



The Pileated Post

VOLUME 11

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DECEMBER 1987

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS dinner meeting, 5:30 PM at the Korner Kitchen in Bigfork. Open to all interested members.

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING, Flathead Bank of Bigfork meeting room. 7:30 Business meeting. 8:00 Program: Dr. Lex Blood of FVCC will present a brief overview of the Glacier Institute's first years, followed by a in depth look at the geology of the Flathead Valley, illustrated with slides. This is a great opportunity to learn about the geological forces which formed our beautiful landscape.

FLATHEAD CHAPTER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, dawn to dusk, followed by a potluck dinner at the Bigfork Senior Citizens Center, 5:00 PM.

EDITOR'S DESK

Leo Keane

Got your Christmas shopping done yet? Or are you still up to your eyeballs in boxes and presents? Do you sometimes have that sinking sense that the holidays for you mean more in a year full of deadlines and committments? Whatever happened to bonfires and skating parties, hay rides or that snowy walk in search of the "perfect" tree? Lost in the frenzy, it seems, all too often.

This year pencil in a place on your holiday calendar for some old-fashioned Christmas spirit. Here's an idea: On Saturday, December 19 (Good Heavens! only five more shopping days till Christmas) join Flathead Audubon for our annual Christmas Bird Count. It's easy. Jean Robocker, our cheerful Christmas Bird Count chairwoman, will enlist you and your family or friends at this month's meeting (or give her a jingle at 755-2751). The cost is \$4.00 per participant. Jean will assign your party a small area within a 10 mile radius of Bigfork. (That's some geography--from Swan Lake to the Flathead and Jewel Basin to Spring Creek.) Your mission is to comb those forests and fields, keeping track of the numbers and species of birds seen. If you know your nuthatches from your chickadees, have field glasses and a bird guide, you're ready to fly. Most of our observations will be old friends--jays and pheasants and Canada geese--but there is always the chance for some rare or obscure sighting--a snowy owl perhaps, or a harlequin duck--and that's the thrill. Also, landowners are usually happy to grant access for birdwatching so you can poke your nose way back into those secluded sloughs and thickets. It's a heckuva good time, believe me.

Best of all, we close the day with a hearty potluck ham dinner back in Bigfork. Here we tally up the count and share the adventures of the day. What a wonderful way to lighten up for the holidays! We sure hope you'll join us.



GUEST COLUMN

MONTANA WILDERNESS BILL UPDATE

by Dick Kuhl
Montana Wilderness Association

As daily news stories indicate, Senator John Melcher is again taking an active interest in wilderness legislation for Montana. Since passing the House in October, Rep. Pat Williams' Montana Wilderness Bill (H. B. 2090) advanced to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of which Melcher is an influential member. The Senate Committee is now reviewing H.B. 2090 and Melcher has been meeting with Senator Baucus regarding wilderness issues as well as requesting input from U.S. Forest Service officials.

On November 13 Senator Melcher sent a letter of reply to many of the people who wrote him concerning wilderness. Among other things, Melcher's letter pointed to three stipulations concerning existing recreational uses, programmed timber sales, and mining access that left the content of his future proposal in doubt. Now, since writing that letter, Senator Melcher has removed his support for wilderness classification of the Badger-Two Medicine area. He will not support even the wilderness study classification contained in Senator Baucus' bill. Instead, Melcher has drafted a bill which allows oil and gas leasing, logging and provides for a feasibility study of a dam in Badger Canyon. Comments he has made in news stories about other areas such as the Rocky Mountain Front indicate that Melcher is considering less, not more, wilderness than in the bills of Baucus and Williams.

A few conservationists met with Senator Melcher in Bozeman on November 14. Cary Lund of the Audubon Society reported that while everyone was encouraged that Melcher was involving himself in wilderness decisions, there was little reason to expect improvements on the Baucus/Williams wilderness bills coming from Senator Melcher. Furthermore, while Melcher had earlier asked for help from people familiar with specific roadless areas, at the November 14 meeting he said he would hold no more meetings with conservationists and has since turned down requests for meetings with Flathead conservationists.

Therefore, conservationists around the state are asking people to write Senator Melcher urging him to increase the wilderness proposals of Baucus and Williams' bills from the 1.3 million acres proposed to 2.8 million acres of our remaining 6 million acres of roadless lands. Conservationists also consider Melcher's three stipulations concerning recreation, mining and logging to be unfair in that they would exclude some areas from wilderness consideration despite their high natural values.

Flathead conservationists are urging Senator Melcher to support the Thompson-Seton and Swan-Jewel wilderness additions as contained in Baucus' and Williams' bills. We are also asking for inclusion of Akinkoka Mountain in the Thompson-Seton area, and the Swan Crest north of Jewel Basin. All interested in the wilderness issue should join in this campaign now to protect Flathead wildlands as well as any other wildlands statewide of which you may have a specific interest. Be sure to urge Senator Melcher to continue meeting with local conservation leaders to insure that he has adequate and accurate information on the North Fork and Swan Crest wildlands.

It will be important to contact Senator Baucus and Congressman Williams as well. The feeling is that they need to know that their bills should improve wilderness protection not decrease it. Negotiations with Senator Melcher should not lead to a weaker wilderness bill.

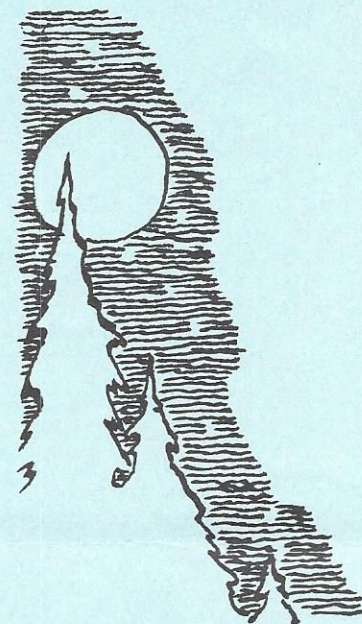
THE PRESIDENT'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

TIS THE SEASON TO BE MERRY
 WAXWINGS FEAST ON HAWTHORN BERRY
 AS WE BUSTLE THROUGH THE TOWN
 FINCHES PULL AT THISTLE DOWN
 OUR LIGHTS APPEAR ALONG THE EAVES
 ROBINS DIG THROUGH FALLEN LEAVES

TIS THE SEASON TO BE GRATEFUL
 THAT OUR WINTER'S NOT BEEN HATEFUL
 CANADA GEESE SEEK FALLEN WHEAT
 CHICKADEES A PLACE TO SLEEP

WE TOAST OUR HALLOWED HOME WITH CHEER
 AND HOPE THE BIRDS WILL COME EACH YEAR
 EVEN WHEN FLOCKS OF GROSBEAKS INCREASE
 IT FILLS OUR HEARTS WITH JOY AND PEACE.

ROBIN



NEWS FROM NAS

By Peter A.A. Berle
 President, National Audubon Society

Every time it rains or snows, Audubon volunteers are checking the pH of the precipitation. The Audubon Citizens Acid Rain Monitoring Network is now in full operation. More than a hundred stations around the country have been reporting their results throughout the fall, and the number is growing steadily. After a rainfall, each volunteer tests the rain using a kit and following procedures developed by Audubon, and phones in data that is recorded in a central computer. Our army of citizen monitors also provides the results to local news media.

In keeping with Audubon's tradition of sound science, the test program has numerous safeguards to insure the accuracy of the results. Citizen monitors save their rain samples for 72 hours. Roughly 10 percent of the samples are called in, at random, and tested by the Bodega Laboratory—part of the University of California at Davis—providing a continuous check on the accuracy of the data acquired by the field stations.

Our first round of results correlates closely with the 1984 data published by the National Atmospheric Deposition Program, which is run by a host of federal agencies—another indication that our measuring techniques are accurate. The difference between the federal program and ours, of course, is that the federal data doesn't come out until a year or so after it is collected and it does not receive the local attention generated by the reporting of Audubon citizen monitors.

The message to date: Acid rain does indeed fall in large portions of this country. While pH varies by place and by rainstorm, there are a lot of low readings out there. The problem will not go away. By making all of us aware that rain contains more than we think, the Audubon Citizens Acid Rain Monitoring Network is doing much to galvanize the political will to pass effective acid rain legislation in Congress.

Seizing the Moment for a Clean Flathead

It is a good time to be part of an active conservation group in a beautiful and environmentally sensitive region of the world. Here in the Flathead and in Montana we face big resource problems but also some great opportunities.

For example, there is a growing concern about our water resources with debates growing over our fisheries in the Swan drainage and Flathead Lake, over forest practices and their effects on stream siltation, and over stream and lake pollution. The problems are difficult to measure and solve, and pose dangers to the region's high quality of life, which is based on these water resources. On the other hand, there is now an excellent opportunity to preserve the pristine quality of these water resources.

This opportunity exists because there appears to be a much higher public consciousness of the threat to our waters than ever before. Citizens in the Swan Valley have held well-attended meetings focusing on threats to the Swan River and Swan Lake from alleged poor logging practices. The proposed Lake County Land Use Plan emphasizes water quality and public hearings on the plan have demonstrated citizen support for land use regulations that will protect water resources. Concurrently, public support is high for dealing with water pollution on the Flathead, while detergent regulations seem to be reducing the phosphorous level into Flathead Lake.

Another reason for optimism is the high profile of the Flathead River Basin Commission. The government agencies and citizens making up the commission appear to take seriously their participation and the commission's influence.

At the state level the Montana Environmental Quality Council is targeting forestry practices and their affects on water quality in preparation for the next state legislative session. The council may recommend regulatory legislation or volunteer cooperative efforts by forest users. In any case the focus is welcome and our forests and water resources will benefit.

If the obstacles can be overcome, and we get a good Montana Wilderness Bill we will gain preservation of pristine water sources as well as permanent protection of the ecosystems involved. Then too, if a wilderness bill does pass, we will have to work diligently to protect the water resources of the released lands, which are now defacto wilderness but would become subject to development.

The opportunities are real but to seize them we will need to keep the heat on federal and state agencies, private industry, and on our legislators to protect our water resources. Conservation groups will need to work together to decide on priorities and lobby for these goals.

As Bob Ballou, Montana Audubon Council president, said at a recent forum, "We have to convince our people that Montana's future is not with the extractive industries but with the non-exploitive uses of our natural resources".

Or as Jack Stanford, director Yellow Bay Biological Station, put it, "We need to foster economic growth that is non-polluting". Stanford noted that he travels throughout the world in his work and "I haven't seen any place anywhere with the natural attributes of the Flathead Basin". "We need", he said, "to make it apparent to government agencies that they cannot afford to foul up here."

It's true, we are on the threshold of great opportunities, and no doubt, we've got our work cut out for us.

SNOWSHOE HARE: *Lepus americanus*

It looks like a banner year for this furry denizen of the deep forest. Here on the west slope of the Rockies snowshoe rabbits, or varying hare (because the pelage varies from brown to white with the season), are bouncing toward the peak of their cycle. Last weekend I tramped over hill and dale in pursuit of the wily whitetail buck and enroute I found the snowy forest crisscrossed with sign of snowshoes.

It's amazing how much spoor (the naturalist's word for tracks or sign) these little creatures will leave behind yet how rarely we're lucky enough to jump one. An obvious reason for this is the perfection of their winter disguise, their white coat is as pure as snow except for the black tips of their ears. Also, however, snowshoes are mostly nocturnal, or diurnal (active at either end of the day), a time at which we humans prefer to be back in camp, snuggled up toward a warm fire.



During the daylight hours snowshoes will remain motionless within their "form"--a depression in snow or grass which "forms" to the hare's shape through frequent use--and rely on their concealment for protection. If jumped, by a blundering deer hunter say, or on purpose, by any one of their many natural enemies (lynx, bobcat, coyote, owls...), a snowshoe will dash lightening quick for a few hundred yards before taking concealment in another form. Within a snowshoe's territory there will be several of these forms habitually used.

Surprisingly, a snowshoe rabbit's territory is quite small and well-defined: less than a hundred acres on the average for a home range, while some might live out their entire life (although it be short) within a few hundred yards of the birth place. When abundant sign is evident then, as in these winter woods, it indicates many individual snowshoes, and thus the population is high.

≈ 1/2 inch



SCAT

Well, we are happy for the little bunnies and wish them the best, for it means the dark, boreal forests of North America this year will be rich with wildlife as the great circle from predator to prey returns once again.

(Although the term rabbit or hare are commonly used interchangeably, the snowshoe is a true hare, the difference being a hare's longer and more powerful hind legs, longer ears and, physiologically, a somewhat different digestive system and tooth structure from that of a rabbit. For more, an excellent reference work is The Mammals of North America by Victor Cahalane, The Macmillan Company, 1961, which I've relied on here.)



High Speed



Slow Speed





1987 FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

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Lynn Kelly, P. O. Box 2289, Polson, MT 59860	883-5797
Jim Rogers, Box 984, Polson, MT 59860	887-2492

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National Audubon Society

CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Yes, I'd like to join. Local Chapter:

FLATHEAD AUDUBON N 54

Mail to: NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY,
Chapter Membership Data Center
P.O. Box 2664, Boulder, CO 80321

INTRODUCTORY MEMBERSHIP

\$20

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Please allow 4-8 weeks for delivery of your first issue.

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THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY meets on the second Monday of each month from September through May. Regular monthly meetings are preceeded by an Executive Board meeting, the time and location of which are published in the preceeding newsletter. The business meeting (7:30) and program (8:00) are held in the downstairs meeting room of the Flathead Bank of Bigfork. These are all open meetings and all interested people are invited to attend. THE PILEATED POST is published nine times a year, September through May, and is sent to all members of the Flathead Audubon Society as one benefit of National dues. For others who would like to receive the newsletter, the cost is \$4.00 per year.

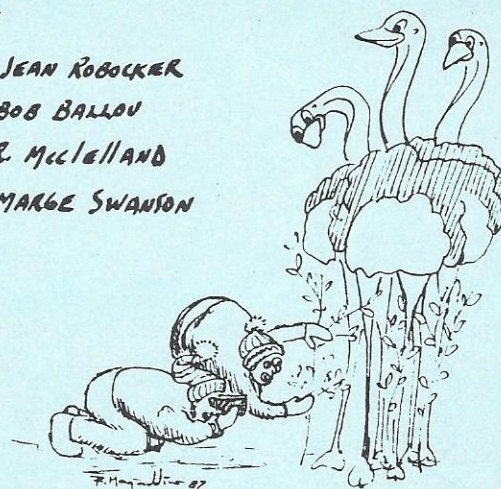
CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

- FLATHEAD DEC. 19 JEAN ROBOCKER
- NINE PIPE DEC. 30 BOB BALLOU
- GLACIER DEC. 29 R. McLELLAND
- KOOTENAI DEC. MARGE SWANSON



FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

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