2.5 Number of students, in thousands, who visited FWP's Montana WILD Education Center in Helena in 2022 to take part in nature learning programs.

Buzz off!

Montana isn't as notorious for mosquitoes as many southern or midwestern states, but we've got plenty. Mountain meadows, the Bighole Valley, and eastern and central Montana grasslands are among the worst spots for getting bit.

Fight back with the best bug spray you can find. According to Consumer Reports, the three most effective repellents are Ben's Tick & Insect (wipes or pump spray), 3M Ultrathon Insect Repellent, and Off Sportsmen Deep Woods Insect Repellent III.

What about alternative repellents, including wristbands, repellent-infused clothing, clip-on fans, and citronella candles? "Don't bother," say Consumer Reports testers. Instead, look for sprays and wipes containing at least 15–30% (but no more) DEET or 20% Picaridin. The best all-natural repellents contain at least 30% oil of lemon eucalyptus, but these last only one hour compared to six hours for the top-rated repellents. ■

FORAGING

Salute the mighty huck

It's official. Governor Greg Gianforte signed a bill in mid-May designating the huckleberry as Montana's official state fruit. Students at Vaughn Elementary School in Cascade County lobbied the governor to support the bill.

Hucks now join the ponderosa pine (state tree), bitterroot (state flower), mourning cloak (state butterfly), and grizzly (state mammal) as the way Montana represents itself to the world.

Celebrate the huckleberry's new status by getting out this summer and picking a few quarts yourself. Most years the best picking is in the Flathead and Kootenai national forests in northwestern Montana. But that region is still in severe drought, so consider trying the Seeley-Swan Valley this summer. Peak picking starts in mid-July and continues well into August. Search forests with roughly 50 percent conifer cover at 3,500 to 7,000 feet elevation.

Note that people aren't the only ones after the berries. Be sure to carry bear pepper spray and make lots of noise to reduce chances of startling a grizzly. ■

STATE PARKS

Sleeper state parks

Pirogue Island State Park. (Note that the main island is what looks like mainland in the left third of the photo.)

Lewis and Clark Caverns, Giant Springs, First Peoples Buffalo Jump, Makoshika, and Flathead Lake get the most press and visitation. And for good reason. But Montana is home to 50 other state parks, many just as scenic, historic, and fun to visit as the better-known sites. Here are three sites off the beaten path to consider visiting this summer or fall:

- **Lost Creek:** This pretty little park a few miles northwest of Anaconda features a shaded canyon for hot summer afternoons, bighorn sheep and mountain goats in the surrounding cliffs, and a lovely waterfall at the end of a short, paved, wheelchair-accessible trail.
- **Pirogue Island:** This is the only state park that's in the Yellowstone River. The island park sits just downstream of Miles City and features trails for hiking and mountain biking, opportunities for birding and shore-fishing, gravelly shoals for agate hunting, and cool, shaded sites for picnicking under tall cottonwoods.
- **Greycliff Prairie Dog Town:** A small site just off Interstate 90 between Billings and Bozeman, Greycliff offers no campsites, shade, or even water. But if the kids are clamoring to see western wildlife and you don't have much time, this is your spot. Park anywhere along the park's 1-mile driving loop and wait. In a few minutes you'll see and hear the little rodents as they pop their heads out of their burrows to investigate the new arrivals. ■

Learn more about these and other state park hidden gems at **fwp.mt.gov/stateparks.**

FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; HOLLY HEYSER

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MIKE MORAN ILLUSTRATION; SHUTTERSTOCK; MONTANA STATE PARKS

DIVERSITY

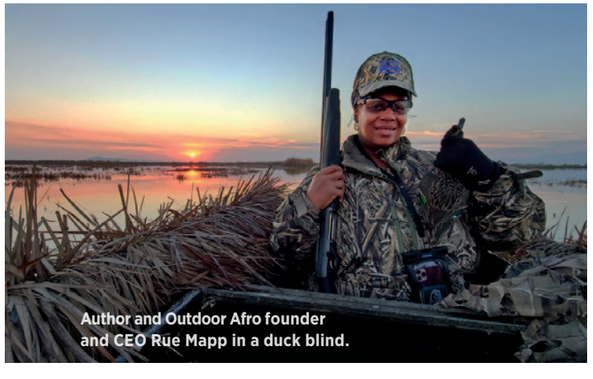
Book and podcast announce, 'We're out here.'

Readers thumbing through the pages of *Outside*, *Peterson's Hunting*, *In-Fisherman*, and, yes, *Montana Outdoors* could get the impression that few if any Black, Indigenous, and other people of color kayak, hunt, fish, camp, or otherwise enjoy the outdoors.

But of course they do, says Rue Mapp, founder and CEO of the nonprofit organization Outdoor Afro, who notes that all people derive the same joy, sustenance, and connection from being in the natural world.

In her new book, *Nature Swagger*, Mapp is helping bring that joy to a wider audience. She writes that in the 12 years since starting Outdoor Afro, she and her team have helped tens of thousands of African Americans "camp in the Colorado Rockies...bird watch in the Florida Everglades, canoe in the Mississippi River, and more—all while learning about the long heritage of Black people connecting in nature."

Nature Swagger inspires Black communities to "reclaim their place in the natural world" as hikers, anglers, hunters, campers, horseback riders, scientists, surfers, beekeepers, and more with stories and essays by 30 people who write about their love of the outdoors.



Author and Outdoor Afro founder and CEO Rue Mapp in a duck blind.

Contributors include Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant, a large-carnivore ecologist with the National Geographic Society who studies black bears and grizzlies in Montana and writes of how her graduate studies of large carnivores helped her recover from an abusive relationship; John Burroughs Medal finalist J. Drew Lanham, who explains that his passion for hunting deer is not about killing a trophy or even acquiring venison but rather an expression of his love of nature; and Dudley Edmondson, whose life mission is to help Black people recognize their ownership of public lands. "If you're standing on a mountaintop with millions of acres of public lands laid out below you," Edmondson writes, "then for all practical purposes at that moment every tree, blade of grass, and body of water on that land belongs to you. That's very powerful knowledge."

Doing similar outreach in a different medium are New Orleans zookeeper and wildlife educator Alexi Grousis and actor and wildlife educator Allison Jones, creators of the *We Out Here* podcast, dedicated to sharing stories of people of color in nature. "I want Black, brown, and Indigenous people to listen and feel seen," says Grousis, explaining that he aims to help more people like him who love the outdoors feel visible and recognize that nature should and can be enjoyed by everyone.

Find *Nature Swagger* at local bookstores or online, and *We Out Here* in the Apple app store. ■