

ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTDOORS

A Newsletter for Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers

Conference Coming Soon!

RMOWP's 2026 conference is right around the corner and the conference registration form is ready and waiting for you. It's included with this newsletter and also available at rmowp.org, where you can fill it out and register online. The conference is in Grand Junction, Colorado, September 29 through October 2, with headquarters at the Grand Junction Clarion Inn. Details are on the RMOWP website.

See you there!

2026 RMOWP Conference Overview

by Steve Cochrane

During this year's conference, we'll gather in Grand Junction, Colorado, where red rock canyons meet alpine lakes, vineyards, and the Colorado River. The area offers an outstanding variety of subjects for both photographers and writers — from sweeping desert overlooks to quiet garden paths — making it a perfect location for RMOWP. The conference will be held September 29 — October 2, 2026, in Grand Junction, Colorado, and hosted at the Clarion Inn with additional events at the Grand Junction Library and Colorado National Monument. Here's the conference overview:

Tuesday, September 29 – Welcome & Kickoff

- Board of Directors Meeting (open to members)
- Registration and Opening Reception with light buffet
- Opening presentation and contest submissions showcase

Wednesday, September 30 – Writing, Wildlife & Sunset Experience

- Bird Banding Experience with Grand Valley Audubon Society
- General Membership Meeting
- Anne Sullivan Writers' Forum
- Workshop: [Publishing for Outdoor Writing - Bill Haggerty](#)
- Special Presentation: Santa Clara Ranch
- Evening field outing to Colorado National Monument for a sunset and moonrise photography experience

Thursday, October 1 – Photography & Storytelling

- Guided Bird Walk with Grand Valley Audubon Society
- Workshop: [Journaling in the Backcountry: How to Capture Your Experiences - Melody Jones](#)
- Photo Critique Session with experienced professionals
- Presentation: The Magic of Taking Photos
- Evening Member Auction and group dinner

Friday, October 2 – Travel, Showcase & Awards

- Presentation: Travel Photography
- "Capturing the Outdoors" Public Showcase at the Grand Junction Library. [Click Here To Learn More](#)
 - Photography displays
 - Live writing readings
 - Community engagement and educational experiences
- Closing Banquet with BBQ dinner and Awards Presentation

We hope to see you there!

President's Column



RMOWP President, Linda Haehnle

Greetings!
I hope
you all
are enjoying
summer activities
and staying cool..
or dry...
whichever is
appropriate for
your part of the
country.
It's hard to

believe summer is almost half over... and that the Conference in Grand Junction is around the corner. As you enjoy the local 4th of July celebrations, remember to wish our country a Happy 250th Birthday. And certainly 'be safe' wherever you are!

Looking forward to seeing you in Grand Junction! ~Linda

**Happy 250th Birthday,
America!**

Survey Results

by Don Laine

Thank you to all who responded to our member survey regarding conference preferences. No surprise that everyone wants conferences with great scenery and opportunities to see and photograph wildlife. Most respondents prefer conference sites to be in smaller communities that are big enough to have the facilities we need. Asked about driving at conferences, most said that some driving is okay, with one adding, "Driving is fine. There are always photo ops along the way." Most members said 3 1/2 days is a good length, although some were receptive to longer conferences. And one person commented, "more workshops, less travel presentations."

Among possible conference sites you listed, top choices included Glacier National Park; Las Cruces, NM; Flagstaff, AZ and the nearby national monuments; North Rim of the Grand Canyon; Cortez, CO; Canyon de Chelly National Monument in Arizona; Spearfish, SD; Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico; Dinosaur National Monument along the border between Colorado and Utah; Montrose, CO and nearby Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park; and Badlands National Park in South Dakota.

Among suggestions for future conference workshops was selecting photo titles - "Many titles for photo submissions are drab - they need to be jazzed up," one person wrote. Another said, "Having interactive workshops with us doing some 'exercises' is really great." Also suggested was tips on improving our photography and writing skills, and organizing group photography such as the nighttime photography session at the Fort Davis, TX conference.

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RMOWP Officers:

President: Linda Haehnle, Aurora, CO (2027)
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David Staat, The Woodlands, TX (2027)
Ron Belak, Kittridge, CO (2028)
Jimmy Smith, Richmond, TX (2028)

A Visit to the Selman Ranch



Painted bunting

text and photos by Peter Kummerfeldt

I seriously doubt that J. O. Selman, founder of the Selman Ranch back in the early 1900s, gave much thought to the birds that called the ranch in northwest Oklahoma, home. I'm guessing that foremost in his mind was surviving the "dust bowl," and secondly, accumulating enough land to support a growing cattle herd.

Step forward 120 years and while the size of the property has shrunk from 60 thousand acres to 14,000 acres and with fewer longhorns still grazing the grasslands of the Oklahoma Panhandle, the birds that J.O. didn't give much thought to are still there. Some are resident birds and others are migrants moving north through the ranch each spring and then south again in the fall, headed towards their wintering grounds in Central and South America.

Flowing through the heart of the ranch is Buffalo Creek, a tributary of the nearby Cimarron River. Surprisingly, the water in the creek is very salty. However it is not the quality of the water that draws the birds to the ranch, rather it is the vast salt flats on either side of the river that offer nesting sites for terns, sandpipers, plovers and other species of birds that travel the Central Flyway of the United States.

It was the birds that brought Mary and I to the ranch at the end of May this year to judge for ourselves just how good the "birding" opportunities were. Not just to "see" the birds but also to photograph them. We had met Sue Selman, J.O. Selman's granddaughter, the current owner of the property, many years ago but had

lost touch with her. While doing some house-cleaning on my all-together too-large collection of digital images I came across some photographs I had taken at the ranch nearly sixteen years ago, and got to wondering if Sue was still alive. A quick search through my telephone directory produced her phone number and moments later I heard her familiar voice announce "Well hallo stranger. How're you doing?" Her warm welcome led to an invitation to visit the ranch and a chance to see, and hopefully photograph, new birds.

We left Colorado Springs on a Friday traveling south on I-25, then east through New Mexico and Oklahoma's "panhandle." Much of the country we drove through was flat, highly developed agricultural land, but as we traveled east the land developed into more hilly country. The Selman Ranch lies about halfway between Buffalo and Woodward, Oklahoma. Rugged country where cottonwood trees lined the creeks and vast expanses of grasslands interspersed with rocky outcroppings rolled away in every direction.

The uniqueness of the ranch's habitat and its location provides bird watchers and bird photographers a destination that will keep you very busy for days. Sue provided a moving blind in the form of her four passenger ATV - a vehicle that negotiated the rough ranch roads very well but more importantly, it concealed us from the birds, allowing us to get close to them. Having lived there for most of her life Sue knew where to find the birds. With
(Continued on Page 5)



Scissortail



*Peter and Mary Kummerfeldt
at Selman Ranch*

*A Visit to the
Selman Ranch,
continued from
Page 4)*

cameras in hand, and binoculars on the seat beside us, we hop-scotched from place to place marveling at the variety of birds we saw and photographed.

We also spent several hours sitting in Sue's semi-subterranean blind.

The weekend passed quickly and while there was still a lot to see and do, on Monday morning we began the long drive home to Colorado Springs. Hopefully there will be a "next time" for us and for any of you that may like to add to your "Life List" or just want to get out and see some new country and the birds that live there, or just sample Sue's wonderful hospitality. Give her a call or you can visit her website at www.selmanranch.com for more information.

Sue Selman:
Cell phone: 580-256-2006
Email: selmanranch@hughes.net

Click on rmowp.org for a list of birds that Peter and Mary saw.

WCWF To Join RMOWP's Upcoming Showcase

Western Colorado Writers' Forum

RMOWP will be teaming up with The Western Colorado Writers' Forum (WCWF) during our upcoming conference public showcase, "Capturing the Outdoors," taking place: Friday, October 2, from 12:00 PM – 5:00 PM at the Grand Junction Library.

According to information WCWF provided, the group was created in 2010 in response to the many writers on the Western Slope looking for opportunities to learn, read, publish, and teach. Most of our offerings are free, and we do not require paid membership. Donations keep us going!

Our offerings over the years have included two major conferences with national speakers and teachers; public readings on the street and on air; workshops for writers in all categories from poetry to journalism to publishing, and everything in between; community outreach; slam poetry contests; stage performance; open mic opportunities; a podcast offering in-depth interviews with local and regional guests; cohosting Lit Radio on KAFM Community Radio; a robust monthly newsletter with info from across Western Colorado; and casual monthly get-togethers to foster writer connections. We also published an anthology in 2025, *Western Colorado Voices*.

Sign up for our newsletter on our website.

- Website link: <https://westerncoloradowriters.org/>.
- June newsletter link: <https://mailchi.mp/e5a9c6dccbe8/june2026newsletter>.
- Anthology link: <https://www.amazon.com/Western-Colorado-Voices-Anthology-Fiction/dp/B0F9MNGKTB/>



Colorado National Monument, courtesy NPS.gov

Photography takes an instant out of time, altering life by holding it still." - Dorothea Lange

North Rim Campground Reopens



Just in time for the summer camping season, the campground at the **North Rim of the Grand Canyon** reopened June 1. The campground had been closed since a fire in 2025, which also destroyed the North Rim's historic lodge and other structures. Online reservations are available through [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov).

Showers will remain closed through 2026, according to the National Park Service, potable water is not available in the campground but can be purchased at the nearby Aramark General Store, and portable toilets are available for campground users.

"Nestled among ponderosa pines and aspens at 8,200 feet, the North Rim Campground offers a peaceful and scenic basecamp for exploring the North Rim's trails, viewpoints, and spectacular canyon vistas," according to the park service's website.

All paved roads on the North Rim are now open, providing access to viewpoints, but some trails, including the Bright Angel Point Trail, remain closed. For additional information see <https://www.nps.gov/grca/learn/news/2026-north-rim-summer-season-access.htm>.

(Photo courtesy NPS.gov.)

Teddy Roosevelt Library Opens July 4

The National Park Service has announced that it is loaning artifacts and other materials to the new **Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library**, located at the entrance to Theodore Roosevelt National Park in Medora, North Dakota, the only national park named after a person.

"Theodore Roosevelt's leadership launched the American conservation movement and the national park system we know today," said Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, adding "By sharing these historic artifacts and stories we are helping connect new generations to Roosevelt's legacy."

Items that will be on display in the library include Roosevelt's Rough Rider uniform from the Spanish American War in 1898, his campaign speech and eyeglass case from 1912, when Roosevelt survived an assassination attempt, and his compass.

A series of special events are planned for the library's opening. See [nps.gov/thro](https://www.nps.gov/thro).

Stay for the Blue Angels!



Following the conference, the U.S. Navy Blue Angels will be performing their airshow on Saturday and Sunday. For more information, visit <https://www.gjairshow.com>. *(Photo courtesy NPS.gov.)*

Writer's Corner

The Trouble with Lightning Bugs

by Virginia Parker Staat

"The difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the difference between the lightning and the lightning bug." ~Mark Twain

It was twilight. David and I were sitting on the front porch of our new little cabin, and lo and behold, I saw a sight I hadn't seen since I was a child. Lightning bugs! Well, we Texans call them fireflies, but they are one and the same critter.

These tiny winged beetles have the unique ability to light up their rear-ends. I discovered during research that by regulating the amount of oxygen intake, these bugs can modulate the flash they produce. Each species has a different flash code to attract its respective mate. (See firefly.org for more information.) To my dismay, I also learned that fireflies are becoming endangered.

Watching the fireflies reminded me of a Mark Twain quote about finding the right word. Twain believed that finding the right word controls what the reader feels, including mood, pace, and temperature. He considered the right word to be powerful, like lightning versus the pale comparison of an almost right word being the soft glow of a lightning bug.

I have personally experienced the difference between a lightning versus lightning bug moment. Years ago I wrote a short story for a contest and won first place. The story was published in a literary journal. Unfortunately, the editor felt a word I had chosen would not be understood by the journal's readers. She changed my word *huzzahed* to *cheered*. As far as I was concerned, she took lightning and turned it into a lightning bug. The experience still stings.

In my humble opinion, this editor fell into a trap explained by Roy Peter Clark in his book *Writing Tools*: "Too often, writers suppress their vocabularies in a misguided attempt to lower the level of language for a general audience. Obscure words should be defined by text or made clear from context. But the reading vocabulary of the average citizen is larger than the writing vocabulary of the typical author. As a result, scribes who choose their words from a deeper well attract special attention from readers..."

How do we know we have found the right word? Pulitzer Prize-nominated journalist Burton

Cole explains, "You cannot make the green twinkle of the bug to explode off the page like the electric shock of the lighting." He offers examples to find the right words: Words must fit the story. As an example, if it is a scary story, use scary words. Words must fit your character. Is your character presented as a lightning character or a more timid lightning bug? Your words must fit the scene. They must fit your tone. Cole concludes, "You have a whole tool box full of words. Keep playing until you find the lightning — or lightning bug — that illuminates the picture. Then dance to the thunder."

As a result of our recent encounter with fireflies, David and I have decided to apply for a Firefly Habitat certification. The hard part? We are currently trying to catch one of the little buggers to type the kind of firefly species we have and submit an observation. It seemed so easy to catch them when I was young. Now? They sure seem to fly much faster. Or, perhaps, I should say they are lightning fast.

Election Results

R MOWP has a new treasurer - **Eric Glassco** from Las Cruces, New Mexico. Congratulations Eric, and Thank You! As usual with uncontested elections voter turnout was low - only 15 of you voted - but that's OK, it's still legal.

Also, you'll note that we did not nominate a secretary. It needs to be someone who is likely to be at conference meetings and is willing and able to take minutes. Any volunteers? Contact Don Laine, info@rmowp.org.

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