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# ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTDOORS

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A Newsletter for Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers

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## 2026 Conference Update

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*by Steve Cochrane*

**W**e're excited to share that planning is well underway for the 2026 Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers & Photographers Conference, taking place in Grand Junction, Colorado the week of September 29 - October 2, 2026.

Our conference meeting space will be hosted at the Clarion Inn Grand Junction Airport, providing a comfortable and convenient location for sessions, networking, and evening gatherings.

This year's conference will feature educational workshops, photography and writing presentations, and opportunities to connect with fellow creatives who share a passion for the outdoors. We are planning a field trip to Colorado National Monument, along with a bird photography outing with a local expert. We are also exploring the possibility of taking part in a bird banding with the local division of wildlife - a unique opportunity to learn about conservation and tracking wildlife.

We're working to engage the local community, including a public exhibit of member photography and published and unpublished written works at the Grand Junction Library, "RMOWP Capturing the Outdoors: Photography and Writing Showcase" (see page 3).

And here's an added bonus - after the conference wraps up, consider sticking around for the Blue Angels air show! It's a fantastic opportunity for aviation photography and an exciting way to extend your time in Grand Junction.

Some members have tried making reservations at the Clarion Inn for the conference and ran into trouble getting the 10% discount applied. The phone number we originally provided connects to the general reservation system, which is not handling our group discount correctly.

To receive the 10% conference discount, please call the hotel's **local Grand Junction number** directly and give them the group details below.

If you plan to attend the conference, I recommend booking your room early. There will be an air show at the airport that same weekend, and rooms in the area tend to fill up and increase in price. There are also several nearby hotels and many Airbnb options available in the area that might be cheaper.

If you already made a reservation and the 10% discount was not applied, the hotel has told us they will correct it at check-in.

### **Clarion Inn – Group Booking Details**

- Local Number: 970-243-6790
- Group Name: Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers
- Group Number: 5269461
- Group Contact: Steve Cochrane

Please let me know if you have any issues booking.

More details on speakers, workshops, and registration will be coming soon. Mark your calendars now - you won't want to miss it!

## President's Column



*RMOWP President, Linda Haehnle*

**G**reetings!  
This certainly has been a 'winter' to go into the history books! From blizzards, to snow drought, to warm temps, floods, and avalanches - who would have

thought we'd see this diversity across the US?? Leaving it behind, we now can look forward to springtime, and see how nature reveals herself.

In the next few months we have the return of Daylight Saving Time with longer days marked by more hours of daylight. Additionally, we all look forward to celebrating the meaning and significance of the Easter holidays.

But wait - let's not overlook St. Patrick's Day and the 'wearing of the green'!! So who was this Irish Saint that we connect with revelry, green beer, and shamrocks??

A few details:

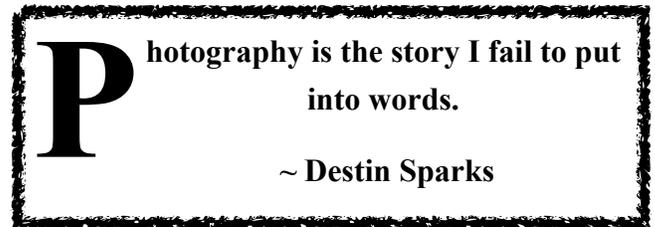
- St. Patrick was a 5th century missionary to Ireland, and later served as a bishop there.
- He is the primary patron saint of Ireland and credited for bringing Christianity to the island, which was historically pagan.

- March 17 was originally chosen to celebrate his life with feasting and revelry, however, is now thought to be the date of his death. Whether in life or death, nothing like a good celebration!!
- We wear a shamrock on St. Patrick's Day to recognize his teaching of the Holy Trinity.
- He is usually depicted with the classic shamrock (a three-leaf clover) rather than the four-leaf variety — and of course they are both GREEN.
- The shamrock is the traditional symbol of Ireland and is connected to Christianity as the three leaves represent the Holy Trinity as well as Faith, Hope, and Love. It is the common type of clover and can be found almost everywhere in Ireland.
- Four-leaf clovers are relatively uncommon compared to shamrocks — so when found they are associated with good luck. That is the meaning of the 4th leaf. (in addition to Faith, Hope, and Love.)
- The first St. Patrick's Day Parade was celebrated in New York City on March 17, 1762.

On this day, it gives us all an opportunity to be a bit of Irish 🍀

Looking forward to seeing you all at the annual conference in Grand Junction!

Blessings, Linda



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**RMOWP Officers:**

President: Linda Haehnle, Aurora, CO (2027)  
Vice President: Steve Cochrane, Rangely, CO (2027)  
Secretary: Kent Taylor, Richardson, TX (2026)  
Treasurer: Maryann Gaug, Silverthorne, CO (2026)  
Past President, Virginia Staat, The Woodlands, TX (2027)

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Al Perry, Herriman, UT (2026)  
June Wolfe, Mesa, AZ (2027)  
David Staat, The Woodlands, TX (2027)  
Ron Belak, Kittridge, CO (2028)  
Jimmy Smith, Richmond, TX (2028)

## 2026 Conference Opportunity & Member Favorite Photo

*by Conference Coordinator and Vice President Steve Cochrane*

**W**e are working with the Grand Junction Library to host a “RMOWP Capturing the Outdoors: Photography and Writing Showcase.”

I recently met with the library’s event coordinator, and she was genuinely excited about partnering with us. The event does require approval from the library board, so it is not officially confirmed yet.

If approved:

- The library will partner with us
- They will help advertise
- They will assist in running the event

If not approved:

- We can still reserve the space at no cost
- We would organize and promote it ourselves

### Date & Time:

October 1 | 2:00 PM – 7:00 PM, during our annual conference

### What This Means for You:

- Each participating member may display **up to five of your best images** (any print format).
- We would also love to feature members’ writing — published or unpublished.
- The room has a projector, where I would like to have a slide show with more of our members’ photography displayed.

To move forward, I need to know:

- How many members would like to participate?
- Will you also be displaying any books or writings?

The library has a flexible space that can be configured as one large room or divided into two smaller rooms. Your participation numbers will determine which option we reserve.

Important note:

We are not allowed to sell items during the event, so please bring business cards in case visitors want to purchase your prints, books, or writings later.

If you are unable to attend the conference but would like your work included, you may send your materials to me or another attending member.

This is a fantastic opportunity to:

- Showcase your work to the public
- Engage with the Grand Junction community
- Promote RMOWP during conference week

### Member Favorite Photo



*Photo and text by Peter Kummerfeldt*

**F**avorite because it’s a rare picture of a meeting between two endangered species of rhino — white on the left and black on the right. I was on a game drive in South Africa one evening several years ago when these two animals stepped out of the bush, cautiously approached each other, huffed and puffed, touched their horns together, and then turned and disappeared back into the bush. It was all over in a few seconds. Our guide/driver at the time, a lifelong South African, stated he had never seen, or heard of, such a scene before.

(Editor's note: To share a favorite photo, send it to [info@rmowp](mailto:info@rmowp) with a brief description of why it's one of your favorites.)

## Summit Night – Kilimanjaro by Steve Cochrane



*Steve Cochrane at Uhuru Peak, Kilimanjaro*

### On the Move

You wake up at 10:30 p.m., but it doesn't feel like waking up — it feels like being pulled out of a dream you weren't finished with. The tent crackles in the cold. Headlamps blink on one by one outside. Somewhere, boots scrape against volcanic gravel. Someone coughs. No one talks.

By 11:00 p.m., we are on the move. The world shrinks immediately. There is no mountain. There is no summit. There is only the small oval of light in front of your boots and the sound of your own breathing — slow, deliberate, all set by your guide: *pole, pole*, Swahili for slowly, slowly.

### The Cold Finds You

It slips through gloves, creeps into fingers, stiffens muscles you swear were warm five minutes ago. Somewhere in the dark, your body starts to argue. At first, it's subtle. A tight calf. A dull ache in your hips. A reminder that you've been climbing for hours on loose gravel in the cold.

Then it gets louder. Your thighs burn. Your shoulders ache under the pack. Your lungs feel thin and sharp, like they can't quite pull in the precious air they need.

### Push Before Dawn

Doubt sneaks in with the pain. It doesn't shout — it whispers. It tells you the summit is still too far, that sunrise is just a rumor people use to keep moving. It tells you that turning around would be logical, sensible, and safe.

One more step. One more breath. Shift your weight. Step again.

You stop looking up. You stop counting time. The line of headlamps ahead of you becomes the only proof that forward still exists.

And somewhere in that silence — between doubt and discipline — you realize something important: this isn't about strength anymore. It's about refusal. Refusing to quit in the dark.

Refusing to negotiate with the voice that wants comfort.

So, I keep moving—slowly, quietly—*pole, pole*.

### Then the Horizon Changes

Not suddenly — gently. A thin line of color appears where black sky meets darker earth. Black turns to navy, navy softens into indigo, and indigo turns to red.

And without anyone needing to say it, you know you've made it to the crater rim.

### Stella Point

We arrive just as the sun does. It doesn't explode into the sky — it spills in. Gold pours across the clouds below, lighting them from underneath until they look like an ocean made of fire and cotton. Shadows stretch across the crater.

The cold is still biting. Your lungs still burn. But none of that matters anymore.

### Not Done Yet

Just when you think you've made it, the mountain reminds you otherwise. Stella Point isn't the end. The guide says it quietly: "Uhuru Peak... about forty-five minutes more."

Forty-five minutes!

So, you move again.

The path along the crater is different — less steep, but cruel in its own way. The cold is sharper now. The wind cuts across the open rim and finds every gap in your layers. Your body is empty, fatigue has settled deep into your bones.

This stretch becomes quiet, but a small voice begins to awaken. It starts off soft, then grows louder: I didn't come this far to stop here.

The sun rises fully now, painting the snowfields gold, throwing long shadows across the crater. (*continued on Page 4*)



*Steve Cochran at Kilimanjaro Summit*

### **Summit Night – Kilimanjaro (continued)**

#### **The Sign Appears**

Not all at once. First the posts. Then the words.

UHURU PEAK — 5,895 meters (19,340 feet)

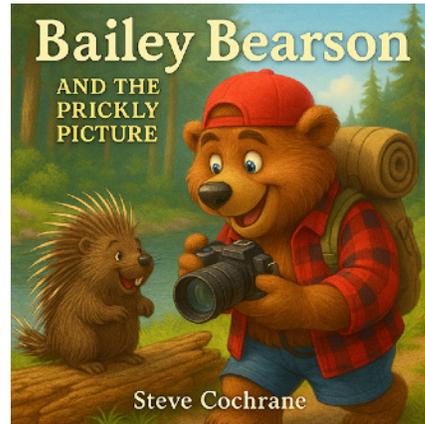
I reach out and touch it — not to prove anything, but to anchor the moment. The wind tugs at me. The sky is impossibly blue. And in the middle of exhaustion, cold, and thin air, a quiet certainty settles in: I’m standing on the roof of Africa.

I smile—not big, not loud—just enough to say, yes, this was worth it.

The summit wasn’t just a place I reached. It was a night I endured. A sunrise that met me at the crater rim. A version of myself who kept walking when stopping would have been easier.

Summit night taught me that doubt is loudest in the dark — and sunrise belongs to those who keep walking anyway.

## **Steve Cochran Published!**



RMOWP Vice President Steve Cochran announces the publication of his very first children’s book, *Bailey Bearson*

*and the Prickly Picture.*

Steve writes, “It’s a story inspired by my love of wildlife and photography. Bailey Bearson is a young bear who sets out with his camera and meets Marty the porcupine — a new (and slightly prickly) friend who teaches him about porcupines and the value of curiosity and kindness.

It’s been a joy bringing this character to life, and I’m grateful for all the encouragement and inspiration I’ve found through RMOWP.

Thanks for taking a look, and for being part of the creative journey that helped make this book possible.”

Steve’s book is available at [shop.stevcochranphotography.com](http://shop.stevcochranphotography.com)

Congratulations, Steve!

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**! RMOWP NEEDS YOU!!! !**

### **RMOWP Needs a New Treasurer & Secretary!**

Elections for RMOWP officers and board of directors are almost upon us and treasurer Maryann Gaug and Secretary Kent Taylor have announced that it is time for them to step aside and give other members an opportunity to serve.

Both treasurer and secretary are two-year terms but they can run for office indefinitely.

Those interested in either position should contact [info@RMOWP.org](mailto:info@RMOWP.org) or call Virginia at 832-367-7072).

Thank You!

## Writer's Corner

### Ink It. Think it. Write It.

by Virginia Parker Staat

*“Keep a notebook. Travel with it, eat with it, sleep with it. Slap into it every stray thought that flutters up into your brain. Cheap paper is less perishable than gray matter, and lead pencil markings endure longer than memory.” ~Jack London*

While deep cleaning the library the other day, I discovered one of my old field notebooks. It was from a backpacking trip that David and I took through the Bitterroot Valley in the mid-1980s. It was such fun to flip through the pages and read about moments captured and snippets of thought.

It reminded me that I use to carry these small spiral notebooks around with me everywhere to jot down field notes. I had several different kinds. Some had waterproof paper, able to handle any weather I encountered in the field, including dirt and grime. Others were simple and small, measuring only 3x5 inches. One of these little notebooks was always handy, tucked deeply in my backpack, purse, or vehicle. My focus was primarily on jotting down observations, particularly sensory descriptions, metaphors, and similes. Others chronicled travels. I carried larger notebooks, normally leather, cloth bound, or one particularly fancy beaded notebook, each one specifically for writing story ideas or poetry or journaling.

As I flipped through the little backpacking journal, I realized that I hardly use one anymore. It's not that I no longer take notes. It's because technology has changed so much over the past several years and there are so many other options that make carrying a notebook around less attractive.

Since the invention of the cell phone, many applications have been developed to make note taking easy. Surprisingly, the camera on my cell phone is one of my most-often used note-taking methods now. I can quickly capture information from a signpost, or photograph the details of a flower, or snap a variety of angles of an object for later study.

For thoughts and ideas, I often use *Apple Notes*, an app that comes with my iPhone. For Androids, *Evernote* and *Google Keep* can be downloaded for free. Many other apps are available, some even allow incorporating photos or artwork, however, these often require a monthly fee.

I have also used voice recording apps. Some free downloads include *Easy Voice Recorder* and

*Voice Memos*. Voice recording, however, is less attractive to me because I rarely take the time to go back and listen to myself. It's the writing that compels me.

After rediscovering my little journal, nostalgia has swept over me. Perhaps I'll return to using these little spiral gems again. After all, they need no batteries or charging or upgrades or passwords. Plus, there's something special about holding a pencil in my hand and watching words flow onto a tiny sheet of paper.

Will Self said, "Always carry a notebook. And I mean always. The short-term memory only retains information for three minutes; unless it is committed to paper, you can lose an idea forever."

It's true. Find yourself a worthy app or spiral notebook. Make friends with it and keep it close by to capture precious moments and fleeting thoughts. It's like a backup program for your mind.

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## What Do You Think?

As RMOWP continues to evolve, we need to know what you - the members - want to do and where you want us to go.

So, in the next few weeks we'll be sending you a survey. A large part of it will be asking about conferences, in particular about specific locations, and, of course, you can add any we neglected to include.

Watch your inbox and please respond. Your input is important.

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