

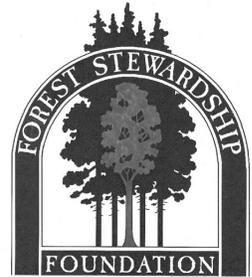
# The Forest Steward's Journal

Summer 2015 Volume 22

## Journal of the Forest Stewardship Foundation

*The MISSION of the Forest Stewardship Foundation is to “educate and inform landowners, natural resource professionals and the general public about the science and ecology of forest lands, the many values derived from forested lands and the principles of sustainable forest land development.”*

*DISCLAIMER: As in the past, we again advise that this information is submitted for your interest only. The Foundation's mission, as indicated above, is to “educate and inform”, not to advocate or persuade. The Foundation takes no position either endorsing or opposing, approving or disapproving, any of the assertions or arguments in the contributed information.*



## From The Chair

What is on every landowner's mind this tail end of July? If you're like me it is wildfire. Our worry this year is made much greater by the continuing drought and record high temperatures. Maybe we won't have a bad fire season, but the odds are against us. If you haven't taken major steps to reduce your hazard you should pay particular attention to the articles that we have included on fuel reduction projects in the Bitterroot and Flathead. Although it may be too late this summer to do anything drastic around your house and property make sure you at least look at doing some of the small simple and effective actions such as cleaning out your gutters, moving that woodpiles, etc. There is lots of help out there starting with your local fire departments, DNRC or check out the Montana FireSafe website.

Our newest board member, Clyde Robbe, has done a great job of summarizing our sixth annual landowner conference in Helena. Once again we co-sponsored the conference with Northwest Management, Inc. We think the conferences keep getting better every year and it is a great opportunity for all of us learn more about natural resource management. The Society of American Foresters will be joining us for the Spring 2016 conference in Helena so this will be a big event that you won't want to miss.

Northwest Woodlands, which is a publication for mainly Oregon, Washington and Idaho family forest associations contacted us last year and asked if we knew of anyone from Montana who would like to contribute an article for their Spring 2015 edition. The edition's focus was on "Love Of The Land". One of our board members, Tom Jones, volunteered to contribute an article and we thought you would enjoy reading it too. Tom and his wife Alvira live near Troy and were the 2011 Montana Tree Farmers of the Year. Knowing Tom and Alvira personally I know first hand their love of the land. This article ties right in with the Ties To The Land workshops we have been sponsoring on succession planning or "who ends up with the farm". We are excited to announce that we will be sponsoring another workshop on September 25<sup>th</sup> in Kalispell. Andy Darling and Sam Gilbert will be the instructors and you can read more about the 2015 workshop in Andy's article.

Ed Levert, Chair

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## 2015 Montana Forest Landowner Conference Well Received

*By Clyde Robbe, Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation*

The 2015 Montana Forest Landowner Conference held Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, was both educational and entertaining as attendees had the opportunity to listen and learn from Pacific Northwest experts including wildlife biologists, botanists, and other natural resource specialists. The sixth annual conference, presented by the Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation and Northwest Management, Inc. convened at the Red Lion Colonial Inn in Helena, MT and was attended by over 100 folks from around the State and country wishing to identify with the conference's theme, "Things That Live In the Forest." Judging by the smiling faces and meeting room background discussions, no one went away disappointed.

In addition to being able to attend high-quality presentations regarding "things that live in the forest", the conference was an opportunity for private forest landowners, agency professionals, industry leaders and consultants to confab on subject matter discussions regarding areas of their own interest and to establish new and re-new old friendships.

The day-long conference was allocated to a combination of whole-group general interest topics as well as concurrent sessions held in the morning and afternoon which allowed participants to pick and choose specific areas of interest to fit their own property's needs and awareness or to add general interest and knowledge otherwise.

*See "2015 Conference" on page 2*



# “2015 Conference”... *continued from page 1*

Following a conference welcome by both Ed Levert, Forest Stewardship Foundation Board of Directors Chairman, and Gary Ellingson of Northwest Management, Inc., we enjoyed a presentation by Jon Haufler, Executive Director of the Ecosystem Management Research Institute, entitled “**Managing for Biodiversity on the Forest Landscape**”. Mr. Haufler reminded us that a working forest is one that is producing forest products, and not just sitting idle without management.



Next up for the morning sessions was a choice between Bryce Maxwell’s “**What Critters Might Be Living in Your Forest – Amphibians, Reptiles and Bats**” presentation and Angela Mallon and Russell Talmo’s “**People Living in the Forest**” back-to-back presentations. As Mr. Maxwell, Zoologist with the Montana Natural Heritage Program, pointed out, an inventory of the types of “critters” living in your forest tells much about the ecosystem conditions of your forest and offers clues to sustain their presence.

Angela Mallon’s “**Firewise Landscaping: One Size Doesn’t fit all**” presentation offered guidelines for creating fire resilient zones around our homes and property. Ms. Mallon is currently the Program Manager for the Forest Stewardship Program with the Montana DNRC and also provides program administration for the private landowner firewise landscape cost share program. A key element of her presentation came as a reminder to landowners that we need to view our properties as “forests” rather than as “fuels”.



Russell Talmo’s “**Living with Wildlife**” presentation provided an interesting and entertaining reflection on some of the issues and fixes he has experienced with in order to resolve people’s attempts to live with some of the “bigger” forest dwellers. Mr. Talmo, representing the group Defenders of Wildlife, provided insightful and experienced methods to thwart unwanted human/wildlife interaction. Remember, chickens, fruit trees and garbage cans equal bears! All morning sessions were evenly split with conference attendees attesting to the elevated and timely interest of all topics for landowners and their own forest needs.

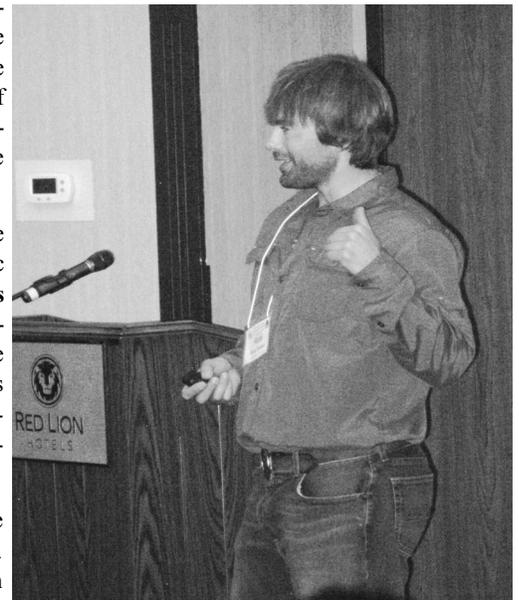
A real treat during the luncheon session was a presentation by Mike Grunett, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks (retired) on “the History of Filming Wildlife in Montana”. Through incredible photos and clips of Montana wildlife and scenery, Mr. Grunett took us through a heart-warming history revealing every Montanan’s love and appreciation for wildlife. Thanks to a recent out-of-state “garage sale discovery” as Mr. Grunett pointed out, some very early Montana FWP films were able to be restored just ahead of the decay of time, and significantly helped to document much of Montana’s early wildlife preservation history.



The afternoon concurrent sessions were equally enlightening under the topic headings “**Managing for Things that Live in the Forest**”, and “**Wood Product Markets and Preparing for a Profitable Timber Sale**”. In the first meeting room, Vanna Boccadori, wildlife biologist, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, provided an accounting of the “Habitat Management efforts on the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area.” This wonderful resource within the Montana wildlife management system offers not only diversity and challenge for wildlife management, but also incredible opportunity to study and perpetuate a variety of big game species.

Following the Mount Haggin presentation, authors Stephen Arno and Carl Fiedler gave interesting analyses of the “Ponderosa Pine: People, Fire and the West’s Most Iconic Tree”. As our State Tree, who can’t identify in some way with the majestic ponderosa pine? With its economic and sheer beauty overtones, the ponderosa pine continues to be a mainstay in many western Montana forests when properly managed to take advantage of its fire-resistance characteristics in properly thinned and managed stands.

In the second concurrent topic meeting room, to cover wood product market topics, Todd Morgan, University of Montana Bureau of Business & Economic Research gave us an up-to-date review of “Who is Buying Wood and What Are They Paying.” Jared Richardson, Forester, Northwest Management, Inc. gave us “Fundamentals of Timber Sale Preparation” tips and guidelines.



*Top Right: John Haufler, Ecosystem Management Research Institute; Bottom Right: Russell Talmo, Defenders of Wildlife; Top Left: Gary Ellingson, Northwest Management; Bottom Left: Ed Levert, Forest Stewardship Foundation*

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**“2015 Conference”... continued from page 2**

These two speakers gave timely review of what can be expected in today’s wood product markets from a price perspective delivered to the mill, current and forecasted future trends, and from a fundamentals of timber sale preparation perspective, identifying what must go into comprehensive timber sale prep starting with a harvest map and leading up to the timber harvest contract. Mr. Richardson reminded us to “work with people you trust!”

By 4:00 pm following closing comments and announcement of the “lively” silent auction winners and door prize winner, the 2015 Landowner Conference was officially adjourned. If you haven’t had the chance to attend or participate in one of the Montana Forest Landowner Conferences, it is highly recommended that you treat yourself to the opportunity in the future.....you will not regret it! We look forward to seeing you next year at the Seventh Annual Conference!



Mike Grunett, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks (retired)

**Preparing for the Worst: Bitterroot  
Landowners Thin Their Forest Ahead  
of Fire Season**

By Perry Backus, pbackus@ravallirepublic.com

CONNER – When Marty Stomberg first started managing her 160-acre tract that locals call Jack Pine Flats, she could turn a little profit from the trees that went to the nearby mill.

Back in the 1980s, she did most of her logging with help from her big team of horses.

By the mid-1990s, the prices for lumber had dipped far enough that she lost money every time she went to thin her forest just west of Conner.

“My goal was always to have a nice looking forest here,” she said. “I kept waiting for the log market to come back up, but it never has.”

In the interim, the massive fires of 2000 burned through thousands of acres all around her, which, of course, heightened her concern over fire. And then the bark beetles arrived and many of her trees turned red.

“I didn’t want to lose my forest,” Stromberg said. “The only way to fight the beetles was to open the forest up enough so the remaining trees could get enough moisture and the air flow improved.”



Conner-area landowner, Marty Stomberg, explains the challenges and rewards of a recent thinning project to forested lands on her property. Stomberg took advantage of federal grant monies administered by the Bitter Root RC&D to help pay for the project. Photo by Perry

And so she – like hundreds of other small private landowners – turned to the Montana Department of Natural Resources fuel reduction grant program, which offers a 50-percent cost-share to landowners wanting to make their forested lands more fire resistant and healthier.

## Preparing for the Worst... Continued from Page 3

On Wednesday, Stromberg took a group of local, state and federal officials on a tour of a 25 acre parcel that was thinned last year.

Beetles had been taking a few trees a year in the recent past, but things changed quickly when the Douglas fir bark beetle arrived on her land.

“Over the last two years, their numbers grew expeditiously,” she said. “It was pretty shocking. We had to act fast.”

Working with Bitter Root RC&D forester Byron Bonney, Stromberg received a grant and then hired Jason Stewart of the Hamilton-based JS Logging and Thinning to do the work.

Stewart remembers the “sea of red” he found in groves of dead Douglas fir trees on the surrounding hillside.

“We ended up taking out a lot of material,” Stewart said.

Stewart has been working the woods the past 27 years. After spending 16 years as a commercial logger with a helicopter logging outfit, Stewart moved to the Bitterroot to focus on restoration logging.

It’s a business on the upswing.

“People are starting to realize how important it is that they do something on their forested lands,” he said. “What’s really encouraging is that people are becoming more proactive, rather than reactive.”

“No one wants to see a catastrophic fire,” Stewart said. “The cost of doing these types of projects is a lot cheaper than fighting a major fire. When you’re done, you are left with a healthy forest instead of a black thing that dumps sediment into the creek.”

Bonney has been helping private landowners tap into the federal grant monies for fuel reduction and forest health projects for years.

“We all know that reducing fuels on forested lands can be an expensive proposition,” Bonney said. “It can easily cost between \$800 and \$1,200 an acre or even more. We can offer a 50/50 cost share for the landowner, which is a really good deal for them.”

The grant monies were set aside shortly after the catastrophic fire season of 2000 by Congress. In the three county area administered by the Bitter Root RC&D, there has been nearly \$5 million spent to help with those fuel reduction efforts.

In Ravalli County, nearly 7,000 acres have been treated. In the three-county area, which includes Missoula and Mineral, a total of 8,500 acres have been thinned. Over 1,200 landowners have taken advantage of the program so far.

Combine that work with the fuel reduction efforts occurring on national forest lands, and there are a lot of dots denoting treated lands that are starting to connect on maps focused on protection of the wildland/urban interface.

The work completed on the Stromberg property abuts a portion of the 5,800-acre Trapper Bunkhouse project completed on Bitterroot National Forest lands in 2013.

The Bitterroot Forest’s Cheri Hartless said the Forest Service either has projects started or are in the works that will eventually reduce fuels in the wildland/urban interface on the west side of the valley from the West Fork to Hamilton. Once those projects are finished, the agency will turn its focus to the east side in the Sapphire Mountains.

## Ties To The Land Workshop Scheduled for September 25, 2015 in Kalispell

The Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation is pleased to offer a “**Ties To The Land**” workshop on September 25, 2015 at the Holiday Inn Express in Kalispell. This award winning day-long workshop about intergenerational transfer of forest, farm, or rangeland is for all who need that boost to start the all important family conversations about the future. The program presents practical tools and interactive exercises to help families learn to face succession head-on. The curriculum touches on estate planning and legal processes, but focuses on the conversations that need to take place within a family before the attorneys and accountants are brought in.

Instructors for this years’ workshop include Andy Darling and Sam Gilbert.

The Holiday Inn Express is located at 275 Treeline Road, behind Costco on HWY 93 North in Kalispell, MT.

Remember, succession happens! Whether that succession is planned and results in the successful transfer of your forest to the next generation depends on you. “**Ties To The Land**” can help! Sign up today and take charge of your family land’s future. For more information, contact Ed Levert at (406) 293-2847 or televert@kvis.net.

# Enjoying Diversity and Productivity in Northwest Montana

*By Tom Jones - Reprinted with permission from an article published in the Spring 2015 issue of Northwest Woodlands magazine*

Our property is located in northwest Montana about 15 miles east of Idaho near the small town of Troy. The property was burned by wildfire in 1910. A few scattered trees survived the fire and are present today. The area regenerated to lodgepole pine and larch with other conifer species scattered throughout to form a mostly evenaged stand. We purchased the property (150 acres) in 1965. We logged approximately 70 acres in 1976 using group and individual tree selection. Natural regeneration came in where the stand was opened up. After retirement in 1994 we completed our first management plan for the property and began much more intensive management, including precommercial thinning, planting, weed control, removal of forest products, and developing a road system to access the property.



*Habitat for Westslope cutthroat and brook trout on the Jones Property— Photo courtesy of the Jones Family*

## General Forest Description

Most of our weather comes from the west, so with the Pacific influence the property is wetter and warmer than further east in Montana, and slightly drier than northern Idaho. This gives us a wide array of both dry site and moist site conifer species, as well as scattered cottonwood, paper birch, aspen and alder. The elevation varies between 2200 and 2400 feet. Most of the soils are deep and well drained, which creates a very good growing site for wood production. About 70 percent of the property has gentle slopes and the rest consists of the steeper breaks into the stream channels. A perennial stream with Westslope cutthroat and brook trout runs through part of the property. Wildlife using the property includes: whitetail deer, elk, moose, black bears, cougars, bobcats, coyotes, snowshoe rabbits, ruffed grouse, song birds, hawks, ravens, and pine squirrels. Occasional species include mule deer, wolves and grizzly bears.

## Management Activities

Our goal is to have a variety of stand structures that encourage a diversity of wildlife species and decrease the fire hazard. We work toward these goals by using different silvicultural practices. After logging, our main objective is to regenerate openings with multispecies stands, favoring fire-resistant species (larch, ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir). We usually get adequate natural regeneration, but to make

sure we get the species mix that's desired, one or two of the fire-resistant species is planted along with one or two of the other desirable species (white pine or spruce). In the past we have collected seed on the property and grown some of our seedlings while the rest were bought from a nursery or given to us when government agencies had excess trees. Our plan now is to collect seed on the property and have a nearby nursery grow the seedlings for us. About 8 to 10 years after planting we do a precommercial thinning to release the best trees to continue growing at a fast rate. At the same time we prune the white pine to decrease the chance of white pine blister rust.

## Challenges Encountered

On a few harvested areas we have had grass, shrubs, and hardwood sprouts overtopping planted tree seedlings. In order to release the seedlings, we removed the competing vegeta-

tion and treated the area around the seedlings with herbicides. This challenge was rare in the past but is more common now. Perhaps climate change is a factor. After harvesting on some of our more moist areas alder regenerates and outgrows the conifer seedlings and saplings. To release the conifers we have been cutting the alder and treating the stumps with herbicide. Since alder is beneficial in adding nitrogen to the site, only the competing alder is treated. It has been a challenge to sell oversized logs since the major mill in this area has retooled for smaller logs. They will buy the logs but at a reduced price because they have to haul them somewhere else. One alternative is to haul these logs longer distances when prices are high enough to offset the haul costs. Another alternative is to sell these logs to a few nearby small family mills that can cut the oversized logs when they have orders for beams or lumber. At times building contractors are in need of large house logs or other specialty logs. By keeping in contact with these small businesses we have been able to sell some of the large logs. We are holding the desirable large trees on the stump until we can get a fair price for them. Orange hawkweed is an invasive weed that can become ground cover in open areas as well as in shaded areas. We have been able to control it on roads and landings by spraying herbicides from a vehicle, but in forested areas the only way to control it is with a backpack sprayer. This is very time consuming and expensive so we have opted to spray only the concentrations near the roads. This method only controls it on part of the property but we have decided to live with this until a viable biological control is found.

*See "Enjoying Diversity..." on Page 6*



*Group and individual tree selection harvests result in a more fire-resistant forest.— Photo courtesy of the Jones Family*

## Enjoying Diversity and Productivity in Northwest Montana—Continued from Page 5

### Educational activities

As landowners we take advantage of all the educational activities offered. When the opportunities arise, we share our knowledge of



2011 Montana Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year.—Photo Courtesy of the Jones Family

good land stewardship with other landowners, friends, family and the general public. We have found that joining forest landowner organizations and getting involved is important. As members we find out about educational opportunities and are kept informed about state and national issues concerning forestry. In 2000 we became members of the American Tree Farm System. We have helped host a state tree farm meeting and have contacted our senators and representatives concerning legislation and farm bill forestry needs. In 2011 we were honored to be chosen Montana Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year. We have also hosted a local Society of American Foresters meeting on our property to review our management practices and we help put on a yearly forest landowners' conference as members of the Montana Stewardship Foundation.

### Family involvement

It is important to get family members involved in working and recreating on the land. They will appreciate how work influences the management of the land and what fun it is to just enjoy outdoor recreation. We have all gone fishing, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling and have cooked hot dogs over an open fire. My wife is always ready to help when needed. She has helped with sale layout and cruising, and all the activities after the logging is complete. She especially likes to burn logging slash piles and chunk them until all the material is burned up. Our daughter and two granddaughters have helped pile, burn and grind slash, clean debris off roads, get firewood, and prune and plant trees. They don't always enjoy the work, but they do enjoy putting their wages toward something special.



It is important to get family members involved in working and recreating on the land.—Photo Courtesy of the Jones Family

### Successful succession

My wife and I are just a couple of the many forest landowners who are aging and thinking about what is going to happen to our forestland when we are gone. We have a lot of sweat equity in our land. We hope it will continue to be a productive forest and supply society with wood products, clean water and air, wildlife habitat and scenic beauty. About 10 years ago our daughter showed no interest in managing our land. We were still able to manage the property but thought that sometime in the future it would be sold. With our love of the land and what we have accomplished over the years, we definitely did not want the property to be subdivided, so in 2009 we decided to put the property in a conservation easement. This stopped any subdivision, and with a few other restrictions included in the conservation easement, all but five acres will always remain in forest. The conservation easement continues in perpetuity, even if the property is sold at a later date. We thought this was the best we could do. About four years after the conservation easement was signed, we heard about a "Ties to the Land" workshop. The brochure said it was a day-long workshop about intergenerational transfer of forest, farm or rangeland and was for all who needed a boost to start the all-important family conversations about the future. At the workshop, we found that we had not discussed everything we should have with our daughter and, since our immediate family is small, our two granddaughters should also be included in discussions. We told them why our ties to the land were so strong and that we would like the property to stay in the family. After some discussion they also decided the land should stay in the family. Our daughter is planning to spend more time with us to understand more about the management of the land and is planning to attend workshops to gain more knowledge. If you have not attended a

Ties to the Land workshop my wife and I strongly recommend that you do. It will help in your successional planning.

### Being forestland owners

There are many reasons that we enjoy being forestland owners. Here are our favorites:

- Helping the local economy by paying contractors and selling wood products.
- Knowing that your forest stewardship has created a healthier forest, protected water quality, maintained or improved wildlife habitat, and provided for recreational activities.
- Being able to go to the quiet of woods and enjoy the surroundings.
- Seeing the fruits of your labor after projects are completed.
- Being a member of landowner organizations and sharing management experiences.
- Showing visitors to the property how stewardship has enhanced the forest.
- Enjoying working and recreating with family and friends on the land.



We enjoy being able to go to the quiet of the woods and enjoy the surroundings.—Photo Courtesy of the Jones Family

**TOM JONES** graduated from West Virginia University with a degree in forest management in 1961. He was employed by the US Forest Service in Montana, Idaho, and Oregon, spending most of his career in timber sale layout, contract preparation and sale administration. Tom was assigned to the Umpqua National Forest when he retired in 1993. He moved back to Montana in 1997 and has continued managing the forestland while doing some forestry consulting work.

# Aiming for Fire-Safe Forests

By Samuel Wilson / The Daily Inter Lake

So far, 2015 is shaping up to be hotter and drier than most years in Northwest Montana, which has forest managers particularly concerned with the potential for wildfires.

A dry two months (Flathead Valley precipitation in April and May was 2.5 inches below normal) could set the stage for fires, depending on whether June continues that trend.

Fuel indicators are showing that we are drier than normal at this time of the year,” said Rich Moore, a state forester. “[But] when you look at this corner of Montana, you never do anything until you see what happens in the month of June, because that is usually our wettest month.”

That said, the potential for a serious fire season often makes landowners in forested areas consider how to protect their homes.

Ali Ulwelling, a fire prevention specialist for the State Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, said landowners have a variety of tools at their disposal to keep the worst of the summer fires from affecting their properties and houses.

“Folks tend to think you need to clearcut, but that’s not the case,” she said. “If you just thin the property, vegetation changes with that opening-up, and you see more wildlife and diversity, shrub layers coming up that create habitat for birds.”

Thinning, opposed to clearcutting, also creates “shaded fuel breaks,” in which a more open forest provides enough shade to keep moisture levels higher than an open clearing would provide.

Ulwelling works closely with Bill Swope, a former U.S. Forest Service firefighter and the lead forester with the Flathead Economic Policy Center. Along with state officials, he visits landowners all around the valley, providing free expertise and consultations on how to most effectively manage forest health, cut down on the likelihood of a fire hitting structures and avoid unnecessary costs to firefighting resources.

“Firefighters shouldn’t be fighting with their backs to the wall just to save a structure,” Swope said. “The ultimate goal is a landscape-level fuel break.”

However, it isn’t always easy to convince landowners to pick up the tab for major fire-prevention projects — which can run up to \$2,500 per acre — so his organization hooks them up with matching grants and other funding assistance to cut down on the costs. Plus, lumber and pulp wood sold to timber companies after thinning activities can help offset the cost of treatment. Those payments can go a long way, but so does the threat of the alternative.

“Smoke in the air is probably the most persuasive tool for us,” Swope said wryly.

Architect Bill Neudorfer flew into town last week from his permanent home in the D.C. area, planning his future hillside house overlooking Somers and Flathead Lake. His 28-acre property was heavily wooded when he purchased it, and over the past two years he has worked with Ulwelling, Swope and Moore to treat about half of it.

Moore pointed to areas where work has already been done, such as plantings of larch and ponderosa pines, two naturally fire- and disease-resistant species. Ulwelling added another benefit to thinning trees on private property: an uptick in biodiversity. Wildflowers such as lupine and buttercups begin popping up and bushes welcome a broader spectrum of birds for wildlife viewing.

The rugged allure of Montana’s wild forests has fueled development



*Trees are being removed from around this cabin east of Echo Lake and the stacked timber will be sold as lumber and pulp wood to help offset the cost of the treatment project. Samuel Wilson/Daily Inter Lake*

throughout Northwest Montana in recent decades. However, those thick woodlands, historically kept healthy by periodic wildfires, can sometimes be problematic for the new human inhabitants.

“The fire-wise picture looks like a cherry orchard,” noted Swope. “And a lot of landowners don’t want the cherry orchard, they don’t want to be able to see all the way to the end of the property.”

As one compromise, prevention specialists have worked with landowners to develop “clumping,” where stands of trees — a quarter-acre or so — are left to grow into thick, more aesthetically appealing groves with thinner buffers around them to mitigate their higher fire potential.

“Defensible space” refers to the amount of thinning around a structure that allows a firefighting crew to effectively defend it from encroaching flames. However, Ulwelling would like to take it a step further. “We’re trying to think in terms of ‘survivable space,’ where you’ve done enough work for the house to make it through a fire without anyone being there.”

That includes a minimum 10-foot buffer between the structure and surrounding trees. And because fire spreads upward, the minimum buffer around structures increases along with the slope of the land.

Still, there’s a lot of room left for improvement in how forests are managed for fire in this area. Swope points to a densely wooded hill situated by the lake across U.S. 93. Mansions and high-priced cabins are scattered throughout the conifer forest, some easily visible and surrounded by open yards, and others just barely poking out of the dense green canopy.

“This is the complexity in the Flathead Valley,” he says, adding that responders to a fire on the hill may not know whether additional structures are nestled out of view or if there is only one access road leading in and out.

“The cost, 20 years ago, to firefight on that hill was pretty minimal, but now when a firefighter rolls on the scene, he’s looking at a very different situation,” said Swope. “This is going to continue to be a problem in the valley.”

For free advice and consultations for private forest management, or to learn more about available grants and funding options, property owners can contact Ulwelling at 751-2270 or the Flathead Economic Policy Center at 892-8155.

*-Reporter Samuel Wilson can be reached at 758-4407 or by email at [swilson@dailyinterlake.com](mailto:swilson@dailyinterlake.com).*

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## **Join the Forest Management Discussion on Facebook**

The Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation has established a Facebook group page to help private forest landowners obtain and exchange information about forest management trends, issues, and more.

We're just getting started in the social media world of Facebook, but the Foundation board established the Facebook group specifically to post and exchange information about the importance of private land forestry. The group address on Facebook is <https://www.facebook.com/montanaforeststewardshipfoundation> and it's easy to get signed up:

- 1) Join Facebook (if you haven't already done so).
- 2) Type in "Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation" into the top "Search" box.
- 3) Once you find the Foundation's group page, click the "Like" box.

Once you "Like" the group page you'll automatically receive all Foundation posts and comments, and will be able to post and comment on the information posted on the page.



**Interested in Private Forest Management?  
Interested in Forest Sustainability?  
Interested in Wood Products Markets?  
JOIN THE MONTANA FOREST  
STEWARDSHIP FOUNDATION**