$\mathbf{Explore}^{\mathsf{m}}$

Aug. 28 - Sept. 10, 2020 Volume 11 // Issue #18

Back to school preparations

Smoky Big Skies

Bridge repairs continue

Big Sky's softball legacy

The alpaca-wool rivalry





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ON THE COVER:

A hot air balloon rises into the hazy, morning cloud cover over Big Sky. Local photographer and Big Sky Resort video producer Patrick Conroy recently captured the scene playing out in the Big Sky air. PHOTO BY PATRICK CONROY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OPINION4	SPORTS33
	HEALTH38
LOCAL8	BUSINESS39
OP NEWS15	DINING45
ENVIRONMENT & OUTDOORS17	FUN47
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT27	LABOR DAY WEEKEND GUIDE49

Back to school preparations

With school opening on Aug. 31, preparations for the return of students were in full swing at the Big Sky School District. Faculty and staff are working to ensure a seamless transition to a hybrid model of teaching that will promote the health and safety of both students and the community.

Smoky Big Skies

Big Sky's coveted mountain views recently sat under a blanket of thick haze as wildfires, fueled by a dry, hot summer scorch the West. A cocktail of fumes from California, Oregon, Idaho and Montana fires were driven into Southwest Montana by a weather system, prompting unhealthy air warnings for sensitive individuals.

Bridge repairs continue

The bridge near the intersection of MT 64 and U.S. 191 was recently completed, however, Big Sky's traffic delays will continue with a new bridge project restricting Highway 191 to one lane of passage. Crews are hoping to complete work on the bridge near Little Coyote Road by late September.

Big Sky's softball legacyUpon his arrival, dreams of a softball league in Big Sky filled Bart Mitchell's head. What has grown to a beloved community activity started in 2000 with just a few fliers informally posted around town.

The alpaca-wool rivalry

Merino wool products have taken the outdoor community by storm but there is a material aiming to challenge its popularity. Bozeman locals James and Sarah Budd, along with their herd of 85 alpacas, are working to show why alpaca wool is a superior product.



Patrick Conroy of Big Sky takes in some late summer fly fishing on secluded Dingley Lake in Polaris, Montana. Read more about late summer and Labor Day activities in section four on page 49. PHOTO BY TUCKER HARRIS

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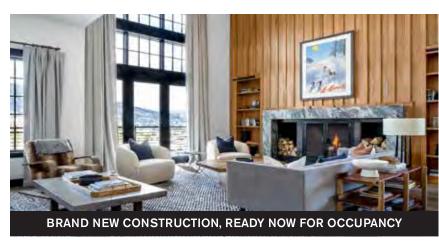
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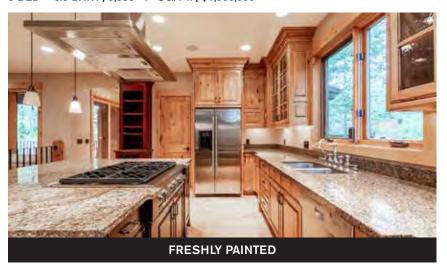




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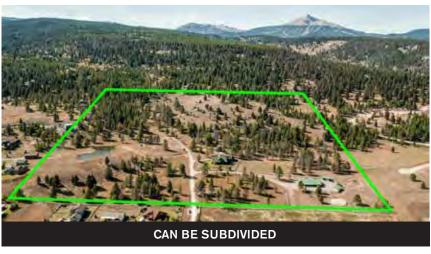
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Bridge renovation projects in Big Sky have gridlocked traffic this summer. How has the road construction impacted your daily schedule or driving experience?



Heidi Lee *Big Sky, Montana*

"For me, the traffic not that bad because I live in the meadow so it doesn't really affect me as much. It's definitely made me late for work though. I left my house at 2:45 p.m. one day to be at work at 3:30 p.m. All I had to do was drop off a few things at a storage unit in the canyon, but it took almost an hour to do that one errand, so I was late for work."



Rex Shauan Big Sky, Montana

"The longest I've had to wait is probably half an hour at the light by the Conoco. But just the line of cars that show up is crazy. If the line is long enough, you can wait at the red light two times—the line will get so long that you won't even be able to get past the light the first time. It's really frustrating."



Joanna Ashworth

Charlotte, North Carolina

"I have been coming here for years and I love Big Sky, but I have never seen the traffic this bad. If you're trying to go to Yellowstone, have a plan. I have been twice now and got stuck for 20 minutes at each of the stops. It definitely makes going anywhere difficult. I'm glad that construction toward West Yellowstone is finally done now."



Callie Stolz
Big Sky, Montana

"I would say that it hasn't really affected me that much on my day to day because I live and work up here in the Meadow. However, there was a Friday that we were leaving town and it tacked on another 30 minutes to our already six-hour drive. To sit and wait to go for that long was insane. I understand that road construction is a necessary evil ... we have to improve the roads. I'm not faulting anyone or complaining about it, but it makes the day-to-day life a lot trickier."

Read more about the traffic updates on page 11.

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NEWS IN BRIEF



'Art for Everyone' returns to Big Sky

BIG SKY ARTISTS COLLECTIVE

BIG SKY – The third annual "Art for Everyone" art show will take place September 5-7 at the Wilson Hotel in Big Sky.

In prior years, Art for Everyone featured artwork on the secondary market—pieces local collectors no longer had space for in their homes. This year, the event is hosted by the Big Sky Artists Collective and will feature new works by local artists.

From 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. throughout Labor Day weekend, work by Big Sky artists such as Georgia Baker, Michelle Greene, Donna LaHue, Heather Rapp and Maggie Shane will be on display and available for sale at the Wilson Hotel at 145 Town Center Avenue. The event is free and open to the public.

"We kept the event name because we believe we offer something for everyone," said Artists Collective coordinator Maggie Shane. "Whether you're looking for a \$25 print, a one-of-a-kind painting, a spectacular photo featuring Montana landscapes or wildlife, or a unique mosaic or glass piece, we'll have it. We're pleased we've been able to curate a show of such a diversity of scale and approach."

Shane expressed appreciation to the Wilson Hotel and the Arts Council of Big Sky, for their assistance in making this year's show happen. "This is a great opportunity for Big Sky artists and community members to connect."

The Artists Collective is a community of artists living or working in Big Sky, who are working with the Arts Council and local business to build a more vibrant visual arts community.

The event includes a Saturday evening artist reception. Watch for details on how to sign up for this limited-attendance event.

Upper Deer Creek River-Access Restoration Project breaks ground

GALLATIN RIVER TASK FORCE

BIG SKY – On Aug. 31, the Upper Deer Creek Riparian Habitat and Access Restoration project will begin upstream of the Deer Creek trailhead in Gallatin Canyon. The Gallatin River Task Force, the Custer Gallatin National Forest and Montana Trout Unlimited are partnering to revegetate riparian habitat, stabilize eroded streambanks, build a user access trail system, develop a formalized parking area and construct sustainable boat launches.

"This will be the second large-scale project to restore the ecological health of the river and improve river access," said Emily O'Connor, Conservation Manager at the Gallatin River Task Force. "This location was selected as a priority due to the broad range and volume of use the site receives, as well as the severe natural-resource damage."

During construction, much of the access site will be closed to vehicles. Once complete, the site will contain sustainable river access points, an accessible fishing platform, improved parking, and 1,414 feet of sustainable user trails. Work is expected to be completed around Halloween, with additional vegetation planting occurring in spring 2021 with the help of volunteers.

The Upper Deer Creek project is part of an ongoing effort led by the Gallatin River Task Force to reduce the level of nutrients and sediment entering the Gallatin River. These restoration projects also enhance riparian vegetation that provides shade to keep water temperatures down and restore habitat for fish.

Behavioral health needs grow during COVID-19 pandemic

BOZEMAN HEALTH

BOZEMAN — As Bozeman, Big Sky and communities throughout the region continue to address the impacts of COVID-19 on our community, families and businesses, the combination of health concerns, economic uncertainty and social isolation is leading to significant increases in the need for behavioral health services.

In June, one in four in American adults were deemed to have met the criteria for serious mental distress and illness, a nearly 700 percent increase over prepandemic levels. The State of Montana once again has the highest suicide rate in the nation, with 29.8 suicides annually per 100,000 population.

Bozeman Health and a network of community partners, including Western Montana Mental Health and Gallatin Mental Health Center, Gallatin City-County Health Department, Gallatin County Sheriff's Office and Community Health Partners have come together to form the Gallatin County Crisis Redesign Committee to meet these needs. Funded by a grant to Bozeman Health Foundation by Montana Healthcare Foundation, this group of health leaders is working to fully understand and improve upon the current continuum of available crisis response services in Gallatin County.

At the same time, building on the work of the Elevating Behavioral Health consortium and early successes in integrating new behavioral health services into its primary care, pediatrics and women's specialists clinics, Bozeman Health has recently taken important steps forward in expanding available crisis response and mental health services for those in need:

Throughout Bozeman Health's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our number one priority has been keeping our staff, patients, and the community safe and healthy. We're proud of the work that has been done to address behavioral health concerns and continue to be grateful to the donors and community partners who collaborate with us for the betterment of Southwest Montana.

BZN to contribute \$3 million to Belgrade's Wastewater Treatment Facility Project

BOZEMAN YELLOWSTONE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

BELGRADE – The Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport will contribute \$3 million toward the construction of the Belgrade Wastewater Treatment Facility Project scheduled to begin construction this year. City engineers calculated the airport's water and sewer use to be 7.5 percent of the city's total usage. Therefore, the Gallatin Airport Authority Board, the governing body of the airport, agreed to pay 7.5 percent of the total cost of the \$40 million upgrade.

The airport and the city of Belgrade are also currently working to finalize a new water, sewer and land lease agreement that sets the terms of their partnership for the next 20 years. The current agreement, set to expire in 2022, has been updated to account for the nearly 50 years of collaboration between the two parties in the past as well as to provide for a more detailed shared use agreement for the future.

"The airport and the city of Belgrade have collaborated well on this issue since the 70's, and we look forward to continuing that collaboration for the benefit of the taxpayers and citizens of Belgrade as well as the airport users and tenants," Airport Director Brian Sprenger said. "This is definitely an example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts."

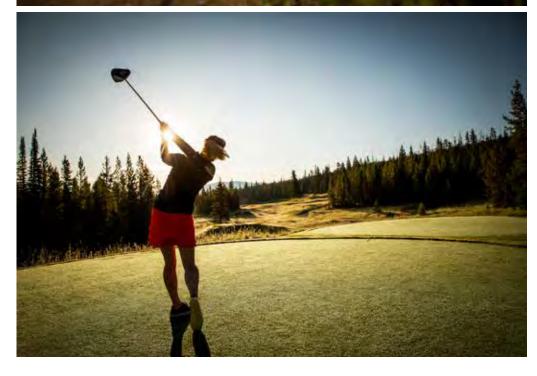
The Airport's \$3 million investment in the city's water and sewer infrastructure is just the latest in a partnership dating back to 1973 when the airport purchased from the state of Montana a right of way easement for the development of airport sewage treatment facilities.

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BSSD faculty and staff prepare for student's return to campus



Faculty and staff were on campus the week of Aug. 24 preparing for students to return to campus. PHOTO BY BRANDON WALKER

BY BRANDON WALKER

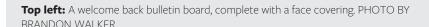
BIG SKY – Big Sky School District faculty have been hard at work, preparing for the return of students to classrooms on Aug. 31. As of Aug. 26, 416 students are anticipated to begin classes at Lone Peak High School and Ophir Elementary and Middle school this year, but projected attendance numbers are changing rapidly.

On Aug. 6, the BSSD school board selected a blended learning model to begin the school year, where 50 percent of students will be present

on campus receiving in-person instruction while the other 50 percent will learn remotely, alternating days on and off campus between the groups. The school board reserved the right to adjust or amend the learning model at any point throughout the year to accommodate for the ever changing COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the week of Aug. 24 faculty and staff returned to campus to prepare classrooms and materials and meet about health and safety protocols ahead of the first day of school. EBS visited campus to capture the sights ahead of the start of the 2020-2021 school year.





Top right: An example of the camera (left) that will broadcast lessons to students learning remotely. PHOTO BY BRANDON WALKER

Bottom right: Desks spaced throughout a classroom to ensure social distancing is maintained when students attend in-person classes. PHOTO BY BRANDON WALKER









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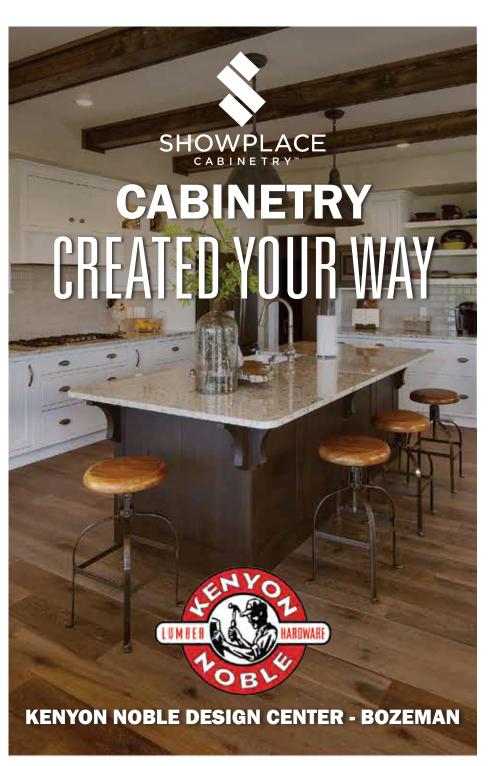


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Bridge work continues, traffic at standstill

As crews complete MT 64 bridge deck, work shifts to US 191 bridge

BY MIRA BRODY

BIG SKY – The bridge deck projects in Big Sky labor on—crews completed the bridge near the intersection of MT 64 and U.S. 191 on Aug. 14, continue work on the bridge by Little Coyote Road, and began on the bridge on U.S. Highway 191, two miles north of Big Sky.

But as the Montana Department of Transportation and its contracted construction crews continue their work, so far rush-hour wait times have not been alleviated. Anyone in Town Center from 5-7 p.m. on a weekday can see traffic backed up beyond Ousel Falls Road for multiple light cycles as drivers are met with one way traffic heading both north and south on Highway 191.

Workers on the bridge by Andesite and Little Coyote roads finished paving, shifting traffic to the completed side in order to begin work on the westbound bridge deck the week of Aug. 17. They will then begin the demolition process, removing the old bridge deck in order to build the new one. MDT expects work on this bridge to be completed by late September.

On the U.S. 191 bridge, workers are tearing up the surface of the road and bridge in order to work on the structure and its connection to the roadway. Crews are using a technique called hydro-milling to break up the top layer of the northbound bridge deck. Hydro-milling uses high-pressured water to cut into the surface layer of the deck without damaging the layers underneath.

Traffic controls and barriers were set up early on Aug. 17 and commuters can expect traffic delays of up to 15 minutes depending on the time of day. Loads wider than 11 feet are restricted and will need to find an alternative route.

Although working hours vary, crews largely work between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m., according to Ashley Davis, civil operations manager at Dick Anderson Construction, and project manager for the Big Sky Bridge Decks Project.

"The reason we can't put more crews on is because ... there's not enough geometric space to work if we got more efficient during the day," Davis said. "[And] there's no night work allowed on the job, so it's not like we can work multiple shifts."

Davis says as a part of their contract with MDT, Dick Anderson is not permitted to have crews working at night.

"MDT kind of frowns on that because of safety concerns, which is why they try to avoid that ... In the construction world, night work is typically less efficient,"

Davis said. "It was never called out in the bid documents that it was expected to be required to work around the clock."

MDT officials declined to comment on crew size and hours, differing instead to Dick Anderson for comment, but did say they hope crews can finish the decks by early October. The bridge on U.S. 191 will most likely be completed by late September or early October, said Craig Walker, MDT engineering project manager.

"It may seem like there's not much going on, but sometimes they have to wait for a cure time so they take off early," said Walker, noting that some cement cure times can take up to a week.

From a public safety standpoint, the Big Sky Fire Department met with MDT prior to construction to discuss safety concerns. The nature of the traffic—cars backed up in only one lane at a time—allows emergency vehicles to get to an emergency scene with ease, according to the Big Sky Fire Department.

"We've had just a slight few delays when they were doing the bridge down at Conoco when traffic was backed way up," said Chief Greg Megaard of an instance where they were transporting someone to Bozeman Deaconess hospital. "We just very carefully turned on the lights and sirens and navigated at a low speed. We've been fairly lucky that most people do [move over] and have been paying attention to sirens as soon as they can."

Chief Megaard reminds drivers, whether moving or stuck in traffic, to keep an eye out for emergency vehicles and move over as quickly as possible to allow them to pass. This is key to keeping the community safe during major constructions projects.

"When you see or hear emergency vehicles, you need to pull over no matter where you're at," Megaard said.

The same light systems and traffic sensors that were in place at the Conoco Travel Shoppe intersection are in use at the U.S. 191 bridge construction site, monitored by engineers who can adjust the light times as needed.

Addressing drivers frustrated by traffic wait times, Davis says that construction work by nature is sequential and that Dick Anderson has been adjusting its crew numbers when possible.

"We've got as many crew on it as we can physically make effective and stay within the contractual requirements [with MDT]," Davis said.



 $Crews \ have \ begun \ work \ on \ the \ Highway \ 191 \ bridge \ and \ just \ swapped \ lanes \ on \ the \ bridge \ at \ Little \ Coyote \ Road. \ PHOTO \ BY \ BRANDON \ WALKER$

Resort tax board talks testing with Congress

BY BELLA BUTLER **EBS CONTRIBUTOR**

BIG SKY – At the Big Sky Resort Area District board's Aug. 12 meeting, board chair Kevin Germain said the district is now in successful communication with the offices of Montana Sens. Steve Daines and Jon Tester, as well as Rep. Greg Gianforte after sending a letter to the delegation requesting its advocacy for more testing supplies for Montana. The objective would then be to advocate for supplies to reach Big Sky and greater Gallatin County, according to Germain.

BSRAD has been a recent proponent of implementing sentinel testing, the widespread testing of selected asymptomatic portions of the workforce or other selected population segments. This approach proved challenging given testing reagent shortages and lengthy turnarounds for results stemming from a July 1 Big Sky community test. It took the state lab and subcontractor Quest Diagnostics as long as four weeks to process results.

Germain said sentinel, or "smart" testing, has proven effective so long as results are received within a few days. While the board expressed interest in partnering with the state and with Bozeman Health, private testing companies are not off the table, according to Germain.

Matrix Medical Network has utilized private COVID-19 testing at the Montage Big Sky hotel construction site in Spanish Peaks, as well as in Moonlight and the Yellowstone Club. Matrix can turn test results around within three days, Germain said.

"I support [sentinel testing] now because I've seen the private efforts that have happened in Big Sky," he said. "I am 100 percent convinced that smart or sentinel testing is well worth the financial commitment."

In addition to working with Congress, Germain said the district is also applying pressure at the state level via the Department of Public Health and Human Services, as the state is responsible for the local distribution of testing supplies and CARES Act funding, which can be used to support testing initiatives.

"I do think [sentinel testing is] a key piece of the puzzle to keeping our community safe yet keeping businesses open during this pandemic," Germain added. "I'm very hopeful and cautiously optimistic we'll get the proper support from the state to do this, but if we can't then I hope that we can pursue plan B." Germain clarified that "plan B" would be operating sentinel-testing programs through third party private testing efforts such as those being implemented by Matrix, an approach BSRAD Executive Director Daniel Bierschwale has been researching.

"Our preference would be to have the state supply Bozeman Health with the proper testing kits and reagents for their Panther [testing] machine in Bozeman," Germain said. "And if the state could do that, then Bozeman Health could process up to 1,000 tests

Bierschwale provided amendments to the board's previously drafted scenario planning, a measure taken in response to the ramifications of the pandemic on the local economy. The plan had at first conservatively forecasted May and June resort tax collections to be significantly reduced. This forecast revealed itself as a lowball estimate when, at press time, May collections totaled 46 percent higher than May 2019 collections and June collections were 6 percent higher than last year.

In his executive report, Bierschwale said he wants to see numbers from July, the first month that both the additional 1 percent tax for infrastructure projects and short-term rental compliance agreement were in effect.

Bierschwale said the plan will continue to adapt as more numbers come in, and BSRAD staff hopes to provide the board with a report leading up to November resort tax appropriations using preliminary booking data from both the airlines and the Big Sky Chamber of Commerce to provide insight into the fate of the upcoming winter season.

In spite of uncertain times, however, the board moved to purchase unit 203 in the RJS Tower in Town Center for \$250,000 for use as additional office space. BSRAD currently owns unit 204 adjacent to unit 203, which it has been renting for more than a year. The board juxtaposed the difference in monthly cost for continuing to rent the space versus purchasing it. While the mortgage for the commercial space would result in a \$208 monthly increase in spending, the board unanimously voted to purchase it, and the majority of board members stated the value in acquiring an asset.

"For an extra \$280 a month to have an asset makes a lot more sense, and I would support any entity that was doing this, whether it's COVID or not," said Vice Chair Sarah Blechta. "It just seems like the more prudent thing to do."

Board Treasurer Steve Johnson presented an investment proposal for the balance BSRAD currently has sitting stagnant in the bank. After conversations with the investment banking firm D.A. Davidson & Co. and the Montana Board of Investments, it became evident that when working with public funds, BSRAD's investment opportunities were limited to mostly lower-yield options, restrictions which Johnson referred to as "criminally negligent."

Given the limitations, Johnson and Bierschwale proposed that the board do two things: adopt an investment policy that could be used to guide future decisions, and divert a portion of BSRAD's possessed funds to a repurchase checking account at First Security Bank, which yields \$.25 and is entirely government secured. The board voted unanimously to transfer the BSRAD balance—roughly \$7 million—to the repurchase checking account.

The board also moved to adopt a new structure for conducting compliance audits, which will double the number of annual audits from 10 to 20 and will select businesses using a point system that considers factors such as collection totals, years since the last audit, and leads on non-compliant issues.



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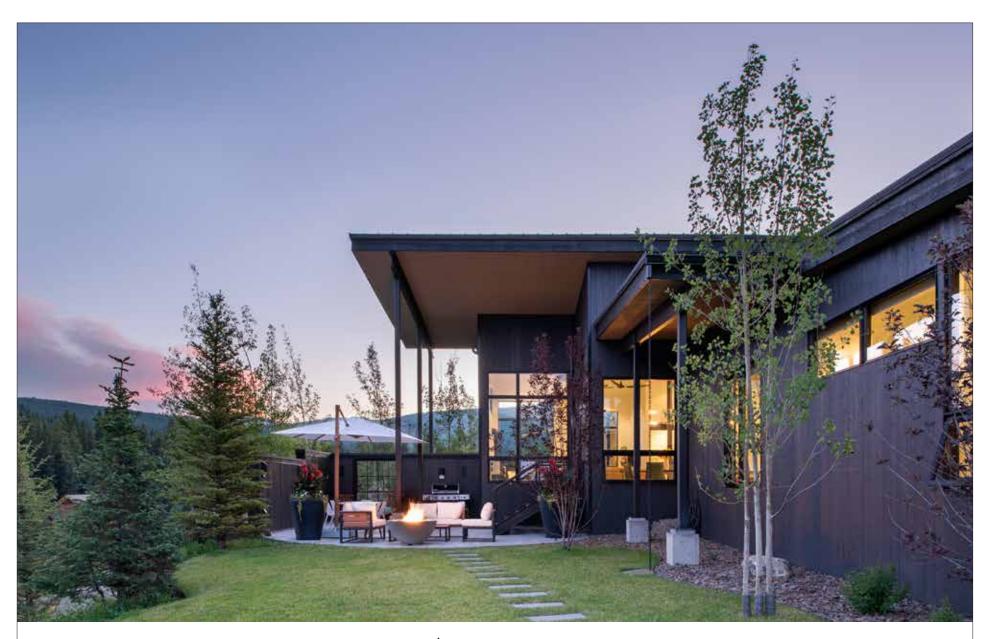
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Crazy Mountain Access Project public comment period extended

BY BRANDON WALKER

BIG SKY – The East Crazy Mountains and Inspiration Divide Public Access Improvement Land Exchange public comment period was recently extended, now running through the entire month of August. After receiving an influx of public comment, representatives for the exchange, also known as the Crazy Mountain Access Project, decided to extend the original public comment deadline of Aug. 7.

CMAP is a possible multi-part land swap that would exchange lands between the Yellowstone Club, a collective of private landowners in the Crazy Mountains and the U.S. Forest Service. If accepted, YC would receive roughly 500 acres of Forest Service land in the Lee Metcalf Wilderness in exchange for 558 acres near Cedar Mountain that would create contiguous public lands boundaries on the western side of the Inspiration Divide trail.

The land acquired by YC is intended to provide greater backcountry skiing and riding opportunities for YC members and would be designated with a conservation easement calling for no development outside of that necessary for skiing and riding operations.

"It was great to see members of our community come out to participate in the open house. The desire to increase and improve public access is encouraging. The Crazy Mountain Access Project will compile the feedback received at the Big Sky town hall, along with the feedback received at the Big Timber, Livingston, and Bozeman open houses," said Vice President of Development at the Yellowstone Club Mike DuCuennois in a statement provided to EBS. "The Crazy Mountain Access Project has also extended the comment period through the end of August and we all encourage Montanans to review details of the current proposal on the website and continue to offer feedback."

Based on feedback, CMAP representatives began to revise the original proposal, factoring public comment into their revisions. The rescheduled Big Sky open house took place on Aug. 13, instead of the originally scheduled

date, Aug. 6, to continue acquiring public feedback and allowing representatives to answer questions. Other open houses previously occurred in Livingston, Big Timber and Bozeman in July.

"People seemed to be in agreement with what was happening in the Crazies, [they] liked the opportunity for access there, but really wanted to see more in the Big Sky area," said Deputy Director for the Park County



A portion of the land that the U.S. Forest Service would receive in the Crazy Mountain Access Project from the Yellowstone Club. PHOTO BY BRANDON WALKER

Environmental Council Erica Lighthiser. She added that some people believed the largest public benefit of the project was the access in the Crazy Mountains rather than in Big Sky.

"And then some good suggestions as to potentially some other ways or ideas ... for Yellowstone Club to potentially sweeten the deal I guess, for the Big Sky community," Lighthiser said.

In addition to the exchange of parcels in the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, CMAP would create a contiguous, nearly 30 square mile portion of public land in the Crazy Mountains through the acquisition of 5,205 privately owned acres by the Forest Service. In return the private landowners collective would be provided 3,614 acres around the border of the newly formed, contiguous public land.

The renewed public access to Crazy Peak would also be of great spiritual importance to the Apsáalooke Nation—formerly known as the Crow. Crazy Peak was granted private ownership when Crow Reservation boundaries were relocated in the 1870s.

East Crazy Mountains and Inspiration
Divide Public Access Improvement
Land Exchange

Land Exchange

INSPIRATION DIVIDE PORTION

FAST CRAZY MOUNTAINS PORTION

"There are some places that just mean so much to so many people that they deserve their own place throughout time, so that everyone has that opportunity to experience what our ancestors sacrificed and really cooperated with each other to achieve and those are things that we can't afford as a species to ignore," said Apsáalooke Nation member Shane Doyle. "I mean we have enough crises and obstacles in our way and you know if we want to be around for the next 1,200 years like the native people have been here then we need to get ahold of our humility and it's places like Crazy Peak that allow us to do that."

UVV CRATYROUNTAINDED

A portion of the land that the Yellowstone Club would acquire from the U.S. Forest Service if the Crazy Mountain Access Project were accepted. PHOTO BY BRANDON WALKER

When the exchange is complete, YC would pay \$1 million for the construction of a 22-mile public trail from Half Moon campground to an established trail at Sweet Grass Creek in the Crazy Mountains.

"I'm psyched about the peak of course, but I'm also really happy that I can take my family there, we can go on the new trail, it's something that I'm looking forward to doing," Doyle said.

After all public comment is reviewed CMAP will present their proposal to the Forest Service and Montana's Congressional Delegation this fall.

"There's just a ton of value for folks to weigh in and take a close look," Lighthiser said. "Because that's how we'll make better decisions and put a better proposal forward."

To view the lands that would be exchanged of submit public comment visit crazymountainproject.com

OUTLAW

News from our publisher, Outlaw Partners

Big Sky Virtual Town Hall presents: Back to school

EBS STAFF

It's a nationwide debate and one that even Big Sky is not immune to—what will the school year look like?

Join Explore Big Sky at the 13th session of Big Sky Virtual Town Hall Monday, Aug. 31 at 5 p.m. We will host six guests who will discuss what it's like, from every level of academia, to prepare both teacher and students for going back-to-school during a pandemic, with additional commentary from a Bozeman Health medical professional.

The Aug. 31 panel includes Dr. Waded Cruzado, President of Montana State University; Clayton Christian, Montana University System Commissioner of Higher Education; Dustin Shipman, BSSD Superintendent and Loren Bough, BSSD School Board Chairman; Nettie Breuner, Big Sky Discovery Academy Head of School; and Dr. Maren Dunn, Family Medicine Physician Bozeman Health Big Sky Medical Center.

Panelists will respond to questions posed by moderators Joseph T. O'Connor, EBS editor-in-chief, and Brandon Walker, EBS local editor. Moderators are encouraging people to submit potential questions ahead of the Town Hall by emailing them to media@theoutlawpartners.com.

The meetings take place in a Q&A format and begin at 5 p.m. MST, lasting approximately 90 minutes.



PHOTO BY TUCKER HARRIS

For the live broadcast, head to facebook.com/explorebigsky

Big Sky Virtual Town Hall is presented by: L&K Real Estate, Shore to Summit Wealth Management and the Big Sky Chamber.



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SECTION 2: ENVIRONMENT & OUTDOORS, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT







Wildfires cloak southwest Montana in hazardous smoke

BY BELLA BUTLER

BIG SKY – As wildfire flames char acreage across the West, Big Sky's treasured mountain views have become hidden behind a veil of smoke.

According to Anne Rys-Sikora, a public information officer for the Northern Rockies Coordination Center, the smoke shrouding southwest Montana is a cocktail of fumes primarily from fires in California and some from Oregon, Idaho and Montana. A recent weather system with a south westerly flow drove smoke from the west coast fires into the Northern Rockies, a trend only confounded by numerous local fires.

In the Lemhi Pass area east of Salmon Idaho, the Bear Creek Fire, which was first detected on Aug. 11, is the largest active fire in Montana. As of EBS press time, the fire was 11,590 acres in size, and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group's Incident Information System reported the fire as 70 percent contained. In Madison County, the Bradley Creek Fire, first detected on Aug. 23, was reported to be 1,870 acres and 75 percent contained.

The NWGC defines containment as a status indicating how much of the perimeter and associated spot fires have been secured with a control line, a method that can "reasonably be expected to stop the fire's spread."

While the National Weather System is forecasting lower temperatures and precipitation, Rys-Sikora said fire season is not over yet, but the upcoming conditions could qualify as a "season-slowing event," another term for the beginning of the end.

Air quality conditions are also expected to improve as a new weather system with a north westerly flow moves into the area, according to Katie Alexander, an air quality meteorologist for the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. This weather pattern will, at the least, keep California smoke out of Montana.

Alexander issues air quality warnings based on data collected from air quality monitors from throughout the state. Montana DEQ does not have a monitor in Big Sky, but Alexander said local conditions could be inferred from reports from surrounding areas like Bozeman and Dillion as well as by looking at satellite imagery.

"At this moment, it's looking a lot better out there," Alexander said in an interview on Aug. 26 after lifting an air quality warning for sensitive populations that lasted four days in Gallatin and Madison counties, as well as other areas across the state. While current air quality conditions appear to be improving, Alexander noted that they are subject to change quickly. Similarly to Rys-Sikora, Alexander was hesitant to make predictions about the end of fire season.

While heavy smoke can be cause for alarm and fodder for conversation, Rys-Sikora said this fire season is not a "terrifically bad year" nor is it a "terrifically light year." The region is hovering somewhere around average. "I do not think that there is anything abnormal," Rys-Sikora said. "We're at the height of fire season in this part of the country."

While national headlines paint a picture of tragedy in California, where CNN reports that 1.25 million acres have burned since Aug. 15, Rys-Sikora observed that conversations around wildfire in Montana often take a different tone.

"Montanans have the good fortune to look at fire as a healthy thing on the landscape and not always as a threatening disastrous event," she said.

While she acknowledged that Montana's local fires can still result in loss, a 5,000-plus-acre fire in Montana may never approach a primary residence, where in more densely populated parts of the country, like the Bay Area in California, this size of fire is more of a concern.

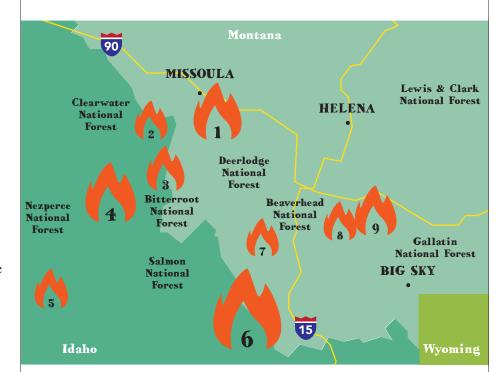
Rys-Sikora said that with hunting season fast approaching, hunters should be aware of current fires as well as the possibility of new ones starting at any moment.



An especially radiant sunset over Lone Mountain in mid-August promised the coming smoke that caused the Montana Department of Environmental Quality to issue an air quality warning. Changing weather patterns are expected to make way for clearer skies moving into September. PHOTO BY MICAH ROBIN

For updates on active wildfires, visit inciweb.nwgc.gov. For daily air quality updates, visit todaysair.mt.gov.

WESTERN MONTANA AND NORTHERN IDAHO ACTIVE WILDFIRES



- 1 Cinnabar Fire
- 2 Marion Fire
- 3 Cub Lake Fire
- 4 Shissler Fire
- 5 Copeland Fire
- 6 Bear Creek Fire
- 7 Shale Creek Fire
- 8 Old Baldy Fire
- 9 Bradley Creek Fire

This map is current as of EBS press time. For more information, visit inciweb.nwcg.gov

THE NEW WEST

BY TODD WILKINSON

There can be no denying species impact other species. The spread of exotic noxious weeds can transform native grassland important to big game animals, dozens of other animals and livestock (which are themselves exotic). The presence of predators has effects on prey. In natural systems, where evolution and time have created intricate webs of interdependence,

the persistence or absence of certain species can have consequences for many others.

On planet Earth, no species has created a larger, more impactful footprint on other species than we Homo sapiens. We are both habitat creators and destroyers. Sometimes we do the former with conscientious purpose in mind while the latter often happens with little reflection on how our actions ripple negatively forward.

As I've written before, true wild places are defined by the kinds of wild things that can continue to survive there without human meddling and intervention.

Footprints of human development on private land (ranchlands excepted) are almost always permanent. On public lands, when government agencies allow recreation use to happen, intensify and grow, it becomes incredibly difficult to unwind or scale back the use—even if it is proved, after the fact, to impact wildlife, because human users will complain that their liberties are being violated.

That's why it's important that government entities, be they federal, state or county, fully ponder the consequences of their actions and be forward-thinking. Particularly in a region like ours, home to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the last one in the Lower 48 to still have all its original large mammals—Yellowstone bison being the only animal not allowed to free range like other species.

Today there are some who deny we outdoor recreationists have impacts, in spite of a large and growing body of scientific research, and the arguments given are similar to those who claim human-caused climate change isn't real or that its effects aren't already visible.

The existing development footprints in Bozeman and Big Sky cannot and will never get smaller. For humans, they are fun and prosperous place to be. Yet their growth has had huge ecological impacts on the movement of wildlife, habitat and clean water.

In Big Sky, it's not the ski hills that have exacted the biggest toll, but human development continuing to expand and consolidate at the foot of Lone Mountain. As outdoor recreation hubs, there are already massive spillover effects from Bozeman and Big Sky on public lands.

Consider this: there's not a single place in the world where wildlife populations—of the kind we have in Greater Yellowstone—have continued to thrive with lots of people circuiting through the places those critters live.

A scientific study in the science and medical journal PLOS One reviewed 274 scientific journal articles published between 1981 and 2015 examining the effects of recreation on a variety of animal species across all geographic areas and recreational activities.

"People generally assume that recreation activities are compatible with conservation goals for protected areas," said Courtney Larson, a PhD student at Colorado State University and lead author of the study. "However, our review of the evidence across wildlife species and habitat types worldwide suggests otherwise."

Wildness: Will our human presence dominate all that remains?

All outdoor recreation activities have impacts. While problems like trail erosion can be solved through better engineering, impacts on wildlife generally come down to numbers of people and intensity of use. There are places where animals have a very low tolerance for human disturbance, especially when they're raising young and are foraging to take in enough calories to survive winters.

Some of the serious negative impacts chronicled in the scientific studies were decreased species diversity; decreased survival, reproduction, or abundance; and behavioral or physiological disturbance, such as decreased foraging and increased stress.

Whether we choose, as a society, to maintain the health of our unparalleled wildlife populations in Greater Yellowstone is not a scientific matter but one of values and deliberately limiting our consumption of wild places.

We don't traverse the backcountry out of an immediate urgent need for survival, but as a decision for how to spend leisure time—a foreign concept to wildlife and, frankly, for many Americans who struggle to make ends meet for their families.

Having access to the caliber of wildness found in Greater Yellowstone is a luxurious privilege and with it comes a responsibility to not mess it up. This isn't about preserving the last great wildlife ecosystem for humans, it's about doing it for the animals.



A wildlife-rich stream corridor in the narrow yet still wild Gallatin Range located between Big Sky and Paradise Valley in the distance. PHOTO BY TODD WILKINSON

What can be a better legacy for all Americans—regardless of our differences and issues of inequality, lack of inclusion and social injustice that must be addressed—than to pass this remnant trove of biological diversity along to the new America?

Most of the natural world—most once-wild places as gauged by the beings able to live there—have been colonized and destroyed by our human footprint. The question before us is will our species continue on its present course to claim them all?

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



BY DAVID TUCKER **EBS CONTRIBUTOR**

As you've likely noticed, a widespread, bright green algae bloom has taken over our backyard waterway. From the upper reaches of the Taylor Fork to downstream of Portal Creek, filamentous vegetation covers the river-bottom rocks.

At first glance, the algae is almost beautiful, looking more like a tropical coral than an aquatic agitator. But in this case, looks are deceiving and its presence is anything but welcoming.

Cladophora, the primary algae of concern in the upper Gallatin watershed, is naturally occurring. Its growth is driven by several factors, including nitrogen and phosphorus levels, water clarity, water temperature, available sunlight, pH, water velocity and water hardness. What the Gallatin River Task Force is working to better understand is why these growth drivers are suddenly leading to more widespread blooms, how much these blooms are being caused by human land use and what we need to do as a community to solve the problem.

"We may be seeing an imbalance on multiple fronts," said Chace Bell, water quality monitoring and assessment specialist with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. "We're in the so-called Goldilocks zone," he continued, where conditions are just right for widespread, nuisance growth.

"So far, in high-gradient, fast-moving rivers [like the Gallatin], the blooms aren't severe enough to affect fish populations in one summer, but we could start to see a macroinvertebrate shift over time," Bell said. To avoid that and other negative outcomes, "we need to be creative in building resiliency," he continued. "There's a tremendous amount of complexity when trying to come up with management plans and solutions because of non-point sources."

Non-point sources are pollutants that originate not where the effect is seen in the river, but elsewhere in the watershed. For example, stormwater tainted with chemicals from fertilizer flows from a driveway in a Big Sky housing development

to our underground aquifers before resurfacing somewhere downstream—say near the Deer Creek fishing access. When this polluted groundwater re-enters surface waters like the Gallatin River, it could still contain high enough levels of nutrients like nitrogen or phosphorus to negatively impact water quality.

One of the manifestations of this impact be could the algae bloom we're currently witnessing. As Bell said, determining the exact reason for the bloom is difficult, but we do know that steps must be taken to curtail excess nutrient loads entering the river.

Riverside restoration projects, like the West Fork willow planting GRTF has done or the river access improvements GRTF made at Moose Creek, are steps in the right direction, but we'll also need a community-wide commitment to improving water resource management based on data collection and water quality monitoring. GRTF has already identified sources of excess nutrients, such as stormwater runoff, irrigation for landscaping and antiquated, poorly maintained septic systems. An upgraded wastewater treatment plant, which has been approved by Big Sky voters, will also help.

As individuals, we can update, upgrade and regularly maintain our septic systems. We can plant trout-friendly lawns that use less fertilizer and less water. We can restore any streamside vegetation on our properties and be sure to always pick up after our pets.

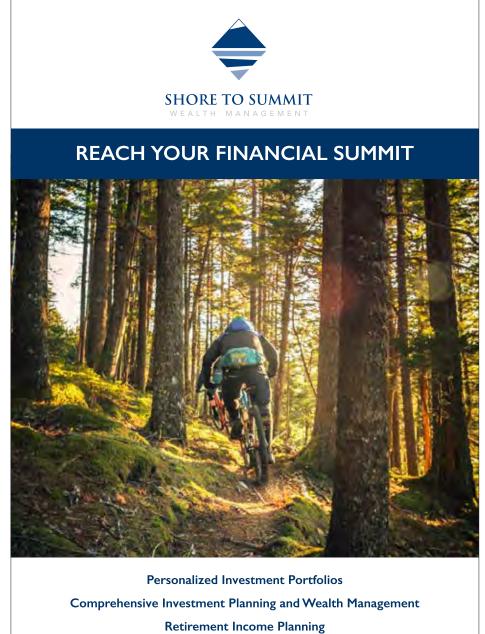
All of these steps are efforts to reduce the concentration of pollutants entering our water resources, and they're outlined and prioritized in GRTF's forthcoming Nutrient Reduction Plan. GRTF's ongoing algae monitoring study will further refine future action steps and add useful data.

For now, it's important for our community to acknowledge that current nutrient levels are too high and major, Big Sky-wide steps must be taken to repair and restore our water resources. If we fail to act, algae blooms will become the norm and more than just a nuisance.

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







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School plus pandemic equals high anxiety

BY ASTA BOWEN WRITERS ON THE RANGE



As a longtime teacher who has heard every complaint under the sun about how horrible school is, how boring, arbitrary, irrelevant and unfair, I find myself somewhat taken aback by the fierce pressure to return to regular classroom instruction.

Of course, those complaints were from students, and much of the pressure is from grownups concerned about little things like getting back to work or helping young ones learn and grow. Kids themselves, par for the course, aren't much asked what they think.

But as of this writing, only about 15 percent of U.S. students are headed back for full-time in-person classes, according to the latest data from Education Week, with a similar number going to a hybrid/partial model. If these proportions hold for the nation overall, it leaves the majority of our kids, almost 70 percent, to continue with remote learning.

Which leaves parents and politicians whiplashed, and rightly so, over how to get back to work and restore some sense of normalcy to daily life, while also being troubled by the obvious risks of reopening and aware that any "social distancing" version of school will be anything but normal. Writer Christine Stevens compared it to outfitting each classroom with its own living, breathing, full-size lion.

And whatever the format, it's a mess: On-days and off-days, endless screen time, morning temperature checks and who stays home if there's a fever, uncertainty about what happens if a student or a teacher gets the virus, friends you can't even sit next to, relentless cleaning protocols, and no guarantee that this year's seniors will ever get their long-awaited walk across the stage.

Whatever the format, we'll still have standards and tests and grades and homework; in other words, everything you always hated about school, but with a lot more hand sanitizer.

Remember last spring on lockdown, when we watched in amazement as the smog cleared over Los Angeles and the murky waters of Venice ran clear? Residents of northern India even reported seeing the Himalayas for the first time in decades. It was

a beguiling hint of possibilities that might lie beyond the grind of the 21st century machine we have come to take for granted.

So it makes me wonder: Why are we in such a hot rush to go back to a system no one liked that much in the first place? It's not just kids who think school sucks; consider the past 40-some years of reform initiatives such as A Nation at Risk, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Common Core, Homeschooling, Unschooling, STEM, STEAM and STREAM.

Thanks to COVID-19, it seems the real bottom line of public schooling is not some starry ideal like equal opportunity for all, but a reliable system of taxpayer-funded childcare. We have now seen how crucial school is to all families everywhere--and how vital for kids themselves. Online learning, even if it's the safest option for human beings at the moment, breaks that contract right across the knee.

I retired before the virus hit, but like my friends still in the trenches, I never stopped caring for kids. We'd soldier up for whatever crazy initiative came down the pike, trying to maximize the benefit and somehow make it work for students. Witness the magic act teachers pulled off last spring, turning on a dime to put the entire school system online—in a matter of weeks, not decades. Polished and perfect? I'm guessing not—but neither, to say the least, was Common Core.

Now may not be the best time for this plea, but I'm making it anyway. When the pandemic is over, be it in a year or a decade, let's put a note in our planner to look not only at what society needs from schools, but also at what the young truly need from us.

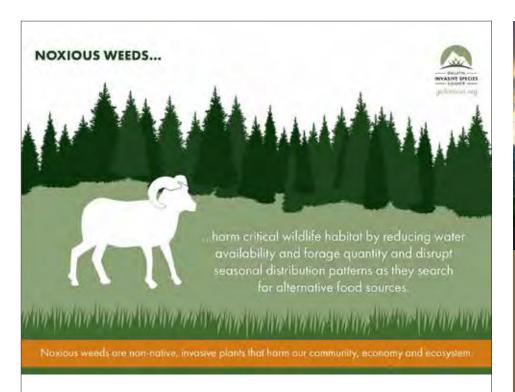
Just because you and I had to live through what felt boring and irrelevant in school doesn't mean our kids and grandkids should. Trust me, it doesn't actually seem to improve character all that much.

Meanwhile, one more request. Before opening those classrooms to the lion that lurks inside, let's ask ourselves one last time: Whose life is it worth? Because until this virus is finally under control with the right mix of prevention, testing and treatment, it's all kind of a big experiment.

A Nation at Risk, indeed.

Asta Bowen is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, a nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. She writes in Montana.





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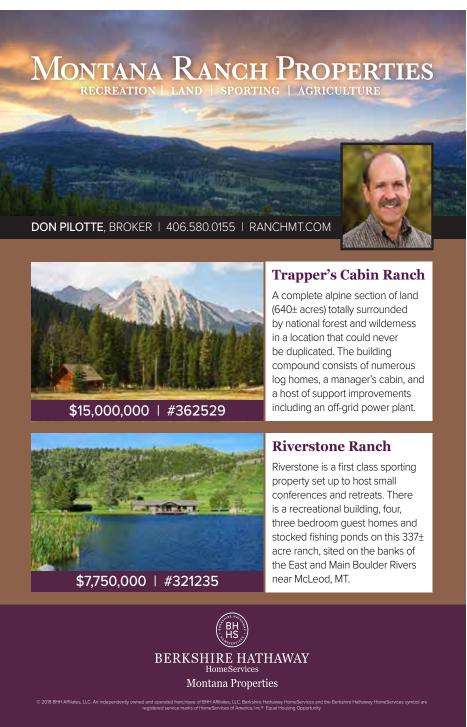
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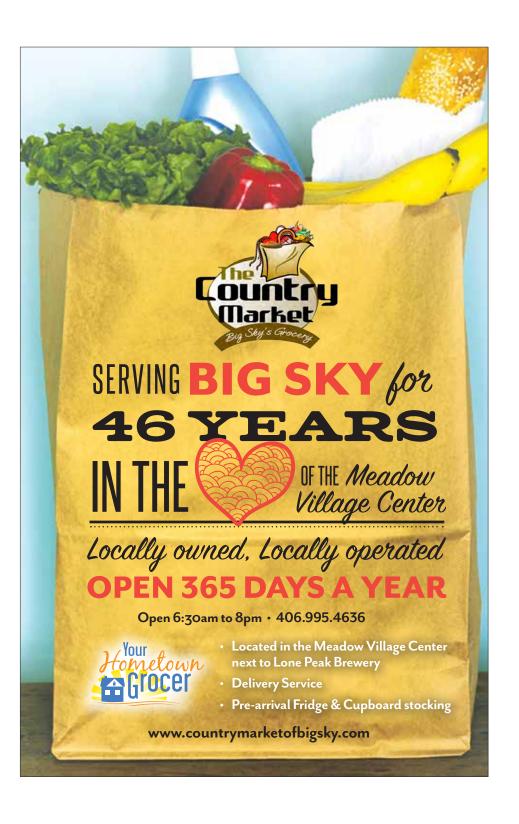
















BY PATRICK STRAUB EBS FISHING COLUMNIST

To say I've been around the proverbial angling bush a few times is no exaggeration. My angling travels have spanned the globe and the days I've spent guiding anglers of all abilities has certainly surpassed 2,000.

My choice to follow a fishing-centric life happened in my early 20s. I left the trout streams of Montana to study writing at a midwestern liberal arts college, knowing I would return to Montana and be a fishing guide. In the quarter-

century since my first season of guiding, I have been asked many questions while a-stream. Here are the top five questions I'm asked and how to learn from them.

What is the biggest trout you've ever caught?

This question is often asked by anglers on the first day I fish with them. Many anglers expect an answer of a brown trout from Chile or a rainbow trout from Kamchatka, but the biggest trout I've caught came from the Yellowstone River just downstream from Livingston. Measuring a bit shy of 38 inches and weighing nearly 12 pounds, this monster engulfed a large streamer, stripped very slowly through a deep run. To get this fish I used a full sinking line and fished on a snowy, overcast day in early November. The lesson: Commit to fish when, how and where the big fish may be. If you do it enough, they will come.

What is your favorite fish to catch?

This is an easy one: permit. A permit is in the family of pompano and jack crevalle. Because permit are very wary, prefer live bait over artificial flies and are not often in areas best fished with a floating fly line and artificial flies, to catch a permit on a fly is an accomplishment. The lesson: Fly fishing offers many ways to challenge your skills. Sure, racking up numbers with a two-fly weighted nymph rig under a strike indicator might catch a lot of fish, but like playing an easy opponent in a ball game, it doesn't make you a better angler. Fly fishing for permit demands the quest for

The top five questions I'm asked And, how to learn from them

excellence in many facets of fly fishing—casting skill, predatory instincts, patience, knowledge of flies and tackle and a little bit of love from the fish gods.

What do you do in the winter?

I'm lucky because I spend my winters traveling to fish, writing about fishing and fishing our local rivers and creeks. The lesson: Whether I'm on a spring creek in Montana or a saltwater flat in Belize, I have learned having bulls-eye accuracy on a 50-foot cast is far better than bombing it out there with a 100-foot cast and hoping for the best.

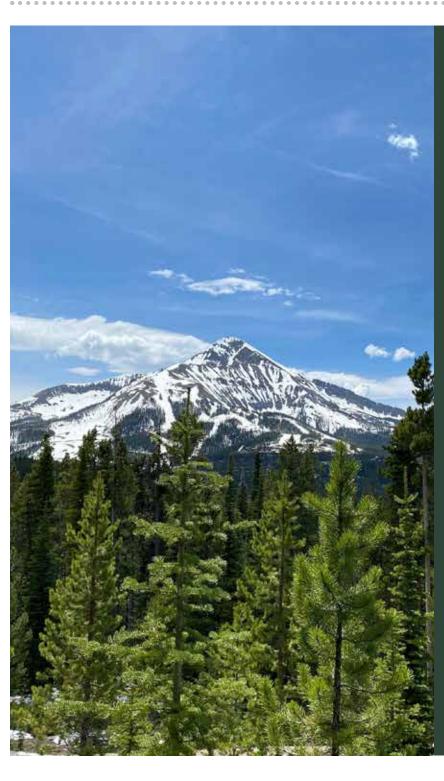
Do you think it will rain/snow/blow/get hot today?

It is human nature to inquire about the weather. But, to answer this question without sounding flippant—if we're wet it is raining, if we are cold it is snowing, etcetera—is a challenge. I give a hall pass on this question because I watch the weather constantly. The lesson: Weather dictates many factors throughout a day of fishing. Personal comfort is best ensured by bringing the proper gear: Waders and rain gear are always important as well as sunscreen and a hat. Like humans, fish react to weather changes. Overcast conditions might allow fish to feel more comfortable feeding on the surface. Wind might blow more grasshoppers into the water. Preparation, observation and then adjustments are crucial.

Have you ever guided anyone famous?

I have and plenty of them. However, I have not yet guided Brad Pitt and told him to stand on a rock in the middle of the Big Blackfoot River and begged him to "shadow cast" for me. If he calls, I'd like to make that happen. The lesson: Everyone was a beginning angler at some point. Whether you are an Oscar winner or an NBA champion a trout is unlikely to eat a poor drift no matter how many rings you have or what you are wearing. The best way to learn is to just go fishing and spend time on the water. And, when you're done watch A River Runs Through It again.

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 eight years. He's owned a fly shop and 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, https://www.dryflymontana.com/.



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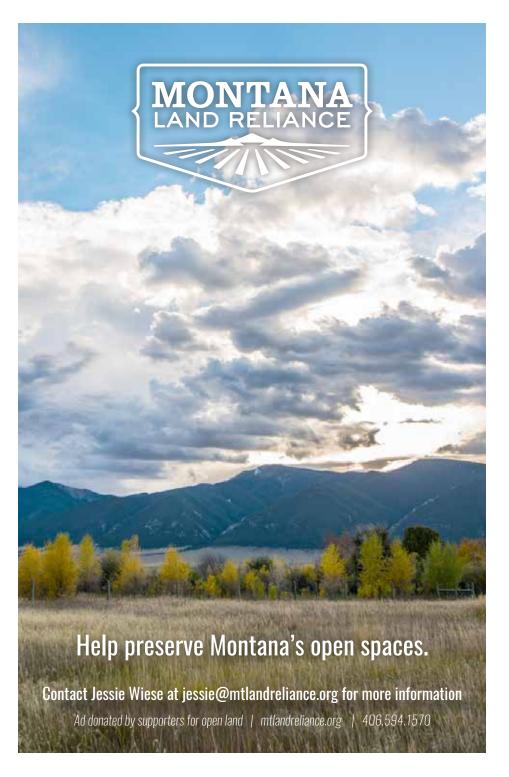
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Despite pandemic, Music in the Mountains persists

BY MIRA BRODY

Big Sky – It was almost reminiscent of any other Thursday summertime evening—staff from Jereco Studios tested lights and sound as members of the bluegrass band Laney Lou and the Bird Dogs warmed up on stage. There were obvious differences, however: the setting was the Warren Miller Performing Arts Center instead of Town Center Park and a majority of the viewers—aside from the few masked guests allowed into the theater—watched virtually.

"In lieu of the live Music in the Mountains in Big Sky, this is definitely a treat for us," said Lena Marie Schiffer, vocalist for Laney Lou and the Bird Dogs, from the WMPAC stage in between songs. "I kind of feel like I'm in a dream right now, where I'm playing a live show with full production. It's crazy."

For more than a decade Music in the Mountains has been a Big Sky summer tradition. The free outdoor concert series produced by the Arts Council of Big Sky has featured up and coming as well as established artists in the Center Stage at Town Center Park for locals and visitors every Thursday from June through September. Each season the series also includes an annual July 4 concert followed by a fireworks show, the Bravo! Big Sky Music Festival and a free performance from Montana Shakespeare in the Parks.

This year, faced with the challenges of COVID-19, the Arts Council, like most of the arts and entertainment industry, had to cancel Music in the Mountains, and adapt.

"We kind of knew that's what we had to do," said Brian Hurlbut, executive director of the Arts Council. "From the health and safety part, that was easy, but the fact that so many people look forward to the concerts and it's such a huge thing for Big Sky economically, and for the Arts Council too, but more for the community ... it's just the thing to do in the summertime."

Hurlbut teamed up with WMPAC Executive Director John Zirkle, and armed with the performing arts center's state-of-the-art theater and technology, the virtual version of Music in the Mountains was created. This summer, the adapted Big Sky staple featured The Waiting, the Kitchen Dwellers, Laney Lou and the Bird Dogs, concluding with Dead Sky on Sept. 3.

Currently, WMPAC can host up to 40 people, including staff. For the Bird Dog's show last week there were 23 people in attendance, each wearing masks for the duration of the show and adequately spaced in the theater that typically seats 280. Each guest had their temperature checked and hands sanitized upon entry.



Jeremiah Slovarp of Jereco Studios manages sound while Laney Lou and the Bird Dogs perform live on stage. PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY



Laney Lou and the Bid Dogs perform for a limited audience at WMPAC and for viewers watching from home at the virtual Music in the Mountains series from Arts Council of Big Sky. PHOTO BY

The show is broadcast on the Arts Council's Facebook Live and YouTube channels with Jereco Studios at the helm of lighting and sound, in addition to five cameras including a GoPro for up-close stage shots. Behind the scenes in the video production room, Lone Peak High School intern Ace Beattie, who has been working with WMPAC since June, attends to the production's camera controls and live broadcast.

The result is a high-quality production, not only for those lucky enough to be in attendance but also those watching from home. It's like Big Sky's own Austin City Limits.

"It's fun, it's hard. It's just like something nobody's ever done before," Beattie said of having to adapt to this new virtual audience—the series has been drawing viewers from all over the country.

Not only is this a way to generate income for the Arts Council, but also a way to give back to the community, while helping local musicians. The gratitude in the theater was palpable, both from those in attendance and on stage.

"As tough as it's been to not play live music, there have been some silver linings in it all and one of them is that we've had a lot of time to sit down and write," Schiffer said. "That's a luxury we don't often afford ourselves."

As for next year, Hurlbut says although he hopes they can use the new Town Center Park stage in some fashion, he can't yet foresee how they'll do so safely.

"I think people are going to be really hungry for live music," Hurlbut said. "At this point I'm not convinced we're going to be able to do anything, although I hope we can. I think two years in a row without it is going to be tough."

Thursday's Music in the Mountains was sponsored by Big Sky Resort Tax, 3 Rivers Communications, American Bank, First Security Bank, Big Sky Landscaping and Hammond Property Management and can be enjoyed on the Arts Council's YouTube channel.

As for the band, they're just happy to be in front of something other than an empty room.

"It's like being a garage band again, but in a really nice setting," vocalist and guitarist Josh Moore said jokingly, looking around the sparsely seated room of attendees, then at the camera, as it broadcasted to thousands of viewers outside the walls of the theater.

Movie theater woes: First a pandemic, now PVOD

BY SAMUEL ORAZEM EBS CONTRIBUTOR

In 2019, "Avengers: Endgame" hauled in nearly \$2.8 billion at the box office and became the highest-grossing film of all time. This massive financial success stood in stark contrast to many industry experts' claims that theaters would soon struggle to compete with streaming services. While those skeptics were certainly not the heralds of a global pandemic, they may turn out to be right because of it.

Everyone has likely seen a movie priced at between \$20 and \$30 and labeled as a "premium video on demand" on their streaming service of choice by now. These PVOD films are ones wherein studios have foregone a traditional, theatrical release. Instead these studios, having lost a significant portion of their expected revenue, have bet the farm on consumers' willingness to open their wallets for at-home entertainment.

NBCUniversal was one of the most aggressive media conglomerates in trialing this pipeline and has released multiple made-for-theater films such as "Trolls World Tour" and "The Invisible Man" on PVOD. The tactic appears to have paid off, likely much to the dismay of theater-hugging Hollywood fundamentalists. In late April, the Wall Street Journal reported that "Trolls World Tour" made as much for Universal Studios in three weeks on PVOD as the original film made in theaters over five months.

And the approach has spread. Disney, owner of the "Avengers" property that broke almost every box office record a year ago, has announced that its live-action remake of "Mulan" will skip theaters and go straight to Disney+. Disney is the definitive industry leader, having accounted for over 40 percent of the 2019 U.S. box office earnings. Choosing PVOD for its premier release of the year indicates that Disney sees a direct-to-consumer model as a viable alternative to theaters.

While studios have not altogether abandoned a return to theaters, trouble is certainly brewing. When "Trolls World Tour" was released on demand, AMC CEO Adam Aron stated, "Effectively immediately, AMC will no longer play any Universal movies in any of our theaters in the United States, Europe, or the Middle East."

Other theater chains joined the fray citing concerns about the viability of their business models if theatrical release windows were scrapped. These "windows" are the periods of time where the only way to see a new film is going to a theater.

The gloomy reality for theaters is that PVOD is positioned to cut into their business in the same way streaming has decimated cable television. Consumers were quick to switch to streaming once the content they wanted was there. Movie studios are clearly open to

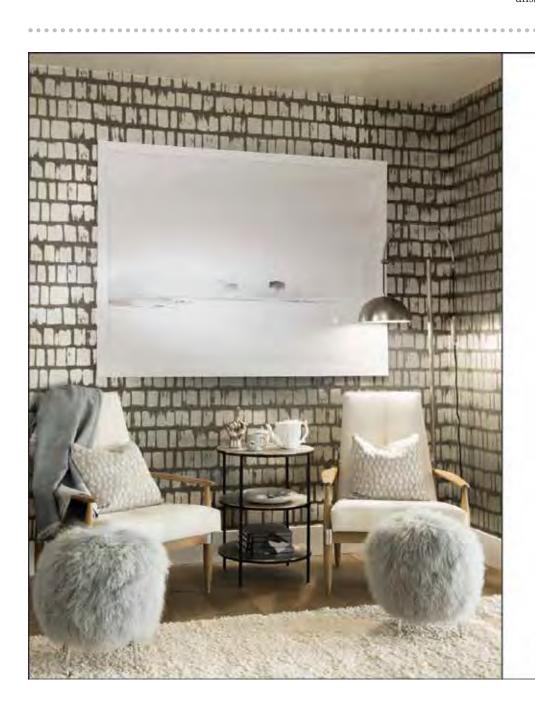


Theatres are quickly realizing that surviving pandemic-induced shutdowns is not the only challenge they are facing. PHOTO BY SAMUEL ORAZEM

skipping theatrical releases, so now the only hope movie theaters have is that, at some point down the road, people prefer the theater to their couch.

The argument that once the pandemic is over we'll want to return to theaters does hold some water. However, people made a similar argument about new episodes of popular television shows keeping customers chained to their cable box. The only real draw of theaters in the future is be the CGI-filled blockbusters you want to see on a big screen, much like sports became the sole lifeline of cable.

For all the other releases, I personally feel that theaters are a bit cumbersome. Rather than a too-chilly cinema house, I would much prefer to watch a movie in my home, with reasonably priced concessions, at a comfortable temperature, and without a pair of unsavory feet plopped menacingly near my seat headrest.





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Album Review: Taylor Swift's 'folklore'



BY SAM ORAZEM EBS CONTRIBUTOR

Taylor Swift's seemingly endless stay at the top of the music industry has won her countless adoring fans. It has also garnered a sizeable group of critics who feel her continued success is a result of trend-chasing and the backing of an army of label executives.

Yet, Swift's critics seem to forget that artists who chase trends often fade away after a couple of years. Swift, on the other hand, has been on top of the industry for nearly 15 years. There's one key difference between her and one hit wonders: Taylor Swift is profoundly good at telling stories.



The 30-year-old singer-songwriter's new album "folklore" is a radical departure from any of her previous work, and it puts that storytelling ability on full display. The title and its tracks are all stylized in lowercase letters, providing a visual indicator that Swift is trying something new. This record is an experiment in the indie and folk genres that avoids both the volume and infectious energy of her previous efforts. The energy in "folklore" is still present, but it's better suited for a night in quarantine than karaoke at a college bar.

Swift and her collaborators place her voice at the forefront and back it with mellow pianos, soft guitars and a smattering of subtle drumming. The second track of the album, "cardigan," is a folk-rock ballad exploring the perils of young love as Swift compares herself to "an old cardigan, under someone's bed." The track makes it clear that while the genre may have switched, the relatable and enjoyably clichéd lyrics about falling in love and heartbreak will still be present on "folklore."

Swift also makes an effort to tackle fresher topics. "the last great american dynasty" is a history lesson about the previous owners of her mansion in Watch Hill, Rhode Island, and upper-class, American culture. Even rabid Swift fans will likely find it refreshing that not every song on this intimate album is a love story.

The album's standout track, "exile," sees Swift collaborating with Bon Iver. They sing the duet over pianos and somber strings continuously swell over the song's runtime. Iver and Swift take on roles of two lovers, contrasting their individual spoken and unspoken experiences as a flawed, suffocating relationship breathes its final, beleaguered breaths.

The major problem with "folklore" is that the instrumentals feel relatively uninspired. The album is slightly weighed down by its unremarkable backing tracks and this becomes especially notable if you prefer listening to an album in its entirety. A full listen also reveals that Swift is not practiced at crafting an overarching narrative to an album. However, it is excusable given this record was clearly an attempt to expand her artistic abilities.

Despite these flaws, "folklore" is a wonderful album that solidifies Swift's position as one of the industry's premier narrative songwriters. Her ability to involve the listener overcomes the formulaic instrumentals and gives each track a "bedtime story" quality: You may know the plot structure and feel like you have heard it before, but you can't help but enjoy it.

Samuel Orazem is a political science student at UCLA with a passion for music, its contributions to cultural development, and its potential for empowering social and political mobilization.



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BIG SKY EVENTS CALENDAR

Friday, Aug. 28 - Thursday, Sept. 10

If your event falls between Sept. 11 and Sept. 25, please submit it by Sept. 24 by emailing media@outlaw.partners

Friday, Aug. 28

Gallatin River Cleanup Gallatin River, Aug. 28-30

Best of 406 Market The Market, 4 p.m.

Friday Afternoon Club EBS Facebook Live, 5 p.m.

Saturday, Aug. 29

Big Sky Biggie Big Sky Town Center, 7:30 a.m.

Annual Lower Madison Clean Up Warm Springs Access, 9 a.m.

Gallatin Valley Farmer's Market Gallatin County Fairgrounds, 9 a.m.

Imagine Volunteer Project with Reach Imagine Paint Works, Bozeman, 9 a.m.

Connecting the Pieces Mosaic Workshop Sign up at bigskyarts.org/events, 10 a.m.

Gals and Guns 2.0 Montana Tactical Firearms, 10 a.m.

Sunday, Aug. 30

"Fall Festival" Drive in Concert Bubby's Burger Barn, 3 p.m.

Monday, Aug. 31

Big Sky Virtual Town Hall EBS Facebook Live, 5 p.m.

Tuesday, Sept. 1

Pint Night with the Bozeman Symphony MAP Brewing Co. Bozeman, 4 p.m.

Bozeman Farmers Market Lindley Park, 5 p.m.

Full Moon Women's Circle Big Sky Community Park, 8 p.m.

Wednesday, Sept. 2

Women in Action Virtual Par-Tee Women in Action Facebook, 9 a.m.

Thursday, Sept. 3

Three Forks Farmers Market Three Forks, 4 p.m.

Friday, Sept. 4

Out in the Mountains Hyalite Reservoir, Sept. 4-6

Saturday, Sept. 5

Art for Everyone The Wilson Hotel, Sept. 5-7

Sunday, Sept. 6

Afternoon Tea Starlite, 1 p.m.

Monday, Sept. 7

Pints with Purpose: independence Bridger Brewing, 5 p.m.

Tuesday, Sept. 8

Montana Bike Odyssey Bike Tour Bozeman, Sept. 8-10

Bozeman Farmers Market Lindley Park, 5 p.m.

Beer Maven: Beer Education Series for Women SHINE Beer Sanctuary + Bottle Shop, 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Sept. 9

POWER KIDS: Yoga Series The Practice Power Yoga, 3 p.m.

Thursday, Sept. 10

Three Forks Farmers Market Three Forks, 4 p.m.

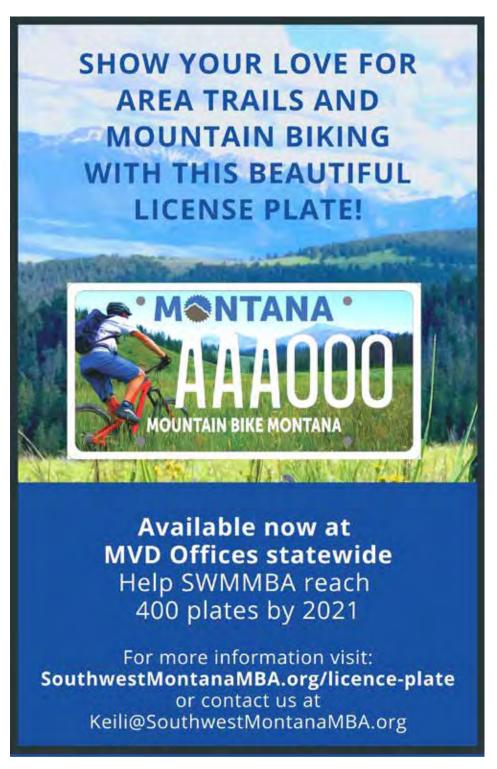




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SECTION 3: BUSINESS, SPORTS, HEALTH & FUN







LPHS athletics ready, eager for season

BY BRANDON WALKER

BIG SKY - Fall marks the return to school and with it comes the fall high school athletics season. In a year complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Montana High School Association released guidelines for teams to return to play. Pandemic aside, the Lone Peak High School athletic programs are itching to get back on the field and court.

Varsity Girls Volleyball

One year removed from a strong, third place district tournament finish, the Lady Big Horns will return to action with a core senior group set to lead this year's squad. Seven seniors, including Chloe Hammond, Ivy Hicks and Reilly Germain will lead the team, with junior TJ Nordahl and sophomores Jessie Bough and Maddie Cone rounding out the roster.

"This team's greatest strength is their grit," said Lady Big Horns coach Missy Botha. "They have passion and perseverance that will carry them through any tough match."

The Lady Big Horns finished with an 11-4 regular season record a year ago. Losing only three athletes from that team, Botha believes this year's group is poised to make the leap and possibly capture a district tournament championship.

"You are going to see more power in the front row led by sophomore Maddie Cone with Ivy Hicks calling the plays, and a dream team back row with Chloe Hammond as Libero," Botha said.

LPHS will play their first match at home versus Absarokee on Aug. 29 at 6:30 p.m.

Varsity Football

Coming off a historic 2019 season when the Big Horns narrowly missed a playoff berth, the team has a younger blend of athletes this year. Many on this year's team tasted the success of the previous year that resulted in a 3-5 record, including milestone victories for the program.

Coach Adam Farr believes speed and team chemistry will be the Big Horns greatest strength this season. Captains Pierce Farr, Isiah Holst and Aiden Miller will lead the 14-man squad.

Sophomores Farr and Holst will head the back field together this year. Farr gained experience a season ago, lining up alongside departed quarterback Frankie Starz, while Holst will enter his first season as the play caller.

The Big Horns had great turnouts at their summer workouts as anticipation mounts ahead of their first game action. Coach Farr hopes to see his team improve and grow throughout the season.

"The underclassmen in particular really pushed towards meshing and practicing and becoming better. More than I've ever seen in the past, so it bodes well for this season and the future," he said.

The Big Horns will play their first contest on the road against Simms High School on Aug. 29.

Varsity Boys and Girls Soccer

For the first time in school history, LPHS will field both a boys and girls varsity soccer program. Anticipation is high as the teams gear up for their first game action representing their school.

"We have a whole lot more heart [and] a lot more gratitude going into this season," said varsity girls coach Jaci Clack. "I think they're pretty grateful that they're even playing at all."

The Class C Big Horns will compete at the Class A level of competition due to the lack of programs at lower levels.

"As students and athletes they're going to learn to become better people playing this game and it'll be one of those things that they get to look back on and know that, 'hey, I was part of that program. I got to be the first team that played on that program," said varsity boys coach Tony Coppola.

Clack believes her team's greatest strength will be their team chemistry. The 12-player team will be led by seniors Sara Wilson—coaches captain—and Della Levine. The players will elect a second captain by way of a vote at a later date.

"I'm excited and optimistic for this upcoming season," Clack said. "With what I have seen so far on a whole—from commitment, from the effort, from the work that they have put in—it's going to add up to something pretty amazing."

Coppola hopes his 13 athletes will become closer as a unit while also growing as human beings. Coppola selected senior Evan Iskenderian as his choice for captain and the team will choose a second captain later in the week.

The Big Horn's first two scheduled contests were canceled due to travel concerns amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, nonetheless, Coppola believes his team is in high spirits and ready to play in a competitive environment.

"You can feel it, they're ready to play," he said. "They want to get out there."

Speaking with resounding gratitude, he thanked the Big Sky community, the school district, the community park for hosting the teams and everyone that has helped make the soccer program a reality.



PHOTO BY MISSY BOTHA



PHOTO BY BRANDON WALKER



PHOTO BY BRANDON WALKER



Reflecting on 20 seasons of Big Sky softball

BY BRANDON WALKER

BIG SKY – Before there were two fields, before the three-time defending tournament champion Lone Peak Caregivers Golden Goats existed, before the Big Sky softball league became what it is today—it all started with a flyer.

Four or five fliers to be exact, according the first commissioner of the league Bart Mitchell. After relocating to Big Sky in the fall of 1999, Mitchell—fueled by his own passion for the game—decided in the summer of 2000 to bring softball to Big Sky.

"I wanted to play and by organizing a league, it's more reliable than just calling your friends to meet me because there's always someone who doesn't show," he said.

However, this wasn't the first taste of the game with the fluorescent yellow, grapefruit-sized ball for the Big Sky community. In 1997 and 1998, fundraiser softball and volleyball tournaments were held by the Ophir School Club to benefit the school district in conjunction with the annual pie auction. In the inaugural tournament of 1997, roughly six teams competed and the Ophir School softball team reigned victorious, while Lone Mountain Taekwondo captured the volleyball tournament championship.

After a year break without the OSC fundraiser softball tournament, Mitchell arrived on the scene from Crested Butte, Colorado and gave the Big Sky community a metaphorical shot in its softball arm. He coordinated with Brian Wheeler, who oversaw the use of the softball field at the time, receiving permission to hang flyers and move ahead with his plan of creating an organized softball league.

"I mean I'm the guy that put up the flyers, but it was all those people that showed up the first night that said, 'Hey, we want to play,' that started it," he said. "... I mean I think it's a Big Sky thing. People give me too much credit, we'll put it that way."

That 'first night' Mitchell referred to drew enough participants for four complete softball teams. Before everyone departed for the evening, Mitchell suggested the idea of forming a softball league with a set schedule and teams that would play throughout the summer. His proposal was met with resounding support and the Big Sky co-ed softball league was born.



An assortment of photos of participants at the Ophir School Club fundraiser softball tournaments. PHOTO COURTESY OF JEAN PALMER

Playing on a lone field, situated in the same location as the current fields but oriented in the opposite direction, those four teams—the Cab Lizards, Milkies, Big Sky Resort and the Master Batters, also known as the Hilbilly Huckers—battled it out in the league's infancy. With no league or tournament championship held in the first season, the Master Batters were crowned the first ever champions in 2001.

In 2003, Mitchell said the popularity of the league began to blossom, attracting more players and teams. With the league's expansion and the community's seasonal work environment came a wave of new athletes.

"It was the old school Big Sky and I mean the people who've lived here a long time, the married people. The average age wasn't as young as it was now," Mitchell said. "... As it grew it got to be more of the seasonal people playing, you know the younger people."

Jean Palmer, a board member of the Big Sky softball committee has been involved in Big Sky softball since the fundraiser tournaments. You may recognize her if you've taken in a ball game, manning the controls

> of the automated scoreboards each night of the week. She recalled that more women participated when softball was new to Big Sky and that the level of competitiveness was not nearly as high as it is today.

"The level of play has gotten way better and every year it gets better so, there's really no easy games anymore," said Lee Horning the commissioner of the Big Sky softball league for five seasons. "Every team is competitive and I think everybody has fun."

The league's budding popularity eventually led to the need for an additional playing surface and in 2011, the league paused for a season while the current set of fields were under construction—no champion was crowned; no season was held. New scoreboards accompanied the implementation of the new fields.

Horning, the league commissioner from 2015 to 2019, arrived on the Big Sky softball scene in 2008 from Minneapolis, Minnesota. An avid softball player, he immediately joined the league, playing for Big Sky Resort. At that time, his current team—the Hillbilly Huckers—was a dominant force.



A volunteer lines the field prior to one of the Ophir School Club fundraiser softball tournaments. PHOTO COURTESY OF JEAN PALMER

They won league championships in 2007, 2008, 2009 and went on for another three-peat from 2012 to 2014.

Throughout the years that Horning has participated, he has seen vast improvements in the game, including the introduction of the 1-1 starting count for batters to improve pace of play. Additionally, Horning said the league implemented the use of a time clock to keep games on schedule. Games are currently allotted 61 minutes before they will be halted, if they are not complete. He applauded the softball committee's efforts and noted that the assistance of the Big Sky Community Organization has helped the league make great strides.

"They really progressed it from a dirt league to a pretty respectable league—almost comparable to some other cities ... even though we don't have the funds or the parks department to take care of it," Horning said.

To this day, the Cab Lizards, Milkies, Big Sky Resort, and the Hilbilly Huckers remain from the inaugural season of 2000. Each team has had their shining moments over the years, with the Resort winning a tournament championship, the Lizards capturing three of their own, but it is the Huckers who have dominated the podium throughout the years. Since their days as the Master Batters, the Huckers have won 11 league championships and four more tournament crowns.

Having only missed the 2011 season since its inception, the fate of the 2020 Big Sky softball league season hung in the balance this spring. Organizers were unsure if holding a season was possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was kind of hard to determine if this was actually going to happen, but we knew if we didn't do it that there wasn't going to be anything going on, so we were really, really stoked that we were able to make it happen because so many people actually are a part of the Big Sky softball organization, so we wanted to be able to fulfill the needs of the community as well," said Whitney McKenzie the chairman of the Big Sky softball league committee.

In coordination with BSCO, league officials introduced health guidelines for the 2020 season that teams were required to follow. They also installed sanitation stations in the dugouts, allowing athletes to maintain cleanliness throughout play.

"As a small town we all band together when we need to and understand that sometimes we have to follow rules that we don't really like, but people are understanding and they really have done a great job down there," McKenzie said.

While the season was shortened—each team participated in eight regular season contests as opposed to 13 games for teams last season—the Big Sky summer staple proceeded without a hitch. In an effort to lessen the number of people congregating at the fields, two games were played per night rather than the usual four that took place simultaneously in previous years.

"I think for the overall mental well-being of people and just a physical outlet, I think it was good that they got the season going," Horning said.

For a small community, enthusiasm is never in short supply on the Big Sky softball diamonds. That enthusiasm and community is what keeps one member of the softball committee coming back year after year.

"The people, the kids playing, the adult children playing," Palmer said.
"... I think that's what keeps me coming back definitely. It's just so much fun to see the camaraderie with everybody and I mean everybody has their own team, but everybody cheers for each other's team too, which is really kind of cool."

Currently, the 2020 season is winding to a close. Teams were split into two divisions for the first time in league history and the league championship will showcase the top seed from each division this year. The Huckers and the LPC Golden Goats will square off for the 2020 league championship on Aug. 27 at 7:15 p.m.

The league tournament will take place the following week as the top eight teams battle in a single elimination tournament for bragging rights.



The 2020 Big Sky softball league season took place with restrictions in place to ensure player health and safety. PHOTO BY TUCKER HARRIS

Golf Tips from a Pro: Welcome back AJGA

BY MARK WEHRMAN EBS CONTRIBUTOR

This year over Labor Day weekend Big Sky Resort Golf Course will once again host the American Junior Golf Association. The AJGA is the gold standard for junior golf in the world. While hosting this event over the past two years, we have seen players from several different countries, as well as the top junior players from the United States compete annually.

These young individuals are competing at the highest level with aspirations of competing at the collegiate level and possibly even on tour someday. The field is set at 78 players after the qualifier which takes place on Sept. 3. Some players will qualify in advance and there will be roughly 100 players trying to earn the last 12 spots in the field through the Sept. 3 qualifier.

After a Friday practice round, the official tournament will take place over three days with 54 holes of stroke play taking place Sept. 5 through Sept. 7. I encourage you all to come out and watch as spectators are welcome and there is no entry fee to enjoy watching golf being played at the highest of levels.

The AJGA tournament has turned into my favorite week of the year. This says a lot because there is a tremendous amount of work and time that goes into hosting this event. I wouldn't trade it for anything. The experiences I have had over the last two years while hosting are stories that I will be telling forever.

Just recently, I gave a lesson to a young female who is qualified for the event already and has been in town for a couple of weeks to practice and get to know the course in advance. It shows you how serious these young golfers are about their games. She has played two rounds so far from the white tees and has carded rounds of 69 and 71—that is 4-under-par in two rounds.

While there isn't much I can tell this young lady about the game, as she is sound in every aspect, I do enjoy asking her questions about how she approaches certain



A sign at the Big Sky Resort Golf Course welcoming AJGA participants. PHOTO BY MARK WEHRMAN

shots and the way she visualizes the execution. We talk about feel, target, and the overall strategy of scoring. Oh, by the way, I forgot to mention that she just turned 14 years of age. I know, catch your breath, because she is truly amazing.

I hope you all take the time to come watch these talented young men and women play the game with such grace, power, and precision. With the setup and administration of the AJGA staff, you feel like you are live at an actual tour event. This event has turned into the pinnacle of our golf season with the golf course always being in fantastic shape, fast greens, challenging rough, and beautifully manicured turf thanks to the tireless work put in by our golf course superintendent, Sam Woodger, and his staff. Junior golf has always been the future of the game and we cherish the opportunity to uphold that legacy here at Big Sky Resort Golf Course!





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Six Steps to Wellness

BY DR. ANDREA WICK EBS CONTRIBUTOR

The six steps to wellness was taught to me by my teacher, Dr. John Brimhall, D.C. This is one, introspective approach that clearly underlines all ways to look at a patient's health. It paints a clear picture of what can become imbalanced in the body structurally, chemically and emotionally. I hope you gain some insight for yourself or a loved one.

Step one: Re-establish structural integrity

The majority of all conditions can improve when the structure of the body is properly re-aligned to allow a free flow of vital energy. Nerve interference and structural misalignment happen when the life energy flowing through the nerves and tissues is blocked. This occurs from trauma such as accidents, falls, fractures, surgery, emotional stress and so on. When tissue and muscles are restricted, blocking electrical impulses, the result can be pain and disease.

Step two: Rebalance electromagnetics

Every cell in our body has an electromagnetic field, much like a magnet has north and south polarities. This polarity affects the function of a cell. The magnetic field of our body should be synchronized with the natural rhythms of the earth, moon and sun. When electromagnetic pollution accumulates, our entire system can become stressed and fatigued. This pollution comes from power lines, appliances, computers, TVs, microwaves, and communication devices.

Step three: Rebalance nutrition and reset the adrenals

Resetting the adrenal glands and correcting nutrition and digestion is a significant stage of healing. Restoring the gut microbiome happens through maintaining healthy gut flora.

Step four: Reprogram the body for any allergy or sensitivity

An environmental substance such as dust, mold or pollen can cause allergic

responses along with food additives or inflammatory foods such as corn, milk, gluten, and soy. Allergic reactions can mimic a wide range of diseases and disorders and lead to a confused immune system. When this happens, the immune system responds by killing off friendly, protective bacteria in the GI tract and encourages infective organisms to invade. Infective organisms are linked to leaky gut syndrome. This condition causes excessive permeability of the GI tract, partly caused by damaged, leaky walls in the digestive tract that allow food particles into the blood stream. Food particles in the digestive tract are normal, but food particles in the blood stream act as foreign invaders.

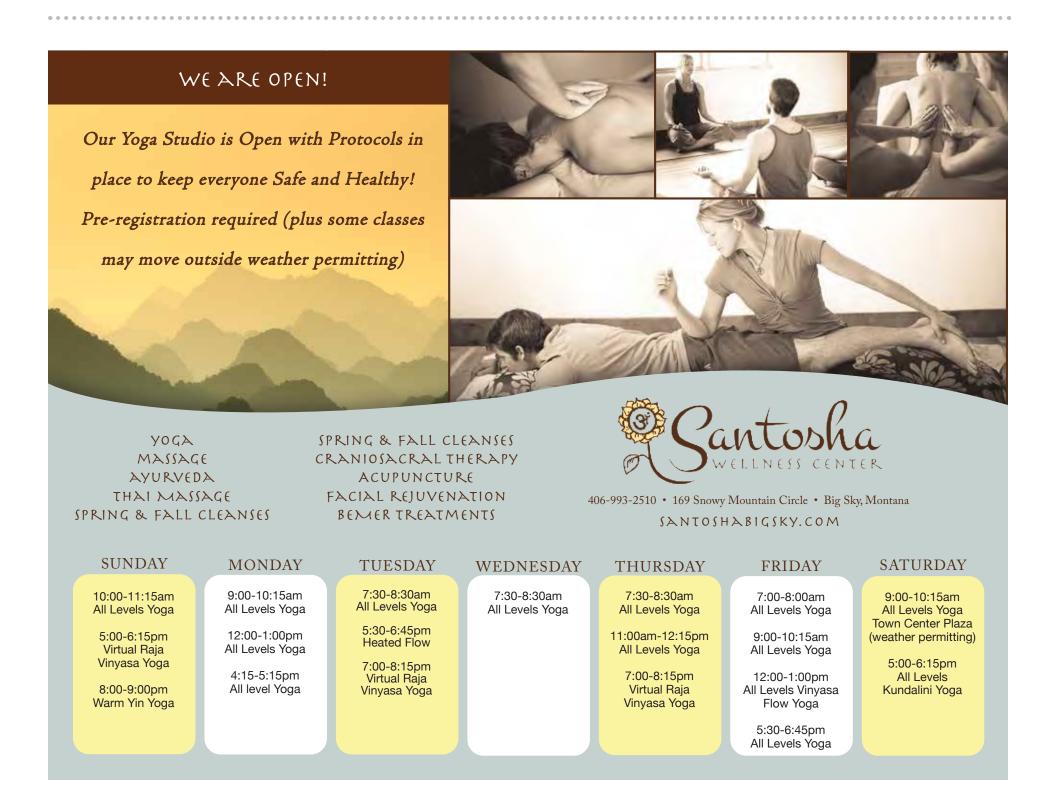
Step five: Re-evaluate emotional patterns and remove limiting belief systems

Emotions produce energy made of electrical and magnetic nerve signals. Emotions literally have a frequency, which radiates outward from our energy field. These chemical and energetic patterns are stored in the mind-body field and are called emotional memory. Past traumatic experiences and perceptions interfere with normal body function and limit one's ability to perceive situations properly. The use of emotional clearing techniques, homeopathy, meditation can aid with this step.

Step six: Eliminate heavy metals

Toxic metals and chemicals find their way into our food, water and air. Some toxins are naturally occurring substances that our body has difficulty breaking down. When accumulated into our cellular tissue, mutation and cell death can occur causing "toxic overload." Common toxicity burdens cause headaches, fatigue, joint pain, skin disorders and allergies. Many toxins also act as neurotoxins which affect memory and mood.

Dr. Andrea Wick is a chiropractor and applied kinesiologist. She graduated from Life University in Marietta, Georgia, and now practices at Healing Hands Chiropractic in Big Sky. She has a passion for holistic health care and being active in the outdoors.





Making it in Big Sky: Big Sky Fitness Fusion & Pilates

BY BRANDON WALKER

BIG SKY – In mid-March the fitness world was required to put down their dumbbells and turn off their treadmills when Gallatin County imposed a directive requiring fitness facilities of all types close their doors to in-person workouts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On March 18, the Gallatin City-County Health Department elected for the closure of fitness facilities, forcing workout enthusiasts to turn to virtual, athome workouts and running routines. Jolene Callahan, the owner of Big Sky Fitness Fusion & Pilates who relocated to Big Sky 15 years ago, decided to lead a variety of virtual fitness classes for the Big Sky community as a result.

Callahan, who purchased and expanded Big Sky Fitness Fusion & Pilates six years ago, offered virtual classes during the quarantine period. She was able to bring back five instructors on June 1 when Gallatin County allowed fitness facilities to function at 75 percent occupancy with social distancing guidelines in place while continuing to offer the virtual attendance option.

Callahan said that roughly a quarter of participants in her fitness courses are choosing to do so virtually, while a majority of people choose to attend classes in person. She recently exchanged emails with EBS to discuss the status of the fitness world amidst the pandemic.

Explore Big Sky: In your opinion, what is the greatest key to operating successfully during a pandemic?

Jolene Callahan: "Making sure that everyone feels safe and comfortable in the environment that you create and maintaining a clean, healthy and positive atmosphere."

EBS: What advice would you offer to new business owners currently? **J.C.:** "Understand and know Big Sky. Make sure there is enough demand for your product."

EBS: As an owner, what will you remember most from when you were able to welcome patrons and reopen the fitness facilities?

J.C.: "How good it felt to have "real" people back in the studio. We offered virtual classes during the shutdown, and that was a nice way to still be able to interact and socialize, but it was not the same as having everyone's energy in the studio."

EBS: How do you believe the virus will continue to affect your business in the next year?

J.C.: "I believe the virus will continue to affect my business over the course of the next year by keeping class size limited in order to maintain social distancing and safety protocols. We will keep researching and following the latest updates of how to maintain a safe workout environment. During the shut down, we offered virtual classes, and we are still offering those for people who do not feel comfortable coming into an indoor environment. This way, people are still able to socialize and interact with their friends from the studio, get a workout created by an instructor that they know and trust and their instructor knows them, and maintain a consistent workout routine."

EBS: What has been your biggest operational challenge as you adhere to COVID-19 health and safety protocols?

J.C.: "The biggest operational challenge is keeping my classes running with fewer participants, in order to maintain a clean and safe environment. We have been following all of the safety protocols since we reopened our doors and we have not had to shut down. So we have been taking care of our clients by creating a really safe haven for people to come and work out."

EBS: How would you characterize the feeling of hosting classes with fewer participants in attendance?

J.C.: "At the moment, hosting classes with fewer attendants makes the studio feel safer and makes it easier to keep our doors open, because we are able to maintain social distancing."

EBS: Have you noticed a difference in the tendencies of patrons as they utilize the fitness facilities?

J.C.: "I have not noticed a big difference in the tendencies of patrons who are utilizing the fitness facilities, because we always disinfected and sanitized all of the equipment that we use, after every person is finished with it. I have noticed people being more conscious of their spacing and hygiene when interacting with others. We have always provided hand sanitizer in the studio, and all of the patrons were really good about using it before, and now everyone is using it more regularly."

EBS: From a business perspective, what will come to mind when you reflect on the pandemic 10 years from now?

J.C.: "Ever since we were children, we've learned how to have good hygiene and manners, and over the course of the years, people have gotten out of following these good habits. So in 10 years, I will remember what I learned during this time."

EBS: What's the best business advice you've ever received?

J.C.: "To always be honest, and to treat people the way that you want to be treated."



Jolene Callahan has owned Big Sky Fitness Fusion & Pilates for six years. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine she began offering virtual workouts. Her and her staff have since happily and safely welcomed participants back to the workout studio for in person classes. PHOTO COURTESY OF BIG SKY FITNESS FUSION & PILATES

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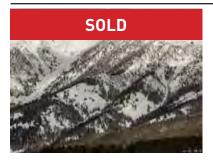


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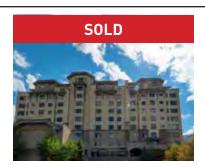
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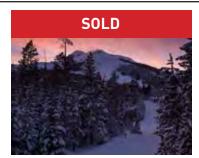
Lot 44 Diamond Hitch 1.25 ACRE / \$699K



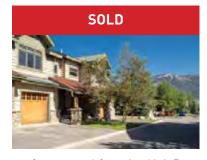
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Lot 64 Goshawk 1.04 ACRES / \$775K



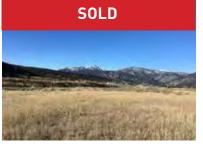
Marketplace Unit 104 Big Sky, MT 1,204 SQ FT / \$560,920



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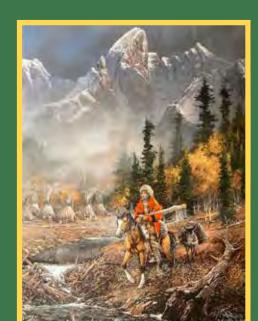
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The alpaca revolution

Alpacas of Montana designs purposeful products, striving to become a household staple

BY MIRA BRODY

BOZEMAN – Hazel, Finn and Chili, three Turkish Anatolian Shepherds, roam the vast pastures at Alpacas of Montana on South Cottonwood Road, just south of Bozeman. At approximately 120 pounds each, these livestock guard dogs are capable of taking down a mountain lion, yet their demeanor is calm and tolerant—that is, until you threaten their herd.

Grouped around them, in fluffy shades of brown, white, black and gray, are 85 alpacas and the largest alpaca textile company in the U.S. Alpacas of Montana owners James and Sarah Budd believe that alpaca fur—what Peruvians refer to as the "gold of the Andes"—is the answer to a lot of the world's wool woes.

Alpacas are the second newest mammal in the world and the result of breeding two different animals from two very different elevation levels. They are a domesticated member of the camelid family, originating on the plains of North America and created through breeding vicunas for their soft fur, and guanacos for the sturdiness of their fur. With these genetics, alpacas are able to grow extremely soft, yet hearty fibers for clothing.

James has a medical background, while Sarah studied psychology and when the pair were looking ahead to their next venture in life they stumbled into alpaca farming by chance. The textiles produced from alpaca fur fascinated them, and they began researching why the products were so warm and soft, yet breathable.

Armed with their knowledge and passion for alpaca products, the Budds hope to make alpaca textiles a staple in U.S. households.

"I can tell you straight up, we know more about alpaca fibers than anyone else in the world," James Budd said. "We bank on having to know that. Now we design purposeful products. It's not just any yarn on any product. We design the yarn first, then the product. Not the product first, then the yarn—it all starts at the baseline of 'what is this product and what are we trying to make it do?"

Alpaca fibers are hollow—making them naturally wicking and breathable—flame and water resistant, antimicrobial, hypoallergenic and warmer, softer and stronger than standard sheep's wool. This makes for a world of versatility when it comes to designing tactical clothing from firefighter helmet liners, to hiking and running socks, next-to-skin clothing and even blankets and everyday wear like sweaters and hats. Their socks have even been featured in Outside Magazine's "Best Winter Workwear of 2020."

Adversely, most sheep's wool is super washed and chemically treated in order to remove the lanolin and barbs that naturally occur in sheep fibers, so it feels less scratchy. This dumps chemicals such as, chlorine and hypochlorous acid and sulfuric acid, into the environment. That is the process used to make SmartWool and other Merino wool products.

"If you care about what you put on your body ... because its been so heavily chemically treated, it's no longer a natural fiber," James said.

Alpaca wool is shaved from the animal, washed gently in Dawn soap, then spun into yarn, before becoming various textile products. Alpacas are also incredibly economically sustainable: they eat less than a half of pound of hay each day and with three stomachs, which help them to absorb all nutrients, making for great compost that the farm also sells.



Hazel, Finn and Chili are Turkish Anatolian Shepherds, a dog bred to herd and protect livestock from predators as large as mountain lions and wolves. This trio keeps sentry over the alpacas of Montana in south Bozeman. PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY



James and Sarah Budd currently have 85 alpacas in their Alpacas of Montana herd. This pen are all females, plus Mr. Snuffleupagus, their guard llama. PHOTO BY MIRA BRODY

James says the reason alpaca wool has not surpassed sheep's wool as a revolutionary textile is the same reason bison meat has not surpassed the beef industry—government lobbyists.

"It's difficult for us because we have a viable product that outperforms wool," he said. "And when you have little to no government support, like the sheep industry has, when you have the sheep industry itself coming after us and attacking us with everything we say or do, all the way to the point of which it is inhibiting the alpaca growth in this country by far because we don't have the true support that every industry needs in order to be successful."

After studying the effects chemical treatments have on the quality of clothing and comparing it to alpaca, James went to the government to advocate for alpacas as a more sustainable clothing source. They wouldn't listen. Every way the livestock industry functions seems to favor sheep over any alternative, from the tax—54 cents per sheep against \$10.60 per alpaca—to the Montana State University wool lab's refusal to test and study alpaca, to the Budd's difficulties getting a loan when they were first started their business.

"Our own state lab won't touch alpaca because the sheep industry won't allow it," Budd said. "We can't even get state support from our university in our own town."

The Budd's hope is for an alpaca revolution and they say the key to making that leap is support. Alpacas of Montana hopes to soon find a partner with the resources and will have to face lobbyists and pave the way for alpacas in the U.S. textile industry.

Meanwhile, James and Sarah do their best to educate the public and treat their animals with the best care possible—last year their annual open house weekend brought in 10,000 visitors of all ages from all over the country. They also set up shop in both Bozeman Ace Hardware stores during the holidays and a couple years ago they made the decision to expand their production to New Zealand, Australia, Peru and Bolivia, allowing them to reach more customers and grow as a company. They currently have 32 new alpaca fabrics designed and are working with companies like Lulu Lemon, Patagonia and Colombia to design purposeful products for everyday use.

This care and passion is reflected in a visit to their alpaca farm, where you'll learn that alpacas greet by touching noses, that older alpacas produce more coarse fibers, that llamas, who also reside on the farm, will guard the alpacas and that each and every animal—including all 83 alpaca residents that live there now—have a name.











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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.

Who doesn't like bacon?



BY SCOTT MECHURA EBS FOOD COLUMNIST

People often say their favorite things about camping or spending time outdoors are the scents and sounds of nature. I couldn't agree more, though there is a sight and sound that often dominates that outdoor landscape: sizzling bacon.

If you think about it, bacon is the equivalent of ground beef.

Ground beef, or burger is generated from a large portion of a cow that would otherwise not get used. They are generally undesirable due to the cuts lack of tenderness.

Other than chef's utilization of pork belly, it doesn't have a home for the average consumer, other than seasoning it and slow smoking to create bacon.

However, bacon does have quite a long history.

As with many foods, bacons origins appear to date back to the Chinese, who salted and cured the bellies of pigs as early as 1500 B.C.

Though not fully documented, there is historical speculation that the Romans and Greeks learned of the process of salting and curing pork belly in their Middle East conquests, ironically. The irony being today, that is the highest concentration of the Muslim and Jewish faiths, who do not eat pork.

And though Columbus is credited with bringing pigs to the Americas under the instruction of Queen Isabella, the National Pork Board credits famed explorer Hernando De Soto with introducing 13 pigs to the new world in 1539.

Etymology is a little foggy, but most sources trace the word to the Germanic word "bakkon", meaning back meat. Also ironic, considering today bacon is made from the belly, or "front", rather than the back.

Save for the aforementioned Muslim and Jewish people, bacon, or some form of treated pork belly, is consumed virtually everywhere in the world. Though it is Americans that seem to hold it in as high regard as football, fireworks and apple pie.

As foods come and go, as trends hit their pinnacle and fade away, as new cooking methods, equipment and tools make professional and home cooking better and easier than ever, bacon remains front and present.

We make t-shirts about it. We have specific bacon cooking contests. We even joke that it is the lone food that prevents many of us from eating vegetarian. Unofficial surveys tell us that roughly two-thirds of Americans are in favor of designating bacon as our national food.

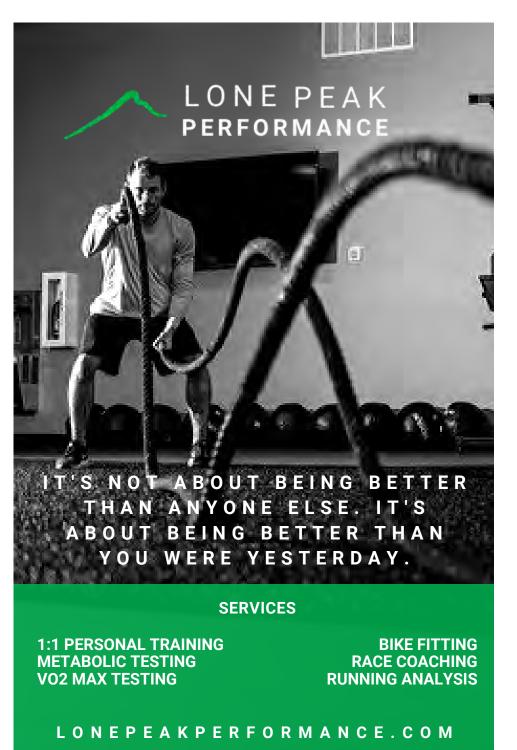
So, as I woke up this morning at my campsite and took my early walk around, it was the smell of bacon that quickly overtook the aromas of both a crisp summer Montana morning, and my cup of pleasantly warm green tea.

It was everywhere. The sound and smell of bacon. From early morning campfires to table-top burners to inside campers and motorhomes. I became aware of just how many people in America enjoy bacon.

Just as I was coming to this realization, I heard a mother standing over her outdoor cooktop ask her daughter in that parental voice eluding to the idea, 'You are crazy,' as well as sending the message that you are going to eat what I made for breakfast; 'Sweetie, who doesn't like bacon?'

Scott Mechura has spent a life in the hospitality industry. He is a former certified beer judge and currently the executive chef at Buck's T-4 Lodge in Big Sky.









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American Life in Poetry

COLUMN 804

BY TED KOOSER U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

What do we select to keep with us when someone we love has died? Here's Gail Mazur, who lives in Massachusetts, opening her closet door to show us. This poem originally appeared in the journal "Ploughshares." Mazur's new and selected poems, "Land's End," is due out this year from the University of Chicago Press.

Blue Work Shirt

I go into our bedroom closet with its one blue work shirt, the cuffs

frayed, the paint stains a loopy non-narrative of color, of spirit.

Now that you are bodiless and my body's no longer the body you knew,

it's good to be reminded every morning of the great mess, the brio of art-making.

On the floor, the splattered clogs you called your "Pollock shoes."

We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts. American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of Poetry magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. "Blue Work Shirt" from Land's End: New & Selected Poems by Gail Mazur. Originally published in Ploughshares. Copyright ©2020 by The University of Chicago. Reproduced by permission. Introduction copyright @2020 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004–2006.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE 40 Master of Mother of DNA SAIS Business Hermes Administration ACDC ENCY Female salmon (abbr.) POOH BACKBONE 8 Semitic deity 12 Anagram 42 Donkey (Fr.) 43 Otalgia RABATERGOT (abbr.) 13 One-spot 14 Fr. priest S T A T I C I S E C A B S E A N A H A B A L L O O A T D U M A B L E D U R E A M I L 49 Wife of Abraham 53 Help 15 Argyll island 16 Vagabond 17 N.Z. bird 54 Amer. Automobile 18 Bevel a ship's ITSREPORT Assn. (abbr.) 57 Lady (Ital.) ABASEOFFER 20 Foreign in origin 58 Wings 59 No middle initial VOLTAIRE AOUT 22 Solve 25 Insect A S V S A A R R N A E L L E RUBE (abbr.) 28 Equal opportunity employer (abbr.) 60 Black SIC 61 Stone (pref.) 62 Youngster 63 Look after 4 Love feast (pref.) 19 Devon river 5 Habakkuk 29 Three-masted (abbr.) 21 19 (Rom. ship Five-franc piece Gr. festival city numeral) 23 Kentucky 33 Mississippi **DOWN** bridge 35 Amer. Medical Male noble bluegrass 1 But (Fr.) 9 Meet 10 Shelter (Fr.) 24 Logic Immediately Assn. (abbr.) proposition 25 Plead 37 S. Afr. language 3 Sayings (súf.) 11 Weakly colored 26 Water (Fr.) 27 Electronic data processing (abbr.) 30 Sheep's cry 31 Belonging to (suf.) 32 Suggestion 34 Apparition 36 Amer. Broadcasting Corp. (abbr.) 39 Defiant shout 41 Exclamations of 33 delight 44 Laughing 38 45 Same (Lat.) 46 Eucalyptus secretion 47 Adjective-forming (suf.) 48 Nipple 50 Noted physicist 51 King of Judah 52 Penmanship 60 55 Wine cup 56 Assistance ©2020 Satori Publishing

Corner Quote

"There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age."

-Sophia Loren

BIG SKY BEATS



"Hallelujah" - Jeff Buckley

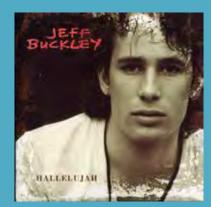
When Leonard Cohen recorded the first version of "Hallelujah" in 1984, he was surely not expecting that hundreds of artists would create their own renditions of the track. One of those covers was sung by the late Jeff Buckley.

Buckley released his version of "Hallelujah" in 1994 on his debut album titled "Grace." Where the original sounds like a eulogy put into song, Buckley's version is a celebration of life. It effortlessly meanders through the entire range of possible emotions and acts as an executive summary of what it is like to be human.

Three years after the release of "Grace," Buckley tragically drowned in the Mississippi River after being caught in the wake of a passing ship. His album and rendition of "Hallelujah" have since gained a cult-like following for reasons best described by Brad Pitt.

As Pitt puts it, "There's an undercurrent to his music, there's something you can't pinpoint. Like the best of films, or the best of art, there's something going on underneath, and there's a truth there. And I find his stuff absolutely haunting. It just ... it's under my skin."

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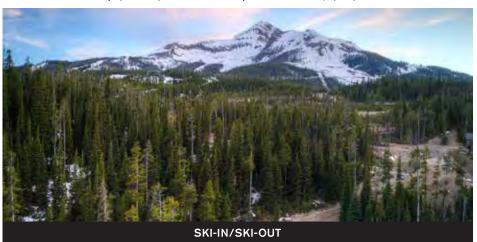


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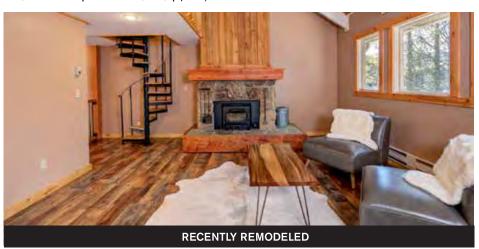
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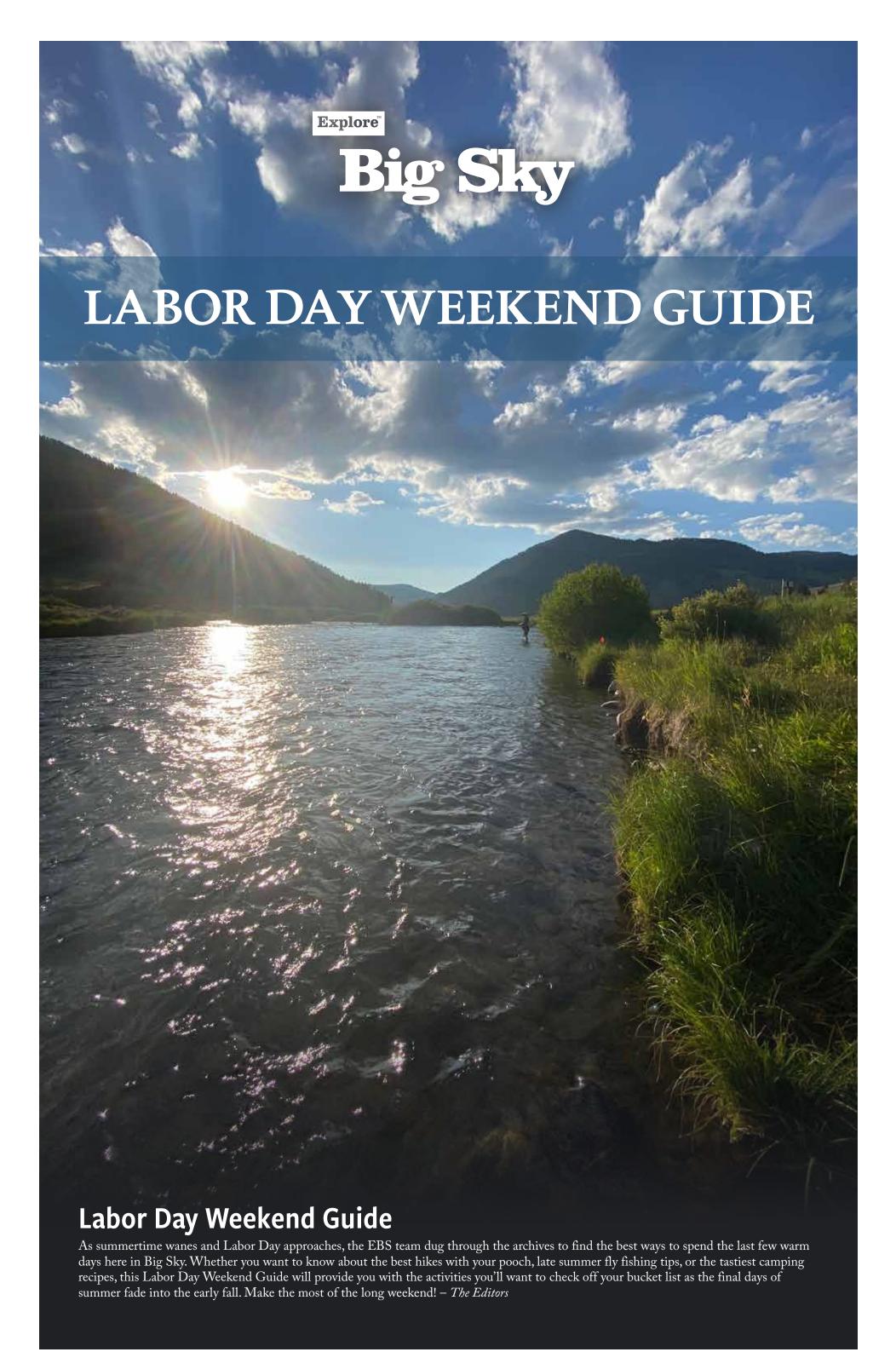
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BEAR BASICS WITH BERNADETTE

DO YOUR PART, BE BEAR SMART

Why are bears so active in the fall?

BY KRIS INMAN EBS CONTRIBUTOR

Are you wondering why you might be seeing more bears around Big Sky? It is because it's that time of the year when they become more active. Bears are preparing to enter their dens and not eat or drink for five to seven months. They consume as much as 15,000-20,000 kilocalories per day during the period of hyperphagia that runs from August to October to make it through the winter denning season. This means bears are covering a lot of area in search of food.

In August, army cutworm moths, more commonly known as millers, escape the summer heat in rock slides above timberline and bears key in on this food source. "Bears consume as many as 40,000 moths a day," said Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team Leader Frank van Manen. "These moths are a valuable natural food source because up to 65 percent of a moth's body weight is fat by the time bears consume them."

In the fall, elk carcasses and gut piles left by hunters or bull elk seriously injured during the fall mating season are sought out as a valuable source of high protein for bears.

It is easy to believe, then, that a bear traveling near Big Sky on trash pickup day might find a smorgasbord of opportunity in human trash, which provides a more consistent and easier food source than the short-duration, seasonal abundance of berries and insects.

It doesn't take long for a bear to key in on those areas where non-bear-resistant trash cans are the norm, or where a few unaware homeowners haven't yet realized their HOA requirement for bear-resistant trash.

Soon the cycle of trash-conditioning and habituation to humans begins. Bears then become bolder, especially during late summer and fall when they are driven to consume what is an unfathomable number of calories a day.

Open windows or garage doors are hard to pass up, "Especially for young 'naïve' sub-adult

black and grizzly bears that are on their own for the first time, females with cubs, or older bears with worn teeth that find it more difficult to acquire enough natural food," said Kevin Frey, the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks grizzly bear specialist.

In addition to consuming a high number of calories, which are converted to fat, allowing the bears to survive through the denning season, bears have a physiological adaptation that lets them survive for five to seven months: during this time, they do not eat, drink or defecate.

Bears only lose a surprising 15 to 25 percent of their body mass and they don't get bedsores or osteoporosis. Instead, they emerge from their dens in the spring with a slowly returning metabolic rate and increased body temperature, lean muscle mass that hasn't atrophied and normal bone density, says FWP bear research biologist Cecily Costello.

This surprising fact led researchers from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, nearly 20 years ago, to visit radio-collared bears in their dens. I participated as a researcher in this study, where we took blood from the hibernating bears to try and understand these physiological adaptations and apply it to humans. This mystery is still unresolved and remains of key interest to medical doctors and researchers.

The period of hyperphagia gives us a better understanding for why bears are more visible in our neighborhoods in the fall. Maybe, too, it gives us another reason to want to keep bears safe.

For the cost of your morning coffee, or less than your favorite lunch sandwich, you can switch to a bear-resistant trash can and by simply keeping your windows and garage doors closed, you keep yourself and bears safe.

Remember to follow Bernadette Bear on social media @bearsmartbigsky to learn how to make Big Sky's story a positive one for bears, people and wild places.

Kris Inman is the community partnerships coordinator for the Wildlife Conservation Society and oversees the Bear Smart Big Sky campaign.

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BY SARA MARINO BIG SKY COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Even on days when no one is up for a hike, I can always count on my dog to be ready to go at a moment's notice. It's nearly impossible not to have a good time on the trail when you see the joy and enthusiasm of your best friend discovering new sights, sounds and smells. Here are a few of my dog's favorite hikes in the Big Sky area. Don't forget to pick up after your dog and to have him or her under leash or voice control.

South Fork Loop

If you're short on time but you and your pup really need to stretch your legs, the South Fork Loop is the trail for you. This 1-mile forested loop provides some solitude and room for your dog to run close to Town Center. The trailhead is adjacent to the South Fork of the Gallatin River, giving your pal a chance to cool off and get a drink before or after your hike. Just up the road, Hummocks and Uplands Trails are also great options if you want to hike a bit further. And Beehive Basin Brewery is a few minutes away from the trailhead if you need a post hike libation.

Cinnamon Mountain Trail

This 8.5-mile out-and-back hike begins at the Cinnamon Creek Trailhead, located 10.5 miles south of Big Sky. With a 2,600-foot elevation gain, it offers a nice workout, and great scenery ranging from forested trail to open meadows with views of Sphinx Mountain, the Taylor Hilgards, and Lone Mountain. The first few miles follow Cinnamon Creek, but be sure to pack extra water for your dog, and don't forget your bear spray.

Top 5 hikes for dogs

Little Willow Way

A local favorite for dogs, this 1.6-mile roundtrip trail starts in the Big Sky Community Park and follows the West Fork of the Gallatin River. This is a great hike for older dogs as it is a flat and well-maintained gravel surface. If you want to keep going, you can add the Black Diamond Trail which will wind through the forest and drop down behind the skate park.

North Fork Trail

Whether hiking or biking, the North Fork Trail offers plenty of fun for both you and your dog. Access this trailhead by way of North Fork Road, just west of the entrance to Lone Mountain Ranch. The mileage and adventure-level opportunities abound—hike a few miles in, keep going 6.7 miles to Bear Basin, or take the Beehive Connector Trail.

Lava Lake

There is a reason this hike is one of the most popular in Gallatin Canyon. This 6-mile out-and-back hike climbs a steady and gradual 1,600 feet through both forest and meadow areas until it culminates at the beautiful alpine lake. There are plenty of water opportunities for your dog along the way, and a great place to swim or fish once you reach the lake. As Big Sky begins to quiet down, enjoy this hike with reduced traffic in the beautiful fall weather.

Sara Marino is the new community development manager for the Big Sky Community Organization. She comes to Big Sky with 17 years of nonprofit experience from the Montana Environmental Information Center.

Visit bscomt.org for more information about Big Sky's parks, trails and recreation programs.





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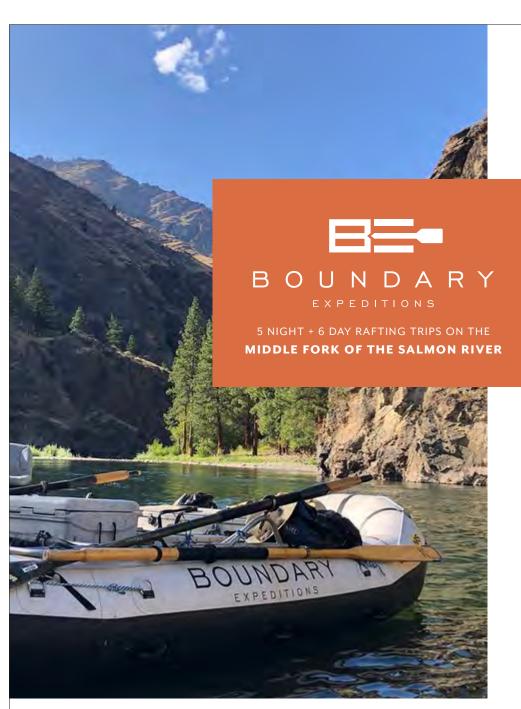
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The biggest fly fishing mistakes, and how to solve them



BY PATRICK STRAUB EBS FISHING COLUMNIST

A local angler who fishes more than 200 days a year told me the other day that he was struggling to catch fish as easily as he did earlier in the summer. My response, albeit a tad adolescent, was, "Well, duh—it's late August."

The next few weeks serve up some of the year's most challenging fishing. Low and clear water, a lack of abundant hatches, water temps climbing in the afternoon causing fish to feed less, and fish that have seen a good amount of angling pressure for several months combine to make for tricky fishing conditions. With that comes the need to tighten up your angling game. Here's some help.

Early on and early off. If people call these days the "dog days of summer," imagine how a river-dwelling trout feels late in the afternoons. Low and clear water mean that trout are more sensitive to light refracting into the water than they are earlier in the season. Counter this by fishing during the hours of the day when light and water temperatures are more conducive to active trout.

Slow down. With the early wake times required for angling success, stretching the last bit of sleep out of your night will be challenging. But the slow down begins the night before—get to bed early so you can wake up early and be ready to hit the water fresh and focused. Once you're on the water, take your time. Fish feed more cautiously in late summer, so stalk a stream slowly, eyeing every possible feeding location. Be meticulous with your rig, as minor adjustments make a big difference.

Sweat the small stuff. In my younger angling days I scoffed at microsplit shot, the advantage of fluorocarbon, the various types of floatants, and other tackle adjustments. However, as fish become more selective,

how your fly is presented is more crucial. Micro-split shot allows for minor changes in a deep nymph rig. For example, a feeding trout may not be willing to move to a different depth to eat your fly, so you have to adjust to get to the right depth.

When fishing dry flies, understand which floatants work the best. Visit my Aug. 4 column for the breakdown on floatants. For sub-surface fishing, such as deep nymphs or emergers below a larger dry fly, fish fluorocarbon tippet. Fluorocarbon is thinner and stronger than mono-filament and less visible in water.

Fish more thoroughly. As trout become more concentrated due to low water, fish deeper runs with conviction as trout will hold in deeper, cooler water. Like above, slow down and spend time fishing all depths. Play around with micro split-shot and fluorocarbon. The sweet spot where trout feed and your fly drifts does exist...you just have to be patient and fish thoroughly to find it.

Think outside of the box. As a self-proclaimed dry fly snob, my late summer angling used to consist of fishing grasshopper and ant patterns on blind faith. I still do that and it often works well for me, but occasionally I have to get creative.

I'll fish very long droppers off my dry fly when fishing a dry-dropper rig. A 4-to-6 foot dropper is not uncommon for me. Other longtime anglers I know will drag, rather than strip, streamers through deeper runs, thinking lethargic late summer fish are less likely to chase a stripped streamer.

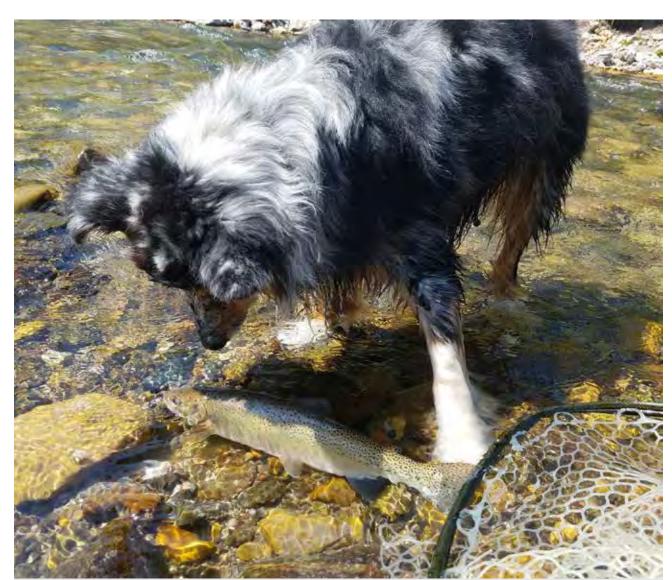
Consider taking colored markers to make the body of a tan fly black, so it looks more like an ant than a stonefly. The possibilities are endless—you just have to take the time to be different.

Maintain perspective. Trout are animals and react to their environment. Sometimes they feed and sometimes they don't. Sometimes, no matter how good an angler is or how perfect the rig and drift are, trout just don't eat. These instances occur more frequently in late summer than other times of the year. If you find yourself in this scenario, take a break and enjoy the surroundings. If you must have instant gratification, somewhere nearby there is a Taco Bell open 24 hours.

I used to disdain the next few weeks of the angling calendar. With more than 20 years of local angling experience, I've grown to really enjoy the last two weeks of August. The masses of tourists are gone and the fair weather anglers are back to reading online blogs. For those like myself willing to fish on a little less sleep and try something different, the dog days might as well be called the trout days.

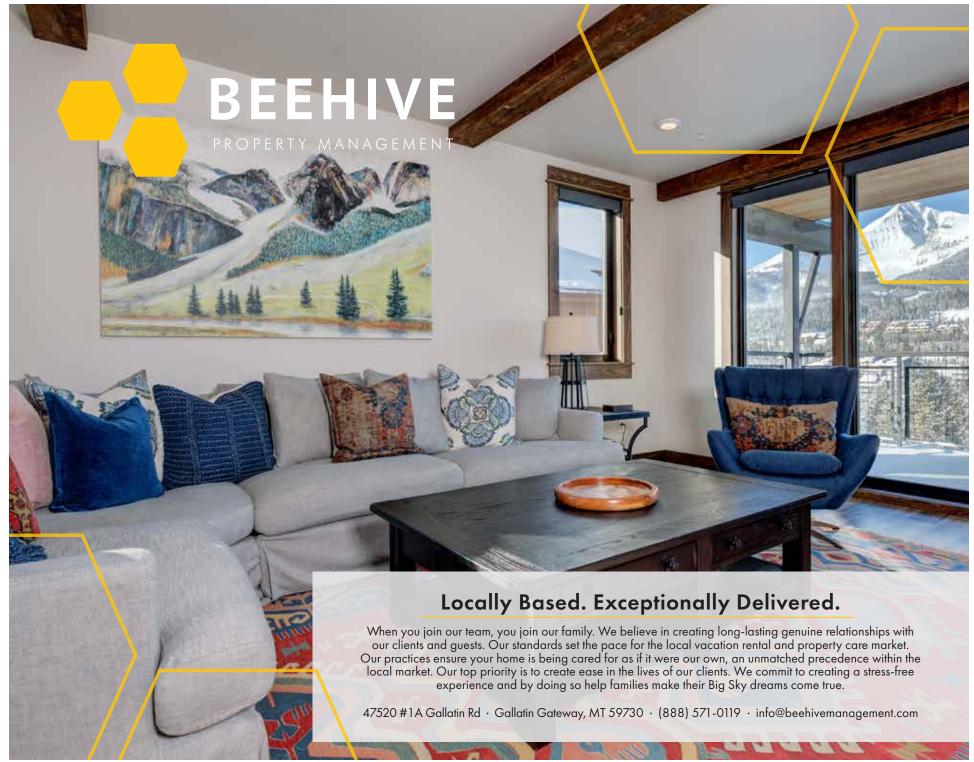
Patrick Straub is a 20-year veteran guide and outfitter on Montana's waters and has fished the world over. He now writes and manages the social media for Yellow Dog Fishing Adventures. He is the author of six books, including "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Fly Fishing" and has been writing The Eddy Line for seven years.

A version of this article previously appeared in a August 2017 edition of Explore Big Sky.



The dog days of summer are upon us. That doesn't mean your fishing has to cease, but it does mean that you need to adjust many facets of your angling. PHOTO BY JACK GARDER





Experience the fall elk rut in Yellowstone

BY CHRISTINE GIANAS WEINHEIMER YELLOWSTONE FOREVER

The majestic elk—the most abundant large mammal in Yellowstone National Park—is a favorite among park visitors to observe and photograph year-round. But for a few weeks each autumn, visitors are treated to an extra special display: the dramatic spectacle of the fall elk rut.

September to mid-October is elk mating season in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, and people from all over the world flock to the northern section of the park hoping to hear the haunting bugle of a bull elk or witness the males engaging in battle.

During the rut, elk gather all along the Northern Range and at Yellowstone's North Entrance, but activity is primarily concentrated in Mammoth Hot Springs. You might see elk congregating on the lawns at Officer's Row, alongside the Gardner River in the Gardner Canyon, or outside the park entrance near the Roosevelt Arch. Elsewhere in the park, you might also spot them along the Madison River near West Yellowstone.

During this time, elk gather in mixed herds of many cows and calves, with a few bulls nearby. Bulls bugle to court females and also to warn and challenge other bulls in the area. When a challenge is answered, the bulls move toward one another and often engage in battle for access to the cows. They push against each other, loudly crashing their antlers together in a contest for dominance.

While these fights rarely cause serious injury to the elk, humans in close proximity should exercise caution. Bull elk can become extremely aggressive during mating season, and have been known to charge vehicles or even people if they feel threatened.

Bulls weighs about 700 pounds and are about 5 feet high at the shoulder, so visitors will want to keep their distance. Park regulations prohibit approaching elk closer than 25 yards, and imitating the call of an elk. Give the elk plenty of room and avoid approaching them in your vehicle.

When exiting the Mammoth Hotel, Albright Visitor Center, or any building in Mammoth Hot Springs, be on high alert. You never know what might be bedded down in a patch of shade just outside, or grazing right around a corner.



Visitors from around the world come to Yellowstone National Park every year to witness the spectacle of the fall elk rut. NPS PHOTO

The gathering of elk herds in Mammoth Hot Springs signals another type of pilgrimage: the intrepid Elk Rut Corps Volunteers. Along with National Park Service staff, volunteers from around the country are stationed in Mammoth to help ensure the safety of visitors who have traveled from near and far to witness the rut.

It's critical for visitors to listen to and follow the direction of NPS staff and elk rut volunteers; with a great deal of experience, they tend to know when the scene might become unsafe, and how to help prevent it from becoming so. Plus, NPS staff and volunteers know a lot of fascinating information about Yellowstone's wildlife, including elk, and are more than happy to share their knowledge with visitors.

Yellowstone Forever—the official nonprofit partner of Yellowstone National Park—funds the staffing of elk rut volunteers as part of the Visitor and Wildlife Education Project.

Learn more at Yellowstone.org.





MOUNTAIN BIKING

IN BIG SKY, MONTANA

Big Sky is home to several public access trails, many of which are open to mountain bikers. Whether you're a newbie to mountain biking, or you've been doing it for years, there is a trail that suits every skill level. The trails listed in this guide are for public use, so get out there and give them a ride!

GEAR GUIDE



HELMET

Mountain biking is fun, but can also be dangerous. Protect your head!



TIRE PUMP & REPAIR KIT

Punctures are inevitable, but won't slow you down if you're prepared.



MULTI-TOOL

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GLOVES

Gloves aren't 100% necessary, but are helpful in case of a crash.



HYDRATION PACK

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SUNGLASSES

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In addition to these trails, there are six easy, 11 moderate, and seven strenuous public access trails in Big Sky, according to the Big Sky Community Organization. These trails are maintained by Big Sky Resort, BSCO, and the U.S. Forest Service. For a detailed trail map, visit becomt.org







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