

2009 Annual Report



*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.*

Our Vision for the Future

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

Our Mission

SwanEcosystemCenter.org

2009

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From Land Conservation to Restoration Jobs



Letter from the Chair

Dear Friends:

The year 2009 will stand out as momentous in the history of the Swan Valley. Nearly 45,000 acres of timberlands transferred from Plum Creek Timber Company to The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land, for later transfer to the Flathead National Forest. These acres, historically intermixed with federal public land, became national forest in early 2010 through the Montana Legacy Project. If all goes as expected, nearly 20,000 acres within the State of Montana checkerboard will become state lands beginning in 2011.

Swan Ecosystem Center (SEC), along with many other agencies and nonprofits, has assumed leadership and responsibility in land conservation since the late 1990s, when the Forest Service acquired Plum Creek parcels around Lindbergh Lake. In subsequent years, following countless meetings with residents and partners, the conservation of prime timberland in the Swan Valley took place one square-mile at a time—until a provision in the 2008 Farm Bill enabled the Montana Legacy Project. Though momentous, the Montana Legacy Project ensures that not much will actually change. The Swan Valley will remain prime forestland, with public access and habitat for native wildlife and plants.

Our opportunities to achieve our forest stewardship goals in the Swan Valley have increased since our inception in 1996, as we have built credibility and expanded capacity within SEC to pass significant public dollars on to landowners for restoration, fuels reduction, weed management and wildlife habitat improvements. In September we received a major American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant, enabling landowners to employ local contractors for forest stewardship projects. By the end of the year, we had initiated over 70 projects in the Swan Valley that employed nearly every local contractor, utilizing the ARRA grant and several smaller grants. Additionally, we joined our partners in the Southwest Crown of the Continent (Swan, Clearwater and Blackfoot Valleys) to apply for a 10-year \$40 million federal grant to achieve stewardship and restoration goals in our three Forest Service Ranger Districts. If successful, the grant will provide reliable opportunities for local contractors and support our plans to develop biomass utilization capacity in the three watersheds.

With all this to build on, our goal, as in the past, is to sustain our traditional forest livelihood for the long-term. About 66,000 acres of former Plum Creek timberlands and thousands of acres owned by private residents will be in need of stewardship and restoration for decades. With your help we will continue encouraging public involvement in forestland management and supporting the use of local contractors for public and private land stewardship.

Sincerely, Neil Meyer

Forest Stewardship on Public and Private Land

In 2009, Swan Ecosystem Center moved into land stewardship in big way. We awarded over \$221,000 to over 70 landowners for forest stewardship projects. Our investment in driving land stewardship significantly impacted the local economy, employing nearly every forest contractor.

Private Lands

We provide landowners with technical and financial assistance to develop long-term forest stewardship plans that reduce forest fuels around homes and maintain ecological function and natural resource values.

Stewardship Goals

Our forests are among the most diverse and productive in Montana. They are vital to sustaining the Swan Valley community. We bring public and private landowners and managers together to assure that the forests of the Swan Valley continue to support a local wood products industry, healthy wildlife populations, diverse native plant communities, a source of clean water, and ample recreational opportunities. We encourage the use of local contractors in public and private forest stewardship projects.

Public Lands

We offer field tours and public meetings to improve understanding among

land management agencies and the public about timber management on national forest and state land in the Swan Valley.

When a diverse group of citizens is involved at the early stages of planning, and when people are receptive to information and new ideas, better land management is often the result.

In 2009, we co-hosted three field trips and public meetings to engage citizens in planning for proposed timber sales.



L to R: Swan Ecosystem Center land steward Mike Palladini, DNRC service forester Allen Branine, VISTA volunteer Ali Vissichelli, landowner Tom Heekin, and contractor Jim Webb on Tom and Lucinda Heekin's land. Tom and Lucinda Heekin developed their stewardship plan after attending the 2009 MSU Forest Stewardship Workshop for Private Landowners held at SEC. The Heekins' goal was to reduce forest fuels and maintain biodiversity in a dense 85-year-old lodgepole stand.

Noxious Weeds

Swan Valley residents and public land managers are controlling noxious weeds with funds from the Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund (MNOWTF) and with the help of education programs offered by the Missoula County Weed District and Swan Ecosystem Center.

The Swan Valley Cooperative Weed Management Area plan developed in 2006 and encompasses 340,771 acres of public and private lands in portions of Missoula and Lake Counties. The plan makes it possible for SEC and the Missoula County Weed District to qualify for the grant funding.



In 2008-09, 22 participants treated weeds on over 900 acres of private and national forest land.

Wetlands Restoration

One of the most unique and ecologically significant aspects of the Swan Valley is its vast array of small and mid-sized wetlands. These wetlands, and all of the connected riparian linkages running between them, function as high quality habitat for many of our most sensitive species, both plant and animal.



Matthew Brothers Construction installing the water control device for the Heekins' wetland restoration project.

Wetlands also perform important ecosystem services such as water purification, flood control and groundwater recharge. Wetlands in the Swan Valley are threatened by conversion, typically by draining for pasture or dredging for ponds.

We work with public and private partners in the Swan Valley to protect natural wetland function and to restore high priority wetlands. Our goal is to further local stewardship of wetlands by providing opportunities for local contractors to acquire wetland restoration skills.

In 2009, The Wetland subcommittee worked with other subcommittees to develop the watershed restoration plan.

Also in 2009, Swan Ecosystem Center helped Lucinda and Tom Heekin restore a seasonal wetland that had been drained for pasture early in the 1900s. In spring 2010, their wetland attracted dozens of waterfowl.

Regarding Forest Stewardship Planning:

"We had a great meeting with Roger (Marshall) last month. We really appreciated the walk around our property....we learned a lot about what is going on there and got some good preliminary ideas about what we might do."

Mary Shaw, Salmon Prairie

Wildlife

The Swan Valley is a great place for wildlife viewing. Those of us who live and work here enjoy seeing wildlife on a regular basis and usually encounter a variety of critters as we go about our daily activities. It's no secret that most of our houses, cabins and barns are located right in the middle of prime wildlife habitat, giving us many opportunities to better understand and interact with our feathered and furry neighbors. Whether you are a full-time or seasonal resident, information is available at Swan Ecosystem Center to give you tips and ideas on living with wildlife in the Swan Valley.

In 2009, the Wildlife subcommittee joined with others to work on the basin-wide watershed restoration plan.

Swan Valley Bear Resources

Bears lead a risky life sharing the Swan Valley's rich, natural habitat with humans. Not only are they occasionally hit by vehicles, we lure them into our backyards by careless management of garbage, pet food, bird feeders, and other attractants, forcing wildlife officials to "manage" the bear for our protection. Swan Ecosystem Center is working with partners to protect humans and bears, and prevent property damage. The Swan Valley Bear Resources helps people avoid conflicts with bears and other wildlife.



Grizzly testing a cooler at the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center in West Yellowstone.

Regarding Swan Valley Bear Resources programs: ***"It's big what you guys are doing. There's no substitute. I don't think the bears would even be here without you."***

Tonya Chilton Montana FWP
Grizzly Bear Trend Monitor

Watershed Restoration Plan

In 2009, Swan Ecosystem Center convened the Forest Stewardship, Native Fish, Water Quality, Wetland and Wildlife subcommittees of the overarching Swan Lands Coordinating Committee to develop a watershed restoration plan that addresses issues on land and water from the Swan-Clearwater Divide to the outlet of Swan Lake, between the crests of the Swan and Mission Mountains.

The basin-wide plan will be adaptive to changing conditions and responsive to new knowledge. It will foster collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders and community members, while acknowledging individual agency and group



limitations. This non-regulatory document will serve as a framework for restoration of the Swan's aquatic, hydrologic, and terres-

trial ecosystems and their beneficial uses.

A draft of the Swan Basin Restoration Plan will be available for review in summer 2010.

Water Quality

Clear, cold waters emerge from the Mission Mountains and the Swan Range and flow through the 410,000-acre Swan River watershed joining the Flathead River and eventually reaching the Pacific Ocean by way of the Columbia River.

The Swan Valley holds more surface water than any other Montana watershed; 16 percent of the land is wet. Water collects in hundreds of pot holes, ponds, lakes, marshes and wetlands, and a 1,300-mile network of streams transports water through the valley.

These wet areas and streamsid es provide significant high quality habitat for native fish and wildlife and clean water for humans.

In 2009, Swan Ecosystem Center and the Flathead National Forest completed road restoration in the Herrick Run area to reduce sedimentation to lakes and streams, and monitored water quality in the Swan River and several of its tributaries, an ongoing effort to determine trends and learn whether restoration efforts are effective. Funding came from Montana DEQ, the Flathead National Forest, and private donations, with considerable in-kind contributions from partner organizations.

A water quality technical advisory group oversaw the projects and worked to develop the watershed restoration plan.

Native Fish

The Swan River and several of its tributaries provide significant habitat for bull trout, a federally-listed threatened species. Nearly half of the bull trout spawning redds on the Flathead National Forest are found in the clear, cold streams of the Swan watershed.



Karen Nichols photo

The Native Fish subcommittee encourages a coordinated, collaborative effort to manage and monitor native fish in the Swan Basin. In the short-term the subcommittee is focused on determining the status of the resident westslope cutthroat trout population and is planning a coordinated management strategy for the species, similar to the coordinated restoration plan for bull trout, already in progress.

In 2009, Swan Ecosystem Center convened the Native Fish subcommittee to help develop the basin-wide watershed restoration plan and work collaboratively to protect native fish.

Montana Legacy Project

We work with several agencies and organizations through the Conservation Strategies subcommittee to maintain the traditional uses of private working lands in the Swan Valley. Conservation efforts are focused on protecting lands with ecological significance and keeping them open for public access and timber management.

In 2009, we worked to inform people about the Montana Legacy Project, a cooperative effort among many organizations, including Swan Ecosystem Center, to conserve about 66,000 acres of Plum Creek Timberlands. A major benchmark in 2009 was reached with the acquisition of nearly 45,000 acres of former timberlands in the Swan Valley.

Temporarily acquired in 2009 by The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land (national land trust organizations), these lands were transferred to the Flathead National Forest in March 2010. Approximately 20,000 acres intermixed with the Swan River State Forest will be acquired in 2010 by the land trusts for eventual transfer to state ownership.

Wilderness & Backcountry Care

Swan Ecosystem Center's backcountry rangers care for over 90 miles of trails and more than 200 remote campsites in the Mission



Mountains Wilderness and along the Swan Front. The rangers disseminate information about Leave No Trace techniques and the Forest Service Food Storage Order that protects people and wildlife. Dozens of volunteers provide hundreds of

hours of labor each year.

This cooperative program with the Flathead National Forest is supported by the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Recreation Trails Program, the National Forest Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service and private donations.

Elk Creek Conservation Area

The Elk Creek Conservation Area is a square-mile parcel of land at the confluence of Elk Creek and the Swan River, owned by Swan Ecosystem Center and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Elk Creek is one of the most important bull trout streams in Montana.

In 2009, SEC grew 1,000 cottonwood and willow seedlings from seeds collected in the Swan Valley. The saplings will be planted in 2010 along the streambanks to reduce bank erosion. The saplings will be protected with fencing from over-browsing by deer, elk and moose.



2009 Financial Statement

The year 2009 was a dramatic year for Swan Ecosystem Center. Our reputation as land stewards and as a vital community resource, and our track record of fiscal responsibility, made us eligible for new government grant investments, most of which are going directly to landowners employing local contractors for forest stewardship activities from fuels reduction to wetland restoration.

Donations from individuals and private foundations made it possible for us to meet the matching funds requirements.

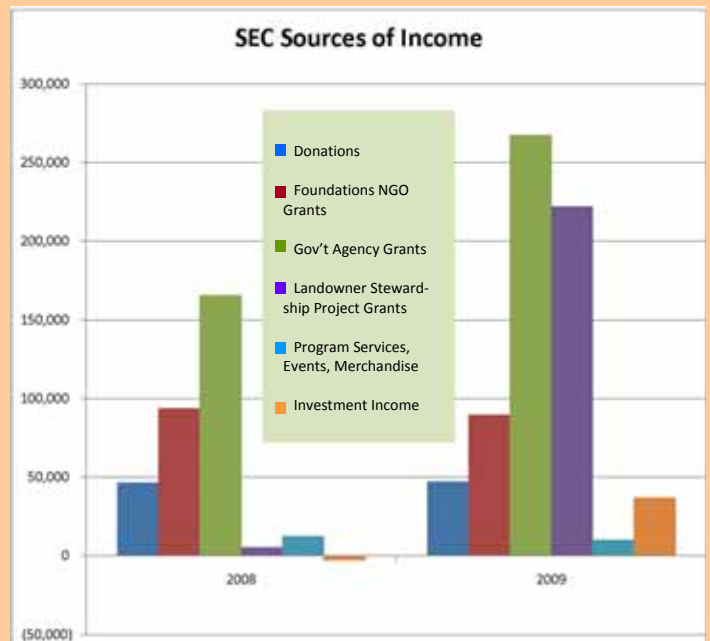
We were able to employ two land and forest stewards to assist private landowners, in addition to our education and outreach staff.

The year 2009 was a bold step to a bright future. 2010 promises to be another landmark year.



Statement of Activity
Year Ended 12/31/10

	2008	2009
Revenue		
Government Grants	170,999	489,532
Private Donations, Foundations	140,213	136,899
Program Services	26,219	4,996
Investment Income	(2,806)	37,081
Other Revenue	12,601	10,139
Total Revenue	347,226	678,647
Expenses		
Landowner Grants Awarded	10,644	221,971
Salaries, Benefits	190,556	206,518
Contracted Services	110,183	145,326
Other Expenses	50,809	83,143
Total Expenses	362,192	656,958
Change in Net Assets	(14,966)	21,689



Thank You Partners and Volunteers

Swan Ecosystem Center is a partnership organization. We pool resources and encourage collaboration to learn about and care for the people, land, water, and the native plants and animals in the Swan Valley.

Private Partners (short list)

Blackfoot Challenge

Brainerd Foundation

The Capital Group

The Cinnabar Foundation

Liz Claiborne Art Ortenberg Fnd

Clearwater Resources Council

Defenders of Wildlife

William H. Donner Foundation

Northwest Connections

Montana Land Reliance

Montana Wilderness Association

The Nature Conservancy

The Trust for Public Land

The Wilderness Society

Trout Unlimited

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

USV Historical Society

Vital Ground Foundation

Wilburforce Foundation

Agency, Government

Partners (short list)

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Missoula County

Montana DEQ

Montana DNRC

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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John & Judi Yajko

Public Service

Swan Ecosystem Center shares space with the Swan Lake Ranger District, Flathead National Forest in the U.S. Forest Service Condon Work Center, where SEC has an office and Visitor Center.

SEC serves the public for the Forest Service, answering questions about trails, campsites and bears; selling maps and firewood permits; and disseminating information about national forest and state timber sales to interested citizens and local contractors.

SEC's participation helps keep the facility open, providing an opportunity in the Swan



Valley for residents to connect with Forest Service managers.

Exhibits and publications about the Swan Valley ecosystem are available for the public in SEC's Visitor Center and resource collection.

You can also find information about trails, forest stewardship, community events and a lot more on the SwanEcosystemCenter.org Web site.

"By the way, this is the best interpretive center I've ever seen."

Jim Shadell
Durango, Colorado

Education for Youth and Adults

After School Club

The After School Club meets at Swan Ecosystem Center one day each week during the school year for fun outdoor learning. In 2009, the AFC planted their native pollinator garden and studied the greater Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, of which the Swan Valley is a part.

Barber Pit Wetland Restoration

Swan Valley School 7th and 8th grade students have adopted the Barber Pit wetland as a restoration project. In 2009, the students worked on an interpretive trail and planted native grasses around the wetland.

High School Citizenship

Seeley Swan High School juniors and seniors meet twice during the school year to tackle current issues affecting the community and the Swan Valley ecosystem. They learn about and participate in a mock "town hall" meeting at the Swan Valley Community Hall.

Water Quality Monitoring

Swan Valley K-8th grade public and home-schooled students monitor stream water quality each year and download the data to the Web site:

MontanaWatershed.org.

Fish Camp

For ten summers, youth aged 9-13 have enjoyed fish camp, an overnight camping program during which kids catch fish and learn about fish biology, fishing techniques and ethics from fish specialists and volunteers.

Forest Ecology Hikes

In 2009, a grant from Recreation Equipment, Inc. (REI) enabled 186 students from Missoula and Kalispell schools to learn about forest ecology in the Swan Valley while having fun hiking.

Y-Camp

In July 2009 SEC provided the nature study component of the weeklong Y-Camp at the U.S.F.S. Condon Work Center.

Family Campfire & Evening Programs

Year-round, SEC offers dozens of evening and campground programs for families covering a wide range of topics relevant to the Swan Valley ecosystem. In 2009, topics included honeybees, wolves, wildflowers, weather, avalanches, fly-tying, mushrooms, First Aid, snowshoeing, local history, geology and more.



Workshops for Adults

In 2009, SEC offered two stewardship workshops for adults. The Noxious Weed workshop focused on weed identification and covered a full spectrum of treatment options for controlling noxious weeds and encouraging native vegetation. The Tree Insects and Diseases workshop focused on identifying pathogens and insects affecting trees in the Swan Valley, and strategies for maintaining vibrant, diverse forests.