DEAR FRIENDS,

2016 was a marvelous year for the Montana Natural History Center. Not only did we continue our focus of providing the best nature-based education in the greater Missoula area, but we did so in celebration.

We celebrated 25 years of cultivating people’s connection to the outdoors, getting to reunite with old friends and colleagues. We made new friends and fostered new partnerships and we expanded our reach to more people than ever before.

From our green screen studio at MNHC we provided live education to classrooms as far away as Rapelje and Colstrip, teaching science and serving as naturalist mentors to kids in rural Montana.

We shared some of our finest Field Notes with a wonderful book, Field Notes from the Montana Natural History Center.

We connected with 12,300 children and adults in learning programs about nature and the various scientific disciplines that help us understand the complexities of our natural world.

As we look ahead, we look forward to meeting the challenge of connecting more people with nature and nurturing the budding seeds of stewardship by welcoming and fostering everyone’s appreciation and love of nature.

In 2017 we will use our green screen technology to reach more classes, and we’ll partner with the University of Montana to teach middle schoolers scientific principles, using osprey and watersheds as the center of a curriculum designed to keep kids engaged in science.

I cannot thank you enough for your continued support in helping us to provide the highest quality nature education to thousands of people in Montana. We look forward to partnering with you to do even more good work in the future!

Sincerely,

THURSTON ELFSTROM
Executive Director
Montana Natural History Center

*Above expenditures are based on the allocation of management and facility to appropriate programs. MNHC is audited biennially. Financial statements and IRS Form 990 are available upon request.
THANK YOU TO OUR 2016 PARTNERS!

We could not operate without the generous support of our many private donors. We thank you all for your ongoing support!

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Five Valleys Land Trust
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EVENING WITH A NATURALIST SPONSORS:
Good Food Store
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“It’s not just students, but whole families that are affected by this program.”

~Susie Graham, 4th grade teacher at Chief Charlo School
The Visiting Naturalist in the Schools program (VNS) brings high quality, engaging science exploration into 4th and 5th grade classrooms with its year-long program. Trained, professional naturalists visit monthly to teach and mentor students as they investigate and appreciate the natural world of plants, skulls, mammals, insects, and birds through careful observation and the connecting concepts of structure and function. Students use field microscopes, binoculars, insect nets, and natural specimens for hands-on learning in the classroom and outdoors in natural habitats.

In 2016, we added an additional Teaching Naturalist to our staff to enable us to bring two more schools into the program and to complete our VNS presence in all MCPS elementary schools. We continue to offer two schools, Chief Charlo and Hawthorne, our twice-a-month Field VNS program.

**VNS IMPACTS:**
- **24,350** direct contact hours of naturalist instruction
- **60%** of contact hours spent outdoors
- **1,700** students involved
- **8:1** low student-to-instructor ratio on field trips
- 80 students in 4 classrooms through the Virtual Naturalist in the Schools Program
- 69 classrooms in 29 different schools (including all of the public schools in Missoula)

Reach rural and urban communities in five western Montana valleys

**VNS MONTHLY TOPICS:**

**SEPTEMBER**
- What is a Naturalist?
  - Introduction and nature journaling

**OCTOBER**
- Full-day Field Trip:
  - Adaptation Olympics, Professor Hike, Wildlife Hike

**NOVEMBER**
- Flower Dissection:
  - What are the basic parts, and how do they work to produce seeds?

**DECEMBER**
- Fruit Adaptations:
  - What different methods do fruits use to spread seeds?

**JANUARY**
- Mammal Skulls:
  - What structural clues help identify the species?

**FEBRUARY**
- Science Inquiry:
  - Does animal size make a difference in surviving winter cold?

**MARCH**
- Science Inquiry:
  - Does the shape of a bird’s wing affect its function for lift?

**APRIL**
- Science Inquiry:
  - How does the structure of a bird’s bill indicate the food it eats?

**MAY**
- Full-day Field Trip:
  - Insect Study, Solo Hike, Wildlife Hike

**MISSOULA SCHOOLS**
- Chief Charlo
- Cold Springs
- Desmet
- Franklin
- Hawthorne
- Hellgate
- Lewis & Clark
- Lowell
- Missoula International School
- Paxson
- Rattlesnake
- Russell
- St. Joseph
- Target Range

**RED AREA:** Visiting Naturalist Schools

**WHITE AREA:** Virtual Naturalist Schools, classes taught via video conferencing
ID NATURE
This past year, our ID (Interactive Distance) Nature Program expanded to reach not only educators but students and classrooms as well. We piloted two programs beginning in 2016. The Virtual Naturalist in the Schools pilot program currently delivers monthly programming to 4 classes in rural areas across Montana: Lincoln, Helmville, Rapelje, and Colstrip. These monthly lessons are live, engaging, and interactive—all offered via video conferencing. The Virtual Science School program, which reached more than 175 students in 2016, works with students in their classrooms on various nature-based topics specific to Montana, and features virtual field trips and hands-on activities.

TRAVELING TRUNKS
One of MNHC’s longest-running programs, Nature Discovery Traveling Trunks are sent statewide to Montana teachers, reaching over 4,000 students annually. Supporting teachers through quality tools, curriculum, and materials, the Nature Discovery Traveling Trunk program completed a multi-year overhaul. Seven new or rehabilitated trunks were added to the program and a full-color resource catalog was printed to share with teachers and schools throughout the region. We now have 23 trunks available for rental. Trunks feature full curriculum and resources on topics like Glacial Lake Missoula, Wolves, Pollinators, Animals in Winter, and Aquatic Invertebrate Monitoring. But they also include a class set of field microscopes, binoculars, hand lenses, insect nets and field kits.

“By the end of the year, the kids are calling themselves naturalists.”
~ Michele Riordan, 4th grade teacher at Hawthorne Elementary

TEACHER BENEFITS PROGRAM
All K-12 teachers who are actively employed in a public or private Montana school are now eligible for our Teacher Benefits Program, launched in 2016. Benefits include a free individual membership; discounts on trunk rentals, Museum Tours, classroom naturalist presentations, and ID Nature programs; special invitations to Nature and Science Nights; and more! Go to MontanaNaturalist.org/teacher-membership to see a full list of benefits.
YOUTH PROGRAMS
Our Summer Outdoor Discovery Day Camps feature hands-on learning, small group sizes, field trips to local natural areas, an introduction to science topics, a service learning component, games, art, and time to explore the outdoors through unstructured play.

Museum Field Trips use MNHC’s collections to excite curiosity and make natural history come to life.

In 2016, Museum Field Trips:
• Reached more than 900 kids and community members from local schools, clubs, summer camps, assisted living communities, and memory care facilities.
• Provided tours of the University of Montana’s Philip L. Wright Zoological Museum for preschool through high school students.
• Created a new monthly school-year program for homeschool families.
• Implemented “Museum On the Go” Field Trips, bringing environmental education into the community at offsite locations including the Fort Missoula Native Plant Garden, Silver’s Lagoon, Ovando Fire Hall, and Hawthorne, Franklin, and Lewis and Clark elementary schools.

SUMMER CAMP IMPACTS:
392 kids from preschool through 8th grade engaged in 33 different camps over 10 weeks
$9200 was raised for our scholarship fund to make our camps accessible to all members of the community
398 children participated in 38 fun and imaginative programs in 2016.

We offered a new camp for middle school students in partnership with Animal Wonders

6 teenagers engaged in leadership development and community service through the Teen Leaders in Training Program

Glowing fluorescent minerals. A “Creepy Crawly” Halloween event. Exploring a constructed beaver lodge. In 2016, 146 kids and their families participated in 9 Saturday Kids’ Activities, enjoying these family-centered programs designed to engage all ages and interests with science activities, art and play.

The miniNaturalist Pre-K Program engages young children in the exploration of the natural world through science, art, literacy and movement activities, all focused on fostering a curiosity for and a connection to nature.
2016 SUMMER CAMP THEMES
Trail Blazers
Art & Nature Adventures
Fantastic Fish and Where to Find Them
Incredible Invertebrates
Birding Bonanza!
Outdoor Adventurers
Rockin’ Rocks
Amazing Animals
Amazing Animal Educators
Middle School Camp
Wild about Wetlands!
Nature’s Greatest Hits
ADULT PROGRAMS
Montana Master Naturalist programming continues to be incredibly successful. Designed for adults who want to stoke their curiosity and deepen their knowledge of the natural world, not only does it bring the MNHC mission to adults in meaningful ways, it also helps foster a community of dedicated, talented volunteers that we (and many other organizations throughout the state) draw on throughout the year in all our educational endeavors.

“I loved the field trips—applying what we are learning.”
~2016 Master Naturalist

2016 MASTER NATURALIST ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

41 new certified Montana Master Naturalists in Missoula, Helena, and Billings

5 Master Naturalist courses:
• MNHC spring
• MNHC summer
• Glacier Institute summer
• Montana Wild - FWP summer (Helena)
• Montana Audubon Center fall (Billings)

Brought in local experts including Nancy Seiler, Tim Wheeler, Brian Williams, and the Two Medicine Dinosaur Center

Offered 3 Naturalist Field Days and 1 Field Weekend to 22 participants on lichens, butterflies, nature journaling, and fossils & dinosaurs
MASTER NATURALIST VOLUNTEERS

Of the 3000+ hours volunteers gave to MNHC in 2016, 625 were given by 21 Master Naturalists from the 2009-2016 classes. But Master Naturalists are giving beyond MNHC as well—in 2016, 54 Master Naturalists donated more than 2,000 hours to various natural history and environmental organizations across the state. Master Naturalist volunteers are giving to Montana communities in many ways. They:

• Work with wildlife of all kinds at rehabilitation centers
• Participate in citizen science projects, from bird and butterfly counts to monitoring wolverine bait stations
• Serve as board members
• Write and edit websites, articles, and newsletters
• Maintain native plant gardens
• Lead field trips for elementary school kids
• Lead naturalist hikes and other outdoor activities for adults
• Do wilderness trail maintenance
• Lead tours and assist guests in visitor centers
• Develop place-based curriculums
• Participate in river clean-ups
• Remove invasive weeds on public lands and trails
• Table at community events and assist with fundraisers
• And much, much, more!

“I don’t want this class to end. I have thoroughly enjoyed every moment.”

~2016 Master Naturalist
people attended 18 Evening Programs on a wide spectrum of environmental topics in 2016. Our unique Evening with a Naturalist program provided dynamic conversations with three speakers: John Marzluff, Emily Graslie, and Bob Pyle. Other 2016 highlights included Sip and Sketch programs led by Madeline Mikolon and Nancy Seiler, Naturalist Trivia nights, and a lecture on citizen science by author, teacher, and naturalist Sharman Apt Russell.

In 2016 the Fort Missoula Native Plant Garden, with its three-season classroom, impressive outdoor learning space, diverse native plants and a variety of wildlife, hosted:

- 4 community programs
- 40 adult participants
- 17 volunteer days

additional visitors, including summer camp kids, Center Visit participants, Visiting Naturalist in the Schools students, Master Naturalist students, and garden volunteers

MNHC worked with community partners to convert the vacant lot at the east end of our building into a Nature Adventure Garden for outdoor play, exploration, and learning. It features native plants and a natural design to encourage creative play. Garden partners included the Montana Native Plant Society, Willard Alternative High School, Gecko Fencing, Native Yards, and more.

A record number of guests visited MNHC’s exhibit center in 2016, learning about Glacial Lake Missoula as well as Montana’s diverse ecosystems, flora, and fauna.

MNHC’s Gallery features wildlife, landscape and natural history-related art by local artists. Showcasing the artistic element of naturalist study, the exhibitions dovetail with the Center’s displays, programs, and classes. 9 artists displayed their work in 2016, and their First Friday Gallery Openings brought in new visitors to MNHC.

volunteers donated more than 3165 hours to MNHC in 2016.

They led stations on field trips, helped in Visiting Naturalist classrooms, taught miniNaturalist and Saturday Kids’ Activity programs, led naturalist hikes, pulled weeds at our Native Plant Garden, filled in at our front desk, served as board members, and much more! Thank you, volunteers!
OUTREACH

In 2016 we published 3 new issues of *Montana Naturalist* magazine, informing thousands of readers on topics including citizen science projects, bats, Blackfeet naming practices, bird migration, and the challenges and successes of wildlife crossing structures. We have also permanently added an additional four pages to each issue, giving us space for more great natural history content.

*Field Notes* is aired three times a week on Montana Public Radio, in partnership with member station KUFM. Written by MNHC staff, volunteers, UM students, Master Naturalists, and other members of the community, *Field Notes* share insights and observations about the natural world with the KUFM listening area. Not able to catch *Field Notes* live? Subscribe to the podcast at [mtpr.org](http://mtpr.org)!

In 2016 we published a book! *Field Notes from the Montana Natural History Center* is a beautiful compilation of 134 Field Notes, grouped by season, written over the past 25 years. Order yours online or stop by MNHC to purchase one in person!

LICENSE PLATE

In 2016 MNHC raised $16,040 from the sale of over 800 license plates! This funding goes directly to providing nature education for children. Adorning your vehicle with our beautiful Great Horned Owl license plates is a great way to show your support. Also, you don’t have to wait until your current plates expire to pick up an MNHC plate!

YOUTUBE

We have started producing entertaining and educational “Science Shorts” on YouTube! Each month, we release a new video that features a natural history topic and also corresponds with our Visiting Naturalist in the Schools curriculum. Check out our YouTube channel and be sure to subscribe!

MEMBERSHIP

Currently, MNHC has over 200 members. In 2016, we increased our annual membership benefits to include:

- Unlimited free admission to our Center and Nature Adventure Playground
- Free admission to the miniNaturalist Pre-K Program
- Free admission to Naturalist-led hikes
- Free access to our Kids’ Discovery Room and Library (books available for check-out)
- Free use of Naturalist backpacks for Nature Adventure loop (starts/ends at MNHC)
- Discounts on classes, programs, and summer camps
- Annual subscription to *Montana Naturalist* magazine

In addition, MNHC is now a member of the Association for Science-Technology Centers (ASTC), which means our members receive reciprocal free admission to over 300 science centers in cities including Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, and more! For a full list, go to [astc.org](http://astc.org).

MAKE A GIFT


CONSIDER A PLANNED GIFT

Help us connect people with nature for generations to come. Please consider MNHC in your legacy planning. Please visit [MontanaNaturalist.org/planned-giving](http://MontanaNaturalist.org/planned-giving).
THE MISSION OF THE MONTANA NATURAL HISTORY CENTER is to promote and cultivate THE APPRECIATION, UNDERSTANDING AND STEWARDSHIP OF NATURE through education.