



PUBLIC LAND
WATER ACCESS
ASSOCIATION
• EST 1985 •

THE KEY QUARTERLY

Unlocking Access to Montana's Public Lands & Waters

Winter 2024

Passing The Public Access Torch

Alex Leone Takes The Reins As Executive Director

PLWA is thrilled to welcome new Executive Director Alex Leone to the public access team. During the fall the organization was honored to have the opportunity to interview a number of incredible candidates for the position. President Bernie Lea commented, "It just shows we are on the right track that so many qualified, incredible people want to work with PLWA. We have been making important changes in the organization in the past few years and people now know how important access work is to Montana." After two months of interviews and discussions, the organization was pleased to make an offer to Alex to come on board as Executive Director. As Alex transitions out of his current position and into full-time status in March, Drewry Hanes continues to serve as our Public Access Consultant, helping ensure coverage of current projects and staff team building. "I think we have a great process here to help segue present program oversight from one administration to another, while also having the opportunity to discuss how some processes can be improved or updated. It's great getting to work all together as a team with Staff and the Board during this time, and I honestly wish more organizations had the ability to do this."

Besides Alex's long term membership and support of the organization, his background and training resonated immediately with the Board. Alex comes to PLWA after over seven years of service with the Clark Fork Coalition, another Montana nonprofit. During his time with the organization, Alex worked on legislative issues, Superfund cleanup projects, partner projects with communities and Governmental offices,

and raised a substantial amount of funds for the organization's work. Alex has also worked as a wildland firefighter and researcher for the US Forest Service, and served as a mentor and teaching assistant for both graduate and undergraduate students.

Alex graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Montana in Forest Resource Management and a Master of Science degree from Montana State University in Earth Sciences. As part of his degree, he researched the Stream Access Law, working with Dr. Julia Haggerty on "*Traditions of Public Access in a Shifting Private Landscape: Social Dimensions of Montana's Stream Access Debates*".

Comments Alex, "I'm elated about this opportunity to lead an organization that protects and preserves one of the most intrinsic and fundamental aspects of living in this state, our access to public lands and waters. As someone who has spent a large portion of my life working and recreating on Montana's waterways, the impact PLWA has had on both my life and career is profound. I believe that my passion for PLWA's mission and my diverse experiences working in the Montana conservation community position me well to join PLWA as a dynamic, empathetic, and forward-thinking leader. As Montana's population continues to grow and our relationship with the landscape evolves, I plan to advocate and work to ensure future generations have the same access to public lands and waters that have shaped so many of us that love this state."

East Side of the Crazy Mountains Update

The proposed land exchange in the East Side of the Crazy Mountains continues to be an issue of grave concern for PLWA as well as for many of our partner organizations and members. As noted in the previous edition of The Key Quarterly, PLWA formally lodged our objections to the US Forest Service's *Proposed East Crazies Inspiration Divide Land Exchange* (ECIDLE) in late 2023. Those comments in full are available via our website, and the organization stands behind them.

In early 2024 the organization as well as other objectors of standing were notified that the US Forest Service had decided to take the unusual step of holding an Objection Resolution Meeting, whereby the USFS and Objectors could discuss noted objections to the plan in more detail. This meeting was to be a closed meeting for individuals who had registered objections with the USFS and were speaking on behalf of members, groups, or communities. An invitation to a closed meeting was issued and several parties were invited. PLWA was joined in objections by:

- Wild Montana
- Montana Wildlife Federation
- Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
- Park County Environmental Council
- Friends of the Crazy Mountains
- Park County Rod and Gun Club

There were also six individuals who spoke in opposition to the ECIDLE, the majority of them PLWA members.

We are pleased to report that the organizations came

together to join PLWA and emphasize the incredible importance of protecting the Sweetgrass Drainage access. PLWA also supported the incredibly important points made by partners and speakers regarding necessary conservation easements and clarity regarding process.

Disturbingly, at the beginning of the meeting, Objectors were told that they were not permitted to discuss any requests for legal action to secure or protect public access into the East Crazy area of the land exchange. Meeting attendees were also told that the meeting would not be allowed to be recorded in an effort to further productive conversation. Speaking on behalf of PLWA and its membership, Drewry Hanes called USFS staff and attendees' attention to the discrepancies between the stated goals of the ECIDLE and the objectives achieved in the exchange. She also questioned how relinquishing claims on parcels of public lands and trail mileage that is currently public could serve to increase public access, as stated in the proposal. The forfeit of USFS easements granted by the Van Cleve Company to the public was also concerning to PLWA. Upon questioning by USFS staff about the existence of these easements, Ms. Hanes produced copies from the department's own files and offered them for review.

PLWA received, with other Objectors, official correspondence from the USFS regarding this matter a few short weeks later, noting that while all Objectors were consistent with their concerns, the USFS would be moving ahead with their proposal unaltered. PLWA is pursuing the matter of access in the East Crazies independently and hopes to have more news soon.



<https://www.tradbowmt.org/>

Safeguarding Montana's Heritage

The Traditional Bowhunters of Montana (TBM) is dedicated to the preservation and advancement of traditional bowhunting values in Montana. "We promote high ethical standards for the hunting and taking of wild game by means of bow and arrow. The TBM provides fellowship to those who wish to pursue a traditional bowhunting lifestyle and is dedicated to continuing Montana's traditional bowhunting heritage."

Reach out to TBM to join, get involved, or donate today. Visit their [website](#) to learn more.

PLWA Celebrates Drewry Hanes' Years of Service To Public Access

It was a touching and memorable Wednesday evening in Bozeman when Board Members, Staff, and supporters came together to honor outgoing Executive Director Drewry Hanes for her many years with the organization. Drew was treated to heartfelt tributes from Treasurer Katy Ross, Director of Access Issues Haley Sir, and Secretary Carol Fox. Friends came from as far as Virginia City & Anaconda to enjoy food, drinks, and celebrate access victories. Commented Drew, "I couldn't be prouder of this organization, of the team we have, and the focus on this mission. I think we are doing some of the most important work in the West, and that we are going to become the most important public access organization in the country because of all of you. It was my honor to lead."

Keep up with us here



[publiclandwateraccess](#)



[plwamt](#)



What Are Members Saying About PLWA?

“

Thank you for all your efforts to keep our public lands and water accessible!

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Keep up the great work. In memory of my father. I plan to get the PLWA license plate (great design and colors, simple) during the next registration cycle.

”

“

The letter to FWP was excellent. Keep up the great work.

”

From the President's Desk

We have encountered many changes in the last seven months. Our distinguished Executive Director, Drew Hanes, is moving on and we wish her well. We know we will continue to benefit from her efforts and successes at PLWA. She is being succeeded by an incredibly qualified leader, Alex Leone, who will not only be a great fit for the organization but will no doubt help PLWA thrive in the coming years.

We also now have a full Board of Directors with the addition of two new appointed members, Brian Conklin (Ennis) and Coby Gierke (Polson) in January. We are updating our Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws, and internal operational documents.

I would like to thank the Staff for their input and efforts during this change of leadership. They were involved and we had very productive discussions as we evaluated each candidate and Board prospects. We are in a new position at this time, so I wish everyone the best.

Remember what Texas Bix Bender says, "Never grumble. It makes you about as welcome as a sidewinder in a cow camp."

Bernard Lea

Bernard Lea, President

When Looking Into PLWA's Membership, Support for Montana Public Access Spans the State, the Country, and Beyond

Last November, PLWA welcomed new member Brent Smith from Danville, IL. Along with his financial donation came some meaningful words from Brent: "I am not from Montana, but I love the state. It's great that Montana has such a rich history of public access. My state has less than 5% public lands. I am interested in supporting outdoor causes in Montana." In a response to our thank you, Brent mentioned that he had gone on to learn more about public access issues since his first visit to the state in 2019. He expressed his gratitude for "people like you fighting to keep access open now and for the future."

We salute and thank Brent, along with the many other out-of-state members that staunchly and generously support PLWA's important public access mission. They hail from twenty-five states that span the far corners of the nation, and we can even boast of some Canadian neighbors among our supporters.

Here are a few stories about what drew those members to PLWA's mission, and what keeps them with us over the years:

Reid Stevens, now a resident of Washington state, was an early joiner of the PLWA team. Reid grew up using public land and water access near his hometown of Forsyth, Montana and reminisces fondly about recreating on public land for over seventy-five years! In a November, 2020 newsletter [story](#) about Reid and his late twin brother Ron, a founding member of PLWA, he noted he supports PLWA "to help ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to enjoy hunting, fishing, hiking, and camping in these incredible environments as much as my family has." In a recent conversation, Reid added that he has made a bequest to PLWA in his will because he wants to see PLWA continue long into the future. Reid states "We need to stay vigilant and advocate for public access as long as people try to block public access."

Another long-time member since PLWA's fledging years in the 1980's, Californian Kitty Craven and her late husband sought PLWA's assistance when they experienced an access problem in the Lima area where they owned property and recreated. PLWA responded with an access investigation. Organizational research and facts about the case helped resolve the issue. Kitty stays with PLWA because she wants to see that access stays open for all.

Member John Hardgrove of Washington and his brother Mike grew up in Montana but left the state after college to pursue their technical professions. Now retired, they like to return home a couple of times a year to enjoy the great Montana outdoors with their friends and relatives. John laments both the decreased

ability for the public to gain access to private lands for hunting and fishing since his youth, and that some of the former access to public lands he enjoyed has also been cut off; "It makes me mad." When he became aware of PLWA's work to safeguard public access and regain what has been illegally closed off, he joined the organization's membership. John regularly donates and has added PLWA to his will. As he reflects on his purchases of Montana hunting and fishing licenses in the past and present: "My first memory of Montana licenses was when they cost \$6 (\$3 for a fishing license and \$3 for a hunting license). Now I pay over \$1000 for non-resident licenses and consider it to be a fair deal – so long as there are places for me to enjoy the water and walk the land."

PLWA is proud to have members like Brent who visit here and appreciate our abundance of public lands and waters and the opportunities provided by public access; members like Kitty who lived here and want to keep access open; and members like Reid and John who grew up here and repeatedly return to enjoy recreating in what they still consider their home.

Director of Access Investigations Haley Sir comments, "We regularly receive access complaints from individuals who live out of state and who run into issues while recreating in Montana. Oftentimes, people reach out to enquire about whether there are similar organizations in their home state that they can support. The inquiries and support we get from those simply visiting our great state speaks volumes to the beauty and uniqueness of our public lands, and show how important it is for us to address each and every access complaint for the benefit of all, local or not."

We have members that have never set foot on Montana soil but contribute to PLWA because they believe strongly in our mission and our work.

We are proud that so many beyond Montana's borders believe in PLWA's work, and we hope that Montana sets the standard for public access initiatives. Public access rights should be the standard, not the exception, as our exiting Executive Director Drewry Hanes so aptly captures in [previous newsletter missives](#):

"[Montana](#) is heterogenous, but it is also one large community bound together by our ardent love of public

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Safe Winter Recreating Practices: Auto Edition

One of the benefits that the multitude of recreational opportunities Montana's public lands and waters offers is the fact that the public has the ability to play outside year round. From fishing to camping to skiing to rock climbing, Montana's mountains, plains, and rivers see activity across all four seasons. For most folks, accessing these points, be they trailheads, public road bridges, State School Trust lands, or other such locations, involves the use of a vehicle.

Big Sky Country boasts many locations beyond the reach of both modern inconveniences such as crowds and modern conveniences such as cell service. As such, during all times of year it is important to develop safe travel practices and be prepared for unplanned events to occur. During the winter months, planning ahead and being prepared becomes even more vital.

No matter the time of year, there are several things that recreationists should always get into the habit of doing before heading out onto public lands and waters.

- Download or carry a map of the location you are heading, and review it beforehand. Check with local officials about any road or trail closures, or any weather events such as floods or avalanche warnings that might affect your activities.
- Tell someone where you are going, and when to expect you back.
- Ensure that your vehicle has been serviced, that you have a full tank of gas, and that you have the correct tires for the activity you are pursuing. If you need chains, ensure they fit the vehicle's tires.

Having a survival kit in the vehicle is an important habit to get in to, especially if you will be traveling beyond the range of cellular service or if you are on roads that may be less frequented by other travelers. The most basic kit for winter should include the following items:

- A headlamp with spare batteries and a spare bulb.
- A first aid kit stocked with basic first aid items and any prescription medications family members regularly take.
- A snow shovel and insulated gloves.
- An ice scraper and brush.
- A winter weight sleeping bag or blanket.
- Non-perishable food (& pet food if applicable).
- Bottled water (consider keeping water in a cooler to avoid freezing in winter).
- Car jump starter pack (the best ones are able to jump start a single stranded vehicle, charge a cell phone, and provide light). Check & recharge every three months.
- Extra clothing, boots, & socks.
- Sand or kitty litter for traction.
- Tow strap (read up on the correct point to attach for your vehicle).
- Flares, triangles, and other emergency objects.
- A lighter and collapsible hand saw to clear debris or make a fire if needed.

It is important to stay with your vehicle if you become stranded as exposure or injury are some of the main reasons recreationists encounter serious problems in rural or backcountry locations. This also helps rescuers find you. With a few simple steps of preparation, Montana offers great opportunities to play outside year round.



I'm ecstatic at this opportunity to work for an organization that I deeply admire and respect, and I'm incredibly humbled and excited to take the reins of such an amazing Montana conservation institution. I am incredibly grateful to Drew for leading the

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

organization into such a solid position for 2024 and beyond.

I look forward to getting to know all of you in the coming year as I travel around Montana.

Alex Leone

Alex Leone, MS

lands and waters. It stretches beyond its borders to the memories and souls of those people who return to her again and again.”

We thank our supporters, within and beyond the edges of our great state, and acknowledge the importance of your dedication to our cause.

The Importance of Montana’s Recreation Economy:

Non-residents recreating in Montana are a huge contributor to Montana’s economy. A [survey](#) of the Montana Travel Industry completed by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at the University of Montana found that in 2022:

- 12.5 million people visited Montana
- \$5.82 billion was spent by Montana visitors
- Outdoor recreation supported 29,453 jobs in Montana
- Top non-resident activities included: day hiking (42%), wildlife watching (29%), nature photography (26%), and car/RV camping (26%)

Similar recreation research data compiled by [Headwaters Economics](#) indicates that Montana’s outdoor recreation economy accounted for 4.4% of Montana’s GDP in 2022, the third highest in the nation, and that 1 in 13 Montana workers are supported by out-of-state travel. Not measured in these statistics are the substantial benefits to Fish, Wildlife, and Parks that occur through purchase of non-resident hunting and fishing licenses.

How Can You Support PLWA?

Looking to make sure access to your favorite places to play stays public for generations to come? Here are a few ways you can support our work:

- Sign up for a PLWA [membership](#) today, and tell your friends. Memberships start at only \$20 a year but are essential in helping us do our work. If you play on public lands or waters, pay for a membership to help us protect access for all!
- Get our Public Lands [license plate](#) for only \$25 and let folks know you support a great cause. Go in to any vehicle registration office in Montana and simply request the plate for your vehicle, trailer, or camper, or if you are a dealer partner with us for free!
- Ask us to come talk to your organization, community, or class, or invite us to table at your next event. Helping us get the word out makes a huge difference!
- Throw a fundraiser for PLWA or partner with us. We love getting out in the community and having a great time. Reach out to plwa@plwa.org for more info.

Interested in Interning with PLWA?

Earn college credit and help safeguard equitable access to Montana’s public lands and waters. Work directly under the Executive Director and the Executive Committee of the Public Land Water Access Association. The PLWA Undergraduate Intern will learn valuable non-profit operation skills tied to public access investigation, grassroots advocacy and community engagement, fundraising, partnership building, legal elements of public access work, and digital communications techniques.

Graduate student, legal, and micro-internships are available at the discretion of the Executive Director.

If your department or program has not partnered with PLWA in the past, we encourage you to review our [Internship page](#) and speak with your department head about a collaboration.

Internship Details:

- Applications for the Fall 2024 PLWA Internship will open in Spring of 2024. Micro-internship opportunities will be announced via Social Media and on the Internship page of PLWA’s website Spring/Summer 2024.
- Internship applicants must be Montana-based and enrolled in a Montana institution.
- Submit questions or requests for graduate or legal internships to:
 - Alex Leone, Executive Director, Public Land Water Access Association – Bozeman, MT: alex@plwa.org

If you would like to partner with PLWA for internships or have us table at your school or institution, please reach out to plwa@plwa.org or visit our website for more information.

PLWA's Reach Across Montana Continues to Expand

Two New Directors Join PLWA's Board



Brian Conklin - Ennis, Montana

Brian moved to Montana after 24 years of working overseas in International Development. As a career US Diplomat for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Brian and his family spent years working in environmental, agriculture, and economic development, using weekends to explore game parks and the wild beauty of Africa. After retiring from the foreign service, his family settled in the Madison Valley where Brian became involved in local access issues while campaigning for County Commissioner. For the last two years he has consulted with organizations around the world to build their capacity to deliver results and impact in their local communities.

Brian and his family moved to Ennis because of the incredible beauty of Montana, and the opportunity to fly fish, hunt, and enjoy the wild places around them. The attraction of Montana was its forward looking

constitution that provides public access to rivers and public areas. One of the first things he saw when he moved to Ennis was an article in Outside Bozeman about a successful fight led by PLWA to unblock fishing access in the Ruby Valley.

"I was immediately drawn to support an organization that was having such an important impact in my community. It is so important to have a group that holds our federal, state, and local officials (as well as landowners) accountable to protect our valuable public access. Without PLWA, these rights would erode and disappear."

Coby Gierke - Polson, Montana

Coby brings over 12 years of experience in executive leadership and environmental conservation working with Federal and State agencies across the West. As a dedicated conservation professional he has successfully built and scaled sustainable and diverse portfolios of attractive conservation programs to stakeholders, from internal staff, state and Federal land management agencies, to individual donors and multimillion-dollar foundations. In addition to leading two organizations as an Executive Director, Coby has held key roles at organizations such as the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation, Colorado Fourteeners Initiative, the National Park Service, and the US Forest Service. A strong business acumen and entrepreneurial thinking for mission-driven businesses is something he's excited to offer to the PLWA.

Coby can be found enjoying the outdoors of Montana and the West on his raft, bike, or boots whenever the opportunity is available.





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Dylan out on public lands

PLWA Who We Are Highlight: Dylan Pipinich

Dylan was born and raised in Anaconda, MT, on the edge of the Pintler Wilderness. By high school age, there were very few lakes in the Pintlers and Pioneers that he hadn't fished, very few drainages that he hadn't hunted, and very few peaks that he hadn't climbed. He completed his undergraduate degree in Bozeman, MT, and later moved to Butte, MT where he still resides.

He says *"My dedication and resolve to recreating on public lands and waters is ...an asset. To be honest, I believe the ability to hunt, hike, and fish on public lands has had more of an impact on who I am today than anything else. It has taught me community, camaraderie, self-worth and drive, and many other virtues. It's a place to find one's self, and without it, I would be a very different person. I've experienced an access issue myself, and lost a very close friend to cancer during the process. It was eye opening to see how fast you can lose something and how hard it is to get it back...I couldn't be any more excited about the accomplishments PLWA has made and where its heading. In my mind, there are few endeavors more righteous."*

Quote of the Quarter:

"Doing the right thing is not a matter of convenience; it reflects your values and integrity."

— Shree Shambav