

Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers Activities Report for 2022

March 16, 2023

The Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (WMRPCV) had another active year, even though many events continued to be constrained by the lingering effects of COVID. The group remains strong, attracting new members and maintaining our traditions of supporting each other, volunteering at local community organizations, and offering encouragements and send-offs for Peace Corps recruits who at last were able to be stationed in their international field assignments in late 2022.



The WMRPCV's were able to hold once again our full annual meeting/retreat, the "Goat Chase Retreat," in June 2022, at Flathead Lake as COVID restrictions were lifted at the church camp where we gather. We had a fine turnout of our members from across the state and a particularly lively group enjoyed our storytelling, potlucks, and adventures in and

around the lake. Our annual meeting allowed us to reaffirm WMRPCV leadership and make plans for outreach activities for the rest of the year. The annual meeting provided an opportunity for us to review the WMRPCV financial standing, which turned out to be strong because of record-breaking sales of Peace Corps calendars, our major fundraising endeavor. Special thanks to our Secretary/Treasurer, Mary Younger (RPCV Cameroon '74-'76), for not only managing our financial resources, but also for well-considered donations to a series of humanitarian and international organizations. We also made reservations for our Goat Chase Retreat for 2023, which will be held from June 9-11, 2023.

Later in June 2022, as part of the celebration of World Refugee Day, the WMRPCV's helped a Missoula-based NGO, Soft Landing, with its annual soccer tournament and celebration of the refugee community in Missoula. Missoula has now over 100 families of settled refugees from places such as the Congo, Iraq, Eritrea, Syria, Afghanistan, and the Ukraine.

In July the WMRPCV's hosted our popular summer potluck at Kiwanis Park in Missoula where over 40 of our members were able to enjoy a summer evening of games, food, and conversation. This was followed a month later by a large gathering

of our group and other young friends of Leia Parsons, who after a two-year delay was off to Paraguay to start her Peace Corps service. Leia's parents, Russ and Shannon Parsons (RPCV's Ecuador '95-'97), have been involved in the WMRPCV for the past several years, and it was exciting for all of us to see Leia follow their parents' footsteps and enter the Peace Corps.

In October 2022, Jonathan Pearson, Advocacy Coordinator for the NPCA, came to Missoula and spent an afternoon and evening with WMRPCV members. We held a well-attended gathering with Jonathan at Imagine Nation Brewing in Missoula, where he was able to outline the work of Peace Corps Advocates and describe the potential of the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act. Two WMRPCV members (myself and Chris Siegler, RPCV Sierra Leone, '68-'70) went to the offices of Montana's two Senators, Jon Tester (D) and Steve Daines (R), to encourage their support for the Act. Staff for both Senators offered assurances that the Senators would vote for the Reauthorization Act, although this opportunity did not arise, as the clock ran out on the bill in the final day of the 117th Congress. The WMRPCV will continue to advocate for the Act in the 118th Congress.

Since the University of Montana (UM) has always been a top location for recruiting new Peace Corps Volunteers, the WMRPCV worked with the University's Director of Community Services to fill the part time position of Peace Corps Recruiter on campus. Because of multiple reasons, a current student at UM was not available to fill the recruiter position, so the WMRPCV leadership (Mary Younger, in particular) was able to encourage a former UM Peace Corps Recruiter, Tenley Snow, to fill the position.

As 2022 came to a close, the WMRPCV's held their annual Christmas party in person for the first time since the onset of COVID. It was a happy affair, with a large group convening at a special location in downtown Missoula, the "Goodworks Center," that allows their excellent meeting space to be utilized by local groups advancing the public interest. The WMRPCV's have already used the Goodworks Center again in 2023, with a celebration of Peace Corps week on March 4, 2023.

All in all, it was a good year for the WMRPCV's. We look forward to 2023 with hope, optimism, and an unflagging commitment to international learning and peace.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Burchfield (RPCV, Guatemala, '73-'76)
WMRPCV President