

Tim Love and Collaboration in Forest and Watershed Management

Clearwater Resource Council for 4/13/12 EOE

Seeley Lake District Ranger Tim Love was recently honored by the Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society as its Natural Resource Professional of 2012. Now that may not sound too surprising for those who know Tim.... he's probably got shelves full of awards like these. But, what is remarkable is that the award was given by a group of professionals focused on fisheries and species conservation to someone who has worked a lot on things like timber harvest and forest management. In a more distant past these efforts might have been seen as threats to native fisheries. The award notes that Tim "leads by example" that he "promotes integration with all his staff to ensure projects on the District are truly meeting the needs of multiple programs" with projects that "decommissioned roads and replaced and removed fish barriers while still meeting the local need for timber production."

Sure, that's all part of the job description, but doing it well enough to be recognized by a group that does not normally include District Rangers is remarkable. Management of public lands and natural resources is generally one of the most challenging jobs you can imagine. For agencies like the Forest Service with a mandate for "Multiple Use", it could mean in some views, doing everything for everybody, everywhere, all of the time. In reality some lands are better suited to some uses than others. But still, deciding what uses and what management is a balancing act that involves all segments of diverse public, private and community interests.

The history of this multidimensional process of management has not always been pretty or even civil. It can be highly contentious with out- and-out conflicts that range from highly charged debates and public criticism, lawsuits and legal battles that can draw decisions out for months or years, acts of protest and civil disobedience, and unfortunately even violence in what some have called "monkey wrenching" or "eco-terrorism". Even within the agencies responsible for public natural resources there can be contentious debate and mistrust. One arm charged with production of goods and services to support local economies and another charged with protection of endangered species habitats or water quality can be pitted against each other. The result can be mistrust, inefficiency, and depending on the political winds and funding sources, a tension that saws back and forth through time with no clear or consistent process leading to a sustainable balance. The debates can grow with extreme views and special interests finding ways to create a stalemate that ultimately benefits no one or no part of the environment.

Trying to manage a process like this can be a tough job, often frustrating and thankless, and, to be sure not always done well. It's an inexact process that requires some trial and error, a willingness to take risks, and the capacity to recognize inevitable mistakes that may not be rewarded with a positive public response. But it is a job that has to be done if we are to benefit in all the ways and from all the services that healthy forests and watersheds support. Jobs and raw materials to support basic industry, clean and abundant water for our communities, productive places to hunt and fish, beautiful places to recreate and attract tourism, even clean air and reduced risk to damaging wildfires are all the stuff we

need. We can't have all that without good managers, willing to take on the challenges knowing they are never going to become rich.

The process of managing public lands has changed a lot in recent history mostly through a growing effort to find collaborative solutions; solutions that work across the old divide between resource production vs. protection, ownership boundaries, and differences of opinion or preferences. The potential for conflict and stalemate still exists, and some groups still have a focus on disrupting the process at any cost. The ongoing lawsuit regarding the Colt-Summit forest-aquatic restoration project on the Seeley Ranger District is one example. But that project will likely move forward because it is supported by a diverse collection of groups and interests that is almost unprecedented including the Forest Service, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, the Wilderness Society, Northwest Connections, Montana Logging Association, the Forest Business Network, the Clearwater Resource Council, the Swan Ecosystem Center, Pyramid Mountain Lumber and other local businesses, County government, and local citizens. It is a project that, in its design, worked hard to bring forest restoration, fire and fuels mitigation, and fish and wildlife habitat restoration and conservation together in a new way. The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project which incorporates many of the same players in the Swan, Clearwater, and upper Blackfoot, or what has become known as the Southwest Crown of the Continent is another much larger effort that has the potential to move a large number of projects like Colt-Summit to reality.

Collaboration in natural resource management is being tried in lots of places with some successes and some failures. With folks like Tim Love, Forest Service district and regional staff, local resource groups, and others working together we just might be moving past a history of conflict to something that promises multiple use management that actually gets the job done. Our local natural resource organization, the Clearwater Resource Council (CRC), and many of our partners are dedicated to a vision of natural resource management that can only happen through collaboration like that. It depends on good people and hard work. If you see Tim Love, congratulate him. If you're interested in digging deeper in CRC's work....contact Ken Barber, Executive Director. (Ken@crcmt.org or 677-0069).

See photo next page.

