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ood work, athletics, politics, and life
outdoors are in Hal Harper’s DNA.
Hal’s father, the late Rev. George Harper,
was one of six Independent delegates to the
Montana Constitutional Convention of 1972.
As a young man, his baseball skills caught the New York Yankees’ eye, but George was intent on the ministry—and Montana’s wild areas were his favorite sanctuaries.
Hal would set Montana pole vault records
in high school and college while honing his considerable skills as a hunter, angler, and winter sports enthusiast.
And he possessed a knack for politics.
In 1973, on the heels of adopting the new
state constitution his father helped craft, Helena voters elected Hal to the Montana House of Representatives as a Republican.
“What Montana seemed to me to be doing
at that time was sizing up where it was and what it needed to do to get ready for the future,”
Hal recalled during an interview for “In the Crucible of Change,” an online series offered by Montana Tech.
In that 1973 session, Montana would determine the fate of more than 70 coal-!red power-plant requests. “We were to be the boiler room of the nation,” Hal said. “That’s when we started thinking, ‘Is this the future of Montana?’”
Hal was defeated in a 1974 Republican primary, later switched political parties, and won 12 elections in a row. He’d go on to hold leadership positions in the House, including Speaker. He retired from public service in 2010 as Gov. Brian Schweitzer’s

Chief Policy Advisor and Legislative Liaison. All told, the University of Montana philosophy grad directly in"uenced Montana’s outdoor policies for 40 years.
Hal carried or sponsored dozens of conserva-tion laws, including the nation’s !rst river restoration act to restore damaged streams and rivers and the Drought Policy Act that recognized climate change realities. He sponsored the Smith River Management Act that allowed the state to issue "oat permits to manage the then overbur-dened 60-mile-long river. Hal championed complex water policy, state park funding, !sh and wildlife laws, and land conservation and restoration. He chaired the Interim Water Policy Committee for six years, passed legislation to address chronically de-watered streams, and helped establish local watershed workgroups. “I was always looking for laws that needed
to be changed because of fairness,” he told the Montana Oral History Project.
Recognitions include the Trout Unlimited National Distinguished Service Award for pro-tection and restoration of America’s coldwater !sheries, Mancinelli Conservation Award by the Pat Barnes Missouri River Chapter of Trout Unlimited, American Fisheries Society Western Division Robert L. Borovicka Conservation Achievement Award, AFSWD recognition for Outstanding Contribution to the Protection and Enhancement of Fisheries Resources in Montana, and Montana Environmental Health Association’s Distinguished Service in Environmental Health. Hal and his wife, Janet, live in Helena. ✮

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