

## GUNNISON ARTS CENTER BRIEFS

### Call for jewelers

Are you a local jeweler looking for a new way to get your name out there or sell your work in the off season? The GAC will be filling the upper gallery with local jewelers work the whole month of March.

Artists deadline to apply is Feb. 22 or 23, all artists who apply will be accepted into the fair. Booths may be shared with artists and are \$20 per booth or \$15 for members. Learn more by calling 970.641.4029.

### "The Greatest Story You'll Ever Tell"

All of us have at least one potentially great story waiting to be shared in a theatrical setting. The purpose of this workshop is to share the structures and strategies of creating a dramatic text that connects successfully the story to the audience. Some experience in writing and an understanding of how theatre works are helpful, but not required.

Workshops dates are Mondays Feb. 15-March 8 from 6-8 p.m. Minimum five students to run. Instructor: Paul Edwards. Cost is \$115 per student. In Partnership with the Vita Institute for the Arts.

### In Our Galleries through Feb. 26

#### Main Gallery: "Color Theory" Created by Gunki Kids

See the art of Gunnison's amazing elementary students! This is their annual chance to hang artwork in an official gallery exhibit at the GAC. Masterpieces in each color have been assigned to each grade. Come see the entire color spectrum of young talent in the valley!

#### Upper Gallery: "Consumed" Open Community Show

What did you consume when we were isolated? What consumed you? How does consumption shape who we are and what we make? Whether it be media, art, food, or ideas, this exhibit will showcase what consumption means to the artists of the Gunnison Valley. In this open community show, you will have the chance to see works from many different artists and in many different media, trying to tackle the idea of consumption after the year we just had.

## Rodents win over Gunnison Valley land managers

Sam Liebl  
Times Editor

Enlarged wetlands, reduced erosion and better resilience to drought. Are these your symptoms? You may have beaver fever.

It's a beneficial disease that the Gunnison Valley's public lands managers have caught in recent years. And they're not alone. Nationwide, there has been a surge of interest in reintroducing beavers to improve wildlife habitat and to contend with climate change. Support for the riparian rodent has coalesced to the extent that five valley agencies submitted a grant proposal last month titled, "The Gunnison Valley has Beaver Fever!"

The proposal seeks nearly \$80,000 in Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) funds for demonstration projects that would restore beavers and beaver habitat to four watersheds on public lands: the Upper Slate River north of Crested Butte, Lottis Creek near Taylor Park, South Beaver Creek near Hartman Rocks and Neversink to the west of Gunnison.

The grant application has garnered about \$90,000 in matching funds from the agencies and several nonprofits, bringing the project total to about \$170,000. But beyond the dollar amount, the willingness of so many groups to work on beaver restoration shows that land managers are on the same page when it comes to putting the critters to work.

"We're starting to see what a massive benefit they can be," said Ashley Hom, a hydrologist with the U.S. Forest Service in Gunnison.

The coalition of groups, uniting under the name "Gunnison Valley Beaver Believers," held its first meeting Jan. 19 and one week later submitted the grant application.

"These demonstration projects are hopefully going to help people who are not beaver believers realize the impacts beavers can have as a win-win on the landscape for everyone," Hom said.

"We know more about beaver nuisance than about beaver benefits, and we'd like to flip that."

Hom said the understanding of beavers as a necessary part of healthy rivers and streams represents a reversal in the field of hydrology. When she was



Courtesy National Park Service

Gunnison Valley land managers are looking to beavers to improve water supplies for humans and wildlife.

earning her master's degree at the University of Montana, her professors taught her that "a stream should be sinuous and replicable. If you wanted to restore a stream, you went upstream and found a reference reach" of high quality habitat.

Along those lines of thinking, river restoration professionals would then bring in heavy equipment and materials like soil and rocks to sculpt a mirror image of the reference reach. It was an expensive process with mixed results. Rivers, acting with a mind of their own, would carve their own courses anyways.

But in recent years, the field has pivoted to letting the river do the work through its own processes of floods and sedimentation, an approach named "low-tech, process-based restoration."

"It's just recently came out that streams should be messy, that they should be so chock full of beaver dams and that they should not have that classic sinuosity," Hom said. Ideas of what rivers should look like mistook artificially tightened, beaver-less streams as what healthy watershed equilibrium should look like.

The revelation that the Gunnison Valley's watersheds should be, to varying degrees, chains of beaver ponds is along the same line of thinking that has inspired dozens of conservation organizations to team up on restoring wet meadows in sagebrush. In encouraging the construction of beaver dams in rivers and in manually building rock dams to re-wet sagebrush areas, conservation groups and public lands agencies see opportunities to make human

water supplies, agriculture and wildlife habitat more resistant to the shrinking of Colorado's snowpack by climate change.

There is, however, one added complication with beavers.

"Beavers are not rocks. They might not stay where you put them," said Alli del Gizzi, the field technician and administrative coordinator with the Coal Creek Watershed Coalition and one of the authors of the CPW grant.

Restoring beavers to the identified watersheds would depend on a supply of nuisance beavers trapped by CPW staff. These beavers have often wandered into residential or urban areas. Relocating them to the project sites would give them a chance at a better life, said Dan Zadra who works for CPW in Gunnison as a property technician. In that capacity Zadra is likely the most experienced beaver trapper in Gunnison County. Should the Beaver Believers' proposal go through, he would be even busier.

"I just love being able to take them from where they are basically having a miserable existence to a wonderful beaver situation," Zadra said.

Zadra frequently takes nuisance beavers to private lands where the owners want the animals to do their work of wetland restoration. The owners, sometimes ending up with flooded land and soggy roads, may get more than they bargained for.

But the Beaver Believers aim to avoid human-beaver conflicts by focusing on restoring historical wetlands on public lands. And their plans call for enticing beavers to stay put in the target locations by building structures ahead of time to

make water deeper and slower — the conditions beavers prefer.

"We have dozens of places that would be fairly low conflict and that would be ready for beavers across the Gunnison Valley," Hom said.

The Coal Creek Watershed Coalition is looking at the Upper Slate River as a promising place for beaver habitat restoration, del Gizzi said. There are already beavers on the portion of the river above Oh Be Joyful Creek, and building beaver dam-mimicking structures would help the existing colonies to expand upstream. The man-made dams would aid adolescent beavers transition more smoothly into life away from their moms and dads.

"It's much less expensive to have resident beavers expand into a restoration area than to pay to move them there," del Gizzi said.

With them, the beavers would bring the benefits of slowing down and spreading out spring runoff, potentially flattening the stream flow curve and thereby providing water longer into the summer and fall. That gives irrigators a better chance of having water to use later in the growing season. Studies have also shown that beavers help wildlife recover more quickly from fires because they provide places of refuge.

"We're not reinventing the wheel with any of this. We're borrowing from the best research and bolstering beaver numbers," Hom said.

(Sam Liebl can be contacted at 970.641.1414 or editor@gunnisontimes.com)