

Mountain Park NEWS

Autumn 2015 • Vol. 16 Num. 4

Autumn — A Time to Slow Down?

It is quiet up here this morning. The squawk of a Clark's nutcracker....the clicking of a grasshopper....the chattering alarm of a pine squirrel....chick-a-dee-dee-dee....the nasal yank of a red-breasted nuthatch. I hear these sounds spread over several minutes, with utter quiet between. It still feels like summer on this hilltop three-fourths of the way up the Tower Trail. The air is quickly warming on its way into the 80s, as the weather report predicted.

None of the leaves have begun to put on their autumn colors yet, but the abundance of late summer wildflowers – sunspots, stiff goldenrod, smooth aster, Bahia ragleaf, Porter aster – clearly speaks to the imminent arrival of fall. The relative quiet does the same. Gone are melodious songs of birds in their breeding activity that seem to fill every audible space when the summer season is young. In place of all that ruckus are the occasional calls that I continue to hear as I sit, think and write. The wind just kicked up. It's a hot wind that reminds me that summer is still here. But it won't be long before the wind's message tells me that fall has arrived.

The lack of bird song, the mature late season wildflowers with few newly sprouted plants - these all reflect how the natural world slows down in the fall, in harmony with the natural rhythm of the seasons.

I've often reflected on how the human culture in which I live doesn't seem to do a whole lot of slowing down in the fall. Regardless of the season, our weeks are essentially the same "grind" that can feel quite endless. Sure, there is the break from school in the summer and a few weeks during the school year for children. But once a person steps into the adult world, the rhythm of our days and weeks is paced not by the seasons but by our jobs, technology, and the numerous demands that our modern culture expects of us. Except for the week or two (or more if one is lucky) of vacation, illness, a few holidays, or some extreme weather event – and even these days often offer little real slowing down – many of us never seem to get a chance to truly slow down, in the fall or at any other time of the year. Maybe it's just me, but it seems as if the pace of the human world just keeps getting faster and faster as the years go by. Slowing down in the fall? How quaint!



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~ VINCENT VAN GOGH



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Located in Pueblo
Mountain Park in Beulah.
719-485-4444 • Fax 866-808-2484
E-mail: mpec@hikeandlearn.org
Website: www.hikeandlearn.org

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MPEC's Mission is to provide
environmental education for the
community in order to create
a citizenry that understands,
respects, enjoys, and cares for
themselves, their families, their
community and the natural world.

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As a person who has always tried to stay connected to the natural world, I can't help but question whether or not we as individuals, and as a society, are missing out on something that we really shouldn't be missing out by always being on the go? Instead, we continue on our seemingly ever-increasing pace that hardly seems to even notice the seasons beyond the inconveniences associated with inclement weather. Would we be healthier as individuals, and as a society as a whole, if our lives did reflect the rhythm of the seasons, and we did slow it down a notch or two in the fall?

As I ponder such questions, thoughts about how such adjustments would impact our system of economics, a system that thrives on ever-increasing speed and growth, come up for me. I suspect such thoughts would probably be considered blasphemous in the halls of our economic institutions.

Regardless, I still believe that much good would come out of choosing to live lives that more closely reflect the rhythm of the seasons. To paraphrase the great conservationist Aldo Leopold, 'we are much more than cogs in a system of economics. We are at core members of the ecological community that includes the soil, the water, the plants, the animals – and the seasons.'

I, for one, am ready to slow down this fall. How about you?

~ Dave Van Manen, Sept. 2, 2015

MPEC's Bumpy Ride

By Dave Van Manen

We've all heard that the only constant in this world is change. Well, such is the case with some things here at MPEC these days. As anyone who is familiar with our organization is aware, we've been in the process of transitioning MPEC's leadership to a new Executive Director. You also may be aware that this process has been a bumpy one. Well, I am here to tell you that another unexpected bump presented itself along this road since the last newsletter.

No, this has not been an easy process, I must admit. But I am pleased to tell you that, as of Mid-July, MPEC's very engaged and committed Board of Trustees stepped up to the plate, dealt with the challenges, and wound up bringing on the very capable Brandi Moore as our Interim Executive Director. Brandi brings with her many years of experience in non-profit management, along with a passion for providing meaningful experiences for young people. The Board has also arranged for me to continue to be involved with MPEC on several levels, which includes working with Brandi as she learns the ins and outs of MPEC's systems and service to the community.

I am also pleased to tell you that what is most important in MPEC's work, our programs that get young people out into Nature, have continued

in spite of these administrative challenges. Our flagship program, Earth Studies, is beginning its 14th year this September. Yes, all those 5th graders from Pueblo City Schools (about 1300 this school year) are again hiking the park's trails, learning about trees and ecosystems and birds and wildflowers and how the natural world is such a great place to be. In no time at all, we'll be putting together next summer's camp schedule, so lots of youngsters can experience the wonder of Nature at one of our terrific camp programs. And I am out there each month with a bunch of little ones at our popular Nature Toddlers program, singing, exploring, and laying the foundation in these littlest ones that Nature is the place to be.

Our programs for adults continue as well. Just the other evening, 25 happy hikers joined me for a Full Moon Music Hike up the Mace Trail (which was a lot less than the 53 hikers who showed up for the late July Full Moon Hike that got cut short by an evening thunderstorm). Yes, it's been rather bumpy, but we are dealing with the challenges and we will get through this tough time. Meanwhile, MPEC's programs are very much alive and well.

Update: Healthy Forest Project

By Steve Douglas, MPEC Volunteer

Pueblo Mountain Park's Healthy Forest Project essentially began with the Forest Stewardship Plan, prepared by Mr. John Grieve (District Forester – Canon City District, Colorado State Forest Service) for Pueblo's Parks and Recreation Department, and published in February 2002. Efforts to implement that plan began in May of 2002, with the removal of 300 Ponderosa Pine trees infested with Mountain Pine Beetle. That effort and thinning projects in 2004-2006 were under Pueblo's management. The Mountain Park Environmental Center (MPEC) has since continued that project. Terms such as hazardous fuels reduction, wildland fire hazard mitigation and shaded fuel break reflect grants under which the work was done, but each of those efforts have had the common goal of implementing the Forest Stewardship Plan, striving to restore a healthy forest environment in the Park. The cumulative efforts over the past thirteen years have amounted to selective thinning and hazardous fuels reduction on 182 acres in the Park.

In 2002, Mr. Grieve noted that "Overall there is a high wildland fire hazard within the park." He divided the Park into Management Units. Unit One is central in the Park, contains historic structures such as Horseshoe Lodge and the Pavilion, and encompasses most of the park roads. It is an area of generally low topographic relief and is mostly forested with Ponderosa Pine. Mr. Grieve went on to state that "The forest structure of Unit One is conducive to the start and spread of wildfire. There is enough surface fuel on the forest floor (grass, forbs, pine needles) to carry fire across the landscape... The heavier use of this unit by visitors increases the likelihood of accidental ignitions in addition to natural starts caused by lightning."

The spread of fire from Unit One into other units of the Park and beyond could have a highly destructive impact on the Beulah Valley watershed and elsewhere in the Wet Mountains, due to the abundance and continuity of the fuel available. In his recommendations, Mr. Grieve stated that "The use of fire should be considered as a future management tool... After fuels have been reduced and separated by thinning and slash has been treated or allowed to break down, fire could be reintroduced into the

park." In keeping with those cautions and recommendations, wildland fire mitigation efforts since February 2002 have primarily focused on Unit One. This year our efforts are directed to the cutting of Gambel Oak that has actively regrown in areas treated since 2002.

MPEC, Pueblo Parks and Recreation Department, Pueblo Fire Department, Beulah Fire Protection and Ambulance District, the Nature Conservancy and others have been discussing the possibility of using prescribed fire as another means to manage hazardous fuels in the Park, as part of the healthy forest project. The application of prescribed fire has advantages over mechanical methods (cutting and chipping) and slash pile burning in that it removes fuel accumulations and distributes nutrients in a widespread fashion. The planned use of prescribed fire in the Park is the removal of surface fuels only, to augment thinning and hazardous fuels reduction efforts already performed. The surface fuels described in 2002 remain and are being rapidly augmented by regrowth of Gambel Oak in much of the treated areas. The concept is to apply prescribed fire in the treated areas of the Park over a period of several consecutive years. This task should never be considered finished - not if the goal is to reestablish and then maintain forest health.

We are in the discussion and planning phases of this next effort. Much remains to be investigated, agreed upon and planned before actually applying prescribed fire to the Park. Look for more on this project in coming MPEC Newsletters. As someone interested in the Park and surrounding lands, feel free to involve yourself in that discussion. Thank you.

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LEARNED TO DO
WHAT ONLY THE
STUDENTS OF NATURE
EVER LEARN, THAT
WAS TO FEEL BEAUTY."
~ LUTHER STANDING
BEAR



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Looking Back on Another Summer of Camps

By Taylor Driver

I hope that the school year has kicked off well for everyone! As the summer months draw to a close, I reflect on how thankful I am to have spent time with so many talented campers who attended our overnight and day camp programs this summer. It was truly our honor at MPEC to spend quality time with so many children as we explored the wonders of Nature together. We don't take this opportunity lightly – it is fundamental to our mission that all children have the opportunity to connect with Nature. What an amazing experience it is to watch campers grow in a positive community that builds their self-confidence and connection to the outdoors.

This year we were very fortunate to have campers visit us from all over Colorado, and even from a few international locations, including China and Nepal. Thank you parents, MPEC members and donors, and everyone who helped make MPEC Summer Camps a part of many children's summer. And a dozen cheers to the dirt under the nails, skinned knees, muddy shoes, bug bites, friends, hobbit houses, and tie-dyes that Summer 2015 had for these campers.



No Walls, No Limits

By Taylor Driver

Here at MPEC, fall marks the start of my favorite time of year, the beginning of our Earth Studies Sessions. Soon fifth graders from 22 Pueblo District Schools will be venturing through the woods of Pueblo Mountain Park, most experiencing their very first time in the mountains. While it is easy to get wrapped up in the excitement of the new school year, I think it is also a crucial time to reflect on why all of us at MPEC continue to invest our hearts into this program. Why is the Earth Studies program so invaluable to both the students who attend and our community as a whole?

There is no denying that students in our urban Pueblo school district, and throughout the country, are becoming increasingly disconnected from the natural environment. There is much research to support this observation that so many of us have made. For example: According to a recent GOCO presentation, out of the 50 United States, Colorado ranks number 1 in seniors participating in outdoor activities, but ranked number 24 in children under 12 participating in outdoor activities, and number 36 for children from families with limited financial resources getting outdoors. This disconnect should be a core concern of our community, and there should be a push to provide sequential, directed educational experiences that help learners of all styles make associations with the their world, each other, and the variety of abstract ideas they encounter in the traditional classroom setting.



Through MPEC's award-winning Earth Studies Program, we strive to offer students the opportunity to synthesize information about themselves and their environment. Being able to teach kids the foundations of science and exploration in a natural environment that offers limitless examples is an amazing opportunity for these students. Beyond the academic objectives, Earth Studies also gets kids outside – hiking, exploring, using their bodies as well as their minds. As an Earth Studies educator, it is a wonderful experience for me to see the light of realization shine on students' faces.

In a state with so many opportunities to experience the wonders of the natural world, MPEC, and the Earth Studies program in particular, are such valuable resources for our community, and for our children's education. I am so proud to be a part of something that serves as the basis of many children's love of nature and science. So here is to another year of no walls and no limits!

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!

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Staying Connected

by Jon Walker, MPEC Board of Trustees

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Jon Walker. I am a new member of the Board of Trustees for the Mountain Park Environmental Center. My professional background is as a librarian and administrator. I have served as the Executive Director for the Pueblo City-County Library District for over eleven years now.

You may ask yourself why a librarian is interested in being involved in the governance of an institution dedicated to parks, mountains and wilderness, and the great outdoors. The answer is easy for me. I spend much of my time inside. It is part of the job, really. I work daily with books, computers, and other information resources and the people who use them, and, of course, all of these activities are essentially pursued indoors and away from nature. So, this is a case of opposites attracting. I love the out-of-doors, in some measure, because it is a rarer treat for me.

I run, I hike, I snow ski. These are my hobbies. And, of course, a hobbyist can be passionate about an avocation. I am. One way for me to appreciate these pursuits is to serve and give back in my new capacity as a member of the MPEC Board of Trustees. Hopefully, some of my experiences and expertise will crossover to serve the interests of this vitally important institution.

The role of MPEC is critical to our community and to our human-ness. Our

connection to nature can be easily lost or forgotten. Among my all-time favorite reads is a short story by E.M. Forster entitled "The Machine Stops." Forster (1879-1970) is a British Nobel-nominated writer, long remembered for novels such as *A Room with a View* and *A Passage to India*. He authored "The Machine Stops" in 1909. It is wonderful little story that foretells humanity's separation from nature by technologies of a variety of sorts and some of the dire consequences of this. The tale is particularly noteworthy for predicting nearly a century ahead such current automation as the Internet, texting, and virtual communities like Facebook. Forster's narrative warns us of the unreal, artificial environment created by our technologies and our need for the natural.

Forster advocated that if men and women are to achieve a satisfactory life, they need to keep contact with the earth and cultivate their imaginations. Just so, MPEC provides programs, camps, facilities, and education to help ensure individuals of all ages in our community have the ongoing opportunity to remain connected to the inspirational and creative gifts available to us via our natural world. This is indispensable to each and every one of us.

I look forward to this opportunity to help serve the Mountain Park Environmental Center.

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: Tonia & Christopher Allen, Barbara & Bill Anaya, Susan Andrew & Virginia Rupp, Marcia Beachy, Cathy Bentley, Georgine Booms, Phil & Debbie Borchers, Dr. Leon Bright, Steve & Becky Brown, Donald L. Bruestle, Robert & Jill Buck, Maria Westy Bush, Jim & Cori Cameron, Jim & Maggie Campbell, City & County of Pueblo, Ted & Sylvia Clair, Pete & Polly Conlon, Anne C. Courtright, John Crandall, Sandra Cunningham, Jeff Holm & David Chandler, Helga Dingman, Steve Douglas & Pam Kubly, Nancy Doyle, Robert Doyle & Donna Stinchcomb, Jim & Edith Edson, Beth Ehrhardt & Scot Potts, Milli Goodman, Matt & Betsy Goodwin, Brandin Hay & Anthony Gutierrez, Marjorie E. Genova, Ellen Guillen, Shirley Haddan, Catherine Halcomb, Cyndi & Dale Hart, Kathryn Higgins, Jack Hunter & Lana Woodruff, Michael & Francie Hurtado, Hank & Taylor Humphreys, Jerry Jackson, Sally & Duane Jones, Anne & Greg Johnson, Danita Johnson, Star Jorgensen, Maureen Kelly, Doris Kester, Katherine Kettler, Nancy & David King, Mark & Yvonne Klune, Douglas Knepper, Carol Kronwitter, Gary & Carol Kyte, Linda & Cesar Lopez, Daniel Lowman, Jack & Joyce Markusfeld, Sally & Pat Mara, Lorena Marisco, Kathy & Alex Martinez, William & Pok-Hui McKinney, Mollie & Bill McCannless, Steve McLaughlin, Gay Davis Miller & Norm Williams, Lee Miller, Del & Jane Milne, Brandi Moore, Anne & Bill Moulton, Diane Mueller & Glenn Runkewich, Sister of Mercy West Midwest Community, Patsy Myers, Frank Nemick, Warren Nolan & Rosalie Vigna, J. Doug Ohmans, Linda Ortega, David & Linda Overlin, Mark Porter & Tristen Faith, Mary Porter & Bernie Abrahams, Michael Poteet & Annabelle Corboy, Lou & Rosa Pratt, Isabel Powell, Dr. Ricjard & Diane Ratliff, Robert Rawlings, Carol & Mark Rickman, Gretchen Rode, John & Elaine Sartoris, Nancy Schricker, Donna Seilheimer, Mike & Sanoy Spahr, Maribeth & Pete Sisroy, Fred & Clareann (Suzy) Smith, Judy Staples, Barbara Stevens, Susan Stiller, Anne Stokes-Hochberg, Kerry & Derrill Swearingen, Allen & Penny Tegan, Lamar Trant, Dave & Helene Van Manen, Nancy Williams, Corrie Woods, and Mark & Barbara Yeager.

Guided Hikes – Autumn

A guided hike in Pueblo Mountain Park in Beulah is a great place to wed your soul to the autumn season! It is best to dress for varying weather, wear a sunhat and sunscreen, and wear good hiking shoes. Also bring along a water bottle and snacks on these moderately strenuous hikes that are educational and fun. Unless otherwise stated, most hikes last from two to three hours and are appropriate for adults and children over 12. Group size usually limited to 15; members free, non-members \$5. Note that if snow conditions warrant, a hike may become a snowshoe hike – and MPEC has lots of snowshoes. **Registration required:** www.hikeandlearn.org or (719) 485-4444.

- **Sat, Sept 19, 1pm, Autumn Equinox Hike** Acknowledge the arrival of fall on this hike in Colorado's lovely southern foothills. Some early autumn colors should be showing on the landscape just as the fall color season begins. There should also be plenty of fall wildflowers in bloom.
- **Wed, Sept 23, 7:00pm, Full Moon Hike** Break away from your routine and take a mid-week break for MPEC's last scheduled full moon hike of 2015. If the weather permits, Ranger Dave will bring along his guitar for some trailside music.
- **Sat, Oct 17, 10am, "Zuke's" October Walk your Dog Hike** An ideal way for you and your pooch to enjoy a mid-autumn morning, including some treats for your pup compliments of Zuke's, a Colorado-based company, and guided by Ranger Sandy. Dogs must be leashed. Note that Ranger Sandy will be taking a few months break and will resume her Zuke's Dog Hikes after the first of the new year.
- **Sun, Oct 25, 10am, Autumn Color Hike** Enjoy the autumn colors that are so richly on display by the area's cottonwoods and oaks and the fall wildflowers that may still be hanging on a month into fall on this hike into the parks' western reaches on the Northridge Trail.
- **Mon, Oct 26, 5:30pm, Autumn Dinner-on-the-Trail Hike** Pack a knapsack dinner and join us for a mid-autumn evening hike where we'll enjoy being outside under the autumn sky and enjoy our dinner along the trail.
- **Sun, Nov 8, 1pm, Yoga-in-Nature Hike** Join us for this popular hike that combines a guided hike with some trailside yoga with yoga teacher Julie Emmons.
- **Sun, Nov 29, 1pm, Post-Thanksgiving Hike** Sticking with our annual tradition, we'll be hiking off the holiday calories with a hike along the late autumn trails of the Mountain Park.
- **Sun, Dec 13, 10am Snowshoe Hike** We don't really know if there will be enough snow on the ground, but if there is, we'll enjoy as snowshoe in the park. If not, then we'll take a hike before MPEC's Open House at the Horseshoe Lodge and Beulah's Annual Yule Log Celebration at the Pavilion.

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~ GEORGE ELIOT

AUTUMN 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.

- **Autumn Equinox Drum Circle** Drum in the autumn season on this fun and relaxed drum circle around the fire in front of the Horseshoe Lodge. We have lots of drums if you don't have your own. Fri, Sept 18, 6:30-8pm.
- **Nature Toddlers** A wonderful way to experience the wonders of Nature with your little one(s). Note the new day of the week that we are trying for the October session. Mon, Oct 26, 10am; Fri, Nov 13, 10am.
- **Yoga in Nature Hike** Experience doing yoga outside while hiking the autumn trails of the Mountain Park. Sun, Nov 8, 1pm
- **MPEC Winter Open House** Stop by MPEC for some holiday festiveness before or after heading over to the Pavilion for the Yule Log Celebration. Sun, Dec 13, 11:30am – 2:30pm
- **Winter Solstice Drum Circle** Bundle up and enjoy a drumming circle around a warm campfire! Sun, Dec 20, 6:30-8pm
- **Evening Nature Talk: El Nino - What is it? What Does it Mean for this Winter?** Join Kyle Mozley of the local National Weather Service office as he shares what the winter forecast is looking like for Southern Colorado considering the strong El Nino that is setting up in the Pacific. Tues, Oct 13, 7pm.



Gearing up for a Record Snowfall This Winter?

By Dave Van Manen

MPEC sends a big thank you to Pam Kubly, Elaine Sartoris, Jan Myers, Anne Whitfield, and Carol Kyte for putting the summer newsletter mailing together; Steve Douglas for all the help with the forest stewardship work – and the article in this newsletter; Shawna Shoaf for designing the newsletter, posters and many other printed items; CDOT for new road sign at lower entrance directing cars to the main entrance; and Owen Hunt with Stickies Sticker, Sign, and Stencil Company for the decal work on MPEC's big school bus.

It is not news to tell you that this has been a rather wet stretch of months since the 8.54" of moisture that I measured in the park last May. Combining May's (the vast majority of which fell as rain) with June's 2.61", July's 3.93" and August's 4.78", this adds up to 19.86" of moisture. No wonder the park's wildflowers have been prolific, the sunflowers on the flats have been like nothing anyone can ever remember seeing, and the landscape has retained its greenness all summer.

Blame it all on El Nino. Meteorologists have been aware of the relationship between the ocean temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific and weather patterns in various parts of the Earth. Above average temperatures in these waters is called an El Nino. One of the weather patterns associated with El Nino is higher than average precipitation and lower than average temperatures in our little part of the world. That includes Pueblo Mountain Park.

According to a consensus of meteorologists,

all indications point to the current moderate El Nino increasing into the strong and possibly very strong rating as we move through the fall and into the coming winter. What does that mean for our weather? Well, the strongest El Nino on record was 1997/1998, and it so happens that the winter of 1997/1998 brought with it 209.5" of snow, the largest amount of winter snowfall the park has seen (at least since the 1950s, which is as far back as the precipitation records I have for Pueblo Mountain Park go). The park's average snowfall is 118".

Does this mean that we are going to have a very snowy winter? There are other variables that impact the weather, so it is not necessarily a done deal. That being said, I've been assessing the condition of my winter clothes and fixing up my cross-country skis and my snowshoes. Because I know that when deep snow arrives, Pueblo Mountain Park is the perfect winter wonderland in which to use those skis and snowshoes.

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