

INDIAN TRAIL MARKER

News & Events of the Indian Trail Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists...Serving Ellis and Navarro Counties

WINTER 2026



*Let's go walking in a winter
wonderland in 2026!*

Jan. 25: stargazing Oliver Park Mansfield

Feb. 21: Winter Walk Mockingbird Nature Park Midlothian

INDIAN TRAIL MASTER NATURALIST NEWSLETTER TEAM
indiantrailnews@itmntx.org

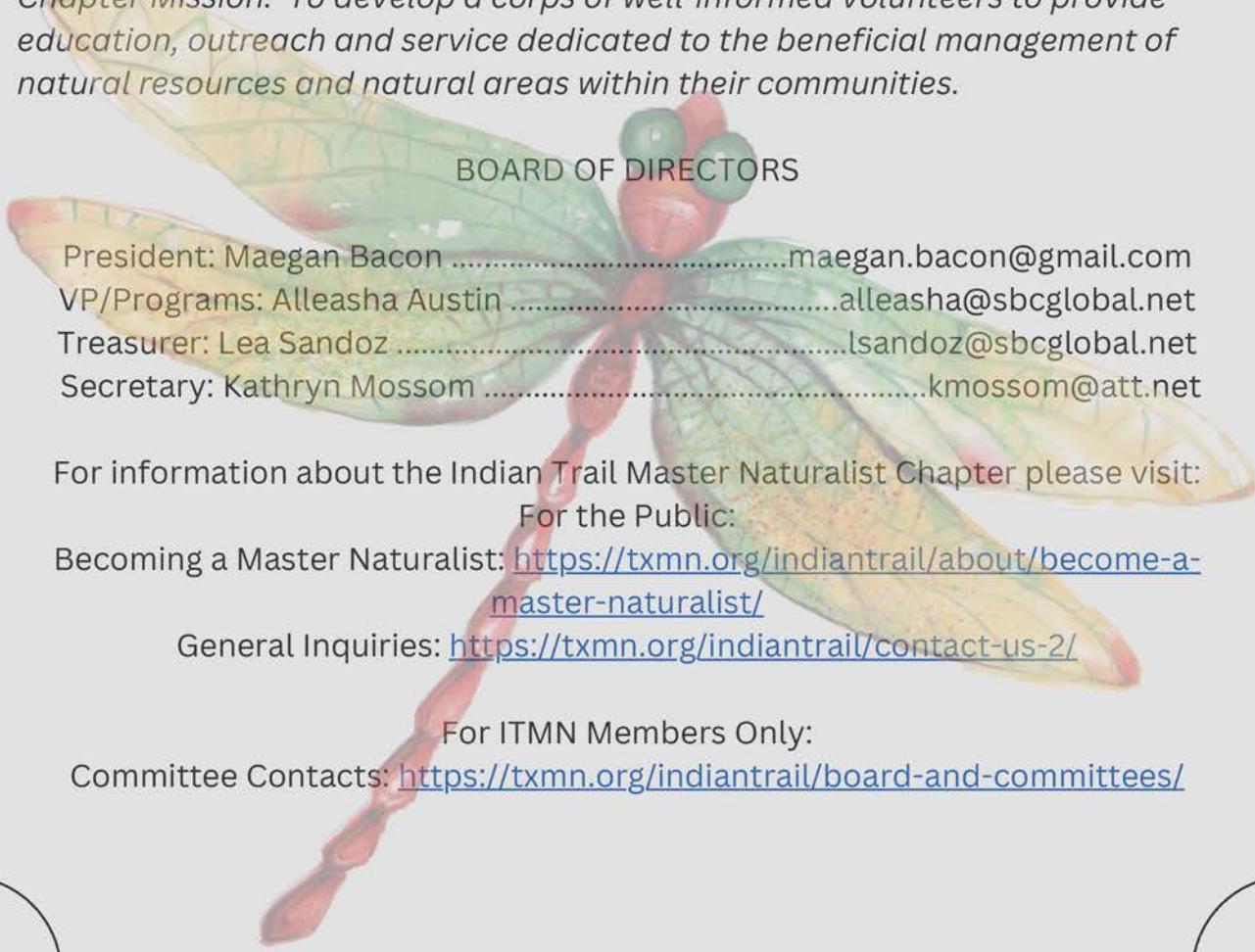
Ann Spencer, Chair/Production

Robbie Robbins, Designer
Tabby Brobst, Editor

INDIAN TRAIL CHAPTER MASTER NATURALIST BOARD

Chapter Mission: To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities.

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For information about the Indian Trail Master Naturalist Chapter please visit:

For the Public:

Becoming a Master Naturalist: <https://txmn.org/indiantrail/about/become-a-master-naturalist/>

General Inquiries: <https://txmn.org/indiantrail/contact-us-2/>

For ITMN Members Only:

Committee Contacts: <https://txmn.org/indiantrail/board-and-committees/>

Winter Word: Zugunruhe

Feeling restless? Our feathered friends are feeling it, too. "Zugunruhe" is the term for the innate response to environmental conditions that drive birds to follow their instincts and fly to their wintering grounds and, in the spring, to their breeding grounds. We'll help them along their way with our annual Feed the Birds on February 14. Watch your email for event details!

From the desk of the president

Trailblazers,

Welcome 2026 – a year full of new opportunities, achievements, and, yes, pins!

Matt and I joined Master Naturalists in 2018 because we were looking for a way to volunteer together, learn more about our land, and encourage our family to get outside. Boy, he had no what he was signing up for!

I'm thrilled to step into the role of President after serving as your chapter Secretary for the past three years. I want to give a huge thank you to Erin for her outstanding leadership and dedication over the last few years; she has been an incredible mentor.

As Master Naturalists, one of the first lessons we learn is that it's okay not to have every answer – but that we must always be willing to search for one. As we enter the new year, I ask this question: What will you explore or master in 2026? What event needs your helping hands or what nature topic is calling for your deep dive?

I look forward to working, learning, and spending time alongside you Nature Nerds this year. Whether we're outside identifying plants in the prairie or sharing a laugh with our speakers, it's always a good time when we're growing together.

Maegan Bacon



Seen and Noted by June McDarby:

Dear Trailblazers,
Our chapter's frequent speaker, (TPWD Wildlife Biologist) Sam Kieschnick, posted an iNat observation during the 2025 worldwide Nature Challenge that elicited much excitement. It documents a rarely seen bug! His post was recently highlighted in their infographic as one of the coolest finds!

Congratulations Sam!

Winter Sky

By Jim Bush

Bare branches rake the winter sky,
the sun-washed blue dome stretched
to wide horizons, seeming larger
now that the trees have shed their leaves,
further opening up the view.
Attention is drawn to clouds –
the ephemeral white forms
drifting into other forms,
each brief and unique,
fading back into the blue.

2025 Class of Trainees



by Lynn Sawyer

Congratulations to the Class of 2025! Job well done! So proud of this incredible group! You'll be seeing these nature enthusiasts along the trail and at our meetings and other activities. Please join me in saying a hearty congratulations as you get to know them! Also a huge thank you to the Training Team (Erin McKool, Donna Thomas, Lynn Wisakowsky, Robbie Robbins, Sandy Fine, Sue Frary, Tabby Brobston, Tanya Kirkland, Trish Gifford, Jerry McClung); Hospitality Team (Celia Yowell, Chris Cook, Amy Allred); Mentors (Trish Gifford, Maureen Nitkowski, Robbie Robbins, Sandy Ashbrook, Sue Frary, Maegan Bacon, Scott Bourgeois, Madeline Kelley-Schwoch); Membership, VMS Team (Tabby Brobston, Erin McKool, Debbie Pierce, Trish Gifford, Susan Vlach); Treasurer (Sue Frary); AT (Lynn Wisakowsky); AgriLife Office (June McDarby); Projects (Tammy Kemnitz Allen); Webmaster (Matt Bacon); and many others who offered support in a multitude of ways. With gratitude, Lynn Sawyer

Pictured from left to right: Front row: Alison Frary, Teresa Grosbell, Madison Moss, Coordinator Lynn Sawyer, Kelly Kern, Nova Thompson, Joshua Garcia;
Back row: Vicki Parker, Melissa Lynch, Greg Browder, Holli Jetsel, Amy Anthony, George Nessinger, Kathryn Mossom, Ashleigh Bugg, Sheila Ward, Alexa Silva; Not pictured: Royce Milam and Phil Moscko

Winter Social December 13

Home of Donna Thomas

Madeline Kelley brought this piece of holiday fun by Ron Sonnier and read it at the Winter Social...

'Red Neck Night Before Christmas'

Wale it was Christmas eve and there I sat in my blind.
On one hand I had my rifle on the other I had shine.
Ma was in the trailer watching relatives on Springer.
The rug-rats was asleep dreaming of Xboxes.
My freezer was all cleared out.
The game warden had said wern't no season on reindeer.
I could almost taste that juicy reindeer steak now.
I asked him about cleves.
He said there wern't no sitch a thang.
I asked again he said if I saw me a elf I could shoot him.
So here I sit awaiting I took me a hit of shine
Made sure the rifle was ready and just closed my eyes for a minute.
When I woke up Santa was a lookin at me.
Well I grabbed for my gun and found out I was duck taped to the chair.
Santa just shook his hair and took a hit of my shine.
He looked at me and said "I t aint milk and cookies but it'll do."
He took my shine both mason jars and dropped em in his sack.
He took out switches and piled em under my chair.
"So you wanted my head on your wall and the reindeer in your freezer, I'm going to
leave you covered in coal. You've been very naughty."
That's what he did, filled up my blind with coal so only my head showed.





Member Spotlights: Our Annual Meeting Winners

Sue Frary from Erin McKool October 27, 2005 Chapter Meeting Agenda

A few months ago, Sue Frary (class of 2016) reached the 5000 volunteer hours milestone. She didn't want to be presented with the award until after the Annual Meeting so that her daughter, Ali, class of 2025, could be surprised in College Station. Remarkably, Sue earned a whopping 1,000 hours since the summer of last year when she had reached the 4,000 hours mark!

If you're new to the chapter, you may know Sue either as our Treasurer or for leading the Bat Acoustic Monitoring project. Either one of these jobs alone would have been a plateful, and she has done both jobs with admirable dedication and professionalism. Sue has also been a devoted Armchair Botanist with the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT) in Fort Worth, digitizing an incomprehensible volume of vouchers for the Institute as well as providing her own specimens.

Sue is also quite the plant expert, giving tutorials at our plant study group, as well as providing individual help to volunteers. It would be impossible to list all the areas of Sue's involvement as a master naturalist, but just to name a few others, she is an avid birder; award-winning photographer; award-winning quilter – she won first place in the quilting category this year at the annual meeting AND Best In Show; has worked tirelessly on Stream Team efforts; led wildflower walks; gotten her hands dirty volunteering many hours at our project sites; volunteered with John Bunker Sands; provided citizen science data to entities such as CoCoRaHS, eBird, and iNaturalist; has given talks on various nature topics to many different groups; and has volunteered countless hours every year on behalf of ITMN's fall training program. And that's just a small snapshot of how she has earned her hours!



Sue holds a doctorate in biochemistry and a bachelor's degree in chemistry, and is an avid baseball fan – listening while she digitizes. Sue truly is an inspiring, interesting, enjoyable person and an extraordinary contributor to our chapter and nature community.

Mark Graham: Artist/Advocate by Erin McKool

“Always continue walking a lot and loving nature, for that’s the real way to learn to understand art better and better.” Vincent van Gogh

Mark Graham, class of 2024, has been a working editorial photographer for more than 47 years. Mark worked for the Dallas Times Herald and Dallas Observer, capturing sports and local life. His photography and work at the Ladd Preserve, which he had been doing for more than seven years before joining ITMN, was instrumental in bringing attention to the Preserve. Mark’s dedication and collaborative advocacy helped convince the Duncanville City Council to establish a conservancy over the land in 2022.

As Amy Martin explained, Mark “helped initiate preservation efforts by posting photographs of Ladd on the neighborhood NextDoor social media and leading hikes on the property.” (In 2023, the Council voted to create the Charles F. Ladd Nature Preserve, establishing the city’s first nature park and it was submitted by Robbie Robbins and approved as an ITMN project that same year.)

Mark joined our 2024 initial training class and has been a dedicated member to this day. He will never seek the spotlight, but he does do everything in his talented power to give nature the best light. We were so proud to hear that he won both First Place and Third Place awards for his photography at the TMN Annual meeting in October 2025. Kudos to Mark Graham!

Citations:

<https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let017/letter.html>

<https://www.greensourcetexas.org/articles/activists-rally-preserve-duncanville-natural-area>

<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/environment/2022/03/10/duncanville-activists-rally-to-save-ladd-property-from-development/>

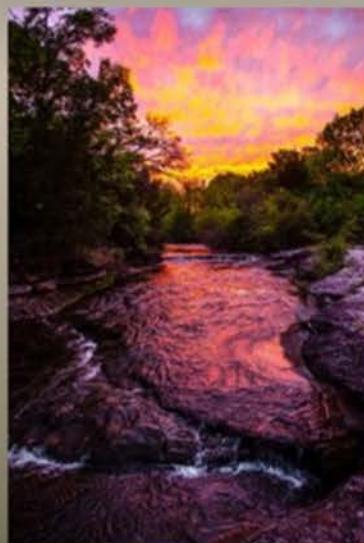
<https://www.greensourcetexas.org/articles/duncanville-creates-citys-first-nature-preserve>

Mark’s Flicker Account:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/markgraham/with/7434110478>

Mark’s Instagram Account: [@mggram55](https://www.instagram.com/mggram55)

Photography: Scenic



1st Place

Ten Mile Creek
By Mark Graham
Indian Trail

Photography: Chapters at Work/Play



3rd Place

Wet Work
By Mark Graham
Indian Trail

2025 Monarch Butterfly Tagging Report

By Amanda Weatherly

The tags were dispersed to the Texas Master Naturalist Indian Trail Chapter members who signed up to tag for the 2025 season during the August monthly meeting. Fifteen members had signed up for this season, and 250 tags were dispersed. There were approximately 150 monarch butterflies successfully tagged, and their data have been reported to Monarch Watch by the membership. *Disclosure: There may be more that were not reported to me in this count at the time of this article.*

The season began very slowly, and at one point, there was a belief that the butterflies may have chosen a different route south. Who knows? They may have even decided not to waste the energy and just overwinter here. Warmer fall temperatures can delay the start of the south migration, which in turn may disrupt their life cycle. The hotter temperatures can also cause the insect to burn more energy during their flight, reducing their reserves for the journey and overwintering.

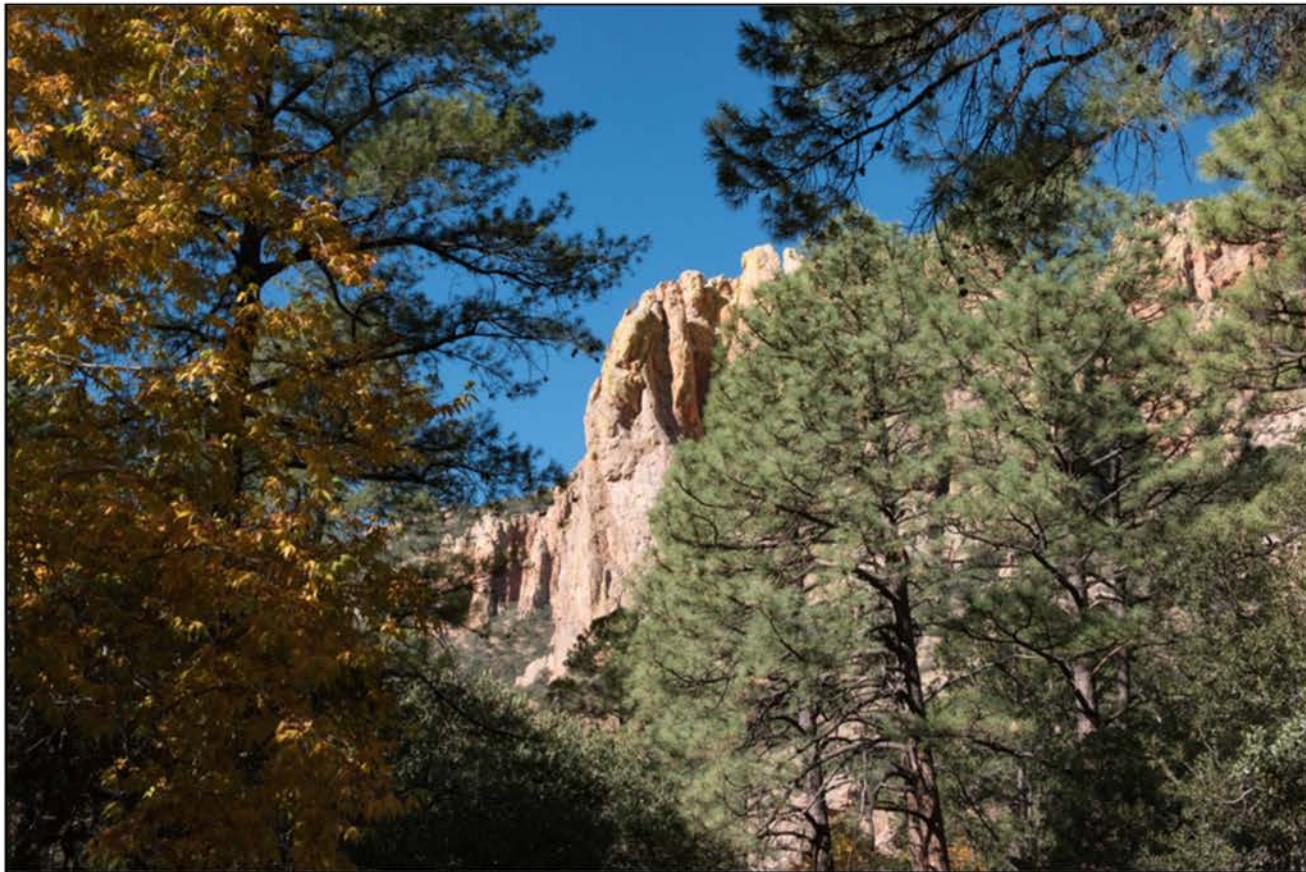
Research hypotheses have pointed to a decline in migration, yet the species appears to be stable. The reason for this is that the disruption in the life cycle results in non-migratory populations, such as those in Florida and Coastal Texas. These butterflies breed year-round and are not part of the great eastern or western migrations. Scientists fear that these combined effects could lead to the end of the massive migration to Mexico and California, resulting in fragmented, localized populations that don't undertake the epic journey and therefore, a beginning to the end of the migrations. See the following website for additional information:

<https://texasbutterflyranch.com/2025/10/15/new-study-hot-temps-cause-monarch-butterflies-to-drop-out-of-their-annual-migration/>

With the above information about delayed migration due to hotter temperatures taken into account, the butterflies began fluttering through the area around October 22. Personally, I tagged the majority of my assigned tags on October 31. I ran out of tags, and it seemed the butterflies were just beginning their journey. Other taggers reported similar situations of no butterflies to butterflies everywhere, and they had also run out of tags. Overall, it was another great year of tagging and a lot of fun.

Looking ahead to the 2026 season, I will hold the annual monarch butterfly tagging information booth during the July monthly meeting. However, I will not do a sign up next season. I will order 250 tags and disperse them at the August meeting.

Apache Hideout Birding



Cave Creek Canyon

Text and photos by Sue Frary

This past November, I went on a trip to southeastern Arizona to hopefully get a look at some western birds we don't normally see in Texas. The base was in Portal, AZ, at Cave Creek Ranch. This is in the Chiricahua Mountains, home to Cochise's and Geronimo's Apache bands in the 1800s and a very remote area (even today). Cave Creek Canyon is full of pines and Arizona sycamores, and is one of the country's most diverse birding spots. There are also bats, deer, black bears, and mountain lions. No TV, no internet. Very peaceful.

Here's a sampler of the western bird species in the canyon and the grasslands east of Portal. For our chapter photographers, the bird shots were taken with a Sony RX10iv, usually at 600mm equivalent and wide open at f4.0.

(continued on following three pages)



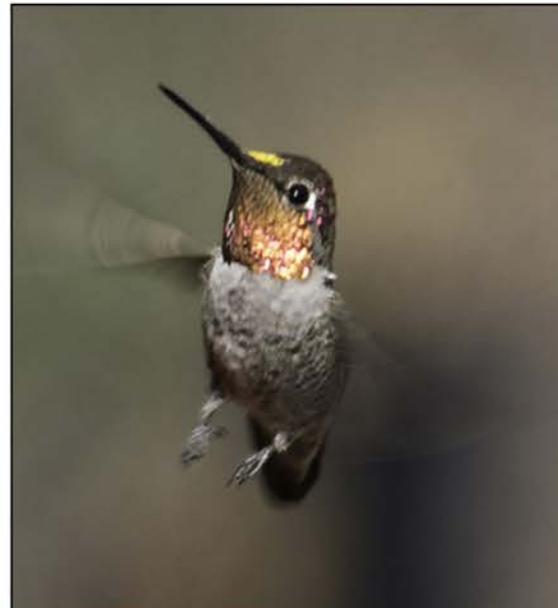
Northern Harrier – often called the “Gray Ghost” because it is so quiet cruising. We see it in Texas, but I couldn’t resist a photo of it as it flew by.



Audubon’s Yellow-Rumped Warbler – the species in Texas is the “Myrtle” variety, with a white throat. Audubon’s western variety has a yellow throat.

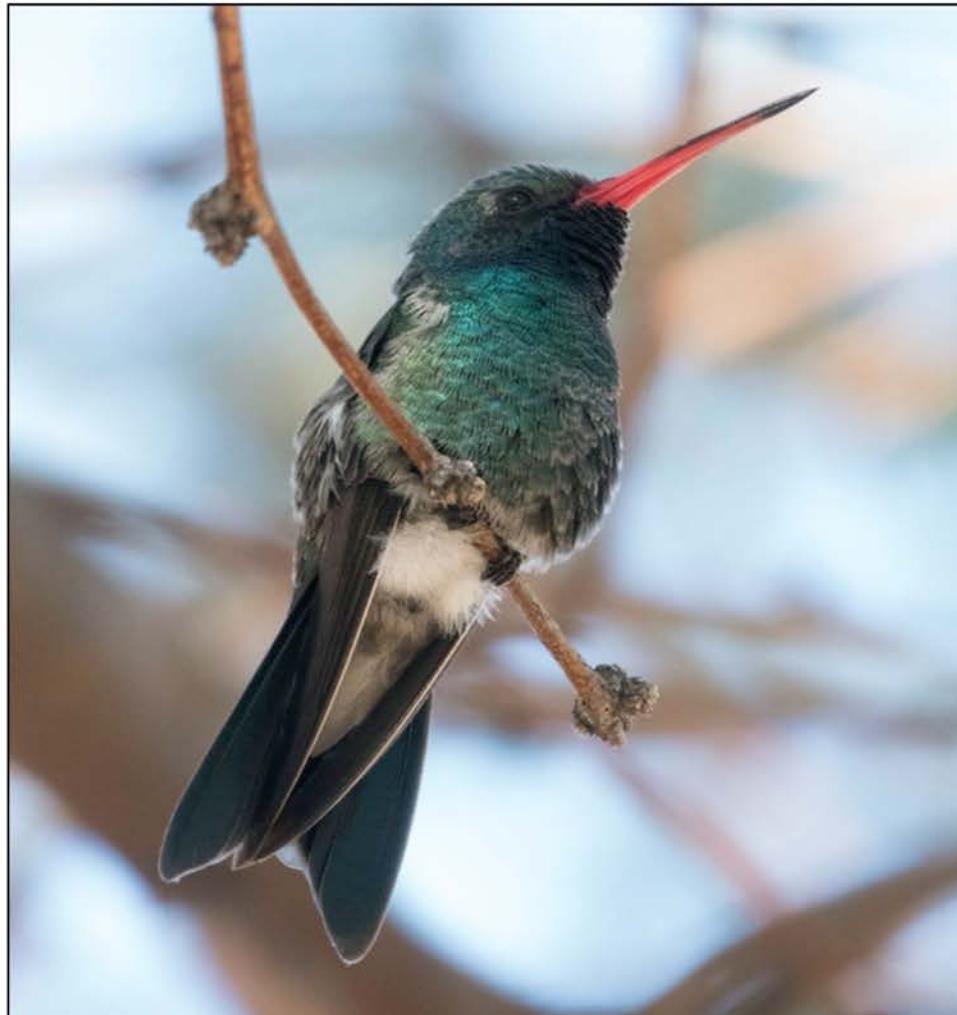
(right) **Anna's Hummingbird** – We don't see it much here, but it's common out west. The yellow on the head isn't feathers, it's pollen.

(below) **Steller's Jay** – Common out west, seen sometimes in Big Bend. Reminds me of the rock band Kiss!



(left) **Gambel's Quail** – Arizona and New Mexico quail... runs around in big flocks.

(right) **Prairie Merlin** – Lovely little falcon, related to the American Kestrel and about the same size.



And last but not least, the **Broad-billed Hummingbird** – its range is in Mexico and it only comes up into the US in extreme southern Arizona and New Mexico. This one happened to be in a neighborhood park in Tucson. He seemed to be very used to people as he posed for about a half-hour, perched right above the chair I was sitting in. Unusual to be that close.

Great trip, lotsa lifers!



The Gila, Aldo Leopold and the Wilderness Myth

Text and photos by Ashleigh Bugg, ITMN Class of 2025

As part of our ITMN training class, I was lucky to read “A Sand County Almanac” by Aldo Leopold. His final chapters on what makes a Wilderness reminded me of a solo camping trip I took to the Gila in June 2024. I’d like to share a reflection from this trip and the thoughts our training class stirred.

The forests of southwestern New Mexico hold the nation’s first designated “Wilderness.” Promoted by the naturalist Aldo Leopold, this expansive area is home to the Gila National Forest, Gila Cliff Dwellings, and Gila Wilderness.

But what exactly is a Wilderness? And can you define or regulate it? After my first dispersed campout in the Lincoln National Forest, I headed west and up into the Gila to find out. *(continued on following two pages)*

In the 1930s and '40s, Aldo Leopold spoke about the concept of Wilderness, particularly in the U.S., where he once worked as a forest service ranger and supervisor.

"Wilderness is a resource that can shrink but cannot grow," Leopold wrote in "A Sand County Almanac." "Invasions can be arrested or modified in a manner to keep an area usable either for recreation, or for science, or for wildlife, but the creation of new wilderness in the full sense of the word is impossible."

It was Leopold's work in the 1920s that led to the creation of the Gila as the first federal Wilderness. He worked to preserve this area of New Mexico more than 40 years before the Wilderness Act was signed into law.

Roughly 558,000 acres of the Gila National Forest were set aside for an area where no road touches. Being in the Gila is like being transported into a world that once was, while still surrounded by the unpreventable march of progress. To access it, you'll need to bring your gear on your back or by mules and horses, much like people did when Leopold first advocated for the area.

I was visiting New Mexico in June 2024, exactly 100 years after the creation of this first "Wilderness in the Nation." Since I was on my road trip and car camping, I opted to find a dispersed campsite in the national forest, rather than the Wilderness, on my way to visit the Gila Cliff Dwellings. Searching for the perfect site, I found the free Sapillo Campground, right across from the Continental Divide Trail.

Built by the Mogollon people around the 1280s, the Gila Cliff Dwellings offer a glimpse into how people lived in the early 1300s. It's vital to be respectful of the area, as [Native Communities](#) hold strong ties to the dwellings and the Gila.

It was one of my favorite cultural areas I visited, although I wasn't in love with the harrowing drive up the mountain to reach the site. Careening up the narrow, winding road, I began to understand why Leopold advocated so strongly for a separate area untouched by cars or machines. He wanted to protect something we're losing rapidly each year.

According to Leopold, even in the 1930s, most of the prime wilderness that made up North America had long disappeared and any chance of saving the remnants was in "rear-guard action."

"Many of the diverse wildernesses out of which we have hammered America are already gone; hence in any practical program the unit areas to be preserved must vary greatly in size and in degree of wildness," he wrote.

"No living man will see again the long-grass prairie, where a sea of prairie flowers lapped at the stirrups of the pioneer... No living man will see again the virgin pineries of the Lake states, or the flatwoods of the coastal plain, or the giant hardwoods; of these, samples of a few acres each will have to suffice."

While federal programs and organizations like the Wilderness Society, which was founded in 1935, sought to help, without a collective effort across all bureaus and a greater moral sense of a land ethic, the process was insufficient, Leopold argued.

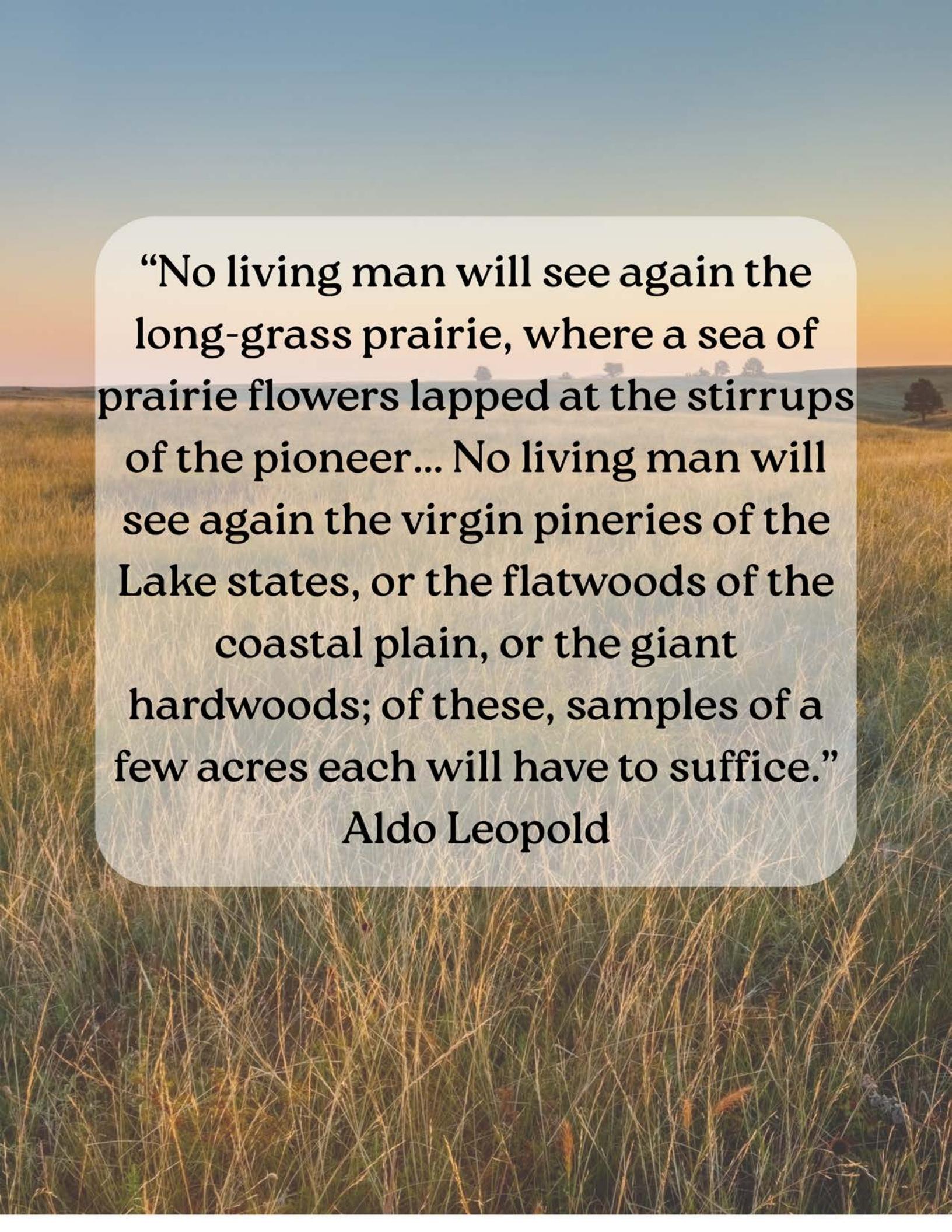
"Collectively these federal areas [national parks and forests] are the backbone of the wilderness program, but they are not so secure as the paper record might lead one to believe. Local pressures for new tourist roads knock off a chip here and a slab there. There is perennial pressure for extension of roads for forest-fire control, and these, by slow degrees, become public highways. At the present moment, ski-tows and ski-hotels are being promoted in many mountain areas, often without regard to their prior designation as wilderness."

As Leopold advocated, sometimes to preserve this idea of Wilderness, it's better not to disturb it all.

New Mexico has quickly become one of my favorite states to visit, and it's due in part to the work of naturalists like Leopold. Meadows surrounded by mountains, glades of aspens, the Gila River winding through, this area continues to fascinate and teach us truths about what it means to be wild, even today.

I headed down from the Gila with a renewed feeling of gratitude for being able to experience these landscapes, before making my way farther west to Arizona.





“No living man will see again the long-grass prairie, where a sea of prairie flowers lapped at the stirrups of the pioneer... No living man will see again the virgin pineries of the Lake states, or the flatwoods of the coastal plain, or the giant hardwoods; of these, samples of a few acres each will have to suffice.”

Aldo Leopold