



ANNUAL REPORT

## Greetings Friends,



As we begin 2023 and reflect on the previous year, it is clear that environmental education in western Montana is strong. The Montana Natural History Center, along with many great environmental education and conservation organizations, is making a real impact by delivering high-quality, local curricula and programming. It is equally clear that as the greater Missoula area grows, like many other places in Montana, so does the need for fostering love, understanding, and stewardship of the natural world.

To that end, MNHC experienced a wonderful year of growth in 2022. We did so by focusing on the four pillars of our strategic plan: increasing mission impact and reach; integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion; incorporating climate change science; and enhancing organizational health.

- We doubled down on our commitment to providing quality in-person educational opportunities to students in rural communities where access to excellent supplemental science education programs like ours is typically difficult or non-existent. In so doing, we expanded the Visiting Naturalist in the Schools program into the lower Flathead Valley this year, thanks to a grant from the Dennis & Phyllis Washington Foundation and the generosity of MNHC's community of friends.
- Our staff attended DEI trainings with Empower Montana. MNHC partnered
  with Soft Landing, the YWCA, Friends of the Children, and Latino Outdoors to
  provide free summer camps for youth from diverse communities. And perhaps
  most importantly, we actively made the organization more diverse with new
  staff and board members.
- The program staff at MNHC attended in-depth climate change education training and began incorporating climate change science into school and community programming. We also made improvements in order to better "walk our talk" and to model sustainability practices to program participants and museum visitors. MNHC went solar with a beautiful array of solar panels installed to maximize the use of the sun's energy atop our roof, courtesy of the community and Northwestern Energy. We replaced our old drinking fountain with an efficient new hybrid water bottle filler/drinking fountain that dispenses cool, delicious water. And we began composting with Soil Cycle Compost Services.
- Finally, in 2022 we successfully completed a capital campaign to build a three-month Operation Reserve Fund, which ensures MNHC's ability to continue to be a leader in nature-based science education throughout Montana and beyond.

Looking ahead, 2023 will be another year of growth. We are offering more out-of-school programs, including spring break camps, backcountry pack trips, and more opportunities for girls in science, technology, engineering, environment, and math. We are also starting to organize, along with a huge host of partners, the 2025 National Association for Interpretation Heartland Annual Conference. And we are excited to welcome more of Missoula's diverse communities in our journey of nature learning and stewardship.

Timo

Thurston Elfstrom, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## 2022 Budget

\$1,111,520

# **Total Net Assets** \$1,983, 657

## **Funding**

Additional Revenue......1%

Business Donations.....3%

Grants ......50%

Individual Donations ...... 30%

Program Fees..... 16%

## **Expenditures**

Community Programs ..... 13%

Exhibits ......15%

Facilities ......1%

Fundraisers ..... 16%

Management......7%

Publications & Outreach... 5%

School Programs ......22%

Summer Camps......21%

\$ raised in license plate sales

\$11,640





The mission of the Montana Natural History Center is to promote and cultivate the appreciation, understanding, and stewardship of nature through education.

## **CUE THE 2022 HIGHLIGHTS:**

In 2022 the Montana Natural History Center engaged over **13,600** people of all ages through our educational programs, volunteerism, community events, and partnerships, providing people of all ages high-quality instruction and connection to nature.

\$15,687 awarded in scholarships. MNHC is dedicated to expanding accessibility to our programs to connect adults and children to nature, regardless of their financial situations.

We went solar! We installed 76 solar panels in July. So far, we have saved over **17,000 lbs** in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – the equivalent of planting 132 trees!

The Spring/Summer 2021 issue of Montana Naturalist was awarded **3rd place** in the National Association of Interpretation's 2022 Interpretive Media Awards!

MNHC had the honor of participating in this year's StoryCorps, which visited Missoula in June. Sue Reel, one of MNHC's founders, and Lisa Bickell, MNHC's former Education Director from 2004-2019, shared a delightful and inspiring conversation about MNHC's early days and how it's grown and changed over the past 31 years. It's a wonderful story, which now resides in the Library of Congress! Listen to it here.

**15,965 YouTube views** with a total of **4,766** hours of watch time (up 131% from 2021)

## 200,780 website views.

44 of our top 100 page visits were educational posts from Field Notes and our naturalist blog. Our top five educational posts this past year were: 1) Avian Adaptations (10,265), 2) Hunting Morels in Montana (4,960), 3) Make Your Own Phenology Wheel (3,644), 4) Black-Capped Chickadees Winter Survival (2,807), and 5) Thermus Aquaticus (2,461).

# **OUR 2022 PROGRAMS**

## SCHOOL PROGRAMS

5,390 students were impacted by our educational programming in person, online, in homeschool, and beyond! After two years of virtual educational programs, MNHC returned to focusing on in-person, place-based learning with children in the Missoula Valley and surrounding areas.

## **VISITING NATURALIST IN THE SCHOOLS (VNS)**

VNS connects professional naturalists with fourth- and fifth-grade students in classrooms across western Montana. Each student receives a journal to record observations, practice nature journaling, and develop their reading and writing skills. Our naturalists teach and mentor students by encouraging ongoing inquiry and curiosity about the natural world. Our curriculum is aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards that also contribute to curriculum goals in literacy, critical thinking, and communication.

\$3,395 in scholarships awarded to VNS schools

1,249 students in the VNS program

28 volunteers gave 698 hours through our VNS program alone!

Our staff provided 767 hours of direct instruction





"I'm SO thankful that my students get to be a part of this wonderful program. The growth I see in them as observers of the natural world, from beginning of year to the end, is profound!! Thanks for your tireless commitment and developmentally appropriate lessons, VNS!! We love you!"

- 2021-2022 VNS classroom teacher

- 2021-2022 VNS classroom teacher

26 schools served with 59 classrooms participating





### THE INTERACTIVE DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM

delivers live, interactive programming through video conferencing across the state of Montana and beyond. Educators gain access to ten web-based video and handson lessons presented by a teaching naturalist that can be opened at the convenience of the teacher and in the comfort of the classroom. After completing the lesson, each month a Teaching Naturalist meets live with the class through Zoom to expand learning and share nature journals.

6 schools

9 classrooms

250 students

## **WOW**

After two years of postponement due to Covid-19 we were able to return to an action-packed in-person week of teacher training once again in 2022!

must in the

A joint program of MNHC and the Montana Osprey Project, the **Wings Over Water (WOW) Osprey Program** brings together middle school STEM teachers from all over the country for a week of intensive professional development experience. Teachers become Osprey experts as they join peers, researchers, and STEM professionals to experience real, interactive field work and education. This year's teachers helped band Osprey chicks, learned about the physics of

flight, and studied aquatic ecology, plus spent time in Butte visiting the Berkeley Pit and active restoration sites. They also dove into the latest national science standards as they workshopped WOW's award-winning STEM curriculum and

created lesson plans of their own.

Teachers return to the classroom with a rich curriculum which is built around Next Generation Science Standards and can be tailored to each classroom's needs.

participated in the summer course.
The curriculum impacts more than 3,000 students across the country.

## YOUTH PROGRAMS

## **SATURDAY KIDS' ACTIVITIES**

Throughout the year, MNHC offers multiple Saturday Kids' activities a month. We learned all about animal tracks and how to identify them, examined various kinds of skulls, competed in Animal Olympics and learned about the specialized things that animal bodies can do, and so much more! Every month features a new topic. The exploration and activities are suitable for a wide age range, so the whole family can be involved!

family can be involved!

81 kids and 72 adults participated in the 24 programs we held.

The miniNaturalists Pre-K program engages young children in the exploration of the natural world through fun hands-on activities and games. The program emphasizes observation, sensory skills, and imagination to cultivate a positive connection with nature at an age when children are just beginning to investigate the world around them.

120 children and their grownups participated in the 35 fun and imaginative programs we hold every Thursday September-May.

## **SUMMER CAMPS**

Our full-day, week-long, nature-themed Outdoor
Discovery Camps for 1st-5th graders ran all summer long.
We offered Pre-K Family
Camps which shared the same weekly themes as the bigger kids' camps, and we hosted two weeks of middle school
STEEM camp! We explored the outdoors, learned about science and nature, and we had a lot of fun.

\$11,782 was awarded in summer camp scholarships to children in need

330 kids participated in 29 camps

**6:1** student-to-instructor ratio







# **STEEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Environment, and Mathematics) Camp**

Our STEEM program looked a little different this year! To increase accessibility, we opened our STEEM professional mentorship program to all middle school girls and turned it into two week-long summer camps! (Previously, STEEM sisters had to be nominated by their teachers to qualify for the program.) We were also honored to have two former STEEM sisters join us for the summer camps as mentors to the year's newest STEEM students.

Our STEEM Camps aim to inspire the next generation of female scientists through hands-on learning and real-world experiences. Through this program girls build trust, confidence, and courage in the fields of science, technology, engineering, environment, and math. These fields have a disproportionately lower percentage of PhDs earned by females; this camp aims to close that gap.

amazing person I am today. Originally there were only 5 of us, but now the program is expanding. I was so lucky to be part of the original 5 because I've gotten to see this program grow and flourish. Throughout this program I have become much more outgoing and have learned so much about the STEEM fields, that I will never forget. I have pushed myself to new limits and unlocked talents I never knew I had. I am elated to be returning to help run this program and help others branch out the way my fellow cohorts and previous leaders helped me. It was an amazing opportunity and I'm glad others get a chance to learn and experience these fields while having fun along the way. I will always value the connections and friendships I made throughout this journey."

-Ella Johnson, former STEEM sister and 2022 STEEM Mentor

## NEW EXHIBIT AND CENTER UPDATES!

# We installed 76 solar panels on our roof!

These panels will generate the majority of the Montana Natural History Center's electricity. Thanks to a generous USB grant from NorthWestern Energy and donations from SBS Solar and several dozen supporters during 2021's Giving Tuesday campaign, we were able to install our solar array in July, and we've delighted in watching the kWh pour in.

Want to see how much energy we're generating? *Check out our SolarEdge dashboard!* Visit the Center to see our new indoor solar exhibit, where you can learn more about solar energy in general and our array in particular!

(This renewable generation project received funding through the NorthWestern Energy Efficiency Plus (E+) Renewable Energy Program. The program is established with Universal System Benefits Program funds collected from all NorthWestern electric customers in the State of Montana.)

"Our Advanced Nonprofit Administration class visit to the Montana Natural History Center could not have been better. From exploring how exhibits are curated and the variety of educational modalities offered, to having the opportunity to chat with MNHC staff about nonprofit careers and advice, I think many students found our field trip the highlight of the semester."

– Dr. Christina Barsky, Baucus Institute Dept. of Public Administration & Policy Assistant Professor

We featured two new Naturalist Field Stations this year. The first highlighted Penny Hegyi's conservation photography and the second hosted the State of Montana Arboretum. This exhibit showcases naturalists at work with a rotating focus on the naturalist as an artist, scientist, or writer.

We received a new display case for the Lierman Collection, which features geological specimens donated from the collection of a dear friend of MNHC, Sherri Lierman. Many thanks to Daniel Minelli for donating the time and materials for this new exhibit case!

We also entered the public phase of our Operating Reserve Campaign. Since early 2021, and with the support of the Kendeda Fund, we have been in

To date, we have raised just over **\$285,000** of our **\$300,000** goal.

the silent phase of a capital campaign to build a reserve fund amounting to a full three months of operating capital.





### DEI

The Montana Natural History Center is committed to building a diverse community which is inclusive of people from all backgrounds. The Montana Natural History Center does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, disability, age, citizenship status, genetic information, marital status, sexual orientation, mental illness, or physical illness. This nondiscrimination policy applies to employees, volunteers, participants, and all aspects of our operations.

MNHC formed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee composed of staff and board members. Staff and board members also attended two day-long DEI training sessions led by Empower Montana on pronouns and systemic racial injustice.



## **OPEN AIR ARTIST IN RESIDENCE**

Open AIR is a place-based Artist-in-Residence program that connects artists and the community with unique sites in Western Montana. We were thrilled to continue our partnership with Open AIR in 2022, to host two Artists in Residence: David Myles Lusk in May and June and Gunhild Lien in September and October.

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Montana Natural History Center is located within the traditional homelands of the *Tatáyaqn* (Bitterroot Salish) and *Qlispélix*<sup>™</sup> (Kalispel) peoples who have lived here since time immemorial. The Montana Natural History Center is dedicated to the recognition of the first peoples of Missoula and the integration of Salish language, culture, and Indigenous knowledge into our programing and exhibit hall.



## ADULT PROGRAMS

Learning and nature exploration aren't just for kids! We provide nature-based education for adults who are fascinated by the natural world and want to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Montana's wild places and creatures, become better writers, and hone their artistic abilities.

1,900 adults participated in nature writing and nature journaling workshops, lectures, field days, and other adult educational programming in 2022.

THE MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM is designed for adults who want to stoke their curiosity, deepen their knowledge of the natural world, and give back to their communities in new ways. We offer a range of programs to fit the needs of a diverse community, but all the classes share a common goal of providing participants with the skills to interpret Montana's flora, fauna, and landscape. In 2022 we continued to offer both in-person and online versions of this course.

\$450 in scholarships was awarded to Master Naturalist participants

**122 individuals** were certified as Master Naturalists in Montana

80 Montana Master Naturalists were certified in Billings, Bozeman, Helena, Polson, the Seeley-Swan Valley, Glacier National Park, and Yellowstone National Park

42 Montana Master Naturalists were certified in Missoula

**VOLUNTEER HOURS: 110** Master Naturalists volunteered **5,966** hours in their communities and participated in **1,346** hours of continuing education. (That's 30 percent more than the **4,572** volunteer hours clocked last year!

In 2022, Montana Master Naturalists gave back to their communities by volunteering with: naturalist field days, lectures, sip and sketches, the Master Naturalist Rendezvous, Visiting Naturalist in the Schools, journaling clubs, other education programs and organizational support, and citizen science projects online (through Zooniverse and SciStarter) and in person: HawkWatch, Birding Big Day, Christmas Bird Count, mountain goat surveys, revegetation projects, invasive weed removal, and more.

"It made me fall in love with Montana all over again."

– 2022 Master Naturalist student

"This course provided an opportunity to rediscover how amazing it is to be outside – each walk or hike is a treasure hunt. The breadth of subjects covered was impressive, and while I have learned a whole lot of new-to-me information, it's clear that I could pick any one of these topics and spend the rest of my life exploring it and have fun doing it. I'm grateful for the experience, would do it again in a heartbeat, and would recommend it to others."

- 2022 Master Naturalist student





Every week since 1991, **FIELD NOTES**, written by naturalists, students, and listeners, has inquired about Montana's natural history. *Field Notes* airs two times per week on Montana Public Radio: Wednesday at 3:55 p.m. and Saturday at 11:54 a.m.

*Field Notes* is also available as a podcast! Subscribe wherever you listen to your podcasts.

52 Field Notes aired on Montana Public Radio, 32 of them new!

Most were written by participants in our *Field Notes* writing workshops.

We offered 2 online Field Notes writing workshops this year.

18 people participated.

## **CERTIFIED INTERPRETIVE GUIDE COURSI**

In partnership with the National Association for Interpretation,
MNHC offers a Certified

8 participants

MNHC offers a Certified Interpretive Guide course for present and future inter

for present and future interpretive program educators. Through classroom and field sessions, this course teaches the fundamentals of program development, delivery, and excellence in interpretation.

one of them. I'm so glad that I did. It's been one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. I've always thought about writing as something I could do one day. On the side. Maybe. Everyone has a 'book project,' for 'one day,' right? But I'm pretty sure I never would have had the confidence to really try it. I'm so much closer to 'there' than before this class. Thank you both, so much, for your wonderful organization, your work, this course, and everything else. Just in this class, you've helped 12 people be better writers, and in turn, countless people will learn more, and be inspired by, those 12 stories about swans, bison, deer, weather, and so much more. That's truly priceless."

~Jason Schein, fall 2022 Field Notes Writing Workshop participant





### **VOLUNTEERS**

Our volunteers, board members, and committee members are invaluable to our organization and are integral to the success and high quality of our programming.

Thank you to each and every volunteer who donated their time in 2022!

We had 115 volunteers donate 2,131 hours in 2022.

We are always looking for more volunteers, and we offer a wide range of opportunities. From helping at the front desk or assisting with VNS field trips to adding your creativity and ideas to our spring luncheon or summer block party, we are sure there is a great fit for

you! Apply to be a volunteer here.

## EDUCATOR RESOURCES

## **TEACHER BENEFITS PROGRAM**

All K-12 teachers actively employed in a public or private Montana school are eligible.

108 teachers

Benefits include:

- Free individual membership
- Special invitations to educator events and trainings
- Discounts on museum tours, classroom naturalist presentations, and ID Nature programs

See the full list of benefits and sign up here.

MONTANA NATURALIST MAGAZINE published 2 new issues. 15,000 magazines were distributed locally and to national subscribers.

## **LICENSE PLATES**

After almost 13 years, we're redesigning our license plate! Stay tuned for updates on MNHC's new specialty license plate design, created by artist Claire Emery!

**\$11,640** raised in license plate sales!

**582** plates sold

**MEMBERSHIP** Become a member today

and enjoy the following

benefits:

451 members in 2022

Let's get to 500 in 2023!

- Unlimited free admission to our Center, Kids' Discovery Room, and Nature Adventure Playground
- Free admission to the miniNaturalist Pre-K Program and naturalist-led hikes
- Discounts on classes, programs, lectures, and summer camps
- Annual subscription to Montana Naturalist magazine

Through the Association for Science-Technology Centers, MNHC members receive reciprocal free admission to over 350 other science centers in cities including Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis, and more! For the full list, go to astc.org.





## **SPRING LUNCHEON & SCHOLARSHIP FUNDRAISER SPONSORS**

Montana Ace The Garden Place **Chontos Design** 

Field to Frame Interpretive Planning & Design

Forty-Four Rental & Design

Goodnight Missoula

Johnson Law Firm

Lolo Liquor & Wine

Native Yards

Nancy Winslow & Doug Webber

NorthWestern Energy

**Riversong Gourmet** 

Wagner's Furniture

## **FALL CELEBRATION & AUCTION SPONSORS**

## **Title Event Sponsor**

Networth Financial

## **Event Sponsors**

**Blackfoot Communications** 

Republic Services

Vicariously Montana

First Security Bank

### **Sponsors**

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Twin Cranes Dental

Western Montana Clinic

**WGM Group** 

Williams Law Firm

Willow Creek Capital Management

### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS**

**Animal Wonders** 

Big Sky Documentary

Film Festival

Blackfoot Challenge

Boys and Girls Club

Clark Fork Coalition

Clark Fork Watershed

**Education Program** 

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)

(Bison Range; Dog Lake) **Empower Montana** 

Five Valleys Audubon

Five Valleys Land Trust

The Flagship Program

Free Cycles

Friends of the Children

Friends of the Lee Metcalf

Wildlife Refuge

Girls Scouts of Montana

& Wyoming

Glacier Institute

Holistic Contentment

Home ReSource

Indigikitchen

International Wildlife Film

Festival

Latino Outdoors

Logiam Presents

Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium

Missoula Federal Credit

Union

Montana Audubon Center

Montana Discovery Foundation

Montana Environmental **Education Association** 

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Montana Native Plant Society

Montana Office of Public

Instruction Montana Osprey Project

Montana Outdoor Science School

Montana Public Radio

Montana State Parks

Montana WaterColor

Society

MPG Ranch MSU-Flathead

Reservation Extension

Office

National Wildlife

Federation

Open AIR

Owl Research Institute

Partners Creative

**PEAS Farm** 

Raptor View Research

Institute

The Red Willow Learning

Center Soil Cycle

spectrUM

Stitches Screenprint and Embroidery

StoryCorps

Streamable Learning Swan Valley Connections

Swiftwater Safety

Institute

Travelers' Rest State Park and Travelers' Rest Connection

**University of Montana:** 

Bird Ecology Lab, Ecology and Organismal Biology, **Environmental Studies** Department, Historical Research Associates. History Department.

Outdoor Program, Paleontology Center. Philip L. Wright Zoological

Museum, Public History Program, School of

Education

Unseen Missoula

USFS. Lolo National Forest, Missoula Ranger

District

Watson's Children's

Center

Wild Skies Raptor Center

Working Dogs for Conservation

YWCA

**Zootown Arts Community** Center

## OTHER ORGANIZATIONS THAT DONATED TO MNHC IN 2022

ALPS Corporation

The Cinnabar Foundation

Cognizant/ATG

Dennis and Phyllis

Washington Foundation Entomology Society of

America

Garden City Janitorial

Heritage Timber

High Stakes Foundation

Kendeda Fund

Lambert Family

Chiropractic Liz Claiborne and Art

Ortenberg Foundation

The Llewellyn Foundation

The Loose Caboose

Louis L. Borick Foundation

Foundation

Max and Betty Swanson

Foundation Missoula Community

Missoula Kiwanis Club Montana Native Plant Society, Clark Fork

Chapter

NorthWestern Energy Efficiency Plus (E+) Renewable Energy

Program

Rossbach Family Foundation

SBS Solar

Simbiotic Software Inc

**TIDES Foundation** 

United Way of Missoula

County **WGM Group** 

William and Margaret Wallace Foundation

Willow Creek Capital Management. Inc

Windfall, Inc

**Xplorer Maps** 

## **2022 STAFF**

Ser Anderson, TEACHING NATURALIST

Kellen Beck, MARKETING AND EVENTS COORDINATOR

Alyssa Cornell-Chavez, COLLECTIONS MANAGER

Allison De Jong, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR &

EDITOR, MONTANA NATURALIST AND FIELD NOTES

Thurston Elfstrom, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Alyssa Giffin, CAMPS COORDINATOR

Drew Lefebvre, MUSEUM PROGRAMS COORDINATOR

Pat Little, DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Jenah Mead, TEACHING NATURALIST

Christine Morris, COMMUNITY PROGRAMS COORDINATOR

Stephanie Murphy, TEACHING NATURALIST

Andrea Panagakis, SCHOOL PROGRAMS MANAGER

Anka Rashed, MUSEUM ASSOCIATE EDUCATOR

Jennifer Robinson, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND **PROGRAMS** 

Mark Schleicher, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Ashley Sinclair, MUSEUM ASSOCIATE & VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

## Moved on to new adventures in 2022

Emma Swartz, TEACHING NATURALIST

Keri Geiser, TEACHING NATURALIST

Kelli Van Noppen, ID NATURE COORDINATOR

## **2022 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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