2024 Grandfather Mountain Nature Photography Weekend
Photo Contest Rules and Requirements

PART 1: IMAGE TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- **File Format:** JPEG

- **Image size:** Images must be *sufficient size and quality for an 8 x 10 or 8 x 12 print*. Just give us the maximum size/quality your camera and software will deliver and you'll generally be fine. Not sure? Ask a Team member for advice.
  Images can be cropped as long as the result meets the size requirements and fits a standard aspect ratio of 4:5, 3:4 or 2:3. (35mm SLR's have a 2:3 aspect ratio.)

- **Media:** Each photographer will be provided with a USB flash drive to hold the images they're entering into the contest. This USB drive should be returned to the photo contest team with 3 selected photos on Saturday afternoon. Each photographer will be assigned an ID number at registration at the beginning of the weekend.

- **Subject Matter:** The basic categories are "Animals in Nature" (in the wild), "Animals in Habitats" (in captivity in the habitats located next to the nature museum), "Wildflowers" (self explanatory) and "Scenics" (landscapes). There is some overlap: A shot of rhododendrons with the mountain in the background may be a *Scenic* or *Wildflower* photo. A butterfly on a flower may be a *Wildflower* or *Animals in Nature* shot.You decide.

- **Location:** All photos must be taken on Grandfather Mountain, with one exception: Shots *of Grandfather Mountain itself* may be taken from off park property. "Grandfather Mountain" includes the attraction (Swinging Bridge, Animal Habitats, etc.) and Grandfather Mountain State Park (backcountry trails).

- **File Names:** Do not submit photos with the default file names generated by your camera! Each digital photo file must be *renamed* using the following convention:

  1. First character: Either "A" for advanced class or "B" for beginner class

  2. Next two characters (Photo Category):
     "AN" for animals in nature
     "HA" for animals in Grandfather Mountain habitats
     "SC" for scenic
     "WF" for wildflower

  3. If you are entering more than one image in any category,
     add a "1", "2" or "3" after the two-letter category code.

  4. Next character: Underscore ("_")

  5. Last three characters: Photographer's ID number

  For example: Beginner photographer James Bond, assigned ID number 007 (of course), submitting three images in the "Scenic" category would name them "bsc1_007", "bsc2_007" and "bsc3_007". This system lets the judges evaluate the images without knowing who took the photo.

- **Beginner or Advanced?** You may decide for yourself whether you're in the Beginner or Advanced category, but if you've had a winning, runner-up or Honorable Mention photo during previous Nature Photography Weekends you're definitely Advanced.

PART 2: IMAGE MODIFICATION/MANIPULATION

Yes, you can touch up images on your computer. Just keep it to a minimum. Please don't submit contrived images, or images that have been manipulated to the degree that they violate the spirit of the contest. Buildings and man-made structures may be included in photographs, but shouldn't be the central subject. This a fairly low-key contest and there are no prizes on offer, so we don't really expect any "cheating"; this information is provided mainly to put everyone on equal footing. We also want to encourage you to spend as much time as possible out on the mountain and as little as possible hunched over a computer! This is a *nature* photography weekend and the goal is to make photos that look... natural. Below is a list of techniques and tools that are permitted.

- **Basic Rules:**

Each image must have been taken during the 2024 Nature Photography Weekend.

You may not add graphics (including borders), watermarks or text, clip art, computer-generated images, or elements from other photographs.

Some modifications may be made to your image in a photo editing program, as long as the modification is applied to the whole image:

- **Cropping:** A little cropping is fine as long as the resulting image meets the contest size requirements (listed in section 1 above) *and* fits a standard aspect ratio of 4:5, 3:4 or 2:3. (35mm film cameras and most digital SLR's make images with a 2:3 aspect ratio.)

- **Brightness & Contrast:** These adjustments are allowed, provided they are applied to the entire image. This also applies to the levels and curves tools in Photoshop and their equivalents in other applications.

- **Rotation:** Rotating the image (to level a horizon, for example) is fine.

- **Spot Retouching:** Digital tools may be used to remove spots caused by dust on the sensor. They may not be used to remove features actually in the scene or to add features that were not there.

- **Sharpening:** The use of sharpening tools is strongly discouraged, but permitted, provided they are applied to the entire image.

- **Blurring:** No blurring of any part of the image is permitted.

- **Black & White Conversion:** Converting a color image to black and white is OK, provided you convert the *whole* image and not just part of it.

- **Filters:** The only filters allowed are noise reduction, color correction and correction of lens distortion; no special effects filters.

General tips:

Most of the techniques described above are easy to do... and to overdo. The judges are experienced digital photography experts and have the technical experience to detect excessive processing and the aesthetic inclination to frown on it. This is a *nature* photography weekend and its main purposes are learning and fun. Just capture the beauty of nature in the least artificial way and you'll be likely to achieve both goals.

Rule of thumb: If someone can tell your image is edited *without* seeing a before/after comparison, you've done too much.

Any questions? Ask a Team member and they'll be happy to help.