SPRING NEWSLETTER

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@RMCESU

Letter from the Executive Director: Lisa Gerloff

In the role as Executive Director, I enjoy working with and supporting all federal and non-federal partners in the RM-CESU and across the CESU Network. The best parts of the job, though, always involve students. So here are a few recent favorite student snippets of mine:

- Two of the three presentations in this Springs CESU Webinar Series highlight the research of students, Hayley Johnson, and Mallory Davies, on projects funded through the CESU mechanism (read more about the Webinar Series on page 2).
- Also, on page 2 you will read about the 2026 Northern Rockies Internship Collaborative cohort. What is missing there is how the members of the 2025 cohort continue to show leadership by sharing their internship experiences in classroom presentations, on Instagram, and in conversations with their friends. Thank you Carl Price, Marlaina Ellis, James Deacon, and Abby Binder!
- Watching media interns, April Eling and Phoebe Mather, the past 7 months expand RM-CESU visibility through partner and research highlights, launching us on Instagram (133 followers since October 2025!), and taking over this newsletter.

Across the board I love how students help us to look at things from a different perspective and to keep our curiosity. Let a student know you appreciate them today!

Northern Rockies Internship Collaborative 2026 Cohort

The Northern Rockies Internship Collaborative (NRIC) is proud to announce the **largest cohort to date** in 2026!
Twenty students (16 from University of Montana, 1 from University of Montana-Western, 1 from Montana State University, 1 from Boise State University and 1 from University of Idaho) will head out in **mid-May** to their USFS placements. These interns will be working in the disciplines of developed recreation, Wilderness, weed inventory, botany, geology/minerals, and hydrology. They will be working along USFS staff on the Custer Gallatin, Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Lolo, Kootenai, Nez Perce-Clearwater, and Idaho Panhandle National Forests. ***Good luck to our 2026 cohort!***

Spring Webinar Series Was A Success!

The Rocky Mountain Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit Spring 2026 Seminar Series brought together researchers and practitioners to explore timely issues across the West. **Hayley Johnson** examined rising recreation pressure in Visitor Use on Public Lands, highlighting social science tools for managing growing demand. **Temuulen Sankey** presented innovative approaches to fuels monitoring using lidar technology. **Mallory L. Davies** closed the series with a decade of research on long-nosed bats, linking migration, diet, and disease risk across the Desert Southwest. Recordings of all three seminars are available to view on our website.


MALLORY DAVIES


DR. TEMUULEN SANKEY


HAYLEY JOHNSON

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT: WILDLIFE RESTORATION FOUNDATION

The **Wildlife Restoration Foundation (WRF)**, a partner organization of the RM-CESU, works to strengthen wildlife conservation through collaboration. The organization often serves as a convener–bringing together wildlife agencies, tribes, zoos, researchers, and conservation practitioners to develop practical approaches to restoring wildlife populations and habitats.
WRF's work is rooted in the idea that **conservation challenges are best addressed through partnerships** across sectors. Many conservation efforts occur in parallel, with agencies, organizations, and communities working toward similar goals but without formal mechanisms for collaboration. WRF helps bridge these gaps by facilitating partnerships that align expertise, resources, and shared conservation objectives.

One of the organization's foundational initiatives is its **Zoo-Park Partnership** model. These collaborations connect AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums with national parks, wildlife refuges, tribes, and other land managers to support wildlife conservation in the field. In these partnerships, zoological institutions contribute scientific expertise, veterinary capacity, animals raised for restoration, wildlife rehabilitation, and public engagement tools that complement on-the-ground wildlife management in parks and protected areas.

Zoo-Park Partnerships typically combine three elements: collaborative field conservation projects, interpretation that connects zoo visitors to wildlife conservation in protected areas, and community stewardship activities that engage the public in hands-on conservation efforts. By linking institutions that care for wildlife with those responsible for managing wild landscapes, these partnerships expand the capacity for restoration projects while building broader public awareness of wildlife challenges in parks.

WRF has also expanded its work in **bison conservation,** helping develop conservation-intent herds at zoological institutions. These herds can support broader restoration efforts by maintaining animals with strong genetic diversity. In some cases, bison born in these programs have contributed to the growth and diversification of herds managed by tribes or other conservation partners.

Looking ahead, WRF will host the **Second North American Bison Summit in April 2027 in Denver, Colorado.** The gathering will bring together tribes and First Nations, ranching communities, conservation organizations, researchers, and government agencies to discuss the future of bison and grassland conservation. Workgroups will focus on topics such as herd genetics and health, tribal buffalo programs, grassland restoration, and cross-sector collaboration.
Through these efforts, the Wildlife Restoration Foundation continues to connect people, institutions, and landscapes in support of a shared goal: restoring abundant and resilient park wildlife populations across North America. Learn more at The Wildlife Restoration Foundation's website.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT: CRAIG LEE

ICE PATCH ARCHEOLOGY, MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

RM-CESU would like to highlight the research of our partner Dr. Craig Lee and his work in ice patch archeology. Dr. Lee researches the human ecology and landscape archeology of alpine and high latitude environments, sharing his process and results with numerous audiences, including the professional scientific community, Native American communities, and the public.

The Glacier National Park Ice Patch Archeology and Paleoecology Project is a collaborative research effort between RM-CESU partners: Glacier National Park, CU Boulder, Montana State University, University of Wyoming, University of Arizona, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, the Blackfeet Nation, and units of the National Park Service. Melting ice poses a risk to previously preserved cultural and natural resources. The project partnership conducted cutting-edge, culturally informed fieldwork to survey, map, and sample stable ice patches in the park in 2010, 2011, 2013 and obtained new aerial photography in 2015. The research was used to establish a National Park Service-wide protocol for the collection, documentation, analysis and curation of artifacts recovered from melting ice patches.

Ice patches develop at high elevations when snow and ice accumulate to levels that do not completely melt in the summer. Over years, the patches become stable and the snow turns into low-density ice. Items deposited on an ice patch by wind, animals, or humans can be frozen for centuries. Unlike glaciers, ice patches do not move at all, so encased objects remain in the same spot. Researchers studying ice patches identify and document artifacts and organic materials left behind as the ice melts. Such finds can include animal bones and scat, leaves deposited by wind, fragments of ancient wood, and Native American artifacts.

“We have learned an incredible amount, ranging from ancient forests that are melting out of ice, ancient ice cores that let you see what wintertime temperatures have been over the last 10 millennia. And of course, the cultural material... the archeological material contains all kinds of interesting organic elements,” said Lee.

Ice patch melt is an issue with both ecological and cultural implications. The impending loss of these ice patches will uncover ancient plant and animal remains that could tell us about past climates, as well as irreplaceable Native American artifacts from the region’s tribes. The ice patches have kept these otherwise perishable objects frozen in time, but when the ice melts they will be exposed to the elements for the first time in centuries. If these fragile objects are not swiftly retrieved by archeologists, they could rapidly deteriorate (Ice Patch Archeology Resource Brief).

Learn more about Dr. Lee’s work here.

NEWEST GNPC- JERRY O'NEAL RECIPIENT: MARISSA NG

Meet our newest Glacier National Park Conservancy - Jerry O'Neal Research Fellowship recipient: **Marissa Ng.** Marissa, a graduate student in Biological Sciences at Montana State University, is leading research on whitebark pine restoration in Glacier National Park, a keystone species that supports wildlife, stabilizes alpine ecosystems, and helps regulate water systems across the landscape.

Her project, "The Last Stand," focuses on understanding what helps newly planted whitebark pine seedlings survive and grow in a changing climate. By studying factors like soil conditions, nearby vegetation, and disease, her work will help park managers improve restoration strategies and protect this threatened species for generations to come.

NOMINATIONS FOR 2026 RM-CESU STUDENT AWARD DUE SEPTEMBER 10TH, 2026

The Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit annually recognizes "above and beyond" accomplishments by students involved in RM-CESU projects. Eligible students must be affiliated with an RM-CESU university partner and have completed their project while enrolled. Nominations may be submitted by either a sponsoring federal agency or the student's academic institution, but must be endorsed by both. Award recipients will receive a certificate and formal recognition, and will present their work at the RM-CESU Fall Meeting.
Nominations are due **September 10, 2026,** and should be submitted electronically to the RM-CESU Executive Coordinator. Apply Here

Partner Publications

University of Montana Social Scientists Investigate Attitudes Among Montana Residents to Wolf Presence: These Montana researchers used three, statewide mail-back surveys spanning a decade (2012-2023; total n = 7607) to determine common perceptions among state residents of wolf presence, hunting and trapping. Results showed high and increasing public tolerance for wolves. Tolerance was low among wolf hunters and large landowners, but increasing among ungulate hunters. Tolerance of wolves was spatially correlated toward population centers and associated with respondents' identities, values, and wolf-related experiences. Those saying they were "tolerant" or "very tolerant" of wolves made up 41% of respondents in 2012. That share rose to 50% in 2017. When the researchers ran the same survey in 2023, 74% held that attitude.
Citation: **A. Metcalf, E. Metcalf, J. Gude, J. Baldridge and M. Lewis, 2025, Increasing tolerance of wolves in Montana, U.S.A. (2012-2023), Conservation Science and Practice Conservation Science and Practice.e70218. https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.70218**

University of Wyoming, USGS, Bureau of Land Management and Wyoming Game and Fish Cooperate to Understand the Decline in Mule Deer in Wyoming: These researchers and modelers analyzed a 40-year (1980–2019) dataset for 37 mule deer populations across Wyoming, to quantify the relative influence of conditions within winter use areas on annual rates of juvenile recruitment. Land cover (agriculture and shrubland) had the largest positive effects on recruitment. Mule deer recruitment increased with higher mean winter temperatures and summer precipitation, but declined with wind, oil and gas developments, cumulative drought, and wildfire. Future increases in drought and decreases in summer precipitation will affect how managers can work to increase mule deer populations, including through use of habitat restoration. The results of integration of these data sets can be used by managers to evaluate future threats and the value of restoration actions, interpret historic demographic change, prioritize populations for conservation, and optimize options for wildlife habitat management.
Citation: **T. Hayes, A. Johnston, L. Hall, J. Randall, M. Kauffman, C. Keefe, K. Monteith, and T. Graves. 2026, Integrating Climate and Anthropogenic Dynamics Can Inform Multifaceted Management for Declining Mule Deer Populations. Ecological Applications 36(1): e70107. https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.70107**

Map of Wyoming, USA, showing distribution of forest (green), shrub (orange), and grassland (yellow) land cover (USDA Forest Service, **2021**). Mule deer winter use contours (solid lines, transparent shading; calculated herein) are truncated by herd unit boundaries (dashed lines; Wyoming Game and Fish Department, State of Wyoming, 2020) (Hillshade data credit: Esri, Maxar, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap, and the GIS user community)..

Upcoming Meetings

- June 23–26, 2026: North American Forest Ecology Workshop, University of Montana, Missoula, MT
- June 27 - July 3, 2026: Freeflow Institute, Summer Field Course on Olympic Peninsula, Law of People & Place, Elwha River + Salish Sea, WA
- July 26 – 31, 2026: Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting ("Ecology in an Era of Uncertainty"), Salt Lake City, UT

Job Opportunities

- **Montana State University**, Avian, Pollinator & Vegetation Technician, Charles M. Russell Wildlife Refuge, MT. Field-based ecological research position conducting vegetation sampling, pollinator surveys, and avian monitoring in prairie and refuge ecosystems. Work supports applied conservation science and habitat management. (Open until filled)
- **Blackfeet Community College**, Land Use & Cultural Resource Manager, Browning, MT. Culturally informed land stewardship, land-based education, and community outreach grounded in hands-on herd and field management. This position advances the College's commitments to student success, cultural preservation, academic excellence, and community engagement.
  (Open until filled)
- **UW-NPS Seasonal Staff**, assist with operations of the UW Research Institute at AMK Ranch, which could include facilitating seasonal operation of our field station, assistance with office tasks, and station-based research in cooperation with Grand Teton National Park. (Open until filled)
- **Postdoctoral Research Associate**, MTCWRU, Mt Coop Wildlife Research Unit, University of Montana. Postdoctoral research opportunity on large mammal monitoring in northwest Montana, US. The position is part of a collaborative project between the University of Montana and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP). Location: Missoula Mountain Campus. (Open until filled)
- **Instructor - Fire Science Wildlands**, Front Range Community College, Work Location: Larimer Campus - Fort Collins, CO (Open until filled)
- **Colorado State University**, Cultural Resources Specialist/Archaeologist, Cheyenne, WY. The Cultural Resources Specialist will support the Air Force Sentinel Program to ensure regulatory compliance with existing laws, regulations, policies, and program requirements.
  (Apply by April 29, 2026)
- **Colorado State University**, Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Crew Member, Durango, CO. With direct guidance from a FIA Crew Leader and indirect guidance from a FIA Supervisory Forester and the FIA Program Manager within the Science and Data Division of the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), the FIA Crew Member position is an autonomous, field-based research role responsible for conducting forest inventory work across multiple states. This position supports the collaborative Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) partnership between CSFS and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), whose mission is to provide comprehensive, accurate, and timely information on the health and productivity of forests across the United States. (Apply by May 16, 2026)