



SUMMER  
2023

# TETON STEWARDS

NEWSLETTER OF THE GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION



Photo: Ranveer





# REIMAGINING TAGGART LAKE: A CAMPAIGN TO RENEW GRAND TETON'S MOST POPULAR YEAR-ROUND DESTINATION

**J**ust a little more than one mile from the road lies a breathtaking glacial lake at the foot of the towering Teton Range. What makes this place special—and unique—is that the roughly three-mile round trip excursion is accessible for everyone: families with both young children and elderly parents, visitors who only have a half day to explore the park, or more experienced recreationists looking to discover the vast backcountry.

Taggart Lake Trailhead is Grand Teton National Park's most-frequented, year-round destination and a place for all visitors to experience first-hand the beauty and grandeur of this iconic national park.

In the summer, scenic hiking routes lead through aspen and pine forests to panoramic lakeshores and numerous alpine objectives. During winter, the groomed Teton Park Road and the nearby moraines that give way to canyons, ridges, and peaks beyond offer a range of seasonal expe-

periences for snowshoers, skiers, and mountaineers. In the spring and fall, particularly on sunny days, visitors using all forms of human-powered locomotion enjoy the Teton Park Road during those few special weeks when the asphalt is dry and the road is closed to vehicles. All of these experiences begin and end at the Taggart Lake Trailhead—a gateway to destinations that are loved and enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities every month of the year.





Above: Visitors enjoy the Taggart Lake area throughout the year. From hiking to skiing to simply enjoying the views, this destination has a little something for everyone.

Photo Left Page—Ed Riddell, Others—Ryan Sheets and Mark Berry

Taggart Lake Trailhead is many visitors' first stop north of the Moose entrance station. The beauty and popularity of the area, along with a significant increase in park visitation in the past ten years, has overwhelmed the site. The sixty-two car parking lot is commonly beyond capacity, forcing people to park along the adjacent roadside. Arriving visitors experience surprise and disappointment at the diminished aesthetics of a line of cars and event-style port-a-johns. Eighty-seven percent of visitors surveyed said they experienced some level of crowding and had concerns about safety. It is clear that current facilities are not meeting demand or visitor needs.

Once away from the cars, crowds disperse and it's not as congested as conditions at the trailhead suggest. However, measurable impacts exist in the form of deteriorating trail sections, user-created paths, and denuded areas along Taggart and Bradley lakes' shorelines.

For more than a year, and with the support of the Foundation, Grand Teton has been studying what is occurring at the site and what might be done to improve conditions for visitors while minimizing their impact on park resources. Now, a comprehensive partnership project is in focus. *Reimagining Taggart Lake* will address

*continued*





Above: Current conditions at Taggart Lake. Photos: Ryan Sheets and Mark Berry

resource impacts, improve parking and trailhead facilities, educate and engage visitors, and create new accessible hiking experiences at a well-loved and spectacular place in Grand Teton—Taggart Lake. Renewing this area and its network of trails will provide enjoyment and preserve this extraordinary mountain landscape for generations to come. This popular destination is worthy of significant investment and the time is now before damage to the area becomes even more extensive.

Grand Teton National Park Foundation will raise at least \$6 million, which will leverage more than \$3 million from the National Park Service. Private, philanthropic support will create outcomes at Taggart Lake that would not otherwise be possible. Please call 307-732-0629 or visit [gtnpf.org](http://gtnpf.org) for more information. Thank you!

# THE PROJECT

## AT THE TRAILHEAD—

*Creating a sense of arrival by:*

- Improving circulation and expanding the parking area
- Updating and adding trailhead amenities for visitors to use during all seasons
- Enhancing orientation and wayfinding information
- Connecting visitors to the natural and human history of the place with thoughtful interpretive elements
- Restoring disturbed areas
- Expanding greenspace surrounding the multi-purpose pathway
- Adding picnic tables, benches, and other opportunities for people to rest and enjoy the views
- Constructing properly sized restroom facilities that support year-round visitation

## BEYOND THE TRAILHEAD—

*Renewing backcountry routes by:*

- Redesigning trail layout to avoid park infrastructure and enhance the hiking experience, including improvements to circulation
- Refining wayfinding and signage at key junctions
- Identifying options to bury power lines that currently take away from scenic view sheds
- Restoring areas impacted by past waterline construction activities
- Defining lakeshore access and viewing areas with the intention of accommodating visitors, minimizing impacts, and protecting natural resources

## *Improving accessibility for all by:*

- Creating universally accessible improvements throughout the trailhead plaza
- Exploring options for new frontcountry loop trails to provide accessibility for visitors with limited mobility
- Following NPS Universal Design and Accessibility standards to ensure that the trail to Taggart Lake is usable by everyone to the greatest extent possible



## Message from President **LESLIE MATTSON**



**In 2011, former Grand Teton National Park Superintendent Mary Gibson Scott called me on the phone. The new Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center had opened, our Youth Conservation Program was in its sixth year, and the Foundation was starting to envision how we would continue supporting our backyard park. Mary had a new challenge—grizzly bears.**

The population inside of Grand Teton was growing and bears were beginning to frequent the roadside, causing traffic jams and endangering visitors. Her solution was simple, she had created a volunteer team to help manage and educate people while conserving bears. The Wildlife Brigade had been in place since 2008, but they needed additional resources to address the growing bear population. The Foundation began providing funding to this team in 2012 and has proudly supported the team ever since. The group of dedicated volunteers facilitates unprecedented wildlife viewing opportunities for park visitors while contributing thousands of hours of time annually.

The Wildlife Brigade has become a critical element of park operations and a model that has been replicated in national parks across the country, including our neighbors to the north in Yellowstone. The success of this team has led to the creation of numerous other Foundation-funded volunteer efforts—String Lakers, Snake River Ambassadors, Jenny Lake Ranger Backcountry Volunteers, and Nordic Ambassadors—that aim to educate visitors and protect resources throughout Grand Teton. In 2022, the park had a total of 540 volunteers, in these programs and others, who provided 40,542 hours of service. We are grateful to all of the individuals who contribute their time and our supporters who make these programs possible.

With summer in full-swing, we are pleased to see our partnership work underway in Grand Teton. From youth programs to glacier research and Teton Crest Trail renewal to Mormon Row preservation, our impact is far-reaching and touches nearly every visitor who sets foot in this park. None of this would be possible without our wonderful donors. Thank you for your passion for this unbelievable place—we are grateful for your continued investment in our work in Grand Teton National Park!

Leslie Mattson

*Leslie*  
President

## *In Remembrance*



**On May 27, Grand Teton lost an amazing advocate and friend, Lisa Claudy Fleischman.**

Lisa was involved with Grand Teton National Park Foundation for over a decade. She served on the resource council from 2009 to 2011 and the board of directors from 2011 to 2020. Lisa was a dedicated ally of the park. Her love

of the wildlife, the landscape, and the cultural stories that shaped Grand Teton inspired us all. Lisa will be deeply missed.

Two of our dedicated supporters, **Bill Givens** and **Ann Ruehr**, passed away this winter. Bill served on the Foundation's board of directors from 2010 to 2016 and was instrumental in creating an avenue for private philanthropy to support the Jenny Lake Rangers. Ann was passionate about conserving the park for future generations to enjoy. Their kindness and generosity will be greatly missed, and their legacy will continue to impact a place that they both deeply cared about—Grand Teton National Park.





# THE WILDLIFE BRIGADE: PROTECTING WILD ANIMALS AND VISITORS IN GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

**“How did you know the bear was here?” It’s one of the most common questions we are asked. Most visitors are surprised to learn the real answer. No, it’s not from collar data. Not every bear is collared. No, there isn’t an app. These bears are truly wild. The truth is that a traffic jam created by excited wildlife watchers (aka: a bear jam) often tips us off.**

It doesn’t take much to start a bear jam. One vehicle parked in the middle of the roadway can do that. One car turns into two and then twenty and then two hundred. Doors fly open. Eager visitors scramble out. A crowd of smiles, cheers, and maybe even a few tears. It’s the junior ranger in awe watching cubs wrestle in a field of wildflowers. It’s the retiree who spent her working years on a factory floor, yearning for the day she would visit the national parks. It’s the traveler from the other side of the world who is visiting this continent for the first time yet already knows the story of our most-renowned grizzly bear. For those of us in the yellow vests,

bear jams are an adrenaline-filled, hair-pulling, deeply rewarding, headshaking, can’t-get-enough experience.

Since 2008, the Wildlife Brigade has strived to provide exceptional wildlife viewing opportunities for park visitors while allowing wild animals unimpeded access to habitat and also providing for human safety. With support from Grand Teton National Park Foundation, the program has grown tremendously since its inception. Today, the Wildlife Brigade is composed of a bear biologist, two seasonal wildlife management rangers, and over thirty dedicated volunteers.





The Wildlife Brigade has proven to be an essential volunteer team in Grand Teton. Their expertise in managing bear jams, educating visitors, and protecting resources has made them a mainstay in park operations.

*Photos: Grizzly Bears–Danita Delimont, Black Bear–JH Huebnerk, others–Ryan Sheets and NPS*



This team provides coverage seven days a week during the summer, from sunrise to sunset.

In 2022, the team responded to 840 jams for a diversity of species ranging from black and grizzly bears to moose, elk, river otters, and great gray owls. In addition to facilitating safe viewing, Wildlife Brigade staff patrol developed areas to secure unattended bear attractants (e.g., food, coolers, etc.), educate visitors about how to stay safe in bear country, and partner with other agencies on local community events. The team also staffs a bear education trailer in the park to talk

about bear ecology and safety while demonstrating the use of bear spray. In total, Wildlife Brigade volunteers contributed 12,105 hours to wildlife conservation efforts in 2022.

Visitor use patterns and the bear population in Grand Teton have changed dramatically since the Wildlife Brigade formed fifteen years ago. In 2008, it was uncommon to see a grizzly bear in the southern half of the park. Today, grizzly bears frequent all corners of Grand Teton National Park, and there are more wildlife watchers hoping to catch a glimpse. The Wildlife Brigade continues to adapt to these changes by piloting new strategies, such as dedicated no stopping zones and new communication tools, while also increasing staff training and capacity.

For many visitors, bear jams may be the only opportunity they have to see wild bears in natural habitat. As we look to the future, the challenge will be maintaining a balance of facilitating viewing opportunities while minimizing disturbance. We look forward to our continued partnership with the Foundation to succeed in these efforts.

*This article was written by Grand Teton National Park Bear Biologist Justin Schwabedissen. For more information and to support this essential volunteer team, call 307-732-0629 or visit [gtnpf.org](http://gtnpf.org). Thank you!*





# SECONDS COUNT: AN INCREDIBLE RESCUE BY GRAND TETON'S JENNY LAKE RANGERS

**The call came in at 8:02 am. It was a clear, sunny August day in Grand Teton National Park.**

Earlier that morning, at 2 am, two young men from the Salt Lake City area began their attempt of the Grand Traverse—one of North America's most famous routes for highly skilled climbers that links Teewinot, Mount Owen, the Grand Teton, Middle Teton, South Teton, Cloudveil, and Nez Perce. The pair had summited the first

peak before sunrise and were moving along the technical ridgeline toward Mount Owen. Then, the unexpected happened. One of them slipped and fell approximately 300 feet down steep, rocky terrain into Cascade Canyon. He was unresponsive, and his friend immediately called 911. "My partner fell off the Grand Traverse,

he has fractured his skull and is incredibly badly hurt. I'm worried he might die," the partner told the dispatcher. At 8:07 am, the dispatcher paged all Jenny Lake Rangers to go to the Lupine Meadows Rescue Cache, initiating an emergency response to try to save this young man's life.





The Jenny Lake Rangers train extensively throughout the year, including multiple short-haul exercises to be sure they can respond quickly and efficiently when someone's life is on the line. Photos: NPS

## **“The unresponsive climber landed at the rescue cache at 9:38 am, one hour and thirty-six minutes after his friend had called for help.”**

The Jenny Lake Rangers are Grand Teton's team of elite search and rescue professionals. They are tasked with protecting resources and visitors in the park's vast backcountry. Their duties include walking trails, talking to visitors, assessing route conditions, and providing general resource protection. Search and rescue is their primary function, although it only accounts for about ten-percent of their time. They will drop everything else to respond to someone in need—it is their most important responsibility.

After receiving the page from the dispatcher, the Jenny Lake Rangers quickly assembled at the rescue cache to make a plan. This was a serious situation—the young man was unresponsive, seconds and minutes could mean life or death. The team determined that a short-haul rescue was needed if they were going to save the climber.

Short-haul is a helicopter rescue technique that flies rescuers into steep, alpine areas by attaching them to a rope that is anchored to the bottom of the aircraft.

When weather conditions cooperate, it provides rangers with the ability to reach people in minutes instead of hours. Although it does not come without risk—dangling hundreds of feet below a helicopter while flying through canyons and near high peaks is dangerous. The Jenny Lake Rangers complete short-haul trainings ten times during the summer season and push themselves to practice in highly technical areas, knowing that when someone is severely injured they must be confident in their skills.

“Six times twenty, so 120 beats per minute. You're doing awesome buddy, come on, you've got this,” the climbing partner said as he shared vital signs of his unresponsive friend with the dispatcher. The dispatcher had remained on the line for nearly an hour, talking the partner through ways to support his friend, helping him track vital signs, and keeping him focused on the task at hand.

“We knew this young man was actively dying,” Jenny Lake District Ranger Scott Guenther said. “We were making deci-

sions as fast as we could, we had to move quickly.”

The helicopter landed at the rescue cache at 8:42 am, and two rangers jumped in immediately to complete a recon flight. Flying up Cascade Canyon, the team located the injured climber, finalized their short-haul strategy, and then dropped the two rescuers nearby on Peak 11,840. The helicopter returned to Lupine Meadows and rangers on-the-ground quickly rigged the aircraft for a short-haul. Once ready, the pilot flew back to Peak 11,840, picked up the two rescuers, and inserted them to the accident site at 9:02 am. The helicopter then returned directly to the rescue cache, picked up two more rangers and the rescue litter, and delivered them to the accident site as well. The pilot hovered nearby while the four rangers loaded the patient into the litter. They signaled the helicopter to return, secured the patient and one rescuer to the end of the line, and were flown back to Lupine Meadows.

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Left: A ranger manages the short-haul rope as the helicopter leaves Lupine Meadows. Right: Rangers transport a patient in a rescue litter to receive medical treatment. Photos: NPS

The unresponsive climber landed at the rescue cache at 9:38 am, one hour and thirty-six minutes after his friend had called for help. He was brought inside where multiple medics and a doctor were waiting. Just like in an emergency room, injuries were splinted, IV lines started, and he was intubated, further stabilized, and prepared for transport in a medical helicopter.

The young man was flown to Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center. After three weeks in a coma, several surgeries, and countless hours of rehab, he made a full recovery. Without the incredibly fast response of the Jenny Lake Rangers and the park's team of dispatchers and first responders, the outcome could have been entirely different.

This is just one of hundreds of stories from decades of rescues completed by the Jenny Lake Rangers in Grand Teton National Park. The team has averaged eighty-two rescues per year for the last three years. They train in a variety of disciplines annually—law enforcement, fire (structure and wildland), emergency medical services (everyone on the team is at least an EMT, many have higher certifications), and search and rescue, which includes rope work, wheeled litters, aviation, rigging for rescue, and short-haul.

A new focus in recent years has been placed on mental health. The group has started working with a professional who trains them in psychological first aid, the stress continuum, and a formalized check-in process. The main goal is to create a community of support for team

members after responding to a serious accident or fatality.

People have always been—and will continue to be—drawn to this extraordinary place for its easy access to an iconic and rugged mountain environment. Grand Teton National Park and its visitors are lucky to have the highly skilled and extremely dedicated Jenny Lake Rangers ready to answer the call when adventures don't quite go as planned.

*Grand Teton National Park Foundation has supported the Jenny Lake Rangers since 2018. We provide funding for highly specialized trainings; state-of-the-art equipment; public outreach and education; and mental health support services. Visit [gtnpf.org](http://gtnpf.org) or call 307-732-0629 to learn more and support this essential team today.*



# THANK YOU!

**Jenny Lake District Ranger Scott Guenther** retired at the end of May. Scott has been a ranger in Grand Teton since 1992 and led the elite Jenny Lake Rangers starting in 2010. His leadership helped the park's search and rescue team successfully execute hundreds of rescues, providing injured and lost visitors with the support they needed and ultimately saving countless lives. He is a tremendous partner and friend, and we will miss working with him. We wish you all the best in your next adventure, thank you Scott!

*Scott is pictured here with his rescue dog at Delta Lake while searching for a missing person in Grand Teton.*





Photo: Diana Stratton

Message from  
Grand Teton National Park Superintendent  
**CHIP JENKINS**



**This year, we are celebrating a significant event that led to the creation of Grand Teton National Park. A century ago, local leaders were deeply concerned that overdevelopment would harm the values that made Jackson Hole so special.**

In July 1923, community members met with the superintendent of Yellowstone National Park in Maud Noble's cabin along the Snake River. The group sought to preserve the character of Jackson Hole, and they knew it would take active citizen stewardship to do so. This initial meeting laid the foundation for the role private philanthropy has played in preserving this place. This special gathering would become a turning point in the history of Jackson Hole and serve as a catalyst for conservation, one that would eventually lead to the creation of Grand Teton National Park. Private philanthropy continues to play a critical and extremely supportive role in preserving and enhancing this majestic landscape.

Grand Teton is a resource-driven park. We are entrusted with protecting and conserving resources like diverse ecosystems, iconic wildlife, stunning landscapes, free-flowing waters, clean air, and the rich history of people who have called this area home. From that first meeting at Maud Noble's cabin—and into the future—this conservation work depends on active citizen stewardship, as well as the incredible support from Grand Teton National Park Foundation.

We recognize how fortunate we are to have the partner we do in Grand Teton National Park Foundation to support this conservation work. Over the last twenty-five years, the Foundation has

raised over \$100 million to support the work of Grand Teton, and citizen stewards, in caring for this magical place. This support enables us to do instrumental research on wildlife like grizzly bears and moose; to fund the volunteer Wildlife Brigade, which enables visitors to have amazing opportunities to view wildlife in their natural habitat; to mobilize the search and rescue work of the Jenny Lake Rangers to help people in need; and to undertake large capital projects like the revitalization of Taggart Lake. From us to you, thank you for the tremendous support you provide.

*Now, let's hit the trail or go get on the river!*





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