

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



Montana Natural History Center
Connecting People with Nature

THE IMPACT OF SCIENCE EDUCATION



Dear Friends of MNHC,

2019 was another ambitious and successful year for the Montana Natural History Center and our mission to connect people to nature through offering amazing education.

We excited people’s curiosity about geology and how changes in the climate can affect the environment and landscape through our newly renovated Glacial Lake Missoula exhibit.

MNHC also focused on making our Center and garden more accessible. Working with generous community partners, we installed new infrastructure at the Center, like hard

surface pathways and a multi-sense garden and accessible picnic tables outside. We also improved access for wheelchairs and generally made our Center more accessible to ensure all people have an equal opportunity to experience the wonder of nature at MNHC.

We reached a record number of people through our exhibits and community and school programs.

And we rolled out a new type of summer camp—a Science, Technology, Engineering, Environment, and Math program aimed specifically at keeping young women involved in those disciplines.

Five young women going into the sixth grade had the unique and exciting opportunity to learn about science through the lens of flight. They got to interact with engineers at Neptune Aviation, wildlife researchers at UM, and a host of other experts, while being mentored by incredible women naturalists working at MNHC.

I had the privilege of witnessing the young women’s relationships with each other grow and blossom, just as their relationship with their mentors and teachers flourished. And on a warm afternoon in July, I was so thrilled to see them present their capstone projects to their families.

It is with a sense of hope and pride in these amazing young women that we at MNHC welcome this cohort of students back this summer to help mentor the next STEEM Sister Camp. I think that they may be as excited as we are!

Finally, I want to thank you for investing in our mission. As we prepare for 2020 and beyond, we’re enthusiastically expanding our School’s Out programming for children and our four-part natural history classes for adults. We will continue sowing seeds of stewardship wherever possible by welcoming and nurturing all people’s understanding and appreciation of the amazing nature that surrounds all of us.

Wishing you another year filled with nature and wonder,

Sincerely,

Thurston Elfstrom

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MONTANA NATURAL HISTORY CENTER

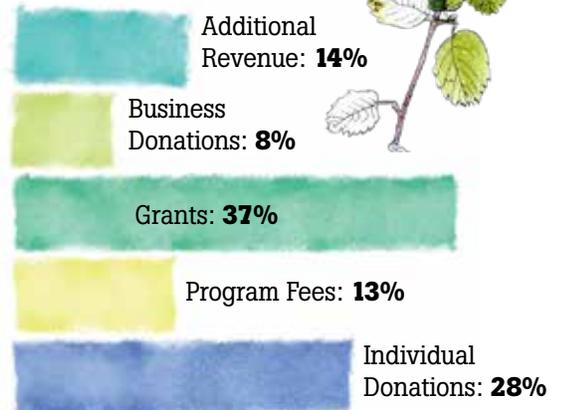
2019 BUDGET

\$861,636.00

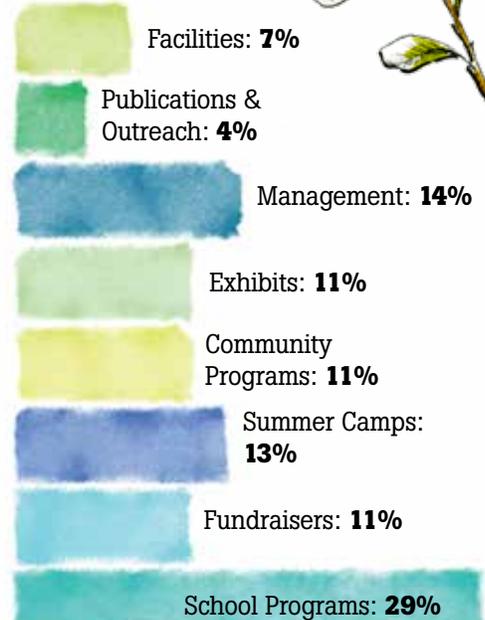
Total Net Assets: \$1,607,075.00

(December 2019)

Funding



Expenditures



*Financial statements and IRS form 990 are available on our website.

All illustrations by Jenah Mead, jenahmead.com.



In 2019 the Montana Natural History Center engaged more than **10,000** people of all ages in nature education through programs, volunteering, community events, and visits to our Center.

Both new and experienced nature-lovers explored Montana's landscapes, flora, and fauna; practiced naturalist skills; marveled at the beauty and intricacy of the natural world; participated in authentic research; shared in our community; and deepened their knowledge of Montana's wild creatures and places from our exhibits, science courses, museum tours, and field days.

HERE ARE SOME OF OUR AMAZING 2019 HIGHLIGHTS!

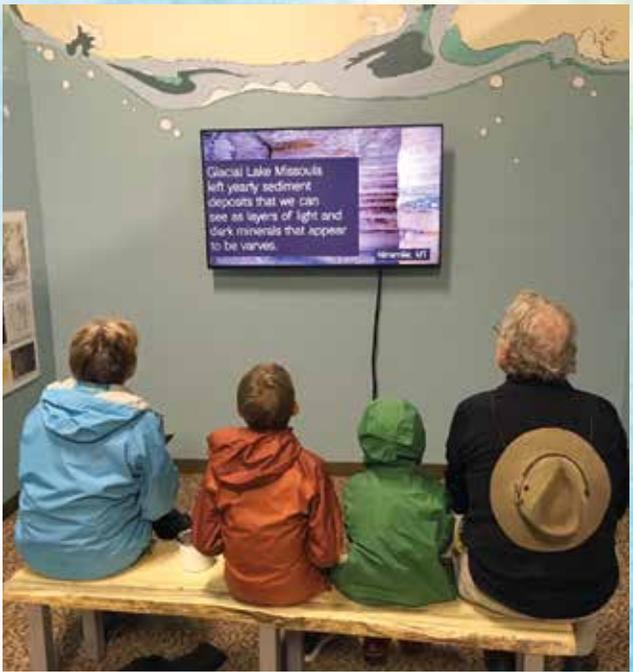
Over **4,700** individuals visited our Nature Center.

We opened two new exhibits: **Glacial Lake Missoula** and the **Naturalist Field Station**

The **Wings Over Water** Program was honored for excellence in environmental STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education as a **2019 UL Innovative Education Award (ULIEA) winner**, receiving a \$25,000 award! ULIEA recognizes organizations in the United States and Canada that demonstrate effective educational programming and community engagement.

We offered over **25** different types of programs during which participants of all ages experienced over **30,500** hours outside in nature.

In 2019 we focused on creating accessible spaces for the whole community. Thanks to a grant from the Missoula Kiwanis Club, we added a wide accessible path, a sensory garden featuring native plants that engage the senses of smell and touch, and a welcoming entrance arch to the Nature Adventure Garden. Thanks to an anonymous donor, the accessibility upgrades continued inside the Center, including an automatic door, safety railing on the wheelchair ramp, new flooring, and updates to the front desk.



"I think giving students a chance to be in and care about their natural world is one of the most important things adults can do in order to conserve and protect this beautiful place. The VNS program provides this opportunity for our students." - VNS 4TH-GRADE TEACHER



SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Visiting Naturalist in the Schools (VNS) connects professional naturalists with fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms in western Montana. The program includes monthly classroom visits and two full-day field trips at a local natural area. Each student receives a journal to record observations, practice science journaling, and develop reading and writing skills. Naturalists teach and mentor students through ongoing inquiry and encouragement of the students' natural 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.

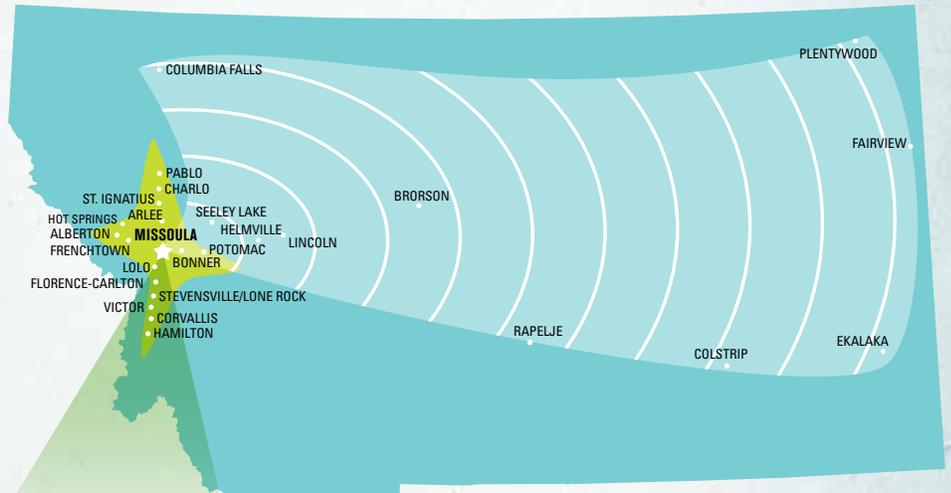
32,300 *direct contact hours of naturalist instruction*

Of those hours, **18,700** *took place outdoors*

1,700 *students* in the VNS program

in **69** *classrooms*

138 *field trips* during the 2019-20 school year



MISSOULA SCHOOLS

Chief Charlo
DeSmet
Franklin
Hawthorne
Hellgate

Jeanette Rankin
Lewis & Clark
Lowell
Paxson
Rattlesnake

Russell
St. Joseph
Target Range

GREEN AREA: Visiting Naturalist Schools

WHITE AREA: Interactive Distance Learning, classes reached via video conferencing



The **Interactive Distance Learning** program expanded in 2019, reaching a wider audience. Through the use of green screen technology and Polycom Video Conferencing equipment, we can deliver live, interactive programming across the state of Montana and beyond.

The **ID Naturalist LIVE!** (formerly **Virtual Naturalist in the Schools**) program brings professional naturalists into 3rd- through 5th-grade classrooms through the use of video conferencing to teach science and natural history across rural Montana. Students get to experience naturalist-led classroom lessons—most of which include outdoor exploration—via monthly virtual nature and science experiences.

16 <i>classrooms</i>	8 <i>schools</i>	300 <i>students</i>
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ID Naturalist is a subscription-based service. Educators gain access to ten web-based video lessons presented by a teaching naturalist that can be opened at the convenience of the teacher and in the comfort of the classroom.

12 <i>classrooms</i>	5 <i>schools</i>	180 <i>students</i>
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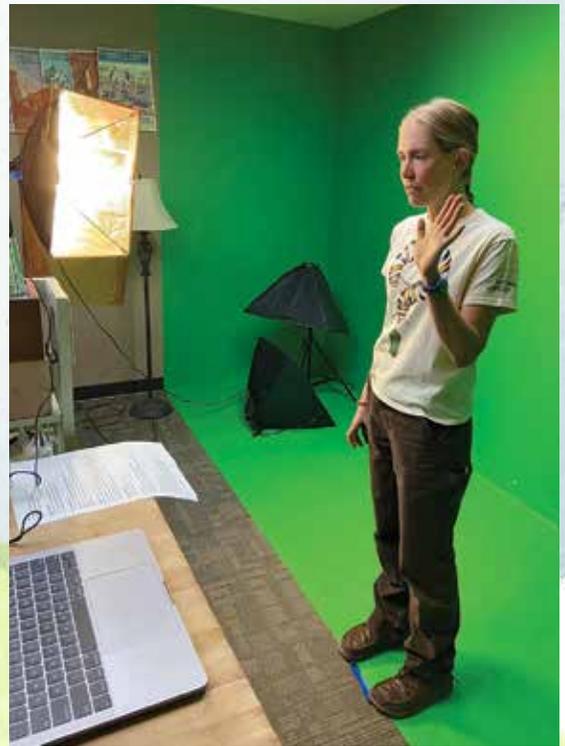
FieldStudies gets students in touch with practicing scientists through live and interactive video broadcasts. Prior to the program's date, teachers are sent a brief video introducing the scientist and their work. Classes are encouraged to generate questions for the scientist and send them in before the live event. On the day of the program, classes tune in for answers to their questions, polling questions, and more served up by the scientist themselves.

6 <i>classrooms</i>	4 <i>schools</i>	200 <i>students</i>
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The Montana Natural History Center is now a content provider for **Streamable Learning**. This innovative programming connects districts and classrooms across North America for live and interactive educational events.

450 <i>people</i> of all ages from 15 <i>different states and Canadian provinces,</i> including Florida, Connecticut, and Ontario
--



"I loved the experience! Any time I can offer opportunities for students to learn in a new and exciting way from a very motivated and knowledgeable professional is a great day."

- ID NATURALIST TEACHER



The **Wings Over Water (WOW) Osprey Program** brings STEM research into middle and high school classrooms and sparks student interest in biology, physics, chemistry, math, and engineering through the study of Ospreys. The program starts by building STEM capacity for teachers through a week-long workshop in Missoula. 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.

Homeschool Naturalists runs September-April and gives students the opportunity to work with teaching naturalists to learn about the natural history of Montana while gaining naturalist skills and making friends. Each month the group explores our place in the ecosystems we love using the naturalist tools of science, writing, and art.

9 *teachers*
participated in
the 2019 teacher
training workshop

bringing the total to
26 *middle and
high school teachers*
using the curriculum

reaching more than
2,000
*students across
the country*

17
preschool-kindergarten students

51
elementary students

12
middle school students

"[WOW is] the best and most useful professional development I have ever done in 27 years of teaching. The access to research scientists was incredible. I am excited to share this curriculum with other teachers in California where there is a hard-core push for all things NGSS." - 2019 WOW TEACHER





YOUTH PROGRAMS

Saturday Kids' Activities are offered twice monthly throughout the school year and feature activities, art, and science experiments. Kids might look for Osprey with binoculars, dissect owl pellets, or walk a model of the solar system. Every month features a new topic. The exploration and activities are suitable for a wide age range, so the whole family can be involved!

157 kids — participated in — **15**
and their families *programs*

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.

550 — participated in — **33**
children and their parents *fun and imaginative programs*



"My child has learned so much about nature and taking care of nature in a fun environment. He is actively thinking about ways to help the environment and not disturb nature."

-2019 SUMMER CAMP PARENT



Summer Camps offer full-day, week-long, nature-themed camps all summer long for preschool (age 4 and up) through 5th grade.

314 *kids* **25**
participated in
naturalist-themed camps

6:1 *low*
student-to-counselor
ratio

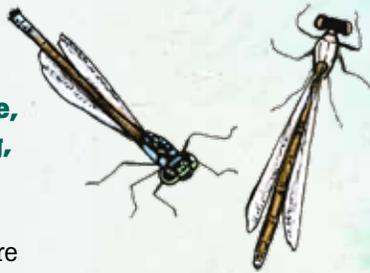
\$10,315 in *scholarships awarded*
to campers thanks to funds raised from the
Annual Women's Scholarship Luncheon



STEEM

The first cohort of girls took part in the **STEEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Environment, and Mathematics) Program**

in 2019. STEEM aims to inspire the next generation of female scientists through hands-on learning and real-world experiences. The goal of this program is to provide incoming middle school girls with a professional mentorship opportunity. Through the program the girls build trust, confidence, and courage in the fields of science, technology, engineering, environment, and math.



"STEEM has by far been the best program that I have ever taken part in. I really enjoyed learning about science by experiencing and doing things, instead of from a boring textbook. We actually got to look at bat skeletons, go to Neptune Aviation to look at planes, and go experience a wind tunnel—super hands-on stuff. STEEM has helped me feel more confident than I ever have before!" **-ZOE QUILICI, 2019 STEEM PARTICIPANT**





2 NEW EXHIBITS

Explore the Naturalist Field Station

This exhibit showcases naturalists at work with a rotating focus on the naturalist as an artist, scientist, and writer. The first rotation focused on grassland ecology research. The current rotation focuses on artist and naturalist Jenah Mead, who explores the extraordinary biodiversity of the natural world through observation and nature journaling.

Explore Glacial Lake Missoula

Learn about the huge lake that filled the Missoula Valley and beyond millennia ago, including floods that repeatedly scoured the landscape from western Montana to the Pacific. See the path of the floods, pick up a map of a driving route that visits several Glacial Lake Missoula landmarks, and watch new videos about the Great Floods.

The **Fort Missoula Native Plant Garden** includes a three-season classroom, impressive outdoor learning space, diverse native plants, and a variety of wildlife.

650 visitors (via nature education programs and community outreach)

AT THE CENTER

4,718

guests visited our exhibit hall in 2019
(18% increase over last year)

1,000

kids and community members participated in
educational programming at the Center





ADULT PROGRAMS

Field trips aren't just for kids. We provide hands-on field experiences for adults who are fascinated by the natural world and want to gain a deeper understanding of Montana's wild places and creatures.

32 participants enjoyed

3

Community Discovery Days

94 people

participated in our
Naturalist Field Days
and *Field Weekends*

817 people attended **30** evening programs,

featuring artists Peggy Christian, Nancy Seiler, and Claudia Paillao;
wildlife biologist Denver Holt; geologist Bruce Baty; and more!



The **Montana 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.

58

*individuals
were certified as
Montana Master
Naturalists*

22

*certified
in
Missoula*

36

*certified in
Helena, Billings,
the Seeley-Swan Valley,
and Glacier National Park*



Volunteer hours:

66

*Master
Naturalists
volunteered*

2,420

*hours
in their
communities*

Of those,

32

*naturalists
volunteered*

530

*hours
at
MNHC!*

Master Naturalist volunteers are giving to Montana communities in many ways:

- participating in citizen science projects, from bird counts to collecting data on wolverines, pikas, bats, and more
- maintaining native plant gardens and wilderness trails
- developing science lessons for schools and community organizations
- researching and writing articles for environmental publications
- leading field trips for elementary school kids, seniors, and everyone in between
- tabling at community events and assisting with fundraisers and outreach
- removing invasive weeds on public lands and trails
- serving as board members for environmental organizations
- providing information to visitors at national and state parks



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
- Discounts on trunk rentals, museum tours, classroom naturalist presentations, and ID Nature programs
- Special invitations to educator events and trainings

Go go MontanaNaturalist.org/teacher-benefits-program to see full list of benefits and to sign up.

101
teachers



Traveling Trunks

Our Nature Discovery traveling educational trunks help make natural history come alive

_____ for over _____
860 students annually across the state!

We have 28 trunks available for rental, each filled with thematic hands-on interdisciplinary and scientifically-accurate educational materials.



OUTREACH

86 **Field Notes** aired on Montana Public Radio.

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:** Tuesday and Friday at 4:54 p.m.

Field Notes is available as a podcast! Subscribe on iTunes, Google Play, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Montana Naturalist Magazine published 2 new issues.

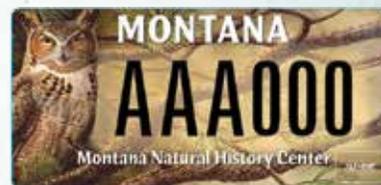
15,500 magazines
distributed locally and to national subscribers.

License plates

\$14,320 raised in
license plate sales

716
license plates sold

You don't have to wait until your current plates expire to pick up an MNHC plate!



Volunteers

Our volunteers, board members, and committee members are invaluable to our organization and are largely responsible for the success and high quality of our programs!

Thank you, volunteers!

3,200 volunteer hours from 75 volunteers

"How to make a difference in this changing world? Volunteering and supporting MNHC financially has been an answer for me. If we are to preserve our natural world, the next generation of leaders must be inspired and involved. Working directly with children through various programs as well as working with staff on fundraising efforts and committees has been a tremendously rewarding experience. The only requirement for being an MNHC volunteer is enthusiasm!" -JACKIE WEDELL, MNHC VOLUNTEER

MEMBERSHIP



471 members in 2019

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 miniNaturalist Pre-K Program and Naturalist-led hikes
- **Discounts** on classes, programs, lectures and summer camps
- **Free use** of Naturalist backpacks for your outdoor adventures (includes binos, field guides, etc.)
- Annual subscription to *Montana Naturalist* magazine

MNHC is 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.

Go to MontanaNaturalist.org/membership to see full list of benefits and to become a member!



MAKE A GIFT

Support our critical work of educating future conservationists and our community with a gift today. **Please visit MontanaNaturalist.org/donate.**

Consider including MNHC in your estate plans.

Help us connect people with nature for generations to come. Please consider MNHC in your estate planning. **Please visit MontanaNaturalist.org/planned-giving.**



THANK YOU TO OUR 2019 PARTNERS!



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Community Collaborations

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Caffé Dolce
Clark Fork Coalition
The Flagship Program
Five Valleys Land Trust
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International Wildlife Film Festival
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Missoula Search and Rescue
Missoula Smokejumper Visitor Center

Montana Environmental Education Association
Montana Museum of Art and Culture
Montana Native Plant Society
Montana Office of Public Instruction
Montana Osprey Project
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Montana State Parks
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National Wildlife Federation
North Missoula Community Development Corporation
Park Side Credit Union
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Raptor View Research Institute
Southgate Mall
spectrUM
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University of Montana: Bird Ecology Lab, Broader Impacts Group, Ecology and Organismal Biology, Environmental Studies Department, Office of Civic Engagement, School of Education, Wildlife Biology Department
University of Montana Paleontology Museum
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USFS, Fire Lab
Watson's Children's Center
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The Dram Shop

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

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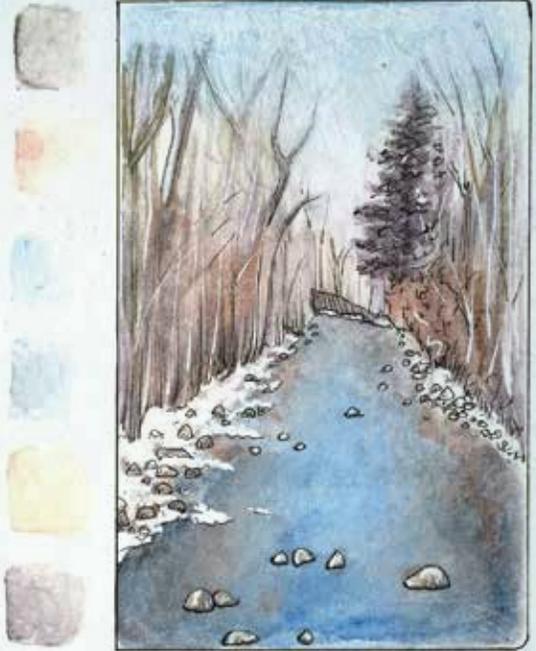
(Rotated off board in 2019)

Edward Monnig

Stephen Speckart

Design by Eileen Chontos

All illustrations by Jenah Mead,
jenahmead.com.



View of Rattlesnake Creek from Bridge

Moved on to new adventures in 2019

Lisa Bickell, *Education Director*

Jenelle Dowling, *Staff Scientist*

Sarah Millar, *Director of Marketing and Corporate Relations*

THE MISSION OF THE
MONTANA NATURAL HISTORY CENTER IS TO
**PROMOTE AND CULTIVATE THE APPRECIATION, UNDERSTANDING,
AND STEWARDSHIP OF NATURE THROUGH EDUCATION.**



Montana Natural History Center
Connecting People with Nature

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