The Nature Conservancy
SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

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May 6, 2004

Ivan Doig
17277 15th Avenue N.W.
Seattle, WA 98177-3846

Dear Ivan,

Thank you for returning my call and for considering a Foreword for Ralph Waldt's book on the Crown of the Continent. We are helping Ralph publish this book to elevate the profile from a conservation perspective of this very special part of the world. As you know, the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the Everglades, and other American icons have better name recognition than the Glacier/Waterton/Crown of the Continent.

As we discussed, I am enclosing a draft of the book so that you can get a feel for the book and the tone and what we are trying to achieve. The book will be published by Riverbend Publishers and will include spectacular photography. Approximately two-thirds of the photos will be Ralph's and one-third will come from other photographers.

We are looking for a Foreword that describes why you are passionate about the Front and this part of Montana/Canada and why this place has inspired so many of your books. If you recall being out on the trail with Ralph and can add any personal anecdote about him or the people who consider the Crown home, that would be ideal. The publisher and I are also available if you have further questions. We are looking for a piece of about 1,000 words, but we would work with you on whatever you want to write.

$1000? deadline?

As I mentioned, we would be willing to pay you for your time and participation in this endeavor. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you more. Best to Carol!

– talked w/ Joe Moll May 25 '04

Best regards,

Betsy

Betsy Baur
Associate State Director for Development

Thank you! I have my fingers + my toes crossed!!
Best,
Betsy

The New York Times

For Wildlife With Wanderlust, Their Own Highway

By KIRK JOHNSON

OVANDO, Mont. — Greg Neudecker stopped his truck on a wooden bridge over Monture Creek and stretched out his arm toward the wilderness lands to the north, and Canada beyond that.

"This is the interstate," he said without irony, gesturing to the little stream, maybe 15 feet across. "Everything connects here, from the wild country down into this valley."

A corridor of the wild through the high country of North America — Yellowstone to Yukon — has long been a dream of environmentalists and biologists like Mr. Neudecker, who say that grizzly bears, elk, wolves and other four-legged commuters need help in looking for mates or new habitats. The great national parks of the West, they say, are becoming genetically isolated islands, cut off by development, urbanization and their ever-present iconic symbol, the barbed-wire fence.

But in places like this, on a patchwork of public and private lands, and through a tangle of human motivations that often have little to do with saving the planet, the wild road north along the spine of the northern Rockies is becoming reality.

Conservation and government groups say most of the 150 miles or so from here to the Canadian border, called the Crown of the Continent, is now largely protected through land buying and conservation agreements with private owners. In December the Nature Conservancy of Canada is expected to lock in the northern anchor — 98,000 acres just over the border in British Columbia that a forestry company has agreed to sell.

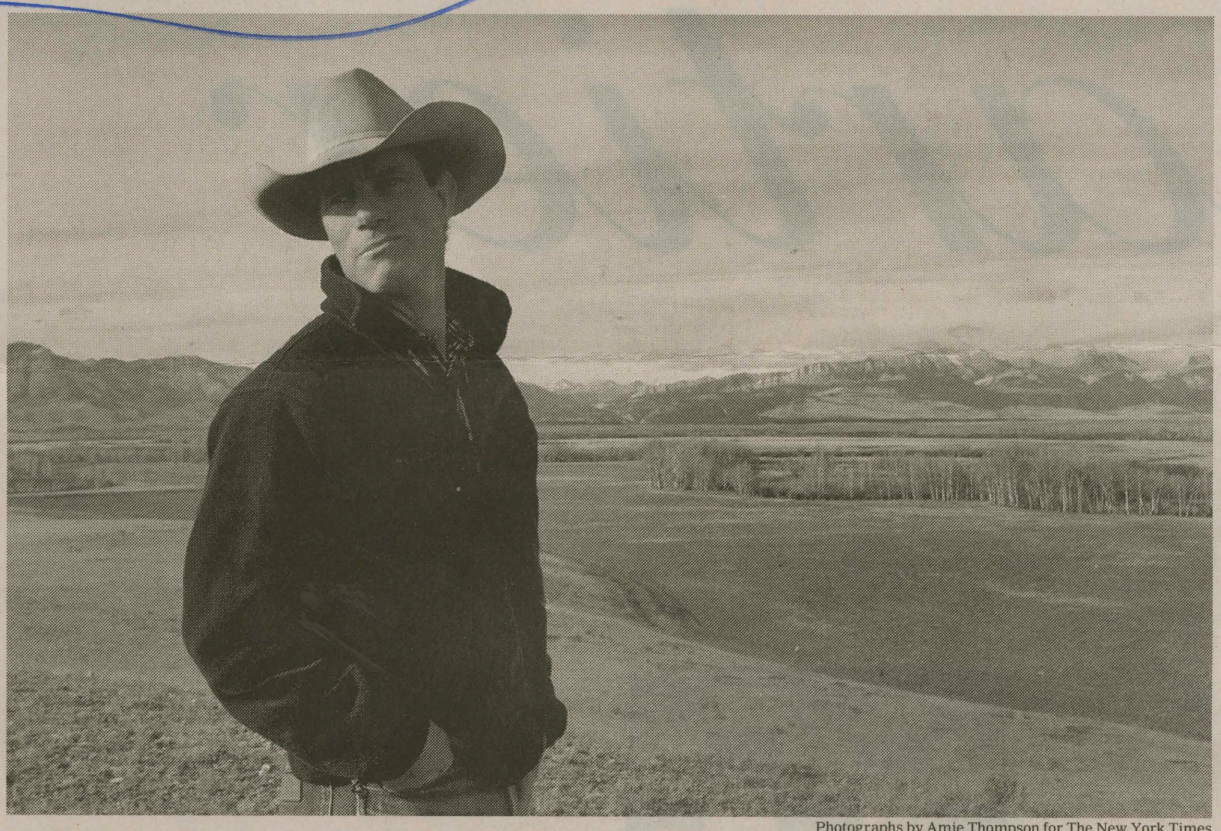
A result will be the creation of a sheltered land bridge where the animal societies of Canada and the United States can intermingle. Conservationists say linking the two pieces of the wildlife road will be as important for its political symbolism as for the animals that will make their way across — and could become more crucial over time if global warming changes alpine climates, forcing animals to migrate permanently.

"Spanning the international border means getting the cooperation and understanding of how natural systems work irrespective of boundaries, and that is a big deal and very, very hopeful one," said Steven J. McCormick, the president and chief executive of the Nature Conservancy in the United States., which has invested more than $45 million to preserve land along the corridor in recent years, an amount matched by the Nature Conservancy of Canada. The centerpiece of the project is a better understanding of how animals really move around. Knowing, for instance, that elk travel to their wintering grounds here in the Blackfoot Valley northeast of Missoula from the high peaks around Glacier National Park is one thing. Knowing exactly how they come — through what bramble of river valleys and passes — has allowed wildlife experts to focus precisely on which lands need protecting, and which ones, given limited resources, can be ignored.

Monture Creek, for example, and its equally humble counterpart to the west called Dunham Creek, are divided by a local landmark called Center Ridge. By a quirk of the glacial age, the three pieces of that triangle — upland and two waterways — wend their way directly back into the Bob Marshall Wilderness that begins north of Ovando. From there, animals connect with the river and ridge systems in Glacier National Park on the border with Canada.

A better understanding of animal mass transit has in turn allowed a downsizing of ambition about the Crown of the Continent project. The goal is not to create new wilderness or new public parks, say conservationists and wildlife experts like Mr. Neudecker, who works for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, but rather to allow movement of animals through the landscape with the least possible human conflict.

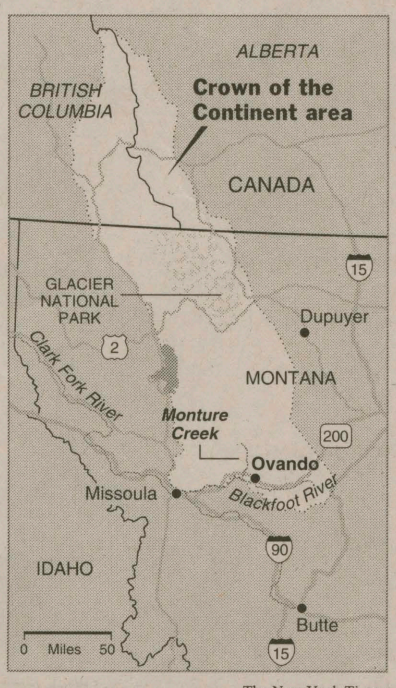
Somewhat paradoxically, that has meant in some cases building more fences, not fewer. Here in Ovando, for instance, the owners of the Two Creeks Ranch had three miles of new electrified grizzly bear fence built and installed this summer, without charge to them, by a team of conservation workers. The $13,000 project sealed off the ranch's calving area, where the baby animals most vulnerable to hungry bears spend their first few days of life. The idea is that bears without easy food sources will keep on moving and not become a nuisance or a threat.



Photographs by Amie Thompson for The New York Times

Dusty Crary, a Montana rancher, has sold his development rights, in part, so grizzlies can get to Canada.

A whitetail deer making its way along a fence on Mr. Crary's ranch.



The New York Times

The Crown of the Continent forms a sheltered land bridge.

Much of the money spent by groups like the Nature Conservancy has gone into the bank accounts of ranchers like Karl Rappold, who has agreed to sell the development rights to most of his land near the town of Dupuyer, about 50 miles from the border. Those contracts mean that Mr. Rappold and his family can continue ranching, but it also means — a crucial point for the wildlife corridor — that the ranch can never be subdivided or developed.

That arrangement has been repeated across roughly 170,000 acres of private land on both sides of the border. Mr. Rappold, whose grandfather started the ranch in the 1880's, said that selling the development rights had given him peace of mind.

"I want my grandson, and his children, to be able to saddle up and ride across this ranch," he said. And he said he had come to understand that the wild creatures are a big part of what makes the land work. "Without them, it wouldn't be the wild country that it is," he said.

Other ranchers have come to embrace the idea of a wildlife corridor for equally specific and personal reasons. Dusty Crary, who raises cattle south of the Rappold place and has also sold his development rights, said that his views about the land and nature changed suddenly, eight years ago, when his father was killed in a ranch accident.

"It made me stop and think, none of us are going to live forever, and how do I want this to be when I'm gone," Mr. Crary said. "It was a little transition for me, a realization that we have to pass things on."

Motivations like that also reinforce what conservationists and wildlife experts say is so unusual about the Crown of the Continent project. No one person is really building it. People are thinking locally and personally, and the resulting combined quilt of their contributions is what creates the corridor.

Other scientists and ranchers say the real question raised by the project is whether any of it is remotely natural. Mr. Rappold, for instance, is so fond of the grizzlies — and so convinced that a grizzly with a full belly will not bother his cattle — that he has begun feeding them. He puts out barrels of molasses for his cows, and then a few more, he says, for the bears. In spring, when bears are emerging from hibernation, he salts the high plateau with winter kills so that by the time the bears come down into his valley, they are no longer famished.

Some wildlife experts cringe at the idea of feeding wild animals, saying it trains them to look to people for food. Others say that keeping bears from becoming marauders is the priority, because the health of the corridor will depend on relationships across the human-animal border.

Others describe a sort of race between two evolving, interconnected forces — more animals, especially grizzlies, moving up and down the corridor, even as environmentalists work to minimize the impact.

Concern about humans crossing the border here — especially terrorists or other unauthorized travelers — is playing only a small role in the project planning, participants say, mainly because the Crown region, far from major population centers, is so remote and rugged.

"We're doing all these things to avoid conflicts, but maybe that just means the animals move on to the places where people aren't doing those good practices," said Geof Foote, a biologist and landowner here in Ovando.

That was apparently the outcome this year on the corridor's eastern edge. A late-spring storm devastated the wild chokecherry crop that grizzlies depend on, and so many of them simply strayed east, in some cases 35 to 40 miles from the mountains, farther from their regular grounds than most local residents had ever seen. One storm affecting one type of wild berry altered the animals' path, and for all the grand designs of man, the bears went where they needed to go.

3 June '04

Betsy Baur
Associate State Director for Development
The Nature Conservancy of Montana
32 South Ewing St.
Helena MT 59601

Dear Betsy--

I managed to clear some time over the Memorial Day weekend to tackle the foreword for Ralph's book, so here it is. A couple of things about it are optional as far as I'm concerned:

--Forewords sometimes have titles and sometimes don't. I put one on, but if it doesn't fit the format, yank it out of there.

--I mentioned the Boone and Crockett TR ranch in more or less the same breath with Pine Butte in the "archipelago" of conservation. Seemed to me to lend a little less partisan stripe to matters, but again, it's nothing I'm wedded to.

If there's any other tweaking of the piece you absolutely need, please call me to discuss. Otherwise, slap it into print. Welcome back to what Joe tells me has been rainy Montana; I hope you had a great trip. One last thing: forgot to hit you up for several copies of the eventual book, which I normally do in any fee negotiation--can you spare half a dozen?

Best wishes,

by Ivan Doig

17277 15th Avenue N.W., Seattle, Washington 98177
(206) 542-6658

faxed
7/8/04

8 July '04

Betsy Baur
Associate State Director for Development
The Nature Conservancy of Montana
32 South Ewing St.
Helena, MT

Dear Betsy--

As per our phone conversation yesterday, my invoice for the "Crown of the Continent" foreword accompanies this letter. I'm glad the piece of writing fits with Ralph's fine work, and I look forward to the book.

Best wishes,

Ivan Doig

8 July '04

Invoice

Vendor's Social Security #: **516-44-4410**

$1,000	fee for 1,000-word essay "Arriving at Glory" and grant of permission for one-time use as Foreword for the book *Crown of the Continent* by Ralph Waldt, as published by The Nature Conservancy of Montana and Riverbend Publishers.

Please remit to:

Ivan Doig
17277 15th Ave. NW
Seattle WA 98177

Arriving at Glory

foreword by Ivan Doig

I came into the country that Ralph Waldt so rightly calls "the Crown of the Continent" as someone who was wide-eyed about that vast and glorious geography, but for all the wrong reasons.

My moment of arrival occurred in a highly dubious way--in the black of night, when I was a jittery high school freshman, knowing only that I was on my way into some unforeseen veer of life in a part of Montana where none of my family had ever set foot. My father and my grandmother had taken on a sheep deal which was landing us, sight unseen, onto a small leased ranch somewhere in the vicinity of a Highway 89 map dot with the pronunciation-resisting name of Dupuyer.

Getting in to the place, particularly in the dark along roads that dwindled and dwindled from gravel to ruts, was alarming enough. The ranch itself was more so when we eventually got there. The sheep owner my dad was going to run the sheep for--we were the western version of sharecroppers--either had not known or had not bothered to tell us that the ranch family had retained half the house to store their belongings in, and so the three of us were to live in one gaunt room which had to serve as kitchen, dining room, living room, and everything else, and a tiny bedroom for my dad and me to share, and an even tinier one for my grandmother. The place sat just far enough up on the sidehill of a coulee to give every foot of ground under us a disconcerting tilt; when I say we never quite

found our footing in three hardscrabble years there, I mean it literally. Nothing for the eye to catch hold of, either: the total count of trees on the whole damn place was two, both of them, as memory tallied them for me on another occasion, "hunched low in front of the house, evidently trying to cower in out of the wind." And, of course, sited "down in a hole" as this unnerving secondhand ranch was, there was no view of any landform except the identical opposite slope of the coulee.

Came the first dawn after our blind leap northward, though, and my father figured we had better go up on the benchland above the coulee and take a look around to see what else we had gotten ourselves into. And in that morning moment, my eyes widened in another way:

"The western skyline before us was filled high with a steel-blue army of mountains, drawn in battalions of peaks and reefs and gorges and crags as far along the entire rim of the earth as could be seen. Summit after summit bladed up thousands of feet as if charging into the air to strike first at storm and lightning, valleys and clefts chasmed wide as if split and hollowed by thunderblast upon thunderblast. Across the clear gape of distance, we could read where black-quilled forest wove in beneath cliffs and back among the plummet of canyons, we could make out the beds of scree crumbled and scattered beneath the marching shields of rimrock."

It has been more than a quarter of a century since my entranced first real look at "the Crown of the Continent" reached print in *This House of Sky*. And it has been a full fifty years since that pilgrimage in the dark brightened into a phase of my life that I have drawn on for book after book. Across that reach of time, I have watched with astonishment as the area of Montana's Rocky Mountain Front that I know best, and write about as my novelistic "Two Medicine country," has evolved into something like a mountain-and-prairie archipelago of conserved nature. The swaths of land now in preservation hands, exemplified by key holdings such as The Nature Conservancy's Pine Butte Swamp

Preserve and the Boone and Crockett Foundation's nearly neighboring Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch, stand out like Treasure Islands in what geography of hope we have left.

Make no mistake: this not the way things have generally gone in the use-it-up-and-junk-it American West. What has happened along the colossal watershed of the continent from Montana's Blackfoot River to Alberta's Highwood River is the surprise story--even yet full of suspense because of the gaps between preserved holdings--of an ecosystem that so far has survived fairly intact in the face of everything the forces of exploration/exploitation have tried to do to it. And, wonder piled upon miracle, we have the best possible scribe in the great outdoors court of "the Crown of the Continent" in the person of Ralph Waldt, whose pocket tag most of his life has read "naturalist" but who writes like a trailside recording angel.

Waldt's evocative gift of phrase--"the doe leading the procession had walked to within six feet of me, grazing on mouthfuls of tender grass, so close I could hear every sound her teeth made on the forage, so close I could count her eyelashes"--will become immediately evident to the reader, as will his terrific camera eye. Let me point out, however, the valuable longitudinal depth that this lovely and bracing book of his provides us: Ralph Waldt, a man after my own diarying heart, has kept track these past thirty years of his on-foot crisscrossings of the northern Continental Divide country, the "Crownland," so to speak. Where he has been, he has always seen and learned. Once on a Pine Butte trail I listened to him give an impromptu impassioned talk on the marvels of an anthill that would have made a Thoreau or an Eiseley perk up their ears.

So, this Waldtian work of prose and photo takes us, in the company of a guide honed by the country itself, to unsuspected viewpoints of an eco-kingdom that most people have only seen bits and pieces of. This crowning glory of our continent in its still-amazing intrinsic unity can be made to last, but only if we of its human component will widen our eyes--our vision--enough.

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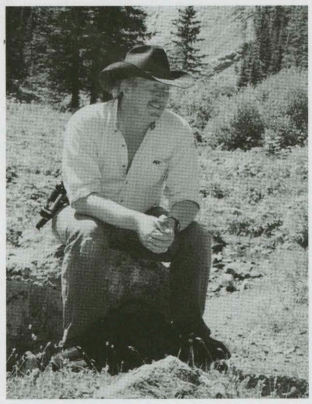
Ralph Waldt

Stories and reflections on the Crown of the Continent



Ralph Waldt

About the Book

In the "Crown of the Continent," author and photographer Ralph Waldt is joined by several writers of great distinction who share his passion for the wild places of this vast region. Acclaimed novelist Ivan Doig, who grew up along the Rocky Mountain Front, writes the book's foreword. International grizzly bear expert Charles Jonkel, who has shared numerous Crown trails with Ralph, writes the preface. And, National Geographic contributor and award-winning wildlife author Douglas Chadwick writes the afterword.

The book is loaded with stunning photographs of wildlife and landscapes. It will hit the bookstores November 1.

Conservancy members may purchase the book directly from the Conservancy's Montana office for $29.95, plus $5.95 for shipping and handling.

To order or for more information, contact Debra Sattler, The Nature Conservancy, 32 South Ewing Street, Helena, MT 59601; 406-443-6730 or via email at dsattler@tnc.org.

For over a decade, the wildlife observations of Nature Conservancy naturalist Ralph Waldt have entranced visitors to the Conservancy's Pine Butte Guest Ranch.

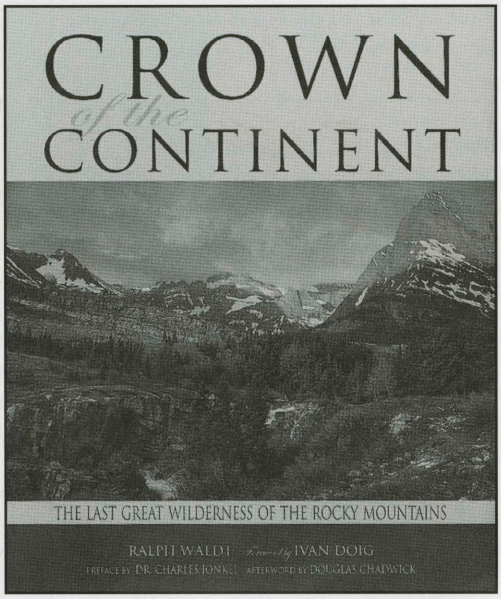
Indeed, anyone lucky enough to take a walk with Ralph has been amazed by his uncanny ability to see what others miss. Noted author Ivan Doig wrote: "Once on a trail I listened to him give an impromptu impassioned talk on the marvels of an anthill that would have made a Thoreau or an Eiseley perk up his ears."

Now Ralph has put his 30 years of observations of the natural world — in both photo and narrative — into his first book: *Crown of the Continent, The Last Great Wilderness of the Rocky Mountains.* The book, published by Riverbend Publishing in Helena, Montana, will hit the bookstores November 1.

His book focuses on the 10-million-acre region of the northern Rockies that noted Glacier explorer George Grinnell called the "Crown of the Continent." This region spans the Continental Divide from the Blackfoot Valley in western Montana, north to Banff National Park. It encompasses the Flathead watershed, the Rocky Mountain Front, several wilderness areas, two international parks and large blocks of land in British Columbia and southwestern Alberta.

"This area," says Ralph, "represents the most intact large ecosystem in the contiguous U.S. and may represent the most intact ecosystem in the whole Rocky Mountain chain."

But for Ralph, the more important connection to this place is personal. He has been tromping through the wild places of the Front since he was 8 years old, when his parents were transferred to Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls.



"I never really decided to become a naturalist," he says. "I just was one."

It was here, where the plains flank the spectacular limestone peaks of the Rockies, that Ralph saw his first grizzly on the prairie. This is the only place in the lower 48 states where grizzlies still roam the prairies, like they did 200 years ago. "I'd never pictured them as a prairie animal," he said.

In the book, Ralph tells about his encounters with grizzly bears. He also relays, with a keen eye and evocative gift of phrase, stories about unusual tailed frogs, violent wilderness storms, epic battles between mountain lions and elk, and delicate wild orchids that bloom and disappear almost overnight.

Ralph says he hopes this book will help convince more private landowners to take steps to protect their holdings. "The biggest thing that people who live and work in these areas can do is to continue to value these lands and teach these values.

"We can enact all the legislation we want to protect these places, but that can be changed by the stroke of a pen. The only thing really protecting these places is the voice of the people."

—*Tana Kappel*

The Burchenals
(continued from pg. 7)

servation Award, given annually to only two landowners in the country.

"We are really fond of this valley, and we all have a responsibility to protect it," said Ralph. "We really haven't done more than a lot of others have done here."

The ranch has grown to over 10,000 acres, about half of which are covered by a conservation easement. Recently family members have donated conservation easements to The Nature Conservancy on their parcels. Ralph's sister placed an easement on her 160-acre property, which is dominated by meadows, small wetlands and creeks.

Also, Cooper and his wife, Anne Fogel, placed an easement on their 40 acres on the north end of the ranch. This property has a pristine spring-fed wetland that drains into Monture Creek. "The wetlands and meadows make it one of the most important grizzly bear properties in the Blackfoot," said Caroline Byrd, the Conservancy's western Montana program manager.

"It was pretty much a no-brainer to donate the conservation easement," said Cooper. "It just seemed like the right thing to do."

Cooper speaks with awe about the grizzlies that inhabit the ranch. "When I was a kid we used to hang around the swamps," not usually bumping into any grizzly bears. "Then they were more of a mystical creature. But lately we see them and are trying to manage accordingly. It's really amazing what we have here."

Cooper has been an active conservation leader in the Blackfoot and is on the fundraising committee for the Blackfoot Community Project. (See story about the project, page 8.)

Cooper is passionate about conserving the Blackfoot, and the ranch serves as a window to the broader conservation picture in the valley.

"The great thing about this ranch," says Ralph, "is that it is an eye-opener for people who come to visit. By bringing visitors to see the ranch and the wildlife, we feel we're indirectly helping out with conservation."

—*Tana Kappel*

Friend of Fish *(continued from pg. 6)*

Though some fish still get trapped, the system for the most part has worked well, he says.

His next project, the fish passage canal, has also been a tough sell. He found little enthusiasm for repairing a fishery that had largely disappeared. And the costs of constructing a canal around the 12-Mile Dam were too high for the irrigation district alone.

Also, while there was considerable science on building "fish ladders," little was known about designing fish passage systems for warm water fish. Unlike salmon or trout that try to go over obstacles, warm water fish seek ways around them.

By September 2002, once again the timing was right. There was increased public scrutiny of how bank stabilization projects along the Yellowstone were altering its free flowing characteristics. The newly formed Yellowstone River Conservation District Council, of which the Conservancy has been active, persuaded Congress to fund a major study of the effects of these projects and other threats to the Yellowstone River.

This increased focus on the Yellowstone was just the ticket for moving the 12-Mile project along. The Fish and Wildlife Service used its National Fish Passage program to commission the Bureau of Reclamation to design the canal. The Conservancy (with funding from the Cinnabar Foundation), the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks raised $300,000 to construct the 660-foot canal. And, the irrigation district paid for the land (almost 4 acres) and will donate the equipment to dig the canal.

Ground-breaking will begin next spring. Once dug, the canal will get a bed of gravel and a high-tech fabric liner to prevent water leakage. Then the crew will place large granite boulders in the stream to produce eddies. The project should be completed within three months.

"The great thing about this project," said the Conservancy's Burt Williams, "is the enthusiastic leadership of a local ag producer and irrigator to pull together these groups to solve a problem for the fish that also benefits the local irrigators."

All the current partners in the 12-Mile project have said they are willing to work together on future conservation projects in the Yellowstone system, said Williams.

FWP's Riggs hopes Roger will continue to inspire others to improve the health of the Yellowstone. "He'll see this project through, and I'm hoping with this start, he'll just keep on going."

"I really want to show the world that we can do these things," says Roger. "I hope I live to see the day when we have a thriving fishery in the Tongue and Yellowstone Rivers. If that makes me an environmentalist, then so be it."

—*Tana Kappel*