

Flathead Audubon and the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area

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Owen Sowerwine was designated Montana's first State Natural Area in 1976. Originally the Flathead County Parks Board leased and managed the Area. (Owen Sowerwine is on State School Trust Land, so must be leased from the state in order to maintain its status as a Natural Area.)



In 1996 Flathead Audubon began helping the Parks Board with the rising lease fee. When the Board relinquished the lease in 1996, Flathead Audubon took it. In 2000, as the fee rose even higher, Montana Audubon stepped in to help, partnering with Flathead Audubon on both the fee and the management.



Source: Linda Winnie, 2009

Bridge Crew

The stated goal of the management plan for Owen Sowerwine is "to provide an active and uninhibited ecological preserve for native species of vegetation and wildlife to evolve as they may, without human alteration of the land or water that supports them."

To that end, one of Audubon's first projects at Owen Sowerwine has been to install fencing around the Area to eliminate entry by horse riders and motorized vehicles. We have also developed a weed reduction program in order to allow the return of native vegetation to the Area.

The management plan also states: "The value of this area to humans --- lies in the growth and knowledge that people are able to derive from their observations of natural phenomena." Audubon fosters this human benefit by providing opportunity for visitors to walk on the mainland portion of the Area, and by encouraging use of the Area by local schools for student field trips and outdoor educational activities. Owen Sowerwine is also the site for many of the outdoor activities coordinated by our own education program. Over the last few years we have cleared several of the existing game trails on the mainland portion, mapped and marked those trails, and installed foot bridges over the portions of those trails that become wet during spring high water. We have also constructed an informational kiosk just inside the main entrance to the Area at the end of Treasure Lane.

All of Audubon's work at Owen Sowerwine is done by volunteers, and is funded by donations and grants. Several members of our Owen Sowerwine Committee have taken on the Area's day-to-day management and maintenance. Each fall we have a Volunteer Workday, which brings 40 to 50 members and friends of Audubon members to the Area to complete some of our bigger projects there. And in 2007 we instituted a Volunteer Monitoring Program to help us gather information on how the

Area is being used—by both humans and wildlife—and to keep track of maintenance needs. Under this program, every two weeks from March through November, one or more of our members visits Owen Sowerwine with a monitoring check list to record what they



Source: Brent Mitchell, 2009

River at Owen Sowerwine Natural Area

observe there, then sends the information off to the volunteer management committee. In addition, all of our members are encouraged to fill out and return to us a monitoring check list whenever they go to Owen Sowerwine. Indeed, anyone who visits Owen Sowerwine can help us in this way. The monitoring check list and an accompanying map of the trails are available on our website, www.flatheadaudubon.org.



Source: Brent Mitchell, 2009

Trail at Owen Sowerwine Natural Area