

spring 2020

# Teller

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WILDLIFE REFUGE

*to inspire, educate, and demonstrate conservation in action*



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**ON THE COVER:** A Lazuli Bunting calls in spring. *Image by Alex Kearney*

## COVID-19 UPDATE

Due to the uncertainty revolving around the future impacts of COVID-19 coupled with the CDC's existing recommendations for social gatherings, we feel it is our responsibility as an organization to do our part in the mitigation of the risk surrounding the virus. We regret to announce the cancellation of the following 2020 spring and summer events:

**STEWARDSHIP DAY | APRIL 25**

**YOUTH EXPO | MAY 9**

**TNT DINNER AND AUCTION | JUNE 13**

Teller Wildlife Refuge is committed to the health and safety of our community, staff, volunteers and supporters and thank you for your understanding.



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### STAFF

- Sam Lawry, *Executive Director*
- Karen Zumwalt, *Education Coordinator*
- Heather Tellock, *Communications and Events Director*
- David Whitmoyer, *Lands Manager*

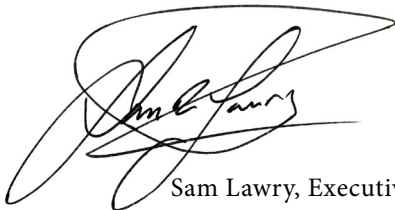
# A WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: CHALLENGING TIMES

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Working for a conservation organization during these trying times often has me wondering why what we do at Teller Wildlife Refuge matters. It's had me remembering the morning of September 11, 2001. I was a waterfowl biologist for Arizona Game and Fish Department heading to work, thinking World War III had started. My number one concern at the time was my family. Today, as we face another crisis, I again think foremost of my family, but just like 9-11, biologists like myself, across the country, continue to do the the work we do, while perhaps modified, because it does matter.

Teller's conservation education programs will undoubtedly change during these challenging times, but we are exploring how we can provide a new conservation connection digitally. Our on-the-ground Wildlife Friendly Farming programs and habitat enhancements are still in motion, although the number of volunteers participating in those projects will be adjusted to comply with social distancing requirements. As we all realize the impacts of COVID-19, places like Teller offer each of us a moment of hope and appreciation of the outdoors. If only for a few minutes, the overhead passing of a Bald Eagle while walking the Teller public trail brings a smile to any face, young or old. While we navigate these times of uncertainty, I invite all of our Teller supporters to get outside ,wherever you are, and allow nature to recharge your battery. Teller stands ready to do its part for people and wildlife.

Be safe and good health to you all,



Sam Lawry, Executive Director



**GAVIN HERBERT, PRESIDENT OF THE TELLER YOUTH CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP COUNCIL** reports that a partnership with the University of Montana student chapter of The Wildlife Society will lead to on the ground conservation projects and potential research on the refuge. This will not only increase the number of people participating but add an important linkage between future wildlife professionals and management activities on the refuge. The mission of the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society is to encourage and support effective wildlife management in Montana by fostering development of current and future wildlife professionals, providing science-based information for policy and education, and communicating and collaborating with conservation organizations and the public.

## LANDS UPDATE

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*David Whitmoyer, Lands Manager*

Hello and happy spring to everyone, now that it is finally here!

Looking back at the last year, I'm amazed at the tremendous amount I have learned about different aspects of wildlife and how they thrive and what can limit their sustainability on the refuge. This piece of property is home to some of the biggest populations of ducks I have ever seen, among other animal species. This is a huge testament to the hard work of volunteers, board members, staff, government programs, and local contractors that have helped develop the refuge in the past. I hope and strive to continue this great legacy for many years to come.

We had a big winter at the refuge with many projects going on all over the property. [Volunteers](#) made all the difference this winter. Among our amazing volunteers, Chuck, Bob, Ron, and Brody are consistent help on the refuge. The five of us have managed to pull miles of run-down fence from the property, enhancing the beauty of the natural landscape and removing potentially harmful obstacles for wildlife. We have also started a campaign to clean up the dead and fallen debris in the forest to help undergrowth prevail and make the refuge more fire safe. Slash piles are created, some of which will be burned, others will be left for ground nesting birds and other species that are fond of such debris. Speaking of birds, we packed 13 goose platforms around the refuge full of straw from Gingrich Farms so that Canada Geese have elevated, protected nesting sites during the spring. Another project we have taken on is protecting evergreen trees in the river bottom. Deer browsing has knocked down the younger trees and has stunted population numbers. Hopefully we can start seeing more evergreens reach a mature age as we monitor this project more regularly.

The education room at the Slack Barn was due for a tune up, so this winter Joe, Bill, Brody, and I worked on remodeling and painting of the room. We put a new coat of paint on the walls and the ceilings and epoxied the floor. It looks great and I can't thank the volunteer help I had enough for the time and effort they put into the project.

The refuge had an array of irrigation pipe spread throughout that I was able to consolidate this winter. We now have enough mainline and pipe to service over 40 acres! All in all, I have created more work for myself, but in turn we are creating more habitat and food sources for all forms of wildlife, which is my passion, as we continue to inspire, educate, and demonstrate conservation in action.

## BISHOP JOINS TELLER BOARD OF TRUSTEES

At the December, 2019 Teller Board of Trustees meeting, the Board unanimously endorsed the selection of Dr. Chad Bishop to serve as the University of Montana Teller Wildlife Refuge Trustee. Chad currently serves as the Director of the Wildlife Biology Program and Associate Professor in the Department of Ecosystem and Conservation Sciences. Dr. Bishop received his B.S. from Montana State in Wildlife Ecology, Masters from University of Idaho, and PhD From Colorado State University in Wildlife Biology. Chad who was born in Iowa grew up following his father into a career in wildlife. Prior to coming to the UM, Chad was the Assistant Director for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. He has a well-rounded background in wildlife conservation and research as well as administration. Chad is very interested in the collaborative opportunities between Teller and the University on a variety of fronts. “It’s an honor to be selected to join the Teller Wildlife Refuge Board and become part of a lasting conservation legacy in the Bitterroot. I am especially pleased to

represent the University of Montana on the Teller Board. Communications are already under way to discover how our UM wildlife biology students can tie in with ongoing education and outreach activities at Teller.” Chad lives in Missoula with his wife Laura, and two children, Jacob and Clara.



*give* IN THE NAME OF  
CONSERVATION

Teller’s mission to inspire, educate and demonstrate conservation in action relies on the support of generous donors like you! Make Teller a part of your annual giving today to support conservations tomorrow!

# TELLER TRAIL GETS A FACELIFT

*Corvallis High School Classroom Without Walls Student*

In the town of Corvallis, located in the Bitterroot Valley, there lies a simple place. A place where nature is able to exist, to flourish. Where wildlife roam free and where the crowns of trees soar into the sky. This is it. This is where everything exists perfect harmony. This is Teller Wildlife Refuge.

But, how is this place staying alive and well? Since the fall of 2019, the Teller managers and Corvallis Classroom Without Walls (CWW) have been working to maintain this habitat in the Bitterroot. So far, we have successfully remodeled the entrance by removing the unnecessary gate that has caused erosion along our Bitterroot River. We've also added a new information kiosk. The CWW students have been able to map the trail system, as well as collect data from the game cameras placed throughout Teller, to give insight into the local wildlife.

Next, CWW will be designing a new sign and more information kiosks throughout the trail. As well as planting native shrubs along the riverbank to prevent continuous erosion. We are also working to combat the garbage that pollutes Teller and the Bitterroot River by introducing a bear proof trash can to the site. According to The Mercury News, if trash is not maintained, it draws wildlife out to eat unnatural foods, which can sicken and kill 100s of animals, as well as make them dependent on human foods. Hopefully with our help, Teller can prosper for years to come.



*image courtesy of Perry Backus*

## RAVALLI ELECTRIC CO-OP PLACES POWERLINE INVERTERS TO REDUCE AVIAN BIRD STRIKES:

In an attempt to reduce powerline bird strikes, members of the [Ravalli Electric Co-op](#) will be installing power line marking devices at three locations on Teller. The three locations all exist where power lines stretch across natural wetland flight plans for a variety of migratory birds. With the appearance of Trumpeter Swans last year, Teller felt obligated to reduce this common threat to Trumpeters and other birds.

According to information put out by the U.S Department of Agriculture, collisions with power transmission and distribution lines may kill anywhere from hundreds of thousands to 175 million birds annually, and power lines electrocute tens to hundreds of thousands more birds annually, but unfortunately, these utilities are poorly monitored for both strikes and electrocutions.

Hats off to Ravalli Electric Co-op for their outstanding commitment to properly safeguard important avian corridors!

# TELLER RECEIVES CROSS CHARITABLE FOUNDATION GRANT

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As 2019 came to a close, Teller was notified that its grant application to restore aspen stands was approved in the amount of \$5,000.00. The [Cross Charitable Foundation](#), located in Bozeman, Montana, invited potential grantees to submit proposals that would benefit migratory wildlife corridors. Specifically, the grant funds are for assisting those organizations actively promoting conservation of the environment, with particular emphasis on conserving wildlife habitat and wildlife migratory routes. Teller's proposal identified three separate aspen enclosures that would enhance riparian habitat values on Teller river bottom lands. Aspen stands are recognized as the single most species rich avian forest habitat found in the West. Protecting aspen from over browsing from white-tailed deer in the past has proven highly successful not only promoting recovery of descendant aspen stands, but encouraging shrubs such as golden currant, redosier dogwood and snowberry to flourish. These projected sites are visited by a host of migratory song birds who benefit from the habitat during seasonal migrations in addition to food sources and nesting habitats. The enclosures will be installed this spring and remain in place for at least 5 to 7 years.



**CHARITABLE  
FOUNDATION**



## *2021 Wedding Package*

Our wedding package includes use of the historic Slack Barn and acres of surrounding grounds for an entire weekend, along with lodging for 14 people at our heritage homes.

Host a rehearsal dinner, ceremony, reception and your family or friends all in one place!

Also included in the package:

- park-like grounds -
- volleyball court and croquet -
- new tables and chairs for 200 -
- assorted wooden benches, tables, chairs and stands -
- dance floor -
- trash removal -
- indoor restroom facilities -

*\$4,500*

*(paid in 3 installments)*

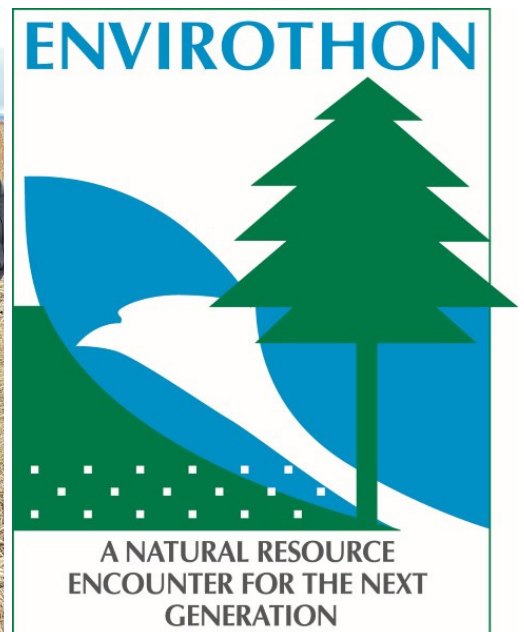
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**CONTACT TELLER WILDLIFE REFUGE**  
406.961.3507 | [heather@tellerwildlife.org](mailto:heather@tellerwildlife.org)

# TELLER PARTNERS WITH HAMILTON HIGH ENVIROTHON

On a chilly March day ten Hamilton High School (HHS) students braved the cold to conduct a field assessment of Teller's wetland complex as part of the annual Envirothon. Their assignment? Develop a water management plan with available water rights to manage the wetland complex for the benefit of water quality, quantity and optimal wildlife habitat. Initiated in 1979, the Pennsylvania Soil and Water Conservation Districts created an "Environmental Olympics" as a way to encourage high school students to become interested in natural resource conservation and environmental issues and careers. The Environmental Olympics, later shortened to Enviro-Olympics, quickly gained popularity as a hands-on outdoor competition designed to challenge and test student's knowledge of soils/land use, aquatic ecology, forestry, wildlife and current environmental issues. In 1988, the program became known as the [Envirothon](#). The HHS Envirothon coach, Marie

Antinoli, recently said, "Teller has been a huge asset to the Hamilton High School Envirothon Team by providing the opportunity for them to problem solve real-life scenarios which bring conservation practices into focus. Learning about Best Management Practices can be murky and abstract but when the team visits Teller, they are able to see with their own eyes how plants and wildlife flourish when properly managed. And like the old adage says, 'Seeing is believing!' By spending time trying to unravel these real-life scenarios, my students become more optimistic for the future when they learn there are proven methods which help preserve fragile and complex ecosystems. I want to thank Sam and all of the supporters of Teller for helping to create a space where students can witness first-hand the effectiveness of practices which conserve soil, water, native plants and wildlife. Teller is helping to mold a generation of believers in the value of environmental conservation."





# Kids corner

## HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT, "WHAT'S THE POINT OF A PORCUPINE?"

Actually, there are about 30,000 of them, but let's not get close enough to count! Each quill is barbed and sharper than a hypodermic needle. *Here are a few things we can know without getting poked!*

THE SCIENTIFIC NAME OF THE NORTH AMERICAN PORCUPINE IS ERETHIZON DORSAT, OR THE ANIMAL WITH THE IRRITATING BACK. THEY ARE PART OF THE RODENT FAMILY, A LITTLE SMALLER THAN A BEAVER, ABOUT 2-3 FEET IN LENGTH AND WEIGH ABOUT 20 POUNDS.

IF YOU LOOK UP IN A TREE AND SEE A BRANCH THAT IS MISSING SOME BARK, THERE MIGHT BE A PORCUPINE IN THE AREA.

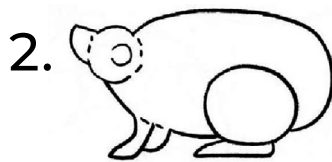
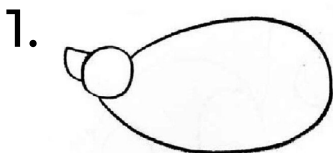
THEY ARE GOOD CLIMBERS, BUT SLOW MOVERS ON THE GROUND. THEIR FAMOUS QUILLS KEEP THEM SAFE FROM PREDATORS. IF THEY'RE THREATENED AND CAN'T GET AWAY, THEY TURN THEIR BACK TOWARD THE ATTACKER AND RELEASE QUILLS. HOPEFULLY THIS DOESN'T HAPPEN TO YOUR PET DOG! IF IT DOES, DO NOT TRY TO REMOVE THE QUILLS ON YOUR OWN!

PORCUPINES LIKE TO LIVE ALONE EXCEPT DURING BREEDING SEASON. UNLIKE SOME RODENTS, THE PORCUPINE ONLY HAS ONE LITTER PER YEAR AND USUALLY ONLY ONE BABY CALLED A PORCUPETTE.

A GROUP OF PORCUPINES IS CALLED A PRICKLE!

PORCUPINES ARE THE TREE TRIMMERS OF THE ECOSYSTEM. THEIR APPETITE FOR CAMBIUM WILL USUALLY ONLY DAMAGE THE TREE BRANCH AND NOT THE WHOLE TREE. FEWER BRANCHES ALLOWS MORE SUNLIGHT TO REACH THE FOREST FLOOR.

how to draw a porcupine!



courtesy of [www.indiahudubaby.com](http://www.indiahudubaby.com)



PO Box 548  
Corvallis, MT 59828  
406.961.3507  
[www.tellerwildlife.org](http://www.tellerwildlife.org)

*A Meadowlark perches amongst budding branches; Image courtesy of Alex Kearney*



*want to learn more?*

E-mail Heather at [heather@tellerwildlife.org](mailto:heather@tellerwildlife.org) or visit us online to sign up for [Teller's E-newsletters](#), [volunteer opportunities](#) and [upcoming Teller happenings](#)!

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