

SUMMER NEWSLETTER



New National CESU Website Now Live

New features include the *CESU Experts Database*, an interactive *Regional Map of all 17 CESUs*, expanded network resources, and *Featured CESU Research* showcasing projects addressing natural and cultural resource management across the country.



@RMCESU



NOMINATIONS FOR 2026 RM-CESU STUDENT AWARD DUE SEPTEMBER 10, 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 RMCESU 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. Directions: [here](#)

NRIC Students Start Season At Northern Rockies Wilderness Skills Institute

Four students from the Northern Rockies Internship Collaborative (NRIC) began their season with a week of hands-on training at the **Northern Rockies Wilderness Skills Institute (NRWSI)** at Powell Ranger Station in Idaho. The annual event brought together more than 200 participants for specialized wilderness skills sessions led by professionals from national forests, national parks, nonprofit conservation organizations, and private industry. **Emmy White, Cameron Akers, McKenzie Case, and Finn Reiker** gained valuable experience in areas including defensive horsemanship, crosscut saw, and axe skills. These students, along with the rest of the 2026 NRIC cohort, are now nearing the end of their summer work season, applying the skills and knowledge they developed throughout their internships.



McKenzie Case practicing felling trees with a crosscut saw



Cameron Aker practicing chopping with an axe



Over 200 participants from across the Northern Rockies attended this year's Wilderness Skills Institute

INTERN HIGHLIGHT: NATIVE PLANT & CONIFER NURSERY RESOURCE STEWARD INTERNS

Four Northern Rockies Internship Collaborative (NRIC) interns are spending their summer helping grow the forests of tomorrow at the **U.S. Forest Service Coeur d'Alene Nursery**.

Aila Dana, Jessica Harris, Abby Johnson, and Kate Hernandez are serving as Native Plant & Conifer Nursery Resource Steward interns, gaining hands-on experience in seed extraction, greenhouse care, pollination, weed management, and seedling preparation. Their work supports the nursery's annual production of millions of native seedlings used in reforestation efforts across the West. As the 2026 NRIC cohort approaches the end of its summer season, these interns are contributing valuable skills and knowledge to forest restoration efforts throughout the region.



Lisa Gerloff, Jessica Harris, Aila Dana, Abby Johnson, and Kate Hernandez



Aila Dana sorting alder seeds using a pollen shaker and sieve machine.

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT: CENTER FOR PUBLIC LANDS,

By: Phoebe Mather



Western Colorado University's Center for Public Lands is a resource for cross-boundary land management and study. This training and resource center brings together students, land managers, and communities with a goal to develop creative responses to contemporary land management challenges.

"We've been around for about 8 years, and the Center for Public Lands is meant to be a resource center that brings together students, land managers, faculty and community members to help steward public lands and come up with innovative ways to address challenges," said Dr. Briget Eastep.

The Center for Public Lands is an educational and community-serving institution working at the core of service, science and scholarship, and we are excited to highlight the work they are doing with the Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (RM-CESU). The Center for Public Lands works in partnership with many CESU partners such as the USDA Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service and Colorado Parks and Wildlife, also including scientists and tribal members in collaboration.

The Center for Public Lands aims to bring together three elements: technical assistance through faculty expertise and research; the ability to support discussion, decisions, and actions that shape the best land management practices; and applied project work to train the next generation of public land stewards. The Center for Public Lands mission is to train a diverse group of leaders who can address public land problems collaboratively and creatively by applying scientific and socio-economic knowledge in the context of the complex realities of planning, management, and policy development for public lands.

"The EMPLOYS (Ecological Management & Public Lands Opportunities for Young Scientists) program is a National Science Foundation [NSF] Trainee Program, where students choose to take a dual degree that bridges science and management," said Eastep.

This program aims to grow opportunities for students through the work that they are pursuing involving partner resources. Student projects have included working with remote cameras to monitor and study backcountry winter recreation patterns to help the community of Crested Butte better understand recreation use patterns, or monitor invasive species in designated wilderness areas for the USDA Forest Service to improve carbon sequestration on private rangelands.

[Learn more at The Center For Public Land's website.](#)

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT: BOATS AND GOATS

BY: APRIL ELING



Eric Boyd, a Master's Student in Wildlife Biology at the University of Montana, was named one of two recipients of the 2025 Glacier National Park Conservancy - Jerry O'Neal Fellowship. The award supports early-career researchers working on issues tied to conservation and recreation, and for Boyd it helped move a complex field project from idea to reality. Boyd's research, titled "Boats and Goats," looks at how river recreation affects mountain goats along the Middle Fork of the Flathead River on the southern edge of Glacier National Park. The stretch of river is popular with rafters and anglers, especially in late spring and early summer. That timing overlaps with a critical period for mountain goats, when they descend from alpine terrain to visit mineral licks that provide sodium and other nutrients missing from their diet.

Those visits are not optional. Mineral licks support body condition, reproduction, and recovery after winter. Disturbance at these sites can force goats to delay or avoid visits, which can increase stress and reduce access to key nutrients. Boyd's work asks whether the steady flow of boats through the corridor is changing how goats use that space.

While researchers have studied the effects of hikers, roads, and aircraft on mountain goats, river recreation has not been examined in the same way. Boyd is trying to fill that gap. His project combines GPS collar data, remote camera monitoring, and direct behavioral observation to understand how goats respond when people are present on the river.

In 2025, his camera system alone captured more than 279,000 images and documented hundreds of individual watercraft moving through the study area. He pairs that data with movement patterns from collared goats and field observations that track behavior such as feeding, vigilance, and flight. Together, those datasets allow him to test whether goats avoid the river, shift their timing, or change how they access mineral licks when recreation levels increase.

The research comes at a moment when land managers are making decisions about how to balance recreation and wildlife protection. The Flathead River is managed under a Comprehensive River Management Plan, and proposed updates include expanding no-stopping zones near key goat habitat. Boyd's findings could help determine whether or not those measures are working.

Funding from the GNPC-O'Neal Fellowship played a key role in making the project possible. Fieldwork along a river corridor requires equipment, travel, and long stretches of time in the field. The fellowship helped cover those costs and supported the data collection needed to carry the study forward.

Boyd's background is closely tied to the landscape he studies. He works as a wildlife biologist for Glacier National Park, where he helps lead research and monitoring projects and responds to human-wildlife conflicts. He also spent years guiding rafts on the Middle Fork, giving him firsthand experience with the recreation patterns he now studies.

With support from the GNPC-O'Neal Fellowship, Boyd's work is building a clearer picture of how people and wildlife share the same corridor, and what it takes to keep that balance in place.

Partner Publications

RM-CESU Partners Discuss How Climate Change and Fire Affect Tree Growth in Recent Issue of Ecosphere: USDA-Forest Service and University of Montana authors describe how they used the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness (SBW) as a natural laboratory to investigate how trees in high-elevation forests respond to disturbance and climate. The authors show that trees near treeline are exhibiting unexpected competitive interactions where facilitation was historically expected to dominate, while trees at lower elevations are growing faster regardless of fire history. These patterns appear to be driven by shifts in growth-climate relationships – winter precipitation, once a limiting factor, now has a neutral-to-positive effect on growth. Citation: **J. Beisel, Cansler, C., Parks, S., Affleck, D., Ballantyne, A. and Larson, A. , 2026, Climate change and fire alter biotic interactions and tree growth in high-elevation forests. Ecosphere, 17(4), e70612. doi: 10.1002/ecs2.70612**



Whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*)

USDA Forest Service Researchers Collaborate on Assessments of Whitebark Pine Forests in Idaho and Nevada: Recent research by Kellen Nelson (USDA-Pacific Northwest Research Station) and others assessed whitebark pine forest structure, composition, and persistence potential in Idaho and Nevada following mountain pine beetle, wildfire, and no recent disturbance by comparing overstory and regenerative relative abundances, classifying post-disturbance communities and gauging persistence via residual mature trees and seedlings. Their work highlights the importance of considering forest composition and persistence metrics for prioritizing conservation efforts.

Citation: K. Nelson, Hankin, L., Lowrey, L., and Bisbing, S., 2026. Whitebark pine persistence potential highly variable following disturbance in the Intermountain West, USA. Canadian Journal of Forest Research,

Upcoming Meetings

- August 17–19, 2026: National Sustainability Society 3rd Annual Conference (“Courage, Credibility and Collective Action in Sustainability”), Colorado State University Spur Campus, Denver, CO

Job Opportunities

- **Montana State University, Research Associate: Data Analyst for River Recreation Use**, Bozeman, MT. Data-focused research position supporting a statewide river recreation monitoring project through recreational use surveys, AI-assisted image processing, GIS analysis, and innovative methods for estimating river use in partnership with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. (Apply by August 1, 2026)
 - **Colorado State University, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Instructors**, Fort Collins, CO. Temporary non-tenure track teaching positions supporting undergraduate and graduate instruction through didactic and laboratory courses within the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. (Apply by August 17, 2026)
 - **Ember Alliance, Fuels Monitoring Module Crewmember, Field Tech**, Greenville, SC. Field technicians support fuels monitoring and wildland fire research through vegetation assessments, field data collection, and fire-related operations while gaining experience in fuels management and prescribed fire practices. (Open until filled)
 - **Ember Alliance, 2026/27 Uwharrie National Forest Prescribed Fire/Fuels Permanent Crew Member**, Troy, NC. Crew members support prescribed fire operations and fuels reduction projects on the Uwharrie National Forest while contributing to wildfire risk reduction and ecosystem health. (Open until filled)
 - **Ember Alliance, Blacksburg Prescribed Fire and Fuels Crew Member (FFT2)**, Blacksburg, VA. Crew members assist with prescribed fire implementation, fuels management, and wildfire mitigation projects while developing field experience and qualifications in fire operations. (Open until filled)
 - **Ember Alliance, Blacksburg Prescribed Fire and Fuels Crew Lead (SRB)**, Blacksburg, VA. Crew leads oversee prescribed fire and fuels management operations while providing field leadership, safety oversight, and mentorship during ecosystem restoration projects. (Open until filled)
 - **Ember Alliance, Blacksburg Prescribed Fire and Fuels Crew Member (FFT1, FAL2)**, Blacksburg, VA. Crew members support prescribed burning, fuels reduction, and vegetation management projects while building advanced wildland fire experience and certifications. (Open until filled)
 - **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)
-
-