

# THE MONTHLY

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SECTION 1

BIG SKY EDITION

## Jack Creek Preserve

*BIG SKY'S BEST KEPT SECRET*

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Hidden up at the top of the mountain, beyond Big Sky Resort, past Moonlight Basin, and just inside the gate leading to Ennis, is one of Big Sky's best kept secrets: over 4,600 acres of pristine, untamed, untouched wilderness that lies protected forever. And the best thing about it? It's all there for anyone to enjoy.

This idyllic 4,600 acres was purchased by the Fossil family in 1993 and the Jack Creek Preserve Foundation was created to manage and operate it in 2005. The Fossil's love of hunting and conserving land was a driving force in their lives and in their commitment to protect the land into perpetuity by putting it into a conservation easement. The Preserve, located at the northern end of the Madison range, strategically connects the northern and southern parts of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, forever preserving included wildlife habitat and corridors that extend from Yellowstone National Park to the Gallatin Valley. The preserve consists of old logging roads, two rustic cabins, open range, meadows, old growth trees, alpine lakes, creeks and diverse wildlife.

Having grown up with a passion for hunting and the outdoors and desiring to leave the corporate world behind, Jon Fossil began looking for a ranch out west back in the early 90's. He found what he was looking for when his travels reached Big Sky where he purchased a large expanse of land in 1993. In 2005, Fossil officially created the 4,600-acre Jack Creek Preserve to not only foster a place where wildlife and habitat would be perpetually protected, but also where people could go to experience and learn about nature and conservation.

Today, the Jack Creek Preserve is run by the Foundation which is led by a 20-member Board of Directors including family members and representatives of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the National Forest Service, Moonlight Basin, Missouri River Healthcare and Ennis. In addition to the aforementioned entities, Foundation partners also include the Big Sky Community Corporation, Big Sky Resort Area District, Pope & Young Club, Yellowstone Club Community

Foundation, Madison River Foundation, Ophir School and Lone Peak High School. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation plays a big role in the Foundation and has funded the Youth Camp at the Preserve. Other entities, such as the Yellowstone Club Community Foundation, also generously support the Jack Creek Preserve.

The Foundation's purpose is, in essence, threefold. The Foundation strives to conserve wildlife and habitat, create education programs and share the experience of hunting. As Katie Alvin, Executive Director for the Jack Creek Preserve Foundation, remarks, "What the Foundation is specifically about is stewardship and management from a holistic perspective . . . how does our love of the land translate into action?" Alvin says that they protect the land by managing it wisely. This includes managing weeds, maintaining healthy forests, supervising the range, protecting wildlife populations and habitat and preserving water quality. Hired in 2010, Alvin has helped realize the Fossil's vision.

Education is also a vital part of the Foundation. Since 2005, the Summer Youth Camp has taught 50 kids for four days about things like archery, wildlife and habitat, wilderness safety, weed identification, fishing and outdoor photography. Funded by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the camp is made possible by the dedicated work of volunteers. This past summer, a wildly successful Archery Day Camp was offered as part of Camp Big Sky. Alvin also conducted a well-received class about wildlife and habitat at the After School Program at Ophir School in May.

Currently, the Jack Creek Preserve Foundation is involving Lone Peak High School (LPHS) in its endeavors. Assisting in the development of an interpretive trail system, the LPHS multimedia class creates maps and brochures for people to use on the trail system, while supporting the students' education regarding mapping, creating map content, managing land and understanding geology among other things. Next summer, educational

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programs will be further expanded. In addition to camps, the Foundation funds a science and ecology scholarship program that has given more than \$35,000 in assistance over the past seven years.

Hunting experiences are also offered at the Jack Creek Preserve. Part of the Foundation's objective is to educate people about the importance of hunting in wildlife management and conservation. In particular, ethical hunting and the entire outdoor experience, as well as respect for the land and the wildlife that comes from the hunting experience, are promoted. A free, 3D Archery Range where hunters can hone their skills; youth hunts; and other hunting opportunities made available through the Foundation's partners, usually as part of fundraising efforts, are also available.

One special opportunity the Jack Creek Preserve Foundation offers every year is a free hunting trip for an injured veteran of the Iraq or Afghanistan

war. Lodging is provided in one of the two cabins located on the property and Jon Fossel, himself, provides guide services to ensure success and a memorable experience. Airfare is also offered if needed. There is an application process and the application can be obtained on the Preserve website.

Future Foundation plans include the creation of the aforementioned interpretive trail system (work on this project has begun) that will link different Preserve educational areas, such as the summer camp site and archery range, and will also include a wheelchair accessible area.

To continue in their educational efforts, the Foundation will soon begin building a 2,000-square-foot Conservation Education Center. Located at the trailhead for the interpretive trail system, the Center will serve as the base for the Preserve's activities. The building will have a kitchen, bathroom, classroom/multi-purpose area and a sleeping loft. MSU field researchers, teachers, students,

tourists and Girl and Boy Scouts will all be able to utilize the Center. With current plans to break ground next spring, Alvin describes a Center that will have a 40-person capacity and serve as a classroom for students, meeting place for daytrips, hub for the trail system and setting for exhibits. In the meantime, plans are being finalized, permits obtained and money raised to complete the project (\$66,000 has been raised thus far).

It is no small thing that the Fossel family has perpetually protected this invaluable piece of land and made it available to anyone to visit and enjoy. It is truly their legacy. Take the time to check out the Jack Creek Preserve. Accessing the Preserve is easy and just a phone call away (the private road dictates that people call first); contact Katie Alvin at (406) 995-7550 or via email at [katie@jackcreekpreserve.org](mailto:katie@jackcreekpreserve.org). For more information or to make a donation, visit the website at [www.jackcreekpreserve.org](http://www.jackcreekpreserve.org).