

News Release

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***Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance Executive Director
Gives Notice of Upcoming Retirement***

The long-time executive director of one of Jackson Hole's oldest and largest membership organizations announced his pending retirement this week.

On Wednesday, July 23, the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance's Franz Camenzind, 64, gave approximately a year's notice of his retirement at a monthly meeting of the nonprofit conservation organization's board of directors.

Camenzind, a cinematographer with a Ph.D. in wildlife biology, has been the Alliance's executive director since 1996, though he began his leadership role in the Alliance in 1983 when he first joined the board. He has lived in Jackson Hole since 1970. The Conservation Alliance aims to achieve harmony between our human activities, and the valley's wildlife and natural resources.

Conservation Alliance board members praised Camenzind for his years of service and thanked him for the generous notice, which will allow them to begin the leadership transition process. Co-Chair Chuck Schneebeck said Camenzind's last year looks to be a busy one for the organization, which will continue relying on the executive director's wisdom and dedication to uphold the organization's mission through his last day on staff – and beyond.

“Rarely have I come across a man who has given so much and asked so little in return to an ecosystem that he calls home,” said Board Co-Chair Anthony Stevens, who said he has been honored to know Camenzind for many years. “From his passion for photography, to the helm of the organization, Franz has always been a hub in the wheel that is the conservation movement. We wish him all the best, and I hope that he knows he will be missed.”

“I’m very happy for Franz because he deserves a break,” said Cindy Harger, the Alliance’s managing director, who has worked with Camenzind for nine years. “However, it will be an adjustment for the organization, and it will be especially hard on all things wild. This hasn’t been just a job for him. It goes to his soul. It’s hard to replace that kind of passion, knowledge and dedication.”

Camenzind said that while he is retiring from the staff, he has no desire to retire completely.

“I’m not retiring from any of the issues facing Jackson Hole,” Camenzind said. “However, I am looking forward to having more time to pursue my own interests – and to catch up on my laundry,” he added, jokingly.

Camenzind said he plans to pursue more photography and writing, as well as simply enjoy the outdoors and observe the wildlife he has dedicated much of his life to protecting.

He said his decision to retire from the Conservation Alliance next year was not an easy one, since he has watched the organization grow and establish itself into a solid force in support of the Grand Teton-Yellowstone area's natural resources.

Since Camenzind began as executive director, the organization has doubled its staff, successfully raised funds to buy its own building on South Cache, increased its membership to 2,000, and has attracted a steady stream of professional, passionate staff and board who work as a team to carry out the organization's mission.

"I have watched with satisfaction as nearly every segment of this community has embraced the diversity of wildlife and wild lands as the backbone of the region – economically, environmentally, culturally, and for many, spiritually," Camenzind said. "It is this shared value base that makes Jackson Hole the best place to call home."

The list of organizational achievements of the Conservation Alliance is long during Camenzind's tenure; a sampling of those accomplishments include:

- Promoting strong natural resource protections in the Comprehensive Plan in the early '90s, including lobbying for zoning changes that reduced Teton County build-out populations from 70,000 to 40,000;
- Working with sportsmen, the business community and other organizations to avert oil and gas exploration on literally hundreds of thousands of acres in the forests surrounding Teton Park and Jackson Hole, areas that comprise critical wildlife habitat;
- Preventing a large subdivision from developing on public lands in Mosquito Creek;
- Securing new, environmentally friendly, management guidelines for golf courses in Jackson Hole;
- Ensuring relatively peaceful skies by working with the community to limit commercial scenic helicopter tours in the valley;
- Working to protect both people and Grand Teton National Park within the master plan for Jackson Hole Airport, which resides within park boundaries; these efforts have included promoting safety run-offs on the runways, installing a control tower and radar system – measures to keep travelers safe without unnecessary expansions into parklands.

Camenzind said that he feels best about the organizational accomplishments that have recognized and promoted the integrity and wholeness of the ecosystem. For instance, Camenzind and the Alliance have played a role, along with many organizations and agencies, in successfully bringing wolves and ecological balance back to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem – the largest remaining relatively intact ecosystem in the continental U.S. He has also enjoyed working with strong Forest Service leadership to prevent oil and gas industrialization of the northern portion of the Bridger-Teton.

"These are things that may help maintain the southern portion of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem as a thriving ecosystem and a world treasure," he said. "Very few places are lucky to have the full complement of wildlife we do, the remote wilderness we do, along with a vibrant, caring community. My hope is that my two grandchildren will be able to experience it in much the same way I have been lucky to."

Long-time board member Bruce Hayse lightened things up a little by offering some reassurance regarding Camenzind's announcement:

"The Alliance Board wishes to assure the general public that they have no need to be alarmed about this course of events," Hayse said. "Before being turned loose, he will be fitted with a radio collar to track his movements, and if it appears he is becoming a threat to humans, he will be removed to a more remote location. They feel there is little likelihood at his age of becoming habituated."

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