

# CINNABAR FOUNDATION

## 2011 Len and Sandy Sargent Stewardship Award: Melanie and Tom Parker

Melanie and Tom Parker are teachers, guides, and advocates for rural Montana. Through Northwest Connections and the University of Montana, they have mentored more than 700 young adults to discover and appreciate rural ecology and livelihoods in western Montana. Their eloquent leadership and intimate knowledge of the forests, waters and wildlife have been integral to the Montana Legacy Project, which will forever conserve 310,000 acres of private forest at risk of conversion for real estate development.

The Parkers follow in the footsteps of their own mentor and neighbor, Bud Moore, a forestry pioneer, woodsman, and a towering giant of Montana conservation, who passed away last November at the age of 93. In Moore's epic 1996 book about land ethics in the Bitterroot Mountains, he credits his old friend and Montana writer, Norman Maclean, for inspiration. In turn, university students inspired by the Parkers now lead outdoor education and ecology programs around the United States.

The stewardship award from the Cinnabar Foundation, which includes a \$5,000 grant to Northwest Connections, honors the legacy of place-based conservation that the Parkers inherited from Bud Moore. "Melanie and Tom Parker step firmly into Montana's rich tradition of citizen conservation leadership. They have found ways to bring together diverse interests and craft innovative solutions that benefit both people and land," said Cinnabar Foundation President, Robin Tawney Nichols. "They find ways to integrate science, community, and education in the conservation of rural landscapes."

In cooperation with the Swan Ecosystem Center and other local partners, Northwest Connections is pursuing a bold new vision for community conservation and rural economic development. The Swan Valley Innovations project will establish a sustainable business campus near the town of Condon. Local residents and visiting university students will operate the integrated businesses, including: a log sort yard, a value-added sawmill and manufacturing shop for doors, framing, and flooring, and a wood pellet mill for local schools and homes. The partnership also plans to establish greenhouses and a small farm, a community center and education facilities with space for small business incubation. The campus will be fueled by an integrated heat and power co-generation plant utilizing wood waste materials.

Melanie is Executive Director of Northwest Connections. She has taught field-based ecology courses for 20 years, and is a vocal advocate for place-based collaborative conservation. Melanie facilitates the Swan Valley Coordinating Committee, and she is the current chair of the Swan Valley Elementary School Board of Trustees.

Tom has been an outfitter and hunting guide in the Swan Valley and surrounding wilderness areas for 33 years. His intimate knowledge of the Swan Valley landscape and its ecology has garnered widespread respect. As Northwest Connection's Conservation Specialist, Tom's passion for nature is contagious.



Tom, Kyra, Melanie & John Parker



Melanie discusses place-based conservation with Gov. Brian Schweitzer, Sen. Max Baucus, and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack in Ovando, 2010

Photos available upon request

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