Peak Experience

Volume 17, Number 1 • Winter 2021

Page 4: Winter Tracks goes digital

Looking back at a challenging year. Looking ahead to a bright future.

Page 6 and 7: Get the most out of the snow. Take a hike!

Bring on 2021! Thoughts at the start of a new year

The new year offers renewed hope and an expectation that more normal times are ahead. But that doesn't make planning any easier for the time being. At some point restrictions will lift. People will choose to gather in groups again. Familiar activities will resume. Life will seem more familiar and comfortable.

Some of the challenges and changes from the last year have helped us grow. Rather than "return to normal," we hope to continue to evolve. Our podcast series, Your Wild Place, will go on. Let us know if you have a wilderness story to tell! Online events have helped connect folks from across a broad geographic area. Connections we want to keep alive even as in person events return.

Our winter tracks youth education combined remote instruction and hands on projects with our G.O.A.T (Great Outdoors Accessibility and Teaching) boxes. The boxes are a hit! And will find their way into our future youth education programs.

And as we huddled around the campfire or backyard fire pit, many came to value these smaller outdoor gatherings. We hope to continue to have connected conversations in more intimate settings.

To cope with the stresses of 2020, many people went outside and discovered the value of quiet recreation on our public lands. Our region offers many great opportunities for outdoor outings, from day trips to close-to-home vacations. None more stunning than the summit of Scotchman Peak. The number of hikers on Scotchman Peak increased dramatically in 2020, nearly doubling from the year prior. Many were on their first hiker ever! This winter we have more winter hikes than ever. Participation and interest is very high.

For those who prefer to explore the Scotchmans on their own, we will be producing a new map in the coming months.

Because of the benefits of recreation and reflection in quiet, natural places, interest in hiking is not likely to decrease. We are planning on an active summer with many opportunities to lead hikes and maintain trails. We also need volunteer trail ambassadors to help keep trails open, hikers safe and mountain goats wild.

All of our programs and activities depend on volunteers. We want to thank everyone who has contributed their time, talent and passion over the years! We also invite anyone who wants to help. If you have an idea, want to lend your voice to a story, lead a hike, swing a Pulaski, learn about and talk about mountain goats, or teach youth, we have a place for you! Call or email. Or, sign up for our every other week "insider" email. Help to save the wild Scotchmans for all!

-Phil Hough

Phil Hough

Kelsey Maxwell joins FSPW as outreach and comms coordinator

From Senate chambers to wild landscapes, Kelsey Maxwell has seen her share of diverse work environments.

This year, she added Sandpoint, Idaho, and the nearby Scotchman Peaks to that list as our newest communications and outreach coordinator. She took over communications, outreach and some fundraising duties after the outgoing assistant director, Britta Mireley, moved out of state with her family.

"North Idaho is such a unique and magical place," said Kelsey. "I can't wait to explore and work to protect the Scotchman Peaks and their surrounding wild areas."

Kelsey's career ranges from work at environmental organizations to the Colorado State Senate as an aide. The admiration she developed for public lands led her to join FSPW in late 2020.

Kelsey Maxwell

FSPW board welcomes Juli Thurston

Juli Thurston

New leadership is here on the Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness board!

Juli Thurston is the Montana State University Agriculture and Natural Resource/Youth Development Extension Agent for Sanders County. Her role includes working on natural resource endeavors and developing adventure programs to get youth outside. She serves on the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition, the Thompson Falls Trails Committee, and is the coordinator for the 4-H Outdoor Adventures Project in Sanders County.

Juli, her husband and their three sons live in Plains, Mont.. She is an avid hiker, camper, horseback rider, and hunter and loves having the Scotchman peaks in her back-yard. Welcome aboard, Juli!

Jessie Grossman appointed board chair

Jessie Grossman

More changes are afoot on the FSPW board. After years of service, Doug Farrell has stepped down as board chair.

While he leaves behind big shoes, our new board chair, Jessie Grossman, is well-prepared and up for the task.

A seasoned conservation professional with over 10 years of experience working for the Yaak Valley Forest Council and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative and a degree in environmental studies and resource conservation from the University of Montana. She currently works as the US Program Manager at the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative.

Doug Ferrell's wilderness legacy endures

Doug Ferrell

As we say farewell to Doug Ferrell's guiding hand at the helm of our board, we know that his boots will stay on the ground and his heart will have a home in the wild Scotchmans. Doug (and his wife Mindy) became a part of our founding team in March 2005. His conservation runs deep.

Doug was also part of the founding of the Cabinet Resource Group in the early 1980s and became engaged in the 1987 Kootenai Forest plan. In the last 16 years Doug also became president of the Montana Wilderness Association and now sits among their council of elders. With his help the Cube Iron Cataract Coalition launched several years ago.

Doug's passion and work for wild places carries on as he co-chair the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders. Doug continues to be a valued member of all these many organizations.

Get your hike on!

For a full schedule, visit scotchmanpeaks.org

Historic Trail #999

Feb. 20

Join from 11am-3pm MT for a 2-mile snowshoe toward Star Peak

Ross Creek Cedars

Feb. 27

Hit the Cedars on snowshoe starting 9:30am PT for lunch

Star Peak Moonlight Hike

Feb. 27

See the full moon rise by hiking to Star Peak starting 12pm!

Spar Lake Snowshoe

March 2

Enjoy a gentle incline in a 9-mile round trip from 9am-3pm MT.

Star Peak hike with Anick

March 14

Hike 8.9 miles from 8am-4pm PT at the #999 trailhead.

Star Peak hike with Jamilee

March 22

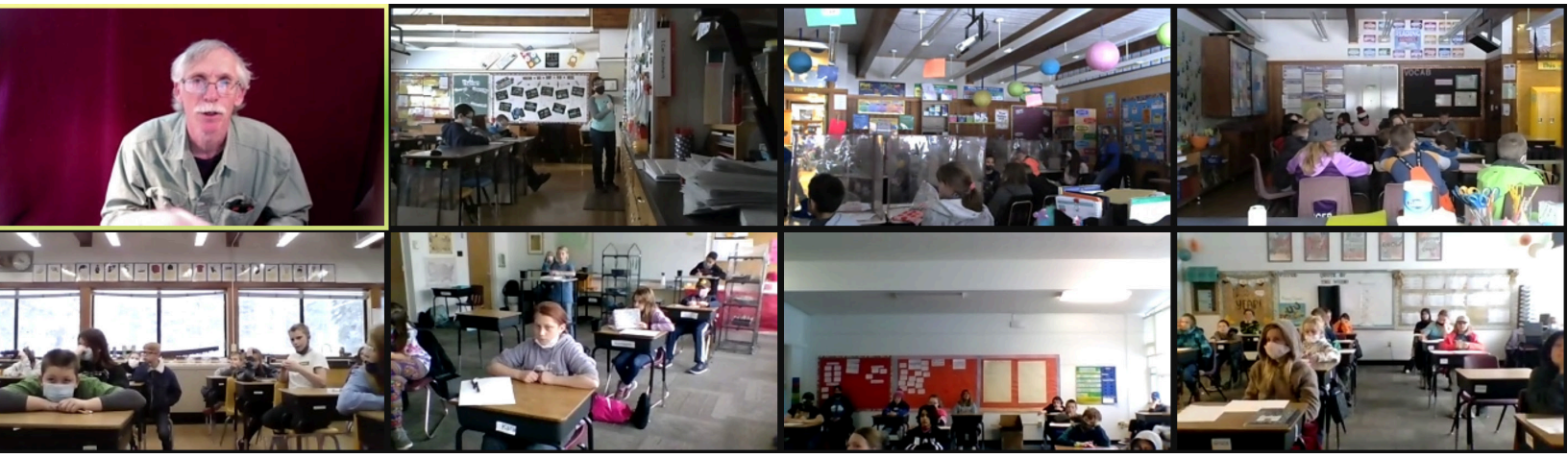
Join us from 9am tp 4pm MT for a hike to the Star Peak lookout.

Regal Creek Winter Hike for Women

April 11

Swing by from 9am-1pm PT for a Regal Creek women-only hike.

Winter Tracks: Learning from a distance



Winter Tracks instructor Ed Robinson teaches ecosystem principles to several regional classrooms.

There's no stopping outdoor education — not even in the midst of global pandemic.

That's the mindset Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness is bringing to its Winter Tracks program this year. And while a few tweaks are implemented to keep students safe, the end result is the same: connecting regional students to their wild backyard.

"Winter Tracks is a special experience in any context. The Friends are happy to do our part in bringing the outdoors indoors."

In past years, Winter Tracks brought students out into the wild, where instructors hosted guided tours of winter ecosystems. Of course, that wasn't possible this season. But thanks to our first ever Great Outdoors Accessibility Trunk, or GOAT, boxes, the Winter Tracks educational experience is now available in a digital format.

Our GOAT boxes are packed with educational supplies for lessons in tree identification, orienteering and animal tracking. Using the supply boxes, our volunteer instructors can guide students through Winter Tracks lessons remotely and safely.

Teaching lessons over Zoom is certainly a different experience from the usual field trips. But so far, students are responing well to the change. Classes are responsive to the instructors' lessons.

The 2021 Winter Tracks season is bringing seasonal learning to nearly 300 students across 14 classrooms in five schools. Three counties — Bonner, Lincoln and Sanders — are participating in the program. And it's all thanks to the program's terrific sponsors: TC Energy, All Seasons Floral and Garden, and Idaho Forest Products Commission.

Winter Tracks is a special experience in any context. The Friends are happy to do our part in bringing the outdoors indoors.

-Cameron Rasmusson

Last year's Winter Tracks program was a big success!

The American beaver transforms wilderness world

On evening hikes at Round Lake State Park, many a hiker has been startled by a loud, "SLAP!"

Dotting the edges of the trails they find stumps of fallen trees that appear to have been gnawed to a sharp point. Along the bank they notice perpendicular slide marks in the mud and grass, leading straight into the water. Keen eyes may spot mounds of branches and mud or even dams in the water.

All these clues point to one amazing animal: the American beaver. They can be found throughout the waterways of the North American continent except for northernmost Canada and the deserts of the Southwestern US. Covered in dense dark brown fur, they are easily distinguished on land by their long, flat, black tail and trademark large front teeth. All these traits are adaptations to help them create their habitat and survive in mostly aquatic environments.

Beavers are one of the few creatures that change the ecosystem to fit their needs. One way they do this is by utilizing those large front teeth. Their teeth are constantly growing, gnawing on branches and trees are a way for them to keep their teeth sharp, healthy, and reasonable length.

They will utilize the trees and branches to construct dams to slow the rate of streams and rivers and to raise the water level. They will also construct lodges for them to live and raise their young. Beavers will slide the logs down the bank into the water, leaving marks in the mud in grass. Something that is fascinating is how far beavers will go to find the best sources of timber. When they must transport the logs long distances, they will construct canals to float the logs down to their dam or lodge.

Their tails assist them in construction of their dams and lodges as well but not in the way most thought. They do not use their tails to haul or pack down mud but instead their tails help them balance as they haul heavy logs to the water. Their special tails also allow for faster swimming, and they act as a warning system. Those loud slaps visitors hear while hiking or kayaking at the lake are beavers slapping their tails against the water to warn others nearby of intruders!

Their tails act as fat storage for the winter months. This helps them keep warm and to survive when food stores are dwindling in the winter. At the base of their tail are glands that produce a special oil known as castor oil. They will spread this oil over their body which gives them a distinct smell and gives their fur a waterproof coating.

The American beaver

Make sure you don't mistake muskrats, which are much smaller with thinner tails, for beavers! Especially since freezing and thawing lake ice this year allow both to gather food and be more social than a typical winter.

-Paige Perry, Round Lake State Park

Your Wild Place's debut year brings stories of nature

Your Wild Place launched last year.

Have you been keeping up with Your Wild Place?

The podcast launched last year is still going strong with regular new episodes. The stories collected last year cover wilderness from multiple angles and viewpoints.

Need a place to start? Our staff have selected a few favorite episodes from 2020. In "Horses, Wilderness & Louis L'Amour," you'll meet Alan and Jesika Harper, a couple that shares a love of exploring wilderness areas on horseback. "The Unlikely Thru-Hiker" tells the story of Derick, a young black man moving from the city to the trails on a long-distance journey. And "Caleb's Miracle" finds Sandy Compton reading his own short story about hope, the perfect touch for the holiday season.

Find each episode at scotchmanpeaks.org/podcast or wherever you get your podcasts.

A Winter Wonderland

Get a new view on nature with winter hiking

This winter, we're having an exceptionally lively hiking season. Thanks to our volunteer hike leaders, we have more hikes than ever before on our winter calendar. Moreover, these expeditions are filling up rapidly, with new and old friends egear to explore. It's no surprise that folks are itching to get outside this winter - life is particularly stressful these days and we've been cooped up in our homes for over a year now.

As we scramble to meet the needs of the adventure-seekers in our community, we are reminded of the grave importance of wild spaces. Walking through an old growth cedar forest in the depths of winter provides us with a unique and precious kind of silence. Hiking to the summit of a snowy mountain and emerging above the clouds fosters clarity that cannot be found elsewhere.

Winter hiking allows for some spectacular vistas across the wnow as the sun sets.

This past year has also been incredibly isolating. Now that most community events are online, we recognize the importance of being able to safely connect with old and new friends face-to-face on the trail. We are honored to be able to provide these experiences for the folks in our community and we are so thankful to our volunteers who make these expeditions possible.

"In times of stress and instability - people rely on the peace of dense forests, free flowing rivers, and breathtaking vistas."

If reading this has inspired you to join us outside this winter - you're in luck! We still have numerous hikes planned in the coming months. We have hikes for all abilities on the weekends and on weekdays. You've never snowshoed before? No problem! Our hike leaders are happy to help and we may even be able to loan you a pair to try it out. We have hikes through the Ross Creek Cedars, to the top of Star Peak, and around Spar Lake.

Plus we have some specialty hikes. In March, FSPW alumni Sandy Compton will be leading an animal tracking expedition down Blue Creek Road. In April, we're collaborating with Women Who Explore Idaho to lead a women-only hike at Regal Creek. Our goal is to ensure there is an adventure accessible for anyone who wants to explore the proposed Scotchman Peaks Wilderness area.

If you're not seeing what you want on our hike schedule - we urge you to make it happen by leading a hike. You don't have to be a storied mountaineer to lead one of our hikes - just a friendly person with a familiarity with the outdoors.

So whether you want to lead or follow, frolic or trec, we want you to join us! Go to www.Scotchmanpeaks.org/hikes-events-schedule/ to plan your adventure today.

-Kelsey Maxwell

Top 10 essentials for snow hikes

Tips and tricks to stay safe outside!

The Sanchez kids celebrate another successful winter hike.

Winter provides a hiking experiences you can't find any other time. But regardless of hike length and intensity, winter brings unique challenges and a need for heightened attention even to basic preparations. Here are a few things to consider:

1. Don't forget the essentials: navigation tools, sun protection, a flashlight or headlamp, first aid, a knife, fire supplies, a compact shelter and extra food, water and clothes. Mistakes and forgetfulness can be much more unforgiving in winter.

2. Leave an itinerary and check in with someone on your return. This is vital any time of year, but even more important in winter when overdue hikers might be trying to shelter in harsher conditions.

3. Pay close attention to your layering system to manage heat and moisture. Sweat that cools us in the summer can kill us in winter.

"Regardless of hike length and intensity, winter brings unique challenges and a need for heightened attention even to basic preparations."

4. Water is still important! When it's warm we remember to drink plenty of fluids, but not so much when it's cold. Dehydration makes it more likely to get hypothermia.

5. Go with a group and know your own limits. Talk about expectations before you go and makes sure everyone keeps group safety first.

6. Don't assume the tracks you are following are following a trail. They might in fact be lost.

7. Not all trailheads are easily accessible in winter so do your research.

8. Don't forget days are shorter. Start early, don't be overly ambitious on distance.

9. Carry a headlamp and extra batteries. The cold wears all kinds of abtteries down more quickly.

10. Consider a pocket guide to tracks and tracking.

With a little basic care and preparation, winter hiking is as enjoyable and rewarding as any other season. It reveals a new side to landscapes that might be familiar in any other context. The secret to enjoying the outdoors in winter is ultimately the same as any other: know your skill level, prepare and emphasize safe practices.

Need a chance to test out your newfound knowledge? Check out our hiking schedule on page 3 and see what's coming up! And as always, stay safe while you're out enjoying our wild backyard.

-Phil Hough

2020: Triumphs

Extreme Plein Air gave artists a chance to exercise their painting and hiking muscles in one outing.

In 2020, FSPW:

TALKED to 1,800 hikers

COMPLETED 851 hrs of volunteer work

CONNECTED with 337 students

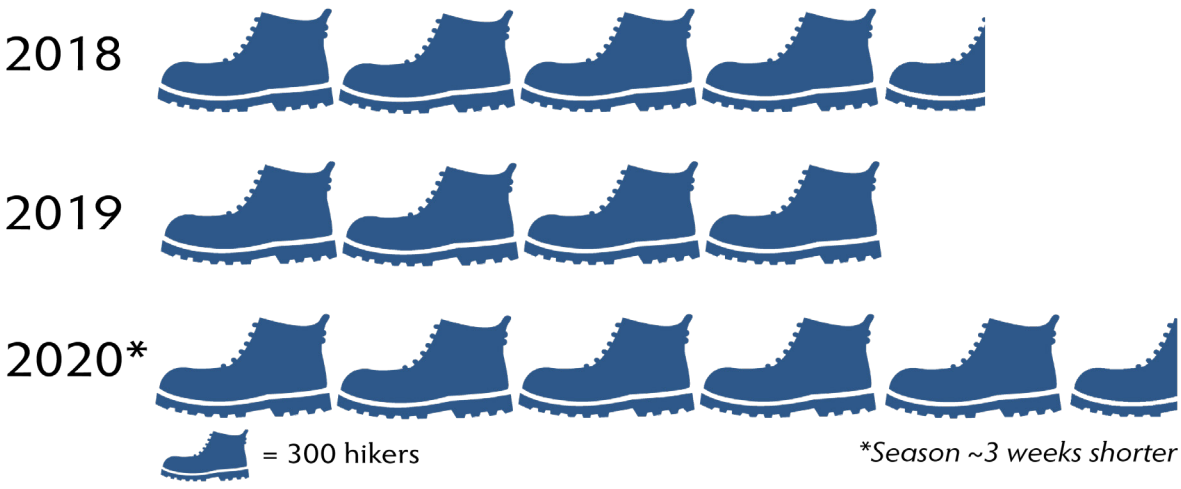
RECRUITED 300 new supporters

ENGAGED 62 volunteers

BUILT 10 miles of trails

Ambassadors program: By the numbers

Hikers Encountered



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A year in review

Thinking back to January 2020, it feels like much more than just a year ago. I suspect I'm not the only person who feels that way. My work in 2020 was both the same and different than in previous years with FSPW. Much of it was focused on laying the groundwork for 2021, when I would be leaving the Friends. Yet somehow, December still snuck up on me.

2020 was also defined so much by "the virus that shall not be named." Despite all the bad that came with it, some good did too. Supporters of FSPW came together for an online auction in the spring. These folks purchased gift cards from their favorite local businesses and then donated those gift cards to FSPW to auction off. Some folks who were out of town or state, sent money for us to purchase gift cards on their behalf. Seeing the community come together to support some awesome small businesses and saving the wild Scotchmans gave me all the warm fuzzies.

I also had the opportunity to coordinate with mask-sewers extraordinaire. When thinking about FSPW's trail season and Trail Ambassador program on Scotchman Peak, we knew some enhanced PPE was needed. With some grant funds from National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, we purchased this pretty epic mountain goat print fabric (and some more neutral forest fabric) for facemasks. A huge thanks to Connie Shay for helping me figure out how much fabric and what kinds to get.

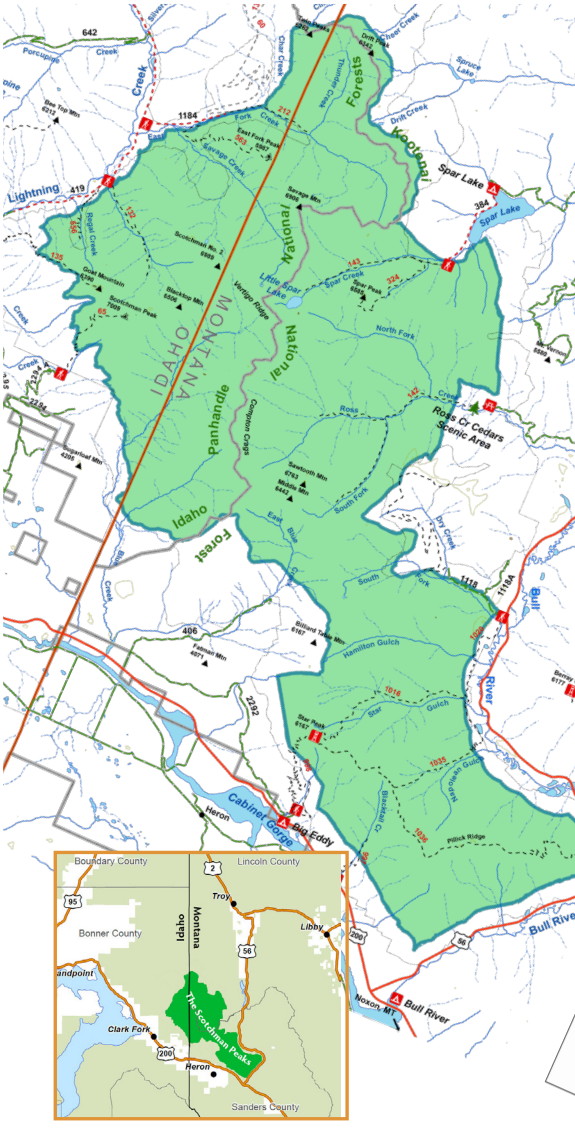
Overall, 2020 was not the year any of us expected it to be. It was not the final year in Sandpoint that I had envisioned. But we took those lemons and made some pretty tasty huckleberry lemonade cocktails. And the best part, the Scotchmans will still be there, waiting for my family to explore the next time we come visit.

-Britta Mireley

Sally Barnhart and her crew celebrate a hike up Star Peak.

FRIENDS OF
SCOTCHMAN PEAKS
WILDERNESS

Uniting thousands of Montanans and Idahoans to save the wild Scotchmans for our children and grandchildren.



Save us a stamp!

Sign up to receive Peak Experience by email at scotchmanpeaks.org/friends/

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PO Box 2061, Sandpoint, ID 83864

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You can save the wild Scotchmans!

Donate to FSPW

Help us save the incredibly wild Scotchman Peaks for our children and grandchildren.

To donate, visit our website or mail in the form below to: PO Box 2061, Sandpoint, ID 83864.

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*Make your contribution monthly to ensure our stewardship and education programs continue every month of the year.