2022 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.

Thurston Elstrom, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2022 Budget</th>
<th>$1,111,520</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Net Assets</td>
<td>$1,983,657</td>
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### 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 CO2 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).
My students and I love this program so much! Watching them experience nature always fills me with so much joy. They notice and comment on things that I don’t always see. It is beautiful to watch them grow through this program.”

– 2021-2022 VNS classroom teacher

“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

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

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28 volunteers gave 698 hours through our VNS program alone!

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MISSOULA SCHOOLS
Chief Charlo
DeSmet
Franklin
Hawthorne
Jeannette Rankin
Lewis and Clark
Lowell
Missoula Christian
Montessori
Pablo
Paxson
Rattlesnake
Russell
St. Joseph
Target Range

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 hands-on 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!

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.

9 teachers 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!

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.

“The STEEM program has helped me become the 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.)**

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

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

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
The Montana Natural History Center is located within the traditional homelands of the T’atáyaqn (Bitterroot Salish) and Qlispélixw (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.

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.
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 COURSE**

In partnership with the National Association for Interpretation, MNHC offers a Certified Interpretive Guide course 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.

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“**These past 15 months have been a hard time. To try to get through it all, I vowed to push myself to do more things outside of my comfort zone. Signing up for this class was 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
MAKE A GIFT
Support our critical work of educating future conservationists and our community with a gift today. Or consider making a recurring monthly contribution!

Consider including MNHC in your estate plans.
Help us connect people with nature for generations to come.
Please consider MNHC in your estate planning.
EDUCATOR RESOURCES

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

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.

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:
• 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.

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.

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!

108 teachers

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

451 members in 2022
Let’s get to 500 in 2023!
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

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)
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
Logjam 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
Keneda Fund
Lambert Family Chiropractic
Liz Claiborne and Art Ortenberg Foundation
The Llewellyn Foundation
The Loose Caboose
Louis L. Borick Foundation
Max and Betty Swanson Foundation
Missoula Community Foundation
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
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Ashley Sinclair, MUSEUM ASSOCIATE & VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR
Emma Swartz, TEACHING NATURALIST

Moved on to new adventures in 2022
Keri Geiser, TEACHING NATURALIST
Kelli Van Noppen, ID NATURE COORDINATOR

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