

# Mountain Park NEWS

Winter 2018 • Vol. 19 Num. 1

## It's Been a Good Run

By Dave Van Manen

"...I feel I'm being called to begin a shift towards doing something else, more directly in the environmental field. I really don't know where this is leading me." These lines are from a December 1996 journal entry. They mark the first time I said in writing that I was ready to get out of the music business, which was how I was making my living in 1996, and do something in the environmental field. A year and a half later, that "something else" in the "environmental field" was beginning to take some form. In June 1998 I journaled, "I see myself...developing some formal proposal to present Environmental Education programming at the Pueblo Mountain Park."

The next couple of years were a whirlwind of activity that led to the creation of the Mountain Park Environmental Center. I put together MPEC's first Board of Trustees: Sarah Bruestle, David Cockrell, Cindy Elm-Sinn, Jean Graeber, Brandin Hay, Elaine Lopez-Pacheco, Chris Nevin-Wood, Cameron McAllister, Katrina Presti, Tim Sandmark, and Helene Van Manen. I went to work for the City of Pueblo's Parks and Recreation Department, organizing some programs – guided hikes and summer camps – in the Mountain Park to see if there would be any real interest. There was. We filed Articles of Incorporation for MPEC with the State of Colorado and secured 501c3 status from the IRS. We negotiated an arrangement with the park's owner, the City of Pueblo, to facilitate education and recreation programs in the park, headquartered in the park's main residence, which was vacant at the time. And in February 2000, MPEC officially opened its doors.

It's been a good run over these two decades. MPEC grew from an idea first articulated in a journal entry into a highly-regarded organization that has made a real impact on the Nature education and recreation scene in southern Colorado. We've won all sorts of awards; have been written about in numerous publications (including the *New York Times*); we've brought thousands and thousands of young people to the park for hands-on, experiential education; we raised and invested nearly \$2 million into renovating the historic Horseshoe Lodge; we took over full management



*MPEC Founder Dave Van Manen with summer campers in Pueblo Mountain Park, 1999.*



*MPEC's headquarters from 2000 through 2008, now the home of the park caretaker.*





**MOUNTAIN PARK  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
CENTER**

Jonathan Pilarski,  
Executive Director  
Ashley Nestman,  
Program Director  
Travis Weiser,  
Maintenance Supervisor  
Steve Juergenson,  
Maintenance Technician  
Lori Youngren,  
Kitchen & Housekeeping Manager  
Lynette Gerow,  
Office Manager  
Hollyn Stephens,  
Lodge Sales  
Dave Van Manen,  
Founder/Special Projects  
Coordinator

Located in Pueblo  
Mountain Park in Beulah.  
719-485-4444 • Fax 866-808-2484  
E-mail: [mpec@hikeandlearn.org](mailto:mpec@hikeandlearn.org)  
Website: [www.hikeandlearn.org](http://www.hikeandlearn.org)

Mountain Park  
Environmental Center is a  
501c3 not-for-profit corporation.

MPEC Board of Trustees:  
Corrine Brown  
Heather Dewey  
Patrick Galvin  
Doris Kester  
Warren Nolan  
Dr. Peg Rooney  
Michael Spahr  
Lamar Trant  
Mark Trevithick  
Teresa Valenti  
Jon Walker  
Joshua Wilcoxson

*Mountain Park News*  
is published seasonally by MPEC.  
All articles by Dave Van Manen  
unless otherwise noted.

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.

Mountain Park  
Environmental Center  
PO Box 99, Beulah, CO 81023

Pueblo Mountain Park is owned by  
the City of Pueblo & managed  
by the Mountain Park  
Environmental Center.



of the 611-acre park  
from the City – all of  
which finally put to  
rest the rumors that  
had been going around  
of the City liquidating  
Pueblo Mountain Park.  
Imagine, The Mountain  
Park Estates, a gated  
community? No, don't  
imagine it. Thanks to the  
success of MPEC, that  
rumor is finally silenced.

Yes, it's been a good  
run! And, in a sense, that  
run is about to come to an end. As of January 1, 2018, the name Mountain Park Environmental Center will be retired. January 1 will also mark the very beginning of the Nature and Wildlife Discovery Center, a new organization forming out of the official merging of MPEC with the Nature and Raptor Center of Pueblo (whose name is also being retired).

There is an element of coming full circle in this process of merging. When the City of Pueblo negotiated that arrangement back in the last months of 1999 for MPEC to operate in Pueblo Mountain Park, the City was still unsure about me and about this new organization's ability to do what we said we wanted to do. So, it was worked out for MPEC to operate under the administrative umbrella of the Greenway and Nature Center (now called the Nature and Raptor Center), with administrative ties to the University of Southern Colorado (now CSU-Pueblo). Although we received no financial support from the Nature Center or USC, and MPEC had to raise every penny of our operating revenues ourselves (which included some start-up funds from the City), the City felt better having The Nature Center's director, Tim Sandsmark, oversee this idea of an environmental education center in the Mountain Park.

Less than three years after MPEC opened its doors, Tim took a job as Executive Director of Lookout Mountain Nature Center in Golden, Colorado (where he is still Director). Not long after Tim's departure, USC decided to cut their administrative ties with both organizations. By then, the City recognized that we at MPEC knew what we were doing, and so the formal ties that we had with the Nature Center were no longer necessary.

I was recently talking with Tim about the merging of MPEC with the Nature Center. Tim reminded me of how our original vision included the possibility of one day operating as one organization, with a River Campus and a Mountain Campus. That was a good idea, Tim – it just took a few more years to actually happen.

Although names are changing, we are bringing the best of what MPEC does – including the Earth Studies program, the Forest School for Little Ranger program, Nature Toddlers, and the Horseshoe Lodge and Retreat Center – to this new incarnation, along with the best of the Nature and Raptor Center. As we move into this new chapter of Nature education and recreation in Pueblo County, we are counting on the rightness of something that the Greek philosopher Aristotle said 2500 years ago, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

**MPEC sends many thanks to those who have supported us over the past few months through memberships and membership renewals, grants, and other donations:** J. Miller Adam, Basin Electric Power Company, Marcia Beachy, Angela Bruflat, Mari Burand, Pete & Polly Conlon, Anne Courtright, Heather Dewey & Josh Wilcoxson, Diane Mueller & Glenn Runkewich, Maura Edison, San Isabel Electric, Paul Fanning, Katryna Fredregill, Marjorie Genova, Betsy & Matt Goodwin, Catherine Halcomb, Wendy Hunker, Doris Kester, Jean & Tom Latka, Sally & Pat Mara, Kathy & Alex Martinez, Nora & Duncan McAuliffe, Bill & Mollie McCanless, Del & Jane Milne, Tamara Montoya, Donald Pfost, Rosa Pratt, Brad & Pam Rice, Rosalie Vigna & Warren Nolan, Harry & Patricia Rurup, James & Shirley Salvatore, Deanna Sanders, Mike & Sandy Spahr, Judy Staples, Anne Stokes-Hochberg, Lamar Trant, Helene & Dave Van Manen, Virginia Waldron, Arlene & Buck Weimer, Maureen Weins, and Chenine Wozniak.

**THANK YOU – YOUR SUPPORT KEEPS US DOING THE GOOD WORK WE DO AT MPEC!**



*Grand opening celebration of the renovated Horseshoe Lodge, October 2008.*



# Ideas, Champions

by Jon Pilarski



Great ideas. They are all around us. We see them every day. They pass through our minds in the morning shower. They come out in a parking lot conversation. They are said in passing. Many

times, just as quickly as they are born, they disappear into the depths of our minds, only to be forgotten. Neglected, they fade away. All too often our great ideas never see the light of day.

It's easy to have big ideas, big dreams, big plans. The difficult part is following through. I have many ideas about the direction I would like to see MPEC go, and I have heard even more ideas from staff, community members, and supporters. Every single one is a great idea, but very few of them see further progress. It's easy to come up with reasons why. We are too busy; we don't have the funding; other things are more important.

However, some ideas are followed through on. Those are the times when someone wouldn't be distracted by other things. Someone was committed to seeing the idea through. Those are the times when the idea had a champion. And when that champion arrives, the result is amazing.

Dave Van Manen woke up one morning and said, "I want to establish a Nature Education Center in Pueblo Mountain Park." He championed the idea, and the result is amazing. MPEC staff member Steve Juergenson and MPEC supporter Michael Wenzl had a vision of a greenhouse at Pueblo Mountain Park that could be used to demonstrate the greenhouse effect to our Earth Studies students. They completed the work, and experiential education couldn't be more impactful. Community members Adam Davidson and Scott Potts had an idea for a mountain bike trail in Pueblo Mountain Park. Because of their work and the work of Southern Colorado Trail Builders, a year from now, you will be able to ride your bike on trails from Pueblo Mountain Park all the way to Highway 165 – all because of an idea and the people who championed it.

And this brings me to a conversation this past

March. It was in a parking lot, the place where so many great ideas are born, only to perish on the cold, hard asphalt. I asked John Gallagher, the director of Nature and Raptor Center of Pueblo, for his thoughts on working together more closely and potentially even merging our operations. The discussion could have easily ended there, but we were determined. We talked the next day and the day after. We continued the conversation, and this idea had its champions.

While the idea of merging MPEC with NRPC has been brought up many times over the past eighteen years, eventually the discussions died off and faded away. This time, we did not let the idea be forgotten. We assembled a team made up of representatives from both organizations. We looked at our missions, visions, and target populations. We explored everything from collaborating on programs to sharing staff to completely merging our operations.

Ultimately, we decided fully merging MPEC and NRCP was the best option on the table. By merging operations we will operate more efficiently and more sustainably. We eliminate redundancy in positions. The cost savings in redundancy allows us to shift resources to needed positions that we simply weren't able to hire in the past. For example, a fund developer that focuses on fund raising is a position that did not exist at either organization previously, but now we will be able to hire someone to fill that role and ensure that we grow our successes in raising money to support our mission.

We also eliminate the need of staff members wearing "too many hats," and thus, working inefficiently. By increasing our staff size, we allow our employees to specialize and focus on their areas of expertise and experience. Staff that once were generalists because their positions necessitated it now become experts in their field.

And we will do this without making any changes to the excellent nature education programming that you have always supported. Well, let me rephrase that. We will make changes, but the changes are all great enhancements. Imagine our students learning about Ponderosa Pine ecosystems at the Mountain Park and then going to the Nature Center to compare and contrast with the river ecosystem. Imagine the lesson on birds in the Mountain Park's Earth Studies Program and our

"WINTER IS  
THE TIME FOR  
COMFORT, FOR  
GOOD FOOD  
AND WARMTH,  
FOR THE TOUCH  
OF A FRIENDLY  
HAND AND FOR  
A TALK BESIDE  
THE FIRE: IT IS  
THE TIME FOR  
HOME."  
~ EDITH SITWELL



**MPEC's NATURE SHOP** is open Monday – Friday, 8am – 4pm. Lots of great unique holiday gifts, including many **LIFE IS GOOD** t-shirts. Please stop by – your purchases are a great way to support our non-profit!





kids being able to meet a raptor up close. Imagine the enhancements to our programs when you take the very best of our two organizations and combine them into one.

This idea. Merging. An idea that has been bouncing around for nearly two decades. An idea that has passed through minds, been spoken in parking lots, and said in passing. An idea that has frequently come and gone, so many times fading away. That idea finally has the champions it needs to succeed.

Credit goes to those champions. To the board members that took time out of their busy schedules to attend several all-day meetings

over the course of three months to arrive at this decision. To the community foundations that provided the financial support to hire a consultant to facilitate those meetings. To the community leaders whose advice was sought and whose support was always given.

And most importantly to the staff that have dedicated their careers to advancing environmental stewardship and population health. They are the ones embarking on a journey of shaping Nature and Wildlife Discovery Center and the future of Nature Education in Southern Colorado. The result will be amazing.

## Breaking Trail in Beulah in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

By Maureen Garelick

In 2017, the Southern Colorado Trail Builders (SCTB) Club has embarked upon a (literally) groundbreaking new project.

Working with the Mountain Park Environmental Center and the City of Pueblo, the club is developing a non-motorized multiuse trail that connects the historic Pueblo Mountain Park in Beulah to the Squirrel Creek Trail and Davenport Campground within adjacent San Isabel National Forest.

Built in 1919, Squirrel Creek was the nation's first National Forest Service campground, although it was destroyed by flooding in 1949. The Davenport campground was created not long after the first site, on higher ground above Squirrel Creek, and in 2010 it was remodeled to replicate the style of the 1920s camping experience.

Now, the SCTB is collaborating with the Mountain Park Environmental Center and the City of Pueblo to break trail to connect to these spots. While some trails organizations outsource trail building to specialized companies, the SCTB is using an exclusively volunteer pool to create this trail.

SCTB Board members Mike McHenry and Adam Davidson worked with officials to map out and then flag a route for the trail

that begins along the northern border of the mountain park. On a chilly September morning, a massive effort by 35 volunteers resulted in the first quarter mile of trail being cut. This distance was no small undertaking, since each foot of trail must be sustainably constructed ensuring proper drainage and minimal maintenance. The volunteers were treated to lunch and drinks after their hard morning of work.

Further trail work days will be announced through their social media and email list. Readers can check out the SCTB Facebook page or website ([southerncoloradotrailbuilders.org](http://southerncoloradotrailbuilders.org)) to learn about other scheduled workdays. The new trail should be completed well in advance of the celebration of the centenary of the Squirrel Creek campground!

*This article was previously published in the Pueblo Town Crier Magazine.*





# Guided Hikes — Winter

"OF ALL THE  
PATHS YOU TAKE  
IN LIFE, MAKE  
SURE A FEW OF  
THEM ARE DIRT."  
~ JOHN MUIR

What better place to find some paths of dirt – or snow – than a guided hike on the trails of Pueblo Mountain Park. 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 (we have snowshoes if you need them). **Registration required:** [www.hikeandlearn.org](http://www.hikeandlearn.org)

- **Sat, Jan 6, 1pm, First Hike of 2018** 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!
- **Sun Jan 21, 1pm, "Zuke's" January Walk Your Dog Hike** A perfect opportunity to bring your canine friend with you on a guided hike (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, Jan 28, 6pm, Almost Full Moon Snowshoe Hike** Venture out on a guided snowshoe hike under the full moon and the pines of the Mountain Park. Snowshoes available if you need them.
- **Sat, Feb 10, 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 mid winter.
- **Sun, Feb 11, 1pm, Winter Watercolor Saunter** The winter landscape offers numerous opportunities to capture the subtle beauty of the season though watercolor paints. Suitable for all levels of watercolor experience, including beginners. All painting supplies provided.
- **Sun, Feb 25, 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 mid-day hike.
- **Sat, Mar 10, 1pm, "Zuke's" March Walk Your Dog Hike** Another opportunity to enjoy a winter saunter with your dog(s), guided by Ranger Henry. Dress warm and be ready for fun and exercise. Dogs must be leashed.
- **Sun, Mar 18, 1pm, Spring Equinox 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.

*Keep your eye out on our website and Facebook page for carpe diem' snowshoe hikes when winter snows arrive! Also, note that as of January 1, MPEC and the Nature & Raptor Center are merging into one organization, the Nature & Wildlife Discovery Center, with a River/Raptor Campus and a Mountain Park Campus. So keep an eye out for other programs offered at the River/Raptor Campus.*



*Abbie (wearing sunglasses, center of photograph) holding her nephew in her lap*

## Some Things Never Change

By Abbie Beeler (age 10, 5<sup>th</sup> grader at Corwin Magnet School)

Some things never change! And I'm glad. I attended the Nature Toddlers program in 2010 and 2011 with my Pappy. I used to love to come to the mountains from Pueblo. I remember sitting around the fire pit and singing with Ranger Dave. I also remember beating on the drums and finding the scarves on the trees during our hikes. It was fun!

Last month I had a day off from school and I got to attend Nature Toddlers with my nephew, and I was so glad to see that he had as much fun as I did when I was 2 & 3. And that they were still singing and hiking. Thanks Ranger Dave for continuing on with a legacy that I loved so much! I have enclosed a couple of pictures from my experience!



*Abbie Beeler attending Nature Toddlers in 2010 (seated, center of photograph)*



# SUMMER CAMPS 2018



Here we are, at the start of the winter season – snow shovel at the ready, hats and coats and gloves getting plenty of use – and the perfect time to make plans for your child's summer camp experiences. Summer camps provide children with days filled with Nature fun and life-long memories.

Note that, as detailed in other articles in this newsletter, MPEC is merging with the Nature and Raptor Center, and so the camps listed here are being offered by the merged organizations' new name, Nature and Wildlife Discovery Center. Some will take place at the River/Raptor campus, some at the Mountain Park campus, and some will be in both campuses.

Any camp taking place at the Mountain Park or in the National Forest will include round-trip transportation from Pueblo. And we are still offering a scholarship program to help those who need financial assistance.

Below is our 2018 camp schedule; descriptions, prices, and many other details can be found at [www.hikeandlearn.org](http://www.hikeandlearn.org) after January 1, including applying for a scholarship and registering. Please do not wait to register, as many camps fill up! If you have any questions, feel free to contact our Program Director, Ashley Nestman ([ashley@hikeandlearn.org](mailto:ashley@hikeandlearn.org); 719-485-4444).

**Campers entering K-1<sup>st</sup>:** Gentle hikes, music, games, and exploration of nature and wildlife.

**Nestlings Camp** June 25-29 (9am-2pm)

*Location: River/Raptor Campus*

**Cubs Camp** July 16-20 (9am-3pm) *Location: Mountain Park Campus*

**Campers entering 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>:** Discover the wonders of Nature along the river, in the prairie, and in the mountains!

**Discovery Camp** July 9-13 (9am-3pm)

*Location: M,W,F at Mountain Park Campus; Tu, Th at River/Raptor Campus*

**Campers entering 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>:** Learn about some of the local wonders of the natural world while having a blast!

**Raptor Camp** June 18-22 (9am-3pm)

*Location: River/Raptor Campus*

**Water & Wildlife Camp** June 11-15 (9am-3pm) *Location: M,W,F at River/Raptor Campus; Tu, Th at Mountain Park Campus*

**Campers entering 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>:** Archery, paddleboarding, hiking, biking and other adventures in this overnight camp!

**Adventure Camp** June 26-28 (3 days/2 nights) *Location: 1 day at River/Raptor Campus; 2 days/2 nights at Mountain Park Campus*

**Campers entering 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>:** Spend time with the resident wolves of the Mission: Wolf Sanctuary.

**Camp Mission: Wolf** June 19-21 (3 days/2 nights) *Location: Mountain Park Campus and Mission: Wolf Sanctuary*

**Campers entering 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>:** Spend a week learning about, caring for, and hanging out with birds of prey!

**Raptor Naturalists Camp** July 23-27 (9am-3pm) *Location: River/Raptor Campus*

**Campers entering 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>:** Learn survival and backpacking basics in the local Greenhorn Mountain Wilderness!

**Greenhorn Wilderness Survival Camp** (4 days/2 nights) July 16-19 *Location: 1-day prep at River/Raptor Campus, 3 days/2 nights in Greenhorn Mountain Wilderness*

**Campers entering 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>:** Spend time with the resident wolves of the Mission: Wolf Sanctuary.

**Camp Mission: Wolf** July 24-26 (3 days/2 nights) *Location: Mountain Park Campus and Mission: Wolf Sanctuary*

"SNOW WAS FALLING,  
SO MUCH LIKE STARS  
FILLING THE DARK TREES  
THAT ONE COULD EASILY  
IMAGINE ITS REASON  
FOR BEING WAS  
NOTHING MORE THAN  
PRETTINESS."  
~ MARY OLIVER



# From Earth Studies Student to Earth Studies Ranger

By Jessica Blunn  
aka Ranger Eve

As we hiked into the rocky mouth of Devil's Canyon, one of the students in my group said, "This is the most beautiful sight in the world." After walking into this part of the canyon dozens of times since I began my work as an Earth Studies Ranger in August, it is easy for my mind to be cluttered with the needs of the children, parents, teachers, and schedule. I often forget what it must be like to see Devil's Canyon for the first time... Two massive, towering, mossy rock walls, pushing from the forest floor to the sky. One student has even suggested that the area is called Devil's Canyon because the walls look like devil horns coming out from the depths of the earth.

I am MPEC's first Earth Studies Ranger who participated in the Earth Studies program as a 5th grader, 11 years ago. I try to reach back into my memory to find the first time I saw Devil's Canyon. Sadly, I cannot remember coming here when I was in 5th grade. At that point in my life, it was very difficult to be present. My father married a woman with two daughters that year. We struggled to cope with the adjustment, especially since it became apparent that my new stepmother had an alcohol and drug problem.

At the time, I closed myself off to the world. I shut down. I barely remember anything from that time in my life, other than a fear that I was causing everyone's problems... that the world would be better without me.

Without remembering fully, the Earth Studies program still shaped my childhood. I had no other choice than to nourish this seed that my Earth Studies Rangers planted for me. I began to take steps in my life to let this part of me grow. I attended camp the following summer, and became a camp counselor at that same camp. I worked at an organic farm. I even convinced my father to let me switch schools, to take charge of my education at a smaller private school outside of Pueblo. I began to have a relationship with nature. The San Isabel National Forest became my healer.

When I look into the eyes of the children I am



*Jessica Blunn at one of the camps she attended as a child.*

teaching, I do my absolute best to truly see them for who they are. They may have their heads down to the ground, but they still deserve to be seen. My mentors, counselors, and park rangers saw into my soul. They saw my laughter as an invitation to enjoy and enlighten, rather than a threat to their own happiness. Without them, I believe I would have gone on a path of total self-destruction. I believe that my mentors planted the seed for me that made all the difference.

The Earth Studies Oath, found in every student's Earth Studies Book, states, "I will care for the Earth so the people of the future will be able to enjoy it the same as me." Whenever I read this to my students, I cannot help but reminisce about the conversations, laughter, and songs that I shared with my mentors through the last 11 years. They cared for the Earth, so that I could walk through Devil's Canyon today, and share those memories with this generation - our shared oral tradition as constant students of the Earth.

As an environmental educator, it is my duty to interpret the wonders of the wild into the language of the child. I also feel that it is my duty to invite children into a world they may have forgotten existed. One full of color, connection, and soul. They may not know that their time at Pueblo Mountain Park is an invitation into a big family of rangers, outdoor enthusiasts, naturalists, scientists, and activists throughout the world. But if they're anything like I was, eventually it will hit them. Their lessons and subconscious memories will one day come full circle, and they may find themselves back at the place where their journey through nature began, at "the most beautiful sight in the world." This time, with new light in their eyes, and new hopes in their hearts.

**MPEC sends a warm thank you** to Carol Kyte, Maggie Campbell, Ann Moulton, Joni Smith, Linda Overlin, and Mary Lucille for processing the fall newsletter mailing; Shawna Shoaf for all the professional help with various graphics design and layout projects; Steve Douglas for continued efforts with the Healthy Forest Project; Dave Overlin for continued support and use of his shop; and Anne Whitfield, Anne Moulton, Trish Neff, Becky Brown, Ruth Ann Amey, Helen Philipsen, Elaine Sartoris, Jan Myers and Carol Kyte for processing the year end mailings.



# "I am Having a Problem with Steller's Jays"

By Dave Van Manen



"Hi Dave, this is Maggie. Please call me when you get a chance. I am having a problem with Steller's jays and want to talk to you about it," said the recorded message on my phone a couple of weeks ago. Before returning her call, I thought a while about what kind of problem she might be having with these large blue birds. I'd been seeing a whole lot of these local jays

lately – more than usual – and so I had a feeling I knew what was up.

"I started feeding the birds again last week," she said, acknowledging that the neighborhood bears were now probably tucked in their dens for the winter and will not be getting into her feeders, "and all I seem to have at the feeders are Steller's jays. They are eating so much, they are keeping all the other birds away, and I don't know what to do. I can't afford this much seed, and I'd like to see some other birds at the feeders."

Yup, just what I thought. At the time of my conversation with Maggie, I hadn't yet resumed setting out my own feeders since putting them away late last spring when the bears emerged. So, I hadn't yet experienced first-hand what she was talking about. But just a couple of mornings ago, I filled a handful of feeders around my place with black oil sunflower seeds, and no sooner had I finished with the last feeder, the first one had a couple of Steller's jays on it, going to town on the free food. Within an hour, there must have been a dozen or more jays, happily gouging on all the seed I just put out. By mid afternoon, the feeders were close to empty, and only then did I see a few chickadees, nuthatches and juncos dodging the

remaining jays to quickly grab a seed and fly off into the pines with it.

Steller's jays are common in the Beulah area, and are found throughout the mountainous regions of western North America. They are named after German naturalist George Steller, who accompanied explorer Vitus Bering on the trip which discovered the sea passage that separates North America and Asia, now known as the Bering Strait.

A visit to the Mountain Park will likely include seeing, and hearing, these pretty birds with a blue body, black head with white streaks above the eyes and on the forehead, and a distinctive black crest. They are bold, noisy, and often gregarious. Along with all sorts of screams and scoldings, their vocalizations include mimicking a red-tailed hawk that can be quite convincing. Besides easy pickings at bird feeders, their natural omnivorous diet varies from fruit seeds, pine seeds and acorns to insects to bird eggs and nestlings. During the cold months, seeds make up the vast majority of their diet.

Maggie and I also wondered why there seem to be more Steller's jays than usual. I don't have a definitive answer, but I have a hunch. Last year brought a bumper crop of ponderosa pine cones – and when I say bumper crop, I mean a massive number of cones. They were everywhere. Each cone can contain up to around seventy-five seeds. My hunch is that all those pine seeds resulted in exceptionally well-nourished Steller's jays who went on to have a very successful and prolific breeding season.

Whatever the reason, Beulah and the Mountain Park is entering winter with a bumper crop of Steller's jays, gracing the forests with their blue beauty and busy antics – and cleaning out a whole lot of bird feeders.

"RIVERS KNOW  
THIS: THERE  
IS NO HURRY.  
WE SHALL GET  
THERE SOME  
DAY."  
~ A.A. MILNE,  
*Winnie the Pooh*

## "Take Time to Just Walk"

By Ranger Sandy Christensen

We offer many different guided hikes along our trails in Pueblo Mountain Park. The hikes are mapped out along Tower, Ranger, Mace, Northridge and Devil's Canyon Trails. They wind their ways through Ponderosa Pine, Douglas Fir and Mountain Shrublands ecosystems.

Although there is much to say about a vigorous hike that stimulates the heart rate, strengthens our muscles, and gets us to the top of the hill or completes the circle hike...what about just walking? Walk just to walk. Slow down. Turn off the device. Connect your feet to the Earth and take time to breathe!

The benefits of walking are many. Our senses

naturally become more refined. Our body relaxes. We see things that otherwise we might simply pass by – the Abert's squirrel storing up pine cones for the winter, the nuthatch coming closer within the silence. The silence. Can you walk in solitude? You may discover the calmness within you when you discover yourself in Nature this way. Slow down and smell the pines. Reconnect yourself with the natural world.

Some may think it boring to walk the same path day after day, but walking a path over and over every day is never the same. There are new discoveries with each step. When we are quiet, the Earth speaks to us. We just need to take the time to listen, and to just walk!



# Twice in a Blue Moon

By Dave Van Manen

Some things don't happen that often – the Chicago Cubs winning the World Series, finding a \$20 bill on the ground, seeing red crossbills in the Mountain Park. As the saying goes, these events occur “once in a blue moon” – because “blue moons” do not happen very often.

So, what exactly is a blue moon? First, it is not blue! The more popular definition these days says a blue moon is the second full moon in a calendar month. Another definition is a blue moon is the third full moon in a season that has four full moons; four full moons in one season is also unusual. But we are going with the monthly blue moon definition in this article.

Since there are 29.5 days between full moons, it happens now and then that a full moon will occur at the very beginning of a month, then again at the very end of the same month. Two full moons in the same month only take place once every two to three years. The next blue moon will be in January 2018 – full moons will occur on the 1<sup>st</sup> and then again on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January of the new year.

Even more unusual is to have two blue moons in the same calendar year. This occurs every 19 years, the number of years – known as the Metonic Cycle – it takes for the new and full moons to re-align with the same, or nearly the

same, calendar dates of the year. Get ready, because 2018 is one of those unusual years.

With a full moon / blue moon on January 31, followed by the month of February, which only has 28 days as 2018 is not a leap year, the next full moon will skip the month of February entirely, and occur on March 1 (remember, full moons occur 29.5 days apart). The next full moon after that will be on March 31 – a second full moon in the same month. And, voila – a second blue moon in the same year.

The next year two blue moons occur in the same year will be in nineteen years, 2037 – two full moons in January, none in February, two in March, 2037.



*Here are the blue moons that will occur between now and January 2037:*  
*January 31, 2018*  
*March 31, 2018*  
*October 31, 2020*  
*August 31, 2023*  
*May 31, 2026*  
*December 31, 2028*  
*September 30, 2031*  
*July 31, 2034*

**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](http://www.hikeandlearn.org)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

#### Supporter Levels:

☐ Student/Low-income \$20/year  
☐ Squirrel (Basic Individual) \$35  
☐ Raccoon (Basic Family) \$50  
☐ Coyote \$120  
☐ Mountain Lion \$240

☐ Bear \$600  
☐ Basic Business \$240  
☐ Special donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ My company will match my gift up to the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (please enclose gift form from your company).

☐ I would like to set up 12 monthly Payments! ( We will contact you to set it up - please provide your phone number above).

Mail to: MPEC PO Box 99, Beulah, CO 81023  
Can we tell a friend about the MPEC?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_



**MOUNTAIN PARK  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
CENTER**

Gift memberships  
available.  
Call 719-485-4444



# OTHER WINTER PROGRAMS AT THE MOUNTAIN PARK

For all the details, pricing, and to register for these programs, go to [www.hikeandlearn.org](http://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.

Also, note that as of January 1, MPEC and the Nature & Raptor Center are merging into one organization, the Nature & Wildlife Discovery Center, with a River/Raptor Campus and a Mountain Park Campus. So keep an eye out for other programs offered at our the River/Raptor Campus.



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!

**Winter Solstice Drum Circle** Bundle up and enjoy a drumming circle around a warm campfire! **Wed, Dec 20, 6:30-8pm**

**Winter Wander-land Family Day** Bring the whole family and unwind from the holidays with a fun-filled family day of Nature – games, hikes, campfire, s'mores and more. Lunch & hot drinks provided. **Wed, Dec 27, 9am-3pm**

**Snow One-Day Camps!** Discover the many wonders of winter time in the mountains: animal tracking, Hobbitville, winter scavenger hunt, arts & crafts, sledding (weather permitting), campfire, cocoa, s'mores & more! Transportation provided from Raptor Center. Two age groups K-2nd, and 3rd-5th. **Thurs, Dec 28, 8:30am-3:30pm**

**Nature Toddlers** Little ones get to experience the wonders of Nature with music, exploration, discovery and fun! Dress to be outside! **Mondays at 10am: Jan 15, Feb 19 & Mar 19**

**Winter Watercolor Painting Saunter** The winter landscape offers numerous opportunities to capture the subtle beauty of the season though watercolor paints. Suitable for all levels of watercolor experience, including beginners. All painting supplies provided. **Sun, Feb 11, 1pm**

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

Printed on recycled paper

"EVEN THE STRONGEST BLIZZARDS START WITH A SINGLE SNOWFLAKE."  
~ SARA RAASCH

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Mountain-Park-Environmental-Center>

**MPEC FACEBOOK**

Visit the

**Return Service Requested**

PO Box 99  
Beulah, CO 81023  
719-485-4444  
[mpec@hikeandlearn.org](mailto:mpec@hikeandlearn.org)  
[www.hikeandlearn.org](http://www.hikeandlearn.org)



Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Beulah, CO  
Permit No. 6