

Foy's to Blacktail: Education Opportunities in a Community Forest

People familiar with the Foy's to Blacktail project typically think of recreation--the biking, hiking, and horseback riding 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.

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. Whereas loggers and foresters were traditionally equipped and trained for extractive forestry on large tracts, future job opportunities in forestry lie in providing services to owners of small tracts. These landowners have numerous and complex needs including ranging from weed control and fire safety to disease prevention and aesthetics.

The 320-acre Conservation Fund parcel adjacent to 120-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 320-acre Conservation Fund property. Please help us buy this land and keep the door open to stewardship of our local forests. We're proud that the Foy's Community Forest concept has received the endorsement of a diverse variety of groups, including:

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