

SEELEY LAKE

Seeley Lake festival delves into more than Maclean's writing

1 HOUR AGO · BY [ROB CHANEY](#)

To someone unfamiliar with “A River Runs Through It,” it might seem risky to build a literary festival around an author famous for only one book in his lifetime, who wrote his masterworks late in his career and was known more as a teacher than a writer.

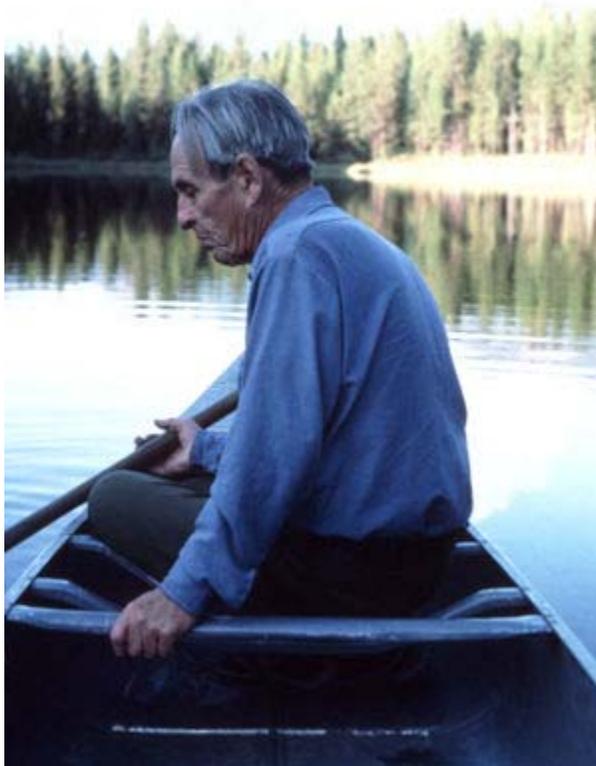
This weekend’s sold-out tours of the book’s fabled fly-fishing spots and the notorious wildfire slopes chronicled in “Young Men and Fire” argue that Norman Maclean’s appeal goes far beyond bookworms. Instead, it could be a template for celebrating the style of stories shaped by place as much as people that won Maclean acclaim.

“We chose that title, *In the Footsteps of Norman Maclean*, so we can turn to other writers who were influenced by him and by the tradition of Western literature,” festival coordinator Jenny Rohrer said. “Next year, we’ll be focusing on the film ‘A River Runs Through

It’ with people like Annick Smith and William Kittridge, who wrote the original screenplay. We’ll be building it around stories that have that similar sense of character and landscape. And we’ll be doing it in a place where we can take you outdoors for a good portion of it.”

That idea helped the festival win a \$20,700 grant to advertise its events at regional and national levels from the Montana Office of Tourism.

“No film is more closely associated with Montana’s landscapes and outdoor recreation than ‘A River Runs Through It,’ ” Montana Department of Commerce Director Meg O’Leary said in an email. “It has been inspiring travelers to visit Montana for more than 20 years, and this festival offers a unique chance to see the sights, hear the sounds and have the experiences that inspired Norman Maclean to write some of Montana’s most treasured literary works.”



That's borne out in the reservation lists at hotels and lodges around Seeley Lake this weekend. Book fans from Georgia to Minnesota will be observed by a British reporter coming from London's Daily Telegraph, who's assigned to write about "Norman Maclean Country."

Lots of other [events](#) remain open in Seeley Lake this weekend, from open-mic forums inviting anyone who knew Maclean to share their memories to scholarly discussions about his time in Seeley Lake and its effect on his writing. A screening of "A River Runs Through It" on Saturday is paired by live jazz at a beer-and-wine tasting Saturday evening.

Sunday tours with space still available include wildland fire in the Seeley Lake area and Blackfoot River stewardship projects. Demonstrations by the Missoula Smokejumper Center will coincide with discussions about "Young Men and Fire" and storytelling by firefighters and smokejumpers. And Monday features an all-day writer's workshop.

"This all grew out of our 'Open Book Club,'" Rohrer said. "In seven years, we've had 58 authors come to Seeley Lake to read. We can get 90 people to come out to a reading in this little community – in winter."

This summer, the festival targets what are known as "geo-tourists" – travelers who want to experience unique, cultural and remote places.

"They're the kind of people who want to attend a festival for a day and then go for an aggressive hike or see Glacier Park," Rohrer said. "They want to see things in the way they used to be – places that are still relatively undeveloped and undisturbed."

Maclean festival schedule

For a full schedule of events at the In the Footsteps of Norman Maclean festival, visit macleanfootsteps.com/events-at-a-glance.