

## Montana Loon Society Awards 1994 -2021

**Explanation of MLS Awards:** (Awards do not have to be awarded every year.)

**Partner of the Year Award** is given to government agency or private industry employees who, in the course of their employment, in spite of having many duties which may or may not include monitoring loons, nonetheless makes the time and takes the effort to get the best loon information and achieve the best loon management possible with available resources. We could not do our work without their help and support.

**Volunteer of the Year Award** goes to people who volunteer many hours of their personal time and effort to ensure that loons will continue to be a part of our Montana landscape. They often also provide vehicles, computers, phones, boats and anything else needed. We couldn't continue our work without them.

**Pioneer of the Year Award**, instigated in 2006, is given to people whose completed research adds significantly to science, and our understanding of common loons.

**Founders Award** is given to people that were with the Society from the beginning of the Society in the 1980s, which so far includes Don Skaar.

**Conservation Partner of the Year:** Added in 2016 for a person or group that helps conserve areas of land, water, or sky important to Montana's loons.

### **MLS AWARD QUICK REVIW LIST BY YEAR:**

**1994 Partner of the Year: Amy Jacobs** Wildlife Biologist for Flathead National Forest,  
Tally Lake Ranger District,  
And **Gary Woody Baxter**, Parks Manager, MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
**1994 Volunteer of the Year: Marj Swanson:** Libby

**1995 Partner of the Year: Jane Engebretson**, Wildlife Biologist, Flathead National  
Forest, Tally Lake and Swan River Ranger Station  
**1995 Volunteer of the Year: Gary and Mary Sloan**, Whitefish

**1996 Partner of the Year: Betsy Spettigue**, Watchable Wildlife Coordinator for  
Montana FWP  
**1996 Volunteer of the Year: Dorothy Boulton** of Seeley Lake

**1997 Partner of the Year: Christie Ferruzzi**, Murphy Lake Ranger Station, Kootenai  
National Forest

**1997 Volunteer of the Year: Cecil “Pody” Riggles, Libby**

**1998 Partner of the Year: Pat Dolan, Biologist, Lolo National Forest**

**1998 Volunteers of the Year: John and Linda Winnie, Kalispell**

**1999 Partner of the Year: Gail Bissell, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks**

**1999 Volunteer of the Year: Donna Love, Seeley Lake**

**2000 Partner of the Year: John Peterson, US Forest Service Wildlife Biologist**

**2000 Volunteer of the Year: Tedra Skaar, Don Skaar, MLS Treasurer’s wife**

**2000 Founder’s Award: Don Skaar, Helena, Montana FWP**

**2001 Partner of the Year: Wayne Strevel, US Forest Service, Seeley Lake**

**2001 Volunteer of the Year: Christie Ferruzzi, Murphy Lake Ranger Station**

**2002 Partner of the Year: None listed in 2003 Newsletter or Board minutes**

**2002 Volunteer of the Year: Tony Dawson, Ashley Lake**

**2003 Partner of the Year: Henning Stabins, biologist Plum Creek Timber Company**

**2003 Volunteer of the Year Award: Gary Noland, Editor of Seeley Lake Pathfinder**

**2004 Partner of the Year, Tim Love, U.S. Forest Service, District Ranger, Seeley Lake  
Ranger Station**

**2004 Volunteer of the Year, Alan Davis, cabin owner on Placid Lake near Seeley Lake**

**2005 Partner of the Year: Bart Martinson, Flathead National Forest, Tally Lake  
Ranger Station**

**2005 Volunteer of the Year: Amy Jacobs, Flathead National Forest, Loon Trunk &  
Donna Love, Seeley Lake, Loon Trunk**

**2006 Partner of the Year: Norm Nerz. DNRC**

**2006 Volunteer of the Year Award: Jessi Perry, wife of FWP tech Jeff Perry**

**2006 Pioneer of the Year: Justin Paugh, Kalispell, Master’s thesis: loon chick  
survival and habitat requirements**

**2007 Partner of the Year: Jami Belt Coordinator Citizen Science Loon Project, Glacier  
National Park**

**2007 Volunteer of the Year: Sarah Hatfield, Glacier National Park, Citizen Science**

**2008 Partner of the Year: Chris Hammond, MT FWP Kalispell**

(In E-mail from Lynn Kelly dated Jan. 2010: Chris Hammond was awarded the Pioneer's Award in 2008 upon the completion of his thesis as well as the Partner's Award because of his role of writing the Common Loon Management Plan.)

**2008 Volunteer of the Year: none**

**2008 Pioneer of the Year: Chris Hammond, for his role in writing the MT Common  
Loon Management Plan.**

**2009 Partner of the Year: Scott Tomson**, US Forest Service, Seeley Lake biologist  
**2009 Volunteers of the Year: Chuck and Myrna Schwartz**, Dicky Lake

**2010 Partner of the Year: Ron Steiner** of Plum Creek Timber Company  
**2010 Volunteer of the Year: Patricia Bouta** of Seeley Lake

**2011 Honorary Membership Award: Donna Love, Seeley Lake**  
**2011 Loon Lady Award: Donna Love Seeley Lake** (We didn't have a Partner or Volunteer Award this year, but Lynn gave Donna these two awards for her many years of service to the Society.)

**2012 MLS Partner of the Year, Jay Kolbe, Ovando**, FWP Biologist  
**2012 Volunteer of the Year, Larry Fenster, Ashley Lake**, loon volunteer on Ashley Lake

**2013 Partner of the Year, Laura Holmquist, Hungry Horse**, US Forest Service Wildlife Biologist  
**2013 Volunteer of the Year, Barbara Summer, Columbia Falls**, Glacier NP Citizens Science

**2014 Partner of the Year, Kristi Dubois, Missoula**, MFWP Wildlife Biologist, Region 2  
**2014 Volunteer of the Year, Steve Gnaidek, Columbia Falls**, Retired Glacier National Park Wildlife Biologist

**2015 Partner of the Year: Lynn Johnson**, Wildlife Biologist, Kootenai National Forest, Fortine and Rexford Ranger Districts (newly combined into the Ksanka Ranger District) for her many years of dedication to loon management.  
**2015 Volunteer of the Year: Jami Belt, GNP**, who organized, guided and developed the new Blackfeet Reservation Loon Ranger program.  
**2015 Letters of Appreciation: Jon Obst**, MT FWP, **Bob Lee** of Flathead Search and Rescue, and **Gary Moses**, recently retired National Park Service with training in rescues, for their help rescuing a loon on Rogers Lake in November 2014, along with **Dr. Dennis Dugger** of Central Valley Animal Hospital in Kalispell who examined the rescued loon.

**2016 Conservation Partner of the Year: Vital Ground Foundation, Missoula** for its protection of 145 acres of private land on Alvord Lake, located near Troy, MT.  
**2016 Partner of the Year: Paul Rumelhart** who helped coordinate the Alvord Lake Festival.  
**2016 Volunteer of the Year: Tony Dawson** for his work on Ashley Lake, Kalispell area

**2017 Partner of the Year: Lorin Hicks, Columbia Falls**, former Plum Creek and now Weyerhaeuser Wildlife Biologist for his help and support for the MLS throughout his years with Plum Creek.

**2017 Volunteer of the Year: Barry Gordon, Ovando**, caretaker at Upsata Lake Lodge for assembling the new loon buoys for the Clearwater/Blackfoot areas.

**2018 Partner of the Year: Rachel Manley, Flathead National Forest, Wildlife Technician** for her efforts on behalf of loon on the Flathead NF, and specifically for her help on Teepee, Spoon and Halfmoon Lakes.

**2018 Volunteer of the Year: Anne Dahl, Condon**, for her many years of counting loons in the Mission Mountain Wilderness for the Swan Ranger District.

**2018 Conservation Award: Ralph Burchenal (1931-2018), Ovando**, Posthumously given to this dedicated rancher and his support for loons on Shoup Lake and loons on other area lakes.

**2019 Partner of the Year: Tim Their, Kalispell**, Retired MT FWP Wildlife Biologist, due to his wildlife work in Region 2.

**2019 Volunteer of the Year Kris Kindberg, Eureka**, resident involved with loons for 17 years in the Tobacco Valley, and for successfully organizing a successful “Pint Night for Loons” fundraiser at a local brewery.

**2020 Partner of the Year: Common Loon Citizen Science Project** for monitoring loons in Glacier National Park.

**2020 Volunteer of the Year: Lori Micken, Pierce Lake Cabin Owner**, for monitoring loons on Pierce Lake.

**2020 Conservation Partner of the Year: Ashley Lake Property Owners Association, Kalispell**

### **Complete Award Descriptions:**

**1994**

**Partner of the Year: Amy Jacobs**, Wildlife Biologist for Flathead National Forest, Tally Lake Ranger District, and **Gary Woody Baxter**, Parks Manager, MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Seeley Lake area. Both have been vigilant in loon management and monitoring loons in their areas.

**Volunteer of the Year: Marj Swanson: Libby**, who for over 12 years has monitored loons in the Libby, Troy and Thompson Falls areas. Her Loon Day territory took three days to cover before we split it up and gave large chunks to other indispensable souls.

**1995**

**Partner of the Year: Jane Engebretson**, Wildlife Biologist, Flathead National Forest, Tally Lake and Swan River Ranger Station, coordinated loon management efforts and monitors loons in most of the Flathead Forest. She also coordinates many Loon Day volunteers.

**Volunteer of the Year: Gary and Mary Sloan**, of the Whitefish, faithfully monitored nesting loons and placed signs on Upper and Lower Stillwater Lakes between Tally Lake and Stryker. Upper Stillwater is very large and special effort is needed to find nest and place signs on this lake.

### **1996**

**Partner of the Year: Betsy Spettigue**, Watchable Wildlife Coordinator for Montana FWP, arranged for preparation of educational tools, organized details of our initial banding effort in Seeley and secured funding for loon monitoring and research for the past few years.

**Volunteer of the Year: Dorothy Boulton** of Seeley Lake has monitored loon lakes, provided leadership in the Loon and Fish Festival in Seeley Lake, coordinated T-shirt sales as a MLS fundraiser and provided essential support during the initial loon banding efforts in Seeley.

### **1997**

**Partner of the Year: Christie Ferruzzi**, Murphy Lake Ranger Station, Kootenai National Forest, has faithfully managed and monitored loons in her area since 1988. The last few years, she has continued this work as a volunteer.

**Volunteer of the Year: Cecil “Pody” Riggles**, of Libby has babysat, protected, monitored and signed the last two pairs of nesting loons in the Thompson Chain of Lakes for years. Because of his faithfulness on Upper Thompson Lake we still have some nesting loons there.

### **1998**

**Partner of the Year: Pat Dolan**, Biologist, Lolo National Forest out of Missoula. In 1994, Pat wrote the Forest Service, “Common Loons in the Northern Region: Biology and Management Recommendations” for Montana and for use by other forests with loons in the Northwest part of the country. She digitized the locations of loon lakes and placed these locations onto the GIS system so that we can share accurate maps with other researchers. In 1997, she standardized and computerized 11 years of loon day data so that it will be readily accessible to resource managers. Pat’s contributions are very significant. She has provided us with valuable tools for our efforts to manage loons in Montana.

**Volunteers of the Year: John and Linda Winnie**, Kalispell who organized strong support for the no-wake regulations on a near-by chain of lakes, represented MLS at the Flathead Conservation Roundtable, and Linda published the best newsletter MLS has ever put out.

### **1999**

**Partner of the Year: Gail Bissell**, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, (MFWP) Biologist, spearheaded the successful effort to get MFWP to purchase the land surrounding the only two loon nests on the Thompson Chain of Lakes. This area has traditionally been a “black

hole” management area under the jurisdiction of several agencies. Its out of the way location left it without anyone involved on the ground. Its decreasing loon population did not become apparent until MLS began monitoring the Thompson Chain in 1995 at the request of MFWP. Gael stepped into this void as the new area coordinator. Gael also consented to be co-chairperson for the Common Loon Working Group (CLWG) and has since conducted two highly productive meetings, established several working CLWG committees and with Lydia Bailey’s help, has started transferring all the known loon data into the state GIS system. After the loss of the only nest on the Thompson Chain last May due to jet skiers (on a no-wake lake!), Gael also became the chair of a special MFWP Region 1 Loon Committee. Its mission is to more closely monitor loons in Region 1, where at least 80% of the breeding pairs of loons in Montana reside. Gael has chosen to make space in her heavy workload to promote the welfare of loons, and does so with great tenacity and determination. With regard to loon management, Lynn Kelly said at the award ceremony, “we are now where we thought we might be five years from now because of Gael’s tremendous effort this year. Gael is like the Clavary charging over the hill at a crucial time when we needed her most.”

**Volunteer of the Year: Donna Love**, Seeley Lake who is a fireball of enthusiasm for loons. She and her husband, Tim, District Ranger at Seeley Lake Forest Service Ranger Station, has been instrumental in monitoring loons on Seeley, Salmon and Alva lakes. Donna has served as MLS secretary since 1997, and has updated our mailing list of 400 people. In 1999 Donna wrote and illustrated the new MLS pamphlet “Responsible Watercraft Use and Montana’s Loons.” This has been an outstanding tool for reaching people about loons. As a substitute teacher Donna has developed a loon talk for students and in August she began doing campground talks for adults. If you want something done, call Donna,” says Lynn Kelly. “We couldn’t do what we do without her.”

## **2000**

**Partner of the Year: John Peterson**, US Forest Service Wildlife Biologist, who worked on behalf of loons very quietly and in an unassuming way in the Troy area from 1993-1999, as a biologist for the Kootenai National Forest. John faithfully built, maintained and checked nest platforms, monitored loon pairs and nests, participated and drove long distances to MLS meetings, despite a desk full of other projects and responsibilities. John worked in isolation with little help, other than from the other biologists and techs on his district. He was always faced with dealing with a public weary from high unemployment and wary of any kind of perceived government interference, which included floating loon nest signs and nesting platforms. Yet he continued to press ahead to get the job done. There would not be loons on some of the lakes in the Troy/Yaak area if it hadn’t been from the consistent and persistent efforts of John over the years.

**Volunteer of the Year: Tedra Skaar, Don Skaar, MLS Treasurer’s wife**, who was and continues to be the primary mover and shaker who has maneuvered through the state and federal bureaucracies in order to get our Tax Exempt status in place. Tedra has been working on this for at least two years and without her this critical designation would not have happened. The many benefits, which come from having the 501 c3 designation are critical to the management of loons and cannot be overstated. We will be able to take

advantage of bulk mailings, work in partnership with FWP/FS projects involving funding and many other items. Lynn said, “Tedra, thank you for slaying this dragon for us! Your contribution has been absolutely critical to our continued efforts on behalf of Montana’s loon population.”

### **Founder’s Award: Don Skaar**

In 1982, Don Skaar started and was the Montana Loon Study. He commenced to traveling literally thousands of miles around northwest Montana checking untold numbers of lakes (at least 62 lakes had loons according to the Management Plan of the day) trying to establish the range boundaries of breeding loons. His future wife, Tedra, often accompanied him.

Don’s data and the data of his late father, P.D. Skaar, author of Bird Distribution in Montana, provide us with the first accurate Montana loon information ever recorded, spanning the late 1970’s to 1989. Don had searched out the historical data on loons and found little he could use.

Don organized the first set of volunteers to help observe and monitor loons (some of whom are still involved) and contacted the North American Loon Fund (NALF) in New Hampshire. This led to the Montana Loon Study becoming an affiliate of NALF.

Around 1985, Don was traveling to various Audubon chapters giving his program on loons and asking for money and volunteers. That’s when I (Lynn Kelly) got involved. (As Don said later, “I created a monster.”) Working with biologists from the Forest Service (Bob Summerfield, Kootenai; Tom Wittinger, Flathead; Mike Hillis, Lolo), and from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (Dale Becker, biologist,) Glacier National Park (Steve Gniadek), Department of State Lands (Dean Graham), Montana Natural Heritage Program (David Genter), and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (Dennis Flath and Dan Casey), Don showed that the common loon needed to be listed as a “sensitive species.” In 1986, the Forest Service listed the common loon a sensitive species.

Don started our annual “Loon Day” (first year 1986?) and compiled the data for several years until we began to send the data to the Montana Natural Heritage Program in Helena at the state capitol. In 1987, Don began the process of writing the Management Plan and the Montana Loon Study contracted with the Forest Service to do this. Don wrote the Loon Management Plan, which was part of a Challenge Grant Cost Share Program (a grant he also wrote) in which the Forest Service funding was matched by monies from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the North American Loon Fund. He traveled to a North American Loon Fund meeting to share his information about loons in Montana in the process of securing these funds. The writing of the plan was completed in 1988-89.

In the meantime, Don had been having annual meetings of the Montana Loon Study, usually held in June in preparation for Loon Day. For this he organized all the volunteers for Loon Day, and as mentioned, he compiled all the Loon Day data. Don wrote the early newsletters reporting the results and loon news around northwest Montana.

In 1992, the Loon Management Plan began to transition into a Loon Conservation Strategy and the Montana Loon Study started becoming the Loon Conservation Strategy Loon Society. After being Coordinator of the Montana Loon Study and the first president

of the Montana Loon Society, he has continued to serve the interest of loons as Treasurer (still is in 2011 – note added in 2011).

While he was doing all the loon work, Don was employed as the fisheries biologist – first as a contractor rehabilitating trout streams, and then for MFWP in Libby and now in Helena. He was also pursuing Tedra, which may explain why they had a ten-year courtship! Dona now lives in Helena with Tedra and daughter, Rachel.

Quite literally there would be no Montana Loon Society without Don Skaar. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude and we want to honor him as our Founder with the Founder's Award. We hope we will have the privilege of working with him in the Montana Loon Society for many years to come.

## **2001**

**Partner of the Year: Wayne Strevel, US Forest Service Campground Maintenance/Operations** is the “man behind the loon signs” in Seeley Lake. Wayne works for the U.S. Forest Service at the Seeley Lake Ranger Station. He is responsible for the maintenance, operations, safety issues and sometimes enforcement with the Forest Service campgrounds. He also gets involved with fire fighting efforts and just about anything else that needs to be done. Despite everything on his plate, Wayne has been “Johnny (Wayne) on the spot” when it comes to getting the loon signs up. His positive attitude is an encouragement to all of us and his polite way of dealing with people, complete with a slight Southern drawl and a touch of humor, makes Wayne a delight to work with. Without a doubt, we just couldn't do what we have to do for loons in the Seeley area with Wayne's faithfulness. Thanks, Wayne, for all you do!

**Volunteer of the Year: Christie Ferruzzi**, Murphy Lake Ranger Station, has been active with loon management since 1986 when Lynn Kelly first met her at Dickey Lake. She started out as a volunteer, watching over loon lakes from Stryker to north of Fortine in the Tobacco River Drainage. This drainage has the highest number of breeding pairs of loons in the state. When she started working at the Murphy Lake Ranger District, part of her duties included loon monitoring and management. Because of her excellent care of both loons and loon data as a Forest Service employee, she was awarded the “Partner's Award” several years ago. However, due to budget cuts funding ran out. So Christie, for the past several years, has been monitoring and managing loons once again as a volunteer. During this time she has promoted the welfare of loons even when it was unpopular and perhaps even slightly perilous to do so. Her unobtrusive manner in dealing with individuals or groups that can be contentious has served her, the Montana Loon Society and the loons well. We still have a healthy population of loons in the Tobacco River drainage because of Christie's persistent efforts to maintain their presence. Christie is the only person who has received both the Partner's and the Volunteer of the Year Award. Thank you Christie. We couldn't do what we need to do for loons in your area without you.

## **2002**

**Volunteer of the Year: Tony Dawson** from Ashley Lake has been interested in loons for many years. He has been one of the primary contacts MLS has had with the homeowners on Ashley. Tony and others wanted a loon ranger on their lake so last fall Tony started a

fund raising campaign that ended up bringing over \$1300 into the loon ranger fund. This enabled Justin Paugh to spend the time he needed to find and monitor 3 nests on Ashley, which is the only lake in Montana that has 3 nesting pairs. It is also the only lake where loons are utilizing all the available suitable nesting habitat despite a very developed lakeshore and high levels of recreation. Because of the money Tony raised, Justin was able to verify re-nesting attempts, find nests we didn't know about and raise the level of awareness about loons to new heights through personal educational contacts and a presentation to the Ashley Lake Homeowner's Association. Thank you Tony for your valuable contribution to protecting the loons on Ashley Lake!

## **2003**

**Partner of the Year: Henning Stabins**, biologist Plum Creek Timber Company (PCTC). His responsibility is to help the company understand and meet the needs of a multitude of different wildlife species and still allow some level of timber harvest on their lands. As a result, he is buried under piles of work and juggles many balls in the air at once. Yet, in the midst of all he has to accomplish, Henning has been "Johnny on the spot" when it comes to loons. A few years back, Henning helped PCTC understand the importance of keeping the area around Little Doney Lake in the Ovando area quiet while incubation and early chick rearing was occurring. As a result, Plum Creek moved its harvest activities away from the lake for an extended period of time.

Henning has been part of the Common Loon Working Group since its inception. When cedar logs were needed to build more nesting platforms, Henning provided the logs. He has rounded up at least \$2000 the couple years to help fund the Loon Ranger Program. In August he was part of the loon banding team on two different nights. In his quiet unassuming way, Henning has been a very effective ambassador between loons and the PCTC, a large landowner with many lakes. Thank you, Henning, for all you have done on behalf of loons. We look forward to working with you into the future.

**Volunteer of the Year Award: Gary Noland**, the editor of Seeley Lake Pathfinder has been covering loon news since 1986. The success of any management program is dependent upon how well the public understands what is happening. Because of Gary's consistent coverage of loon management, ranger presence, loon programs and inclusion of Donna Love's articles, the recreating public in the Clearwater drainage are, for the most part, well informed about loons and their needs. Gary has also been a force in the background for other vital MLS educational projects. We are so thankful for his consistent help with loon education for all these years.

## **2004**

**Partner of the Year, Tim Love, U.S. Forest Service**, District Ranger at Seeley Lake Ranger Station. He has been incredibly supportive of all the loon work occurring on his district for the past 8 or so years. Tim has participated in loon banding and monitoring and has aided with the procurement of funds. He has provided office space and lodging for the loon rangers. Most recently he proposed a no-wake zone for the extreme north end of Seeley Lake because of the high volume of fast moving personal watercraft and ski boats which posed either an annoyance or an outright danger to both human anglers,

canoeists and the loon family that inhabits this part of the lake. Tim shared his ideas with the businesses in Seeley who approved of this action. The proposal was approved by the FWP Commission and will be in effect this year.

**Volunteer of the Year, Alan Davis**, cabin owner on Placid Lake near Seeley Lake. Alan has been indispensable to the critical loon banding efforts that occurred in 2003-2004 on Placid Lake and other lakes in the Seeley area. Both years Alan provided his boat to be used as one of the capture vessels and his time as the operator. "His time" means working from 11 PM to about 4 AM. While the work can be very exciting as loons are caught, Alan still lost more than 1 night of sleep. He also provided the banding crew of several people a wonderful place to sleep once they stumbled in about 4:30 Am. Alan is also the person who places the floating buoys around the nest site early in the spring. The loons of Placid are in good hands with Alan around.

## **2005**

**Partner of the Year: Bart Martinson**, Flathead National Forest, Tally Lake Ranger Station. Each year loon nests must be located and floating signs must be set around these nests as soon as the nest is discovered. This generally happens between May 1 and 15. This year we had nests being initiated in late April due to mid weather. The Achilles Heel of our very effective loon ranger program is that the rangers do not start their duties until mid-May, 2 – 3 weeks after many loons have initiated nesting. These individuals are hired to find/monitor nests, place and remove floating signs, and provide public education on boat ramps and campgrounds. For the past few years, Bart has stepped into the gap, found the nests and placed the signs as needed. We had an average number of chicks surviving this past summer, but the number would have been much less if Bart hadn't been there. Besides sign deployment, Bart has also been instrumental in helping with loon banding during the past two years. For these things and all other things Bart did that weren't mentioned.

## **Volunteer of the Year: Amy Jacobs and Donna Love.**

**Amy Jacobs** of the Flathead National Forest, Tally Lake Ranger Station is one of the recipients of the 2005 Volunteer of the Year Award. She has been active in MLS since its inception in the mid-1980's and in 1994, was awarded the Partners Award for all her work as a forest bio-tech/biologist in the many aspects of loon nest monitoring, protection and public education. Amy has always seen the incredible importance of education in successful wildlife management. This spring, she and others set up a loon display at the Family Forestry Forum north of Columbia Falls attended by multitudes of people, including many school children. During the past 2-3 years (at least) she has been collecting and modifying activities, materials and ideas for the development of multiple Loon Trunks to be used by teachers and other loon educators in Northwest Montana. Because Amy had previously developed the Herpetology trunk, she has been able to guide MLS through the process of trunk-making. During 2005, her efforts greatly intensified since the goal was to finish the trunks by September. Thanks to Amy and co-chair, Donna Love, (see below) we have four outstanding trunks complete with a notebook full of colorful information and activity pages for use in our schools.

**Donna Love** of Seeley Lake is a second recipient of the 2005 Volunteer of the Year Award. Donna has been the life of the Montana Loon Society for many years. She monitors loon lakes before the loon ranger arrives in mid-May, helps train and guide the ranger once he/she are present. As secretary of MLS, she keeps excellent minutes of the meetings, providing summaries for the newsletter. If there is a banding going on in the Seeley area, she is often there in the dead of night. Loon census? She's at her assigned lakes. Her desire to share information about loons and teach younger children resulted in the publication of her first book, "Loons, Diving Birds of North America." A portion of the sales of the book at the Seeley Lake Loon and Fish Festival goes to MLS. Donna was the recipient of the Volunteer of the Year Award in 1999, but her incredible efforts to design and finish the loon trunks over the past few years has earned her a second Volunteer of the Year Award. These trunks will be an invaluable resource for teachers in northwest Montana and will contribute greatly to loon education. They contain a multitude of loon activities, resources, puppets, pictures, books and other materials that will enable local teachers to both learn about and teach about loons. There is no way to properly thank Donna for all her work on behalf of loons. We hope this award lets her know, once again, how much we appreciate all she does.

## 2006

**Partner of the Year: Norm Nerz.** DNRC. Norm's duties include many things beside loon management. Despite this he has been monitoring loons on state lands for years now. Lynn said, "As if his day job wasn't enough, he has been an integral part of the loon banding teams which go to work about 11 PM and finally get to bed about 4:30 AM during the summer banding months. He has also compiled all the loon mortality information and is the incoming CLWG co-chair. He is a dedicated professional and we're very grateful for all he has done for Montana's loons and loon research."

**Volunteer of the Year Award: Jessi Perry,** wife of FWP tech Jeff Perry, who was absolutely indispensable for the last two summers of banding. She was out many times and her presence was critical on numerous occasions when the banding team didn't have all the people that were needed. Lynn said, "We can't thank her enough for her time and effort on behalf of Montana's loons and loon research."

**Pioneer of the Year: Justin Paugh.** A new research award this year, the Pioneer of the Year, went to Justin Paugh for his research efforts. Justin began as a volunteer loon ranger several years ago and became a loon ranger the following year. Soon he began fieldwork for his Master's Thesis, looking at loon chick survival and habitat requirements. This past spring he finished his work. His thesis indicates that "habitat" isn't limited to the nesting lake, but encompasses a network of lakes around the nesting lake. Lynn said, "His work provides a vital reminder that without proper understanding of habitat requirements, we could work very hard to manage Montana's common loons and still miss the mark."

## 2007

**Partner of the Year: Jami Belt** Coordinator Citizen Science Loon Project in Glacier National Park did an excellent job of coordinating the citizen science project on Common Loons in Glacier during the summer of 2007. Jami recruited and, and with help from

Briana Board (intern), trained 156 people as Volunteer Loon Observers and gave educational presentations to 395 additional people. Jami created and gave 7 short training sessions (1-2 hours long) for park staff, crews conducting research in Glacier NP, and short-term volunteers, such as visiting high school groups, and 10 long training sessions (4-6 hours) for volunteer loon observers. Jami and Briana coordinated all aspects of scheduling staff and volunteers to monitor lakes on Loon Day and throughout the breeding season. Each long training session included a large amount of safety training (on driving; hiking and personal safety; safety in bear country). She created an advanced training presentation for returning volunteers. Over 450 surveys were conducted on 79 lakes in Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. Each of Glacier's 45 priority lakes and 7 of Waterton's lakes were surveyed at least 3 times throughout the breeding season (prior to, during, and after Loon Day) for a total of 2,240 volunteer hours for the citizen science loon project in 2007. Jami met four new goals for 2007: training staff and volunteers in Waterton Lakes National Park; monitoring potential loon lakes at least once in Waterton in 2007; conducting the first annual Spring Loon Day in Glacier NP; and monitoring 22 remote wetlands in Glacier. Jami also conducted quality control visits (investigated suspect data). In addition to meeting these four goals, she worked hard to get better estimates of nesting locations, nursery areas, hatch dates, and migration dates. She also entered and summarized the data from 2007. She supervised Briana Board, a VIP and Glacier National Parks Associate intern, who assisted in training sessions, coordinated Summer Loon Day, surveyed remote lakes, and created a training manual for future project coordinators. Jami also co-authored the grant that we obtained from Glacier National Park Associates. She worked with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and the Montana Loon Society throughout the season. Most importantly, Jami cultivated a solid relationship with the volunteers, especially a large core of returning volunteers.

**Volunteer of the Year: Sarah Hatfield**, Glacier National Park, received the 2007 Volunteer Award for her work in the park (GNP). She worked for several years with the Division of Interpretation and Education in GNP, as a Naturalists and as an Environmental Education Specialist on both the east and west sides of Glacier. Her volunteer work at the Learning Center was key to getting loon observation data entry completed in 2007. She also did field work with the Glacier's Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center (CCRLC).

## **2008**

**Partner of the Year: Chris Hammond** for his role in writing the State Loon Management Plan

(From an E-mail from Lynn Kelly dated Jan. 2010: Chris Hammond was awarded the Pioneer's Award in 2008 upon the completion of his thesis as well as the Partner's Award because of his role of writing the Common Loon Management Plan.)

**2008 Volunteer of the Year** (Didn't have one this year.)

**2008 Pioneer of the Year: Chris Hammon**, MT FWP for the completion of his thesis on Montana Loon Management, which became the Montana FWP's Loon Management Plan

## **2009**

**Partner of the Year: Scott Tomson**, US Forest Service, Seeley Lake biologist for his work with loons in the Clearwater Drainage in the Seeley Lake area. For many years,

Scott has served as the area Loon Coordinator for the Common Loon Working Group. Each year he has helped new loon rangers learn about the lakes in the area, as well as spent many hours helping them on the ground placing and removing signs. The Clearwater Drainage has always been one of the state's most productive loon areas. With Scott's help, it continues to be so.

**Volunteers of the Year: Chuck and Myrna Schwartz** have been watching loons and other wildlife on Dickey Lake since retiring and moving to Dickey Lake in 2001. They first alerted biologists to a new loon pair nesting on Dickey pond in 2007, and have been monitoring and managing access to this nest since then. Chuck and Myrna have worked with local land owners educating them, and their grandkids about loons, and garnering permission and support from local landowners to place signs as well as a nesting platform on privately owned Dickey pond. In 2009 Chuck and Myrna built and helped place three nesting platforms for our program— one replaced the 20 year-old cedar platform at south Dickey Lake, one replaced the sunken Lick Lake platform and the 3<sup>rd</sup> was placed at Dickey pond. Chuck listened to biologists discuss the challenges loons have in using the existing platforms, and added splash guards, and access ramps to this new model. He is also in the process of helping us develop a natural, overhead bald eagle deterrent to the platform as well as a better floating sign. In addition, Chuck drafted up a diagram and wrote directions for these platforms to include in the Loon Conservation Plan. The instructions/diagrams for building loon platforms in the northwest have not been updated since Don Skaar wrote the state's original loon plan in the late '80's. Our loon program in NW Montana has been given a "shot in the arm" by caring folks such as Chuck and Myrna, who have the skills and the desire to maintain loons and loon habitat in NW Montana!

## **2010**

**Partner of the Year: Ron Steiner** of Plum Creek Timber Company was a Montana Common Loon Working Group co-chair in 2009 and 2010. He helped with organization and logistics for our meetings, put together educational resources for loon conservation, manned the loon table for the annual Family Forestry EXPO, and provided essential funding for efforts such as our Loon Ranger intern program. His efforts convinced his corporation to temporarily close public access at the outlet to Ashley Lake to protect nesting loons. In addition, his communication skills and positive attitude were essential in resolving issues. Ron has been re-assigned to work in and near Coos Bay Oregon. We much appreciated his efforts and will miss him!

**Volunteer of the Year: Patricia Bouta of Seeley Lake.** The 2010 Montana Loon Society Volunteer of the Year Award goes to a person who is new to the Society, but jumped right in and took it upon herself to become our Newsletter Editor, almost sight unseen, since we hadn't had a newsletter editor for four years. We appreciate not only her hard work, but how wonderful the 2010 Newsletter turned out. It was beautiful and it was the first time that it was also available in electronic format, which will save the Society in future printing and shipping cost. We also recognize her for the fabulous loon costume that she made for loon functions. The original has already been used at the Loon and Fish Festival and the 4th of July Parade in Seeley Lake and other functions. Another contribution she has made to the cause of loons is to become the new MLS secretary. Since the secretary is in charge of keeping the membership files and she has a new

computer, she had to enter all the Society's data by hand into a new database. So, thank you for all your help, Patricia Bouta! Loons of Montana appreciate your service and talent!

**2011 – We didn't have regular awards this year, but Lynn gave Donna Love these two awards:**

**Honorary Membership: Donna Love of Seeley Lake** in recognition of outstanding and extraordinary service in helping the Montana Loon Society accomplish its purposes.

**Loon Lady Award: Donna Love of Seeley Lake** for distinguished service above and beyond anything we could ask or think, for the common loons in Montana.

**2012**

**MLS Partner of the Year Award, Jay Kolbe,**

Jay Kolbe, MT FWP Wildlife Biologist in FWP Region 2 has continually helped and assisted with loon management in the Blackfoot/Clearwater area in his quiet and unassuming manner for many years. Specifically, in the summer of 2012, on the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, he went out of his way to help with a report of a hurt loon, as well as assisted Chris Hammond with a night banding of the loon, so the Common Loon Working Group could, in part determine if there was in fact an injury. The bird and chick turned out fine, but this happened at a time when his family was visiting and all on his time off. He has also taken it upon himself to assist with the placement of the "no-wake" buoys on Seeley Lake, which provide safety for canoers and a quiet place on the lake for wildlife, including loons. Jay, we appreciate your service and sacrifice for wildlife and are pleased to present you this award.

**Volunteer of the Year Award, Larry Fenster**

Larry Fenster, a lakeshore owner at Ashley Lake for over 30 years, has been a dedicated volunteer for nearly that long working diligently for the benefit of the loons in any capacity asked of him. He has set and removed signs annually as well as stored and repaired them as needed. He has helped build, repair, foliate and move every nesting platform on the lake. He has been on several banding outings, identified banded birds, nesting sites, participated in many of the loon count days and constantly spreads the word to the unaware as to the importance of giving the loons their space. Larry has long had the reputation among the locals and the visitors as the man to ask about any of the flora and fauna in the Ashley Lake basin and its no wonder because once you've met him you will immediately recognize his friendly and unassuming style, his knowledge and passion for all things natural, an abundance of information and, you will have found a new friend.

**2013**

**Partner of the Year, Laura Holmquist**

As a Forest Service wildlife biologist and a mother, Laura Holmquist has carved out time over the last several years to put extra effort shaping education about lead toxicity and common loons. In 2013, Laura followed through on an idea and organized, created, designed two display boards discussing lead toxicity. The boards discuss the effects of lead toxicity to common loons and other waterfowl and give examples of safe alternatives. The presentation boards have a portable design so they may be set up at boat shows, county fairs, and other public venues to help raise awareness about the dangers of

lead to common loon conservation. Board Member Mark Ruby stated, "I have had the privilege of working with Laura for several years and am consistently impressed by her ability to balance her large workload and still find time to accomplish extra projects for loon conservation."

**Volunteer of the Year, Barbara Summer**

Barbara Summer joined Glacier National Park's Common Loon Citizen Science Program in 2006. She has been a dedicated volunteer every year since, contributing over 100 hours of her time each year. Living south of Bigfork, she has driven probably thousands of miles back and forth to Glacier to accomplish this volunteer effort. When she started, observing and recording data on wildlife was a new interest, but it lit a bright candle in her and she worked very hard and quickly excelled. She always goes the extra mile (literally and figuratively), getting out there at first light, spending several hours beyond the required one-hour survey to understand what is going on in the loon territory. She has spend hours searching for and successfully finding nests on some of Glacier's largest lakes, like Kintla Lake, where we have not historically had any nest locations documented. Due to her intensive effort, Barbara is the first person to observe a banded loon in Glacier National Park, again, a huge feat. Barbara's passion as a volunteer also shows through in her attention to detail, always making sure she completed surveys correctly. She also expanded to volunteer for Glacier High Country Citizen's Science program, Harlequin duck research, and HawkWatch program in Glacier. She has also assisted with the Youth Exploring Science program to engage high school student in citizen science. Jami Belt of Glacier National Park said, "Barbara is a treasure to us, an amazing field naturalist and a great ally for Glacier's Loons. Lisa Bates, also of Glacier, added, "I can't think of anyone more deserving of this award. Her passion, dedication and conservation ethic speak volumes about who Barbara is as a person."

**2014**

**Partner of the Year:** Kristi Dubois, MT FWP Region 2, Wildlife Biologist, for her many years of working with and overseeing the Blackfoot/Clearwater Loon Rangers, often using funds from her own budget for the Loon Ranger Program, and specifically for her work this past 2014 summer season undertaking the difficult task during the change from "wake" to "non-wake" status of Alva Lake in the Clearwater River Drainage near Seeley Lake. Due to great public information and outreach, a fabulous loon ranger, Cory Reiniger, (fully supported and kept well-informed by Kristi), and much needed signage, the change-over went fairly smoothly, and much easier than anyone thought.

**Volunteer of the Year:** Steve Gniadek of Columbia Falls for his work instigating, planning and organizing the new East Glacier/Blackfeet Indian Reservation Loon Ranger/Coordinator position. Steve was Glacier National Park's wildlife biologist for 20 years, and now as a layperson has continued his work with common loon management east of Glacier National Park and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation by developing this important position. Lynn said, "I am so thrilled about this loon ranger. This area has been a black hole for loons in Montana for some time. Steve's help was invaluable to understanding how our birds are doing in this important area."

**2015**

**Partner of the Year Award** was received by Lynn Johnson, Wildlife Biologist, Kootenai National Forest, Fortine and Rexford Ranger Districts (newly combined into the Ksanka Ranger District) for her many years of dedication to loon management. Lynn has been involved with loon monitoring, platform building, and the placement of nesting platforms and sign buoys since the early 1990's. She has coordinated the Loon Ranger program at Murphy Lake for the last 8 years and is currently the Common Loon Working Group Area Coordinator for the Murphy Lake and Eureka Areas. Lynn Kelly said, "Thank you, Lynn, for your many years of service."

**Volunteer of the Year Award** was received by Jami Belt who, for the past two years, has organized, guided and developed not only the depth and breadth of the Blackfoot Reserve Loon Ranger program, but personally oversaw the Loon Ranger and the on-the-ground work. As a biologist for Glacier National Park, this was not a part of her regular work, but took it upon herself to develop and become a part of this program, not only establishing the program, but advancing it as well. Jami has recently taken a job in Alaska and moved. Lynn said, "Thank you, Jami, for your awesome help and dedication."

Letters of Appreciation Awarded to: **Jon Obst**, MT FWP, **Bob Lee** of Flathead Search and Rescue, and **Gary Moses**, recently retired National Park Service with training in rescues, for their help rescuing a loon on Rogers Lake in November 2014, along with **Dr. Dennis Dugger** of Central Valley Animal Hospital in Kalispell who examined the rescued loon.

## 2016

### **Montana Loon Society Conservation Partner of the Year Award: Vital Ground Foundation**

The Montana Loon Society is honored to present the 2016 Conservation Partners Award to The Vital Ground Foundation for its protection of 145 acres of private land on Alvord Lake, located near Troy, MT. This project was the culmination of 12 years of efforts by the private landowner and many other organizations to finally protect a piece of land that provides nesting habitat for common loons as well as habitat for many other species including deer, elk, grizzly and black bears, mountain lions, moose, osprey, and great blue herons. The parcel is now the Alvord Lake Community Forest (can insert link to VG's website or news articles) and will be managed in conjunction with the partners and the local community who all made this project possible.

We want to specifically recognize the support and leadership of Ryan Lutey, previously Vital Ground's Director of Lands when the project was initiated, and now Vital Ground's Executive Director. Ryan kept this highly complex proposed Community Forest project on track, worked closely with the landowners, as well as partners, federal and state agencies, and members of the local community. He was responsible for submitting

numerous complex grant applications to the Forest Service, foundations, and many other organizations in a timely manner; he attended a multitude of community meetings; he constantly worked with Vital Ground's board and staff and helped make this project the focus of Vital Ground's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. It was this last effort, as part of Bart the Bear's Memorial Challenge at the end of 2015, that the remainder of the needed funds for Alvord Lake was raised from Vital Ground's most dedicated supporters. Alvord Lake was the single most expensive and complex project that Vital Ground has ever undertaken and it would not have been possible without Ryan's leadership along with support from the Vital Ground's staff, Board of Trustees, partners, supporters, and local community. - Montana Loon Society (Information supplied by Gael Bissell)

### **2016 Partner of the Year Award: Paul Ramelhart**

Paul Rumelhart was a huge help with coordinating all the activities at the Alvord Lake Festival. These included helping write press releases, arranging shuttles to and from Kalispell and many other aspects of organizing a large event. On the day of the event he participated at the loon/bird table. He made a species list for the area and had it copied for participants. He also helped set up and take down displays and visited with many of the 100 attendees. – Gael Bissell

### **2016 Volunteer of the Year Award: Tony Dawson, Ashley Lake**

Tony Dawson recognized a potential problem with a new home being built almost directly behind the floating platform at the Causeway Territory on Ashley Lake. He suggested that we put in place a screen that would hide the heavy equipment and workers from the platform. He obtained permission from the landowner to allow us to put up a screen. On the first attempt, we (Tony, Keely (tech), and I) used a black heavy landscape fabric that was attached to trees using large screws and 2" x 2" x 8' wood pieces. We cut slits in the fabric to help with wind flow. Unfortunately, the wind was too strong and the blind was ripped off of the trees. We moved on to plan B. I purchased camouflage similar to that used on duck blinds hoping that the wind would not be an issue. Tony and I took down the remaining landscape fabric and replaced it with the camouflage. The nest was unsuccessful, but we are not sure if it was loon related or blind related. Tony made every effort to protect the nest from the construction short of asking the landowner not to build (Who knows, maybe he did!). The good news is that Tony's communication with that landowner was positive and they seemed sincerely interested in loon conservation and management on Ashley Lake. His dedication to the management and conservation outreach efforts for common loons are unmatched by any other Montana lake home owner that I know. – Chris Hammond

### **2017 Partner of the Year: Lorin Hicks, Columbia Falls**

Lorin Hicks, Columbia Falls, former Plum Creek and now Weyerhaeuser Wildlife Biologist for his help and support for Montana's loons and MLS throughout his years with Plum Creek. (More information at a later date.) The 2017 Partner of the Year award

was presented to Wildlife Biologist Dr. Lorin Hicks of Kalispell. Dr. Hicks recently retired from Weyerhaeuser Company after working for them since their purchase of Plum Creek Timber Company's mill in Columbia Falls, MT. Prior to his retirement, Lorin served as Plum Creek's Director of Fish and Wildlife Resources and was responsible for wildlife management on over 7.9 million acres in Washington, Idaho, Montana, Arkansas, Louisiana, and 16 other states, though he made Montana his home. He has dealt with huge wildlife issues from grizzly bears to bats, from spotted owls to bull trout, and everything in between. Through it all he still had time to help with Montana's 200 strong common loon population. In the early years, Plum Creek provided a grant to develop the loon trunks. Following that, both Plum Creek and Weyerhaeuser supported the CLWG Loon Ranger program and the loon band contest. All of this happened because Dr. Hicks cared about Montana's loons. MLS President Lynn Kelly said, "We can't thank him enough for all he has done for the society and for Montana's loons, and we hope he stays in touch."

### **2017 Volunteer of the Year: Barry Gordon, Ovando Resident, Upsata Lake**

Barry Gordon, caretaker at Upsata Lake Lodge, which is now a US Fish & Wildlife Private Lands Office for USFW Region 6, Mountain-Prairie. We thank Barry for his care for the lake's loons that haven't hatched chicks for several years, but with Barry's help is now back "on-line" for chicks, and for assembling the new loon buoys for the Clearwater and Blackfoot areas. An important loon nesting lake, Upsata Lake is on the northwest border of the 119 acres Upsata Lake Waterfowl Production area located 5.5 miles northeast of Ovando in the heart of the knob and kettle topography of the Blackfoot River watershed. The lake itself has a state boat launch and picnic area. The eastern portion of the WPA is open to hunting (elk, deer, and some waterfowl), but bring your bear spray! Grizzly bears are a common sight. After losing loons on Salmon Lake in the Clearwater Drainage system to the west, Upsata Lake is now the most southern loon lake in Montana and as such, is an important linkage lake to loons to the south. It is also one of only three lakes left with nesting loons on the main Blackfoot River drainage and is important for loon colonization for other area lakes. Lynn Kelly said, "Barry's help with this lake's loons, and for assembling the new buoys for the Clearwater/Blackfoot area are very much appreciated. It's great to have new people stepping up the plate for the cause of loons."

### **2018 Partner of the Year: Rachel Manley**

The 2018 Partner of the Year Award was presented to Rachel Manley, Wildlife Technician for Glacier View, Hungry Horse, and Spotted Bear Ranger Districts for her many years of work in the Flathead. Rachel has worked hard to develop relationships with landowners around Halfmoon and Spoon lakes to provide education about loons. Her effort on Spoon Lake has especially paid off. Many VRBO rentals exist on that lake and she ensured all have information available and has worked with the landowners to make sure they emphasized the importance of giving nesting loons space. She also started deploying floating signs around the nesting area, and in 2017 she partnered with Chris Hammond at MTFWP to make improvements on the floating platform at Teepee Lake to provide nesting habitat. Flathead National Forest Wildlife Biologist, Laura Strong, said,

“These conservation efforts are vital to the continued success of common loons in Northwestern Montana.”

### **2018 Volunteer of the Year: Anne Dahl, Condon**

The 2018 Volunteer of the Year Award was presented to Anne Dahl of Condon, MT for all her work counting loons in the Mission Mountain Wilderness, Swan Ranger District. For many years, Anne has hiked to Lindbergh (a four mile hike) and Crystal Lake (a three mile hike) for both the May and July surveys to count loons. Thanks to her dedication we have many years of data on loons at these lakes. Forest Service Wildlife Biologist Mark Ruby on the Swan Ranger District said, “Anne Dahl has been an enduring presence for loons in the Swan Valley. Sun, rain, snow or ice, Anne has been steadfast in her monitoring and reporting of loons, especially on the difficult to reach lakes of Lindbergh and Crystal.”

### **2018 Conservation Award: Ralph Burchenal, Ovando**

The 2018 Conservation Award was bestowed posthumously on Ralph Burchenal (1931-2018) for all his work for Montana’s loons through his generous support for the society, and his dedicated care of the nesting loons on Shoup Lake situated on his ranch in Ovando (Blackfoot River drainage). Last fall, a memorial service was held for him in his home state, Ohio, but another is being planned for him in the Ovando area this summer. It is then that we will present this award to his wife, Toone. MLS President Lynn Kelly said, “We will miss this kind, generous man who loved all things Montana, and Montana’s loons.”

### **2019 MLS Partner of the Year: Tim Their, Retired MT FWP Wildlife Biologist, Kalispell**

The 2019 MLS Partner of the Year Award goes to recently retired MT FWP Wildlife Biologist, Tim Their. Chris Hammond, Co-Chair of the Common Loon Working Group, wrote in his nomination letter, “I do not know of a man more deserving of Montana Loon Society's Partner of the Year Award. In all reality, Tim Thier, was deserving of this award for as long as I have known him, nearly 20 years. I feel I have learned more from Tim than I learned in some of my wildlife courses in college. Without Tim, many of Montana's loon territories would likely have succumbed to human disturbance. He never even flinched when you asked for assistance and placed floating loon signs around a platform on Bull Lake for more years than I can remember. His dedication to common loon conservation in the Trego and Eureka areas contributed to the local expansion of breeding territories on public and private lakes, an amazing feat for anyone. If folks only knew of what Tim's schedule consisted of on a daily basis they would question whether he was even human. For these reasons, I believe Tim is long overdue to be recognized as the Partner of the Year.” MLS President, Lynn Kelly, said, “Congratulations, Tim, on your retirement, and thank you, for all you have done for loons in Northwestern Montana. We look forward to working with you in your new role as a retiree on our lakes.”

### **2019 MLS Volunteer of the Year: Kris Kindberg, Eureka, MT**

The MLS Volunteer of the Year Award was received by Kris Kindberg who for the past 17 years has been watching loons on Eureka Area lakes. She has taken a special interest in monitoring the loon pair and nesting activities on Tetrault Lake in the Tobacco Valley and in 2019 was a midnight observer to the banding of both adults and 1 chick. Kris has been a MLS Board Member for the past 5 years and in 2019 she put a great amount of effort into organizing a successful Pint Night fundraiser at HA Brewery. This also provided a great opportunity for MLS to get information out to the local area and the proceeds help support the Loon Ranger Program that is critical to tracking loon nesting success and population counts of Montana's loons. Thank you, Kris, for your dedicated watch over the Tetrault loons and your contribution to the Montana Loon Society.

### **2020 MLS Partner of the Year: Glacier National Park Citizen Science Program**

The Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) is considered a Species of Special Concern by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, due to the species' sensitivity to disturbance during nesting season and its low reproductive and recruitment rates. Glacier National Park (GNP) began monitoring loons in 1988 by joining the July Loon Day effort to count all the loons in Montana during this single day. While this effort revealed that Glacier supported 20- 25% of Montana's breeding Common Loon population, it left many gaps in our knowledge about loons and how to protect them and their habitat.

In 2006, with generous support from the Glacier National Park Conservancy, GNP established the Common Loon Citizen Science project to train volunteers to gather baseline data on population and distribution of common loons, to improve accuracy during an annual Loon Day count, and to increase survey coverage of 45 lakes in Glacier. Citizen Scientists in GNP attend a one day training on loon ecology and how to safely and ethically monitor them, and then volunteer their time to hike long miles and drive often rough roads to each of these lakes frequently throughout the breeding season. In addition to helping us track loon populations GNP Citizen Scientists have also helped us identify nesting sites and nursery areas, document hatch dates and nest failures and helped us learn a lot more about loon ecology than we ever expected. And they have educated countless visitors and locals on the sensitivity of loons and importance of preserving this charismatic species. An average of 110 citizen scientists donate considerable time each season to helping us monitor loons, and have conducted over 2700 surveys and contributed 42,655 hours of their time. It is a vast understatement to say "We could not do it without them"!

### **2020 Volunteer of the Year: Lori Micken, Pierce Lake Cabin Owner**

The Swan Valley holds many remarkable things, but Pierce Lake resident Lori Micken, Montana author, school teacher, naturalist, biologist and local loon steward, is one of its best kept secrets. In the 15 years the Loon Society has worked in the Swan Valley, Pierce Lake has been the most steadfast and productive loon nesting lake in the valley. For most of this time it has been the Swan's only productive nesting lake. In truth, Lori has been kind enough to teach us a great deal about loon conservation from her knowledge of the birds and this one lake. Over the years, Lori has fastidiously chronicled and reported

nesting dates, hatch dates, platform condition or needed repairs, threats to the birds and chick survival. She has loaned her boat and property for many hours of loon observations, floating sign deployment or banding operations. It is past due that Lori should be recognized for all her work for loon conservation at Pierce Lake. Mark Ruby, Region 2 MLS Board Member and U.S. Forest Service Biologist, said, "I am proud to be able to nominate her for volunteer of the year as a small token for what she does for common loons at Pierce Lake and the help she has provided for their management in the Swan Valley."

### **2020 Conservation of the Year: Ashley Lake Property Owners Association, Kalispell**

The 2020 Montana Loon Society Conservation of the Year Award goes to the Ashley Lake Property Owners Association (ALPOA). This association is made up of landowners in the Ashley lake watershed basin and was formed over 25 years ago. In 1996 the neighbors came together to form the Ashley Lake Neighborhood Plan which has this as its vision statement "The vision statement of the Ashley Lake Neighborhood is to provide a safe community and preserve and enhance upon the unique environment in which we have been fortunate to have bestowed upon us. To this end we seek to be strong stewards protecting the water, air quality, maintaining the serenity and improving upon the health of the forest that surround Ashley Lake, and maintain the closeness of the Ashley Lake Community." All of those living around the lake have a passion for the loons that spend their spring, summers and fall at the lake and many years ago ALPOA created a "Loon Fund" where donations could be made to support the preservation of the loons. A portion of this money has been donated to the Montana Loon Society on an annual basis and is used to support among other things, the Loon Ranger Program, nesting signs and floating nesting platforms. ALPOA recognizes the inevitable continued growth and development of lakeshore and has many folks who are committed to doing everything humanly possible to maintain a strong loon presence on the lake. Every year at their annual meeting Tony Dawson, known locally as "The Loon Guy", and a member of the MLS board, gives a *State of the Loon* address which is often followed by many stories from excited lakeshore owners. They love to talk about the loons they recently saw or the haunting calls in the evening or sightings of chicks in the spring. The lake has the distinction of having more nesting pair of loons than any lake west of the Mississippi with 4 pair!

Ashley Lake is a significant breeding area and has been credited with spreading its population to nearby lakes which then leapfrog to more lakes and expand the northwest Montana population. Members of ALPOA deserve great credit for their continued commitment and support in the interest of the common loon. Congratulations ALPOA and thank you for your continued support!

### **2021 Partner of the Year: Smith Wells, MT FWP GIS Natural Resource Analyst**

This year's Partner of the Year was awarded to Smith Wells, MT FWP GIS Natural Resource Analyst in Helena for her work on integrating MT loon data with Glacier National Park data. Smith Wells was the tech force who moved the Common Loon Working Group to one statewide database! She has also been instrumental as we transitioned to Survey 123 as our tool for May and July surveys and other observations.

Smith took on merging the Glacier National Park database in with the rest of the agencies and tribes which was no easy feat. She worked hand in hand with agency biologists to understand the needs of the survey, how to make sure everyone had access to it, and help us learn how to get the data back when we needed it to make land management decisions. Laura Strong, past CLWG Co-chair said, "Smith is such a pleasure to work with and shows her expertise at every turn. We're so thankful to FWP for letting her work with us on this project--we couldn't have done it without her." Jami Belt, present CLWG Co-chair said, "Thank you, Smith, for your dedication and patience! You are a deserving recipient of this Partner of the Year AWARD! We appreciate you. On behalf of the entire Common Loon Working Group, Thank you."

### **2021 Volunteer of the Year: Daniel and Virginia Poleschook, Photographers and Naturalists**

This year's MLS Volunteer of the Year was awarded to Daniel and Virginia Poleschook for their generous donation of their spectacular loon photos for use on our new website.

Not many miles away in Washington State, Daniel and Ginger have helped conduct conservation efforts on a small population of common loons in the northeast corner of the state near Loon Lake. In addition, they have also done work on the western side of the state on the Pacific coast and near Puget Sound.

The 78 common loon images in 15 categories that they shared with us are a small representation of the over one-million of the species that they have acquired since they started their work in 1996. With over 90 hard drives filled with their loon and other waterbird images, (and a large spreadsheet to provide information on each image!) their gift to the Montana Loon Society made it possible for our new loon web site to be one of the best in the state, and maybe even the nation.

MLS President Lynn Kelly said, "We appreciate their love of loons, their dedication to promoting information about common loons, and their years of work for loon conservation. We are honored by their gift to us and to Montana's loons."

### **2021 Conservation of the Year: Jack and Rachel Potter, Tepee Lake, North Fork Valley Cabin Owners**

This year's Conservation Award goes to Jack and Rachel Potter, who, along with other cabin owners on Tepee Lake in the North Fork of the Flathead River, successfully petitioned MTFWP to limit lake watercraft to manually operated watercraft only.

Tepee Lake is a 43 acre, 20 feet deep lake at its deepest, with no perennial surface

inlet or outlet. It sits in the Tepee Lake Complex, which is rated by the MT Dept. of Environmental Quality as a Wetland of Outstanding Significance due to its great diversity of wetland plant communities.

Historic data of common loons on the lake is unknown, but common loons and nesting success have been documented since the 1950's. It is known that it has produced 23 loon chicks in the past thirty years. People on the lakeshore and wildlife (even bears) sometimes disturbed the nest, so twelve years ago, cabin owners requested and were granted by MTFWP an artificial nesting platform be installed, which helped nesting success.

Their petition stated that although there is currently no motorized use on the lake, nor any history of it, with the increase of people to Glacier National Park and new settlement in the North Fork Valley, it will only be a matter of time before a new neighbor or visitor brings a motorboat or jet-ski to the lake. The petitioners hope the new manually powered watercraft status will preserve the peace, quiet, and rustic character of the area before a conflict develops.

Montana Loon Society President Lynn Kelly stated, "We applaud the efforts of Jack and Rachel for their foresight in preserving Tepee Lake, limiting it to manually operated watercraft. The loons on the lake appreciate it, too."