some effects may actually benefit grizzlies in the short-term (longer growing season); no one can reliably predict the short-term impacts to grizzlies. Human tolerance and understanding may be more important than climate-induced habitat changes. Grizzlies are adaptable. Long-term climatic changes that may result in grizzly declines will also likely have significant consequences for all of humanity. The urgency to act on climate change is amply justified by our own self-interest, without invoking grizzly bear survival.

The most important issues we should stress are what the recovery plan calls “adequate regulatory mechanisms” and the continuation of population and habitat monitoring to ensure the population doesn’t decline below sustainable levels. A good monitoring program and enforcement efforts will help keep the bear from falling below recovery goals. We need to make sure the state has the resources to continue monitoring and enforcement.

Oppose Grizzly Delisting

By Frank Vitale, NFPA board member

The issue of delisting the great bear is huge and complex. After all, seeing a grizzly bear is an incredible experience and can be life changing for many people. I’ve spent the better part of my life in grizzly country and have observed bears from the mountains to the prairies, and I’m still in awe every time I see one.

The issue of delisting is intertwined politically, biologically and culturally.

The grizzly bear was listed as threatened in 1973, in the lower 48 states. Five recovery zones were identified which included the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), the Bitterroot-Selway Ecosystem, the Selkirk/Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem, the North Cascade Ecosystem, and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE).

Of the five recovery zones, only 2 areas have “appeared” to have reached the numbers set as recovered for those distinct areas - the GYE and the NCDE. Even the experts are at odds over the accuracy of the number of bears.

In the Selkirk/Cabinet-Yaak recovery zone, the estimated number of bears is around 45-50. The number of bears in the North Cascades is extremely low and barely hanging on. The Bitterroot-Selway recovery zone has no known bears or at least any reliable documentation that any live there. It’s a huge black hole.

So between all five recovery zones the estimated population of bears sits at about 1,800. It has taken over 40 years to reach this number.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) plainly states that the bear will be delisted when the biological evidence shows that the population of bears in ALL (my emphasis) the recovery zones have reached their target numbers and are stable. These target numbers were set in the days when the bears were first listed. The science is now showing a very different and rapidly changing picture: warming climate,

the loss of key food sources, human encroachment, loss of habitat, and the lack of political will to protect some of the most important linkages between recovery zones.

What is blatantly evident is the USFWS, with pressure from the states of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, are trying to reinterpret the ESA. What we see is a piecemeal approach that falls squarely on the side of politics. Even the changing science has yet to be seriously looked at.

If delisted, the states will take over management and will pursue a hunting season. Their rationale is that hunters will want to have bear numbers healthy and sustainable (i.e., more bears to hunt), but evidence shows us otherwise. If we look at how the states have managed gray wolves, it's been largely a failure with wolf numbers declining in many recovery areas.

What will be successful, if delisted, will be the increase in revenue from selling a limited number of grizzly bear permits. Another rationale for reinstating a hunting season is that problem bears could be targeted by hunters. Imagine shooting your trophy having two ear tags, a radio collar and lip tattoos! Most of the bears taken by hunters will probably be subadult males or young females which are the very ones we want to keep.

Is hunting bears on the periphery good management, especially if we want to have them expand into linkage zones between recovery areas?

A couple years back, I asked a former grizzly bear recovery coordinator about bears east of the Rocky Mountain Front that wandered out of the recovery areas. His response was, "If these bears do not get into trouble they won't be persecuted. We see no future for those bears."

My thought about his response is this. The future of these bears should not rest on the decisions set by a few select people. Future generations deserve the opportunity to decide where they want to see and experience grizzly bears.

The Salish-Kootenai will oppose any hunting season and do not support delisting. The Shoshone-Bannock tribes in Idaho have also come out against delisting. Hopefully the Blackfeet will join most other first Nation People in their fight to keep protections for the big bears. Traditionally, grizzly were not hunted, but were held in high reverence from a spiritual and cultural standpoint.

When talking about delisting the grizzly bear, it doesn't matter if we just focus on the NCDE. We are talking about the same bear whether it's in Montana, Wyoming, Idaho or Washington. That we can never have bears outside the recover zones is absurd and short-sighted. We're already seeing the concept of large landscape restoration, and attitudes and tolerance are changing. For example, on the Rocky Mountain Front, large ranches have protected bears by managing livestock in a way that reduces conflicts. Many large ranches are in conservation easements. Why rush to delist now? We should reevaluate delisting in about 10 years. Then we can see if we have achieved what the ESA intended.

The piecemeal approach the USFWS and the states want to take will put the bear's future in jeopardy. The argument that keeping grizzlies on the endangered species list takes away money and resources from other species is shallow at best. Protecting grizzly bears and maintaining large landscape conservation protects other species as well. Wolverines, lynx, wolves, etc. do well when we protect the country that grizzlies need to survive. I do not think waiting 10 years will cost us our credibility. It would be better to wait than to rush delisting. Let's make sure we have all the pieces together and do what we

intended and truly recover and restore one of the most iconic animals of North America. The spoilers have been trying to weaken the ESA for a long time. What's at stake is huge.

In his book *Grizzly Country*, Andy Russel wrote:

“Wasteful and incredibly shortsighted exploitation of natural resources by industry was carving the wilderness into ragged ribbons. With its passing it was clearly evident that not only was the old-time mountain man almost nothing more than a character of history, but as I watched, the grizzly was being hard pressed to find the necessary environment for his continuance.”

“It was a sad thing to contemplate, especially for one who knew the freedom and the happiness of real mountain wilderness and had shown it to many people from all over the world; but tears of nostalgia do nothing for that being mourned. So I dropped the rifle and picked up the pen and the camera to see what could be done to save some of the fast-vanishing wilderness and thus to help, too, the grizzly that must have it to survive.”

Website Report: Wildlife, Land Management and a Long Fire Season

By Bill Walker

This past years' website coverage was more about variety than one big story. Here are the highlights...

An unwelcome guest, the 2015 fire season arrived at the party early and stayed late. There were a lot of fires in the region. Luckily, none were catastrophic, but there was a tremendous amount of smoke in the air and one blaze, the Marston Fire, looked for a few days like it would threaten the North Fork.

The Flathead National Forest issued the second revision of their updated Forest Plan. The Whitefish Range Partnership, of which the NFPA is a participant, and many other stakeholder groups got to work providing feedback on this extensive set of documents.

The Bureau of Land Management announced that they would be canceling drilling leases in the Badger-Two Medicine region. This was good news for a whole host of organizations, tribes and individuals who had been fighting to increase protections for this region. Solonex, the lease owner whose lawsuit triggered the confrontation, vowed to appeal.

Two proposed mines near the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness inched closer to approval. Maybe. Among other issues, there are some serious watershed concerns.

Sage grouse gained expanded protection from a consortium of western states. The states are trying to head off federal regulation. The feds are a bit skeptical, as are some conservation groups.

The region's grizzly bears inched closer to delisting. This removal of Endangered Species Act protections is a very controversial move. See the articles above by Steve Gniadek and Frank Vitale for a good overview of the issues involved.

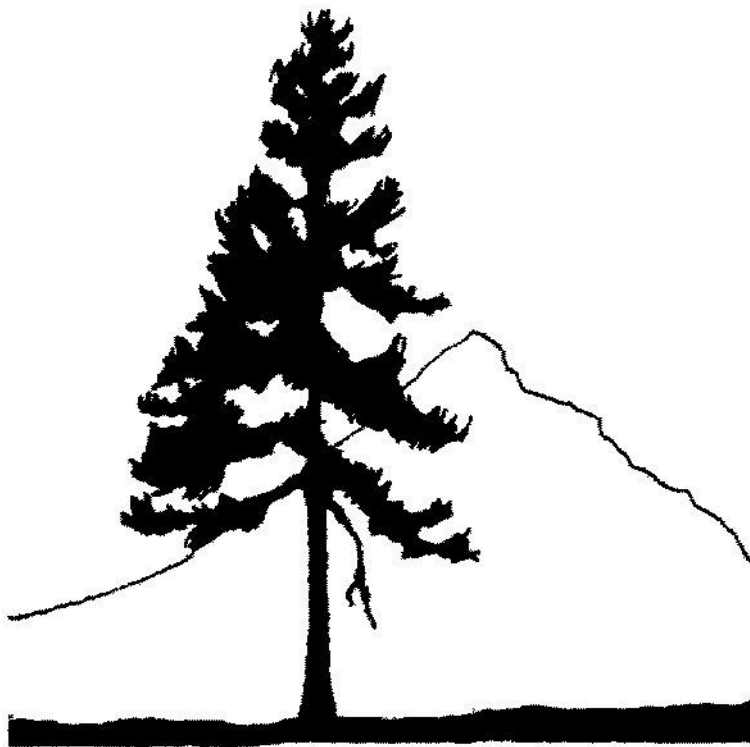
And finally, *the website got prettier*. We've been including photos with postings whenever practicable. The same images appear in the Twitter feed and on the NFPA Facebook page. There will also be a few other changes Real Soon Now, including bios of the board members, a place to find the organizational documents and a few other goodies.

As usual, we're always on the lookout for contributions – photos, articles, pointers to useful material and so forth. Suggestions are always appreciated, as is the occasional compliment.

The NFPA web site is at <http://www.gravel.org/>.

There is also a Twitter feed at <https://twitter.com/nfpanews>.

And a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/nfpreservationassociation>.



North Fork Preservation Association Summer Events — 2016

NFPA Annual Meeting on July 30

5:30pm Pot Luck Supper

6:45pm Annual Meeting: Bylaws approval/Election of Officers & Board Members

7:30pm Speaker: Dr. David Mattson

Dr. Mattson has more than 35 years of professional training and experience focusing on the ecology and management of grizzly bears and mountain lions as well as the role of science in natural resources policy. He holds degrees in Forest Resource Management and Forest Ecology, and a doctorate in Wildlife Resource Management.

Prior to his retirement in 2013, Dr. Mattson was Research Wildlife Biologist, Leader of the Colorado Plateau Research Station, and Western Field Director of the MIT-USGS Science Impact Collaborative, all with US Geological Survey. He is currently Lecturer and Senior Visiting Scientist at Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and also serves as Science Advisor for the non-profit organization Wyoming Wildlife Advocates and as a Research Associate with the Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative.

Dr. Mattson was extensively quoted in a recent article about grizzly bear delisting in *High Country News*. He has researched grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, and Canada and holds sometimes controversial viewpoints about grizzlies and their chance of survival in our changing world.

Other Activities

The North Fork Landowners' Association sponsors a number of hikes, river floats and bicycling events. See the "recurring events" notes near the bottom of their calendar page (<http://nflandowners.com/calendar>) for details and listings of more activities.

The Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) offers several hikes each year in Northwest Montana. See the MWA website for full details and to pre-register for any of these hikes (<http://wildmontana.org/discover-the-wild/wilderness-walks/2016-wilderness-walks>).

The North Fork Trails Association (NFTA) has a number of trails-related activities throughout the year, some in conjunction with other organizations. See their online calendar (<http://nftrails.org/calendar/>) for details.

A Gentle Reminder: Time to Pay Your Dues!

If you have not yet paid your NFPA membership dues for 2016, it's time!

Regular membership dues are \$20/year; \$25/year for the whole family.

"Living lightly" (students and such like) dues are only \$10/year.

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

IF YOU HAVEN'T PAID YOUR DUES YET, IT'S TIME!

If you have paid your dues for 2016. ***Thank you!***

I want to help protect the North Fork of the Flathead River Valley at the western edge of Glacier National Park.

_____	New	Name	_____
_____	Renewal	Address	_____

		Phone	_____
		Email	_____

Save a tree! I wish to receive the newsletter by email _____

I want to join the NFPA. Here is my membership fee of \$20.00/year _____
family membership of \$25.00/year _____
living lightly membership of \$10.00/year _____

I want to help. Here is my donation of _____ for _____

Please remove me from your mailing list. _____

Mail check or cash to: North Fork Preservation Association
77 Moose Creek Road
Polebridge, MT 59928
(406) 752-5935

North Fork Preservation Association

77 Moose Creek Road
Polebridge MT 59928

Please remember to pay your dues!

NFPA OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS

Debo Powers, President (406) 407-0787 NFPAPresident@gravel.org
Randy Kenyon, Vice Pres., Chair of Watershed Working Grp (406) 257-4362 kenyonnorthfork@gmail.com
Suzanne Daniell, Secretary (406) 862-2831 sdaniell@cyberport.net
Kelly Edwards, Treasurer (847) 990-0727 polebridgemod@yahoo.com
John Frederick, Past President (406) 888-5084 john@gravel.org
Steve Gniadek, Chair of Wildlife Working Group (406) 892-7406 grayjaybro@yahoo.com
Frank Vitale, Chair of Wilderness Working Group (406) 752-2909 sixmules@gmail.com
Bill Walker, Media/Newsletter Editor wkwalker@nvdi.com
Annemarie Harrod (615) 269-3992 amharrod@gmail.com
Alan McNeil (406) 755-5041 alanmcneil@mac.com
Cameron Naficy (406) 546-2952 cameron@wildrockies.org
Walter Roberts (413) 658-7436 waltermelvinroberts3@gmail.com

Officers are elected for a one-year term; board members for two. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact a board member.

Dr. David Mattson will speak at the NFPA annual meeting on July 30. Dr. Mattson is a wildlife biologist who has spent his entire career working on grizzly bear recovery. He was recently quoted extensively in an article about delisting in the High Country News.