

CINNABAR FOUNDATION

New Board Member Announcement

TERESA ERICKSON

CONNECTING THE PAST TO THE PRESENT, AND BEYOND

Teresa Erickson recently joined the Cinnabar Foundation's Board of Directors, bringing with her a wealth of experience and a demonstrated commitment to conservation, spanning more than forty years. Born in Colorado to a hard rock miner and a Latina Apache, Teresa learned at an early age how deeply connected we are to the natural world around us. As her father worked long hours in the mines, her mother raised Teresa and her younger sister Lill to respect the plants and animals that shared the landscape of their rural home in Telluride. Teresa's early memories include safely shepherding spiders out of their house and being admonished by her father not to fear the myriad small creatures that often found their way into and around their lives.



Teresa Erickson

These formative experiences set the tone for Teresa as her appreciation and wonder for the natural world continued to grow. As a teenager, Teresa teamed up with her sister and began mapping trails and contributing to local wilderness projects. As she committed more time and energy to conservation work, Teresa began to realize, "that I could do this forever as a job. That nothing could be better than fighting for what I loved."

Teresa and her sister continued to collaborate. As they took on more ambitious projects, they often faced broader systemic challenges and increased skepticism. Rather than shrink from these challenges, Teresa channeled them to "harden and motivate" her to work harder. Against what seemed like long odds, the sisters managed to successfully conserve more than 100,000 acres in the Big Blue Wilderness of the San Juan Mountains.

In 1980, Teresa helped found Western Colorado Congress, and served as their original staff director until she moved to Montana. From 1986 to 2019, Teresa served as the Staff Director of the Northern Plains Resource Council, a grassroots organization started by Montana cattle

ranchers whose land, water, and livelihoods were threatened by massive coal mining and other fossil fuel development in the early 1970s.

Teresa is known and has been recognized for her ability to effectively work with people of all backgrounds, including a diverse constituency of farmers, ranchers, Native Americans, environmentalists, and others concerned about the stewardship of Montana's natural resources and sustainable economic development.

In 1993, she received the "1st Annual Jeannette Rankin Award" from A Territory Resource, recognizing her years of dedication to principles of social justice and land stewardship. The Cinnabar Foundation honored Teresa and her husband Pat Sweeney, former executive director of the Western Organization of Resource Councils, with the 2010 "Len and Sandy Sargent Stewardship Award," for their driving force behind the establishment of a nested system of local, state and regional resource councils to represent the collective voice of rural citizens, and inspiring legions of grassroots voices for conservation, family agriculture, and sustainable communities in Montana and the High Plains. The following year, Farm Aid recognized Teresa as a National Farm Advocate.

Teresa's passion, knowledge, and long commitment to conservation work adds a valuable perspective to Cinnabar as new and dynamic challenges continue to arise in this region.

One of Teresa's proudest accomplishments was realized during her tenure at the Northern Plains Resource Council, when they successfully renovated an old grocery store into Montana's first LEED Platinum building, which only consumes 21% of the energy of new buildings built to code.

Providing leadership in the fight to conserve our natural systems and spaces in Montana is no small feat; the scale and scope of our challenges reflect the complexity of those systems we work to protect. Teresa's passion for conservation is evidenced by her many achievements in the field, as well as her persistence despite countless setbacks. Her long commitment to this important work brings valuable perspective as new and dynamic challenges continue to arise. "All of us at the Cinnabar Foundation are excited to welcome Teresa to the Board, and eager to learn with her as we continue in our shared commitment toward conservation in Montana and the Greater Yellowstone region," said board president Grant Parker.