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Cliff

MONTAGNE

Over his career, whether professionally as professor of Soil Science Emeritus at Montana State University or personally as a volunteer and non-profit leader, Cliff Montagne has taken a holistic approach.

“You can think holistically about anything,” he said.

During his time at MSU he developed a holistic decision making course, noting that “the ways western science can be more efficient if it’s looked at through the whole system by learning from living in the place.”

“I see it as a life’s work to see the connections between nature and people,” he said. “And to work to make those connections mutually beneficial.”

Montagne has put this method into practice with the non-profit BioRegions International that he started with his wife. The organization seeks to exchange knowledge, experience and skills between and within bioregions in different communities.

“[We started in] in 1998 in Northern Mongolia to learn about issues with the environment, health and the importance of tradition,” he said. “I thought it would be an opportunity to learn, but also to share using holistic management.”

The program looks at the economic

impacts and relationship with nature in rural landscapes, specifically the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and Northern Mongolia, and involves an exchange of information. “The Mongolians we worked with said, ‘we’d like to know what education you do with environmental health and the arts and economics, and if we think it might work for us we’ll try it on our own terms,’” Montagne said. “So we’ve developed a partnership with many Mongolians, and learning has gone both ways.”

A further major component of Montagne’s love of the outdoors has been his lifelong interest in cross-country skiing. And as a result, he’s contributed to the sport’s growth in the Gallatin Valley. He began learning in junior and high school in Bozeman and recalls that his father bought a sled and got permission to make cross-country ski trails in Lindley Park. After attending Dartmouth College, Montagne returned to the area and acted as a ski coach for the high school. He’s also gone on to ski competitively across the country as well traveled to Norway and Canada for competitions.

He is currently an active board member of the non-profit cross-country ski center, Crosscut Mountain Sports Center. He has been involved with the organization

since their founding in 2016. However, his history and connections with the area go much further back.

Decades ago while coaching for the high school, he noticed this piece of land near the base of the Bridger that looked ideal for cross-country skiing, so he asked the owner if they could use it and they gave him permission. They then received permission from the Bohart family as well to access an additional section of land as well, which allowed them to ski from the base north of Bridger to the Brackett Creek Forest Service Cabin.

After the Boharts passed away, the Bridger Nordic Ski Club purchased their land and his family was able to buy that first piece of land. Together, they combined to become Crosscut Ski Ranch Nordic Ski Center. The ranch only operated for a few years before failing and being sold to developers with plans for condos. Fortunately though the land continued to be operated as a nordic ski spot with various kids programs and events, including the U.S. Senior National Championships and Olympic Tryout Finals in 2002.

Led by Eric Love, who held a passion for biathlon, the land was purchased by the Biathlon Club and Crosscut Mountain Sports Center. Shortly after, Montagne was asked to join the board.

“I [was] able to provide a lot of historical information about Crosscut, which I feel like has been helpful,” he said.

Although much has changed in the decades since Crosscut’s first iteration, he said he appreciates that it is now available to more people of varying abilities, and continues to appreciate its place in the community.

“The activity of crosscut is centered around a piece of land where people can come and learn and interact together,” he said. There’s a lot of effort to be open to all.”

In addition to cross-country skiing in the winter, the center offers hiking and biking in the summertime, training and recreation opportunities for biathlon, educational programs, and year-round training for the U.S. Paralympic team. They are also currently in the fundraising and design stage for a state of the art lodge that will be next to the biathlon center.

“The vision for this lodge is to be as environmentally benign as possible, but to provide support to the athletes, students and staff.”

Montagne said that he has always been interested in nature, which “has led to a life of being outdoors as much as works.”