

## The Most Valuable Resource

By Joann Wallenburn, Clearwater Resource Council

You know – I really envy all the folks around here who grew up here. I am certain that had I grown up in Seeley Lake (or Condon or Ovando or Potomac), rather than the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C., I would have had that pony I always wanted. I would have learned to ski much earlier in life. I wouldn't have had to learn to thread a worm on a hook –YUCK-- to catch fish. Dry flies are so much nicer, but give me a cane pole and a bobber and I'm a terror on the pond!

Those of us who weren't privileged enough to grow up here made a choice to move here. Why? What led you to decide to live here? The mountains? The lakes? The trout streams? The hunting? Bird watching? Hiking, camping, canoeing, boating? A job? Really????

For my husband and me, it was the snow-capped mountains separated by a narrow valley with a small community that wasn't over-developed. And the trees. Not those scrawny pinions pines in Colorado, but tall Ponderosa Pines and Western Larch. Doug Fir. Can't leave out the snow – the more the better. And we mustn't forget the critters. How cool is it to see deer, wolves, fox, elk, bear – right in your own yard?!? Even the chipmunks are just so darn cute. The ravens trying to break open golf balls thinking they are eggs crack me up. Never in Virginia.

I doubt many, if any will argue that Seeley Lake is NOT surrounded by plentiful, beautiful natural resources. I'm sure, too, that most will agree that Seeley Lake's future depends on those natural resources. A lot of effort is being made to ensure that the natural resources we all enjoy today will be here, in good condition, for our children and our children's children.

There are the "weed warriors" – those folks who are fighting the war against noxious weeds. We have to find the weeds, map how large the infestation is, create a plan of attack, spray and/or pull them, map how large the infestation still is, revise the plan of attack – and so on and so on. Sometime the warriors collect bugs and release the bugs that attack the weeds.

There are the "lake adopters" – the folks who go out on the lake they adopted every other week through the summer to take water quality measurements. When you consider the hundreds of hours donated on boats that would cost \$50+/hour to rent, the value of their donation is tremendous. The value of the data is priceless.

Then we have the "lake AIS monitors" – the folks who were trained to collect sophisticated water samples to be tested by eDNA techniques to look for the presence of aquatic invasive species (AIS).

Even the children are engaged in protecting our natural resources. I remember the original Earth Day. Yep, I'm dating myself. Our biology class (back in Virginia) actually got to go outside and sit on the grass to have class that day! Whoopee! Or should I say Big Whoop? The science classes at Seeley-Swan High School are doing university-level research work on the stream that flows through their campus. They get in the water and measure how much water is flowing and how fast. They maintain expensive, sophisticated loggers; even a weather station. They collect samples for chemical analysis. They help Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks biologists electrofish the stream to measure fish populations.

Then we have the “forest doctors” – the landowners who mitigate the fire fuels on their property to improve forest health and reduce the likelihood of a catastrophic wild fire and minimize the damage when (not if) wildfire occurs here.

“Air purifiers” – those who changed out their old woodstoves for cleaner-burning new stoves – and the people who helped pay for that.

So I ask you – those of us who chose to live here and those of us lucky enough to grow up here... Which is the most valuable resource?

My vote is for the “folks”, the people who give so generously of their time and talents to help keep our plentiful, beautiful natural resources both plentiful and beautiful. We just can’t appreciate them enough.

The field season is right around the corner. There is more than enough to do to keep everyone of us busy. What interests you? We have “an app” for that. Give us a call (210-8453) or shoot us an email ([projects@crcmt.org](mailto:projects@crcmt.org)) to discuss what you enjoy doing and how you might help.