

ARCHIVED LETTERS FROM THE CHAIR

June 2010

The Cinnabar Foundation found itself thrust in an unfamiliar orbit when Jim Posewitz announced his plans to retire as the Foundation's one and only executive director. Jim's keen insight, thoughtful vision, and consummate passion for wild lands and wild places have helped inform and inspire Cinnabar's mission since its founding more than a quarter century ago. With that same focus, Jim joined the rest of the board in redesigning his staff position to address the challenges facing the Foundation as it launches new initiatives to fulfill its fundamental mission to fund, in perpetuity, conservation advocacy, education, and research, and the preservation of open space. After completing the search process, the board unanimously voted to hire Steve Thompson, and we could not be happier with our decision.

Steve comes to Cinnabar with 19 years experience as a conservation professional, most recently as a senior program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). Opening NPCA's first field office in the nation, Steve channeled his considerable creative energy into literally putting the Crown of the Continent on the map.

Our new executive director became acquainted with the Cinnabar Foundation many years ago through his work with several Foundation constituents, initially as the first field organizer for the Montana Wilderness Association and then as a board member for the Cabinet Resource Group and Citizens for a Better Flathead. Steve also served as a founding board co-chair of the Montana Conservation Voters and helped another Foundation grantee, the Yaak Valley Forest Council, craft its first strategic plan.

Through his work with each of these organizations, Steve says he "came to realize that victories are tenuous without building a stronger culture of conservation in . . . rural communities." Over the past decade, much of Steve's work has focused on building trust among a broad spectrum of community groups, breaking down barriers, and "creating nontraditional partnerships," which he says recognize a "shared appreciation of Montana's natural heritage."

Like Jim Posewitz, Steve has a remarkable ability to see the big picture over the course of years or decades. As a journalist and activist, Steve is intellectually curious, fact-driven, and creative.

Steve and his wife Kerrie Byrne demonstrate their commitment to community by embracing life in the small town of Whitefish in northwest Montana. With open minds and rolled-up sleeves, they participate in all facets of their community. They walk the walk.

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We welcome Steve and Kerrie to the Cinnabar Foundation family, and we hope those in the broader community soon will meet them (if they haven't already).

— Robin Tawney Nichols

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Sometimes the stars align, and we
count ourselves lucky beyond measure.