



MK Nature Center

STREAM

In this issue >>>

Life of a Pond	2
Creatures of the Night	3
Art and Nature	4
AmeriCorps 2025	5
Native Plant Sale	6
Idaho Gives	7
Welcome New Master Naturalists	8
Beginning Birding	9
Volunteer Appreciation	10
Volunteers and Supporters	11

The Seasonal Newsletter of the Morrison Knudsen Nature Center

SPRING 2025

Trout Tank

Lori Wilson, Wildlife Educator, MKNC, IDFG

We have over 100 fry in our trout tank at MK Nature Center! Not French fries, but rather trout *fry*: This is the name of young trout. The trout eggs first hatched into alevins just a few weeks after we put the eggs in the tank. At the alevin stage, the trout are still attached to their yolk sac, which provides them essential nutrients as they grow (see lower left photo). To protect from being eaten by predators, the alevin stay buried in the gravel as much as possible. On February 18th, we started seeing the alevin “button up.” This means they lose their yolk sac. They are now hungry little trout. These little guys get fed three times a day by MKNC staff to keep them developing and growing. Come check out this Trout in the Classroom tank through the middle of June, when the young trout will be released into the nature center creek.

Photo by Sam Stukel, USFWS



MKNC staff member Gage Pendelton feeds the trout three times per day on his shift. Photo by Lily Linton.

The fry measured 1.25 inches long on the first day of April. Photo by IDFG.

The Life of a Pond

Sara Focht, Conservation Education Supervisor, MKNC, IDFG

Succession is the ecological term used to describe “the gradual process by which an ecological community changes over time, driven by natural factors, leading to the establishment of a stable climax community.” Succession happens all around us in different ecosystems such as forests, lava flows, ponds, sand dunes, and even deserted human-dominated landscapes. After a disturbance, early successional species grow, later being out-competed by mid-successional species and eventually by the dominant species.

As ponds like the nature center’s fill with sediment, they become shallower. This allows different plants to grow and become more dominant. Over time, ponds can become meadows and eventually forests! At the nature center, we are observing succession daily, as this habitat created and planted in 1990, grows up, changes and becomes something different than how it started. The sturgeon pond is slowly filling with sediment, restricting where fish can swim and how well visitors can see them.



Golden Environmental and Dredging, along with Mountain West Commercial Diving spent two weeks at MK Nature Center cleaning up the sediment accumulated in the sturgeon pond to help reverse the natural successional process! As a human-created habitat, and one meant for wildlife viewing, it is essential for us to keep the pond open for fish and clear for visitors!

Divers reported the sediment was 4 feet deep on the far end of the pond. They removed that, improving the accessibility for sturgeon and other fish to utilize the entire habitat.

Staff at MK Nature Center is thankful for our colleagues at the Idaho Fish and Game Engineering Bureau and this great contracted crew for helping us be the best place to see wildlife in Boise!

Eric Anderson, Adam Evans from Golden Environmental and Dredging stand next to, Chuck Stockwell, Ben Bernier, Matt Probert from Mountain West Diving. These five served as the main crew for the pond cleaning project at MKNC in March, 2025. Photo by IDFG.



Photos left to right: Divers Matt and Ben prepare to dive. Matt on communication duty (talks to the diver). A diver and Chuck prep for action. Chuck saves the day by retrieving a visitor’s glasses dropped in the pond! Photos by Eric Anderson.

Creatures of the Night

Bethany Tennant, Biological Aide, MKNC, IDFG

Many animals that visit MKNC exhibit **nocturnal** behavior, meaning that they are active at night and inactive during the day. Some are **crepuscular**, coming out at dawn and dusk, and some utilize both behaviors depending on various factors. There are several reasons why a nocturnal lifestyle is advantageous for native wildlife, especially in urbanized areas such as Boise. Nocturnality can offer animals increased protection from predators, better foraging opportunities, less competition, as well as an escape from daytime heat and human disturbance. Special adaptations that aid in a nocturnal lifestyle include specialized vision for low-light conditions, as well as keen hearing and sense of smell. While **diurnal** animals, those that are active during the day, may have an easier time with navigation and thermoregulation, they are more at risk of predation and the stressors of human activity.

Here at MKNC, trail cameras are placed near high-traffic animal path and several nocturnal stars emerged!

Beaver are primarily nocturnal, traveling from the greenbelt at night to MKNC in search of food and building material for their lodges. Sometimes beaver can be seen at dusk, but they like to stick to the protection of darkness to avoid human activity. Beaver stay busy throughout the night at MKNC, munching on the bark of willow and cottonwood trees and traveling back and forth from the river and the nature center. Like beaver, bobcats also use the cover of night to avoid human activity. Bobcats patrol their territories and search for prey, often hunting squirrels, mice, and ducks. Riparian habitats such as MKNC offer bobcats dense vegetation cover, plentiful food, and a nightly escape from human disturbance. Striped skunks are also nocturnal, foraging for insects and other invertebrates throughout the night, retiring to their hidden dens at dawn. Their big bushy tails are hard to miss on camera!

Other wildlife with both nocturnal and crepuscular behaviors have also been spotted at MKNC. Some are behaviorally flexible, able to shift their activity for better protection and efficiency. Mule deer are often seen during the day, but use dawn and dusk hours to forage with decreased disturbance. American mink and raccoons are also adaptable, being primarily nocturnal but they can shift their activity throughout other hours, sometimes being seen during the day.

The nocturnal lifestyle offers a wide array of benefits to native wildlife. MKNC's riparian habitat gives these animals a refuge from urbanization. If you visit MK Nature Center and don't see many animals, know they were there, walking along the same paths as you all night, every night!

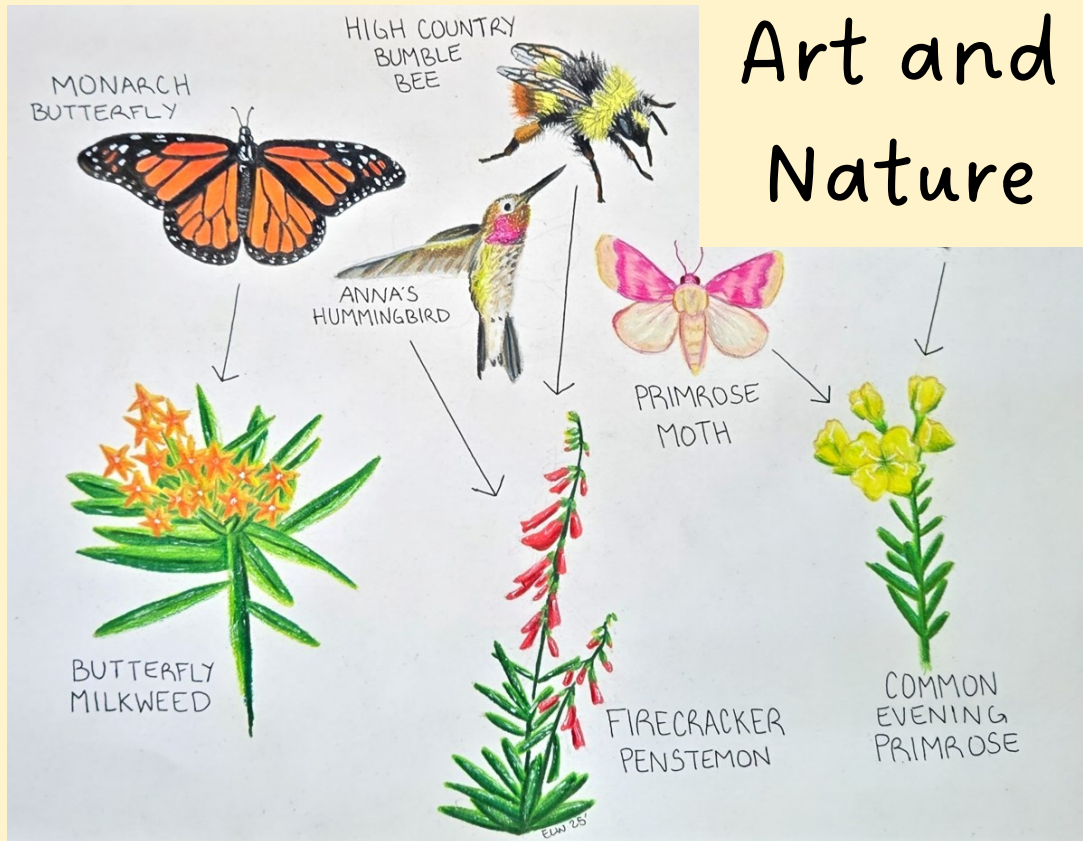
animaldiversity.org

Rial RV, Canellas F, Akaâr M, Rubiño JA, Barceló P, Martín A, Gamundí A, Nicolau MC. The Birth of the Mammalian Sleep. *Biology* (Basel). 2022 May 11;11(5):734. doi: 10.3390/biology11050734. PMID: 35625462; PMCID: PMC9138988.

Stripped skunk, beaver, and mule deer photos by MKNC nocturnal cameras.



Art and Nature



Artwork and information by
Erica Wilson, volunteer, IDFG

- There are over 400 hundred pollinator species in Idaho, consisting of insects like bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, flies, as well as vertebrate pollinator species such as bats and birds.
- As a hummingbird feeds, its head and face get brushed with pollen. Many flowers are designed to make sure hummingbirds get a good dusting of pollen. As the bird moves from one flower to another, it brushes against more pollen. Pollen is exchanged between plants.
- There are approximately 4,000 species of native bees in North America.
- There are about 340 different kinds of hummingbirds world-wide. About 19 different hummingbirds live in the United States. Five species have been seen in Idaho.
- Over 150 kinds of crops we eat are pollinated only or mostly by bees.
- Bees and butterflies can see ultraviolet light. This light allows them to see patterns on the flower that we cannot see. For example, they may see lines going down the flower petals or a bullseye in the center of the flower. These patterns are called nectar guides and help direct pollinators to the nectar in a flower.
- Over 80% of the monarch butterflies population has disappeared over the past two decades, largely attributed to habitat loss.

AmeriCorps 2025

Sara Focht, Conservation Education Supervisor, MK Nature Center, IDFG



Lily Linton is MKNC's 2025 AmeriCorps Member.

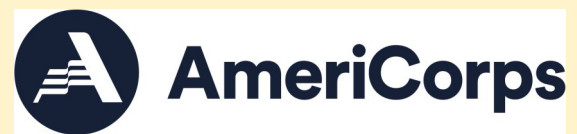
Lily Linton joins the MK Nature Center team as our 2025 AmeriCorps Member! We are excited to bring this motivated, experienced professional to our team to help with our education programs during our busiest time of the year.

Lily's adventures began in Portland, Oregon. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, she was surrounded by nature, and a love for the environment bloomed. Lily has extensive customer service and outdoor education experience—a perfect recipe for success at MK Nature Center. With a degree in Environmental Studies from Portland State University, she has a great foundation of knowledge of the ecological concepts we strive to teach at the nature center. While pursuing her degree Lily volunteered in conservation efforts around Portland and sustainability initiatives

on campus. She found her passion for environmental education while working with Portland Parks and Recreation's nature-based summer camps. She hopes to expand her knowledge and experience base through her work with the MK Nature Center Staff and the visitors with whom she interacts.

When not at the Nature Center, you might find Lily roller skating, riding her bike on the greenbelt or hiking through the foothills. She has two pet rabbits, Bunbun and Mithrax who, are dear to her.

MKNC has hosted an AmeriCorps member for the past eight years. The program is housed in Idaho by [Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute](#) in Moscow, Idaho. [Friends of MK Nature Center \(FOMKNC\)](#) funds our AmeriCorps Member each year. If you are a member of FOMKNC, your donation directly benefits our capacities by bringing this program to us.



2025 Idaho Native Plant Sale

Sara Focht, Conservation Education Supervisor, MKNC, IDFG

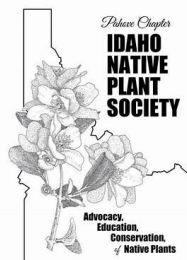
Native plants support native wildlife! Planting native Idaho plants in your yard is a “win-win” situation, in that native plants take less water than non-native plants *and* they support native wildlife! Native bees and birds can thrive in human-dominated environments if the right plants for food and shelter are available.

The Pahove chapter of the Idaho Native Plant Society will partner with MKNC to host their annual Native Plant Sale at MK Nature Center on Saturday, April 26th from 10 am –1 pm.

Talk with experts about which native plants might work best in your yard to attract pollinators and other local wildlife.

[Watch the INPS website for details and plant lists.](#) A detailed availability list will be available close to April 22nd.

Cash, checks, and debit/credit is accepted, but cash and checks are preferred.



Idaho Gives

Elizabeth Grosse, FOMKNC Board Member



April 28th—May 1st are the dates for this year's **Idaho Gives Campaign**. Idaho Gives is an annual effort for Idaho non-profits to raise money and support good work throughout the state.

Friends of MK Nature Center will be a featured group and we ask you to consider [making a donation!](#) The Friends of MK Nature Center is our 501(c)(3) partner and because they are led by an all volunteer board, 100% of donations goes directly to funding educational enhancements for MK Nature Center!

The MK Nature Center has wide community impact. Free and open to the public year-round, it attracts visitors of all ages and walks of life. The nature center provides a learning space and respite for those seeking to relax and recharge in the outdoors. Every year educational programming is provided for over 10,000 students, and there are an additional 150,000 walk-onvisitors. The Friends of the MK Nature Center seeks to make every visit fun, informative and memorable.

Fund these Idaho Gives 2025 Projects

1. The Friends of MK Nature Center will continue to sponsor the design and creation of a new **outdoor learning space** that will begin this summer. The design is nearly finalized. The space will augment the existing indoor auditorium to hold a variety of group classes, presentations, and hands-on nature related activities in an outdoor setting. This project will provide the needed additional space and habitat area to expand the number and types of outdoor events and teaching activities available for visiting school classes and other educational groups. Ground-breaking for this project will occur after July 1, 2025.
2. The Friends of the MK Nature Center has financially supported the placement of an **AmeriCorps Member** for eight years. This person provides six months of full-time educational support to the Wildlife Educators and volunteers at the nature center for 6 months. Our AmeriCorps Members add so much capacity, creativity, enthusiasm, and customer service to our programs! See page 5 in this issue to meet our 2025 AmeriCorps Member.

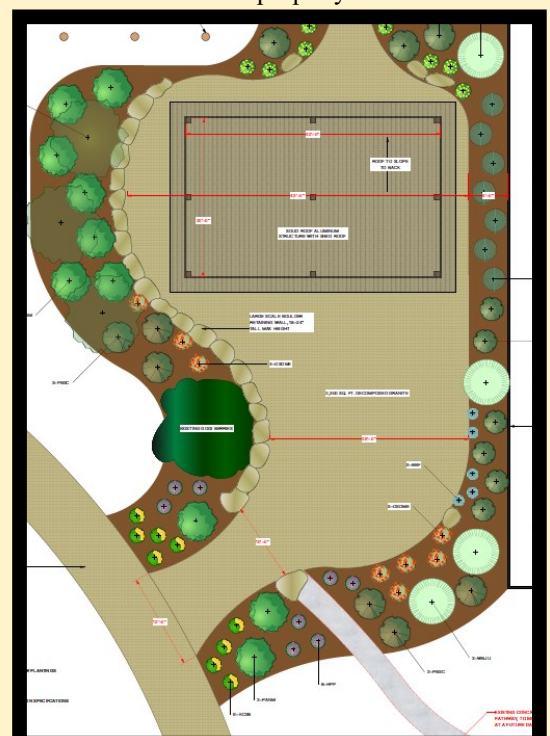


With the remodeling of IDFG Headquarters in 2020, MK Nature Center lost the open space area used for classes, ceremonies, and social events. This project aims to recreate that space and function. Photos of former educational space at MK. Photos by IDFG.



FRIENDS OF MK NATURE CENTER

Draft design for outdoor learning space at NW corner of MKNC property.

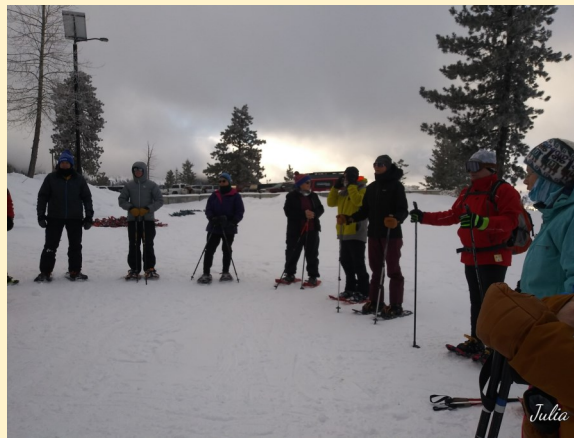


Welcome New Volunteers

The Sagebrush-steppe Chapter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program began training its 16th cohort on January 8th, 2025. This year brings about change for the chapter as leadership responsibilities previously held by chapter sponsoring agencies (MK Nature Center, Golden Eagle Audubon and Bogus Basin) widened to include a dedicated committee of volunteers who are now in designated roles for the chapter (Coordinator, Treasurer, Social Committee, Class Liaison). But what did not change was the group of friendly and enthusiastic participants who are active and interested in the presentations, field trips, and experiences provided! We thank these folks and all the members of the Sagebrush-steppe Chapter whose desire to learn, experience, and contribute is inspiring.



The Class of 2025 paused for this photo on their opening day. Out looking for winter ducks of the Treasure Valley, they got side tracked with songbirds. Photos below clockwise starting in upper left: Class members interview each-other for class introductions, snowschool, birding, learning in the classroom, posing with Lonesome Larry, planting native plants.





Great-horned owl photo by Amina Catovic, MKNC.

Beginning Birding

Amina Catovic. Biological Aide, IDFG, MKNC

If you're like me and grew up before the early 2000s, Pokemon was everything; training and collecting mystical creatures who evolve into greater and more decorated versions of themselves. But you needn't play the game to understand the excitement. From Jigglypuff to Pikachu, the feeling of discovery was unbeatable. Imagine being able to go outside and discover magical creatures while you do so. What if I told you there's real-life Pokemon everywhere, on every continent in the world, even in your own backyard?

Everyone knows birds, but most don't realize just how diverse birds can be. With over 11,000 known species across the globe, being unique is a bird's specialty. Take an ostrich and a robin; they're both birds but couldn't be more different from each other. That is exactly what makes birds special; no two species are the same. Birding may seem like a niche hobby that only experts are allowed to partake in, but it can be as simple as sitting outside looking at what flies by. In my opinion, the less you know about birds, the more exciting it is. Half the fun is trying to figure out what's making that ear-piercing call at five in the morning.

While I entered the world of birding with no experience, it doesn't have to be the same for you. The great thing is that it's almost a no-cost hobby, all you need is your eyes and ears. However, if you're dedicated, then a good pair of binoculars is the way to start. I'm not exactly an expert, so when shopping I found an option that wouldn't make me sweat the next time I checked my bank account. All you really need from a pair of binoculars is to see clearly and to see far.

The diversity of birds makes them remarkable but also makes it difficult to identify them. Not only have birds mastered fashion in the form of feathers, but they've also mastered the art of sound. It can be overwhelming hearing so many birds at once. If only there was an app that could identify individual calls. There is! My favorite is Merlin Bird ID. It's free to download and was created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Not only can you ID bird calls in real time, Merlin offers guides to help you identify birds and learn more about them. My first observation recorded was a red-winged blackbird, which I'd never seen before. Only hearing the call, if it weren't for Merlin I wouldn't have known what to look for and where to look.

The more birds you see the more you'll want to track them, aka a life list. A life list is a record of every species you've seen. Among these are "lifers," birds you've seen for the first time in your life. If you're old-fashioned you can keep a physical list, but if you want to save yourself from future hand-cramps, e-bird is your friend. e-bird allows you to keep checklists of birds and will generate maps of "hotspots" in your area, meaning areas frequented by fellow birders. Merlin and e-bird go hand in hand, making things a lot easier.

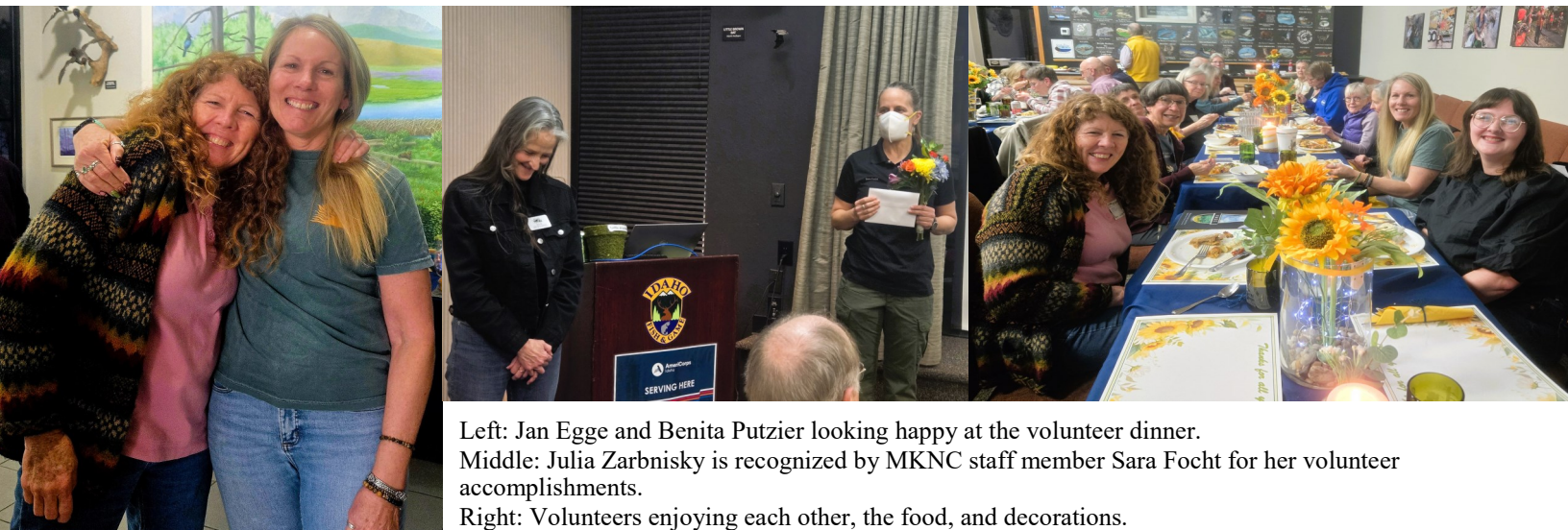
I hope you can take this information and dive into birding! Regardless, if you follow my advice, the world of birds is here and always welcoming. Whether you can name a thousand species or can't identify a single bird, birding is for everyone, anywhere, at any time. The birds are perching in trees, soaring high, or weaving through bushes. The only question left is, will you go find them?

Song sparrow (top) and lesser goldfinch (bottom) photos by Amina Catovic.



Volunteer Appreciation

On February 26th, MKNC hosted its annual dinner to celebrate volunteers and supporters. MKNC's Sue Dudley sends the invitations, plans the event, and spruces up the place with amazing décor. We had a great time honoring our supporters in a fun, festive evening.



Left: Jan Egge and Benita Putzier looking happy at the volunteer dinner.
Middle: Julia Zarbnisky is recognized by MKNC staff member Sara Focht for her volunteer accomplishments.
Right: Volunteers enjoying each other, the food, and decorations.



Left: Waiting patiently in the food line, Howard Sheppa, Alan Crockett, Alice Crockett and Jon Mathews.
Middle: We were thrilled to host IDFG Director Fredericks (third from front) and his wife Anja. They sat with volunteer Steve Getlein (plaid shirt) and former MKNC supervisor, Vicky Runnoe (front).
Right: Long-time volunteers Joan Dodd and Terry Thomas.



Left: MKNC staff member Sue Dudley honors volunteer Todd Finato. Middle: MKNC staff member Susan Ziebarth honors longtime volunteer Arleen Schaeffer. Right: Volunteer Claire Veseth is honored by MKNC staff member Lori Wilson.

DONORS



Bard of Goddess Fest Church

Bill Horton

Scott Prestel

Idaho Native Plant Society-Pahove Chapter

Donors listed here do not include Friends of MK Nature Center members

VOLUNTEERS

January

Steve Berg
Patrice Davies
Todd Finato
Mike Garets
Steve Getlein
Marylee Hale

February

Carolyn King
Kevin Laughlin
Cindy Marlow
Jon Mathews
Terri Muse
Bronwyn Myers

March

Liz Vavricka
Clarie Veseth
Debbie Wiggins
Kelly Wilson
Julia Zarbnisky

Spring marks the beginning of many things at the nature center including our VERY busy tour season!

Claire Veseth, Jon Mathews, and Bronwyn Myers guide groups on MKNC tours. Photos by IDFG.



Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) adheres to all applicable state and federal laws and regulations related to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, gender, disability or veteran's status. If you feel you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility of Idaho Fish and Game, or if you desire further information, please write to: Idaho Department of Fish and Game, P.O. Box 25, Boise, ID 83707 OR U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Federal Assistance, Mailstop: MBSP-4020, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22203, Telephone: (703) 358-2156. This publication will be made available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the Department of Fish and Game for assistance. Costs associated with this publication are available from IDFG in accordance with section 60-202, Idaho Code. MKNC Stream Newsletter 53917, 4-1-25/125/Sara Focht.