

PEAK EXPERIENCE

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Peak Perspectives: Pass the baton!

Wilderness is a constant, a guiding star that spans the generations. It connects us to our elders and ancestors. And, if we act, it will continue and enrich the lives of our kids and grandkids. The beginning and future of Wilderness are beyond the boundaries of our own time. The work to protect wilderness started before us. And it must also continue past our own time. This means that we need to prepare others to pick up and continue our work, to assure a legacy of wilderness continues.

We must prepare the next generation to take over. We strive to ignite the curiosity in our kids through our hikes, our Winter Tracks program, and other youth educational opportunities. Experiences like these can transform people. We seek to inspire, in kids of all ages, a passion for protecting the Scotchman Peaks forever.

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The Friends of Scotchman Peaks were formed in January 2005. We just celebrated our 18th anniversary! The last of our founding board members, Neil Wimberly, recently retired from active board service. Our past board members have remained committed and engaged. As they retire, they have passed the baton to others. Our current board is as strong, vibrant, and committed as our founders were. If you are interested in becoming a board member, do let us know.

In 18 years, we have evolved from all volunteers to four full-time and two part-time year-round paid staff as

well as a paid summer seasonal intern. We now have a rich history of work, abundant partnerships, and a variety of stewardship and educational programs. As new staff, like our communications and engagement manager Rose Olson, come on board, we bring them into the tapestry of experiences our supporters share. We prepare new staff and board with the skills, experience, and passion to be able to have long and successful careers as stewards of wilderness and of our public lands.

P e r m a n e n t Wilderness needs perpetual funding. Help us to establish our Endowment Fund! Your donation to help launch the fund, no matter how big or small, will be

"Permanent Wilderness needs perpetual funding. Help us to establish our Endowment Fund!"

a drop that creates a permanent ripple. Won't you join us today in helping to create a fund which assures this effort



Star Peak.

goes forward? Your contribution now will help to leave a legacy of Wilderness for our kids and grandkids tomorrow.

This will continue the legacy of Wilderness, which came to us from the past. And, together, we will assure that this legacy of Wilderness is there for the next generation and the one after that!

-Phil Hough

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Winter Tracks '23 a smashing success



Students practice bear safety at a Winter Tracks event.

Winter Tracks 2023 is drawing to a close. We had 385 students from 11 local elementary schools in Bonner, Lincoln, and Sanders counties participate. Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness is especially proud of the interactions and bonds that the students and our local volunteers share. We feel strongly that connecting with nature has the power to transform a child's life. Getting kids outside to enjoy experiences that revolve around nature in their backyard ignites curiosity and a love for wild places.

Imagine the thrill that comes from getting to touch otter pelts and bear skulls, learning to identify trees and follow animal tracks, and navigating through the woods with just a map and compass. The students that participate in Winter Tracks have an amazing time with our volunteers. Our volunteers are experts in ecology, forestry, wildlife biology, USDA professionals, and local outdoor guides. The

best part of Winter Tracks, though, is the sound of kids being outside. Laughter ringing throughout Round Lake, excited conversations as they learn new skills and information, as well as critically learning by interactive modules. Winter Tracks is about doing and engaging in learning in a snow-filled environment. FSPW feels that this kinesthetic learner modality is often overlooked in a typical classroom, but at Winter Tracks it's at a premium.

Our field trips to Round Lake State Park infuse the area's elementary students with a passion for the natural world. Often, as students get older, their sense of wonderment and curiosity is stifled with standardized testing, the pressure to measure up to rigorous metrics, and the social mine field they experience daily. Outdoor hands-on learning can reignite wonderment, joy, and curiosity in students. Seeing fresh animal tracks,

or finding a route with a compass and touching pelts and skulls help students develop a sense of place. Connecting children with nature, we are nurturing the next generations of hikers, adventurers, and professionals in the outdoor sphere.

This program wouldn't be possible without the dedicated volunteers that bundle up for winter education in the snow. They possess a wonderful gift of giving, sharing, and spreading knowledge to grade schoolers in a manner that is easily digestible. This Winter Tracks season, the Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness had 75 volunteers, who donated an astonishing 227 hours of volunteer hours to the program. Lastly, a shoutout to the staff at Round Lake State Park for allowing us to use their facilities, helping us teach Leave no Trace and bear awareness, and keeping hot water flowing for hot cocoa and marshmallows.

-Joel Thompson

Voices in the Wilderness: Ariel Olson

“To be stranded,” Thelma and Louise excitedly agreed. These two over-the-hill ladies were replying to the question, “What are your expectations on this five-day river trip down the Salmon?” Their names were not actually Thelma and Louise, but based on their spirit, it is an appropriate nickname. The pair had met fortuitously on a summer adventure long ago and continued the tradition meeting once a year for some grand escape.

We raft guides chuckled, but all secretly hoped that stranding these two would not be the case. The trip was labeled “family magic,” as six was the youngest age allowed for participants. Five lovely days down the lower Salmon and a bit of the Snake River. Everything we’d need for the trip was on the boats, including some inflatable kayaks (duckies) for family fun in the calmer sections. The extensive pack list went through a rigorous three-check system to make absolutely sure nothing would be left behind, and we were off, boating one of Idaho’s most infamous rivers.

“Five lovely days down the lower Salmon and a bit of the Snake River.”

In early September, the river slows from lack of precipitation. Commercial boating also slows and this particular trip was small enough that a short gear boat was all that was needed for support. This meant that some of the coolers and trip gear would be carried on guest boats. The canyons of the Salmon can be as deep as one mile and hot winds get trapped following the river’s flow. The third day of the trip was a day of hot winds and

ceaseless sun. The dried brown foliage along the canyon walls were reminiscent of fall although the heat carried on. The cool, perfect water was the best respite, and the boats floated lazily as guests swam. As the saying goes, “Time flies when you’re having fun,” and soon it was time to search for camp.

The raft company has a few beaches they’d prefer we park guests on — white sand and flat tent sites please! Private boaters are generally more adventurous and also considerate of commercial trips with big groups. This day we were running out of luck. Beach after beach was full, and we realized we’d have to enter Cougar Canyon and hope to get lucky. Cougar Canyon is a slot canyon with vertical rock walls closing the river into a hallway. It is notoriously haunted and a sign of bad luck, but we had no choice. In we went!

We did find a nice enough beach for our small group, but no trees to tie boats to overnight. The tactic is called a highline, and the boats parallel the sand, a rope from bow and stern attached to a sand stake (basically a rebar pole) hammered into the sand above the seasonal high water mark. We tied the gear boat off solo, and the three guest boats were tied together. It had been a textbook day, and the night was so warm, a fellow guide and I threw our sleeping bags right on the sand and slept under the stars.

We were the first two up as we felt some rain drops on our faces. I sat up



Ariel Olson

and felt that the beach looked different than I remembered. The guest boats were gone! Not in view, nowhere, gone! The gear boat was loose and banging slightly against the sand, one of the sand stakes about to come out.

We woke up the other guides, and after we insisted it was not a prank, we all put our heads together. One guide tried to navigate downriver along the shore, but the canyon walls don’t allow safe travel. Another guide tried to hike out, but it is far and hard hiking. We SAT phoned for help, but there was no way to extract guests out of the canyon. There was news back that a blowout occurred on the Middle Fork, meaning it rained hard enough that the river flooded and rose inches overnight. Our guest boats tied together must have been pulled down river.

FSPW welcomes Rose Olson

We are so excited to introduce Rose Olson, our new Communications & Engagement Manager.

Rose grew up in northern Idaho where she learned early on the importance of getting outside every day.

The daughter of a forester and a botanist, it was no surprise when she pursued a degree in Environmental Science from University of Idaho.

An avid outdoor generalist - right now you might find Rose casually birding, mountain biking, gardening, nordic skiing, foraging for wild foods, snowboarding, fly fishing, camping, hiking, or just boppin' around with her dog - an aussie/border collie who, objectively speaking, is the most precious dog alive.



Thelma and Louise were perfectly content. They'd been questioned thoroughly at this point. As we discussed our next move, the rain became a light driz-

"I sat up and felt that the beach looked different than I remembered. The guest boats were gone!"

zle. The food cooler for that day was on one of the boats, so we had to get creative with leftovers from the day before. The kids started a game of building the longest functioning stream from the top of the beach to the main body. Finally, news came to us that our boats had eddied out about three miles downriver, and some-

one had tied them off.

Now, how to get there?

Half the gear on the beach was dispersed between those boats as well as all the people. All we had was one short gear boat and a two-person ducky. We started to load up. Packing these boats is already a grand game of Tetris, but this was ultimate survival Tetris. When all was loaded, there was one inch of rubber showing above the water's surface. The guides jammed as many as could fit into the ducky: one helmet and one paddle per four people! The gear boat was rowed with central oars, but the captain couldn't see above the six-foot mountain of people and stuff. Another guide had to move stealthily back and forth to relay navigational tips and not tip the boat over.

There was a class-three rapid to be navigated, and everyone stayed in the boat.

In my five years on the river, this was the greatest obstacle I ever had to overcome. I wonder if Thelma and Louise recount this story as one of their best met expectations.

There is a picture of our sunken gear boat and our overloaded ducky somewhere in a river warehouse and I hope the story has been passed down in river rafting infamy.

Author Note: Ariel grew up in the woods of north Idaho. In her free time, she loves gardening, riding her mountain and dirt bikes, exploring local lakes, and learning more about wild mushrooms.

StarPeak Lookout gets a facelift!



Through funding from the Great American Outdoors Act passed into law in 2020, the Cabinet Ranger District in partnership with the Northwest Montana Lookout Association (NMLA) and support from the Friends of the

Scotchman Peaks Wilderness, a major restoration project on Star Peak Lookout begins this summer. The project will span over a two-year period starting with replacing the badly weathered roof, removing the windows to be refurbished

offsite, repairing/replacing failing structural material, and painting the exterior. Then, in 2024, the windows will be reinstalled, shutters removed and replaced with new shutters, and finished with a final protective coat of paint.

Support FSPW through Idaho Gives, Incredibly Wild Online Auction

As winter gives way to spring, Idaho Gives comes around again! This year, May 1-4, the Gem State will come together, raising money and awareness for Idaho nonprofits. We hope you will include FSPW among your choices. Your donation helps us to:

Keep trails open, hikers safe, and

mountain goats wild, as well as provide adventures and inspire kids of all ages.

Incredibly Wild Online Auction

From June 8-24, we will host our fourth annual Incredibly Wild Online Auction. We will be offering over 50

unique items and incredible experiences!

Join us in committing to investing in small businesses, local artists, and memory-making experiences with our family and loved ones. Plus, you can feel good knowing your bids will be supporting the wild Scotchmans!

Chris Compton joins FSPW board



We are so excited to welcome new board member, Chris Compton. Chris is a native son to the Scotchmans. Growing up on the Blue C Ranch in Montana, a few miles southeast of Scotchman Peaks, he has been hiking the back country that is now the proposed Scotchman Peaks Wilderness his whole life. Chris has been a supporter of the wilderness initiative since it was proposed in the early 1970s.

Following a career in the technical trades, he now runs a worldwide technical training program from his office on the Blue C Ranch with a direct view of the Scotchmans. His off-work therapy includes fishing, flying, timber frame construction, tree farming, and more.

Susan James' volunteer work makes learning fun

Susan James, a park ranger at the Libby Dam, is an integral volunteer for Lincoln County's Winter Tracks program. Susan has volunteered with Winter Tracks for years and she always comes ready to help with a smile.

This year, Susan ran the fire safety station that taught kids about how to behave around a fire, how to cook delicious snacks by a fire, and how heat can change many things in nature. She showed the kids how a weasel turns color through the seasons based on the weather. The kids always love Susan's demonstrations, and of course, the yummy snacks that Susan and Keith (her husband) helped them make.

We are lucky to have Susan as a volunteer with Winter Tracks and are appreciative of Susan and Keith's dedication to sharing their expertise with the next generation of outdoor explorers.



Looking forward to the 2023 trail season



The snow will soon be receding from the slopes of the mountains within the proposed wilderness area of the Scotchman Peaks. These majestic mountains lie on the border that separates northern Idaho and Montana. If you view this border on a map, what quickly jumps out is the numerous curves that make up the middle section of the state line, juxtaposed against the nearly parallel lines at the top and bottom of the state. A mere 45 miles wide at the Canadian border, it appears that early surveyors simply gave up after traveling crosscountry through the rugged Bitterroot Mountains. Can you imagine the struggles these adventurous individuals contended with throughout this remote and wild topography?

Luckily for today's adventurers can drive to numerous trailheads throughout the Scotchman Peaks to explore the mountains, rivers, and cedar forests that make up this lush landscape. With apps like Trailforks, AllTrails, and Gaia GPS, a plethora of trails are at your fingertips in a nanosecond.

Have you ever stopped to think about that marvel of modern society? You want to find a trail and *poof* that information is on your phone, complete with turn by turn directions and reviews from other hikers. It's so easy to find trails, connect with community, and recreate in nature today.

How did these trails get here though?

"Today's adventurers can drive to numerous trailheads throughout the Scotchmans to explore."

It was through a rigorous permit process, wildlife assessments, and tireless work from dedicated volunteers and nonprofits. It didn't happen quickly or haphazardly. It takes years of planning, prodding, and pleading to finalize a trail system. After that phase is complete, the physical labor of building the actual trail begins. The trail is carved from the sides of steep

hills, through and around streams, with tremendous elevation gains until it reaches its precipice on the summit of a mountain.

You can join Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness this summer as we continue the work to ensure that winter tree falls are removed, that dangerous rock fall is rerouted, and that the trails width is maintained against the constant battle with flora's encroachment. It is hard work, in all kinds of weather conditions, using traditional manual tools. It also is extremely rewarding to work alongside other volunteers that love nature enough to donate the "sweat equity" needed to ensure that these trails remain navigable for all hikers to enjoy.

Visit our website and select a few dates that fit into your schedule to join us for trail projects in 2023. Find our Hiking & Events calendar under the Get Involved menu on our website.

Thank you to all 48 of our volunteers in 2022.

-Joel Thompson

find us on facebook • instagram

Beyond the goats: the mink of the Scotchmans



The mink (*Mustela vison*), is a medium-sized, semi-aquatic carnivore about 24 inches long and weighing approximately one to two pounds. Mink have pointed noses and a keen sense of smell. Their ears are short and rounded, and they have a flattened head to aid in a sleek swimming torpedo design. Their thick, furry tail is about eight inches long and their fur is chocolate brown to black, with a white chin patch and underbelly. The fur is soft and covered with waterproof, oily hair.

Historically, mink were a prized fur, sometimes called sable, and were made into luxurious and comfortable stoles, wraps, and hats. The fur retains a beautiful luster, and this species is an official Montana furbearer managed and protected by regular fur harvest seasons.

Mink are versatile predators with semi-webbed feet, sharp claws, and long whiskers. The term mustelid refers to musk-bearing creatures, and they often mark territories for defense and mating. Habitat preference is usually near rivers, streams, lakes, beaver ponds, and wetland areas. They nest in hollow logs or stumps near water, piles of driftwood, or under rocks. Occasionally, they

will den in old beaver lodges, muskrat mounds, or in bank dens of beaver or muskrat. There is a close relationship between mink and muskrat. During winter, mink may enter a muskrat den and kill the resident, taking over the den. Mink are adept in the water, and at times go under the snow to harvest mice and voles in winter.

"Mink are versatile predators with semi-webbed feet, sharp claws, and long whiskers."

The mink can be tenacious and kill prey larger than itself. They are primarily nocturnal, very territorial and quietly secretive. Diet consists mainly of fish, small mammals, birds, crayfish, eggs, lizards, grubs, earthworms, insects, mice, muskrats, and in summer, they prey on ducks and other waterfowl. Otters sometimes kill mink, and some owls may take the young kits or an adult mink on occasion.

Mink mate from January through March, have a 40-80 day gestation, and an average of four young are born in



April or May. Mink tracks exhibit a one-three-one toe pattern, and at times may show a two by two bounding stride imprint.

Though generally solitary and unsociable, the mink is the most widespread member of the weasel family in Canada and the United States. So when exploring the wilderness of the Scotchmans, step quietly, use the cover of the timber, and sneak a peak into the many waterbodies that dot the landscape. You may be rewarded by the site of this secretive weasel slickly exiting the water with a squirming fish!

-Juli Thurston

Walking in a winter wonderland

Thanks in part to the heavy snowfall, there was no shortage of beautiful sights to see in our wild backyard this winter, especially on a bluebird day. Here are just a few of the many wonderful pictures FSPW supporters submitted recently.



Get involved this summer!



There are so many ways to get involved this summer! Take a look at some of the options below.

Have an idea that doesn't quite fit with our current programming? Feel free to contact FSPW staffers and share your ideas!

Trail maintenance days

There's no better way to show love for Scotchman Peaks than volunteering for a trail crew. It's the work that keeps our wild backyard open for everyone.

You don't need experience to join one of our trail projects, just a willingness to learn. Our staff and volunteer trail leads will teach you everything you need to know about trail safety, cross-cut saw techniques, weed identification, trail building methods, and more. Keep an eye on our online Hiking & Events calendar for dates.

Lead a hike

Sharing your knowledge and experience on the trails with others is a great way to connect through nature. To lead a FSPW hike, you don't have to be a fast hiker or an expert outdoors person. All you need is a familiarity

with the trail and a little enthusiasm.

Trail leaders can guide a hike in the Scotchmans at any time of the year.

Become a Trail Ambassador

Every summer, Scotchman Peak Trail Ambassadors hit the trails to make sure hikers know they need to keep their distance from wildlife. It's a great reason to get out for a hike while performing an important conservation service.

Simply pick a day to be out on the Scotchman Peak trail, gently educate fellow hikers on trail etiquette and safe goat interactions, and fill out our Trail Ambassador report form at the end of the day.

We'll provide you with a brief training and also gift you a shirt and a hat!

The Trail Ambassador program runs all summer long on weekends and national holidays. Bring a friend, or your whole family for a fun and impactful day in the wild Scotchmans.

Sign up on our website today.



Our Mission

We're uniting thousands of people from Idaho and Montana to pass on a Scotchman Peaks Wilderness for our children and grandchildren.



Situated along the Idaho-Montana border, Scotchman Peaks is an 88,000-acre roadless where wildlife and people can roam free.

Save us a stamp!

Contact info@scotchmanpeaks.org and ask to receive Peak Experience by email rather than snail mail.



Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness, Inc.
PO Box 2061, Sandpoint, ID 83864

SAVE THE WILD SCOTCHMANS! Donate to FSPW

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

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\$25 \$50 \$100 \$200 \$_____

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***Other ways to give:** Learn about leaving a legacy at <https://www.scotchmanpeaks.org/endowment>

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