



The MontanaSierran

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Highwood Coal Proposal and Rural Utilities Service News

By Tiffany Saleh, Missoula Field Office Intern



Missouri River outside Great Falls, MT
Photo by Bob Clark

The federal government should not be in the business of financing coal plants. It looks like they are starting to get the message, thanks to the efforts and support of those who, like Sierra Club members, are concerned about the negative environmental impacts and health effects of coal plants.

Southern Montana Electric Generation & Transmission (SME) has been working to finance what would be the largest coal plant built in Montana in two decades, the Highwood Generating Station. The proposed 250-megawatt coal-fired power plant would be built on the shore of the Missouri River just outside Great Falls, and would spew almost 3 million tons of greenhouse gasses into the air each year, along with many other harmful pollutants. In

addition, the Highwood plant would be located within a National Historic Landmark, potentially destroying the site and leading to its delisting.

Along with other environmental organizations, Sierra Club stands in opposition to new coal-fired plants. To that end, Sierra Club, Montana Environmental Information Center and Citizens for Clean Energy filed a lawsuit to prevent SME from gaining funding from the federal government through its Rural Utilities Service. And it seems the effort is paying off.

On February 19, 2008, The Agricultural Department's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) announced that it has suspended its low-interest lending program for rural electric cooperatives seeking federal assistance to build new coal-fired plants. RUS notified SME that it would not loan money to help finance the cooperative's new Highwood plant, nor will it finance *any* new coal plants in 2008 or 2009.

According to RUS spokesman Jay Fletcher, at the direction of the White House, none of the \$7.1 billion Congress appropriated to RUS' electrical program for fiscal year 2008 can be used to finance coal-fired or nuclear electricity generating facilities. "Which means we will not be building coal plants," he added.

Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-CA),

chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, said RUS needs to be more protective of taxpayer funds, and account for the financial risks associated with future global warming regulations when it considers these applications. Bruce Nilles, a Sierra Club lawyer who has led much of the group's campaign against Midwest coal plants, agrees. He noted that climate change analysis is now something that the private market generally does, and that it was "incredible that a federal agency holding keys to the federal treasury doesn't do the same and pretends that global warming regulation is not going to occur."

Unfortunately, the RUS decision has not halted the proposed project completely. SME and the city of Great Falls continue to search for alternate financing for the Highwood facility. In an interview, Great Falls City Manager John

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Late in 2007 these two bull elk became tangled in barbed wire near Dixon, MT, on the Confederated Kootenai and Salish Reservation. A tribal game warden killed the elk with a 12-gauge shotgun because he could not safely snip the wires to free them. The racks, complete with the wire, will be displayed at the tribal fish and wildlife offices in Polson.

See the Montana Chapter Outings section for a service outing in which you can help to minimize the chance of this happening to other elk.

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For more information about:

Montana Chapter activities and meetings, contact Jeff van den Noort at (406)592-1871.

The Missoula/Bitterroot area activities and meetings, contact John Wolverton at (406)543-6696.

Visit our Chapter website at www.montana.sierraclub.org.

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Club Offices location and contact information

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Missoula Office

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**Highwood Coal Proposal...
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Lawton, "This development does not change the probability level of whether it will be built," Lawton said.

The February decision of the Rural Utilities Service is a welcome step forward in the fight against a massively polluting energy source. The costs of new coal plants are rising, as is the cost of coal itself, especially with the addition of any future global warming regulations. Therefore, it is imperative that we evaluate the role, if any, coal should play in our energy future. We should continue to move forward with the clean, affordable, available energy solutions, such as wind and solar power, and increasing energy efficiency. With the help and support of its members, Sierra Club is working to make this possibility a reality. 🐾



Sierra Club Challenges Gray Wolf Delisting

By Melanie Stein, Jackson, WY staff

Recently, the American West's iconic symbol of the wild – the gray wolf – was removed from the Endangered Species List. The wolf once roamed most of North America, but human distaste for the predator wiped out most of the population in the early 20th century. In the mid 1990's, the federal government reintroduced wolves into Yellowstone National Park in hopes of restoring this animal to its natural landscape in the Northern Rockies.

Since reintroduction, wolves have been steadily climbing toward recovery in the Northern Rockies. Currently, there are approximately 1,500 wolves in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. In Montana, there are approximately 420 wolves. On the surface, this population growth appears to be proof that its time to remove protections for the gray wolf in the Northern Rockies. But Sierra Club isn't so sure.

Mostly, we are opposed to delisting because wolf subpopulations aren't connected to each other, and state management plans are overly aggressive, geared to maintaining the minimum number of breeding pairs allowed. Sierra Club can't

support delisting until the states commit to maintaining a sustainable, interconnected wolf population in the Northern Rockies.

Right now, the three subpopulations of wolves in the Northern Rockies – in Central Idaho, Montana, and the Greater Yellowstone Area – have largely remained isolated populations, meaning that there hasn't been much connectivity between the populations.

And the state wolf management plans in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming are highly aggressive. After delisting, states are required to maintain only 10 breeding pairs. The plans do not commit to maintaining wolves above minimum levels - which could mean an 80 percent reduction in wolves in the states, just because the management plans allow them to do so.

In the past few years, Montana has led the charge in lethal management of wolves by Wildlife Services. Montana ordered an average of 38 wolves removed per year from 2002-2006, compared with 28 in Wyoming, and 22 in Idaho.¹ Montana ordered 53 wolves killed in 2006 in response to just 38 confirmed wolf predations on livestock.²

Although Montana's wolf management plan is the best of the three states, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has already passed a proposal for a wolf hunting season in the fall of 2008. We believe wolf population numbers in Montana are too small to sustain a hunt.

When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service solicited comments from average folks like you and me on the delisting proposal in 2007, they were met with overwhelming opposition. Along with us, scientists, hunters, ranchers, conservation groups and others – in the Northern Rockies, across the country, and internationally

1 <http://fwpp.mt.gov/content/getItem.aspx?id=26915>

2 *Ibid.*

Continued on page 4

EARTHFEST in Missoula

April 18th

Missoula Valley Recycling honors the sponsors of Recycling in the Schools Program at the Stensrud Building 5-10pm with music and appetizers: www.missoulavalleyrecycling.com.

April 19th

- Clark Fork River Clean-up 10-12pm and glass crusher (sponsored by REI) 10am -3pm at Caras Park: www.clarkfork.org and www.rei.com.
- Festival of Cycles at Bonner Park, noon - 4pm: www.strans.org/freecycles.html.
- Ecopentathlon: Earth Service workers bike from event to event—cleaning the river, weeding MT Sentinel, sorting recyclables and working at the Peas Farm. This and other UM Earth Week events described at: www.umt.edu/earthday.

April 20th

MUD's 2nd Annual Earth Day Celebration, Caras Park, noon - 7pm with sustainable businesses and organizations, local food, beer & wine, great bands (and glass crusher sponsored by MFCU 10am - 3pm):

www.mudproject.org/earthday.

April 26th

E-Waste Collection Day, Western Montana Fairgrounds, 9am - 2pm, sponsored by Sony.

**Sierra Club Challenges Gray Wolf Delisting
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– think it’s too early to remove wolves from the Endangered Species List. In fact, 98 percent of the approximately 93,000 comments that USFWS received were in opposition to delisting.

Here’s what two people from Montana had to say about delisting:

The proposed rule states that hunting will be allowed as long as the states maintain 15 packs each. Again, this is too aggressive for a species that has only been back in their native territories for 12 years. Wolves are recovering, yes, but are not at this level yet. Furthermore, the public is not at the level to have the mindset necessary to respectfully hunt wolves and not begin a slaughter. Wolves will not be hunted for meat or to put food on the table. They will be hunted for trophy.... This is a recipe for disaster.

We experience joy observing wolves in their natural state, interacting with other species in the age-old dance of life and death. We experience horror in the sense that wolf recovery has become even more political and that the USFWS has succumbed to political pressures while abandoning sound science. What is considered “suitable” or “unsuitable” habitat is not based on science, only politics and societal pressures.

And so, the Sierra Club, along with 10 other local, regional and national conservation groups, has challenged the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s decision to remove the great gray wolf from the Endangered Species List. To learn more, visit the Sierra Club’s Wyoming Chapter website at

www.wyoming.sierraclub.org. 🐾

**For a Lolo Peak
campaign update
visit our website at**

www.montana.sierraclub.org

Bill Halts New Coal Plants Until Coal Technology Catches Up with Clean Rhetoric



Congressmen Henry Waxman (D-CA) and Edward Markey (D-MA) have introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives legislation that addresses the largest new source of global warming pollution — new coal-fired power plants. H.R. 5575:

* Requires all new coal plants to capture and store safely at least 85% of their carbon dioxide emissions. None of the approximately 100 proposed coal plants in the United States currently meet this requirement. The bill would also ensure that any new coal plants that do not capture and store their carbon will not be given free pollution allowances under any future global warming legislation.

* Takes a common sense approach to our energy future. Everyone realizes that federal global warming legislation is coming; this bill recognizes that and forces coal plant developers to assume responsibility for their global warming pollution.

Before we move forward with new coal plants we need to make sure that they will be viable, affordable

energy options in the new energy future we are creating. We need to make sure that the technology to capture and store carbon is feasible and in place. Otherwise we could end up locked in to another 50 years of dirty power that negates all of our other efforts to improve public

health and fight global warming.

The coal industry is spending more than \$35 million to try to convince the American people that coal can be burned cleanly. This bill holds them to their rhetoric and will demonstrate whether there is any truth behind the industry’s slick public relations campaign.

Because of the rising cost of coal and new coal plants, it is imperative that while we are evaluating the role—if any—coal should play in our energy future, we should continue to move forward with the clean, affordable energy solutions that are available today, like energy conservation, efficiency, wind and solar power. Investing in these clean energy technologies today can keep our lights on, save us money and create jobs—all while fighting global warming.

This legislation presents a great opportunity to educate Congress about the threat posed by new coal plants.

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Montana Chapter Outings

Free and open to the public. Please, no companion animals.



Skiers enjoying a local Sierra Club group outing in February. The route from Lolo Pass to Lee Creek campground had near perfect snow conditions under clear blue skies and mild temperatures.

Photo by Kristi DuBois

entanglement. Then we'll take an interpretive-sightseeing 1/2 mile hike to another work-sites. Time permitting, we'll "top" some of the the invasive Hounds Tongue weeds. Long sleeve shirt, long pants, sturdy footwear, work gloves, and glasses of some sort will be required. Bring your own gloves, glasses, tool belt, linemans pliers and small bolt cutters if you can; but we will have supplies on hand for those who do not have such items. Not recommended for anyone with bad knees or bad back. Contact, Bert Lindler (406)542-7645 or blindler (at) montana.com.

Friday - Sunday, July 25-27, Great Burn Backpack Trip. Backpack along the Montana/Idaho border in the wildest reaches of the northern Bitterroot Mountains. Spectacular scenery, wildlife, and natural history abound in this 250,000 acre inter-state roadless area. This 15 mile trip will be moderately strenuous with some off-trail travel required. Space is limited. Contact Bob Clark: (406)549-1142 or bob.clark (at) sierraclub.org.

Saturday - Sunday, July 26 - 27, Pine Creek Lake Backpack. Backpack to Pine Creek Lake in the Absaroka Wilderness just North of Yellowstone National Park. These Mountains are rugged and wild, with old growth forests, waterfalls, wildlife, and most important peace and quiet. Pine Creek Lake is situated in a cirque valley that was once carved out by a glacier and is surrounded by 10,000-foot peaks. After a hard hike, we will enjoy time swimming, fishing, and lounging in the sun. The first mile of our hike is an easy stroll to Pine Creek Falls and the next four miles are tough ones (gaining 1,000 feet every mile)—please, experienced and strong hikers only. Space is limited, so hurry and call Chris (at) (406)209-6770 for more details.

August dates TBA, Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness backpack. Join us on this service outing to McCalla Creek/St. Mary's Peak area. A perfect mix of service and pleasure. We plan to recon and document potential user-created routes, bushwack a steep ridge, and spend the night at Upper McCalla Lake – approximately 7 miles round trip. There may be an opportunity to get to the top of St. Mary's peak as well! Or we could try to descend McCalla Creek and take another logging road back to the vehicles, looking for more user-created trails along the way. This is a fairly strenuous hike. This will be a joint outing with the Rocky Mountaineers. Trip leaders: Steve Schombel, (406)721-4686, and Bob Clark, (406)549-1142 or bob.clark (at) sierraclub.org.

Saturday - Sunday, August 9 - 10, Backpack to Carlton Lake, Climb to Lolo Peak. Taking the most popular route from the Mormon Peak trailhead, we'll hike a good trail to the top of Carlton Ridge with over 2000 feet of elevation gain, then drop several hundred feet to Carlton Lake to set up camp for the evening. We'll do a daypack scramble of 1000 feet up and along the long ridge to the south to Missoula's landmark: 9,096' high Lolo Peak. Great views all around! Total elevation gain nearly 4000 feet. Join us on this overnight trip in order to experience and learn why this area should be protected from ski resort development and is crucial for elk, fish, bear, old growth pine, larch trees, hunters, hikers and for scientific research. Contact John Wolverton, (406)543-6696.

Thursday - Sunday, September 4 - 7, Missouri River Breaks Canoe Float/Camp. Float with us on this 50+ mile canoe trip through the lightly traveled "Badlands" within the Wild and Scenic corridor of this famous river. Early September normally has mild weather, less wind, and fewer folk and mosquitos. Side hikes and explorations will be on the agenda. Rent or BYOBoat/gear. Contact John Wolverton (406)543-6696.

Friday - Sunday, May 23 - 25, Lower Flathead River Canoe Float/Camp. Beginning at Buffalo Bridge we'll flow south about 40 miles through the Flathead Indian Reservation to Dixon. Described as an "extremely scenic section of river" which "rolls by steep cliffs and unusual badlands", where waterfowl should abound. In spring this dam controlled class 1 section of river will move along at a good pace; which may allow for an additional 14 mile leg to Perma bridge. Tribal recreation-camping fee/permit required. Contact: John Wolverton (406)543-6696.

Saturday, June 14th, Spring Wildflower Hike to Packer Meadow. Join us for an 8-mile hike on the Lee Ridge Trail as we hike from Lee Creek Campground to Packer Meadow to see the purple Camas bloom at Lolo Pass. This is a moderately strenuous hike. Horticulturist Adrienne Hopkins will help us identify wildflowers and plants along the way. Bring your lunch and plenty of water. Rain cancels the hike. 9am meet-up at the Missoula BIGLOTS! parking lot to carpool. For more information, please contact Adrienne at (406)549-7012 or John Wolverton at (406)543-6696

Saturday June 28, Service Outing: Fence and Weed Pull in Sawmill Gulch Elk Habitat. Help remove barbed wire and Hound's Tongue from elk winter range in the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area. Meet-up at the main Rattlesnake Trailhead north of Missoula at 8am and we'll be done by noon, giving volunteers a chance to recreate or head home for chores. We'll remove the last vestiges of barbed wire from a steep, brushy roadside area, making it easier for the North Hills elk herd and white-tails to roam and avoid

Join our Energy Activist Network

Building a Montana Sierra Club Energy Activist Network

As we move through the year, there will be opportunities to effect positive change in how our communities address climate change and energy at the local, regional, and national level. We support clean energy choices that address global warming, and protect our wildlife and water. We urge responsible officials to support positive measures and oppose poor choices like dirty coal. We will continue to do outreach and public education events throughout the year, but—most importantly—we need to build a network of activists from around the State who, when called upon, will contact elected and agency officials, write letters to the editor, talk with their family and friends, or help with public visibility events.

To be included in our Energy Activist Network contact the Missoula office at (406)549-1142 or e-mail bob.clark (at) sierraclub.org. Please provide us with the following:

Name • Address • Phone • E-mail

Thank You!

Bill Halts New Coal Plants...

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Across the country, Sierra Club is fighting to stop the construction of dirty new coal plants (like the Highwood Generating Station near Great Falls, MT) and direct the proposed investments into energy efficiency, renewable resources and other clean alternatives. For more information about the threat posed to our health and our environment visit www.sierraclub.org/coal.

The complete language of the bill and a summary can be found at:

<http://oversight.house.gov/story.asp?ID=1797>.

Urge your Representative to support this bill!

Representative Dennis Rehberg
United States House of Representatives
516 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2601
202-225-3211 (D.C.)

<http://www.house.gov/writerep/> 🐾



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Newsletter Information

The Montana Sierran welcomes your letters, articles, photographs and illustrations!

Send newsletter content to:
mtsierraneditor (at) gmail.com

OR mail to:
Rebecca Richter
PO Box 3766
Missoula, MT 59806

The Montana Sierran reserves the right to edit or reject submissions at its discretion.

Submissions must include first and last name with city/town (and state, if outside of Montana). Please include your phone number and email address so we may contact you.

Please format photographs at 300ppi as .tiff or .jpg files, and illustrations at 300 ppi in .eps, .gif, .pdf, .tiff, or .jpg. Including a caption is always appreciated.

Deadlines for content submission are on the Equinoxes and Solistices: March 21, June 21, September 21, and December 21.

Please contact me at (406)546-9658 if you have questions concerning file formatting or content submission procedures. I look forward to hearing from you!

-Rebecca Richter, Editor



On December 1st, volunteers returned yet again to Sawmill Gulch of the Rattlesnake National Recreation area to pull and pile more barbed wire around the old homestead sites. These service outings are directed at improving winter elk habitat and prepping the area for an upcoming wildland-urban interface fuels reduction demonstration project. This low-impact demo project is the product of a coalition between the Sierra Club, Society of American Forresters and the Lolo National Forest.

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Outings (for details, please see page 5)

Fri - Sun, May 23 - 25, *Lower Flathead River Canoe Float/Camp.*

Saturday, June 14th, *Spring Wildflower Hike to Packer Meadow.*

Sat, June 28, *Service Outing — Fence and Weed Pull in Sawmill Gulch Elk Habitat.*

Fri - Sun, July 25-27, *Great Burn Backpack Trip.*

Sat - Sun, July 26 - 27, *Pine Creek Lake Backpack.*

Sat - Sun, August date TBA, *Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness backpack.*

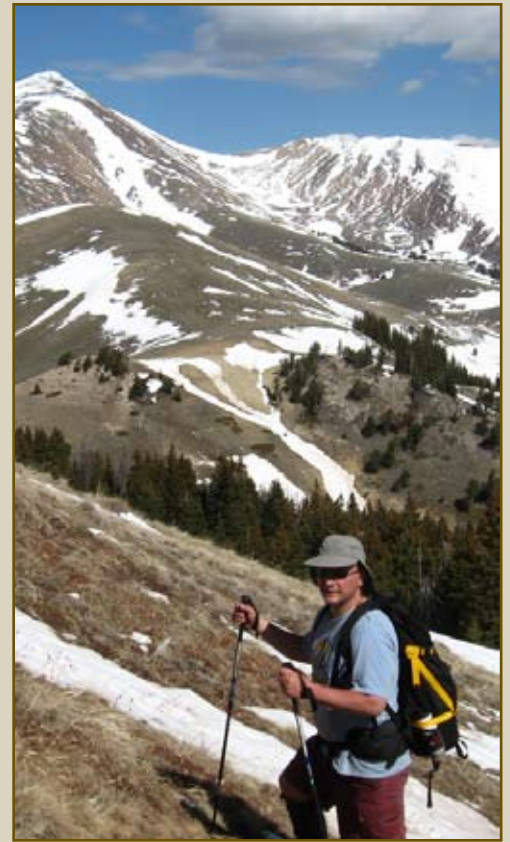
Sat - Sun, August 9 - 10, *Backpack to Carlton Lake, Climb to Lolo Peak.*

Thurs - Sun, September 4 - 7, *Missouri River Breaks Canoe Float/Camp.*

Earth Day Event in Missoula (for details, please see page 4)

The MUD (Missoula Urban Demonstration) Project is hosting its **2nd Annual Earth Day Celebration at Missoula's Caras Park on April 20th from 12-7 pm.** This event will feature a wide variety of exhibits from local organizations and businesses that promote sustainability. Other activities will include a diverse line-up of live music, local beer, wine and food, as well as interactive workshops for children. The celebration will feature Glaszilla, the mobile glass pulverizer, for community members to recycle their clean glass bottles. The pulverized glass will be going to the Missoula Federal Credit Union's new building on Russell Street.

The Montana Chapter of the Sierra Club will be participating in this event with a display and information table. Come out and join us!



Lima Peaks, by Rob Clark

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Photo by Chris Berman



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