



PutneyNatureImages | Summer Magnificence



QUARTERLY

Summer | 2022

Connecting With Place

by Madeline Thayer



Look Inside

LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Without the right education about a place, we are all capable of making bad choices, despite our good intentions.

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I spent the better part of my childhood with a view of the Twin Sisters practically out my back window and within walking distance of the nearest entry point to Rocky Mountain National Park.

My earliest memories in the park are comprised of running along dusty trails among budding aspens long before you had to get up at 4 a.m. to get a parking spot at Glacier Gorge or the existence of a Timed-Entry System.

When I was in elementary school, we took a class trip to the park. I'm sure we were a sight to be seen — a discombobulated, complaining gaggle of second graders being herded up to Alberta Falls. The only thing I remember about that trip was the pride I felt when my dad, a park ranger at the time, came hiking down the trail, and I barreled through the throngs of my classmates to give him a hug and proudly introduce him and his job to my friends.

A few summers later, my mom and I had a weekly hiking date with some family friends who happened to have a daughter my own age, and I learned the joys of exploring and sharing nature with a best friend. That was the summer

that Rocky lost one of its rangers, Jeff Christensen, to a fall into a cirque between Ypsilon Mountain and Mount Chiquita. I remember sitting on the hood of my dad's car at the Backcountry Office one evening at dusk before Jeff had been found. My dad was working late, helping to coordinate search efforts, and at eleven years old, I was beginning to understand the incredible power and danger that existed alongside these beautiful mountains.

In the years that followed, I entered a phase of indifference to the peaks and high country surrounding me. Swept up in the teenage thrills of middle and high school, I spent my time focusing on new hobbies, exploring friendships and relationships, and chronicling it all in a series of journals now relegated to my attic.

But the mountains remained, and eventually I returned to them. By the time I graduated from high school, I was galivanting off for 20-mile-long adventures in the backcountry with my friends, returning late in the afternoon, moderately banged up,

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about a place, we are all
capable of making bad
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good intentions.*



A Message from our Executive Director



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Dear Friends,

Happy summer in the Rockies! Despite the annual chaos of another season kick-off in the park, I escaped for a quick trip to Oregon for my daughter's birthday weekend where we rafted for three days on the Rogue River, one of the original Wild and Scenic rivers designated in 1968. I was delighted to find that I can't remember the last time I've felt so entirely out of my element in nature. Other than the elk, the flora and fauna in the lush environment had me charmed and befuddled for days and wishing I had brought along a field guide, since we had no cell phone service to query all our creature questions.

On the last night of the trip, we set-up in a campsite with pools of water teeming with orange-ish newts. Recalling the ever-elusive, and entirely alien-looking salamanders of Lily Lake, I reached down and scooped one up and encouraged my husband (he declined) to pet its unexpectedly rough skin before gently returning it to the pool. My daughter bounded over a few minutes later to tell me that she had found some sort of water lizard over yonder and caught it. Overhearing us, our guide came rushing over in horror to let us know that the newts we were handling so cavalierly were deadly toxic. I asked her if she meant that they had salmonella, while wandering over to the soap to scrub our hands, and she clarified, that because they were toxic to ingest, I probably need not worry too much if we made sure we got our hands really clean.

We emerged the next day, newts largely forgotten and still alive. I Googled up the newts, and lo and behold, the rough-skinned newt of Oregon is indeed quite toxic, though fortunately, only if ingested. Upon hearing my list of newt facts, my husband said, "You two are exactly like the tourists in Rocky with the elk." And he's right! Why would we touch any animal, much less one we couldn't even name? We were "bad" tourists, even with the best of intentions.

Now, as the park swells to its maximum capacity of visitors daily, I've been thinking about that epiphany every time I see a tourist behaving poorly, standing too close to an elk for a selfie, plucking a flower, standing too close to a precarious drop-off for a photo, feeding a chipmunk a cookie. Without the right education about a place, we are all capable of making bad choices, despite our good intentions.

Perhaps next time you see visitors gone amok in nature you'll also think of a time that you made a poor or uninformed choice – maybe it will help to be a little more patient and gently educate others how to be good stewards to these remarkable places we are charged with stewarding together.

Happy hiking,



Estee Rivera Murdock

Estee Rivera Murdock

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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.

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For ALL Your RMNP Memorabilia

Along Peak View Drive on the NE corner of Prospect Mountain Drive in Estes Park, land on two sides is designated as owned by RMNP on Larimer County property maps. Why does the park own land there?

The National Park Service does not manage land along Peak View Drive in Estes Park. Public lands in Larimer County are managed by Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Forest Service, and the State of Colorado, to name a few of the agencies. There are often errors in the Larimer County Assessor's records for federally-managed parcels, and many of these parcels are currently erroneously tagged with ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK SERVICE. We have been working with Larimer County Assessor Bob Overbeck and his staff to correct the errors. — *RMNP Park Planner Cheri Yost*

Is it advisable for residents to put out bird feeders and birdbaths at this time with the bird flu issues?

It's gratifying to see folks being willing to help counter this very serious outbreak of deadly bird flu. The most serious problems occur in domestic fowl. Relative to wild birds, the present strain (H5N1) has been extremely rare in species that are typically the focus of backyard attractants in summer (e.g., finches, sparrows, hummingbirds). Geese, ducks, other water and shore birds, corvids (e.g., crows, magpies, jays) and raptors are wild species most susceptible to this deadly virus. In general, then, removing the typical bird attractants will have a negligible benefit in combatting bird flu at this time. Exceptions: 1) if domestic poultry are nearby, remove attractants; 2) avoid things that would cause magpies, jays, or crows to congregate. I urge folks to stay tuned to this issue — as we should have learned by now, viruses do mutate rapidly and the present situation is no guarantee that a strain more virulent to songbirds won't emerge. And, of course, because there are other diseases that can be transmitted when birds congregate, it is important that feeders be kept very clean. Finally, for the sake of our bears, feeders must be taken down when unattended, certainly at night, unless completely and unflinchingly out of the reach of bears. — *Retired RMNP Wildlife Biologist Gary Miller*

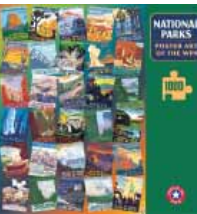
I saw a young male elk in velvet with one antler developing normally and the other strangely twisted and angling downward. Will this elk have this anomaly for its entire life?

USUALLY, the cause of a deformed antler is from damage occurring during its soft, fast-growing velvet stage. The following year's antler will then develop normally. I suspect that's likely the case here. He might have gotten the soft antler tangled up in fencing, netting or other trappings of our residential areas. Much more rare would be a genetic mutation causing such a deformity and that would repeat with each year's antler. Of course, there would be a low likelihood of that bull passing on that mutation. Some readers may recall the bull elk folks nicknamed "Unicorn" whose antler came straight out over its head instead of to the side. He was around for a number of years, showing the same deformity. — *Retired RMNP Wildlife Biologist Gary Miller*



BLACK BEAR ENAMEL MUG

Perfect for any camping trip, this enamel mug with black bear graphics is dishwasher safe. Hand-made by craftspeople in Poland. 3" tall and 3.5" wide at rim. Price: \$27.99; **Member Price: \$23.79**



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posters in the WPA style are featured on this colorful and historic 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle. Completed puzzle dimensions: 17.25" x 26.5." Made in the U.S.A. Price: \$24.99; **Member Price: \$21.24**



STAINLESS STEEL WATER BOTTLE — RMNP MAP

Lightweight, stainless, with no plastic aftertaste, this sturdy 25-ounce bottle will serve you well for many years on many adventures. Available in black or blue; hand wash only. Price: \$29.95; **Member Price: \$25.46**



LEATHER PATCH CAP

Simple, but classy, this hat is minimally decorated but has all the right feels: lightweight, sturdy, and ready for the next hike. Color: Olive.

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More memorabilia at RMConservancy.org or Call 970-586-0121 to order.

Fall River Entrance in 2018 clearly exhibiting the need for an expansion of the entrance station.



by Daniel Lawson,
RMNP Deputy
Facility Manager

Fall River Entrance Station to Receive Face Lift in Late Summer

The current buildings were designed and constructed as part of the National Park Service's "Mission 66" program.

Later this summer, construction will begin on a new and improved entrance station at the Fall River Entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park. This much needed project has been in the works for more than a decade, and the construction phase will be frustrating for visitors – but the detours and delays will all be worth it in the end!

This will not be the first time this entrance station has been removed, replaced or constructed in the park's history. In fact, when the project is complete, it will be the fifth version of an entrance station in the Fall River corridor. It may be hard to believe, but one earlier iteration was located on the western edge of Horseshoe Park. The park's entrance road even traveled between Sheep Lakes for a time.

Another fun fact: The current entrance station was originally designed to be operated only during the summer season. As such, the two middle kiosks were designed to be portable and were built on skids. Park crews would simply move the kiosks out of the way each winter to give better access for the snowplows. Can you imagine the park doing that today?

We've come a long way since the current entrance station was built in the 1960s, but some things, like a busy entrance station with long lines, haven't changed. These once adequate facilities have exceeded their useful design life and no longer meet the safety or operational needs of the park or its many visitors. The current buildings were designed and constructed as part of the National Park Service's "Mission 66" program. Mission 66 was a nationwide effort to modernize park facilities in the face of rapidly increasing visitation and aging infrastructure.

If this all sounds familiar, it may be because there is a similar program going on in the National Park Service today. The Great American Outdoors Act was passed by Congress in 2020. This bipartisan effort is providing 1.9 billion dollars in annual funding to modernize facilities and address the significant maintenance backlog in our national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, recreation areas, and American Indian Schools. At Rocky, these funds are being used to fund millions of dollars in utility replacement work in Park Headquarters and the Moraine Park Campground. To learn more about

Figure 1: Fall River Entrance Station in Horseshoe Park, circa 1920.



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Partner - \$5,000 - \$9,999

Did you know that many businesses and brands generously support the Rocky Mountain Conservancy? Each company gives in unique ways, both financially and in-kind, and you can see those partners highlighted at RMConservancy.org/corporate-partner. This quarter's new partners shown here.



To learn more about joining the Conservancy's Corporate Partner program, please contact our Philanthropy department at (970) 586-0108.

Leader - \$10,000 - \$24,999



this program, visit: <https://www.doi.gov/gaoa>.

Many of the facilities constructed during the Mission 66 era in Rocky need upgrading and attention after well over 50 years of serving the park's visitors. The Fall River Entrance is no exception. This project will replace the entrance station and all three kiosks with new buildings. An additional entrance lane will be added, and the roadway will

be widened to the park boundary to help alleviate congestion at the entrance. In addition, a new entrance sign will welcome future generations of park visitors to Rocky. Hopefully, this will be the last time the park entrance changes location or needs a major upgrade, at least for a long while. And no, the kiosks aren't designed to be moveable this time around.



Figure 2: Fall River Entrance, circa 1940

Support Rocky's resource management programs by donating to the Rocky Mountain Conservancy at RMConservancy.org, or call 970-586-0108

Road tube counters at Deer Ridge Junction. Road tubes are attached to counters that record time-stamped vehicle counts, direction of travel, and speed.



by Paige Lambert,
Continental Divide
Research Learning Center

How Visitor Use Monitoring Supports Adaptive Management in Rocky Mountain National Park

Image 1: RMNP's 2022 Visitor-Use Monitoring Team (left to right): Anna Bornstein, Keily Pineda, MacKenzie Conant, and Frank Peplowski.



Image 2: Road tube counters at the Grand Lake Entrance Station. Road tubes are attached to counter.



This summer, Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) is implementing the third year of a Timed-Entry Permit System. Timed entry is one of several temporary, pilot strategies RMNP has utilized since 2016 to address the impact of increasing visitation. The goals of these strategies are to improve visitor and staff safety, resource protection, visitor experience, and operational capacity.

RMNP makes management decisions using “Adaptive Management” — an approach that continually incorporates the most recent and relevant scientific information into actions and policies. To determine if timed entry helps achieve management goals, the Continental Divide Research Learning Center (CDRLC) monitors various elements of visitor use, including traffic patterns, trail-use patterns, visitor impact to natural resources, and human encounter rates along trail corridors.

Monitoring provides park managers with data used to make real-time improvements to the current Timed-Entry system and supports the park's long range visitor-use planning efforts.

Visitor-use monitoring is a collaborative effort between CDRLC staff, NPS management specialists, research partners, the NPS Scientists in Park Program, and the Rocky Mountain Conservancy. We greatly appreciate the Conservancy's support to fund this critical research used for real-time, adaptive management of the park.

During the past three years, the Rocky Mountain Conservancy support has allowed the park to expand its previous visitor-use research that was conducted in 2013 and 2017. The Conservancy funds field support equipment, including road tube counters,

data collection and analysis, research publications, and monitoring efforts by NPS staff and interns.

Traffic Patterns

Traffic pattern data are the primary source used to analyze and adjust the Timed-Entry System. These data are collected using road tube counters (*Image 2*), which provide insight about total volume of vehicles entering the park during a 24-hour period, how timed entry influences patterns of vehicle entry, and which areas receive the most traffic. Tube counter data help managers understand popular driving destinations, peak visitation hours, and the ability of the Timed-Entry system to maximize visitation while protecting visitor experience and resources.

RMNP uses tube counter data to understand, update and change (i.e. adaptively manage) Timed-Entry Permit reservations in real time to better balance access while maintaining visitor experience. One example of this real-time management occurred in 2021 — resource managers observed lower rates of visitation than expected even though daily reservations were sold out. To understand what may be driving this pattern, resource managers used traffic counter data to determine if there were “Reservation No-Show” rates (Figure 1).

Tube counter data revealed that the number of vehicles entering the Bear Lake Corridor was, on average, ~30% less than the number of Bear Lake reservations sold for corresponding reservation windows. This “No-Show” rate of ~30% prompted RMNP managers to increase the numbers of

reservations sold for the Bear Lake corridor at 5 p.m. the night before to maximize access while still addressing visitation impact and monitoring resource conditions.

During 2022, the CDRLC will continue collecting tube counter data, and each two-week data collection period is shared with the park Leadership Team to determine if additional adaptations to the Timed-Entry System are needed.

Trail-Use Patterns

RMNP also monitors the influence of timed entry on trail-use and peak-use times. To accomplish this, the CDRLC maintains a suite of infrared trail counters located at popular trailheads and trail segments throughout the park. Trail counters provide information on total trail-use volume and hourly use through the day. In 2020, trail counters confirmed that, even under timed entry, trails in the Bear Lake Road corridor remained the most popular hiking destinations in the park (Figure 2). Trail-use data, combined with traffic data, for this area suggested that this first iteration of timed entry (2020) did not have the intended result of reducing crowding and congestion in this area of the park. These data, along with other considerations, resulted in the addition of the secondary Bear Lake Road Corridor Reservation in 2021 and 2022 to better address visitation impact in this area.

Trail Encounter Rates

Having the trail to oneself is an experience many visitors highly value. Many trails in RMNP are within designated Wilderness, defined as part of the Wilderness Act of 1964. Designated Wilderness provides outstanding recreational opportunities, including the experience of solitude. To understand how timed entry influences opportunities for solitude, the CDRLC will pilot a new visitor-use monitoring protocol

to quantify trail congestion in wilderness. While trail counters provide information on visitation at certain locations, these numbers do not necessarily reflect how many other individuals a hiker might encounter (i.e., opportunities for solitude). To better understand encounter rates, CDRLC staff will develop methodology and collect baseline data to quantify congestion on popular trails.

If you are interested in volunteering as a community scientist to assist with trail encounter rates monitoring, please email ROMO_Research@nps.gov to discuss current opportunities.

Visitor Impact to Natural Resources

To understand visitor impact to natural resources, the CDRLC utilizes community science volunteers to document impact through the Community Led Impact Monitoring (CLIM) program. The CLIM program identifies and quantifies three main visitor-use effects: informal trails, congregation-induced bare ground areas, and human waste. Previous study locations for the CLIM program include Glacier Gorge (trailhead to Sky Pond; 2020) and Wild Basin (trailhead to Thunder Lake; 2021).

Collectively, community scientists have mapped more than 1,500 informal trails totaling nearly 30 miles, 237 congregation-induced bare ground areas totaling over 7,000 square miles, and over 400 occurrences of improperly buried human waste. Data collected as part of the CLIM program have been used to quantify nitrogen inputs from urine into the Loch-Vale Watershed in Glacier Gorge, inform decisions about potential backcountry privy sites, and help promote the use of WAG bags (kit equipped with a gelling agent that traps, deodorizes and breaks down waste) in high-visitation wilderness areas in RMNP.

The CLIM program will continue in 2022

with an emphasis on high-visitation areas, including locations on the alpine tundra. If you are interested in volunteering as a community scientist for the CLIM program, please email ROMO_Research@nps.gov to discuss current opportunities.

The mission of the NPS is to “preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.” Visitor-use research and monitoring directly supports this mission by providing important data used to maximize access today while protecting visitor experience and resources for tomorrow. Visitor-use data collected in 2022 not only helps resource managers adaptively manage and improve the current Timed Entry System, but will also help inform future long range visitor use planning. The Rocky Mountain Conservancy plays a critical role in these efforts to achieve the NPS mission — we greatly appreciate your support!



A map of informal trails near Alberta Falls, a popular destination hike in Glacier Gorge. Line colors represent the severity of informal trail condition with blue representing light vegetation trampling or loss and red representing complete vegetation loss. The dashed grey line represents the official trail.

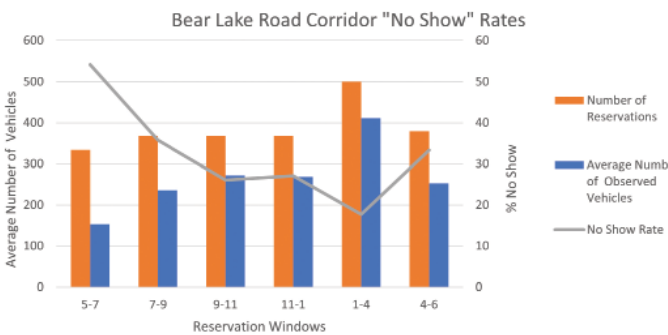


Figure 1: Reservation “no show” Rates for the Bear Lake Road Corridor (BLRC). The difference between the two colors is the number of vehicles that did not enter the BLRC during their reservation window, known as “no shows.” No-show rates across reservation windows range from 19%-55% with an average of ~30%.

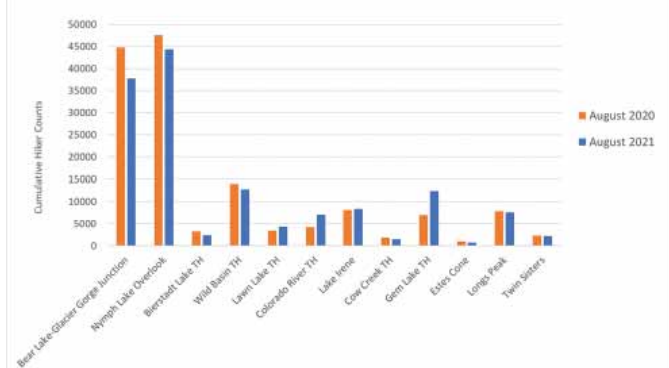


Figure 2: Cumulative hiker counts on popular trails throughout the park. Trails in the Bear Lake area are represented by the Bear Lake-Glacier Gorge Junction and Nymph Lake Overlook counters.

"I think my greatest contribution has been to build bridges to non-ecologists, interpreting ecology and its utility to them."

— Bettie Willard, ecologist, founder of the Field Seminar Program in 1962



Conservancy Welcomes New Education Director Carlie Bangs



Education Director Carlie Bangs and her young daughter enjoying the gifts of nature.



Carlie was born and raised in Lincoln, NE, and went to the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, where she studied environmental studies with a sociology focus, and environmental education. She worked with schools and created curriculum for after-school garden clubs. She visited Estes Park during the summers to work for her aunt and uncle's landscaping business. This was also where she met her future husband. Estes Park quickly became her home.

Since 2009, Carlie has worked in programming for other nonprofits in the Estes Park community, beginning her Colorado career at the YMCA of the Rockies as an outdoor education instructor. She moved her way up through the organization in roles such as the outdoor education director and associate program director. While her children were young, she moved to a smaller nonprofit that focused on early childhood development, advocacy, and connecting resources to families. Most recently, she served the Estes Park community as a Town Trustee. Whatever role she's in, she shows up ready to listen and eager to create.

Outside of her professional life, Carlie has three daughters, two cats,

a dog, and six chickens. Whether she and her family are skiing, traveling to new destinations, or camping, it's always an adventure. She loves raising her children in Estes Park.

Carlie is excited to be back to full time work at the Conservancy as the education director where she can hit the ground running to bring programming back. She believes in the programs and courses that have been offered in the past, and is eager to adapt for the changing world and audiences. She is thrilled to be back in the outdoor education field, and she is excited to hear from you!

Please reach out with any thoughts or comments to:

carlie.bangs@RMConservancy.org

970-586-0108 ext 100



Rocky Mountain Conservancy Park Puzzler

Across

1. _____ host insects that prefer them for laying their eggs, and small animals gnaw this calcium-rich material for a much-needed nutrient.
5. The Big _____, Rocky Mountain National Park's most beloved and photographed bull elk since the immortal Samson — who was poached by a bowhunter more than 25 years ago — has died.
6. The _____ Headwaters Project is a significant collaborative cutthroat trout re-introduction project in Rocky.
8. Trail Ridge Road is in the process of opening for the season! Be sure to adhere to closure signs when _____ operations are underway.
10. Contrary to common understanding, _____ goose is the correct nomenclature for this ubiquitous water-loving bird.
11. Did you know that parking on vegetation or organic topsoil kills plants, compacts the soil, spreads _____ weeds, and poses a fire risk?
12. Wildfires can affect stream habitats by causing increased inputs of _____ and ash from burned hillsides, as well as increased light levels into riparian areas.
13. It is likely that _____ will occur in throughout the burned areas of the park in the coming years and trout populations are expected to rebound.
15. Two large eagles are found in RMNP, with the bald eagle more frequently sited than the _____ eagle.
16. Park survey methods to determine trout populations in burned areas include using a backpack _____ to stun the fish temporarily making them easy to catch.
18. Stop in to meet Rocky's new Lead Program Manager for Interpretation, Education and Volunteers, Kim _____.

19. Beavers have been observed _____ in stream research areas, particularly where the willows have been protected by fencing.

Down

2. The Rocky Mountain Conservancy funds many park education programs, and the recent Distant Learning Program allows each _____ in a classroom to experience the park virtually.
3. The Rocky Mountain Conservancy has selected an architectural firm to create the construction drawings for _____ Mountain Lookout Tower in accordance with the Historic Structure Report (HSR) and park priorities determined last year.
4. Keep an eye out for Rocky's _____ staff that have joined for this busy summer season in visitor centers and on the trail.

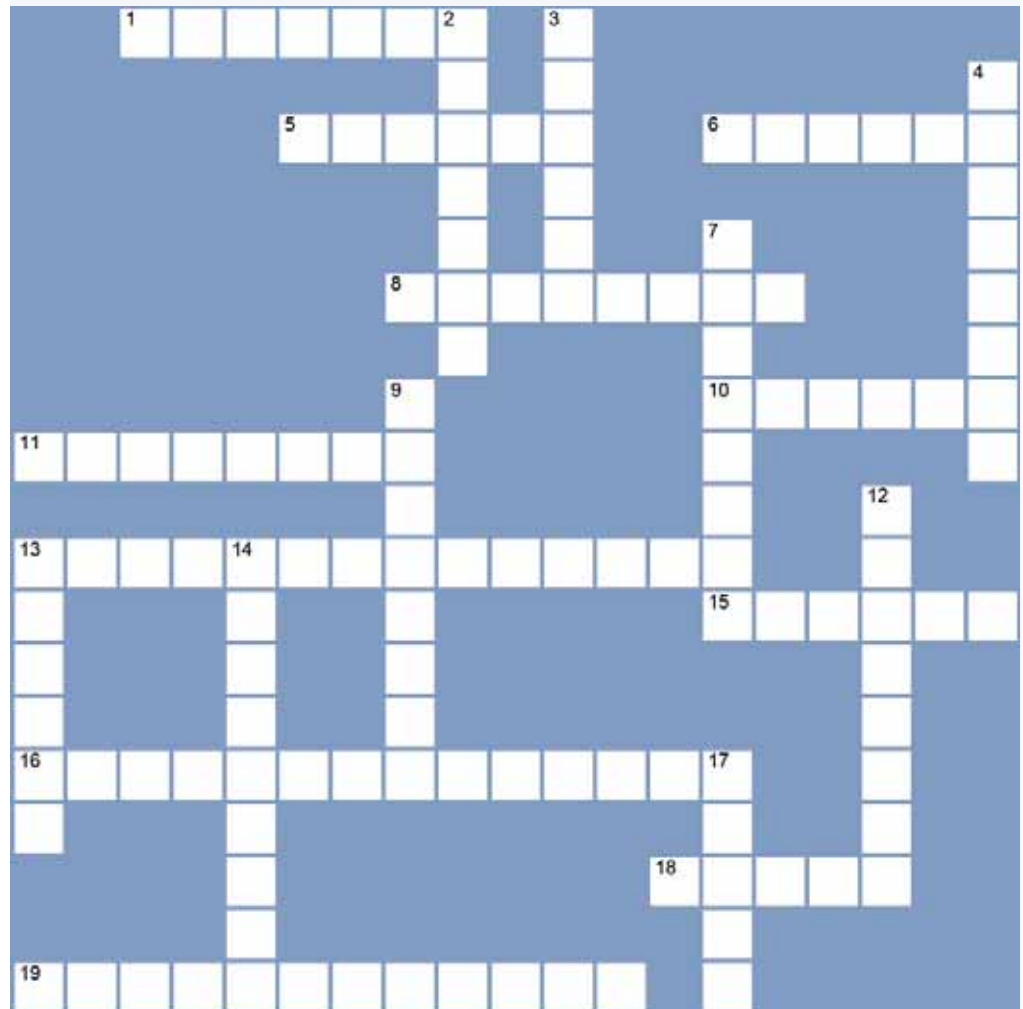
7. In a national park, antler collection amounts to _____ and is considered a violation.

9. American white _____ are one of the largest birds in North America with a 9-foot wingspan and started visiting Grand Lake in larger numbers during spring and fall migrations in about 2013.

13. Surprisingly populous in montane and lower elevations in and around Rocky, the wild turkey roams in a group known as a _____, or gaggle.

14. Introducing more visitors through a _____ system could make the effects of high visitation to Rocky even greater. (2 words)

17. Two Conservancy Conservation Corps crews will work in tandem within the _____ and Comanche Peak Wilderness area to reestablish trails in the Cameron Peak burn scar.



The Rocky Mountain Conservancy expresses special thanks to the following people for their donations supporting Rocky Mountain National Park: April 1, 2022 – June 28, 2022

Total gifts: 1,506 | Total donations: \$141,811



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Ypsilon Mountain in early July, with rydbergia blooming in the foreground and a Never Summer Mountains view.

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Nature. Pass it on.

Connecting With Place

Continued from page 1



Madeline and Finley hiking the Ouzel Lake Trail in the spring of 2022.



Madeline and Finley appreciating the drama of Ouzel Falls.



and grinning from ear to ear, eager to share stories of the days' adventures.

After I graduated from college, I was ready to leave my little hometown but refused to apply for jobs anywhere without a mountain range nearby. Salt Lake City, Utah, is home now, and after living here for the last six years, going on dozens of camping and backpacking trips and hundreds of hikes, I'm confident that I've seen only a fraction of what this state has to offer.

And yet, there is no place like Rocky. I make a point to come back for a long week in the summer as often as I can, frequently dragging with me one of my friends who has no idea the sort of wild adventures they're in for. Anytime we come home for holidays, no matter the depth of snow to trudge through, I make my pilgrimage to Mills Lake, peaceful and relatively unpopulated through the long winter months.

This year, on a cold, snowy January day, not unlike the ones I spent at Mills Lake, my first son was born. A grueling 40-hour labor and an emergency C-section left me in no state to immediately whisk him away on a desert adventure, a shock to no one but me. But at two and a half months, we packed up the car and went camping, and at four months, he completed his first backpacking trip. A modest, three-day, two-night, 20-mile trip in the desert with warm spring weather and plenty of water to drink and splash in.

Since he was born, we've all been eagerly awaiting his first trip to Rocky, and I've been over and over in my mind which hikes to take him on first and how he'll tolerate the altitude. Luckily, we got a good-natured baby, who, despite all odds, actually seems to enjoy backpacking, for the most part. He seems content to watch his environment change from the vantage point of a baby backpack for hours, interspersed with naps facilitated by the rhythmic movement of our feet up the trail.

From the moment I found out I was pregnant, I spent hours trying to figure out how to give him the best chance of falling in love with a place the way I fell in love with Rocky. For me, it happened slowly, over many years, but before I knew it, the park had become the place I loved most in the world, the place to which I would always return.

At the same time, I know it's something that, as a parent, I don't have much control over — something I shouldn't try to control. I hope he'll find a place that feels like home no matter how long he's away and how his life changes, and I hope that place is Rocky. But if it's not, that's okay, too. And until he tells me that it isn't what he wants, I'll keep toting him around the mountains and pointing out the snow-covered peaks, the timid wildlife hiding in the shadows, the colors of the wildflowers, and the many moods painted across the sky.

People Who Plan to Make a Difference in Rocky

by Walt Borneman,
Conservancy Board Member;
Philanthropy Co-chair

The one thing all of our donors have in common is a love for Rocky Mountain National Park. Whether you are a long-time or first-time donor, whether your contributions are large or small, sporadic or annually scheduled, we extend a grateful and heartfelt “thank you!” The Rocky Mountain Conservancy would not be celebrating 91 years of service to the park — proud of the past and excited about the future — without each and every one of you.

Most of us have been involved in charitable giving long enough to know the phrase “planned giving.” Traditionally, it is associated with some form of estate gift. But in truth, all of us who support nonprofit causes are engaged in planned giving all the time in terms of annual gifts, volunteer activities, and advocacy. It is particularly rewarding when this spirit of stewardship is embraced by multiple generations, especially as younger family members become engaged as donors and make gifts in honor of parents to support Conservancy programs.

This past year, the Sessel family made a multi-year commitment to fund the Sessel Family Fellowship. Marcus Sessel, the patriarch of the family, has been a long-time VIP, volunteer in the park, and he has been involved with Field Institute programs since 1990. His son, Mark Sessel, and Mark’s siblings, Debbie and Maurice, have made this commitment first and

foremost to honor their father, but also to acknowledge Marcus’s deep commitment to this special place.

The Conservancy board and staff are always ready to assist donors in crafting giving strategies that ensure that your gift will be invested in the Conservancy’s mission according to your philanthropic goals. Among the simplest ways is to name the Conservancy the beneficiary of a CD, IRA, or insurance policy and designate the funds for “Best Use.” Additionally, while the age for Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) has been extended to 72, those turning 70 1/2 this year may make Qualified Charitable Distributions from IRAs. As always, please consult your tax advisor for specifics.

All of our donors make a difference. Together we have shared many successes over the years, from Conservation Corps trails crews and the Next Generation Fund to critical land acquisitions and life-changing education programs. Despite solid growth for the Conservancy during the last few years, the challenges facing Rocky Mountain National Park and its surrounding ecosystem have grown exponentially. Your contributions, collectively and individually, are essential because the future of this park, indeed the future of the West, is in your hands. We need you now more than ever.

Mark and Marcus Sessel. The whole Sessel family has committed to a multi-year gift to fund the Sessel Family Fellowship to honor Marcus’s love for Rocky.



Park Puzzler Solution



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Rocky Mountain Conservancy

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An unlucky paedomorphic tiger salamander is captured by a patient garter snake at Lily Lake — read all about it in this issue's Nature Notes!

Visit RMConservancy.org
or call 970-586-0108

Nature Notes

The joys of summer persist amidst the worst pandemic the modern world has seen to date. Elk have calved, bluebirds are fledged, cottontails are multiplying and golden banner has come and gone •

On the night of June 23, retired RMNP Wildlife Biologist **Gary Miller** watched a single firefly "bioluminesce" its way east, just a hundred yards or so from the park, along the Big Thompson River. Fireflies are native to Colorado but normally at lower elevations east of Rocky — typically found in riparian and wetland areas. Perhaps it hitchhiked into the park with campers that had arrived from the east, since it was spotted coming from the direction of the private campground near the park entrance • Conservancy Member **Rod Webb** and his wife **Sandra** spotted 16 juvenile pine siskens eating seed off their deck. At ~8200 feet where they live, they might see a few every summer, but this was a veritable flock. There was some jostling amongst them, suggesting perhaps a less than fraternal harmony among the members • A coyote den with seven pups was spotted in late May in Carriage Hills in Estes Park. It wasn't long before the achingly cute pups started exploring outside the den and soon were observed gallivanting in the meadow and rough housing with each other as they grew. Suddenly, in mid-June, they were gone — either moved by the mom or maybe ready to start hunting for real • Conservancy Director of Administration **Carolyn Carlson** and her husband **Kent** also spotted a litter of eight coyote pups at a den in Horseshoe Park in early June, and they watched them through binoculars as mom let them nurse surrounded by the glorious views of Horseshoe Park. Rumor has it that

the coyote mom originally dug a den closer to the road but had to move it further into the meadow because of an aggressive moose that was stalking the area • **Carolyn** and **Kent** also witnessed the first tentative steps of a newborn elk calf in Moraine Park • RMNP Sign Maker **Cory Johnson** was eating lunch outside the park sign shop in mid-June when he saw movement on the back side of his truck tire. When he got down to inspect it, he found an enormous brown moth flattened against it there — it was about 5"–6" across. When he did a little research he identified it as a black witch moth. While this may sound sinister, it is not normally seen in Rocky, but more commonly in tropical and subtropical forests. Its range includes southern Canada, and it is the largest moth in North America • RMNP visitor **Karen Grieve** observed what appeared to be salamander newts all over the bottom of Lily Lake, with their frill of external gills, glowing white in the murkiness of the lake. As she was watching them swim around, she caught some movement out of the corner of her eye and was lucky to see a western terrestrial garter snake down by the shore as it snatched a salamander newt and carried it into the grass nearby to work on positioning the awkward thing for swallowing. During a particularly tricky maneuver the snake was attempting, the newt made its escape, seemingly unharmed, into the safety of the lake. Retired RMNP Naturalist **Kathy Brazelton** commented that it has been a particularly good year for the paedomorphic tiger salamanders at Lily Lake. She is referring to the tiger salamanders that don't metamorphose to terrestrial adults but remain aquatic, with larval characteristics in tact, even when reproductively mature • Estes Park Resident **Dean Martinson** was biking up Little Valley Road in Estes Park when he spotted a healthy-looking



black bear scrounging for grubs in the woods (*Photo above*) • Conservancy Publications Director **Nancy Wilson** reported that house wrens made a nest in her patio bluebird box in Estes Park, and they were very vocal defenders of their space as they worked diligently to build a cozy nest of sticks for their babies soon to come. She noted that if a human happened to blunder into the wrens' 10-foot diameter safely bubble by mistake, the wrens were sure to scold with loud recriminations and much fluttering of wings. Once the eggs hatched, the vocal chatter when the parents brought food was prompt and intense, but to sit outside and watch without moving, she was afforded the sight on multiple occasions of one of the parents exiting the nest box with a white fecal sack in its beak, keeping the nest clean for the hatched nestlings • Enjoy these days of summer for they are precious, and oh-so-fleeting!