



funding cutting edge environmental action since 1982

PO Box 42523 • Portland, Oregon 97242 • (360) 636.6030 • fundwildnature.org

For immediate release: March 4, 2010

Contact: Douglas Bevington, Fund for Wild Nature, (510) 207-0313
Mathew Koehler, WildWest Institute, (406) 396-0321

Missoula Forest Advocate Wins “Grassroots Activist of the Year” Award

Missoula, MT—Matthew Koehler, executive director of the WildWest Institute, has won the Grassroots Activist of the Year award from the Fund for Wild Nature. The Fund for Wild Nature is an environmental grantmaking organization endowed by donations from its members. The Fund sponsors cutting-edge grassroots groups throughout the United States and internationally that meet emerging needs for protecting biodiversity and wilderness.

“Matthew Koehler epitomizes the bold and effective grassroots environmental activism that the Fund for Wild Nature is proud to support,” said Douglas Bevington, a Fund for Wild Nature board member and the author of *The Rebirth of Environmentalism: Grassroots Activism from the Spotted Owl to the Polar Bear*, who will present the award to Koehler at an event in Missoula on Saturday, March 6.

The Fund’s Grassroots Activist of the Year award for 2010 celebrates Matthew Koehler’s fifteen years of effective forest protection advocacy. Koehler moved to Missoula in 1996, where he began working with the Native Forest Network and subsequently became the executive director of the WildWest Institute.

In the late 1990s, Koehler was one of the co-founders of the National Forest Protection Alliance, a national coalition of 130 grassroots forest protection organizations dedicated to public forest protection and restoration. He helped develop NFPA’s national strategy and served as editor of its publication *Forest Advocate*. Koehler’s media coordination and grassroots organizing trainings also helped train and inspire a new generation of environmental activists.

Following the 2000 wildfires, Koehler’s media outreach shaped national news coverage about fire issues, and directly contributed to greater public awareness, understanding, and acceptance of wildfire on the landscape. Koehler also played a lead role in challenging ecologically-harmful post-fire salvage logging on the Bitterroot, Lolo, and Siskiyou National Forests, helping to protect critical fish and wildlife habitat and tens of thousands of acres of old-growth forests and roadless wildlands in the process.

Koehler’s fire-related work has also included educating homeowners and communities about “fire-wise” principles. In 2006 and 2007, Koehler raised \$25,000, hired a local fuel reduction

crew and partnered with the West End Volunteer Fire Department to create defensible space around the homes of elderly members of the DeBorgia, Montana community.

Recently, Koehler has been at forefront of raising concerns over the Beaverhead Partnership proposal and Senator Jon Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, especially related to the bill's unprecedented logging mandates and budget implications, concerns which are also shared by the US Forest Service and Obama Administration.

Last summer Koehler helped form the Last Best Place Wildlands Campaign, a coalition that includes 5th generation Montanans, small-business owners, scientists, hikers and backpackers, hunters and anglers, veterans and retired Forest Service officials. He was invited to represent this coalition when he testified before the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee last December.

“Over the years I’ve been blessed to work closely with some truly remarkable and inspiring forest activists here in Montana and around the country,” said Koehler. “When I look back on all that we’ve accomplished, I’m most proud of the special places we have protected – from old-growth forests and roadless wildlands to critical habitat for fish and wildlife – and the fact that we’ve helped steer the Forest Service towards a more sustainable future where restoration and protection is emphasized more than simply ‘getting out the cut’.”

Koehler will receive the Grassroots Activist on the Year award at a fundraising event for the Last Best Place Wildlands Campaign on March 6. The event, featuring the music of Walkin’ Jim Stoltz, begins at 6pm at the Stensrud Building, 314 N. First St., in Missoula.

###