

PROTECTING THE WATER, WILDLIFE AND OUTDOOR HERITAGE OF THE CROWN OF THE CONTINENT.



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**Wild Writer Douglas H. Chadwick**  
**An interview with a Friend of the North Fork Flathead**

October 2, 2013

Dear Friend:

[Doug Chadwick](#) reflected for a moment and then had to agree: he's been around long enough and written enough about the North Fork Flathead that some of his writings qualify as 'history.' Not as in "weighty and important," he is quick to add, "just old."

*Headwaters Montana* sat down with Doug for a brief interview on the subject of one of his favorite places on Earth, the North Fork. Doug and his wife Karen purchased land along the river in 1976.

***HW: Doug, you've been a landowner in the North Fork Flathead for some time. What's your connection to that place?***

**DC:** I had been working for several seasons, well, it turned out to be years doing goat surveys for Glacier National Park, and fell in love with the park like so many people do. It was my first time in Montana with a complete wildlife community. I saw this small neighboring human community [surrounded by] tons of public land. While I was studying goats, I was studying wildlife as a whole. Now there are more people talking about ecosystems and connectivity. If your a biologist you recognize that there aren't park animals', there aren't 'park bears', there aren't 'park wolverine, elk, moose. They are all ecosystem elk, moose, bears. An important reason they survive and are part of the park community is because they are part of the greater Glacier area, and the North Fork is a key, key part of that.

**(For Doug Chadwick's most recent writing on the North Fork Flathead in National Geographic's "Daily News", click [here](#).)**

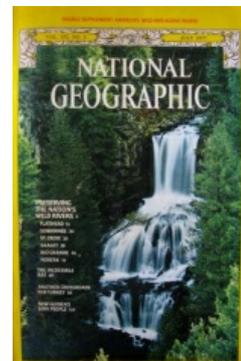


**Douglas H. Chadwick & Friend**

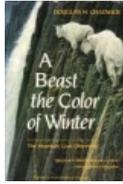
Doug Chadwick bought land in the North Fork Flathead River Valley in 1976. He's been a stalwart and articulate defender of wildlife and wilderness values for that landscape - and elsewhere - ever since. A nationally acclaimed writer for *National Geographic Magazine* and the author of 12 books and numerous magazine articles and book chapters, Chadwick now lives in Whitefish with his wife Karen Reeves.



**1983: Glacier Threatened**  
Doug Chadwick had an article and photographs published in the July 1983 LIFE Magazine. The article discussed threats to Glacier National Park due to adjacent logging, oil and gas exploration and development, and coal and mineral mining. Some of these threats have been resolved to Glacier's benefit and, others [remain](#). Click image above for a regrettably poor quality PDF of the 1983 article.)



**Celebrating the National Wild and Scenic River Act of 1975**  
Doug Chadwick wrote an article for this July 1977 National Geographic Magazine. The North, Middle, and South Forks of the Flathead River were placed under the protection of the Act which primarily prevents dams from being built on designated sections of rivers across the U.S. and provides direction to government agencies for keeping existing character of



**First Book**  
Published in 1983, *The Beast the Color of Winter* established Chadwick as an outstanding field naturalist and talented writer. The book was re-issued in 2002.

**HW: How did you go from park researcher to buying land in the North Fork?**

**DC:** All I can tell you is that Karen and I drove up there in a snowstorm; you couldn't see 30 feet down the road.. [We] had a map drawn by a guy in Kalispell who sold used cars and real estate, and found this place in the bottomland and there were just tracks everywhere. Coyotes running across the tracks of moose, elk - all the animals that depend on that bottomland. I couldn't see the mountains, but I knew I was in a really good spot rich with wildlife. Of course, we all rationalize moving into a place where you're a disturbance, and we are, but I figured, if this place is for sale we won't be as much of a disturbance as someone else might be. And we promptly settled right in. It just felt right. [The bottomland] is where a lot of the life of Glacier Park and the Whitefish Range is in the winter. I always wanted to live in a place like that, where there were more wild creatures than people, where it's intact.

**HW: When did you place a conservation easement on your property?**

**DC:** That's what I was going to say. The first thing that came up [as new residents] was that [then Congressman] Max Baucus had proposed "Wild and Scenic" protection for the three forks of the Flathead. I think at the time I was president of the [Montana Wilderness Association](#) Flathead Chapter. So partly in that capacity but also in the capacity as a landowner who has the river as one border of his property, I went back [to D.C.] on my own nickel and gave testimony. And lo and behold back in those days a lot of good things were happening. It wasn't polarized, it wasn't an issue divided by political ideology. The North Fork at various times had had dam proposals, and all kinds of things, and suddenly here it was protected. And in that bill there was funding for the Forest Service to acquire easements.

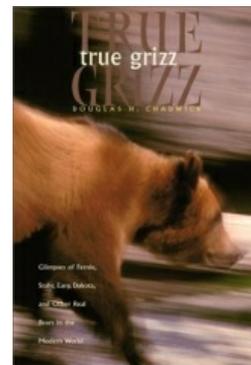
Easements were a pretty new thing; I didn't know too much about them. And Karen and I went right out and put one on [our] place for which we were paid a pretty token amount. But land was cheaper back then too. If I could sum it up, "Even a dirtbag biologist could afford a place on the North Fork." I also wanted to put my actions where my mouth was. "You want protection for the river? So you should protect it by getting a conservation easement." I think we were one of the first North Forkers to do it.

It wasn't long after that - 1979 - when the Cabin Creek coal mine issue really started to heat up. What I remember was that while [the mine] was still being heatedly discussed, the wolves came back... beginning with a lone wolf named Kishenena. Wolves didn't breed or



**Of Man and Wolf**  
The official return of the gray wolf (*Canis lupis*) for the North Fork Flathead Valley occurred in 1985. Doug Chadwick saw large 'dog' prints as early as 1979, perhaps early, non-resident wolves visiting from British Columbia, Canada. (Photo credit: [people.ucsc.edu](#))

or keeping existing character of rivers "wild", "scenic", or "recreational".



**Flathead Grizzlies**

Doug Chadwick recounts the life stories of Flathead area grizzlies in this 2003 book that documents the bears surviving in lean huckleberry years as they forage amidst human settlements at the margins of their wild territories.



**Volunteering to Learn More**  
Doug Chadwick volunteered countless hours over five years -

officially become residents of the park until 1985. That was officially the [starting] date of recovery in the West, well before the re-introductions in Yellowstone and Idaho. Now the wild community is more complete than ever. Even in 1979 there were tracks everywhere, and I remember thinking, "Either somebody's got a really big dog, or..."

To a guy who began studying wildlife in an era with unlimited hunting of grizzly bears, no wolves, all of sudden I could find a carcass in the woods somewhere and there would be grizzlies, mountain lion, wolf, and wolverine tracks everywhere. I thought this is becoming a truly special place.

After an experience like that, you're obliged to do everything you can to try and help. You know, I'm a 'wordy' guy [a writer]. I did an article for LIFE magazine back then after Glacier came out as the most threatened [national park] in a nationwide survey because of the proposed developments on all sides.



**Nature's Map**  
The idea that mankind could protect wildlife populations by establishing distinct parks and wilderness areas has given way to "[Landscape Scale Conservation](#)" that maintains core areas connected by corridors or linkage zones. The [Crown of the Continent](#) ecosystem represents one region connected to other regions north and south. The [Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative](#) exemplifies this approach.

**HW:** Has your connection to the North Fork diminished for you at all over the years?

**DC:** No. Not at all. [The River] is the most alive part of the valley. Tied to the snowpack [that melts] and comes out of the Whitefish Range and the Park, it's what ties it all together. It's the thread, the circulatory system. It provides the nutrients to the bottomlands that makes them so rich.

My relationship now isn't so much to the North Fork or the Whitefish Range, or the park. It's to what we now call "The Crown of the Continent". I was working with the Montana Wilderness Association to get the [Great Bear Wilderness](#) [created]. It was [mostly] **Loren Kreck** and **Thurman Trospen** and many other people who had been doing it for decades. I just chipped in on it. Now we had wilderness bordering [the park's south side]. But then we had this unique situation in the North Fork with the park on one side and, oh, they're going to do seismic testing and develop oil and gas in the Whitefish Range. They did put a drill rig on Tom Ladenburg's land in the North Fork. They put flagging on the road warning people of the potentially lethal dangers of [sulphur dioxide] gas escape. All of sudden that's part of the neighborhood. And that was just one well. Then there were proposals to pave the North Fork road, and pretty intense logging on the Canadian side.

[Fortunately] there was a lull until renewed talk of [coal] mining [in Canada] in 2000,... the "New Millennium". By that time [the North Fork] was part of us. The mining was all on a scale when you combined it with the [coal bed methane stuff](#) that would have



and all seasons - to help with the "Wolverine Project" in Glacier National Park. The research, begun in 2006 and now terminated, provided breakthrough data and understanding on wolverines in the Park. Chadwick's book, [The Wolverine Way](#) was published in 2010 and has helped create a surge of interest in the illusive [Gulo gulo](#) which will help convince policy makers of the public's interest in the wolverine's recovery and future management.. A PBS/Nature documentary, "[Wolverine: Chasing the Phantom](#)" also resulted from the research and book.



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Headwaters Montana works to protect the water, wildlife, and traditional outdoor heritage in the Crown of the Continent. Please click on "Donate Now" to help ~ **Thank You!** ~

essentially industrialized the headwaters, and put the whole circulatory system at risk. Put all the animal communities at risk, including those in the park. The bull trout have their real strongholds on the Canadian side. Those headwaters energize the whole Crown system. It was at this point that we thought maybe we have to give up this life... Not because it wouldn't still have a lot of great qualities, but because it would just break our hearts [to see the valley industrialized].

That's our relationship to the whole thing. You fight [the proposals] any way you can. And you try and find a balance so that you're enjoying your life without being stirred up all the time.

Another thing to get across as a long time [now part-time] resident [of the North Fork], I have noticed a real change in the community. They're gotten to a place where I hope most Montanans will get: They got tired of fighting. They went through quite a long process to get neighborhood zoning. And in the end, it was quite a compromise that everyone felt pretty comfortable with. That fed into where it is today where even those opposed to regulations know what they've got in the North Fork. And most everybody's come to see it as the special place that is. They know what a rare community we have here, both wildlife and human.

**HW: What would be "one more thing" that people could do for the North Fork, or for the Flathead Valley, besides support conservation?**

**DC:** I want to get past the predictable answers of "Get active." "Write letters." "Make phone calls." *Go on out and enjoy it; it's your land.* Ninety-seven percent of the North Fork Flathead is publicly owned. Come, get the Good News, meet some great animals, experience their homeland. *And then you'll be able to answer that question yourself, "What else can I do?!"*

**Working Stiffs**

*Doug Chadwick interviewed U.S. Senator Max Baucus during a pause in a "Work Day" on Glacier View Mountain in the North Fork Flathead valley. Chadwick and Baucus talked about the North Fork Watershed Protection Act (S. 233) and the need to keep working to protect this most special place.*

*To read Chadwick's National Geographic "Daily News" article, click [here](#).*

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