

On the Path

Party and Fundraiser at El Topo Cantina Nov 7!

By Keith Hammer

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What do you get when you when you put John Dunnigan in Bigfork's El Topo Cantina and stir in a great nonprofit cause? Another Swan View Coalition fundraising party to help conserve habitat for fish, wildlife and people in the Swan Range!

That's right, John Dunnigan will provide his unique brand of music and humor, El Topo will provide finger food, the Cantina will be open for beverages, over \$3,000 in merchandise and services will be offered in a silent auction, and two fine Patagonia jackets will be raffled off! This winning combination provided good times for all in 2003 and 2006, and we're set for a similar celebration come Sunday, November 7, from 5-8 pm!

Yes, these parties are more than just fundraisers! They are a great time for folks that love the great outdoors to come out of the woodwork, socialize and share stories with one another about their adventures. And a lot has transpired since Swan View's last party at El Topo that needs to be celebrated!

While we may often doubt whether it does any good to write letters to public officials, letters written by Swan View Coalition members and others have secured giant strides in the protection of fish and wildlife habitat. In 2009, the Flathead National Forest secured twenty miles of trail along the Swan Crest for non-motorized recreation and increased wildlife security there by prohibiting motorcycles. The Napa Ridge Trail, Bruce Ridge Trail, and the southernmost reaches of Alpine Trail #7 now provide the peace needed by wildlife and people seeking quiet habitat!

In 2009, Fish and Wildlife Service designated 39,000 square miles of National Forests in six western states as "critical habitat" for threatened lynx, with some 13,000 square miles of that in Montana. Some large-owner private lands were also designated, including large chunks of former Plum Creek lands in the Swan Valley now being brought under public ownership as a part of the Montana Legacy Project. Lands designated as "critical habitat" for a threatened or endangered species like lynx are provided another level of protection because "adverse modification" of those habitats is prohibited by federal law.

Last month, Fish and Wildlife Service designated 20,000 miles of streams and 500,000 acres of lakes in Montana, Washington, Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada as critical habitat for threatened bull trout, along with 750 miles of coastal habitat in Washington. The designation of critical habitat will go far to protect the habitats bull trout depend upon for their survival, and this protection will benefit people and all life dependent on clean water!

These designations come after years of struggle and are of little meaning, however, without the constant vigilance of an informed public and nonprofit conservation organizations like Swan View Coalition, Friends of the Wild Swan, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, and many others. Hence we must take time to celebrate and to renew our commitments to conservation. Parties like the upcoming fundraiser at El Topo Cantina

are key in lifting our spirits and reminding us that we are part of a larger community of folks working to conserve America's fish and wildlife!

Speaking of wildlife, John Dunnigan defines his critical habitat as "bierstubes, corporate events, weddings, schools, fairs and festive brouhahas of every conceivable kind." His web site continues, "If Jimmy Buffett, James Taylor and John Prine were joined together in some bizarre musical cloning experiment, the outcome would be John Dunnigan." If you've already seen John perform, you'll be at El Topo November 7! If not, you'll want to mark your calendar and take in this unique experience!

Silent auction items at the event are geared toward maintaining our personal health and appreciation of the outdoors. Two hand-crafted fire bowls by Chris Gotschalk host grizzly bear and Swan Range themes and will make an excellent addition to one's backyard, while a wind-form yard sculpture by John Noyes spins a flock of metal birds in the slightest of breezes! A wide array of art and photography bring the great outdoors into our homes and a number of gift certificates for therapeutic massage, acupuncture and craniosacral therapy will help keep us fit for our outdoor adventures, geared up with a \$100 gift certificate from Rocky Mountain Outfitter!

A suggested \$5 donation at the door will help cover costs of food and will also buy your first raffle ticket for one of two fine Patagonia fleece jackets, men's or women's! So come enjoy yourselves and do a little early holiday shopping to help conserve the great outdoors we all love! The party will run from 5-8 pm, but the silent auction will close at 6:30, followed by the jacket raffle drawings – so don't be late!

Keith Hammer grew up hiking, skiing, camping, hunting, and fishing in the Swan Mountains. He has worked a number of jobs, from Forest Service trail worker to logger to backcountry guide, and currently works as an environmental consultant and head of the nonprofit Swan View Coalition. His column appears regularly in this paper and is archived at www.swanrange.org. Keith can be reached at 406-755-1379 or keith@swanview.org.



Handcrafted fire bowls for auction by Chris Gotschalk.