

ALDO LEOPOLD

WILDERNESS RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Quarterly News Letter



June 2026

As the rainy Missoula spring extends into summer, ALWRI's field research season is already in full swing.

Here in Montana, ALWRI Social Scientist Jaclyn Rushing has been leading a **citizen science approach for monitoring dispersed visitor use and associated impacts** in the Blackfoot River watershed. Launched this spring, the new project brings together a team of partners from local non-profit Blackfoot Challenge, the BLM, The Nature Conservancy, and the University of Montana—all of whom manage lands throughout the watershed.

Because dispersed recreation occurs in undeveloped settings, like backcountry camp sites and trails, it can be difficult to monitor with traditional tools such as road and trail counters, or with approaches like agency-led field observations. Adding to the challenge, these traditional survey tools and approaches are often time and resource intensive.

In an effort to add capacity and reduce these burdens, the research team is turning to volunteer citizen scientists, many of whom are local to the area and have a vested interest and connection to this treasured place. Throughout the summer, both citizen scientists and land management professionals will visit pre-determined dispersed-use areas within one drainage of the watershed to record number of recreationists, activity type, and dispersed campsite impacts (e.g., vegetation damage; amount of litter and human waste). Once the research team receives the dataset collected by the citizen scientists, the team will be able to use it as a resource for management planning and have an opportunity to compare different methods of collecting data around dispersed recreation. This project will culminate in a final report to be published in spring 2027.



Farther afield, Jaclyn and ALWRI Research Social Scientist Chris Armatas joined with a team of researchers and practitioners from across the Forest Service for a project on **applied science support for visitor use management in high-use recreation areas**. This past May, the team provided in-person Forest-Service-wide training on the Cleveland National Forest in California, focusing on designing recreation allocation systems for high-use areas, incorporating recent research on both visitor and manager perspectives. Their [project page](#) includes information on the overall effort, including descriptions of the research, connected applied science projects, and central training materials such as this [guidebook](#), developed for the training workshop. In the year ahead, the team will build on their pilot training and offer additional courses across the National Wilderness Protected Area System.

The ALWRI team has also been busy back in Missoula. Last week, our researchers participated in the 2026 National Wilderness Skills Institute (NWSI), on the University of Montana campus, which brought together field

rangers, land managers, partner organizations, and volunteers to build skills necessary for preserving designated wilderness and wild & scenic rivers. NWSI focal topics this year included wilderness character analysis, river restoration, backcountry traditional tools, and international ranger association resources. The event included a plenary session/viewing of ALWRI Research Social Scientist Lauren Redmore's recent documentary collaboration "The Wild Next Door: Between City Limits and Sacred Lands," which was followed by a panel discussion with ALWRI collaborators. Lauren also presented work done in collaboration with Jaclyn Rushing and ALWRI Research Ecologist Kellie Carim, on **Federal-Tribal Shared Stewardship of Wild & Scenic Rivers: Lessons learned from Social Science**.

Chris Armatas presented work on international wilderness perspectives, and on recreation allocation in Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers. And Jaclyn Rushing participated in a panel discussion, sharing perspectives on managing wilderness during a time of global changes – including on the use fire as a management tool. Jaclyn drew on recent findings from a paper led by ALWRI graduate student affiliate Clare Boerigter.

This grassroots professional development workshop brought together field rangers, land managers, partner organizations, and volunteers to build skills necessary for preserving designated wilderness and wild & scenic rivers. For our research community, the event provided an excellent showcase of how hands-on field stewardship, evolving management culture, and multi-organization collaboration intersect in real-time.

Kellie Carim and colleagues recently published their work on eDNA sampling of salmonid fish in two eastern Oregon wilderness areas. [The paper](#) described baseline distributions of brook trout, Columbia River redband trout and bull trout in Monunment Rock and Strawberry Mountain Wilderness areas, as well as providing a framework for using eDNA sampling for monitoring fish distributions in remote locations.

As we approach the longest day of the year, ALWRI wishes you a summer full of wild places, cold rivers, and clear skies.

See you out there!

The ALWRI Team

