

Mesa Verde Foundation

Stewards of an Ancient Treasure

FALL NEWSLETTER

2026



LETTER FROM THE MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK SUPERINTENDENT

After a largely dry winter and spring, we are celebrating the onset of monsoon rains in Southwest Colorado. Big, billowy clouds bring shade and afternoon rains, and yes, some hail and lightning. It is hard to predict what weather will show up in autumn and winter, but don't let that sway you from an off-season visit to Mesa Verde. As America continues to mark its 250th anniversary, Colorado its 150th year of statehood, and Mesa Verde its 120th year as a national park, there is plenty to inspire your experience of the landscape in its quieter months. Light and color change in intensity. The main visitor use areas are less crowded and provide for more intimate settings to learn and reflect. If you love sunrises, sunsets, and stargazing, you don't have to rise so early or stay up so late to experience the ebb and flow of day and night.



“This is my last letter as the superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park.”

being rehabilitated to restore them for use by NPS employees. These 1920s-era homes need new utilities and other upgrades that will maintain their historic integrity and make them more livable for the 21st century. This same project will involve the Chapin Mesa Museum, where an electrical upgrade and rehabilitation of doors and windows are planned. This work will require a closure of the museum, but we don't yet know the dates. Always check the park's website for information on activities, events, and closures: www.nps.gov/meve.

The work at the museum will also support the eventual completion of new exhibits. We've spent the past few years working with the park's 27 associated Tribes and Pueblos on content and design. We are very excited about the results. Exhibit fabrication will begin in 2027. Our thanks to the Mesa Verde Foundation for raising funds to support key elements of the project. We expect to celebrate the new exhibits with a grand re-opening in 2028.

If you visit this fall, you'll be among the first to enjoy road and parking improvements at Far View Sites and Cedar Tree Tower. A Federal Highways project has kept those areas closed this summer as adjustments have been made to better protect the cultural sites accessed by these spur roads.

At the Headquarters Area, you'll see construction activity over the winter and throughout next summer. The historic stone houses built early in the National Park Service (NPS) administration of Mesa Verde are

This is my last letter as the superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park. By the time you read this, I will be retired from federal service (*editor's note: see page 10*). However, I'll be taking advantage of living nearby and plan to make many trips into the park — as a visitor! It has been a joy to work with the Mesa Verde Foundation on park projects over the past five years. My thanks to the board, staff, and donors for making great things happen.

Kayci Cook Collins, *Mesa Verde Superintendent*

The Civilian Conservation Corps at Mesa Verde — Then and Now



CCC enrollees, July 1933. *Courtesy National Park Service, Mesa Verde National Park.*

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) came into existence in 1933 at just the right moment for Mesa Verde. Park visitation had increased dramatically in the 1920s due to the advent of automobile travel. Accordingly, by 1932, the park had drawn up plans for significant improvements to deal with the increasing pressure, yet progress was impeded by a lack of funding and manpower.

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt became president in March 1933, the Great Depression (1929-39) was battering the country. One in four workers was unemployed. Young, unskilled men were particularly affected. FDR's New Deal policies put forth a series of economic and social reforms (including work relief programs) to help ease the Depression's grip. Congress quickly passed the Emergency Conservation Work Act in the same month that FDR took office. It included the CCC (although it was not known by that name for four more years), which placed a particular focus on national parks and natural resources.

The CCC not only put men to work, restoring morale to millions of unemployed, but also provided educational opportunities, seeking to build "better men" who would become self-reliant and economically independent. Recruits were men aged 18-25 who signed up for six-month stints and were paid \$30 per

month. Of that, CCCers (as they were known) were allowed to pocket \$5-\$8, with the balance sent home to their families. Upon induction, CCCers were evaluated for their education level and physical condition. Skilled positions were created for truck drivers, welders, electricians, carpenters, metal workers, and plumbers. Those without skills were given shovels, saws, and picks to perform manual labor. Some 3 million young men served in the CCC over nearly a decade.



CCCers spent many man-days maintaining roads in the park. *Courtesy National Park Service, Mesa Verde National Park.*

Mesa Verde's proposed improvement plan was ripe for CCC help. It was wide-ranging, including road improvements (roads in the park were single lane), water development, landscaping, trail system



Ranger-led tour descending the CCC-created steps on the trail to Square Tower. *Photo credit Todd Bacon.*

expansion, upgrading of the facilities in and around the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum, and more. However, the Depression's impact meant that there was scant money to fund such ambitious projects. Enter the CCC.

The first CCCers arrived at Mesa Verde two months after the program's inception, on May 27, 1933.



The original CCC tent camp in Prater Canyon in summer 1933.
Courtesy National Park Service, Mesa Verde National Park.

Local skilled workers (known as “locally experienced men” or LEMs) augmented CCCers. They were recruited from the nearby communities of Cortez, Mancos, and Durango. LEMs included mechanics, electricians, bricklayers, truck drivers, and carpenters.

They were mostly from Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. Their impact was immediate and sustained.

As Ricardo Torres-Reyes wrote in *Mesa Verde National Park: An Administrative History 1906-1970*, “The hand of the CCC was everywhere: road-building, landscaping, furniture making, restoration of vegetation, pest control, development of camp sites, construction of buildings, electrical work, assisting as guides, store clerks, office clerks, mechanics, fire lookouts, fire fighters, museum work, ranger assistants, pump operators — all and a lot more were jobs performed by enrollees in the CCC.”

In the summer of 1933, a tent camp in Prater Canyon was erected for housing. Potable water was trucked in from Mancos. Four separate federal agencies managed the recruits and their work. The Department of Labor handled recruiting. While in camp from dusk to dawn, U.S. Army officers had watch over the CCCers. During the workday, the Department of Agriculture administered activities to follow the plans the Park Service had developed (which had been approved by the Department of Interior).

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)



Barracks #5 getting a new foundation in 2024.
Photo credit Todd Bacon.



Barracks #5 today. Photo credit Todd Bacon.



The Rec Hall entrance today.
Photo credit Todd Bacon.



Mesa Verde Foundation Board meeting in the Rec Hall, June 2026. Photo credit Todd Bacon.

In 1934, a year-round living and working facility was built just north of the Chapin Mesa headquarters area. Buildings included barracks, a mess hall, maintenance sheds, and a recreation cabin. Each barrack, built to house 40 men, featured army cots, coal-fired heaters, windows for ventilation, wooden latrines, and solar-heated showers. There were typically 180-200 CCCers in the camp at any one time. Today, the original Barracks #5 has been preserved, although its ultimate use has yet to be determined. The Rec Hall remains a functioning amenity for Park Service employees and others.

The projects undertaken by CCCers were varied and extensive. Work logs were kept by project number, type of project, and the number of man-days spent on each one. Projects, whose impact can still be seen today, included:

- repairing and maintaining the dangerous Knife Edge Road, which was the only way to get up to Chapin Mesa in those days;
- constructing the fire lookout at Park Point;
- quarrying rock and building the curbs and walls around roads and parking lots at the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum and park headquarters;

When the CCC arrived at Mesa Verde, roads were rough one-lane surfaces. The Knife Edge Road was particularly treacherous and notorious for landslides. It was deactivated after the Morefield-Prater Tunnel opened in 1957.

(Continued on page 6)



CCCers clearing a landslide on the Knife Edge Road. *Courtesy National Park Service, Mesa Verde National Park.*



Traces of the Knife Edge Road today. *Photo credit Todd Bacon.*



CCCers beginning work on the Park Point fire lookout, 1940. *Courtesy National Park Service, Mesa Verde National Park.*



The Park Point fire lookout today. *Photo credit Todd Bacon.*



Rock from a nearby quarry being shaped for installation along the road at the park headquarters. *Courtesy National Park Service, Mesa Verde National Park.*



A CCC-built rock wall along the parking lot across from the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum. *Photo credit Todd Bacon.*

(Continued from page 4)



One of the chandeliers in the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum Auditorium made by CCC metalworkers. *Photo credit Todd Bacon.*



The Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum has benches made by CCC furniture makers. *Photo credit Todd Bacon.*



CCC carpenters made the ranger reception desk in the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum foyer. *Photo credit Todd Bacon.*

- making chandeliers, dioramas, benches, and other interior features at the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum;
- expanding, improving, and maintaining the trail systems;
- constructing the Chapin Mesa Amphitheater.



The Chapin Mesa Amphitheater, completed in 1938, hosted the first Park Service campfire talks in the country. It is currently not in use.

Photo credit Todd Bacon.

Perhaps the most popular and effective New Deal program, the CCC had a profound impact on the country and on Mesa Verde during the near-decade of its existence. Nationwide, CCCers planted some 3 billion trees and built 700 new state parks (including the renowned Red Rocks Amphitheater outside Denver). The program ended when World War II made new demands on the nation's young men. The CCC and its work had given Americans a renewed appreciation for the outdoors and natural resources, particularly at parks such as Mesa Verde. The CCC's impact endures to this day.

Editor's note: For a deeper dive into the history of the CCC in Mesa Verde, readers are encouraged to reference The New Deal Days: The CCC at Mesa Verde by Ronald C. Brown and Duane A. Smith (2006); Mesa Verde National Park: An Administrative History 1906-1970 by Ricardo Torres-Reyes (1970); and Mesa Verde's Secret Garden: A History of Managing the Backcountry and Wilderness of a National Park by Christopher Barnes (2026).

Join Us in Denver for a Day of History, Heritage Preservation and Celebration

The Mesa Verde Foundation wraps up its celebration of the 120th anniversary of Mesa Verde National Park with a day of activities in the Denver area on Friday, September 25th.

Mesa Verde's 120th Anniversary Symposium

Friday, September 25, 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

History Colorado Center

1200 Broadway, Denver, CO 80203

Registration: \$120

Begin the day with a thought-provoking symposium featuring distinguished experts and scholars who will examine Mesa Verde's remarkable history, Indigenous heritage, wilderness values, and ongoing preservation efforts.

Featured presenters include:

- **Christie Wildcat**, Assistant Curator of Native American & Indigenous History at History Colorado
- **Donna Glowacki**, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Notre Dame and associate researcher for Mesa Verde National Park
- **Christopher Barns**, nationally recognized wilderness policy expert, author of *Mesa Verde's Secret Garden*, documentary writer and director, and Mesa Verde volunteer
- **Troy A. Eid**, Partner at Greenberg Traurig, former U.S. Attorney for Colorado, and national leader in Tribal sovereignty and cultural resource protection

Attendees will gain valuable insights into the park's cultural landscape, the importance of preserving archaeological resources, and the collaborative efforts shaping Mesa Verde's future.

Mesa Verde Foundation Cocktail Party

Friday, September 25 | 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Polo Club North Clubhouse

2552 E Alameda Ave, Denver, CO 80209

Registration: \$60

Continue the celebration in the evening with a cocktail reception that brings Mesa Verde's history to life. Guests will enjoy networking, conversation, and a special presentation by:

- **Joe Sindelar**, former Mesa Verde National Park Ranger, retired educator, and History Colorado volunteer, who will portray **Jesse Nusbaum**, one of the most influential figures in Mesa Verde's early preservation and management.

This engaging living-history presentation offers a memorable and entertaining look at the people and stories that helped shape Mesa Verde National Park.

Attend One or Both Events

Whether you choose the educational symposium, the evening reception, or both, these events provide a meaningful opportunity to celebrate 120 years of preservation, cultural heritage, and stewardship at Mesa Verde National Park.

Symposium Registration: \$120 per person

Cocktail Reception Registration: \$60 per person

Join the Mesa Verde Foundation in honoring the past, celebrating the present, and supporting the future of this extraordinary national treasure.

Register: www.mesaverdefoundation.org/events or include your payment with a note, guest names, and contact information in the reply envelope enclosed in this newsletter.



Mexican spotted owl inside Mesa Verde National Park on June 22, 2026. Photo Credit: NPS/C.Lee

By Nathan Brown, Biologist/Wildlife Program Lead

After a handful of observations of Mexican spotted owls (MSO) in the 1940s, there were consistent records of MSO occupying Mesa Verde National Park from the early 1980s through the early 2000s (*Figure 1*). The last verified sighting inside the park was in 2004, with some additional audio detections through 2009. No evidence or detections occurred from 2009 until this summer, despite annual surveys.

Unexpectedly, during a backcountry patrol in June of this year, a NPS Ranger walked into a historic dwelling site, saw an owl, and took the accompanying photograph with his cell phone. *This documentation was thrilling – the first definitive evidence of an MSO inside the park boundary since 2004!* The site is inside a proposed

Protected Activity Center, which is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service management designation based on continued occupancy, nesting, and production.

GPS-collared Mexican spotted owls have been documented migrating several hundred miles in New Mexico. Data suggest that an owl can cross about 30 miles per day during dispersal events. *Figure 2* illustrates areas of documented, occupied MSO habitat over time. The solo red dot in SW Colorado is Mesa Verde. There are also known locations in NE Arizona. However, that portion of the map shows no activity due to privacy and sovereignty concerns of the Navajo Nation, so those sites are not officially reported. The take-home is that the Mesa Verde MSO habitat patch is roughly 80 air-miles from known occupied MSO habitat in Utah (the Dark Canyon/Canyonlands complex) and about 40 air-miles from known occupied habitat in NE Arizona on the Navajo Nation.

Generally, MSO pairs migrate seasonally, although the “migration” might just be a few miles up or down from their nesting site, depending on

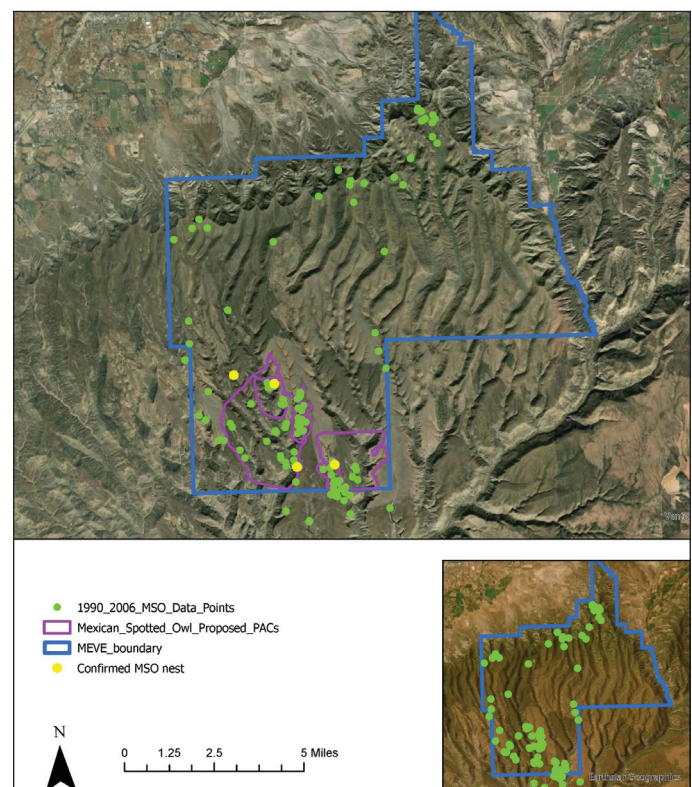


Figure 1. Mexican spotted owl detections in Mesa Verde 1990-2006.

climate conditions. Young, unpaired owls disperse in the late summer and early fall while looking for suitable habitat and/or mates. These dispersal events may cover distances of 100 miles or more.

Figure 2 shows that the population/habitat patch for MSO in Mesa Verde is at the edge of the range, and it is expected to “blink” on and off over ecological time. Due to long-term drought, the habitat quality in Mesa Verde’s canyons may be decreasing, shifting from a slightly mesic (wet) canyon structure to a more xeric (dry) canyon structure.

Two nighttime follow-up surveys were conducted at the location where the owl was photographed earlier this summer, resulting in a positive audio detection on the first survey and no detection on the second. The park’s Natural Resources staff will continue to monitor the site throughout this summer and will survey the area again starting in April of 2027. It is not known at this time if the owl was just dispersing and moving through, or if there was/is a nesting pair present at the site. Hopefully, subsequent surveys this summer and next year will clarify the status of Mexican spotted owls in Mesa Verde.

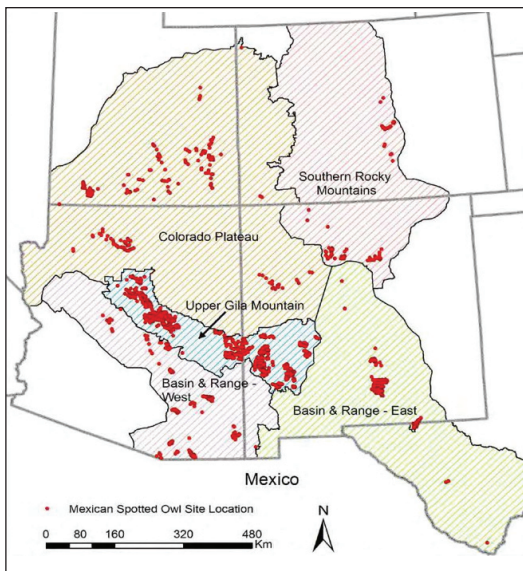


Figure 2. General areas occupied by Mexican spotted owls within five EMUs within their range in the United States. *MSO Range Wide Occupancy Map. (USFWS 2012).*

Appreciating our Community Partners

At the Mesa Verde Foundation, we are often asked how best to support our mission of protecting and preserving Mesa Verde National Park. While we offer several ways to make direct monetary donations, Mesa Verde Foundation’s Community Partners program aims to link your support for our Community Partner businesses to advancing the Foundation’s work.

Our Community Partners support us through annual contributions of \$250 or more, by inviting customers to donate to MVF, by donating a portion of each sale, or by a combination of these.

Current Community Partners include Desert Sun Coffee Roasters, Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, and Pinnacle Heat Pumps, all located in Durango. When you patronize these businesses, they in turn help us to meet our mission of promoting understanding and appreciation of Mesa Verde National Park. We greatly appreciate the support of these businesses!



Are you interested in helping us expand our Community Partners Program? We are actively seeking additional partners and would be happy to discuss this opportunity with you. Please reach out to Kim Paulin at kim@mesaverdefoundation.org to learn more and to see if this program might be a good fit for your business.

Celebrating Mesa Verde's Recent Retirees



Kayci Cook Collins

(Mesa Verde NP 2021-2026; NPS 1982-2026)

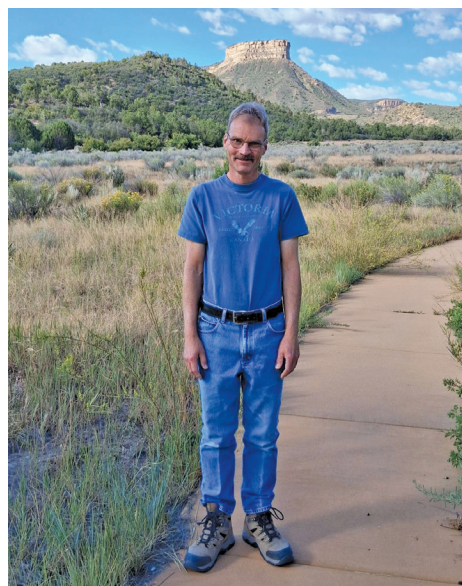
Kayci retired as Superintendent of Mesa Verde & Yucca House on August 31, 2026, after a 43-year career with the National Park Service (NPS). She grew up in the NPS and became the 4th generation of her family to work in the parks. In 2025, the Cook family marked 100 years of continuous NPS service. Kayci was proud to make that milestone. Prior to her five great years at Mesa Verde, her NPS journey took her from Alaska to Wisconsin, Washington, D.C., Maryland, California, Texas, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona.

Among her favorite memories along the way:

- coordinating the re-installation of a historic Fresnel lens in the Devils Island Lighthouse at Apostle Islands National Monument;
- watching a group of blind students read the words to the Star-Spangled Banner in Braille on an exhibit at Fort McHenry National Monument and then burst into song;
- creating a 6-foot-long foam pupfish costume for an evening program at Death Valley National Park;
- sniffing the candy scent of Ponderosa Pines at El Morro National Monument;
- watching brown bears catch salmon on the Brooks River at Katmai National Park;
- squinting against the blinding sparkle of snow draped across the landscape at Arches National Park;
- riding a horse up Chinle Wash at Canyon de Chelly among golden cottonwood trees; and

- sitting on the sea wall at the Jefferson Memorial to watch the Bicentennial fireworks display on July 4, 1976.

At Mesa Verde, her two favorite memories are seeing a mountain lion bound across Wetherill Mesa Road and accompanying a large group of tribal representatives, staff, and researchers on a tour of Cliff Palace. She says she wouldn't change a thing about her career: "The parks are wonderful, but my greatest joy has come from interactions and relationships with people – visitors, co-workers, and partners."



Paul Blomgren

(Mesa Verde NP 1996-2026)

Paul Blomgren retired at the end of September after twenty years at Mesa Verde NP. He came first as an archeologist and became an IT specialist a few years later. In his role of keeping the staff connected to the electronic aspects of caring for Mesa Verde and its visitors, Paul was literally the most important person on the park staff!

About his career, Paul said:

I first saw Mesa Verde as a little kid on a family trip in 1970. I came back to the park in 1996 as an archeologist, part of an effort to survey the Chapin 5 burn area. While working on that project, I became involved with database management and supporting technology. Following that, I started working as an Information Technology Specialist for

the park in 2002, which continued through April 2026. Fun times and interesting times. For example, the early days involved a helicopter ride as part of the daily commute. Not many jobs offer that! During the outbreak of the Long Mesa Fire in 2002, we found ourselves in a "bug out" situation, evacuating equipment from the computer shop to avoid what looked like was going to be an inevitable burn-over. I've been very lucky over the years to witness incredible beauty and power. The endless color-drenched sunrises and sunsets, star-filled night skies

one can almost fall into, clouds and storms that defy imagination in their colors and scale, and the wildlife in all its myriad forms. I've driven through snowstorms strong enough to push me sideways across the road, seen thunderstorms shoot out lightning strikes every couple of seconds, scorching the land before drenching it. I've watched an approaching flame front as it moved down Chapin Mesa and a volcanic-looking fire plume as it consumed part of Wetherill Mesa. From the snowfall to the ashfall, I wouldn't trade any of it for anything.

Become a Friend or Fellow

Mesa Verde Foundation Friends and Fellows are the champions of our organization. Their annual commitments are essential to our work of promoting, preserving, and protecting Mesa Verde National Park.

Friends of Mesa Verde Foundation Levels

Friend member benefits include discounts on MVF Programs, invitations to MVF events, and bi-annual MVF Newsletters.

Mesa Verde Contributor \$100 – \$249

Mesa Verde Sustainer \$250 – \$499

Mesa Verde Partner \$500 – \$999

Fellows of Mesa Verde Foundation Levels

Fellow level memberships receive all Friend member benefits plus discounts on MVF Tours, and special MVF Fellows-only experiences.

Additionally, Fellows at the following levels receive these additional benefits:

Spruce Tree Fellow \$1,000 – \$2,499: a basket weaving kit with link to a video tutorial by fiber artist and textile scholar, Christopher Lewis (Zuni Pueblo), live Zoom Q&A with Shannon Clifford, MVF Executive Director.

Balcony House Fellow \$2,500 – \$4,999: a basket weaving kit with link to a video tutorial by fiber artist and textile scholar, Christopher Lewis (Zuni Pueblo), live Zoom Q&A with Shannon Clifford, MVF Executive Director and a Mesa Verde National Park Annual Pass.

Cliff Palace Fellow \$5,000 – \$9,999: a basket weaving kit with link to a video tutorial by fiber artist and textile scholar, Christopher Lewis (Zuni Pueblo), live Zoom Q&A with Shannon Clifford, MVF Executive Director and one annual America the Beautiful Pass to all National Parks.

Mesa Verde Society \$10,000 and Up: a basket weaving kit with link to a video tutorial by fiber artist and textile scholar, Christopher Lewis (Zuni Pueblo), live Zoom Q&A with Shannon Clifford, MVF Executive Director, one annual America the Beautiful Pass to all National Parks, complimentary behind-the-scenes access at Mesa Verde National Park and other venues (museums, archaeological sites, etc.), and special, one-on-one tours/receptions with Park Superintendent and other Park personnel or archaeologists.

You can become a Friend or Fellow by donating using the enclosed envelope, or by visiting our website at www.mesaverdefoundation.org.

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Mesa Verde Foundation
8600 Ralston Road, Suite #100
Arvada, CO 80002

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Mesa Verde National Park License Plates

Show your support. Order your plate today!



Ordering your Mesa Verde National Park license plate is easy!

Simply visit mesaverdefoundation.org and make a one-time \$30 license plate donation. Once the donation is processed, you will be issued a PIN number that you will use when registering your vehicle with your county motor vehicle office. Please be aware that to issue the plate, the state will charge an additional (one time) \$50 fee to process your order.