



© Carl Finocchio | Sunrise at Dream Lake



# QUARTERLY

## Winter | 2025



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## A Stitch in Time: The Journey of the Quilt that Helped Conserve a Tract of Rocky Mountain National Park

By Anne Morris | Communications Associate

The year was 1983, and the leadership of Rocky Mountain National Park had a problem.

Homer and Thelma Jennings, owners of a prime 40-acre inholding in the Kawuneeche Valley, were selling their property and developers were eyeing the parcel to subdivide and build houses. Located five miles north of Grand Lake and just west of the Colorado River, the land included portions of Baker Creek and was considered prime habitat for elk, deer, and river otters. How could the parcel be protected?

The park turned to the Rocky Mountain Nature Association (RMNA, now the Rocky Mountain Conservancy) to secure a contract to purchase the property and mount a fundraising campaign. The RMNA had two years to raise the approximately \$85,000 necessary to make the balloon payment. Yet, a little more than one year later, in January 1985, just \$16,000 had been raised. The remaining \$69,000 was needed by November 22nd or the deal would fall through, jeopardizing the beautiful Jennings Tract.

### A Race Against Time

Then-park Superintendent Jim Thompson supported the fundraising as reported in

Estes Park Trail articles as the deadline loomed closer.

“Abundant wildlife is one facet of this ecosystem rich in plant, insect, aquatic and forest activity,” Thompson was quoted, along with repeating a recurring theme of

Continued on page 14

*A quilt made to support fundraising included flowers and wildlife.*



*Whimsical  
and  
mesmerizing  
ice patterns  
in the frozen  
surface of  
Dream Lake.*



## A Message from our Executive Director



### Board of Directors

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Dear Friends,

My husband and I love the outdoors and we're lucky to work in conservation and outdoor recreation. The only thing we love better than being outdoors ourselves, though, is seeing our daughter outdoors, as she explores and experiences plants, wildlife, trails, and landscapes. She probably thinks we're as cringeworthy as any other parents, but we've done something very important. Our daughter is growing up immersed in nature and outdoor adventures.

Many other parents and children aren't so fortunate. That's why I was thrilled when Congress, in a rare moment of bipartisanship, recently passed the EXPLORE Act. Among many initiatives supporting conservation and the outdoor recreation industry, this legislation reauthorizes and funds the Every Kid Outdoors Program for seven more years. Now all fourth-grade students can continue to get a free one-year pass to enable them and their families to visit more than 2,000 national parks and federal land sites. Visit [www.everykidoutdoors.gov](http://www.everykidoutdoors.gov) to learn more. On a personal note, I coordinated this project when I worked at the National Park Service headquarters in Washington, D.C., and I'm as passionate about the program now as I was then.

Also near and dear to me for the same reasons is the Conservancy's support to education and getting children and families into our park and public lands. We do this in many ways: providing bus transportation for park field trips for under-resourced schools, funding Junior Ranger books and programs, offering teacher workshops, augmenting park ranger staff with education interns and fellows, fielding the High School Leadership Corps, and offering family-oriented tours and workshops through our Field Institute.

Whether you call it "nature bathing" or "unplugging" or "getting away from it all," we all know instinctually that being outdoors and experiencing wonder is good for us and good for our children. Scientific studies back this up.

In 2025, Let's. Get. Outdoors. And let's take some children and their friends with us!

Warmly,



*Estee Rivera Murdock*

Estee Rivera Murdock  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



# Ask the Conservancy



Quarterly reporters unearth answers to any questions asked by Conservancy members and park visitors. If you are curious about something in or about the park, email [Communications@RMConservancy.org](mailto:Communications@RMConservancy.org) or write: Ask the Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Conservancy, PO Box 3100, Estes Park, CO 80517.



## Are there plans for maintenance work along Rocky's unimproved Long Meadows Trail on the west side where large fallen trees lay on the path?

The short answer is "not now," as Rocky's trails program prioritizes the 355 miles of popular marked trails they oversee and maintain across the park. Doug Parker,

the park's trails program supervisor, says that given limited resources and short weather windows for trail work, he and his crews generally focus on keeping the marked trails clear and safe. One exception is the unimproved trail in the Bear Lake trail system that provides access to Lake Haiyaha.

The trails program is perhaps one of the most challenging responsibilities in the park. With the majority of Rocky's land designated as Wilderness, most every mile must be reached on foot and most work accomplished by hand. Stock animals, horses and mules, can be used to pack in tools and supplies. And as frequent hikers understand, most trails are not fully clear of ice and snow until early July with new snowfall possible as early as September. To maintain the extensive system of marked trails, the park is divided into three areas of responsibility. Each year, the supervisor for each area inspects the trails and uses a tablet to record the trail assessments into Rocky's GIS database. Trail work is then prioritized as red (1-3 years), yellow (3-5 years), and green. So the trails team right now is completing planning for the execution of the 2025 summer work season with focus areas and projects that were actually determined 3-5 years ago.

The trails program receives and welcomes trail reports from the public and addresses many conditions immediately such as downed trees or boulders on trails and damaged bridges. There's a small, well-trained cohort of Volunteers-in-Parks (VIPs) that assists them; you'll recognize them on the trails because they'll have volunteer uniforms or name tags and they may have a handsaw sticking out of their daypack!

One of the Conservancy's major contributions to the park is providing the services of the Conservation Corps, bringing about 50 young people to work in the park and on similar public lands. Working as part of the AmeriCorps program and recruited, trained, supervised, and supported logistically by the Conservancy, these young people learn about nature and career opportunities while providing boots on the ground, ready-to-go-to-work labor in the backcountry.



## Shop Conservancy Nature Stores

[www.RMConservancy.org/shop](http://www.RMConservancy.org/shop)



### ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK COPPER BOTTOM MUG

This 18 oz matte mug features a white print design of an elk standing in a grove of trees in front of mountains with the words "Rocky Mountain National Park." The mug has a unique three-layered design with turquoise gloss on top, textured raw stone in the middle, and copper metallic finish on the bottom. Handwash recommended. Item #013409 Price: \$16.99 **Member Price: \$14.44**



### ROCKY MOUNTAIN FIELD GUIDE: A TRAILSIDE NATURAL HISTORY

Comprehensive yet portable, this beautiful guide by naturalist Daniel Mathews describes trees and shrubs, flowering plants and ferns, fungi and lichens, insects and fish, amphibians and reptiles, birds and mammals, rocks, and even the changing mountain climates and the ecological effects of forest fires. This essential guide is perfect for hikers, campers, naturalists, students, teachers, and tourists—everyone who wants to know more about the stunning Rocky Mountains. Item #013710 Price: \$32.95 **Member Price: \$28.01**



### ELK DESIGN CREWNECK SWEATSHIRT

This super cozy and soft, stone heather-colored crewneck makes a perfect addition to your wardrobe and a great gift everyone will love. Features a printed-on design of a black and white, hand sketched, majestic bull elk and the words "Rocky Mountain National Park." Made of 52% cotton and 48% polyester. Men's sizing S-XXL. Price: \$60.99 **Member Price: \$51.84**



### ELK IN ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK POSTER

A Rocky Mountain National Park poster of an elk herd in a meadow of yellow wildflowers with beautiful mountains in the background. This beautiful print is produced using the giclee fine art printing process with archival matte finish paper and fade resistant inks of the highest quality and is designed to last a lifetime. Made in the USA. 13 x 18 inches. Item #013733 Price: \$26.99 **Member Price: \$22.94**

More memorabilia at  
[www.RMConservancy.org/shop](http://www.RMConservancy.org/shop)  
970-586-0121

*Weasels' ability to blend into their environment helps them hunt.*



By Chadd Drott



## The Wild Lives of Rocky's Long-Tailed Weasels

*This weasel's friendly face belies its powerful jaws and ability to quickly kill their prey.*



*Weasels' winter coats match Rocky Mountain snow almost perfectly.*



When you think of predators in Rocky Mountain National Park, it's natural to think of larger mammals such as mountain lions, bears, coyotes, and foxes. You might be surprised, then, that one of the park's most fierce and interesting predators weighs less than a pound: the long-tailed weasel!

Don't let the size fool you. This little rhyme helps decipher whether a species is a predator or prey: "Eyes in front, you're meant to hunt; eyes on the side, you're meant to hide." This helps you determine that, although small, the long-tailed weasel is, in fact, a predatory species.

Weasels are part of the Mustelidae family of carnivorous mammals which include otters, ferrets, badgers, wolverines, martens, fishers, and mink. Colorado and Rocky Mountain National Park are home to two species of weasels: the short-tailed weasels (often called ermines or stoats) and the more common long-tailed weasels, which I'll focus on in this article.

So what does a weasel look like? In general, weasels have a small head with prominent whiskers, a long narrow body, and short limbs. They are one of many mammal species that exhibit sexual dimorphism,

meaning the males and females differ in appearance. In the case of weasels, the difference is size, with males being larger. They can measure up to 38 inches from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail. They can also weigh as much as nine ounces. Females are slightly smaller, coming in at 30.5 inches and weighing a maximum of 7.2 ounces. This species of weasel is described as long-tailed because they can sport a tail that is about half their body length.

Like ptarmigans and snowshoe hares, weasels will molt and change color to blend into their environment. In the summer months, they are brown from nose to about the first 80 percent of their tails along the dorsal line of the body. The underbelly is either white or a slight yellow cream color from the chin to the inguinal region. Their eyes are jet black. In winter, their whole body turns a brilliant pure white, excluding their beady eyes and the very tip of the tail which always remains black.

The black tip of the tail is an adaptation believed to be a defense mechanism. Birds or animals preying on the weasel—especially in winter when the weasel's body blends in with snow cover—may be confused by



the tip as the weasel flees, causing the predator to pounce on that black tip instead of the weasel's vulnerable head and body.

As a tour guide in Rocky, I find clients are often surprised to learn that long-tailed weasels molt. "Molt? I thought only birds molted?"

Molting provides weasels with seasonal camouflage which can help them as they hunt mice, voles, rabbits, or birds. That same camouflage helps weasels evade animals preying on them. Another great rule to remember when observing wildlife in their natural environment is if you are not the biggest predator, then you are not the only predator. These weasels have to avoid coming face-to-face with coyotes, foxes, bobcats, eagles, some owl species, and then, of course, their larger cousins such as badgers.

The timing of the long-tailed weasel's molt in spring and autumn has always been what fascinates me the most. Molting is a neurochemical process initiated by the release of hormones from the weasel's pituitary gland. For a species that does not keep time or follow a calendar, they hit the mark

*Sherrie Duris captured this photograph along the road to the Fern Lake Trailhead seconds before the weasel took after—and took down—a rabbit three times its size.*



© Sherrie Duris

right on time year after year. Most people think the molt takes place because of temperature changes—because it gets cold in the winter and hot in the summer. Researchers believe the actual trigger to the weasel's brain is the amount of daylight or length of the day, a factor of equinoxes and the seasonal tilt of the earth's axis.

Weasels have other characteristics that set them apart. One is their high rate of metabolism—which is about twice the rate of animals of similar size—which drives them to live what I call a speedy life. They spend most of their time hunting (eating about half of their weight in food each day which could be two to three mice or voles) or sleeping to maintain their metabolism.

Weasels may look sweet and cuddly, but another unique characteristic that helps them hunt is their unusually powerful jaws and bite force. For example, the long-tailed weasel's cousin species, the least weasel, is considered to have the second-strongest bite force "pound for pound" of any other land animal in the world! Only the Tasmanian Devil has a stronger bite. Weasels typically kill prey with a single, crushing bite to either the windpipe, jugular, or back of the spinal cord.



© Sherrie Duris

*This weasel almost appears to fly as it pursues prey after an October snowfall.*

Mating is their only other activity, along with males and females raising their young, known as "kits." Males spend any free time fighting off other males for territory. It's a simple but harsh life.

Scientists continue to study and learn about the long-tailed weasel. One reflection of that is that the taxonomy of long-tailed weasels was changed in 2021 from "Mustela frenata" to "Neogale frenata" based on genetic studies showing its lineage was distinct enough to warrant its own genus.

The long-tailed weasel can be found in any environment in Rocky Mountain National Park. They are found in all three ecosystems: high montane, subalpine, and alpine. They are most often seen in and around waterways throughout the park, taking full advantage of abundant food sources of the riparian areas. They can also be seen on or along the roadways and trails throughout the park and at any elevation along any rocky outcropping. Nowhere is there a spot safe from the ever curious and always hungry weasel.

*Chadd Drott has studied wildlife for 25 years and operates a Colorado-based wildlife tour company. Reprinted with permission from the March 2023 edition of Hike Rocky Magazine.*

Left: Field Institute participants hike off into Rocky to discover orchids.

Right: The Bettie course on fly fishing also included extensive education on stream ecology.



## Field Institute Offers New Courses and Improved Experiences for 2025

*Field Institute courses are designed for people who love Rocky and would like to take a deep dive in exploring the landscape, history, flora, and fauna of the Rocky Mountains.*

*Education team Danielle Wolf and Katie Colson are ready to welcome visitors to 2025 Field Institute courses and programs.*



Rocky Mountain Conservancy's Field Institute team has been hard at work this winter lining up courses and summer programs for 2025! If you've never experienced a Field Institute course, now is a great time to start. Updates for the upcoming summer include new courses and instructors, reduced prices, new field buses, and more options in course formats to accommodate a wide variety of schedules.

Field Institute courses are designed for people who love Rocky and would like to take a deep dive in exploring the landscape, history, flora, and fauna of the Rocky Mountains. The Field Institute was founded in 1962 by pioneering tundra ecologist, educator, and environmental advocate Bettie Willard, the first in the National Park Service. With topics including art, science, wellness, wildlife, geology, and park life ranging from bats and butterflies to elk and raptors, and more, there are courses for diverse interests. Registration for all courses is now open.

"One way we complement but differ from commercial tour operators is the professional expertise and experience of our talented instructors," said Conservancy Education Manager

Danielle Wolf. "Our instructors generally have written authoritative publications or worked professionally in the field they're teaching. They are subject matter experts, and they love to share their knowledge and passion with new audiences."

For example, Kim Swift, who recently retired from the National Park Service as Rocky's division lead for interpretation and education programs, will teach a new course entitled Art and Stories of Rocky Mountain National Park: A Behind-the-Scenes Tour. Well-known historian (and Conservancy board member), Dr. Jim Pickering, will lead a new 4-hour program featuring historic sites in Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park. And Gary Miller, retired wildlife biologist and interpretative ranger, will teach another new course, Wetlands and Wildlife: Elk, moose, willows & fencing strategies in Rocky Mountain National Park, to explain the science behind "exclosures" and the interaction between large mammals and wetland environments.

These and a handful of other new titles join perennial Field Institute course favorites, such as instruction in photography or birding and courses on wildflowers and park wildlife.

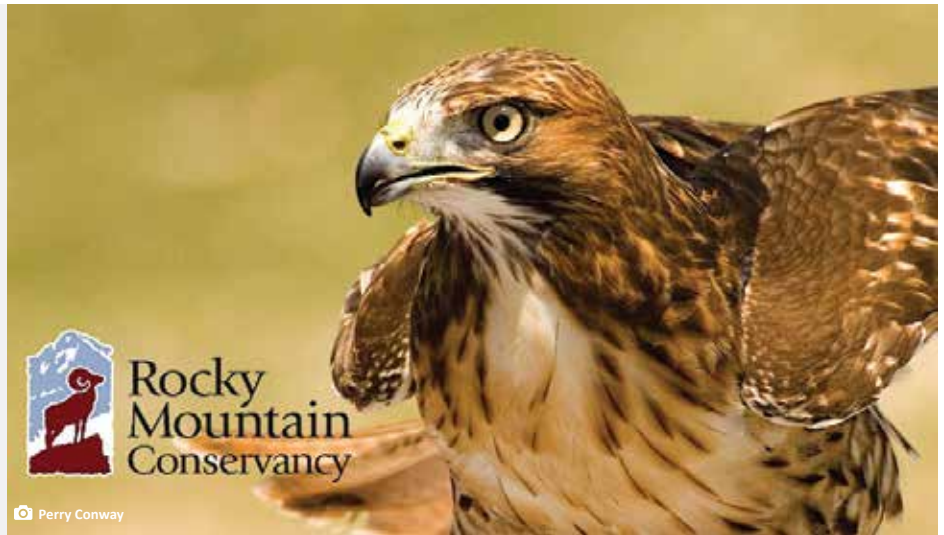


Based on participant feedback, the Field Institute has added half-day programs along with existing full-day or multiple-day programs, and course prices have been reduced. Field Institute courses are limited in size to encourage interaction between instructors and participants. Wheelchair accessible transportation is available upon request.

Field Institute courses meet at a Visitor Center or other central location, with participants traveling into the park together with their instructor on one of the Conservancy's new 15-passenger shuttles. Timed entry permits and park entrance fees are included in the course registration. Many courses include a brief introductory classroom session, but the bulk of each course is spent outdoors in hands-on learning. The most popular programs often fill months in advance, so don't wait too long to sign up for your favorite! Full details on each program are available on the Conservancy's website at [RMConservancy.org/upcoming-events](http://RMConservancy.org/upcoming-events).

And in honor of Bettie Willard and her pioneering work in protecting public lands, the Conservancy also offers a series of "Bettie Courses," designed specifically for women. These programs offer a chance for women to learn a new skill, meet other like-minded women, and connect with the outdoors. These programs are designed to inspire ongoing stewardship of public lands by introducing women to a range of

*The Field Institute offers courses on wildlife, geology, plants, and photography, among many other interest areas.*



© Perry Conway

*The Rocky Mountain Raptors course returns this season May 28-29 with both a classroom and a field session.*

outdoor recreation opportunities and special places in and around Rocky Mountain National Park. 2025 Bettie Courses include a range of day hikes, both summer and winter, as well as fly-fishing and outdoor climbing programs. More information on these programs is available on the Conservancy's website at [RMConservancy.org/learn-with-us](http://RMConservancy.org/learn-with-us).

Finally, each summer and fall, the Conservancy operates a series of scenic ecology tours, offering a wonderful introduction to Rocky Mountain National Park through the changing seasons. Summer programs take guests from the montane meadows at the park's lower elevations, up Trail Ridge Road, through the subalpine forests, and on to the alpine tundra. Along the way, guides share information on plants, wildlife, and park history.

Fall tours focus on the beauty and drama of changing fall foliage and the elk rut, with a focus on how plants and animals are preparing for the changing seasons. Fall tours also provide a chance to see bull elk in action. Tour guests are invited to sit back, relax, and take in the spectacular views offered throughout the park as they ride along.

Wolf emphasized that there is truly something for everyone. "Each course brings participants into the park for a chance to explore the subject up close and learn about a new facet of Rocky's magic," she said. "Whether you're ready for a multi-day Field Institute course or interested in a more relaxed scenic ecology tour, we hope you'll join us for one of our engaging and informative programs in 2025. We'll see you in the park!"



**Learn with us! Scan this QR for 2025 Field Institute courses and tours.**



## Personal Memories of Dr. Bettie Willard

Reading the 2024 Autumn Quarterly article on Dr. Bettie Willard reminded Conservancy member Rick Spitzer of his personal interactions with her in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He shared these memories:

“I was the Seasonal Supervisory Naturalist for the Colorado River District during that time. I had met Bettie Willard earlier and asked her if I could steal her book title. She said yes, and I did a campfire program called 'Land Above the Trees' for probably 10 years.

I asked her if she would be willing to meet my crew and provide some training. She was more than willing and we set up a time and place.

I told my team we were going to do some training about the tundra, but did not tell them who we were meeting. We pulled up at Rock Cut, got out of the cars, and I told them we were meeting the lady across the road. They were wondering what was going on. The lady was wearing what looked like a house coat and bonnet. What? Who?

I introduced them to Bettie and we were provided with one of best training experiences one could imagine. We went to many of the sites she worked on and saw her “toothpicks” at some of the places that were later listed on the National Register of Historic Places. [Willard used colored toothpicks to mark tundra plants.] She showed us some of the most unique plants in Rocky and provided a wealth of information about them.

She worked with the crew again a few years later. Amazing experience from a fantastic person!”



## Park Dispatch Staff Earn Advanced Certification

With financial support from the Conservancy, two members of Rocky’s dispatch team recently earned their Emergency Medical Dispatching (EMD) certification. And less than two days after completing the two-week-long course, one of the dispatchers was able to directly apply the training in response to a motor vehicle accident with traumatic injuries that occurred in the park.

Dispatch Supervisor Talia Filsinger explained that EMD protocols guide a dispatcher in assisting people on-scene while other emergency resources such as law enforcement or medical are enroute. “Based on the situation or the chief complaint—a fall, breathing issues, or injury—EMD helps the dispatcher know what questions to ask first and what issues to address in order of importance.”

Based on responses, the dispatcher can advise the reporting party or others on-scene in real time of actions to take prior to arrival of first responders. Overall, EMD can help ensure the best outcome possible for park visitors and staff. EMD also enhances dispatchers’ ability to handle time-sensitive and sometimes complex responses to emergency situations.

“Dispatching is a high-pressure job with a lot of responsibility,” Filsinger added. It’s also very fulfilling: to be

that calm, reassuring voice on the phone or radio when people need it most. I’m proud of the service and professionalism of our dispatch team.”

Conservancy funding will also enable two more dispatchers to complete their EMD certification, an industry standard, in February.



## Longs Peak Attains New Heights...Again

Researchers from the National Geodetic Survey (NGS) have employed new technology and mathematical models to re-evaluate the elevation of Colorado’s 14ers, including Rocky’s iconic Longs Peak. Their findings: the height of Longs Peak is now estimated at 14,255.9 ft, a decrease from 14,259 ft, an elevation commonly in use since the early 2000s.

In a paper published in the *Journal of Geodesy*, authors Kevin Ahlgren, Derek van Westrum, and Brian Shaw used data gathered with Light Detection and Ranging technology (LiDAR) and high-resolution models of the earth’s surface to recalculate elevations and compare results with historical triangulation data and methods. Overall, they found most of Colorado’s 14ers were about one meter shorter than previous estimates.

LiDAR uses laser pulses to measure distances and is usually collected from airplanes and helicopters. The NGS is an agency of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).





## Conservancy Grateful for the Talents and Contributions of Departing Board Members



Courtesy Photo | Howard "Howdy" Fry



Courtesy Photo | Katherine Dines



Courtesy Photo | Charles Cofas

Three members of the Rocky Mountain Conservancy board of directors will depart the board in February of this year. Treasurer Howard "Howdy" Fry and board member Katherine Dines have reached their term limits, and, after 11 years on the board, Charles Cofas is moving out of state to be near his extended family. All three have left an indelible mark, and their passion and service to the Conservancy and Rocky Mountain National Park will be missed.

Howdy Fry, originally from Texas, developed a love of Rocky Mountain National Park through annual summer visits with his family to Rocky and the east and west gateway communities. Now living full time in Grand Lake, Fry is a former banker and currently an investment professional. He was a key member of the Conservancy finance & operations, audit, and investment committees, in addition to serving as board treasurer.

"Under his thoughtful and diligent leadership, our investment policies have placed the organization in an exceptionally strong financial position," said Brian Ross, immediate past president of the Conservancy's board.

Katherine Dines' board service continues a tradition begun by her father, Bruce E. Dines, Sr., who served on the board and, who, in 2003, helped found the Conservation Corps, one of the Conservancy's flagship programs.

"Katherine has gracefully carried forward the Dines family legacy of supporting the Conservancy," said Ross. "Serving as Co-Chair of the organization's Philanthropy Committee for the past many years, Katherine has consistently and energetically exhibited her passion for Rocky Mountain National Park and the Conservancy, especially for the park's west side. The events she hosted to raise awareness of the Conservancy's work are legend."

When not promoting education and stewardship of Rocky, Dines is a professional songwriter, performer, and recording and teaching artist with a focus on creating music for children and families. She created an award-winning series of 13 albums known as "Hunk-Ta-Bunk-Ta Music for Growing Families" which included an album nominated for a Grammy.

"It is impossible to overstate the central role Charles played in the

planning and construction of our Rocky Terraces workforce housing project," said Walt Borneman, board president. "As a volunteer board member, Charles saved the Conservancy untold dollars for construction management and brought this signature project in on time and under budget. The Conservancy will forever be in his debt."

Like Fry, Cofas is also from Texas. As an engineer with more than 40 years' experience in domestic and international project management and business development, Cofas was particularly well qualified to supervise the construction of Rocky Terraces. Cofas chaired the facilities committee and, most recently, served as the board vice president.

Conservancy board members serve 3-year terms and are limited to four consecutive terms. Members work on one or more committees including Operations & Finance, Philanthropy, Education, Audit, Retirement, Investment, and Facilities. While the full board convenes three times a year, board members work throughout the year on their assigned committees and in support of the Conservancy's philanthropy programs.



## New Trailer Improves Park's Emergency Response Capabilities

With support from El Pomar Foundation, Rocky Mountain Conservancy purchased a new emergency services trailer to support the park's ability to respond to critical incidents ranging from search and rescue operations and vehicle accidents to natural disasters and criminal events. With almost 95 percent of the park designated as wilderness, the trailer enables the park's first responders to arrive on scene with a full range of tools and capabilities needed to safely manage and resolve emergency events.

"Most police agencies don't deal with the stuff we do. We need to be more self-sufficient," explained Law Enforcement Ranger Mitch Hauptman, who oversaw the project and trailer modifications. For example, municipal first responders often have an electrical source nearby that they can tap to power lighting and equipment on scene,

unlike wilderness areas with little to no infrastructure. Using experience from past incidents, Hauptman and fellow rangers identified necessary capabilities and then built out the trailer in-house.

Customizing the trailer and building the modifications themselves saved a significant amount of money in comparison to purchasing a commercially-outfitted unit, and also enabled park staff to tailor the new trailer specifically to the park's environment and needs. Hardened for backcountry roads, the trailer holds a generator, high power lighting, shelters, tools, command post equipment, traffic control devices and signage, an evidence locker, and more. Two parallel rails on the exterior allow the quick addition of shelter and the ability to mount whiteboards for tracking operational information, all of which are carried in the trailer. The interior includes shelving and a comprehensive and flexible system of anchors and tie-downs to keep gear safely in place

while readily accessible.

One of the most immediate benefits of the trailer is the generator and lighting, which can illuminate an operational scene "like daylight," said Hauptman, and greatly increase safety as well as enhance the ability to conduct investigations or provide aid. Park staff used this capability in September in response to a serious motor vehicle crash and investigation near the park entrance.

Hauptman himself invested many hours of his own off-duty time identifying and completing modifications, finding that progress during his shifts was slow due to the high operational tempo in the park. The completion of the trailer, however, was a team effort among law enforcement and other divisions. With the exception of a large tool chest, all of the equipment in the trailer was purchased new with support from the Conservancy and other park divisions. Maintenance purchased the generator and signage and the auto mechanics team installed steel end irons and retractable stabilization jacks.

*With teamwork and support across other park divisions, Law Enforcement Ranger Mitch Hauptman oversaw modifications to the park's new emergency services trailer.*



Conservancy





# Rocky Mountain Conservancy Park Puzzler

## Across

- 2.** The Conservancy participated in acquisition of this historic tearoom.
- 6.** These stock animals can carry around 150 lbs of equipment and supplies to support park operations in the backcountry.
- 8.** The Conservancy applies for this type of funding to support the full range of Rocky's education and conservation programs.
- 9.** Popular trail and destination in Rocky noted for the need to ascend a waterfall.
- 11.** One of Rocky's raptor populations known for the ability to reach speeds of 200 mph.
- 12.** Rocky is one of the few NPS parks to have this facility which supports vegetation restoration and reforestation.
- 14.** Along with 23 Across, this fish species is one of the few native to the park.
- 15.** Clarks \_\_\_\_\_ has a special association with limber pines by helping disperse the trees' seeds as these birds forage and store food supplies.
- 16.** The Conservancy's premier education program at Rocky, the first to be established in the NPS.
- 17.** The Conservancy provides funding to hire a technician in this discipline to help identify, protect, and preserve cultural resources during trail maintenance and construction.
- 20.** An important initiative in Rocky which the Conservancy supports in part through the purchase of wheelchairs adapted for outdoor terrain and trail modifications.

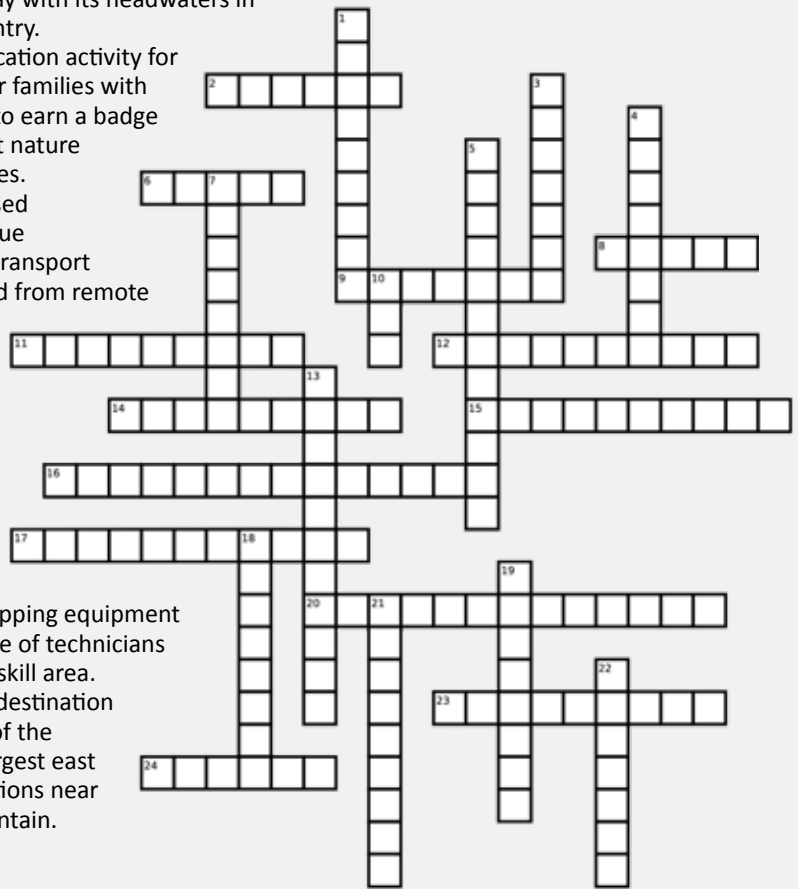
**23.** Along with 14 Across, this fish species is one of the few native to the park.

**24.** Rocky's \_\_\_\_\_ facility holds natural and cultural history specimens.

## Down

- 1.** These structures at individual campsites in campgrounds help prevent large animals and small critters alike from seeking human food sources.
- 3.** One of the first woman park rangers in NPS and a noted botanist and protector of Rocky's tundra ecosystem.
- 4.** Iconic waterway with its headwaters in Rocky's high country.
- 5.** A popular education activity for children and their families with the opportunity to earn a badge by learning about nature and park resources.
- 7.** A technique used by Search & Rescue professionals to transport equipment to and from remote locations by helicopter or to extract patients.
- 10.** The term for beaver offspring.
- 13.** With donor support, the Conservancy funds precise mapping equipment and funds the hire of technicians proficient in this skill area.
- 18.** This popular destination was part of one of the Conservancy's largest east side land acquisitions near Twin Sisters mountain.

- 19.** The Conservancy supports interpretative programs on stars and constellations as well as efforts to reduce light pollution in the park under this project category.
- 21.** A challenging hiking destination which is located below Longs Peak's famed diamond face.
- 22.** The Conservancy provides funding for the design and construction of these facilities to reduce the impact of human waste along popular trails.



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## Quilt Story

*Continued from page 1*

the fundraising campaign: “Each dime will save a square foot of the 40-acre parcel and each dollar saves 10 square feet and helps protect the scenic valley from development.”

By mid-May 1985, \$30,000 had been raised with Superintendent Thompson cautioning that “there was a long way to go.” Funds were trickling in from grants and memorial gifts, and from donation boxes set up in the visitor centers. By late August, almost \$56,000 had been collected, still significantly short of the goal.

## The Quilt and the Raffle

As time was quickly running out, the Rocky Mountain National Park Women (RMNPW), a group of spouses of National Park Service employees and female park employees, came up with an idea to contribute. The RMNPW would create a king-sized handmade quilt and sponsor a raffle. As the Estes Park Trail reported of the women’s handiwork, “Each quilt square is an original design. Cross stitch, embroidery and applique are some of the methods used by the women to complete their designs.”

Kris Axtell and her husband, Craig, who worked in resource management at Rocky, were relatively new to Estes

*Kris Axtell in 2025 with her raccoon cross-stitch.*



*Jennings Tract*

Park at that time, having recently relocated from Isle Royale National Park. Still a resident of the Estes Valley today, Kris recalls how the quilt came together. There wasn’t a formal design behind the quilt; the women simply agreed on how many 12-inch by 12-inch squares were needed, and then members contributed the pieces that would be interspersed with panels of sashing and enclosed with fabric binding.

Once the squares were completed, a small group of women gathered to sew the panels together, finishing the quilt with a simple tie stitch.

The 32 unique quilt panels included

*RMNPW officers Laurie Oliver (l) and Kris Axtell (r) present check to RMNA Executive Director Curt Buchholtz.*



*Gwyn Fields saved some of the original raffle tickets.*



*King-Sized Quilt*

columbines and other wildflowers, a mountain bluebird, a golden aspen tree, a hummingbird, moose, elk, bears, beaver, bighorn sheep, a family of deer, a pika, a raccoon, and notable park landmarks such as Longs Peak and Lumpy Ridge. One square included a climber and another featured a cross-country skier. In short, the quilt embodied many aspects of the park that visitors and nature lovers adore.

“We liked to sew and we were crafters,” Kris said. “We didn’t really have expectations for the quilt. It was just one of those things that fell together.”

Raffle tickets were sold for \$1.00 each and the drawing held August 25th. RMNPW president Laurie Oliver commented at the time that “the project just mushroomed. Our goal at the outset was to raise \$100.” In early November, Laurie and Kris presented a \$1,800 check to the RMNA toward the Jennings Tract acquisition.

With just a few weeks remaining, the RMNA was still \$7,000 short. And a day before the deadline, the RMNA was \$837.42 shy of the goal. That’s when the RMNA received a call from Burt McBurney, who summered in a cabin near Rocky and had been following the Jennings Tract project from his home in Jennings, La. McBurney contributed the last of the necessary funds, and the Estes Park Trail headline the next week

*Continued on page 15*



Continued from page 14

proclaimed, “Jennings man clinches Jennings Tract.” With NPS Director William Penn Mott accepting the deed a few weeks later, the Jennings property was officially part of Rocky and the land restored to its natural state. While the Jennings Tract project wrapped up, the story of the quilt was really just beginning.

### The Quilt Comes Full Circle

Gwyn Fields was the very enthusiastic winner of the 1985 quilt raffle. She and her husband, Jim, were college students when they met working at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park during the summer of 1961. Gwyn recalled that Jim and his parents had been visiting Rocky from Kansas since he was a toddler. Both had a deep and lifelong connection to the outdoors and a special fondness for Rocky Mountain National Park where they met and fell in love.

What followed for Jim and Gwyn after they married was lots of travel for work, education, curiosity, and adventure, including two years in Nepal with the Peace Corps and living abroad in England. Wherever they traveled, however, Rocky was always close to their hearts. When the RMNPW raffle came about, Gwyn wanted to win that quilt so badly that she bought 25 tickets. She was ecstatic when she received the phone call saying she’d won.

Jim hung the quilt where the family could look at it every day. Jim and

Gwyn’s daughter, Helen, said, “For decades the quilt was the central feature of the living room and people would always ask about it when they came in.” Helen said her mother loved telling the story of winning the quilt—but would also admit from time to time that she felt a little bad taking the quilt away from Colorado.

One day last spring, Conservancy Development Officer Karen Lloyd-D’Onofrio called Gwyn at her home in Maryland to thank her for a donation and the two quickly fell into talking about shared experiences. “We had a long talk because she had spent a lot of time in England where she explored the history and culture,” said Karen. “She knew where I grew up - Ironbridge and the Welsh borders - and so we had a reminiscing session.” They both also shared their strong associations with the YMCA.

“This is why I love my job so much,” Karen says. “I have the privilege of connecting with our donors, listening to their stories, and understanding why the park is important to them.”

Gwyn also shared her story about the quilt. Not long after, Gwyn reached out to offer to return the quilt to the Conservancy. Unbeknownst to Karen, Gwyn had been in hospice care; Gwyn passed away just a few days after the quilt came full circle back to Colorado. Daughter Helen told Karen how much Gwyn had enjoyed their conversations and shared a photo of some of the

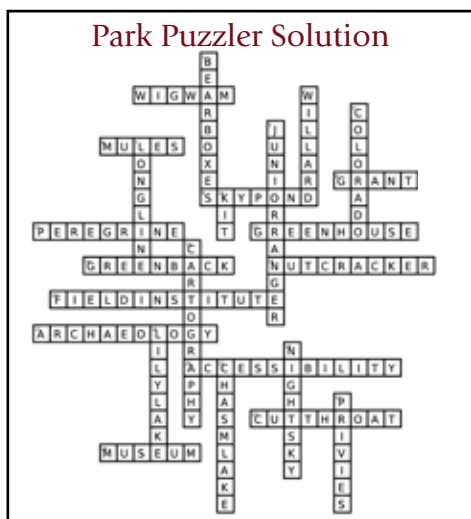
original raffle tickets that she and her brother, Bruce, had come across. Even to her final days, Gwyn’s thoughts and heart remained intertwined with the park she and her family loved so much. The Fields family also shared their love and commitment to Rocky Mountain National Park with a generous estate gift of \$211,000.

### Enduring Significance

The purchase of the Jennings Tract in 1985 was a milestone in Conservancy history. The RMNA, at the suggestion of NPS Director Mott, created and incorporated a new nonprofit, the Rocky Mountain National Park Associates, for the purpose of fundraising for park special projects and land acquisition. The Rocky Mountain Conservancy continues this key mission today. The quilt serves as a tangible reminder of the success of the Jennings Tract project and was displayed at the Conservancy’s November holiday gathering with an acknowledgment of Gwyn and her story.

Today, the Conservancy gives millions of dollars each year in direct funding to Rocky and has supported over 100 significant projects for the park. Some of the Conservancy’s major successes include land acquisitions to protect perimeter locations and inholdings, such as the area around Lily Lake, the Cascade Cottages property on Fall River, and ranch properties in the Kawuneeche Valley on the park’s west side.

Gwyn Ellis Fields and Jim Fields in 1962 and at home in 2019 in front of the quilt with a memento from their time living in Japan.





# Rocky Mountain Conservancy

Estee Rivera Murdock, executive director  
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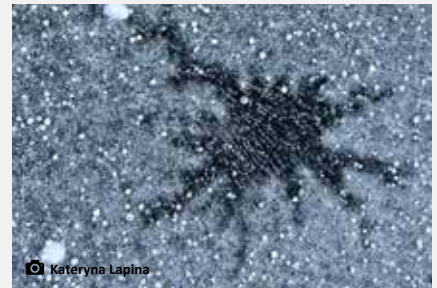
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## Nature Notes

• Hardy visitors to Rocky this past cold and windy December were treated to beautiful scenes reminiscent of the movie, *Frozen*.  
• At Lake of Glass, **Kateryna Lapina** found unique patterns in the ice called “lake stars,” formed when the surface begins freezing but the temperature cycles through warmer and colder weather. A few days earlier, she caught sight of this pine marten peaking out from behind some rocks at Lake Haiyaha.  
• **Erik Stensland** also found himself captivated by lake ice, making several hikes to photograph the unique formations and effects. “Sometimes it’s as if I’m looking into deep space with all the bubbles caught in the ice,” Erik said. “I can get lost doing this for hours.” The photo at the top of page 2 is taken from one of Erik’s images of the ice at Dream Lake.  
• **Tami Roberts** came upon this scene of softly falling snow and “a deer sitting alone taking in the beauty of the park.” She described it as “a real-life Christmas card.”  
• On the other hand, **Brad Manard** saw two bull elk, who apparently did not get the memo that the rut was over, locking antlers in the snow.  
• **Haley Seubert** ventured up to Black Lake where,

on the far side of the lake, she saw two ice climbers making their way up a frozen waterfall—barely visible except for the bright red spots of their parkas. • On a hike out of Bear Lake, Kansans **Dan and Scottlyn Winegar** got a spectacular view of Longs Peak topped with a brilliant display of “cloud iridescence.” This colorful halo effect is created by the diffraction of sunlight by ice crystals in the atmosphere. Scottlyn said hiking in winter was “magical.” • **Bruce Davies** was hiking on Deer Mountain and came across some very fresh mountain lion tracks in the snow. He thought it would be great to see the mountain lion—but then wondered if the mountain lion might be nearby wanting to see him!



© Kateryna Lapina



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