



# 2020 Annual Report



## Our Mission

The mission of the Clearwater Resource Council is to engage the community and facilitate efforts that will enhance, conserve, sustain and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Clearwater Watershed for present and future generations.

## Our Goals

- Build community capacity to resolve issues;
- Create opportunities for interaction among citizens, businesses and agencies;
- Build common ground by consensus process;
- Facilitate timely collection and dissemination of information;
- Enhance the understanding of cumulative effects of land management practices; and
- Develop and support responsible resource stewardship programs.

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Lindy Gracey, Project Assistant  
Emily McGuirt, BSWC Member  
Haylie Brown, GIS Technician  
Bonnie Johnson, Accountant  
Jeff Harrits, Webmaster

## Description of Basin

The Clearwater watershed, located in Missoula County, Montana, has unique natural resource values as it forms the southernmost portion of the North Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE), which extends from the Highwood River in Alberta to the Blackfoot River in Montana. The NCDE is also known as the “Crown of the Continent” and encompasses over 10 million acres of some of the most unspoiled lands on the North American continent. Astoundingly, all of the plants and animals which resided here during the expedition of Lewis and Clark in the early 1800s continue to inhabit this region, making it all the more important to conserve these lands for the continued survival of these species. Additionally, the watershed has unique cultural values to both the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Blackfeet Nation who referred to this area as the “backbone of the world.” This region embodies the convergence of natural beauty and cultural heritage.



Photo: Emily McGuirt



Glacial forces shaped the Clearwater valley’s unique topography over two million years ago, and formed the succession of lakes, which from north to south include: Summit Lake, Clearwater Lake, Rainy Lake, Lake Alva, Lake Inez, Seeley Lake, and Salmon Lake, along with Placid and Big Sky Lakes. The economic importance of this chain of lakes is undeniable since the hub of activity here in the Clearwater occurs in close proximity to these bodies of water. They provide prime recreational opportunities, such as fishing, swimming, and boating, for both residents and tourists.

The Clearwater watershed is still pristine in nature although several of its species (bull trout, Canada lynx, and grizzly bear) are listed under the Endangered Species Act. The complex connectivity of the waterways in this region provides the ideal ecosystem for the threatened bull trout, while the large swaths of uninterrupted forested areas provide habitat for grizzly bears and Canada lynx. Moreover, together with the Swan Lake region and the Lincoln Ranger District, the Clearwater has distinctive landscape connectivity value, linking the Bob Marshall, the Lincoln Scapegoat, and the Mission Mountain Wilderness areas. This landscape connectivity is vital to the survival of many organisms, as habitat fragmentation is one of the most commonly cited threats to both aquatic and terrestrial species survival.

# CRC's Program Highlights

## Bonneville Environmental Foundation (BEF) Model Watershed Program

In 2011, CRC was selected in a competitive process by BEF as a model watershed due to its outstanding natural resource values and its meaningful environmental programs. While the 10-year funding commitment from BEF ends in 2021, this support has allowed CRC to strengthen its aquatics programs as described below.

### Aquatics Programs

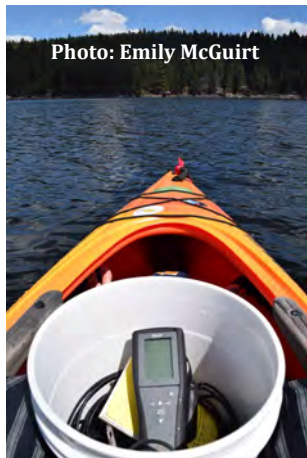
#### ADOPT-A-STREAM (AAS)

Established in 2013, CRC continued AAS with the assistance of several dedicated community volunteers. In 2020, CRC monitored 11 sites, obtaining a total of 162 total samples, for the following creeks: Morrell, Seeley, Camp, Rice, Trail, Blind Canyon, Swamp, Mountain, West Fork Clearwater, East Fork Clearwater, and Richmond. The nutrient monitoring in fire-affected streams has been particularly important in measuring the impacts of the two major fire events which occurred in 2017. See the CRC website for the 2020 AAS field season results.



#### ADOPT-A-LAKE (AAL)

CRC completed its 12th year of lake monitoring using basic water quality parameters including dissolved oxygen, temperature and secchi disc readings. In 2020, with the help of our dedicated volunteers, CRC monitored 13 sites for the following lakes: Alva, Big Sky, Inez, Placid, Salmon, and Seeley. The results from this long-term data set allowed us to conclude that a heightened investment in water quality monitoring was needed, and CRC was able to secure funding from the Bureau of Reclamation to collect baseline nutrient samples starting in 2021. See the CRC website for the 2020 AAL field season results.



#### AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

Since 2011, CRC volunteers and staff have continued to be statewide leaders in creating a model AIS monitoring program by testing our highest risk lakes for the absence/presence of AIS. In 2020, CRC monitored 62 sites 5 times each on the following lakes:

Alva, Big Sky, Inez, Placid, Salmon, Seeley, Lindbergh, Holland, Browns, Upsata, and Cooper's. We are happy to report that all of our samples came back negative for the presence of invasive mussels.

#### Students-in-Action (SIA)

CRC partnered with the Seeley-Swan High School to monitor water quality in Morrell Creek. This service project promotes hands-on learning related to practical science and math skills. CRC also deployed virtual Aquatic Invasive Species curricula to science classes during the spring of 2020. See the CRC website for the 2020 SIA field results.

#### Macroinvertebrate Monitoring — Pilot Program (new in 2020)

This year, CRC launched a macroinvertebrate program to (1) monitor for the presence/absence of invasive species; and (2) to obtain a baseline for aquatic biodiversity. Macroinvertebrates (aquatic bugs) serve as the “canary in the coalmine” for our local waters. See the CRC website for the 2020 macroinvertebrate monitoring results.



## Fuels Mitigation

Reducing the potential for catastrophic wildfire around homes is a top priority for CRC. In 2020, CRC coordinated fuel mitigation activities and educated the community on creating and maintaining healthy forests. We also launched a community approach to fuels mitigation, with over 50 property owners in the Big Sky Lake area enrolling in the CRC fuels mitigation program. Over the course of the past year, CRC worked with the residents to undertake fuels mitigation projects on over 400 acres of forested lands. To date, CRC has channeled over \$4 million dollars of federal, state, county and matching funds for fuel mitigation work on over 3,000 acres of private property. We are excited to expand this program in 2021 with the new funding sources secured in 2020.

## Forest Landscape Restoration

CRC continued to participate in the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project (CFLRP), a program of the U.S. Forest Service that addresses fuel mitigation, forest restoration, fish and wildlife habitat improvements, noxious weed treatment and renewable resource management in selected landscapes. As an extension of this effort, CRC worked with partners to obtain needed funding for specific on-the-ground terrestrial restoration projects.

## Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (BCSA)

CRC continued to partner with a diverse group of stakeholders on the pending BCSA. If passed, the Act would add 78,000 acres to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Mission Mountains Wilderness Areas, and would protect forest-based jobs and local economies.

## Trails

With funding from the Seeley Lake Community Foundation, and in partnership with the USFS, CRC worked to design new educational signage at the Big Larch campground. Signs will be installed in 2021.

## Clearwater Lakes Alliance (CLA)

The CLA was successfully launched in 2020 at Placid Lake. The goal of CLA is to empower lakeshore property owners to take a more proactive role in managing the health of lakes upon which they live. More specifically, CRC facilitated discussions between the Placid Lake Cabin owners and MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks to develop a strategy to better manage the private dam on Placid Lake. In addition, CRC obtained funding to support the development of a Placid Lake Management Plan in 2021.



## Education and Outreach

**Committee:** CRC created a communications/education committee to enhance existing education and outreach activities. Several of our CRC's newest events include:



Photo: Emily McGuirt

### Northern Pike Conservation effort:

In 2020, CRC worked with the Placid Lake Cabin owners and MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks to host a Northern Pike monitoring effort to assess whether invasive Northern Pike had previously breached the Placid Lake dam and entered the lake (a haven for native fish species). The spearfishing group from Missoula that conducted the survey on behalf of the stakeholders fortunately found no Northern pike. While this is not definitive proof that the invasive Northern pike have not entered Placid Lake, the survey results served as an indicator that the lake was still potentially viable for native fish populations.

### Make-the-Cut Invasive Lily Event (new in 2020)

Invasive fragrant water lilies have proliferated in most of our lakes over the last decade, and is problematic as these lilies:

- Reduce habitat for native fish;
- Displace native aquatic plant species;
- Adversely impact recreational opportunities as boats are impeded with invasive water lilies;
- Increase available mosquito habitat; and
- Contributes to algae growth/decreased water quality.

To address this threat, CRC launched its *Make-the-Cut* lily project which removed over 500 lbs of invasive lilies in Placid and Salmon Lakes in 2020, with the assistance of a large group of volunteers. Based on the success of this pilot, the program will be expanded in 2021.



Photo: Seeley Swan Pathfinder



Photo: Emily McGuirt

### Macroinvertebrate Workshop

This summer workshop focused on developing macroinvertebrate identification skills and providing hand-on monitoring exercises. Both aquatic invasive species and native species were incorporated into this workshop. The goal of the workshop was to educate residents about the critical role of macroinvertebrates in local ecosystems.

**New Merchandising Line:** CRC launched a new merchandising line to increase public exposure to CRC and its mission. Visit [crcmt.org](http://crcmt.org) place your orders today!

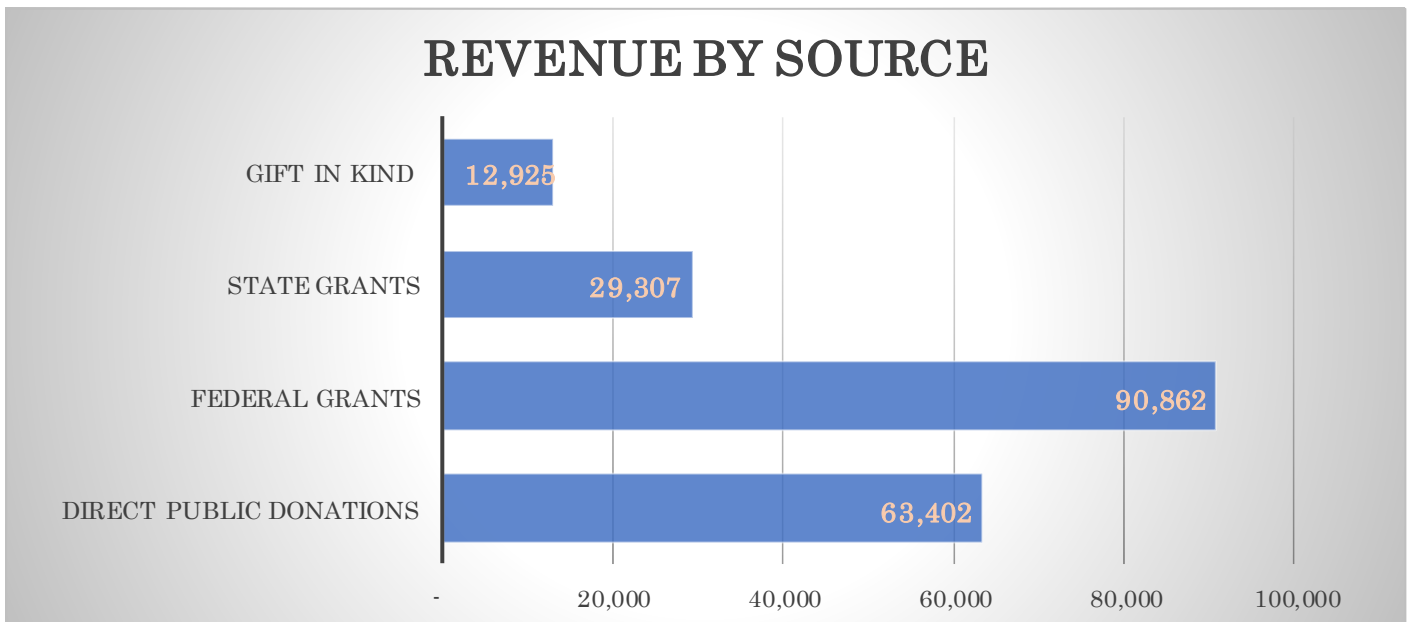
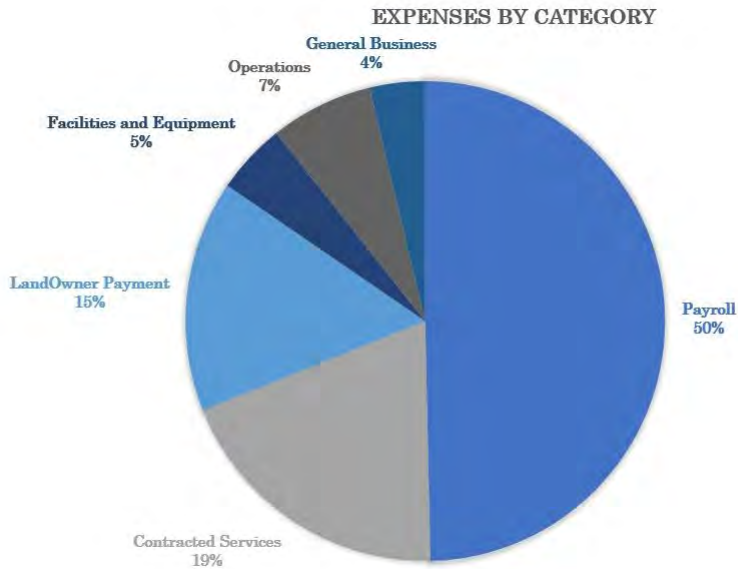
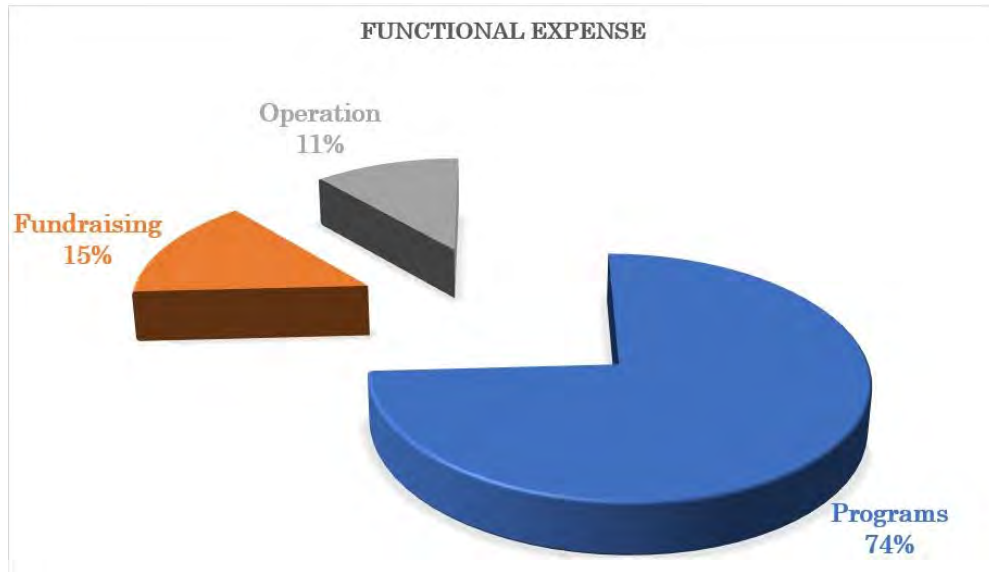


Photo: Emily McGuirt



Photo: Emily McGuirt

# CRC's 2020 Financials Highlights



## Thank you, Sponsors!

Citizens Alliance Bank, Fraternal Order of Eagles #32, Garden City Compost, Heritage Printing, Highlander Beer, Missoula Textiles, Rovero's Hardware, Seeley Lake Community Foundation, Seeley Swan Pathfinder, Stageline Pizza

## Thank you, Photographers!

Front & back covers: Emily McGuirt  
Pages 2-3: Jeff Harrits

## Thank you, Volunteers!

Reyna Abreu-Vigil, Judd Binley, Tom Dauenhauer, Jed Dewey, Tommy Driscoll, Fred Fleming, Pat Gleason, Barry Gordon, Robert Harman, Cathy Harrits, Jeff Harrits, Jeff Holm, Carol Hunter, Chris Hunter, Allison Hurcomb, Dave Johnson, Penny Johnson, Sarah Klaus, George Leighton, Roger Marshall, Avery McGuirt, Juliana Ritter, Abby Schmeichel, Clyde Sterling, Sherry Sterling, Glen Stocking, Joy Stocking, Abigail Toretsky, Joann Wallenburn, David Wallenburn, Britt Wood, April Woodhouse, and Steve Woodhouse

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