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TOPICAL TOP STORY

Norman Maclean Festival

John Maclean speaks of forests and balance at Forest Service Museum

THOMAS PLANK thomas.plank@lee.net 19 hrs ago



The first clear day in more than a week saw nearly 200 people gather early Sunday morning at the National Museum of Forest Service History to enjoy pancakes and talks from two famous conservationists: John Maclean and Bill Moore.

The two speakers were invited in conjunction with the Norman Maclean Festival over the weekend in Missoula. As the only free event of the festival, the turnout was high, although the pine bough centerpieces, pancakes, bacon, and coffee might have helped significantly.

The tension between conservation and control was obvious in the timing of the Norman Maclean Festival this year.

The smoke that has been so damaging to Seeley Lake forced the Maclean Festival to move from its usual two days in Seeley and one day in Missoula to have all three days of the festival occur in Missoula this year. That smoke has John Maclean and Bill Moore comparing 2017 to the famous 1910 fire season when the Great Burn destroyed millions of acres of forest in just a few days.

Maclean, who now lives in Washington, D.C., spoke like a preacher as he described Montana's beauty and fire's danger while telling stories of the old legends like Elers Koch and his own father. "What's remarkable," he said after his speech, "is that the current fire season has ominous similarities to 1910," the year of the Great Burn.

Maclean has plenty of experience with fires, as his nearly six books on wildfire in the American West attest.

"We have to know how to manage forests without endless litigation," Maclean said. "Is it possible for human beings to do no good? Doesn't this fire season tell you something? Balance is needed."

Lisa Tate, the executive director of the Museum, said that the event was "part of our mission to share conservation history with the public," and inviting "a speaker of the magnitude of John Maclean" along with Bill Moore, a "legend of forestry," is part of reaching out to the broader community. Tate explained the Museum's newest features focused on the interpretive side of curation, including several brand new signs that explained the Macleans' and the Moores' impact on forestry in the American West.

As a non-profit, the National Museum of Forest Service History relies on people like Dave Stack and Cheryl Hughes to bring in speakers like Maclean and Moore. Stack worked for the Forest Service for 35 years and is now a vice-president and the Museum's historian in charge of the some 50,000 pieces of inventory the Museum has curated so far.

"There is so much history the public needs to understand about the Forest Service," Stack said.

Hughes taught at Sentinel High School for years, where she focused on "place-based education, giving kids experiences where the writers worked and wrote," Hughes said.

When she retired, Hughes took on a consultancy with the Forest Service where she developed grants to impact teachers nationally through primary source education that dovetailed with her place-based education style. Currently the educational director for the Museum, she wrote the Montana Humanities grant that helped bring the new signs to the museum that give the biographies and impact of Bud Moore, Elers Koch, and Norman and John Maclean.

And on John Maclean's biography, one line stood out in particular. "Like his father, John knew there was a story of man and nature that must be told, and he must tell it."

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