



Morrison Knudsen

Nature Center

STREAM

The Seasonal Newsletter of the Morrison Knudsen Nature Center Spring 2026

In this issue >>>

Native Plant Sale	2
Idaho Gives	3
Volunteer of the Month	4
Images of Spring	5
Art and Nature American Mink	6
Celebrating Supporters	7
2026 AmeriCorps	8
What's the Buzz?	9
Volunteers and Donors	10
Wildlife Express	11

Ten Reasons to Plant Natives

1. Native plants are beautiful!
2. Native plants use less water.
3. Pollinators and other native wildlife are attracted to native plants.
4. Once established, native plants require less maintenance.
5. Native plants preserve biodiversity.
6. Native plants do not require extensive fertilizers or mowing.
7. Native plants are adapted perfectly to our climate.
8. Native plants preserve our natural heritage.
9. Buying native plants at the MKNC plant sale supports the Idaho Native Plant Society and MK Nature Center.
10. Native plants in your yard will spark conversation with your neighbors about the importance of these plants.

Photos left to right:
Oregon grape in bloom
Sagebrush
Orange globemallow



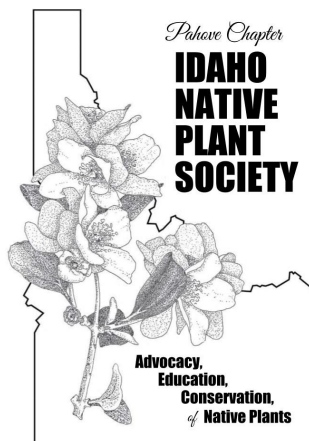
Native Plant Sale

April 24-25

The MK Nature Center and the Idaho Native Plant Society (Pahove Chapter) will once again bring you native plants for purchase this spring. Beautify your yard and attract native pollinators with plants that are perfectly adapted to Idaho's climate. This annual sale supports both organizations, but more importantly, it helps you support native wildlife and preserve natural biodiversity in southern Idaho.

Friday, April 24 5pm-7pm Native Plant Sale members ONLY (you can purchase an [annual membership at checkout](#)).

Saturday, April 25 10am-1pm Sale open to the public.



All photos by IDFG



Idaho GIVES-Will You?

Sara Focht, Conservation Education Supervisor, MKNC, IDFG

Since July 1, the Friends of MK Nature Center has not had a moment of rest. They have been funding projects, hiring contractors, and purchasing products non-stop. Visitors at MK Nature Center see the changes and upgrades, but they may not be aware that these are funded from the wonderful members of our Friends group.

Contributions from the Friends of MK Nature Center ranged from huge projects like the **design and construction of the outdoor learning space** (pictured upper left), to small purchases used every day like the classroom **whiteboards**.

The most unique contributions, in my opinion, included paying for three new **owl taxidermies** (saw-whet, long eared, northern pygmy) and buying **seven pounds of bees** for our beehive (that is nearly 20 thousand bees).



Some items funded this year were a little more “behind the scenes” like a **heating and cooling unit** to make our kiosk more work-friendly and paying for the **removal of some damaged outdoor art work**.

You can see their impact, but this year you can hear it too! The Friends group paid for the **revamping of our outdated and broken sound system** so now when you visit, you will hear wolves howl, streams bubbling, and birds chirping along with nature music.

The Friends of MK Nature Center also generously supported us financially with a **donation to our volunteer program** that enables us to celebrate and reward our precious and essential volunteers.



All photos by IDFG.

THANK YOU!



[**CLICK TO DONATE**](#)

Idaho Gives is nearly here and this marks your opportunity to donate to Friends of MK Nature Center and be a part of supporting the MK Nature Center, in the year to come! Donate to Friends of MK Nature Center on May 4-7.

Volunteer of the Month

January

Susan Floriana-Riley



Susan Floriana-Riley is a talented nature center volunteer. She began volunteering in 2017 when she joined the Idaho Master Naturalist Program. Since then, she has donated over 250 hours of volunteer time at MK Nature Center. Susan does a little of everything, but we so appreciate her artistic talents that help us make things look professional and beautiful. Susan also helps at events and with grounds and habitat maintenance. She was a key founder of our sensory garden. In addition, she creates all our reader boards and helps with special educational displays. We appreciate Susan's commitment to volunteering and her ability to help us in so many useful and creative ways.

Photos by MKNC.

February

Howard Sheppa



Howard Sheppa is honored with this award for not only his longevity as an MK Nature Center volunteer but also for the diversity and dedication he exhibits in his volunteer work. Howard became a volunteer in 2018 and has logged over 220 hours at the Nature Center. Howard is one of our dedicated volunteer beekeepers, runs errands, manages the annual whitefish stocking program, installed the stepping stumps, helped create all our wildlife silhouettes, and is currently on the Friends of MKNC board as treasurer. There is rarely a week that goes by without us seeing and working with Howard!

March

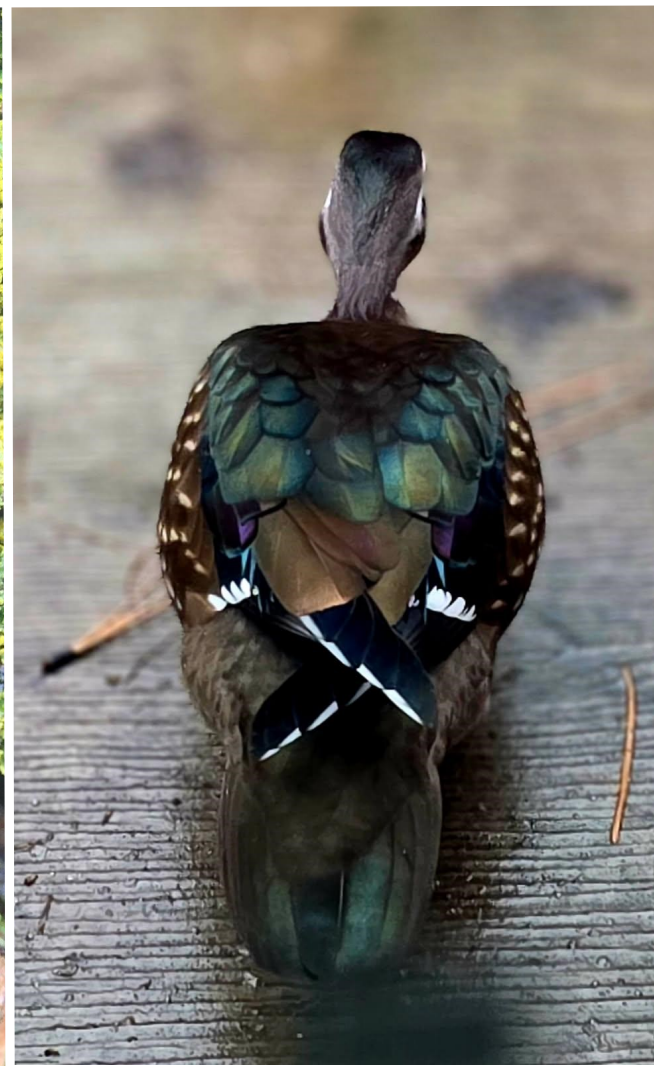
Julia



Julia started volunteering at MK Nature Center in 2022 and has donated over 250 hours of volunteer service. As a retired elementary school teacher, Julia brings her natural talents as an educator to MK as a tour guide. In addition to leading programs, Julia organizes and is the team leader for the Sagebrush-steppe Chapter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program (an adult education and volunteer program). Julia's organizational skills, reliability, and excellent rapport with students and visitors makes our education team better!

Images of Spring

Clockwise starting in upper left: Anna's hummingbird by Axel Qarterone. Sturgeon by Allison Ady. Wood duck by Allison Ady. California tortoise shell butterfly by Allison Ady. Western toad by Bethany Tennant. Middle: spring lichen by Sara Focht.



Art and Nature

Erica Wilson, Volunteer, MKNC



Common Name: American Mink

Scientific Name: *Neogale vison*

Native to Idaho

Habitat: Mink make burrows or dens along the banks of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and other bodies of water. They will make their own or use the old burrows, dens, or lodges of other animals.

Reproduction: Mating season starts around January and lasts through April. Females give birth to a litter of three to six kits. The kits are weaned when they are five to six weeks old and start hunting with their mother around eight weeks old. They will stay with their mother until the fall.

Behavior: Mink spend time in the water hunting for food. They are very territorial and the males will sometimes fight over hunting space. Mink produce a foul-smelling musk to mark their territory and can also release it when they feel threatened.

Diet: Mink are highly opportunistic carnivores that feed on a wide variety of prey. They will eat most small animals such as birds, muskrats, rabbits, and mice. They also eat reptiles and amphibians like snakes and frogs. In the water they will eat fish, crayfish and invertebrates like mussels, clams and snails. Insects are also a part of their diet.

Facts:

- Mink are long slender mammals with the tail making up a third of its total length.
- Mink have partially webbed feet to help them swim and hunt in water.
- Mink can dive approximately 16 feet deep.
- Mink are most active at dawn and dusk.
- Mink are furbearers. In the 1800s, mink were trapped and their pelts used to make coats, hats, gloves and other accessories. Regulated trapping is still practiced.
- When mink are excited or content, they purr like a cat.
- Mink usually kill their prey by quickly biting the animal on the neck.

Celebrating Supporters

Sue Dudley, Volunteer Coordinator and Gift Shop Manager, MKNC, IDFG

February 4th was a night of honoring our wonderful volunteers and supporters. These are some of the most amazing people on the planet as they generously give of their time and finances to support the nature center. We are truly grateful to all of you!



All photos by IDFG.

AmeriCorps 2026



A warm welcome to Emily Stellway, MK Nature Center's 2026 AmeriCorps Member. Emily's love of nature started young. She grew up catching lizards in her hometown of Prescott Arizona and backpacking in the Grand Canyon with her family. Emily came to us from Celebration Park where she worked as an Interpretive Ranger. She has ample experience teaching kids in an outdoor setting, which is pretty useful here at MKNC. Emily graduated from Northwest Nazarene University in 2024 with a Wildlife Biology and Ecology degree. She has experience in the field monitoring nighthawks as a student research assistant. Emily also has been a canoe instructor, lifeguard and is a scuba diver. Her experience with kids, wildlife and water make her a perfect fit. In her free time she loves hanging out with her husband Kedrick and her dog Gilbert, swimming, hiking and trying all different kinds of art projects. Welcome, Emily!



MK Nature Center has been fortunate to have the financial support for the AmeriCorps Program from the Friends of MK Nature Center. Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute in Moscow, Idaho is the parent organization for this AmeriCorps Program. We value their work and partnership to bring us education program support each year.



What's the Buzz?

Beekeeping at MK Nature Center

Vicky Runnoe, Volunteer, MKNC, IDFG



Article author, beekeeper, and retired manager at MK Nature Center, Vicky Runnoe sports the beekeeping uniform.

The nature center's observation honey bee hive is a busy place in spring.. Warm temperatures and the bloom of seasonal flowers jumpstarts activity in the hive. This bustle of activity provides visitors with an up-close look at the complex world of these familiar colonial insects. In tandem with the buzzing of bees is the work of our beekeeping team.

Hives of honey bees require tending from spring until late fall when the bees become inactive. The smaller interior space of an observation hive requires even more care. From cleaning to population control to treating mites to extracting honey, the observation hive is carefully tended by our beekeepers. Catching a whiff of smoke in the air is a sure sign that the beekeepers are at work.



The popular observation hive.

While the thought of working closely with thousands of stinging insects might be a wee bit intimidating, it is fascinating and rather calming. Beekeepers work slowly and methodically, disturbing the bees as little as possible. Smoke helps calm the bees by hiding their natural pheromone alarm signals. Protective gear, while making beekeepers look somewhat otherworldly, provides protection from potential stings. The low buzz of bees and sweet scent of honey is a pleasant backdrop for the tasks at hand.

Our beekeepers assess the health of the hive. That sweet odor of honey is a sign that all is well. Finding tiny, rice-shaped eggs or small larvae tucked into honeycomb cells indicates a healthy, active queen. She is found by carefully scanning each frame. If the population in the observation hive is too high, beekeepers remove several frames of bees, placing them into a smaller nucleus colony or nuc. The nuc can be used to start a new colony. Having an extra source of bees can be helpful in repopulating the observation hive if needed.



Most, but not all of our amazing beekeeping team. All photos by MKNC.

Beekeeping tasks ebb and flow with the seasonal activity of the hive and are never completely predictable, something that makes beekeeping always interesting. The reward for all this work comes in early fall when the beekeeping team gathers to extract honey. The floral scent of fresh honey and warm beeswax fills the auditorium as the liquid gold is extracted, filtered and bottled. It is a sweet reward, indeed!

The nature center's beekeeping team always welcomes new members, so please join us! If you are interested, please email Frankie Curet (frankie.curet@idfg.idaho.gov).

DONORS

Edwina Allen
Kathleen Allen
Roberta Ferrin
Jason Rose

Sharon & Russ Kiefer
Bob Popac
Scott Prestel
Judy Waterline
Rondal Waddell

Donors listed right do not include Friends of MK Nature Center members and donations.

VOLUNTEERS

Jaimi Anghel
Violette Anghel
Steve Berg
Jon Bergset
Pam Bly
Alan Crockett
Joan Dodd
Roberts Doering
Roberta Domico
Kevin Drews
Jan Egge
Todd Finato
Susan Floriana-Riley

Berk Fraser
Steve Getlein
Elizabeth Grosse
Marylee Hale
Trevor Jensen
Jenny Kelly
Rebecca Killeen
Susan King
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Randy Langseth
Kevin Laughlin
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Martha McClay
Andy Meyer
Chris Monell
Bronwyn Myers
Josh Olson
Diana Parker
Benita Putzier
Barb Recla
Gail Robb
Madeline Rosa
Vicky Runnoe
Cathy Sanderson
Howard Sheppa

Katie Sheppa
Sandy Sweet
Claire Veseth
Roger Wallace
Julia Zarbnisky
Susan Ziebarth

January

February

March

Wildlife Express

Sara Focht, Conservation Education Supervisor, MKNC, IDFG

If you are reading the MK Nature Center newsletter, my guess is that you would enjoy reading Wildlife Express. This publication is posted on the IDFG website monthly, September through May. Back issues are available, covering most Idaho fish and wildlife species. This publication used to be written and designed for kids and issued as physical newspapers in classrooms all across the state. Later, the publication was posted only electronically and recently, the publication is geared toward a slightly older audience. Check out all issues of Wildlife Express at <https://idfg.idaho.gov/education/wildlife-express>, and don't forget to scroll to the bottom and click [View the Entire Back Catalog](#) to see years of great wildlife information and beautiful photographs.



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