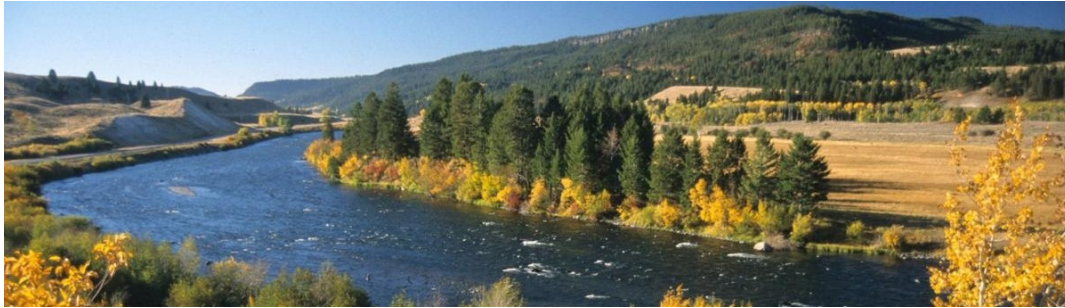




OUR MONTANA_{INC.}

Extended Summer Edition

Meet the People & Projects Behind Our Montana



One of the things that makes Our Montana special is the remarkable range of interests, experience, and projects represented by the people who make up our organization. Our recent board meeting brought together updates from across the many areas of work our board members are involved in. We thought our Summer Edition would be a wonderful opportunity to share some of those stories—and the people behind them—with you.

In this extended edition, you'll learn more about work ranging from the Yellowstone River, conservation, and wildlife to Montana history, archaeology, education, historic preservation, and community involvement.

Some of these projects are happening right now, while others represent years of work that have helped shape Our Montana and its story.

We hope you enjoy getting to know our board members a little better and seeing the many ways their work continues to connect people with Montana's landscapes, history, communities, and one another.

Welcome to our Extended Summer Edition!

THE YELLOWSTONE & CONSERVATION

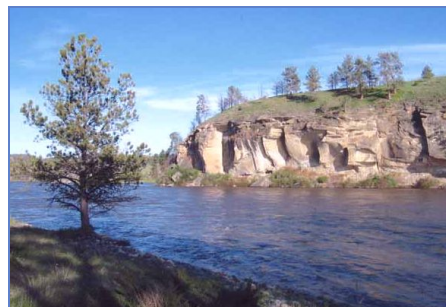
Building a Collaborative Future for the Yellowstone River

Mike Penfold, Our Montana President

The Yellowstone River connects communities, agriculture, wildlife, recreation, and livelihoods across hundreds of miles of Montana. Protecting those many values into the future will require something equally important: people willing to work together.

Our Montana President Mike Penfold has been helping bring partners together to explore the development of a collaborative watershed effort for the Middle Yellowstone River.

The idea grew from recognition that, while watershed collaborations are active on other rivers in Montana, there is an opportunity for greater coordination along a river with a name recognized the world over—the “Yellowstone.” Our Montana has joined with representatives from the Yellowstone River Parks Association, Rocky Mountain College, and Montana State



The larger vision is one of collaboration. Agriculture, conservation organizations, educational institutions, businesses, recreation interests, local communities, agencies, and others all have a stake in the Yellowstone River. Bringing those perspectives together could provide a stronger foundation for

University Billings to begin exploring what such an organization might look like and how it could best serve the river and the communities connected to it.

Rather than beginning with a predetermined structure, the group is taking time to learn. This summer, Our Montana welcomed Mercy Chepkwony, a Ph.D. candidate at Penn State University, for an internship focused on helping the partners evaluate possible paths forward. Her work includes studying successful watershed organizations, interviewing partners, examining organizational and governance models, identifying potential stakeholders, and researching funding opportunities.

addressing challenges while protecting the qualities that make the Yellowstone so important to Montana. The effort is about looking ahead. How can we sustain the values of the Yellowstone River in a changing world? And how can the people who depend upon and care about the river have a meaningful role in shaping that future?

Those questions are helping guide the work now underway. The answers will take time, conversation, and cooperation—but creating a place for those conversations may be one of the most important first steps.

Got Buckthorn?

Ross Waples, Trail Coordination & River Monitoring



Invasive species are an ever-increasing problem all over the West, often on public land. Spotted knapweed, Russian olive trees, and poison hemlock are a few of the invasive species that have taken root along the Yellowstone River.

In Yellowstone County, Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) has had a serious impact on city and county parks, and until the last five years or so was only minimally controlled. This 12- to 15-foot-tall tree (introduced from Europe as an ornamental) crowds out native species and can form dense thickets that are all but impossible to walk through.

Controlling this species is a daunting endeavor. Birds eat the berries, thereby spreading the seeds. The species name *cathartica* is Latin for “purge.” The black berries contain emodin, a strong laxative that causes the birds to quickly expel the seeds in the same ecosystem where the berries were consumed.

Our Montana board member Ross Waples has long been involved in efforts to address invasive species along the Yellowstone River, with a particular focus on controlling Common Buckthorn in Riverfront Park and Two Moon Park. His hands-on volunteer work has given him a firsthand look at both

Buckthorn Cutting in the Parks

Several years ago, a group of volunteers took it upon themselves to begin cutting the buckthorn in Riverfront Park and Two Moon Park, two of the most heavily infested areas. The trees are cut and an herbicide is applied to the stump to prevent regrowth. The former City Forester, Steve McConnell, provided the herbicide, electric chainsaws, and manual pruning tools for Riverfront. The county provided herbicide for Two Moon Park.

In 2021, the city obtained a grant to mechanically treat about 30 acres in Riverfront. Powerful tractors shredded the trees, leaving a cover of mulched wood. A mixture of native grass and forbs was then broadcast on the site. Unfortunately, this effort was less than successful. The shredders cut off the trees at ground level, which makes it impossible to treat the stumps with herbicide. Also, the record-breaking Yellowstone flood inundated most of the treated acreage and washed away much of the native seed. Consequently, the buckthorn regrew and is now nearly six feet tall and thicker than ever. The current City Forester is working on a plan to eradicate the pest and is allowing me to cut (but not treat) the cut trees. At least one other Our Montana board member has offered to assist me.

the persistence of this invasive species and the challenges involved in controlling it.

In Two Moon Park, cutting has gone on for several years and is ongoing with a team of volunteers.

Bison and the Future of Montana's Prairie

Don “Doc.” Woerner, Buffalo Restoration

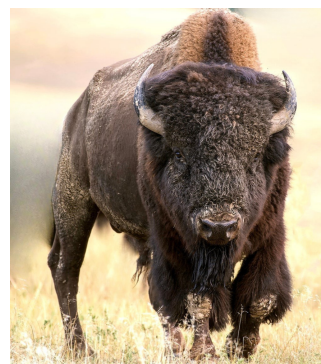
Bison have long been an important part of Montana's landscape, history, and culture. Today, questions surrounding their conservation and management continue to be part of a much larger conversation about the future of Montana's prairie lands.

Our Montana board member Don “Doc.” Woerner brings a particularly meaningful perspective to that conversation through his work helping Indian tribes establish buffalo herds. His involvement offers firsthand insight into the importance of restoring buffalo to the landscape and the cultural and ecological significance these herds can hold.

At Our Montana's July board meeting, Doc. shared an update on bison conservation and recent federal grazing decisions affecting American Prairie. His report opened a broader discussion about public lands, grazing policy, conservation herds, privately owned bison, and the challenges surrounding bison management in Montana.

The conversation also highlighted the unique place buffalo hold in Montana. Beyond their ecological role on native grasslands, they are deeply connected to the history and cultures of the region's Indigenous peoples. Efforts to establish and sustain tribal buffalo herds are one important part of the larger story of buffalo restoration across the West.

Recent changes involving grazing leases have brought additional attention to questions about the future of conservation herds and the role of public lands in those efforts. For Our Montana, these developments are worth following as part of a continuing conversation about conservation, cultural heritage, and the future of Montana's prairie landscape.



PEOPLE, LANDSCAPE & HISTORY

New Tools Bring Ancient Stories Into View

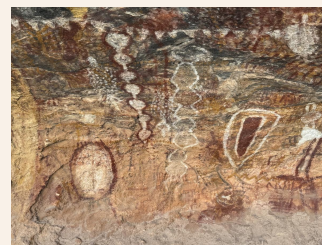
Dave Eckroth, Historical & Archaeological Research



Typical Terrain of the Study Area



Finely Detailed Elk



Polychromatic Rock Art

Some of the oldest stories written on the Western landscape can be easy to miss. Faded pigments on a rock wall, a shelter tucked into the mountains, or a rock art panel overlooking the Yellowstone River may hold evidence of people who lived, traveled, and gathered in these places long ago.

Our Montana board member Dave Eckroth and Patty Molinaro have been helping document and study these places through recent rock art research in both New Mexico and Montana.

In the Guadalupe Mountains of New Mexico, Dave and Patty Molinaro

But not all of the research involved technology. The team also investigated whether native tobacco could be found in the immediate vicinity of the rock art. Tobacco was identified near a number of the sites, providing another piece of information for researchers studying these locations.

Closer to home, Dave and Patty Molinaro have also been involved with a rock art project led by Tim Urbaniak north of Pompeys Pillar along the Yellowstone River.

Researchers documented GPS coordinates for numerous rock art panels and compared

participated in a rock art survey led by Larry Loendorf involving a multidisciplinary team of approximately ten people, including archaeologists, botanists, White Mountain Apache cultural representatives, artists, and specialists in other fields.

Together, the team studied 11 rock shelters and caves, updating previously recorded sites with modern GPS technology and collecting new information for archaeological site records.

Technology is also allowing researchers to see these sites in new ways. The team used DStretch, an imaging tool that enhances color pigments on rock surfaces and can make faded rock art easier to study. Photogrammetry was also conducted to provide more detailed documentation and analysis of the sites.

observations from site visits conducted more than four decades apart—in 1981 and 2024. The work is helping provide a clearer record of the site and the changes that may have occurred over time.

The project also examined whether the site qualifies for the National Register of Historic Places, including consideration of its significance to history and its potential to provide important information about Montana's prehistory and history.

From traditional fieldwork to GPS mapping, enhanced imaging, and photogrammetry, Dave and Patty Molinaro's recent projects demonstrate how new tools can help researchers take another look at places that have been known for generations—and sometimes discover that there is still much more for the landscape to tell us.

Sharing Crow History and Stories from the Land

Patty Molinaro, Author & Historical Researcher



From left: Mardell Plainfeather, Patty Molinaro, and Angela Russell.

Our Montana board member Patty Molinaro has had a busy summer sharing her research and knowledge of Crow history with audiences in Montana and Wyoming.

During the last week of July, Patty joined Angela Russell and Mardell Plainfeather in *Our Side: Apsaalooke Stories from the Land*, a two-day event thoughtfully curated by JoRee LaFrance of the Crow Tribe and hosted by River Arts & Books in Roscoe, Montana.

Held outdoors along the East Rosebud River in the shadow of Butcher Mountain, the well-attended gathering provided a particularly meaningful setting for sharing stories connected to the land.

Their session included an opening prayer, the Crow creation story, a historical overview of the Crow people, and discussion of local place names associated with the Crow during their time at or near the Absaroka Agency, south of present-day Absarokee.

The landscape itself was part of the story. Patty shared historical context surrounding Butcher Mountain, whose name was likely associated with the practice of butchering cattle at the agency, as well as Armstrong Lake—today's East Rosebud Lake and the source of the East Rosebud River. The lake was the former home of Crow Agent Henry J. Armstrong, who took up two homestead patents there.

Patty's summer presentations also took her to Cody, Wyoming, where she braved strong crosswinds to speak before the Park County Historical Society. Her PowerPoint presentation, based upon her title *Origins of Crow Agencies, Transitioning Beyond the Buffalo*, was warmly received by the active and knowledgeable group.

A few weeks later, Patty presented an expanded version at Little Bighorn College. This gathering held particular meaning for her. The overflowing audience included many descendants of the people whose histories she discussed, opening the way for heartfelt dialogue, additional insight, and questions from those seeking to learn more.

Through these gatherings, history became more than something recorded on a page—it became an opportunity for people to come together, share knowledge, and deepen their understanding of the people, places, and stories that continue to shape Montana.

Keeping Montana History Within Reach

Ralph Saunders, Bozeman Trail Researcher, Historian & Author

Some of Montana's most fascinating history is still right in front of us—in old trail routes crossing the landscape, in stories recorded by early travelers, and even in an interpretive sign tucked away along the Yellowstone River. For Our Montana board member Ralph Saunders, preserving that history also means helping people find it, understand it, and experience it for themselves.



One of Ralph's current efforts, working alongside Our Montana President Mike Penfold, centers on the Steamboat Josephine, whose travels on the Yellowstone River are an important part of the river's early transportation history. An existing interpretive sign near Riverfront Park tells part of that story, but over time it has become difficult to locate and is now surrounded by vegetation.

Ralph and Mike have been working with City of Billings Parks representatives to explore relocating the sign to a more visible location and making the historic site easier for visitors to find. Ideas also include directional signage and a QR code that could give visitors access to additional information about the Josephine and its journeys along the Yellowstone.

That desire to connect people with the places where history actually happened can also be seen in Ralph's book, *The Bozeman Trail in Montana: A Trail Description and Touring Guide*. The book is the result of years of research and fieldwork, drawing upon emigrant diaries, historic maps, photographs, mapped trail locations, and surviving evidence of the original wagon route.

Rather than simply telling the story of the Bozeman Trail, Ralph's guide helps readers follow it across Montana, connecting the written history with the landscape that remains today. The book continues to reach new readers locally and through Amazon, with proceeds from its sales benefiting Our Montana and supporting the organization's work.

Whether helping visitors rediscover a nearly hidden piece of Yellowstone River history or guiding readers along the path of the Bozeman Trail, Ralph's work reminds us that history doesn't have to remain on the page. Sometimes the best way to preserve a story is to help people stand where it happened.

Preserving—and Connecting—Montana History

Dave Wanzenried, Restoration & Improvement Projects

Our Montana board member Dave Wanzenried has spent years working to preserve and bring new attention to important historic places across the region. Two of his ongoing efforts—Coulson/Boothill Cemetery and Montana Echoes—are now coming together in an especially interesting way.

Preserving the Story of Boothill Cemetery

Dave has led Our Montana's work at Coulson/Boothill Cemetery, working in cooperation with the City of Billings, Billings Parks, and community partners to preserve and improve this important historic site.

Earlier this summer, the Friends of the Boothill Cemetery received authorization from the Billings Parks and Recreation Board and the Billings Public Art Committee to install a permanent interpretive panel on the concrete base left behind when the

Connecting Historic Places Through Montana Echoes

Montana Echoes is a web-based platform designed to connect historic sites and museums throughout southcentral and southeastern Montana. QR codes at participating locations allow visitors to access photographs, documents, maps, narratives, and other historical information that could never fit on a traditional interpretive sign. Visitors can also discover other historic places nearby, helping connect individual sites into a much larger story of the region.

At Boothill, the new interpretive maps will use QR codes connected to Montana Echoes, allowing visitors to explore much more about the historic events and places identified on the display and save that information for later research.

Dave also continues his involvement with Canyon Creek Battlefield, where the project currently remains status quo. The Chief Plenty Coups Memorial at Swords Park was paused in May 2026.

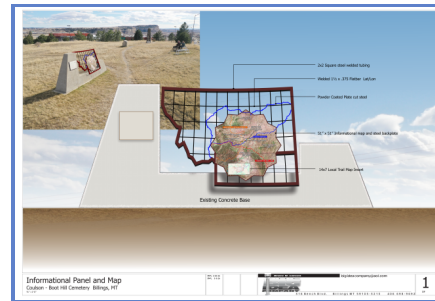
cemetery's historic steel sign was relocated to the parking lot level.

The new display will feature two maps highlighting significant historic events and places across the region, as well as sites surrounding Boothill Cemetery. The Friends also plan to reach out to community members with a passion for regional history to help develop the content for the display and accompanying online materials.

As the Boothill project has grown, Dave's work has expanded beyond preserving the physical site to finding new ways for visitors to explore the history connected to it. That effort is closely tied to another project he has been developing—Montana Echoes.

Together, Dave's work at Boothill, Canyon Creek Battlefield, and through Montana Echoes reflects a common purpose: preserving the places where Montana history happened while finding new ways to help people discover and understand their stories.

Explore Montana Echoes



COMMUNITY & OUR MONTANA

Staying Engaged in the Issues That Shape Montana Tom Towe, Our Montana Treasurer

Our Montana Treasurer and longtime board member Tom Towe, who was involved in organizing what later became Our Montana, continues to devote his time and experience to issues affecting Montana's communities, environment, and public life.

Several years ago, Tom helped organize an effort originally known as Climate Week, which has since grown into the Climate Coalition, bringing together local organizations concerned about climate change. Over the years, the organization has brought a number of notable speakers to Billings, including a Nobel Peace Prize winner and nationally recognized authors and experts.

This year's program will continue that tradition with a professor from Arizona whose expertise in climate change is paired with a reputation for bringing wit and humor to the subject. The presentation is planned for September 13 at 5:30 p.m. at Petro Theatre. Although Tom has recently turned over his role as president to make room for other commitments, he remains actively involved with the organization.

**Explore Climate Week
Events**

Tom also continues to organize and plan programs for the Billings Democratic Study Group, a weekly study group that brings speakers together to discuss current issues, candidates, government, and public policy. The group provides an ongoing forum for conversation about issues affecting Montana and the nation.

Writing has become another important part of Tom's civic involvement. He has authored a number of guest editorials addressing issues ranging from political cooperation and the federal government to the rapid development of large data centers.

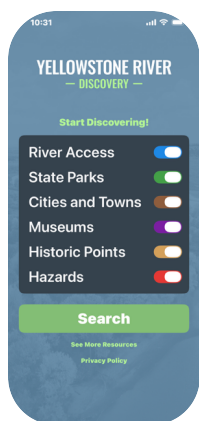
His recent writing on data centers has focused particularly on their potential impact on regulated utilities and electricity rates in Montana. Tom believes careful consideration and appropriate regulation will be important to ensure that the growing electricity demands of these facilities do not unfairly increase costs for Montana ratepayers. He has specifically suggested that regulated utilities be prohibited by state law from becoming involved with data centers, leaving data centers to provide their own electricity.

Whether organizing community programs, writing about public policy, or encouraging people to engage with difficult issues, Tom continues to bring decades of experience and a strong commitment to public service to the conversations shaping Montana's future. In some ways, this work follows his 20 years in the Montana State Legislature and four years as Chairman of the Montana State Parks and Recreation Board.

Helping People Discover the Yellowstone River

Dale Anderson, Yellowstone
River App Content Coordinator

For many years, Our Montana board member Dale Anderson has contributed his time and knowledge to Our Montana, including serving as Content Coordinator for the Yellowstone River App.



Originally known as Explore the Yellowstone River, the app was created to help residents and visitors discover the places and stories connected to the Yellowstone. Dale played an important role in coordinating its content, including information about river access, communities, historic sites, museums, parks, and other points of interest.

Following a major update, the app is now the Yellowstone River Discovery App, with updated technology and a renewed focus on helping people explore and better understand the river. Dale's longtime work as Content Coordinator remains an important part of the app's story and Our Montana's work along the Yellowstone.

Bringing Montana History to Life

John Pulasky, Back to the Future
Coordinator

Our Montana board member John Pulasky has spent many years helping Montanans better understand the world around them and the history that shaped it. A climatologist by profession, John has broadcast climate and weather information on agricultural radio networks across Montana and shared his knowledge through Our Montana's television program.

One of his most memorable contributions is Back to the Future with Lewis & Clark, the award-winning educational program he organized beginning in 2006. Described as a "Lewis & Clark college for kids," the week-long program brought more than 10,000 seventh-grade students from south-central Montana to MSU Billings City College for a hands-on journey into the world of the Lewis & Clark Expedition.

Students explored how expedition members accomplished everyday tasks—and how we accomplish those same tasks today—with subjects ranging from mapping and GPS, blacksmithing and weather to Native American culture, flora and fauna, medical practices, and bison.

Although the program is no longer active, Back to the Future with Lewis & Clark remains an important part of Our Montana's legacy of education, historical interpretation, and community engagement—and of the experience of thousands of young Montanans.

Your Gift Helps Protect the Places We Love

From the Yellowstone River and Montana's open landscapes to historic sites, wildlife, and the stories that connect us to this remarkable place, Our Montana's work continues throughout the year.

If you value this work, we invite you to consider supporting [Our Montana](#). Every contribution helps protect Montana's landscapes, heritage, and communities for generations to come.



Support Montana's Heritage

Show Your Love for Montana — With Every Mile

Our Montana Specialty License Plate



In a state where every road tells a story — from snow-dusted backcountry tracks to winding riverside highways — your vehicle can help carry forward the heritage we all cherish.

The Our Montana license plate is more than a beautiful design.

It's a way for every Montanan to take part in preserving the places, histories, and wild spaces that make our state extraordinary.

When you choose this plate, you're helping protect:

- the Yellowstone River and the landscapes connected to it
- Montana's historic and archaeological places
- wildlife, habitat, and open spaces
- education, conservation, and community partnerships
- the history and stories that connect people to Montana

A Plate Rooted in Montana's Beauty

Each plate features symbols of our shared heritage:

The Bitterroot — Montana's state flower, a sign of resilience and beauty

The Western Meadowlark — our state bird, and the unmistakable voice of summer

Mountain silhouettes inspired by an aerial photograph by award-winning photographer Larry Mayer

Artwork and layout by Barbara Scheppele of Cooper Creative, whose design honors Montana's natural character
Every plate is a small work of art — and a big step toward protecting the landscapes we love.



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