

Mountain Park NEWS

Winter 2016 • Vol. 17 Num. 1

Sticking Around for Another Winter



Here I am – again! The last time I sat on this lichen-covered chunk of crumbling granite, it was a gentle spring afternoon. A handful of early season wildflowers, clumps of green grass, and a warm sun accompanied me that day. Fast forward several months to this early December day, and the plants are brown and dried up, their life energy pulled down into their roots to wait out the winter.

I am perched on a south-facing hillside that looks down on the park's upper road. This afternoon's sun is trying, unsuccessfully, to work its way through a thin cloud cover that has crept into the western sky. The sun was shining brightly earlier today and all day yesterday, melting most of the snow off of this sloped perch. So I knew this spot would be snowless – an ideal outdoor office to sit and write in an otherwise snowy winter landscape.

November ended only after fifteen inches of snow wrote the word *winter* all over the park. Clumps of snow remain on the hundreds of pine and fir trees that cover the north-facing slope directly in front of me. Tracks of snowshoers and cross-country skiers are visible down on the road, now closed off to motorized traffic, along with tracks showing the wanderings of the park's more hairy travelers – deer, rabbit, fox, squirrel. Clearly, there is still plenty of winter activity in the park.

This will be my fortieth winter in Beulah. After spending my first couple of decades of winters on the busy, dirty streets of New York City, I much prefer winters here in these Wet Mountains. I tried to leave Beulah once, in the fall before my seventh winter, but my roots had already begun to stick, so here I am, ready for another winter. The western writer and environmentalist Wallace Stegner would call me a “sticker,” someone who finds a place, settles, learns the place, and commits to it. As opposed to a “boomer,” who is always looking for the next place to try and strike it rich. Being a sticker apparently works for me. I like the way Gary Snyder put it, “Find your place on the planet, dig in, and take responsibility from there.”

In the last two weeks, I learned that two people I've known who were about my age will not be experiencing this winter, or any winter, again. Life can be so short! I have no idea how many more winters I will get to live here in Beulah, or get to live through at all. I may have dozens more, or this may be my last. What I do know is that I intend on savoring every bit of this winter, to live each day of it to the fullest.

The sound of a clump of snow falling off a branch and landing on a large rock – like a hissing sound or tiny pebbles hitting a hard surface – pulls my eyes from the page of my journal to the winter landscape that is quickly *feeling* more and more winter-like. I can make out the position of the sun

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TO GIVE IT
SWEETNESS.”
~JOHN
STEINBECK



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MPEC's Mission is to provide
environmental education for the
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a citizenry that understands,
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through the gray – it is moments away from reaching the horizon. As always seems to happen when the winter sun drops below the western ridge, the temperature drops as well. It is about time I slip on my snowshoes, add my tracks to the ones down on the road, and get some warm blood pumping around my body.

Cold! Snow! Ice! Wind! Bring them on – I am thrilled to be a sticker in this southern Colorado valley, and thrilled to still have another winter to be alive in!

~ Dave Van Manen

December 1, 2015

Guided Hikes - Winter

"I BELIEVE THE
WORLD IS
INCOMPREHENSIBLY
BEAUTIFUL - AN
ENDLESS PROSPECT
OF MAGIC AND
WONDER."
~ ANSEL ADAMS

Come discover some of the world's magic and wonder on a Guided Hike in Pueblo Mountain Park. An MPEC Guided Hike is a great way to get outside and enjoy a winter's day. Snow cover is hard to predict – it may be snowy (in which case we'll snowshoe) or it may not. Either way, it is best to dress in layers and wear good hiking shoes. Also, bring along plenty of water, and maybe a snack on these moderately strenuous hikes that are educational and fun. Unless otherwise noted, most hikes last from two to three hours and are appropriate for adults and children over 12. MPEC members free, non-members \$5. **Note:** If snow conditions are right during a scheduled hike, the hike may become a snowshoe outing. **Registration required:** www.hikeandlearn.org

- **Sun, Jan 3, 1pm, First Hike of 2016** A great way to begin the New Year -- be outside, get some exercise, meet some new friends, learn some things about Nature - start the new year off right!
- **Sat, Jan 30, 1pm, An Afternoon Winter Hike** Maybe there will be snow on the ground, maybe there won't. Either way, we'll be out along the trails, seeing what the land looks like in late January.
- **Sat, Feb 13, 1pm, "Zuke's" February Walk Your Dog Hike** This is about the halfway point of winter...a perfect excuse to take a hike with your pup (or a snowshoe, weather permitting – and we have the snowshoes if you don't). Dress warm and be ready for fun and exercise. Dogs must be leashed.
- **Sun, Feb 28 11am, Winter Wildflower Hike** By this time each year, the park's first species of wildflower, spring beauty, is sometimes blooming (sometimes as early as late January), so we'll be looking for them! Flowers or no flowers, it will be a terrific late morning hike.
- **Sat, Mar 12, 1pm, "Zuke's" March Walk Your Dog Hike** Another opportunity to enjoy a winter saunter with your dog(s), guided by Ranger Sandy. Dress warm and be ready for fun and exercise. Dogs must be leashed.
- **Sun, Mar 20, 11am, Spring Equinox Nature Quotes Saunter** The sun is halfway on its sky-climbing journey between its December low point on the winter solstice and its June high point on the summer solstice. We'll be searching for signs of spring as we acknowledge the equinox on this hike, inspired by the words of some terrific Nature writers (bring along a quote to share or not, we'll have several ready to inspire).

MPEC sends a warm thank you to Anne Moulton, Jan Myers, Ruth Ann Amey, Helen Philipsen, Elaine Sartoris, and Carol Kyte for putting the fall newsletter mailing together; Austin McCullah for helping out with grading the park roads; Steve Douglas for the ongoing help with the forest stewardship work as well as his additional assistance getting the wood supply organized for the winter.; Shawna Shoaf for designing the newsletter, posters and many other printed items; Laura Leyba for helping out with all sorts of projects; the staff and clients of YOS (Youth Offender System) for help with firewood for the biomass boilers.

Winter Wildflowers

By Dave Van Manen

Winter! Just the word conjures up so many images - conifer trees covered in huge dollops of snow; the path of a pair of cross-country skis cut into fresh powder; snowshoeing on a crisp sunny day through deep snow and discovering mouse tracks scampering their way across the surface of the snow; seeing the shadow of wood smoke floating over the snow in the moonlight on a cold, cold night; listening to the sound of snowflakes landing on the shoulders of my jacket while standing perfectly still deep in the snowy woods. The days of t-shirts and shorts, afternoon thunderstorms, long sunny days that stay light well into the evening, and green grass and colorful wildflowers seem so far away when the land is in its winter garb of snow and cold.

But the truth is, along with all of these chilly images, winter in Colorado's southern foothills often brings with it the blossoms of a few native wildflowers as well. If you know where to look, chances are pretty good that a mid-winter hike in Pueblo Mountain Park can offer a look at some newly sprouted flowers. They aren't necessarily conspicuous or showy, as they are quite small, but they are a sign that the natural procession of the seasons remains, and that many more wildflowers will follow these as spring eventually takes over the winter.

I've been recording the dates of various natural occurrences in the park for many years, including the dates I discover these early wildflowers are first in bloom each year. Incidentally, this is called *phenology*, which is the study of how the biological world times natural events like bird migrations and wildflowers blooming. Since the calendar date for the winter season officially ends on March 20, I know of at least two species of wildflowers common to the park that can and often show their first blossoms well before that date.

For a little member of the Purslane family, spring beauty (*Claytonia rosea*), it would be an unusual year if this white or pink five-petal blossom didn't present its first blossoms well before March 20. I usually find a few of these earliest wildflowers around mid-February underneath a particular clump of Gambel oak along the Tower Trail. But I did find a few in bloom on January 27 several years ago. No, it is not an "in-your-face, look-at-me, I'm gorgeous" kind of flower, but if you get up close (best with a

hand-lens), it truly is a lovely little flower, with mid-winter making it all the more lovely.

Another potential winter bloomer is mountain bladderpod (*Lesquerella montana*), a yellow mustard that prefers the rocky soils of the park's sunny south-facing hillsides, known as the mountain shrubland ecosystem. This is another low-growing plant, with four-petal blossoms growing on stems that radiate from a central basal cluster of hairy, pale-green leaves. I've found this in bloom as early as March 11.

Once the calendar says that winter is officially over and the race towards the park's most flowery month of May is underway, snowstorms may continue, but the snow only provides welcome moisture for early spring flowers like Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla ludoviciana*), mountain candytuft (*Noccaea montana*), dwarf daisy (*Erigeron pumilus*), and Nelson larkspur (*Delphinium nuttallianum*).

Pueblo Mountain Park offers so many natural wonders in all seasons – even wildflowers in winter!



MPEC's 2016 Summer Camps



MPEC now has an on-line donor page at our website. You can easily and securely renew your membership or make a donation using your credit card at our new web link. Just go to www.hikeandlearn.org click on **Help MPEC Grow**. Thanks!

The snow may be a foot deep outside under the pines, but we are getting excited about summer days full of wildflowers, birdsong, and the happy sounds of children in Nature attending our 2016 summer camps. We love how MPEC provides so many children with precious summer days filled with Nature fun and life-long memories. We have camps available for children in Kindergarten, starting with our Cubs Camps, all the way through 9th graders in several of our camps. Transportation from Pueblo is included in all of our camps, and through our amazing scholarship program we are able to send many children to camp at a reduced rate. Registration for camps will be opening on January 1st, 2016; many camps fill quickly so do not hesitate to sign up before spots are filled. Prices listed are MPEC member price (non-member price in parentheses). Please visit www.hikeandlearn.org for more information and to register for camp.

Cubs Camp (children entering K-1st Grade):

One of our most popular camps, children will participate in gentle hikes, music, games, and exploration. A great way to introduce your children to the outdoors! Parents are welcome to attend. 8:00 am- 1:30 pm daily.

June 13-17; \$140 (\$150)

Nature Explorers (2nd-3rd Grade):

Campers will hike, explore, and participate in a variety of other Nature activities with MPEC Rangers. 8:00 am – 3:00 pm daily. **July 11-15; \$160 (\$170)**

Intrepid Adventurers (4th-5th Grade):

Through hiking, exploring, Nature games, and other fun outdoor activities, campers will have a great summer adventure in Pueblo Mountain Park. **July 18-22; \$160 (\$170)**

Survival Camp (5th-6th Grade):

These three day, two night camps are perfect for any child who loves the outdoors. Campers will gain basic backpacking and survival skills, while using minimal tools and technology. Choose from two separate camp dates.

Survival Camp 1: June 14-16, Survival Camp 2: July 12-14; \$260 (\$280)

Mission Wolf (6th-9th Grade):

A very popular MPEC summer camp; join us for this three day, two night service learning camp. Participants will spend time with the resident wolves of the Mission Wolf Sanctuary, volunteering their time to support this wonderful organization, while learning all about the role wolves play in ecosystems. Come hear the wolves howl! Choose from two separate camp dates. **Mission Wolf 1: June 28-30; Mission Wolf 2: August 2-4; \$280 (\$300)**

Greenhorn Wilderness Camp (7th-9th Grade):

This three day, two night camp is designed for young people with a love of Nature and an interest in backpacking. Participants will carry all the gear they need up the Greenhorn Trail through some of the wildest country in the area. **June 21-23; \$310 (\$330)**

Mountain Adventure Camp (4th-6th Grade):

During this five-day residential camp, campers get to stay in the beautiful Horseshoe Lodge, participating in a variety of fun outdoor activities, including hiking, team development on our challenge course, rock climbing, crafts and much more. Campers will also get to participate in a one night introduction to backpacking within the Mountain Park, where they will get to sleep under Colorado stars. All meals are included. **July 25-29; \$380 (\$400)**



MPEC sends a huge and heartfelt THANK YOU to all who have donated to MPEC through new memberships, membership renewals, grants, memorials, and other donations: Bud Allen, Tonia & Christopher Allen, Klaus & Joan Anselm, Paulette Arns, Gary & Liz Bacon, Cathy Bentley, Maria Westy Bush, Sam Carlsson, Kelly Charlton, Janice Chase, Dan & Brenda Clements, Polly & Pete Conlon, Anne Courtright, Sheila Cover, Maria Davis, Bryan & Jennifer Gallagher, Cathy Lee Gibson, Katryna Fredregill, Marjorie Genova, Lorelee Gregory, Cyndi & Dale Hart, Wendy Hunker, Danita Johnson, Terry Johnson, Bob and Doris Johnston Foundation, Duane & Sally Jones, Penelope Justice, Doris Kester, Kathryn Kettler, Dave & Joan Kriehn, Frank Lamb Foundation, Raymond Lay, Sally & Pat Mara, Phillip Marin, Bill & Pok-Hui McKinney, Dorothy Mendoza, Diane Mueller & Glenn Runkewich, Elaine Lopez Pacheco, AJ & Lynn Pilarski, JP & Laura Pilarski, Robert Pratt Family, Mary Quattro, Dr. Richard & Diane Ratliff, Patricia & Harry Rurup, Donna Seilheimer, Fred & Clareann (Suzy) Smith, Jean Smith, Mike & Sandy Spahr, Judy Staples, Anne Stokes-Hochberg, James & Paulette Stuart, Keith Swerdfeger, Teresa Theriault, Erin & Luke Tomky, Lamar Trant, Dave & Helene Van Manen, Brad Whitney, Bechtel National Inc., City & County of Pueblo, Railway Technology Consulting, and United Way of Pueblo County.

Yes!!! I want to join the Mountain Park Environmental Center and be a part of an organization that helps folks of all ages connect with Nature! Members receive the *Mountain Park News*, a discount on bookshop items and program fees, and the satisfaction of supporting an organization dedicated to the promotion of ecological literacy. Your Support is tax-deductible!

Make secure online donations using your credit card at our website: www.hikeandlearn.org

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Pueblo Mountain Park: Where Many "Firsts" Take Place

By Warren Nolan, MPEC Board of Trustees

Headachy after spending too much time inside the loud shroud of the digital cloud? Are you malwarred to desperation, depressed by 24/7 cable news? Do you need an infusion of hope and optimism? There is no better antidote for doom and gloom than seeing and hearing a crooked line of boisterous children following their Earth Studies teacher up the Tower Trail.

The Earth Studies Program at the Mountain Park Environmental Center brings over 1,300 5th graders from Pueblo City Schools to Beulah for several full days over the school year. Yes, it covers state and district educational standards, but most importantly, it unplugs children, nurtures new possibilities, and helps them build healthy spiritual and neurological connections from the raw materials of nature.

My own support of MPEC stems from the 1950's and 60's when my mother and father, along with friends and siblings, would often drive to Pueblo Mountain Park to picnic. Our caravan of Ford and Chevy station wagons would pull up next to a picnic table, car doors would burst open and unbound, we would instinctively form a noisy, moving tribe of children -- a tangle of siblings, cousins, and friends. Like Vikings, we would swarm the picnic tables loaded with supermarket bounty and steal away with Oscar Meyer hot dogs, Rainbo buns, cans of Shurfine pop, and Kraft marshmallows -- our aunts in hot pursuit shouting out our full Christian names.

We played raucous games of hide and seek, counting: one, two, three and then we would scatter -- like wild animals -- in hot pursuit of my dad and my uncle Lloyd, who would hide above us in the quiet canopy of a ponderosa pine tree. This same uncle Lloyd was also the shaman of fire. He would delicately construct a tipi of dry twigs, light a match and then huff and puff. We laughed at the spectacle of our big uncle sprawled out on the ground, the geological crack of his upper butt on full display. We held our breath and then let out a guttural ahhhhh when the first flames of fire would flicker and rise on the tongue of my uncle's breath. Meanwhile, my father, still hiding, would circle the boundaries of our comfort zone making screechy yeti-like yelps.

Many of my own personal outdoor firsts occurred in Pueblo Mountain Park. My first hike was up the Tower Trail where a nearby lightning bolt sprayed ozone and straightened my hair. Beulah was also the first place I camped. On a late summer afternoon my dad drove me and my

brother to Beulah. We picnicked, then threw a piece of .006 mill plastic on the ground, unrolled our musty smelling army surplus bags, and stayed awake all night. That night I witnessed my first full moon rise. My confused brain thought the big beaming moon was some sort of disaster -- a plane crash, or a star exploding. No catastrophe, just the moon.

As I fish these events to the surface of memory, I am struck by what a visionary idea those Pueblo citizens, known as the San Isabel Public Recreation Association, had when they convinced the City of Pueblo to purchase, for \$6,000 in January 1920, the 611 acres of land that became Pueblo Mountain Park.

Seventy-five years later the park was neglected, underutilized, and all-but-forgotten when another group of Pueblo County citizens formed a non-profit, known as the Mountain Park Environmental Association, to resuscitate park. Led by Dave and Helene Van Manen, their vision escaped to grow and glow, and I doubt that in 1998, even these visionaries could envision what Pueblo Mountain Park would become in 2015 -- a healthy, intertwined infrastructure of forest, trails, and historic buildings reformed and rebuilt. A park rejuvenated by the joyous cacophony of happy, noisy children.

What excites me most is that, through programs made possible by the Mountain Park Environmental Center, Pueblo's children, our children, have the opportunity to build their own catalog of experiences, memories, and outdoor firsts: first hike on snowshoes, first spring Pasque flower, or first walk in the woods. But, the vision that is Mountain Park Environmental Center needs your help.

Please help support programs that provide a place for children to: romp, run, scream, laugh, cry, fall down, get up, make dams in a creek, or just roll around in a pile of pine needles. Help how? Bring children to the park. Of course, you can bring your own children, but you can also bring many other children to the park through the gift of your time, membership, or by making a donation that ensures there are buses to transport children and teachers to teach children.

At the end of our family picnics, on the way back to Pueblo -- filthy and exhausted -- we would sprawl in the backseat and fall asleep until my dad's excited voice would wake us up as he announced, at the top of Big Hill, that he could see the twinkling lights of Pueblo on the horizon.

"SNOW WAS
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~ MARY OLIVER

Two Endangered Species at the Pond

By Dave Van Manen and Paul Foutz

The Pond in Pueblo Mountain Park is one of the park's special places. Crayfish, water striders, dragonflies, and many other species all call it home. Avian visitors like the occasional great blue heron, American dipper and kingfisher can sometimes be spied there as well. And now, thanks to a collaborative effort between MPEC and Colorado Parks and Wildlife, southern redbelly dace, a state endangered minnow, also call the Pond home.

Paul Foutz, a biologist with CPW who specializes in native aquatic species, and his team worked closely with MPEC to establish a population of southern redbelly dace in the Pond. Paul considers this effort

“a great cooperative project between MPEC and CPW to assist with the recovery of the state endangered southern redbelly dace, *Chrosomus erythrogaster*. The southern redbelly dace is only native to the Arkansas River Basin in Colorado (it was primarily found historically in tributary streams to the Arkansas River in an area from about Florence to Pueblo). Currently only a few natural populations of southern redbelly dace occur in the wild in Colorado. These populations are supplemented by several refuge populations throughout the basin that have been created from what was thought to be the ‘last’ remaining wild population in 1987. Since that time, new wild populations have been discovered through CPW survey work. Individuals from a recently discovered wild population were brought into the Native Aquatic Restoration Center in Alamosa in 2014. That facility, which specializes in propagating threatened and endangered native aquatic species, cultured the fish for the Pueblo Mountain Park refuge site on South Creek.”

After a couple of years of planning, discussions, and assessing the pond's suitability as appropriate habitat for the dace through gathering information on the pond's ecology, the decision was made last summer to move forward with the project. A day in mid-September was chosen as the release date. This worked well for MPEC, as we had the future of another endangered species in mind in choosing the date. We wanted to be sure that the date chosen would have a class of Earth Studies students in the park to observe and participate in the release.

Sadly, children spending time in Nature

has become another endangered species. And not just in Colorado – children in the outdoors is a federal endangered species, if not global. MPEC has been working hard over the last couple of decades through programs like Earth Studies to address the “Nature deficit disorder” that has contributed to creating this endangered species. We knew the fish release would be a great opportunity for these 5th graders to have a great outdoor experience. As anticipated, they got to participate in this effort to make our little part of the Earth a healthier place for southern redbelly dace, and for humans too!

The long-term success of establishing a population of the endangered minnow in the Pond remains to be seen and will require ongoing monitoring. But it was crystal clear that having our Earth Studies students be a part of this exciting day was a huge success. They were engaged in the process, asked lots of questions of the CPW biologists, and were fully hands-on in releasing the fish!

The release of southern redbelly dace and our students' participation in the release have now been added to the long list of why the Pond in Pueblo Mountain Park is a special place.



OTHER WINTER PROGRAMS AT MPEC



For all the details, pricing, and to register for these programs, go to MPEC's website at www.hikeandlearn.org and click on PROGRAMS. If you need assistance with registering on-line, or if you do not have access to a computer, please call 719-485-4444.

Winter Solstice Drum Circle Weather permitting, we'll drum in the winter season around the fire circle. Sun, Dec 20, 6:30-8pm

Nature Toddlers Little ones get to experience the wonders of Nature with music, exploration, fun! Dress to be outside! Fridays at 10am: Feb 12, & Mar 4.

Homeschool in the Park (for 2nd-4th graders) Winter art workshop: Students will hike into Devils Canyon and learn about basic geology, stopping to quickly sketch parts of the hike that catch their eye. In the afternoon they will have the opportunity to do a canvas painting, with instructional aid, of one of their favorite sketches. Round-trip transportation from Pueblo provided. Fri, Feb 5, 8:30am-3pm

Spring Equinox Drum Circle Drum in the spring around the fire circle! Sun, Mar 20, 6:30 – 8pm



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"WINTER IS NOT A SEASON, IT'S AN OCCUPATION."
~ SINCLAIR LEWIS

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