

MONTANA WILDERNESS SCHOOL

IMPACT REPORT 2020





“Sam has an excitement about the possibilities for his life and a wider horizon than ever before. Most importantly, he believes in himself and his abilities to change his life for good. All his talents and character are expanded.”

- MWS Parent

Letter from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When COVID-19 appeared this past winter MWS was preparing for our busiest season yet. As the world slowed down and began transitioning into a full-blown pandemic emergency, we had no idea if we would be able to operate our 2020 program. But as we all settled into our new normal, it became crystal clear to me we had to do everything we could to support our community, keep our staff employed, and get kids together and outside to provide some semblance of normal and sparks for the future. We chose to do everything in our power to run our program.

As June approached and other outdoor education schools closed their doors, we were flooded with interested students and parents from around the country, and every course quickly filled. Keeping safety as our biggest priority, we established all new policies and protocols, developed a 14-day pre-course symptom screening protocol, and communicated daily with staff and student families to build everyone's confidence. Against all odds, on July 1 we launched our program.

MWS ran one of our busiest program seasons ever this year. It was an incredible amount of work preparing for and safely

running our multi-week backcountry expeditions. And it was absolutely worth it. Being acknowledged by our students' families for our thoroughness, our ingenuity, and our positive communication getting daughters and sons out in the backcountry in a safe manner and returned home proud, happy, tired, and healthy makes me so proud of our staff. It also makes me tremendously grateful for all our supporters who made this happen!

MWS isn't just about getting youth off their screens and outside. The opportunities we provide are unique. MWS students are immersed in our amazing public lands and wild spaces with a group of diverse youth dealing with both personal and group mental, physical, and emotional challenges. Challenges are real, personal growth is almost guaranteed, and establishing trust and support in an expedition community with kids very different than each other is paramount.

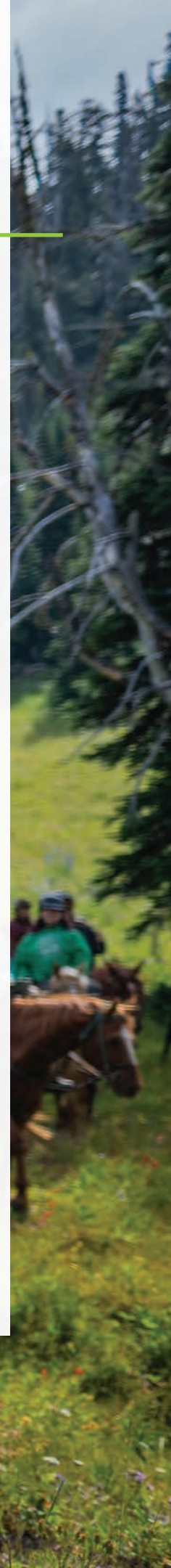
MWS continues to be a small grassroots organization with a huge impact. At a time of great division and polarization in our country, we build bridges. At a time when families struggle financially, we continue to provide the majority of our local youth with financial support. At a time when youth are more socially isolated than ever, we bring kids together and build community. And, at a time when youth are more overwhelmed than ever with anxiety, depression, or worse, we provide opportunities for confidence, success, connection, and growth.


Thank you all again for being such an important part of our success and for all your support during such a challenging time. Onward to brighter and better days ahead!

Stay Wild,

Gar Duke

Co-founder and Executive Director





Our Mission is to provide empowering expeditionary wilderness courses to youth that foster personal growth and cultivate a conservation ethic through connecting with remote landscapes and wild places.

Our Vision is to develop the highest quality expeditionary outdoor education program in the United States. We strive to serve diverse and motivated youth in communities throughout Montana. Through challenging and empowering experiences on our courses, youth will develop a deeper connection to the natural world, and will return to their communities as more skilled, confident, and compassionate leaders.

64 | MWS STUDENTS

\$85,705 | AWARDED IN SCHOLARSHIPS

564 | PROGRAM DAYS

17,688 | PROGRAM HOURS

689 | USFS/BLM/NPS/USFWS PUBLIC LAND USER DAYS

767 | MILES HIKED

108 | RIVER MILES PADDLED

64 | STUDENTS RECEIVED LEAVE NO TRACE (LNT) TRAINING CERTIFICATIONS

2020

Youth Wilderness Program IMPACT REPORT



**MONTANA
WILDERNESS
SCHOOL**

Staff

Gar Duke

Co-founder and Executive Director

Josh Olsen

Co-founder and Program Director

Claire Kleese

Communications Manager

Martha Sellers

Development Manager

Erin McCleary

Operations Manager

Hannah Marshall

Youth Program Manager

Kodee Cloninger

Outreach and Admissions Manager

Ross Lesslie

Student Outreach and Program Support

Hannah Karn

Student Outreach and Program Support

Ryan Peters

Student Outreach and Program Support

Kristine Mazur-Ferriter

Student Outreach

Megan McInerney

Student Outreach

Board of Directors

Jon Christensen

Board Chair

Bill Stoddart

Board Treasurer

Deborah Love

Board Secretary

Chris Bunting

Gar Duke

Jessie Wiese

Mike Wolfe

Advisor Team

Andy Lichtenheld

Ashton Snyder

Damien Powledge

Darcy Chenoweth

Dave McEvoy

Dr. Steve Halvorson

Justin Short

Kate Burnaby Wright

Kestrel Neathawk

Mike Fiebig

Robert Campbell

Shane Doyle

Sheri Blackwood

Steve Smith

Whitney Milhoan

Field Instructors

Andrew Harvison

Andrew Morehouse

Christie Conway

Eliza Donahue

Hannah Karn

Hannah Marshall

Kimberly Covill

Matt Zia

Megan Compton

Ross Lesslie

Ryan Milling

Ryan Peters

Shannon Regan

Field Intern

Colin Burdsall



This past year was challenging for the Montana Wilderness School amidst the novel coronavirus disease or (COVID-19). In response MWS shortened our season by a month and implemented significant new policies, procedures and guidelines to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, MWS successfully ran six open enrollment expeditions and one contract expedition. Despite the uncertainty and

logistical challenges, I am happy to report that 64 students had fundamentally transformative experiences in the unique wild lands of Montana. Students were immersed in wild places from 5-14 days and educated about wilderness self-care, camp craft, Leave No Trace, communication, mountaineering, canoeing, horse packing and backpacking. We successfully offered and ran two new course types this year: The Backcountry Ski and Ride expedition and The Backcountry Skills for the Aspiring Hunter Expedition.

We started the 2020 field season with the health of our staff and students as our foremost priority. The 2020 field season provided a number of challenges for the organization from adjusting to Forest Service orders limiting group size to the rigorous medical screening we applied to all student and staff in an attempt to create “COVID-free Cohorts” for each expedition. It was our goal to reduce the risk of exposure and transmission with screening and adherence to hygiene protocols. Despite all the uncertainty, the strong commitment to the program by invested staff members and an unwavering commitment to our mission maintained the high caliber of MWS expeditions in a year of unprecedented challenges. Enrollment was strong with our reduced course offering, and the outreach and enrollment team did an exceptional job pivoting to online recruiting. Operating in the era of COVID gave us an opportunity to look at the program operations and enrollment plans as we retool and recalibrate for 2021, with renewed focus on safe operations.

Due to the overwhelming success of our scholarship fundraiser, we were able to provide full or partial scholarships to 73% of our Montana students and no participant was turned away from MWS for financial reasons. As 2021 approaches we also look forward to improving the program’s operations and maintaining our commitment to continue making MWS more diverse, inclusive and equitable, with a goal of improving enrollment particularly in underserved urban, rural, and native communities around Montana. 2020 was full of adversity and challenges, but a number of things made all the hard work and sleepless nights worthwhile: watching our students have an opportunity to engage, talk and laugh with their peers; observing students work as a team and communicate authentically to overcome challenges on the river and in the mountains; and witnessing students strengthen their resolve and resiliency. Providing these transformative experiences to our students was maybe never as important as it was in 2020.

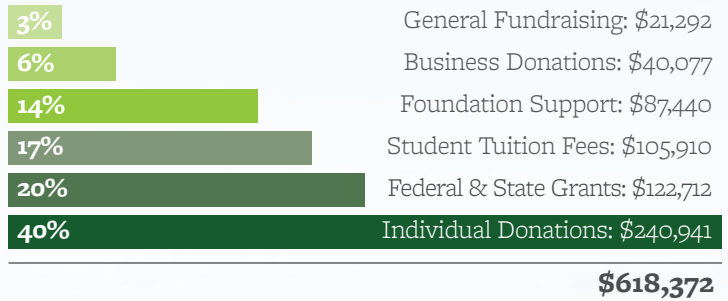
Onward,

Josh Olsen

Co-founder and Program Director

FINANCIALS

Income



Expenses



CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS

WOLVERINE LEVEL (\$5,000+)



MOUNTAIN LION LEVEL (\$1,000-\$2,499)

Pedal Lucid

BISON LEVEL (UNDER \$1,000)

406 Barbelle	Montana Whitewater
Arc'teryx	North Bridger Bison
Beringia	Oboz Footwear
Big Sky Resort	OnSite Energy - Solar Electric Services
Bozeman Brewing Co	OnX Maps
Bozeman Cottage Inc	Outlaw Partners
Bridger Brewing Co	Pat Hoffman Artworks
Bronwen Jewelry	REI Bozeman
Cosmic Pizza	Rocky Mountain Hunting Calls
Crosscut Mountain Sports Center	Sageborn Products
Duckworth	Spire Climbing Center
Eide Bailly LLP	The Mountain Project
First Interstate Bank Bozeman	Uphill Pursuits
Intrinsik Architecture	Walmart Bozeman
Kokopelli Raft Co	Whiskey Leatherworks
Map Brewing Co	Yogesh Simpson Design

“In this tech age I love the unplugged facilitation of personal growth and connection to others and nature. There is magic for us all in the outdoors but MWS has buckets to share.”

- MWS Parent

2020 DONORS

WOLVERINE LEVEL

(\$10,000+)

Anonymous
Chris & Rebekah Bunting
Robert Duke
Friend Family Philanthropic Fund
Michelle & Robert Friend
Nicole Friend & Gar Duke
Mariposa Fund
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GRIZZLY BEAR LEVEL

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(\$250-\$499)

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Heather Milovina
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(UNDER \$100)

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Toni Todoric
Jessica Tuberty
Cathy Upton
Cristina Valerio
David Weinstein
Mary Westby
Nicole Wild

Industry + Organization Partners:

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Big Sky Youth Empowerment
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SheJumps
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U.S. Forest Service
Women's Adventure Film Tour
Yellowstone National Park
Yogesh Simpson Design

Volunteers + In-Kind Support

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Justin Short
Ashton Snyder

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Henderson Foundation
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The Kendeda Fund
The Sample Foundation
Treacy Foundation
Yellowstone Club
Community Foundation



**MONTANA
WILDERNESS
SCHOOL**

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Begin the adventure at
montanawildernessschool.org