



Cabinet Resource Group

Newsletter, Spring 2017

"Protecting our natural resources through education and action."

RANGER CABINET DISTRICT WILDERNESS AND TRAILS UPDATE

We had a great 2016 trail maintenance season. With help from volunteer and partner groups, we cleared 208 miles of trail. One of the highlights of the 2016 season was the amount of work accomplished by the first CRG/USFS volunteer wilderness ranger intern, Spencer Lachman. Spencer is a wildlife biology student at the University of Montana who worked 514 hours from June through August. He assisted our wilderness crew in clearing trail, rehabilitating campsites, and performing Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) campsite inventories in the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness. With our trail crew, Spencer assisted with maintenance and clearing of non-wilderness trails, also working with the wildlife crew on survey stations throughout the District. Outreach is underway for our 2017 seasonal workforce. Spencer has expressed interest in working with us again if I can find the means to fit him in.

Our trail clearing target is 187 miles for the upcoming season. Preliminary budget numbers point to a crew size similar to 2016: one wilderness ranger, one trail crew foreman, and two trail crew members. Also, both CRG and Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness (FSPW) have agreed to carry forward their intern program into the 2017 season, adding two individuals, a vital component to our success.

Two exciting developments are on the "trail frontier." The first is the recent passage of the "*National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act*." The intent is to "augment and support the capabilities of Federal employees to carry out or contribute to trail maintenance." through the increased the use of volunteers and partners, and utilization of district fire crews to assist with trail maintenance when feasible.

The second development, specific to Cabinet Ranger District, Bob Cheshire, a

resident of the Bull River Valley, has offered monetary assistance to maintain and improve Devil's Club Trail #966. Currently, the trail has a lot of blowdowns, brush in the trail corridor and large portions of the tread in need of repair. Bob's contribution will provide two Montana Conservation Corps Youth Expedition crews. Planning for this project is underway, we anticipate an implementation date of June or July of this year.

Thank you CRG for all you do for wild land preservation. *Joel Sather*

REDUCTION IN TRAIL MAINTENANCE FUNDING

Last summer I heard rumors that the forest service planned to abandon the maintenance of the trail system on the Kootenai National Forest. As this is of particular concern to me, I contacted Mary Laws (406-283-7648) who is the Kootenai National Forest trail director in Libby's KNF headquarters. She informed me that Washington had changed the method of funding the trail system budget. Previously the budget was based on the number of trail miles in the forest. The KNF trail system is extensive therefore the budget was large. Washington-based the new system of funding on the number of people using the trails. Therefore, the forests near the metropolitan areas will be well funded, but the rural areas such as the KNF or the LOLO or all of Montana for that matter will see a drastic cutback.

Apparently, the funding cuts for the Cabinet district alone additional cuts of thirty percent per year for the foreseeable future.

Trail 966 in the Cabinets is of particular interest to me. This trail starts at the end of the East Fork Bull River road and climbs through the Cabinet Wilderness to the top of Dads Peak and then down to Snake Pass (about 11 miles). (continued)

The portion of the Wilderness (about 4 miles) is some of the most spectacular scenery in the Cabinets. Several years ago, I received a RAC grant of \$20,000 to reopen this trail which had been abandoned by the Forest service for about ten years. The forest service did the work, and the trail was in great shape, but now after three years, it is nearly unusable. Due to a lack of funding, it has been placed on a five-year rotational basis for maintenance.

Now for the good news.

With the approval of Mary Laws and the Cabinet District Ranger, (John Grubel), starting next spring, I have arranged to donate a sum of money every other year to the MCC (Montana Conservation Corps) for the maintenance of this trail. With private funding, this trail will stay open for years to come. I worked on the Cabinet trail crew from 1979 to 1984 and at age 71 still pack a chainsaw into some non-wilderness trails, but it gets tougher every year. *Robert Cheshire*



“The Forest Service’s National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System establishes a bold vision for a sustainable trail system achieved through collaborative stewardship. The strategy identifies core values to guide implementation and outlines a series of strategic actions to leverage critical investments in agency and partner leader intent and resources toward achieving a 10-year action plan.”
<https://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/tail-management/strategy/index.shtml>

CRG’s EXPANDING ROLE IN TRAIL STEWARDSHIP

Jim Nash

For the second year, Cabinet Resource Group sponsors an intern to work on the Cabinet Ranger District trails crew. Last year’s CRG intern was Spencer Lachman from the University of Montana. CRG pays for food and housing expenses for the volunteer, and thus far we have twenty applications for the volunteer position for the 2017 season.

As the Forest Service reduces funding for trail maintenance, CRG’s role in trail stewardship will expand. Private groups must fill the need or many trails will be inaccessible. As timber jobs continue to decline the future economy will diversify into recreation and wildlife. CRG has applied for a \$15,000 grant for a paid trails steward to be hired by the FS. Duties include trail maintenance, weed control, and education. As the face of CRG, the intern represents our organization at events and will lead volunteers in trail projects. The grant would also cover a Youth Montana Conservation Corp crew to tackle some of the more challenging trail work.

Cabinet Resource Group will continue to monitor and defend against degradation of our pristine environment as we attempt to meet the needs of the community. We intend to sponsor the volunteer internship into the future and will apply for grant funding for a steward. We will be partnering with other groups such as Cabinet Back Country Horseman, Friends of Scotchman and the Forest Service. Our trails are a heritage we received and need to preserve for future generations.

We will have volunteer days for trail work in the summer. We welcome volunteers. Please return enclosed post card or sign up here: www.cabinetresourcegroup.org/volunteer

TOE PONDS OR TOAD STOOLS?

Bill Martin

Should CRG oppose a reducing the depth of the topsoil from 18" to 8" in the reclamation of the Troy tailings pile? A rhetorical question, asked to elicit an effect rather than to inform you, so have I got your attention, dear reader?

The approved reclamation plan for the Troy Mine requires an 18" cap on the topsoil for the tailings facility. Asarco agreed to stockpile this dirt *below* the tailings dike and *above* the flood stage for Lake Creek.

The mine went into production and the tailings impoundment filled. It also leaked. Without notifying the state, Asarco built the "toe ponds" between the dike and Lake Creek to catch leakage, and then pump it back up into the impoundment. These toe ponds were built using the stockpiled topsoil intended for the reclamation project.

We've reached the reclamation stage of this project, and there's not enough top soil.

Where is it? In the toe ponds? Sold on the black soil market?

(More rhetorical questions for your consideration.)

Hecla has asked for an amendment to reduce the amount to less than half of the original depth? 8" not 18" of topsoil on the tailings impoundment.

Hecla representative, Doug Styles says their research shows that 8" will be as effective as 18". He offered to provide a presentation on this issue. Are we interested? (Final rhetorical question.) As soon as Cesar, Kim Matthew, and myself with anyone else who cares to attend can coordinate it, we'll make it happen. Call one of us if you are interested in joining us.

And then, there are the toads....

Removing the toe ponds to recover the missing topsoil would result in increased discharge and sedimentation into Lake Creek.

And,

Western Toads, like the majority of amphibians on our planet, are disappearing from their natural habitats, passing out of existence.

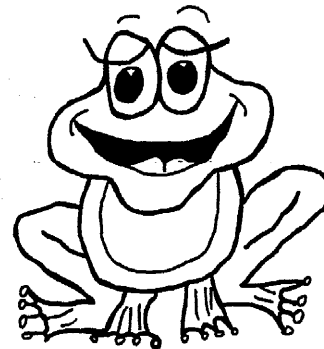
Locally, however, they seem to be doing well---in the toe ponds.

No more questions from me, but perhaps you have one or two?

It will be several months before the DEQ asks for public comment.

Now is the time to educate ourselves so as to be able to make informed, substantive comment when the time for it arrives.

Go to the DEQ website for Hecla's amendment application.

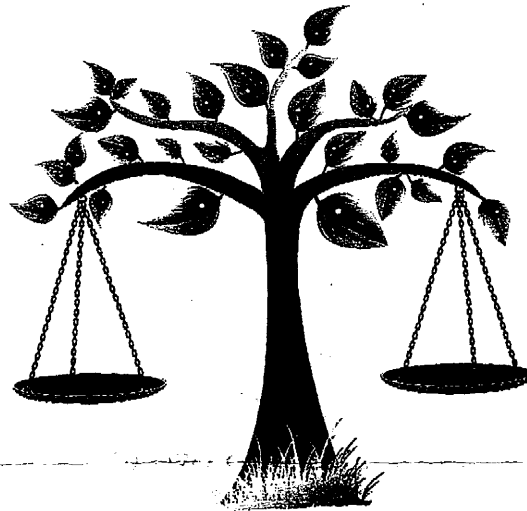


A Note from the Editor: The Cabinet Resource Group is the **GO-TO** group for **facts** concerning the environment in Northwestern Montana. We encourage you to enjoy the fresh air, clean water, and beautiful surroundings in our part of the world. Our mission is to maintain the integrity of the wilderness through *responsible* forestry, water management, and commercial enterprises in our mountains. As stewards of the area, we investigate the information provided by our federal and state agencies as well as data issued by private interests. We seek to establish the reliability and veracity of the information and serve our community as the watch dog of responsible use of the "Last Best Place." MDH

The Cabinet Resource Group

The Balancing Actors

Environment



Economy

As one of our founders, Bill Martin expressed in several former issues of CRG's Newsletters: "We want to be *for* things, not against them." As our organization has evolved over the last 40 years, that concept continues to be our underlying principle. Citing a well-worn cliché used by developers, "A stable, healthy economy must be based on a healthy environment..." CRG changes the sentence to express our point of view. "A healthy environment can support a stable economy."

As our planet tumbles toward destruction through climate change, thoughtless human actions or lack of actions without consideration for the long-term future impact upon Mother Earth, our organization tries to restore the balance between necessary progress, productivity, and protection of our natural resources.

According to Bill, the original intention behind Cabinet Resource Group's formation was *to promote responsible economic development* in our region. Aside from the natural splendor surrounding us, there is no denying the economic assets beneath our mountains. Our valley blesses us with beauty and bounty. With these benefits, we are challenged to improve our lives without sacrificing our environment.

The Original Purpose Statement:

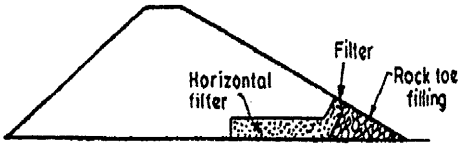
"to promote the well-being of the area by providing opportunities for utilization of human resources, and encouraging enlightened regard for natural resources."

The original vision was "as a means of political empowerment to collectively have a voice in decisions affecting our lives. We encouraged the inclusion of a broad spectrum of opinion to work toward common goals." Sadly, the decades between the birth of CRG and its current incarnation have seen sharp divisions of opinions into two (or more) separate and opposing positions.

The solution is **not** either/or, for/against, pro/con the Rock Creek/Montenore/Hecla Mining in our neighborhood. As it was in 1976 and continues to be now: CRG strives to be the open forum for all sides of this issue. As such, we believe in progress, but not at the price of the environment. That does not make all of us hippy tree-huggers, although most of us have hugged a tree on occasion, it does make us concerned citizens who want what's best for all of us, economically, environmentally, today and into the future.

Join us to create a positive economic environment through responsible progress in our valley. Our guiding vision is to hold those agencies, corporations, and government entities who pretend to be beyond our control **accountable** to the people affected by their decisions, actions.





Fool us Once, Twice

Will there be a third time?

Cesar Hernandez

Early in our history, the search for deep rich topsoil drove our country's westward expansion. Farmers know that deep rich topsoil is the growth medium for any crop from peas to trees.

When Asarco proposed the Troy mine in 1979, the MT Department of Health & Environmental Sciences (DHES) issued the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), requiring an 18" topsoil covering for reclamation of the mine tailings impoundment.

State Law MCA (Montana Code Annotated) in the Metal Mine Reclamation Act 82-4-338 (3)(a) requires the DEQ (Dept. of Environmental Quality) to **audit the performance bond every five years**. This ensured reclamation of hard-rock mining projects would be the responsibility of the company who mined our wilderness, rather than having those costs fall upon Montana taxpaying citizens.

In 1999, Revett, a newly formed entity, acquired the Troy Mine.

In 2000, the Cabinet Resource Group (CRG) informed MT DEQ that a performance bond review was due for the Troy mine, even though Asarco had ceased production in 1997 because of low metals prices. DEQ resisted, causing CRG to initiate legal proceedings to enforce the issue. In 2005, after further prodding by CRG, DEQ began the required review, first as an EA (Environmental Analysis) and then as a full-blown EIS (Environmental Impact Statement).

In September 2012, a Revised Troy Mine Reclamation Plan was adopted and signed, raising the Reclamation Performance Bond from \$12.8 million to \$24.6 million dollars. Under the revision, 18" of topsoil continued to be the topsoil covering requirement.

In 2016 HECLA Mining purchased the Troy mine and the proposed Rock Creek Mine projects from Revett Minerals for \$30 million dollars in a stock exchange deal.

On Dec. 16, 2016, HECLA Mining applied for an amendment to the Troy Mine Revised Reclamation Plan to cover the surface of the Troy tailings impoundment with 8" inches of topsoil rather than the 18" in the original agreement. Because of a shortage in the Troy mine topsoil stockpile, there was not enough material to fulfill the 18" obligation.

The original Troy mine EIS (1979) identified 766,000 tons of topsoil storage to cover the tailings impoundment to a depth of 18-inches. As of today, HECLA claims only 336,000 cu./m are available because ASARCO used another 80,000 cu./m of topsoil to illegally (without prior authorization) construct toe ponds located along the western perimeter of the tailings impoundment.

HECLA claims the toe ponds will remain in place after reclamation to provide habitat for moose and breeding grounds for the Western toad. (Please see Bill Miller's article on the Western toad in this issue.)

In their report, (August 8, 2016) HECLA Mine Consultants Knight Piesold and CDM Smith concluded an 8" topsoil cover for the tailings impoundment would suffice as a reclamation medium.

In 1980, Knight Piesold designed (and monitored until 2011) the MT Polley tailings impoundment in the Cariboo Region of British Columbia, Canada.

The MT Polley Mine tailings impoundment, 90-foot tall, covering four square miles **failed** on August 4, 2014, releasing 10,000,000 cubic

meters of water and 4.5 million cubic meters of tailings slurry into nearby Quesnel Lake and its outfall the Quesnel River.

Today chronically toxic levels of arsenic, selenium, and copper are in the lake and river ecosystem.

An Independent Panel Concluded:
"The Panel concluded that the dominant contribution to the failure resides in the design. The design did not take into account the complexity of the sub-glacial and pre-glacial geological environment associated with the perimeter embankment foundation. As a result, foundation investigations and associated site characterization failed to identify a continuous GLU layer in the vicinity of the breach and to recognize that it was susceptible to undrained failure when subject to the stresses associated with the

In 2016, Mt Polley mine owners Imperial Minerals sued Knight-Piesold for damages related to the design and monitoring of their MT Polley facility in the Canadian Supreme Court of British Columbia.

After taking 12 years to conduct the assessment required by law, and **then only at the prodding of concerned citizens**, CRG questions the MT DEQ's decision to consider this proposed amendment to lower the reclamation topsoil requirements intended to protect human health and our environment.

Either DHES (predecessor to DEQ) failed in its assessment of the topsoil volumes, or accepted insufficient Asarco data on the topsoil volume, only to have DEQ repeat the same failure; does the adage, "let the buyer beware" apply to HECLA's purchase of the Troy mine?

A 354,000 cu./m volume of topsoil shortage at the Troy mine might cost HECLA an

additional \$4 million dollars. Montana citizens currently spend \$9 million dollars a year on mining reclamation **shortfalls** for the underfunded bankrupt legacy of Pegasus Gold at the Zortman-Landusky mines. The MT DEQ should know better, and if they don't then CRG will be there to remind them.

DEQ has issued its Record of Decision for the Proposed Rock Creek Mine underneath the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness.

Will the required 1000-foot buffers and other reclamations and environmental protections be challenged at HECLA's request?

An educated, concerned public can affect the result, and preserve our environment for future generations. Write, call or email your concerns:

Herb Rolfes hrolfes@mt.gov

DEQ, Hard Rock Bureau, P.O.B. 200901,
1520 E. 6th Ave., Helena, MT 59620-0901

Want to know more?

You are cordially invited to

CELEBRATE EARTH DAY!

APRIL 22, 2017

CRG's Annual Dinner Meeting

Speaker James Kuiper

"Mt. Polley, and Beyond"

Big Horn Lodge, Noxon MT

Please call Diane Mosely

@ 406-847-2024

for more information.



President: Cesar Hernandez, Polson 406-210-7160	Donations are tax deductible!
Vice President: Bill Martin, Troy 406-295-5258	If you care about the Cabinets,
Secretary: Debra Achatz, Trout Creek 406-827-3973	our natural resources, and the people
Treasurer: Colleen Hinds, Heron 406-847-2209	who live here now and in the future:
Director: Jim Nash, Noxon, 406-847-5610	JOIN US!
Director: Tom Humphreys, Noxon, 406-847-2594	We are your Grass Roots Group!

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We welcome comments, articles, input.

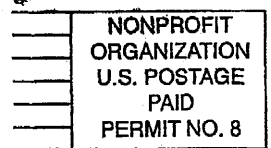
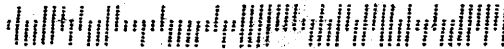
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