



SUMMER  
2020

# TETON STEWARDS

NEWSLETTER OF THE GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION





# KELLY HAYFIELDS— AMBITIOUS RESTORATION EFFORT AIMS TO RE-WILD AREAS OF GRAND TETON

**J**ackson Hole's early homesteaders settled in the area now known as Mormon Row in Grand Teton National Park, partly because of the unusually deep topsoil there. Beginning in the late 1800s, they converted large swaths of the local sagebrush grasslands to pasture and hay field grasses for agricultural use. These irrigated crops eventually covered more than 4,000 acres and became known as the Kelly Hayfields.

Their preferred crop was smooth brome, a non-native perennial grass well suited to cool, short growing seasons. It provided livestock with good nutrition during its growing stage and could be baled for use during the rest of the year. Historic photos of the area reveal a rich, pastoral landscape in an unusually stunning setting, with the Teton Range as its backdrop.

When the 1950 expansion of Grand Teton enveloped Mormon Row, and as the National Park Service began acquiring its lands in the 1960s, active cultivation gradually diminished. The converted pasture species persisted, however, and compared to native vegetative communities, the unirrigated, nonnative vegetation had little value to bison, elk, sage grouse, and other wildlife, particularly outside of the primary growing season.

Park managers have had long-standing interest in returning the formerly cultivated fields to native sagebrush-grasslands, but the task was daunting, and they lacked necessary resources. But in the 1990s, as ecological stewardship programs grew, visionary park biologists began deliberate assessments of what could be done there and how to go about it.

They began with research out of necessity, because the knowledge needed

to develop an effective strategy did not exist. Through a multi-year, systematic series of small scale, controlled experiments in the pastures, patterns of successful approaches began to emerge, and a course of action was charted. The park formalized its ambitious plan in 2007, and the current effort to restore 4,500 acres of the Kelly Hayfields began.



*A historic photo of the Kelly Hayfields taken from Blacktail Butte and looking north toward Mormon Row. Courtesy National Park Service, Grand Teton National Park, Historic Fire Records, GRTE-00552, Photographer LM Moe*

To date, nearly 1,500 acres are in various stages of restoration, with areas furthest along containing well-established native plant assemblages. Even to the untrained eye, comparing pastures at both ends of the restoration spectrum during the peak of growing season leaves one awestruck. The restored fields are alive with the colors of native flowering plants, and animal tracks and scat attest to the invigorated benefits to

park wildlife. Sage-grouse research data show a dramatic shift from avoidance of the old pastures to heavy use of the restored landscapes, while field observations document heavy use by elk, bison, and pronghorn.

The Kelly Hayfields restoration program is a primary feature of a larger conservation and re-wilding effort for the greater Hayfields area. Its location between the Snake River and Gros Ventre mountains, proximity to Blacktail Butte, and habitat importance to a wide variety of species, offer a remarkable opportunity to restore this area adjacent to expansive sagebrush-steppe landscapes in near pristine condition, including those protected on Antelope Flats.

The Foundation has provided more than \$120,000 to this important project through generous support from private donors, Teton Conservation District, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Concurrent restorative activities—also supported by the Foundation—for Kelly Warm Springs and Ditch Creek, and concerted efforts to stabilize and enhance the Mormon Row Historic District, add considerably to its stature and overall importance, enhancing the ecological function and value of this popular and accessible area to all park visitors.





The re-wilding of nearly 4,500 acres from invasive grasses to native sagebrush-steppe habitat will benefit wildlife that depend on Grand Teton to survive. This includes bison, elk, mule deer, pronghorn, meadowlarks, badgers, and many more.



## RESTORATION PROCESS

- Collection of native plant seeds
- Propagation of native plants and seed off-site
- Removal of existing non-native vegetation
- Replanting with native seeds and plants
- Ongoing control of invasive plants
- Use of temporary fencing when necessary until restored areas can withstand grazing pressure
- Monitoring and reapplication of previous steps when necessary
- Harvesting of native seed from established restoration sites for use on future sites





Message from President  
**LESLIE MATTSON**



**W**hen Grand Teton re-opened to visitors in mid-May, people were eager to breathe the fresh air and experience the wonders of the park first-hand. The mountains, rivers, and wildlife are always incredible during late spring and early summer, but this year seemed more spectacular than ever—the calls of the Western Meadowlark, the fresh blanket of wildflowers, and the celebrity grizzly bear sow known as 399 emerged from her den with four cubs of the year. All of these seasonal changes were a welcome reminder that, despite what is going on in the world, nature persists and is here to inspire and enjoy.

The Foundation officially transferred the Moulton Ranch Cabins—the last privately-held inholding on the Mormon Row Historic District—to Grand Teton. The closing took place on April 1 under very unusual circumstances. Due to the shelter in place order in Teton County, I signed the papers in my car outside of the title company's office (*see photo*).

A private purchaser could have redeveloped the inholding, building up to 10,000 square feet of new construction in this historic district. Instead, the nine existing lodging units on the property will house park employees. We are proud to support Grand Teton by providing more space for their workforce to

live, especially now—they had to reduce their seasonal hires by forty-percent due to new standards that ensure the health and safety of their staff. This would not have been possible without a generous donor who approached us in 2016 when the property was initially listed for sale, we refer to her as Ms. Anonymous. Her philanthropy allowed us to purchase the property.

The majority of our work in Grand Teton is continuing this summer including wildlife research and monitoring, habitat restoration, volunteer programs, trail improvements, and more. The first year of construction as part of our *SNAKE RIVER GATEWAYS* campaign is also underway, see the

article on the next page for details about what to expect at Pacific Creek this season.

All of our work in partnership with Grand Teton is fueled by the passion of people like you. Together we are able to help steward this spectacular landscape and ensure the park we know and love is here for future generations to enjoy. Thank you for your encouragement. I hope you and your family are healthy, safe, and have the opportunity to visit the park soon!

Leslie Mattson

  
President





# SNAKE RIVER GATEWAYS:

## *Work Underway at Pacific Creek*

**F**loating the Snake River's braided channels beneath the Teton Range is an unforgettable experience. The unmatched wildlife viewing, scenic vistas, and recreational opportunities have inspired generations to advocate for the conservation of this incredible resource, leading to its designation as a federally protected Wild and Scenic River in 2009.

Although being on the water is breathtaking, the sites that provide access are experiencing use that they were not designed to sustain. Inadequate launching facilities, poor traffic circulation, eroded river banks, and a variety of safety concerns pose a real challenge for visitors seeking to launch a boat or simply view the river from shore.

Work is underway at Pacific Creek, marking the beginning of *Snake River Gateways*—our multi-year project in partnership with Grand Teton that will enhance access and protect resources along the river in the park. The effort will improve the visitor experience, address unsafe conditions, restore riparian areas, and emphasize accessibility for all. Pacific Creek is the first of three project sites, work

will continue in coming years at Jackson Lake Dam and Moose Landing.

Areas in and around Pacific Creek represent a variety of river conditions and challenges for paddling, fly-fishing, and exploring, as well as serving as a rest stop for visitors travelling in the park by vehicle. Site improvements include:

- **Building a ramp that can be easily maintained each year to eliminate sediment deposition—a current challenge due to the confluence of Pacific Creek and the Snake River just upstream**
- **Creating intuitive traffic flow, adequate rigging and parking areas, and a pedestrian pathway**
- **Designing educational elements and an overlook area**
- **Separating user groups to decrease congestion**

River access at Pacific Creek will be closed to the public starting September 1, allowing construction crews to be as efficient as possible while creating a site that will be used by park visitors well into the future.

The Foundation's goal is to raise \$6.5 million to support improvements at all three sites, with \$4 million raised

to date. Private philanthropy is providing a margin of excellence to the effort that would not be possible otherwise. The Foundation's contributions are also leveraging additional National Park Foundation funds authorized by the National Park Service Centennial Act of 2016, bringing the agency's total contribution to the project to over \$5 million.

For more information and to support the *Snake River Gateways* campaign, visit [www.gtnpf.org/SnakeRiver](http://www.gtnpf.org/SnakeRiver). Thank you!



Conceptual renderings show plans for new signage and a river overlook at the site.







Photo: Diana Stratton

## Message from Grand Teton National Park Acting Superintendent **GOPAUL NOOJIBAIL**



**T**ogether, we continue to navigate uncharted territory as we respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. I recognize that our lives at work and at home have been disrupted to varying degrees of severity. I hope everyone is healthy and safe.

We listened to concerns from our local partners and based on local health guidance, we temporarily closed the park on March 24. This decision was critical to focus on the health and safety of everyone, and to help our local communities manage limited medical facilities and resources.

On May 18, in coordination with public health officials and our community, we began to phase in operations and increase recreational access in the park. The initial phase of the reopening plan focused on basic day-use access for visitors with limited services, followed by a thoughtful and gradual increase in visitor access and services, including access to waterways, visitor centers, and overnight backcountry stays.

Ensuring the health and safety of our employees, volunteers, partners, and

visitors has been and remains our number one priority at Grand Teton National Park. We are continuing to work closely with federal, state, and local health authorities to limit the spread and closely monitor the pandemic.

To that end, we have been very diligent in our examination of each service and facility to ensure our operations are complying with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state and local health guidance. We continue to monitor our operations and maintain close communications with our health partners.

Several mitigations and procedures are in place to protect park staff. We will continue to monitor all park functions and encourage visitors to adhere to CDC guidance for mitigating risks associated with the spread of COVID-19 and take

any additional steps necessary to protect our public health. Summer 2020 will be a dynamic summer, and at any point, if public health guidance shifts, we may need to adjust our operations accordingly.

Through this challenging time, I have been honored to work alongside the professional and resilient employees of Grand Teton National Park, as well as all our volunteers and partners.

I recognize and greatly appreciate the continued support of the Grand Teton National Park Foundation, especially during this pandemic. Your continued support is incredible and always inspires me to know that we truly are a genuine community working together to care for this special place. Now, more than ever, your support means a lot and makes a difference. Thanks!



# BEAR BOXES

**A Special Gift For Your Favorite  
Wildlife Enthusiast**

\$1,500 funds a bear-resistant food storage box in Grand Teton National Park, with a 3 x 5" stainless steel plaque to honor your special person. Your bear box will be installed at one of the park's many frontcountry campgrounds and will help keep Grand Teton's bears wild and visitors safe. Thanks to donors, more than 500 boxes have been installed to date, moving us closer to our goal of installing 1,000 bear boxes throughout Grand Teton National Park.



Visit [www.gtnpf.org/WildTreasures](http://www.gtnpf.org/WildTreasures) to learn more about these life-saving lockers.  
Contact Alex St. Clair at 307-732-0629 or [alex@gtnpf.org](mailto:alex@gtnpf.org) to get your bear box today!

Photo: Diana Stratton

## HORACE ALBRIGHT SOCIETY

*Ensuring the future of Grand Teton National Park Foundation*



### CREATE A CONSERVATION LEGACY TODAY.

*"The Foundation's mission is made possible solely through the generous and widespread support of its individual donors. Our belief is that the Foundation must be assured of future funding to maintain its ability to provide assistance to the unbelievable resource of wildlife, rivers and streams, mountain trails, and cultural heritage that is Grand Teton National Park. We are proud to include Grand Teton in our estate planning and bequests."*

*—Lynne and Van Davis, Horace Albright Society members*

We invite you to consider arranging a gift in your charitable estate plan so that our work to enhance the park's cultural, historic, and natural resources will continue for generations to come. Your will or trust, life insurance policy, and retirement accounts can provide incredible benefits to the organizations you care about. These gifts cost nothing during your lifetime and have long-lasting impact. Ask your financial advisor about tax advantages that come with including the Foundation in your plans for the future. **Thank you!**

Contact Ponteir Sackrey at 307-732-0629 or visit [www.gtnpf.org](http://www.gtnpf.org) to discover ways you can support the Foundation without impacting the way you live today.





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