

Gael Bissell and Alan Wood Are Honored at Flathead Audubon's Second Recognition of Outstanding Conservation Achievements

Flathead Audubon's second Recognition of Outstanding Conservation Achievements was presented to Gael Bissell and Alan Wood at our February meeting. Gael and Alan are with the Region One Office of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Kalispell. Gael is the Habitat Conservation Biologist/Management Biologist, and Alan is the Wildlife Mitigation Director.

The presentation was made by Lynn Kelly, a past president of Flathead Audubon and current President of the Montana Loon society. Lynn teaches science at the Polson Middle School. Below is the text of the presentation.

Welcome Gael Bissell and Alan Wood.

Tonight Flathead Audubon is privileged to honor you both for your biological expertise, your vision for the Thompson/Fisher River Drainages, your communication skills, and your persistence in securing a major habitat conservation project for this area. You provided the leadership for your agency, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, to cooperate with The Plum Creek Timber Company in securing a conservation easement on 141,000 acres of Plum Creek land in the Thompson and Fisher River Drainages. This easement will protect wildlife populations and maintain recreational access in perpetuity. We **have great praise for you and all the parties to this accomplishment.

Gael, you first told Flathead Audubon of this significant area in October 1996 at our monthly meeting devoted to Quality of Life issues. In 1997 you updated us on the value of the habitat, and field trips followed to the area. Thank you for keeping us informed as this project developed.

Since your graduation from Ohio Wesleyan University, cum laude, and your Masters of Science Degree from the University of Montana, you have been involved in wildlife research here in Montana. We specifically note your efforts to protect Montana's Common Loons. You secured Fish Wildlife and Parks Living with Wildlife grants the past two years to initiate and fund the Loon Ranger Program. The Loon Rangers monitor Loon activity on area lakes, including the Thompson Chain of Lakes. The implementation of this program was vital to Loon management in Montana. The public education provided by these Loon Rangers has resulted in a decrease in boating disturbance during Loon nesting season, which has yielded an increase in the production of Loon chicks in Montana.

Alan, your work for wildlife rests on an impressive educational background: Bachelor of Science, Utah State University, Master of Wildlife and Range Resources, Brigham Young University, Ph.D. Wildlife Management, Montana State University, Bozeman.

You have designed a number of wildlife development plans and wildlife mitigation plans in Montana and other states. Recognition of your achievements includes a series of Biologist of the Year Awards and Certificates of Appreciation.

Gael and Alan, last year Jim Williams, Fish, Wildlife and Parks Regional Wildlife Manager and Alan Christiansen of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation recognized your professionalism and dedication by nominating you both for The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society Biologists of the Year Award. This nomination was successful, and The Wildlife Society presented the Award to you both at their 2001 meeting.

Also in 2001 you received The Fish, Wildlife and Parks Director's Award of Excellence. The Thompson/ Fisher River Conservation Easement Team consisted of Debby Dills, Martha Williams, Bobbi Keefer, and Gael and Alan. This team completed a major conservation project, protecting wildlife populations and maintaining recreational access in perpetuity by placing a conservation easement on 141,000 acres of Plum Creek Company lands in the Thompson/Fisher River Drainages of northwest Montana. This easement is the largest of its kind in Montana's conservation history. They wrestled with a nontraditional approach that required unique and innovative terms to insure the value of these lands as wildlife habitat and corporate timberlands. The strong support from Dan Vincent, Fish, Wildlife and Parks Region One Supervisor, was crucial to moving this project forward. Approval for the project came from Pat Graham, former Director of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission, especially Region 1 Commissioner Charlie Decker, and Steve Knapp, Habitat Bureau Chief, Helena.

We congratulate and thank Fish, Wildlife and Parks for arranging and helping to fund this conservation easement.

We applaud this innovative easement, and applaud you, Gael and Alan, for your role in bringing it to fruition. We understand that this is a grand beginning to further work toward securing easements on other Plum Creek lands.

Gael and Alan, please accept these Flathead Audubon cups. We toast your conservation achievement and wish you continued success.

By Linda Winnie