



OUR MONTANA_{INC.}

Exploring Montana: Fall 2024

Where Nature, History, and Community Converge

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Conserving the Pryor Mountains

A Commitment to Our Natural Heritage

The Pryor Mountains possess a rich and diverse heritage that extends far beyond recent conservation efforts. For centuries, these mountains have been a spiritual home to the Crow Tribe. They also bear witness to the earliest human presence in the Americas, where evidence in caves and the high-quality chert gathered for stone tools..



Geologically unique, the Pryors are formed from uplifted sedimentary rock, distinguishing them from the glacier-carved igneous formations typical of the nearby Beartooth Mountains. This geological distinctiveness supports rich and varied ecosystems, making the Pryors a prime location for biological and geological research.

The abundance of cultural resources in the area presents significant opportunities for further study. Many of these cultural sites remain important to the Crow Tribe, who maintain a close connection to the region with their Reservation nearby.

The Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service have made significant progress in their planning for the Pryor Mountains, and have identified key areas that have wilderness qualities. The road system in the Pryors is well established, and there is limited potential for logging or mineral development, making the region an ideal candidate for additional wilderness protection.

Recognizing the need for comprehensive conservation, Our Montana and the Pryors Coalition have joined forces to advance efforts in the region. We propose that the entire Pryor Mountains landscape should be

Ralph Saunders
Bozeman Trail
Researcher

Jim Thompson
Attorney /
Past Chair

Dave Walzenried
Restoration and
Improvement Projects

Ross Wapels
Trail Coordination &
River Monitoring

Don Woerner
Buffalo Restoration



considered for long-term preservation. While wilderness designation remains a key objective, we believe that a National Monument designation by the President would provide an additional layer of protection to this unique landscape.

Importantly, many of the typical controversies surrounding conservation efforts are absent in the Pryor Mountains. With minimal potential for resource extraction and a pre-existing road network, there are few obstacles to achieving further protection. At the same time, the potential for additional research into the region's flora, fauna, and cultural heritage is immense.

By preserving the Pryor Mountains, we make a lasting commitment to our natural heritage, ensuring that this unique and valuable ecosystem remains protected for future generations to study, enjoy, and cherish.



*Pictures Courtesy of: TheCloudFoundation.org
& PryorMountains.org*

Announcements and Highlights!

Celebrating Robbie Carpenter's Retirement

Thank You, Robbie, for a Decade of Dedication and Leadership!

It's with a mix of joy and bittersweet feelings that we announce the retirement of Robbie Carpenter, our beloved President and Executive Director. Robbie has been the heart and soul of Our Montana since she joined in 2014, bringing her warmth, wisdom, and unwavering dedication to everything she did.

Over the years, Robbie's impact has been immeasurable. She was there for the creation of the

Explore Yellowstone River App, the success of our Back to the Future events, and preservation work along the Bozeman Trail. But more than her accomplishments, it's her kindness, sense of humor, and passion that have left an indelible mark on all of us. She guided Our Montana with grace and compassion, making everyone feel welcome and inspired



We will miss her deeply but are grateful for the time and energy she poured into Our Montana. Robbie, thank you for being the driving force behind so much of what we've accomplished. As you move on to new adventures, know that you'll always be a cherished part of our family.

Please join us in celebrating Robbie's remarkable legacy and wishing her all the happiness in her well-deserved retirement!

Honoring the Generous Support for the Explore Yellowstone River App!

Making Progress Together



We are thrilled to share some exciting news about our Explore Yellowstone River App! Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of our community, we have made great progress in funding critical updates for the app.

First and foremost, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to each and every individual who contributed to this project. Your support is instrumental in helping us enhance the app and provide a more immersive and informative experience for everyone who loves the Yellowstone River. From small donations to larger gifts, every bit of support has made a significant impact.

In addition to the amazing contributions from our community, we are honored to announce that we have received two generous grants—one from the Billings Community Foundation and another from the Tollefson and Licht Family Advised Fund. Both grants will go directly towards advancing the app's



We are incredibly grateful for the continued support from the Billings Community Foundation and the Tollefson and Licht Family Advised Fund. Their belief in our mission means the world to us, and we look forward to sharing the exciting progress as the project moves forward!

Thank you to our incredible community and grant providers for making this project possible. With your help, we're creating a better future for the Yellowstone River and everyone who enjoys its beauty and history.

Stay tuned for more updates, and thank you again for your unwavering support!

features and usability, ensuring it remains a valuable resource for exploring and learning about the river.

With these funds, we're able to implement updates that will help users navigate the river more easily, access historical and cultural information, and stay informed about conservation efforts. We are incredibly grateful for the continued support from the Billings Community Foundation and the Tollefson and Licht Family Advised Fund. Their belief in our mission means the world to us, and we look forward to sharing the exciting progress as the project moves forward!

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Important Update for Our Montana Readers

We're making a small change to how you receive our newsletters! From now on, you'll see our updates coming directly from info@ourmontana.org as regular emails with the newsletter attached. We're transitioning away from Constant Contact to streamline our communications and make it easier for you to stay informed.

Don't worry—everyone is still on our mailing list! You'll just notice a refreshed format in the next issue. As always, we're so grateful to have you as part of the Our Montana community! Thank you for being with us on this journey!

News and Updates!

Coulson "Boothill" Cemetery Restoration: Project Progress and Updates!

Restoration Underway and Inviting Visitors

Nestled at the intersection of Aronson Avenue and Swords Lane near MetraPark, the Coulson Cemetery Park—commonly known as Boothill Cemetery—offers a two-acre glimpse into the turbulent past of Billings' predecessor, the town of Coulson. Named after the Coulson Packet Line, a steamboat operation that faltered due to railroad competition in the mid-1800s, this hilltop parcel holds the secrets of between 130 and 150 souls, many of whom lived and died during Coulson's fleeting boom from 1877 to 1882.

Over the past year, a comprehensive restoration effort led by Our Montana board member Dave Wanzenried, in collaboration with the Friends of Coulson

What's Next for Boothill Cemetery?



Photo: Boothill Sign Finds a New Home

As part of the ongoing restoration efforts, a modest interpretive center is planned using the concrete base that once supported the steel

Boothill Cemetery Park, the Billings Community Foundation, and the Billings Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands Department, has brought renewed focus to this historic site. Continued involvement has ensured that the project stays true to its goals of preserving local history while enhancing the visitor experience. While the project is still ongoing, significant progress has been made, including the relocation of the original Boothill sign to its new home at Earl Guss Park on Bench Boulevard, enhancing visibility and providing a more accessible location for visitors to learn about the site's history.

Efforts to better define and protect the gravesites began with a 2019 ground-penetrating imaging project led by Montana State University Billings students under Professor Thomas Rust, which re-identified many burial locations. This research laid the foundation for future restoration work, ensuring that all updates respect the historic boundaries and burial sites.



**Photos: Boothill Sign
Relocation Project**

Boothill Cemetery sign. This kiosk-like structure will serve as an educational hub for visitors, providing a focal point where people can learn more about the cemetery's history, the town of Coulson, and the stories of those interred. Design and planning are currently underway, and once completed, the interpretive center will be a valuable addition to the park, preserving the area's rustic character while enhancing its educational value. Another significant enhancement will be the introduction of digital resources to increase visitor engagement. The project includes the integration of QR codes throughout the park, allowing visitors to access a comprehensive database of stories and historical data related to the cemetery and the surrounding area. These codes will link to a new website that will offer detailed information about the history of the cemetery, the people buried there, and notable events that occurred nearby. This blending of traditional signage and modern technology aims to create a more dynamic and interactive visitor experience.

Although these elements are still in progress, the park is already welcoming visitors and providing a space for reflection and learning. The future additions will offer a richer, more interactive experience, connecting people to the history of the region in a meaningful way.

Everyone is invited to visit the site and witness the ongoing transformation. Your continued support and contributions are helping preserve a unique chapter of Billings' past for future generations.

Drones Confirm the Bozeman Trail

Mapping History with Modern Technology

Ralph Saunders has conducted what some call a forensic study of the Bozeman Trail's location. This precise study is the first of its kind since the trail was last used from 1864 to 1866. Saunders' meticulous research incorporates diaries of Bozeman Trail travelers, his expertise in wagon travel routes, and Google Earth imagery. He has completed the study from the Montana state line to Virginia City.

This summer, we explored whether aerial photography using drones could effectively confirm or discover the trail's location. Our work focused on the Crow Reservation, where Bill Yellowtail hosted a field camp. His knowledge to the country was invaluable. Ryan Willett piloted his drone over numerous areas to determine if the video footage could reveal the old trail's tracks.

The results were overwhelmingly positive. Drone video proved to be an invaluable tool, not only in confirming the trail's known location but also in uncovering its true path in some previously uncertain areas. This technology has opened up new possibilities for historical research and preservation of the Bozeman Trail.



Pictured (left to right): Becky Kallevig, Rancher, Ryan Willett, and Ralph Saunders.

Mystery of a Large Cultural Site

What happened here?



Pictured: Maggie Yellowtail

Crow Indian Bill Yellowtail recently guided Dave Eckroth, Patty Molinaro, and Jaeger Held to an intriguing cultural site near his ranch. The location has sparked curiosity due to the challenges in determining its historical significance and the events that transpired there.

The site, situated atop a flat ridge, features strategically placed rock structures that appear to be defensive in nature. During their exploration, Dave and Jaeger uncovered a variety of artifacts, including buttons from cavalry uniforms, iron arrowheads, and Indian beads. These findings suggest a potential clash between Native Americans and U.S. cavalry forces. Mrs. Yellowtail also discovered a cache of stone tools.

Despite these discoveries, the true nature of what occurred at this site remains a mystery. The diverse array of artifacts hints at a complex historical event or events, but the exact circumstances are yet to be determined. This enigmatic cultural site continues to intrigue the Yellowtail's and us. The question persists: What happened here?



Pictured: Yaeger Held

Videos and Features!

Spotlight Videos

Explore Our Montana's Rich Programming on Community 7 Television

Explore the latest and most engaging stories from across Montana with our series of interviews hosted by Mike Penfold. Broadcast on Community 7, "Our Montana" features in-depth conversations with notable Montanans, from celebrated authors and environmental stewards to health professionals and local leaders. This section of our newsletter highlights the most recent programs, offering a window into the diverse perspectives that enrich our understanding of the state's cultural and natural heritage. Discover all past episodes on our dedicated page at Community 7 TV [HERE](#).



Insight on Crow Heritage with Bill Yellowtail

Experience a compelling conversation with Bill Yellowtail on the Crow Reservation. Filmed on June 10, 2024, this episode offers a profound look into the cultural and environmental challenges faced by the Crow community through the insights of one of its most prominent voices.



Pictured: Bill Yellowtail and Mike Penfold

[Watch the interview](#)

Acclaimed Montana Author Russell Rowl

Our Montana's Mike Penfold sits down with acclaimed Montana author Russell Rowland to discuss his childhood, his journey as a writer, and his latest projects. They also explore his published works and the insights he shares through his podcast. Filmed on July 11, 2024.



Pictured: Author, Russell Rowland

[Watch the interview](#)

Building Community and Green Spaces with Director Mike Pigg

Mike interviews Billings Parks and Recreation Director, Mike Pigg, to discuss the department's efforts and the incredible work they do across the city. Filmed on July 23, 2024.



[Watch the interview](#)

*Pictured: Mike Penfold and
Director, Mike Pigg*

Health and Climate: A Conversation with Dr. Rob Byron and Dr. Lori Byron

Dr. Rob Byron and Dr. Lori Byron delve into the critical connection between climate and health, sharing their inspiring work with Montana Health Professionals for a Healthy Climate. Filmed on August 20, 2024.

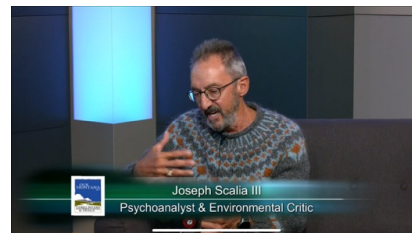


*Pictured: Dr. Rob Byron and Dr.
Lori Byron*

[Watch the interview](#)

Preserving Montana's Wild Places: Joe Scalia III on the Custer Gallatin Wilderness

In this episode of Our Montana, Joe Scalia III joins Mike Penfold to explore the beauty and importance of the Custer Gallatin Wilderness. Recorded on August 22, 2024.



Pictured: Joe Scalia III

[Watch the interview](#)

Celebrating Montana!

Discover More on Our Digital Platform!

Looking to delve deeper into Our Montana's initiatives and projects? Look no further than our revamped digital platform, OurMontana.org!

Our website serves as a treasure trove of information, offering everything from captivating historical insights to thought-provoking interviews.

Whether you're seeking the latest updates on our endeavors or simply eager to explore Montana's rich culture, our website has something for everyone.

So, if you haven't already, be sure to pay a visit to OurMontana.org today. Join us on our digital journey as we celebrate the beauty and vibrancy of Montana!



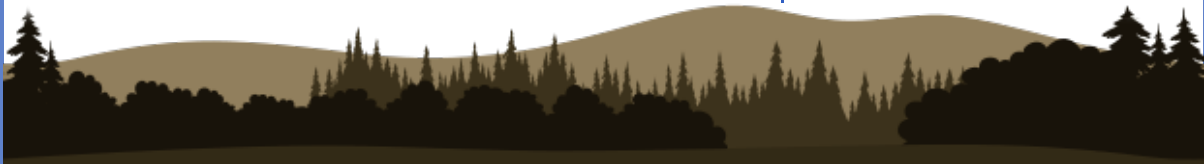
OurMontana.org.

Support Montana's Heritage with Our Montana License Plates



[Learn More](#)

Our Montana is a license plate for ALL Montanans! Available NOW at your local licensing office. Funds help the organization work to preserve the scenic, historic, archaeological, scientific, recreational, and natural resources of Montana.



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