



North Fork Landowners' Association Spring 2021 Newsletter

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Greetings from the snowy North Fork! Still, Spring is on the horizon, the eaves are dripping, and we are all ready for summer to arrive. The North Fork is a special place, where even with our differences, we find the time to come together and enjoy each other's company. As always, this newsletter and our Calendar are packed with articles and events reflecting that diversity. There is something for everyone included in these pages! And...Oh, yes, the COVID thing. We are optimistic about this summer and are pushing ahead with a full slate of activities. There may be some social distancing requirements, especially early in the season, but we will try to deal with difficulties as they arrive and make any necessary adjustments in a timely fashion. Please keep an eye on the NFLA website (<http://nflandowners.com>) for announcements and schedule updates.

So, thanks again to our Board, Committees, volunteers, and YOU, the members, for all the time, support, and contributions you've given that help to preserve our North Fork traditions, history, and Sondreson Hall. We look forward to seeing you this summer!

Bill Walker, President

North Fork Landowners' Association

***DON'T MISS OUR CALENDAR
of SUMMER PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES***

*****Inside*****

FIRE MITIGATION COMMITTEE *by Allen Chrisman & Molly Shepherd*

Since the 2003 Wedge Canyon Fire, the NFLA's Fire Mitigation Committee has been working with landowners and federal, state and local agencies to create defensible space around our homes and to increase the North Fork's fire resilience.

This year, the Fire Mitigation Committee will sponsor its annual Firewise Day workshop on Wednesday July 14, 2021 from 9:30 to noon, preceding the Summer Interlocal meeting. Tentatively, the program will feature excerpts from a documentary on the 2018 Paradise Fire in Northern California, with expert commentary from two experienced firefighters who were on the scene. Our focus will be on lessons learned from the devastating fire and how they might apply to the North Fork. We'll also hear presentations on Flathead County's Wildfire Protection Plan and revisions to the North Fork Fire Plan; on the 2021 fire



2021 North Fork Firewise Day
North Fork Landowners Association
Fire Mitigation Committee
Wednesday, July 14, 2021 0930 – 1200
Sondreson Community Hall, Whale Creek

Time	Presenter	Topic
0930	Allen Chrisman	Welcome & Introductions
0935	Todd & Scott	Fire in Paradise, CA - Shared Experiences
1045	Break	
1100	Lincoln Chute	Flathead County Community Wildland Fire Protection Plan Update
1110	Allen Chrisman/ Molly Shepherd	North Fork Community Wildland Fire Protection Plan Update
1115	Sean Johnson	NRCS TIPS Wedge Canyon Proposed Project
1130	Deb Starling/ Carol Daly	FEPC Hazardous Fuels Grant Status and Opportunities
1135	Andy Huntsberger	2021 Fire Season Projections
1155	Molly Shepherd	Wrap-up and Adjourn

season forecast and anticipated personnel and equipment deployment; and on grants and opportunities for hazardous fuel reduction that may be available to landowners.

The committee also will sponsor a Basic Fire Training workshop on Thursday June 24, 2021 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Presentations will focus on preparing for the fire season, evacuation planning, and chainsaw use and safety. Fire equipment will be available for purchase. Please bring your own lunch.

Landowners who are interested in arranging a free home wildfire assessment may contact the DNRC's Ali Ulwelling at aulwelling@mt.gov. We ask landowners to keep track of the time and money that they expend on Firewise activities. Qualifying activities include reducing fuels and creating defensible space around homes. Firewise USA requires the data for membership renewal. We'll collect the information in the Fall.

2021 North Fork Outlook *by Jim Dahlstrom, GNP North Fork District Ranger*

Visitors to Glacier this summer will see a noticeable increase in the amount of services provided compared to last year (think more boating, camping, hiking, and all of the Park open for business), along with a new tool to help spread out visitor use and reduce overcrowding that has been all too commonplace in recent years. Ticketed entry for the Going to the Sun Road begins on Memorial Day weekend, which you can learn more about here: [Going-to-the-Sun Road Ticketed Entry - Glacier National Park \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#) In short, ANY vehicle traveling through the West Entrance will be required to have a ticket, which includes commuters going back and forth with an Annual Pass. The Camas Road will be under construction as well, with 30 minute delays each way all summer long to complete the 2 year resurfacing project. Commuters may use the West Entrance before 6 am or after 5 pm if they want to avoid making a reservation.

What does this mean for the North Fork? We know that tourist traffic to the Flathead Valley has the potential to be record breaking once again, and many people will unintentionally find their way to the North Fork. You can bet that more locals will be coming as well. This combined with the road construction on Hwy 2 around West Glacier has Park managers concerned that other areas of the park will see increased traffic, and how best to manage that. One major operational change at Polebridge this season will be a staffed AIS inspection station., eliminating the need for North Fork bound boaters to get their craft inspected in Apgar. We are also working with Flathead County and MDT on better signage around the Camas Bridge intersection, and further south down the road towards Columbia Falls. Look for further updates and changes on our website, and, as always, feel free to call or visit with me at the Ranger Station.

FIRE AND PROPANE *by Lynn Ogle, North Fork Fire Chief*

Wildfire may be coming back this summer here in the North Fork. With fire in mind, we all have generators...some with diesel, some with propane, and even some with gasoline. But in most cabins and homes, we all use propane even if just for a BBQ grill.

My point is that our need for propane is greater than we realize. Propane can leak, and when it does it follows the ground - it goes to the lowest possible place and pools up. So, if it leaks in your cabin, it could go into the crawlspace, or anywhere that is lower than where the leak began.

In the event of a spontaneous fire, all it takes is a spark to start a fire and in a closed-in space a spark will cause an explosion. In the event of a wildfire, the heat from the fire itself could cause leaks and bebies (an explosion of propane). Should that occur, we would be able to see the ball of fire from the farthest reaches of the North Fork.

I am asking everyone who has propane to check your propane tanks, lines, and connections, now. Use a mix of water and Dawn soap; make it thick enough to make bubbles, put it in a spray bottle, and spray the lines and joints, looking for bubbles. If you see any leaks, smell gas, or even THINK you smell it, call your propane provider immediately. **Have a safe summer.**



Photo courtesy of Larry Wilson

Prepare a Family Disaster Plan:

- Find 2 Exit routes from your house (your main driveway may be compromised)
- Plan to evacuate family members & animals **EARLY**
- Get trailers for large animals, pianos, pictures, snowmobiles **EARLY**
- Make a list of needed medications, financial records, laptops, etc
- Choose an out of area friend to check in with in case your family gets separated
- Pack a good 1st aid kit, shovel, collapsible bucket, chainsaw in your car **EARLY**

GET ACQUAINTED – COME JOIN US !

The NORTH FORK COMPACT was established in 1971, with the purpose of establishing a “landowner’s covenant where each party agrees not to devote their property to any commercial, industrial, or manufacturing use inconsistent with the preservation of the present semi-primitive character of the North Fork area.” Membership is open to any North Fork landowner. Their **Annual Meeting** will be Monday, August 9th, 2021, at 8 pm at Sondreson Hall; also, a **ZOOM Annual Meeting** for landowners not currently in the North Fork area will be held on Monday, August 2nd at 7pm via Zoom. For more information, contact Bruce McNeil at cbm10@msn.com, 406-253-9720, or visit their website <https://sites.google.com/view/northforkcompact/home>.

The NORTH FORK PATROL was initially formed as a Committee in 1981 under the former North Fork Improvement Association (now called the North Fork Landowners Association). In 2014 it was designated as its own separate 501 (c)(4) organization. The purpose of the Patrol through the years “has been to help check on properties for damage, vandalism, and poaching.” **It is not a law enforcement or security agency.** With the increase in structures, people, and now rentals, checking on properties has become more challenging. Currently there are 140 properties signed up for patrol; NFLA membership is not required. **More information** can be found at <https://nflandowners.com/north-fork-patrol/> or contact Mark Heaphy, Chairman 406-890-5043, or email m-mheaphy@hotmail.com.

Grizzly Bear Information and Updates

by Tim Manley, Grizzly Bear Management Specialist, MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks

With spring here, it is time to expect grizzly and black bears to start emerging from their winter dens. Radio collars are turned on (March 1st), and two management grizzly bears have stuck their heads out of their dens allowing the collars to connect with the satellite. An adult male captured by Jamie Jonkel near Seeley Lake and relocated near Frozen Lake, has denned in B.C., north of the Frozen Lake. The second bear is a subadult female that denned in the Swan Range.

During 2020, there was a fair amount of grizzly bear observations reported by landowners in the North Fork. Some of the first reports (3/29) were of a female with two 2-year-olds north of Trail Creek. These bears did not cause any conflicts, but they were observed or captured on cameras throughout the spring, primarily feeding on green grass in yards. I think the two youngsters were kicked out sometime in June and continued to be seen throughout the summer and fall, ranging from north of Trail Creek down to Red Meadow. I recommended that people not let them hang around yards and homes, so they didn't become even more habituated to residences and human activity. The adult female was photographed with an adult male grizzly bear during the breeding season, so she may have cubs this spring.

The bear we called "Oattie", who started his adventures in an oat field near Polebridge a couple of years ago, dropped his radio collar after we triggered it via satellite. Allen Chrisman allowed us access and went in with us to pick up the collar. Since he was a young bear and still growing, we didn't want it to get too tight on him. We certainly appreciate Allen's assistance. Later, I spoke with the owner of the oatfield and he agreed not to plant oats there again; we appreciated his willingness to plant a non-grain crop.

The bear we had radio-collared and called "Monica" dropped her radio collar in 2019 south of Home Ranch. In May of 2020, I had a report of a female grizzly with 3 new cubs on the Hay Creek Rd. I also was sent photos of a female with 3 cubs later in the year on private property near Hay Creek. My feeling is this is "Monica" because she was using the same areas as in the past. Hopefully, she won't cause any conflicts this year. Please let me know if you see her hanging around!

A big concern we had in 2020 was the influx of people into the North Fork, the surrounding Forest Service and DNRC lands. We encountered people just camping anywhere they could find a wide spot. We didn't have any reported conflicts from those campers, but did find food and garbage left behind at some of those sites.

Considered essential during COVID-19, we captured 19 grizzly bears for management reasons and had 129 confirmed grizzly bear conflicts, mainly on the eastern edge of the Flathead Valley, Columbia Falls, Whitefish, and Swan Lake. The most common reported conflicts involved bears in chicken coops, garbage, bird feeders, and livestock feed.

Now is a good time to identify, secure or remove any attractants that you have out that bears might get into. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 406-250-1265 or at the email below. Justine Vallieres will be working for me again this field season beginning the first part of May. I have completed an Annual Report for 2020. If you are interested in reading about the grizzly bear management work that we do, let me know and I will email you a PDF. My email is tim.manley@mt.gov.



"Grizzlies enjoying a good back rub!"
Photo courtesy of Chrisman/Wiley Family Forest

GET ACQUAINTED – COME JOIN US !

The NORTH FORK PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION was founded by local residents in 1982 in response to proposals to pave the road and develop a coal mine upstream in Canada. The Association works with the community to develop land-use planning and offers programs that demonstrate how human and natural communities can successfully coexist. The NFPA's mission is "to champion stewardship of the natural resources and protection of the exceptional biodiversity of the North Fork of the Flathead River watershed in northwest Montana." This year's **annual membership meeting** is July 31 at Sondreson Hall – potluck at 5:30, elections at 6:45, speakers at 7:30. Everyone is invited! Speakers include Sally Thompson Greiser, author of *People Before the Park: The Kootenai and Blackfeet before Glacier National Park*, and tribal members of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai tribe. For more information, go to the NFPA website at www.gravel.org.

The NORTH FORK TRAILS ASSOCIATION, established in 2013, has a mission "to promote the maintenance and preservation of the historic trail structure in the North Fork Flathead area with the aim of supporting recreation, forest management, and research." The North Fork has an extensive trail system, especially west of the River, but reductions in federal funding have allowed it to become dilapidated and partially abandoned. The NFTA was formed with the goal of reversing this process. To participate, feel free to show up at any of our events (the **calendar** is posted at <http://nftrails.org/calendar/>), use our "Contact Us" page (<http://nftrails.org/contact-us/>), or contact the current President, Bill Walker, directly at wkwalker@nvdi.com. Finally, NFTA sponsors various **types of training** that are open to the public, including an **annual First Aid/CPR/AED course** every spring.

BULLETS WE HAVE DODGED!

by Jim Rittenburg and Lois Walker

“The North Fork of the Flathead River Valley is a unique and very special place. Nestled between the towering mountains of Glacier National Park and the thick pines of the Flathead National Forest, the valley is anchored by the North Fork of the Flathead River. The North Fork feels like a place left behind by the modern world. No phones or electricity gives the remote valley and its residents an experience hard to find today in the lower 48 states. A wide open, uncrowded place, with pristine water, clean air, dark night skies, abundant wildlife, quiet and solitude, with incredible scenic vistas are values residents of the North Fork hold dear.”

The excerpt above, taken from the 2008 North Fork Neighborhood Plan, pretty much sums up what brought most of us here to the North Fork. However, the story could have been much different. With the recent dramatic increase in tourism pressure, real estate sales, and building activity in the North Fork, it is timely to reflect on the bullets we have dodged over the past 100+ years and prepare for the bullets of the future. Since the earliest settlement in the North Fork in the 1890s, our neighborhood has faced serious threats from five major directions:

- Mining – Coal and Oil
- Industrialization – Proposed Glacier View Dam and Hydro Plant
- Tourism Highway – International Loop Road through Glacier, Waterton and the NF
- Frontier Land of the North - 1,860 Acre Vast Recreational Complex
- Land Development – Lack of Coordinated Land Use Planning Prior to the 1970s

Let’s revisit the path that each of these threats took and think about how different the North Fork would be today if any one of them had taken a different course.

Bullet 1: Mining

In the 1880s coal was found in the North Fork near Coal Creek. At the time, the Great Northern Railway needed coal for fuel, as did the giant smelters associated with mining throughout the region, prompting local prospectors to develop the coal beds. In 1892 a steamboat called the T.F. Oakes set out on its maiden (and only) voyage from Coal Creek down the Flathead River toward Columbia Falls with its load of coal. It wrecked in the rapids by Canyon Creek. The next year some coal was brought out on a raft, but this method was quickly abandoned following another wreck in the rapids. From then on coal was transported to town over land! The quality of the lignite coal from these beds was not suitable for use by the railway nor was it suitable for conversion to coke for smelting operations, but it was a suitable heating fuel for local businesses and homes. Coal mining in the North Fork continued until 1942 when wartime labor shortages and lack of demand for low-grade coal forced the mines to shut down.

Further north from the Coal Creek coal beds, prospectors filed the first oil claims in Montana in 1892 near Kintla Lake. The prospectors were alerted to the potential of oil in the Kintla area by bear hides sold at Tobacco Plains that smelled of kerosene. The North Fork Valley quickly attracted settlers hoping to find oil and anticipating that a railway spur would come up the valley. Neither of these things happened, and with the financial panic of 1893 and the subsequent depression, there was a temporary collapse of the Kintla area oil district during the 1890s. Interest was revived in the Kintla oil fields in 1900 when a group of businessmen from Butte formed the Butte Oil Company and filed a claim on land near Kintla Lake in 1901. A wagon road was built from Belton to Kintla and drilling began. The first well reached 1400 feet in 1901 but in the winter of 1902 the derrick burned down. Competing companies, including the Kintla Oil Co. and the Kintla Lake Oil Co., also put in wells around the same time, but they all ended in failure. Over the next decade no significant oil reserves were found and in 1912 all claims of the Butte Oil Company were declared void. The cabin built by the Butte Oil Company along the edge of Kintla Lake in 1900 still remains today as a ranger cabin.

The collapse of Kintla oil exploration in the early 1900s did not end the threat of mining in the North Fork. Exploration for coal, and oil and gas, continued along

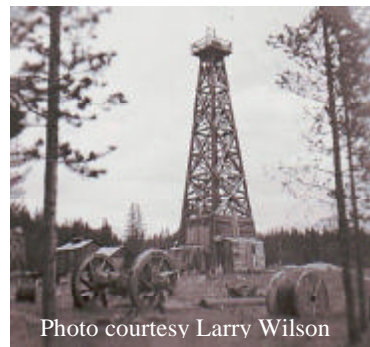


Photo courtesy Larry Wilson

the Flathead River Basin both in Canada, and in the North Fork, for another century. Oil exploration on the Canadian side resurged in the 1950s, for instance. In the 1970s and 1980s oil prices shot up due to an embargo in the Middle East and the U.S. Government turned to domestic oil exploration. An explosion of oil and gas leases were sold across the Flathead National Forest, resulting in 450 leases covering nearly a million acres of land, with 105 leases being in the North Fork to companies including ExxonMobil, Conoco Philips, Cenex, and others. In 1989, amid significant local protest, and without any public hearings, the Montana Oil and Gas Conservation Board approved a proposal by Cenex to drill a 10,000-foot exploratory well on private property in the North Fork within a few miles of the park (by Home Ranch Bottoms). The well came up dry. Thanks to significant public advocacy led by John Frederick, Roger Sullivan, and the North Fork Preservation Association, public hearings were subsequently held. Ultimately, Cenex decided not to develop any of its leases in the North

Fork and released them back to the Department of State Lands. Fortunately, this century-long story of mining development in the North Fork has a happy ending. In 2011, the Flathead River basin became protected under an international transboundary agreement between Montana and British Columbia, banning oil and gas extraction and mining in the Flathead River Basin both in British Columbia and the North Fork. On the national level, in 2014 the US Congress passed the North Fork Watershed Protection Act, withdrawing all federally owned land in the North Fork from any mineral or geothermal leasing.



Roger Sullivan, Jon Heberling, and John Frederick (r-l) argue before the Oil and Gas Board in the North Fork Preservation Association case (1989).

Bullet 2: Industrialization – Glacier View Dam and Hydro Plant

Imagine a nice summer day in the North Fork. People from town, and around the country, are heading up to Glacier View Reservoir and Recreation area. A 30,000-acre lake stretching 25 miles up the Flathead from the dam between Glacier View Mountain and Huckleberry Mountain, all way past the Holycross property to Ford Ranger Station, and averaging 4-5 miles across. The plans were in place and it came close to happening around 70 years ago!

Initial thoughts of putting a dam across the North Fork of the Flathead River began in the mid-1930s and resulted in a proposal prepared in 1943 by the Army Corp of Engineers. The dam was to be a 416-foot-high earth-filled structure spanning the river between the two mountains. The reservoir created would have spanned 25 miles north



toward the Canadian border, inundating 30,000 acres (about 20,000 acres of park and 10,000 acres of private land). It would have raised the water level in Logging Lake by 50 feet and put Polebridge and the current Polebridge Ranger station under water. Proponents of the dam, including Senator Mike Mansfield, local union groups, chambers of commerce, and flood control advocates, believed inexpensive hydro-electric power created by the dam would attract industrial development, such as aluminum processing plants and airplane production facilities, leading to establishment of a manufacturing empire in western Montana.

Illustration of the proposed Glacier View Dam, 1948, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In 1948, the proposed dam garnered national attention as a result of public hearings held in Kalispell. The majority of testimony was against the dam, including opposition from the National Park Service, major conservation groups, and local residents. Following the public hearings in 1948, the National Park Service decided to build the Camas road to bring more people into the prospective dam area as a way of showing its intent for recreational use of this disputed area. Ironically, the Park Service believed that by investing in development to bring more people into that area of the North Fork it would strengthen their position in opposing the dam and the anticipated industrial development.

The Army Corp of Engineers abandoned the Glacier View Dam project in 1949, due in large part to the strong resistance it faced. Also at that time the Hungry Horse Dam construction was already underway. Senator Mansfield tried unsuccessfully to revive the project saying it “would not affect the beauty of the park in any way but would make it more beautiful by creating a large lake over ground that has no scenic attraction.” Into the early 1950s, Montana legislators and the Army Corp of Engineers struggled to revive the Glacier View Dam project and looked for other sites on the upper forks of the Flathead River, including at Spruce Park on the Middle Fork. Talk of a dam at Glacier View finally abated in 1955 with Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay voicing his strong opposition to the dam and the detrimental impact it would have on the National Park. Interestingly, the activity around creating dams on the branches of the Flathead river both enraged and inspired John and Frank Craighead, twin wildlife biologists and wild river enthusiasts. As part of a proactive attempt to stop the dams, the Craigheads proposed a classification system for wild and scenic rivers in the United States. In 1957, John Craighead first published his call for this designation. Together the two brothers led the efforts that resulted in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, and in the end wrote much of the text that went into the legislation.

North Forkers Oppose Glacier View Dam
(Hungry Horse News, May 21, 1948)

At their Monday evening meeting, the North Fork Improvement association voted to “Let’s Keep the North Fork Primitive,” as this chamber of commerce for the area just west of Glacier national park opposed the proposed Glacier View dam.

The association met at the Harry Holcomb ranch, and members were agreed that the proposed dam would destroy their homesites, eliminate game range, and interfere with the recreational purpose of the park’s west side.

Bullet 3: Tourism Highway Through NF, GNP, and Waterton Park

Anyone who has recently traveled the Going to the Sun Road on a mid-summer’s day has experienced how popular and congested that route has become. Imagine a tourist highway that forms two loops in the shape of a figure 8 with Going to the Sun road being the center section of the figure 8, and Polebridge and the NF being along the northwest side of the upper loop of the figure 8. As we know, the bottom half of this loop was completed and is a popular drive today. However, the northern loop is where the story begins!



A four-wheel drive trek was staged in 1969 to demonstrate the feasibility of a road linking Glacier and Waterton Parks. (Galt Museum and Archives)

A road linking Waterton Park and Glacier National Park was first suggested in 1915 by the Commissioner of Canadian National Parks. The idea which proposed a road across Akamina Pass was popular but got delayed due to WWI. Construction on the Akamina Parkway finally started in 1921, with the intention of ultimately linking Waterton to Lake McDonald. Work was slow and arduous with substantial repairs required following each winter, and by 1927 only about six miles had been completed from Waterton Park headquarters toward Akamina Pass. The opening of the Prince of Wales Hotel in 1927 increased interest in the loop road, but the project got bogged down in 1928 when agreement could not be reached between Alberta, British Columbia, and the U.S. for road funding and land allocation, and then the Great Depression hit in 1929. Over the next several decades work on the Akamina Parkway came in fits and starts with hopes that an agreement could be worked out to expand Waterton Lakes Park into B.C. and complete a road through B.C. and across the border into GNP.

However, by the mid-1950s the road had only been completed to Cameron Lake, still 20 miles short of reaching the border and GNP north of Kintla Lake. Over the next several decades a number of international treks were organized by horseback and motorized vehicle to demonstrate the potential of a route running from the terminus of the Akamina highway at Cameron Lake in Alberta to GNP near Kintla Lake and the Flathead River. Finally, in 1977 after many attempts by Alberta, B.C., and the U.S. to reach agreement on funding and land, the proposal of a loop road was abandoned from the Waterton Park Master Plan.

Had the loop road come to fruition, most private properties in the NF would lie directly along a major tourist highway. Millions of people a year from both north and south of the Canadian border would be funneled right through Polebridge and the North Fork community! Tourists could have jumped on the scenic highway to drive a big loop passing through West Glacier, up the inside NF highway, across the Flathead River at Polebridge, then north on the outside NF highway almost to the border where the road would cross the river back into GNP just north of Kintla Lake. The highway would then cross into Canada and continue across B.C., over Kishinena Pass and Akamina Pass into Alberta and through Waterton Lakes Park. The loop would continue out the east side of Waterton Park, pass by Chief Mountain and down to the GNP entrance at St Mary's, west across the Going to the Sun Road and back to the West Glacier Park entrance. Although there are still rumblings today about expanding Waterton Park west into B.C., there does not appear to be anything imminent on the horizon.

Bullet 4: Vast Recreational Complex...“Frontier Land of the North”

You're enjoying a quiet drive up the North Fork Road, and as you get to the top of Vance Hill a commercial jet sweeps over the treetops on its final approach into Bowman Landing, an 11,000-foot runway taking daily commercial flights into a vast recreational complex known as Frontier Land of the North. This is what could have been if an untimely death had not changed the course of history. The January 16, 1966 *Daily Inter Lake* reported on the project that Hugh Bowman already had underway. About 4,500 feet of the 11,000-foot runway had already been cleared and Bowman was routinely landing his Cessna 182 on the strip. Bowman's father originally bought the 1,900-acre property in 1936. Thirty years later, in 1966, Hugh Bowman had embarked on a plan to fully develop 1,860 acres of his land that stretched from the Whitefish Mountain range on the west to the edge of Paradise Ridge on the east.



Reporting at the time said: “The recreational complex and amusement park will be well lighted and modern in every respect and is expected to attract visitors from near and far.” The project was expected to be completed over a 3-5 year period with 20% completion expected by the end of 1966. The complex was anticipated to cost \$22 million and would include the concrete runway taking daily flights of a commercial airline, 12 hangars for private planes, and an airport building with a lounge. Once you landed there would be plenty to do! A ski facility was planned on the north slope of the Whitefish Range adjacent to the

airstrip. It was to have four ski runs, a 24-unit motel with a heated swimming pool and restaurant. The first ski lift was expected to open the following season in the winter of 1967. But wait, there's more! This would be a year-round resort with housing subdivisions (platting was about to start and housing lots were already sold) and miniature train rides, merry-go-round lagoon, jungle island, shooting gallery, miniature golf, fishing ponds, and fishing float trips. At the time, Polebridge Postmaster Ted Ross was enthusiastic about the future development of the North Fork. He commented, “We hear we are going to get a new highway, too. Of course, we have been hearing that for some time but it sounds like it's a lot closer.”

So, what happened? Within about two weeks of the 1966 *Daily Inter Lake* article, Floyd Mee, caretaker of Hugh Bowman's property, unexpectedly died. Mee, who died Feb. 2, 1966 was employed by Glacier Corporation and had previously cleared 4,500 feet of the runway. Then 15 months later, on May 4, 1967,

Hugh Bowman died at the age of 44. His untimely death seemed to bring an end to the dream that was Frontier Land of the North. Bowman's wife, Charlotte, went on to marry Bud Fishel, who was more interested in farming and raising cattle than in developing a recreation complex.

Subsequently, Charlotte sold much of the property, which included the land on the bench to the west above Vance Hill, as well as land to the east of the NF Road including what is now Paradise Ridge. In fact, the properties of both of the authors of this article were previously part of the Bowman/Fishel land and would have been part of Frontier Land of the North had history taken a different turn! The end of Bowman Landing strip can still be seen at the edge of the Rittenburg property.

Bullet 5: North Fork Land Use Planning

The natural resources and beauty of the North Fork have led to a steady growth in residents and visitors to the region. If not for the hard work, persistence, and foresight of some dedicated NF landowners over several decades, the character of the North Fork could have been changed forever by over development and exploitation. The topic of land use planning in the North Fork is as relevant today as it was 50 years ago when the concept of NF planning first took root. Let's travel back in time to see how we got to where we are today.

Settlement in the North Fork began shortly after the completion of the Great Northern Railway across Marias Pass and the founding of Columbia Falls in 1891. Prospects of coal mining at Coal Creek and exploitation of oil seeps near Kintla Lake first brought settlers into the drainage, and by 1893 settlers were filing land claims around Sullivan Meadow and at Coal Creek. By 1910 there were 44 claims east of the Flathead River and 14 claims on the west side. Homesteading east of the river halted in 1910 following creation of Glacier National Park, and between 1910 and World War I about 100 homesteads were settled west of the river. Park managers viewed the privately owned inholdings as a nuisance and pursued a policy of trying to return inholdings to public land as opportunities arose. In 1912, every homesteader on the east side of the river signed a petition asking that the North Fork Valley be removed from the park's boundaries. The petition stated, "We submit that it is more important to furnish homes to a land-hungry people than to lock the land up as a rich man's playground." Park Superintendent Logan responded by saying, "Instead of giving up any land there I think we should take steps to obtain more land; in fact, get rid of every settler on the North Fork of the Flathead River."

During the first half of the 1900s there was substantial excitement and support for developing and exploiting the resources of the North Fork Valley to provide work and wealth for the local population and to entice industry into the region. The potential for generating hydropower by damming the river; exploiting natural resources such as coal, oil, and timber; and tapping into recreational opportunities such as dude ranches and other recreational facilities were all exciting opportunities for a small but growing population in a beautiful and remote area. But along with that excitement there was also the realization that these activities could potentially change the North Fork forever. And so, in 1947 the North Fork Improvement Association (NFIA) was formed "so that united effort [could] be put forth to promote the general welfare of the community." As the community continued to grow, the NFIA initiated the process of land use planning that continues today and has been instrumental in helping to protect the values that residents of the North Fork hold dear (see first sentence of this article!). The NFIA, which later changed its name to the North Fork Landowners Association (NFLA) in 2005, has served as a clearinghouse and forum for land owners in the North Fork.

In 1973, a group of concerned landowners formed the North Fork Compact for the purpose of voluntarily limiting subdivision of their property to 20 acres or more by placing a covenant on the deed to their property. The intent of this visionary group was to prevent their land from being heavily subdivided or devoted to commercial uses and it set an example for minimum lot size that would subsequently become incorporated into the North Fork Zoning Regulations 25 years later. Key milestones of land use planning in the North Fork include:

- 1977: Flathead County initiated a planning process attempting to establish zoning in the North Fork.
- 1982: The North Fork Preservation Association was formed to promote conservation policies to protect the natural resources of the North Fork.
- 1984: The Land Use Planning Committee was established to develop a Land Use Plan for private properties from Camas Creek to the Canadian Border.

- 1986: Draft of the North Fork Neighborhood Plan published.
- 1987: Creation of the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee by Flathead County Commissioners
- 1991: Approval of the first North Fork Neighborhood Plan
- 1998: Creation of the North Fork Zoning District and adoption of the North Fork Zoning Regulations by Flathead County Commissioners.
- 2008: Adoption of the Revised North Fork Neighborhood Plan
- 2020: Initiation of a text amendment process to update North Fork Zoning Regulations

Here we are in 2021, 23 years after the North Fork Zoning Regulations were adopted. Those regulations were based on the 1991 Neighborhood Plan, and although the Neighborhood Plan was significantly revised and reissued in 2008, the zoning regulations have yet to be updated to reflect the goals and values of the 2008 plan. Today as we look down the barrel of another gun with tourism and visitation to the North Fork exploding, property values and real estate transactions skyrocketing, and new development pressures increasing, the North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee is working with the community, and the County, to update the North Fork Zoning Regulations through a text amendment process. When the process is completed later this year, the updated regulations will reflect the goals and policies of the current Neighborhood Plan and will continue to protect the values that residents of the North Fork hold dear.

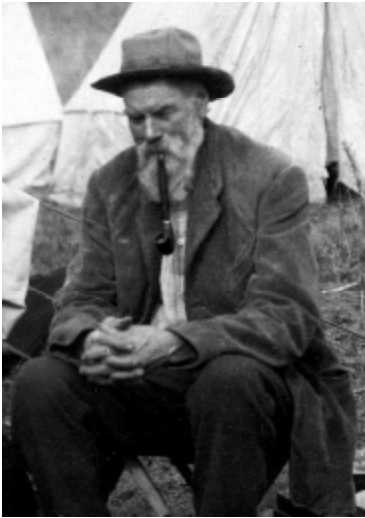


October 1979 land use planning meeting. (L-R) Larry Wilson, Duke Hoiland, Mike Eddy, Lynn Ogle, and John Frederick. Looking on, the ever-supportive Naomi Hoiland.

NFLUAC Progress Report *by North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee, Chairman Randy Kenyon*

This past summer, in 2020, a Zoning issue arose that became divisive. The North Fork Land Use Advisory Committee (NFLUAC) met to review this issue. After a number of unsuccessful attempts at resolution, it soon became apparent that under the current zoning regulations further efforts would not be worthwhile. At that time, it was determined the best course of action would be to undertake a thorough reassessment of our zoning. Results of this endeavor made it clear that certain sections of our zoning regulations required clarification. With counsel from the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office, the NFLUAC determined the most appropriate course would be the Text Amendment process, as opposed to major revision. For practical reasons, a test amendment sub-committee was established and they began their efforts this winter. Continued consultation between the County Planning and Zoning Office and this sub-committee has resulted in a preliminary product, and the long process of our community review, revision, and recommendation. When this is finalized, it will be presented to the County with resolution expected sometime in the Fall of 2021.

Community engagement is absolutely essential to ensure the final result will strike a balance between preserving our unique lifestyle and respecting the rights of landowners. A Google search for “North Fork Neighborhood Plan” and/or “North Fork Zoning” will access documents essential to this decision making. If you are interested in receiving email updates, or have questions or concerns, please contact NFLUAC Chairman Randy Kenyon at kenyonnorthfork@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you!



The First North Forker? *By Arne Boveng*

Who was the very first person to live or settle in The North Fork? The real answer most certainly points to a Native American source, but without a written record or at least a strong oral tradition, you're left to your own imagination. In the case of the North Fork valley, however, we actually have a strong contender for the title - Thomas Jefferson.

Those familiar with early North Fork history know of this Thomas Jefferson, regionally famous during the beginning of the Flathead Valley settlement. Nearly all the early valley residents knew "Uncle Jeff," "Long Jeff" or sometimes just "Jeff," and even though that name today seems surreal, it did not receive the same skepticism then. During the 1800s it was fairly common to be named after famous presidents, but even so, Jefferson was remarkable in so many ways: a standout sensation at six and one-half feet tall with a long, white beard, a pipe (always), he commanded instant attention while saying few words.

Not a whole lot is known concerning Jeff's early years. There is merit to the folklore that says he was a Pony Express rider: Chauncey Beebe, another well-known Northforker, said that the insides of Long Jeff's legs were like leather, worn and shaped by years of riding, and that he was never two steps away from a horse.

Coming to the Flathead in 1883, he pursued some trapping, as well as anything that had to do with horses and packing. Kalispell Judge, Eugene McCarthy wrote about an encounter with Jeff: "While fishing on the Flathead River in 1884 I noticed across the river, smoke from a campfire in a bunch of willows. It was Hank Robinson, Long Jeff and a man named MacDonald. They hollered at me and asked if I'd seen a boat loaded with hides, floating down the river. They had been upriver all winter trapping, then started downriver with two boats; in one was their grub bedding, guns and traps, while in the other boat was \$1700 worth of otter, marten and beaver hides. At a portage the boat loaded with furs got away from them and although they had searched the river to Flathead Lake, they never did find it." Naturally, these endeavors took Jeff up to the North Fork country, which most likely led to his discovery of the coal beds at Coal Creek. He was involved in packing a water-powered saw mill up to Hay Creek to cut timber for the coal company, as well as a mowing machine and horse rake, putting up several tons of hay that season. The water pressure was inadequate to cut timber, but the hay work may have given that beloved creek its name.

In 1886, Uncle Jeff and six other men sold their coal claims to James Talbot, founder of Columbia Falls, for a handsome sum of \$50,000. It appears he used some of that money to buy 160 acres of timberland in what is now part of Lone Pine State Park, and reportedly lost the rest in a saloon business in the bustling town beneath Lone Pine, known as Ashley. From that time on it seems Thomas Jefferson spent the rest of his life in the North Fork.

Lee Kerr, one of the founders of The Kintla Lake Oil Company, credits Jeff with the discovery of the North Fork oil seeps and the subsequent burst of claims and drilling, even though it was Kootenai Indians that showed him the locations. The Flathead Monitor of Kalispell put out a report that caught the attention of Butte investors; **"Uncle Jeff" Original Discoverer**. The article explained that oil had been found on the North Fork a few years earlier, by an old-time scout and trapper, Thomas Jefferson, better known as Uncle Jeff - also one of the original locators of the coal claims at Coal Creek.

He was an old timer before he ever stepped foot in the North Fork, held in awe by most of the younger men of the woods and mountains. The USGS survey teams often hired him as their lead packer and guide during their early topographical efforts that produced the first good maps of Glacier Park. His homestead near Logging Lake proved to be a strategic base camp for the crews' activities. The list goes on and on about this most mesmerizing, quiet and thoughtful character.

In the 1970's and 80's, the National Park Service conducted interviews of original, surviving homesteaders from the North Fork. An obvious star witness to the Park's unique, early cultural history was Mary Schoenberger, then 87 years old. Mary and her husband Charles' homestead house still stands in perfect shape in the Big Prairie area, north of Polebridge, and was the site of the North Fork's first post office. Mary was the first postmistress. One letter she wrote in correspondence with the Park interviewer begins with this line, "I think it's safe to say that Uncle Jeff as he was known in the Flathead was the first settler in the North Fork."

Are there any other contenders?

Sources consulted:

Early Flathead and Tobacco Plains by Marie Cuffe Shea

Flathead Monitor (June 9, 1921)

National Park Service Interviews with Ralph Thayer, Mary Schoenberger & Eva Beebe



SUMMER-GEDDON 2020 . . .

or WHERE DID ALL THIS TRAFFIC COME FROM? *by Lois Walker*

On the day of the Summer Interlocal last summer, Wednesday, July 8, I found myself in a quandary. Should I go to the meeting and take up one of the 50 seats allocated under Covid 19 restrictions, or should I stay home and let someone else have the seat (since Bill would already be there).

Then I thought to myself, “What other productive use could I make of those 3-4 hours?” The lightbulb went on. Data! We need data. The locals were complaining about the surge in traffic on the North Fork Road with the east side of the Park and most of the campgrounds closed. Why not collect some statistics? “Why not go down to Camas intersection and count vehicles?” Crazy, huh?

Naturally, I expected to encounter quite a few cars on the road, but boy, was I in for a surprise! Parked just north of the Camas Road intersection, I deployed my handy clipboard and ballpoint pen. I would count the vehicles coming out of Glacier Park and turning north onto the North Fork Road, the number of vehicles coming up the road from Columbia Falls, and the number of vehicles southbound out of the North Fork. A simple task? Well, no! The cars and trucks came so steadily that I could barely look down at my paper. I settled for just making hash marks in three different columns and counting them later.

I numbed my bum for four hours, 8:00 a.m. until noon. Not even a potty break! Here were the results:

Coming from Camas Road in GNP:	256 vehicles
Coming from Columbia Falls:	138 vehicles
Southbound out of the North Fork:	183 vehicles
Total	577 vehicles

While I was tabulating these numbers, another 20 or so vehicles went by. Then I drove north to Sondreson Hall to report the numbers to the Interlocal meeting. Driving from Camas Road to the Hall, I passed 73 more vehicles southbound.

Altogether, in 4½ hours on a cool Wednesday morning, I counted almost 700 vehicles on the North Fork Road! In addition to cars and trucks, I observed motorcycles, ATVs, trikes, one large horse trailer, and a large flatbed truck. Interestingly for a summer day, there were no gravel dump trucks, cement trucks, or delivery vehicles.

Where were they from? There were an inordinate number of vehicles with California plates. To be expected, there were many from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming, as well as Texas. But I also noted Alaska, Florida, Iowa, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maine, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, Vermont, and Wisconsin. I’m sure I missed others. So, a good cross-section of states from around the country.

If you thought there was a lot of traffic on the North Fork Road last summer, you were right!! Let’s hope that with restrictions eased and more options open to visitors, we won’t be talking about “Summer-Geddon 2021” at this time next year.

Incoming cars seek parking spots in the full parking lot of the Logan Pass Visitor Center in Glacier National Park on Sept. 11, 2019. Hunter D’Antuono | Flathead Beacon



GET ACQUAINTED – COME JOIN US !

The NORTH FORK LANDOWNERS’ ASSOCIATION, founded in 1947, owns Sondreson Hall at Whale Creek – a center for business and social events on the North Fork. It’s purpose “is to promote the general welfare of the community...and encourage and facilitate participation in association activities.” We welcome members and non-members to all **meetings, educational programs, and social activities** – check out our **Summer Calendar** of events at www.nflandowners.com. It’s also posted at the Hall, and on sandwich boards at the Mercantile and Home Ranch Bottoms. For questions, more information, or to join contact the Treasurer at nflatreasurer@gmail.com.

Do you have unwanted Greeting Cards and envelopes? The NFLA **Sunshine Committee** could really use them: Birthday, Sympathy, Thank You, Get Well Soon, and even blank cards are all sent out to brighten someone’s day! Email nflatreasurer@gmail.com, and we will make arrangements to get them from you.

**North Fork Landowners' Association
P.O. Box 1603
Columbia Falls, MT 59912**



Emergency Services on the North Fork

Fire, Sheriff, SAR or Medical Emergency	Call 911
Border Patrol	406-862-2561
Flathead County Sheriff Dispatch	406-758-5610; 758-5585 report a crime
Flathead Nat'l Forest Law Enforcement	406-758-5297
Game Warden	406-249-6231
GNP Polebridge Ranger Station	406-888-7842
Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks	406-752-5501
To report a Forest Fire	406-758-5260 Kalispell; 387-3800 H Horse
To report a Poacher	1-800-TIP-MONT (847-6668)
BLACK bear problems 406-250-0062	GRIZZLY bear problems 406-250-1265