



QUARTERLY

Winter 2022



LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Be not thwarted by the blustery winds or the pilings of snow the allure of Rocky awaits!

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ASK NANCY COLUMN

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OUR AMAZING DONORS

The love for Rocky is abundantly clear...

PG. 11

Musings on the History of Interpretation in the National Park Service

by Kathy Brazelton

A new year! A chance to make some big resolutions and some moderate course corrections in our lives and our goals. I like to pause at this time of year and look back as well as forward — which led me this year to my musings.

I plan to retire in April of 2022 after an incredible 35-year career as a park ranger with the National Park Service (NPS), with most of those years spent in the field of interpretation. Looking back on the history of my profession is a favorite pastime of mine — the stories are so compelling, the faces so varied! Won't you join me in a trip down memory lane?

Let's begin with the oft-asked question: Just what DO you interpretive rangers do, anyway? Having worked in both little and big parks, I have worn so many hats and performed so many duties, it's a wonder I can even see straight! Luckily, the division of interpretation in Washington, D.C., helps us to explain this: "Interpretation is the practice of sharing the stories of a place in order to connect visitors and their experiences to our nation's natural and historic resources. Our profession is driven by the philosophy of engaging audiences for the purpose of inspiring them to care about park resources and the collective history of our nation. Through this practice, the National Park Service communicates the values of environmental conservation and social justice in support of our mission of preservation, protection, and recreation."

<Whew!> It's a mouthful — but take just a moment and read it over two or three times to let it sink in. A lofty goal, this interpretation stuff.

As with almost all professions, interpretation has changed and grown, but I love that always, at the core of things, protection of these sacred NPS lands was the primary aim. To study the story of interpretive rangers we must first study all rangers, and in the origins of national parks there actually weren't any for us to study. U.S. Army Cavalry and Buffalo Soldiers were dispatched to keep an eye on things and discourage poaching. These early parks were lucky to have such caretakers, but they really needed dedicated, trained staff to be available to the growing number of park visitors.

Early park visitors, those intrepid "sagebrushers," were on their own in most instances. Slowly, park lodges and ranger stations appeared, with many offering "lectures." Visitors were looking at the resources and marveling at the natural wonders of our nation's fledgling parks, and that marveling was GOOD — but rangers started wondering if we couldn't pair it with a program to help them learn about these wonders as well.

Stephen Mather, the first director of the NPS, enthusiastically recruited some university professors from California, including Dr. C. M. Goethe, Dr. Loye Miller, and Dr. Harold Bryant, for those who wish to research these

And this is the wonder of Rocky—the constant intrigue and lure of its changing seasons, the unpredictability of the landscape and the wildlife within it, and the sense of newness, no matter how many times we've hiked the same trail or path.



A Message from our Executive Director



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Dear Friends,

As I write this note, my 10-year-old daughter is eagerly reviewing the suggested clothing and packing list for her 5th grade snowshoe field trip with her school to Rocky Mountain National Park later this week. She, like countless other Front Range students, has taken a field trip to the park nearly every single one of her elementary school years, and yet her excitement and anticipation remain sky high. As a park neighbor for half of her young life, she's also been incredibly fortunate to have adventures in the park most weekends during the year — she's even skinned up the Hidden Valley slopes (albeit sometimes begrudgingly and alternately motivated and/or bribed upwards with the promise of candy at the top), and skied down, which was a little more adrenaline-pumping than the snowshoe experience that lies ahead this week. Despite all of her adventures in the park, with each outing, she's still engaged, and still excited to play in the park. And this is the wonder of Rocky — the constant intrigue and lure of its changing seasons, the unpredictability of the landscape and the wildlife within it, and the sense of newness, no matter how many times we've hiked the same trail or path.

This week, we'll be dipping into double-digit negative temperatures, and it's going to be awfully hard to get excited about the prospect of backcountry treks and skiing in the park (I, too, am known to have been cajoled to a summit with the promise of chocolate bars by my husband). Yet, the allure remains, and I'm looking forward to seeing the park in its winter glory. Will I see you out there?

Whenever you do visit the park, be sure to send us a picture so that we can share it with those who can't visit the park this year, or to inspire someone to come for the first time. I've lost count of the dozens of letters and photographs that I've been sent from RMNP super-fans, often in their 90s, recounting their wild adventures in the park "back in the day." They often close by telling me how much they love the *Quarterly* newsletter, especially the photos, to keep them connected to this place they love. So, plan a visit and get out there, (take a child or even a whole classroom with you!), have fun, take some pictures, and be sure to share your once-in-a-lifetime experiences in Rocky to help us all get through these cold and snowy months ahead until the first pasque flowers start appearing in the spring.

Warmly,



Estee Rivera Murdock
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ask Nancy 🔀

Quarterly Editor Nancy Wilson attempts to unearth answers to any questions asked by Conservancy members and park visitors. If you are curious about something in or about the park, email nancy.wilson@rmconservancy.org or write: Nancy Wilson, Rocky Mountain Conservancy, PO Box 3100, Estes Park, CO 80517.

Shop Conservancy Nature Stores

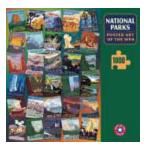
For ALL Your RMNP Memorabilia

In high winds or frigid temperatures, why don't the small birds like finches and sparrows take refuge in abandoned bluebird houses during the winter? Small birds wintering in northern areas accommodate severe weather in a number of ways — fluffing feathers (some grow extra feathers for winter), communal roosting, even some changes in their circulatory system. Some, especially cavity nesters, commonly use cavities/nest boxes as communal night roosts (I've seen as many as a dozen pygmy nuthatches emerge from a nest box at first light). However, for some, a nest box, lacking perches, limited floor space, and with an opening toward the top allowing heat to escape, may not be as energetically beneficial as larger numbers of birds roosting closely together but still able to keep their feathers fluffed, as in a dense evergreen. — Retired RMNP Wildlife Biologist Gary Miller

What does the park do to nurture relationships with Native American tribes that identify Rocky Mountain National Park as an ancestral home? Since 2017, Rocky Mountain National Park's Interpretation and Education Division has partnered with the University of Colorado Boulder (Center of the American West and the Center for Native American and Indigenous Studies), the NPS Intermountain Region (Cultural Anthropology Program), and representatives from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes in Oklahoma, the Northern Arapaho Tribe in Wyoming, the Northern Cheyenne Tribe in Montana, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe in Colorado, the Ute Indian Tribe of Uintah and Ouray in Utah, and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe in Colorado, on a project aimed at promoting better representation of tribal nations at the national parks. Work is sometimes slow, but it is constantly moving forward, and wonderful relationships are being built! Project goals include, 1. Encouraging visitors to Rocky Mountain National Park to see the park not only as a beautiful natural setting but also as a place where Native peoples hold strong historical and contemporary connections. This goal will be partially reached this summer as we sponsor a speakers' series of tribal representatives and the construction of some new exhibits; 2. Supporting tribal nations as they work to connect with the park and their ancestral lands; and 3. Building relationships among tribal nations, Rocky Mountain National Park, and the University of Colorado. — RMNP Supervisory Park Ranger, Interpretation, Kathy Brazelton

What kind of research is the park engaged in regarding the status and condition of pika populations in Rocky, and what

are the findings? Research of the American pika (Ochotona princeps) has been conducted within Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) since 2008. Currently, pika research is being performed through a community science project led by the Colorado Pika Project (CPP), which is a collaboration between RMNP, Denver Zoo, Rocky Mountain Wild, CitiSci.org, and the University of Colorado — Boulder. This project is built off of the Pikas-in-Peril baseline study that was conducted across multiple National Parks (Jeffress et al. 2013) that projected serious declines in pika occupancy at RMNP. Through CPP, community scientists are trained to collect long-term pika occupancy data to characterize changes in species distributions within RMNP and the regional area. The CPP has developed a database and training program for community scientists and conducted multiple research projects. Overall, the research has reported pika occupancy has been relatively stable within the park; however, longer-term data is needed to understand pika population trends. Additional research determined there are two subspecies of American pikas within the park, a northern and southern subspecies, which may be due to geographic barriers to dispersal, selection against hybrid individuals, or both (Castillo et al. 2018). More recent research is looking into stress levels of the pika related to habitat features and climate change. — RMNP Research Coordinator – Continental Divide Research Learning Center Lisa Cowart Baron



WPA NATIONAL PARK POSTER JIGSAW PUZZLE

From 1936 – 1943 the Federal Art Project under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) commissioned more than 200,000 works from American artists and artisans to support struggling creatives. WPA National Park posters and newly created posters in the WPA style are featured on this colorful and historic 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle. Completed puzzle dimensions: 17.25" x 26.5" Made in the USA.

Price: \$24.99 Member Price: \$21.24



KID'S BLACK BEAR BEANIE HAT Such a cute way to stay warm this winter — AND —

winter — AND this black bear beanie is green! 100% acrylic. One size fits all.

Price: \$13.95 Member Price: \$11.86



LIGHTWEIGHT RMNP HOODIE SHIRT

Enjoy this soft and light extra layer as the seasons change. 60% cotton, 40% polyester

Price: \$29.95 Member Price: \$25.46

More memorabilia at RMConservancy.org or Call 970-586-0121 to order.



An example of a simulated beaver structure in action in the park



by Jeremy Sueltenfuss and Alex Brooks Colorado Sate University

If willows need beaver, and beaver need willows. how do we go about getting each back onto this landscape if both can thrive only in the presence of the other?!?

> Researchers collecting annual willow growth data at one of the research sites.



Simulated Beaver Structures to Encourage Willow Growth (Part 2)

Mountain floodplain ecosystems throughout the West have experienced major changes during the last 200 years. Where once stood tall willow communities and rivers with multiple channels, one now finds open meadows with simple, single channels. And the few willows that do remain are often much smaller than what once occurred, both in height and stem diameter. The reasons for this shift are many.

The list of reasons for the decline in willow populations includes the removal of willows for hay production,

the eradication of beaver through past fur trapping and ongoing "nuisance" removal, overgrazing by elk or cattle, and the straightening of river channels. While these activities used to be seen through a positive lens as developing the land into something productive, we now know that these changes have led to the collapse of these important systems, with many questions remaining about how to restore them.

Wolf reintroduction gets a lot of press, but again, the real champion at the base of this ecosystem is the willow. Willows, composed of many different species in the genus Salix, are the foundation species for mountain floodplain ecosystems. As the dominant plant type in the community, they provide habitat for the

smaller plants on the ground, small mammals that live in their base, birds that nest in their branches, bats that feast on the insects hiding in the canopy, elk and moose that eat the new growth, and beavers that use the branches for their dams and lodges and eat their bark. In the absence of willows, these areas provide little habitat for anything other than dandelions and exotic clover.

Today, it's still unclear precisely how to get willows back on the landscape

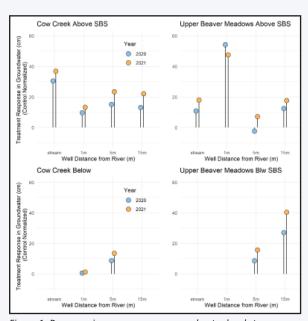


Figure 1: Response in mean summer groundwater levels to simulated beaver structure (SBS). Installation at wells directly above and below SBS that are 1, 5 and 15 meters from river. Response variable compares post-treatment years (2020 and 2021) to pre-treatment year (2019). Response is normalized by water levels along control transect. Y-axis indicates the amount that the treatment well was higher (or lower) than the control well in a post-treatment year compared to the pre-treatment year.

with the vigor they once had. Willows need beaver for raising water levels and distributing new branches around the system, which then grow into new willow plants. Yet beavers won't live in an area without a large willow community to sustain them. Beavers eat willows specifically, so a robust willow community is needed to provide enough food and building supplies. If willows need beaver, and beaver need willows, how do we go about getting each back onto this landscape if both can thrive only in the presence of the other?!?

The environmental factors limiting a species, or groups of similar species, can vary across space and through time. Past work on willows has suggested that they might be limited by water availability. When rivers are simplified and straightened they often become incised, cutting down into the land below where they used to be. This downcutting lowers the water levels in the adjacent floodplain, potentially lowering them below the root zone of floodplain plant species. Rocky Mountain National Park and project collaborators from Colorado State University (CSU) designed a study to test whether willows in Rocky Mountain National Park are limited by water, and whether increasing those water levels would lead to an increase in willow growth.

Simulated Beaver Structures

In the fall of 2019, project collaborators installed Simulated Beaver Structures (SBS) in strategic locations in three sites in Rocky. The purpose of these structures was to raise the water level in the channel to see if raised water levels leads to raised ground water levels in the floodplain, subsequently improving willow growth. To detect these potential changes, groundwater monitoring wells were installed throughout the floodplain, and individual willows were identified, tagged, and remeasured each year.

Impact on Channel and Floodplain Water Levels

To assess the goal of raising the water table, water levels were measured in the stream and in groundwater pre-SBS installation (2019) and then post-SBS installation (2020-2021) along transects at a control site (without a SBS) and above and below the SBS, which allowed the comparison of mean summer water levels between years and locations. Differences in the treatment transects were compared to those observed in the control transect normalized for year-to-year hydrologic differences.

The installation had mixed results, varying both across and within sites (Figure 1). At Cow Creek, the stream and groundwater levels increased near the SBS site, with moderate increases in the stream level and smaller increases in the

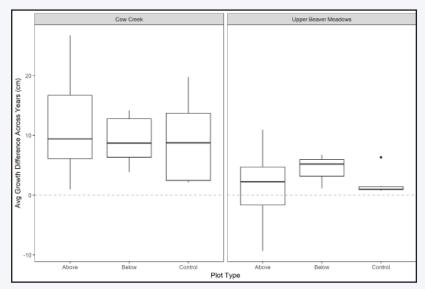


Figure 2. Willow growth at each plot type, located directly upstream of the simulated beaver structure (SBS), directly downstream of the SBS, and the control site that is not influenced by the SBS, and across years, comparing the growth in the first year before the SBS was built to the growth measured in 2021.

groundwater wells that were 1, 5, and 15 meters away from the river. Interestingly, the hydrologic response seemed greater at 5 and 15 m than right next to the channel at the 1 m well. At Upper Beaver Meadows (UBM), a smaller increase was observed in the stream level, a large increase at the 1 m well and no meaningful increase at the 5 m well. A 30 – 40 cm increase was observed in water level 15 m from the SBS at the transect downstream of the SBS. This is potentially due to the recharge of the floodplain upstream of the structure, a positive indication that SBSs are influencing groundwater levels throughout the floodplain.

Impact on Willow Growth

At the outset, willow growth was expected to increase once the SBSs were installed, due to the expected increase in floodplain groundwater levels. To detect the potential change in willow growth, willow growth can be compared at the SBS to willow growth at the control sites (without SBSs), and growth at the SBS can be compared to the growth in those exact same willows before the SBSs were built. Contrary to what was expected, no increase in willow growth was detected at the SBS compared to the control sites, nor any change in growth from before the SBS were built to after (Figure 2).

Conclusions and Management Recommendations

Water levels in the channel and groundwater levels in the floodplain were generally higher from the SBS, yet willow growth was not clearly affected by this hydrologic change. Apart from the large groundwater increase at the 1 m well at UBM, SBS Dams continued on page 7

Author Jeremy's two sons who came up to help that day exploring the real beaver dam in Horseshoe Park.





The park worked with the town to design the multiuse trail inside the park so that it would connect seamlessly with the multiuse trail outside the park.



by RMNP Park **Planners Cheri Yost** and Sheri Fedorchak (Retired)

Fall River Multiuse Connector Trail into Aspenglen Campground Completed

The Rocky Mountain Conservancy provided funding to design and construct the portion of the trail in the park.



Although construction was delayed, the park vegetation team was able to rake seed this fall.



Multiuse trails serve many user groups, including walkers, runners and cyclists. Their surfaces are typically paved, and the width is generous so that passing is easy. We are happy to report that the partnership between the park, the Town of Estes Park, and the Rocky Mountain Conservancy has completed the construction of a 1.5 mile multiuse trail connecting the historic Fall River Hydroplant, located along Fish Hatchery Road, and near the Fall River Visitor Center, with Aspenglen Campground in Rocky Mountain National Park.

The multiuse trail terminates at Aspenglen Campground (AGCG), and the short trail section in the park extends from the north side of the pedestrian bridge over Fall River in AGCG, to the south side of the bridge, where it ends at the closest campsite adjacent to the bridge. The park has converted this campsite to welcome pedestrians and bicyclists, with signage, two picnic tables, and a bench.

The Rocky Mountain Conservancy provided funding to design and construct the portion of the trail in the park. To capitalize on efficiencies and assure that the park and town portions of the trails matched up, the park and the town further partnered using the same contractor for design and construction.

While the weather at the moment is not conducive to outdoor activities, this can change in a moment! Be ready to explore this new connection between the Town and Rocky Mountain National Park — a partnership project at its best!





Sprague Lake, August 5, 2021 Preparing for Boulder Brook boreal toad tadpole reintroduction (left to right): Sarah Ganger (NPS), Ryan Mellin (U.S. Geological Survey), Madison Null (U.S. Geological Survey), Amber Reed (CSU)

Boulder Brook is Hopping with Boreal Toads Once Again

by Jonathan Lewis, **Rocky Mountain Conservancy Biology Program Amphibian**

Once common in the high elevation wetlands of Rocky Mountain National Park, boreal toads (Anaxyrus boreas boreas) are now rarely seen. The dramatic population decline in the park and throughout Colorado is credited to the introduction of an exotic pathogen known as chytrid fungus (Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis), which was first detected in the park in 1998. The fungus causes a fatal skin disease that has been widespread and detrimental to amphibian populations worldwide.

Today, breeding activity only occurs at 5 of 20 historic breeding sites documented since the park's inception in 1915. The species is currently listed as endangered by the state of Colorado and was considered for federal listing in 2017. The best way to improve the status of the boreal toad is to establish more populations, which is now underway at the Boulder Brook wetland located immediately west of Sprague Lake.

Over the past 30 years, park biologists have collaborated with state and federal institutions to re-introduce boreal toads to historic breeding locations within the park. In 2019, the Rocky Mountain Conservancy joined this effort by providing critical funding for boreal toad restoration projects, which includes the new Boulder Brook site.

In the spring of 2019, before committing to Boulder Brook, park biologists conducted multiple tests to see if the chytrid fungus was present, including the release of four hatchery-reared adults as disease sentinels. Each toad was fit with a VHF telemetry belt which allowed staff to find, recapture and test toads weekly for the fungus using a quick and minimally invasive cotton swab. None of the tests detected chytrid fungus, which opened the door for the 2019 pilot tadpole reintroduction, followed by fullscale efforts in 2020 and 2021.

Amphibians have an incredible growth

process with defined developmental stages, which allows the monitoring of their success at each step. The first batch of 621 tadpoles released at the Boulder Brook site in August 2019 were collected as eggs from the Fay Lakes wetland and reared at Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Fish Research Hatchery in Bellvue, Colorado. In the spring of 2020, eggs were collected from Zimmerman Lake and Panhandle Creek, which resulted in 7,245 tadpoles and 181 metamorphs released at the Boulder Brook site.

Native tiger salamanders were observed preying on tadpoles in one large pond as the first batch of tadpoles was released, so that area was subsequently avoided. Initial post-reintroduction monitoring discovered some tadpole congregation sites, however, as visibility deteriorated because of the Cameron Peak and East Troublesome Fires. very few tadpoles were observed.

In 2021, tadpole reintroductions continued at carefully selected locations to avoid tiger salamanders. USGS and Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff collected eggs from Lost Lake and Panhandle Creek, which resulted in 5,348 tadpoles released. They were closely monitored and almost immediately observed clustering in shallow mud in preparation for metamorphosis. During the following weeks, hundreds of boreal toads were observed in metamorphosis developing legs and arms and reabsorbing their tails as they emerged, first crawling then hopping, from their aquatic habitat to a new terrestrial environment in the wetland. We hope to observe yearlings during spring surveys in 2022, which will confirm overwinter survival, another essential milestone for successful reestablishment of the species at Boulder Brook.



SBS Dams continued from page 5

the wells had smaller increases in groundwater than were expected. That these willows did not increase in annual growth was surprising, yet might be related to the small change in water levels. However, other current research being conducted in Rocky Mountain National Park suggests water limitation might not be the main limiting factor to willow growth. Although willows did not grow more from these structures, the SBS appeared to increase growth of the understory plants. The herbaceous plant communities seemed to respond to the increase in water availability, both by growing more robust and likely shifting which species were dominant in the community. While increased water levels may have a limited impact on willow growth, these SBSs may still be a valuable restoration tool for the restoration of the entire riparian ecosystem. A continued effort to identifying the limiting factors to willow growth and best restoration techniques is ongoing, but it seems clear that the answer is more complex than just assigning water limitation as the main culprit. Stay tuned!



Black bears in Rocky are few, and park efforts to safeguard these locals have significantly amped up in the last few years.



From seed to stalk:

Philanthropy News and Updates

Adopt a Bear Box!

It's a proven fact: Bear-proof food storage lockers in Rocky's campgrounds improve visitor safety and prevent bears from accessing human food. The Conservancy and RMNP are teaming up to offer you a unique opportunity to adopt a bear box, and, with a minimum donation of \$2,000, you can name a bear-proof storage locker at Moraine Park Campground with a personalized inscription.

Contributors of the full \$2,000 Bear Box Sponsorship will receive their name (or loved one's name) engraved on a 4" x 6" brass plate that is permanently affixed to a bear-proof storage box in the Moraine Park Campground. You can choose to add your name to the engraved plague or memorialize a loved one:

This bear proof box was made possible through a generous donation to the Rocky Mountain Conservancy by (or) in memory of (or) in honor of ___

Your donation will go to support the Wildlife Conservation Fund at Rocky, which supports bear conservation, as well as the protection and management of all the park's wildlife inhabitants. If you have questions about sponsoring a bearproof storage box, please contact Michael Allen at michael.allen@rmconservancy. org, or call (720) 845-5690.

Preventing bears from obtaining human food is one of the top priorities of Rocky's wildlife managers. Bears that gain access to human food eventually become more aggressive towards

humans and may need to be removed from the population. Bear-proof food storage lockers help campers manage their food and bear attractants safely.

Colorado Gives Day Boost for the Conservancy On Colorado Gives Day, December 7,

2021, the Rocky Mountain Conservancy capped off one the single biggest fundraising days in the Conservancy's history. In all, nearly 600 online donors gave through ColoradoGives.org.

Colorado Gives Day is an annual giving holiday that provides a matching incentive for donors to give to their favorite nonprofits in Colorado. Thanks to Community First Foundation and FirstBank, Colorado Gives Day features a \$1.6 million incentive fund, one of the largest gives-day incentive funds in the country. Every donation on Colorado Gives Day receives a portion of the Incentive Fund, which increases the value of each gift to the Rocky Mountain Conservancy. The Conservancy Team would like to thank those who participated in Colorado Gives Day, and our year-end annual campaign. Your support helps to protect and conserve Rocky, improve hiking trails, and support a variety of programs to improve the visitor experience.

This is what the food storage lockers in the park campgrounds look like including a sponsorship plaque (below).







Join Our Social Media Team!

This photo (above) was taken by Rachel Clark, one of the Conservancy's Facebook friends. We absolutely loved this one of Dream Lake and Hallett Peak, and she generously sent us a copy for us to use as we see fit. Send us your favorite pictures of the park, and depending on their resolution and quality, we might use them in this publication or in other publications we produce — and always with photo credits noted.

Be in the know ...

Pile Burning in Rocky

After a big snow, when the winds are calm, conditions are overtly favorable for Rocky Mountain National Park Fire Management staff to burn the piles that they have gathered together in various areas of the park. When these are ignited, smoke is often visible in the area, which not infrequently prompts observant individuals to report seeing smoke, or sometimes actual flames which can be visible as well.

Pile burning operations begin only when conditions allow. Safety factors, weather conditions, air quality, and other environmental regulations are continually monitored as a part of any fire management operation.

Why is this important?

When fighting the East Troublesome Fire in 2020, firefighters were able to take advantage of previous and existing prescribed fire and hazardous fuels treatment areas that provided a buffer between the fire and the town of Estes Park. Additionally, prior hazard-fuels projects aided considerably in stopping the fire from jumping Bear Lake Road

and Trail Ridge Road. Years of hazardous fuels reduction projects and bark beetle tree removal on the west side were instrumental in the successful burnout operations around the town of Grand Lake, and also helped minimize structure loss in the main park housing area.

Piles of slash in the park are from several fuels reduction projects and hazard tree removals. Slash from these projects has been cut and piled by park fire crews and contractors over the last two years and are now dry enough to burn. They are designed to reduce significant accumulations of forest fuels that can generate extreme or problematic fire behavior adjacent to wildland urban interface. By reducing the potential fire behavior, the wildland fire risk to firefighters and the public is significantly reduced. However, these projects are not designed as a stand-alone defense against wildfires nor are they guaranteed to hold a wildfire in the worst conditions. To learn more about wildfire mitigation around homes visit www.firewise.org

RMNP Search-and-Rescue Vehicle On Order

On behalf of the Conservancy team, we'd like to thank all those who generously supported the Searchand-Rescue (SAR) replacement vehicle initiative last year, and we're excited to announce that we met our goal of \$75,000 to finish the project.

As you may know, the SAR team currently uses an aging ambulance that has become increasingly less reliable over time. And with the exponential growth of SAR incidents at Rocky, this vehicle is no longer able to reliably respond. The new tactical vehicle will be a badly needed upgrade that will support the team and help them reliably respond to emergencies in the park. THANK YOU to the Conservancy community for supporting this critical initiative.

The latest SAR replacement vehicle concept — it's going to be such a boon for the park!



Support Rocky's Searchand-Rescue program at RMConservancy.org, or call 970-586-0108



Rocky Mountain Conservancy Park Puzzler

Across

the park.

- Moose, elk and deer are all in the _____ family
 Formed only when neither organism can thrive on its own, lichen appears when a symbiotic relationship between ____ and alga develops.
 The Conservancy will host a record-setting nine crews in the illustrious _____ Corps next summer.
 The Conservancy helped to fund a 2021 study exploring the effects
- **16.** After many years of consultation with _____ tribes, the Conservancy will be supporting the park's development of new or improved exhibits in all the visitor centers, which will include information and stories significant to the tribes.

of the pilot _____ system on patterns

of vehicle use and experience in

- **17.** A primary cause of boreal toad declines is due to the _____ fungus which cause a thickening of the toad's skin that causes absorption issues.
- **19.** The Ute tribe would harvest the inner bark of the ponderosa pine for nutrition and _____ purposes. You can still find some scarring on trees in the park today!
- 20. Pikas rely heavily on the cooler temperatures, talus and _____ of alpine environments for survival.21. The Ute tribe was one of the first

Native American tribes to acquire .

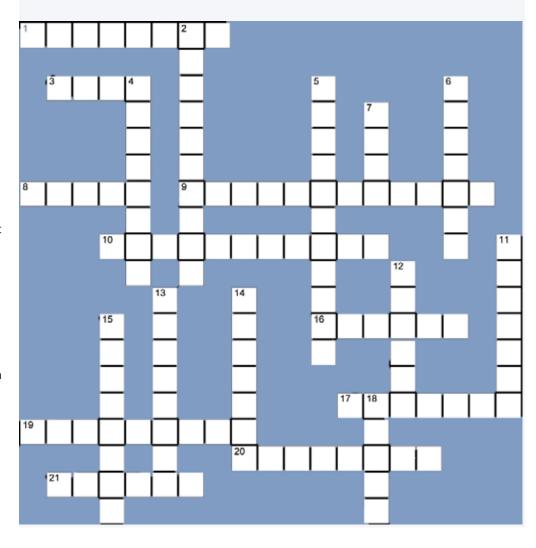
Down

- 2. Most _____ occur during or right after snowstorms, and waiting 36 hours after one can allow snow to become more stable.
- **3.** Bear root, more commonly known as _____, was used for medicinal purposes by the Ute tribe and continues to be used by them today to treat colds, upper respiratory ailments, and much more.
- **4.** Since the 1920s, the RMNP museum and _____ storage facility has been home to a host of cultural, botanical, geological and biological

- specimens collected by permitted researchers in Rocky.
- **5.** Beginning in 1985, the Conservancy (then the Rocky Mountain Nature Association) added _____ for special projects to its list of park-supported programs a program that is strongly backed by its donors to this day.
- **6.** Peregrine, red-tail, and other birds of prey are referred to as _____, from the Latin *rapio* meaning to seize or pillage.
- **7.** The _____ concolor is known as "the cat with many names," including cougar, panther and mountain lion.
- **11.** The renowned authority of tundra ecology Dr. Bettie _____ brought expertise and credibility to the Conservancy's Field Institute program back in 1962.
- **12.** Approximately _____ percent of RMNP is tundra, making it one of the

largest examples of this ecosystem protected in the contiguous US.

- 13. Following the East Troublesome and Cameron Peak fires in 2020, the Conservancy has set up a _____ Recovery and Healthy Forests Fund to generate support for park recovery efforts.
- **14.** Current RMNP research studies are exploring climate-related impact to an array of _____ in the park, including pika, ptarmigan, trout, and more.
- **15.** While today's _____ are stable, their future is sketchy since predicted atmospheric warming will lead to decreases in seasonal snow by the end of the century.
- **18.** The Conservancy takes pride in supporting the park's _____ of the Rockies program that extends the park's reach to distant schools.



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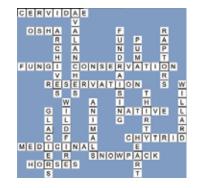
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Park Puzzler Solution



MUSINGS continued from page 1

fascinating men further. Director Mather stated that "one of the chief functions of the national parks and monuments is to serve educational purposes." We are grateful to this day for his vision.

It also has been noted from the start of the NPS in 1916 that a well-informed visitor was usually a "better" visitor, much less likely to engage in activities that would harm the very resources they had come to enjoy. This early recognition of the phenomenon of "care about = care for" was the foundation of the establishment of interpretation in the national parks, and the promotion of stewardship is still at the forefront of our daily work.

For many at this time, education simply meant naming — this is a redwood tree, this is a mule deer, this is a monarch butterfly. Now, don't get me wrong: I am the ranger who DELIGHTS in botanical Latin and the use of scientific names! But names are only the base of the pyramid of knowledge — what about meanings? Values? Relationships?

Environmental writer Barry Lopez said, "The quickest door to open in the woods for a child is the one that leads to the smallest room, by knowing the name each thing is called." Rocky Mountain National Park's own Enos Mills recognized a new profession of "Nature Guiding," stating, "A nature guide is not a guide in the ordinary sense of the word, and is not a teacher. At all times, however, he has been rightly associated with information and some form of education. But nature guiding, as we see it, is more inspirational than informational." The start of the Ranger Naturalist Service in the national parks helped it grow even a bit more, blending the power of inspiration with some good, well-researched information.

In the 1950s, the NPS sent playwright and author Freeman Tilden on a nationwide journey to try to get a working definition of interpretation. He declared it "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."

He went on to outline six principles which are still in use today (read more at Tilden's Six Principles —The History of Meaning Making (@ nps.gov)). These principles helped us understand more about communication, and the importance of the VISITOR in these interactions. In what I have heard called our "accidental arrogance," rangers told the visitor the meaning and value of the resource. As we learned more about learning itself and the myriad ways our visitors might absorb park information, we kept tweaking our interpretive efforts. We branched out



Kathy Brazelton in the field with budding Junior Rangers

into exploring feelings, "grocking" oranges with our fingertips, and other inspired techniques that then often sadly left out the science part of the message. How to strike a balance?

Great minds from the interpretive world of the NPS got together in the late 1990s/early 2000s to develop a network of competencies — a combination of knowledge, skills and abilities that allow employees to perform a task or function at a specifically defined level of proficiency. This view of interpretation proposed a dynamic mix of offerings, including emphasis on the importance of both the intellectual connections as well as the emotional connections between the resource and the visitor. The "interpretive equation" was coined (for my mathematics-oriented friends, it is a metaphor, not a real equation) (KR + KA) x AT = IO, where KR is Knowledge of the Resource, KA is Knowledge of the Audience, AT is Appropriate Techniques, and IO is Interpretive Opportunity. Notice, there are no guarantees — it is an opportunity offered to our visitors, but not a sure connection.

And our latest take to offer a consistently high quality product across the national parks is called Audience-Centered Learning. This approach includes the visitors and their opinions, values and experiences in the actual building and presentation of the program. It takes a well-trained ranger to be a facilitator of these

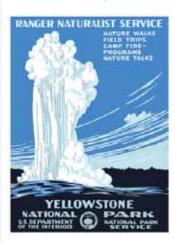
programs, embracing the sharing of ideas, ensuring the accuracy of the science, and protecting the rights of all in the group to participate.

In my musings, I was thrilled to witness the metamorphosis of a profession to be proud of, building on the rich heritage of the NPS and yet remaining open to new ideas and approaches. This metamorphosis reminds me of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*: "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

I feel blessed to have been a part of the growth and the ideas that emerged during my 35-year adventure. I offer my heartfelt thanks to the employees at each park I've worked at, the park friends and volunteers, our partners like the Rocky Mountain Conservancy, and the wonderful park visitors. It has been an honor to do my part to care for and educate about our precious park resources. Even if not dressed in the "green and gray," I, Kathy Brazelton, pledge to ALWAYS fight for our parks!

See you on the trail!

From 1936 – 1943 the Federal Art Project under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) commissioned more than 200,000 works from American artists and artisans to support struggling creatives. Out of these commissions came hundreds of poster designs like this one of Yellowstone that capture the breadth and beauty of American culture and landscapes.



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Rocky Mountain Conservancy

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Nature Notes

It cannot be denied that winter is upon us, and uff da! The wind! Relentless and forceful would characterize it nicely. A gradually increasing amount snow to date has created impressive drift sculptures, especially in the park where more snow makes for more innovative art •

Conservancy Member Marlene Borneman was on

"Science Behind the Scenery" Webinar Series Open to the Public

Rocky Mountain National Park and the Rocky Mountain Conservancy are co-hosting a virtual "Science Behind the Scenery" webinar series in lieu of the park's traditional Biennial Research Conference. Beginning February 15, 2022, this webinar series will be taking place on Tuesdays from 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM MST from February 15 to March 15, 2022. The webinar series will be available online via GoToWebinar.

Each webinar will focus on one resource topic. Researchers will present for 15 minutes each followed by a Q & A session, during which time audience members can engage with presenters. A representative from Rocky Mountain National Park will be available to discuss applications of the research. Webinar topics include: Visitor-Use Management, Species Conservation, Riparian Ecosystem Restoration, and Fire and Forests.

This webinar series is free and open to the public. To sign up for the webinar series and to see a more detailed program schedule, as well as to learn about past research conferences, visit https://www.nps.aov/rlc/rontinentaldivide/research-conference.htm

a hike with husband (and Conservancy Board Member) Walt in early November up to Flattop Mountain. The winds were ferocious, but as they headed past Emerald Lake Overlook they really got blasted by cold winds. At this point, they made the decision to turn around as they had already been on the summit several times during the summer. As they headed down out of the worst of the wind, Marlene heard a familiar soft, clucking sound. They started looking around in the snow- covered slopes, and after a couple of minutes spotted at least a dozen ptarmigans, which, in their winter coat of brilliant white they were challenging to spot in snow. In the picture (right) they were all huddle close to one another, roosting in the hollows of deep snowdrifts to keep warm. The winds had blown clear several willows, a main food source in winter, and they could see broken tips on the low branches where the ptarmigan had eaten. They were well and truly captivated by these alpine birds, and despite the cold, the couple observed the nestled birds for about 20 minutes, watching them digging shelters in the snow with their densely feathered feet • In the middle of December, RMNP Interpretive Ranger Ricardo Escobar was hiking the West Glacier Creek Trail from Storm Pass to Glacier Gorge, with the fresh, snowy trail all to himself. Strong winds precluded seeing wildlife along the trail, but on his way back to his car, a mountain chickadee's piercing call stopped him in his tracks. In that moment,



Can you find all the ptarmigan camouflaged in the snow? (Hint: there are five)

he caught sight of a pair of pine grosbeaks silently nibbling willow buds within five feet of where he was standing • RMNP Woodcrafter Cory Johnson was plowing snow at the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center early on Christmas Eve where he spotted two sets of fairly fresh mountain lion tracks in the snow, emerging from the area below the visitor center, crossing the parking lot and heading toward High Drive. Cory also observed a beautiful coyote that very same morning • Keep moving, and stay connected to whatever brings you moments of joy.