

ARCHIVED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORTS

January 2014

Over dinner the other day in Missoula, I was regaled by Kristi DuBois' stories about her long (and continuing) career as one of the first female field biologists at the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Back in the day, Kristi worked under the tutelage of Jim Posewitz, now retired as the department's director of Ecological Services and the agency's — nay, Montana state government's undisputed champion of conservation.

While leading the agency's broad conservation mission, Posewitz also was active in the non-governmental sector. In 1983, he joined Leonard and Sandy Sargent and Phil Tawney to found the Cinnabar Foundation as Montana's homegrown conservation fund. In the intervening 30 years, the Foundation has provided 1,500 often-pivotal grants to community-based project and grass-roots activists committed to carrying forward Montana's constitutional pledge to provide a "clean and healthful environment" for its citizens.

Four years after Poz once again, retired, this time as Cinnabar's part-time executive director, I stepped into those big shoes. When I meet with people like Kristi and her super-volunteer husband Bert Lindler, I'm reminded that we inherit Montana's spectacular natural legacy not by accident, but thanks to the dedication of those who came before us. And virtually every day I learn of fresh projects, local initiatives, and energetic new volunteers who are working to keep Montana the "Last Best Place."

As the calendar turns to 2014, several recent events have sharpened my appreciation for the unique role that Cinnabar plays in Montana.

- Our second Conservation Story Contest attracted dozens of submissions. Our stellar panel of judges was led by Bozeman writer Todd Wilkinson alongside five Cinnabar board members, who selected the **best conservation stories of 2013** around the theme Celebrating Success and Envisioning the Future. During their deliberations, I was struck by the judges' blend of forward-looking clarity

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leavened with more than 200 years of collective experience as actors in their own Montana conservation stories.

- We mailed our **2013 annual report** to more than 100 people who have donated to the Cinnabar Foundation since 2010. Our board decided we needed to provide a more formal accounting to our growing number of donors. And then board members, led by Secretary Judi Stauffer, took the lead to write and design the report.
- After crunching the numbers for our annual report, I was struck by the tiny fraction of our budget that goes toward administrative overhead, less than four percent. That's possible due to the tremendous dedication of our board members and volunteers. Donors tell us they like knowing that their dollars go directly to conservation on the ground.
- My dinner with Kristi and Bert, both conservation heroes in their own right, brought it all home. Bert and Kristi recently informed us that they are **leaving a bequest** to the Cinnabar Foundation in their wills. "We've both seen the good that the Cinnabar Foundation has done during our lives," Bert said, "and we have every reason to believe it will continue doing so far many decades to come."

In a nutshell, it's about our legacy. We are privileged to enjoy the fruits of conservationists who labored before us, and we are responsible for the legacies we leave for future generations. It's a mantle that we proudly wear at the Cinnabar Foundation.

— Steve Thompson

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