



MONTANA'S CONSERVATION HEROES

Representing a mix of occupations and approaches, the newest inductees into the Montana Outdoor Hall of Fame embody a common vision of protecting the lands, waters, and wildlife that make Montana the last best place. **By Tom Palmer**

EDITOR'S NOTE: At a public ceremony in Helena last December, 16 conservation heroes—living and deceased—were inducted into the Montana Outdoor Hall of Fame. Nationally renowned conservation leader and author Jim Posewitz of Helena, for years a biologist and conservation advocate with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, founded the hall of fame in 2012 with support from the Montana Historical Society, which verifies the histories and significance of nominees. A volunteer board of representatives from Montana's Outdoor Legacy Foundation, the Montana Wildlife Federation, the Montana Wilderness Association, Montana Trout Unlimited, and FWP select new inductees every two years. The Cinnabar Foundation and NorthWestern Energy are partners in the project. Posewitz, himself a 2016 inductee, introduced the 2018 inductees:



Lewis and Clark at Eagle Creek, 1967. By Thomas Hart Benton. Courtesy of the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis.



Jim Posewitz

When Montana people ratified our Constitution in 1972 it began with: "We the people of Montana (are) grateful to God for the quiet beauty of our state, the grandeur of our mountains, the vastness of our rolling plains...." They did so knowing that within those grand mountains and across those vast plains there lived a richly restored fish and wildlife abundance, a grand collection of waterways flowing fresh and free, and quiet places destined to remain forever wild.

Today, 154 years after the Montana Territory was born, we gather to recognize that these precious outdoor amenities came

to our time carried by individuals who cared, showed up, and stood up on their behalf. They are amenities that, in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "add to the beauty of living and therefore to the joy of life."

The 16 people we recognize tonight are but a small sample of the legions of worthy and deserving Montanans. These people, along with those inducted in 2014 and 2016, came from all facets of Montana society. They include pioneers, politicians, artists, resource managers, grassroots activists, and individual Montanans—people who simply would not allow America's last best place to just slip away. We thank and honor them all.

JOEL CALDWELL

2018 INDUCTEE PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MONTANA OUTDOOR HALL OF FAME



Michel Pablo, Charles A. Allard

MICHEL PABLO
1844-1914
CHARLES A. ALLARD
1852-1896

There was a time when 30 million bison roamed North America. In 1830, mass destruction of the animals began. Two million bison were slaughtered in 1870 alone.

Then came two 19th-century men born to Indian mothers who worked together to save the buffalo—and by extension, perhaps, their native culture—from extinction.

In 1873, reservation ranchers Charles A. Allard and Michel Pablo purchased several

orphaned calves that had been brought over the Continental Divide to the Flathead Valley.

Allard was a chatterbox, an effusive salesman. Pablo, a pensive agriculturist and businessman. They made a perfect team.

They turned their buffalo out in the fence-free Flathead and Mission Valleys.

While their intent was entrepreneurial, they also aspired to help replenish a wild buffalo population.

When Allard died in 1896, following complications from a fall from his horse, the Allard-Pablo herd numbered 300. Allard's half-share was dispersed to several U.S.

locations, with one-third purchased by Kalispell's Charles E. Conrad.

By 1906, Pablo's 700 buffalo ran headlong into the Flathead Valley's federal homestead boom. With settlers populating the once-open range, Pablo worried about the herd's safety. He offered it to the U.S. government, but officials refused. So he turned to Canada. Between 1908 and 1910, he shipped nearly 500 head to Alberta's Wood Buffalo Park.

The U.S. government's reluctance to aid Pablo's herd riled the American public. William Hornaday's American Bison Society responded by working with President Theodore Roosevelt to provide land for what became the National Bison Range.

Today, some 30,000 wild bison inhabit North America, a historical repopulation launched by the Allard-Pablo partnership. Visitors to the National Bison Range in Moiese, Yellowstone National Park, South Dakota's Custer State Park, and Canada's Wood Buffalo Park are treated to the sight of bison herds in their native range.

Roughly 140 years after Allard and Pablo purchased those orphaned buffalo calves, President Barack Obama signed the National Bison Legacy Act of 2016, establishing the bison as the official mammal of the United States.

★

ARNOLD BOLLE
1912-1994
HELEN BOLLE
1916-2016

Arnold Bolle was educated in his hometown of Watertown, Wisconsin, the University of Montana, and Harvard University, where he earned a master's degree in forestry and later a Ph.D. in public administration.

While a student at UM, Arnie met fellow student Helen Swan. Helen's father, K.D. Swan, was the U.S. Forest Service's first official photographer. Upon their UM graduations in 1937 and receipt of his first paycheck, Arnie and Helen were married.

Arnie joined the UM forestry faculty in 1954 and eight years later was appointed dean of the university's School of Forestry.

The Bolle home was a hub of environmental discussion for students, politicians, and activists. Helen welcomed them all. Together the Bolles embraced local conservation concerns, and Helen's huckleberry pies became legendary at fundraising events.

In 1970, at the request of Montana's U.S.



Helen and Arnold Bolle

Senator Lee Metcalf, Bolle and six of his UM colleagues documented a clear-cutting fiasco on the Bitterroot National Forest. The study was titled *A University View of the Forest Service* but commonly called the Bolle Report. Metcalf published the Bolle Report as a Senate document, and thousands of copies were distributed. The report triggered a bitter national forest land management struggle that eventually led to significant changes in forest policy and passage of the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

The Wilderness Society in Washington, D.C. honored Bolle by establishing its Bolle Center for Ecosystem Management and its highest honor, the Robert Marshall Award.

In 1994, Liz Claiborne and Art Ortenberg donated a significant gift to the UM Foundation to enable formation of the Bolle Center for People and Forests.

JACK ATCHESON, SR.
1932-2018

Born in Pennsylvania, Jack Atcheson, Sr. arrived in Butte as an adolescent when his family moved West. He joined the U.S. Army as a teenager and volunteered for combat duty in the Korean War.

When he returned home, he and his wife, Mary Claire, built a Butte taxidermy business into a worldwide hunting enterprise: Jack Atcheson & Sons, Inc. But it was an incident on Montana's Hi-Line that ignited his activism.

In 1978, Atcheson was hunting on what he believed to be state-owned public land when he was booted off. Atcheson returned home and read the legal statutes that provide for Montana's State School Trust Lands. He learned that fees paid to graze or mine the lands help fund Montana's public schools. Still, Atcheson maintained that state lands ought to be accessible to all.

Atcheson helped found what became the Montana Coalition for Appropriate Management of State Lands. That group cleared a path through arcane legalities that eventually allowed the public to pay a small fee to use school trust lands for recreation. The effort created the potential to open 5.2 million acres to resident and nonresident hunters, anglers, bird watchers, and others.

Later, Atcheson joined the Montana Coalition for Stream Access, which spearheaded advocacy for the Montana Stream Access Law. Atcheson also championed wildlife-friendly fencing on public and private lands.

In 2000, he received *Outdoor Life* maga-



Jack Atcheson, Sr.

zine's Conservation Award for public access advocacy and for his "lifetime of achievement in the conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat."

★

ARNOLD "SMOKE" ELSER
1934-

When Arnold "Smoke" Elser began working as a backcountry outfitter in 1964, he quickly saw that campsites and grazing meadows were damaged from overuse. He became among the first to use lightweight tents and other gear, which reduced the number of mules in pack strings. In camp, he laid down light plastic netting to protect the grass under tents and other trampled areas. He tied his saddle horses to high lines rather than to trees, because ropes girdled the trunks.

Elser eventually taught 3,000 people these conservation techniques in a horse-



Smoke Elser

packing class at the University of Montana.

Yet it was the campfire stories he and his wife, Thelma, told that captured the imagination of the guests who in turn became new advocates for protecting Montana's wild country. For instance, on a summer pack trip in 1969, Elser's party encountered a bulldozer punching in a road near the Middle Fork of the Flathead River just north of the Bob Marshall Wilderness boundary. "Nothing makes you madder than when you're telling your guests you're in a really pristine area and all of a sudden you run into a bulldozer," Elser recalled in a Montana PBS documentary that celebrated his legacy.

Elser also worked with *Missoulian* reporter Dale Burk (profiled below) to publicize U.S. Forest Service plans to develop the Middle Fork of the Flathead. That reporting helped spur federal designation of the Great Bear Wilderness and Scapegoat Wilderness.

Elser's recognition includes the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the University of Montana Forestry Alumni Association, the Missoula Conservation Roundtable's Lifetime Conservation Achievement Award (for him and Thelma), and the Back Country Horsemen of America's Legacy Award. In 2016, Elser was inducted into the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame.

★

DALE BURK
1936-

Dale Burk grew up in a logging family in the Tobacco Valley. He knew the timber business, but his heart was in journalism.

For 10 years, Burk worked at the *Missoulian*, Missoula's daily newspaper. In 1968, his first year at the paper, he got to know Guy Brandborg, a forester on the Bitterroot National Forest. Their talks set Burk on a reportorial course in 1969 that resulted in a series of articles about U.S. Forest Service logging. Burk uncovered massive clearcutting, aggressive road building, and logging-centric management that gave short shrift to the concept of multiple use.

His groundbreaking reporting continued for several years. In 1971, the *New York Times* published on its front page Burk's photograph of Brandborg and a Wyoming senator viewing a clear-cut that resembled a carpet-bombed landscape. It enraged the nation.

Few environmental reporters existed



Dale Burk

Burke's front page photograph in the *New York Times* of two men viewing a Montana clearcut that resembled a carpet-bombed landscape enraged the nation.

then, much less in Montana. Burk broke new ground to inform Montanans about forest management—catalyzing crucial national support for reforms.

Burk's work also helped spark passage of the National Forest Management Act. His book, *Great Bear, Wild River*, was instrumental in the 1978 designation of the Great Bear Wilderness along the Middle Fork of the Flathead River.

Harvard recognized Burk's achievements with its 1975-76 Nieman Fellowship for journalism. His local club, the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association, awarded him its Lifetime Achievement Award. The Missoula Conservation Roundtable names its annual award for "most outstanding citizen advocate" after Burk.

Burk and his work serve as reminders that journalists and a free press are vital to a civil society.

★

GEORGE GRANT
1906-2008

George Grant grew up in Butte, surrounded by a landscape so damaged by a century of mining and smelting that it became the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's largest Superfund cleanup site ever. In the midst of the Great Depression, Grant would steal away to a cabin on the Big Hole River to spend summer days fly-fishing for trout.

Those bucolic outings awakened his conservation ethic. He evangelized for the Big Hole River for the rest of his life, becoming the river's fiercest advocate—and a model activist for some of the most profound river conservation battles in Montana history.

In the mid-1960s, Grant and Tony Schoonen (MOHOF 2016 inductee) convinced a nascent Trout Unlimited to take on its first national environmental battle,



George Grant

against the proposed construction of Raichle Dam on the main stem of the Big Hole. Grant and Schoonen formed an unlikely alliance with local ranchers to turn back attempts to build the dam at Notch Bottom. Today, the 150-mile-long Big Hole remains among the few free-flowing wild trout rivers in the United States.

Grant and Schoonen formed an unlikely alliance with local ranchers to turn back attempts to build the dam at Notch Bottom on the Big Hole River.

A Montana TU pioneer, Grant mobilized followers through *The River Rat*, the rabble-rousing newsletter he edited.

Later, to restrict the practice of bulldozing gravel for irrigation diversions in the Big Hole, Grant and Schoonen teamed up to advocate for Montana's landmark Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act, commonly known as the "310 Law."

Grant was already an internationally acclaimed fly-tier, patenting in 1939 his method for weaving hackles. Two of his books, *Montana Trout Flies* and *The Master Fly Weaver*, are collector's items. In 1973, the Federation of Fly Fishers awarded Grant its

These profiles are shortened versions that Tom Palmer, former chief of the FWP Information Bureau, wrote for the Montana Outdoor Hall of Fame.

prestigious Bud Buszek Memorial Award for excellence in fly tying.

Grant's legacy endures. Butte's TU chapter and a state Big Hole River fishing access site each bear his name. A 1991 FWP film, *Three Men, Three Rivers*, pays him tribute.



STAN F. MEYER

1935-

Stanley F. Meyer graduated in journalism from what was then Iowa State College in 1956, a year after his beloved Jane graduated with a similar vocational interest. They married and in 1957 moved to Great Falls, where Stan was hired as a radio and TV farm broadcaster. By 1964, both Stan and Jane had joined Wendt Advertising in Great Falls.

In Great Falls, Meyer took an interest in Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery. In 1966, on a minuscule budget, he directed a 23-minute film depicting the Lewis and Clark Expedition's journey across Montana. It was that project that inspired a lifetime of conservation work.

In 1987, Meyer was named board chair of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) of Montana. He spent his time enthusiastically explaining TNC's conservation philosophy to the public. His mastery of collaborative resource management techniques attracted the attention of Montana's newly elected governor Marc Racicot. Racicot appointed Meyer, also a Republican, as a Montana FWP commissioner.

With Meyer's leadership, during an eight-year (1993-2001) stint as an FWP commissioner and chairman, the department preserved more than 250,000 acres of critical wildlife habitat via the purchase of conservation easements from willing



Stan Meyer

landowners. Later, Meyer was enlisted to explain the hunter-funded easements to skeptical state lawmakers, stockgrowers, and farm groups. Those discussions helped get the state's Habitat Montana Program reauthorized in 2005 so that FWP could conserve additional critical habitat.

Meyer also embarked on an eight-year odyssey to breath new life into an almost forgotten Indian landmark, Ulm Pishkun, a sacred site near Great Falls. Today, the renamed First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park is a National Historic Landmark.



P.D. SKAAR

1923-1983

Palmer David Skaar, one of the most important contributors to our understanding of Montana birds, arrived in Bozeman from Indiana in 1957 to teach microbial genetics at what was then Montana State College.



P.D. Skaar

However, it was his seminal work on bird distribution across Montana that made him a conservation leader.

Skaar developed a system of monitoring all bird species, in all seasons, year after year. It required birders to document where birds live by using "latilongs," rectangular tracts of land formed by the intersection of latitude and longitude mapping lines. Montana has 49 latilongs.

With information derived from his recording method, he published *Birds of the Bozeman Latilong* in 1969, followed by seven editions of the tome, *Montana Bird Distribution*.

Birds of the Bozeman Latilong was not just a catalog of bird species; it also provided estimates of abundance in preferred habitats

and dates of migration. This new approach provided planners and policymakers with a clearer understanding of how land-use development and habitat modifications such as mining, timber sales, and other development affect bird habitat and distribution.

In the 50 years since it was published, many bird species that Skaar described have diminished due to subdivision development in the Gallatin Valley. We know this only because of his meticulous methods of documentation.

Skaar's birders have tallied more than 1 million individual records since 1975. His system is still used today in the Montana Natural Heritage Program's database. The information from *Montana Bird Distribution* is used by government agencies, NGOs, and private consultants.



PHIL TAWNEY

1949-1994

ROBIN TAWNEY NICHOLS

1949-

As University of Montana students, Phil Tawney and Robin Tawney Nichols arrived in Helena to work as interns at the 1971 Montana legislative session. They returned two winters later, as up-and-coming activists, this time recruited by Don Aldrich (MOHOF 2014 inductee), executive secretary of the Montana Wildlife Federation and until then the state's lone conservation lobbyist.

Calling themselves the Environmental Lobby, the trio buttonholed Montana state legislators by day and burned up the phones at night, rallying citizens to contact their



Robin Tawney Nichols and Phil Tawney

lawmakers about pending legislation.

That experience led the Tawneys and others to create, in 1973, the Montana Environmental Information Center, an environmental watchdog nonprofit. From 1971 to 1975, the Tawneys were part of crafting or reforming laws aimed at protecting Montana's air and water quality, requiring mine reclamation, detailing environmental standards for energy production and subdivision development, and controlling instream flows.

In the 1980s, now with a UM law degree, Phil played a vital role in the early success of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, as its first legal counsel. His work lives on in the hundreds of thousands of acres of wildlife habitat conserved by the RMEF.

Phil also worked with landowner and fly fisherman Otto "Moose" Teller to secure more than 1,200 acres of Bitterroot floodplain and agricultural lands under a perpetual conservation easement known today as the Teller Wildlife Refuge.

Meanwhile, Robin wrote magazine articles about Montana's complex conservation issues and published her first children's guide—to Yellowstone National Park. Since Phil's death from leukemia in 1994, she has written family-oriented nature guides as well as stories of Montana's early environmental history.



GAIL SMALL

1956-

Gail Small, assistant professor of Native American Studies at Montana State University, has spent more than 30 years working to strengthen tribal sovereignty and environmental protection in Indian Country.

Raised in a family of 10 children on southeastern Montana's Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, Small witnessed firsthand the "coal wars" that began in the 1960s.

At an early age, Small was aware of the tribe's resistance to Bureau of Indian Affairs' efforts to coerce Cheyenne leaders to agree to terms with strip-mining companies. People outside the tribe looked unkindly at the resistance. Small recalled in 2005 that she "couldn't endure the harassment that we were getting from the non-Indians at school because of our tribe's stand against mining and protecting our land. A lot of us quit high



Gail Small

school." She was among them.

Nonetheless, Small earned a degree in sociology from the University of Montana in 1978. At 21, she was back home, the youngest member of a tribal negotiating committee—and the only college graduate—working to cancel the coal leases.

It took 15 years, but the courts ruled in favor of the Cheyenne. This marked the first time the federal government barred multinational corporations from Indian Country.

The victory gave Small hope. She enrolled in the University of Oregon School of Law and earned her Juris Doctorate in 1982. When she returned home in 1984, it was as part of a team of Cheyenne leaders who helped form Native Action, one of the first nonprofit organizations based on an Indian reservation. Native Action aimed to provide information that people could grasp in a manner that would allow them to speak their own voice.

Among Small's many tributes are the Jeannette Rankin Award, the Rockefeller

It took 15 years, but the courts ruled in favor of the Cheyenne. It marked the first time the federal government barred multinationals from Indian Country.

Foundation Next Generation Fellowship, and the Ecotrust Indigenous Leadership Award.

In 2015, Stanford University's Woods Institute for the Environment honored Small as a Leopold Leadership fellow in recognition of Native Action's transformation of Indian law and environmental policy.

The national accolades notwithstanding, Small still holds close to her roots, living on the family ranch near Lame Deer.

★

JACK WARD THOMAS

1934-2016

Jack Ward Thomas was a child of the Dust Bowl, born in powder-dry Handley, Texas. He never shook the childhood memories of time spent indoors under a table draped with a damp tablecloth to keep the dust at bay.

He left Texas and moved east.



Jack Ward Thomas

After earning his Ph.D. at Amherst College, he led U.S. Forest Service research there, taking breaks in the campus cemetery. Observations from his time in that and other cemeteries inspired Thomas to write "Invite Wildlife to Your Backyard," for *National Wildlife*, one of the most popular

articles on wildlife ever written. Reprints run into the millions.

In 1974, he moved to Oregon to be chief research wildlife biologist and program leader at the USFS Forestry and Range Sciences Laboratory. There Thomas studied elk ecology and led a wildlife conservation planning effort that became the intellectual cornerstone of his hallmark achievement: ecosystem management.

In the early 1990s, Thomas became embroiled in the era's white-hot political issue: the conservation of old-growth ecosystems and spotted owl habitat in the Pacific Northwest. With the logging business already in decline, timber industries laid blame for 30,000 lost jobs on the federally protected northern spotted owl. President Bill Clinton tapped Thomas to develop a forest plan focused on old-growth ecosystems.

Two years later, in 1993, President Clinton appointed Thomas the 13th chief of the USFS—and the first whose career centered on wildlife research.

With Thomas at the helm, the USFS adopted the Northwest Forest Plan in 1994. The spotted owl controversy smoldered on, but Thomas never backed away. "We don't just manage land," he said at the time. "We're supposed to be leaders. Conservation leaders...in protecting and improving the lands."

Upon his USFS retirement in 1996, Thomas joined the University of Montana's College of Forestry and Conservation as the Boone and Crockett Professor of Wildlife Conservation. Beloved by his students, he held the position for 10 years.

For Thomas, ecosystem management was the big picture. "We need to be prepared to move into the 21st century," he'd tell his colleagues, "or we'll be left in the dust."

★

LEONARD "LEN" SARGENT

1912-1997

MERRIAM "SANDY" SARGENT

1921-1997

Len and Sandy Sargent moved to Montana from the East in 1969 after purchasing a

ranch in Cinnabar Basin, just north of Yellowstone National Park. From the start, they were ardent advocates for the natural environment around them.



Sandy and Len Sargent

They joined the seven-year battle to prevent the federal government from building a dam on the Yellowstone River at Allenspur. They were fierce promoters of wilderness areas in Absaroka-Beartooth country. They donated to the early wave of grassroots environmental and conservation groups—including the Northern Plains Resource Council, the Montana Environmental Information Center, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation—that were dedicated to protecting the wild places of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and beyond.

Their experiences led the Sargents to develop a model to ensure more extensive and systematic future funding for emerging conservation groups and issues. They established the Cinnabar Foundation in the 1980s, and later endowed it with 80 percent of their estate. Since then, the foundation has awarded nearly \$8 million to more than 1,860 successful grant applicants.

Len and Sandy's son, the late Rick Hubbard Sargent, and his wife, Judi Stauffer, established the Len and Sandy Sargent Environmental Activism & Advocacy Fellowship Award at the University of Montana Environmental Studies Program. 🐾



To nominate someone—living or deceased—for the next class of inductees, and to read biographies of past inductees, visit the Montana's Outdoors Legacy Foundation website at mtoutdoorlegacy.org.