



Rocky Mountain Conservancy

QUARTERLY

Winter 2018

AN EAST SIDE RETROSPECTIVE

by Sybil Barnes

There's a saying you might have heard — "The only thing constant is change." Sometimes I wonder how true that is. When I look up at Longs Peak or the Twin Owls or The Thumb on Prospect Mountain, I can easily imagine that I'm seeing these mountain features for the first time, like the early pioneers of Estes Park who arrived in the late 1800s. And while the geologic skeleton of this area has remained fundamentally unchanged during these last hundred years or so, from a human perspective, there are many places in Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park about which I can't say the same.

This brief Estes Park retrospective begins with Joel and Patsy Estes. Perhaps as a way to escape from the turmoil of the approaching Civil War, Patsy Estes and her family chose to live a hardscrabble life of subsistence ranching in a place with no neighbors. She had followed her husband from a relatively comfortable life in Missouri to this place he had discovered on a hunting trip and thought was beautiful. None of her writings exist so it's impossible to say if she shared that sentiment. Though there was an abundance of wild game and fish to eat, it was a lonely life. The Estes family had only each other and the rare visitor for entertainment. Joel and his sons made trips to Denver to sell meat and skins but Patsy stayed home with the other children. They eventually moved on to New Mexico

after selling their "improved" property with its panoramic views from Longs Peak to Eagle Rock.

Isabella Bird shared many of her feelings through her writing when she arrived from England as one of the first tourists to enjoy the hospitality of Griff Evans and his family. Evans had moved up the hill from Lyons to take over the Estes holdings and was one of the first to recognize the potential of entertaining visitors as a revenue source. Ms. Bird had a horse and was interested in exploring the area, both on horseback and on foot, and, as a visitor, she had few of the responsibilities of providing a home or entertainment. Her writings may have encouraged a certain Irish nobleman to explore this part of Colorado while he was on a hunting trip to Wyoming.

Unfortunately, no known record exists of the guests at Lord Dunraven's hotel on Fish Creek. There are a few photographs which show women "taking the air" in front of the hotel. And it is known that the Irish Earl was not accompanied by his wife or daughters on most of his American trips. He spent his days riding and hunting, and his evenings with food and drink. His visits were mostly made in the summer or fall, but he left a land manager on-site year round.

By the turn of the century, there was a town forming in the open space that had been named Estes' Park by the newspaper editor, William Byers. Ranchers, like the MacGregors and the

(Retrospective continued on page 11)



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Dear Members,

Happy New Year!

It's been a year since I accepted my position as executive director of this organization, and what a year it's been. It's been beautiful watching the seasons change, and seeing the joy on the faces of park visitors as they experience the park, some for the first time and some for the thousandth time. National parks are public lands for all of us, and it's very important to the Conservancy that everyone have the opportunity to enjoy them and steward them.

This fall, our phones rang off the hook for a few weeks, with concerned park lovers wanting to know more about our position on the National Park Service's proposal to raise peak season-admission fees at Rocky Mountain National Park (and 16 other national parks). At Rocky Mountain National Park, the proposed increase would result in an up to 350% cost increase, seasonally, from the current \$20 one-day entry fee to \$70 for a one-time or one-week admission. While some felt that the increased fees might help to support the park and reduce congestion, after careful review, the Conservancy submitted a letter to the NPS opposing the fee increase, considering the actual reduction in park funding and the end result of unethically pricing out visitors who cannot afford the increases.

As the primary philanthropic partner to RMNP, one of the top-five most-visited parks in the system, the Conservancy is aware of the funding and visitation challenges here. However, this massive fee increase is not an appropriate strategy to deal with these challenges. This increased entry price will only serve as a barrier to accessing public lands, keeping lower-income and middle-income people from enjoying the park, and setting the park, and the Conservancy, back years in our investments and efforts to engage new audiences. Of special note: The timing of the seasonal increase (June 1st - October 31st) affects families and students in particular, especially considering that many can only take vacations during peak times when school is out of session. It's critical that parks are accessible to people of all means, not just to those that can afford to pay-to-play.

For those who can afford the increases, the fee increase would likely encourage people to buy the \$80 America the Beautiful Annual Pass instead of Rocky's 1-day pass. It's important to note that if an annual pass that wasn't purchased at RMNP is used for entry at RMNP, the park receives \$0 of that fee-revenue locally. In effect, the end result of this proposed fee increase is that the parks will likely see a substantial drop in fee-revenue that would otherwise have stayed on-site to fund visitor services and amenities.

Many other partners, including gateway community leaders, and the local business community, also expressed their strong opposition to the proposal. This proposed top-down management approach from Washington, D.C. also circumvents the thoughtful local work that RMNP has been putting into developing strategic visitor-use management plans.

The Conservancy is a non-partisan organization, and will always remain so, but advocating for issues that are critical to the public lands that we, and our partners, love and support is mission-true. I hope that you, as our members and fellow park lovers, will continue to engage thoughtfully in these critical issues with us. We look forward to hearing the final decision from the NPS on the proposed increases, and we will share more with you as we learn more. In the meantime, enjoy the quiet of winter in the park, by foot or sled or ski, and I hope to see you on the trails!

Best,

Estee Rivera Murdock



(Photo: Conservancy Member Walt Kaesler)



Photo: NPS/Russell Smith

The Delights of Rocky's West Side in Winter

by Jeffrey Caton

Cascades of ice, skyward views of snowcapped mountains, snowy walks in a silent forest, snowshoeing in the wilderness with a ranger, and cross-country skiing across a frozen valley. Rocky's west side guards the quiet of winter, allowing visitors a personal experience with the park. Excluding a few busy weekends, visitors can often stand alone below Adams Falls listening as the last bit of summer slips away beneath an ice-covered waterfall. Farther up the trail the view opens revealing Mt. Craig framed between canyon walls with East Inlet Creek meandering in the meadow below. A stunning wintertime view!

Some wintertime west side charms

- Enjoy a snowshoe hike on the moderately difficult 2-mile Green Mountain Trail, which leads the well-prepared traveler through a dark spruce forest to Big Meadows and the possibility of a moose wading through the snow.
- For an easier snowshoe trek, the 1-mile Coyote Valley Trail takes hikers across the Colorado River to experience breathtaking views of the jagged Never Summer Mountains towering over miles of the pristine, frozen valley.
- Farther into the park: Stop at the Holzwarth Historic site, which offers an easy trail with an intriguing story. Families can walk one-half mile across the valley to see what remains of the Holzwarth dude ranch that began welcoming visitors in the 1920s.
- Finally, the Colorado River Trail allows one to get close to the headwaters of the majestic Colorado River that flows through nine National Park Service sites. While on the trail, take a moment to reflect on the humble beginnings of such a mighty river that shapes the western United States.

For less rigorous activities on the west side:

- Drive up Trail Ridge Road to view the frozen Kawuneeche Valley
- Discover the joys of a ranger-led snowshoe program
- Kids can earn a Junior Ranger badge and get more personalized attention during this time of year for this significant achievement
- Enjoy the 30-minute park documentary at the Kawuneeche Visitor Center to explore the magic and opportunities of the west side

Open daily, the Kawuneeche Visitor Center offers exhibits and friendly staff to help make your winter experience memorable.

Cover photo credits

(Upper) "Life As a Snowshoe Hare — Yum!" by Putney Nature Images, Longmont, CO; (Lower) "Lake Haiyaha Ice" courtesy of NPS/Jon Olsen

Photos are always appreciated! Scenery, wildlife and wildflowers greatly enhance this publication, so get out there and explore Rocky!

Please send high-resolution images to nancy.wilson@RM-Conservancy.org by April 1 for publication in the 2018 Spring Quarterly.

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.

Why do certain birds like geese and ducks fly in formation? Geese and some other waterfowl fly in a V-formation to save energy with the bird behind flying slightly higher than the one in front to take advantage of the uplift, kind of like surfing a wave. Birds take turns being in front, allowing them to fly long distances. Other birds like raptors, such as the Swainson's hawk, fly in *kettles* (groups of soaring or migrating hawks) using thermal updrafts to save energy, which results in a circular migration pattern. Some seagulls also do this, such as the Franklin's gulls that migrate through Colorado in the spring and fall. Smaller birds, like warblers, fly in large flocks and not in formations for a kind of safety-in-numbers kind of thing. — *Retired RMNP Resources Management Specialist Jeff Connor*

What's happening with those stems with funny bulbous growths on them? Galls – those "abnormal" distensions or bulges we see in the twigs, stems and leaves of plants – are the result of mutual adaptations of plant and insect (usually) or other organism (bacteria, fungi). Here in Rocky, we most commonly notice insect-induced galls on chokecherry, willows, goldenrod and spruce. There are perhaps dozens of variations to gall formation, but here's the basic insect model: An insect inserts her ovipositor into plant tissue and deposits her egg along with some complex secretions. This irritation triggers the plant to protect itself, as it is adapted to do for any wound, by compartmentalizing the affected area through increased cell division and/or cell size, shape and structure (morphogenesis). In this case, the secretions accompanying the egg appear to further direct the increased tissue formation of a shape and size specific to that species of insect, resulting in a unique gall. Meanwhile, (*Galls continued on page 7*)

I've heard that there are white-tailed deer occasionally observed in the park. Is that true? There are several sightings of white-tailed deer in the park each year, most often observed within groups of mule deer. These sightings have occurred for at least the last 15 years. White-tailed deer do hybridize with mule deer, and whether the individuals we are observing are hybrids or pure white-tailed deer is unknown. Ungulates, including deer, can easily travel long distances for seasonal migrations or shifting range use. Although the specific reasons for these white-tailed deer observations is unknown, we believe they are natural occurrences. Expect that they will continue into the future with the confirmation that they do not represent a resource concern for the park. — *RMNP Conservation Biologist Mary Kay Watry*

What are those weird, Styrofoam-like pellets of snow that seem more prevalent in the Rockies than in other snowy regions of the country? The sky is dark and threatening – here comes the precipitation! Wait a minute – it's not rain, it's not sleet, it's not hail, it's not snow ... it actually looks like tiny Styrofoam pellets. This is *graupel*, from the German word meaning "pearl barley." It looks a lot like sleet or small hailstones, but the small white balls are made of snow, not ice. This form of precipitation starts as snowflakes, then those snowflakes grow larger and larger as supercooled water droplets in the clouds begin to freeze on them. The products are soft, light and crushable pellets. Graupel is often called "soft hail." — *RMNP Interpretive Ranger Kathy Brazelton*



(Photo: Suzanne Silverthorn)

Park Inholdings: Partnering to Preserve Park Landscapes

by Suzanne Silverthorn

With the realities of limited federal funding and a lengthy acquisition process, two critical inholding properties within Rocky Mountain National Park could have been sold recently to other private interests.

As Larry Gamble reflects on his 25-year career as the park's Chief of Planning and Project Stewardship, he attributes the swift involvement by the Rocky Mountain Conservancy and its land trust partners as the primary reason these properties are now protected. "In terms of acquisition, there's a misconception that the National Park Service has a right of first refusal to acquire inholdings, and we do not," he explains. "Private property within the park boundary can be bought and sold on the open market just like any other property."

Gamble says the park is grateful for the Conservancy's leadership in facilitating the purchase of the 40-acre Cascade Cottages property, which had been the largest commercial inholding within the park. For Gamble, who was interviewed for this article before his retirement in December, it was a wonderful centennial legacy project and one of the highlights of his tenure.

Likewise, when it became known that a 12.5-acre inholding was for sale in Wild Basin, a private citizen stepped in to purchase the property. Not for personal gratification, but as a conservation buyer. The buyer's intention was to see the land eventually acquired by the park service. This was accomplished recently through the efforts of the Rocky Mountain Conservancy, Wilderness Land Trust and the National Park Trust.

For Esther Rivera Murdock, the Rocky Mountain Conservancy's executive director, the "what if" scenario became all too real. "When you're in the middle of nowhere in the wilderness and you see a big red cabin, it just changes your whole connection with the place and sense of remoteness," she said.

This set into motion a chain of events that enabled the land trust partners to take possession of the property. The two-story, 2,000-square-foot dwelling was removed during the summer, and

the grounds re-wilded to help lower the property value to make it more affordable for the park, and to make the property compatible with the surrounding wilderness area. An appraisal is pending, and the transaction is on the homestretch, according to Rivera. Once the purchase is complete, the park will initiate a process to administratively add acreage to be designated wilderness.

The ability for the Rocky Mountain

Conservancy and its land trust partners to acquire a property on short notice is a huge benefit to the park.

"Otherwise," said Gamble, "if it were just up to us, due to our limited funding, we would literally lose opportunity after opportunity because no landowner is going to wait for us to acquire the money for

As opportunities present themselves, the park service has a strong interest in acquiring land, according to Gamble. The challenge is finding willing sellers.

the transaction. Those opportunities don't come around very often. And those opportunities don't remain open very long."

Being nimble is a role that is well-suited for the Rocky Mountain Conservancy, said Rivera. "The Conservancy is not a land trust. We'll hold a piece of land for a period of time with the intent to transfer the land when the park service or forest service is ready to accept it," she said. "It is never the

Conservancy's intent to keep pieces of land in perpetuity. So, in cases where we think it's going to take longer, for whatever reason, be it an Act of Congress or a longer process, we'll work with a land trust to hold that piece of land."

Opportunities to acquire inholdings in the park are rare, according to Gamble, who has worked on a handful of transactions



Wild Basin structure during the deconstruction
(Photo: Carolyn Kilgore)



View of Wild Basin from the recently acquired property

during his career. Records show only 40 private inholdings remain within the park boundaries today, representing less than one percent of the park's total acreage. There was a time in the park's early years where there were 350 or more private inholdings, according to Gamble. Today, the largest concentration of inholdings is in Moraine Park, which accounts for 21 of the 36 inholdings on the east side of the park. There are four inholdings on the west side. The largest inholding is McGregor Ranch at 1,200 acres. This is the only property in which the park has the right of first refusal to purchase the land if it comes up for sale.

Most of the remaining inholding parcels are small and have been passed on from generation to generation. Gamble has maintained a longstanding relationship with the family members. He describes the arrangement as a peaceful, hands-off co-existence. "We provide them with access, of course, because that's required as part of the park's enabling legislation."

Through the years, Gamble has routinely kept inholders updated when events such as wildfires or floods endanger their property or might affect access. He's also been a resource for questions about repairs and upgrades to inholder properties. A recent exchange with a cabin owner in Moraine Park about a roof replacement, for example, included a suggestion to use a nonreflective material to blend in with the surroundings. "I think most of our inholders are sensitive to the park and they want to do the right thing, and we appreciate that," he said. On the other hand, if a property owner wanted to do something radically different, Gamble acknowledges that would be a concern. "There's always the threat that someone could acquire a parcel and decide to redevelop in a way that's not necessarily compatible with the park."

Development outside the park's boundaries can also raise compatibility issues. A high priority of the Rocky Mountain Conservancy these days is

participating in discussions involving the Fish Hatchery property owned by the town of Estes Park. Located along Fall River Road near the Aspenglen campground, the property has been identified as a development site for workforce housing. Rivera says the Conservancy will be working closely with the Estes Valley Land Trust to propose a conservation easement that would be used to provide a buffer between the park and the new development. "We want to be at the table during this process to ensure the development is thoughtful in recognizing the park's unique neighbor role," she said. Protection of sensitive wildlife habitat, riparian areas and viewsheds will be among the priorities.

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The Rocky Mountain

Rocky Mountain Conservancy land and water protection projects since 1985

2017 Wild Basin property

\$350,000

2016 Cascade Cottages

\$3,200,000

2009 McGowan Tract

\$18,100

2009 Crane Trust Tract (donated)

2008 Owen-McMahon Tract

\$300,000

2007 Kueker Tract

\$600,000

2005 Fahy Tract

\$846,000

2002 Sleepy Hollow

\$315,248

2002 Enos Mills easement

\$54,136

2002 Miller Tract

\$1,020,000

2000 Lily Lake Water Rights

\$60,000

1991 Adams Tract

\$280,000

1998 Roessler Tract

\$415,000

1990 Baldpate Land

\$20,000

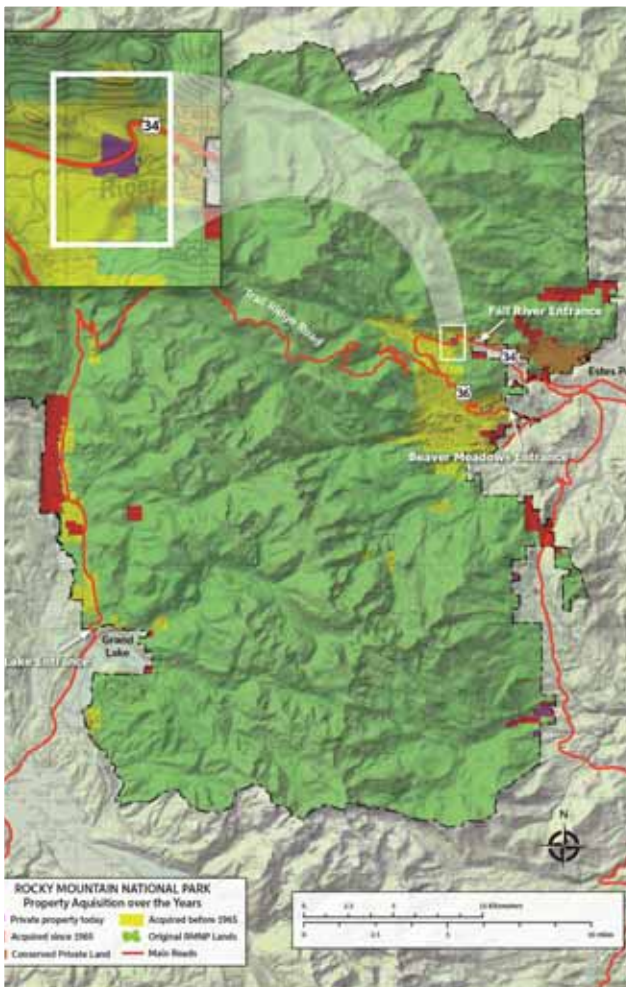
1985 Jennings Tract

\$78,000

Conservancy is in lockstep with the park's acquisition philosophy, according to Rivera. "Sometimes we are the point of entry to the conversation, other times it's the park." Either way, she emphasized that the discussions can only begin with a willing seller or donor. She recommends discussing estate planning options early-on, so expectations and long-term goals can be agreed upon as well as appropriate recognition.

To learn more about estate planning as well as other giving opportunities, visit the Conservancy's website at RMConservancy.org, or call us directly at 970-586-0108.

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.



Map of property acquired by the Rocky Mountain Conservancy for RMNP over the years, as depicted just before the 40-acre Cascade Cottage parcel was acquired, and not including the recently acquired Wild Basin property.



The Conservancy Welcomes Rosemary Truman, 2018 Winter Olson Family Fellow

Since 2006, Alan and Carol-Ann Olson of Boulder, Colorado, have donated to the Rocky Mountain Conservancy to fund two fellows each year with the Rocky Mountain Conservancy's Field Institute.

Rosemary fell in love with Rocky Mountain National Park as a child. Her grandparents owned a home in Estes Park and every summer she attended day camp at the YMCA of the Rockies. As a young adult, she developed a deeper appreciation for the Rocky Mountains during her three summers working at that very same camp. The majority of her spare time was spent hiking, camping and exploring Rocky Mountain National Park.

During this time it became evident that she wanted to spend her life exploring, preserving and learning about the beautiful lands in this country. It is her hope that this fellowship opportunity with the Conservancy will be the beginning of a career doing just that.

Rosemary went to college at Truman State University in Kirksville, MO. She graduated in May, 2015, with a B.A. in psychology and a minor in disability studies. Since graduating, Rosemary spent two years living and working seasonally in Colorado in Denver, Estes Park and Aspen. Most recently, she was living in Bar Harbor, Maine, and then Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In these places her jobs included teaching outdoor education and being a tour guide.

Rosemary loves to travel, work in beautiful places, and educate others. After this education experience ends in late May, she hopes to work for an organization with an environmentally related cause. Going back to school to earn her master's degree is another option on the horizon, once she decides which path to follow that would

best align with her career goals and her interests. As an Olson Family fellow, Rosemary will be involved leading snowshoe walks, kids and family activities

and custom programs. She will also be helping out behind-the-scenes to learn about nonprofit management, community outreach and program planning.



Featured Field Institute Programs

Here's what's happening the next few months — visit our website to learn more about these outdoor adventures in the park!

Avalanche Awareness & Outdoor Safety in Winter

February 9

Winter Ecology: A Snowshoeing Trek for Kids & Families

February 10, 24; March 10, 31

Photographing Winter Landscapes

March 9 – 11

Coyotes: Song Dogs of the West

March 24

Fire in Ecosystems: Friend or Foe

April 14

Beginning Watercolor for the Nature Enthusiast

April 28

North with the Spring: Bird Migration

April 28

(Ask Nancy: Galls continued from page 3)

within the plant, the larva emerges from the egg and takes advantage of the plant's tough, often fibrous "bomb shelter" gall. (Well, maybe not exactly a bomb shelter — birds and rodents sometimes feed on the galls for a meat-and-vegetable meal). Besides providing shelter, the gall serves as a generously stocked pantry for the larva to feed, grow and metamorphose to an adult. The new adult chews its way out of the gall to begin the cycle again — in some cases, returning the favor to its plant benefactor as a pollinator for that species.

Word of the day: Cecidiology — the study of plant galls

Common galls visitors may notice in the park include:

- On spruce, sometimes Douglas fir** — pineapple-shaped growth on twig tip, turns brown in fall, caused by an adelgid (aphid-like insect)
- On chokecherry** — "poop on a stick" caused by a fungus; "pimples" on leaves, caused by a mite
- On aspen** — bulbous swelling on current-year twig, caused by a fly
- On willows** — cluster of round galls on leaves, caused by a sawfly; twig tip resembling pinecone, caused by a midge

An excellent reference is Colorado State University Extension Bulletin 506A, *Insects that Feed on Colorado Trees and Shrubs* by Crenshaw, Leatherman and Kondratieff.



Insect gall on sagebrush
(Photo: Member Marlene Borneman)

Park Puzzler

by RM Conservancy Member Joel Kaplow

Across

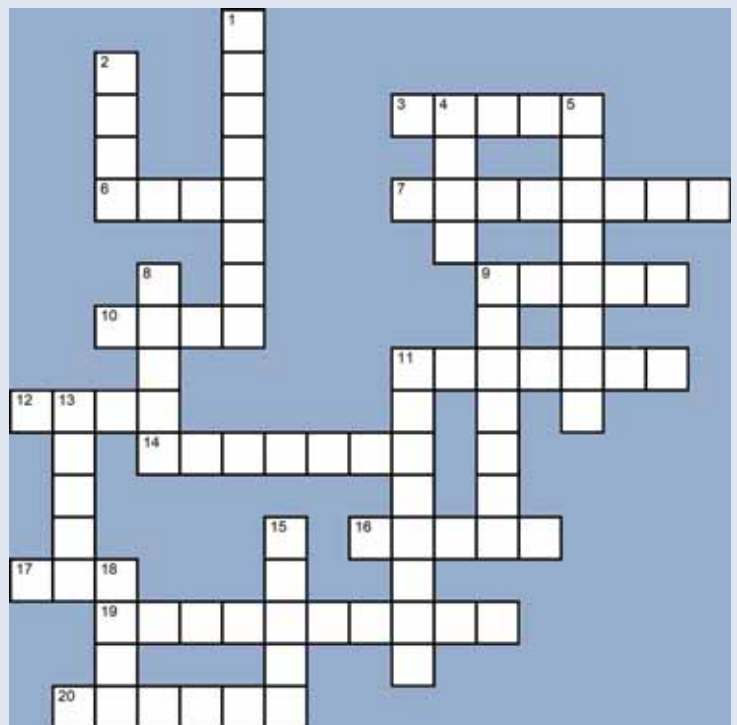
- 3 For new construction, RMNP has adopted the practice of "naturalistic design" — the use of local materials to blend in with surroundings, e.g., rock used instead of brick, or a footbridge made with logs the same diameter as the surrounding ____.
- 6 Trail Ridge Road was built between 1926 and 1932, well before the '60s when green-mindedness arose, but great pains were taken to reduce any impact on the surrounding tundra. Work was done only ____ months each year, due to the harsh conditions up there.
- 7 For a park structure to be listed in the National Register of ____ Places, it must be considered significant in either architecture, engineering, archeology or culture.
- 9 The ____ Ditch, slicing across the east flank of Rocky's Never Summer Range, predates the park by 20 years. It grabs water from the west side of the Divide and channels it over La Poudre Pass, where it enters the Cache La Poudre River.
- 10 The first auto route to traverse RMNP was ____ River Road, built between 1913 and 1920. It was so un-user-friendly, the whole eastern section was bypassed by Trail Ridge Road shortly thereafter.
- 11 Due to WWII, U.S. national parks didn't see a lot of maintenance, and things fell into disrepair. A 10-year campaign to give them a face-lift was put in place, looking to finish by the NPS' 50th anniversary in 1966. The project was dubbed "____ 66."
- 12 Abner Sprague's property became Stead's Ranch in 1900, situated on the east end of Moraine Park. It eventually boasted a swimming pool, rodeo grounds, stables, guest houses, hotel and a ____ course.
- 14 As of January 3, the Thomas Fire, California's largest ever, had destroyed 1,063 structures and blackened 440 square miles — an area ____ square miles larger than all of RMNP!
- 16 Enos Mills married nature guide Esther Burnell in 1918. After Enos died in 1922, she took over managing the ____ Peak Inn.
- 17 The park's ____ Trail is named for the tribe that summered in the future-RMNP area up until the late 1700s.
- 19 In 1928, NPS women were not allowed to carry the title of "ranger." So the well-credentialed Margaret Fuller Boos, holding a Ph.D. in geology, was given the title of "ranger- ____" when hired by Roger Toll.
- 20 "We can never have enough of ____." — Henry David Thoreau

Down

- 1 The park's snowplow crew gets into gear every spring, targeting ____ Day for the opening of Trail Ridge Road.
- 2 What is a baby moose called?
- 4 Back in the day, tourists could access Grand Canyon, Yosemite and Yellowstone

national parks by ____, unlike Rocky, which has always been visited by folks on foot, horseback or by motor vehicle.

- 5 Did you know that Rocky has two "sisters"? Tusheti National Park in the country of Georgia, and Tatra National Park, which straddles Poland and ____.
- 8 Surprisingly, the second national park to be established in North America is ____ National Park in Alberta, Canada, born in 1885, three years after Yellowstone.
- 9 What's a baby Canada goose called?
- 11 Technically, Yellowstone National Park is not the oldest in the world — by nearly 100 years. Bogd Khan Uul National Park became a "protected area" waaay back in 1788. It's located south of Ulan Bator, ____.
- 13 What's a baby owl called?
- 15 If you took all of Rocky's trails and laid them end to end, you'd have a trail over ____-hundred miles long!
- 18 Enos and Esther Mills became parents to baby Edna in 1919. But due to a typo on her birth certificate, she went by a different name for most of her life. What did she call herself?





Rocky Mountain Network field crew monitoring stream habitat on the upper Colorado River in 2013

(Photo: NPS/W. Schweiger)

Checking Rocky's Vital Signs: Rocky Mountain Network Science in the Park

by Sonya Daw, science writer/editor with the Rocky Mountain Inventory and Monitoring Network

National parks are the guardians of our unique American natural and cultural history. But perhaps more than ever before, parks exist in a rapidly changing landscape. Urban, suburban and rural areas are increasingly developed. Invasive, exotic species are replacing native species. Air and water pollution remain a problem. Visitor-use of parks is increasing, and the climate is changing. All of these factors can impact the natural web of life, which leads us to ask several questions. How healthy are our parks? How are they changing? And, how can we best manage and protect them?



Network staff monitor a fen-plant community near Haynack Lakes in 2007.

(Photo: NPS/W. Schweiger)

To answer these questions, the National Park Service clustered parks into 32 Inventory and Monitoring Networks. Each network comprises a group of parks with similar geographic and natural resource characteristics served by a small team of Network-level scientists. The Rocky Mountain Network includes Rocky Mountain National Park, as well as five other park units all located within the central and southern Rocky Mountain Cordillera. Since 2007, Network scientists have been collaborating with park-based scientists, resource managers, and other cooperators to monitor natural resources, specifically “vital signs,” within each of these national park units. “Vital signs” are resources that serve as red flags if conditions deteriorate. Network monitoring supports park managers’ ability to make science-based management decisions by tracking the vital signs of park health over the long term.

What Do We Monitor in Rocky Mountain National Park?

Wetland Ecological Integrity

Rocky has abundant wetlands. From wet meadows and fens (peatland), to riparian wetlands, these biodiversity hotspots are important to myriad species. Migratory birds, like the Wilson’s warbler and Lincoln’s sparrow, eat, nest and shelter in wetlands. Amphibians, like the chorus frog and boreal toad, need wetlands to reproduce. Elk dine on wetland plants. Yet wetlands are also very sensitive to stress. Rapid climate change, groundwater changes, and invasive exotic plants can threaten wetlands. Heavy browsing by elk and moose, espe-

cially in low-elevation riparian wetlands, has impacted native willows, cottonwoods and understory plants. The dramatic decline of beaver in the park over the last two or three decades has also taken a toll on wetland integrity. Moose, introduced west of the park, are now using wetlands on both sides of the Continental Divide.

In our efforts, we monitor wetland health park-wide to learn how these biologically rich ecosystems function and respond to stresses. We assess wetland health in the park using a variety of indicators. We record which plants grow in the wetlands, and whether invasive exotic plants are present. We count the number of willow stems in each site, and record if the plants are in good or stressed condition. We measure groundwater level as well as human disturbance in and around the site. We also record the presence and habitat-use of elk, moose and a keystone wetland species — beaver. Water captured behind beaver dams can dramatically recharge groundwater levels, influencing, in turn, the entire wetland community.

Wetland monitoring has many potential benefits for the park. Understanding wetland conditions helps managers identify the most pristine sites for protection as well as prioritizing degraded sites for restoration. Surveys between 2007 and 2010, for example, detected invasive cattails in some park wetlands. Wetland monitoring also helps identify how changing snow-pack, stream flows, and groundwater patterns affect the park’s wetlands. Another application of this kind of monitoring is to inform park managers how wetlands are responding to their efforts to reduce elk overuse of this habitat type.

Alpine Communities

Visitors delight in the views atop Rocky's high mountain peaks. On these wind-swept slopes above tree line, alpine plants must adapt to extreme wind, temperature, snow, ice, and intense solar radiation. To do this, these robust plants are shorter, grow frugally, and bear leaves resistant to freeze-damage and desiccation. Alpine communities can also serve as "climate change refugia," providing areas of habitat that may provide refuge for high-elevation species as the climate changes. Predictions are for alpine temperatures to moderate and snowpack to decrease. This could lead to invasion by subalpine plants that outcompete alpine plants in the absence of heavy snowpack and extreme temperatures. Alpine communities are also sensitive to heavy visitor-use, air pollution, and overuse by animals, such as elk. The park monitors alpine communities because of their value to visitors and because of their vulnerability to the unique multiple stresses at a park like Rocky. Our sites are included in the international GLORIA research network (Global Observation Research Initiative in Alpine Environments) of 130+ alpine monitoring sites worldwide. As temperatures increase, evidence from GLORIA sites indicates that trees and other subalpine species are, in fact, invading alpine communities.

We assess alpine community health by tracking native plants growing in our plots, and documenting invasive exotic plants that may have arrived or spread. We are particularly interested in whether trees — and which species — may be encroaching on the alpine. We also measure soil temperatures at different elevations and aspects (direction the slope faces). From this, we can document changes in the growing season and periods of snow cover, both important determinants of plant communities.



Rocky Mountain network field crew/botanists monitoring the alpine plant community in 2011 with the Never Summer Range in the background. (Photo: NPS)

Park managers can use this information to compare the condition of Rocky's highly visited alpine with conditions in less-visited alpine habitats in neighboring parks. One interesting finding from this work is the relatively sparse encroachment by invasive plant species, even though thousands of visitors explore Rocky's alpine slopes each year.

Stream Ecological Integrity

Rocky's streams are vital resources. They anchor the hydrology (water cycle) of the park, recycle nutrients like carbon, and provide habitat for wildlife. Visitors fish and recreate along Rocky's pristine streams. However, streams are sensitive to a variety of stressors. Excessive nutrients, sediment and air pollution degrade them. Climate change warms streams and lowers flow by shrinking the snowpack that feeds them, potentially affecting fish and invertebrates. Because streams signal the effects of multiple stressors, we monitor their status and long-term trends to inform park resource managers.

We assess stream health in several ways. We measure water chemistry, like pH and nitrogen concentration values, that affect the plants and animals in streams. We measure the physical structure in and around streams that functions as fish and aquatic insect habitat, like woody debris and the size of sand and cobble along the streambed. Because algae and aquatic insect communities respond to cumulative human and natural disturbances, we also monitor them as indicators of stream health.

Stream monitoring information is currently being applied to the management of the Grand Ditch breach on the west side of the park. Several monitoring sites were purposely placed on the upper Colorado River, above and below the site of the breach. Monitoring here, coupled with interpretation from park staff, will help track changes potentially due to the breach, plan ongoing restoration, and measure the effectiveness of this work. We are also able to place the effects of the breach in the context of our larger sample of streams spread across the park.

Snow Chemistry

High mountain snowpack feeds Rocky's streams. Unfortunately, it also acts like a collection basket for air pollution. Particles of nitrate, ammonium, sulfate and mercury enter falling snow and concentrate in the snowpack. Over the spring and summer, these pollutants find their way into Rocky's streams as snows melt,



Snow chemistry sampling in Rocky in 2015 (Photo: USGS)

affecting downstream ecosystems and species. Each winter we support U.S. Geological Survey scientists sampling snowpack chemistry. This helps track current conditions and long-term trends.

In Rocky's high mountain snowpack, our partners test for air pollutants, such as nitrate, ammonium and sulfate, as well as total mercury concentration. They also measure the snow depth and the amount of water contained in the snowpack to help us understand the concentration of pollutants in water (as well as the total amount of pollutants).

Snow chemistry monitoring has shown a decrease in some pollutants over time (such as sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide), likely associated with pollution controls and regulations under the Clean Air Act. This is not true for all pollutants. Ammonium deposition and concentrations in snowpack have been trending upward. For example, ammonium can cause damage to foliage, alter plant productivity and growth, decrease drought and frost tolerance, and harm development of healthy root systems.

Learn More

Park managers can use scientifically credible, long-term monitoring data to stay abreast of changes in the park's health, and make better-informed decisions about its management. For more information about the inventory and monitoring work done in Rocky and in five other park units, please visit <https://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/romn/index.cfm>.

(Retrospective continued from page 1)

McCreerys, and the James and Hondius families, had become accustomed to the conveniences of a general store and weekly mail delivery. More and more dudes were discovering the delights of a summer spent in the cool mountains. Shops selling souvenir photographs were opening at the confluence of the Big Thompson and Fall River in the space between Elkhorn Lodge and the MacGregor holdings. Horses and hiking were the main means of transportation and a pleasant way to explore the area.

Other families, including the Spragues and the Chapmans, had ventured farther west and created another small community in what they called Willow Park (now called Moraine Park). Private cabins were built on the eastern hillside with sweeping views of the meadow between the moraines. Fish were abundant in the Big Thompson River, and Frank Bartholf grazed his cattle farther to the south off what would later become the Bear Lake Road. It is these pioneers that laid the foundations of tourism in Rocky Mountain National Park, which later would become the greatest draw into this region.

But back to our story.

Flora Stanley first came to Estes Park with her husband in 1909. He saw the potential for growth and development as a summer tourist destination. He had the discretionary income to build a fine hotel and create an infrastructure of utilities for the town that had been platted by Abner Sprague and was being marketed by Loveland businessman C.H. Bond, and others. The hotel needed electric lights and indoor plumbing, so Stanley funded a power plant and a sewage system which would serve the entire village. He also donated some of his property for public use as a community park and gathering place. Flora had vision problems, so she was unable to comment on the view. She was probably delighted that her husband's respiratory problems were solved by spending summers in the mountains, but possibly just as happy to return to Maine for nine

months of the year.

When Esther Burnell and her sister Elizabeth came west on a summer vacation, they discovered another settlement in the Tahosa Valley at the base of Longs Peak. The young women were hired to be nature guides at Enos Mills' lodge, the Longs Peak Inn. After a summer spent climbing mountains and identifying wildflowers, Elizabeth went to California to continue her education, and Esther stayed to homestead property on the Fall River Road. She married Enos and they welcomed a daughter, Enda, into the world. After Enos' untimely death, Esther and Enda

"... it is some comfort to think that the mountains will remain, no matter what change occurs, human-caused or otherwise."

continued his legacy by running the inn and ensuring that his nature writings stayed in print and that his environmental and ecological philosophies were nurtured through the 20th century.

Growth of the town of Estes Park has always been limited by the topography of the area. Many people wanted to visit during the summer but not many wanted to spend a windy and cold winter here. That underwent a dramatic shift with the construction of the Alva B. Adams Tunnel which brought water from the wetter west side to the plains of eastern Colorado. When Bertha Ramey's family moved to Estes Park from Lyons to offer insurance and related services to the businesses and homeowners, the land where the Estes family had settled was still a meadow with the Big Thompson River meandering through it. By 1950, that property had been flooded by a reservoir called Lake Estes. Now, when visitors make the last turn down Park Hill, they see water reflecting the mountain ranges beyond.



Estes Park townsite circa 1920

(Photo: Clatworthy collection, handcolored by Cheryl Pennington)

Also by the 1950s, a few hundred people had decided to spend the winter months in Estes Park. Many of them worked for the National Park Service. Others spent the slower months getting their tourist accommodations ready for the next season. By the 1970s, young businesspeople were seeing the potential for attracting visitors all year round. Though the main business district of the town was still only three blocks long, development had reached across all the flat spaces and was beginning to creep up the sides of the surrounding mountains.

Indeed, change is very apparent when viewed from this angle. But it is some comfort to think that the mountains will remain, no matter what change occurs, human-caused or otherwise. In another hundred years or a thousand years, or even a hundred thousand years, the approach to Estes Park will still begin in a valley and rise to breathtaking heights before gliding down to open space surrounded by mountains. And the strains of Cowboy Brad's song, "We Live in Paradise" might possibly be heard in the wind.

Sybil Barnes has been a researcher, editor, proofreader or contributor to many books on the history of Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park. Over the last 45 years, she has owned a bookstore, served as local history librarian at the Estes Valley Public Library, been a part-time librarian at RMNP, written newspaper articles and authored Estes Park: Images of America.



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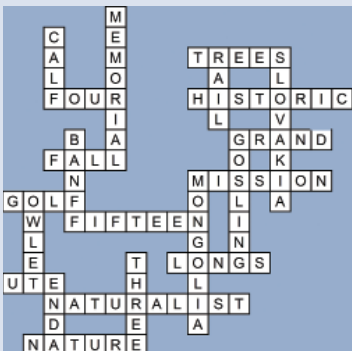
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And who hasn't had a day like this?
(Photo: Conservancy Member Jim Ward)

Nature Notes

Winter is here, with the winds to prove it, but snow has been sparse on both the east and the west sides of the park so far. Unseasonably warm temperatures alternate with spells of bitter cold which keeps us all on our toes. Conservancy Director of Donor Relations **Julie Klett** watched a red-tailed hawk swoop to the ground to nab a small vole-like creature just outside the Conservancy's membership office window. The hawk stayed in the vicinity for quite a while, keeping a sharp eye out for bonus appetizers. Conservancy member **Marlene Borneman** reported that during a Thanksgiving wander in Little Horseshoe Park something on the ground caught her eye. She was surprised to see a common dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*, in bloom! She then spotted several more. This was the end of November and she remembered that flower guides did indicate that these plants can bloom through October. But then she looked down at her attire: no gloves, no warm woolly hat, no layers upon layers of warm clothing. It could definitely be called warm on these south slopes of Little Horseshoe meadows... And then a few days later, a hiking friend sent her a photo of a blue aster in bloom that she'd seen on a recent walk. And while it's true that these flowers of the sunflower family are hardy and adaptable, it was startling to see another potential harbinger of things to come in Rocky. Marlene also participated in the Winter Bird Count the first week of January, and when she was hiking along Lumpy Ridge area, much to her delight, she caught her first sighting of a northern pygmy owl! It was perched

high in a bare aspen tree, most likely scanning the area for its next meal. At the end of November, RMNP Landscape Architect **Hanem Abouelezz** noted that there had been some enormous mule deer bucks seen along the forested section of Bear Lake Road just before Moraine Park. As it was the end of the rut for mule deer, it was clear that some of the bucks had been through the wringer, with roughed-up hair and evidence of damage.



Depending on environmental temperature and humidity, ice crystals can develop from the initial hexagonal prism into numerous symmetric shapes, including columns (like these), needles, plates and dendrites.
(Photo: Kent Carlson)

Earlier in November, Hanem was lucky to see two large bucks, antlers locked, one pushing the other down a hillside. It was apparent that the buck on the uphill side of the fight was winning the struggle. All of a sudden the buck on the downhill side called it quits, unlocked his antlers, whirled 180 degrees and dashed off. RMNP Interpretive Ranger **Kathy Brazelton** spotted a wee weasel near the Beaver Meadows Entrance in early January — it was *quite* easy to see, as it had turned white when there was no snow to camouflage it. The color change in its coat is driven by the amount of daily sunlight, or photoperiod. It *will* turn white, no matter what the temperature or amount of snowpack. Questions we must ask: As we see more and more effects of our changing climate, what will befall our winter friends with color-changing properties, like weasel, snowshoe hares, and ptarmigans? In mid-December, Conservancy Finance Director **Sarah Rhode** was working at the office in the late afternoon when **Annie**, the office dog, started making the strangest whining noises in the accounting office. A glance to the window revealed a healthy-looking bobcat sitting right along the office building. Sarah and some of the other Conservancy staff were delighted to watch it close-up until it walked toward a nearby rocky ledge, giving one over-the-shoulder gaze at its audience before moseying away. Speaking of office dogs, the Conservancy's Field Institute office dog, **Henry**, has been doing a commendable job collecting the plethora of deer bones that were scattered by a mysterious predator throughout the Field Institute property. Startled Conservation Corps manager **Geoff Elliot** dodged a daring bighorn ram that darted across the road as Geoff was driving to work from Glen Haven. Hooray for Geoff's speedy reaction time! The ram then scaled the roadside cliff without appearing to notice the car that nearly hit it. Take heart — the days are getting longer again!



It's the season for the shedding of antlers for mule deer. This shedding process takes two to three weeks to complete, while the regeneration takes an entire summer to complete — before the cycle starts all over again. (Photo: Conservancy Retail Staff Member Sherry Caldwell)