



High Desert Voices

A newsletter published by and for volunteers

August 2024

HIGH DESERT
MUSEUM

Hayley Brazier and the Natural History Pub Talks

by Tom McGibbon, Newsletter Writer



“The Little Talks That Could” is how Hayley Brazier, Ph.D., affectionately refers to her Natural History Pub (NHP) series. However, this incredible series of speakers and topics, which she orchestrates, are anything *but* little. They are gigantic swings and hits at a set of far-ranging environmental subjects, critically relevant to contemporary society and local northwest communities.

The hour-long talks are held on the first Monday of each month at 7:00 pm, September through May, in the Father Luke’s Room of McMenamins Old St Francis School in downtown Bend. Doors open at 5:30 pm to accommodate the many attendees who come early to enjoy the nosh, their favorite beverage, or just to mingle in a friendly, informal atmosphere.

The High Desert Museum (HDM) has sponsored the NHP for the past decade. The COVID pandemic disrupted the program, causing it to be sporadic. Hayley accepted the position as HDM Curator of Natural History in the fall of 2021, responsible for producing content, text, and artifacts for HDM exhibits. In addition to her larger curator role, she’s also rejuvenated the NHP to its current, highly successful format. Eric Frank, Public Program Director at the HDM, also assists Hayley with the program. Hayley notes the goals of the NHP are “to connect cutting edge science and conservation projects directly to the public and to bring people together with different opinions or perspectives,” adding with pride that, “attendees hear the latest stuff.”

As a young person growing up in the Kansas heartland, Hayley was inspired by historians and aspired to be one. As she said, she always “loved the way they talked and thought about the world,” and pursued this passion throughout her educational life. Since natural history is not a structured curriculum offered in higher education institutions, Hayley pursued her undergraduate and master’s degrees in environmental history. Her Ph.D. doctoral thesis in marine environmental history reflected her focus on how humans interact with their environments and change these environments or how the environments change them.

This interest included the study of forestry, fire, human populations, wildlife, disease, climate, agriculture, and cultural impacts. Hayley has emphasized these themes to NHP speakers, and they are woven throughout the series.



Hayley maintains an extremely high, professional standard for NHP speakers. She meets this standard by utilizing a wide variety of search-avenues to identify these individuals. She then verifies that they have strong subject matter expertise, as well as “enthusiasm, passion, and a love” for the topics they’re presenting.

Often, she will align the topics to complement or provide ‘deeper dives’ on exhibits that are being displayed within the HDM. For example, in 2023, NHP focused on wildlife and environments that fall under the protections of the Endangered Species Act, as the 50th anniversary of its passage was being celebrated at the HDM. Another time, she had a “snow scientist” in conjunction with the HDM *Under the Snow* exhibit.



Coaching the speakers is an important task that Hayley performs, and it's critical to the quality of the program. To support this end, she shares ideas from her "Conservation Priority Plan," detailing priorities that include, changes in land use, coexistence with wildlife habitats, invasive species (plants and animals), climate change as a scientific topic versus a political policy, and water quality.

The NHP subjects are a fingerprint of Hayley's intellectual diversity and curiosity and her passion for natural history. One talk focused on how the history of forest-science research impacted politics, public opinion, and recognition of the value and conservation of old-growth forest ecosystems.

Another talk focused on the history of the extirpation of salmonid and steelhead species from local rivers and the efforts of local conservation groups, working with community interest, to remove barriers to restore habitat and these species to their historical waterways. Still another focused on the restoration of wildflowers to decimated desert sagebrush lands as a key to stemming the decline of native bird populations. There's something for everyone at NHP.

The 2024–2025 season begins anew in September with a talk on the Canada lynx by Carmen Vanbianchi, Research Director and Co-founder of Home Range Wildlife Research. In October, Aerial Detection Survey Program Manager Daniel DePinte, who is responsible for annual United States Forest Service surveys of forests health and fire recovery will present "Aerial Surveys of the West." Then, in November, Reese Mercer of the Western Beavers Cooperative, will present a talk on beavers.

The NHP series is a sparkling gem in the crown of HDM offerings. So, if you're interested in either learning more on new subjects, or expanding your knowledge of familiar subjects, from world-renowned experts, authors, and activists, make your plans to attend the NHP series. It's also an excellent way to learn how to personally engage with issues of interest to you.

Free tickets are available through the HDM website, a month prior to the event. Sign up early as they are in high demand and go quickly.

Photos by Todd Cary & Siobhan Sullivan

Lost in Place, Found in Nature

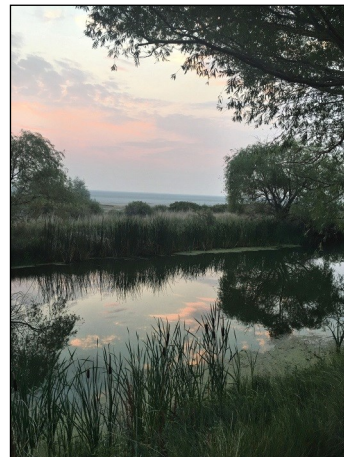
by Torree Abrams, Newsletter Writer



Spending time in Central Oregon and the High Desert provides opportunities to experience nature in ways that makes one want to stop time and become lost in the beauty of place. One way to find the right words for such dreamy moments is to participate in the nature writing intensive, sponsored by the High Desert Museum, and led by Ellen Waterston. For a weekend, writers of all interests and abilities come together somewhere in the High Desert to learn, experience, and share nature writing under the guidance and encouragement of Cascades Master of Fine Arts instructor and founder of the Writing Ranch, Ellen Waterston. This year the sold-out event meets at the Summer Lake Lodge August 8–11. Past workshops have been held at

[Playa](#), a center that supports the work of scientists and artists, on the dry lakebed of Summer Lake, and at the [Malheur Field Station](#) in the middle of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge.

Ellen Waterston puts everyone at ease from the first gathering until the final morning, when participants read their final writings. Using mentor texts featuring authors such as Annie Dillard, Sherman Alexie, and Brian Doyle and writing exercises that spark emotions, Ellen's lessons awaken creativity. New authors are discovered, vocabularies are expanded, and risks are taken. One learns about the "autobiography of place," how to write a haibun (a poetic form combining haiku and prose), and, most importantly, how to follow inspiration and write from the heart. Everyone is surprised by what is created being lost in place. Tears and laughter, despair and righteous anger, awe and reverence explode from the page, changing the listeners and the authors. Friendships and connections grow quickly, and everyone learns the value of having a writing community during the workshop and back in daily life.





People from all walks of life gather as strangers, hoping for inspiration and encouragement in their writing journeys. Participants definitely get what they came for and so much more. Jon Nelson, curator of wildlife at the High Desert Museum, leads a field trip to explore the wildlife of the area. You might learn that turkey vultures can breathe through some of their bones and witness an American bittern pointing its long beak skyward to camouflage itself among the tules. Dennis Jenkins, senior research archaeologist at the University of Oregon and principal investigator for the university's Northern Great Basin Archaeological Field School, leads the group to places where ancient finds have changed the understanding of when people first inhabited the High Desert. Dr. Jenkins' humor and enthusiasm entertains and enlightens and makes one consider spending a summer digging in the dirt with him.

No matter where writers are lost in place, beds are comfortable, showers and bathrooms are available, and there is plentiful good food and snacks. All dietary needs are accommodated. There is free time for hiking, journaling, napping, or sketching. The retreat organizers give homework each evening and writers can collaborate or write independently. Often wine, snacks, tea, and coffee are shared during downtime and friendships blossom with numbers exchanged and invitations to join writing groups offered.

During the first writing workshop, people shared why they came and what they hoped to achieve during the intensive. Some people are there to support a friend and do not consider themselves a writer. More seasoned writers unlock new perspectives and create work that they are proud to share and possibly expand on later and publish.



The Lost in Place writing intensive is an emotional, life-altering experience. Tears and laughter flow freely with equal measure. An appreciation for the beauty and peril of the High Desert becomes a cause that the participants embrace with fervor. By the end of the weekend, budding authors are celebrated, and everyone leaves with confidence, inspiration, and renewed commitment to a writing life.



The Lost in Place writing intensive is another example of the High Desert Museum being so much more than a museum, wildlife encounter, or art gallery. It is part of a dynamic, ever-changing conversation and creation about our unique environment here in Central Oregon. Anyone with the slightest interest in this weekend should sign up early for next year's event. Magic happens when you are lost in place.

Photos by Torree Abrams & file

Sea Otters Return to the Oregon Coast!

by Hannah Cooperrider, Newsletter Writer



Source: National Marine Sanctuaries, NOAA

In late June, two male [sea otters were spotted](#) swimming off the coast of Cannon Beach, prompting excitement and surprise in the conservation community. It is one of the few rare sightings of sea otters along Oregon's coast since fur traders wiped out the population in the early 1900s. So, what does this sighting mean for the future of Oregon's sea otters? How do they contrast with our beloved river otters?

Modern day sea otters live in two main locations along the West Coast - the largest of them being off the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, with over 2,000 individuals. The rest of the population is spread out along California's coastline with little or no crossover into Oregon. The two otters who were spotted at Cannon Beach seem to have migrated

from the Olympic populations, which is over 100 miles north. What made this sighting even more exciting was the fact that, traditionally, sea otters are not known to be migratory. Because of the distance and the rarity of these creatures in Oregon, the local biologists and naturalists were skeptical they were even actually sea otters



Source: King of Hearts, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Coast during fur trading days, the environment and other animals in the food chain suffer in many ways, altering the appearance and function of the natural order. In particular, sea otters in Washington and California are vital to controlling the sea urchin and shellfish populations, which in turn allows more kelp forests to grow, providing habitat and shelter to a wide variety of marine life. Cultivating these kelp forests also makes sea otters great fighters of climate change. Kelp and ocean grasses are important carbon sinks and absorb large amounts of carbon dioxide like any forest on land. Kelp also prevents shoreline erosion and ocean acidification. If sea otters were to return to the Oregon Coast permanently, it would prompt an ecological restoration of the waters and restore the natural systems that were lost so long ago.

Due to their shrunken range because of habitat loss and historical fur trapping, sea otters have developed into two distinct subspecies along the West Coast: the southern sea otter, *Enhydra lutris nereis*, and the northern sea otter, *Enhydra lutris konyoni*. While very similar, these animals vary in their behavior, size, and lifestyle and have not been known to intermingle. The southern otters are some of the smallest marine mammals, with individuals weighing around fifty pounds. The northern group is slightly larger. Like the river otter, sea otters do not have blubber, but instead use their thick, oily coats to protect them from the frigid water they live in. They are also [master generators of heat](#), which means they burn high amounts of energy and require up to 25% of their body weight in food each day.

Sea otters are very social creatures, like Oregon's river otters, and are known to hang out in groups and have well-developed social structures. They rarely come on land, however, and can even sleep by tangling themselves in kelp or floating together in "rafts" so they don't drift away. Sea otters are special creatures in that they also know how to use basic tools such as rocks to open the shellfish they eat and even have a storage pouch under their armpits to store extra prey as they are hunting. It's easy to mistake a sea otter for one of its river otter cousins, but the greatest give-away is the sea otter's feet. Both types of otter have clawed, webbed feet, but the sea otter's flipper-like hind feet are more adapted for a life spent in the ocean.



Source: National Marine Sanctuaries, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

turned to 13% of their historical range and are still expanding. It's an exciting reminder that our beloved river otter's relatives belong here in Oregon too and are on their way to a comeback!

until they spotted them firsthand. In the past, river otters, such as the ones we have here in the High Desert Museum, have appeared along the coast, confusing beachgoers to wrongfully label them "sea otters."

In their habitats and ecosystems, sea otters are a keystone species, meaning they are essential to the health and prosperity of their environment. When a species is removed, as it was on the Oregon



Source: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Headquarters, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

The recent sighting on the coast elicited many claims and statements that Oregon could once again have a sustainable sea otter population off its shores, but because these animals are not migratory, this dream will be a long time in the making. According to the local conservation group [Elakha Alliance](#), female sea otters are even less likely to be migratory than males, and without females, establishing a new population is impossible. Still, the otters are a reminder of how the Oregon Coast should look and a promising step towards a return to the environment's status quo. Sea otters are slowly reclaiming their historical range along the West Coast, and maybe one day they will return as permanent residents to Oregon's beaches. In California, southern sea otters have re-

Sensing Sasquatch Exhibition

by Siobhan Sullivan, Newsletter Editor



The *Sensing Sasquatch* exhibition at the High Desert Museum considers this being from a Native American perspective. Indigenous peoples have had deep relationships with Sasquatch throughout time. Native peoples regard Sasquatch as a spiritual guide who delivers important messages to humans. Their interactions with humans can be life-changing experiences.

This exhibition highlights the work of five Native artists reflecting on their close connection with Sasquatch. Like the creature itself, much of the artwork is large in scale.

Descriptions of encounters with Sasquatch often involve the senses of sight, smell, and sound. The exhibit encourages visitors to use their senses “to imagine a reality that may be different from your own.” A Subaru car, covered with Sas-

quatch stickers, transports visitors into this unique exhibition.

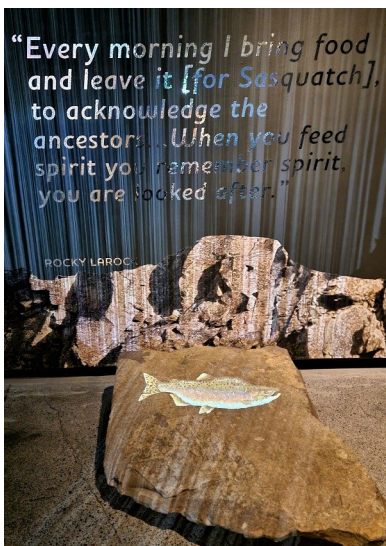
When you enter the gallery, a large screen shows various names Native American people have used for Sasquatch. The term *Sasquatch* is an anglicized version of the word *sasq'ets*, which comes from the Coast Salish First Nations people who live in what is now part of southwestern British Columbia.

As you continue through the gallery, you'll notice a large wooden mask on the wall. Rocky LaRock (Salish) created the *Shapeshifter* mixed media carving. You can sense a powerful presence in this artwork. LaRock notes that Sasquatch “is our world, our provider, our brother.” He states they are honored to feed and protect him, not to catch, kill, or track him.

A salmon painting on a boulder depicts how food is offered to Sasquatch. A quote by Rocky LaRock above the painting reads, “Every morning I bring food and leave it [for Sasquatch] to acknowledge the ancestors. When you feed spirit you remember spirit, you are looked after.”

On another boulder, you'll see a pictograph from the Tule River Indian Reservation in central California. This image, which is hundreds of years old, depicts a hairy man. An excerpt from the San Joaquin Valley Yokuts describing Sasquatch reads in part: “Big Foot was a creature that was like a great big giant with long, shaggy hair.” They admired Sasquatch because they ate animals that might harm people, but Yokuts also warned their children to stay away from where they've been seen. They say, “He eats you up, bones and all.”

In the center of the gallery, a mixed media sculpture towers over visitors. HollyAnna CougarTracks DeCoteau Littlebull (Yakama, Nez Perce, Cayuse, Cree) created *The Protector*. This work is based on her





memories of seeing Sasquatch shadows between the trees. HollyAnna remembers the creature moving forward but looking backward. She says that Bigfoot are “protectors of all living things... If they die so too does everything else.”

The fur-covered Sasquatch sculpture is impressive, but so is the way it’s separated from the rest of the exhibit. Long strands of string hang from curving ceiling tracks, adding to a sense of mystery. The shadows created by these curtains are eye-catching and works of art in their own way.

If you step through a doorway in part of this exhibit, a motion sensor triggers a video to play. Phillip Cash Cash, Ph.D. (Nez Perce, Cayuse) created the *Sasquatch running* video. In this short colorful video, Cash Cash shows us “how truly beautiful this vast world is.”

Along one wall, two enormous multimedia rattles, also created by Cash Cash, hang in the shadows. These are titled *Sasquatch’s Rattle No. 1* and *Sasquatch’s Rattle No. 2*. A quote on the wall reminds visitors that if you have “an experience with beings like Sasquatch, then you will know the world as we do.”

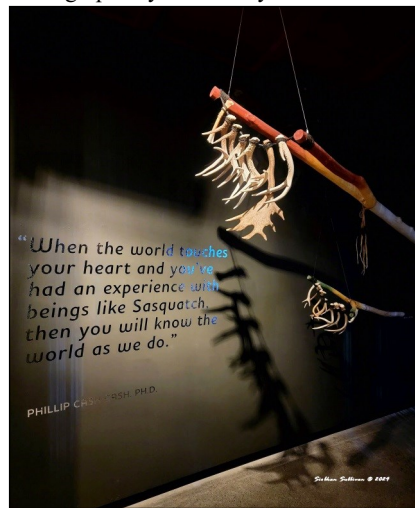
On another wall, Frank Buffalo Hyde’s (Nez Perce, Onondaga) painting with 3-D details is on display. This work illustrates how Sasquatch is an “interdimensional enigma who lurked in the forest for millennia... that continues to live among humans.”

Sasquatch frequently makes their presence known by their strong odors. Visitors can smell the scents of elements of their world in one display. Scent boxes hold the smell of blooming wildflowers, aromatic sagebrush, the musk of wild animals, and ancient trees.

A life-size mixed media sculpture of a Sasquatch stands near the main entrance. Charlene “Tilly” Moody (Warm Springs) created the *Around Us Watching* sculpture. From one side, visitors will view a sculpture covered with a smoked bison hide. On the other side, images from contemporary life merge with traditional art and patterns. A colorful mural of geometric patterns fills the wall behind the sculpture.

To experience Sasquatch through all your senses, be sure to visit the *Sensing Sasquatch* exhibition. It will be featured at the Museum from now through January 12, 2025.

Photographs by Todd Cary & Siobhan Sullivan



Summer Lake Wildlife Area

High Desert Voices

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HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

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2024



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	August 2024
8–11	Museum Event: <i>4th Annual Lost in Place Nature Writing Intensive.</i> 9:00 am–5:00 pm. \$671 a person, all-inclusive weekend. SOLD OUT! Waitlist here .
8	Museum Event: <i>Museum and Me.</i> 4:00–7:00 pm. Free for individuals, friends, and family. RSVP here .
15	Museum Event: <i>Sawmill Demonstration.</i> 1:00–4:00 pm. Free with Museum admission.
24	Museum Event: <i>High Desert Rendezvous.</i> 5:00–8:00 pm. To purchase tickets and tables, go here .
28	Museum Event: <i>Bat Walk Wednesday.</i> 8:00–9:0 pm. \$8 member adults, \$4.80 member children 12 and under; nonmembers \$10 adults, \$6 children 12 and under. RSVP here .
	To RSVP or register, click the link next to the event description or call 541-382-4754.