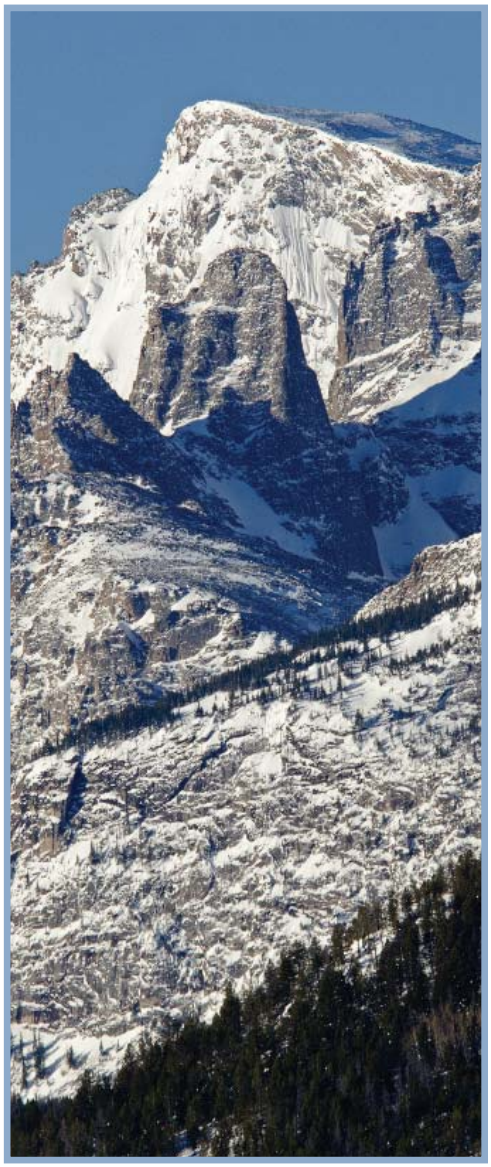


Rocky Mountain Conservancy

Quarterly

Winter 2017

Reflection

by Charles Money

As I consider the pending close to my career of service to national parks and other public lands, it is hard not to be drawn into reflection of what changes have occurred in those four decades, especially during the years dedicated to nonprofit organizations. In some ways, the forces that changed the landscape of support for our national heritage were mirrored in the chapters of my own journey.

Thirty-plus years ago, I took a chance. I left a management position with the National Park Service (NPS) to join the small staff of a "cooperating association." At that time, Southwest Parks and Monuments Association (SPMA) was one of the few nonprofit organizations formed by the National Park Service to have paid staff beyond a few part-time bookstore clerks. In fact, most of the associations were actually managed by the NPS to do those things that the agency was not allowed to do, principally, to sell books.

SPMA's own origins in the 1930s emerge from the efforts of legendary superintendent Frank (Boss) Pinkley, to stem the increasing vandalism to Arizona's Casa Grande National Monument by improving visitor knowledge of the site. With no staff and little financial resources, Pinkley personally printed small informational booklets, placed them in a coffee can at the entrance to the monument and posted a request for a few cents to be left behind by visitors. Since charging the public for information was frowned upon by the NPS, Pinkley, along with some of his friends, formed a nonprofit organization in 1938 to continue the practice in the other southwestern monuments he oversaw.

For more than 50 years, these small organizations functioned without significant change, selling books, guides and maps in park visitor centers. Some generated enough money to invest in publishing their own books, filling informational gaps that commercial publishers couldn't. The more successful organizations generated enough money to donate to the park, primarily to support the park's educational mission. However, in 1981, an incident involving the then Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, changed the course of cooperating associations.

For several years, cooperating associations were asked to contribute to the National Park Service "Director's Fund" to support national initiatives and programs. Casting about to find funds to host a private reception in Arlington House, Secretary Watt procured the necessary money from this Director's Fund. When Watt's private use of the funds and the Arlington House came to the attention of the Inspector General's Office, the close relationship between the cooperating associations and National Park Service employees also came under scrutiny. Soon thereafter, a policy order was issued prohibiting NPS employees from sitting on cooperating association boards of directors and from directly engaging in the business of the associations. These actions forced

*(**Reflection,** continued on page 2)*

Inside: Meet Rocky's New Superintendent! (See page 8)

*(**Reflection** continued)*

the nonprofits to expand their boards to include a broader representation of their communities, and to hire management staff. With greater independence and increased exposure to innovative approaches in the nonprofit sector, the stage was set for associations to create a new vision of support to national parks.

In 1988, I was lured back to San Francisco to be a part of a newly organized nonprofit focused on the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), a park for which I worked several years earlier. The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, with newfound freedoms and the support of a progressive park management team, set about to create a new model of private-sector support for a national park. Up to that point, GGNRA was only known by its individual parts, a random collection of abandoned military posts and a few neglected city and state parks. Knowing that it could take decades and tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars to transform these disparate parts into something deserving of the name "national park," the organization established a full-scale fundraising program.

With greater independence and increased exposure to innovative approaches in the nonprofit sector, the stage was set for associations to create a new vision of support to national parks.

By building on the revenues from sales of innovative products and fee-based interpretive programs in highly popular venues in the park such as Alcatraz Island and Muir Woods, we launched campaign after campaign to rebuild decaying infrastructure; building new trails, constructing visitor centers, and creating educational programs that sought and welcomed children and families from previously underserved populations.

While championed by the park and local communities, the GGNP Conservancy was not without its critics, especially within the more traditional leadership circles of the National Park Service. Cries to break up the organization by separating its cooperating association role from its development and fundraising role resounded. However, the success of the Conservancy had become widely known and other organizations, including the Rocky Mountain Nature Association (RMNA), were beginning to see the value of such "hybrid" entities. Though some like RMNA were eventually forced to split, the GGNP Conservancy, with the help of a vocal community, resisted such attempts and continued to be an example of a highly effective park partner.

After more than a decade of working to help build a national park in the San Francisco Bay Area, in 1998, the "call of the wild" became irresistible and our family moved northward to Alaska. There I was asked to lead what would later be known as Alaska Geographic. A significant departure from Golden Gate, this organization was chartered to support all of the national parks, forests and wildlife refuges in Alaska, well over 100 million acres. Yet, despite the size of these public lands, annually, the number of visitors to just Alcatraz Island alone exceeded all those that would visit Alaska.

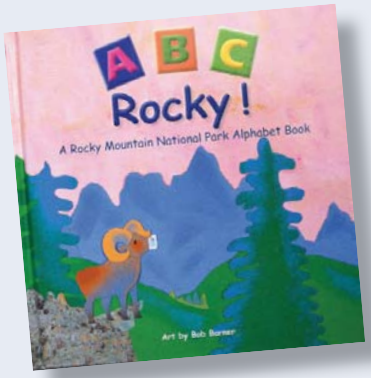
Given the low number of visitors, Alaska Geographic became focused less on visitor amenities and more about reaching those who could have an impact on the protection of Alaska, but whom may never see its broad expanse of wilderness. Films created about little-known parks, like the six-million-acre Gates of the Arctic, and the largely misunderstood Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, were now priorities, as well as publishing books on climate change and the preservation of wildlife habitat. We then turned our attention to the youth of Alaska, a generation that would eventually face decisions that would determine the fate of the Arctic. Working hand-in-hand with our partner agencies, we formed youth advisory groups and service learning programs to help instill conservation values and the importance of intact ecosystems. The organization started to see its mission beyond working within the boundaries of those public lands, and working more on behalf of their survival.

Our family relished its 14 years in Alaska, and each of us carried its wildness within us as we migrated south to a new adventure, this time back to the first park in which I ever set foot. I have found within the Rocky Mountain Conservancy elements of each of the organizations for which I have had the honor of serving. From offering high-quality visitor services and programs, to improving and growing the park through the philanthropic support of the community, to engaging the next generation of park stewards, the Rocky Mountain Conservancy is playing vital roles that will ensure the park's relevance and survival into the next 100 years.

And just as my personal journey has followed changing opportunities to make a difference for these lands, so will the continued evolution of nonprofit organizations like the Rocky Mountain Conservancy support and nourish our national parks and other treasured lands in ways we have yet to imagine.

photo: Jim Ward

Charley Money has been the executive director of the Rocky Mountain Conservancy since 2012.



The Conservancy Publishes:

A Unique Paper Collage Alphabet Book for Rocky

The Rocky Mountain Conservancy is pleased to present its newest publication for kids: *ABC Rocky! A Rocky Mountain National Park Alphabet Book.* This unique book is a fabulous collection of Rocky-specific scenes rendered in paper collage, pastels and printing inks by San Francisco artist Bob Barner. See for yourself (below) how vibrant and playful these works of art are depicted, with fun alphabet block letters and fun facts of the natural history of the park. Funded through the Conservancy's Next Generation Fund, this book will delight kids and parents alike! Hardcover, 32 pages.

Order online at **RMConservancy.org**, or call 970-586-0121 to order your copy today!

Cover photo credits

(Upper): **"Winter Long-tailed Weasel"** by Conservancy member Putney Nature Images, Longmont, CO; (Lower) **"Taylor and Sharkstooth"** by Conservancy member Walt Kaesler, Estes Park, CO.

Please send high-resolution images to nancy.wilson@RMConservancy.org by March 1 for publication in the 2017 Spring *Quarterly*.

Photos are always appreciated! Scenery, wildlife and wildflowers greatly enhance this publication, so get out there and take a hike! *Thank You!*

Ask Nancy

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

What is the word origin of "ptarmigan"? The word *ptarmigan* comes from the Scottish Gaelic *tàrmachan*, which literally means "croaker." The silent p was added in 1684 by Robert Sibbald through the influence of Greek, especially *pteron*, meaning "wing," "feather," or "pinion." — *The Oxford Dictionary of British Bird Names*

Why do aspen trees form buds for the next season in the late fall when they will soon be exposed to many months of freezing temperatures and desiccating winds? Why not wait until spring to develop these seemingly tender and vulnerable growths? Aspen, as do many trees, form the next year's buds during the current year's growing season — often these buds are fully developed by August. Buds may be condensed flowers, leaves or branches, and they contain all the parts necessary for growing those structures in a complex, reduced form. The complex form includes bud scales that protect the buds against pathogens and low temperatures during the winter, as well as "winterized" cells. Similar to many animals, aspen increase solutes and decrease water in the cells of these buds to lower their freezing point. Between the many condensed layers of leaves and winterization of cells, buds are very hardy. In fact, they must be released from this winter condition (called "bud break") prior to growing in the spring. The reason the buds are produced during the prior growing season is that it takes so much energy, something that is not in high supply at the beginning of the spring season because leaves are not fully developed to produce the needed energy. Indeed, an aspen flowers before it leafs out. For that to be possible, the flower structure must be premade (in the bud) and energy reserves must be present. The tree's only energy source in the early spring is what was stored the previous growing season, in the form of starch in the roots of the tree. Those reserves are needed for flowering, leafing out, and any other growth, so no one function receives all of these resources. — *UNC-Greeley Professor Dr. Scott Franklin*

Why are there no green or blue mammals? Or true red, for that matter! Some mammals DO have bright colors on *some* body parts — think primates like the mandrill — and sloths can get pretty green from the algae that live on their fur. In general for mammals, however, it's key to consider the natural selection driver of predator — prey relationships. As such, muted earth-tone colors and the ability to blend into the habitat, offer a distinct advantage that bright colors would not. A brightly colored prey morsel would be at a disadvantage in avoiding capture. Conversely, a brightly colored predator would have difficulty sneaking up on its meal. In this world, bright coloration is generally related to reproduction — advertisement and mate selection, most familiarly in male birds. Mammals more typically use behavioral and olfactory cues in their reproductive activities. — *Retired RMNP Wildlife Biologist Gary Miller*

Why do coyotes howl? Howling is a basic communication behavior in coyotes that serves a couple of different purposes. One is to call the pack, which consists of a first-generation family group, back together after a period of solo hunting. A second purpose is to announce their presence to other packs in the area, basically warning other family groups against trespassing across territorial boundaries.

Science-Informed Decision-Making Case Study:

Grand Ditch Breach Restoration Project

Scott Esser and Carissa Turner

View of the erosion gully directly below the Grand Ditch created by the breach event in 2003. Noted as Zone 1 in Figure 1. *Photo: NPS*

On May 30, 2003, the Grand Ditch, a trans-basin, water-diversion canal in the northwest corner of Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) breached its bank. The breach saturated an adjacent hillslope which gave way, sending an estimated 47,000 cubic yards of sediment and debris into Lulu Creek and the headwaters of the Colorado River. Damage to 22 acres of upland, stream, riparian and wetland habitat occurred over a distance of 1.5 miles (Figure 1). More than 20,000 trees were lost and approximately 50 different plant species were impacted.

The streambed of Lulu Creek was gouged nearly seven feet deep, widening the channel by as much as ten times. When the torrent arrived at the low-gradient confluence with the Colorado River, it deposited sediment and debris in an alluvial fan up to six feet thick. The sediment-filled waters continued downstream along the Colorado River, clogging the channel and covering the Lulu City wetland and the Colorado River floodplain with gravel, sand and other debris.

In 2006, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a civil lawsuit against the owners of the Grand Ditch under the authority of the Park System Resource Protection Act (PSRPA). In May 2008, parties reached an out-of-court settlement in which the owners agreed to pay the United States $9 million in damages to restore the area. Since then, Rocky Mountain National Park has utilized science-based decision making and adaptive-management principals in the restoration of the Grand Ditch breach.

Science-Informed Decision Making

Prior to the breach, in 1999, the National Park Service (NPS) developed its Natural Resource Challenge (NRC) which aimed to ensure that natural resources are preserved for future generations. The NRC holds that science and research are "our best hope to maintain and restore the rich natural heritage found in the national parks," both of which are critical in the planning and implementation of projects on national park lands. The Grand Ditch Breach Restoration project is a noteworthy example of how RMNP has used scientific research to assess environmental impact, understand changes to ecosystems, and develop overall restoration design.

Starting directly after the breach, RMNP partnered with local researchers and agencies to study the ecosystem components affected by the breach. Colorado State University, the NPS Rocky Mountain Network Inventory and Monitoring Program, and the NPS Water Resources Division were key partners in this effort.

Dr. David Cooper and Dr. Sara Rathburn from Colorado State University (CSU) studied sediment deposition and wetland and river impacts and functions. In 2004, LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging — an infrared imaging technique) and ground surveys were used to determine the ex-

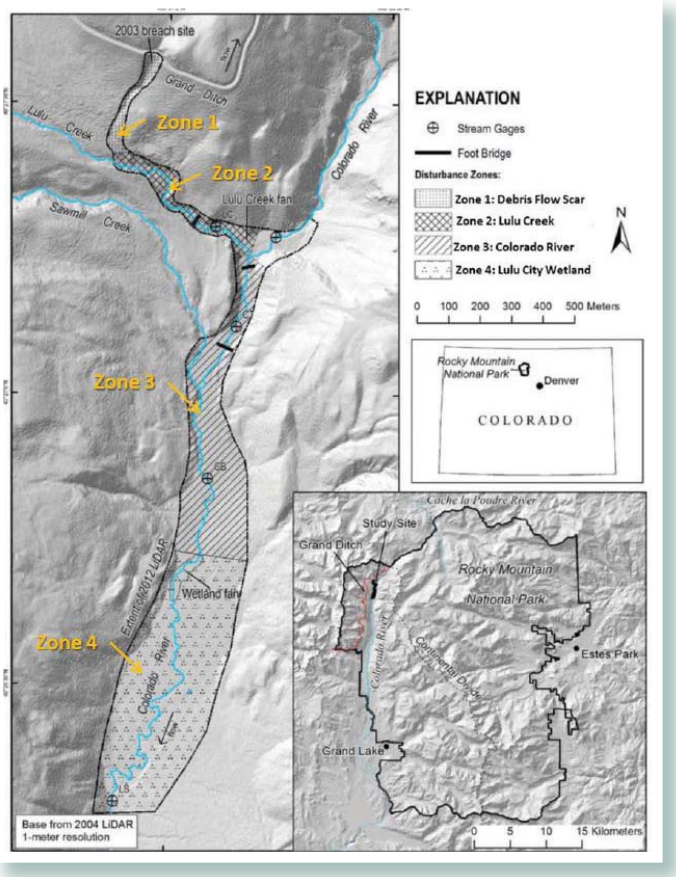


Figure 1: Overview Map of the Grand Ditch Breach Restoration Project Area. Outlined area depicts the 22 acres of impacted area including the Colorado River and Lulu City Wetland. *Photo: NPS*

tent and depth of the sediment deposited from the breach. A repeat LiDAR survey was conducted in 2012 to quantify additional changes that had occurred since the initial survey. Extensive changes to the river channels, such as widening and shallowing and increased amounts of logs, were documented along Lulu Creek and the Colorado River. Furthermore, changes to the groundwater hydrology of the wetlands and floodplains were noted (Figure 2). This research revealed that river functions and depths to and fluctuations in groundwater were not adequate to support the wetland and riparian vegetation that once inhabited the area. Ultimately, this information was used develop a very specific sediment and wood removal plan to restore the river channel, floodplain and groundwater hydrology to support native and riparian wetland vegetation and ecological and wilderness values.

Dr. Sara Rathburn (right) and park staff measure cross sections of Lulu Creek.
Photo: NPS

The Rocky Mountain Inventory and Monitoring program and the Water Resources Division established two monitoring sites to collect baseline and reference data on vegetation, biodiversity, and water quality (Figure 3). These sites, one located inside the impacted area and the other located outside the impacted area to serve as a reference site, are surveyed on a cyclic basis to monitor changes. These initial surveys will be compared to surveys conducted after the restoration to ensure that the restoration is effective and meets the objectives of restoring native vegetation and preserving water quality.

Restoration through Adaptive Management The Grand Ditch Breach Restoration team has compiled the valuable knowledge and information learned from these scientific studies to develop an adaptive management-based implementation strategy.

Phase I of this strategy began in 2015, and included the restoration of a small segment of the Colorado River in the Lulu City wetland. Monitoring of the river restoration and the associated groundwater hydrology is currently underway to understand the changes. Phase II of the ecological restoration includes the removal and redistribution of sediment and wood from Lulu Creek, the Colorado River and Lulu City wetland, and is scheduled to begin during the summer of 2017.

Ground Survey soil pits measured the extent and depth of sediment deposits from the Grand Ditch breach as well as other sediment deposits dating back to the early 1900s.
Photo: NPS

Scott Esser is an ecologist, and Carissa Turner a biologist, for the Continental Divide Research Learning Center.

Whatever Happened to Wilbur Dean (aka M56)?

by Retired RMNP Wildlife Biologist Gary Miller

Conservancy members may recall the excitement accompanying the sighting and photo of a wolverine in Rocky Mountain National Park in June, 2009. The species is native to Colorado, but has long been extirpated as a viable population, and this was the first confirmed occurrence in many decades. This young male was captured and fitted with an internal radio transmitter at Togwotee Pass near Grand Teton N.P. in 2008.

Known as M56, researchers tracked his travels across the Red Desert and over Wyoming's Shirley Mountains to northern Colorado and Rocky Mountain National Park. He spent a good part of subsequent years in the park and the Indian Peaks, but also wandered well south of Leadville, and was again photographed at Mt. Bierstadt. He became the poster child for Rocky's BioBlitz in 2012 when Jim Salestrom wrote and performed, "Wilbur Dean the Wolverine" relating the saga of his travels.

The last radio contact was in October, 2012, but there were occasional reports that seemed somewhat credible for a couple of years afterwards. In any case, at some point he left these mountains, eventually travelling across the lowlands of Montana into North Dakota. Sadly, in April, 2016, he was shot and killed by a ranch hand in western North Dakota near the Montana border, who said the animal was harassing cattle. To his credit, the fellow did report it to North Dakota wildlife authorities, and their necropsy found the radio implant confirming that it was Wilbur Dean. Rest in peace, Wilbur Dean.

Note: Whether or not wolverines deserve to come under the protection of the Endangered Species Act has been an ongoing issue for many years. After many years of study, in 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a preliminary proposal to list wolverines in the "lower 48" as threatened. Then, in its 2014 final ruling, the agency reversed itself and decided to not list. Lawsuits objecting to the decision followed and in the same month Wilbur Dean lost his life, a federal District Court judge overturned the agency's decision, finding its rationale for not listing flawed. The Fish and Wildlife Service has begun a new review of the best available science regarding wolverines, their habitat, and whether wolverines meet the criteria for ESA listing.

photo: Marlene Borneman

Rocky Mountain Conservancy – Field Institute
2017 Program Highlights

The Rocky Mountain Conservancy – Field Institute Program is excited to announce new course offerings for 2017! Catalogs are available now and registration is open online and by phone – read on to learn more about some tantalizing new offerings in store for the coming season!

New Bus Tours!

Have a free morning? Try these half-day tours to explore the lower elevations in Rocky Mountain National Park.

From Meadow to Tree Line examines the montane and subalpine ecosystems while staying alert for sightings of meadow animals such as coyote, squirrel and elk. Delve into park history and Longs Peak as you travel along Trail Ridge Road as high as Rainbow Curve to view the park's eastern side from a higher vantage point.

From Elk to Aspen takes participants to view elk in the meadows in the early morning during the rut ,and exploring, driving corridors known for spectacular fall aspen color displays. A great tour for photographers and wildlife watchers alike!

New Classes for Kids

Cloudy with a Chance of ... Graupel? investigates mountain weather in a fun and interactive way at Trail Riv
r Ranch on the park's west side.

Rocky Mountain History Hike explores the history of RMNP during a hike to Eugenia mine, discussing questions like: Why did people settle here? How did they survive?

Our top favorites! Kids' Flyfishing and Stream Ecology, Who Pooped in the Woods? and Upper Beaver Meadows Nature Hunt: A Virtual Geocache Adventure will be offered on a regular basis throughout the summer.

New Classes for Adults

A variety of new adult classes in 2017 include:

Night Sky Landscape Photography with award-winning teacher/photographer Stan Honda

The Ghost of Fall River Road with historian and author Mary Taylor Young

Learn to Use a Dichotomous Key with author and plant expert Marlene Borneman

Along with these new class offerings, the Field Institute is delighted to bring back some of last summer's favorites, including The Orchids of RMNP, Hummingbirds: Field Research, and many more!

RMConservancy.org

Tribute to Madeline Framson: A Volunteer Extraordinaire 1922–2016

With heavy hearts and deepest gratitude, we share the news of Madeline Framson's death on October 13, 2016.

For the last 35 years, Madeline was actively volunteering, for Rocky, the Colorado Mountain Club (CMC) and the Conservancy. Her activities included trail maintenance, fire prevention through fuel reduction, fighting invasive weeds, bighorn sheep herd health, barbed wire removal, revegetation along Trail Ridge Road, automobile wreckage removal, natural landscape restoration of the Hidden Valley ski area, trimming bushes and trees along Fern Lake Road and assisting with the Ride the Rockies bicycle tour. The volunteer efforts of the CMC's Shining Mountains Group required skill, dedication and physical endurance for many tasks that were often grimy and unglamorous but needed to be done. Not as glamorous were the countless hours she recruited other volunteers for Conservancy mailings — something we relied on for more than two decades.

Her early life is an amazing story of WWII involvement, civil rights activism and so much more. Learn more about this amazing woman at www.legacy.com/obituaries/eptrail/ and search the list for Madeline Bass Framson.

Sayonara Madeline! With love, from your Conservancy buddies.

Park Puzzler

by RM Conservancy Member Joel Kaplow

Across

6 *Rhodiola integrifolia*, aka ___ crown, is a flower with thick, succulent leaves that can be found in either wet or dry areas of the tundra. The blossoms are in a flat-topped cluster, and are a deep wine-red in color.

7 Living organisms and their environment, taken collectively on a planetary scale, comprise the ___.

9 The ___, a striking pinnacle found on the east side of Loch Vale towering above Sky Pond, is 500 feet tall with sheer walls. Successful technical climbers will tell you it has a surprisingly flat summit that's 15 x 30 yards wide.

10 About ___ percent of your entrance fee for RMNP stays within the park, and is used for the benefit of all things Rocky.

13 The top three answers from visitors surveyed for their main reason for a park visit: recreational opportunities, wildlife viewing and the ___.

17 Rocky straddles three counties: Boulder, Grand and ___, which contains the largest chunk.

18 There is a glacier at the west end of Wild Basin named for Jack ___, a Rocky ranger who, in 1925, helped install the cables that aided climbers near the summit of Longs Peak.

21 Located on the west side of Estes Cone is ___ Pass.

22 ___ zones are the areas of land that are adjacent to streams or lakes, usually with more diverse flora and fauna than the surrounding drier areas.

Down

1 F.O. Stanley was a remarkable inventor and innovator, with many patents that went beyond the Stanley Steamer, and he helped fund Enos Mills' traveling expenses during his RMNP campaigns. Surprisingly, F.O. also handcrafted his own ___, which are sought by musicians, and are worth thousands of dollars today.

2 Just to the east of the glacier at 18-Across is a rock formation known as Eagles ___.

3 The devastating rains of September 2013 caused several landslides within RMNP. The ___ Trail, which starts behind the Lily Lake Visitor Center, sustained heavy damage when a slide wiped out several switchback sections. A study for repairs is slated for 2017. (2 wds.)

4 A close cousin of 6-Across, *Clementsia rhodantha,* aka ___ crown, aka rose crown, is partial to boggy, squishy areas of the tundra. It has a pink blossom, and succulent leaves which are useful for storing water.

5 A large, 42-acre inholding known at the ___ Cottages parcel, is being absorbed into RMNP's 415 square miles. The Davis family, owners of the property as of 1941, arranged to give RMNP first crack when it came time for it to leave the family.

8 A biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment, taken on a local level, is known as an ___.

11 A narrow park valley that was carved by rivers of ice moving from south to north, which now contains Mills Lake and Black Lake, is appropriately named Glacier ___.

12 F.O. Stanley, a very rich man from his inventions, suffered from consumption (tuberculosis) and was advised to move to Colorado in 1903. His health improved, and in 1909 the eponymous Stanley Hotel in Estes Park was completed. It's white now, but what color paint was used on the original structure?

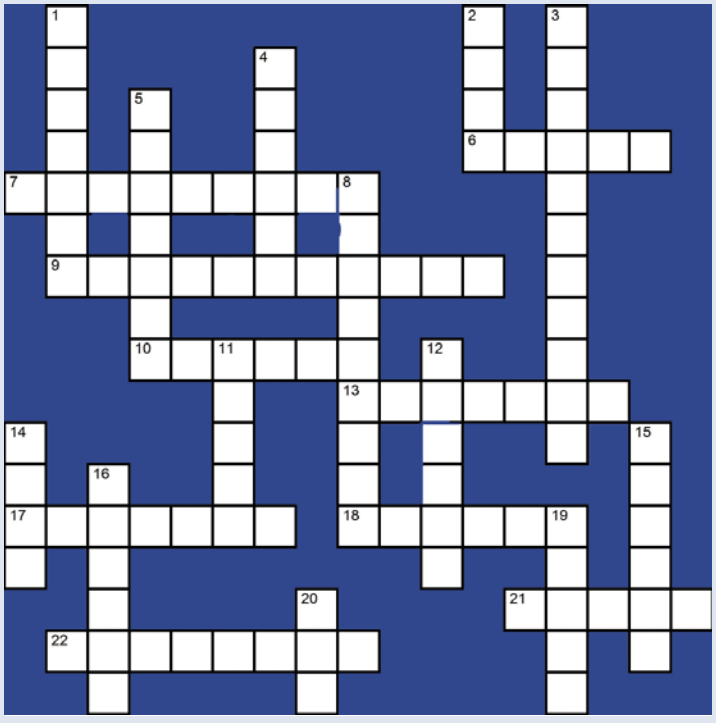
14 On the north end of 11-Down is found ___ Mountain, so named because it appears that glaciers have carved away 50% of the original peak.

15 Fall Creek arises on the north flank of Fall Mountain on the northern border of Rocky, then flows northeast and meets the South Fork of the Cache la ___ River.

16 Not to be confused with Frozen Lake, ___ Lake is clustered with the rock outcrop at 2-Down and the glacier at 18-Across at the west end of Wild Basin.

19 When the Stanley Hotel was built, it had all the modern conveniences of the time, including electricity that came from a hydroelectric plant built by F.O. Stanley on Fall River, and, unusual for a remote location, running tap ___.

20 Located east of Ypsilon Mountain in RMNP's Mummy Range are three lakes named for C.E. ___, the first president of the American Alpine Club.



New Superintendent Darla Sidles Accepts the Challenge

by Suzanne Silverthorn

It was the 1970s, and a choice visit to Rocky Mountain National Park would be her first and only chance to experience the outdoors with her family. As an impressionable 8-year-old, it was the snowball fight with her sister and father that lingers as a favorite memory. And for Darla Sidles, the new Superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park, that childhood visit of hers looms large in how she's approaching her role in the park's 101st year and beyond.

Sidles stopped by the Rocky Mountain Conservancy offices in December to share insights from her first few months on the job and to provide a glimpse of what's ahead. As she clasps her hands around a hot cup of tea, she describes the challenges facing the park with candor and determination, pondering what the experience will be like for future eight-year-olds and the role she hopes to play in helping to shape it. Will they have a lifelong connection to Rocky's natural wonder? Will there be access to snowfields 100 years from now? Sidles is optimistic that there's a wonderful future ahead for the park. But that comes later.

The conversation quickly turns to Sidles' immediate focus on the topic of overcrowding, which has consumed much of her time here since arriving in August following a seven-year run as Superintendent of Saguaro National Park in Arizona. A 26-year veteran of the National Park Service, her diversity of experiences and opportunities have prepared her for this role. She's held both administrative and boots-on-the-ground posts across the country, including Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Texas, Alaska, Washington and Utah. Before Saguaro, she spent nine years at Zion, which included work on similar crowding issues. For Sidles, 53, this new combination of place, people and issues has become the perfect intersection and one can't help but feel inspired by her sense of purpose.

To that end, the most pressing priority identified by Sidles is to define the park's visitor capacity and to begin a conversation about long-term solutions. Visitation in the park is on track to reach 4.5 million in 2016, another record and a near double-digit increase from its record-breaking centennial year in 2015. Only Great Smoky Mountains and Grand Canyon had higher visitations in 2015. And neither of those parks will see an explosion of population growth as is projected for Colorado's Front Range communities.

As a prelude to the past summer season, Rocky's Public Affairs Office launched an awareness campaign suggesting ways to plan ahead for a more enjoyable visit. Suggestions included hiking early or hiking late, checking the weather forecast in advance to better plan the day, carpooling or using the shuttle system, and being additionally proactive by reserving a campsite six months out.

Even then, during busy days in the summer and fall, Sidles describes an endless stream of idling vehicles snaking through the communities of Estes Park and Lyons as long lines formed at the park entrances. Like clockwork, this daily arrival en masse took its toll on the park's infrastructure. Parking lots overflowed, toilets and trash cans were overrun, wildlife-human encounters increased, tundra was trampled, and perhaps most disconcerting for Sidles was the escalation in frustration by visitors — some even lashing out at Rocky's staff and volunteers, which compromised their safety. News announcements during the summer blended urban-like topics of car break-ins and visitor reminders about how to behave in the park with the more typical information on groundbreaking research and park stewardship.

For Sidles, ensuring resource preservation while simultaneously providing a quality visitor experience at Rocky is at the core of what motivates her. She envisions a future where intense traffic congestion and harried visitors are a thing of the past and where opportunities to explore

Rocky's front country and backcountry are safer and more enjoyable.

To help guide the visitor-use transformation, an assessment is taking place to document best management practices that have been undertaken at other high-visitation parks. "If we can learn what others have done and potentially apply them here through an inclusive public process — which means getting input from the communities, park staff, and visitors, on a national scope, I think we'll be ahead of the game," Sidles said. Examples of management strategies being introduced at other high-use parks include timed-entry systems, reservation systems, and other mechanisms. Sidles likens these measures to permit systems used by river rafters on popular waterways. Modification of the shuttle system will also be explored. "We're just hoping that we can learn from these other parks to understand what works best, and what provides a quality visitor experience that simultaneously does not impair park resources." These comparisons, she says, along with other data to be collected, will help determine what the recommended strategy will be moving forward. Sidles expects there may be a phased approach, to address destination-specific strategies first, followed by a broader comprehensive visitor-use management strategy. The park is intent in involving the gateway communities of Estes Park and Grand Lake at the outset of the conversation.

In the short term, the park's staff and volunteers will continue to mitigate impact where they can, encouraging use of the shuttle system and restricting vehicle access when parking lots are full and traffic congestion is at its peak, especially in the Bear Lake and Wild Basin areas. Also, encouraging visitors to plan ahead before their arrival will be emphasized at every opportunity to help manage expectations. To that end, the park is now encouraging visitors to pay their entrance fee online before they get to the park, which allows them to use the smartphone receipt as their entrance pass.

Yet, with all the focus on visitation, Sidles wants to ensure that there are increased visiting opportunities for underrepresented populations as well as a more diverse staff. "We have so many people coming to the park right now, but when you look at the diversity of those visitors, they don't reflect the face of the nation. And that's a concern." As a first step, Sidles has set out to work more robustly with the Rocky Mountain Conservancy and its Next Generation Fund, as well as other partners, to develop strategies that will make the park relevant to underserved youth from the Front Range. In this, she draws upon her experiences at Saguaro where she led an effort to increase visitation from Tucson's inner city and to expand the staff's diversity. "Whether it's diversity in ethnicity or race or age or interests, we need to make sure we're on the cutting edge of that because if we keep doing things the way we've always done, then we're probably not going to be important 50 years from now when there's a different need, a different desire out there."

"We have so many people coming to the park right now, but when you look at the diversity of those visitors, they don't reflect the face of the nation. And that's a concern."

With help from expanded partnerships, Sidles sees opportunities to become even more strategic and visionary in charting the park's future. She's looking to forge greater involvement by the Conservancy, universities and other organizations, plus increased collaboration with the gateway communities, as well as making the most of the park's relationship with its 2,700 volunteers to ensure that the services they're providing are meeting the park's highest priorities.

She sees the global discussion of climate change as an opportunity to conduct research and share with the public the impact that is relevant to them, such as clean air and water that are necessary for wildlife and humans. "If we can tell that story from the perspective of an 'indicator park,' this may help people understand the critical nature of what we're dealing with as a society."

Superintendent Darla Sidles describes herself as energetic, forward-thinking, and inclusive. She values strong partnerships and looks forward to bolstering the park's relationship with the Rocky Mountain Conservancy.

Along the way, Sidles believes that it will be imperative to prioritize what's most important for the park and to work as efficiently as possible given current budget limitations and the transition to a new administration in Washington, D.C.

She ponders for a moment before offering a final thought, "Our job is to protect the park forever and to provide an outstanding visitor experience. It's that simple. And it's that difficult." With that, Sidles finishes her last sip of tea, offers well-wishes to the Conservancy staff, and heads out the door to prepare for her next meeting. There is more work to be done.

Suzanne Silverthorn is a frequent contributor to the Quarterly. *When she's not writing or visiting the park, she serves as Director of Communications for the town of Vail, Colorado.*

photo: Jim Ward

Fear Not Rocky's Fierce Winter Facade

by Barbara Scott

The snow crunches under my feet as I shuffle up the trail. A few new inches of snow has fallen overnight adding to the sparkling blanket of white over the brown and crunchy vegetation. The park is transformed!

Early winter, before the snow falls, always makes me a bit sad. The brown and dormant landscape holds little joy, instead epitomizing winter's symbolism of old age and death. Even the animals seem to be ambivalent about it, methodically foraging the last remaining bits of nutrition from the dead and dying plants and duff.

Once the snow falls, though, Rocky Mountain National Park becomes a world of sparkle and light. A new coating of snow turns the familiar into the novel, the well-known into the undiscovered, the dying into the reawakened. I practically bounce down the trail delighting in finding shapes and pictures in the cloud-like mounds of white around me.

The wind spins tiny snowflakes across my face and onto my jacket where I examine their tiny crystalline forms. Each snowflake is born as a speck of dust or debris that flies through the air, eventually getting cold enough to collect water vapor. These frozen water droplets attract more and more water vapor that grows and, because of the chemical makeup of water, freezes into hexagonal ice crystals. Depending on the temperature and the water content of the clouds around them as the fly, the ice crystals take on unique shapes — some stars, some plates, some columns. The environment around them causes them to change and grow as they descend through the cloud layer. They are rarely perfect, but beautiful all the same. And as these ice crystals form and fall, they stick together, forming the snowflakes that transform the Rocky Mountain scenery into a winter snow globe.

I stop to examine some tracks that cross the trail in front of me – tracks that I never would have seen had it not been for the snow. Loping in a small, angled gait, it was a two-print track pattern the size of fingertips touching the snow. They alternate between short and long leaps from about 6 to 30 inches apart. I follow them off the trail until they disappear into a small snowbank. Not far away I see them reappear, this time with an extra set of drag marks alongside. This short-tailed weasel had caught a meal!

I scan the forest around me with the hope of catching sight of the little white mustelid, but no luck. It is probably snoozing the day away in the borrowed burrow of its prey, waiting for the cover of darkness to emerge and hunt again. I imagine this ferocious little predator wiping its tiny brow in relief that the snow has finally come. In winter, the weasel changes its color to match the surrounding snowpack — to become invisible to both prey and predators. The weasels' color change comes with the changing of the photoperiod. The shorter days trigger the hormonal change and molting of one color fur for the next. But white fur in a brown landscape where the snow keeps coming later and later in the season makes it hard to blend in. Natural selection may eventually change when the molt begins, but until then my weasel friend may have some challenges.

> The snow tells stories that we don't hear in other seasons – stories about life and death, survival and hardship.

The snow tells stories that we don't hear in other seasons — stories about life and death, survival and hardship. These struggles go on around us every day, but in the snow, you can see them. You can see the tunnels of the voles that live just where the snowpack meets the earth so they can stay warm. You can see the drag marks of the weasel that catches that vole and hauls it off for dinner. If you get up early before the wind comes, you might even see the wing marks made when the great-horned owl catches the weasel that didn't move fast enough to escape.

That's why I like winter. There's no hiding. Everything is refreshed and manifest for the world to see.

As I continue my hike I feel the sting of the cold air on my face. My breath streams around me as my heart begins to pound. I move faster to try to coax the circulation back into my fingers and toes. I'm just beginning to warm up my body when I turn a corner and get hit full on by the wind.

Rocky Mountain National Park would not be what it is without the wind. Prevailing winds from the west are funneled down mountain valleys, creating locally divergent and perpetual wind patterns. Summits and crests can have gusts in excess of 200 miles per hour. Farther down the slopes, winter winds may load dangerous cornices or bring extreme temperature swings. Savvy park recreationists know to dress not for the temperature, but for the wind which can find its way into even the tiniest aperture.

I almost didn't begin my hike this day because of the wind. I could have stayed warm at home and waited for the wind to die down. That would have been the easy thing to do. But then I would have missed the renewal of new snow. I would have missed the snowflakes and the weasel tracks. I would have missed seeing my breath and feeling the tip of my nose go red.

There's always wind. You can't let it get you down. Instead, let it blow your doubt, your insecurities and your fears away. Embrace the sparkling world around you. Seasons pass quickly. Get out and enjoy this beautiful winter. You'll be glad you did.

Barbara Scott is a park ranger interpreter at Rocky Mountain National Park.

Colorado Gives Day Beats Records!

Local nonprofits gathered at various businesses to promote this year's Colorado Gives Day event (from left to right): Alison Rivers, Estes Park Nonprofit Resource Center,Alice Burkholder, Harmony Foundation, Julie Klett, Rocky Mountain Conservancy, Jill Lancaster, Estes Park Nonprofit Resource Center and Cynthia Combs Krumme, Estes Park Nonprofit Resource Center at Kind Coffee in Estes Park.

What an exciting day we had on December 6 for Colorado Gives Day! Statewide, donations totaled $33.8 million! More than 233 Rocky Mountain National Park fans donated more than $30,000 to the Conservancy, blowing past our goal of $25,000 and exceeding 2015 totals by more than $9,000.

It is a fun day for us, not just to see the donations coming in, but also to see how much you love Rocky Mountain National Park and the work we accomplish together. Thank you for your participation and for your support. Your donations will be put to excellent use in 2017!

We also thank generous local businesses Kind Coffee, Poppy's Pizza and Grill, and Snowy Peaks Winery for hosting special events and being super-enthusiastic fundraising professionals that day. We're already looking forward to Colorado Gives Day 2017!

Conservancy Annual Appeal a Rousing Success

As of press time in mid-December, the annual appeal was going strong with more than 900 donations made for a total of more than $227,700 (including the Colorado Gives Day gifts). Approximately half of those funds are directed to Best Use, and the other half is divided almost equally in thirds to Trail Improvement, our Conservation Corps, and the Next Generation Fund. We should have final tallies by the end of January. Whatever amount you gave, or which fund you donated to, we are fantastically grateful for your generous support of our 2017 season. We also appreciate your kind and thoughtful notes—we read every single one! Thank you for being the most important part of our team. Together, we take good care of RMNP and other public lands, and inspire our youth. We'll keep you posted about how your contributions are being put to work in 2017.

Rocky License Plates Reach 3,000!

Good news!

By mid-December, the Conservancy had processed donations for more than 3,000 plate sets (the minimum required to ensure that they are available in 2017). This program has raised over $90,000 so far, with 100% supporting YOUR Rocky Mountain National Park! It is fun and rewarding to see so many of these plates on the road already. A significant number of donors to the License Plate Program also made additional Best Use gifts amounting to more than $10,900. Thank you! If you still need your plates, just head to www.RMConservancy.org and make a $30 minimum donation (per vehicle) to our License Plate Program. Full details and FAQs are available at RMConservancy.org.

Conservancy and Partners Gift Wild Basin Property to Rocky Mountain National Park

It could have been a worst-case scenario for Rocky Mountain National Park: a "Land for Sale" sign going up in one of the most popular areas of the park and within lands designated as Wilderness. If not for a quick response from the Rocky Mountain Conservancy, a 12.5-acre property was about to be listed for sale for only the second time in the last 70 years. With a 2,000-square-foot house perched on a rocky overlook and easy motorized access, the demand for this private property within Wild Basin would have been great. Instead, the Conservancy, with assistance from the Wilderness Land Trust and the National Park Trust, secured its purchase for the park. The property was purchased on December 14.

Saving this land for permanent protection had been a high priority for the Conservancy since 2009, when the property was originally listed for sale. At that time, a generous conservation buyer agreed to purchase and hold the property until the Conservancy or the park was in a position to purchase it for final protection. When that buyer decided that they wished to sell and transfer the property this year, "we knew right away that we had to step in quickly with what land protection reserves we had," Charles Money, Executive Director of the Conservancy said.

Thanks to the successful completion of the Cascade Cottages Centennial Capital Campaign earlier this year, the Conservancy was able to provide $300,000 in Land Protection Fund reserves for the purchase of the Wild Basin parcel. However, more assistance was needed to meet the $750,000 purchase price. The Conservancy subsequently engaged the assistance of the Wilderness Land Trust and the National Park Trust. The Wilderness Land Trust negotiated the purchase contract with the landowner and agreed to provide additional funds for the purchase. The National Park Trust engaged the support of a generous local donor who wished to make a significant gift to the park during the centennial year of the National Park Service. The financial contributions of these partners and the Conservancy enabled the purchase of the parcel.

Located approximately one mile from the Wild Basin entrance, this parcel along the access drive is within the Wilderness Area boundary in the park. As a result of this purchase the land will finally be able to be managed as wilderness (the highest level of conservation protection for federal lands). The addition of the property to the park and removal of the access drive will eliminate a developed 33-acre incursion into the wilderness area, including the road. However, the house and access drive must be removed. The Wilderness Land Trust will undertake the deconstruction process, which will be funded by the Conservancy. The planned deconstruction process, scheduled for spring of 2017, will recycle as much of the building material as possible.

Darla Sidles, superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park said, "We are extremely grateful to the Rocky Mountain Conservancy, The Wilderness Land Trust, and National Park Trust in acquiring this private piece of land inside the park. This is a gift that will live on forever as protected wilderness."

Thank you to you, the Conservancy's donors and members, for making this project possible!

Conservancy Funds New Park Greenhouse Fence to Support Restoration Projects in the Park

by Trish Stockton

The greenhouse and nursery at Rocky Mountain National Park has a long relationship with the Rocky Mountain Conservancy. Initial funds for the greenhouse were raised by the Conservancy in 1995 through generous donations from donors and members of the park's nonprofit partner.

Thanks in large part to the Conservancy's support, the greenhouse now grows between 20,000 and 35,000 native grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees each year. Park staff and volunteers collect seed in various locations within park boundaries during the fall to process and propagate the seed in the winter. We are constantly researching and experimenting to ensure that we are maximizing production and propagating the best native competitors possible. In addition to plants grown inside the greenhouse, many mature plants overwinter in the nursery beds outside.

Most recently, through Conservancy donations, we were able to replace our failing fence. The old fence was constructed in 1999, and years of sun and wind had taken their toll on the fencing and the wind protection fabric. The first section of fence fell during the winter of 2012, with a larger section following in the winter of 2015.

The installation of chain link was chosen over the original wood alternative material for its longevity and cleaner appearance. During the research process we found out that chin link can be recycled, which was an important bonus feature. Much consideration was given to the inclusion of the brown slats that are needed to block out winter winds (not pictured), replacing the wind fabric that was previously used. To avoid an overly "industrial" look for the nursery, it was decided the slats would cover just four feet of the 7-foot-high fence. This allows for the much-needed wind protection without closing the area off to those passing by.

The greenhouse and nursery support multiple restoration projects in the park every year. Some of the projects include restoration around the new comfort stations at Aspenglen and Glacier Basin campgrounds, the new Grand Lake entrance booths, the shuttle stops, and tree plantings at Timber Creek Campground. The most challenging project was restoring the Alpine Ridge Trail (aka "Huffer Hill") after the new stairs were installed. Using native plants for a successful restoration offers a distinct advantage over invasive weeds by allowing the native plants to establish a disturbed site first, before the onslaught of quick-growing invasive plants move in, or to stabilize hillsides and slopes with deep-rooted growth to prevent erosion and sediment deposition into streams and lakes. Of course, using native species also supports local fauna and pollinators.

Some of the projects will require more than the usual grasses and forbs that the park has grown in the past. This fall, we concentrated on collecting seeds from more than 20 different tree and shrub species, most of which we have never grown in the park greenhouse. Because of these new demands, the original plant bed layout wasn't sufficient for the need. The new fence encloses a larger area than the original fence, allowing for easier access as well as a different layout of beds. The new layout has larger sunken beds with wider isles to accommodate carts, two new shade structures that allow for less watering, and all-new wind-resistant sprinklers.

A formal "cemetery" was also added; this area enables us to bury hard-to-propagate seeds for the winter so nature can do the work for us. New gates were also installed with an eye for easy access that can be opened from inside or out — what a concept! All these improvements were on hold while we waited for the new fence to be installed. Now it looks shiny and new, and very modern — in a mountain kind of way.

Thanks to the continuing support from the Rocky Mountain Conservancy our nursery now is a shining example of efficiency and longevity. Come for a visit on Earth Day, April 22, 2017.

Trish Stockton has been a seasonal Biological Science Technician, Greenhouse Operations, at the park greenhouse for the last nine seasons.

Rocky Mountain Conservancy

The Rocky Mountain Conservancy expresses special thanks to the following people for their donations toward projects in Rocky Mountain National Park:

September 20, 2016 – December 13, 2016

803 gifts ~ total donations $316,923

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Park Puzzler Solution

Keeping a low profile
Photo: Conservancy Member Jim Ward

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Nature Notes

Winter is finally shifting into high gear here in Rocky with estremely high winds — we're talking up toward 90 mph winds! Eek! Weak sunlight seeping through the clouds turns the air into tiny flying crystals and pine needles shine silvery bright in the sparse afternoon light.....On Black Friday at Black Lake (10,620 feet), Conservancy member **Marlene Borneman** reported lots of great deals — in fact — FREE! Including but not limited to: deep blue skies, glorious warm sunshine, splendid views, refreshingly crisp breezes, brittle sounds of ice cracking, echos of a woodpecker hard at work... and the best deal of all — the sound of silence.....While hiking up Glacier Gorge on the slopes down from Shelf and Solitude lakes, **Marlene** was delighted to catch her first sighting of the uncommonly seen American three-toed woodpecker, formerly called the Northern three-toed woodpecker. This one was a male with its distinctive bright yellow cap. It was vigorously pecking on a large dead tree, but paused just long enough for her to get a quick snapshot.....**Marlene's** next surprise in late autumn was while hiking in the Indian Peaks with Conservancy member **Cindy Sission**. Right below Blue Lake was a large accumulation of snow with nine ptarmigans going crazy, diving and rolling around in the snow. Were they making snow angles, Cindy asked? Unlikely! The suspicion is that this group of ptarmigans were preparing to molt. Perhaps the recent snowstorm triggered them into action.....Conservancy member and nature photographer **Gene Putney** was thrilled to witness a white-coated long-tailed weasel along the Bear Lake corridor in mid-November. The creature was pure white (see cover picture) and Gene was beside himself with delight, having sought to photograph this elusive creature in its winter coloration for more than 21 years. He could follow its progress as it tunneled under the surface by watching the upward push of snow beneath the surface as it progressed. "Pop Goes the Weasel" came to mind the way the sleek creature tunneled and ... popped! Tunneled and... POPPED! When it did appear, it was visible for less than a second. Then it would pop up somewhere else. It was hard to track it was moving so fast. The shutter speed on the cover picture of this publication was 1/8000 of a second, so, very fast.....Park Naturalist **Kathy Brazelton** and retired RMNP Wildlife Biologist **Gary Miller** also were lucky enough to observe a long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*) in its white winter pelage in late November, but at a lower elevation. Without the snowy context, the sinewy creature was startlingly white against the brown background vegetation as it searched for voles.....Yet another winter weasel story to tell: RMNP Woodcrafter **Cory Johnson** was up at McGregor Falls in late November replacing a rotten signpost. He had just set his pack down when he caught some movement out of the corner of his eye. Sure enough, it was a weasel in its white winter coat and the little black tip on the tail. In the blink of any eye, it ran across the trail and then across the stream and disappeared among the dead trees on the far side.....**Fire managers** from Rocky plan to take advantage of any upcoming wet or winter weather conditions to burn piles of slash generated from several fuels reduction projects and hazard tree removals. The fuels reduction projects are designed to reduce significant accumulations of forest fuels that can generate extreme or problematic fire behavior adjacent to urban interface. Slash from these projects has been cut by park fire crews and contractors during the last two years and are now dry enough to burn. Pile burning operations will only begin when conditions allow and may begin as early as January and continue through April as conditions permit. The piles are located in a variety of locations on the east side of the park, including west of Deer Mountain, around Eagle Cliff Mountain, along upper Fall River Road, near the Mill Creek Ranger Station off of Bear Lake Road, and west of Beaver Meadows Entrance..... In late December, **Conservancy staff** was alerted to a kerfuffle in the woods near the office by a horde of crows and ravens gathering with a racket of calls in a tree nearby. More than 50 of them flew into the tree and the sound was deafening for a good 6 minutes. It's likely that the birds were mobbing an owl that one of them had found, which is not uncommon. Apparently, crows and ravens will harass owls because owls eat them, so a good way to locate owls is to listen for the racket crows make when they find an owl, or a bobcat, or some other predator.....When mid-winter looks bleak, set your sights on your next trip to Rocky — it's a bright light at the end of the tunnel!

During the rut in late September, in Horseshoe Park across from Sheep Lakes, this beleaguered buck came walking down with his harem, trailing the tail of this heavy extension cord about 30-feet behind him. The bull separated from the herd and started rubbing his antlers on the willows — either to try to get the cord off, or just exhibiting normal elk behavior for this time of year. He somehow succeeded in getting the cord off just when a nearby ranger was getting ready to call for assistance. *Photo: Putney Nature Images*

Entrance Passes Now Available for Purchase Online

Visitors can now purchase 1- or 7-day entrance passes online for Rocky using pay.gov. It's easy! Go to www.nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/fees.htm and begin the payment proecess. Your email confirmation is your pass and you can either print this confirmation to show at the entrance station or you can simply show the email confirmation on your mobile device (you may need to take a screen shot of the email since there is spotty cell coverage throughout the park). Signs will be coming in the near future for visitor centers. Check it out!

www.nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/fees.htm