

Fresh Air

2025



# ANNUAL REPORT



Montana Natural History Center

# Dear Friends of MNHC,

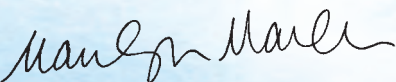
2025 was both a breath of fresh air and a whirlwind at the Montana Natural History Center! We welcomed new staff, settled into new roles, and developed new ideas.

Our adult programming got a boost with monthly lectures, art classes, and field trips. Topics ranged from paleontology and legendary storytellers of the West to repatriating Indigenous objects from museums and the ecology of beavers. Photography? Sketching? Watercolors? Yep, we did it all! MNHC is known for our excellent youth programming, but we provide so much to engage adults and families, too.

I'm grateful for our talented staff who leaned into their unique styles to serve in new ways that matched their personalities and passions. Allison and Beth launched Nature Writing Hush Hour and Drop-in Nature Journaling, two peaceful programs that are free for participants. Kevin started regular guest appearances every Friday on MTPR's *Pea Green Boat*. Elena led birdwatching at the Native Plant Garden at Fort Missoula. Erin partnered with the Food Bank to reach families during summer snack times. Jennifer hosted a regional conference for the National Association of Interpretation. There was no shortage of new projects and ideas from our talented educators.

We added interns! College interns helped in the gardens, at fundraising events, and took on leadership roles for our Saturday kids' programs. We are ready to embrace more partnerships with the University of Montana. All our fabulous volunteers and interns jumped into the current with us and multiplied our efforts to bring exceptional nature programs to western Montana and beyond.

Thank you for leaning into the wind with us this year and joining us as we work to match our efforts to the energy and beauty of the seasons. When things get gusty I am so grateful for your grounding support and friendship.



Executive Director

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

## 2025 FINANCIALS

**Total Income**  
\$1,253,659

**Total Expenses**  
\$1,104,502

**Total Net Income**  
\$149,157

**Total Net Assets**  
\$1,778,947

### Income

Individual Donations.....	42%
Business Donations.....	4%
Grants .....	25%
Program Fees.....	15%
License Plate Sales .....	1%
Additional Revenue.....	13%

### Expenses

Facilities & Overhead ...	20%
Publications & Outreach..	5%
Exhibits.....	15%
Development .....	8%
Community Programs ....	10%
Museum Youth Programs	14%
Fundraisers .....	7%
Visiting Naturalist in the Schools.....	21%

# Six Celebrations of 2025



## 1. Hosted the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) Heartland Regional Workshop

In April, MNHC hosted “Stories on the Landscape,” the NAI Heartland Regional workshop that brought together teachers, scientists, artists, and naturalists to experience western Montana through educational field days, discussions, and networking. Keynote speakers included Mariah Gladstone, founder of IndigiKitchen, and Kallie Moore, paleontologist and PBS *Eons* co-host. MNHC is an active member of NAI, an organization dedicated to inspiring leadership and excellence to advance heritage interpretation as a profession.



## 2. Launched Programs & Volunteering at our Native Plant Gardens

Community gardens are an important part of our outdoor classrooms! With the launch of our new garden experiences, volunteers put in 116 hours at our Native Plant Garden at Fort Missoula, and participants enjoyed 16 garden programs during the summer months including birding and insect classes, painting courses, lectures on native plants’ medicinal use, and so much more. Plus, in early January of 2026 we hosted a special night of winter storytelling with Montana’s 11th Poet Laureate, Chris LaTray – a reminder that the garden is a place that grows community all year long!



## 3. Teaching Naturalist Kevin Niehaus Joined MTPR’s *Pea Green Boat*

Since 1976 Montana Public Radio has been committed to reaching young listeners through its weekly children’s program, the *Pea Green Boat*. Friday listeners have grown accustomed to a returning guest, MNHC’s Teaching Naturalist Kevin Niehaus, who joins the program to speak on seasonal happenings in the natural world through approachable language, storytelling, and easy conversations that gets kids curious about our wild, wonderful spaces.

## 4. Wings Over Water (WOW) Hosted Educators from Across the Nation

In partnership with the University of Montana, our award-winning WOW program brings STEM research into middle school classrooms and sparks student interest in biology, physics, chemistry, math, and engineering through the study of Ospreys. In 2025, MNHC hosted ten teachers from across the United States to the WOW program; curriculum development from their time in WOW rippled into middle school classrooms from California to Pennsylvania.

## 5. 71 Classrooms Participated in Our Visiting Naturalist in the Schools (VNS) Program

For over two decades, MNHC's Visiting Naturalist in the Schools (VNS) program has connected Montana students with nature in their own backyard by bringing professional naturalists into fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms across western Montana. Our naturalists play a vital role in teaching and mentoring students by fostering ongoing inquiry and curiosity about the natural world. In 2025, 71 regional classrooms and 1,544 students participated in our celebrated VNS program!

## 6. Paired New Center Exhibits with Montana Artists

Emphasizing the close relationship between science and humanities, we complemented our new exhibits with gallery displays from artists in our community. In November, the opening of the new Naturalist Field Station exhibit, *The University of Montana Herbarium*, was enhanced by photographer Peggy Christian's work that explores the beauty of botanical forms found in herbariums. And MNHC welcomed back paleontologist and artist Jason C. Poole from Elevation Science Institute to prepare and conserve dinosaur fossils collected in southern Montana. MNHC also displayed Jason's artwork, which plays an important role in helping bring the prehistoric past to life! In addition, we were honored to showcase work from photographer and student Nicole Emlen and her visual project, "Lessons from Zoo Animals."



# MNHC Reach by the Numbers

## OVERVIEW

In 2025, the Montana Natural History Center engaged over **15,430** people of all ages through our education programs, volunteerism, community events, and partnerships, providing our community with high-quality instruction and connection to nature.



**3,414**

regional STUDENTS were impacted by our programs and camps



MNHC awarded **\$17,810** in SCHOLARSHIPS



**150**

VOLUNTEERS gave **1,874** hours their time to MNHC



**1,111**

ADULTS participated in MNHC educational programs or certifications



**234** community collabs and partnerships



**4,288**

Center VISITORS, including **2,149** first-time visitors



**472**

MNHC members



**830**

joined us for a FUNDRAISER or community event



**112**

FREE PROGRAMS or events provided by MNHC



# Youth & Student Programs

## VISITING NATURALISTS IN THE SCHOOLS



**\$6,860** in SCHOLARSHIPS awarded to VNS schools



**1,554**

STUDENTS in the VNS program



**30** schools served with **71 CLASSROOMS** participating



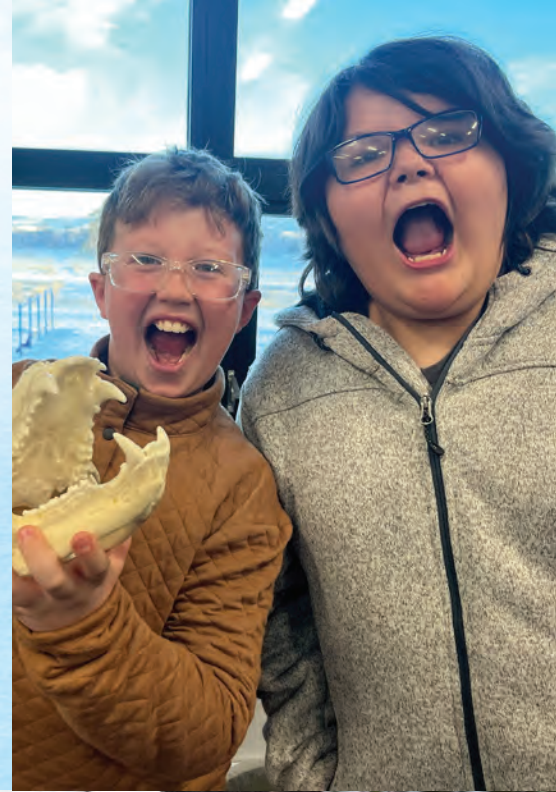
**155** enrolled in our Teacher Benefits Program

**23** volunteers gave **470** hours of their time to VNS CLASSROOMS



## YOUTH PROGRAMS

**926** CHILDREN AND THEIR GROWNUPS participated in **38** miniNaturalist programs





## SUMMER CAMPS



**\$9,000**

in SCHOLARSHIPS awarded to campers

**342**

SUMMER CAMPERS,  
including **22** middle school  
STEEM participants



**6:1**

STUDENT-TO-  
INSTRUCTOR  
ratio (or lower!)





# Adult Programs



## MASTER NATURALIST (MN)



**\$1,950**  
in scholarships  
AWARDED to MN  
participants



**124**  
INDIVIDUALS  
certified as MN in  
Montana

**58** Montana MN certified  
in Missoula



MN VOLUNTEERED

**6,507**

hours in their communities and  
participated in **2,168** hours  
of continuing education



## WINGS OVER WATERS (WOW)

**10** participating teachers from California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, and North Carolina.

**4,937** STUDENTS IMPACTED

## [FUN]DRAISING EVENTS



**85** guests attended our SPRING LUNCHEON. Raised over **\$14,635** for camp scholarships.

**325** GUESTS attended our Fall Banquet and Auction. Raised over **\$190,000** for MNHC programs.



**420**  joined us for our HOLIDAY BAZAAR



## OTHER



**52** MNHC FIELD NOTES aired on Montana Public Radio



**480** MNHC license plates sold



**247,428** WEBSITE VIEWS



**15,000** copies of MONTANA NATURALIST MAGAZINE circulated



**12,355** SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS on Facebook, Instagram, Bluesky, and YouTube

# Faces and Voices of MNHC!

*There is no other program that meets the needs for our young scientists in such a thorough, hands-on, and active participation with an expert. It is an invaluable part of our school year."*

- VNS CLASSROOM TEACHER



*"MNHC has been a favorite since my kids (now adults!) attended camp. Your outreach to youth – all ages really – makes nature a part of life as it should be. Your staff is helpful in so many ways. Thanks for all that you do!"* - JUDY MATSON

*“They love it!  
They look forward to  
it every day and bring  
home new vocabulary  
and knowledge that  
they don't necessarily  
get at school.”*

- MNHC SUMMER CAMP PARENT



*Thank you!! She loved her  
teachers! Beyond all the  
amazing things she learned,  
as a parent, being able to  
leave her with people I knew  
would help her feel happy and  
supported is priceless!*

- MNHC SUMMER CAMP PARENT

*“Knowing that I have  
the capacity to sit down  
and write words that  
make people feel excited  
to go outside is an  
incredible gift, and I am  
very grateful for this  
class for it.”*

- ZOLA KELL, FIELD NOTES WRITING  
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT





# Membership

**472** MEMBERS in 2025  
Let's get to **1,000** in 2026!



Become a member today and enjoy the following benefits:

- Unlimited **free** admission to our Center, Kids' Discovery Room, and Nature Adventure Playground
- **Discounts** on classes, programs, lectures, plus discounts and early registration on 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](http://astc.org).

*Montana Naturalist* magazine published 2 new issues, with articles exploring the legend and future of the monarch butterfly, careful listening of the *Threshold* podcast, curious adaptations in nature, the Blackfeet's sacred relationship with cottonwood, promotions of old-growth forests, and more! 15,000 magazines were distributed locally and to national subscribers.



**LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:** The Montana Natural History Center is located within the traditional homelands of the *T'at'áyaqn* (Bitterroot Salish) and *Qlispéliá*<sup>20</sup> (Kalispel) peoples who have lived here since time immemorial. MNHC is dedicated to the recognition of the first peoples of Missoula and the integration of Salish language, culture, and Indigenous knowledge into our programming and Exhibit Hall.



## In the News

The *Missoulian* featured MNHC's Education Director Jennifer Robinson's recognition as Distinguished Interpretive Manager and our NAI Heartland Regional workshop, as well as our summer camp adventures at Jocko Fish Hackery. *KPAX* featured our garden volunteering opportunities at the Fort Missoula Native Plant Garden and our geology "Voyage to the Varves" field day.

**DEI:** We are 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, sex, gender expression, 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.





# Sponsors and Partnerships

***We could not operate without the generous support of our many supporters and partners. We thank you all for your continued support!***

## **SPRING LUNCHEON SPONSORS**

### **TITLE SPONSORS:**

Networth Financial  
Hellgate Hunters & Anglers  
Marilyn Marler

### **EVENT SPONSORS:**

Beth Brennan  
Nancy Winslow & Dr. Doug Webber

### **SUSTAINING SPONSORS:**

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Julie Gardner, Lambros Real Estate, ERA  
Field to Frame  
The Roxy Theater  
Stockman Bank  
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### **EVENT SPONSORS:**

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### **ADDITIONAL SPONSORS:**

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## **HOLIDAY BAZAAR VENDORS**

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Elena Ulev  
Kiley Voss  
Bailey Zook

## COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

Animal Wonders  
Big Sky Documentary Film Festival  
Bitterroot Trout Unlimited  
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  
Elevation Science Institute  
Holistic Contentment  
Home ReSource  
International Wildlife Film Festival  
Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium  
Missoula Fire Lab  
Montana Audubon Center  
Montana Discovery Foundation  
Montana Environmental Education Association  
Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks  
Montana Native Plant Society - Clark Fork Chapter

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  
PEAS Farm  
Pine & Needle Embroidery  
Raptor View Research Institute

The Red Willow Learning Center  
Soil Cycle  
spectrUM  
Sullivan Fly Rods  
Sundog Expeditions  
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, Herbarium, History Department, Historical Research Associates, Paleontology Center, Philip L. Wright Zoological Museum, Public History Program,

School of Education, Outdoor Program UMBEL  
Bird Banding  
Unseen Missoula  
USFS, Lolo National Forest, Missoula Ranger District  
Watson's Children's Center  
Western Montana Astronomical Association  
Wild Skies Raptor Center  
Wild Wanders  
Wind River Bear Institute  
Working Dogs for Conservation Yellowstone Forever  
YWCA  
Zootown Arts Community Center

## OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND SUPPORTERS WHO DONATED TO MNHC IN 2025

Acorn Naturalists  
Adventure Cycling  
Adventure Life  
Amy Shawley Paquette  
Atelier Nail Spa  
Art Haus Fine Art Framing  
Bake Sale Cookies Etc.  
Bedrock Sandals  
Ben Burda  
Bernice's Bakery  
Beth Woody  
Biga Pizza  
Big Dipper  
Big Sky Brewing Co.  
Big Sky Documentary Film Festival  
Black Coffee Roasting Co.  
Blue Heron Nature Tours  
Book Exchange  
Boone & Crockett Club  
Brooker Family  
Bruce Baty  
Bruce Bugbee  
BZook Ceramics  
Cabela's

Cambie Taphouse + Coffee  
Caras Nursery  
Carol Seiler  
Caroline and Willis Kurtz  
Clyde Coffee  
Colleen Matson  
Daniel Minelli  
David Easter  
David Schmetterling  
Discovery Ski Area  
Don & Andrea Stierle  
Donna Erickson  
Double K Ranch  
Double Tree / Finn  
The Dram Shop  
Ed Stalling  
El Diablo  
Eva-Maria Maggi  
Fact and Fiction  
Fairmont Hot Springs  
Farm to Market Pork  
FiddleHead Cakes  
Five on Black  
First Security Bank  
Gary Fee & Jo Burriss  
Gia Rondono and Wayne Fairchild  
Glacier Ice Rink  
Granite Peak Orthodontics

Great Harvest Bread Company  
Grizzly Liquor  
Heritage Timber  
Highlander Brewery  
Hindu Hillbilly & Rivulet Apiaries  
Home ReSource  
Hummingbird Designs / Elena Ulev  
International Wildlife Film Festival  
Jason Poole  
Jim Mullen  
Joane Bayer  
Josh Seckinger  
Kallie Moore  
Katie Seidenschwartz  
Kelli VanNoppen / Valley House Woodworking  
Kristi DuBois  
Linda Holding  
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Liquid Planet at the Book Exchange  
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Logjam Presents  
Maclay Ranch  
Marilyn Marler  
Michelle Nowels

Missoula Butterfly House & Insectarium  
Missoula Children's Theater  
Missoula Country Club  
Missoula Symphony Association  
Montana Club  
Mother Moose Gifts  
Mountain Meat Shares  
Mystery Ranch  
Nancy Fitch  
Nancy Seiler  
Nancy Ventresca  
Nathan Johnson  
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Northern Rockies Research & Educational Services  
onX Maps  
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Pat Jamieson  
Patagonia Outlet  
Patagonian Hands  
Ranch Club, Missoula  
Randy Zielinski  
Ranch at Rock Creek  
REI  
Rhonda Callison  
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Three Bales Home Supply  
The Trailhead  
Tuholske Family  
The Vespiary  
VRTX Gym  
Winding Pine Pottery / Kara Shapiro  
Worden's  
Xplorer Maps  
Yellowstone Dog Sled Adventures  
Yellowstone Wolf Tracker

## 2025 STAFF

Kellen Beck,  
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Nora Christy,  
TEACHING NATURALIST

Beth Conway,  
MARKETING & EVENTS  
COORDINATOR

Alyssa Cornell,  
COLLECTIONS MANAGER

Allison De Jong,  
COMMUNICATIONS  
COORDINATOR & EDITOR,  
MONTANA NATURALIST  
AND FIELD NOTES

Hope Ensminger,  
MUSEUM YOUTH  
PROGRAMS COORDINATOR

Jennifer Grigg,  
FRONT DESK  
ADMINISTRATOR

Ryan Mahar,  
TEACHING NATURALIST

Marilyn Marler,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Christine Morris,  
COMMUNITY PROGRAMS  
COORDINATOR

Kevin Niehaus,  
TEACHING NATURALIST

Jennifer Robinson,  
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION  
AND PROGRAMS

Eleva Ulev,  
GARDEN MANAGER

Erin Vielbig, TEACHING  
NATURALIST COORDINATOR

## 2025 SEASONAL STAFF

Malinda Gaudry,  
VNS SEASONAL STAFF

Kayla Heinze,  
SEASONAL NATURALIST

Abby Main,  
SEASONAL NATURALIST &  
VNS SEASONAL STAFF

Pam Murcia,  
SEASONAL NATURALIST

Summer Nelson,  
VNS SEASONAL STAFF

Emily Pence,  
SEASONAL NATURALIST

Elisa Spencer,  
SEASONAL NATURALIST

Priya Subberwal,  
SEASONAL NATURALIST

Anika Wypyszyk,  
VNS SEASONAL STAFF

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Graham Roy,  
SECRETARY

John E. Smith

Mandela van Eeden

## MOVED ON TO NEW ADVENTURES

In 2025 we had the following staff and board move on to new adventures. We are grateful for the time and talent they shared while at MNHC.

## STAFF

Fern Bodnar,  
MUSEUM YOUTH  
PROGRAMS COORDINATOR

## ROTATED OFF BOARD

Peggy Christian

Gary Fee

Ian Foster

Katie Guffin

Design by Eileen Chontos



**Montana Natural History Center**

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