Update From Our Vice President: Watch for Late-Season Wilderness Walks

CALLIE BOYLE
Southwestern Wildlands Chapter vice president

For many of us, being in nature is a needed respite from the craziness and stress of the modern world. We seek the solace of the trails and breathe deeply in the quiet, away from the constant hiss and hum and rumble that surrounds most of us in our day-to-day lives. Science backs this up: just 30 minutes in nature dramatically affects our health, including improved concentration, memory, cognitive function, circulation, blood pressure, heart health, metabolism, stress and anxiety levels, and more. Even living near a green space decreases stress and anxiety.

For over 60 years, Wild Montana volunteers have led Wilderness Walks across the state. Our goal is simple and shared – to connect with each other in the peace of Montana's public lands and to provide opportunity for participants to explore new places they otherwise might not visit.

Our chapter has already led many exciting walks in southwest Montana this summer. If you missed them, we're also hosting five late-season walks throughout August and September. These walks take hikers into some of the most beautiful parts of our southwest corner of the state, including a trek from Upper Seymour Lake to Goat Flat with wilderness instructor Hallie Zolynski; a strenuous (but completely worth it) hike past Upper Miner Lake in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest; and an opportunity to put stewardship into action with an Agness Lake cleanup hike.

For the science-minded, Julee Shamhart and Alina Cansler will lead hikers through the recently burned forest up to Johnson Lake and share their knowledge of both white bark pine ecology and fire ecology.

Our final hike in September is one for the whole family – a fantasy-themed hike for those who long to recreate a journey across Middle Earth! Costumes are strongly encouraged.

Wilderness Walks have limited spots available and fill up incredibly fast, so make sure to be ready to register. Late season Wilderness Walks are scheduled July 16 through Sept. 30. Registration opens June 29 for members and on July 1 for non-members.
Earth Day Cleanup on the Big Hole
Volunteers clear trash from campgrounds and fishing access sites along the Big Hole River

JILL KOLB
Southwestern Wildlands Chapter board member

On a cool spring day, 24 volunteers gathered at the Divide Fishing Access Site and Campground to work on the Earth Day Big Hole Cleanup. Members and guests from Dillon, Glen, Butte, and even Arizona came to lend a hand. Our crew was also joined by the associate director of the Big Hole Watershed Committee, Tana Nulph, and her family.

Twelve fishing access sites from Jerry Creek to Notch Bottom, three campgrounds, and the I-15 Interchange at Divide received a spring cleaning. We noticed numerous outfitters and fishermen on the river that day. Fishing here in Montana has a large economic impact. The water flow was also good. As many of us know, lower snowpack has a huge impact on how much water is left for river and stream flow later in the season for fishing, as well as agricultural use.

Many thanks to Rick and Kriss Douglass for a warm hardy meal after the work was done. Thanks to Wild Montana’s communications team, the chapter’s members who put this event together, and mostly to the folks who volunteered their time to make this cleanup a success!

Our chapter gave away two water bottles to volunteers. The winners are Julia Clark and Joyce Connors. The water bottles will be on their way to you soon!

Big Hole cleanup volunteers in action.
We all worry about animals that can cause us grief as we enjoy the backcountry. First off, we worry and take precautions for bears. Moose should also be considered dangerous and, of course, mountain lions. However, there is a much smaller mammal that potentially could cause a serious problem. That is the lowly deer mouse (Peromyscus maniculatus).

The deer mouse is dangerous because it is the reservoir for Sin Nombre Virus (SNV). SNV is a hantavirus and has a about 40% mortality rate for people that contract pulmonary respiratory syndrome caused by the virus. Most human cases are contracted in some kind of out building. In those areas, the deer mice deposit urine and feces containing the virus that can then become attached to respirable dust particles. Once inhaled the virus attacks the lining of the lungs. The vascular system of the lungs becomes “leaky,” and there is a 40% chance the human will drown in the human’s own fluids.

What does that have to do with wilderness? Deer mice are found at nearly all elevations and all habitats in Montana. Deer mice can also enter open food containers (see below), open vehicles, unzipped tents, campers, etc. Two people died from hanta in Yosemite National Park who had camped in non-mouse proof tent cabins. So, the point is to be cautious about what you have in the backcountry that might attract deer mice. If you stay in a Forest Service cabin, the Forest Service furnishes you with a spray bottle of 15% bleach to spray everything in the cabin. Store food in mouse proof and bear proof containers.

Dr. Rick Douglass is an emeritus professor who taught at Montana Tech for nearly 30 years and studied hantavirus deer mouse ecology for 20 years. Previously to the professor job, he conducted research in the Canadian and Alaskan arctics.
Spring Into Summer Event Focuses on “Trails Crew 101”

CALLIE BOYLE
Southwestern Wildlands Chapter vice president

It snowed just the day before.

We were all holding our breaths, unsure if the weather would cooperate. It’s a risk you take when you plan any outdoor event in Montana in May, but we all consoled ourselves with the old adage, “There’s no bad weather, just inadequate clothing.”

Still, we were hoping for some sunshine.

A relief, then, that on the morning of our Chapter’s annual Spring into Summer event dawned a little cloudy, but clear of rain or snow. Our goal this year was a little different from Spring into Summer events of the past. While we wanted to celebrate the coming of summer and the release of the yearly Wilderness Walks book, we also wanted to focus on providing education and community for the people who may not yet know what exactly our chapter focuses our energies on.

Southwestern Wildlands Chapter is fully committed to the stewardship of our public lands. To us, that means care, attention, and action. We dedicate our time and resources to actively maintaining the trails in our region, mitigating invasive and noxious weeds, and offering both volunteer and stock support for the agencies managing our public lands. That means hours of clearing trails of downed timber, hours of carrying backpack sprayers to address outbreaks of noxious weeds, hours of packing shovels and chainsaws and various other equipment on horses to bring into the backcountry for crews to build and maintain remote trails.

To that end, our Spring into Summer event was a “Trails Crew 101;” a primer on how we do what we do. We offered multiple stations: first aid, backcountry basics, chainsaw safety, cross-cut saw demonstrations, horse safety, and hand-tools for trail building. Members of our chapter staffed each station, offering demon-

Volunteers Needed!

Our chapter is embarking on an ambitious volunteer stewardship project this summer and we need your help. Southwestern Wildlands Chapter’s “Visit With Respect” initiative will restore the pristine nature of more than 50 mountain lakes within the chapter area over the next two years.

If you’re interested in volunteering, please text Charlie for details at 406-491-1428 or email staghornranch@gmail.com. Learn more about the project at wildmontana.org/respect.
strations and explanations on each aspect of trail work. We set up at Foreman’s Park, just in the shadow of the Mountain Consolidated Mine and the headframe towering above us was a nice backdrop for all who attended.

Attendees also were treated to gorgeous views of the Highland Mountains as they browsed the booths and munched on burgers and hot dogs, served up by our resident camp cook, Rick Douglass. A steady stream of visitors tried their hands at the cross-cut station, carefully supervised by chapter board members Roger Gordon and Mike Sullivan. EMT and safety instructor Ryan Mulcahy demonstrated tourniquets and splints on his show-stealing assistant, his daughter Riley, age 8. Across the path, Sherry Vogel spoke with visitors about backcountry basics, like what clothes to wear and gear to bring to stay safe and comfortable when out on the trails. Horse packers Charlie O’Leary and Callie Boyle rode their horses around the event and explained how packhorses carry equipment into the backcountry. Down at the pavilion, Jill Kolb answered questions about our chapter and Wild Montana in general.

Overall, the event was a success, and we’re excited to build upon it next year. We were able to recruit a few new members and provide a fun and educational afternoon for all.

A huge thank you to all who attended, to the Butte Silver Bow Parks and Rec staff, to the SWW events board, and the board of directors, to the Wild Montana staffers who attended, to Ryan Mulcahy, to Matt Moore, and especially to Jill Kolb, who almost single handedly planned the event.
The American Dipper: Watch for this “Hummingbird of Blooming Waters”

CALLIE BOYLE
Southwestern Wildlands Chapter vice president

A hike through the forest is always made better by a wildlife sighting. Here in southwestern Montana, we are most fortunate to share our wild places with numerous species rarely seen in the rest of the United States, including the “charismatic megafauna” well known to most people – bison, elk, wolves, cougars, bears, moose, as well as many other mammals such as deer, lynx, wolverines, and more.

A glimpse of any one of these wild residents is exciting, a reminder that we share our world with creatures separate and apart from us, living their own lives outside of our experiences.

But the big mammals are not the only citizens of the forest, and many hundreds of small lives exist barely within our notice. We might hike right past the chorus frog, completely unaware of its presence, or think of the cutthroat trout only when we have a pole in hand. A snake hidden in the leaves might provide a moment’s marvel (or fright!) before we are on our way.

One of my favorites, but lesser-known creatures, is the water ouzel, now more commonly known as the American Dipper. These chunky gray birds live along streams and creeks, often deep in the forest. They eat aquatic insects, and these little guys will swim and dive to the creek bottom to find their food. You will see them hopping up and down the rocks of rushing mountain streams, dipping their heads into the water, and diving from the air.

Several characteristics of the water ouzel make them unique birds. First, they are an indicator species, living only in unpolluted streams where the water quality is good. Second, they are non-migratory, though they will move to larger, unfrozen waters during winter. Third, they molt their tail and wing feathers in the late summer, making them unable to fly at that time. And finally, they are North America’s only aquatic songbird.

Ouzels are easy to identify, both by their habitat and their physical characteristics. They live along the swiftly rushing waters of creeks and streams, especially those with rocky bottoms and larger rocks jutting out of the water. They are gray, with white eyelids. When they blink, it looks like their eyes are flashing. Their songs are high-pitched and trilling, and both the males and females sing.

The American Dipper, or water ouzel, was also a favorite of John Muir. He wrote:

“He is the mountain streams’ own darling, the hummingbird of blooming waters, loving rocky ripple-slopes and sheets of foam as a bee loves flowers, as a lark loves sunshine and meadows. Among all the mountain birds, none has cheered me so much in my lonely wanderings, —none so unfailingly. For both in winter and summer he sings, sweetly, cheerily, independent alike of sunshine and of love, requiring no other inspiration than the stream on which he dwells.”

photo by Brian E Small
Meet Longtime Member
Julie Flammang

ROGER GORDON
Southwestern Wildlands Chapter representative

Julie Flammang is a longtime Montana Wilderness Association/Wild Montana member. She is a Minnesota native and graduated from the University of Minnesota – Duluth with a Bachelor of Science degree in geology in 1979. Following graduation she began work as an exploration geologist with the Anaconda Copper Company. She was based in Denver but assigned to Montana, primarily in the western part of the state, and spent the next five years hiking in Montana’s national forests and on Anaconda/ARCO mineral properties looking for the next big mine. During that time she fell in love with the varied and beautiful landscapes Montana is blessed with and became a full-time resident in 1986. She moved to Butte and joined an environmental engineering firm. Julie spent the next 33 years working on mine wastes and contaminated groundwater projects. During her career she investigated over 300 abandoned mines throughout Montana.

Recently retired, Julie now spends as much time as she can outdoors, hiking, walking her dogs, gardening, watching and feeding birds, curling and skating. Growing up with three hockey-loving brothers led to a lasting fondness for ice, and she has been a volunteer hockey coach for 3 to 7-year-old kids since 1994. She still enjoys playing herself, and last season helped coach Butte’s girls teams. If you try any of the learn to skate programs at the Butte Community Ice Center, you are sure to see her on the ice helping out.

Julie joined the Wild MontanaMontana Wilderness Association in 1989 soon after moving to Butte as a way of supporting those who work so hard to keep Montana wild, and now she looks forward to actively participating in trail projects. She feels lucky to live in southwest Montana where there are so many wild spaces you can access in under an hour’s drive.
Is your name or address incorrect, or did you receive more than one mailing? Scan here, or visit wildmontana.org/update to let us know.