



# The North Fork News

North Fork Landowners' Association - Fall 2009

## **The NFLA Historical** Committee held its

inaugural meeting on October 6, 2009. The committee is co-chaired by Debo Powers and Morgan Hart. The meeting was well attended with 7 members gathering to discuss ways in which the NFLA can locate, duplicate, categorize and store aspects of the rich historical heritage of the North Fork. The collective activities of the committee, its members and any interested affiliated individuals will be referred to as The North Fork History Project for external communications purposes. Potential project areas discussed by the committee included: oral history, a timeline of the North Fork with associated reference materials, Indian trails, history of fire, homesteader biographies, art history and culinary history.

There are a great deal of artifacts in the form of oral histories and stories; documents such as diaries, journals and letters; photos and maps as well as locations of buildings which need to be captured before they are lost. Our old timers aren't getting any younger and deteriorating source materials should be collected, duplicated and stored as soon as possible. Efforts were initiated to locate these artifacts with initial priority given to locating and conducting interviews with senior

North Fork residents and former residents.

The committee was excited at the prospect of relocating the old North Fork School House (aka Funk Cabin) to a location adjacent to Sondreson Hall and having it be a North Fork Museum. We discussed the need for funds to make that happen. There has been discussion at the last two business meetings about reviving the North Fork auction and the Historical Committee suggested using the auction specifically as a fundraising activity to raise money to acquire and move the old school house. The committee is also going to pursue federal RAC funding.

Finally, the committee would like to urge all NFLA members to think about and list anything that you can think of that might be of interest for the project. Make a list of the people, stories, documents, pictures, diaries, drawings, maps, journals, tools, books, photos, tapes, etc., even buildings, and send the list to either Debo Powers ([powersd@mail.leon.k12.fl.us](mailto:powersd@mail.leon.k12.fl.us)) or Morgan Hart ([dmhart@cyberneutics.com](mailto:dmhart@cyberneutics.com)). There is a vast store of knowledge in North Forkers themselves. We need to identify and locate former residents. As committee member Tom Edwards said during the meeting: "People make the North Fork special." Help preserve the memories of this special place.

**Ruth Sondreson** would like to hear from her friends and past neighbors. Besides providing and milling the lumber for the hall, she and her husband Loyd were the co-sponsors of our "Thanksgiving Dinner" tradition which began in 1975 with 27 participants. She has moved to:

Avamere at Sherwood, Apartment #204  
16500 Century Drive  
Sherwood, OR 97140

She is doing quite well and will be celebrating her 92nd birthday this coming May 18.

**Thanksgiving Dinner at the Hall** begins Thursday, November 27 at 3 pm. Dinner will be served at 4. Bring your table service and your favorite side dish. Host is once again Steve Berg.

**Winter Inter Local Meeting** will be held mid morning February 10 at the Office of Fish Wildlife and Parks in Kalispell and is sponsored by the US Border Patrol.

**Keep informed**—check [www.nflandowners.com](http://www.nflandowners.com) regularly for updates or to download your membership application.

**Giving back to the community,** members of the NFLA voted at the September 5 business meeting to collect donations for the Columbia Falls Food Bank. Driven by a desire to enhance community relations between the North Fork residents and those in the valley, the NFLA gathered 327 pounds of food and cash contributions totaling \$290 at the October business meeting. The food drive will continue next summer. All members of the NFLA wish to thank Bob Grimaldi who is spearheading this effort. Details of next year's food bank program will appear in the Spring NFLA Newsletter and at [www.NFLAowners.com](http://www.NFLAowners.com).

**On a visit to the banks** of the Flathead River near Blankenship on August 12, Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, "pledged his support for a long-term solution that would protect the Flathead River from mining threats," reports Chris Peterson in the August 13 Hungry Horse News.



The latest threat concerns gold-mine exploration by the Max Resource Corp. in the Howell Creek drainage and in the Crowsnest, about 10 miles north of the border in British Columbia. Accompanied by Sens. Max Baucus and Jon Tester, Salazar held a press conference at Blankenship visiting with scientists, Glacier National Park officials and businesspeople, reports Peterson.

In a related story, Peterson reports that Baucus had written Secretary of State Hillary Clinton with his concerns. In response, a spokesman for Max Resource emphasized that the firm is doing exploration work only, and Canadian officials said "Canada disagrees with any presumption that the Waterton-Glacier World Heritage Site is in danger from resource development activities in Canada," reports Peterson.

June 2009 brought about a change in ownership of the **Polebridge Mercantile**. Flannery Coats and Stuart Reiswig took the keys from Dan and Deb Kaufman and with their help jumped into the day-to-day operations of the store and bakery. Sixteen-hour days and learning the basics of baking and store ownership, prevented them from much in the way of community outreach during the super-busy summer, but now that things are beginning to slow down, Flannery and Stuart would like to get to meet each and every member of the North Fork community!

They are looking forward to filling up visitors on the cold winter days with coffee, hot chocolate or tea, along with one of their delicious baked goods. In return, they are eager to hear stories, have conversations and get suggestions as to how they can better serve the needs of the community. Their desire to reach out to the community requires reciprocal action by us! They would like to tie some community events, such as a baking bee or a chainsaw carving contest, to the store that would serve to benefit us all.

Their interest in community comes naturally as both have extensive backgrounds in the field. During the past year they worked for community agencies in Missoula, Stuart at the Poverello Shelter and Flannery at the Women's Organization for Resources and Development. Before Missoula both volunteered as teachers at the Working Boys Center in Quito, Ecuador. This community development organization, recognized as a model agency by the U.N., provides education, vocational training, and food programs for families who have migrated from rural areas in the Andes to the city.

After Thanksgiving the Merc will be open Friday through Sunday until April, as well as for special occasions. Coffee is on and a fire is in the stove! We all wish Dan and Deb well in their new lives and offer a big welcome to Flannery and Stuart.



**The Cell Phone Committee** has made inquiries into getting a tower that would serve users in the north fork. Homeland security will support efforts in this direction but there seems to be no interest on behalf of the service providers.

Zoning regulations provide for the construction of cell phone towers as a "conditional" use. Any cellular tower would require a conditional use permit from the county.

It has been reported that some residents have had luck with powered boosters in both their vehicles as well as their homes. Those interested should seek advice from one of the local radio gear service centers.

**The NFLA Weed Committee** met on September 30th with members Valerie Cox, John Frederick, Will Hammerquist, Annemarie Harrod and Steve Weber present in order to set goals and to assign tasks for our first year.

The group initially reviewed weed identification booklets provided by Glacier National Park's Weed Management Coordinator, looked at the U.S. Forest Service's Weed Plan and examined some of the available pamphlets from Montana State University Extension Service. Members focused on invasive weeds known to be present in the North Fork.

The committee targeted service to North Fork landowners through education that will broaden weed identification skills and present to them a variety of options for weed treatment. With the help of federal, state and county agencies, the committee will pursue grant monies to assist in mapping and mitigating the North Fork's weed infestations.

A fun and educational "Weed Rodeo Day" is planned for mid-July 2010. So all of you weed wranglers and weed vigilantes, get ready to have a good time, good food, and good advice on corralling your weeds!

**North Forkers** will see several brand-new smiling faces at future North Fork Landowners' Association meetings, as the board of directors experienced maximum turnover at the annual elections Aug. 1 at Sondreson Hall.

Betsy Holycross was elected to her first one-year term as NFLA president, replacing Molly Shepherd, who finished her second consecutive term in that post. Shepherd will remain on the board of directors as immediate past president.

Margaret Heaphy was elected to a one-year term as vice president, replacing the retiring Oliver Meister. During his years of service to the North Fork, Meister was active in many association projects, including a weed-control program.

Ed Heger will be leaving the NFLA board as Past President. He has been appointed to the Flathead Basin Commission.

Lee Secrest was newly elected to the board for a two-year term as north director. He replaces the retiring Lynn Ogle, who is Flathead County's North Fork fire chief. Also new to the board of directors is Richard Hildner, who was elected to a two-year term as south director. Hildner replaces the retiring Frank Vitale, who masterminded construction of Sondreson Hall's dazzling new front porch.

Holycross appointed Valerie Cox to her first term as secretary-treasurer. Cox replaces Pat Cole, who retired after nine years of impeccable service in that position. Cox has been active in organizing hike-and-bike outings.

Not up for election were North Director Steve Berg and South Director Jan Caldwell, who were in the middle of their two-year terms.

## Road Committee



In September, 2008, President Molly Shepherd appointed Margaret Heaphy, Betsy Holycross, Ed Heger, Steve Berg and Steve Weber to the road committee which was charged with examining the background of past actions on the North Fork Road exploring the range of options going forward and making that information available to the North Fork community. The committee held its first meeting December 12 and met monthly thereafter through June 2009. Committee members agreed to meet with the federal, state and local agencies which are or have been involved in North Fork Road decisions and actions and subsequently met at least once or communicated with:

- Flathead County Road Department
- Flathead county Commissioner
- Glacier National Park,
- United States Forest Service
- U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Resource Advisory Council Member
- Montana Department of Transportation
- Montana Department of Environmental Quality
- Montana Fish , Wildlife and Parks
- U.S. Border Patrol

Summaries of committee and agency meetings were posted on the NFLA webpage and reports of these meetings were made to the NFLA (June meeting) and NFRCHS (August meeting). A brief recap follows:

**The Feds:** Thirty years ago, Flathead County and the USFS planned to have the Canyon to Camas portion of the North Fork road paved. However, because there were threatened and endangered species (T&Es), in the project area, namely grizzly bears and gray wolves, the Federal Highway Administration had to consult with the USFWS about the impacts of the project on the bears and wolves. The USFWS concluded that the paving project would "likely threaten the continued existence of the grizzly bear and gray wolf." This "jeopardy opinion" meant that going forward with the project might violate the Endangered Species Act and would almost inevitably be challenged in court. Conse-

quently, the plan to pave the road was scrapped and a gravel road was constructed between 1984 and 1987.

Thirty years later, environmental considerations still loom large for almost any action on the North Fork Road. Major new construction projects, like paving from Canyon to Camas, would require a new EIS and another consultation with the USFWS. The environment has changed over the years and so have the T & Es. Wolves have been delisted and the grizzly bear population is recovering. On the other hand, the Canada lynx and bull trout have been added to the T & E list. Furthermore, the analysis of project impacts now extends beyond the project footprint and assesses the broader ecological impacts. Another factor is Glacier National Park's strong recommendation against paving any of the road including the nine miles between the Canyon and Camas. The Park cites it's mission is to preserve and protect the primitive values inherent in the North Fork portion of the Park.

**County and State:** The Road Committee spent considerable time meeting with state and county agencies looking at what is being done on the road and what might be done respect to dust control and dust abatement.

Flathead County Road Dept is busy working on the section of road from Camas northward toward Polebridge. The first stage was to shape the roadway and ditches as well as removing rocks and debris from the road edges that would interfere with future grading. Those landowners returning to the North Fork will notice the superb job done by the county in this regard.

The county awarded a contract this summer to crush gravel and mix bentonite (clay) with it as a means to better solidify and stabilize the material in an effort to reduce dust. The U.S. Forest Service's Demer's Ridge gravel pit is being used for this purpose. Work will continue this fall as long as the weather cooperates.

The county is working on a County Wide Management Plan to prioritize all county roads for maintenance treatments. This will be the work plan for the road maintenance budget for the next 2 years. One factor influencing the prioritization of roads is how many vehicles travel on the road. The county did a

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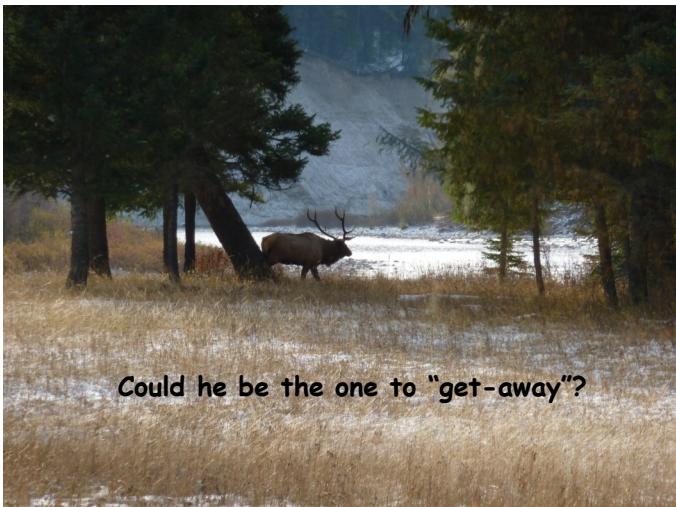
(Road News Continued from page 4)

vehicle count at 5 different locations on the North Fork road from September 4 through September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009. The plan will be finalized this fall.

Recently completed is a new concrete bridge over Teepee Creek near the Ford Work Center. The Trail Creek Bridge is on tap for replacement next summer which will complete the upgrade to all bridges along the north fork road.

On Sept. 8, 2009 Laura Fay, a research scientist at Western Transportation Institute, came to talk to the community about "Dust Control Options". WTI was founded in 1994 by Caltrans, MTDOT, and MSU, and is part of the Engineering Dept at Montana State University, MSU. Laura participated in the first international conference on dust entitled **Problems and Future Needs**. Laura talked about using a feasibility study as a tool for the community to look at all the possible solutions for the North Fork road. A feasibility study all options, related costs, lifespan of treatments and impacts of each treatment.

The road committee has a meeting planned with Jim Dupont, county commissioner and Jim Lynch, MTDOT, to see if a feasibility study would be beneficial to the county as well as the landowners.



**Fire was discovered** near Ninko Creek on Friday, September 18 burning to the west of the 2003 Wedge Canyon Fire and north of Whale Creek .



Forest Service Photo

On September 27, USFS spokesman Denice Germann reported that there was no cause for alarm on the part of North Fork residents living near the fire. If the situation changed and there was cause for concern, the affected North Fork residents would be provided with plenty of warning by the Flathead County Sheriff's department coming door-to-door.

At the NFLA October business meeting Larry Wilson reported that the fire area had grown to 600 acres but continued to be well contained. On October 5, Ms. Germann reported the fire was fully confined but would continue to be staffed and monitored as needed until there was a "fire-ending event."

Although residents in the area can expect to see some smoke as it smolders or burns in the interior of the fire, all roads and trails have been reopened.

To the right is a picture taken by member Joe Novak on October 3 from near Trail Creek showing the fire running into snow!



## The NFLA ***Fire Mitigation Committee***

sponsored a wildfire workshop on July 8, 2009. The workshop focused on the status of federal, state and private wildfire mitigation efforts in the North Fork Valley six years after the Wedge Canyon Fire. Representatives from the Forest Service, the Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, the Northwest Regional Resource Conservation & Development Council (RC&D) and the Fire Mitigation Committee addressed how the landscape has changed since 2003. They also considered what remains to be done to mitigate the risk of wildfire to structures.



Detailed maps showed how public and private efforts complement one another. According to RC&D Community Forester Bill Swope, the collaboration has yielded "phenomenal" results. The maps will be kept in Son-dreson Hall.

The workshop served as the North Fork's Firewise Day, thereby satisfying one of the criteria for maintaining our annual Firewise Community status review. Among other benefits, the Federal Emergency Management Administration gives a Firewise Community priority in consideration for pre-disaster mitigation planning and project grants.

The Fire Mitigation Committee gave awards to three RC&D foresters at the Inter Local meeting. Mike Justus, Bill Swope and Mason Richwine launched and implemented our fire mitigation cost-share program. Since 2004, they have met with approximately 150 North Fork landowners, entered into 99 cost-share agreements and disbursed about \$280,000 in grant funds.

The Forest Service has been planning its Red Whale Project fire mitigation project for years, in cooperation with other agencies and North Fork landowners. Implementation of Red Whale, including the Red Meadow Drive portion of the project, has been delayed due to anticipated litigation.

While plans are to award the contract for the entire Red Whale Project so work can begin in the summer of 2010, a lawsuit could further delay or preclude implementation. The project calls for about 3200 acres of mechanical thinning and 1000 acres of prescribed burning.

Finally, the Fire Mitigation Committee is revising the North Fork Fire Mitigation and Planning Report in conjunction with the revision of Flathead County's Wildfire Plan.

***Webmaster Patti Craig-Hart*** has been busy this fall working on the NFLA's website. Trying to live up to the high standards set by past webmaster Richard Wackrow, Craig-Hart has added a new page consolidating all NFLA documents and minutes as well as revising the stories archive. Plans for new pages that will be available this coming summer include an emergencies page, information from the weed committee, and reports from the North Fork Historical Committee. Everyone is invited to visit the website throughout the winter at [www.nflowners.com](http://www.nflowners.com) for the latest North Fork news. Please send all comments about and suggestions for the website to our general address [Contact@nflowners.org](mailto:Contact@nflowners.org).

***Newsletter Editor Jon Elliott*** welcomes any and all suggestions of stories for inclusion in the bi-annual newsletter. Especially desired are events to be shown on the coming summer's social and meetings schedule. Please get your articles and events to him at [jonnate@hotmail.com](mailto:jonnate@hotmail.com) by the end of March.