



# OUR MONTANA<sub>INC.</sub>

Exploring Montana: Spring 2025

## Where Nature, History, and Community Converge

### Guiding Our Path Forward: Mike Penfold Named New President

Bringing a Lifetime of Leadership to the Helm



At the April 2025 board meeting, longtime conservationist and public lands advocate Mike Penfold was officially named President of Our Montana. With nearly six decades of public service—including leadership roles as State Director of the Bureau of Land Management in both Montana and Alaska—Mike has helped shape some of the most impactful conservation and public access policies in the western United States.

Since joining Our Montana, Mike has been a steady presence and guiding voice, working to expand public access along the Yellowstone River, support historic trail documentation, and foster cross-agency collaboration on cultural and environmental initiatives. He's also the host of Our Montana on Community 7 TV, where he shares stories that deepen public understanding of the state's rich landscapes and heritage.



Photo Caption: Mike Penfold Interview with Bill Yellowtail on a sunny hilltop above the Crow Reservation.

[Watch The Interview](#)

### Board of Directors

**Mike Penfold**  
President

**Tom Towe**  
Treasurer

### Board Members

**Dale Anderson**  
Yellowstone River App  
Content Coordinator

**Dave Eckroth**  
Historical &  
Archaeological Research

**Jaeger Held**  
Historical Research

**Rebecca Kallevig**  
Archaeology & Historical  
Research

**Gary Little**  
Commercial Illustrator,  
Fine Artist & Sculptor

**Patty Molenaro**  
Author / Historical  
Researcher

**John Pulasky**  
Back to the Future  
Coordinator

**Marlene Saunders**  
Historical Research  
Editor

**Ralph Saunders**  
Bozeman Trail  
Researcher

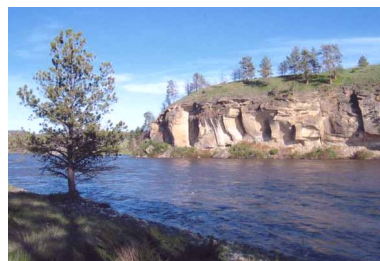
**Dave Walzenried**  
Restoration and  
Improvement Projects

**Ross Wapels**  
Trail Coordination &  
River Monitoring

**Don Woerner**  
Buffalo Restoration

## Announcements, News and Highlights!

[New Yellowstone Watershed Initiative](#)



Uniting for River Health & Conservation  
Our Montana, Yellowstone River Parks  
Association and the Yellowstone River Research  
Center, at Rocky Mountain College are  
spearheading a new initiative: the formation of  
a Yellowstone River Watershed Group. This  
collaborative effort will bring together  
community leaders, scientists, stakeholders and  
conservationists to protect and restore the  
health of the Yellowstone River and its surrounding landscapes.

The group will explore partnerships with local Conservation Districts and other stakeholders to address pressing ecological challenges—including oil spill prevention, stormwater runoff, the spread of invasive plant species and issues concerning the sustainability of the Yellowstone River.

Early planning is already underway, and we're excited about the potential for grant funding and regional collaboration to move this vision forward.

Stay tuned for more as this effort evolves—and thank you for supporting Our Montana's mission to safeguard our state's most vital waterways.

## Experience the Pryor Mountains Like Never Before

*A visual journey through one of Montana's most storied landscapes*



Created by longtime conservationist and storyteller Mike Penfold, this original Our Montana feature offers a rare and moving look into the awe-inspiring Pryor Mountains. Designed to showcase the region's raw beauty and underscore its need for lasting protection, the film blends thoughtful narration with breathtaking aerial footage. From wind-sculpted ridges to remote valleys rich in history, the Pryors are captured here in all their wild majesty.

Special thanks to Ryan Willett, whose stunning drone videography captures the wild majesty of the region from above. His visuals bring to life the power, beauty, and solitude that define this part of the state—offering a perspective few have ever seen.

Whether you've explored the Pryors before or are discovering them for the first time, this feature invites you to reflect on what makes Montana's landscapes so extraordinary—and why protecting them for future generations matters.

**Watch  
Now!**

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

Spearheaded by Dave Wanzanried—whose vision, dedication, and leadership have made this project possible—the Boot Hill Cemetery project continues to grow into a vibrant tribute to Montana's past. With the help of dedicated volunteers and community collaboration, this historic site has been revitalized through thoughtful restoration, improved signage, and new educational tools.

Recent efforts include a major site cleanup and preparation for a new informational kiosk—complete with a map and QR code access to deeper stories about the people and events that shaped the area. This digital expansion is part of a broader initiative to connect visitors with Montana's rich history through accessible, engaging experiences.

Future plans include integrating Boot Hill into a larger network of digitally connected heritage sites using QR codes that link to maps, images, and historical context. This innovative approach helps tell Montana's story in a more interactive way while reducing the need for excessive physical signage.

These efforts are part of Our Montana's broader mission to preserve and share the cultural heritage of the region, and we're grateful to everyone who has contributed their time, energy, and expertise to help bring this meaningful work to life.

## Board Member Spotlight: Jaeger Held

This summer, board member Jaeger Held steps into a new role as an interpretive ranger at Fort Laramie National Historic Site in southeast Wyoming. Once a pivotal 19th-century trading post and military fort along the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails, Fort Laramie now welcomes visitors from around the world to learn about frontier life, Plains Tribes, and westward expansion.

As an interpretive ranger, Jaeger will lead guided walks, present living-history programs, and help visitors connect the fort's stories to the broader history of the American West—experience he'll bring back to Our Montana projects.

Congratulations, Jaeger, and we look forward to hearing your insights from the trail!



## Yellowstone River App: Exciting Updates Coming Soon!

*Making Progress Together*



Thanks to the incredible generosity from our community and grant supporters, the Explore Yellowstone River App enhancements are nearly complete!

Your support is bringing key improvements—making it easier to navigate the river, discover historical landmarks, explore cultural stories, and stay informed about local conservation efforts.

Look for these exciting Android and iPhone updates by the end of May. We'll let you know as soon as it's ready to explore!

Thank you again for helping us preserve and celebrate the beauty and heritage of the Yellowstone River.

## Bozeman Trail Book Heads to Print!

*Mapping Montana's Historic Pathways*

Ralph Saunders has finished his deep-dive manuscript, *The Bozeman Trail in Montana*—the first comprehensive mapping of the 535-mile route since the 1860s. Drawing on pioneer diaries, wagon-route forensics, and modern drone imagery, Ralph pinpoints the exact corridor settlers followed on their rush to Montana's goldfields.

At our April board meeting, members voted to move the project into the printing phase, setting aside funds to produce a high-quality, photo-rich edition. Once the print vendor is selected, copies will be shared with museums, libraries, classrooms, and partner trails groups so more people can explore this pivotal chapter of Western history. Stay tuned for release details—and get ready to trace the trail yourself!

## Bison Recovery: Big Goals, Big Landscapes

*Championing Wildlife on Montana's Expansive Plains*



At our recent board meeting, Don Woerner shared powerful insights into the future of wild bison in Montana and beyond. As both a rancher and conservationist, Don continues to advocate for the return of large-scale, free-ranging herds to the vast landscapes that once supported them.

Highlights from his update include:

- Restoration goals in places like the Charles M. Russell (CMR) Wildlife Refuge, Wind River Range, and northern Big Horn Mountains.
- The need for public education to help people understand bison not as livestock, but as native wildlife requiring space, balance, and thoughtful management.
- Updates on ongoing challenges: disease control, land access, and navigating the complex policies surrounding bison herd stewardship.

We're deeply grateful to Don for his continued leadership and tireless work in bringing bison conservation to the forefront. Our Montana is proud to support these efforts to reconnect our state's cultural and ecological heritage—one hoofprint at a time.

## Our Montana Spotlight Videos!

### *Sharing Montana Stories!*

Explore Montana through inspiring conversations on Our Montana, airing on Community 7 TV. Each episode highlights notable Montanans—from authors and environmental stewards to health professionals and local leaders—offering unique insights into the people and projects shaping our state's culture and heritage.

Catch up on recent episodes in the section below, and visit our full archive of **Our Montana** on **Community 7** Stay tuned for more extraordinary Montana stories!



#### *Earth Week* (Apr 2025)

Mike Penfold welcomes Terran Fielder (EarthDay.org), Katie Harrison (SustainaBillings), and artist Hank Fuller to preview global Earth Day events and spotlight Billings-area clean-ups, workshops, and art installations.

► [Watch Here](#)



#### *Local Social Impacts* (Mar 27, 2025)

Community activist Bailey Desper and Mike Penfold discuss local initiatives like block parties, volunteer meet-ups, and pop-up events designed to strengthen Billings neighborhoods.

► [Watch Here](#)

#### *Yellowstone River Cleanup* (Mar 21, 2025)

Mike Penfold talks with Jack Sterling and Kayhan Ostovar about spring restoration efforts along the Yellowstone River, highlighting how community members can participate and protect our vital waterways.

► [Watch Here](#)



#### *Yellowstone Valley Gives 2025* (Feb 19, 2025)

Zack Terakedis (ED, Billings Community Foundation) interviews Stephanie Waller (Director of Donor Relations) about the upcoming two-day giving event in May, detailing how community donations support local nonprofits.

► [Watch Here](#)

#### *Flight of the Nez Perce* (Feb 14, 2025)

Historian Ed Saunders guides viewers along the historic Nez Perce Trail, sharing stories and contemporary insights into this significant, albeit tragic, chapter in Montana's history.

► [Watch Here](#)



#### *Conservation Education at the Montana Audubon Center* (Feb 19, 2025)



Emily Chilcoat and Denella Stapley showcase interactive bird and watershed science programs available at the Audubon Center, emphasizing conservation education.

► [Watch Here](#)

## Drive the Cause Forward: Contribute or Choose Our License Plate!

### Help Us Protect Montana's Lands, Waters, and Heritage

Your support matters now more than ever.



Montana's landscapes—and the communities that rely on them—face growing threats. Recent policy shifts have weakened environmental protections nationwide, including rollbacks to safeguards for clean air, water, wildlife corridors, and public lands access. As stewards of Montana's cultural and ecological legacy, we're committed to doing everything we can to preserve what makes this place so special.

From river conservation and watershed education to historical preservation and wildlife recovery, Our Montana is working to build a more resilient and informed future. But we can't do it without you.

Every donation helps fuel Our Montana's community-based projects like:

- The Bozeman Trail
- Bison recovery
- Yellowstone River Watershed
- Pryor Mountains Protection
- Boot Hill Cemetery and cultural preservation initiatives
- The Explore Yellowstone River app
- And so much more...

Please consider supporting this work with a tax-deductible gift today.

Together, we can keep Montana wild, rooted, and thriving—for generations to come.

[Donate Today!](#)

### Support Montana's Heritage with an Our Montana License Plate



[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.

## Our Montana, Inc.

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