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Life and land from the heart of the Yellowstone Region

FREE

Big Sky

April 23 - May 6, 2021
Volume 12 // Issue #9

**Big Sky Resort Closes
Successful Season**

Water and Sewer District secures funding

Tour Bozeman's "spooky history"

A record year for avalanche fatalities

Musician duo creates the Canoe Dealers



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ON THE COVER:

A young mountain goat, known as a kid, romps through spring flowers in Montana. Mountain goats are the extremely agile mammals that can move nimbly on rocky ledges where they're safe from predators. PHOTO BY DANIEL J. COX / NATURAL EXPOSURES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OPINION.....	4	BUSINESS	33
LOCAL NEWS BRIEFS.....	6	ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT.....	35
LOCAL	8	FINANCE.....	40
HEALTH.....	17	DINING.....	42
ENVIRONMENT & OUTDOORS.....	18	FUN.....	43

12

Big Sky Resort closes successful season

It was a weekend filled with sunshine, big smiles and wacky outfits at Big Sky Resort. After an early closure in 2020 due to COVID-19, the resort operated for the entirety of the 2020-2021 ski season and retired Swift Current 4, which will be replaced by the new, high-speed Swift Current 6 next year.

11

Water and Sewer District secures funding

The district is working with First Security Bank to finalize an almost \$43 million loan to finance the wastewater treatment plant upgrade that will double capacity. With the loan in place, the district will be able to move forward with a bid award and start construction in May.

15

Tour Bozeman's "spooky history"

The Bozeman Paranormal Society is a nonprofit group in Bozeman offering spirit cleansing and investigative services. This summer marks the fourth year of their Walking Ghost Tours, which takes guests on a journey through some of the area's oldest buildings and the ghosts that reside in them.

20

A record year for avalanche fatalities

This year, 36 backcountry users died in avalanches in the U.S., a record number previously set in the 2009-2010 winter season. A myriad of factors contributed, including increased backcountry use and a temperamental snowpack that remained unstable for much of the season.

39

Musician duo creates the Canoe Dealers

During the 2020 pandemic lockdowns, folk/bluegrass musicians Ryan Acker and Lena Marie Schiffer used the time to dive into a new project together. The lack of live music has been lamented by many, but Acker pointed out that the extra time gave them the time and space to create and grow as musicians.



Lone Mountain on closing day from the skies, heading into Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport. PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY

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EDITORIAL POLICY

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April 28, 2021

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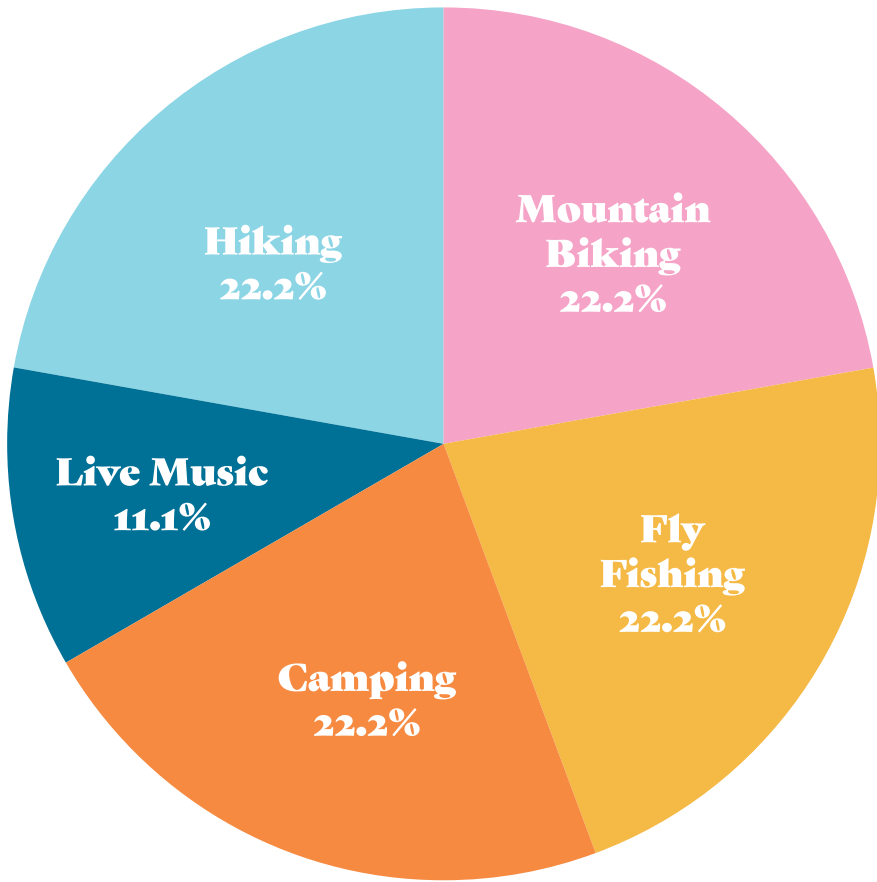
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25 TOWN CENTER AVENUE | 145 TOWN CENTER AVENUE | 66 MOUNTAIN LOOP ROAD | 181 CLUBHOUSE FORK



Which part of summer are you most excited about?

Results tallied from EBS Facebook poll, April 16-21.



“Rafting. Floating out on the Yellowstone River, when the oars hit the water and you cast a line in and hope for a brown. To me there’s nothing like being out on the river.”

Tyler Hough
Paradise Valley, Montana

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

BSSD vote could increase staff pay

To the Editor:

Greetings from the Big Sky School District superintendent. As the spring election cycle in Montana is now upon us, the school district has a levy for voter consideration.

This year, the school district is seeking the passage of an operational levy of \$75,000 tied directly to staff increases in compensation. As a public school in the state of Montana, the trustees and administration work diligently to budget each and every dollar with the goal of providing the best education for the children of our community, as such, teacher and staff salaries are an important aspect of our yearly budget.

As the tax base in our community grows, the value of our mills increases and the \$75,000 request is an exact increase of 1.97 mills. In dollars and cents, this equates to a per-year tax increase of \$13.30 on a home with a value \$500,000; a per-year tax increase of \$26.60 on a home with a value of \$1,000,000.

The timeline for election 2021 is as follows:

- Ballots were mailed between April 14 and April 19.
- Ballots are due to the Gallatin County Election Office by 8 p.m. on or before May 4.

Thanks for your past and present support of the school district.

Dr. Dustin Shipman, Superintendent, BSSD
Big Sky

OP-ED:

C2H2: The new climate report

To the Editor:

Though many are unaware or disbelieving, Montanans, like people everywhere, are already feeling the impacts of climate change. Many of those come in the form of detrimental impacts on our health.

Following information presented in the original Montana Climate Assessment in 2017, the recently released C2H2 report, short for “Climate Change and Human Health in Montana: A Special Report of the Montana Climate Assessment,” analyzed evidence from a wide range of sources. Key findings include that the areas of greatest concern for climate impacts in Montana are increased temperatures and periods of extreme heat, worsening air quality, primarily from wildfires, and more frequent climate surprises, such as flooding and extreme weather events.

The report details direct connections between climate and health, such as the association of heat stroke and dehydration in higher temperatures, or increased risks of asthma attacks, even premature births, heart attacks and strokes from worsening air quality.

More subtle, but no less important, are links between both warmer temperatures and drought to decreased crop productivity and lowered nutritional content of grains. Perhaps least recognized by many are the connections between higher temperatures with increased mental health issues, including depression, domestic violence and suicide.

In addition to the extensive supportive evidence cited in the C2H2 report, one of its greatest strengths lies in the diverse recommendations it contains for addressing climate change. These include actions for individuals, healthcare professionals, organizations and elected officials.

The first step in each is to acknowledge that climate change is a problem. This Earth Day let’s start talking about solutions.

Marian Kummer, MD
Big Sky

BETTER TOGETHER



A biweekly District bulletin

BIG SKY RELIEF

Thank you to all the individuals and employers who have participated in the Surveillance Testing program so far! We encourage eligible participants and employers to continue to test weekly, even if they have received the COVID-19 vaccine. And as always, please continue to practice social distancing and wear a mask while in public.

The **FREE Community Surveillance Testing** program will continue until we deplete our current test supply. Big Sky Relief partners have arranged to continue the program by mailing samples Monday-Friday to an off-site lab.

TEST PICK UP



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TEST RESULTS



Returned tests will be shipped Monday-Friday @ 1 pm. Expect results within 24-72 hours of shipment.

VACCINATION INFO FOR BIG SKY RESIDENTS

Bozeman Health is following the guidelines as outlined by the state of Montana and closely collaborating with Gallatin City-County Health Department to administer COVID-19 vaccines to all patients age 16 and older. There is special prioritization for those that meet Phase 1A, 1B, and 1B+ criteria.

Bozeman Health Big Sky Medical Center is offering a variety of clinics for Big Sky residents.

For more information or to schedule an appointment visit:

BozemanHealth.org/vaccine

District Events



Board Meeting*
@ 9:00 am

Memorial Day
Office Closed



Application Review Meeting #1*
@ 5:30 pm

Application Review Meeting #2*
@ 5:30 pm



*All meetings are open to the public and held via Zoom.
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Bozeman activists march, grieve for Daunte Wright, racial justice

EBS STAFF

BOZEMAN – On Sunday afternoon, local activists gathered at Bogert Park in Bozeman to protest the death of Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old black man who was killed by police during a traffic stop outside Minneapolis on April 11. The march was put on by Bozeman United for Racial Justice and the Black Student Union at MSU and included a march downtown, speeches, a group song and a moment of silence.

Attendees were encouraged to bring noisemakers and express their grief and rage in a nonviolent manner, as well as pay their respects at an alter below the stage. The alter included a portrait of Wright alongside Adam Toledo, a 13-year-old who was shot by Chicago police on March 29. Around the stage was a string of yellow air fresheners, each representing a person of color killed this year. It is said that Wright was reaching to change his air freshener when he was originally pulled over.

“Today in this moment, in this space, we remember Daunte and George [Floyd] and Breonna [Taylor] and Adam and the countless others we’ve lost,” said Christopher Coburn of the Bozeman United for Racial Justice during a speech on stage at Bogert Park. Coburn is also a Bozeman City Commissioner and serves on the Gallatin County Board of Health. “I’m with you in grief, I’m with you in pain and I’m with you in resolve to not let Black death end in silence.”

Big Sky SNO organizes recycling day

EBS STAFF

BIG SKY – The Big Sky Sustainability Network Organization will host a free community recycling day on May 14. The event will take place in the Big Sky Community Park from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and presents an opportunity for free recycling of yard waste, scrap metals and glass bottles and jars. In order to recycle electronics, businesses must call ahead. Items that will not be accepted include batteries, food waste and refrigerators.

This event is made possible through the participation of many local organizations including Big Sky Community Organization, Yes Compost, 406 Recycling, Roxy’s Market, We Recycle Montana and Republic Services. Volunteers are still needed for the event.

If you are interested in volunteering, contact Alexis Alloway at aalloway@republicservices.com or 406-579-2205. If you plan on recycling electronics, call ahead to (406) 449-6008 and pre-register.

Rotary Club of Big Sky announces scholarship

NEWS BY ROTARY CLUB

BIG SKY – The Rotary Club of Big Sky announced its annual scholarship in the amount of \$4,500 to be awarded to a Big Sky resident attending college or a vocational post-high school program. Funds for the scholarship are raised at the annual Gold Raffle and Auction held each January.

The criteria for the scholarship will be based on financial need, community service, and academic performance. A committee of three Rotarians will review each application, and a winner will be announced by May 31, 2021. All applications must be submitted by April 30, 2021.

Big Sky residents interested in applying for this scholarship should contact a Rotarian for an application or visit www.bigskyrotary.com for more information.

LPHS senior awarded NHS Scholarship

BIG SKY SCHOOL DISTRICT

BIG SKY – Senior Michael Romney is one of 575 semifinalists who will receive a \$3,200 scholarship from the National Honor Society. Romney was chosen from among 10,000 applicants for this national scholarship which provides support towards a student’s higher education.

Since 1946, more than \$19 million in scholarships have been awarded to outstanding NHS senior members. The scholarship program is supported by the parent organization of NHS, the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Recipients are chosen based on their demonstrated work to support the four pillars of NHS: scholarship, service, leadership and character.

“Michael Romney is one of the brightest, most selfless students I have ever had the opportunity to teach in my career,” said NHS Chapter advisor Dr. Kate Eisele. “Not only is Michael the first National Merit Semifinalist in Lone Peak High School history, he’s also the student who is involved in just about every single aspect of the school’s culture, from the newscast, sports, theater, and Big Brothers, Big Sisters. Everywhere I look in this school, there’s Michael, exemplifying character, service and leadership.”

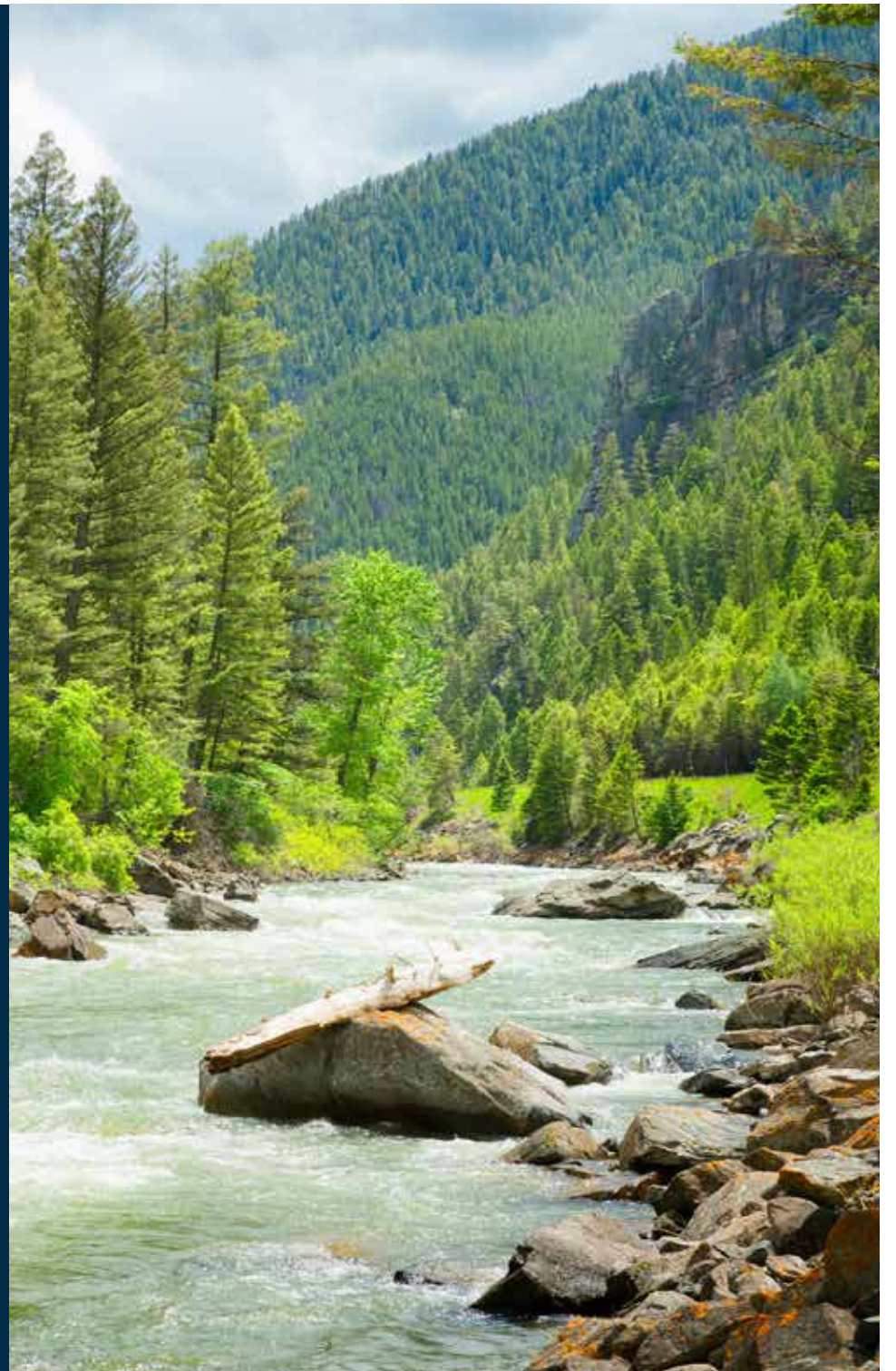
During his high school career, Romney served as the president of the NHS chapter at LPHS. He played a pivotal role in organizing the 5th annual Harbor’s Hero Run held virtually in May 2020 due to COVID-19. Romney was also instrumental last year in organizing the first “Thanksgiving in a Bag” food drive, which received a record number of donations this year.

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2020 record year for Big Sky recycling

Organizers say growing center needs leadership

BY GABRIELLE GASSER

BIG SKY – In 2016, after a year without recycling in Big Sky, three partners came together to establish a recycling center. The recycling center has since become a community staple with total material gathered in 2020 surpassing the 2019 total by more than 90,000 pounds. Now, with growing needs, one of the original organizers says the center is in need of leadership.

During the year without recycling, John Haas, founder and president of Haas Builders, realized that except for two waste management companies, nobody had really come forward to lead the charge to implement community recycling.

“This is when I decided to step up and get involved,” he wrote in a recent email to EBS.

Haas joined Dave Leverett, co-owner and founder of We Recycle Montana, and Jim Simon, district manager of the Gallatin Solid Waste Management District, to set up the current recycling center located off U.S. Highway 191.

Haas said many community members and businesses have pitched in support for the center throughout its existence including his employees at Haas Builders, Alan McClain with Big Sky Landscaping, the Simkins family, Moonlight Painting, Kevin Barton from Ace Hardware, and Jeremy Harder and Brett Slehofer who organized the paving of the site.

The current recycling center has been operating for five years now and in 2020 collected 386,580 pounds of total material, according to We Recycle Montana counts. But in a growing town, Simon says it may not be enough.

“It’s a bit undersized for the volumes that we’re seeing especially during the seasonal highs,” he said.

The site currently features seven bins, six of which are for cardboard. The remaining bin is divided into three sections to collect No. 1 and No. 2 plastics, steel and aluminum cans and mixed office and newspaper.

Simon said that while the site has been greatly improved and handles traffic flows, there is still an issue with blowing debris which, if it becomes too much of a problem, could be grounds for removing the site. Both Haas and Simon encouraged residents to recycle properly and refrain from dumping trash at the site.

“There are a handful of wonderful community members who do help keep the area clean,” Haas said.

The recycling center is a free service subsidized by the fees collected at the Logan Landfill, according to Simon. To provide that free service, Simon said the district is spending about \$300,000 to \$350,000 a year, county-wide, on the recycling program, a number which is subject to change based on the commodity market.

In addition to those costs, maintenance or cleanup activity, such as a call to come and collect improperly dumped waste, costs about \$24,000 a year according to Simon.

Leverett of We Recycle Montana, the organization contracted by the Gallatin Solid Waste Management District to haul recycling from the Big Sky site to their

location on Jackrabbit Lane, said that Big Sky is the most logistically challenging of the Solid Waste Management District sites that they service. This is due to the long travel time up the Gallatin Canyon and the number of pickups required to maintain the site.

There was a significant uptick in cardboard recycling this year due to the increase in online ordering prompted by the pandemic, according to Leverett, and his organization typically runs pick-ups four days a week. After a Friday afternoon pickup, the site tends to be full again on Monday, he said.

Not only does the drive up the Gallatin Canyon make pickups more expensive and logistically challenging, but international policy also plays a role in local recycling programs.

Simon said that he saw a significant bump in costs when China put up their “Green Fence” in 2018 which banned other countries from shipping plastics there and required a higher quality of cardboard. He explained that back in 2010, the average cost to haul and process recycling was about \$42 a ton. Today, he said, it has raised to over \$200 a ton though costs can fluctuate depending on the commodity market and cost offsets.

Locally, recent growth in Big Sky also has had an impact on the recycling program.

“The future of growth in Big Sky, makes many things like the recycling center uncertain,” Haas wrote.

One factor that could help ensure the longevity and growth of the Big Sky site would be unified leadership for the recycling center.

“If not for Dave Leverett with We Recycle Montana and Jim Simon with Gallatin County Solid Waste Management District, we would probably not have recycling at all,” Haas said.

Leverett echoed Haas, concurring that leadership is “desperately needed.” He also suggested that a self-contained compactor at the site would greatly increase capacity and reduce the number of pickups needed. According to Leverett, one compactor could hold 8,000 pounds of cardboard on average which he estimates could reduce pickups to once every week or 10 days at the non-commercial site.

In order to grow and implement something like a compactor, the recycling center needs funding, and it is uncertain where that funding could come from. Simon emphasized the difficulty of finding a new location for the recycling center as well as the high costs of expanding and staffing it.

For now, Simon says there’s something the community can do: “Make sure that people take care of the site and respect it and respect the neighbors around there. It’s a donated site, it’s a free service that can go away, so we don’t want to have that happen.”

Currently, the site, donated by Haas, is doing its job and the Big Sky community has kept the site clean and operating. The three partners have turned their gaze to the future and hope to establish more permanent leadership.

“It would be sad to see all the hard work of this community fall to the wayside, without some sort of organized effort for the future,” Haas said.



The Big Sky recycling site off of U.S. Highway 191 features seven bins that collect cardboard, No. 1 and No. 2 plastics, steel and aluminum cans and mixed office and Newspaper. PHOTOS BY GABRIELLE GASSER

Morningstar hires new executive director

BY GABRIELLE GASSER

BIG SKY – Four months after opening up the position, Morningstar Learning Center will welcome its new executive director, Mariel Butan, at the end of May.

Butan grew up in Florida and earned her master's degree in education administration. She spent time working in higher education and living in Washington D.C. before she had a "crisis of purpose." At that point, Butan explained, "I wasn't in the right space to have the impact that I want to have in this world, but I didn't have the answer as to what that was; I just knew what it wasn't."

Always having wanted to live abroad, Butan left D.C. to spend time living in places like Romania, Vietnam and Ecuador where she worked in international nonprofit management.

Butan's adventures aren't limited to overseas travel: she enjoys many different outdoor activities including skiing, kayaking, hiking and horseback riding. In fact, she has ridden a horse on every continent except for Antarctica.

Upon returning to the states, she came to Big Sky in 2017 and started a remote job with a national education nonprofit. She lives with her partner, a ski patrol at Big Sky Resort, and they spend lots of time outside as well as embark on culinary adventures indoors. Butan also serves as the Treasurer of Windhorse Equine Learning, a Bozeman nonprofit that provides experiential equine-assisted learning.

Morningstar opened the executive director position in December 2020 after the board of directors did some restructuring and split the executive director role into two positions: executive director and center director. Previously, the executive director was in charge of daily operations as well as big picture planning. Moving forward, the center director will handle the day-to-day nitty gritty while the executive director will focus on larger projects and a strategic plan for the future.

As the executive director, Butan will focus on maintaining and building community partnerships, managing the center director and making a strategic plan for the future. The restructuring of the two roles means that the center director will primarily focus on day-to-day operations, freeing up the executive director to focus on Morningstar's big picture. Butan will start full time in her new role at the end of May after finishing up some consulting projects.

"That kind of strategic work, and the ability to impact my own community, is really what drew me to the role," Butan said in an April 12 interview with EBS.

Stephanie Kissell, secretary of the board of directors and a member of the hiring committee, says she is impressed with Butan and thrilled that she is coming on board.

"One of the things that was clear is that Mariel's background, her experiences, and values align with the core mission of Morningstar, and they do make her uniquely suited to lead our organization," Kissell said.

Maren Dunn, president of Morningstar's board of directors, echoed Kissell's appreciation for Butan's background.



Mariel Butan was recently named as the new executive director of Morningstar Learning Center. She brings years of experience in nonprofit management and education making her well-suited for the role. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIEL BUTAN

"Her attention to detail, work ethic and team-player attitude are exactly what Morningstar Learning Center needs to stabilize and grow into its potential," Dunn said.

Dunn said she is excited to work with Butan moving forward.

"I know Mariel will help MLC grow and achieve its goals and bring to fruition many plans we have only dreamed about," Dunn said.

Butan said she is looking forward to the opportunity to help people in the community.

"My number one goal is to listen and observe and really get the pulse of what this community needs from Morningstar," Butan said. "[I will] gather all of that information to then be able to make recommendations and plans of action to say, 'okay here's how we can work together to steward Morningstar into the future in a way that is going to benefit our kids as well as Big Sky and the families who live here.'"

She said she is not entering the role with a plan in mind, rather, Butan aims to listen to and work with the Big Sky community. Butan also highly values her work and strives to help others.

"I'm very much a work to live kind of person," she said. "But the work that I do has to be impactful, and I also try really hard to bring joy to the work and to every day in general. It is so important to me to be able to use my skillset to help people live better lives."

BSCO welcomes new CEO

BY BELLA BUTLER

BIG SKY – In April, the Big Sky Community Organization welcomed a new CEO, Whitney Montgomery, into its leadership ranks.

Long before taking the position at BSCO, Montgomery's upbringing groomed him to be a lover of the outdoors. His father, a Presbyterian minister and college professor, and his mother, also an educator, would load their family of six in aluminum canoes and paddle down the rivers of east Tennessee where they lived.

Montgomery says he was still in diapers when he went on his first camping trip. "My parents even put a harness around me and tied me to a tree so I wouldn't wander off," he recalled in an interview with Explore Big Sky.

"[I] really was fortunate to have a family that put service to others at the top of the priority list for vocations, and then also a real commitment to being outdoors and connected with nature," he said.

The values imbued in Montgomery by his parents and childhood experiences translated directly to his professional life in which he worked as a headmaster for a school in Kenya and as a grant writer for a health care organization.

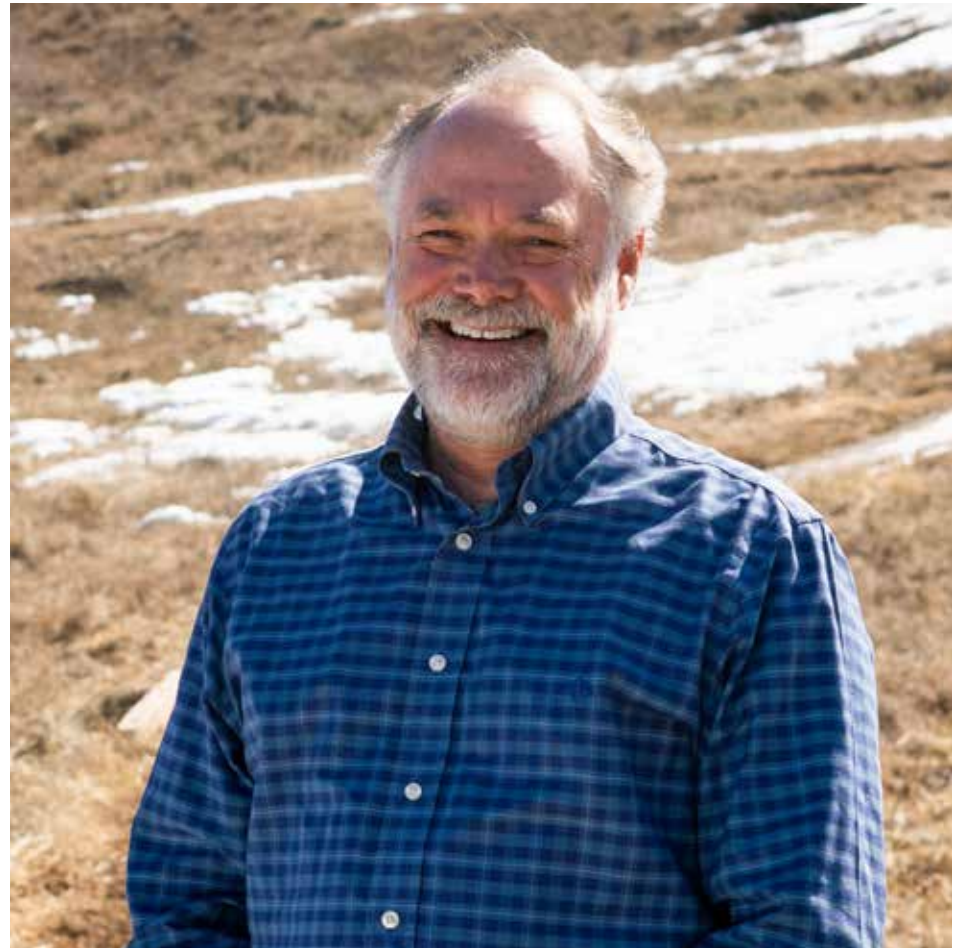
After that, Montgomery stepped into the for-profit sector when he started a restaurant, Just Fresh, a quick-service adaptation of a healthy bakery café and market. Just Fresh started in Charlotte, North Carolina and Montgomery eventually grew the business to a chain with locations up and down the East Coast.

Following 13 years with Just Fresh, Montgomery returned to the outdoors and education, working for 15 years as the executive director of the North Carolina Outward Bound School, an experiential outdoor education program.

Next to his professional experience, Montgomery has a colorful adventure resume. During and after his time at Davidson College in North Carolina, he lived in Colorado, Alaska and the U.S. Virgin Islands working in the ski and salmon industries and on charter boats. These days, he enjoys skiing, mountain biking and hiking.

Much of his work has been in growing the companies and nonprofits he's worked for, a skill that both he and BSCO board members believe will serve the Big Sky nonprofit well with big projects like the opening of BASE, the new community center.

"BSCO is at a place now where it's getting ready to really take off, and so it's an opportunity for me to combine skills that I've learned over the years and put it into a real community-based organization," Montgomery said.



Whitney Montgomery (pictured) recently joined the Big Sky Community Organization as the nonprofit's newest CEO. Montgomery moved to Big Sky from Asheville, North Carolina, where he worked for 15 years as the executive director of the North Carolina Outward Bound School. PHOTO COURTESY OF WHITNEY MONTGOMERY

Tallie Lancey, BSCO board vice chair, said Montgomery's past managerial and fundraising experience, his entrepreneurial success and strong recommendations from past board members made him "far and away the best candidate."

"We learned quickly that he's a big picture guy who also isn't afraid to get his hands dirty," Lancey wrote in an email to EBS.

Montgomery said he hopes to continue working on many BSCO priorities, like protecting open space for public use as well as maintaining trails as visitation to Big Sky grows.

More broadly, the new CEO will also be focusing on objectives that will be newer to the community organization with the introduction of indoor recreation managed by BSCO when BASE is open.

"One of those strategic decisions that needs to be made is how we maintain growth with indoor recreation and continue to expand the outdoor recreation opportunities," he said. He added that based on growing community interest in volunteering, he'll be thinking about how to organize and professionalize local volunteer opportunities.

"In his rapid fire introduction to Big Sky, Whitney has perceptively identified our biggest opportunities to enhance connectivity, which is at the core of our vision," Lancey wrote.

Montgomery, who has three grown children, is excited by BSCO's focus on community and the opportunity to work and live alongside board members, donors, staff and volunteers.

"In this day and age, I think it's lost upon many of us to focus on building community, and that is what is important to me," he said.



Montgomery poses with his son, Harris, after the Green River kayaking race in western North Carolina. Montgomery has three children: Harris, Catherine and Findley. PHOTO COURTESY OF WHITNEY MONTGOMERY

Water and Sewer District finalizes financing package

BY GABRIELLE GASSER

BIG SKY – The financing package for the wastewater treatment plant upgrade is almost entirely secured. At an April 20 board meeting, the Big Sky County Water and Sewer District voted on eight different business action items which included approval of a financial loan commitment letter, approval of a bond purchase agreement and approval of amendments to an interlocal agreement with Big Sky Resort Area District.

After learning that the State Revolving Fund did not have enough money available to fund the Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade, the district has been working with bond counsel Dan Semmens of Dorsey & Whitney to secure a loan from First Security Bank to the tune of almost \$43 million. The final step to lock that in will be a bond resolution, which Ron Edwards, general manager of the Water and Sewer District, said they hope to have completed in the next few days.

Edwards said this upgrade is necessary and it will double the facility's daily capacity from 650,000 gallons a day to 1.3 million.

Funding for the upgrade project will largely come from three sources, the loan from First Security Bank, the district's own money and BSRAD funds collected through the 1% for Infrastructure tax. The total cost of the project is estimated at about \$52 million with infrastructure costs running at \$47 million and various other contingencies such as engineering, and legal fees.

Funding for the project could change, however, as House Bill 632, intended to distribute funds from the Federal American Rescue Plan Act, makes its way through state legislature. The rescue plan awards Montana almost \$3 billion of the \$1.9 trillion total, \$500,00 million of which is earmarked for infrastructure projects.



Phase 1 of the wastewater treatment plant upgrade is fully designed and construction is expected to begin in May. RENDERING COURTESY OF THE BIG SKY COUNTY WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT

In an effort to access those funds, BSRAD and the Water and Sewer District amended their interlocal agreement to pay for a lobbying effort in Helena. As per the agreement, BSRAD will pay for 60 percent of the \$60,000 total and the Water and Sewer District will pay for 40 percent. The funds will be used to engage the services of Taylor Luther Group, PLLC in a lobbyist contract which will give the upgrade project representation at the state level.

The lobbying contract was only part of the changes made to the interlocal agreement. There was concern over how ARPA funds could potentially affect BSRAD's funding commitment of 60 percent of the upgrade costs or \$27 million. Edwards explained that BSRAD's one percent commitment hasn't changed, but they did rework the agreement so that money can be accessed now to support work on the Canyon Project. Previously, the Canyon Project would not be funded until after the Water and Sewer District received \$27 million for the plant upgrade.

Assuming the bond resolution documents are squared away in short order, Edwards said the board hopes to award a construction contract before the April 29 deadline and construction is expected to start in May after the district gives notice to proceed. The entirety of Phase 1 construction is expected to be completed in the summer of 2023.

The board of the Water and Sewer District has been working hard to get to this point and a customer and community member who attended the meeting made sure to congratulate them on their hard work during a public comment period.

"It's a huge step for Big Sky to get this plant going," Edwards said. "It's going to really improve our ability to treat our wastewater for all this reuse."



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All loans subject to credit approval. Fees and restrictions may apply.

Ski Season 2020-2021: A recap in photos

PHOTO CREDIT: ERIN MULHERN, TYLER ALLEN, OUTLAW PARTNERS PHOTOS

BY GABRIELLE GASSER

BIG SKY –Big Sky Resort notched a successful 2020-2021 ski season with no closures after shutting down lifts in March of 2020 due to the pandemic. The dedicated efforts of resort employees, various new COVID-19 protocols put in place by resort leadership, and of course, the compliance of visitors to the resort all contributed to the successful season.

“We couldn’t be happier with how things went,” said Troy Nedved, general manager of Big Sky Resort. “It’s been a long winter, it’s been a lot of hard work, and our teammates they’ve had a heck of a winter and done a great job with all of our COVID protocols.”

Some new protocols this season included mask requirements indoors as well as in lift lines, adjusting the availability of lift tickets, and expanding of online purchase options.

Nedved noted that the resort made numerous adjustments throughout the ski season as the situation changed and as the county updated its guidelines. Moving forward, he added that the online purchasing and grab-and-go food options added this year will likely continue in the future.

A 25-season employee of the resort, Nedved completed his first full season as general manager on April 18. He offered praise to all resort employees for the rewarding season.

Nedved thanked the Mountain Services team for their work managing lift lines, helping guests with access needs and, on top of their normal duties, enforcing mask wearing. “They carried a big burden on that end,” he said. “A lot of our teams jumped in and shared and helped. It’s really hard to single out one group because everyone carried a lot of weight on their shoulders.”

Construction of the new Swift Current lift began on April 19, the day after the lifts stopped spinning, and the plan is to have the new lift operational for the 2021-22 ski season. In addition, Nedved said the resort is working hard on initiatives to improve the guest experience.

The team at Big Sky Resort was able to pull through this uncertain year and make the ski season happen for locals and visitors alike with the support of the Big Sky community.

“I want to thank the community and everyone for all their contributions to getting us through this winter,” Nedved said. “It certainly was a full community effort. I think everyone has a lot to be proud of as to how Big Sky performed and responded during such a difficult year, so I want to say thanks to everyone here.”





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Big Sky Community Organization releases summer programs

BIG SKY COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

BIG SKY – The Big Sky Community Organization is thrilled to be offering a variety of new-and-favorite programming this summer in compliance with the Governor's orders. The health and safety of employees, participants and our community remain a top priority. For more information on any of the programs listed below contact registration@bscomt.org or visit bscomt.org.

Volunteer opportunities

If you are interested in volunteering for BSCO, there are several opportunities for you including one-time special events, project work and long-term commitments. For more information contact volunteer@bscomt.org.

Important Parks & Trails Events:

- Friday, April 23-25 9 a.m.-5 p.m.: Runoff Cleanoff with the Gallatin River Task Force
- Friday, April 30 at 10 a.m.-2 p.m.: Gallatin Canyon Trail Trash Pick-Up Day
- Friday, May 7 at 10 a.m.-2 p.m.: Lone Mountain Trail Trash Pick-Up Day
- Friday, June 4 at 4 p.m.: Summer Trail Ambassador Training
- Saturday, June 5 at 9 a.m.-12 p.m.: National Trails Day

Camp Big Sky

June 14 – Aug. 27

Camp Big Sky registration opens Monday, May 3 at 9 a.m. for children entering first through sixth grades. You can find more information about the camp programs and register online through the BSCO website at bscomt.org/camp-big-sky. For in-person registration assistance, attend the Kickstart Summer Camp Registration event at the Big Sky Community Park where the BSCO will be joined by the Big Sky Discovery Academy, Jack Creek Preserve Foundation, Camp Moonlight and Women In Action. Spanish translation services will be made available as well as a sign-up sheet for Camp Big Sky lunches with the Big Sky Community Food Bank.

Important dates:

- Monday, May 3 at 9 a.m.: Priority Registration
- For resident campers enrolled in the 2021 fall semester at either Big Sky School District #72 or the Big Sky Discovery Academy.
- Monday, May 3 at 4-8 p.m.: Kickstart Summer Camp Registration Event
- Monday, May 10 at 9 a.m.: Public Registration for Non-Residents

Adult Softball League

June 7 – Aug. 29

Are you ready to play ball? The adult softball leagues consist of up to 16 teams each summer. Games will take place Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at the Big Sky Community Park.

Important Dates:

- Friday, May 14: Team Registration Forms Due
- Saturday, May 15: Softball Field Maintenance Day
- Thursday, May 20: Mandatory Team Managers Meeting
- Monday, May 24 – Friday, June 4: Team Practice & Player Registration
- Monday, June 7: League play begins!
- Friday, Aug. 27 - Sunday, Aug. 29: End of Season Tournament



The Big Sky Community Organization is once again offering adult league softball for those eager to get out on the field. OUTLAW PARTNERS PHOTO

Bozeman ghost hunters root out “the history of the area”

Paranormal Society to offer walking tours of city’s haunted spaces

BY MIRA BRODY

BOZEMAN – One of Elies Adams’ favorite buildings in the Gallatin Valley to search for paranormal activity in is the Rialto Theater in Downtown Bozeman. There, she has clearly heard the voice of a male spirit saying the words “Pablo, Pablo, Pablo.”

Before its recent renovation, the Rialto is where Puerto Rican baritone opera singer Pablo Elvira used to perform and where he founded Intermountain Opera in 1979, the area’s first professional opera company. He called Bozeman home until his death in 2000. If you walk Main Street in front of the Rialto today, you’ll see a star in the concrete with his name on it.

Adams, who founded the Bozeman Paranormal Society nine years ago, believes Elvira never left the Rialto because even in the afterlife, he is spiritually attached to it. Adams says this phenomenon is common. The Bozeman Paranormal Society is the only ghost hunting group that has been able to investigate the Rialto, by attempting to pick up paranormal activity on their ghost hunting instruments. Adams says one of her fellow ghost hunters has even seen Elvira in the theater.

“The Rialto Theater is one of the most active buildings in Bozeman because of the spirit of Pablo Elvira,” Adams said. “We’ve caught his voice through what they call an EVP, or electronic voice phenomenon saying ‘Pablo, Pablo, Pablo.’”

The Paranormal Society is a nonprofit and provides spirit cleansing, consisting of sage smudging, and investigative services, using ghost hunting instruments to identify spirit activity. Adams started the society in 2013 after a dream she had. She had always taken an interest in the concept of ghost hunting and felt her dream was a sign to start a nonprofit group in Bozeman.

Adams says many times local residents will call the Paranormal Society because there is spiritual activity in their home, a sign that a spirit is having trouble passing on.

At one particular house, the activity they experienced was consistent with that of a poltergeist—slamming doors and such—and took four tries to cleanse the home before the activity ceased.

This summer Adams and her team of volunteers will embark on the fourth year of their Walking Ghost Tours series, designed as a way to get the community more involved. Their first walk was informal, but a hit, drawing nearly 70 guests.

“We thought it would be a fun way to get the community out to learn about the spooky history of Bozeman and get to enjoy these old buildings,” Adams said.

The society will continue its Walking Ghost Tours series starting on June 18 at 8 p.m. Attendees will meet at the courthouse downtown and, armed



Ghost hunter Elies Adams says there is visual evidence in this photo of the outside of the Willson Auditorium of ghost activity. Can you find the orb? PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BOZEMAN PARANORMAL SOCIETY



Elies Adams (right) leads a Walking Ghost Tour outside of Silver Annies in Downtown Bozeman. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BOZEMAN PARANORMAL SOCIETY

with basic ghost hunting tools, will stroll around some of Bozeman’s oldest buildings like the Willson Auditorium, the Masonic Temple and more nondescript buildings in alleyways that used to be brothels, hotels and bars.

Basic ghost hunting tools include a digital camera, digital voice recorder and an electromagnetic field reader. More technical equipment that you may see on ghost hunting TV shows include a thermal imaging camera—spirits show up as a cold spot—dousing rods made of copper and used to pick up answers to yes or no questions and a ghost box, which slows frequencies so the hunters can understand the ghost’s answers to their questions.

Adams says ghost hunters who join the tours will be able to use these tools to find cold spots and pick up spirit activity in the form of voices and movement. She enjoys teaching people, even the skeptics, about the spirit world and teaching them about the history of Bozeman.

“We’re trying to find answers to questions,” Adams said. “I think that ghost hunting is trying to find the history of the area. The ghosts are telling us the history and I think of ghost hunting as tying that history together.”

In her experience, ghosts aren’t usually disruptive, but are sometimes stuck somewhere, unable to leave. Their job is to try and help that spirit move on. She compares the afterlife to that of the Pixar movie, “Soul.”

“Being a ghost hunter for nine years now, there are still answers to try and figure out but I kind of have a strong idea of what I think the after life is,” Adams said. “You have choices. We have a higher power, and you have a decision if you want to live life in a place that you’re happier.”

To Adams, Elvira epitomizes this credo.

“I think Pablo is a happy ghost and that’s where he’s the happiest,” she said. “He didn’t want to go to where what you could call a ‘higher power’ is. He decided to stick around to hang out in the spot, the Rialto.”

You can find the full schedule of this summer’s Walking Ghost Tours on the Bozeman Paranormal Society’s Facebook page and visit bozemanparanormal.com to learn more about them.

JOIN US FOR **BIG SKY'S BIGGEST WEEK!**

SUMMER 2021 LINEUP - BIGSKYPBR.COM

**All events located at the PBR Basecamp Tent in Town Center Plaza unless otherwise noted*

FRIDAY, JULY 16

11am-6pm - 6th Annual Big Sky Art Auction

6pm - Big Sky Community Rodeo at the Big Sky Events Arena

9pm - Community Street Dance featuring Dirtwire - Town Center Avenue

SATURDAY, JULY 17 & SUNDAY, JULY 18

10am-6pm - 6th Annual Big Sky Art Auction

TUESDAY, JULY 20

4pm - Mutton Bustin Pre-Ride Competition at the Big Sky Events Arena

6pm - Big Sky Bingo Night

9pm - Live Music featuring Dammit Lauren and The Well

WEDNESDAY, JULY 21

10am - Big Sky PBR and Western Sports Foundation Golf Tournament

5pm - Farmers Market

THURSDAY, JULY 22

12-6pm - Big Sky PBR Basecamp Vendor Village Open

2pm - PBR Meet & Greet

4pm - Live Music

7pm - 10th Annual Big Sky PBR Night 1 Bull Riding at the Big Sky Events Arena

TBA - Music in the Mountains Concert

FRIDAY, JULY 23

12-6pm - Big Sky PBR Basecamp Vendor Village Open

2pm - PBR Meet & Greet

4pm - Live Music

7pm - 10th Annual Big Sky PBR Night 2 Bull Riding at the Big Sky Events Arena

Live Music Following Bull Riding - Jason Boland & The Stragglers

SATURDAY, JULY 24

12-6pm - Big Sky PBR Basecamp Vendor Village Open

2pm - PBR Meet & Greet

4pm - Live Music

7pm - 10th Annual Big Sky PBR Championship Night 3 Bull Riding at the Big Sky Events Arena

Live Music Following Bull Riding - Robert Earl Keen

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SECTION 2: ENVIRONMENT & OUTDOORS, AND HEALTH



U.S. counts record-matching total of avalanche fatalities pg. 20



An in-depth look at bear spray and grizzly attacks pg. 26



Chronic wasting disease test developed by scientists pg. 30

Life 101

Why do people like you—or not?



BY LINDA ARNOLD
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

Newsflash: most folks unconsciously decide whether they like you within seconds.

Let's flip the table. When you meet someone, you may get a feeling right away. There's just something about their energy.

Maybe you're thinking you have common interests or information to share. Perhaps they could help you with your career or a family challenge.

Authorities boil it down to one thing: whether you can trust the other person. Trust is such a deep topic, though. How can you tell if such trust exists at a glance?

According to author Heidi Grant Halvorson, who has written several books on relationships, it usually comes down to how well you can convey two things: warmth and competence.

Now hear this

Everyone wants to be heard.

And, whether you know it or not, you're always sending signals where you stand on this. If you're scanning the room, you're not paying attention to the person in front of you. Looking down at your smartphone sends the same message.

The eyes have it

Making eye contact can make all the difference in the world. In addition to showing the other person you're focusing on them, it's an effective way to convey competence.

A former boss of mine was a master at this. Whenever we met, he fixed a steely-eyed gaze on me throughout the entire meeting, all while remaining focused on what we were discussing. This guy had a ton of things on his platter, yet he never seemed preoccupied.

Name calling

"I never forget a face, but I just can't remember names," is a familiar phrase. Business Insider has a few tips:

- Repeat a person's name as you speak with them.
- Associate the name with an image or a word. Our brains think in pictures.
- Use the contacts feature on your smartphone to write a short description.

"In life, and at work, remembering peoples' names can help you build stronger relationships and avoid awkward situations," says Jacquelyn Smith, former Business Insider careers editor. "It's a sign of respect."

Listen and learn

Active listening, a communications skill involving a conscious effort to focus fully on the speaker, requires four steps, according to the social network Quora.

1. Hearing—pay attention.
2. Interpreting—ask clarifying questions. "You seem to know a lot about X. What can you tell me about ..."
3. Evaluating—avoid judgments.
4. Responding—acknowledge with a nod.

Watch the thermostat

While warmth was listed at the beginning of this column, don't overdo it. You could come across as inauthentic or as a doormat.

"The key to finding the sweet spot between "love-dovey" and "arrogant bastard," says author Halvorson, "is to simply be a person of your word. That's what building trust is all about."

In group conversations, make an effort to include everyone. If someone gets overlooked or interrupted, circle back to them.

Take ownership of your mistakes as well. Consider how refreshing it is to hear someone take responsibility and say "I messed up."

Let it go

Sometimes the chemistry just isn't there—no matter how hard you try. Remember the movie "He's Just Not That Into You?"

You may remind the other person of an ex or a former coworker. Don't ruminate over it. Chances are it's just as much in the other person's court as yours.

While you can't control the reactions of those around you, you could improve your chances of favorable first impressions by incorporating some of these techniques.

Trust me.

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Water Wisdom

Water Wisdom: The forgotten fork?

BY DAVID TUCKER
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

Something happens to me every time I enter the Gallatin Canyon. On one hand, I am uplifted by the natural beauty of the river, the geologic formations above its banks and the ample wildlife along its shores. But on the other, I am saddened by the constant rush of traffic, the never-ending line of construction vehicles and the chest-high piles of traction sand.

This emotional tug-of-war isn't unique to me—I hear similar reactions from others all the time. It is the central dilemma of a place as beautiful as the Canyon. We want to share this beauty, but how can we while still protecting it for generations to come? How can we do right by the wildlife that call it home, while honoring the legacy of those who came before us?

The short answer is that it won't be easy, but if we're able to, it'll be well worth the effort. Because isn't the Gallatin as spectacular as any other river in Montana? Isn't it worth fighting for in the same way that the Smith, Madison, Yellowstone, Big Hole and Flathead are worth fighting for?

Sometimes I think we forget just how important this river is, and how vital its health is for the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. When viewed from above, it seems as if the Gallatin cuts straight through the heart of the GYE, pumping it full of the life this region is famous for.

Just the other day, like any average weekday, I noticed a group of elk, huddled in a circle, all eyes looking outward as we rushed by in our cars. The elk were in the middle of a meadow, a safe haven adjacent to the highway, but it was clear they were not looking to stay there long. They wanted to move, and by the look of things, they wanted to move toward and then across the highway.

I didn't stay to see what happened, but not less than two days later, a report on Explore Big Sky's Instagram account showed a road-killed cow elk, cut open at the midsection by the force of a passing car. The elk lay dead in the ditch, left to rot as passersby mostly went about their business.

Was this one of the elk that had been huddled in a ball days before in the Canyon? I'll never know, but I can't help feeling like this is a powerful metaphor for Big Sky and the Gallatin River that we love.

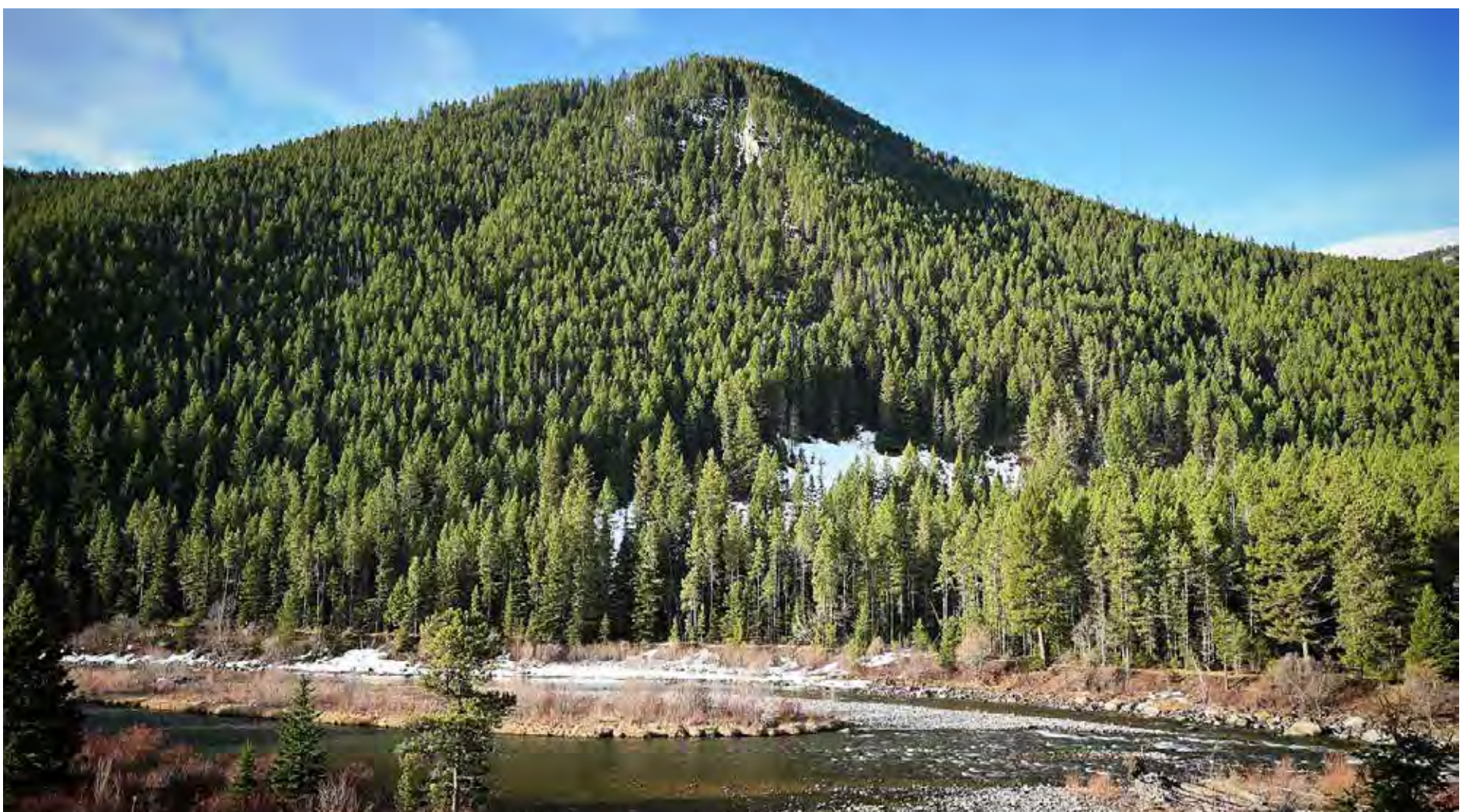
Right now, the Gallatin is that small herd of elk, huddled nervously in a ball, wondering what fate it awaits. It's under threats from all sides, and its future is in many ways uncertain. Those of us who care about it can nervously await a negative outcome, such as a hole in the gut, or we can do something.

We can keep taking the proactive steps necessary to make sure we give the Gallatin a fighting chance. Instead of indifferently passing and letting the Gallatin rot, we can commit to a culture of conservation that will keep the river clean and the community healthy.

It is not outside the realm of possibility to have conservation and growth. We can welcome more people, but only if we do so smartly and intentionally and with ecological integrity at the forefront of our decision-making. We must remember that the Gallatin is a singular river playing a unique role in the Greater Yellowstone drama.

To protect it, we cannot forget about it.

David Tucker is the communications manager for the Gallatin River Task Force.



Spring sunshine spotlights the Gallatin in all its glory. PHOTO COURTESY OF GALLATIN RIVER TASK FORCE

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U.S. counts record-matching total of avalanche fatalities

Local death in Beehive adds to national total

BY BELLA BUTLER

BIG SKY – Matt Clanton jokes with his friends that the reason they volunteer with the search and rescue unit in Big Sky is that one day they'll need it. With each rescue they collect karmic points to be stashed away in some celestial cache. This winter season, Clanton cashed in his points.

A Big Sky local for the last four years, Clanton, 30, took a trip with friends in January to Cooke City, near the northeast entrance to Yellowstone National Park, called a “mecca of backcountry skiing” in a 2020 Freeskier magazine article. Among the crew's various objectives was The Fin, a steep, fin-shaped aspect on Mount Republic in the Beartooth Mountains.

After crossing off other big lines earlier in the trip on what they'd concluded was stable snow, Clanton's group of three paired with another trio to ascend The Fin. When the experienced group reached the field they intended to descend, they dug two snow pits to analyze the stability of the snowpack. Their tests indicated stable snow and they greenlighted the slope before making for the summit about 400 yards above them.

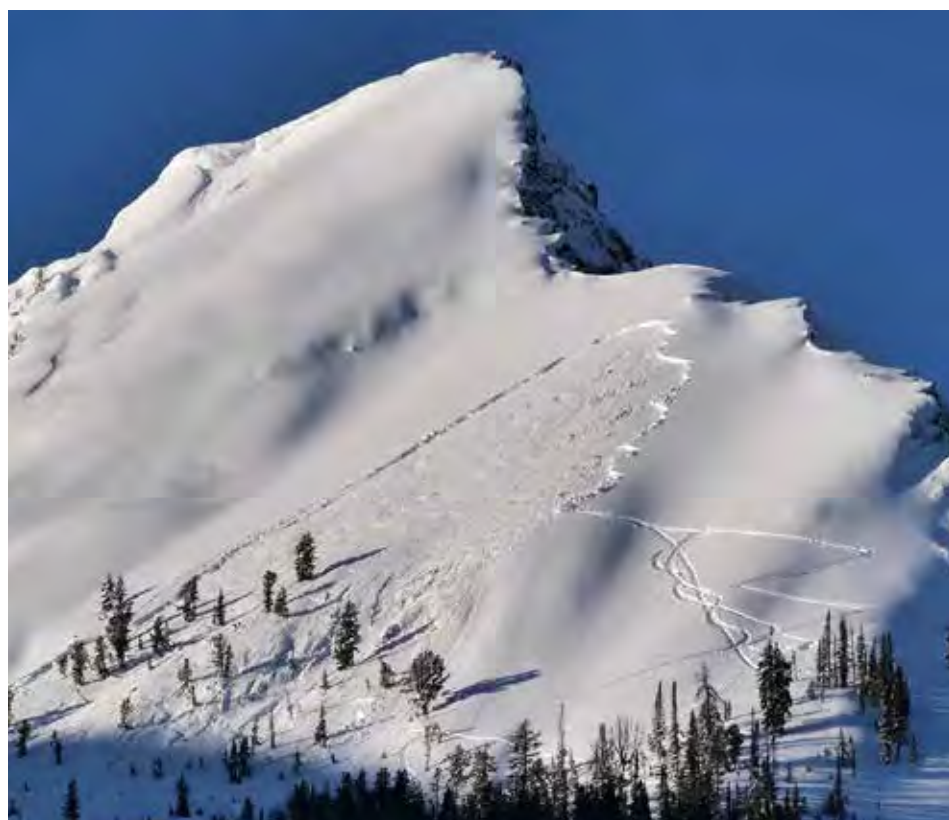
The skiers crossed over a slight aspect change, a seemingly benign decision at the time that in actuality put them atop a snowpack half as deep as where they'd dug their pits. They continued cutting upward across the snowfield until Clanton heard the “whumph”—a dreaded sign in the backcountry that something has gone terribly wrong.

“I swear I saw [the snow] drop from my knees to my shins,” Clanton said, recalling the moment in a recent interview.

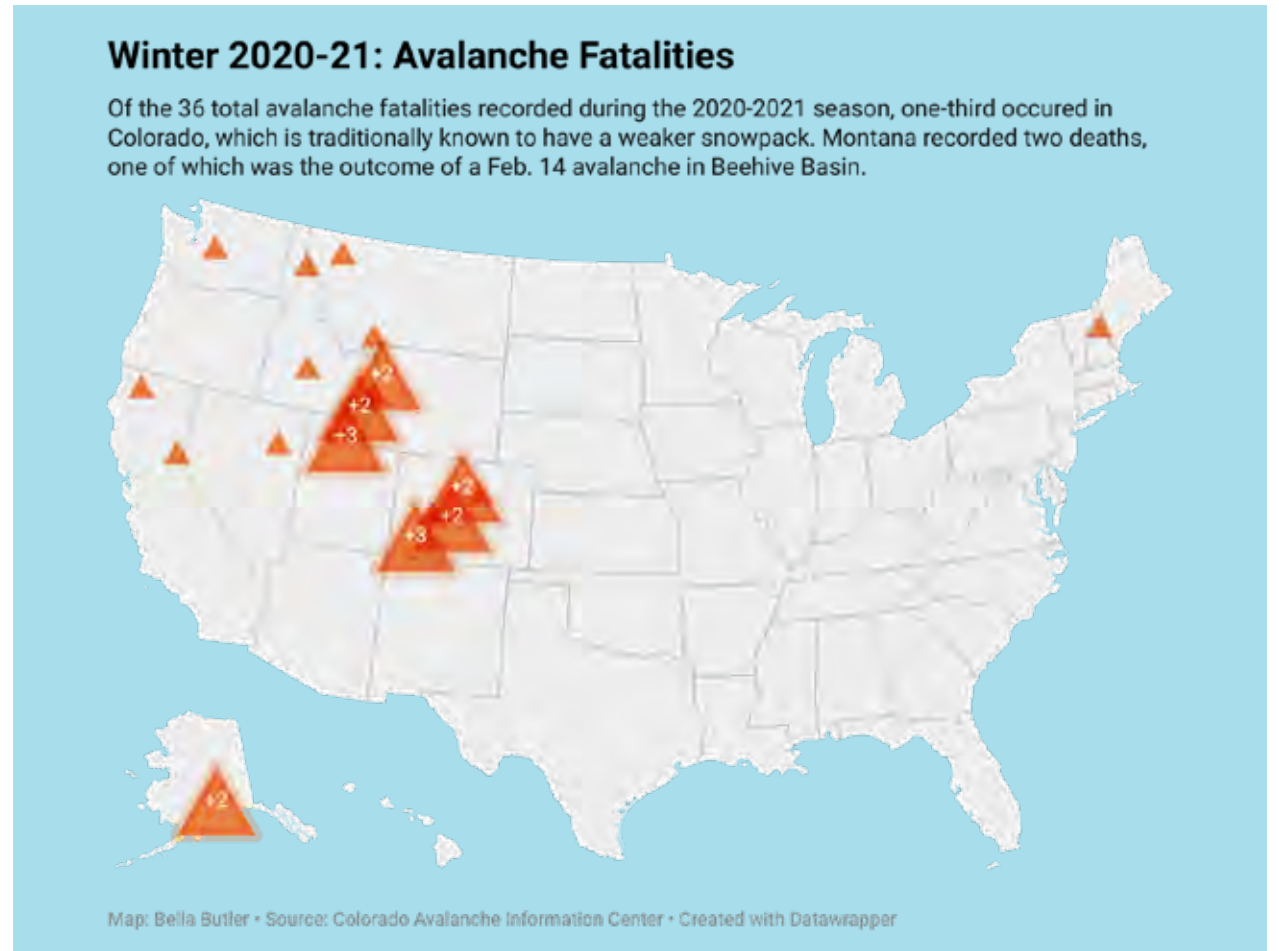
Then a skier ahead of him shouted, “Above!”

“We look up and ... it just looks like a dragon coming out of the clouds essentially, just this crazy amount of snow coming down,” Clanton said.

He watched as the two skiers ahead of him were swept up by the avalanche, like rocks on the beach when the tide comes in, he remembers. Soon after, Clanton was knocked on his back. He saw a blur of blackness as he went under the snow and then blue again when he'd resurface. He hit something hard and sailed over a band of cliffs.



Matt Clanton, a Big Sky local, was caught in an avalanche in Cooke City on a feature known as The Fin on Jan. 8. Clanton sustained severe injuries but survived. PHOTO BY B. FREDLUND



When the slide hit Clanton, he remembers thinking “I'm not wearing a helmet. I'm going to die.”

Though he sustained severe injuries and was evacuated in a helicopter to emergency care, Clanton and his party all lived. Months after his accident, Clanton has returned to backcountry touring with his injuries mostly healed and gratitude for his life and more respect for the mountains.

But this story could have ended drastically different. In fact, for 36 other backcountry users in the United States this past season, it did.

In a pandemic year that has already forced confrontation with mortality, a notably high number of people died in the backcountry this season, matching the modern record of 36 set during the 2009-2010 winter season. And winter in the mountains isn't over.

According to Ethan Greene, director of the Colorado Avalanche Information Center, the modern avalanche accident period is considered post-1950, a general timestamp for when people getting caught in avy accidents were also recreating in the snow.



A splitboarder is evacuated and transported from Beehive Basin after getting caught in an avalanche on Feb. 14. The rider later died in the hospital. OUTLAW PARTNERS PHOTO

A decade of avalanche fatalities in the U.S.

This year, avalanche accidents have claimed 36 lives, a number matched only by the record set during the 2009-2010 winter season.



Chart: Bella Butler • Source: Colorado Avalanche Information Center • Created with Datawrapper

In an April 16 interview, Greene described this season as “difficult and challenging.” Colorado has recorded 12 avalanche deaths this year, leading the U.S. with one-third of the overall total.

Why so many this season? Greene says the devil is in the details.

“In order to get a fatal avalanche accident, you need people that are exposed to an avalanche hazard and an avalanche hazard that is capable of killing people,” Greene said. “This year was, in some ways, a terrible confluence of those factors.”

Greene says that backcountry recreation has been on a steady incline for years, a trend supported mostly through anecdotal evidence. This year, interest expanded at a more rapid rate, Greene said. Many in the outdoor industry, including Greene, have speculated that the pandemic has played a major role in pushing more people to recreate on public lands, both in summer and winter.

“If you looked at the last 20 years there would be an upward trend, but the slope of that trend certainly felt steeper in the last 12 months,” Greene said.

In Greene’s catastrophic recipe for an avalanche fatality, that explains the people. The other component is snow. In Colorado, Greene says, the avalanche information center ranked this year as an event that might occur once in 10 years based on snowpack instability and weakness.

Colorado’s snowpack is continental, one of the weakest in the country. Unlike a maritime snowpack in the Pacific Northwest and California, which experiences avalanche hazard as a result of storms coming in and out, the continental snowpack suffers from persistent structural weaknesses that make the post-storm healing process much slower than near the coast.

The snowpack in Montana is considered intermountain, meaning it’s somewhere between continental and maritime and less consistent year over year. This past season, Montana contributed two deaths to the national total: one snowmobiler on Feb. 6 northeast of Flathead Lake, and one splitboarder in Beehive Basin near Big Sky on Feb. 14.

A month after his own accident, Clanton remembers getting the search and rescue call with his girlfriend, who is also on search and rescue, to respond to the Beehive incident. Still injured, Clanton wasn’t able to respond on his own splitboard, but drove his girlfriend and other responders to the trailhead where he offered background support while several groups skinned toward the slide site.

Responders were able to transport the victim, Craig Kitto, a Bozeman school principal, off site and eventually to Bozeman Health Deaconess Hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries later that night.

U.S. Avalanche Fatalities by Activity



Chart: Bella Butler • Source: Colorado Avalanche Information Center • Created with Datawrapper

During the rescue, Clanton felt goosebumps down his spine. “That was me a month ago,” he recalls thinking.

Kitto and the 35 other lives claimed by avalanches this year have, like those before them, left a wound in the community of backcountry skiers that spans mountain ranges and states.

“They’re just devastating to the communities,” said Alex Marienthal, a forecaster with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center. “It’s never expected, and it always has a big ripple effect through quite a few people.”

Marienthal says there’s always room for improvement, especially when it comes to education, but many involved in avalanche accidents this season have been experienced backcountry users, like Clanton.

“The most basic thing that can be done is to share experiences,” Marienthal said. “People have close calls and no one hears about it because no one got badly injured or needed a rescue or got killed.” He said that sharing those close calls with peers could go a long way toward awareness.

Locally, the GNFAAC has wrapped up its forecasting season. Nearly 7,000 people received the daily forecast during the season.

Gallatin County Sheriff Search and Rescue 2020 Annual Report

2020 was a difficult year all around, but Gallatin County Sheriff Search and Rescue remained mission-ready despite the challenging times.

“We had months of stay-at-home orders, yet our Search and Rescue numbers surpassed last year and the number of people venturing into the backcountry seemingly grew,” the organization wrote in its annual report.

Below are some of the statistics from GCSSAR’s activity in 2020.

20

20

IN REVIEW

115

Calls

1,433

Volunteer responses

38

Searches

170

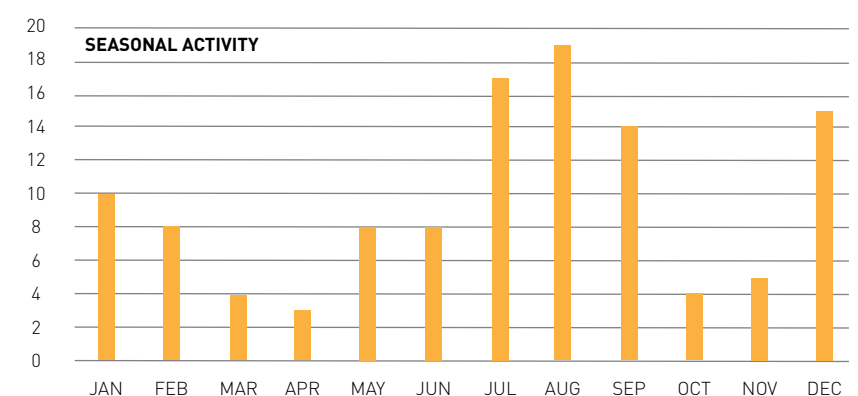
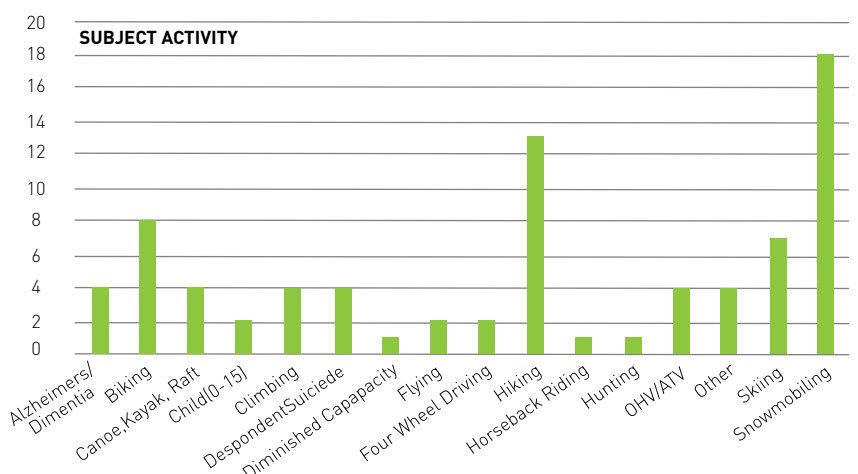
Active volunteers

72

Rescues

4,028

Volunteer hours



Some Western states join the rush to suppress voting



BY JEFF MILCHEN
WRITERS ON THE RANGE

Colorado's elections are a bipartisan success story, so when Major League baseball responded to Georgia's new voting restrictions by moving the All-Star Game to Denver, it couldn't have made a better choice.

More than 76 percent of eligible Coloradoans voted in 2020—second only to Minnesota in statewide turnout. Every registered voter gets a mail-in ballot weeks ahead of Election

Day, there are convenient and safe drop boxes, and in-person voting is also available. People seem to love the choices.

Yet other Rocky Mountain states seem locked in competition to pass the most brazenly anti-democratic election laws.

Montana bills would eliminate Election Day voter registration and impose new restrictions on absentee voting. In Wyoming, many lawmakers seek to abolish voting by mail entirely.

Hold my beer, says Arizona. Following Democrats' success in federal races last fall, GOP legislators unleashed a barrage of bills restricting voting, of which seven are advancing through the legislature. Those measures include requiring absentee voters to get their ballots notarized and banning practices that don't even exist in Arizona, such as automatic voter registration and Election Day registration.

And in Idaho, GOP state House Majority Leader Mike Moyle said, "Voting shouldn't be easy," when introducing a bill to make it a felony to collect and return multiple ballots on behalf of others.

While the most extreme measures may fail, still harmful bills remain, showing the need for federal protection of political rights. U.S. election overseers called November's contests the most secure in history, yet "stolen election" claims still get pushed to justify rules changes. The first three months of 2021 saw legislators across 47 states introduce more than 360 restrictive bills encompassing dozens of voter suppression tactics.

Obstacles to voting impact people of color most heavily, and in the Interior West, Native Americans are the primary casualty. The 65,000-plus votes cast in the Arizona portion of Navajo Nation overwhelmingly favored President Joe Biden in 2020 and easily exceeded his statewide victory margin. In Tohono O'odham Nation, bordering Mexico, about 90 percent of ballots went for Biden.

It's no accident that indigenous voters would be most inconvenienced or deterred by the four Arizona bills that would create new obstacles for absentee voters. The sheer size of the Navajo Reservation -- 27,000 square miles spanning three states -- makes in-person voting difficult.

Multiple studies have found that mail-in voting has been politically neutral. And despite being dragged down in federal elections last year by a historically unpopular candidate atop the ticket, Republicans dominated state elections and made a net gain in Congressional seats.

Meanwhile, more than 500 state bills were introduced this year to improve voter protections and strengthen

procedures, including every West Coast and Plains state but Kansas. Kentucky just proved it possible to pass a bipartisan law that both improves election security and protects voters.

But stopping disenfranchisement of vulnerable groups requires federal reform. For decades, our Voting Rights Act required states with histories of voter suppression to get federal approval for new voting laws, ensuring they had no discriminatory purpose or effect. In practice, the law protected citizens in every state.

In 2006, an overwhelming Congressional majority (and a unanimous Senate) extended the Voting Rights Act for 25 years. But in 2013, Chief Justice John Roberts—who worked to restrict ballot access prior to his judicial career—joined the 5-4 Supreme Court majority to gut key protections of the law.

The ruling enabled states to resume voter suppression tactics, which Texas did within hours.

In response, the House of Representatives recently passed the "For the People Act," potentially the most important voting rights advance since the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Now in the Senate, the bill would expand and secure ballot access, increase election security and reduce the power of money over elections.

With not a single Republican supporting the House bill, however, the bill is doomed unless the filibuster is ended. Even if the Act passed, one more task remains: passing a constitutional Amendment that embeds an affirmative right to vote and ensures our votes count equally.

For as long as our ability to vote depends on the state we live in, and the political party controlling it, voting is merely a vulnerable privilege, not a right.

Jeff Milchen is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, a nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation in the West. He writes in Bozeman, Montana, and is the founder of Reclaim Democracy! which works to expand voting rights and democracy nationwide.



Photo courtesy of unsplash



Seven tips for fishing with nymphs

BY PATRICK STRAUB
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

Seeing a trout rise to a dry fly is what hooked many of us on fly fishing. A sense of satisfaction is gained from properly casting a dry fly on the water's surface, watching it float downstream and witnessing a trout eat it. For many of us, this is what we crave, but when fish just won't rise to a dry fly, fishing nymphs under the surface may be the only way to bring a fish to hand.

Because over 80 percent of a trout's diet is consumed underwater, anglers must adapt and learn what happens when a trout is feeding on nymphs. As many of our local rivers and creeks will soon be in runoff mode—high and off-color or muddy with snow melt—trout will feed almost exclusively on nymphs. Here are seven tips to help you catch more fish during this period.

Know the lifecycle of an aquatic insect: “Nymphs” is the generic term for dozens of aquatic insects that live underwater. Nymphs can range from larvae to pupae to freshwater shrimp to the last stage of a hatching insect. When a hatch is about to begin, many nymphs become active with some species migrating towards the surface. It is during this “emerging” stage that trout feed on nymphs that have been dislodged or are floating in the current.

A few patterns can imitate a lot of nymphs: Whittle down your fly selection to include the following: Pheasant Tail nymphs for mayflies; Prince nymphs for caddis and stoneflies; Pat's Rubberlegs for larger stoneflies; Zebra midges for midges and small mayflies and caddis; and Czech nymphs for scuds and sowbugs.

Beadheads are your friend: When I first started fly fishing in the 1980s beadhead nymphs were revolutionary. These days when fishing nymphs, using a beadhead is standard. Depending on the speed of the water consider using a tungsten beadhead fly—faster water requires a heavier bead.

Weight for it: Because 80 percent of the time most nymphs are near the bottom of the river, adding weight to your leader is crucial. This allows your flies to sink faster and spend more time at the depth the fish are feeding rather than sinking slowly and possibly never getting to the fish before drifting out of feeding range.

Fish with two flies—always: Fishing two flies increases your offering to a hungry trout, plus it adds more weight to your rig which makes your flies sink faster. On rivers with a variety of insect species like the Gallatin River, choose a mayfly pattern such as a Pheasant Tail and stonefly pattern like a Pat's Rubberlegs.

Open your casting loop: Add up the parts of a standard subsurface nymph rig—a leader, an indicator, weight and two flies and it is going to



With the onset of spring and changing river conditions, fishing subsurface with nymphs will be a good choice for more angling success.
PHOTO COURTESY OF PATRICK STRAUB

cast different than a single-fly dry fly rig. It is essential to slow-down the casting stroke by pausing longer before transitioning from back cast to forward cast. A longer pause creates a wider casting loop which reduces the risk of tangling up the rig.

Learn to read water and read it well: When a fish rises to the surface, they give away their location, but when a fish is feeding sub-surface it is very difficult to see them. Nymph fishing requires anglers to study the surface of the water for clues to what the bottom of the river may look like and cast their fly accordingly. Sometimes YouTube videos or reading Dave Hughes' Reading the Water can unlock many mysteries of subsurface trout lies.

As our rivers transition from late winter to spring to eventually snow melt runoff, conditions change daily. A few days of daytime highs in 70-degree temperatures cause high and muddy or off-color rivers and streams. When this occurs it is time to put away the dry flies and bring out the nymphs.

Patrick Straub has fished on five continents. He is the author of six books, including “Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Fly Fishing” and has been writing the Eddy Line for nine years. He was one of the largest outfitters in Montana, but these days he now only guides anglers who value quality over quantity. If you want to fish with him, visit his website, dryflymontana.com.

THE NEW WEST

We, and much of the West, are locked in megadrought



BY TODD WILKINSON

We are living in a time in which some people would rather ignore the dots than begin connecting them, or ponder the meaning of cause and effect, or believe that denying science is less anxious an undertaking than giving serious consideration to what's in front of us.

Sometimes it's difficult to assess what's happening when you're in the middle of it. Consider the indicators:

Regular and increasing summer hoot owl fishing and floating restrictions on our rivers; algae blooms on lakes and even in the Gallatin. A Labor Day weekend forest fire near the M Trailhead in Bozeman that topped the Bridgers and destroyed 68 structures, 30 of which were homes up Bridger Canyon. (That is but one touchstone in longer and more intense wildfire seasons stretching from the Rockies to the West Coast).

Whitebark pine trees, whose cone seeds are an important source of nutrition for grizzly bears, continue to die and now are being considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Melting out of the mountain snowpack is generally happening earlier. Wetlands are drying out and disappearing. Average temperatures are rising.

This month, a peer-reviewed analysis published in the journal "Science" suggests that much of the West, including southwest Montana and much of Wyoming, is suffering the consequences not of a drought, but megadrought. The study is titled "Large contribution from anthropogenic warming to an emerging North American megadrought." (science.sciencemag.org/content/368/6488/314)

While the impact is most pronounced in desert and far-west states, the tentacles extend right into our backyard in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

"Severe and persistent 21st-century drought in southwestern North America motivates comparisons to medieval megadroughts and questions about the role of anthropogenic [human-caused] climate change," the nine authors write. "We use hydrological modeling and new 1,200-year tree-ring reconstructions so summer soil moisture to demonstrate that the 2000-2018 drought was the second driest 19-year period since 800, exceeded only by a late-1500s megadrought."

Based on 31 different climate models, researchers believe humans putting more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere is altering weather patterns and ocean water temperatures, giving way to less moisture, lower humidity and warmer temperatures.



The afternoon in early September 1988 when the Old Faithful Inn nearly burned to the ground from the advancing North Fork Fire. Wilkinson covered the fire that day as a reporter. PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIPEDIA/PUBLIC DOMAIN

Human-caused climate change, they say, has helped to transform what would ordinarily be a drought event into an extended megadrought.

One of the tools used to compare warm, dry periods in the past with the time we're in now are tree rings that allow scientists to look back in time. Outside of deserts, and particularly in forested areas, the researchers note that drought conditions are worsened by drying soils in summer driven by human-caused warming through enhanced water evaporation and early loss of snowpack.

One way to think about it is this: a ski area may have lots of powder in February but if warming temperatures cause it to melt earlier, and summer moisture either doesn't materialize or rains are offset by scorching temperatures, soils dry out.

When soils dry, grasses and forests dry and become highly vulnerable to fire, whether lightning or human caused. No amount of forest thinning will halt drying soils; in fact, logging, some other studies note, may make things worse.

In Greater Yellowstone, including mountain foothill areas around Bozeman, Big Sky, Paradise Valley and in the Tetons, thousands of homes have been built at the edge or inside forests. Policy experts say they are the equivalent of people building homes in river flood plains or along ocean coastlines where hurricanes roar ashore.

In many areas, insurance companies are either requiring homeowners to pay enormously high premiums or they have announced they will no longer pay out damage claims for property owners who choose to build in risky areas.

On top of that, firefighting costs are often borne by all American taxpayers. In recent years, those costs have consumed half of the U.S. Forest Service budget with a huge percentage related to defending structures on private land.

At the same time, the agency has dealt with unprecedented cutbacks in personnel carrying out scientific research and wildlife stewardship, backcountry management, trail maintenance, law enforcement, monitoring of livestock grazing allotments, and restoration work.

While climate change means huge challenges relating to fires and property loss (including health issues from smoke), water availability, rangeland for wildlife and livestock, crop production, and the outdoor recreation economy, in the desert Southwest it may be even more dire.

Tens of millions of Americans depend on snowmelt and precipitation that originates in the Rockies and then, via river systems like the Colorado, is tapped by states including Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and California downstream.

Lake Powell, a federal water project in southern Utah that was touted as a water bank insurance policy against droughts and a wellspring for economic prosperity via land development, crop irrigation and recreation, is suffering from a "20-year drought"—the last 10 years of which have been called extreme. This summer, water levels could reach 3,540 feet of elevation above sea level at Lake Powell, lowest since 1968.

Experts say that water today has been over-appropriated, meaning more has been allocated to different user groups than is generated in the system, especially during droughts. While transferring of water rights related to agriculture has bought states in the Colorado River upper and lower compacts more time, many believe it is time borrowed.

This summer, Dr. Cathy Whitlock of Montana State University, Scott Bischke and others will release the first-ever assessment that examines the ecological impacts of climate change on Greater Yellowstone. Look for it. The analysis will be yet another opportunity for connecting the dots of science-based reality.

Todd Wilkinson is the founder of Bozeman-based Mountain Journal and is a correspondent for National Geographic. He also authored of the book "Grizzlies of Pilgrim Creek," featuring photography by Thomas D. Mangelsen, about famous Jackson Hole grizzly bear 399.



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To live or die in bear country: Counting the seconds in your grizzly moment of truth

Mountain Journal's in-depth look at grizzly attacks, bear spray and what you need to know

INTRODUCTION BY MIRA BRODY

On April 16, Carl Mock, 40, of West Yellowstone, succumbed to his injuries following a grizzly bear attack. The attack took place just south of Baker's Hole Campground, which is located north of West Yellowstone. According to a report released by the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the grizzly was an older male defending a moose kill nearby. The bear was put down after hazing attempts were unsuccessful. Grizzlies are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and their management is currently under the jurisdiction of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, a partnership between U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, working closely in Montana with FWP, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services, the Forest Service and Tribal lands.

As a reminder, we're revisiting a story the Mountain Journal published an article outlining the dangers of recreating in grizzly country and what to do if you come upon a bear.

BY TODD WILKINSON

Set the timer on your cell phone stopwatch to six seconds. Now click and begin the countdown.

As the notion goes, if this were the amount of time your hand was placed in a pot of boiling water or, for purposes of this story, your skull or other body part clenched in the jaws of a grizzly bear, it would seem, possibly, an eternity. But think how fast it just passed by.

A world-class human sprinter, running 21.7 miles per hour, can cover 60 yards—180 feet—in roughly that time—six seconds. A charging grizzly can reach a speed of around 30 miles an hour and at full gait that translates into about 44 feet per second.

Do the calculation for how long it might take a bruin, a mother, say, worried that you represent a hazard to her cubs. She's being understandably protective, closing the distance of half a football field—or closer—quickly.

Heighten the urgency of the equation by putting yourself in the picture—on the potential receiving end of a mauling—with literally a moment to react as space between you and bear narrows.

Will the bruin hurtling toward you halt? Continue to advance? Pull up short in a bluff charge? What are its intentions? Should you stand your ground? Drop to the earth and brace? Or reach for a holster, extract what's in it like a Hollywood gunfighter and begin firing?

Can you really keep your cool, take aim in six seconds—and what if you miss? Can you pull the can of bear spray out of its holster, dislodge the safety, and pull the trigger?

Here is a fact confirmed by scientific studies and statistics: There are a lot of hunters who have gotten hurt badly, or killed, based on the belief they were sure shots. And they have needlessly wounded or killed a lot of bears. Hundreds over the last few decades; over a couple of generations a number high enough to replace the entire population—about 700—that miraculously persists in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem today.

A much smaller number of people—and bears—have ever been injured when bear spray is involved. Nine out of ten times, when bear spray has been successfully deployed, people and bears do not die, researchers say.

During a meeting one year ago in Missoula, Montana, something extraordinary happened. The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, the government entity comprising federal and state agencies involved in the management of grizzlies in the northern Rockies, rescinded the long-standing “six-second rule” when it comes to suggested requirements for the amount of time it takes for a can of bear spray to empty.

To the uninformed, “bear spray” is the non-lethal deterrent many hikers and hunters carry to thwart bruin attacks or to confront bears behaving in defense-driven incidents. Another salient fact worth noting to debunk the myth of the Old West—the vast, vast, vast majority of grizzlies do not view humans as prey. The vast, vast, vast majority of close encounters with people involve bears that are: 1. instinctively engaging a perceived threat to cubs; 2. surprise encounters when they can't smell, see or hear us as we amble into them, as when they are feeding on a carcass, in a berry patch, walking along a river when there's a lot of white noise from rushing water, or sleeping in their day beds.

The vast, vast, vast majority of encounters, in terms of what provokes them, are more Revenant (based on accidental run-in) than Night of the Grizzlies and, like in Revenant, made worse for Hugh Glass, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, because he fought back, experts say.

In September 2017, a hunter from Rock Springs, Wyoming was mauled by a sow grizzly that he apparently surprised in the Teton Wilderness east of Jackson Hole. He had bear spray in his backpack and a rifle but the attack happened so fast he didn't have time to respond. Two of his hunting companions then fired shots to scare away the bear.

While the primary concern, of course, was for the well-being of the hunter (whose injuries were non-life-threatening), there was also concern that his companions might have shot famous Grizzly 399, her adult female cub 610 or another sow with cubs nicknamed “Blondie.”

In October, Chris Queen, an off-duty game warden with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department shot and killed a sow grizzly (which had three cubs) that he claimed attacked him while he was hunting in Little Sunlight Basin northwest of Cody. He told authorities the mother bear initiated a bluff charge. After the bruin returned to her cubs, she apparently worried for their safety and ran at Queen at full speed. He raised his rifle and dropped the bear a few feet from where he was standing. The Cody Enterprise newspaper reported that Queen “was forced to kill the bear.” An investigation into the circumstances is ongoing but certainly one of the questions will be: Why did Queen resort to bullets and not bear spray?

For those who don't know what bear spray is, forget bug repellent and whatever you do, don't call it “pepper spray”; think of it as being akin to a specially-concocted, far more potent and longer emitting form of Mace (carried by urban joggers and others



When deploying bear spray in the direction of a charging grizzly, aim lower rather than higher, experts like Chuck Bartlebaugh say. Tilt the can downward in the direction of the bear so that the ingredients atomize in the air and rise, creating a wall (rather than spraying over the top of the bear). Do it sooner rather than wait until a bear is mere feet away. And make sure you have a good grip on the can. Hold with two hands if necessary. PHOTO COURTESY OF MOUNTAIN JOURNAL

for self defense against menacing people/pit bulls in cities) but designed specifically to halt the biggest apex omnivore in the Lower 48.

As far as keeping people and bears alive when their paths collide, bear spray has been a radical game-changing invention over the last quarter century. In many profound ways, it has been as important as the banning of sport hunting of bears, and harsh penalties enforced by law enforcement, prosecutors and judges against outlaw poachers and the destruction of bear habitat including the construction of roads and trails into their havens, as well as the successful virtuous campaign of cleaning up the way Homo sapiens uses and disposes of its food and trash.

Prior to bear spray's arrival, lots of grizzlies were killed by people with firearms, some based on dubious excuses of self-defense. For whatever reason bullets were responsible, bear deaths represented a major challenge for wildlife managers trying to pull back grizzly populations in the Lower 48 states (in Greater Yellowstone and the Glacier/Crown of the Continent ecosystem) from the brink of extirpation.

Bear spray, according to extensive research and expert opinion, has proved itself to be more effective and reliable than bullets. Dr. Tom Smith is the reigning guru of studying bear attacks. He is based at Brigham Young University and the author of a couple of seminal studies, including the causes of bear attacks in Alaska and how they culminated.

Smith says brown bears inflicted more injuries than any other species in Alaska. The average brown bear encounter is more dangerous—3.5 times more likely to result in injury—than the average polar bear encounter, and 21 times more dangerous than the average black bear encounter. This is the opinion of both Smith and colleague Dr. Stephen Herrero, professor emeritus at the University of Calgary in Canada and legendary author of *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*.

I wrote a series of stories about bear attacks for National Geographic that followed in the wake of a fatal hiker mauling and the decision to kill the bear in Yellowstone.

I had a couple of long visits with Smith. In a 2008 analysis carried out by Smith, Herrero and colleagues, scientists found that bear spray was 92 percent effective in deterring attacks from the three species of North American bears—brown, black and polar— in Alaska between 1985 and 2006. Ninety-eight percent of people carrying bear spray who got into close encounters with bears were uninjured. The study that Smith and Herrero authored—truly fascinating wonky reading and contested by some—can be found here and here Smith and Herrero more recently

completed another exhaustive review titled “A Brief Summary of Bear-Human Interactions in Alaska: 1883-2014.” In it, they raked through 647 different incidents involving the state’s three species, based on incident reports, eyewitness statements and other available information.

More than 40 percent of all human encounters were the result of people surprising them, and most “could have been avoided had the persons involved made noise appropriately, to let the bear know of their presence in advance of their appearance, thus avoiding conflict,” Smith, Herrero and colleagues found.

The stealthy techniques that hunters employ in moving through brushy areas with low visibility are exactly opposite from the kind of behavior that makes for safer navigation of bear country.

Their review found that in 52 percent of all close encounters with bears over the last 125 years, no one was injured. Yet when injury did occur, people tended to sustain wounds to their head and neck 4.5 times more often than other parts of the body.

This article was originally published in the Mountain Journal on October 29, 2017 and has been shortened for brevity. You can read the full article at mountainjournal.org.



Bear spray crusader Chuck Bartlebaugh putting on a demonstration to show approximate distances for when to start pulling on the trigger of a can. PHOTO COURTESY OF MOUNTAIN JOURNAL

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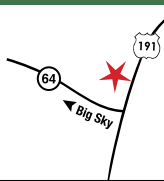
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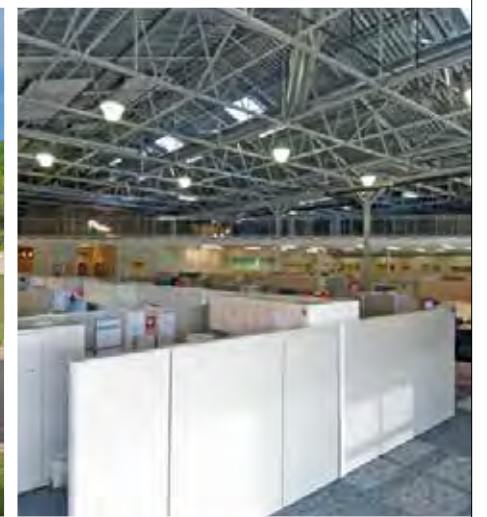
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Chronic wasting disease test developed by scientists

BY BRETT FRENCH
THE BILLINGS GAZETTE

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) – Scientists have developed a new way to test live animals for chronic wasting disease that holds promise for one day detecting the illness in the wild.

“We need to do more in the form of field testing to verify its utility,” said Byron Caughey, chief of the TSE/Prion Biochemistry Section at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in Hamilton.

The new method utilizes a piece of tissue from the animal’s ear for testing. Previously, more invasive tests had proven effective but difficult to collect, including a rectal sample or biopsy of lymph nodes.

“We hope this will be simpler and safer for the animal,” Caughey said.

The results of the study identifying the effectiveness of the ear punch test were recently published in the journal “Scientific Reports.” Along with Caughey, scientists who contributed to the research were: Natalia do Carmo Ferreira, Jorge M. Charco, Jakob Plagenz, Christina D. Orru, Nathaniel D. Denkers, Michael A. Metrick II, Andrew G. Hughson, Karen A. Griffin, Brent Race, Edward A. Hoover, Joaquin Castilla, Tracy A. Nichols and Michael W. Miller.

Chronic wasting disease is an always fatal infection that afflicts deer, elk and moose. It was first documented in the wild in Montana in a mule deer buck killed in Carbon County in 2017. Since then, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has facilitated the testing of thousands of hunter-killed game to find where CWD is occurring in the state and how prevalent it is in certain populations.

Testing was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic last hunting season, according to Jennifer Ramsey, an FWP wildlife veterinarian. As technicians got ill, fewer samples were collected than originally hoped. For those tests that were performed, however, having the work done at the state lab in Bozeman helped speed the turnaround time, she added.

Hunters who kill game infected with CWD are advised not to eat the meat, although no connection has yet been established between eating an ill animal and becoming infected. However, an outbreak of a similar disease in 1992—Mad Cow Disease known as Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease in humans—was linked to humans consuming infected cattle in Britain.

CWD and CJD are both believed to be caused by abnormally folded proteins known as prions that trigger other prions to misfold, resulting in nerve and brain damage. The prions are spread through an infected animal’s bodily fluids. The proteins may survive on plants and in the soil for long periods. After being infected, it can take an animal two to four years before it shows symptoms that include listlessness, drooling, lack of coordination and weight loss.

So far, wildlife in 26 states, two Canadian provinces and four foreign countries have identified the disease in wild or captive animals.

New test

The new method developed for detecting CWD relies on the RT-QuIC test, short for Real-time quaking-induced conversion. The concept was developed for CJD and has been adapted for other neurological diseases like Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s.

Once infected, prions are believed to move through their host’s body via nerves, much like herpes. So, the scientists targeted a nerve in mule deer ears to sample for CWD.

Out of 58 ear punches of what looked like healthy deer killed by hunters, the new method detected 81 percent of the infected animals (24 out of 21) and 91 percent of those not infected (29 out of 32). The mule deer ears were provided by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

The results rivaled the sensitivity of rectal biopsies using the same RT-QuIC method. The study said one possibility for the false positives may have been cross contamination.

“We hope to improve on things now that we have a prototype,” Caughey said.

Future tests will attempt to ascertain how early the ear punch might detect CWD after an animal is infected. That will require a costly, time-consuming study, he said.

The deer samples collected from Colorado seemed to come from healthy animals, so Caughey said it appears the new testing is good enough to identify sick animals before they are showing symptoms. It would be an advantage in helping slow the spread of CWD if there was a field test that could quickly identify infected animals, Ramsey said.

“I think people are looking for that,” she said.



A mule deer walks through the snow. CWD was first documented in the wild in Montana in a mule deer buck killed in Carbon County, Montana, in 2017. PHOTO BY JOE DUDECK / UNSPLASH

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PHOTO CREDIT: FRED MARMASTER

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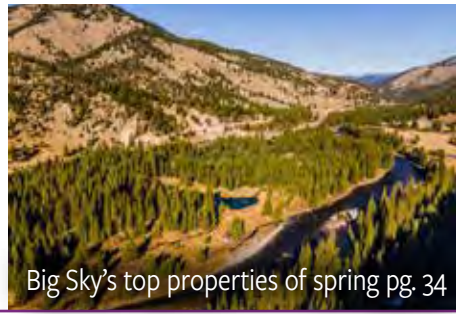


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SECTION 3:
BUSINESS, A & E, FINANCE
DINING & FUN




Making it in Big Sky: The Crail Ranch Homestead Museum

BY GABRIELLE GASSER

BIG SKY— In 1902, Augustus Franklin Crail established a homestead on the banks of the Gallatin River in the area now known as the Big Sky Meadow Village. For half a century, the homestead expanded to 960 acres and was home to generations of Crails. Today, the Historic Crail Ranch Museum, marked by two log structures that are some of the oldest in the area, is an admired relic of Big Sky's rustic early days.

As Big Sky grew and the ranch land was purchased by Chet Huntley, the two remaining cabins were eventually placed on the National Register of Historic Places thanks to the efforts of the now-defunct Gallatin Canyon Historical Society in the 1980s. In 2001, a dedicated group of conservators turned the preserved Crail Ranch into the Crail Ranch Homestead Museum.

The chair of the historic Crail Ranch Conservators or "lead conservator" as she likes to say, Anne Marie Mistretta joined the cause when she moved to Big Sky full-time in 2003. She and her husband, Jerry Mistretta, had been coming to Big Sky since 1993 for vacations while living in Connecticut, where they resided in a barn converted to a house. Mistretta had a lot of antiques and was involved in local history in Connecticut and felt she would miss that when coming to Big Sky.

She began volunteering with the conservators immediately upon arriving in Big Sky full time. Mistretta took a hiatus from the Crail Ranch during her tenure as superintendent of Big Sky School District #72 but rejoined immediately following her retirement. After becoming chair of the conservators in 2013, Mistretta said the group focused on infrastructure projects and on curating the museum to be an educational resource for the school and summer camps.

EBS talked with Mistretta to learn more about the Crail Ranch and its role in the Big Sky community.

Some of the answers below have been edited for brevity.

Explore Big Sky: *How are BSCO and other organizations involved with the Crail Ranch?*

Anne Marie Mistretta: "That's the other thing that we've tried to do in the last seven years is make sure that we're a community asset. We actually are, quote unquote, owned by Big Sky Community Organization. They hold the title to the property and they also provide quite a few services for us such as accounting services and property upgrades ... Over the last seven years what we've tried to do is connect more closely with the school district so that we are part of the school district curriculum. We are partners with Big Sky County Water and Sewer District, Gallatin River Task Force, Gallatin Invasive Species Alliance, we are even connected, to some extent, with the Warren Miller Performing Arts Center. We see ourselves as a community asset. There's lots of places in Montana that have little homesteads, but we're among the few communities that have a homestead that's actually a museum."



The Historic Crail Ranch Conservators pose in 2014 in front of a newly erected storage shed which was built to help the property grow as a museum. Today there is an ongoing effort to create an online database of all the artifacts, photos and documents in the Crail Ranch Homestead Museum. PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNE MARIE MISTRETTEA

EBS: *What is the importance of the Crail Ranch to Big Sky?*

AMM: "We're in a community that is growing, is in many respects changing and this museum keeps the community grounded in its ranching and homesteading roots so that we, as a community, can see what we evolved from, and how the pillars of our society here in Big Sky remained the same. Those pillars are: our people, our character, our recreation and our natural environment. I maintain that no matter how we are changing in terms of growth, we are the people that we were 100-and-some years ago, we have always had the same volunteering and giving character and we have always been about recreation in the outdoors and there's always been a very heightened concern for the natural environment here. I always posit that no matter how much we've grown, we have retained that character and those values."

EBS: *What programs or events does the Crail Ranch organize?*

AMM: "We do children's education, and we do that through our connections with the school curriculum, and the summer camps. We do adult education, and we have summer programs. We usually have what's called a living history presentation, which is an afternoon with an actor who adopts the persona of a local or regional historical figure. We do a lot of publications and we write for local newspapers, as well as Montana Historian Magazine (and) Destination Big Sky. We write a lot, and our publications are about local and regional history, even state and national history, but they're through the lens of someone from the Crail family or somebody locally ... We do a number of things in the summer, like hike-and-learns. In the winter we have a biannual event, it's called Of Wilderness and Resorts, and we normally have someone locally who is published and then we also show the Homesteads to Huntley film. There is something on the horizon, it's called customcodex.com. We just contracted with them and we will be having a tremendous amount of information digitally online that people can access exhibits as well as any part of our 1,400-artifact collections. We have interpretive signs around the community so that people can read them and learn ... I feel that we've not only been all about preserving this ranch, it's 120 some years old, but that it's a jewel in our community because it can educate people, we give tours too."

EBS: *What is the most interesting piece of history about the Crail Ranch?*

AMM: "Historic Crail Ranch's most important attribute is its resilience. Unique double dovetail notching provides structural stability. After operating as a stock ranch for 50 years, followed by a short stint as a dude ranch, two buildings survived the wrecking ball and a fire when the property transformed to a golf course. Since the 1980s, various groups have rehabilitated and preserved the Crail Ranch, including the Gallatin Canyon Women's Club and the now-defunct Gallatin Canyon Historical Society. The property now serves as a museum, preserved by the Historic Crail Ranch Conservators under the Big Sky Community Organization."

EBS: *What is the best piece of business advice you have ever received?*

AMM: "A museum is not static, and it isn't just about objects and artifacts, it's about people and their desire to learn from what we have and what we know and connect it to themselves. That's why we have much more of an online presence now and it's because we really want people to engage with our research and with our objects."

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BIG SKY EVENTS CALENDAR

Friday, April 23 – Thursday May 6

If your event falls between May 7 and May 20, please submit it by April 28 by emailing media@outlaw.partners

Friday, April 23

Friday Afternoon Club

EBS Facebook Live, 5 p.m.

Uncorked & Unplugged: Maggie Hickman

Blend – Wine Bar & Gallery, Bozeman, 7 p.m.

Saturday, April 24

Saturday Sweat

Moving Mountains, 8 a.m.

Rocky Mountain Home & Garden Show

Gallatin County Fairgrounds, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Sunday, April 25

Sunday Brunch

Mountains Walking Brewery, Bozeman, 10 a.m.

Service Industry Night

Devil's Toboggan, Bozeman, 4 p.m.

Monday, April 26

Trivia Night

Pinky G's Pizzeria, 7 p.m.

Full Moon Women's Circle

Santasha Wellness Center, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 27

Bingo Night

Molly Brown Bar, Bozeman, 8 p.m.

Bone Dry Comedy Night

American Legion, Bozeman, 9 p.m.

Wednesday, April 28

Tiger Grant Virtual Discussion

Big Sky Chamber of Commerce, 8:30 a.m., Register at: bigsky.chambermaster.com

Yoga Jam

Santasha Wellness Center, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 29

Pure Barre Pop Up

Blend – Wine Bar & Gallery, Bozeman, 4 p.m.

Sunrise Karaoke

Eagles Bar, Bozeman, 9 p.m.

Friday, April 30

Friday Afternoon Club

EBS Facebook Live, 5 p.m.

Gallatin Canyon Trail Trash Pickup

Pick up bags at Geysers Whitewater, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Saturday, May 1

Saturday Sweat

Moving Mountains, 8 a.m.

Live Poker

Cat's Paw, Bozeman, 1 p.m.

Sunday, May 2

Bozeman Zen Group

Online, 8:30 a.m., Join on zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/9586576266>

Twisted Trivia

Bar IX, Bozeman, 7 p.m.

Monday, May 3

Trivia Night

Pinky G's Pizzeria, 7 p.m.

Sword Play & Character Study

MSU Black Box Theater, Bozeman, 6:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 4

Live Music: Rich Mayo

Kountry Korner Kafé, 6 p.m.

Open STEAMLab

Montana Science Center, 3 p.m.

Wednesday, May 5

Health Care Connections

Gallatin City-County Health Department, 11 a.m.

Open Mic Comedy Night

J & Company Bar, Bozeman, 8 p.m.

Thursday, May 6

Live Music

J & Company Bar, Bozeman, 8 p.m.

Bucket Night

Bar IX, Bozeman, 8 p.m.

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Musician Spotlight: Mathias

BY TIMOTHY BEHUNIAK
EBS ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Mathias's passion for performing originated when he received a guitar on his 10th birthday. Today, the Bozeman-based singer-songwriter has been playing music in Big Sky Country for over two decades, but is also known around the world for his lively performances, powerful vocals and percussive guitar style. Although a Williston, North Dakota native, his family homesteaded on both sides of the border, so his Montana roots run deep.



Mathias has entertained crowds with his percussive guitar style in Montana and around the world. PHOTO COURTESY OF MATHIAS

In 2010, Mathias released his debut album, "Walk Alone," after working in the studio with Emmy-award-winning producer Jeremiah Slovarp. The following two years, Mathias traveled internationally, entertaining crowds in Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore and Chiang Mai, among others. Mathias, 41, spoke with EBS about his music career, reasons for moving to Montana and his love for the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood."

Explore Big Sky: *Why did you start playing music? Is guitar your main instrument?*

Mathias: "When I was a kid I always had a song in my head. I could often be heard humming a tune, whether it was a Billy Joel song or the theme to 'Star Wars.' I guess it was a natural progression to pick up an instrument. There was a catalyzing event involving a friend and myself playing air guitar on hockey sticks to Twisted Sister's, 'We're Not Gonna Take It.' That sort of sealed the deal. I went home telling my parents I had to have a guitar. Eventually I received one for my 10th birthday after fulfilling an agreement to take piano lessons as a prerequisite. Shortly thereafter I began playing percussion in band as well. I feel piano and percussion were the ideal foundation for playing guitar. Your right hand keeps the rhythm while your left works with the chords and melody."

EBS: *What made you decide to come here?*

M: "I originally came out here to study film and to live simply in the mountains. Bozeman and Big Sky had been common stops on family vacations en route to Yellowstone when I was young. My older brother attended Montana State University, which furthered my connection to Bozeman. By the time I moved here, I was already in love with the area."

EBS: *How would you describe your style?*

M: "Ah, the dreaded question. I suppose I would say it's acoustic folk and rock with everything from country to funk mixed in. My guitar style is very percussive. If there's something that sets me apart stylistically, it's my utilization of open strings to produce a fuller sound—it's a sort of faux 12-string technique. I feel my vocals can run the gamut from the airy and intimate side to a more full and assertive voice."

EBS: *Does the Montana lifestyle affect your songwriting and playing? If so, in what way?*

M: "In some ways I've gotten slightly more Americana and country over the years. While I don't think the average patron of a local watering hole in rural Montana would classify me that way, they hear it instantly in Europe or Asia. And of course, I've written a lot of my lyrics about Montana and my experiences here."

EBS: *What are some of your personal favorite songs you enjoy performing?*

M: "I love the songs that lend themselves to a flow state. For instance, I do my own rendition of "Norwegian Wood." It's actually about 80 percent original material that I've gradually written around the Beatles' classic. It's in drop D [tuning] so there's a nice drone to improvise over. The song just creates a great space to explore. I have half a dozen little variations and jams I've written off of it over the years, and it's constantly evolving. I love that about it. Some nights it's not a matter of whether I play 'Norwegian Wood,' but rather which version I should do."

This article was originally published in Explore Big Sky on April 2, 2019.

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Artist spotlight: Norseman Designs West

The 3D artist that lives and breathes his work

BY MIRA BRODY

CODY, WY – John Gallis is 71 but he doesn't see himself retiring anytime soon. He loves what he does, and has been fortunate enough to make a living from it. The Long Island, New York native has been a professional woodworker for nearly 50 years, crafting artistic, functional furniture with inspirations from nature.

His woodworking career began out of high school when he found that he was best at expressing himself through his hands. He was the chief cabinetmaker at Bloomingdales, but made the move to Cody after he and his wife at the time came out west to visit his brother-in-law, who was working as a coal miner in Gillette. After a month-long road trip, he was hooked by the open land, clean air and blue skies.

"I thought I was smart," Gallis jokes of the harsh climate, lamenting that his Harley Davidson is still under wraps in April. "I looked on the map and saw we're at the same longitude as Long Island, but I didn't factor in the 5,000 feet of elevation."

They made the move in 1996 and for a while he worked for a local furniture maker until he opened his own line of award-winning high-end western furniture under the name Norseman Designs West. He and his wife raised four children and all still live in the area.

The name of his business is derived from a trip he took to Norway, where he stood in awe of the craftsmanship of the ships.



John Gallis has been crafting furniture for nearly 50 of his 71 years in life and enjoys every minute of it. PHOTO COURTESY OF NORSEMAN DESIGNS WEST

"I fell in love with the Viking ships that they had there and their construction and precision," Gallis said. "I really liked their style and adventure."

Gallis is in good company in Cody—the town is the original home of the Western Design Conference, which is he still involved with. He's also a member of By Western Hands, whose mission is "To educate, conserve, and perpetuate the legacy of western design and craftsmanship." You can see his work on their website or in their showroom in Cody.

Gallis lives and breathes woodworking. He enjoys incorporating different textures into his pieces and says the gratifying aspect of being a three dimensional artist is being able to watch someone interact with his work. He was fortunate to be able to attend the Big Sky Art Auction last summer with By Western Hands and looks forward to attending again this year.

"I especially like it when you meet the person who falls in love with your furniture so much that they want to wake up with it every day," Gallis said.

Luckily, his skill matches his work ethic, something his clients appreciate.

"Until it's good enough for me it's not good enough for the client," he said. "I don't own a lot of my own work because it really sells."

Don't miss John Gallis and Norseman Designs West with By Western Hands at the Big Sky Art Auction from July 16 through 18. Visit bigskyartauction.com for more information.



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A band borne through the pandemic

The 'Canoe Dealers' feature two regional names in bluegrass

BY MIRA BRODY

BOZEMAN – “You Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere” was written by Bob Dylan when he was in recovery from a motorcycle accident that left him in a self-imposed exile. It was also the song that in August of 2020, Lena Marie Schiffer and Ryan Acker decided to cover in order to kick off their newest music project, the Canoe Dealers. At the time, we were all in the thick of the COVID-19 pandemic and musicians in particular, severed from their audiences and income entirely, were experiencing a torturous exile of their own.

“I kind of came to this realization that a ‘do it yourself’ musician—someone that is capable of doing things on their own—has a better chance of extending their career,” Acker said. “Being self-sufficient really goes a long way in this music industry.”

Acker, of the Minneapolis, Minnesota-based folk/bluegrass band, The Last Revel, and Schiffer, of the Bozeman-based folk/bluegrass band Laney Lou and the Bird Dogs, used the lockdown as an opportunity to build their home studio and dive headfirst into their new project, the Canoe Dealers.

The two met when the Bird Dogs were opening for the Last Revel at the 2016 Red Ants Pants Music Festival and kept in touch until Acker made the move to Montana in 2019. In addition to their new band, they also got engaged last year.

Acker is originally from New Glarus, Wisconsin, and moved to Minnesota for school. After The Last Revel formed, they quickly gained a solid audience, winning the Emerging Artist Contest at Red Ants Pants Music Festival in 2014. Right now, Acker and his band mates are taking a rest from touring after doing so vigorously for nearly a decade. Acker did release his first solo record in April 2020, titled “Winter Where You’re From” and is currently recording his second album, set to release this year.

Schiffer grew up in Santa Barbara, California and moved to Bozeman in 2011, having already known about the area through her mother, artist Pamela Kendall Schiffer. The Bird Dogs formed in 2013 after Schiffer met the band’s vocalist, banjo and dobro player, Matt Demarais, after posting a Craigslist ad looking for musicians to jam with. She’s also an accredited massage therapist who practices on and off at Enso Natural Medicine. The Bird Dogs just finished recording their fifth album, to be released in June, which follows their 2019 first full-length studio album, “Sweet Little Lies,” and three live albums.

The silver lining for them is that the Canoe Dealers probably wouldn’t exist if not for the pandemic—it provided space and time in which to create, because the truth is, artists don’t stop working when the paychecks stop coming. While unable to tour with their bands this year, they have found that it is much easier to perform for smaller, distanced and intimate crowds as opposed to their usual big bands.

“I feel more well rounded as a musician now,” Acker said. “It forces you to work on your craft more when you’re by yourself.”

“The break we took came at the right moment,” he added. “We were touring for so hard for so long, everyone needed to let life live.”

Schiffer was fortunate to be a recipient of the Montana Arts Council Grant, and together, the Canoe Dealers have been fortunate enough to play a few shows during the pandemic and hone in on their musical style.

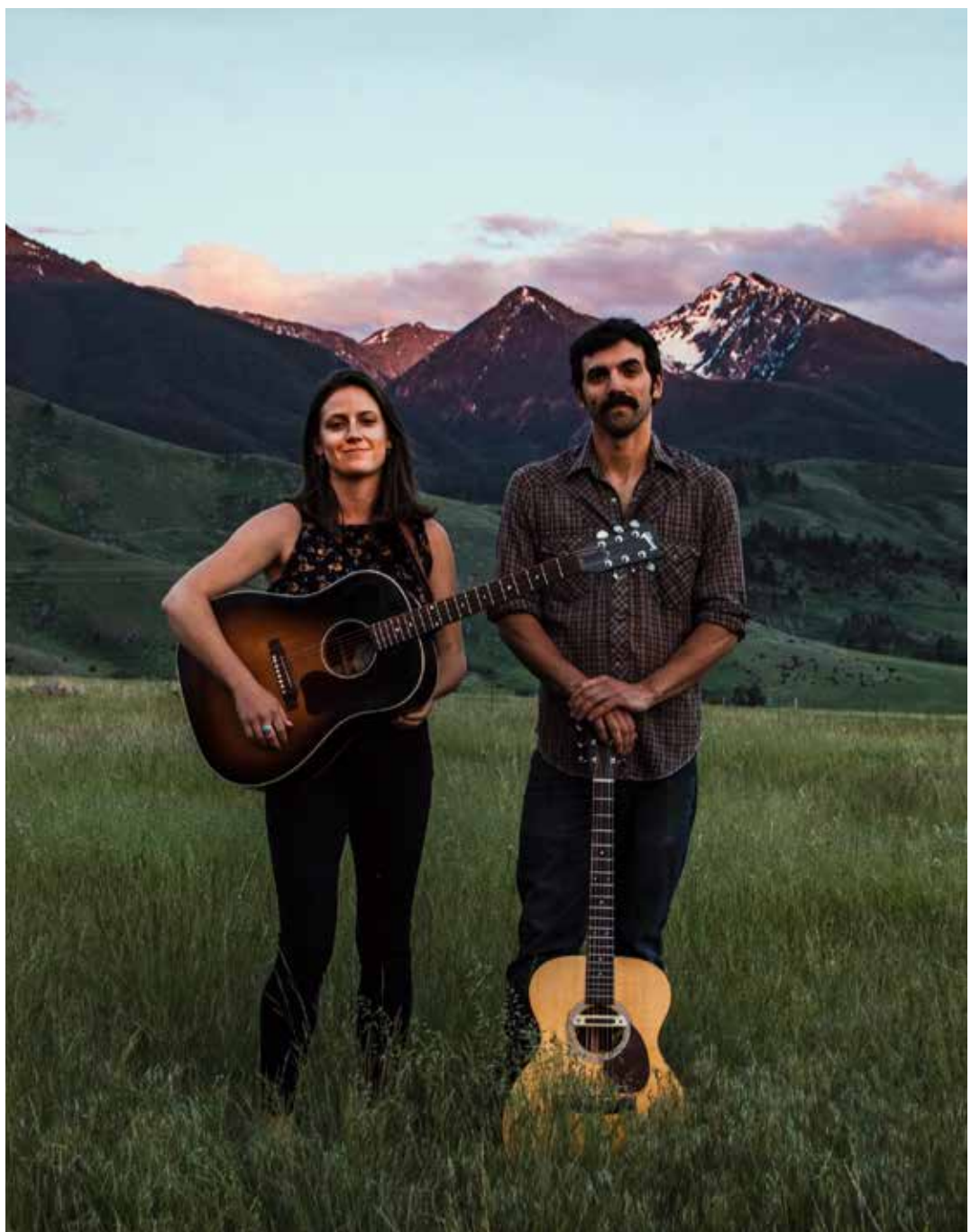
“I think we’ve really enjoyed connecting with Montanans,” Schiffer said of their smaller, pandemic-sized shows. She cites a particularly powerful show last summer at Pine Creek Lodge when Acker opened for Dave Simonett of Trampled By Turtles, which she described as “a beautiful experience.”

“The pandemic has created a larger appreciation for music,” Schiffer said. “Art has always persevered through tough times—artists are resilient people. I’m certain that there are thousands of other musicians and artists that are doing the same things. Both us of really believe that there’s going to be a really huge renaissance of art and music. We’ve all be prepping for the release, and fans are ready to hear it.”

Acker agrees—the nationally-touring musician says Montanans seem to have a larger appreciation for music than other audiences and are especially supportive of their local bands.

Renaissance or not, it seems artists and admirers of art are experiencing at the very least, a shift in perspective.

“I had a dream about that song in March 2020, but it was this dark mysterious version,” Acker said, speaking of the Bob Dylan song that started it all. “When I woke up ... it was almost like a strike of lightning. I’ve always appreciated Bob Dylan, but I love how you can interpret [that song] in different ways. The story in the song changes completely, I felt like it was really easy to interpret the lyrics in a different way. It would be cool to reimagine songs that people are really familiar with.”



Lena Marie Schiffer and Ryan Acker of the Canoe Dealers, which was a project that emerged out of the pandemic’s lockdown. PHOTO BY CHLOE NOSTRANT

Enjoying the Ride: Spring Clean your Estate Plan



BY BENJAMIN SPIKER
EBS CONTRIBUTOR

I read a joke the other day that made me chuckle. It simply went: “I can’t believe it’s already time to put off my spring cleaning until next year.” To me, this represented a sentiment I could relate to and thought how it easily applies to many other facts of life, not just dust bunnies and window cleaning.

Over years of working with clients to assist them with their planning needs, one item I’ve come across frequently is a client’s lack of attention to their estate plan. There seems to be a general reluctance by many to think about getting their affairs in order for the “just in case” moments of life. While I always recommend a client speak with their attorney and CPA regarding these items regularly, here are some tips on ways that you can begin to spring clean your estate plan so that you and your family can continue to Enjoy the Ride!

1. First and foremost, if you don’t have basic estate planning documents, this should be a priority! Don’t wait. Protect your family and don’t leave important decisions up to state courts. Some of the documents your attorney may recommend you prepare are a will, a living will (advanced healthcare directive), a durable power of attorney, a financial power of attorney and even various types of trusts amongst others.
2. Most experts I’ve dealt with recommend reviewing your estate planning documents every three to five years, or sooner if you have a big life event like marriage, divorce, birth of a child or the death of a family member. Also, if you’ve moved to a new state you should consider having an attorney review your documents to make sure they are still applicable under your new home’s state laws.
3. If you have some sort of significant financial change in your life, it’s probably a good time to make sure your documents are in order to protect you and your loved ones. Maybe you’ve sold your business after many years or perhaps bought an investment property or vacation home. Generally, if you’ve had a large change (good or bad) in your estate value you may want to make sure your initial directions are still appropriate.
4. Review how your accounts are titled. Should they be in the name of a trust that you have created and then neglected to update the accounts? Are accounts correctly titled in joint name so that a surviving spouse could have easy access to them if an emergency occurred? If you are single, is there someone who should have immediate access to an account if you were to suddenly pass? If so, see if the financial institution you use offers the ability to place Transfer on Death, or Payable on Death instructions on your taxable accounts.
5. Review your beneficiary information on your retirement accounts and life insurance policies to make sure that everything is directed where you want it to be upon your passing. One thing to note if you utilize TOD, POD instructions on taxable accounts and name beneficiaries on retirement accounts or insurance policies, these instructions will supersede instructions in your will regarding these assets.
6. Do you have a Power of Attorney on file with the institution you work with allowing someone to provide instructions to the institution should you become incapacitated? This is an item that is often overlooked. You can have an attorney draft a financial power of attorney as part of your estate plan or many financial institutions offer their own internal financial power of attorney documents you can complete for free.

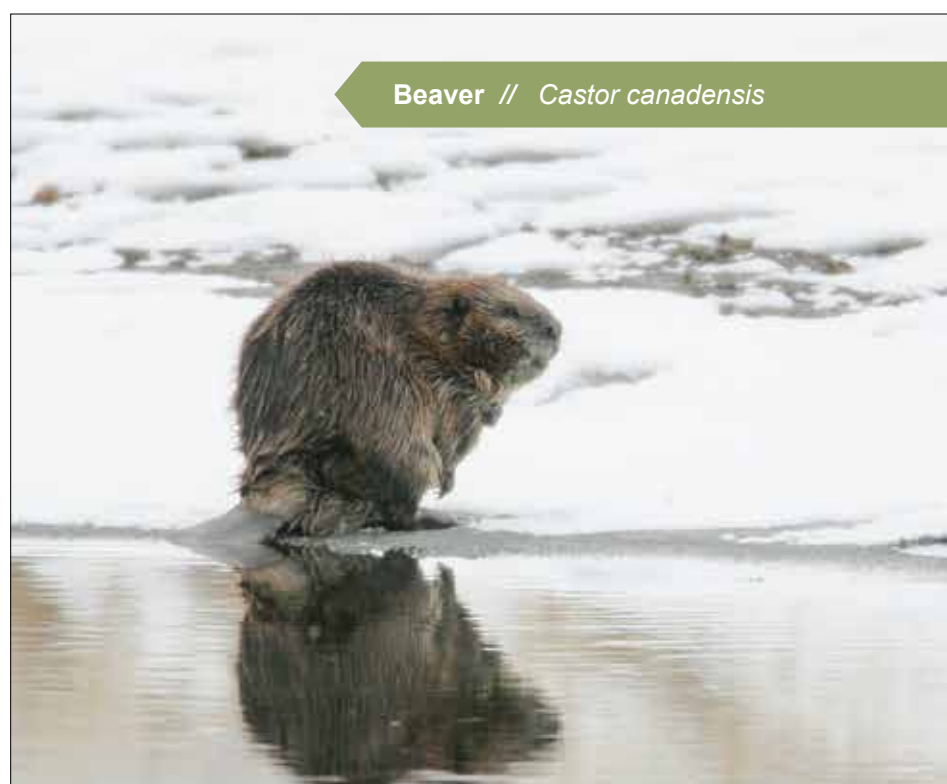
While this list is, by no means, exhaustive, it may serve to help you and your family feel and be better prepared for whatever the future may hold. Remember to always keep important documents together and somewhere secure like a fireproof safe, a safety deposit box, or if digital, an encrypted external hard drive or secure cloud-based storage site.

Make sure someone is aware of where to find this information and how to get to it when needed. Whatever you do, take the time this spring to get your estate in order, then get back to Enjoying the Ride!

Benjamin D. Spiker is the Co-Founder and Managing Director of Shore to Summit Wealth Management. His wealth management career spans more than 22 years and he currently works and lives in Annapolis, MD with his wife, two sons and daughter.

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AMUSE-BOUCHE

Amuse-bouche refers to an appetizer, and by French translation means, “to entertain the mouth.” It offers a glimpse into what you should expect from a meal. Also it’s free, compliments of the chef.

The circle of life



BY SCOTT MECHURA
EBS FOOD COLUMNIST

If you’ve read one of my columns about ranching and the raising of beef cattle, you’ve read a dozen.

I’ve taken a variety of ranch tours in Ovando, Terry, Belt and just outside of Red Lodge, and beef symposiums in White Sulphur Springs and Billings, and three of the four federally inspected meat processing facilities Montana has. I have met hundreds of hardworking families that contribute to the more than 600 cattle ranches dispersed throughout this great state.

A couple weekends ago I added to that knowledge and experience when I visited my new friends, Rory and Melissa Clark on their ranch, R & R Clark Farms.

Located a handful of miles south of Geraldine, mountains and buttes are the backdrop to crop fields as far as your vision will take you. It was one of the most expansive 360-degree views I have ever seen in Montana, and that’s saying something.

Being the latest custodian of multi-generational ranchland dating back to 1928 comes with some obvious pressure of stewardship and responsibility. Not the least of which is living up to your great aunt Ruby, who, according to a 1972 feature in the Great Falls Tribune, was a local legend and could outwork young men a third her age.

Ruby singlehandedly ran this ranch for several years after the passing of her husband, all the while operating the local diner in Geraldine. Keep in mind that the idea that a woman could run a ranch in 1950’s and 1960’s Montana was unheard of.

Talk about multi-tasking.

Currently at around 120 head, R & R Clark Ranch hopes to grow to 200 in the coming year. Since you don’t just drive to the nearest Walmart to pick up more cattle, this is an aggressive undertaking.

I woke early Saturday morning to a sunrise that resembled a Kansas wheat field. The sun saturated already golden, dormant fields just waiting to spring to life the moment nature gives the go-ahead. All this to the soundtrack of at least six different birds that I could identify, not the least of which was a small flock of whooping cranes out in the barley fields.

Our specific task for the day was to ear tag a calf born earlier that morning. Seems like a pretty simple day by anyone’s standards. But as I learned years ago, nothing is simple on a ranch.

Rory had already been physically challenged by a protective mother who put him on his back just two weeks prior with one head-butt to the chest, followed up with her driving him six feet across the ground like he was a pillow. Finally, he was able to get to his feet and use his full ton pickup truck as a shield. Needless to say, we went into the task with some additional caution.

To listen to Rory and Melissa talk about their cows and calves as we walked and drove the ranch, it was crystal clear they live their lives and treat their animals with more respect than most humans do for each other.

For years, I’ve been told by more than one rancher that they have never met a chef before. I always tell them that the way I see it, meeting and interacting with them is almost essential—we are the two people that are the beginning and end user of a mutually respected circle of life.

The life and workload of a culinarian is overwhelming for most people. Yet every time I meet or spend time with a Montana cattle rancher, I walk away feeling guilty for having ever complained I had a hard day.

Scott Mechura has spent a life in the hospitality industry. He is a former certified beer judge and currently the multi-concept culinary director for a Bozeman based restaurant group.



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American Life in Poetry

BY KWAME DAWES

Missouri poet, Kitty Carpenter, could have chosen any number of titles for her poem, a moving and difficult accounting of how the roles of parent and child change as a result of the passing of time; but it is, in the end, a poem that locates its hope in memory—the memory that the farm represents for her when she thinks of her mother’s strength.

Farm Sonnet

By Kitty Carpenter

The barn roof sags like an ancient mare’s back.
 The field, overgrown, parts of it a marsh
 where the pond spills over. No hay or sacks
 of grain are stacked for the cold. In the harsh
 winters of my youth, Mama, with an axe,
 trudged tirelessly each day through deep snow,
 balanced on the steep bank, swung down to crack
 the ice so horses could drink. With each blow
 I feared she would fall, but she never slipped.
 Now Mama’s bent and withered, vacant gray
 eyes fixed on something I can’t see. I dip
 my head when she calls me Mom. What’s to say?
 The time we have’s still too short to master
 love, and then, the hollow that comes after.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS

- Son of, in Gaelic names
- Low (Fr.)
- Boom times
- Apiece
- Danube tributary
- Gaming cubes
- Pact
- Norwegian king
- No (Scot.)
- Fertilizer
- Dance company (abbr.)
- Incense ingredient
- New Mexico art colony
- Chicago airport
- Hamlet’s friend
- Frog genus
- The (Ger.)
- Fat (pref.)
- Penna
- Golden oriole
- Close

DOWN

- Prayer beads
- Ironwood
- Greek letter
- Good (Lat.)
- Razor-billed auk
- Loud-voiced person
- Jap. vegetable
- Anta

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

T	I	M	E	D	A	D	H	A	N	G	
R	A	A	D	O	B	O	A	D	A	R	
O	G	R	E	N	I	L	R	E	M	I	
T	O	C	S	I	N	P	A	D	N	A	G
		S	H	E		H	A	E			
L	A	N	A	I	D	I	A	N	I	T	E
A	S	B		R	A	N		O	A	R	
D	E	C	A	G	O	N	S	C	U	B	A
		B	A	S		B	E	E			
E	M	E	U	T	E	A	S	L	E	E	P
D	E	A	L	T	B	S	T	A	L	A	
D	E	C	I	T	A	I	S	A	R		
A	K	H	A	E	A	N	C	E	N	E	

DOWN

- Wound crust
- Belonging to (suf.)
- Newt
- Sassafras tree
- Propeller
- Scrape
- Watering hole
- Yellow ide
- Have (Scot.)
- Dropsy
- Possessive pronoun
- Kwa language
- Fat
- Provide
- Son of Noah
- Fiber
- Beat rapidly
- Off-track betting (abbr.)
- But (Fr.)
- Carried away
- Fahrenheit (abbr.)
- Elbe tributary
- School course (abbr.)
- Recent
- “Blue Eagle”

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Corner Quote

“Of all the things I wondered about on this land, I wondered the hardest about the seduction of certain geographies that feel like home — not by story or blood but merely by their forms and colors. How our perceptions are our only internal map of the world, how there are places that claim you and places that warn you away. How you can fall in love with the light.”

- Ellen Meloy, *“The Anthropology of Turquoise: Reflections on Desert, Sea, Stone, and Sky”*

BIG SKY BEATS

Movie soundtracks

BY GABRIELLE GASSER

A perhaps underrated part of the cinema experience is the wonderful soundtrack tailored expertly to that film. There have been times where my decision to see a movie was influenced by the composer. The soundtracks can give me goosebumps, make me feel motivated or inspire a deep sorrow. Some of my favorite composers include Hans Zimmer who scored “Interstellar” and Alexandre Desplat who scored “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” and “The Danish Girl.” This playlist features songs from some of my favorite movie soundtracks.



- “Lily’s Theme” by Alexandre Desplat
- “The Black Pearl” by Klaus Badelt
- “Cornfield Chase” by Hans Zimmer
- “The Danish Girl” by Alexandre Desplat
- “Game of Thrones” by Ramin Djawadi
- “Why So Serious?” by Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard
- “The Hanging Tree” by James Newton Howard
- “The Avengers” by Alan Silvestri
- “Iron Man 3” by Brian Tyler
- “Theme from Jurassic Park” by John Williams

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BACK40

For Explore Big Sky, the Back 40 is a resource: a place where we can delve into subjects and ask experts to share their knowledge. Here, we highlight stories from our flagship sister publication Mountain Outlaw magazine.

Noun: wild or rough terrain adjacent to a developed area **Origin:** shortened form of “back 40 acres”

From Soil to Salad

How the local food movement is returning Montana to its roots



Whitehall Farmers Market. PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

BY CLAIRE CELLA

As the calendar cycles into spring and summer, farmers across Montana return to their fields, with a growing sense that the seasons are not the only repeating occurrence here. The way farmers are producing and who they're supplying is turning, even returning, to values that run deep in the state's soil.

This is due in part to a burgeoning local food movement in the state, one that mirrors a national trend of caring more about the quality of the food we eat and where it comes from. A state known for its rich farming heritage, for decades agriculture has been one of Montana's primary industries.

This celebrated tradition has also generated one of the country's most vibrant local food scenes, according to the nonprofit food advocacy organization Strolling of the Heifers. In 2017, their annual “Locavore Index” ranked Montana fourth in the nation based on per-capita USDA Census of Agriculture data from all 50 states. It's an impressive rating for this rural and arid state, which only trailed Vermont, Maine and Oregon—states with greater population densities, less extreme temperatures, higher precipitation and more progressive demographics.

Liz Carlisle, author of *Lentil Underground*, substantiated her home state's ranking. In her book, the journalist and lecturer at Stanford University on food and agriculture tells the story of a pioneering family of Montana farmers who bucked the trend of corporate agribusiness by planting lentils, and grew a million-dollar organic food enterprise. “The local food economy is quite vibrant right now in Montana,” she said in an interview. “And it's not new. People are returning to something—a way of life—that was the norm in their grandparents' generation.”

There was a period in Montana's agricultural history when this lifestyle was not predominant. Since the 1950s, Montana food production has capitalized on financial support from the federal government, which encouraged farmers to specialize in certain crops, like wheat and barley, and to grow high volumes for export.

That economic stability of monoculture production was for many farmers too enticing to resist, Carlisle said. As a result, family cows, diverse garden plots and crop rotations disappeared as farmers could no longer afford the time or space to grow anything but high-yield grains and pulses. In 1950, Montana agriculture provided nearly 70 percent of a Montanan's diet, but at the height of the commodity era, more than 86 percent was imported, according to the Alternative Energy Resources Organization, a membership-based group devoted to promoting clean energy, healthy food and sustainable agriculture in the state.



A Western Montana Growers Co-op intern works the fields of the Lowdown Farm in Moiese, Montana. PHOTO COURTESY OF WMGC



Emma Fernandez speaks to the virtues of Montana-grown grains with a student, as a part of the Montana Harvest of the Month program. PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTANA TEAM NUTRITION

That change began in the early 1970s, through to the farm crisis in the '80s, when fossil fuel prices skyrocketed and global grain prices fell. Farmers that relied on expensive chemical fertilizers to remain productive faced bankruptcy, and they looked out over terrible soil health in their fields. Farmers began to realize that "commodity grain was no longer viable, and this way of farming was not environmentally or socially good," Carlisle said.

And if there's one thing that sets the state apart, she said, it's a "robust civil society, a moral economy" that allows Montanans to build things, like healthy, local food systems, with intentionality and a sense of responsibility.

The movement is seen as a way to diversify the state's economy, emphasize the health of Montanans, revive rural towns, and help the state rebuild its community-orientated social structures. And it takes many forms: through farmers markets—Montana has more than 80 with four or five added each year; community-supported agriculture programs; food hubs and cooperatives; and farm-to-school and farm-to-hospital initiatives. It also involves many creative and committed people.

"Whether it's local food or positive youth development, you can get a lot done in Montana just by knowing a few people and being passionate," said Steph Hystad, the marketing officer at the Montana Department of Agriculture. Together, the state's industrious local food nonprofits, innovative entrepreneurs and inspired individuals have created economic development centers, generated local food-based businesses, and collated the available resources—from delivery trucks to marketing strategies.

"It's that Western mentality of 'I see this needs to be done and I'm going to do it,'" Hystad said. So when Montanans realized they were losing critical financial opportunities due to a lack of infrastructure, things started to shift. The Department of Agriculture began teaching people how to sustain their businesses by producing products that are now grown, made, processed and sold all within the state.

In 2000, the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center's facility in Ronan was built to provide a venue for processing, research and the creation of value-added products. The Western Montana Growers Co-op was formed in 2003 by a group of producers who realized they could find a greater economy of scale by working together. What started with seven members has grown to 36, and last August, the co-op brought in more sales in one month than its first two years, according to WMGC General Manager Dave Prather.

Slowly, the infrastructure that connects farmers to the growing demand for local goods is coming back to serve regional markets, helping farmers, ranchers and small Montana towns stay solvent.

Another contribution is the concerted effort to get local food into institutions, such as schools and hospitals. This is done through a number of initiatives such as Farm to School, Beef to School,

Farm to Campus, and Trout to Trade. These programs help give smaller producers the broad base of the Montana population to supply because they are such large buying entities—investing nearly \$33 million in food annually.

Aubree Roth is Montana's Farm to School coordinator, as part of the National Farm to School Network, and works closely with Demetrius Fassas, a local foods program specialist with the Farm to Cafeteria Network. Both Roth and Fassas help K-12 schools throughout the state implement school gardens, establish food-based education, and procure local foods for school meal programs.

Their most recent collaboration is Harvest of the Month, a statewide program that showcases Montana-grown foods in communities through a curriculum of cooking lessons, recipes and taste tests. So far, over 130 schools have participated, Fassas said, and schools in the program increased their spending on local foods by an average of 40 percent in one year.

Programs like Farm to Campus at Montana State University in Bozeman, and the University of Montana's Farm-to-College Program in Missoula, have been growing for over a decade. According to Kara Landolfi, MSU's Farm to Campus coordinator, their initiative invests more than \$1.5 million, or 22.4 percent, of the total annual budget in local foods to feed its students.

MSU's Steer-A-Year program provides nearly 30 cows annually, which are raised by students and fed to finish at the university's teaching farm, and then used as meat for the dining services.

Seth Bostick, who runs the dining service at the Kalispell Regional Health Center, puts quality of food as the first priority—because his primary clients are hospital patients who need proper nutrition.

When Bostick joined Kalispell Regional, he sought out cleaner proteins by sourcing local grass-fed beef, and the equivalent for pork, poultry and fish. He also blanches, roasts and freezes seasonal produce to provide local products year-round.

Bostick is encouraged by the growth and stability of the state's homegrown food movement. "You know it's a state filled with good people when you see them switch the way they've been doing things for years, just because they want to, because it's right, even if they're getting less money," Bostick said. "That speaks volumes of these farmers and ranchers."

In the end, Montana's local food movement just makes sense.

"People here are closer to agriculture, they see it every day, and they realize it's important for our children to be involved, to understand and to celebrate Montana agriculture," Hystad said.

People take great pride in being from Montana, Carlisle added. "There's something unspoiled about our state—the clean water, clean air, the open space—and I think that's something that people want to also be in their food."

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A 2017 farm tour, organized by the Alternative Energy Resources Organization at Manuel Farm and Ranch near Havre, was a networking opportunity for farmers and ranchers. PHOTO BY JACKIE HEINERT/AERO



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