

Winter 2009-10

Roger Marshall joins forest stewardship staff

Swan Ecosystem Center added former Plum Creek Timber Co. forester Roger Marshall to the staff in late August to help private landowners and local contractors benefit from SEC's \$404,000 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus grant.

Roger and SEC's forest steward, Mike Palladini are working with private landowners in the Swan Valley on projects designed to enhance forest conditions and create jobs. Nearly every forest contractor in the valley is involved.

Roger was a Plum Creek forester in Seeley Lake for 33 years. He is familiar with Swan Valley forests and experienced in contract administration. Roger has a keen interest in developing sustainable forestry models.

The ARRA grant, provided through Montana DNRC, is one of several funding sources SEC has received to help landowners reduce forest fuels, cope with tree insects and diseases, protect water quality and restore wetlands.

ARRA funding is provided on a 90/10 cost-share basis, with the landowners contributing 10 percent of the project costs for approved practices, while other grants are offered on a 50/50 cost-share basis.

Mike, Roger and DNRC's Allen Branine help landowners develop stewardship plans. They assess projects in the field with the landowners, who then select a contractor to imple-



Roger Marshall, SEC's newest forest steward, visiting a project site with the Jeep Liberty donated by the Grounded Eagle Foundation.

ment the project. Landowners receive funding assistance for expenses after the value of merchantable materials have been subtracted from the total cost.

These grants are supporting 71 projects on nearly 2,000 acres of private lands.

Grounded Eagle donates Jeep Liberty

Swan Ecosystem Center received an extraordinary gift in September, a forest green 2002 Jeep Liberty, donated by the Grounded Eagle Foundation.

The long-time Swan Valley raptor rehabilitation center closed recently. SEC also received a much needed cache of office supplies from the former nonprofit.

The Jeep has been on the job nearly every day, not only carrying SEC's forest stewards to private lands project sites (adjoining story), but also transporting loads of educational tools and volunteers assisting SEC's education coordinator Diann Ericson (story page 5).

Wetland restored to natural condition

Swan Ecosystem Center's first wetland restoration project got underway in October on land owned by Tom and Lucinda Heekin.

The natural wetland had been ditched and drained for haying in the homesteading days by the original owners.

Tom and Lucinda wanted to return the wetland to its original condition for the benefit of native water fowl, reptiles, amphibians, native plants, as well as deer, elk and large carnivores such as bears.

The wetland had been a semi-

Continued page 3

Swan Ecosystem Center

Our Vision

The Swan Valley is rural and wild. It is a rich environment where people and a natural diversity of native plants and animals thrive. People learn and work together to ensure that the ecosystem's resources are protected, responsibly used, and available for all future generations.

Mission

Maintain a strong, vital community involved in setting its own destiny through partnerships that encourage sustainable use and care of public and private lands.

Swan Ecosystem Center

*Respecting each other.
Sustaining the land.*

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Swan Valley Ecosystem Management & Learning Center, Inc.

Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC) is a nonprofit community 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 of the Flathead National Forest. This partnership allows the community to maintain an effective working relationship with the federal land managers.

Swan Ecosystem Center
6887 Highway 83, Condon, MT 59826

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406/754-3138

406/754-2965 (fax)

swanec@blackfoot.net (e-mail)

SwanEcosystemCenter.org (Web)

Swan watershed planning to address water and land

Development of the basin-wide Swan Watershed Restoration Plan (SWRP) is underway, coordinated by Swan Ecosystem Center's VISTA volunteer Ali Vissichelli.

The plan is intended to be a "restoration roadmap," guiding public agencies and residents in planning projects that restore, maintain, and protect the Swan's aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, with emphasis on cooperative and collaborative efficiency.

The plan's scope is the entire Swan Lake watershed, from the Swan-Clearwater Divide to the outlet of Swan Lake, between the ridge tops of the Mission Mountains and the Swan Range. The SWRP is not restricted to water quality. It includes terrestrial as well as aquatic concerns within the geographic boundaries of the watershed.

The project involves the collaborative efforts of Swan Valley residents and public and private agencies, including but not limited to the U.S. Forest Service, Montana DNRC, Northwest Connections, Missoula Co. Rural Initiatives, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Montana, Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Ali began development of the planning process with the genesis of the Table of Contents, which has been circulated among agencies and residents for comment.

Now on its fourth draft, the Table of Contents has evolved into a tiered framework for a plan with seven focus categories: forests, landscape conservation, native fish, roads, water quality, wetlands, and wildlife.

The task of filling the plan's contents will fall to the six subcommittees

of the Swan Lands Coordinating Committee, whose titles reflect the aforementioned categories with the exception of "roads," which will be addressed by all.

Enthusiasm for the SWRP came from Northern California on Tuesday, November 10 with a presentation from Nick Goulette of the Watershed Research and Training Center. Nick relayed the successes and challenges that came with developing a collaborative plan for watershed restoration in Hayfork,



Planning coordinator Ali Vissichelli at work on the Swan Watershed Restoration Plan.

Calif.

The transfer of former Plum Creek lands to the Forest Service in 2010 created motivation for watershed restoration planning. Montana DEQ also provided impetus. DEQ, now requires such a document from watershed groups like SEC wishing to receive 319 Grant funding. These grants have provided the monetary support since 2007 for four road restoration projects in the Swan designed to reduce sediment runoff into streams in the Cold Lakes, Elk Creek and Herrick Run drainages. A Beaver Creek road project will begin in 2010.

The 319 grants have also supported water quality monitoring of Swan Lake, the Swan River and several tributaries to help determine the cause of oxygen depletion in two deep holes of Swan Lake, which could be naturally caused or due in part to residential development in the watershed as well as sedimentation from forest roads.

If you would like a copy of the draft Table of Contents or to be involved with planning, call SEC, 754-3137, or email Ali Vissichelli at avissichelli@gmail.com.

Two in one

SEC's wildlife program gets new leader; office gets new manager

Longtime Swan Ecosystem Center volunteer Betsy Spetigue joined the staff in later November to head up SEC's wildlife programs and serve as office manager. Betsy has had a home in the Swan Valley since 1996.

She has been an interpretive specialist at Glacier National Park, a communications specialist for the Colorado Division of Wildlife, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Watchable Wildlife Program coordinator, among other jobs.

As a volunteer Betsy wrote grants to support SEC's wilderness and back country ranger program, assisted with the Living With Wildlife Program, edited the Upper Swan Valley Landscape Assessment, and helped with education programs, to name a few of the tasks she lent her skills to.

Betsy's organizational skills and wildlife background will serve SEC well.

Wetland project continued



Mathew Brothers crew installing water control structure to reestablish a natural wetland on Heekin's property.

permanent water regime, meaning it remained flooded through the growing season in all but the driest years. After being drained, it functioned as a seasonal wetland, drying up early in the summer.

The project was funded by the Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Matthew Brothers Construction installed the water control structure and dike under the guidance of Partners coordinator Greg Neudecker and SEC's forest steward Mike Palladini.

Submerged mounds were created within the wetland and replanted with native sedges and rushes to provide nesting and foraging habitat. The project will be monitored to evaluate success for several years, starting this spring.

Thank You SEC Volunteers

We honor and appreciate all volunteers. Below are the names of volunteers who contributed in 2008-09.

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Getting More Kids in the Woods

The rainy weeks of middle to late October did little to deter students from enjoying a day of hiking in the Swan Valley, as part of a collaborative education program aimed at getting youth outdoors.

Eight groups participated, comprised of both students and instructors from area schools, including, Kalispell, Bigfork, Seeley Lake and Missoula.

Promotion and logistics for the trips were funded by Swan Ecosystem Center. Funding for transportation was provided by REI (a Seattle-based outdoor recreation equipment company founded in the 1960s).

REI has afforded extra time outdoors for the largest number of SEC youth participants since the inception of SEC's education programs in the mid 1990s. Over 150 students hiked either Lion Creek trail, Holland Creek trail #415, Glacier Slough trail or the Holland Lake Nature Trail. Ages ranged from 7 to 18 years old.

The hikes were the latest project sponsored by the partnership between REI and SEC. REI has also funded the purchase of snowshoes and cross country ski equipment for students.

The partnership is one of which SEC is proud to be a part.

SEC's Education Coordinator, Diann Ericson said, "The satisfaction of working on this project is great. Teachers and students found pleasure outdoors even during cloudy, rainy days. Students' attitudes reflected enthusiasm with questions and observations during the hikes. They listened well and respected the safety issues of such an activity."

The hikes would not have been possible without the unsung heroes of this project, the MVPs (much valued participants).

Several Seeley-Swan volunteers joined the hikes and offered their expertise. Their participation allowed students to be separated into small groups, creating an atmosphere that encouraged more discussion about the environment and the ethics of hiking along busy public trails. The MVP's were **Allen Branine, Erika Edgely, Rick Ferguson, Mary Fitzsimon, Kari Gunderson, Ron Jones, Carol Koepchi, Adam Lieberg, Sharon MacQuarrie, Allison Visichelli, Marylou Wilhelm, and Brian from MCC.**

Shop REI, support education program

Please lend your attention to Swan Ecosystem Center's web site, SwanEcosystemCenter.org, and locate REI's Christmas logo on the homepage.

For those willing to shop REI's online store, 5% the purchase total will be donated to SEC. REI's online store must be accessed through SEC's web-site in order to take advantage of this opportunity.

We thank you ahead of time for your participation. Please call Diann, 754-3137 for more information.

Ericson joins MEEA board

SEC's Education Coordinator, Diann Ericson, was recently voted onto the Montana Environmental Education Association (MEEA) Board. MEEA is a state-wide organization devoted to facilitating outdoor environmental education into classrooms.

Diann's commitment to MEEA's mission stems from her belief that the number of hours spent outdoors correlates with the health of youths. Inspired by Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*, Diann would like to see a component of outdoor education in every classroom in Montana. "MEEA is the catalyst for a statewide movement to have no child left indoors." Call Diann to learn more about MEEA.

REI Swan Valley Hikes Photo Gallery



Volunteers Sharon MacQuarrie and Marylou Wilhelm (top) and Adam Lieberg (bottom) were three of 12 volunteers assisting with the REI hikes. Students came in groups such as the Coyote Choir from the YMCA and Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Missoula.

Missions and Swan Range Season Highlights

Volunteers and the enthusiasm of wilderness and backcountry visitors were highlights of the 2009 season for SEC's Swan Range ranger

Mike Childs and Mission Mountains Wilderness rangers Kari Gunderson and Lucas Lamar.

On the Swan Range, the Great Northern and Hungry Horse fire crews were awesome to work with, Mike said. The crews helped open a path through an immense heap of avalanche debris on the Foothills Trail. Mike also reported that 98.5 percent of people he met on the



Avalanche debris 2009

trails were thrilled to be in the backcountry and willing to help keep campsites clean.

In the Mission Mountains Wilderness, Kari and Luke had similar experiences with happy campers. Several Montanans who had left the state years ago came back to hike in the Missions and to their liking found it in much the same. Highlights included walk log repair on the Cold Creek and Piper Creek trails, and the 42 Laabs family members and friends who helped repair the Glacier Lake trail walk logs.

2009 Budget

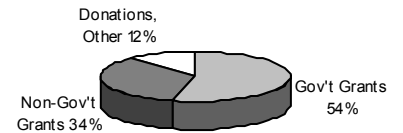
Projects: \$486,641

- Bear Aware
- Education
- Firewise and Fuels Reduction Grants
- Foot Race
- Forest Stewardship
- Oral Histories
- Resource Center
- Swan Lands Conservation
- Water Quality Monitoring and Restoration
- Wilderness Caretaking
- Visitor Center

Operating Expenses: \$59,550

(Swan Lands and Elk Creek acquisition funding is not shown here.)

Anticipated Funding Sources



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