

Winter 2007-08

Foresters, ecologists needed to implement Elk Creek joint management plan

Swan Ecosystem Center is looking for foresters and ecologists to help oversee activity in the Elk Creek Conservation Area--land Swan Ecosystem Center and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes acquired last year.

SEC purchased the west half of the Elk Creek Section 35 in 2006 and the Tribes purchased the east side, with the goals of perpetuating bull trout and other native species, and of promoting a naturally functioning forest that can sustain native species, all within the human community of Condon.

The joint management plan, completed September 15, calls for establishing a 5-member team made up of two people from the Swan Valley, two from the Tribes' Natural Resources Department and one expert not affiliated with either. The members must be selected by the first of the year.

SEC will chose the two Swan Valley members, who, along with the Tribes' two members, will select the fifth unaffiliated person. The team of five will determine how often to meet and develop a schedule of activities.

The management team will continue assessing the condition of the land, begun by the planners in 2007, and develop strategies for noxious weed management, streamside restoration and forest

health enhancement. Many kinds of actions can occur within the Conservation Area if the plan's step-by-step decision-making process is followed.

The Elk Creek Conservation Area Management Plan is on SEC's Web site, SwanEcosystemCenter.com,



Neil and Dixie Meyer at the south entrance to Section 35

and at the Swan Valley Community Library. Free CD-versions are available by contacting SEC and printed copies can be purchased for \$33.

**Swan Lands Update
 Checkerboard map colorful and on line**

The Swan Valley conservation map is gaining complexity and shifting colors as Plum Creek Timber Company sells its land.

The pink Plum Creek squares are diminishing, white residential and commercial squares are expanding, and new colors are being added. The changes are happening so fast it's hard to keep the detailed map current. To view the most recent changes you can visit the Web site: SwanValleyConservation.org.

Just this year, private buyers purchased three Plum Creek sections, adding more white to the map in the Barber Creek, Glacier Creek and Owl Loop areas. Additionally, the remaining parcels around Metcalf Lake recently sold, completing the transition of that entire section from timberland to residential use.

Meanwhile, a handful of residential owners have recently completed conservation easements, represented in yellow, bringing the valley total to about 5,000 acres.

The Plum Creek lands interspersed with blue State lands east of Highway 83 are in shades of tan and orange. Most of the sections remain as Plum Creek timberlands (about 7,000 acres) but are prevented from subdivision development through the federal Forest Legacy Program, while 800 acres have been conveyed to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Former Plum Creek lands acquired by the Flathead National

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Swan Ecosystem Center Purpose

- Maintain a strong vital community in the Swan Valley, Montana, one involved in setting its own destiny through partnerships that encourage sustainable use and care of public and private lands.
- Create a learning center that promotes understanding of the land and relationships between people and the land.
- Integrate science and the knowledge of local people experienced with the land.
- Emphasize interrelationships of economic and social considerations in ecosystem issues and processes, and emphasize the necessity of addressing these inherent relationships at all levels.



Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC) is an inclusive, nonprofit 501(c)(3) citizens' group working on local ecosystem and education programs.

SEC shares responsibility for the U.S. Forest Service Condon Work Center through partnership agreements with the Swan Lake Ranger District, Flathead National Forest. This partnership allows the community to maintain a vital connection with the federal land managers.

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& Learning Center, Inc.

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SwanEcosystemCenter.com (website)

Field tour goal: improved understanding, fire safety and forest health management

Swan Valley residents joined the Forest Service November 6 on a field tour in the Barber Creek and Pierce Lake areas to view thinning projects



designed to improve fire safety and forest health on national forest lands.

The Forest Service hopes the give-and-take dialogue common on field tours will lead to better management of the national forest and help neighbors plan stewardship activities on their own parcels.

The Swan Lake Ranger District is also trying other communication tactics. Fire manager John Ingebretson went door-to-door to talk with neighbors during the project's early planning stages and learn of their concerns. The agency is continuing this strategy elsewhere in the valley where several similar projects are planned.

The Holland Pierce Fuels Reduction and Forest Health project on the east side of the valley is under contract with Pyramid Mountain Lumber, Seeley Lake.

Pyramid is employing several local subcontractors to complete the project.

A volunteer multi-party monitoring team made up residents and forestry professionals is assessing the biological and social success of the Holland Pierce Project.

Audit assures SEC's funds are in good hands

Swan Ecosystem Center requested an audit of its 2006 financial statements and received a favorable opinion in the independent auditor's report.

SEC hired Ronald Paul Foltz, Certified Public Accountant, to conduct the audit. The goal was to reassure SEC's board of directors and donors that funds are managed appropriately, given the fact that SEC is now accepting large contributions and grants for purchasing and protecting land, as well as regular donations for operations and special projects.

SEC initiated the Swan Lands Acquisition Fund in 2006 to help conserve forestlands and habitat that Plum Creek Timber Company is selling. The fund can be spent for land purchases or conservation easements, and used as matching dollars for federal and state grants.

The audit found that SEC has an effective system of checks and balances. The auditors also looked at SEC's operations and projects accounts, tracked the income and expenses related to each and found that our practices meet accepted standards.

We will continue the auditing process annually so we can assure donors their contributions are properly safeguarded and used appropriately.

The Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit land trust organization, is also raising funds for land conservation in the Swan Valley. TPL is SEC's primary land trust partner for the conservation of Plum Creek lands. Donations for acquisitions and easements can be made to SEC or TPL.

Lookout tree dies, ASC records the fall

The giant ponderosa pine lookout tree on Spook Ridge succumbed to wind and age in September, split in half at the top, and broke apart just a few days after SEC's Diann Ericson led a group of history buffs to the site.

When the hikers arrived September 6 at the 4,100-foot elevation knob on Spook Ridge, where the tree stood for more than two centuries, the top third was cracked but was still attached. The tree's top had been dead for a couple of years.

Two days later members of Bill and Pam Peabody's family went up and found the top broken off and on the ground.

In October, SEC's After School Club hiked to the site with Diann to record by camera the tree's demise.

Back in 1933 Forest Service employees Olander Slethaug and Slim Myers received extra pay of 40 cents an hour to screw climbing spikes into the tree's trunk and limb the lower branches, according to a history provided by Suzanne Vernon.

The broken trunk's circumference is 9.5 feet at 4.5 feet off the ground

and is over three feet in diameter. The tree's estimated height was 140-160 feet, well above the surrounding forest on the ridge between Barber and Holland Creeks and easily visible from the Kraft Creek Road across the valley, until this fall.

Imagine climbing the metal screws on the Spook Ridge Lookout Tree to



scan the valley for lightning strikes--hoping the storm had passed and you wouldn't be blown out of the sky.

The Swan Valley in the 1930s had several lookout trees scattered at mid-elevations. Other lookouts were at Piper Creek, Elk Point, Squeezer Creek, Simmons Meadows and Bohanan Point near Swan Lake.

Stewardship packets help new, longtime residents use BMPs when caring for their land

Swan Ecosystem Center has assembled thick packets of brochures designed to help residents practice good stewardship on their lands.

The packets are available for realtors and for residents who stop by the SEC office. The brochure titles range from "What Trees Should I Leave After I Harvest" to "Stream

Crossings, Culverts, Bridges and Fords."

The packets have information about selling timber, buying tree seedlings, Firewise planning, streamside management and how to get necessary permits.

Living With Wildlife packets are also available.

Checkerboard continued

Forest are the dark green squares (about 8,000 acres). The Elk Creek Conservation area (640 acres) is olive.

About 60,000 acres of Plum Creek lands still remain as pink squares--in

timber management. Other colors on the checkerboard represent conservation strategies not yet in play.

Art auction reaps benefits for wilderness, backcountry care

The first art auction hosted October 5 by Swan Ecosystem Center and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation (BMWF) at the Hockaday Art Museum in Kalispell brought artists and wilderness aficionados together and generated funds for wilderness and backcountry trails and campsites.

SEC and BMWF provide crews and funds to help the Forest Service care for the Mission Mountains and Bob Marshall wildernesses, including the Swan Range.

The event highlighted the Artist and Wilderness Connection, an artists-in-residence program offered by SEC, BMWF, the Hockaday Museum and the Flathead National Forest, that invites artists to gain inspiration and communicate the values of wildlands to a broad audience through art.

Several Swan Valley artists provided auction items and many volunteers helped at the event.

Grant puts a dent in weed populations

Over 500 acres in the Swan Valley were rid of weeds in 2007 during the first year of a 2-year program, thanks to a Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund grant and the efforts of 15 residents and the Missoula County Weed District.

SEC and the Weed District applied for the funds in 2006. The grants are passed on to participating landowners in the Missoula and Lake County portions of the Swan Valley. The Flathead National Forest is also a participant. The agency will treat about 1500 acres of national forest land in 2008. SEC and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes will treat about 50 acres of roads and old logging landings in the Elk Creek Conservation Area in 2008 as well.

The matching funds grant can be used for approved chemicals and reseeding to replace the weeds.

Thank You SEC Supporters

We depend on volunteers and donors. The recent financial contributors are listed. But volunteers are equally important and highly valued. Thank you all.

- | | | | |
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2007 Budget

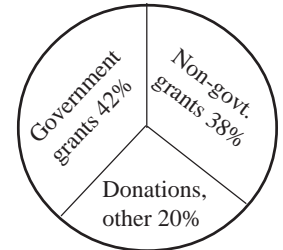
Projects \$351,971

- Bear Smart
- Education
- Firewise Programs and fuels grants
- Forest Stewardship
- Oral Histories
- Resource Center
- Swan Lands Project
- Water Quality Monitoring & Restoration
- Wilderness Caretaking
- Visitor Center
- Footrace

Operating Expenses \$49,250

(Swan lands and Elk Creek acquisition funding is not included here.)

Anticipated Funding Sources



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Send checks to Swan Ecosystem Center,
6887 Highway 83, Condon MT 59826.

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