

The Good Earth

John Peel, Features Editor • 375-4586 • johnp@durangoherald.com

In this s

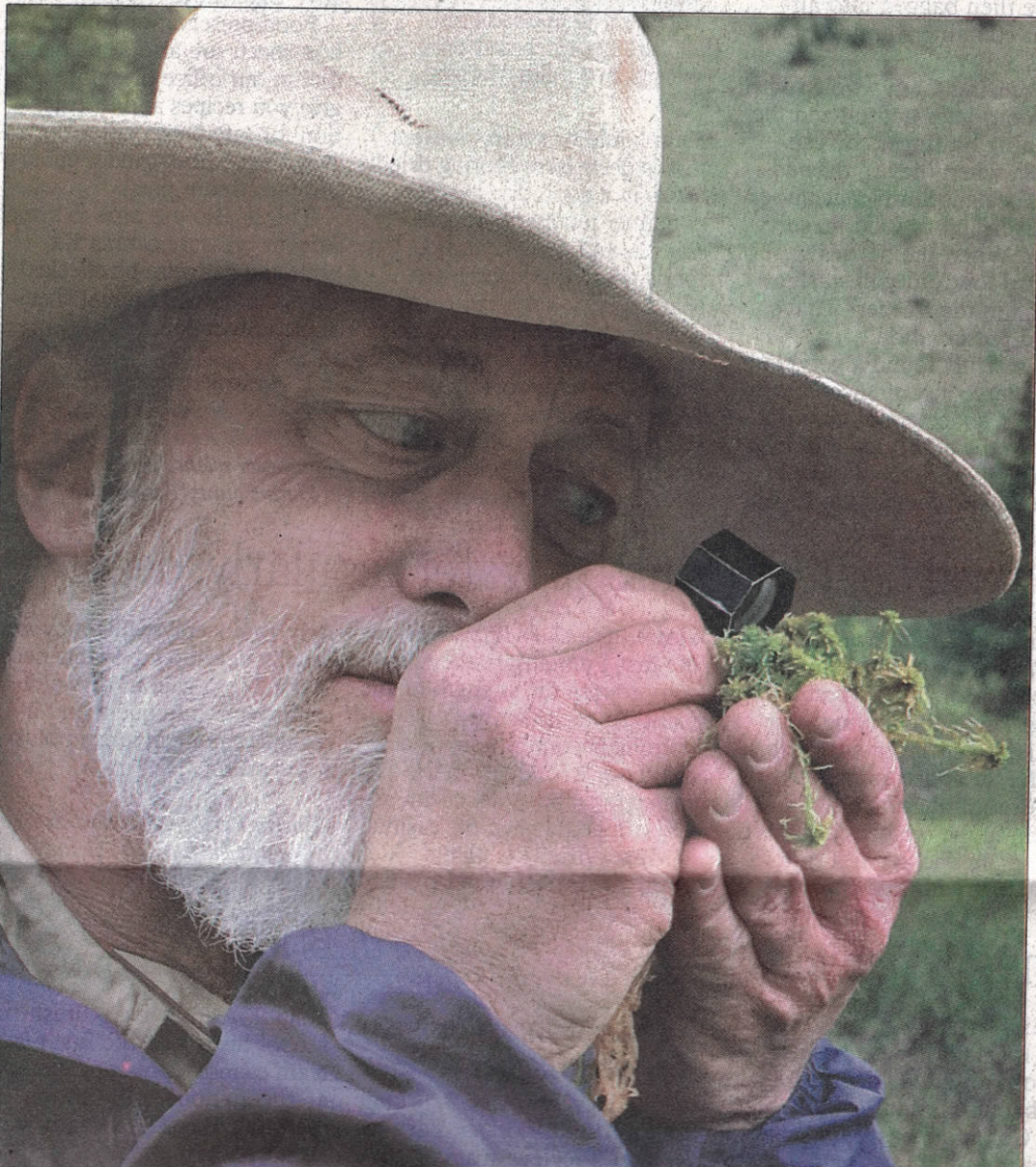
Abby & the Fu
Classifieds.....
World

THE DU

Gathering MOSS

Scientists focus studies on rare sphagnum species of San Juans

By Dale Rodebaugh
Herald Staff Writer



SILVERTON –
Academics and others
spent Tuesday and
Wednesday here and in
Friday learning how to identify
sphagnum mosses – remnant
remnants left in the San
Juan Mountains after the glacier
retreated about 15,000
years ago.

Sphagnum moss, better
known to gardeners as peat
moss – a soil additive that in-
creases soil capacity to retain
water and nutrients – grows in
fens. Fens are delicate wetlands
that may sustain rare plant and
animal life or serve as geologic
time capsules.

In certain locations, sphagnum
mosses stayed behind (the
glacial retreat),” said David
Pepper, a professor and wetland
ecologist from Colorado
State University in Fort
Collins.

*Sphagnum moss,
better known to
gardeners as peat
moss – a soil
additive that
increases soil
capacity to retain
water and nutrients
grows in fens*

Du
en
ex
hon
Herma
in Duran
Fort Le

Herald

A Danish
expert who
Fort Lewis C
the 2009 Göte
sidered the N
vironmental
Former Vice I
won the awar

Søren Her
environmenta
who led Sams
into a money
by harnessing
North Sea ho
Göteborg Aw
Dr. Anna Kaj
under-secretar
United Natio
Peñalosa, ma
Colombia.

The Götebc
is marking its
million Swe

The
recognize
work for
and inte
susta
develo

A Danish expert who Fort Lewis the 2009 G considered the vironment Former Vic won the av Søren H environme who led Sa into a mo by harness North Sea Göteborg Dr. Anna under-sec United N Peñalosa, Colombia The G is marking million

recog wor and d

\$127,907 strategic internati opment. The a held No Sams wind bl time, p from off it consu cess.

The i ish islar ing a pl depend able so Sams New Yo and I named ment" In a The D Herma to loo gardi ng but forts l global of po grasp In l Herm Sams

Academics and others spent Tuesday and Wednesday here and in Ouray learning how to identify sphagnum mosses – remnant populations left in the San Juan Mountains after the glaciers retreated about 15,000 years ago.

Sphagnum moss, better known to gardeners as peat moss – a soil additive that increases soil capacity to retain water and nutrients – grows in fens. Fens are delicate wetlands that may sustain rare plant and animal life or serve as geologic time capsules.

“In certain locations, sphagnum mosses stayed behind (the glacial retreat),” said David Cooper, a professor and wetlands ecologist from Colorado State University in Fort Collins.

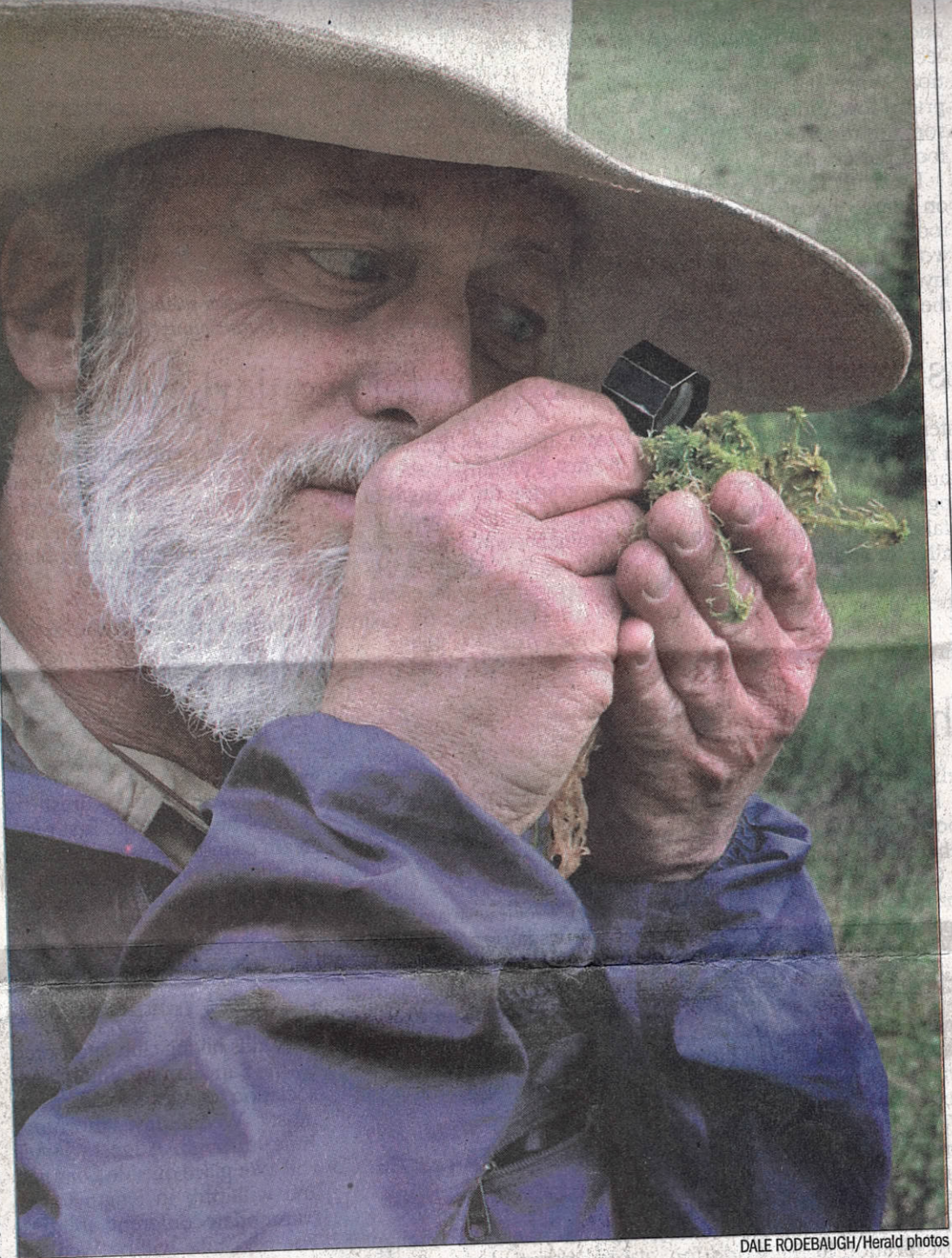
Sphagnum moss, better known to gardeners as peat moss – a soil additive that increases soil capacity to retain water and nutrients – grows in fens.

Finding species gives clues as to what happened during climatic conditions in the past.

Cooper was among workshop leaders who spent Monday scouting fens in the region for sphagnum moss locations to be visited by workshop attendees. Also on the scouting team was Richard Andrus, a sphagnologist from Binghamton University in New York. The workshop was hosted by Mountain Studies Institute and co-sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service and the Colorado Native Plant Society.

The search party was delighted with the discovery of sphagnum riparium at Chattanooga, an abandoned mining community north of Silverton. It's only the third time the species has been discovered in the Rocky Mountains and the first time in Colorado, they said.

Even rarer is the sphagnum balticum discovered in a Chattanooga fen several years ago by Andrus, Cooper and Chris Arp. In 2003, the trio published a paper on the species, which has



DALE RODEBAUGH/Herald photos

David Cooper, a wetlands ecologist at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, gets up close with a sample of sphagnum moss at a fen bordering Mineral Creek north of Silverton on Monday.



Richard Andrus, a sphagnologist and professor at Binghamton University, (red vest) leads a workshop held Tuesday and Wednesday in Silverton and Ouray. Participants, from left in foreground, are Cooper; Gay Austin, a botanist with the Colorado Division of Wildlife; and Rod Chimner, a wetlands ecologist at Michigan Technical University. In the back is Ron Wittmann, a broovhyte