

**Gayle Joslin HCTV INTERVIEW with Will Boland and Valerie Hellerman  
Dec. 4, 2008  
Continental Divide Wildlife Linkage Zone**

Introduction – Why after having just retired are you working on this issue?

It was exactly one year ago when I retired from the State of Montana after having been a wildlife biologist for 32 years. And since we are talking about wildlife here, today I will point out that I was born here in Helena, was drawn to wildland places and wildlife since I was a kid. So, in the vernacular of wildlife management, I happen to have a relatively small home range.

I found a career in wildlife management when that profession was considered unsuitable for women, and so, after having graduated from Montana State University in Bozeman with degrees in Wildlife Management and Zoology, my first position was with the University of Montana at Missoula working on the then newly listed grizzly bear which had just been listed as a threatened species under the endangered species act in 1975.

Two years of work involving capturing, collaring, radio tracking grizzly bears and monitoring their habitat needs. That led to a position with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks where a good portion of my time was focused on mountain goats and how they and their habitat are affected by hard rock mining (that was in NW MT in the Cabinet Mtns) and then by energy exploration along the RMF.

Then, as the local FWP wildlife management biologist I spent several years trying to deal with attrition of wildlife habitat primarily on private lands – subdivisions, commercial developments, and all the complications that brings such as conflict with wildlife – as Helena's urban deer demonstrate.

Then there is PUBLIC land and how it is changing. People tend to think that we needn't worry about loss of wildlife habitat on public lands – because they are by definition PUBLIC – so supposedly they are not subject to damages from development. So, when the Montana Army National Guard proposed a military biathlon training facility near the crest of the Continental Divide, likely the most important physical feature on our local landscape, and crucial as a WILDLIFE LINKAGE ZONE, I was compelled to follow through on this issue – one that I had already been involved in for 4 years.

## **HHAA**

The local **Helena Hunters and Anglers Association** had also expressed concerns over the future of functional landscapes for wildlife in our community, so as a member of that organization we are following through on our commitment to the Divide Country as hunters and conservationists.

Who are HHAA? HHAA works to:

- protect and restore fish and wildlife to all suitable habitats
- conserve all natural resources as a public trust – vital to our general welfare
- promote the highest standards of ethical conduct and sportsmanship

**HISTORY** **Amazing to see how history knits itself together and delivers us to our time in history. A thumbnail sketch of how and why HHAA has an historical role to play takes us back to the first true Montana sportsmen**

- 1872 James and Granville Stuart were responsible for writing the first wildlife conservation game code in MT, when MT was still a territory. 4 yrs before Custer (1876)
- At that moment, the person who would have the most profound effect on Montana public lands and who would create the HNF, was beginning high school. That was TR
- 1877 Granville Stuart formed the Helena Rifle Club. We have a street named after him on the upper west side of town. The Helena Rifle Club was a sportsman's and conservation club.
- 1905 United States president Theodore Roosevelt, along with Gifford Pinchot formed the U.S. Forest Service as part of America's Forest Conservation and Wildlife restoration effort. Land and wildlife conservation of the time were melded together – as it should be.
- 1907 TR creates the HNF by executive order. At the time, there was considerable resistance from Congress to setting aside public lands. TR responded to that resistance saying: **“Eventually those who live in the vicinity of the Forest will decide their future.”**
  - **And so, HERE WE ARE, citizens living in the vicinity of the forest, playing out our role in deciding their future.**

HHAH advanced a Resolution to the Lewis & Clark County Commission this year.

### **L&C CO RESOLUTION**

In fact, in June of this year, the L&C Co Commission passed a resolution acknowledging the importance of the Continental Divide here at our back door, and the immeasurable value it provides as a wildlife linkage zone for wildlife.

### **LINKAGE ZONES**

Technically, the term LINKAGE ZONE better defines the landscape issue we are addressing on the Continental Divide.

We often use the term, Wildlife Movement Corridor, but that tends to mislead people into thinking that movement of animals is what we are talking about, and in part it IS movement of animals, particularly those critters that are naturally sparse. Those uncommon creatures are at the top of the food chain. Those rare creatures that can't be made ordinary, safe, or convenient. Wolverine, wolves, lynx, grizzly bears.

So, while these critters, as well as deer, elk, moose, hawks, hares, and voles, do in fact move around, it is the **flow of genetic material through the landscape** that is crucial. WHY?

Most people have a notion of what **inbreeding** is: Inbred animals start to show visible and also have invisible maladies such as malformations, inability to efficiently carry out tasks such as eating, running, breeding. Nature eventually removes them from the landscape. Inbreeding leads eventually to **extinction** – so genetic exchange, particularly between populations that may be **isolated**, comes down to the ability of individual animals being able to make movements between these isolated parcels of very good habitat.

Think of it as large beads strung along a thin string. The beads represent suitable habitat and the string represents seriously reduced, but still available threads of habitat that connect the larger habitat beads. In this case there are large chunks of good habitat to the south in the Yellowstone Ecosystem and to the north in the Northern Divide Ecosystem (Bob Marshall, Lincoln Scapegoat, Glacier, Waterton), with smaller beads such as proposed wilderness and existing roadless areas like Nevada Mountain, Jericho

Mountain-Black Mountain, and Electric Peak – all of these occurring along our Continental Divide west of Helena.

We know from DNA analysis that grizzly bears from the No. Cont. Divide have moved south of Butte, so this connection between the Yellowstone and NCDE exists. And we know that wolverine and lynx consistently use the MacDonald Pass area, and wolves are regulars as well.

#### MAP of Linkage Zone

Thus through reproduction of animals that come into contact from different beads of habitat along the “chain” genetic material is exchanged, and essentially flows through the landscape, keeping wildlife species viable.

### **FRAGMENTATION**

This current reality of isolated habitats, i.e. beads and string, is new. While the species we are familiar with have been functioning unimpaired and uninterrupted on this continent for tens of thousands of years, it has only been in the last century that intact habitats have been broken up by human developments. The term for this is **fragmentation**. Think of it as a huge and metastasizing obstacle course. Animals are able to make their way around humanity only to a point.

Man has rules that state that certain ground is private, and on that ground, man can use it as he pleases. So private property cannot be relied upon to provide usable habitat for wildlife. On the other hand, humankind tends to believe that ground that has been classified as public and will remain undeveloped and available for natural processes such as healthy watersheds and wildlife habitat.

These public lands occur in an already fragmented pattern out on the landscape. So, when a narrow piece of public land that has been functioning as a connecting thread between larger pieces of wildlife habitat, is proposed for a military, recreational, training facility, those of us living in the vicinity of the forest, and who, as TR said “will decide the forest’s future” – it is at this point that we will take a stand.

### **BIATHLON PROPOSAL**

Scoping 2004. Draft EA, Final EA – always raising serious concerns with the project because of its location in such a sensitive and important spot right on the divide.