

TRANSCRIPT: A FOREST HOME, YAAK VALLEY, MONTANA

Mikolas “Crash” Karuzas is a self-employed, small-outfit logger, a “gyppo.”

[Singing.]

Don't you cut timber on a windy day.
Look out son, you better listen what I say.
Limbs in the top liable blow either way.
Don't you cut timber on a windy day.

Rick Bass is an author who often writes about the Yaak Valley, where he has lived since 1987. He is an impassioned advocate for wilderness protection.

For the most part, the story of Yaak's forest is a story of co-dominance, which seems to me to be a good metaphor for the community. We have significant diversity in our community and no one view, no one person, no one group, should run the show, nor do they run the show. And that's the real challenge that we're facing as a community is how to keep that community vibrant and engaged with the issues, just as we're trying to keep this wonderful, multispecies forest intact and functioning, rather than over-managed, over-manipulated, over-harmed, over...over-injured, over-controlled. And the community gives off the same kind of vibrance, the same kind of help. There's windstorms and ice storms in the woods, and we have those kinds of flurries of activities in our community. But a healthy community can not only withstand those stresses but bends and sways and develops a strength as a result of those stresses, if there's commitment to do that. In the forest, that kind of commitment is called life. The trees have to do it to survive. The forest has to do it to survive. In a community, it's called democracy.

Reuben Kneller is a traditional logger and sawmill operator who was chosen by residents to serve on the Yaak Valley Forest Stewardship Steering Committee.

Yeah, there's been a lot of timber harvested, but contrary to all the stories that you hear—“There's no timber left,” and, “We're going to run out of timber,” and all that sort of thing—there's nothing to it. That's just somebody wants to make something out of it. I shouldn't say we'll never run out of timber, but if we harvest it sensibly, we could keep right on working.

Jeanne Higgins works for the U.S. Forest Service and was formerly the district ranger working with the Yaak community.



INDIVISIBLE

If the communities can resolve issues, there's a lot better chance of this being successful than if the lawmakers are the ones trying to resolve the issues. You know this dialogue that's gone on I see as the most beneficial of anything, even if there isn't actually something, a project on the ground. I believe there will be. How successful it will be I don't know just because of the energy and efforts that go into it.

Mark Ewing is a native of the Yaak Valley. He telecommutes as an investment portfolio manager and an ice cream company executive.

We feel that we can accomplish those goals, keeping the roadless areas roadless, managing our own backyard, locally, without government intervention, without ideas and say-so from Washington, from people that have never set foot here and don't know the first thing about the land, the logistics, the scope, or the mentality of the people here.

Rick Bass has made the issue of protecting the last roadless areas of the Yaak Valley a national cause through his writing and speaking engagements.

What everybody's excited about—and they should be—is the paradigm shift for a focus on taking what the forest has to give, not what you want, necessarily, before you go into a stand. Just taking the weak, sick, diseased trees and leaving the healthy stock, focusing on restoration, paying for quality of work, rewarding quality of work. That's all great and that can really change the Forest Service's direction, management policies, all of that. But all along I've said that what I think the real sleeper value of this project is that it can—I don't think force is too strong of a word—it can force the community to get people together who otherwise had refused to get together and cooperate in a project. It has that potential.

Robyn King is a founder of the Yaak Valley Forest Council and an advocate for both community dialogue and forest conservation. She is a small business systems manager and community activist. Recorded in her home in the Yaak Valley.

My favorite thing to say about this place is our diversity is our strength, just like our forest. Our community absolutely reflects this forest that's around us. And the diversity is our strength. And I know that in that diversity, if we can just learn how to communicate with each other, we're going to be an incredibly strong community that can face anything together.

Crash and Shirley Karuzas have lived in the Yaak Valley since 1978. Shirley is the business manager for the Yaak Valley School District.

SK: You guys know that song...

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CK and SK:
[Singing.]

I see that you are a logger and not just a common bum
For nobody but a logger, stirs his coffee with his thumb.

I once had a logger lover. There's none like him today.
If you poured whiskey on it, he would eat a bale of hay.

The weather tried to freeze him. It tried its level best.
At a hundred degrees below zero, he buttoned up his vest.

It froze clear through to China. It froze to the stars above.
At a thousand degrees below zero, it froze my logger love.

CK: And so my tale has ended—

SK: They tried their best to—

CK and SK: —thaw him and would you believe it, sir,
They cut him into ax blades to chop the Douglas fir.

And, so I lost my lover and to this café I've come.
And here I wait for someone who stirs his coffee with his thumb.
[Laughing.]