

## EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES IN A COMMUNITY FOREST

People familiar with the Foy's to Blacktail project typically think of recreation--the biking, hiking, horseback riding and wildlife watching opportunities this popular area offers. With its proximity to town and its position as the gateway to thousands of acres of forest lands, the area above Herron Park offers another potential asset to our community—education about forests, nature, and conservation.

Across the country, millions of acres of working forests are being subdivided into 5 to 40 acre tracts that are not actively managed and do not produce forest products. Northwest Montana, whose economy and culture were built on forestry, is no exception to this trend. Future job opportunities in forestry include providing services to owners of small tracts. These landowners have numerous and complex needs ranging from weed control and fire safety to disease prevention and aesthetics.

The Conservation Fund parcel (currently 280 acres) adjacent to 160-acre Herron Park is a working forest that provides a wonderful opportunity for forest stewardship education. Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC), with assistance from MSU Extension Forestry, is developing curriculum emphasizing management of small-acreage tracts of forest and range land. FVCC wishes to use the Conservation Fund/Herron Park property as a "classroom" for this endeavor.

FVCC will use the property to educate two types of students. First, it will teach small-tract landowners (5 to 40 acres) various aspects of forest management including disease prevention, fire hazard reduction, and proper thinning practices. Second, it will train professionals to service small-acreage landowners who want help with management of their forested properties.

Forest education opportunities also abound for younger students, from pre-kindergarten through high school. Project Learning Tree, a nationally recognized program for elementary and high school students, has developed extensive outdoor education curricula focusing on forests. Locally, the Family Forestry Expo, now in its 20th year, is a wildly successful week-long education program teaching students and their families about the importance of forests to our economy and environment. The Foy's Community Forest presents an ideal opportunity to expand the reach of these popular programs.

Small acreage owners and local students can receive a hands-on education right outside their front door--but only if Foy's to Blacktail can purchase and protect public access to the 280-acre Conservation Fund property. Please help us buy this land and keep the door open to stewardship of our local forests. The Foy's Community Forest concept has received the endorsement of a diverse variety of groups, including:

Flathead County Commissioners	Montana Logging Association
Flathead County Parks Board	Montana Forest Owners Association
Flathead Valley Community College	Montana Tree Farm
MSU Extension Forestry	American Forest Foundation
The Conservation Fund	Plum Creek Timber Company
Montana Conservation Corps	Stoltze Land and Lumber Company
City of Kalispell	MT Forest Stewardship Steering Committee
Montana Recreational Trails Program	MT Division of Natural Resources & Conservation
Local equestrian and bike organizations	MT Division of Fish, Wildlife and Parks