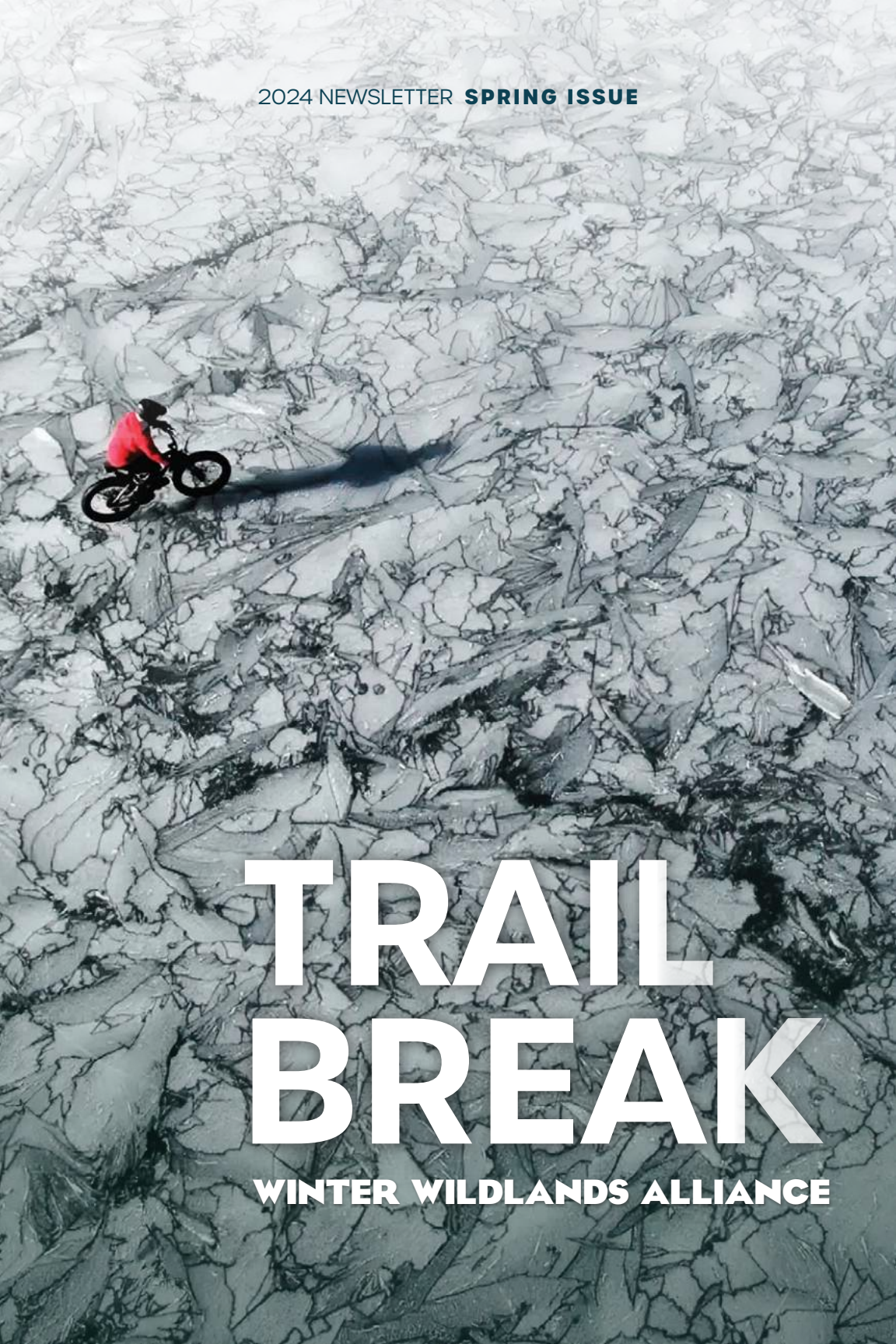
2024 NEWSLETTER **SPRING ISSUE**



TRAIL BREAK

WINTER WILDLANDS ALLIANCE

WINTER
WILDLANDS
ALLIANCE

Tamara Harrison and Sofia Dewolfe spend their day on top of a ridgeline on Bald Mountain in Sun Valley, Idaho. Unceded Cayuse, Umatilla, Shoshone-Bannock, and Walla Walla lands. Photo by Hillary Mayberry @hillarymayberryphoto.

COVER PHOTO:
Fatbike rider Jeff Glass enjoys a ride along smooth ice on Round Lake off the Tahoe Rim Trail in the USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. Unceded Cayuse, Umatilla, Washoe, and Walla Walla lands. Photo by Anthony Cupaiuolo, First Tracks Productions @acwithft.

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Trail Break, Spring 2024 Issue

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Winter Wildlands Alliance is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring and empowering people to protect America's wild snowscapes.

Kyle Toohey breaks through to blue in Little Cottonwood Canyon, Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. Unceded Ute, Eastern Shoshone, Goshute and Timpanogos lands. Photo by Iz La Motte @izmottephoto.

Rise and Fall of the Redline

As the first wet flakes blew in, I drove down to the brewery for a standing-room only screening: the Eastern Sierra premiere of "The Redline Traverse," Steve Seime's homespun documentary about Jenna Kane and Greg Cunningham's epic 19-day ski tour last spring along the High Sierra Crest from Mount Whitney to Mammoth. The movie had been teased in this year's Backcountry Film Festival. The community was out in force, buying raffle tickets for the local avalanche center, buzzing with the promise of new snow.

The concept was hatched by skinny ski pioneers Tom Carter, Allan Bard and Chris Cox in the early '80s, inspired by the freewheeling '70s-style ski mountaineering of Doug Robinson and friends. On the old paper maps was a red line that ran along the crest. The gist was to stick as close to that line as the terrain and conditions would allow, to stay above 11,000 feet, and, most importantly, to "redline" the proverbial fun meter. The ghosts of Orland Bartholomew, with his hickory skis and rake-handle ski poles, and Norman Clyde, with his legendary 100-pound packs full of cameras and kettles and hardcover books in Greek, haunt the whole enterprise.

"That's really what it's all about," says Cunningham in the film: "the style… fun, adventure, and jumping off into the unknown." It wasn't quite as unknown, of course, as it had been 110 or even 40 years ago. They'd studied the guidebooks, gleaned what beta they could from the old-timers, pored over satellite images on Google Earth. They could see the long, clear future of the weather window where their predecessors could see only the horizon. And yet, there was still much to discover: what actually went, what didn't, and where there was powder, corn, wind-scoured granite, or manky, impassable sludge.

Early morning thoughts on legacy, style and change

Perhaps most surprising, in that deepest season in contemporary memory—would there ever again be so much snow as in the winter of 2022-23?—was the solitude they experienced. Day after day they saw no other humans. Aside from the commercial air traffic and a growing amount of space trash wheeling across the night sky, the range was as wild and quiet as it was when Teddy Roosevelt added it to the National Forest Reserve system in 1908. As it was across the long millennia of ancient sheep hunters and obsidian traders. As it has been for tens of millions of years.

But here we were, packed into a brewery on a Wednesday night with a hundred other people—a hundred bearded, dredded, sunburnt, tech-clad dirtbags of all shades, genders and persuasions—beautiful, beaming people, every one of whom has the gear, the basic skills, and all the maps and routes and beta in a single phone app in their pockets. Plus the unquenchable appetite to get out into it and take pictures. And for every room like this, there are a hundred more in mountain towns across North America. According to the folks selling the gear, maybe 5 million backcountry skiers and splitboarders all counted up.

I have to admit, and I'm sorry for it, that my first thought was: there goes the Redline Traverse. And then I thought: well, who knows, maybe these are the people, my people, who will one day finally come together to save these places for all time.

Let's go skiing.

David Page, Executive Director
Winter Wildlands Alliance

Vanessa, once silenced by self-doubt, now glides through the backcountry sponsored by Fischer Skis. Unceded Cayuse, Walla Walla, Umatilla, Eastern Shoshone, Shoshone-Bannock, and Cheyenne lands. Photo by Jr Rodriguez @jrrdrgz.

Acknowledgment:

EMBRACING IMPERFECTION

By Vanessa Chavarriaga Posada

Like many immigrants, I grew up with some pretty rigid expectations of who I should be and what I should do with my life. Perfection was the baseline, but the goal was always to break paradigms and create higher levels of success than I knew. The goal was to be so good that they could not look away.

The drive to do better pushed me further. I removed the word “difficult” from my vocabulary. Describing things as difficult was a privilege; it assumed that some things were easy. For a young undocumented immigrant living in a conservative wealthy white suburb, nothing was easy.

I kept my head down and worked hard. But what I didn’t know is that I was tightly weaving my identity and worth with my ability to produce and succeed. The better grades I got, the better person I became. The more extracurriculars I did, the further I would go in life. This pattern got interrupted very harshly by one of the biggest fears an immigrant teenager carries: college rejection letters. Seven of them, to be exact.

I had been selected for a highly competitive scholarship program for low-income students. I felt overwhelmed with pride when I read the names of all the Ivy Leagues on the pamphlet: this was it. My hard work had finally paid off. When all of the responses came back negative, the world of meritocracy I had lived in my whole life vanished. My family didn’t have the right legacy, I thought I didn’t have the right legal status or enough money. I wasn’t good enough. I would never be good enough.

What started as despair eventually became freedom. Knowing that I would never be good enough to succeed in a white supremacist world gave me permission to stop trying to fit into their boxes. It gave me permission to get creative, build my own

world. All of this led me to skiing.

I hit the skin track with fervor at the age of 22. As an adult learner, expectations were low and perfection was impossible. So I kept showing up imperfectly. The joy I experienced learning to ski gave me the bravery to keep trying. But something was different: for the first time in my life I allowed myself to stand out and embrace my culture. Spanish rolled off my tongue like water rolling down the snowy creeks, my gold hoops caught the first rays of light, my snacks served as curiosities and inspired stories. I carried my culture and my ancestors with me in this frozen and foreign territory.

Embracing imperfection gave me permission to show up as my whole self. I quickly learned that all the parts of me that I carried around shamefully as a teenager were the most beautiful ones. I learned that I don't need to be the best at everything. Being an immigrant is all about being a trail breaker. The space we create is only the beginning.

IN OUR PHOTO CAPTIONS THROUGHOUT TRAIL BREAK, we acknowledge the ancestral and ongoing stewardship of Indigenous lands. We recognize that this acknowledgment does not address the many historical and ongoing injustices that underlie and undermine our current public lands system. WWA is committed to improving our allyship with the Indigenous communities on whose lands we have the fleeting privilege to work and play, and to taking impactful action toward equitable access, environmental justice, and the restoration of Indigenous leadership in the stewardship of the Earth we all love and depend on.

VANESSA CHAVARRIAGA POSADA
@vanessa_chav is an environmental sociologist and outdoor athlete from Medellín, Colombia. She is a three-culture kid whose childhood was split between Colombia, the US and Mexico. As an immigrant and woman of color, Vanessa recognizes the systemic barriers that purposefully keep BIPOC out of outdoor spaces. Taking up space in the outdoor community feels revolutionary. Her work now focuses on the intersections of race, identity, and nature through sponsored content, DEI education, public speaking, and writing. Vanessa's film "Soñadora" was the first recipient of WWA's Human-Powered Film Grant in 2022 and toured across the country with our 19th annual Backcountry Film Festival program.

THIS BEER GIVES BACK TO THE

ENVIRONMENT

Proceeds go to our National Stewardship Fund to help support local winter trailhead projects and backcountry ambassadors.

GRANITE BACKCOUNTRY ALLIANCE

WINTER WILDLANDS ALLIANCE

MAMMOTH BREWING CO.

Frazier's well-earned snow beard on the nordic track in Sun Valley, Idaho. Unceded Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, and Shoshone-Bannock lands. Photo courtesy Frazier Miller.

Frazier shares the joy of skiing with the next generation, his son Shaw. Unceded Ute, Timpanogos, and Eastern Shoshone lands. Photo courtesy Frazier Miller.

CEO Coach, Mountaineer, Winter Wildlands Alliance's Newest Board Member:

FRAZIER MILLER

PORTOLA VALLEY, CA

Frazier's connection to the winter landscape runs deep, anchored in cherished memories of skiing with his boys. Witnessing his sons evolve into strong, independent skiers after years of ski school, lessons, and countless hours in the car has been immensely gratifying.

Beyond skiing, Frazier finds solace in the mountain snow during summers, boasting a resume that includes two ascents of Denali and most of the Pacific Northwest's volcanoes. Celebrating his 50th birthday, he and his wife, Tia, accomplished the remarkable feat of scaling Mt. Hood, Mt. Adams, and Mt. St Helens in a mere three days with their sights set on Mt. Rainier this summer.

Frazier sees WWA as the guardian of our winter backcountry. Eager to contribute, he aims to bolster WWA's capacity through increased membership and foundation development. His enthusiasm also extends to sidecountry issues, particularly the delicate balance between resort expansion and preserving sensitive snowscapes. Frazier feels honored to be part of the mission, ready to lend his voice to the cause.

"Skiing for me is a spiritual experience – not just the sport, but being in nature in winter. I want to do everything I can to help protect the winter backcountry for future generations."

Outdoor Alliance Communications and Marketing Associate, Winter Wildlands Alliance member:

NICOLE BROWN

EUGENE, OR

"Getting involved in public lands advocacy is empowering. Participating in comment periods, and writing your representatives: these actions go hand in hand with adventure."

Nicole didn't grow up skiing. Instead, she spent her childhood racing BMX. As an adult, quiet hiking trails and long backpacking trips brought her back outside. In 2015, Nicole founded Women Who Hike, a worldwide organization that empowers women on and off the trail.

Today, she's added backcountry skiing to her long list of endeavors, complementing her work in outdoor advocacy with Outdoor Alliance, a coalition of national advocacy organizations that unites the voices of outdoor enthusiasts to conserve public lands. WWA is a founding member of Outdoor Alliance. Nicole works to help our communities get involved with local and national advocacy efforts led by Outdoor Alliance and the organization's member groups.

Nicole says getting into the backcountry is "her thing" because it combines her love of hiking with skiing and moving slowly through the mountains. She says, "Advocacy, the process itself, is kind of like going backcountry skiing. If you've never been before, you don't just show up by yourself. You take some time to learn about it. You get the equipment, you go with a friend who knows avalanche safety and how to navigate the terrain. At Outdoor Alliance, that's what we do, we help navigate the landscape of conservation policy and the advocacy process."

Nicole balances her days between advocacy work and shedding her skins on top of snowy mountains. Unceded Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla lands. Photo by Whitney Whitehouse @whitwhitehouse.

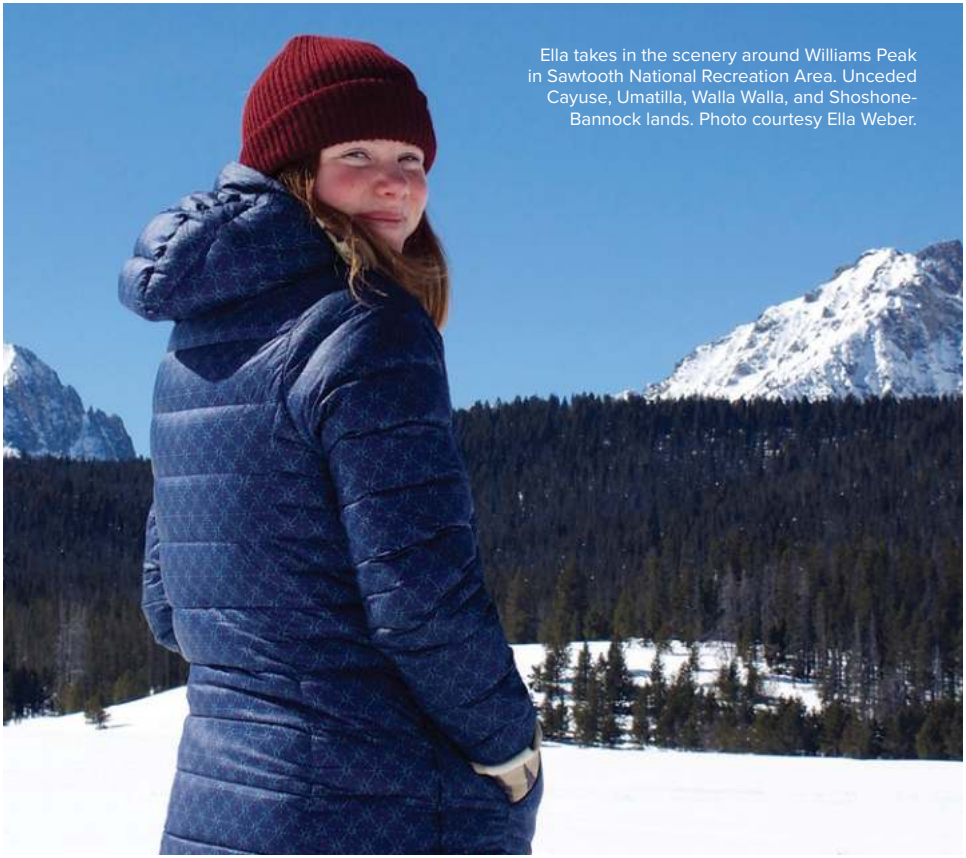
Youth Advocates, Sibling Snow Rippers,
Winter Wildlands Alliance Members:

ELLA & LIAM WEBER

WASHINGTON, DC AND SEATTLE, WA

Ella and Liam Weber, siblings with a shared love for backcountry skiing and a fierce dedication to winter recreation and climate activism, are making waves in their communities. While spending school breaks in the Sawtooths and exploring their backyard playground on Boise National Forest, they share a passion for preserving the natural world. For them, backcountry skiing isn't just a sport; it's a gateway to the stunning landscapes, peaceful settings, and winter excitement that inspires their friendships, family, and career choices.

Guided by a mom who encouraged volunteer participation from a young age, Ella and Liam became involved with WWA before they could spell "backcountry."



Ella takes in the scenery around Williams Peak in Sawtooth National Recreation Area. Unceded Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, and Shoshone-Bannock lands. Photo courtesy Ella Weber.

Liam clearly feeling stoked after a first run on a sunny day in the Valhalla Range of British Columbia, Canada. Unceded Cayuse, Okanagan, Sinixt, Secwépemc, Stoney, Umatilla, and Walla Walla lands. Photo courtesy Liam Weber.

With a deep-seated commitment to the environment, the Weber siblings learned that activism accompanies them wherever they go, requiring an energized, intergenerational team. From selling raffle tickets at the Backcountry Film Festival to talking with friends in the skin track: they have grown to be confident in raising awareness about the impact of climate change and the importance of conservation.

Currently, Liam is braving the Pacific Northwest's wet snow conditions, working in a rental shop and exploring the sidecountry at Crystal Mountain near Seattle, WA. And Ella is interning in Washington, DC to further her work in climate advocacy.

Neither sibling is content with being a mere observer. Liam and Ella actively engage in advocacy work because they know that saving the places they love requires showing up, setting the skin track, and leaving a Gen Z approach to activism.

MOOSE MOUNTAIN SAVED

By Josef Fairbanks

Winter recreationists enjoy all that Moose Mountain has to offer on Superior National Forest. Unceded Anishinabewaki lands. Photos by Joe Herron @joeherron_, Rory Scoles @superiorhighlandbc, and Josef Fairbanks @joeduluth.

The Next Chapter of Skiing and Stewardship in Minnesota

The road North from Duluth on Minnesota's Highway 61 winds through towering cliffs that hug the icy shores of Lake Superior. A skier's eye wanders naturally from the double yellow centerline to draw its own lines in the surrounding snowy glades. Known as the Superior Highlands, this rugged, largely undeveloped region boasts some of the best skiing terrain in the Midwest. It's no surprise that as the backcountry segment continues its boom in the ski industry, the Superior Highlands has become a hotbed for powder hounds willing to earn their turns. A local resort's plan to develop the region's most coveted skiing terrain nearly nipped this blossoming backcountry scene in the bud, but the community rallied to save its crown jewel: Moose Mountain.

Moose Mountain is Minnesota's most prominent geological feature, rising 1000 vertical feet from Lake Superior to the summit. A canopy of mature hardwoods provide natural glades that transition to a dense mix of conifers. Open rock face clearings offer a range of terrain from gentle slopes to huckable cliffs. As part of the Superior National Forest, the mountain is publicly accessible, but Lutsen Mountains Resort, a neighboring commercial ski operation that operates on one-half of Moose Mountain (on private land), applied for a special use permit to develop the adjacent public land in a massive resort expansion. The project would have prohibited public access to the mountain to allow exclusive use by in-bounds resort patrons paying for the privilege.

Superior Highland Backcountry (SHB), a WWA Grassroots Group, helped galvanize the backcountry community's resistance to the proposed expansion. In doing so, they joined others invested in protecting Moose Mountain, including local businesses, others in the outdoor community, and Ojibwe tribes with treaty rights to the land. In 2023, the US Forest Service denied the resort expansion proposal. The Forest Service cited the impacts of the expansion proposal on backcountry skiing access, tribal resources such as sugar maple stands, and negative effects for users of the adjoining Superior Hiking Trail. After years of advocacy, the group is now celebrating having saved Moose Mountain.

With the Forest Service's decision to deny private development on Moose Mountain, SHB is preparing an application of its own. From its founding days, SHB proposed a new vision for the future of skiing in Minnesota—a network of hand-gladed, public-access backcountry ski areas and a hut-to-hut system for winter touring, with Moose Mountain as its beating heart. From SHB's perspective, creating low-impact backcountry ski areas in Northern Minnesota is a creative and respectful opportunity to weave together stewardship, human health and enjoyment, and economic vitality. The group hopes to improve public access to the mountain as a backcountry ski area while respecting the alternative land uses. In this way, Saving Moose Mountain turns the page to an exciting new chapter of skiing as land stewardship in the region.

Connor wants to ensure the tracks he leaves behind are worth following. Unceded Ute lands. Photo by Isaiah Branch-Boyle @isaiahjboyle.

SKIN TRACKS

Indigenous skier and all-around radical human, **Connor Ryan**, shares his skin track playlist

CONNOR RYAN @sacredstoke is a proud Hunkpapa Lakota and passionate skier. Connor was born and raised in the homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute peoples, who have become some of his biggest inspirations and closest relatives, at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. Skiing is his dance and prayer, a ceremony of its own, one that offers a chance to center himself within nature and the Great Mystery of the universe surrounding him. Connor works to inspire others to deepen their connection to the places they live and play in order for us all to be better relatives to our planet, our communities, and ourselves.

The skin track is the place I try to clear my head and put down some of the daily obligations I carry in order to lighten the load that our troubled world puts on my heart. I exchange the internal heaviness rooted in causes beyond my control for a pack weighed down with personal responsibility. Most days the sounds of the wind between the trees and peaks or the scratching of my outerwear through the brush is the sound that renews me and draws me to the present moment... but some days I need a little more auditory encouragement.

If my headphones are on, they are probably blaring. My playlist usually starts with something to set me straight like a lyrical compass, a ballad for the times. These first songs have a message I would scream to the world from the treetops in hopes to make the obvious as apparent to them as it seems to me.

The first songs I hear while my skins glide along help me to let go, the next ones help me to flow. I start to seek out emotion above all else, honoring the parts of me that feel unrecognized. I seldom give enough voice to the gratitude I have for myself and what it has taken for me to become who I am, so I also lean into transmuting my grief and anger into fuel that propels me against gravity. Inevitably, by the time I reach the top I let the volume fade and drop into a chaotic world with newfound flow ready to dance with life and the mountains again. **Flow with me?**

Scan the QR code to access Connor's Skin Track Playlist on Spotify. Please listen kindly and responsibly.

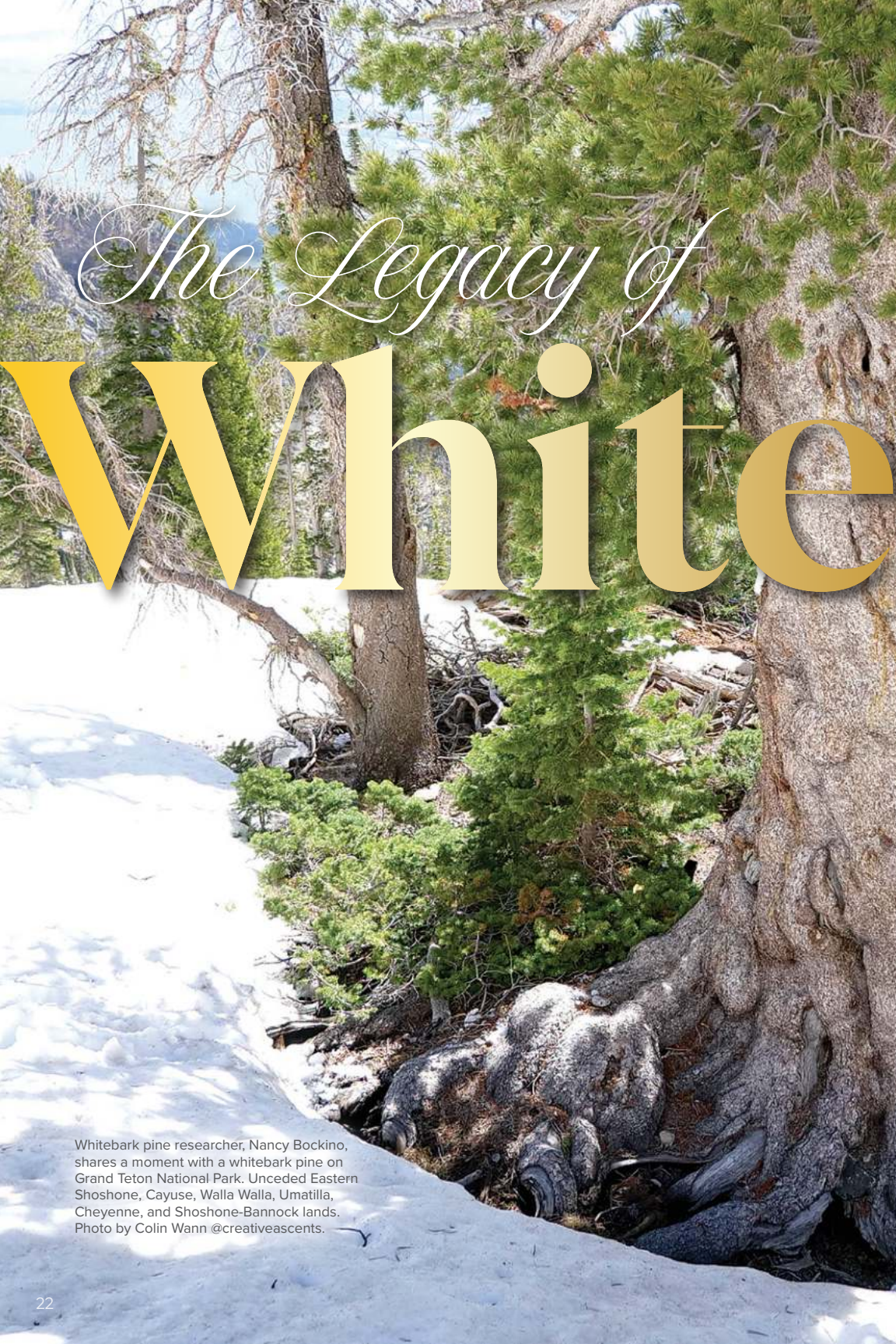
Spotify

Connor's Skin Track Playlist

1. **War Pigs**
   T-Pain
2. **Testify**
   Rage Against the Machine
3. **Creator Made an Animal**
   Snotty Nose Rez Kids & Boslen
4. **Grinding All My Life**
   Nipsey Hussle
5. **Still Here**
   Drake
6. **DAMN RIGHT**
   Snotty Nose Rez Kids
7. **In Bloom**
   Nirvana
8. **Savior**
   Rise Against
9. **My Blood Runs Through This Land**
   Black Belt Eagle Scout
10. **You Get What You Give**
    New Radicals

Fitness runner Annie Van Fossan powers through the spring melt-off. Unceded Cayuse, Umatilla, Shoshone-Bannock, and Walla Walla lands. Photo by Hillary Mayberry @hillarymayberryphoto.

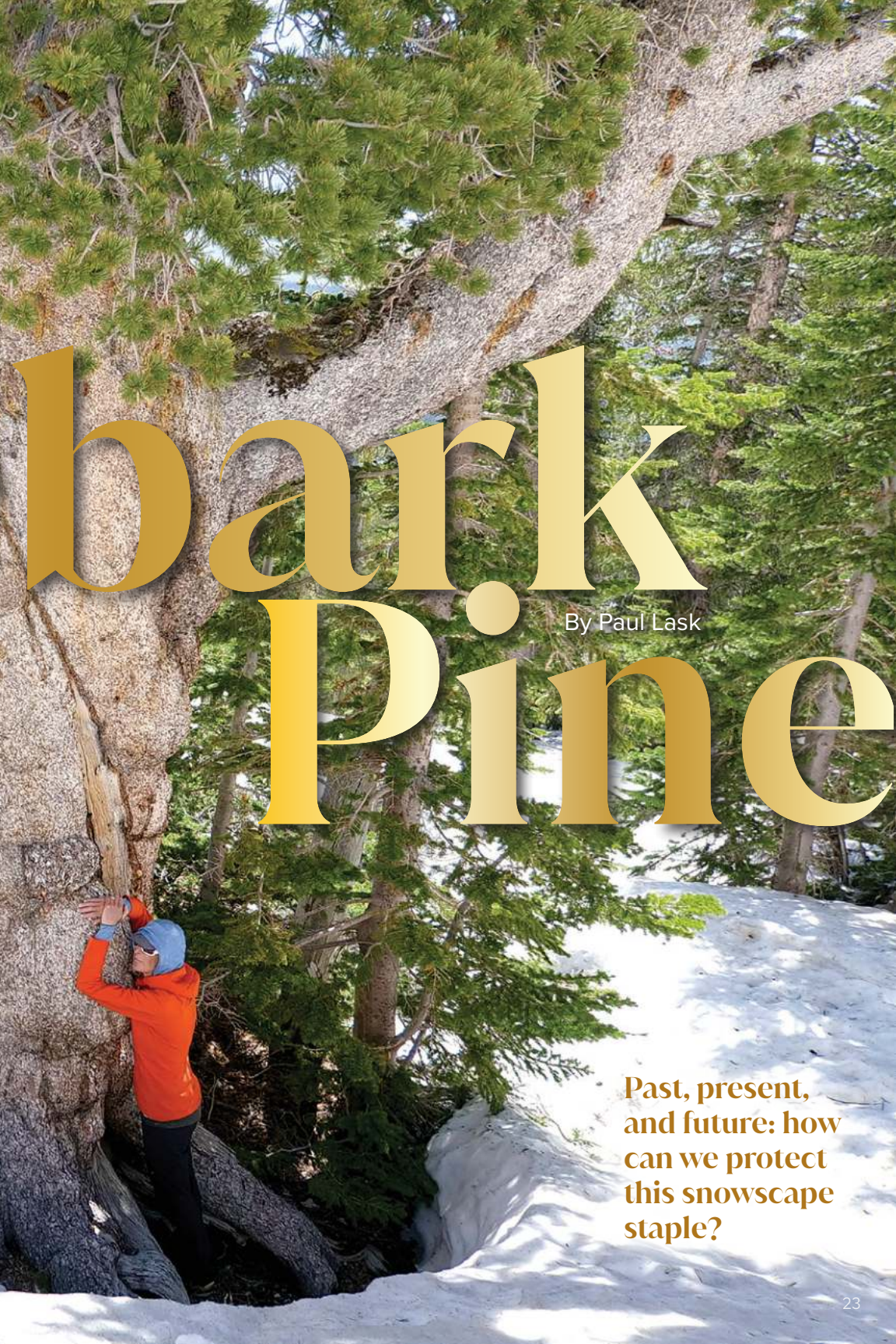
The Legacy of White



Whitebark pine researcher, Nancy Bockino, shares a moment with a whitebark pine on Grand Teton National Park. Unceded Eastern Shoshone, Cayuse, Walla Walla, Umatilla, Cheyenne, and Shoshone-Bannock lands. Photo by Colin Wann @creativeascents.

bark Pine

By Paul Lask



Past, present, and future: how can we protect this snowscape staple?

A Clark's nutcracker rests during its search for whitebark pine seeds. Unceded Eastern Shoshone, Cayuse, Walla Walla, Umatilla, Cheyenne, and Shoshone-Bannock lands. Photo by Tibor.

The Whitebark provides the backdrop for some of our greatest adventures. Unceded Eastern Shoshone, Cayuse, Walla Walla, Umatilla, Cheyenne, and Shoshone-Bannock lands. Photo by Colin Wann @creativeascents.

Nancy Bockino admires the tree that fuels her conservation passion. Grand Teton National Park. Unceded Eastern Shoshone, Cayuse, Walla Walla, Umatilla, Cheyenne, and Shoshone-Bannock lands. Photo by Colin Wann @creativeascents.

Imagine for a moment the very beginning of the potential 1,000 year lifespan of the whitebark pine, a tree that grows along high mountain slopes and ridges throughout western North America.

It starts with a bird called a Clark's nutcracker. When whitebark pine seeds are ripe for dispersal, the nutcracker arrives with its daggerlike bill, pries open the scales of tightly sealed cones, and transports the pea-sized seeds under its tongue to shallow soil caches all over the high mountain landscape. Throughout a summer, a single bird can stash tens of thousands of seeds.

In winter, by mysterious feats of navigation and memory, the nutcracker locates its hoards, unearthing the tiny mounds now buried deep under the snow. These seeds are hot commodities. One field guide notes that they have, ounce for ounce, more calories than chocolate. They contain minerals like iron and zinc and are over 50% fat.

A whitebark pine's odds narrow when we take into account the dozen other birds and eight species of mammal relying on its seeds. These include the red squirrel, whose seed caches are raided by grizzly bears fattening up for winter. All this is going down in a harsh montane environment. Up at timberline, between five and twelve thousand feet, the soil is rocky and thin. The fortunate seeds that germinate and emerge as seedlings are hammered by winter storms, desiccated by harsh summer winds, and face multiple

Guide and naturalist, Jesse A Logan, hugs a whitebark pine on a day out on Custer-Gallatin National Forest. Unceded Cayuse, Umatilla, Walla Walla, Cheyenne, and Crow lands. Photo by Colin Wann @creativeascents.

A skier glides through whitebark pine snowscapes. Grand Teton National Park. Unceded Eastern Shoshone, Cayuse, Walla Walla, Umatilla, Cheyenne, and Shoshone-Bannock lands. Photo by Colin Wann @creativeascents.

stressors which have contributed to their listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 2022.

The lucky few that survive face risks as well, including a fatal invasive fungal infection called white pine blister rust, pine beetle outbreaks, and larger, hotter wildfires. Climate change is exacerbating all of this.

In a 2018 survey, American Forests noted there are as many dead whitebark pines as there are living ones with an estimated 325 million trees killed. With fewer trees on the landscape, each one that remains is “now at greater risk to any or all of the potentially damaging agents, simply due to the shrinking number of trees,” writes Kristen Legg, an ecologist with the National Park Service.

Because its range is stitched across majestic snowscapes in national parks and forests, the whitebark is often part of the setting for those of us who ski, climb, and recreate in the mountains. Yet many of us overlook or take for granted the pretty backdrop of gnarled old trees.

We might not realize or think too much about the fact that the shade of their crowns stabilizes and preserves snowpack, which is vital for watershed health; that their roots protect against erosion; and that they are entwined with wildlife through their harbors of habitat. Back in the early 1960s, Rachel Carson famously painted a nightmarishly quiet world robbed of songbirds. Scan a blanched whitebark forest and a similar dystopia begins to emerge.

To ward off a coming extinction, federal and tribal agencies have teamed up with conservation organizations and researchers to protect and restore whitebark pine forests. In 2017, the Whitebark Pine Ecosystem Foundation (WPEF) published a roadmap to guide restoration called the "National Whitebark Pine Restoration Plan."

This is a multifaceted project whose timeline is on the scale of centuries. Trees that are naturally resistant to blister rust are being caged, their cones shipped to nurseries, their seedlings planted back on the landscape. Living whitebark pines can be treated to protect against beetles. Surrounding timberlands can be managed in a way that reduces fire severity. The knowledge and tools are available, but inspiring the passion, getting people to care about a tree's fate, arguably starts at the level of recreation.

In 2016, WPEF launched a ski area certification program to encourage ski areas and resorts to participate in the recovery of whitebark pine. Their approach includes recognizing the areas already participating in whitebark conservation, educating staff and managers on the ways they can help protect and restore, and offering guided snowshoe walks in which the whitebark is discussed. To date, WPEF has certified half a dozen ski areas—including the Yellowstone Club, which was the first area certified on private lands.

Jeff Cadry, environmental manager for the Yellowstone Club, says they have been transporting whitebark pines away from ski runs where they're susceptible to damage from snow grooming machines. They have relocated over 500 hundred trees, and are looking to expand the operation.

Skiing, hiking, and camping under the canopy of a whitebark forest "feels magical," Wes Swaffar, director of the Northern Rockies at American Forests told me over the phone. "Backcountry recreationists know this, and they need to share this with people."

This sentiment was echoed by Dr. Andrew Bower, Climate Adaptation Specialist with the Forest Service in Washington state: "Ski areas throughout the west are probably the best opportunities for the public to see and appreciate and learn about whitebark pine."

WWA's mission to inspire and empower people to protect America's wild snowscapes is grown on this fertile political ground where recreation and conservation overlap. Given about 90% of whitebark pine forests are on public land in the United States, lovers of the snowy wilds currently hold a fragile multigenerational gift, whether or not they know it.

Say that tiny seed squeezed through its bottleneck of early challenges. It elbowed up, held on to its place in the ground, and in thirty years produced its first cone. This cone will take two years to fully mature. Fifty years later, a tree enters "peak cone production," a manufacturing cycle that goes on for centuries. The tree just needs to remain. To do what it has always done.

Buffeted by screaming winds, pummeled by blizzards, "every tree is an expression of time and struggle," nature photographer Quinn Lowrey notes in an interview with WPEF in 2022. Whitebark don't "hide their past but wear it openly in the exposition of their form," he adds. Its past consists of centuries of nourishment, safety, and

stabilization for whole ecosystems. To bend from the weight of such shouldering is understandable.

The tenacity of this keystone species is what makes it so hard to fathom it's endangered state. If we could learn to love something as more than a decorative screen we whiz past down mountainsides, birdwatched, or walked alongside as we contemplate transcendence. If we could fully understand that in those moments we are having an impact. If we saw we had the potential to course correct. There's precedent here—we've restored redwood forests, pulled the bald eagle and the American bison back from the edge of extinction; wolf packs move again across lands from which they were exterminated a century ago.

The group of whitebark pine's human protectors are just as steadfast as the tree itself. Since the mid-90s, Legg, the National Park Service ecologist, has interacted with many of the same people in her research over the past three decades. Whole careers have been dedicated to this tree. "Like the tree," Legg said, "these people are hardy, tough, steadfast, and so committed."

Raising awareness that protection of this tree can start where we recreate. The lucky humans who recreate in whitebark forests can themselves be seeds. You can help grow a legacy, a hopeful tale of returning vitality to the mountains, something future generations will study as they too learn how to better relate to the natural world.

For more information, follow **@fortheloveofwhitebark** *and catch the film, "Beloved Whitebark: Stalwart Witness" in this season's Backcountry Film Festival program:* **winterwildlands.org/stream**

Nancy Bockino ponders legacy, transcendence, and stewardship on Grand Teton National Park. Unceded Eastern Shoshone, Cayuse, Walla Walla, Umatilla, Cheyenne, and Shoshone-Bannock lands. Photo by Colin Wann @creativeascents.

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Whitebark Society

Join this leadership giving society as a major donor who supports our work and programs at a level of $1,000 or more annually. Whitebark Society members power our mission to protect and steward America's wildest snowscapes for ourselves and future generations. They have an unparalleled opportunity to influence the quality and sustainability of backcountry skiing.

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The ghost of a whitebark pine still remains on a slope above Appistoki Creek in the Two Medicine Area of Glacier National Park. Unceded Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla lands. Photo by Hunter D'Antuono via Flathead Beacon.

Exploring Colorado's Backyards

San Juan Mountains Association's SnowSchool program connects kids to their local snowscapes

By Emma Renly

Just outside the city limits of Durango, Colorado, rise the San Juan Mountains. On this winter morning in January, the snowy landscape provides an opportunity for young kids to connect with the surrounding environment through a day out with San Juan Mountains Association's (SJMA) local SnowSchool program.

Since 2002, WWA has partnered with SJMA to help introduce the next generation of land stewards to Southwest Colorado's ecology. This includes field trips with local schools, a weekly homeschool program, afterschool programs, and interpretive programs for the community.

A focus of SnowSchool is to help kids understand the snow's impact on the local watershed, along with snow science, winter survival, and animal ecology. The curriculum was created in collaboration with NASA researchers and other snow scientists for preschool to high school level grades.

On this specific snow day, Gannon, age 9, said it best while building a snow fort: "The whole reason I'm here is to learn and play."

SJMA's outdoor education programs run year-round, with the winter months focused on SnowSchool curriculum and supported by WWA through resources such as snowshoes and snow study tools. Each week, students from different schools, communities, and age groups pile into school buses, meet at trailheads and in their classrooms to learn more about snow and their local backyards.

"I love hanging out with my friends and playing in the snow," said Elliot, age 10. "I like the teachers and everything we learn."

Instructors even noted that SnowSchool days are their favorite each week. Understanding that having fun is key to learning, these teachers, volunteers, and community members skillfully combine play and education to further the students' learning about the importance of conservation and protection of public lands.

Today's break-time snowball fights are coupled with conversations about land use, a huge focus of SJMA's education outreach.

"You would think fires don't start in the winter, but you're wrong, they do," explained Josephine, age 10. "Sometimes people don't put their fire out completely,

Students enjoy their day out with SJMA's SnowSchool program on San Juan National Forest. Unceded Ute, Pueblos, and Diné Bikéyah lands. Photos by Emma Renly @emesre.

and it can start burning underground and catch the trees on fire, even in the snow."

With low snowpack this winter and as spring snowmelt creeps across the mountains, connecting the students' interest in the snowscape to the local watersheds remains at the heart of the winter programming. This includes digging a snow pit to observe the different layers and ice crystals of the snowpack while connecting what it means for the amount of water that will be stored in the watersheds for consumption.

Throughout the day, students were eager to share pieces of information they had retained as they snowshoed around and discovered different pieces of their watershed landscape.

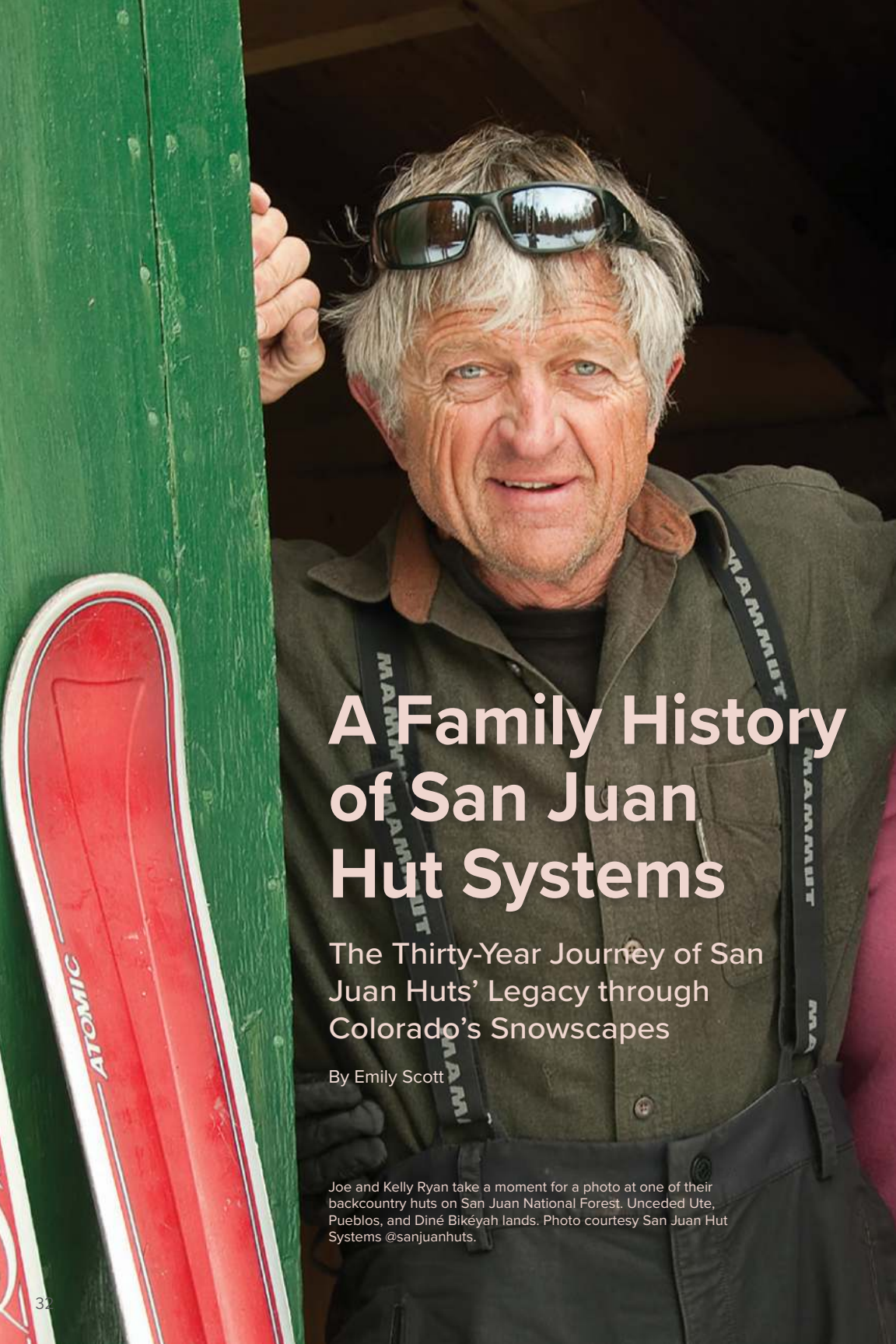
"I learned you can make natural sunscreen by rubbing your hand on aspen trees," said Savannah, age 10. "I tried it and it actually works! Some daily skin care advice for you."

Many animals, such as the lynx, beaver, mountain lion, and fox survive and thrive throughout the winter months; however, as Gus, age 7, quickly learned, there are no polar bears in the San Juan Mountains. He understood, however, how animals such as the mole live underground to stay safe in the winter months.

"And warm, since the snow is insulation," added his older brother Amus, age 10.

With 72 SnowSchool sites across the country, the goal remains consistent: introduce the next generation to the magic of winter, to snow's impact on our lives, and how to play on our winter public lands.

Find your local SnowSchool site:
winterwildlands.org/find-a-site



A Family History of San Juan Hut Systems

The Thirty-Year Journey of San Juan Huts' Legacy through Colorado's Snowscapes

By Emily Scott

Joe and Kelly Ryan take a moment for a photo at one of their backcountry huts on San Juan National Forest. Unceded Ute, Pueblos, and Diné Bikéyah lands. Photo courtesy San Juan Hut Systems @sanjuanhuts.

Deep in Colorado, a mesmerizing tale unfurls: a saga of family legacy, resilience, and the inception of San Juan Hut Systems, a hut-to-hut system that weaves through southwest Colorado's wild snowscapes.

In 1983, inspired by Canadian skiing adventures, San Juan Hut Systems founder Joe Ryan aspired to transplant the hut-to-hut experience to American soil. A comprehensive year-round hut system was needed in the US and Joe was looking for a better 'family job' than guiding (his current occupation) for his daughter, Kelly.

After the loss of his friend and future hut system business partner to an avalanche, Joe's dream lay dormant but not forgotten. In 1987, Joe, now with four-year-old Kelly by his side, breathed life back into the idea, establishing the first piece of San Juan Hut Systems on the north slope of the Sneffels Range. This marked the birth of a unique network of huts, creating a first-of-its-kind human-powered travel system between Telluride and Ouray.

After years of guiding humans through the huts on their own power, Joe decided to sell the business in 2010. Kelly, guiding on Mt. Rainier at the time, initially paid little attention to the idea. A mere three days later, she decided to move home and take over the family business. "I spent my twenties trying to find somewhere better to live and work, but there is nowhere better," she reflected.

Under Kelly's guidance, San Juan Hut Systems supports wild journeys to inspire and empower all kinds of adventurers to experience unique Colorado snowscapes. Kelly says, "My dad tends to avoid schedules and routines, which keeps life

Joe and Kelly adventure through their hut system on San Juan National Forest. Unceded Ute, Pueblos, and Diné Bikéyah lands. Photo courtesy San Juan Hut Systems @sanjuanhuts.

fun but can be challenging in a business. I have added a lot of boring checklists and routines that helped us grow and provide a better product, but the mission is still the same: to help people get out in this amazing terrain to have their own adventures while leaving a minimal footprint."

These huts echo the spirit of their founder, offering a slice of safety and comfort in the vast expanse of the wild. They serve as a gateway for people to have unique and powerful experiences in the backcountry because, as Kelly explains, when traveling to the huts "you are alone out there," and there are "not many other experiences like that in the modern world."

Now, with a young daughter of her own, Kelly envisions passing the torch to her daughter as the heir to the legacy of the San Juan Hut Systems.

Write your San Juan story with the Ryans, where every hut is a chapter and the surrounding wild snowscapes are pages waiting to be filled with adventure: **sanjuanhuts.com**

TURN TRACTION INTO ACTION

CMC RIMS
Data Collection App

GET IT ON Google Play

Download on the App Store

win cool gear

Is the parking lot full? Is access to the trail blocked?

We need more data to inform how winter recreation is managed on public lands and to ensure America's wild snowscapes are protected for future generations. By using the **CMC RIMS app**, you can help land management agencies better address important winter recreation issues that impact us all.

COLORADO MOUNTAIN CLUB · WINTER WILDLANDS ALLIANCE · ski kind.

cmc.org/conservation/rims-mobile-app

YEAR IN REVIEW annual report

8 WINTER TRAVEL PLANS IN THE WORKS

ELDORADO, TAHOE, PLUMAS, LAKE TAHOE BASIN MANAGEMENT UNIT, INYO, SHOSHONE, KOOTENAI, FLATHEAD

35 PROJECTS & CAMPAIGNS ACROSS ELEVEN STATES

389 HOURS IN MEETINGS

with partners & land management agencies

10 NEW EPISODES OF TRAIL BREAK RADIO

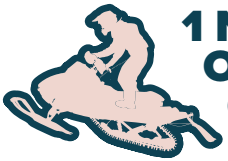
495 acres of Public Land

(and backcountry ski terrain) protected from commercial ski area expansion on the Superior National Forest in Minnesota

ski ♥ kind.

PLEDGES: 1740

2023



1 NEW OSV PLAN COMPLETED

Kaniksu

on the Idaho-Panhandle NF

$22,061 RAISED

FROM 97 DONORS

ON GIVING TUESDAY

2 NEW FOREST PLANS STARTED

LOLO AND BRIDGER-TETON

3 NEW STAFF MEMBERS

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  California Stewardship Manager
- **BRITTANY LEFFEL**
  Colorado Policy Coordinator
- **EMILY SCOTT**
  Operations Coordinator

WINTERING WILDLIFE

CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

founded with **5 partners** and growing!

winteringwildlife.org

1 NEW BOARD MEMBER FRAZIER MILLER

99% OF MEMBERS AGREE **WWA** IS DOING **IMPACTFUL WORK**

and what matters most to members is "creating balance in the backcountry"

93 BACKCOUNTRY FILM FESTIVAL TOUR STOPS across **20** STATES and **3** countries

35,000 kids engaged across **72 active SnowSchool sites** in **17 states**

1,300 FREE OR DISCOUNTED

snowshoes, hands-on snow science learning tools, and winter gear donated to kids in SnowSchool site communities across the country

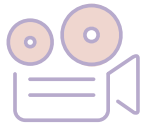
NEW grassroots GROUPS: 3

and 34 groups total across 15 states

10 NEW BACKCOUNTRY PARTNERS

52% of SnowSchool students qualify as underserved

2ND Annual **$7,500** film grant awarded to **"WHAT IF?"**



9 members of **WWA's JEDI Committee**

JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

HOSTED THE 10TH BIENNIAL **GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY CONFERENCE**

Winter Wildlands Alliance Network

GRASSROOTS GROUPS

ALASKA

Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition
Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks

CALIFORNIA & NEVADA

Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association
Friends of the Inyo
Friends of Plumas Wilderness
Snowlands Network
Tahoe Backcountry Alliance

COLORADO

Colorado Mountain Club
High Country Conservation Advocates
Friends of The Routt Backcountry
San Juan Backcountry Alliance
Elk Mountains Backcountry Alliance
Tenth Mountain Division Hut Association

IDAHO

Idaho Conservation League
Nordic and Backcountry Skiers Alliance of Idaho
Teton Valley Trails and Pathways

MINNESOTA

Superior Highland Backcountry

MONTANA

Beartooth Recreational Trails Association
Montana Backcountry Alliance
Wild Montana

NEW HAMPSHIRE & MAINE

Granite Backcountry Alliance

NEW MEXICO

Taos Mountain Alliance

OREGON

Mazamas

UTAH

Nordic United
Wasatch Backcountry Alliance

VERMONT

Catamount Trail Association

WASHINGTON

Chewelah Valley Land Trust
El Sendero Backcountry Ski and Snowshoe Club
The Mountaineers
Spokane Mountaineers

WEST VIRGINIA

Friends of Blackwater

WYOMING

Teton Backcountry Alliance
Togwotee Backcountry Alliance
Wyoming Wilderness Association

BACKCOUNTRY PARTNERS

Alaska Guide Collective (Anchorage, AK)
Alpine Quest Sports (Vail, CO)
Avalanche Science Guides (Boise, ID)
Backcountry Babes (Truckee, CA)
Backwoods Mountain Sports (Sun Valley, ID)
Dan Bailey's Outdoor Company (Livingston, MT)
Denali Arts Council (Talkeetna, AK)
Idaho Mountain Touring (Boise, ID)
Jackson Hole Ecotour Adventures (Jackson, WY)
Mammoth Brewing Co. (Mammoth Lakes, CA)
No Lift Needed (Grantham, NH)
Rich Meyer Alpine Guide (Bay Area, CA)
San Juan Hut Systems (Ridgway, CO)
Sun Valley Trekking (Sun Valley, ID)
Tahoe Mountain Sports (Truckee, CA)

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