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## **Blackfoot River still runs through displaced Maclean festival**

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Noah Snyder, a grandson of author Norman Maclean, sits on a rock at a Ninemile Prairie fishing access site along the Blackfoot River in 2015.

There's the movie, of course.

And Norman Maclean's novella, "A River Runs Through It," that spawned the movie.

But the second festival in Maclean's name branches into other things on which Maclean and a remarkable circle of family and Montana friends left their marks, before and since the English professor, author and fly fisherman died in 1990.

"That's why we decided to call it 'In the Footsteps of Norman Maclean,'" director Jenny Rohrer said Wednesday. "It gives us license to move around a little bit."

Most of the festival that runs Friday through Sunday has been moved from Seeley Lake to Missoula because of the Rice Ridge fire and its smoky effects. The highlight comes on the last afternoon at the Wilma Theater with the appearance of Tom Skerritt, who played the Rev. John Maclean — Norman and Paul's father — in the movie that came out 25 years ago.

Skerritt, producer Patrick Markey, and Oscar-winning screenwriter Richard Friedenberg will be joined on stage at 1 p.m. by Maclean's daughter, Jean Maclean Snyder, to discuss the challenges of turning "A River" from a book into a feature film. Snyder served as a consultant on the set. Lt. Gov. Mike Cooney and Mayor John Engen are part of the program that will be followed at 3 p.m. by a 25th anniversary screening of the movie.

Rohrer was working out details Wednesday with Snyder to bring to the program a three-minute video recorded by producer Robert Redford in conjunction with the re-release in June of the books "A River Runs Through It, and Other Stories" and Maclean's "Young Men and Fire."

"It's about how (Redford) came to meet Maclean, how he won his trust and how the movie got to be made," said Rohrer. "A least we got a piece of Robert Redford."

The festival produced by Alpine Artisans made a successful maiden voyage in Seeley Lake two years ago and will probably remain on an every-other-year schedule. Its base for this weekend is a fitting one, the Fellowship Hall of the First Presbyterian Church, 235 S. Fifth St. W. That's the Missoula church that Rev. Maclean built in 1909, when Norman was 7 years old and Paul just 3.

"We decided to spend the first day focusing on what we call the story of the Blackfoot, a river that was such an important player in Norman's writing," Rohrer said.

Two guided tours are offered at 9:30 a.m. Friday, one starting at First Presbyterian and discusses the geology of the Blackfoot Valley, the other one out of The Seeley Lake Historical Society Barn south of town called "Norman's Neighborhood." The afternoon speaking slate is devoted to storytelling from perspectives of the Blackfoot by keynote speaker Richard Manning, the valley's deep history (Native tribes and Meriwether Lewis), groundbreaking conservation efforts (Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Blackfoot Challenge) and dude ranches, presented by Juanita Vero of the historic E Bar L Ranch in Greenough.

On Saturday the attention turns to the diverse writings about the Blackfoot and the "Headwaters story."

"Headwaters" is the 1996 anthology of Blackfoot River stories edited by longtime Blackfoot resident Annick Smith, a writer and filmmaker. She brought together writers who penned 49 stories at a time when approval of a gold mine above Lincoln was pending state approval that never came.

"It was actually a piece of activism," Rohrer said. "The goal was to bring it to Helena and distribute it to all the state legislators to lobby against the gold mine."

Eight of those writers, including Smith, William Kittredge, Fred Haefele and Manning will be presenting Saturday afternoon starting at 1 p.m.

Sunday's slate starts with a new partner, the National Museum of Forest Service History on Highway 10 West past the Missoula airport, which opened its gate this summer. A chuckwagon breakfast talk that starts with pancakes at 8 a.m. will bring together three men with families deeply rooted in the Maclean story: John Maclean, Norman's son and author of five books on wildfires; Peter Koch, grandson of legendary early Forest Service ranger and fire control expert Elers Koch; and Bill Moore, whose father Bud Moore was a close friend of Maclean's.

"The focus of it really is families and the Forest Service and their histories that are built around the Macleans and their friendships here in Missoula," said Cheryl Hughes of the museum.

Elers Koch was with the Forest Service before it was the Forest Service.

"He was one of the original forest rangers that Gifford Pinchot set up here in Missoula," Hughes said.

Koch and his family had a cabin on Forest Service lease land next to the Macleans on Seeley Lake.

Peter Koch is an artist and author himself who lives in Berkeley, California, but is well-known on the art scene of his native Missoula. He edited his grandfather's "Forty Years a Forester: 1903-1943," that was written in 1953 and re-released in 1998, and is interested in issuing a new version.

"John (Maclean) wrote me and said he'd really like to extend some time in the program to Peter," Hughes said. "He said, 'I want to help him commemorate his grandfather and his friendship with our family.' I was really receptive to that."

Bud Moore and Norman Maclean met in the mid-1970s, when Maclean began writing "A River Runs Through It." The two "almost immediately became fast friends, and Bud's second wife, Janet, was part of that friendship circle," said Hughes.

In later years, she said, the Moores "carved out a place on their property" in Condon for Maclean to fish on. Maclean helped Bud Moore get his book "The Lochsa Story — Land Ethics in the Bitterroot Mountains" published.

"That was a huge joint effort," said Hughes. "The ability to write was pretty different between the two of them. Norman tried to help fine-tune it, and he looked to Bud to help fine-tune the forestry part of his book."

Bill Moore will speak about Maclean's relationship with Bill Bell, the ranger in the Bitterroot who was a central figure in one of Maclean's two "other stories" — "USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky." That short story was also made into a movie.

Sunday's schedule includes a 9:30 a.m. screening at the Roxy Theater of "Shadow Casting: The Making of A River Runs Through It" with director Dennis Aig and John Bailey of Livingston. Bailey was Redford's fly-fishing coach on the movie set.

"This year's fires are an unwelcome but somewhat appropriate backdrop to Maclean's work," Rohrer noted. "We're thankful that the church that Reverend Maclean called his own, the First Presbyterian Church of Missoula, has welcomed us."

### Getting in

An all-access pass to the In the Footsteps of the Norman Maclean Festival is \$200. Friday and Saturday all-day passes are \$25 each, while the Sunday morning session at the Roxy is \$10 and the afternoon program at the Wilma is \$20. Passes can be purchased at the door.

Tickets are sold out for a gala dinner Friday night at the home of Big Blackfoot River Keeper Jerry O'Connell on the banks of the Blackfoot. A wine tasting hosted by Missoula's Wine Guy Mike at Le Petit Outre in Missoula is set for 6 p.m. Saturday. Cost is \$35. The 8 a.m. Sunday chuckwagon pancake breakfast with John Maclean at the National Museum of Forest Service History, 6305 Highway 10 West in Missoula, is free of charge.

For information and a full schedule go to [macleanfootsteps.com](http://macleanfootsteps.com).

### MORE INFORMATION

Fires, smoke force changes to Seeley schools, Maclean Festival, Ovando Gran Fondo, others

- Stories, storytellers link family to 'River Runs Through It' author Norman Maclean
- Norman Maclean remembered at festival in Seeley Lake

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