
ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTDOORS

A Newsletter for Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers

RMOWP Heads to Taos!

It's now official: The 2025 annual conference of Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers will be in Taos, New Mexico, **September 14-17**, with headquarters at Taos Tennis, next to Quail Ridge Resort on New Mexico 150 (Taos Ski Valley Road).

That's Sunday through Wednesday, and tentative plans call for a board meeting Sunday afternoon and the opening reception and presentation of contest submissions Sunday evening. The conference concludes Wednesday evening with the banquet and awards ceremony, and in between we'll have workshops, programs, field trips to scenic and historic sites, and some free time to explore the Taos area on your own.

Among activities in the planning stages are a half-day float trip on the Rio Grande and a guided walk to see petroglyphs (plus great views and maybe wildlife) in the Orilla Verde Recreation Area, part of the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument. We would like to arrange a guided tour of Taos Pueblo, maybe have a meal along the Rio Grande, and possibly get into the high country.

Quail Ridge is a condominium resort and a possible lodging choice, and there are also numerous air B&Bs and other lodging possibilities nearby, including in the town of Taos.

Stay tuned! We'll keep you posted through rmowp.org, this newsletter, and maybe even an email or two.



*Scenes from Taos: San Francisco de Asis
Church in Ranchos de Taos, Taos
Mountain, Yucca near Taos. Text and
photos by Don Laine.*

President's Column



RMOWP President, Linda Haehnle

HAPPY NEW YEAR !!!
As we look forward to welcoming 2025, its always exciting to anticipate something 'NEW'...

Instead of setting expectations that might fall short this year, psychologists recommend setting aspirations —

Saying these somewhat softer intentions tend to be longer lasting and are more likely to be achieved.

What are your aspirations for this 'NEW' year??

May this 'NEW' year bring a renewed sense of hope, continued good health, and a wealth of positive opportunities... along with interesting and fun adventures to each and every one of you! ~Linda

The Roaming View on Facebook

RMOWP's Vice President, Steve Cochrane, has opened a Facebook photography group called The Roaming View. Steve plans to post a photography assignment twice a month. His last assignment featured black and white photography. The site is open to all types of photography.

To post a photo, use the comment section of the post assignment. You are welcome to post on past assignments also.

You must have a Facebook account to take part in the assignments. You will need to join the group and answer two questions. For more information and to join the group, follow the link to (see <https://www.facebook.com/groups/theroamingview/>).



2nd Place Novice Images, June Wolfe

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Writing Best of Show 2024

Aliy Zirkle 2016 Iditarod Sled Dog Race, by Judy Lehmkuhl

INCOMING!!! The shout rings out. It is 5:30 am and twenty degrees below zero Fahrenheit. The watcher on the river bluff spots a light in the darkness, still miles away. He sends a companion to warn us. We probably have 10-15 minutes to prepare.

The Galena Iditarod Check Station springs into action. Coffee hot? Check. Sled ready with the musher's pre-mailed supplies? Check. Someone volunteer to take the sledload down to the lot? Check. Straw for the dogs to bed down on? Check. Box with 12 bottles of Heet fuel? Check. Bucket of hot water? Check. Maybe that is why they call it a check station!

It seems the entire village is on hand to welcome Aliy Zirkle as the first musher of 2016 to reach Galena. Children swarm around the huge piles of snow shoved back from the parking lot. Elders drink coffee and chat inside the Community Tribal Hall turned Iditarod Central. And the rest of us wait, bundled for the cold, jiggling in anticipation.

Suddenly, surprising me even though I am anticipating it, searching for it — a headlight appears. The winter quiet is broken by barking village dogs, cheering and clapping spectators lining the road, and cries of “Hike! Gee! Gee! Haw!” as the team fairly flies up the river bank. Dogs' eyes reflect a green spark as they swing along the road and into the flood-light lit parking lot. “Whoa!” They pull to a stop at the bale of straw where the official checker records the musher's name, the arrival time, the number of dogs (information which I will later enter on a large wall chart, and Radio Communications people send back and ahead to the other checkpoints). The dogs are still excited, biting the ice and scratching and rolling in the snow. “Aliy! Welcome to Galena! How is the trail? Will you be staying? Do you want to declare an 8 or 24?” (Rest time required by the Iditarod Trail Committee and taken within certain parameters at the musher's discretion.)

“Follow that person in the orange vest. He will lead you to a place to park your team down that small hill onto Alexander Lake. Your supplies are already there. There is a bucket of hot water and more available from a hose in the entryway. Is there anything else you need?”

As the dog team rushes down the hill, children tumble and follow along, we volunteers and onlookers closing in behind. Following the headlight of the guide, Aliy pulls her team parallel into her assigned spot and stomps in the snowhook to secure her sled. She stretches out the dogline, sinks another hook into the far end to keep the dogs from tangling or wrangling. Loosening the necklines, she gives each pair of dogs a large flake of straw which they immediately paw into a snug bed, curl up, and stick their noses under their tails. Rummaging through the sled bag, ripping open the supply bags, Aliy produces food and water dishes, snacks, and takes the time to pet and thank each dog, remove their booties (those who haven't removed their own!), appraise their condition, provide blankets, water, and prepare them for a much needed rest. Quickly she sets up an alcohol stove, fueled with the bottles of Heet, fetches another bucket of hot water from the building, and prepares a warm meal of kibble, meat and fish. The dogs greet this with excitement and eat eagerly, then look to see if there is any left in another bowl within stretching distance. Patience, there will be more!

Each of the dogs is checked out by veterinarians who volunteer for the race, some traveling from checkpoint to checkpoint just ahead of the teams. They massage sore muscles, wrap wrists and legs for warmth and support, take temperatures and body samples, apply ointment and administer medications. Each musher carries a book detailing the dogs health. Are the dogs eating well, staying hydrated, eyes bright, alert and eager? Fit to continue the race?

Only after the all-important dogs have been cared for, does Aliy return to the community hall, to take care of her own personal needs and greet us, her friends and admirers. Tired as she is from the 50 mile long run from Ruby, and before that, the three days and over 500 miles from the official race start on Willow Lake north of Anchorage, she is always smiling and cordial and especially interactive with the children. Hot drinks and plentiful food await her...not only the food sent out by the Iditarod Trail Committee and cooked by volunteers, but also crockpot after crockpot of village food. There are another 60 some mushers behind Aliy, who will be arriving over the next three or four days. Some will stay for a while, some will grab their supplies and run on through, all will be welcomed, well-cared for, and well-fed. *(Sled Dog Race, Continued on Page 4)*

Writing Best of Show (continued)

Sled Dog Race (Continued from Page 3)

Finally, Aliy can take advantage of the curtained off section of the hall and seek rest for herself. Sleep is not easy in the bright, noisy, people-filled hall but exhaustion soon claims her.

The sun rises, bathing the scene with golden light, catching the tops of the birch trees rimmed in frost. There is not much heat to the sun this early in the day; it might warm up to 10 below later in the afternoon. This is perfect weather for sled dog racing. The snow is squeaky, crisp and firm, the trail fast. The dogs can run without overheating. Should it get warmer, the snow will get punchy and sticky, and many mushers will choose to spend the daylight hours resting, letting the sleeping dogs enjoy the warmth, and wait until after sunset to join the race again. Since it is less than half-way through the race, and weather cool, Aliy elects to spend only eight hours in Galena. She will take the longer break farther down the Yukon River, before leaving it for the coast and the long run to the finish line in Nome.

After a few hours of rest, she is up and feeding her dogs, preparing them to run again. All are healthy and happy; none need to be dropped and returned to Anchorage. People are milling about the dog lot, petting the dogs that are friendly, taking pictures, talking with the mushers. Back inside, Aliy takes time for a leisurely breakfast with us, chatting with friends.

But soon she is pulling on her winter gear and parka. Time to clean up and repack the sled. Replace a worn runner. Stow whatever might be needed; some extra straw, snacks for dog and human. The rest goes in a drop bag or a return bag, to be sorted by the volunteers later. Check and tighten lines. Booties on the dogs. Bred to be sled dogs, they catch her excitement and are clearly more than ready to go whenever she is.

One last check with the race officials, noting time of departure and number of dogs out, and she is ready. The dogs are jumping and barking and howling, pulling on their lines, trading places and tangling themselves. Patiently Ally sorts them out, pulls the snow hook. "HIKE!" She guides the eager team through the lot (which now contains a number of other teams who have arrived while she was sleeping) and back onto the Iditarod

Trail. As she clears the incline on the opposite side of the lot, we seize our rakes and shovels to clean up the used straw and whatever the dogs have left behind—ready for the next Iditarod musher into Galena.

Good-bye Aliy. Safe travels. See you in Nome.

(Aliy Zirkle finished Iditarod 2016 in 3rd place, in spite of being attacked by a drunken snowmobiler enroute to Nulato.)



1st Black and White, Beto Gutierrez, Cranes in Flight



2nd Black and White, Ron Belak Leopard in a Tree

Writer's Corner

A Circuitous Path to Becoming a Writer

by Ron Belak

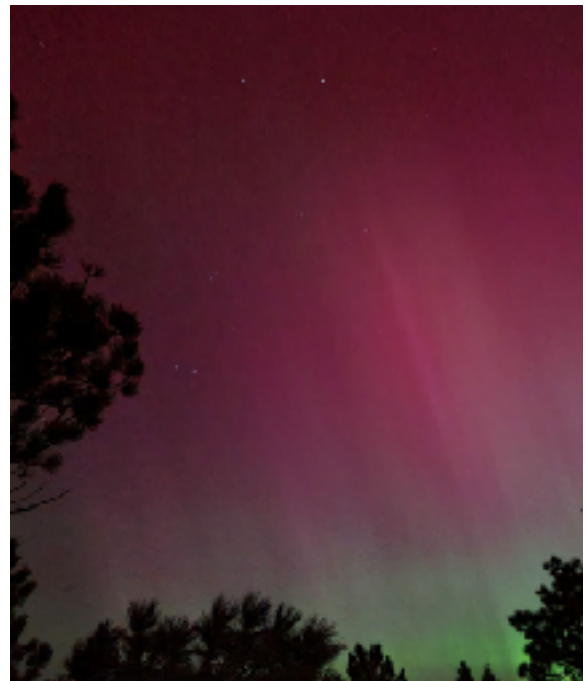
“So, you just finished your MFA in creative writing. What are you going to do now?” This was the opening sentence in an article appearing in the newsletter of an esteemed New York-based writers’ association. In this article, the author offered advice, encouragement and career counseling to newly minted aspiring novelists. Yes, I belong to this association, but my master’s degree is in a subject as far from the fine arts as one can imagine—it’s in geology. I was employed for 30 years as an exploration geologist and a natural resource analyst. Yet I consider myself an accomplished writer, having published 100 magazine articles and written two books.

My road to becoming a writer took a sinuous and sometimes tortuous path. I fell behind in reading comprehension early in my schooling but eventually came to enjoy reading. Throughout my primary and secondary education, my teachers taught me proper sentence construction, vocabulary and how to write a paragraph. Nevertheless, I did not warm to literature. I hated Shakespeare in high school and despised poetry. I only took one English class in college, but many of my geology classes had term papers, so I did get adequate writing practice. In graduate school, I had to write a lengthy thesis, which I subsequently published in a major scientific journal.

Scientific writing, however, is much different from what your average reader envisions as entertainment. Most readers would consider it dry, poorly structured and often incomprehensible. I agree. It’s on par with government reports, but 23 years of writing and editing these reports really taught me how to write. The federal agency I worked for stressed clear and concise writing in the deductive style—a manner in which each paragraph starts with a powerful charge sentence that tells the reader the main point of the paragraph. This makes it easy for the reader. While this style of writing works well for reports and the type of writing I do, that is “where to” and “how to” outdoor articles, it is not a recipe for the great American novel. For example, if one writes a murder mystery, one does

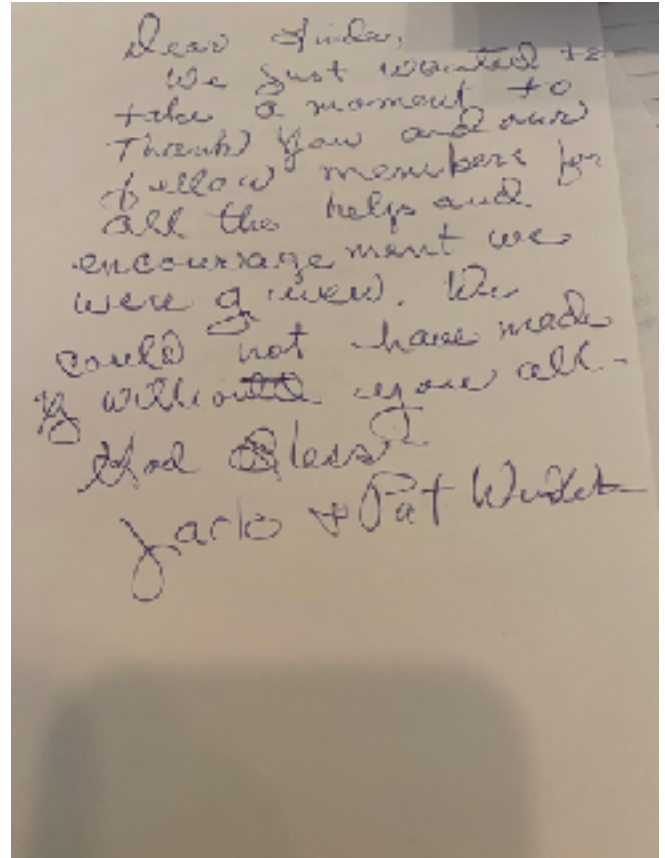
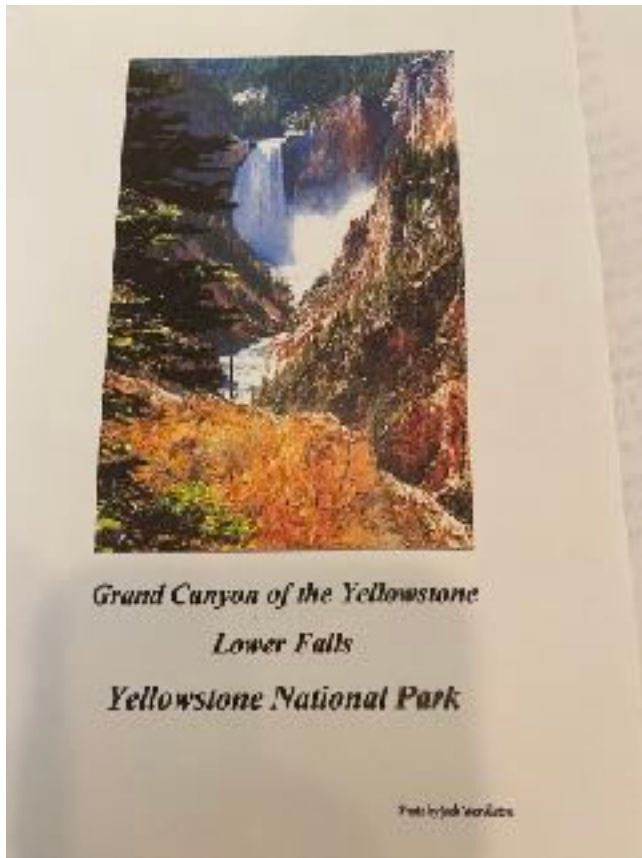
I write mostly to educate people. I loved assisting in the teaching of undergraduate classes and probably would have pursued an academic career if it were not for my graduate advisor insisting that I write a dissertation on trace fossils and learn German. I’m not sure which one would have been worse. I hope by educating people on how and where to fish, backcountry ski, watch birds, and backpack, I will instill in readers a greater appreciation for the backcountry, especially wilderness areas, which are all on federal lands. If people appreciate these areas, they will fight to protect them. Wilderness areas can only be created by Congress and are not necessarily forever. They can be just one corrupt or self-serving Congress away from being abolished.

I also write because people pay me to write. Not that I get rich doing so, but the money I earn buys more outdoor equipment, cameras and laptops so that I can continue writing. I don’t write just because I enjoy it. Often it is a task to get started writing an assignment, but once I get started, the creative juices flow. And isn’t that what writing is all about?



3rd Natural Phenomena, Judy Lehmkuhl, Aurora

Member News



RMOWP President Linda Haehnle shared this letter she received from Pat and Jack Wendleton, thanking everyone for helping them participate in the 2024 RMOWP conference in First Davis, Texas. Jack and Pat rode Amtrak to the conference from their home in Missouri and were able to enjoy their getaway and reconnecting with old friends.

National Park Service Announces 2025 Free Days

The National Park Service has announced six days of free admission during 2025. The practice officially began in 2004 with the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, which called for free admission to all properties managed by NPS on days that were deemed "days of celebration and commemoration."

For 2025, you don't pay admission fees on the following days:

- Jan 20 - Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- April 19 - First day of National Park Week

- June 19 - Juneteenth National Independence Day
- August 4 - Great American Outdoors Act Signing Day
- September 27 - National Public Lands Day
- November 11 - Veterans Day

The number of free days varies by year. Although entrance fees are waived, there are still fees for services such as camping reservations, tours, and boat launching.

Great Backyard Bird Count



The 28th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count is scheduled for February 14-17. Visit birdcount.org for more information.

The presence of a single bird can change everything for one who appreciates them.
-Julie Zickefoose, *Saving Femima: Life And Love With A Hard-Luck Jay*

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Rare Bird



Summer Tanager in Winter

photo and text by Virginia Staar

Have you ever become a citizen scientist and participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count? It's great fun. David and I particularly enjoy it because we have worked for over 30 years to turn our backyard into a certified backyard habitat. In 1991 we began with six species of birds and currently have over 25 species visiting our yard.

The most notable of our feathered friends is a Summer tanager who has decided to overwinter with us rather than migrate to Central or South America. He is so notable that he is listed as a rare bird on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Great Backyard Bird Count website. The tanager first appeared as an adolescent with his mother about five years ago and has continued to winter here ever since.

In 2021, during what Texans call our infamous "snowmageddon" (when snow stayed on the ground in the Houston area for five days), the Great Backyard Bird Count was scheduled. As usual, I entered our bird species count online, including the tanager. To my surprise, I received an email from Cornell suggesting that I had not identified the bird correctly. The gentleman who wrote told me the tanager was extremely rare for my area, particularly in winter. He continued, mentioning that I had probably misidentified the bird and that it was simply a cardinal.

I sent photos, mostly of my red bird at the bird feeder, eating meal worms. When I received a reply back from the skeptic, his only words were, "It looks like you spoil him."

More 2024 Contest Photos



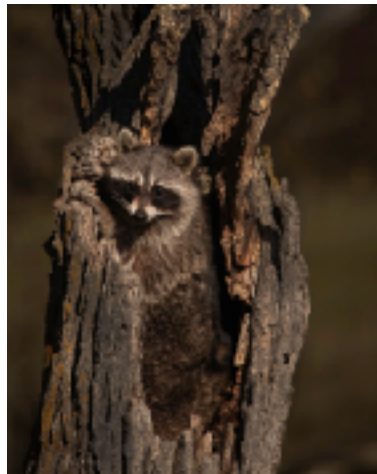
2nd *People in Nature*, Beto Gutierrez, Blessed Sunrise



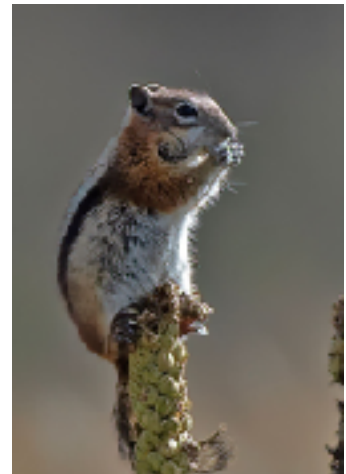
2nd *Scenics*, David Staatz, Dempster in Fall



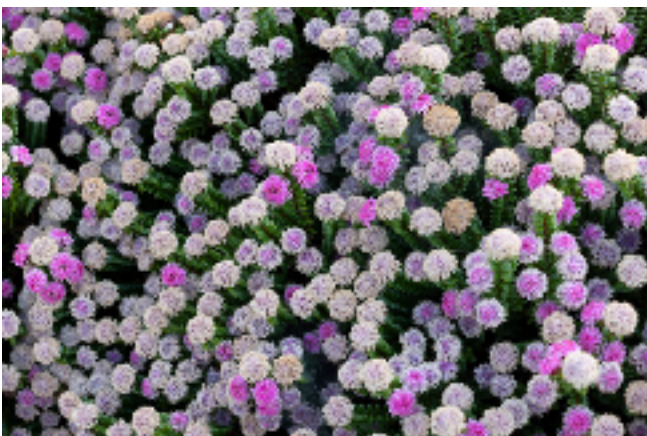
3rd *Flora*, Frank Zurey, Ivy



2nd *Fauna*, Randy Watkins, Raccoon Morning



2nd *Images from Last Conference*, Beto Gutierrez, Chipmunk with Munchies



3rd *Flora*, Steve Cochrane, Field of Flowers



3rd *Fauna*, Buddy Green, Great Kiskadees-Adult Feeding Dragonfly