

## KNF coalition lays out ideas for forests

Decades ago the idea of loggers and environmentalists sitting down to discuss timber harvests was unlikely at best.

But times have changed and a meeting held last week in Noxon showcased just how far these sides have come in looking for a future path for the Kootenai National Forest that includes a reasonable timber harvest and concessions to protect wildlands.

It happens within the framework of the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition (KFSC), a group of dedicated representatives from different entities with keen interests in the Kootenai National Forest (KNF) and the forest plan. It includes the Montana Wilderness Association, Thompson River Lumber, the Idaho Forest Group, Cabinet Resource Group, Yaak Valley Forest Council and public officials.

Robin King, KFSC chair, said the goal was clear, to improve forest management in northwest Montana. "We're interested in seeing active management [of national forest lands] be successful," King told a standing room only group at the Noxon Fire Hall last week. "We spend many years fighting with each other," she observed, "and all that resulted was we learned how to fight. Instead, we need to find common ground."

That appears to be the result of years of collaboration among the board of KFSC and input from northwest Montana resi-

dents.

Summarizing the result of their independent work for Kootenai Forest lands, King said the group arrived at several key strategies



Ledger photos

IDAHO FOREST GROUP representative Tim Dougherty talks about how the group looked at realistic timber harvest goals.

that not only meet the desires of the cooperative partners, but present a unified voice to the Forest Service that will hopefully help them make decisions that can stand the test of challenges with broad based support.

"The document we produced became our 'internal guiding document,'" said King, "a key element to our mission."

They reached the elements of that document by spending a lot of time

meeting with KNF personnel and spending a lot of time on the ground with them, at the project level.

Their plan for the Forest includes elements to ensure

a sustainable and predictable timber harvest for local loggers and mills. They also recognize the need to provide recreation opportunities for everyone, including motorized users such as snowmobilers, four-wheelers and motorcyclists. Finally, and certainly not the least, is a protection of wildlands for future generations, areas such as the Cabinet Mountains, the Scotchman Peaks area and Roderick Mountain which provides secure big game habitat and; cold clean water for fish and solitude for those who wish to venture into the wilderness areas.

Speaking to the elements of the plan put forth by KFSC, Lincoln County Forester Ed Levert said working with the Kootenai Forest plan, they favor an approach of treating more acres for timber harvest each year, but less intensively. But at the same

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GENEROUS DONATION from Blackfoot Telephone will help the Heron Community make needed upgrades to the old school building that serves as a community center. Heron resident Sandy Compton, left, accepted a check for \$10,000 from Blackfoot and CoBank from Blackfoot employees Charlie Wilson and Jim Willoughby recently. Funds will be used to replace inefficient windows.

## Heron center gets big boost from Blackfoot

After decades of limited use, the old Heron School classroom building is getting a new facelift to ease energy costs and help the building become more usable to the community.

Sandy Compton of Heron said a big project will be the replacement of single pane windows in the structure with new windows that will be more energy efficient. He hopes to see the building's energy costs cost in half.

The project, he said, will be mainly possible thanks to a very generous donation from Blackfoot Telephone.

After Blackfoot learned of their challenges, the company reached out to see if there was something they could do. Blackfoot CEO Bill Squires said Heron has not asked for much help from the company and they felt it was a suitable time to see if they couldn't help in the community.

An application for a Blackfoot community support grant was filed and the board, with Squire's suggestion not only approved a \$5,000 grant but then applied for a matching grant from CoBank, a national cooperative fund-

ing agency used by the company. That second funding was approved and Blackfoot awarded \$10,000 to the Heron Community Center for building renovations.

Compton said the work could begin as early as this week.

The original school for the community, a three story historic building, still stands, although minus the top story. Then, said Compton, when Washington Water Power (now Avista Utilities) was constructing their Cabinet Gorge dam in the 1950s, through a mitigation pro-

gram they helped construct a new building that would have two classrooms and a lunchroom. Almost before the building could be occupied, said Compton, the need rose and the new structure was turned into three classrooms and a kitchen was installed in the old school building.

In the early 1980s, the Heron School (K through 8) was closed and students began attending Noxon schools.

In the late 1990s, the Noxon School District sold the building for a nominal fee to the Heron

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MONTANA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION representative Amy Robinson shows areas on a working map where the coalition found common ground.

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**MAKING A DIFFERENCE** for area food banks, Jackie Mumm of Blackfoot Telephone, left, presents a check for \$750 to BJ Handford of the Community Harvest Food Bank in Thompson Falls. Blackfoot annually donate to area food banks and this year increased contributions from \$500 to \$750. Checks also went in Plains to the Community Food Pantry, in Noxon to the Community Fellowship Food Bank and to the Gospel Mountain Assembly of God Food Pantry of Thompson Falls.

## Heron center

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Community and a park district was established to pay for upkeep on the buildings. Compton said that arrangement works, but it doesn't leave much left over for repairs.

By this time the building had suffered significant damage, primarily from an in-floor heating system that hadn't been property

drained. Repairs were made and the community began using the structure again.

"The building really is a valuable resource for our community," said Compton. "We have a small public health club there, a resource room for classes such as yoga and quilting and when combined with the other build-

ing a commercial kitchen provides for bigger events."

He added that the original school building has a theater stage and for 20 years was the home of the infinitely entertaining Heron Players.

Compton noted that the buildings are somewhat under utilized and the community is always looking for events to keep them busy, but they are the hub of activity for the area.

Blackfoot's assistance will fund about 80 percent of the window replacement project said Compton and

they are looking for some other help to finish the job. For \$200, one can adopt one of the smaller windows and pay for its upgrade. So far they've had two takers for that effort.

Squires emphasized that one of the goals of Blackfoot, a telephone cooperative, is to help the communities they serve and this is one opportunity where the company really felt they could lend a hand.

In addition to the buildings, the facility contains a basketball court and ball field.

## Kootenai Forest coalition

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time, he said they kept the goal of harvesting 70-90 million board feet annually focusing on lands that are suitable for timber harvest.

Looking at specific harvest guidelines, he said they felt the harvest plans should mimic natural events wherever possible, like the aftermath of natural events such as forest fires.

"This approach leads to a more natural looking end result," he told the group.

Tim Dougherty, co-chair of the group and a representative from the Idaho Forest Group, echoed that the group wanted to make sure the KNF could accommodate a harvest level of that magnitude, and they hired an independent consultant to verify the goal.

One of the results of that analysis, he explained, was that the Forest Service doesn't have the staff personnel they had 20 to 30 years ago when larger volumes of timber were put up for sale. He explained that the study determined that it would be challenging to meet the harvest goals without the staff to dedicate to preparing sales.

Secondly, he said another factor that arose was the realization that effects on the watershed were greater with intensive harvests and that led to the approach of less intensive management on areas which eased the pressure on the watershed resource.

"The Forest Service needs the bodies to do the work required by NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act]" said Dougherty. "The amount of work to meet NEPA requirements has greatly expanded."

Speaking to the goal of meeting motorized recreation needs, Senator Chas Vincent of Lincoln County, said the goal was adopted of designating areas for permanent snowmobile use and protecting existing groomed areas as they are today.

Amy Robinson of the Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) said the group looked at several areas for protection and came to agreement on many. They also looked at providing buffers near private lands, to protect those areas from wildland fires which have been let burn in wildland protected areas.

Vincent said the group spent thousands and thousands of hours working on their recommendations, but "it's only ink on paper unless they are acted on."

He noted that a real challenge for the Forest Service is finding the funds to enact the elements of the forest plan which is supported by the KFSC guiding document. But with challenges to their actions, the Forest Service, through Congress, needs to find a way to streamline the NEPA process so it doesn't cause roadblocks to so many proposals.

"An environmental review that used to take 30 pages, now takes 900," said Vincent.

Several audience members voiced support for that idea.

Doug Ferrell, of Trout Creek and a strong supporter of the work done by the coalition, said the Forest Service is influenced by voices on the extreme ends of the spectrum. "The coalition seeks middle ground, a way to solve problems. All around Montana," he said, "people generally support more active management [of timber lands] and protection of wildlands. The coalition wants to be a good partner to help the Forest Service do their work and maybe help protect them from lawsuits."

Vincent added that the Forest Service from the top down, needs to be incentivized to work with coalitions to reach their goals."

Coalition members all voiced support for the Forest Service and their efforts, saying the KNF has been wonderful to work with throughout the process.

## Wildlife film to be presented at Plains gym

The public is invited to join Plains students for a special presentation about polar bears at 2 p.m. Weds., Nov. 16 at the Plains High School gym.

Dr. Frank Tyro, who taught photography, TV production and mass communication at Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, will present video and photography from field trips to Churchill, Manitoba to study polar bears. Tyro is president of the Great Bear Foundation, a group based in Missoula and Haines, Alaska, dedicated to preserving the eight species of bears and their habitat around the world. People from all over the world have joined the Foundation on these field trips to observe bears in their natural habit and learn about Artic ecology.

Dr. Tyro has won multiple awards for excellence in TV and film production. His presentation at Plains School is being sponsored by Clark Fork Enrichment Corporation.

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