Montana State BCH Convention 2016
By Helen Suta and Fred Fitzpatrick, East Slope Back Country Horsemen

The State BCH convention is something many members look forward to in the spring. It does mean spring is here, and that means getting to enjoy the things that bring us all together. For the chapter that is hosting the convention, it means finally bringing at least a year and a half of planning, worry, work, stress, and, in the end, satisfaction in getting it all together for a job well done. I think that probably sums up the East Slope Chapter’s feelings now that the convention is over.

The beautiful weather we asked for came with the early arrivals and vendors on Friday morning. Our Saturday morning began with our Junior Director, Abby Hutton, performing the National Anthem beautifully. Thank you also to the color guard from Malmstrom Air Force Base for the presentation of the colors.

The general sessions were run very efficiently as usual by the State officers. We had the reading of the resolution concerning our opposition to the sale and/or transfer of Federal Public Lands. The only real discussion was on the wording in parts of the resolution. In the end we were able to craft an amicable resolution that everyone was happy with; let’s just hope that it will convey our feeling about our public lands to all our congressional delegates be it either national or statewide.

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We had the pleasure of BCHA Chairman Don Saner and his wife Karen join us for the convention and Don gave us a talk during lunch; he also got the opportunity to take part in the crosscut saw competition.

After a delicious lunch of Mexican cuisine, the delegates again went into session for an hour. That was followed by an afternoon of beautiful weather to enjoy the saw competition. We would like to say thanks to Mark Himmel and Greg Schatz for taking time to facilitate the saw competition and also to Ian Bardwell for furnishing the crosscut saw and giving an axe demonstration. This also gave everybody time to visit the vendors. Keith Alltucker’s diamond hitch demonstration was well received with quite a few people getting some hands on experience. And of course the two workshops provided by our own Dr. Dick Kinyon and photography expert Andy Watson. Both presenters did a very nice job conveying their message to all who attended their workshops with some very enlightening topics.

The evening brought a no-host cocktail hour followed by the banquet. Our neighbor and recording artist, Wyline Gustafson of Conrad, provided musical entertainment during the banquet. The banquet was followed by the live auction with our chapter member, auctioneer, and rodeo clown Zane Drishinski. He provided a very entertaining and profitable auction for the state organization. We also had some very lovely las-
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### 2015 Volunteer Hours Report for BCH Montana

**By John Chepulis**

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**You Tube**

Our volunteer hours report is on YouTube at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vIZzihfVhg

Thanks to Fred Fitzpatrick for making us shine on-line!

Watch the video, like it and share it on your Facebook page,
spread the word for BCH MT!
**Letter from the Chair**

It’s only been a couple of weeks since the convention and we already have a couple of things on the agenda for our May meeting. I’ve had some suggestions on the meeting dates for this year that have merit, so we will be taking another look at that.

Mack Long has written the letter to Chief Tidwell about the trails allocation model used for trail funding. I would like to thank Mack and his committee for a great job on this issue. As a follow-up to our convention discussion, we will be having a couple guest speakers from Region 1 at the May meeting; they will bring us up to date on the laws and regulations that govern them in managing wilderness study areas and proposed wilderness areas. This should help us in coming to a consensus on our position on the use of bicycles in all types of wilderness. They will also talk about the trails allocation model.

Communication is the key to all success. I’m asking for your help to please be more diligent turning in your chapter’s information, such as volunteer hours, updating membership/newsletter mailing lists, and email addresses. There are fellow members who dedicate a lot of time volunteering to manage this data; it would make their job so much easier if it’s turned in on a regular basis.

Well, enough about director business. I really want to thank the East Slope Chapter for giving us a great convention. I think everyone had a great time and important, timely topics were discussed. We received a lot of compliments from Don Saner, our National Chairman. Don had plenty of nice things to say about Montana on the presidents’ call this week.

BCHMT is more than just the Board of Directors. We have over 1,100 members statewide; if you’re reading this you are probably one of us — and if you’re not one of us, go to our website at www.bchmt.org, find a chapter near you, and join us. Back Country Horsemen are a good group of people with a great purpose, and working together there’s not much we can’t accomplish, which is something we’ve seen over and over again!

Thank you, Rich, Sherri, and Nancy for accepting the officer positions; I look forward to working with you and our State Directors throughout the year. And finally, I’d like to thank you for the contribution you make for the betterment of Back Country Horsemen.

Safe travels.

Your chairman,

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**We need to declare WAR!!!**

*By Jonah Libsack-Maynard, Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead*

There is a silent, poisonous, killer invading our land. It is the invasive noxious weed. These weeds are proving to be the single greatest threat to natural ecosystems. They are found in the national parks, forests, backyards, city streets, farmlands and pastures. They contain chemicals and toxins that crowd out or kill surrounding plants. This means wild game and bird habitat and food sources are affected. Domestic livestock grazing can be reduced or eliminated. Soil erosion increases. Production of agricultural crops is reduced. Many of these weeds are poisonous to animals and irritating to humans. And we are doing very little to combat this invasion. Every time the soil is disturbed (construction, timber harvesting, road building, over grazing, hiking off trail, etc.) we open the probability of weed invasion. If you think you are not affected and it’s not your problem think again. Do you like to hunt? Hike? Fish? Do you let your kids play in the yard? There is also an economic impact. Are you concerned with your property’s value? Do you like to eat? Prices go up as the cost of feed and agricultural crops increase. 2015 was one of the driest years we have ever seen in northwest Montana. If you have livestock and think hay prices are high now you are in for a rude awakening.

Everyone needs to get involved to help fight this invasion. They are NOT just pretty flowers and plants. They are deadly enemies that are consuming our land. Let’s keep Montana green. Get involved.

**A Noxious Weed Workshop** has been held the last 2 years at FVCC as a collaborative effort between the Flathead National Forest, the Montana Department of Agriculture, Montana State University Extension, CHS, Glacier National Park and the Flathead County Weed Department. These people are all resources for weed management assistance and are working diligently to control this problem.

Check out this award winning video at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9v0cbW37VzA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9v0cbW37VzA) (that’s a zero after the 9v)

“Waging the War Against Weeds” produced April 13, 2013 by National and Colorado programming.
The summers of 2014 and 2015 was very busy for the Wild Horse Plains Back Country Horsemen. The installation of 103 trail signs project within the Plains-Thompson Falls District of the Lolo National Forest is now complete.

The local district of the Forest Service had the signs in inventory, but didn’t have the budget to install them. So, the opportunity to enter into a two year Challenge Cost Share Agreement with the United States Forest Service was available, and the project was under way.

The cooperative efforts of the Back Country Horsemen, combined with off-road motorcycle users and hikers, made the project successful. When the location of the sign was found, it was determined whether the existing sign needed to be replaced or not. If not, it was easy. The task included taking a photo and gps coordinates. If the sign needed to be replaced, then the old signs were removed, and then documented with a photos and gps coordinates as well. The information was delivered to the local Forest Service for their records and trail mapping. On occasion, there weren’t any signs found at all.

This project not only included the sign installation, but major trail clearing efforts as well. Many of the trails had not yet been cleared by the Forest Service crews, so the volunteers for this sign project had the opportunity to assist in those endeavors as well.

To put this project in perspective, the value of the personal time, stock, materials and vehicles logged in at $30,411.38. With a club as small as Plains, this is a major feat. In fact, about a dozen folks completed the entire project with 685 hours logged into the record books. And remember, this is all volunteer.

Many a time while installing the signs, other users complimented and thanked the works for their efforts in making the forest service more trail friendly. In harmony with the mission statement:

To perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America’s back country and wilderness. To work to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use. To assist various agencies responsible for the maintenance and management of public lands. To educate, encourage, and solicit active participation in the wise and sustained use of the back country resource by horsemen and the general public, commensurate with our heritage. Foster and encourage formation of new Back Country Horsemen organizations.

Hats off to the local Wild Horse Plains Back Country Horsemen for another project well done.
The Power of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana
(or Why is the Back Country Horsemen of Montana political?)

By Greg Schatz, Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead

A few months ago the Back Country Horsemen of the Flathead met with representatives from each of the Flathead National Forest districts to talk about upcoming trail and trailhead projects. After the meeting, one of the Forest Service employees told us about the new trails funding allocation model that the national office of the US Forest Service has decided to use for the regional trail budgets. The theory behind this funding model is that trail money is going to be taken from regions with low population and given to regions with high population, along with the belief that all costs of trail clearing - regardless of the location of the trail - are equal. There are many flaws with this trail funding model, the biggest being that the Northern Region, which includes Montana, is going to get its already meager trail budget cut by 10% each year over the next three years. A lot of our money is going to be sent to Alaska - no population there, and a lot of our money is going to areas where trails run through deserts - nothing to clear there.

After talking with my wife, Deborah, about this for a couple of days and realizing this will have a huge impact here on the Flathead as well as around the state, I called Connie Long, chairman of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana at the time. After several phone calls between Connie and her husband Mack and Deborah and I, it was decided that BCHMT should write a letter to the Chief of the Forest Service Tom Tidwell. Several of us had met Tom when he was the Regional Forestier and attended BCHMT conventions. We also directed our comments to Deputy Chief Leslie Weldon, who also has been the Regional Forestier here before she went to Washington and has been on an overnight pack trip with the BCHMT. Of course, we also sent copies of our letter to the Montana congressional delegation.

As the wheels of the government were slowly turning, Connie called Senator Tester’s office and talked with the senator’s staff about the trail funding problem. The next week, senators Tester and Daines were in a senate sub-committee meeting with Chief Tidwell and they shared with him how much harm this budget cut will do to the Forest Service trail system in Montana and the people who use the trails. By the end of the week, Chief Tidwell sent a letter to the senators saying that the trail budget for the Northern Region will remain the same as in 2015 and that they will reevaluate the trails funding allocation model within the next year.

While BCHMT was successful this time, we need to keep paying attention to the trail funding that is received here in Montana.

While we were doing research on this topic, we became aware that the Flathead National Forest is planning on taking back country trail money and using it on front country trails. Of course, we sent a letter in opposition and will continue to follow up. Perhaps you and your local BCH chapter should look into the trail budgets on your local Forest.
It’s always impossible to sum up one’s life in a few short paragraphs, especially someone as talented, kind, loving and special as Dave. He and his wife Julie were founding members of the Selway-Pintler Wilderness Back Country Horsemen in 2006. Dave was a rancher, packer, farrier, musician and one of the best mule men around. His hard work and dedication as a Back Country Horseman was astonishing. Dave could pack anything. He and Julie were always there when a string of 7 to 8 head were needed for a pack project. They not only volunteered for BCH pack support, but traveled the state helping out the CDTMT, Forest Service, Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation and countless of other back country users and contractors. It would be impossible to guess how many logs Dave has cleared off the trails in his lifetime! Dave was a quiet man, with a slow and steady approach. You could always count on him to get the job done. As a farrier, well, he was one of the best. He was patient and kind and truly cared about the animal. It was rare that a shoe was ever lost. Camping with Dave was always a pleasure…such a hearty appetite and a wonderful sense of humor! There was always a twinkle in his eye and a smile for you when you met him. Not only has the SPWBCH lost a true friend and a core member of our chapter, but the BCH as a whole has lost a member who was one of a kind. He is truly missed and was loved by all. Thanks for the ride my friend…we will pat a tree for you on the trail and keep you in our hearts.
Sitting around the table the Charlie Russell board was trying to figure out who was going to write an article for the State newsletter. It’s one of those meetings that everyone attends or the absent person gets nominated, we’ve all been there. Well the suggestion was made for me to write an article on the blasting project I helped with last year. Before I knew it there was a unanimous vote, even my wife voted for me to write the article. That’s the way I remember it any way.

We’ve all done so many projects that they all seem to blend together as the years go by. Let’s face it, trail clearing will never win a Pulitzer Prize. However there was a project I helped on doing some blasting so that a small section of trail was not so treacherous during the winter time. There was this one spot that was on a very steep granite hillside, where at one point the trail being 24” wide with a spring coming out at the high point and running down the rocky trail. During the summer this location was no problem, but during the winter months the tread would ice over making it unsafe to ride a horse over. I usually got off and walked my horse as the down side drop off was a sheer 12 foot in the middle of a rock slide, definitely a pucker factor when it was iced up.

The district decided to blast and widen the tread so that there would be more room. I volunteered to help out since I was always nagging them to do something before we had a wreck or lost a horse. Ian Bardwell from the Rocky Mountain Ranger District was in charge. We used Forest Service stock for packing C4 explosive and the tools required for the day. The rock drill weighed what seemed like a hundred pounds and was older than me. I believe it took us most of the day to drill the holes in the granite and then connect them with fuse wire. We were to position ourselves 200 yards away, above and below for safety reasons. I decided to set my camera on a log about 40’ from the blast site and turned on the video (in hind sight this was a little too close). Horses were with us further down the trail but in eye sight during the blast for their safety and ours.

When the explosion went off I could feel the shock wave roll down the narrow drainage. My horse bellied down so much it looked like she had fallen down and then popped back up eyes wide probably wondering what was going on.

After a short break we carefully approached the site and began the clean-up. The blast worked perfectly and the end result was a wider tread with the spring flowing directly off the tread. There is a 20 second video on the CRBCH face book site for your enjoyment; sorry to say that my camera has not been the same since the filming.
Support your local Wilderness foundation with packing support

There are many opportunities for you to support young folks who want to swing the Pulaski. Volunteer to provide packing support for back country trail crews, working through one of our partner organizations throughout the state.

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation has over 30 packing support opportunities throughout the summer. Contact Rebecca at 406.387.3868 or program@bmwf.org. The Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation was formed in 2005 and helps steward 4 million acres across Idaho and Montana. Contact the SBFC by calling 208.871.1906 or www.selwaybitterroot.org.

The Absaroka-Beartooth Wildness Foundation’s fifth field season kicks off this spring. Every year they are growing with more projects and working with more partner groups. Contact the ABWF by calling David at 406.425.1944 or info@abwilderness.org.

And, don’t forget the Continental Divide Trail (CDT Montana). CDT Montana, now working under the Montana Wilderness Association, is tasked with completing the CDT trail through Montana and Idaho, the largest unfinished section at only 58% completed. Contact Zuri 406.438.2040 or Shannon 406.499.2309 for more information about packing opportunities on the CDT.

HISTORY OF BCHA
Revised 2/20/2015

1973 Flathead Valley, Montana
1977 Back Country Horsemens of Washington
1979 Salmon, Idaho + Montana = BCHA
1981 California High Sierra Stock Users
1987 Affiliate: Oklahoma = 6 states
1989 Oklahoma withdraws = 5 states
1993 States: Wyoming, Utah; Affiliate: NW BCH of NM
1994 Affiliates: BCH Arizona, Tiller Creek OR, High Desert Trail Riders OR, Homer AK = 10
1995 State: New Mexico; Affiliate: 4 Corners BCH CO, BOC of Ozarks AR = 12
1996 States: Nevada, North Carolina; Affiliate: Front Range CO = 14
1997 States: Oregon, Colorado = 14
1998 Dropped Alaska affiliate 13
1999 Affiliate: SE Oklahoma, North Arkansas = 15 Confirm: Buffalo River affiliate
2001 Affiliate: Central Arizona = 15
2003 Affiliates: Show Me Missouri, Hoosier Indiana, Golden Horseshoe VA = 22
2004 State: Show Me MO; Affiliate: Lake Havasu AZ – moved to AZ state organization
2005 Affiliates: Ottawa MI, No Man’s Land VA = 23
2006 Affiliates: Middle & South GA, Southern Appalachian TN = 24
2007 State: Hoosier Indiana; Affiliates: Alaska, Florida Forever, North GA = 25
2008 States: Alabama; Affiliates: Kentucky and Wisconsin (Chequamegon) = 28
2009 States: Virginia; Affiliates: Iron Mtn VA, Ft Harrod KY, Red River KY, Big South Fork TN, Pigeon River & Beyond MI; lost S. Carolina = 28
2010 State: West Virginia; Affiliate: South Dakota; Lost Wisconsin = 29
2011 State: Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky; Affiliates: East Coast Florida BCH, Central Michigan, Black Hill SD = 29
2012 State: South Dakota
2014 States: Arkansas, Florida, Kansas = 30
2015 States: Michigan, Mississippi; Affiliate: Saratoga NY = 32
2016 States: Alaska, Iowa, North Dakota = 35

The adventure started months before when I spoke with Shannon Freix about the possibility of the Gallatin Valley chapter being the pack support for the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) at their Targhee Pass trail project on August 1st through the 8th. The plan was brought up at our board meeting and I got commitment from enough people that we could help them out. We have been involved with the 4-H program lately in providing training and support for their new packing clinics. When I mentioned the CDT project, Greg Benjamin, the 4-H leader in charge of the packing clinics, asked if it would be acceptable if some of the more advanced students could pack the CDT group in and the Gallatin Valley chapter could pack them out. CDT was fine with that arrangement so the packers all registered online and the adventure began.

According to the Montana Wilderness Association’s Continental Divide Trail 2015 season summary, the “packer value” for the 980 miles of the Continental Divide Trail that they oversee was $63,840. We are proud to be members of the Back Country Horsemen of America, an organization that cares for and shares trails with others.

August 1, 2015, dawned sunny and warm as we loaded the nine horses into the trailers for the two hour trip from Bozeman to Targhee Pass Trailhead. It took a few tries to find the unmarked road that led to the trailhead, but once there, there was plenty of space for parking and arranging the equipment.

Four Gallatin Valley Back Country Horsemen, including a 3rd year 4-H Horse Packing Project member, volunteered to move approximately 1,000 pounds of gear for the Montana Wilderness Association. We packed the supplies, enough to last a dozen people a week in the wilderness, in order to improve a section along the Continental Divide.

The Wilderness Association’s workers were appreciative of our ef-
Decker Dispatch

forts. They especially liked when we asked for all their day packs in order to stuff them into a four-foot plastic culvert to balance a load. Although the actual trail we rode was short in length, it was beautiful with high mountain views. At our destination, the volunteers helped unload packs and petted the horses. For some, the experience of being around packing animals was unique. After a leisurely lunch, group photo, and handshakes all around, we loaded up our own gear and spent the rest of the day exploring trails in the area.

None of the Pack-Out group had been to the trailhead before and nobody wanted to camp out the night before, so we got up at 0 dark 30 on a cold rainy August day and headed to Targhee Pass. We had exchanged emails with the Pack-In group so we had a good idea of what to expect. The crew consisted of Lawrence and Kathy Vandyke, Carmen and Scott Orr, and Dan and Alice Marsh with Alice staying at the trailhead because we had to use her horse for packing. Each of us lived in a different section of the county so we had to figure out what time to get going to meet at the trailhead at 7 AM, get packed up and head down the trail by 8 AM and meet the crew at their campsite three miles up the trail at 9 AM. It was 117 miles from my house to the trailhead and Carmen and Scott had a two-horse trailer and a new mule along with their riding horses so I left the house at 4:15, drove by their place and picked up the mule at 4:30, before heading down the canyon.

By some miracle we all arrived at the trailhead a little before 7 AM. Lawrence and Kathy each had a riding horse/mule and brought three pack mules; Carmen and Scott each had a riding horse and the new mule; I had a riding horse and packed my wife’s stout Foxtrotter. The new mule took a while to fit the borrowed pack saddle but luckily all the straps could be adjusted enough to make it work. We brought a couple of hard-sided panniers and a pair of soft panniers and lots of rope. Most of the CDT gear was supposed to be in boxes waiting for us at camp.

All went well on the trip into the camp site except for the trails that were slicker than snot on a doorknob and the visibility that was a couple inches past our nose. Did I mention it was raining? We got to the campsite right at 9 AM and there were a lot of wet happy faces huddled under a tree, waiting and relieved to see us. They had thoughts we might not show up because of the rain and were not looking forward to having to unpack their tents and spend another night at camp. The trail crew did a great job of balancing the loads so we loaded all of the tools in the hard panniers and the Foxtrotter had the job of packing them out. We brought hooks and straps for the boxes so they went on the deckers very well and we cinched them down with a patented Lawrence diamond hitch. By 10:30 we were all packed up and ready to head back to the trailhead. I was in the back when we started out but the tools were making so much racket the mules were having a fit so Lawrence pulled over and let me pass and when the mules could see what all the racket was, they settled down and we got back to the trailhead without a rodeo. None of the packs came loose and everything arrived back at the parking lot intact. The CDT crew thanked us for our help and we said our goodbyes. We left the trailhead at noon and made our way back home. Did I mention it was still raining? We stopped at the Corral Bar on the way back for a late lunch. I got back home twelve hours later and after putting the horses up, I took a little nap.

Overall the project went well and the CDT folks were great to work with. If your chapter has a chance to work with the CDT I recommend that you jump at the chance. I have the whole adventure on GPS for anyone that needs to know where the Targhee Pass trailhead is or the CDT campsite along the trail. I would like to go back there some day when the sun is out to be able to see what it looks like. I was told by the Pack-In crew that there are great views up there.
In the News

Former Forest Supervisor: Why I Resigned Over a Public Land Dispute

BY GLORIA FLORA ET, JANUARY 13, 2016

GLORIA FLORA IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SUSTAINABLE OBTAINABLE SOLUTIONS, AN ORGANIZATION ENSURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLIC LANDS.

Bringing the hammer down on the Bundys won’t fix the much bigger problems our lands face.

Once again, a provocative armed display of dissatisfaction with a federal land management agency is unfolding—this time, at a remote wildlife refuge in southern Oregon. It’s been happening since 1848, when Mexico ceded the southwest quadrant of the United States after losing the Mexican-American War. Early settlers were primarily Mormons and Confederate Civil War refugees, both fiercely anti-federal government. Those attitudes haven’t changed much.

In the late 1990s, when I served as Forest Supervisor of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in Nevada and eastern California, the simmering anti-federal government animosities boiled over dangerously multiple times but failed to garner much notice. Now, we’re seeing a similar boil-over in Oregon. The Nevada-based protestors, despite confusion over history and the exact purpose of their one-sided standoff, are demanding privatization, to give the land back to “the people.” It sounds compelling, but it’s invented history.

The federal government created the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, the focus of this standoff, by usurping the Native American Pauite Nation’s homeland, then, years later, aggregating their abandoned reservation and a used-up cattle ranch bought at a premium during the Depression. The Malheur occupation today sounds a battle-cry of frustration from unwanted proxies who believe they speak for the people of Harney County. Clearly, the interlopers have their facts wrong. But their hair-trigger reaction to a situation reminiscent of their grievances deserves a closer look.

The heart of the matter is that the human dimensions of managing public lands are just as important as the physical and biological dimensions. We Americans love our landscapes. Those who spend a lifetime on the land, like ranchers, connect with it even more deeply. That attachment, our sense of place, is part of our identities. The mythos of the West, with its freedom of the open range, may not be entirely accurate, but it’s written in our cultural DNA and value systems. When you threaten someone’s land ethic, values and lifestyle, you’re in for a fight.

Nevada has a preponderance of public lands, mostly fenced by the Department of Defense. Feds there have sparred with a small, loud cohort of rural citizens for decades. These self-described patriots have used bulldozers to “open” roads (often destroying spawning habitat, river channels and artifacts in their wake) and bombed federal property, offices and an employee’s home. The renegades, which include elected officials, have treated federal employees and their families to threats (and actual) bodily injury and property damage, thrown them out of restaurants and hotels, and submitted them to harassment, shunning and public shaming. I resigned to call national attention to this violence against employees and public lands, which only temporarily slowed them down.

Much of Nevada and conservative parts of Western states look on in amusement. Fed-bashing remains a popular spectator sport in these parts. But armed stand-offs by wanna-be revolutionaries and their flagrant refusal to pay for their commercial use of public lands isn’t winning many hearts and minds. Nor is the seldom-publicized disease of federal violence these people commit against employees of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, an average of 214 incidents every year for the past 20 years. Far more go unreported out of fear of retribution.

Throw in extractive industries, anti-environment extremists and federal politicians fomenting more fear with bizarre warnings of rural cleansing by the feds. Local politicians are often complicit or remain silent.

Indeed there are plenty of cringe-worthy federal missteps: a mash-up of under-reactions, over-reactions and egotism. Flashy, strong-arm displays by U.S. law enforcement haven’t worked; it doesn’t matter that they’re legally right. Arrogance on the part of any federal land manager or agent is inexcusable. But laws or consequences of breaking them can’t be ignored repeatedly by public servants sworn to uphold them.

Then there are the majority of Americans in the middle, who expect federal laws to be enforced, protecting public land from abuse and theft while sustainably, scientifically managing it for the future. Come hell or high water.

The term “cowboy welfare” didn’t materialize out of thin air. Grazing allotments on public land are privileges, not rights, subsidized by fees 93% cheaper than private pasture in the West. Many small and mid-sized ranching operations can’t pencil out if they are not using subsidized grazing on public lands.

That’s an extremely stressful realization and a symptom of artificially controlled markets, corporate mergers of meat-packers (there are only four in the U.S.) and a globalized economic system that no longer rewards American values of pluck and boot-straps. It’s not the fault of environmentalists, East Coast liberals or a federal agency. There are larger forces at work here. Fighting symptoms does not cure the disease.

Policies crafted without heart or wisdom can add to this difficult conundrum. Robotic implementation of those rules further aggravates the grievances and tensions. Respectfully seeking to understand these stressors and their effects on communities and agencies is an essential first step, because things aren’t getting any easier.

A flagging economy, bedeviled by drought, floods and wildfires, puts us all on thin ice. Community members, including federal employees, need to help each other in new and deeper ways because the external support systems can no longer maintain our collective safety and prosperity nor can they sustainably manage our public lands for
future generations, let alone ours.

The rise of forest collaboratives and citizen-lead legislation over the past decade offers bright rays of hope. We all want meaningful jobs and relationships, economic stability and resilient, productive landscapes. People from all sides of public-land issues, if they choose to, can repair relationships so that they can work toward those common goals. As a result of collaboration, we’ve seen the demise of timber wars allowing increased forest restoration and jobs in small towns throughout the West. And federal land managers are responding positively, despite the impacts of falling budgets and rising wildfire costs.

There are 25 forest collaboratives in Oregon alone, including one in Harney County. Ranchers, conservationists, hunters and foresters across America can and do work together for the collective good. For example, those are the folks behind the citizen-generated Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act, focused on preserving 350,000 public acres in Montana as a haven for wildlife and recreation, a draw for jobs and economic security for communities, and a place for grazing for ranches that have operated there for more than 100 years. The Act helps fight weeds and secures more than 67,000 acres of new Wilderness on lands already managed for their wilderness qualities, adding the first new Wilderness acres in Montana in 31 years. It took seven years and endless one-on-one conversations but emerged with solid citizen backing, 80 supporting organizations and bi-partisan support. Despite profound differences, all sides came together for the common good.

I left a remarkable career and my retirement on the table to try to end this divisiveness. Of all people, you’d think I’d be the first to call for the hammer to come down on this fringe element. But that won’t protect public lands or promote civility in public land management. So let’s put down the guns and handbooks, exchanging vitriol for honest cooperation and common sense. Our finite public resources are under siege by natural, economic and global forces bigger than Bundy’s boys. That demands the best stewardship we can muster—collectively.

Follow-up Story: Lease Canceled

The Department of Interior cancels oil and gas lease in the sacred Badger-Two Medicine

By Casey Perkins, Montana Wilderness Association, Rocky Mountain Front field director

There will be no oil rigs rolling into the sacred Badger-Two Medicine anytime soon.

This morning, the federal government took action to terminate the Solenex lease on the grounds that it was improperly and therefore illegally issued in 1982.

In a letter to Solenex, the acting Montana director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) wrote that the BLM and United States Forest Service (USFS) violated the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act. He also explained that the agencies “failed to comport with the national policy to protect and preserve the rights of American Indians to exercise traditional religions, including access to important sites.”

The letter to Solenex goes on: “The BLM and the Department have determined that surface disturbing activities are incompatible with the irreplaceable natural and cultural resources of the Badger-Two medicine area. Those resources must be safeguarded from all future oil and gas activities.”

The Louisiana-based Solenex company filed its original complaint to U.S. District Judge Richard Leon in 2013, alleging that the government had unlawfully delayed the development of the lease and asking the court to lift the lease suspension so the company could begin drilling in the Badger as early as the summer of 2016. This direct threat to the cultural, historical, and ecological values of the Badger-Two Medicine, just south of Glacier National Park, inspired a cascade of opposition to drilling there.

From tribal nations to sportsmen and women to people across Montana who love wild places, we raised our voices together – and we have been heard.

We also recognize that there is more work to be done. We expect this action will be appealed. The Blackfeet will keep fighting, and so will we. Fortunately, we will be continuing our fight on firm ground because the government’s defense of lease cancellation is legally and morally sound.

We are optimistic that this decision will be upheld and that we will be able to turn our attention to the seventeen remaining leases over 34,000 acres in the Badger. This first cancellation is a big step forward, and we’ll keep moving forward until all of these leases are gone.

Montanans realize that there are some places that are too important, too culturally and ecologically significant, to be drilled. The Badger-Two Medicine is one of those places. We’re thankful that the Department of Interior and Secretary Sally Jewell have come to this realization as well.

MWA will continue working with the Blackfeet tribe until the Badger is finally and permanently protected.

Editor’s note: Solenex has challenged the cancellation of the lease, asking US District Court Judge Richard Leon to reject the Interior Department’s cancellation of the lease. See our on-line newsletter for more details.
Montana State BCH Convention 2016
[continued from front page]
dies; Connie Long, Sandy Himmel and Abby Hutton who presented the items for auction. Between these ladies and Zane there definitely was some lively entertainment provided. The silent auction ended at that time, followed by the raffle drawing. That was followed by The Crawford Brothers Band from Heart Butte. Judging by the number of people staying to hear the music and dance, I would say they were a success.

Sunday morning brought Cowboy Church presided over by our members Clete Gregory and Marty Metz. Marty did a wonderful job giving an inspirational message of our Lord. Clete and Marty also provide music with Marty on the guitar and Clete on the piano, great job guys.

The general session began with outgoing President Connie Long reading letters of recommendation for individuals from different chapters, and presenting a chairman’s award to each. Photo contest winners were announced in all four categories with ribbons awarded for prizes to the first three vote getters in each category along with one overall people’s choice award. We also heard a very interesting presentation from Casey Perkins from the Montana Wilderness Association on the oil leases in the Badger Two-Medicine.

Following the break, the business was concluded with a vote on the wording of the resolution, and a decision to appoint a committee to work on the revision of the constitution. New state officer nominations were announced with Brad Pollman as the new BCHMT Chairman, Rich Carl as Vice Chairman and Sherrie Lionberger as Treasurer. These candidates would be voted on along with nominations from the floor at the post convention State Board meeting. Sherrie and Bernie Lionberger did a presentation on the fires in the Bob Marshall Wilderness and fire policy. The general session concluded followed by the State Board post convention meeting.

We then heard the nominations for our National Directors. As senior director, Chuck Miller was unable to continue due to term limits. We had to elect another national director. Getting the nomination was Mark Himmel who will serve along with John Chepulis. We also elected one alternate National Director, that being Connie Long.

We would like to give Chuck Miller a great big THANK YOU for all his years of service to us as our National Director. Chuck, you did an amazing job and always kept us very informed of all that was going on at the national level. Thanks again for all your selfless work.

Thank you all who attended for making this convention a fun and successful experience. We will see you all next spring in Polson!
Louisiana company challenges Badger Two-Medicine ruling
Reported by MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press; Updated Apr 16, 2016

BILLINGS – A Louisiana company challenged the cancellation of an oil and gas lease in northwest Montana on Friday, after federal officials said drilling would disturb an area sacred to the Blackfoot tribes of the U.S. and Canada.

The 6,200-acre lease owned by Solenex LLC of Baton Rouge is in the Badger-Two Medicine area of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. It’s just outside Glacier National Park and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

Attorneys for the company want U.S. District Judge Richard Leon in Washington, D.C., to reject the Interior Department’s March 17 cancellation of the lease.

Leon has been sympathetic to Solenex’s arguments in prior court hearings, lambasting officials for decades of bureaucratic delays since the lease was issued in 1982. It was suspended because of a legal challenge in 1985, and the issue had remained unresolved ever since.

Solenex sued the government seeking to lift the suspension in 2013.

The lease is within a 165,000-acre area deemed by the government to be a Traditional Cultural District of the Blackfoot tribes. It’s the site of the creation story for the Blackfoot tribes of southern Canada and the Blackfeet Nation of Montana.

Attorneys for Solenex say the establishment of the cultural district was simply a pretext to deny the company its right to drill.

“For 33 years, (the Interior Department) affirmatively represented – through their actions, statements, documents – that the lease was valid and properly issued,” Solenex attorney Steven Lechner wrote in a Friday court filing.

He added that the cancellation was done out of spite in response to prior rulings from Leon favorable to the company.

Interior officials contend the lease was improperly issued in part because environmental studies did not consider the effects of drilling on the tribes. Spokeswoman Amanda Degroff said the agency would not comment Friday on the pending litigation.

Forest Service reverses course on trails budget cut
By Chris Peterson, Hungry Horse News. Reprinted with permission.

The Forest Service has reversed course on a trail maintenance budget cut for Montana and other states in the Northern Region. Both Montana Sens. Steve Daines and Jon Tester criticized a move by the Service last week that would shift funds from states like Montana to southern regions where there are more people.

The funding shift locally meant a 10 percent reduction in funding this year and an additional 10 percent cut in the next two years. For the Flathead National Forest, it would have amounted to a $60,000 cut this year alone and more than a $160,000 cut total by year three.

Statewide, the measure would have cut nearly $1 million from Montana’s trails budget this year.

“Montanans use public trails to hike, hunt, and experience our great outdoors,” Tester said today after the Forest Service announced it would make the trails budget “nearly whole” again. “These trails are critically important to our outdoor economy, and restoring these damaging cuts will allow folks to continue to explore Big Sky Country. I appreciate the Forest Service taking another look at how important this is to Montana.”

“Montana’s National Forests and public lands are a treasured part of our state and today’s news ensures that Montanans will continue to enjoy our great outdoors,” Daines said. “As an avid outdoorsman, I know how important maintaining and expanding access to our public lands are for our way of life. This is a welcome step to see the Forest Service value Montanans’ feedback and I will continue to press the Forest Service for strong trail budgets for Montana each and every year.”

Tester is a Democrat and Daines is a Republican. Both men expressed displeasure at the budget cuts during a hearing earlier this month with Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell.