

Mesa Verde Foundation

Stewards of an Ancient Treasure

FALL NEWSLETTER

2021



Mesa Verde Foundation Welcomes Kayci Cook Collins as New Superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park



The Mesa Verde Foundation is pleased to welcome Kayci Cook Collins as the newly-appointed superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park. We are excited to have her join the team and look forward to working with her.

On July 29th, 2021, National Park Service Regional Director Mike Reynolds announced the selection of Kayci Cook Collins as superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park and Yucca House National Monument in Colorado, a position she assumed on August 29th. She also supervises the superintendent of Chaco Culture National Historical Park and Aztec Ruins National Monument.

Collins has more than 35 years of National Park Service experience. She most recently served as the superintendent of the Flagstaff Area National Monuments in Arizona that includes Walnut Canyon, Wupatki, and Sunset Crater Volcano National Monuments.

Collins is “thrilled to be joining the excellent team of employees, volunteers, and partners who care for Mesa Verde National Park and Yucca House National Monument.” She also said that she “looks forward to working with the many traditionally associated Tribes for whom the park and monument are important landscapes. The cultural resources and dramatic scenery of Mesa Verde have captivated me since I was a child, often visiting my grandparents who lived and worked in the park. It is an honor to return as the superintendent.”

Collins previously served as the superintendent at New Mexico’s El Morro and El Malpais National Monuments, Maryland’s Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine and Hampton National Historic Site, and as deputy superintendent of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in Utah and Arizona. She recently completed a detail as the superintendent of the Southeast Utah Group (Arches and Canyonlands National Parks and Hovenweep and Natural Bridges National Monuments). She has also worked for the Alaska Regional Office as the Alaska Desk Officer and in Washington D.C. as a legislative affairs specialist.

Collins has an extensive career in interpretation and resource management. She received her bachelor's degree in Recreation Resource Management from Northern Arizona University. Collins has a family connection with two parks: her maternal grandfather worked at Mesa Verde and Chaco Culture, and her father worked at Chaco Culture. She enjoys hiking, reading, baking, and spending time with her son Sean Collins, a junior at University of Arizona.

The Mesa Verde Foundation's Executive Director, Shannon Clifford, recently asked Kayci a few "getting to know you" questions as shared below.

Of all the National Parks, what drew you to Mesa Verde?

Mesa Verde National Park is one of the most iconic archeological preserves in the world, in a beautiful and dramatic setting that includes wilderness. The Colorado Plateau is my favorite biogeographical region of the country—I've spent most of my career working in National Park Service units on the plateau. But what makes this assignment special is that it represents a homecoming of sorts. My maternal grandparents were both raised in Mancos in the shadow of Mesa Verde. My grandfather, Meredith Guillet, so enjoyed his time working in the Civilian Conservation Corps at Mesa Verde during the 1930s that he decided on a career in the National Park Service, which culminated with his assignment as Mesa Verde's superintendent from 1966 to 1972. We visited the Park often from Canyon de Chelly National Monument, where we lived at the time. I have many wonderful childhood memories of the Chapin Mesa area of the Park. To return as the Park superintendent is an honor beyond anything I could ever imagine!

What are you most looking forward to as superintendent of Mesa Verde?

I am looking forward to becoming familiar with the full complement of the Park's resources, especially the wilderness and backcountry areas that I've not explored much at all. I'm also very

excited to work at a park with an energetic philanthropic partner like the Mesa Verde Foundation. I know there is much that we can do together to benefit the Park's resources, visitors, and employees.

What is one thing you hope to accomplish as superintendent of Mesa Verde?

I think that is a tough question to answer ahead of getting settled and learning more about the Park's challenges and opportunities. I should say "Parks" since Yucca House National Monument is managed with Mesa Verde. When coming into a new assignment, I generally start with the goal of learning what is important to a Park's staff and its partners. What is needed to meet the strategic goals of the Park? In this case, there is need to refresh the Parks' strategic plan to set goals and objectives for the next few years, so that will be a priority.

Welcome Kayci Cook Collins! We are happy to have you on board and look forward to working with you.

Thank you, Cliff Spencer!



We are grateful for your 11 years of service as the superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park and your 37 years of service to the National Park Service. Congratulations on your retirement!

Celebrating the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum Accessibility Project



Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum is getting an accessibility facelift! Thanks to a grant for supplies from the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation and installation by Park staff, wheelchair ramps are expected to be installed and ready when the Museum opens again next year. Ramps for the Museum were identified by the Mesa Verde Foundation and the Park as a top priority in 2021. The Foundation is delighted to help fulfill this need.

According to recent Cornell University research, 6.9% of Americans have an ambulatory disability (2017 Disability Status Report, United States, 2019). Given that some 600,000 people visit Mesa Verde National Park annually, potentially 6.9% of whom may have an ambulatory disability, this means approximately 41,400 visitors will benefit from the Chapin Mesa Museum Accessibility Project each year.

The grant to support this project was awarded through the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation Quality of Life Grants Program. The Quality of Life Grants Program is one of the pillars of the Paralysis Resource Center. This program, pioneered by the late Dana Reeve, focuses on impacting and empowering people living with paralysis, including families

and caregivers, by providing grants to nonprofit organizations whose projects and initiatives foster inclusion, involvement, and community engagement, while promoting health and wellness for those affected by paralysis in all 50 states and U.S. territories.

The Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum is one of the oldest in the National Park Service. It was constructed from 1922 to 1925 and is a National Historic Landmark. It was designed by Mesa Verde's first park superintendent, Jesse Nusbaum, replacing the log cabin that had displayed park artifacts since 1917. Constructed of Cliff House Sandstone, the same type of rock used by the Ancestral Puebloan people to construct their dwellings, the Modified Pueblo Revival Architecture reflects the architecture of descendent communities. It is beautifully integrated into the natural landscape.

The Mesa Verde Foundation and Mesa Verde National Park are thrilled and honored to have the support of donors like the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation in fulfilling this important priority.

“The Reeve Foundation is humbled and proud to be able to support important organizations by offering life-changing projects and programs through this grant cycle,” said Mark Bogosian, Director, Quality of Life Grants Program, Reeve Foundation.



Mug House Is Open for Ranger-Guided Tours

Mug House is one of those dwelling sites in Mesa Verde that doesn't appear on any map. Because of its orientation, it isn't visible from any road or trail. The trailhead itself is unmarked and obscured by scrub vegetation. Good luck finding it on your own (which is actually against Park rules). All of this secrecy is intentional to help preserve and protect this stunning site consisting of 94 rooms and 8 kivas. In fact, the only way to see Mug House is to join a ranger-led tour, which also happens to be the best possible way to learn its history and to feel the presence of the Ancestral Puebloans who lived there over 800 years ago.

A spot on one of these tours costs \$25.00 and can be reserved up to 14 days in advance at www.recreation.gov. The tours are limited to 10 people, guaranteeing a truly special experience, and are offered twice daily through October 23rd this year. (Check the Park website for tours in 2022.)



The 2.25-mile round-trip hike is strenuous—it involves scrambling around boulders, navigating scree slopes and dodging endangered plant species. The whole trip takes about two hours.

The Wetherill brothers and their brother-in-law, Charles Mason, came upon the site, nestled in a 280' long alcove, in the winter of 1890. The site looked like the occupants had just picked up and left. They found pottery, stone tools, buckskins, sandals, bones, awls and corncobs. In one room, they found three mugs tied together with yucca cord—hence the name of the dwelling that housed between 80 and 100 people. They returned in 1891 with the young Swedish explorer and scientist, Gustaf Nordenskiöld, who etched his “No. 19” on a slab boulder to identify the site. However, Nordenskiöld was more interested in a nearby dwelling, as he wrote in his journal, “Our work at Mug House was of no lengthy duration, for we found that another ruin, Step House, on the east side of the mesa, contained a number of graves deserving of investigation.”



The oldest tree rings at the Mug House site date from 1066, while the last ones are from 1277. It is believed that the site was abandoned around 1300. In a detailed hydrology study conducted by Wright Water Engineers in 2007, researchers sadly concluded, “The final Mug House occupants experienced scarcity; they were poor. Earlier trade had all but ceased, and wild game was minimal; they reused almost everything by repairing sandals, pots and tools. There were few luxury items in the later years. This early American community had experienced hard times.” On a more positive note, they also praised the construction as “innovative, well planned and efficient”, while concluding that “the Ancestral Puebloans of Mug House were very good engineers.”



“Conversations from the Mesa”

Mesa Verde Foundation Webinar Series

Upcoming Webinars

All webinar times are in Mountain Standard Time

**Wednesday, November 10th
4:00 p.m.**

“Wildlife and Natural Resource Management”

Nathan Brown, Biologist/Wildlife Program Lead, Mesa Verde National Park

**Wednesday, December 8th
4:00 p.m.**

“Water Ecology of Mesa Verde National Park and Yucca House”

Andrew Spear, Bioscience Technician, Mesa Verde National Park

Make sure to subscribe to our email list (www.mesaverdefoundation.org) to get notifications on these upcoming programs; also follow us on Instagram and Facebook.

What? A Fishery Resource in Mesa Verde?



The speckled dace, a member of the minnow family, can be found in temperate waters from Mexico to British Columbia. Photo credit: Roger Tabor, USFWS

Did you know that there are fish in Mesa Verde National Park? It's probably not the first or even the second or third thing that comes to mind when you picture that high desert terrain. However, the Park boundaries include a 5-mile stretch of the Mancos River as it courses through the remote Upper Mancos River Canyon (closed to the public). In a survey of the Park's stretch of the water conducted in May of this year, an electro-shocking team turned up twenty speckled dace and one fat-head minnow, but, according to Park Biologist and Wildlife Program Lead Nathan Brown, there could be, or should be, roundtail chub and flannelmouth and bluehead suckers. Enhancements to the river and the surrounding environment will be necessary to restore the habitat to become a more viable aquatic resource.

The present-day condition of the watershed and the fishery is yet another story of the combined effects of riparian damage, drought and climate change. Cattle were first brought into the area in the late 1880's. (Remember the story of the Wetherill brothers stumbling on Cliff Palace while searching for stray cattle in 1888?) Livestock continued to graze along the banks of the river until 2005, when the Park Service restricted that use. The damage done to the river over the decades has been long-lasting due to priority water allocations upstream, the extreme drought conditions of recent years and rising temperatures from climate change. That degradation is projected to increase in the future without some intervening action.

In an effort to stem the tide, Mesa Verde took the lead in a successful grant application to the Desert Fish Habitat Partnership. The processes being implemented in the pilot project include: population assessment, deep water and shoreline habitat improvement, restoration of floodplains, re-establishment of watershed connectivity, mitigation of the impact of climate change and educational outreach. Drew Spear, Bioscience Technician with Mesa Verde, is leading this collaborative partnership between the Park and the Bureau of Land Management. The project is also supported by assistance and contributions from the US Fish & Wildlife Service, Colorado Parks & Wildlife and the Mancos Watershed Group, which includes the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and the Mancos Conservation District among other Mancos River stakeholders. The skills on this diverse team encompass a riparian habitat manager, an aquatic ecologist, a hydrologist and a native species biologist.



Nathan Brown, Biologist/Wildlife Program Lead with Mesa Verde, assists state partners in electro-shocking the Mancos River in May of this year. Photo credit: NPS

The Foundation is excited to announce that our free webinar series *Conversations from the Mesa* will feature Nathan Brown, Biologist and Wildlife Program Lead, speaking on wildlife and natural resource management in the Park on **November 10th** and Drew Spear, Biosciences Technician, speaking on the water ecology of Mesa Verde and Yucca House on **December 8th**. Make sure to subscribe to our email list (www.mesaverdefoundation.org) to get notifications on these upcoming programs; also follow us on Instagram and Facebook.

One of the strategies to improve the watershed uses the placement of simulated beaver structures in selected stretches of the river. Beavers have been active on Ute Mountain Ute land downstream, so it is hoped that they could be re-established in the Mesa Verde reach, which covers the transition from a cold-water, mountain stream to a warm-water, desert stream. It is anticipated that beavers will occupy and maintain the frameworks, as well as expand them into the future. Beaver impoundments will increase water retention, creating deeper holding water for fish. These restoration strategies will hopefully promote a healthier riparian ecosystem that will not only provide opportunities for fish recovery and encourage beaver occupation in the project reach, but also improve habitat for elk, mule deer and black bear, as well as several species of birds and amphibians.

Because there are no threatened or endangered species in the Park's stretch of the Mancos, Mesa Verde has no leverage to encourage minimum stream flows when faced with upstream demands for agriculture. Therefore, collaborative, interagency projects such as this one may be the best hope for a sustained fishery in the Park.

MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK LICENSE PLATE

Order yours today!



This beautiful plate will help the Mesa Verde Foundation raise funds that will directly benefit Mesa Verde National Park. The federal government cannot and does not completely fund our national parks. Financial assistance is needed to maintain and improve parks for present and future generations. The new plate will provide some of the needed funds and will greatly benefit the Park and its visitors.

- Looking for a gift for someone who has everything? Mesa Verde National Park license plates would make a perfect gift.
- Do you want to let the world know that you support the Park, its heritage, and its treasures? MVNP license plates will shout it out for you.
- Do you want to own the license plates that your petition signature helped to make possible?

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.

Become a Friend of Mesa Verde Foundation Today!

Friends of Mesa Verde Foundation Levels

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

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Fellows of Mesa Verde Foundation Levels

Fellow level memberships receive all Friend member benefits plus discounts on MVF Tours, special MVF Fellows-only experiences, exclusive events and receptions in Denver, the Four Corners Region, Phoenix, Santa Fe and the Park and:

Fellows at the following levels receive these additional benefits:

Spruce Tree Fellow **\$1,000 - \$2,499**
One pack of eight unique 5x7 photocards by photographer Todd Bacon.

Balcony House Fellow **\$2,500 - \$4,999**
Two packs of eight unique 5x7 photocards by photographer Todd Bacon, and a Mesa Verde National Park Annual Pass.

Cliff Palace Fellow **\$5,000 - \$9,999**
Three packs of eight unique 5x7 photocards by photographer Todd Bacon, and one annual America the Beautiful Pass to all National Parks.

Mesa Verde Society **\$10,000 and Up**
Four packs of eight unique 5x7 photocards, by photographer Todd Bacon, one annual America the Beautiful Pass to all National Parks and complimentary behind-the-scenes tours/programs 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.

Join Today by using the enclosed envelope or <https://www.mesaverdefoundation.org/become-a-friend/>

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Colorado GivesDay

Did you know that the Mesa Verde Foundation works to secure funding for capital improvements, special projects and educational endeavors that promote an understanding of Mesa Verde National Park's cultural and natural resources?

On Colorado Gives Day, our goal is to raise \$15,000. We can only do it with your help. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation so we can continue helping those who need it most.

**Join other Coloradoans by Giving Where You Live:
Make a one-time donation at
<https://www.coloradogives.org/MesaVerdeFoundation>**

**Become a sustaining member by giving monthly at
<https://www.coloradogives.org/MesaVerdeFoundation>**

Your support can make a tremendous difference!

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December 7, 2021

[ColoradoGivesDay.org](https://www.ColoradoGivesDay.org)