



# San Juan Mountains Association

Fall 2019

EXPLORE ♦ LEARN ♦ PROTECT

The Newsletter for Members of SJMA

## Introducing the Weminuche Wilderness Stewardship Fund

by David Taft

**A**s summer winds down, golden leaves fall to the forest floor, and the first snows begin dusting the peaks, San Juan Mountains Association is looking to next season and future stewardship efforts. This fall, SJMA launched the Weminuche Wilderness Stewardship Fund, an innovative new tool for stewarding our region's most exceptional public lands.

*"The Weminuche Wilderness Stewardship Fund will provide the foundation to ensure that the largest wilderness in Colorado is cared for into the future."*



Elk Creek Trail, 2019—Photo by Kenneth Fannon

SJMA has been active in the Weminuche Wilderness since the founding in 1988. For decades, SJMA's Wilderness Information Specialists and Ghost Riders have diligently patrolled the Weminuche. SJMA also supports the USFS Wilderness Monitoring program which monitors popular areas, naturalizes illegal campfire rings, and documents wilderness conditions throughout this vast expanse. SJMA volunteers in these programs have dedicated their time and energy to ensure that wilderness



Weminuche Wilderness—Snowden Peak

visitors are aware of best practices and wilderness regulations. They also provide on-the-ground reporting for land managers so resource issues can be identified and resolved. The need for this presence continues to grow as visitation skyrockets, federal resources remain tight, and challenges such as the spruce beetle continue to affect the forest.

The Weminuche Wilderness Stewardship Fund will help us grow our existing programs, increase the number of boots on the ground with additional volunteers, expand trail clearing efforts, and ensure that we are contributing to the future health and vibrancy of this exceptional place.

Thanks to your member donations, local business contributions, and San Juan Mountain Jam attendees, we're off to a great start. Throughout the fall and winter we will continue to raise funds, plan volunteer trainings, and recruit new volunteers to help us protect the Weminuche Wilderness in 2020 and beyond. Reach out to [david@sjma.org](mailto:david@sjma.org) to learn how you can get involved.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Hispano Settlements .....	2
Ice Lakes Tiny House .....	3
Fond Farewell .....	4
Make a Difference .....	5
Spruce Beetle .....	6
Winter Adventures .....	7
Xmas Tree Coupon .....	8

**David Taft** is SJMA's Conservation Director. He divides his time between working for and playing on the land he loves. Reach him at [david@sjma.org](mailto:david@sjma.org).



## *San Juan Mountains Association*

*SJMA empowers local residents and visitors to explore, learn about, and protect the spectacular public lands of Southwest Colorado.*

**Executive Director**  
Brent Schoradt

**Associate Director**  
Lea Parks-Novak

**Cultural Program Director**  
Ruth Lambert

**Conservation Director**  
David Taft

**Volunteer & Education  
Specialist**  
MK Gunn

**Director of Visitor Services  
& Bookstore Operations**  
Priscilla Sherman

**Assistant Director of Visitor  
Services & Bookstore  
Operations**  
Patti Brady

**Visitor Services Staff**  
Tom Ferrell  
Elizabeth Reid  
Alyce Walker  
Rachelle Fish

**Education Outreach &  
Visitor Services**  
Karen Hickerson

**Newsletter Editor**  
Rachelle Fish

## Early Hispano Settlements and Iglesia de San Antonio

by Ruth Lambert

**S**JMA has begun a project to study the history of Hispano settlements along the San Juan River in Archuleta County and southeastern La Plata County. Hispano contributions are often unrecognized and underappreciated yet they add a richness to our collective story.



Iglesia de San Antonio

Often at old or abandoned small settlements, the church and cemetery are the last remaining elements. In order to learn about the early settlement in the San Juan riverine area, this project studies five Catholic churches at Pagosa Junction, Trujillo, Tiffany, Allison, and the church ruins at Juanita. The project is assembling historical information from church records, genealogical data and interviews with knowledgeable people; collecting historical documents and photographs; and documenting the churches through field recording and photographs.

In La Plata County, the towns of Allison and Tiffany were initially established in 1881 as Denver & Rio Grande Railroad stops that developed over time into farming communities. Hispano residents moved into these settlements for railroad work and later when lands were withdrawn from settlement along the San Juan River for a future water project that became Navajo Lake. Today, the remaining churches offer the best clues into early life along the river. The settlement of Tiffany

and its church, the *Iglesia de San Antonio* have been the focus of recent study.

Tiffany grew from the early railroad stop in the early 1900s to establish a mercantile, expanded railroad facilities, a school, livery, and a dance hall.

The Iglesia de San Antonio was completed in 1928 to serve local Catholic families. The building was constructed by local residents of hand-made adobe blocks that were covered by wire and stucco.

The church operated until 1972 when the regular weekly services for the parishioners were transferred to St. Ignatius in Ignacio. Over the church's 91 years, it has been faithfully and lovingly cared for by local families. Mass is held annually on St. Anthony's feast day in June when church members attend the Spanish Mass.

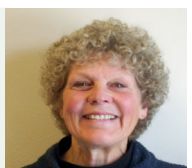
---

***"In early 2019, SJMA successfully nominated the Iglesia for listing on Colorado's Most Endangered Places List, only the second listing in La Plata County and the first listing to recognize the County's Hispano heritage. In September, the Iglesia was listed on La Plata County Register of Historic Places."***

---

The church is an important part of the Hispano history of our area and a priority for preservation. The next steps for church preservation are applications for grant funding for stabilization and repairs and community fund raising. Once funds are acquired work is scheduled to begin next year.

**Ruth Lambert** is the Cultural Program Director for SJMA. Her passions are historic archaeology, genealogy, and historic cemeteries. Reach her at [ruth@sjma.org](mailto:ruth@sjma.org).





# Ice Lakes Basin—Tiny House, Big Crowds

by David Taft

After a harrowing drive over Molas and Coal Bank Passes in early July, the Outdoor Research tiny house rolled up South Mineral Creek Road to the parking area for the Ice Lakes Trail to find at least a dozen cars parked in its pre-arranged summer parking spot. This would be a common theme for Tiny's time up in Silverton, as upwards of 100 cars (often as many as 200) joined Tiny each day, often starting long before the sun crested over the valley walls.



Tiny House Educational Basecamp

*“Over the course of the summer, 27 SJMA volunteers spent their days in this stunning valley speaking with over 4,000 hikers.”*

The impacts of our Tiny House Educational Basecamp were hard to ignore this summer. Volunteers talked to hikers about forest regulations, trail conditions and encouraged preparedness. After a legendary snowpack and numerous destructive avalanches, the trail was in rough shape. There were drainage blowouts, dozens of trees blocking the trail, and hundreds of yards of social trails that formed to circumnavigate the trail obstructions. Compounding the situation, there were hundreds of hikers passing through every single day. Thankfully, these challenging conditions weren't too daunting for our incredible volunteers, and it's safe to say they stepped up to the task.



Ice Lake-July 2019

Over the course of the summer, volunteers cleared debris, cleaned out drainage features, naturalized hundreds of yards of social trails and eroded switchbacks, cleared over sixty trees that had fallen onto the trail, and spread Leave No Trace information to visiting hikers. This was a massive effort, and by coordinating with volunteers from Great Old Broads for Wilderness and the Hardrock 100 Endurance Run we were able to ensure a quality experience for forest users while ensuring that the spectacular natural resources in Ice Lakes Basin were protected.

While the tiny house is currently on her way to New York City, SJMA is planning our future endeavors at Ice Lakes and other favorite San Juan gems. We hope you will join us for next year's stewardship efforts. Undoubtedly, winter will take a toll on our trail system and hikers from around the world will continue to visit these scenic wonders. We'll need plenty of help keeping trails up to the task and ensuring visitors know to leave it better than they found it.

Thank you to Outdoor Research and Backcountry Experience for partnering with us in helping to steward Ice Lakes Basin.



## *Thank You to the Sponsors of the San Juan Mountain Jam*

*All proceeds benefiting the Weminuche Wilderness Stewardship Fund*

### **Platinum Founders Circle (\$1,500 and up)**

Alpine Bank

Dental Associates of the Southwest

Backcountry Experience

### **Gold Champion (\$1,000 and up)**

Durango & Silverton

Narrow Gauge Railroad

SKA Brewing Co

### **Silver Ambassador (\$500 and up)**

Adventure Pro Magazine

Four Corners Endodontics

Fresh off the Press

## *A Special Thank You to our Corporate Sponsor for 2019-2020*



**Alpine Bank**  
Member FDIC

## A Fond Farewell to Kathe Hayes

**A**fter 22 years, Kathe Hayes, our Volunteer Program Director, is retiring. She has played an integral part in shaping SJMA, inspiring volunteers, and growing SJMA's stewardship programs. She wore many different hats during her long tenure which included everything from event coordinator to event chef. We are so appreciative of her dedication and hard work over the years and will miss her enormously.

### **You have dedicated the last 22 years to SJMA- what kept you coming back?**

I am one of the lucky ones to be able to combine my passions and my work. My role at SJMA was directly linked to my passion for the wilderness, connecting people with the land, and educating the public about the importance of our wild lands. All aspects of my job were tied to my passion - I trained Wilderness Information Specialist (WIS) and Ghost Rider volunteers, taught Leave No Trace principles as a Master Educator, educated elementary students, organized trail projects, and worked with Volunteers of Outdoor Colorado (VOC) on larger local projects. I also had the freedom to create new programs that highlight my love for public land stewardship: Adopt a Road, Adopt a Trail, and Wilderness Study Area Monitoring, among others.

### **What would you consider your career highlights?**



WIS / Ghost Riders Volunteers

In 1997, I took over SJMA's founding program, the Wilderness Information Specialists (WIS)/Ghost Rider Program. I expanded this volunteer ranger program to include Lizard Head and South San Juan Wilderness, in addition to the original Needle Creek/Chicago Basin in the Weminuche Wilderness. We increased our presence in the Weminuche by creating a Chicago Basin



Basecamp to better facilitate public contact. I developed an online training program to expand the interest and availability for persons who could not make the in-house trainings. Volunteers continue to contribute 1500 to 2000 hours per year to educate wilderness visitors on pertinent trail information and Leave No Trace ethics.

Another highlight was organizing a week-long Leave No Trace (LNT) Hot Spot team for Ice Lakes Basin in 2016. It resulted in a thorough impact report by Leave No Trace and a plan for minimizing the impacts of the area. We began implementing the recommendations by developing a trail head informational sign, performing trail work and discussing LNT with local visitors. This past summer, we were able to increase our impact with the Tiny House Educational Basecamp and continued trail work.

### **What are some of your favorite experiences with SJMA?**

Each spring, young college students who have never been out west devote their spring break to work on public lands by attending our Alternative Spring Break program. The program consists of teaching the students about public lands, land managing agencies, LNT as well as performing service projects. Most of the students reported to us that this was a "life changing" experience. In return, each year they energized me with their willingness to learn and give back. I loved sharing our public lands with these college students with the hopes of creating the next generation of public land advocates.

### **What will you miss the most?**

The most rewarded thing for me was connecting people with the land and providing opportunities for volunteers to give back to the land they already love. I loved recruiting, coordinating and working with volunteers from all walks of life, many who

*(continued on page 5)*



(continued from page 4)

have become life-long friends with shared passions.

### What's next?

I'm pretty active so I imagine I will be keeping busy advocating for public lands. I looking forward to volunteer opportunities on the San Juan and advocating for horses in the backcountry through our local Back Country Horsemen groups. I will ride my horse more! There's always something to do on this great land of ours.



Alternative Spring Break

## How You Can Make A Difference

By Lea Novak

We believe public lands – our legacy in the American West – deserve to be protected. **Join** San Juan Mountains Association today to ensure continued stewardship of our public lands in SW Colorado. Every **gift** to SJMA has a direct impact on our conservation education and public land stewardship programs. Beyond your donations, here are other ways you can help advance our mission.

**COLORADO GIVES DAY** Every year, SJMA, participates in Colorado Gives Day. This is one way to financially support SJMA, *in addition to your annual SJMA membership*. SJMA receives a certain percent of matching dollars from an Incentive Fund provided by the Community First Foundation and First Bank. How do you donate? Visit [SWCOGives.org](http://SWCOGives.org) on December 10, 2019 starting at 12:00am, or schedule your online donation TODAY.

**USE YOUR LOYALTY CARD FROM ALPINE BANK:** SJMA benefits when you use your Alpine Bank Loyalty Card. Each time you use your Loyalty Check Card of choice, Alpine Bank donates 10 cents to nonprofits and community organizations.

**USE YOUR CITY MARKET CARD:** Register SJMA as your favored recipient in City Market Community Rewards Program (formerly CARES) at [citymarketcommunityrewards.com](http://citymarketcommunityrewards.com). Each time you shop a percentage of your purchase is donated to SJMA.

**SHOP AT AMAZONSMILE:** You shop. Amazon gives. Select SJMA as your charity of choice at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com). Each time you shop, .05% of eligible purchases are donated to advance our mission.

*Together, with your support, we can continue to foster the legacy of public lands for decades to come.*

**Lea Parks-Novak** is SJMA's Associate Director. You can usually find her fly fishing or boating down a river. Reach her at [lea@sjma.org](mailto:lea@sjma.org).



## Your Membership Dollars at Work

Thanks to your support, here is some of what we accomplished:

**Contributed** 15,000 volunteer hours to help manage local public lands (an increase of 25% from 2018)

**Provided** Leave No Trace education to over 4,000 hikers at the Ice Lakes Educational Basecamp over the summer

**Cleared** 60 trees from the Ice Lakes Trail using crosscut saws

**Provided** information to ~150,000 visitors which included answering questions about historic snow conditions, and recreational opportunities

**Taught** 700 students about water ecology, geology and mining history of the San Juan National Forest

**Led** nearly 300 guests on volunteer-led Purgatory nature tours

**Guided** 2 teen backpacking trips introducing public lands stewardship to the next generation

**Trained** 16 teachers at the 7th Forest to Faucets teacher workshop

**Presented** a talk about Hispanic cemeteries at Center for SW Studies and organized volunteers for historic church documentation

# A Positive Take On Spruce Beetle

by MK Gunn

**D**eep in the Weminuche Wilderness there's a trail that dead ends at the head of a valley. My two dogs and I wandered up there in August of 2016. After seven miles on a major trail, we turned onto an invisible trail. We tromped up a sunny meadow to the edge of the woods. The forest was thick here. Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir tangled amongst the occasional southwestern white pine. These sky scrapers formed the sparse canopy. Down below, deciduous bushes mingled with tall summer wildflowers. Larkspur, monkshood, California corn lily, and cow parsnip were over my head. Ragwort, red columbine, and bittercress filled in below. There is a reason why this area was so laden with wildflowers. Almost all the towering spruce trees are dead.



These trees were eaten from the inside out, suffocated and dehydrated by tiny spruce beetles, and had been dead for ten years. Now the canopy was opened to allow more sunlight and awaken the long dormant wildflower seeds.

The dead trees complicate hiking. After navigating the meadow, the trail was hard to see among the

fresh deadfall. I danced under, over and around three fallen trees within the first ten feet. They rested at awkward heights and their mischievous branches grabbed at me. My overnight pack made the choreography harder. My dogs wondered why I was always so slow.

One large tree had fallen higher than my head but its branches insisted that I continue my awkward dance while tiptoeing over stepping stones in a small stream. Other places offered no view of my footing. I stepped blindly as I parted wildflowers. I was mesmerized by the density of the foliage. No humans had been up that way in weeks.

Not only had the beetle-kill trees proved prosperous for the proliferation of pretty petals, but the first two miles of difficult trail hemmed in another six miles of vast valley meadows intermingled with flowing streams. This prime and protected habitat supports a profusion of wildlife. In



one meadow, I encountered a massive herd of cow elk with their spotted calves and saw a mountain lion stalking them. The dead trees created an island where wild creatures carried on their lives as nature intended.

If you've seen Wolf Creek Pass in the last ten years, you may have thought, *It's so sad that the trees are dead!* It IS sad in some ways. Some of our favorite places will never again look as we remember them. Also, some of our most loved trails are increasingly inaccessible due to downed trees. While SJMA is committed to improving trail access, sometimes it's worth remembering that nature isn't static and spruce beetles are part of nature.

In an ecosystem with healthier trees and fewer beetles, trees can actually push the beetles out with sap. This is known as "pitching out". But the current beetle infestations in the western US are exasperated by drought and warmer temperatures. Longer summers allow local spruce beetles to complete two reproductive cycles each year instead of just one and winter temperatures haven't been cold enough to kill the beetles. On top of that, drought provides less water to the trees so they can't pitch out the beetles.

Perhaps you are wondering what you can do to help. Well, you're already doing something just by being a member. Becoming a member helps fund SJMA's efforts to clear trails of downed trees and educate the public on forest ecology. The beetles are still munching their way west through the San Juan National Forest so get ready for more wildflowers and secluded wildlife habitat.

**MK Gunn** is SJMA's Education and Volunteer Specialist. Look for her chasing fall colors from the mountains down to the desert! Reach her at [mk@sjma.org](mailto:mk@sjma.org).





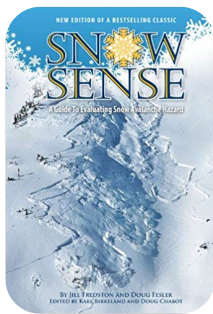
# Being Prepared for Winter Adventure

by Priscilla Sherman

The winter of 2018-19 was a historic year for snow accumulation in the San Juan Mountains. Along with all that snow came massive avalanches throughout the high country. Whether or not we will ever see that amount of snow again is uncertain, however those of us who love to get out and enjoy backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling need to be prepared for whatever conditions Mother Nature provides.



Molas Pass



SJMA's bookstores have a number of books that offer information on forecasting weather, where to go in the snow, winter survival tips, and avalanche essentials. For those who venture into the backcountry in the winter, checkout Snow Sense, by Jill Fredston and Doug Fesler. This is a great guide to evaluating avalanche potential, types of terrain that might present avalanches, weather contributions, and essential equipment needed in the event that you are caught in an avalanche.

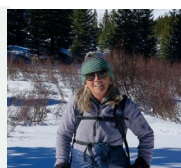
If you are looking to learn more about survival skills and ultralight backpacking, author Justin Lichter's book Ultralight Survival Kit is a great place to start. Lichter will help you plan, pack and get organized with ultralight gear, and brush up on your survival skills in the backcountry for any time of year.



Weather information is critical for planning for any outing in the high country. Weather in the San Juan Mountains is especially difficult to predict. A staff favorite is The Backpacker guide to Predicting Weather by Lisa Densmore, which can teach you how to forecast weather changes while you are out and also how to plan and be prepared for changing conditions.

Come in to the San Juan Public Lands Center and talk to our experienced and knowledgeable staff to learn about winter essential products and get up-to-date trail advice. We also have a great brochure on Where to Go In the Snow that outlines areas in the San Juan Mountains. We are happy to assist in making your winter adventure in the San Juan Mountains enjoyable and safe.

**Priscilla Sherman** is SJMA's Director of Visitor Services. She's happiest amongst the wildflowers, camera in hand. Reach her at [priscilla@sjma.org](mailto:priscilla@sjma.org).



Discount Coupon

**SJMA Bookstore  
Holiday Sale!**

**20% off**

11/22/19—12/31/19

Members & Volunteers receive  
an additional 5% off

Offer good at all of your  
SJMA bookstores



(Not valid with sales on National  
Forest maps, Search & Rescue cards  
nor any agency permit or pass)

## Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities

There's always something fun  
going on at SJMA.

- \* **Local Tree Cutting:** Nov 22  
at 8:00 at Fairgrounds  
parking lot.
- \* **Christmas Tree Lot:** Nov 29-  
Dec 21, 3 hour shifts

For more info, check out our  
events calendar at  
[www.sjma.org/events](http://www.sjma.org/events)



**San Juan Mountains  
Association**

EXPLORE ♦ LEARN ♦ PROTECT

PO Box 2261  
Durango, CO 81302

970-385-1210  
www.sjma.org

*SJMA empowers local  
residents and visitors to  
explore, learn about and  
protect the spectacular  
public lands of Southwest  
Colorado.*

NON-PROFIT

U. S. POSTAGE PAID

DURANGO, CO

PERMIT NO. 449

## It's Almost Christmas Time!

**N**ow that snow is hitting the peaks, it really feels like Christmas is coming up soon, and with it of course comes SJMA's Christmas Tree sale! We are again offering local trees that will be cut from areas that need thinning, in cooperation with the San Juan National Forest. We'll have 220 local trees this year, along with 560 trees from out of the area. All trees will be available for sale at the lot starting November 29<sup>rd</sup>. Sales benefit SJMA's conservation education and public lands stewardship programs. We'll also be looking for some wonderful Christmas Tree volunteers again this year. We hope to see you there this December!



**San Juan Mountains  
Association**  
EXPLORE ♦ LEARN ♦ PROTECT

**\$10 Off Coupon**

**Support SJMA and PURCHASE A CHRISTMAS  
TREE**

**at the 7th Annual**

**CHRISTMAS TREES FOR CONSERVATION**

**Corner of Camino del Rio & College Drive  
(Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Parking Lot)**

**November 29<sup>rd</sup> through December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019**

**Or until trees sell out!**

