

MLN Virtual Program: Montana Fibershed – Connecting Montana Folks with Montana Fiber

Date: Thursday, 1/26/23, from 6:30 – 8 pm

Format: Zoom Webinar

Registration Link: <https://tinyurl.com/MTfibershed>

Speakers: Barbara French and Helena Harris

Barbara French Bio:



Barb French is a maker with a life-long devotion to natural fibers. She learned to sew and knit from her mother at a young age, and from high school days, was making and designing her own clothes. Later, weaving, spinning and dyeing were added to her fiber obsessions

Barb studied music and languages at Montana State University, graduating with a B.A. in French. She received her M.A. Ed. from Tennessee State University, as well as her Certificate in English as a

Second Language. She has taught French, Humanities, and ESL. Barb owned a yarn shop in Bozeman in the 2000's and the focus of her teaching turned toward the fiber arts of weaving, spinning, knitting, and others. More recently, her work centers on weaving, for garments and for rugs.

The Montana Fibershed organization has encompassed so many of Barb's interests, from the love of fiber and fashion, to the sustainable growth of Montana's textile industry and the fascinating subject of regenerative agriculture within the Montana fiber economy. As a member of the original steering committee and now a Board member, she is dedicated to spreading the good word of the benefits of local, natural fibers for both people and planet.

Helen Harris Bio:



Helen Harris is a professional artist who's medium includes weaving, stitching, dyeing & mineral pigment painting. She holds BFA & MA degrees in Textile Design/Weaving/Mixed Media Art, from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, IL.

Growing up she learned to mend and stitch at her grandmother's knee. These days, if she isn't wandering the foothills of her Ennis home looking for colors, patterns, and textures in nature to inspire elaborate weavings, she is creatively mending jeans and recycling fibers. Helen sees an opportunity to support regenerative agriculture through her artistry and fashions and sourcing regional fibers is one way to begin.

Helen is a current board member of the Montana Fibershed, took part in the organization's debut event, the Farm-To-Fashion show. She believes sustainability is linked to the concept of slow fashion, or the conscious production, distribution, and

mindful use of clothing. Slow fashion goes beyond how we create and market garments, to include the full lifecycle of these textiles.

Program Description

The concept of a "fibershed," a term coined by Rebecca Burgess, and popularized in her 2019 book* of the same name, has spread all over the U.S. and the world. Like a watershed, which defines a catchment and drainage area for a given landscape, a fibershed is a geographically-defined area in which natural fiber resources are produced and then used by the people living within its boundaries. Montana Fibershed seeks to educate Montanans on the benefits of a place-based, local fiber system. A parallel concept to the local foods movement, this local cloth movement highlights the origins of our fiber and clothing. Just like our food, our natural-fiber clothing also comes from the land. We are working to connect our fiber producers, the farmers and ranchers, to our local designers, makers, businesses, and other end-users of Montana-raised natural fiber, and in so doing, to bolster the Montana textile economy and its supply chains, and to promote regenerative agricultural practices for healthy soils and a more balanced ecosystem across our great state.

*Fibershed: Growing a Movement of Farmers, Fashion Activists, and Makers for a New Textile Economy, by Rebecca Burgess, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2019.