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QUARTERLY

Winter | 2026



Look Inside

LETTER FROM OUR
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PG. 2

ASK OUR EXPERTS COLUMN
*How do long-tailed weasels
thrive and hunt in winter
conditions?*
PG. 3

FEATURED STORIES
*When Nature Calls: Find a
Privy or Pack it out, Repairing
the Twin Sisters Peak Trail, A
Conservation Corps Story, Jim
Pickering Uncovers Early Park
History in Latest Work, and
Around the Conservancy*
PG. 4-15

OUR AMAZING DONORS
*Supporting Rocky Mountain
National Park*
PG. 12-13

CROSSWORD PUZZLE
*Take your knowledge of Rocky
and solve these clues*
PG. 11

When Nature Calls: Find a Privy or Pack it out

By Gabby Sherwood, Communications Associate

Rocky Mountain National Park's (RMNP) 252,123 acres of congressionally designated wilderness (95% of the park) offer spectacular opportunities for recreation, solitude, and breathtaking views. This special designation protects the park's unique ecosystems from further resource damage. **These wild places are also open to the public and attract over 4 million visitors each year.**

With so many people visiting the park, it is crucial to have safe and effective methods for managing and disposing of human waste. **You may be surprised to learn that digging a cat hole to take care of business often does more harm than good.** Buried human waste, coupled with high visitation, affects water quality, plant and animal life, and human health.

"There are significant human and environmental concerns associated with improper disposal of human waste in fragile ecosystems like those found in Rocky," said Rocky Mountain Conservancy's 2023 Scholar-in-Residence, Dr. B. Derrick Taff. **"Human waste can lead to water and soil contaminants such as E. coli.** Given the volume of recreationists in the park, and that everyone needs to relieve themselves, this can create serious water quality issues."



Rocky's wilderness crews installed five new toilets in 2025.

In streams and lakes, human waste can lead to an increase in nitrogen and a depletion of oxygen, resulting in an uninhabitable environment for aquatic species. Land-dwelling species can also be affected. Due to the park's rugged environment, animals often dig up buried human waste, which "further exposes the waste to transmission and puts the animal's well-being at risk," said Taff.

From his Scholar-in-Residence research, Taff found that one of the major barriers to proper waste disposal is miscommunication. "Generally, people want to do the right thing and protect the park and visitor experience," said Taff, who is a professor at Penn State University and science advisor for Leave No Trace. "No one wants to

Notchtop Mountain lit by
the morning alpenglow
across Lake Helene.



A Message from our Executive Director



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Dear Friends,

Our cherished park and National Park Service colleagues have faced numerous challenges and pressures in the last year, which we need to discuss and shine a light on, but it's just as important to share success stories. Because of your support, we accomplished incredible things together and remained headstrong in our mission of stewarding Rocky Mountain National Park.

Last year, you gave over \$3.5 million to Rocky, which helped the park with projects like transplanting 2,000 willow saplings, installing 135 accessible picnic tables, and hosting the first Tribal Youth Summit in Rocky. With your support, our very own Conservation Corps was 52-members strong, and these folks restored 163 miles of trails and removed 9,122 invasive plants in the park.

In 2026, we continue to support learning opportunities for youth and young adults in our High School Leadership Corps and Conservation Corps. Sadly, two dozen school field trips were cancelled due to the government shutdown in October 2025, and we will double down on our commitment to getting kids into the park for educational opportunities through our Next Generation Fund this year. We are continuing critical restoration work in the Kawuneeche Valley and will start the next phase of the project at Onahu Creek. And as a park with one of the highest search and rescue rates in the country, your support helps ensure those exploring Rocky have the best chance of returning home safely to their loved ones if an adventure ever goes sideways.

In this issue, you'll read about trail restoration planned for the popular Twin Sisters Peak Trail, how Wag Bags and wilderness toilets are key to protecting our park from the impacts of visitors in wild places, and life-changing testimonies from young adults in our Conservation Corps.

We hope that these conservation stories encourage, inspire, and move you to keep standing up for our park. We are stronger together in our work. Thank you for helping us keep Rocky's future rich with trails, wildlife, and adventure for generations to come!

Warmly,



Estee Rivera Murdock

Estee Rivera Murdock
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ask the Conservancy



Shop Conservancy Nature Stores



How do long-tailed weasels thrive and hunt in winter conditions?

They may be cute, but long-tailed weasels (*Neogale frenata*) are one of nature's fiercest predators. A sharp sense of sight, hearing, and smell, along with the crushing force of their bite, proves that this weasel is made to hunt.

Long-tailed weasels have adapted to use snowy conditions to their advantage. They molt twice a year to blend in with their environment, sporting a white winter coat that turns light brown with a creamy yellow chest and belly in the summer. Their black-tipped tail remains year-round to confuse predators like raptors and coyotes. The timing of weasels' biannual molt is triggered by photoperiod—the amount of sunlight available in a day.

To conserve energy in the winter, they will hunt for several hours and then sleep for several hours during the day. Long-tailed weasels also consume up to 40-50 percent of their own body weight each day to keep up with their high metabolism.

Their diet consists mainly of small to medium-sized mammals such as chipmunks, squirrels, pika, voles, and mice. They'll sometimes go after larger animals like snowshoe hares or marmot pups.

However, most of their prey base hibernates, presenting weasels with the challenge of finding enough food. Their small, tube-like body allows them to fearlessly raid burrows as they hunt beneath the snow surface—an area called the subnivean. "Once close enough, weasels quickly wrap themselves around their prey and deliver a swift, fatal bite to the base of the skull," said Kathy Brazelton, former RMNP district interpreter.

Have you ever seen a long-tailed weasel in Rocky? Submit your photo and story at communications@RMConservancy.org.



SWEATSHIRT – RMNP NIGHT SKY BEAR

This super cozy fleece crewneck makes a perfect go-to addition to your wardrobe or a great gift. Bear and mountain constellation in a starry sky is featured in white ink on the dark blue background of the sweatshirt.

Price: \$36.99 Member Price: \$31.44



NATIONAL PARK PUZZLE

Designed to celebrate the landscapes that inspire us most, this puzzle brings together original illustrations of some of America's most iconic national parks. 500 pieces, 18" x 24", by Roaming Heart Design.

Price: \$30.00 Member Price: \$25.50



BLANKET – RMNP SCENIC ELK

This super cozy, teal fleece blanket shows off a beautiful fall scene of bugling elk with mountains and a scenic sunset in the background. Measures roughly 48" x 57".

Price: \$38.99 Member Price: \$33.14



INSULATED TUMBLER – WATERCOLOR MOUNTAINS

Take this 20-oz arctic blue insulated tumbler with a unique watercolor mountain design wherever you go! Hand wash only.

Price: \$24.99 Member Price: \$21.24



BOOK – WHEN THE PARK WAS YOUNG: CHAPTERS IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF RMNP

Estes Park Historian Laureate Dr. James H. Pickering offers five sagas from Rocky Mountain National Park's formative years. In these well-documented chapters, he chronicles the challenges the park's earliest stewards faced.

Price: \$26.95 Member Price: \$22.91

**Find more great merchandise at
www.RMConservancy.org/shop**

Remnants of the 2013 landslide on Twin Sisters Peak can be seen from Highway 7.



By
Gabby Sherwood,
Communications
Associate

Power the Path: Repairing the Twin Sisters Trail

"With high visitation year-round, we want to ensure the trail is built to handle that visitor capacity long-term."

— Doug Parker, RMNP
Facility Manager of
Backcountry Operations

The 2013 landslide destroyed everything in its path.



The panoramic view of Longs Peak, Mount Meeker, Estes Cone, and Lake Estes from the summit of Twin Sisters Peak in Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) is a rewarding sight after a steep ascent, and one of the reasons why it is such a popular trail. Originally known as Lily Mountain by early settlers in Estes Park, the mountain was officially renamed Twin Sisters in 1907. Just a year before the park was established, the first trail to the summit was built in 1914 by the U.S. Forest Service and then later reconstructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1936.

Today, about 1.5 miles into the hike, the remnants of a massive landslide scar the trail. The landslide was caused by the flood of September 2013 and bulldozed everything in its path across the western side of the mountain, leaving significant damage. After years of heavy visitor use and the landslide, the trail's infrastructure has deteriorated, social trails have been created, and deep ruts have formed where water doesn't drain well from the trail.

While RMNP trail crews responded quickly to stabilize the trail, remove hazardous debris, and reopen the trail in 2013, there are still improvements to be made. "With high visitation year-round, we want to ensure the trail is built to handle that visitor capacity long-term," said RMNP Facility Manager of Backcountry Operations Doug Parker.

Shortly after the flood, trail crews realigned a segment of the trail that was badly damaged. **To help sustain the high use of the trail, Rocky Mountain Conservancy is supporting a trail restoration project which is slated to start in July 2026 and continue through October 2026.** "We'll be doing a lot of general repairs to the trail that we haven't done in over 20 years," said Parker.

Trail crews began working on the project in 2025, realigning sections of failing tread (surface of the trail), and will continue to build upon those improvements this summer.

Trail sustainability benefits both visitor enjoyment and the preservation of natural resources. Sections of the trail around and closest to the landslide that are too

Trail Key



- **RUTTING:** Deep, worn trenches that form over time when water doesn't drain from a trail.
- **REALIGNMENT:** Moving a portion of a trail from one spot to another.
- **TREAD:** Walking surface of the trail.
- **SOCIAL TRAIL:** Unofficial, user-created path that forms over time as people walk off designated trails.
- **GRADE:** The steepness of a trail.
- **TRAIL DRAINAGE:** The use of structures and design techniques to prevent water pooling, ruts, and erosion on the trail.

steep will be realigned to an area with a less severe grade. "In Rocky, anything between an 8-10% grade is the ideal trail grade," said Parker. "A trail within this grade doesn't need a lot of infrastructure or long-term maintenance." **Over time, anything above a 10% grade will result in trail widening, debris build-up, and erosion, exposing rocks on the trail.**

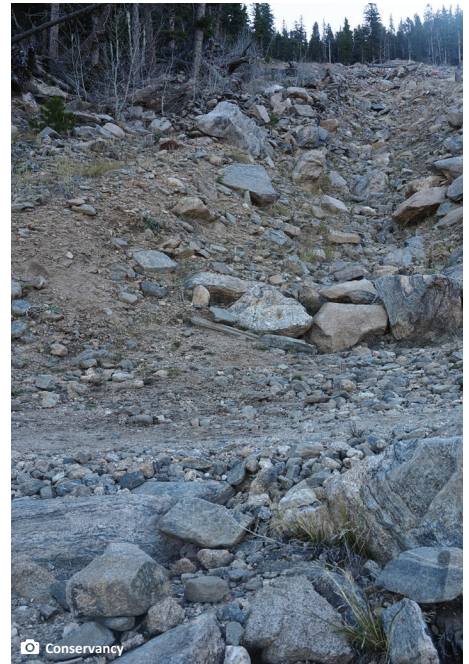
Relocating the trail to an area with a grade more appropriate for heavy visitor use will also ensure that hikers don't create social trails or trample fragile plant life. "When we do trail realignments, we use trail grade measuring tools called clinometers," said Parker. "We find areas of the trail that are doing well, which are usually between a 1-10% grade, to reduce maintenance."

Once the realignment sections above and below the landslide are complete, trail crews will begin repairing the trail's water drainage system and areas experiencing erosion. "We'll improve the drainage structures along the trail to keep it dry and prevent further erosion, pooling of water, and deterioration of the trail tread," said Parker.

Twin Sisters continues to be a trail that many connect with and enjoy. By repairing the trail for long term use, we are ensuring that present and future generations can continue to hike up both peaks of Twin Sisters and enjoy the iconic scenery.

The Conservancy has committed \$424,000 to the Twin Sisters Peak restoration project in 2026 through the Trail Improvement Fund. **You can help by giving a gift at RMConservancy.org/donate.**

Damage and eroded areas of the Twin Sisters Trail.



The planned restoration work will ensure the trail is built for sustainability.



Scan this QR code to donate to Rocky Mountain Conservancy.



Shira Nathan, 2025
Conservation Corps
crew member.



By
Shira Nathan

The Conservation Corps Increased my Confidence and Connection in Nature *A Conservation Corps Story*

*"Being in the
Conservation
Corps has
reinforced my
desire to learn
about, be in, and
protect nature."*

— Shira Nathan

Nathan walking through dense willow.



In 2023, when I was 17, I spent two weeks in Rocky Mountain National Park as part of the Rocky Mountain Conservancy High School Leadership Corps (HSLC). We lived at the Glacier Basin Campground and got a taste of a season in the Conservation Corps with service projects, a three-day hitch (an overnight work trip), and lots of amazing memories. It was far out of my comfort zone. I would have described myself as someone who liked *being* outside but not necessarily *working and living* outside. **The decision to challenge myself with this program was one of the most influential of my life.**

As a high-schooler, I face-planted while backpacking, soaked my socks twice in one hike, and learned I was much stronger than I thought. While in the HSLC, I wrote in my journal, "Being in the Conservation Corps has reinforced my desire to learn about, be in, and protect nature."

I joined the adult Corps because I knew that everything I had gained from that brief experience would only be strengthened by a full season – and I was right.

As a member of the Vegetation Crew in 2025, I worked alongside the National Park Service to survey and treat invasive species. The community made the experience transformative. From our project partners to my fellow crew members, everyone was interested in helping both the park and each other thrive. They taught me how to crash through dense willows and emerge singing (literally).

The 2025 Conservation Corps Vegetation Crew.



Their support gave me the confidence to continue challenging myself, like when the crews living at Glacier Basin sheltered during an intense thunderstorm. I encountered a scary storm on a mountainside the day before during a solo hike. While I made it down unharmed, I was a little rattled, and this storm at Glacier Basin put me on edge. I told my crew how scary it had been because I was alone. My friend immediately said, "But you're not alone this time. We're all here." I burst into tears and she gave me a big hug. Between the lightning, the sunset, and the mountains, the view was so beautiful that everyone was in awe of the thing that had me trembling only minutes before.

Two years and 300 service hours have passed since my first season with the HSLC. Everything this program has meant to me cannot fit onto one page. It was nothing short of life changing. Everything I learned, whether it was solo hiking, plant identification, or cooking skills, I learned with the encouragement of incredible people. I was challenged deeply and learned there are so many options for myself in life beyond what I've pictured.

Lightning strikes during a sunset in Rocky.



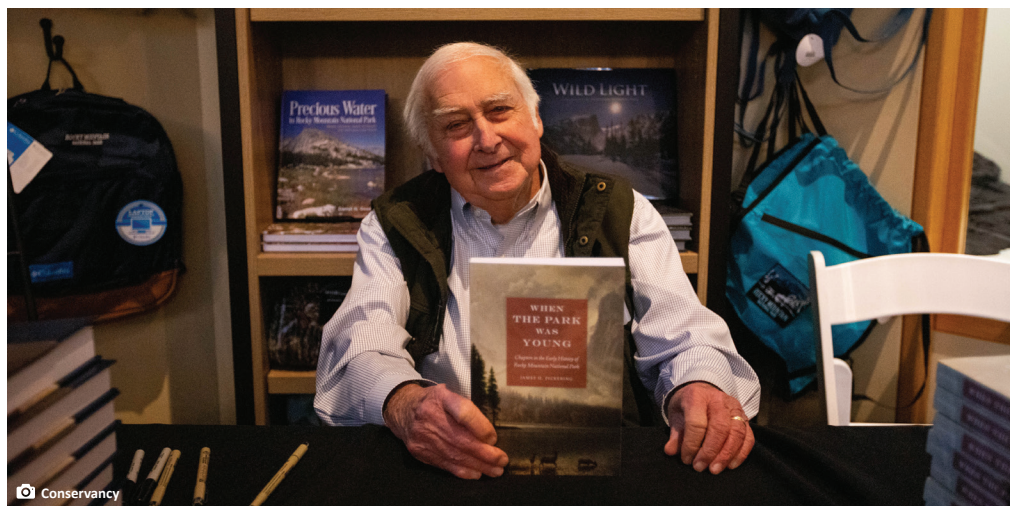
The 2025 Conservation Corps Vegetation Crew surveys and treats invasive species.



In 2023, Nathan (first row, fifth from left) participated in the Conservancy's High School Leadership Corps.



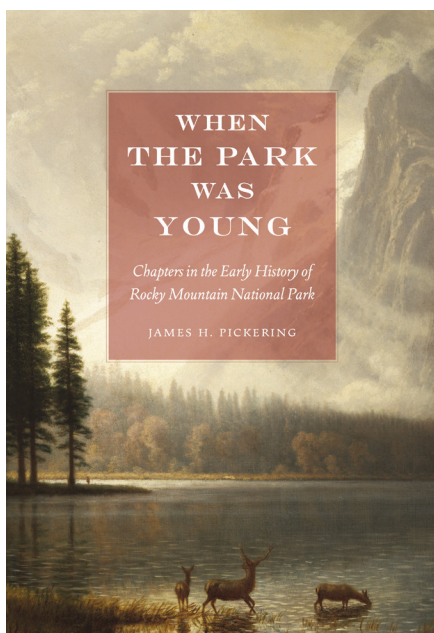
Jim Pickering signs copies
of his book at the 2025
Holiday Gathering.



By
Kaci Yoh,
Communications
Manager

Jim Pickering Uncovers Early Park History in Latest Work

*As Estes Park's
Historian Laureate
and one of the
foremost chroniclers
of the region's past,
Pickering sheds light
on the formative years
of Rocky Mountain
National Park.*



The newest work by Dr. James H. Pickering, *When the Park Was Young: Chapters in the Early History of Rocky Mountain National Park*, has recently been published by Rocky Mountain Conservancy.

As Estes Park's Historian Laureate and one of the foremost chroniclers of the region's past, Pickering sheds light on the formative years of Rocky Mountain National Park. Richly illustrated and thoroughly documented, *When the Park Was Young* reveals patterns of the past that continue to shape Rocky's story to this day.

As Rich Fedorchak, Rocky's former chief of interpretation, notes in his foreword, "Park histories like Jim Pickering's demonstrate, and remind us, that national parks like Rocky Mountain do not exist, and never have existed, as world apart. They exist in time, continually subject to, and shaped by, the human history that takes place in and around them."

When Charles Russell Trowbridge, Rocky's first superintendent, arrived in Estes Park on July 1, 1915 to open the new national park, he faced an extraordinary challenge: with only three full-time rangers and a modest

\$10,000 budget, he was charged with overseeing 358 square miles of newly designated public land. In *When the Park Was Young*, Pickering explores how Trowbridge and his early successors met those challenges – laying the foundation for what would become one of America's most beloved national parks.

In five engaging and meticulously researched chapters, Pickering recounts how these early park superintendents navigated the monumental task of building infrastructure, managing concessions, and prioritizing land stewardship while welcoming visitors to a fledgling national treasure. He brings to life conflicts, characters, and controversies that shaped the park's formative years – including the outburst that erupted in 1919 over the concession awarded to transportation pioneer Roe Emery, a decade-long dispute that involved both park advocate Enos Mills, and ultimately, the sitting Secretary of the Interior.

Rocky Mountain Conservancy held an exclusive gathering for Conservancy members and donors where Pickering signed copies of his new book. If

you were unable to attend this event, *When the Park Was Young* is now available for purchase at RMConservancy.org/shop.

Pickering has served as Estes Park's Historian Laureate since 2006 and is a longtime board member and past president of the Rocky Mountain Conservancy. His latest work continues his decades-long dedication to preserving and interpreting the intertwined histories of Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park.

"Park histories like Jim Pickering's demonstrate, and remind us, that national parks like Rocky Mountain do not exist, and never have existed, as world apart. They exist in time, continually subject to, and shaped by, the human history that takes place in and around them."

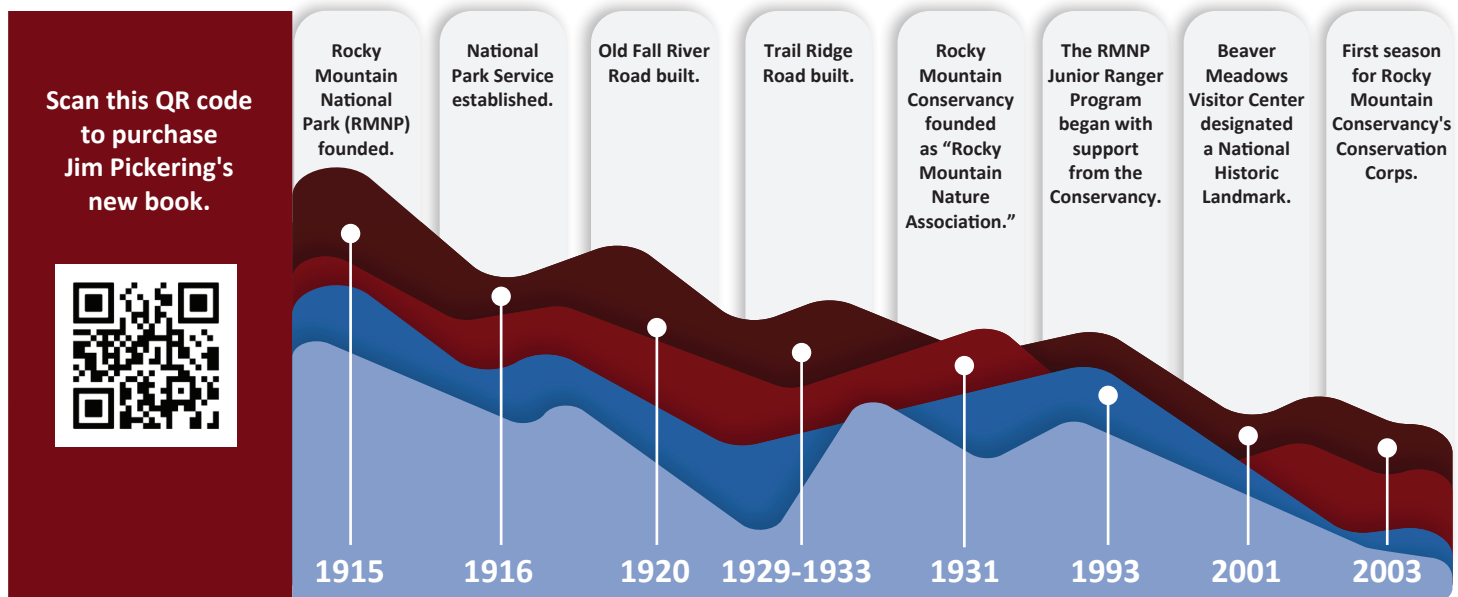
— Rich Fedorchak, Rocky's former Chief of Interpretation



The Conservancy sold copies of *When the Park Was Young* at the 2025 Holiday Gathering.



The dedication of Rocky Mountain National Park in 1915.





Check Trails, Layer Up, Head Out: Winter Hiking Tips Everyone Should Know

By Gabby Sherwood,
Communications Associate

Winter conditions in Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) vary from a bluebird day with mild temperatures to hurricane force winds with single-digit temperatures, sometimes in the same day! To build confidence and competence for those who wish to recreate in Rocky during the winter, Rocky Mountain Conservancy Education Coordinator, Katie Colson, presented a free winter hiking tips clinic at the Estes Valley Library last December.

No stranger to recreating in winter conditions, Colson is a nationally registered emergency medical technician (EMT), wilderness first responder (WFR), member of the RMNP search and rescue team, and has guided backcountry skiing, ice climbing, and mountaineering. Not only is she highly qualified, but she remembers what it's like to be unfamiliar with winter recreation.

"I grew up in a place without a lot of snow, and there are winter hiking tips that were not readily shared with me when I first got started," said Colson. "I had to make a lot of mistakes and learn over a long period of time



Colson leads a Bettie winter hike to Bierstadt Lake.

before I enjoyed being outside in the winter. I want to help lower that barrier for folks." Colson emphasizes the importance of preventing cold-related injuries, proper layering, and how to prepare for a hike. The key to avoiding cold injuries such as frostbite or hypothermia is to change layers as needed and hike with good partners who check in on one another. "If you're feeling too cold and can't get warm, it's time to turn around and end your hike," said Colson. "No recreational activity is worth suffering a cold injury."

Instead of the common hiking mantra 'be bold, start cold,' Colson encourages hikers to "be a team player and stop to change layers." It's ok for a winter hike to turn into a fashion show and stop to remove and put on layers. "The trick is listening to your body and staying at the right temperature the whole time," said Colson. If extremities like the ears, nose, or toes are too cold at the beginning of a hike, it is harder for blood to return to those areas. When it's cold, the body prioritizes blood flow to the core to protect its vital organs like the heart and neglects extremities such as the fingers and toes.

Winter conditions can also change quickly, so it's important for hikers to be prepared: research the route before going, have a map downloaded, ensure the route isn't in avalanche terrain, and check the latest weather forecast, trail conditions, and avalanche conditions periodically. **Register for upcoming winter programs and guided hikes at RMConservancy.org/events.**

Colson geared up for ice climbing at Hidden Falls.





Rocky Mountain Conservancy Park Puzzler

Across

2. The early signs of this serious cold-related illness are clumsiness, shivering, slurred speech, slow thinking, and mild confusion.

3. This deciduous tree is a food source for elk in the winter.

4. Completed in 1920, this precursor to Trail Ridge Road was the park's first auto route into the alpine tundra.

5. This space between the ground and the bottom of the snowpack is an insulated environment for small animals to shelter from winter conditions and predators.

6. This Shawnee name for elk translates to "white deer" or "white rump".

7. Originally settled as a cattle ranch and then a guest ranch, this east side property in the Cow Creek Valley is now an agricultural and recreational complex.

8. This influential writer and traveler is famous for her 1873 ascent of Longs Peak and her book, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, which includes her published letters detailing her adventures in Colorado.

10. This area on the east side of Rocky gets its name from the shapes formed by the meandering Fall River.

12. One of the first plants to grow after a forest fire, growing in large masses after the wind has dispersed its seeds in burned areas.

14. After a fire, the seeds disperse from the cones of this conifer tree in Rocky.

13. This popular but treacherous climbing route to the summit of Longs Peak attracts thousands from around the world each summer.

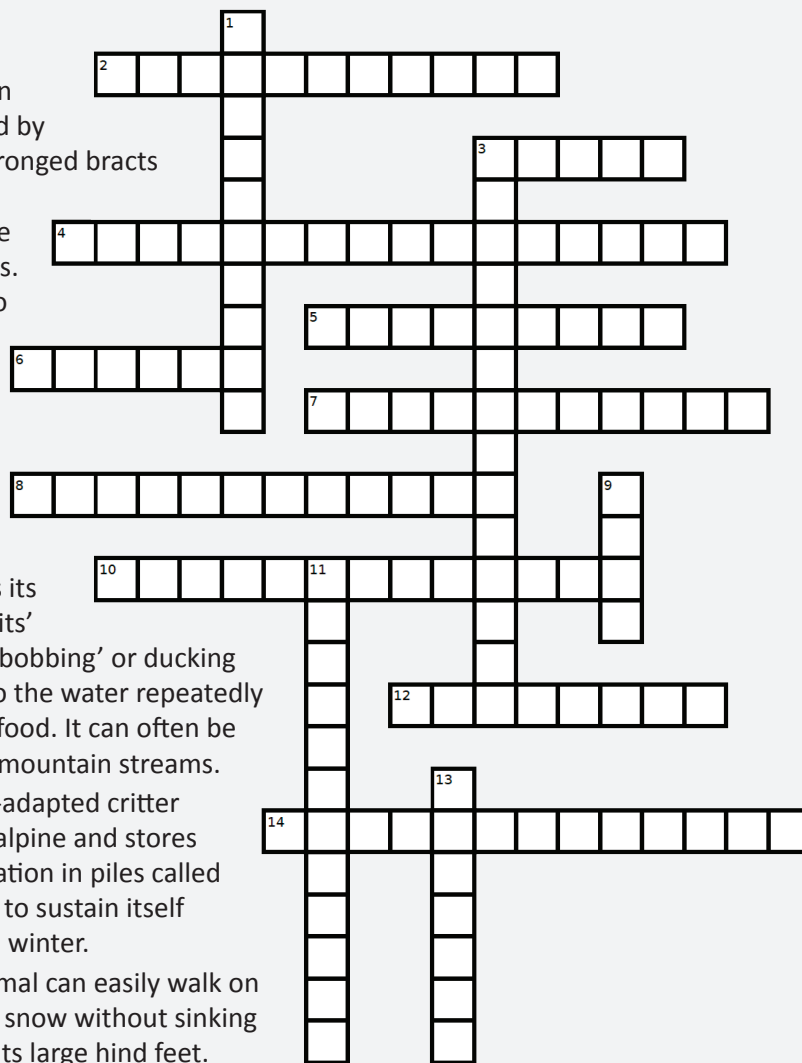
Down

1. A conifer tree that can be identified by the three-pronged bracts that stick out from the cone's scales. There is also a "mouse tail" myth about this tree's cones.

3. This native bird species gets its name from its behavioral 'bobbing' or ducking its head into the water repeatedly to catch its food. It can often be found near mountain streams.

9. This cold-adapted critter lives in the alpine and stores dried vegetation in piles called "haystacks" to sustain itself through the winter.

11. This animal can easily walk on top of deep snow without sinking because of its large hind feet.



Solution on page 15

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These tributes of gifts were given to the Rocky Mountain Conservancy from
September 1 – November 30, 2025.



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Stephanie Davis: In memory of Randal
Duet-Champagne
Sandra J. Dent: In memory of David L. Dent
Brian and Louise Desmond: In memory of
Jonathan D. Bible
Betsy Edwards: In memory of Randal Duet-
Champagne
Pamela Boles Eglinski: In memory of Jim
Disney
Melinda and Gary Ely: In memory of Gary
M. Boyer
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Barbara Ferguson: In memory of Dora and
Arnold Schenk

Joni Fernandez: In memory of Angelina
Giannelli and Thomas Fernandez
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Krumwiede
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Amy Geist: In memory of Maxine Geist
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memory of Norma L. Moore
Donna Grunwald: In memory of Steven
Grunwald
Susan K. Harris: In memory of Gil Anderson
Fred and Sharon Henkin: In memory of
Larry Carpenter
Zelek and Jane Herman: In memory of Ted
and Suzanne Tepper
Patricia C. Hesch: In memory of David Kafer
Laura Hiebenthal: In memory of Rodney
Hiebenthal
John Holdaway: In memory of Michael and
David Holdaway
Steve Holifield: In memory of Darrell
Drissell
Barbara and Tracy Hood: In memory of Lola
Brett
Marisa Howe: In memory of Jan Ramaker
Kathleen Iduovich: In memory of Billy
Gene Baker
Michelle Imig: In memory of Michael Imig
Robert W. and Mary Ann Jackson: In
memory of Dr. Alan Herrington
Rick K. Jacobs: In memory of Julie K. Jacobs
Roxanne Jensen and Dean S. Neuwirth:
In memory of William W. (Peter) Grant III
Sue Kading: In memory of Jerry Lee Karbs
Mary Karr-Petras: In memory of Gregory
Petras
Connie Klibbe: In memory of Daniel P.
Klibbe
Kenneth L. and Linda L. Kovar: In memory of
Emmett T. Powers
Nancy Matson: In memory of Earl E. Matson
William C. and Ellen Y. Matten: In memory
of Dean J. Matten
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McDonald

Ella McKinney: In memory of Tammy Sherman
 Joyce Meyer: In memory of Kim Westerhoff
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 Karen Minnis: In memory of Lynn Weakly
 Juanita R. Muntz: In memory of Geoff Muntz
 William Newman: In memory of Janice Newman
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 Kellie Peak: In memory of Brian L. Peak
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 Coleen Reedy: In memory of Peter Jeffris
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 Kira Sales: In memory of Mike Barber
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 Shayla Stater: In memory of James Durdin
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 Adam Stobart: In memory of Lynn Weakly
 Jennifer Swanson: In memory of Barbara Hopkins
 Karen M. Szews: In memory of Ed and Jean Szews
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 Karen Van Hooser: In memory of Thomas Alan Rayburn

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When Nature Calls

experience someone else's waste, but visitors are generally unprepared and confused by inconsistent messaging regarding proper disposal of waste."

So, what should visitors do when visiting Rocky? Use a toilet if one is available. If not, pack out waste using a Wag Bag.

Option 1: Wilderness Toilets

Privies have been used in national parks for many decades. Crews dig a 4-foot hole in the ground and place the privy over it, moving locations as the holes fill up with human waste.

As visitation and demand for wilderness campsites have increased, the stress on toilets has too. **From 2006-2022, Rocky's wilderness crews had to dig 137 privy holes to move existing privies to new locations.** That's a lot of waste! There are limited areas to dig holes at wilderness sites, which means the continued use of these types of privies could lead to limitations or closures.

To address this problem, the park has tested new urine-diverting toilets (UDTs) over the last five years. UDTs are above-ground structures, fabricated outside of the park, transported in by pack animals, and assembled on site.

"Our locations are determined by user numbers, previous human waste

"When people try to find their own place to dispose of human waste, they can trample endangered plant species, damage cultural resource sites, or create social trails."

— Doug Parker, RMNP Facility Manager of Backcountry Operations

ANATOMY OF A URINE-DIVERTING TOILET



Liquid waste returns to the soil.

Foot pedal moves solid waste to the box.

This box holds solid waste.

facilities, and factors that allow use by the greatest number of user groups in an area," said RMNP Wilderness Field Coordinator, Tara Vessella, who is the project lead for UDT installations. "We aim to use previously disturbed areas that are flat and more than 200 feet from water sources." Once built, the toilets can remain on that site for the long term or be easily moved if challenges arise.

UDTs also minimize risk to Rocky's ecological and cultural assets.

"When people try to find their own place to dispose of human waste, they can trample endangered plant species, damage cultural resource sites, or create social trails," said RMNP Facility Manager of Backcountry Operations Doug Parker. "By consolidating the use to one location, we can ensure less digging, less resource damage, and a more efficient method for wilderness crews to remove the waste from the park."

UDTs are simple to operate. After nature calls, users press the toilet pedal, moving solid waste on a conveyor belt into a box that crews maintain. "Pit privy holes are filled with both liquid and solid waste," said Parker. "With urine-diverting toilets, the liquids are diverted from the toilet through a tube away from people and water." Crews pack out solid human waste on mules and llamas bi-annually, which is disposed of in the local municipal wastewater treatment facility for processing. **An engineering bonus everyone will appreciate is that these toilets have zero odor.**

Not only are they better for the environment, but the toilet installation and maintenance are much easier for park staff to manage. This process begins with mules and llamas packing in the 500-pound toilet unit in pieces to a location where wilderness

crews assemble the toilet in one full workday, ready for visitors to use the next day. “They’re easy to maintain and the crews do a really good job of having a plan to take care of them once they’re out in the field,” said Parker.

In 2025, Conservancy donors supported the installation of five UDTs in the park and we plan to support an additional ten UDTs in 2026.

Option 2: Wag Bags

When toilet systems in the park are unusable due to winter’s arrival from about October through June, the next best option is to pack out human waste using Wag Bags.

Wag Bags are toilet kits that have become increasingly popular with backcountry users, climbers, and hikers. Each kit contains a sealable solid and liquid waste bag with antimicrobial wipes and tissues, and uses waste activated gel to break down waste inside the Wag Bag. The Wilderness Office provides Wag

Bags to every permit holder to use in specific areas of the park that don't have facilities like urine-diverting toilets.

Since pit and urine-diverting toilets don't function properly during the winter season, crews do not maintain them. “Visitation drops significantly in the winter,” said RMNP Wilderness and Climbing Program Supervisor Mike Lukens. “So during the winter months when privies and urine-diverting toilets aren't available, the solution for managing human waste is to carry it out in Wag Bags and dispose of it properly.”

In popular climbing and hiking areas such as the Longs Peak Trail, park staff have installed Wag Bag dispensers for visitors to use when toilets are not in operation and to discourage attempted waste burials. Park staff also distribute Wag Bags to climbers in areas like Lumpy Ridge, where toilets are not available during a day of recreation. Wag Bags are also available for purchase in Conservancy Nature Stores.

“Our preference would be for everyone to use toilets because then that human waste is being carried out of the park and treated,” said Lukens. “But that doesn’t make sense for 100% of the park. **Pack out your waste when a toilet isn’t available to minimize the spread of pathogens like E. coli through drinking water.**”

For years, Rocky Mountain Conservancy has supported proper waste management in the park by supporting the purchase and distribution of Wag Bags.

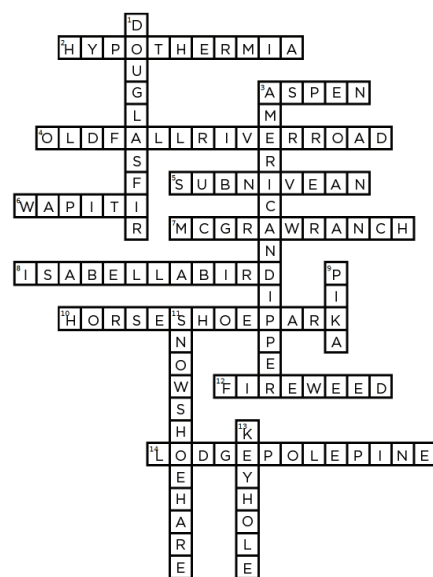
Support UDTs by
giving to the Trail
Improvement Fund.



The Conservancy supports the purchase and distribution of Wag Bags in the park.



Park Puzzler Solution





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Twin Sisters Peak beneath a starry night.

Visit [RMConservancy.org](https://www.rmconservancy.org)
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Nature Notes

• **Ryan and Brittany Haulsey** paused at Bear Lake to take in a stunning view of Longs Peak. They lingered to enjoy the scene as many other visitors stopped to admire it as well. While hiking the Lily Mountain trail, they also spotted a clark's nutcracker enjoying a snack.



• **Denise and Mark Bretting** spotted a long-tailed weasel on the south side of Lily Lake in the early morning on August 4, 2025. It popped up, down, and around the rocks near the trail. • **Karen Smith** captured a unique scene of a rainbow over the Never Summer Mountains from the Green Mountain Trailhead in September 2025. You can hike the same trail many times and always see something new!



• **Jonna Book** spotted this white-tailed ptarmigan on her way up to Chasm Lake.



• **Marlene Borneman** spotted a snowshoe hare near Timberline Falls on her birthday!

