

NORTH FORK PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

"...to champion stewardship of the natural resources and protection of the exceptional biodiversity of the North Fork of the Flathead River watershed in Northwest Montana."

Volume XLI

Summer 2023

Number 1

NFPA Annual Meeting

July 22, 2023, at Sondreson Community Hall
Whale Creek Bridge & North Fork Road

For this year's annual meeting we've invited **Liz Fairbanks**, a Road Ecologist at The Center for Large Landscapes, to help us better understand the role a road (or road systems) plays in an ecosystem.

We would love for you to be among our honored guests.

5:30pm: Potluck supper

6:45pm: Short business meeting to elect officers and members of the Board of Directors and report on the work of NFPA

7:30pm: Speaker

We are excited to spend an evening with all of you, share with you what we've been up to, and look forward to a great presentation.

Potholes

By Flannery Coats, NFPA President

Did you know that the word pothole originated in England in the 15th and 16th century? According to the state of California's "Pothole Fact Sheet", pottery makers would dig for clay deposits underneath the deep ruts made by wagon and coach wheels, leaving behind holes in the road. Teamsters at the time were well aware of who and what caused them and ultimately deemed them "potholes."

Of course, North Fork potholes are self-generating wonders that require no potters and are at times prolific. I've heard them once described as "cheese grater holes making knuckle meat out of tires." That got me thinking... what if there were no potholes? A speedy trip to town, for sure. A few bucks saved in vehicle maintenance, no doubt. But what about the exceptional wildlife that lives and travels in the North Fork? How do potholes (and unpaved roads) affect them?

For this year's annual meeting we've invited Liz Fairbanks, a Road Ecologist at The Center for Large Landscapes, to help us better understand the role a road (or road systems) plays in an ecosystem. Since graduate school, her work has been focused on habitat connectivity and road ecology research. Liz worked for the Western Transportation Institute for several years, during which time she contributed to road ecology research projects in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and Nebraska. She then spent two years working for the Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative researching the impacts of roads on ungulate migration routes in western Wyoming.

We are super excited to welcome Liz to our little corner of unpaved paradise, and this couldn't be at a more interesting time to learn more about roads and landscapes. If you aren't aware, Flathead County recently applied for a nearly \$6 million Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant to begin the preliminary environmental evaluation and public involvement process looking at the feasibility of paving 10 miles of the North Fork Road to the intersection of Camas Road. The funding would also cover roughly two-and-a-half miles of road improvements as a first phase of the full corridor improvement project.

Now is the time for us to learn more and put on our thinking caps about the future of the North Fork. Join us in the conversation at our annual meeting!

Save, don't pave. And remember, don't be an asphalt.

Wildlife Corner

By Diane Boyd, Chair of the NFPA Wildlife Working Group

The swallows arrived at Trail Creek on May 4, having flown north from wintering grounds in Central and South America. So glad to see them back! Scruffy, skinny whitetails are everywhere feeding on green succulent shoots to replace the fat reserves they lost over winter. I've often wondered how starving deer and elk can nurture a growing fetus during the month of May to pop out a robust healthy baby in early June. Another of Mother Nature's miracles. Rain, rain, more rain. Normal spring in the North Fork.

A total of 273 wolves were killed in Montana this past winter, with zero wolves harvested in the North Fork HD 110.

Grizzly bears are out and hungry, so be bear-aware around your home and when you're hiking. NFPA may help provide bear-proof trash bins, please contact us for more info.

Justine Vallieres is the new Wildlife Conflict Specialist for the North Fork, and we're ecstatic to have her here filling the big shoes of recently retired Tim Manley!

Polebridge Bear Smart Report Spring 2023

Polebridge Bear Smart (PBBS) is looking forward to a busy summer with the continuation of existing projects and the addition of exciting new ones.

The late spring/early summer season is in full swing with two PBBS training courses for seasonal employees of Polebridge businesses. Held on May 24th and June 2nd. This year the program was advanced by partnering with the Glacier Institute as well as MT FWP, both of whom were on hand to help with training, providing inert bear spray for practice and to answer the insightful questions posed by participants.

We are particularly excited about an Initial Response Program we have developed in collaboration with Justine Vallieres, bear biologist with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks. PBBS volunteers recently completed training and are standing by, ready to respond to North Fork landowners who have a bear incident or a bear frequenting their property. The intent is to quickly provide assistance under the guidance of the bear biologists who are often overwhelmed with incidents during the busy summer months. We are able to loan game cameras and scare devices on the short term to identify individual bears and deter them. In doing so we hope to protect the bears from habituation as well as mitigate property damage, keeping both bears and humans safer. PLEASE reach out if you have an issue with a bear frequenting your property and please let FWP know if a bear causes damage or does not respond to hazing. This information helps them determine which individual bears might be involved. Recent research has shown that early efforts at deterring bears is most effective; removing bears to an alternative location often does not resolve the issue, as bears tend to migrate back to their previous habitat.

Additionally, PBBS will be expanding its programs this year to include outreach to short-term rental property owners with tools to help renters be responsible and safe in bear country. If you own a short-term rental, expect an email contact regarding this program.

During the summer of 2022, with support from a Sierra Club grant and private donations, we launched a bear canister program for North Fork residents. The 96-gallon Kodiak bear-resistant canisters were made available at a reduced cost for purchase or rent. This program will continue in 2023; please see accompanying information if you wish to purchase or rent a canister.

Feel free to contact Suzanne Hildner with any comments, questions or suggestions. Here's looking forward to a fun-filled and safe summer for both humans and bears.

Suzanne Hildner, PBBS Chair

Wilderness Matters

By Debo Powers

NFPA has long desired Wilderness designation in the northern Whitefish Range. Our work on the Whitefish Range Partnership ten years ago helped to secure Recommended Wilderness for a little more than 80,000 acres. Although this Recommended Wilderness is being managed as Wilderness by the Flathead National Forest, actual Wilderness designation requires an act to be passed by the U.S. Congress. This is unlikely in the near future. Currently, we have only one member of Congress from Montana who supports the preservation of wild public lands.

Notes from Upstream

By Randy Kenyon, Chair of the NFPA Watershed Working Group

To the surprise of no one, the Forest Service Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP) update continues to languish. The contractual relationship with another agency has ended, which has led to an individual being selected to continue working on the plan – specifically, teasing out usage data and helping to establish “capacity” and “values,” both of which are critical plan elements. Seems like “Enterprise Teams” may be taking on the task of completing the plan. Since this endeavor began in 2019, I decline to offer projections on the environmental assessment, plan completion and subsequent implementation dates.

On the other hand, the really good river news is that the Flathead Rivers Alliance (FRA) is off and running again this year with an array of programs that bode well for maintaining and enhancing both river health and recreational experiences in collaboration with management agencies and community stakeholders. Heading into its third year of operations, the FRA continues to grow its volunteer-based stewardship programs, among a robust portfolio of diverse initiatives focusing on stewardship that including river safety, citizen science, river ambassadors, and a water quality monitoring program funded by the Flathead Lake Biological Station’s Monitoring Montana Waters program. In 2022, the organization celebrated 240+ volunteers, 800+ volunteer hours served and improved 111 miles of the 219-mile Flathead Wild & Scenic River corridor, including the North Fork. For more information, email info@flatheadrivers.org or visit www.flatheadrivers.org.

Finally, efforts in the aquatic invasive species (AIS) realm remain critical to our watershed integrity. The Montana legislature has stepped forward with legislation authorizing Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to institute two programs ensuring public participation: the Angler AIS Prevention Pass and the Vessel AIS Prevention Pass. Please contact FWP to learn more if you plan on fishing or boating.

Paving raises its ugly head... Again!

Report from NFPA Transportation Committee

By Debo Powers

NFPA was founded in 1982 in response to two threats facing the North Fork. One was a proposed coal mine in Canada on a tributary to the Flathead River and the other threat was paving the North Fork Road.

In 41 years, NFPA has not wavered in its strong stance against paving the North Fork Road. Paving was a threat in 1982, and it is still a threat today.

In 2010 (just 13 years ago), Flathead County and the Montana Department of Transportation completed an extensive Road Corridor Study that concluded that there was overwhelming support for dust abatement but not for paving. See: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/northfork/docs/final-corridor-study.pdf>

Despite this previous study, the Flathead County Commissioners signed a proposal in April for a FLAP grant with the U.S. Department of Transportation to study the idea of paving the North Fork Road north to Camas Road intersection (again). The grant proposal contained many inaccuracies about public sentiment regarding paving, so NFPA sent a letter to clarify those inaccuracies.

In this letter, NFPA pointed out that opponents outnumber proponents and there are a broad array of reasons for opposition, including the following concerns:

- Documented impacts on wildlife from paved roadways, including disrupting connectivity between Glacier Park and Flathead Forest.
- Increases in speed without attendant funding for enforcement of speed limits.
- Increased channeling of recreation users into an area where the infrastructure is already overwhelmed.
- Preservation of the North Fork's primitive and rustic character.
- The failure to place this substantial expenditure of funds in the context of a larger transportation plan for the North Fork.

If the FLAP grant is approved, there will be a NEPA process which will include a robust public debate on the issue. You can count on NFPA to be very vocal on this issue: asking questions, providing information, and insisting on meaningful public participation.

Another road issue that NFPA is vocal about is whether the Inside Road in Glacier Park from Polebridge south to Fish Creek should be open to public through-traffic. Once again, NFPA will be in opposition to the vehicular impacts on wildlife that an open road would bring.

The NFPA Transportation Committee is working hard to address threats to the North Fork from roads and is advocating for an overall transportation plan for the North Fork that addresses the cumulative impacts.

Scholarship and Award Committee Report, 2023

By Suzanne Hildner, Chair of the Scholarship and Award Committee

The last year was an exciting one for the NFPA Awards/Scholarship Committee. We had a very impressive group of applicants for the Kreck/Fields Scholarship. So impressive, in fact, that we awarded two scholarships! Our awardees were Jacob Bretz and Najifa Farhat, both students at the University of Montana. Mr. Bretz is pursuing a master's degree in Environmental Philosophy and Ms. Farhat a master's in Environmental Science and Natural Resource Journalism at U of M. We wish them both the very best of luck in their studies and beyond.

The Glacier National Park Stewardship Award (formerly the Jack Potter Glacier National Park Stewardship Award) was given to Michael Jamison. Michael, who presently works for the National Parks Conservation Association, has been a tireless advocate for the North Fork of the Flathead and Glacier National Park. A highly respected conservationist, Jamison was described by Flannery Freund this way: "Michael is a passionate, timeless, bold, thoughtful and fearless leader in the world of conservation in a universal sense. He literally knows no boundaries in his efforts. The North Fork wouldn't be what it is today without him."

Other Activities Around the North Fork

The North Fork Landowners Association sponsors a number of hikes, river floats and bicycling events. Check their calendar page (<https://nflandowners.com/calendar>) for details and listings of more activities.

Wild Montana (formerly Montana Wilderness Association) offers several hikes each year in Northwest Montana. They have both a summer and winter schedule. See their website for full details: <https://wildmontana.org/> (click the "discover" link near the top[of the home page.]

The North Fork Trails Association (NFTA) has quite a few trails-related activities throughout the year, some in conjunction with other organizations. See their web site (<https://nftrails.org/>) for more information.

Flathead Rivers Alliance (FRA) launched a River Ambassador Program this summer and is usually seeking volunteers to join the team. To learn more visit: <https://www.flatheadrivers.org/>.

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL FORM

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

If it's been more than a couple of years since you last paid dues, this may be your last newsletter.

If you *have* paid your dues for 2023. **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 _____

I wish to receive occasional email alerts about important issues! _____

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Columbia Falls, MT 59912

<https://gravel.org/>

Please remember to pay your dues!

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

NFPA T-shirts are Here!

For the first time in many years, NFPA has a new t-shirt! The cost is \$20 and they will be on sale in all sizes at the Home Ranch Store (and at our annual meeting). Show your support for the exceptional biodiversity and wildness of the North Fork by wearing this great shirt!