

NFLA Newsletter

Spring 2009

NFLA Road Committee takes pragmatic approach to better road maintenance

Since being established last fall by North Fork Landowners' Association President Molly Shepherd, the NFLA Road Committee has let little grass grow under its feet—meeting with officials who influence maintenance of the road, and investigating alternative methods of achieving a better-maintained road.

Beginning with its initial meeting Dec. 12, the committee has met with newly elected Flathead County Commissioner Jim Dupont, county Public Works Director Dave Prunty, Glacier National Park Superintendent Chas Cartwright, and officials with the Flathead National Forest and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Also, it has consulted with a town in Alaska with similar maintenance problems, with the major purveyor of dust-abatement products, and with an official at the Montana Department of Transportation.

Meanwhile, Flathead County has been allotted \$96,500 in federal funds by the local Resource Advisory Committee to put crushed rock on the North Fork Road from Camas Creek to Polebridge. Prunty says the work will begin in late summer or early fall, and will take about two weeks.

The county had requested \$175,000 for graveling the entire 10 miles, Prunty says, so the smaller amount will mean that less of the road will get the rock.

Regarding dust abatement:

- There are 700 miles of unpaved road in the county, 38 miles of which are part of the North Fork Road.
- Dust abatement using magnesium chloride (the preferred treatment) costs \$3,500-\$4,000 per mile.
- Few county residents and no North Fork landowners participated in a county \$100,000, 50-50, dust-abatement cost-share program.

Road Committee members are Chairperson Betsy Holycross; Steve Berg, deputy chair; Margaret Heaphy; Ed Heger; Steve Weber. They have been asked to perform research, meet with officials to explore options, and report their findings for consideration by the NFLA board of directors and membership. A full report is expected by this summer.

The committee's dedicated e-mail address is northforkroad@live.com. We have extensive coverage of, and a page dedicated to, the North Fork Road on our Web site, www.nflandowners.org.

North Fork of the Flathead on two endangered-rivers lists

Threats from proposed mining operations in Canada have resulted in the North Fork of the Flathead River, and the Flathead River as it's called in British Columbia, being put on two endangered-rivers lists.

The North Fork ranks fifth on American Rivers' 23rd-annual list of America's most endangered rivers. No. 1 is the Sacramento-San Joaquin river system in California.

Says a press release from American Rivers: "In the United States, the North Fork is one of the best-protected watersheds in the country. But the river remains unprotected where it originates in British Columbia. ... The U.S. State Department must keep President Obama's campaign commitment to oppose mining in the headwaters of the North Fork."

American Rivers, founded in 1973, claims to be "the leading national organization standing up for healthy rivers," with more than 65,000 members.

Meanwhile, the Flathead River tops the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia's most endangered rivers list for 2009, according to a news release from the ORCBC.

"[W]hile the U.S. section is protected," the press release says, "the B.C. stretch faces a number of threats, the most prominent being the proposed Cline open pit coal mine. Given the size and location of the mine in the river's headwaters, water quality would be impacted and recreational, wildlife and wilderness values would be greatly compromised."

The open-pit coal mine proposed by Cline Mining Corp. of Sudbury, Ontario, is in the permitting/ planning stage, which is moving forward. The Flathead River Basin in B.C. has been eliminated from BP (British Petroleum) Canada's immediate plans to drill for coal-bed methane. However, while BP plans to begin operations in the Elk River drainage in B.C., a longer-term threat to the Flathead remains.

The drilling process involves pumping large amounts of water into the ground to release the gas, thus releasing heavy metals and other pollutants into the watershed.

In April 2008, citizens of Fernie, B.C., complemented protests by environmental and wildlife groups on both sides of the border by conducting a street demonstration against BP's proposed frilling project.

NFLA to mark 62 years of community service in June

June of this year will mark the 62nd anniversary of the formation of the North Fork Improvement Association (now the North Fork Landowners' Association) by community-spirited North Forkers on June 2, 1947, and the writing of its first bylaws that same month.

According to bylaws adopted on Aug. 1, 1954, and since amended, the NFLA was founded "to promote the general welfare of the community of the upper valley of the North Fork of the Flathead River ... to construct, reconstruct, operate, maintain and regulate the use of a community building ... [and to] pursue the interests of all North Fork landowners, regardless of permanent residence, and encourage and facilitate their participation in association activities."

In 2009, the association is pursuing this mission through its proactive board of directors and committees:

- The Road Committee is working to effect better maintenance of the North Fork Road.
- The Fire Mitigation Committee works with state agencies to partially finance thinning projects on the North Fork. Through the committee, the North Fork is participating in the Firewise Community program. The Federal Emergency Management Administration gives a Firewise Community priority in consideration for pre-disaster mitigation planning and project grants.
- Several NFLA members are working with the Flathead Basin Commission and other groups to prevent the development of Canadian Mines north of the border that would adversely affect water quality and wildlife on the North Fork watershed.
- The 11-member North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee includes all eight NFLA directors. From 1999 through 2008, the committee succeeded in implementing two zoning-regulation packages to protect the North Fork from uncontrolled development, and brought those regulations into line with state law through adoption of the North Fork Neighborhood Plan.
- The Inter Local Agreement provides for face-to-face contact with representatives of agencies whose policies and actions affect the North Fork. Inter Local Agreement meetings are held in the winter (in town) and summer (at the hall). Signatories to the agreement include the Flathead National Forest, Glacier National Park and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.
- Additional NFLA programs and services include efforts to control noxious weeds; maintenance of a poaching reward fund; a newsletter mailed to all North Fork landowners in the spring and fall; a growing Web site, www.NFLandowners.org.
- In recent years, Sondreson Hall has been the venue for workshops covering weed control, forestry management, conservation easements and many other subjects of interest to North Forkers.

A.L.E.R.T. helicopter sites in works; deputies to ride with Border Patrol

North Fork Fire Chief Lynn Ogle has reported that the A.L.E.R.T. helicopter emergency service will be locating landing sites on the North Fork with a global positioning satellite system.

Landing sites should be located every five miles, with a minimum 60-foot round circle, but 120 feet preferred. Ideally, Ogle said, A.L.E.R.T. will look for sites that are accessible year-round, and should be posting “LZ” (landing zone) signs in April and May.

Ogle also advised that U.S. Border Patrol agents will have county deputies riding with them at least three days per week to increase law enforcement on the North Fork, make

traffic stops and respond to 911 calls.

New hall-rental fee schedule accommodates shorter-term use

In response to members who had argued that a \$75-per-day rental fee was unfair to those wishing to use Sondreson Hall for only a couple hours, the North Fork Landowners' Association board of directors on Feb. 28 approved a rental-fee schedule to accommodate rentals for less than a full day.

New member rental fees are \$10 per two-hour rental, with a minimum of eight rentals; \$25 for a one-time rental up to two hours; \$50 for a one-time rental up to four hours; \$75 for a one-time rental over four hours. Rental fee for non-members is \$150 per day.

2009 schedule highlights

This year's summer Inter Local Agreement meeting will be held Wednesday, July 8 at 1 p.m., instead of in an evening time slot. The meeting will be preceded by the Fire Mitigation Committee workshop "The Home Ignition Zone" and a potluck lunch.

Other notable items on the 2009 North Fork Landowners' Association schedule are:

- Hall repair and cleanup; 10 a.m., Saturday, May 23
- Six kayaking/canoeing outings (new in 2009)
- Six hike and bike excursions
- A weed workshop conducted by Steve Robinson of the Flathead County Weed Department
- Evenings of line dancing and square dancing (beginners welcome)

NFLA business meetings are scheduled for the first Saturday of the month, June-October. The annual NFLA election will be held Saturday, Aug. 1, at 9:15 p.m.

See the schedule in this newsletter. For schedule updates, check at Sondreson Hall or go to www.NFLandowners.org.

Limited grant money still available for private fuels-reduction projects

A limited amount of cost-share grant money is still available for fuels-reduction treatments around homes.

The original \$150,000 Stevens grant, which was awarded after the Wedge Canyon and Robert fires in 2003, has expired. Under agreements between North Fork landowners and the Northwest Regional Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D), 350 acres of treatments were completed.

The North Fork's target amount under the grant was 184 acres. About one-third of the total acres treated under Stevens grants in Flathead, Lincoln and Sanders counties were

on the North Fork. The acreage does not include significant fuels-reduction efforts by private landowners working without grant assistance.

In 2005, the Fire Mitigation Committee obtained a supplementary grant in the amount of \$104,000. The grant will expire in April 2010. As much as \$25,000 of the grant could still be available, the final amount contingent upon whether several landowners who have expressed interest decide to go forward with treatments. Remaining funds will be available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The RC&D has administered the grants, with grant money contributing 75 percent of the cost of an agreed-upon fuel-reduction treatment and the landowner contributing 25 percent. The rate of payment depends upon the work that needs to be done to create a defensible space against wildfire. The range of payment now is \$500 to \$1,000 per acre. Mulching slash remains an option.

To determine whether your property qualifies for the limited remaining grant money, call Bill Swope, RC&D Community Forester, at (406) 892-3866 or e-mail him at **bhswope@centurytel.net**.

North Fork Landowners' Association

Polebridge, Montana

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Immediate Past President Ed Heger
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End Spring 2009 newsletter