



San Juan Mountains Association

Fall 2020

EXPLORE ♦ LEARN ♦ PROTECT

The Newsletter for Members of SJMA

SJMA Steps Up to Address Mounting Challenges for Our Public Lands

by David Taft

Those of us fortunate enough to live in or near the mountains tend to understand the value of natural spaces and wilderness—for our physical health, mental well-being, and quality of life. This year, due to the COVID-19 crisis, many others have been awakened to these natural benefits. As the legendary Yosemite preservationist John Muir noted “thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity”. This year’s visitation to the San Juan Mountains clearly illustrates how the pandemic reminded many of this need.

The record high number of visitors this season brought unprecedented challenges and unique opportunities for San Juan Mountains Association’s conservation and stewardship programs. The impacts of this increased visitation were compounded by the winter 2018/19’s massive avalanches, an ongoing spruce beetle epidemic, and the recent fire on our busiest and most iconic trail, Ice Lakes.



Volunteers at SJMA’s Ice Lakes Educational Basecamp

In response to this summer’s challenges, SJMA volunteers stepped up. Continuing the success of our 2019 Tiny House



Educational Basecamp at Ice Lakes Trailhead, we once again established a daily staff and volunteer presence both at the trailhead and on the trail. The number of Ice Lakes visitors doubled and, on some days, tripled in this already wildly busy area.

“To mitigate the most harmful effects of this increased visitation, SJMA volunteers contributed over 400 hours of service and talked with over 9000 Ice Lakes hikers.”

Volunteers cleaned up trash, cleared downed trees, distributed WAG bags to backpackers, encouraged Leave No Trace principles, and gathered useful visitation data. The efforts by these volunteers was monumental and we can’t thank them enough.

Looking forward to 2021, SJMA will continue to provide a presence at Ice Lakes Trail to promote outdoor ethics as well as begin to restore the damage to this iconic trail inflicted by the Ice Fire.

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San Juan Mountains Association

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

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New for 2020, SJMA launched the San Juan Wilderness Stewardship Crew. Thanks to your donations to the Weminuche Wilderness Stewardship Fund, we hired four incredible team members who spent the summer patrolling the wilderness, clearing downed trees, hauling out trash, and cleaning up illegal campsites. Among their accomplishments were clearing the Needle Creek trail of more than 70 downed trees, establishing 8 campsites in the avalanche debris at Rainbow Hot Springs, performing tread maintenance on the Elk Creek trail, and naturalizing nearly 200 illegal campsites and campfire rings. Continuing into fall, crew member MK Thompson continued to patrol the Weminuche Wilderness, educating hunters and cleaning up popular trails after a very busy year. Next year, we plan to expand the crew to six team members increasing our impact on the lands we love.



San Juan Wilderness Stewardship Crew heading into Chicago Basin



SCC crews clearing avalanche debris from Colorado Trail

But that's not all! Thanks to the National Forest Foundation's matching funds, SJMA hired a Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) crew to clear two of the four avalanche debris fields on the Elk Creek Trail. The SCC crew cleared upwards of 500 catastrophically downed trees with help from USFS Wilderness Ranger Kristina Schenck and her crew. This was a spectacular community effort. We look forward to continuing this work in 2021 by clearing the third and fourth debris piles.

"We are proud to turn your donations of time and money into tangible outcomes, and we couldn't be more excited to carry this momentum into 2021."

As with so many of our lives in 2020, this season was a challenge. We weren't sure whether any staff or volunteers would be allowed to work on the forest despite early indications visitation would be massive. In June, we got the green light to move forward, and we are proud of the work SJMA and all of our amazing volunteers accomplished.

Thank you for helping us keep the San Juans wild in the face of growing threats to our public lands.

David Taft is SJMA's Conservation Director. He divides his time between working for and playing on the land he loves. Reach him at dtaft@sjma.org.



SJMA Launches New Programs to Get Youth Outdoors

by Adriana Stimax

Let's step back to a time before the pandemic. Simpler times, right? But even before the challenges of quarantine, our younger generations have struggled to spend quality time in nature. Before 2020, kids ages 8-18 spent an average of seven and a half hours in front of a screen every day. Childhood obesity has more than tripled since the 70s with almost one in five American kids affected. And now, with virtual learning becoming the norm, these problems have all been amplified.



In this time of COVID-19, kids need outdoor access more than ever. The pandemic has held us hostage to our screens. However, it's important for us to remember that this is not the only option. We

are blessed to live in the San Juan Mountains with access to millions of acres of outdoor spaces and public lands. This access to public lands combined with SJMA's incredible team of experienced outdoor science educators creates the perfect learning environment to counteract our kids' technology-saturated brains.

Thanks to SJMA's merger with Durango Nature Studies (DNS) and your donations, SJMA safely and successfully launched summer camps during this time of great need. For the first time ever, SJMA was able to run multiple summer camps serving 130 kids, ages from 6 to 17. Traditionally DNS camps were located at the Durango Nature Center. This summer, SJMA launched a new model that includes adventures on National Forest trails as well.

"By spending more time on their public lands, kids learn to be good stewards of their environment and lifelong protectors of wild spaces. Your donations are invested in this next generation of public land caretakers."

In addition, we have expanded our programming in Montezuma County through our partnership with the Montezuma Inspire Coalition (MIC). MIC is a collaboration between a number of nonprofits funded by a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant. Our goal is to inspire and empower the youth of Montezuma County to

get outdoors. With this partnership, we have been able to reach students that are traditionally underserved and overlooked, despite their proximity to beautiful public lands.

Thanks to the MIC partnership, SJMA conducted our first Montezuma-based summer camp for middle and high school students. They hiked for miles, explored the flora and fauna of every life

zone from desert to alpine, studied watersheds, went paddle boarding, and even climbed a 13er!



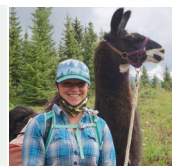
SJMA's Summer Camp -Conquering a 13er

"My son came home knowing the names of mountains and totally jazzed about places he wants to hike in the future....I honestly feel this was a shaping event in his life." - Parent of summer camp student, 2020

Now that school has started, we have partnered with districts across La Plata and Montezuma counties to provide quality outdoor education as well as after school care. COVID has forced us to think outside the box of traditional classroom visits and field trips. For example, our educators have been hard at work designing virtual programming that includes self-guided expeditions to encourage the students to explore public lands on their own.

These programs are the perfect antidote to excessive screen time by getting kids outside, active, and engaged. Outdoor spaces are the safest and healthiest place for kids to learn, play, and socialize while physically distancing. When it's finally time to put the masks away, SJMA will continue to create opportunities for our youth to learn and grow in our shared outdoor spaces and to foster the next generation of public land stewards. Thank you for being part of the solution by supporting these critical programs.

Adriana Stimax is SJMA's new Education Program Director. You can find her running the rivers & exploring the canyons. Reach her at astimax@sjma.org.



Volunteer Spotlight—Paulette and Charlie Schmalz, Guardians of Ice Lakes

Long-time volunteers Paulette and Charlie Schmalz are some of our finest. Through their professionalism and passion, they have helped to protect the lands they love as well as positively affect the experience of countless visitors to the San Juan Mountains. SJMA can't thank them enough for their dedication to our shared mission over the past 18 years!



Paulette and Charlie in front of the SJMA's Tiny House Educational Basecamp in 2019

How long have you lived in the area? We moved to Silverton from Grand Junction when we retired in 2002.

Why did you choose this area? We were very familiar with the area and thought we'd enjoy many of the outdoor activities available here.

What attracted you to SJMA? As folks who love a sense of community, we immediately looked for opportunities to get involved in and contribute to our new home. SJMA's mission to explore, learn and protect falls perfectly in line with everything we wanted to do here in the San Juans. While we love the idea of volunteering to simply experience the beauty of the San Juans, we also felt the need to have a positive impact on the places we cherish. We believe that having a

presence on our public lands to promote responsible recreation has always been important, but now, with the rapid increase of visitors, more than ever. Volunteering with SJMA allows us to share our love of nature, help others appreciate its beauty and learn to care for and protect what we have.

What type of volunteer work do you do for SJMA?

Over the past *18 years* we have been involved in a wide range of SJMA volunteer opportunities. We have volunteered as far away as the Canyons of the Ancients National Monument, to more locally at Highland Mary Lakes and Chicago Basin and now our home base of Ice Lakes trail. This summer, volunteering at SJMA's Ice Lakes Educational Basecamp was a supersized challenge with the high volume of visitation. Our love for this area and our sense of duty to help protect this incredible place resulted in 350 volunteer hours, where we helped to maintain the trail and promoted Leave No Trace Ethics to countless visitors, many of them first time visitors.

What was the most memorable volunteer experience you've had over the years? The one time we went into Chicago Basin with Lois Bartig-Small and her llamas. It was quite the experience with bear cubs in camp in the evening and moose in the morning. We learned a lot about dealing with llamas when other animals are around.

If you could tell every visitor to the forest one thing, what would it be? Enjoy your public lands but be mindful of the impact you have on not only the environment but also on the health and welfare of the animals living here and other forest visitors.

What is your favorite quote? "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include souls, water, plants and animals, or collectively the land." - Aldo Leopold

Thank You to All our Hard-Working Volunteers!

As a volunteer driven organization, we are incredibly proud of the hardworking folks that make this organization what it is. Volunteers spend the year monitoring conditions, picking up trash, and providing helpful information to visitors.

- 2020 Wilderness Volunteers: Spent over 124 days on trail making over 4400 visitor contacts and clearing 78 trees
- Ice Lakes Basecamp Volunteers: 29 volunteers and staff contacted over 9,200 hikers providing ~ 475 hours of Leave No Trace education.

Looking forward to 2021: SJMA Forest Ambassadors Will Help Address Surge in Forest Visitors

by Brent Schoradt

After a busy summer in the backcountry, one thing is clear: our forests need more ambassadors to educate visitors, encourage proper “Leave No Trace” practices, and help care for the land. SJMA’s longstanding efforts at Ice Lakes and throughout the Weminuche Wilderness have shown the difference that our dedicated staff and volunteers can make for our public lands.

“SJMA is so pleased to partner with the San Juan National Forest to launch a new Forest Ambassador program in 2021.”

The goal is to educate forest visitors on fire safety and forest health while encouraging responsible recreation. Our hope is to duplicate the Ice Lakes Educational Basecamp at popular trailheads and recreation “hot spots” within the Southwest Colorado Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative project area in Montezuma, San Juan, and La Plata Counties (see: restoringtherockies.org). The Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI) is a stakeholder-driven forest health collaborative that seeks to increase the resiliency of local forests, wildlife habitats, communities, recreation opportunities, and water resources.

We don’t expect the recent surge in forest visitors to dissipate in the years to come. Thanks to the support of SJMA’s members and volunteers, SJMA is on the front lines engaging with forest visitors, in our quest to instill a conservation ethic that reduces impacts to natural



SJMA’s Ice Lakes Educational Basecamp in 2020

resources while enhancing the visitor experience. Stay tuned as we prepare to launch this new Forest Ambassadors program in 2021. Together, we can make a huge difference for our public lands by directly engaging in on-the-ground education and stewardship. We all know that our forests need more ambassadors. If you’d like to be a SJMA volunteer Forest Ambassador, email David Taft at

dtaft@sjma.org.

Brent Schoradt is SJMA’s Executive Director. He loves exploring this beautiful area with his family. Reach him at bschoradt@sjma.org.



Your Membership Dollars at Work

Thanks to your support in 2020, SJMA accomplished the following:

Merged with Durango Nature Studies to become the leading outdoor education non-profit in Southwest Colorado. Launched the following new programs:

- Forest Fridays: connecting Montezuma County youth to public lands when schools are not in session;

- San Juan Ramblers: after-school programming for La Plata County youth

- science-based summer camp programs in Montezuma and La Plata County

Launched the San Juan

Wilderness Stewardship Crew: naturalized 198 illegal campsites, cleared 178 downed trees, hauled out 260 lbs of trash, distributed over 200 wag bags (to encourage visitors to haul out their waste), spent 213 hours monitoring visitor use and completely cleared 32 miles of trail

Improved Colorado Trail access:

cleared over 500 downed trees from 2 avalanche piles along Elk Creek Trail in the Weminuche Wilderness

Provided information to

thousands of visitors via phone and email despite closed offices

***SJMA Online
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Holiday Sale
11/21 - 12/31***



20% off with
coupon code
WINTER20

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(Not valid with sales on
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nor any agency permit or
pass or other items on
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Historic Provancher Ranch

by Ruth Lambert

The historic Provancher Ranch (also known as the Murray Homestead) is located about 15 miles south of Pagosa Springs along the Blanco River. The ranch is nestled in meadows at the confluence of Benson Creek and the Blanco River and surrounded by pines and aspens. The ranch site requires a mile hike, but once there, you are transported back to the early 1900s and the lonely life of an isolated high-altitude rancher.



Provancher Ranch

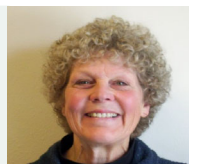
The area that would become the ranch appears to have first been patented by Effie Blake in 1903. Effie and J.V. Blake were Pagosa Springs general store proprietors who became land speculators as they obtained and transferred patents to the New Mexico Lumber Company for their harvesting of timber for railroad development. In 1903, the ranch lands were sold to John Benson for purposes of cattle grazing. Benson did little with the land and sold the acreage to David Provancher in 1906.

David Provancher was a French Canadian who immigrated to the United States in 1884 and worked in the area for the timber and railroad industry. However, in the early 1900s he ran cattle along the Blanco River and in 1910 built a mill and cabin near the river. The October 1911 flood destroyed these structures and in 1911, he and his neighbor, Marcellino Archuleta, built the log ranch house that is standing today. Provancher established his family at the ranch and constructed a barn, sheds, a homestead garden, corrals and a stock pond. The Provancher ranch was self-sustaining with cattle, sheep, garden produce and hay for the livestock. The family maintained the ranch until 1939, when the widowed and elderly Provancher sold the property to Ray and Blanche Murray.

The Murrays lived at the ranch for about seven years and during that time diversified the operations. They engaged in dairying, beef cattle, sheep and hog raising, kitchen gardening and subsistence hunting and fishing. Their sheep provided meat for consumption and sale, and wool that was sold for eastern markets. Their kitchen garden provided potatoes, lettuce, spinach, squash, onion and strawberries for household consumption. After the Murrays sold the properties, there were a series of brief ownerships and the ranch was acquired by the Forest Service in 1970. Today, the ranch site includes the log homestead, the collapsed barn and remains of the loading chute, loafing shed, a partial root cellar and the stock corral.

Although no one lives at the ranch, there are some relatively new residents. Discovered in 1977, the attic of the ranch house is now home to the "Fringed Myotis" *Myotis thysanodes* as a seasonal large maternity roost. These bats raise their young in the attic and then migrate south around October 1st, returning in June the following year. The bat is 'a sensitive' species in southwest Colorado. Despite the isolated location, the Provancher Ranch has been monitored by SJMA's site steward

Ruth Lambert is the Cultural Program Director for SJMA. Her passions are historic archaeology, genealogy, and historic cemeteries. Reach her at rlambert@sjma.org.



Don't Let Winter Conditions Keep You Inside

by Priscilla Sherman

Looking for ways to continue your summer hiking adventures this winter? With social distancing and indoor gatherings still strongly discouraged, this may be the perfect year to expand your mountain adventuring to a new winter sport. Snowshoeing, backcountry skiing or Nordic skiing will help you reduce cabin-fever and get some exercise while surrounded by the beauty of the San Juans. Get those kids outside too for some sledding, tubing, building snowmen and snow forts –but don't forget the hot chocolate!

Getting started: Venturing into the backcountry in winter takes some additional preparation and skill.

Find the right gear for you depending on your experience, the type of terrain and your ability. For skiing, the type of binding varies based on the terrain and conditions. When choosing snowshoes, traction is an important piece to consider. Trekking poles with large baskets are recommended for stability and balance.

Keep warm and dry from your head to your toes! Find a pair of winter boots and toasty socks that will keep your feet dry and warm without allowing snow to get inside. Make sure you wear plenty of layers starting with a water/windproof layer and ending with a base layer. Even if the temperature is cold, if the sun is shining, your body can warm up quickly as you are exercising.

Know before you go: Be prepared!

In addition to precautions taken in warmer months, it is extremely important to know the topography of the area and whether you are recreating in avalanche terrain. Always check the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC) website before heading out. If you are recreating in avalanche-prone terrain, make sure everyone in your party carries and knows how to use an avalanche beacon, pole and shovel. Avoid potential avalanche paths: steep slopes with no trees, areas under or above cornices, old slide paths, snow with cracks in it or that sounds hollow beneath your feet. Always cross potentially dangerous areas in single file.

For more information about avalanche awareness and education contact the experts at Friends of the San Juans (www.thesanjuans.org).

And remember to follow Leave No Trace principles - leave only your tracks in the snow!

Where to go in the snow: Most National Forest land is open for winter recreating. Listed below are some of the many areas you can explore this winter across the San Juan (SJNF) and Rio Grande National Forests (RGNF).



Nordic Skiing -There are several areas groomed specifically for Nordic skiing and skate skiing. In the SJNF, East Vallecito XC Ski Trails, West Fork Nordic Trails, Coyote Hill Nordic Trails, and Chicken Creek XC Ski Area. In RGNF, Archuleta Trail, Rock Creek and Stone Cellar Campground near Antonito and Monte Vista.

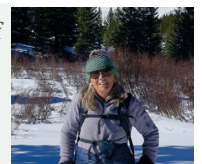
Snowshoeing: Any trails and unplowed roads can be a good choice for a snowshoe adventure.

Snowmobiling: In SJNF, Echo Basin, West Mancos Road, Molas Pass Recreation Area, Middle Mountain, Plumtaw Trail, and Turkey Springs Winter Loop. In RGNF, Park Creek, Cross Creek Campgrounds outside of South Fork and Road Canyon recreation area outside of Creede.

Backcountry Skiing: Red Mountain Pass and Molas Pass along Highway 550 near Silverton, Wolf Creek Pass north of Pagosa Springs, and Lizard Head Pass north of Dolores offer some of the best hike-to terrain in the state for the experienced and adventurous.

Sledding: In SJNF, Molas Pass and Andrews Lake. In RGNF, check out the Beaver Creek Reservoir area and Wolf Creek trailhead.

Priscilla Sherman is SJMA's Director of Visitor Services. She's happiest amongst the wildflowers, camera in hand. Reach her at psherman@sjma.org.





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It's Almost Christmas Time!

Now that snow is hitting the peaks, it really feels like Christmas is coming up soon, and with it of course comes SJMA's Christmas Trees for Conservation 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 ~250 local trees this year, along with 545 trees from out of the area. All trees will be available for sale at the lot starting November 27th. 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 and will be following all COVID-19 safety standards (www.sjma.org/get-involved/volunteer-opportunities/sjma-christmas-tree-lot). We hope to see you there this December!



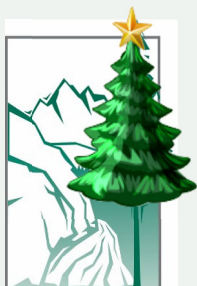
\$10 Off Coupon

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CHRISTMAS TREES FOR CONSERVATION**

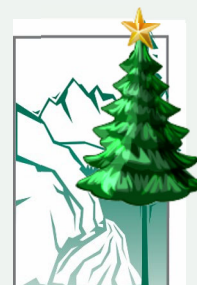
**Corner of Camino del Rio & College Drive
(Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Parking Lot)**

November 27 through December 20, 2019

Or until trees sell out!



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