



Gaining Ground

Healing the land. Building community.

FALL 2018

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Volunteers return in June 2018 to the location of WRV's first project in 1999 at Pella Crossing near Hygiene, to restore wetlands damaged by the 2013 flood waters.

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Looking Forward Looking Back

By Katherine Thompson

The 2018 project season has come to a close and there is much to celebrate. We planted nearly 10,000 plants, seeded 25 acres, maintained nearly five miles of trail, and 72 volunteers took on leadership roles for the first time, for example. As WRV's new Executive Director, I am pleased and gratified by all we have done together to care for Colorado's special places.

Soon we will gather to appreciate our volunteer, member, and donor community; this community is the reason we exist and the engine behind all we accomplish. While the restoration work we have completed is impressive, the most remarkable aspect of WRV is the community that has grown up around the organization. Over the past few months, I have been humbled by the vision of founding executive director Ed Self and the dedication it took to make his vision a reality. I want to offer Ed a sincere thank you for all the help he provided during the transition.

In the past few months, I have embarked on a listening tour of sorts. I have met with board members, long-time and new volunteers, donors, and partners to gather input. You have shared many wonderful tales of how you came to WRV and why you've stayed. You have shared your love and admiration for the organization, and your hopes for its future. You have shared what's working well and what needs attention. I am so thankful for your time, your stories, and your generous welcome to WRV.

In this newsletter you'll hear from many WRV staff members – an incredible team of individuals! I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know them, learning how to support them, and understanding how to capitalize on their significant strengths. They are a passionate, committed, and competent bunch and I am excited to support them as they grow in their roles.

Looking forward, WRV will continue its commitment to building community and healing the land. We are already working to implement many of the suggestions community members have made to streamline some of our systems, and to devise strategies to meet the coming challenges in the field. We want to continue to engage with you in these efforts and we hope you will reach out if you haven't already.

Many thanks to Ed, the board of directors, the staff and all of the members of the WRV community for your ongoing support of WRV. I can't wait to work with you all in the years ahead.



Current and future WRV Executive Directors, Ed and Katherine, enjoy a quiet moment together during a volunteer event at Rocky Mountain National Park in June of 2018.

Youth & Family Program | By Rachel Brett

This fall, I led a small fuel mitigation project with a group of high school students. We lopped small trees and branches to clear the understory and reduce the risk of wildfire. I've used loppers dozens of times on numerous fuel mitigation projects and in my own backyard, but it wasn't until this project that I heard a student—and then another, and another—refer to them as “lobsters.” Now, I can't even look at a pair of loppers without imagining that I'm clipping branches with the claws of a big, red, delicious crustacean.

Although shellfish only occasionally make an appearance on projects, a similar thing happens nearly every time I work with youth. One of my favorite things about working with young people is that they constantly challenge me to change my perspective. They maintain the wonderful ability to reinvent their world on a regular basis. In a way, this is why our work with youth is so powerful—because we are helping to shape their worldview into one that embraces their role as stewards of the land.

With over 700 youth participating in projects and trainings, 2018 was full of such moments of discovery and rediscovery. In a year that

was full of new and exciting opportunities for the Youth and Family Program, we even added a new acronym to the long list of WRV abbreviations. The WYLD (WRV Youth Leadership Development) Program was launched by a small group of high schoolers to provide ongoing leadership experiences for teens. This season we expanded our ability to provide in-depth education in the field for many participants, thanks to the support of CU-Boulder graduate students and professor/Crew Leader Tim Seastedt. We also kicked off the first annual Youth Exploring Stewardship Conference for teenagers from around the region in partnership with eight other local youth organizations, and we offered three new “family friendly” projects aimed at providing an accessible way for families with younger children to engage in our work. In our programming, we continued our organization-wide focus on providing experiences for underserved youth who typically don't have access to programs like ours.

We'll be continuing all these efforts in the coming year by offering more projects to engage families and diverse youth; more

emphasis on linking experience with education; and more occasions for teens to take ownership and serve as leaders in their community. Along the way, there will also be more opportunities, both for our participants and for me, to try out new perspectives and change the way we see the world—and of course, more chances to use the lobsters.



Youth Crew Leader Leidy Pineda helps inspire one of our youngest volunteers

Watershed Program | By Geoffrey May

Our rivers and streams are the lifeblood of Colorado. Issues around waterways are common headlines in local news, community discussions, and neighborly chats. The Watershed Program at WRV seeks to not only restore the rivers and streams in our state, but also to care for the surrounding land that falls within their watersheds. For example, our partners at the St. Vrain Creek Coalition are not only concerned with the health of 54 miles of the creek, but also with the surrounding 546 square miles of land that make up the St. Vrain Creek watershed. From its source at the Continental Divide to its end at the western edge of the Colorado plains,

this watershed has vast resources that are all potentially impacted by the work that we do.

Some of our volunteers have, I'm sure, heard WRV staff talk about the impacts of erosion while on all manner of projects, especially on our trail restoration and road obliteration events. These impacts can be hard to put in perspective since they can happen so far downstream, but the importance of keeping their influence in mind is continually reaffirmed by our watershed management partners, agency contacts, and land owners.

As a result, WRV's Watershed Program has been busy this season. In Boulder County,

we took on one of our largest projects to date at Apple Valley in addition to important work at Button Rock Preserve. In Larimer County, we partnered with the City of Fort Collins to restore McClelland Creek and continued work with the Forest Service on the Big Thompson. Hundreds of volunteer hours went into this effort - a big thank you to all who participated!

Keep in mind as you build a water bar, plant that bundle of willows, or install your next piece of erosion control fabric that the impact of your work can go much farther downstream than you thought!



Volunteers spread wood straw to cover native seeds at Apple Valley near Lyons—WRV's largest watershed restoration project to date.

Restoration Program

By Morgan Crowley

What is the Restoration Program anyway? When we think of programs at WRV, we typically think of projects that have a common theme, such as seeds or trails, or we might think of a specific community like our youth volunteers or our amazing leaders. To some extent the Restoration Program is broadly defined as everything we do as an organization that is charged with restoring the land. The Restoration Program is both the root of all our projects and the source for new programs in the future.

Many of WRV's most iconic projects fall into this program – from our ongoing work in Northern Colorado at Campbell Valley to our weekend-long projects spent restoring habitat in Rocky Mountain National Park. In 2018 Restoration Program project volunteers also returned to Pella Crossing (where WRV began) to restore wetlands, reseed, and fence off sensitive areas in Daniels Park in South Denver. We also gathered for a sing-along with Elephant Revival at the Red Rocks project and spent several days closing an old road in South Park at over 12,000 ft. More than 100 volunteers from local outdoor companies gathered with WRV, Conservation Colorado, and the Butterfly Pavilion to restore native plants at Westminster's Standley Lake. And nearly 30 volunteers travelled to the Western Slope for four days to enhance habitat for the threatened Gunnison sage-grouse on the Uncompahgre Plateau. As we reach the end of our season, the Restoration Program and WRV as a community are seeking to draw upon the deep roots we've already created and to set some new seeds for the future. We've emerged from a year of great changes more resilient than ever and we look forward to continuing to restore the land and build community on projects and among our volunteers as we head into our twentieth year.

Trail building... Not just for adrenaline-fueled rock junkies anymore. (Though we like them too) | By Nate Boschmann

Trail building projects have a reputation... a reputation that they probably have earned but don't need to cling to anymore. Sure... it takes a certain level of physical fitness, strength, and stamina to hike into a work area carrying a tool and then accomplishing something meaningful, but that scenario is involved in any number of the restoration projects WRV engages in every year. It's not just the challenging nature of building trail alone but the perception of the purpose of trail building that promotes the idea of building trail as an effort to conquer rather than restore a landscape.

We've all seen damaging social trails develop across our public lands. Visitors go where they want; most with little thought to the impacts they are having on sensitive landscapes. As with any restoration, the first active step in trail building is to remove the disturbance that's destabilizing the ecosystem. Very often, it's the only necessary step. WRV constructs and restores trails to allow for access to beautiful places that we all crave while mitigating the harmful impacts of that access. When a trail is designed and constructed with both the user experience and landscape sustainability in mind it can play a transformative role in both; inviting the user to stay on durable surfaces far enough away from a sensitive area to prevent harming it but close enough to enjoy its beauty.

Trail construction and restoration has been part of WRV's mission since the early days and has grown into a program in its own right. Our public lands partners value the balanced approach we take by involving stakeholder groups in design decisions and still not losing sight of long-term sustainability. We just can't do that without a diverse community of restoration volunteers, and we invite you to join us in this effort...you may find out you enjoy adrenaline after all!



Teamwork prevailed during our Young Gulch Trail Project in Poudre Canyon outside Fort Collins.

Gaining Ground

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Native Seed Program

By Amy Ansari

“We cannot expect flowers to bloom in the wrong conditions,” wrote Lauren Courtman, our Native Seed Program intern, in her admission letter to CSU. Reading this statement made me reflect on the WRV Native Seed Program’s past eight years. As the program continues to flourish, year after year, producing more seeds and growing in scope, it’s clear that the WRV community has cultivated the right conditions for the program to bloom, and we are thrilled to watch it thrive!

A turning point this year was our hire of plant ecologist Erica Cooper to run and develop the future of our Native Seed Program. Under Erica’s care, the program has continued to blossom. This year there were more than 20 seed collections and cleaning projects – each led by incredible and dedicated greeters and crew leaders that connected with volunteers from the moment they stepped out of their cars until the end of the project.

Due to the dedication of our leaders, the seed program has remained nimble enough to gather large quantities of native shrubs that produce edible berries, such as American plum, Chokecherry and various currants, even in a season notable for its unrelenting hailstorms, drought, and intense heat waves. This shrub collection work provided our partners with native species that are incredibly important to pollinators and a wide variety of birds and mammals as high calorie late summer forage. Not only that, it gave us the opportunity to experiment with new (and very messy!) seed cleaning techniques at both the Fort Collins and Boulder offices.

WRV is so very proud and grateful for everyone that contributed to making the Native Seed Program so successful, especially our agency partners – Boulder County Parks and Open Space, City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, City of Longmont and Lory State Park. Their dedication to using locally adapted seed on restoration projects has helped pave the way for many other agencies to take this approach as well. Planning for 2019 is already underway and we’re excited about some new partnerships on the horizon!



Volunteers collect yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) at Peck Native Seed Garden in Boulder County during a record season for seed collection at WRV.

Forestry Program

By William Vieth

I never meant to be a sawyer. I was an academic; I spent years studying, working in a lab, and doing ecological research. All it took was one tree for that to change.

I had just finished my S-212 chainsaw course, the same training we ask all our volunteer sawyers to attend. There was so much to remember. Start-up and operation, communication, predicting the fall, checking for hazards. Adrenaline was pumping, and I had 3 different checklists running through my head. I shouted out to everyone around me and began. Face cut. Angle cut. Everything was going by so quickly. Back cut...

Suddenly time stood still. This immense, seemingly immovable tree began to move. I couldn’t tear my eyes away as 50’ of ponderosa began to tip over and fall. A sense of pride, excitement, and awe crashed into me like 5000 pounds of pine hitting the forest floor.

Many of our sawyers have similar experiences to my own. Forestry work is complicated, dangerous, and exhausting. But our core group of sawyers just keeps coming back to every single project we can offer them. There’s something truly addicting about this work. And, that core group just keeps getting bigger.

This year we sent another 6 volunteers through basic chainsaw training, assisted in training over 25 youth corps members, and 14 volunteers attended a Wildlands Firefighter training to be eligible for prescribed fire work. We hosted a record 6 projects up at Red Feather Lakes, where over 75 volunteers completed fuels reduction work. Our volunteers did further work in Denver, Longmont, Lyons, and Boulder doing fuels reduction and invasive species removal.



Dedicated volunteer sawyers at our Elkhorn Creek fuels reduction site, near Red Feather Lakes.

I’m happy to say that next year looks incredibly promising. We’ll be hosting another basic chainsaw certification, Wildlands Firefighter training, and a more advanced ‘Faller-Boss’ training for our most experienced sawyers. We can expect another 5-6 projects in the Red Feather Lakes area, as well as continued involvement with our partners in the Denver and Boulder region. Finally, I’m excited to announce a brand-new partnership where we’ll be doing 15 acres of fuels reduction near Allenspark in perhaps the most spectacular valley I’ve ever seen.

I like to think of the Forestry Program as an old diesel engine. It takes a lot of effort to get going, but once you do it just keeps going forever.

Invasive Species Program | By Morgan Crowley

Excuse us while we get into the weeds a bit... 2018 was a bad year for noxious weeds in Colorado, and that was a good thing for us. This year for the first time since the infamous “sweed” collection of 2016, WRV’s Seeds and Weeds Programs joined forces to run a combined Crew Leader Training for Weed Warriors and Seed Saviors. As usual we hit the ground running at the earliest signs of spring to combat our nemesis Myrtle, myrtle spurge that is. More than 130 volunteers formed ranks in March and April to beat back the 2018 tides of spurge!

Our prairie marches against the next least-wanted on our list, Mediterranean sage, are becoming more subdued each year as fewer and fewer of these smelly *Salvias* dare rear their heads in these parts any longer. In this fight, the end is in sight! Similarly, in our efforts to outcompete tamarisk we are proving so successful that for our last tamarisk pull in Longmont we reduced the number of volunteers needed because previous efforts were so effective! Out on the Dolores river, tamarisk was no match for one determined volunteer –Pat– who single-handedly attacked new sprouts while other volunteers planted cottonwoods, to ensure that tamarisk would not regain a foothold where it had been previously eradicated.

We even found the time to take out some teasel at Standley Lake along with a multitude of moth mullein, while some youth volunteers joined the ranks of the Weed Warriors up at Betasso and mowed down mullein. All in all a lot of weeds were weeded before they could have seeded, and we call that a win. Now we turn our attention to planning for 2019 and some big ideas for how to coordinate the efforts on our Front Range and work toward more weed-free lands. Hope to see you out there next year, warriors!



Volunteers keep myrtle spurge from taking over our foothill ecosystems!

Monitoring Group Reports | By David Fulton-Beale

WRV’s Monitoring Group made some strides forward in 2018! This year, we added a new step to our monitoring process and collected baseline data on three new projects using a new protocol that we hope to implement more broadly next year. The data we collect before projects will allow us to learn more about the effectiveness of our work when we return in future years.

Monitors visited 15 past projects, ranging from the site of a 2001 project at Long Lake to the location of a flood restoration project from

last year, and learned lessons and observed success along the way. For example, we discovered that almost all of our riparian plantings at the September 2017 Little Thompson 1000th project survived! We also found that our seed mix did better in areas where we had spread new topsoil (see photos). At the 2016 Peschel project site we found some tamarisk growing, so we returned with volunteers a month later to clear the plants out. Thank you to all our hard-working volunteer monitors; we look forward to continuing our work in 2019!



The site of the September 2017 Little Thompson 1000th project on project day (left) and the following spring (right).

Thank you, donors, funders, sponsors and partners!

Your generosity allows us to empower volunteers to restore the land! We are grateful to those who made contributions or pledges from September 1, 2017 through October 10, 2018:

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We also thank the 42 groups who gave up to \$499 this past year.

Staff Profile: Geoffrey May

Geoffrey May studied Political Science and Developmental Biology, has tattoos from 12 different artists, and makes a darn fine pie! Geoffrey began his time with WRV as a volunteer in 2013. He soon fell in love with the WRV volunteer experience, the community, and the fulfilling work of our organization. He joined the Fort Collins staff shortly after graduating from college in 2015.



Geoffrey has worked on large-scale watershed restoration projects for WRV since 2016.

In 2016, Geoffrey began working out of the Boulder office and for the past 2 seasons has taken on large-scale projects at Left Hand Creek and Apple Valley to restore damages from the 2013 flood that devastated many Front Range watersheds. Geoffrey is also applying his strong background in the culinary arts to the Cook Leadership Development role.

When not at work Geoffrey likes to cook, bake, and participate in all manner of nerdy activities. He's a not-quite-subtle Star Wars fan, he helps to organize events at Denver Comic Con, and he focuses on becoming a more educated beer connoisseur.

Volunteer Spotlight: SarahDawn Haynes, Possibilities Cartographer | By Katherine Thompson

*What brought you to WRV in the beginning?
How has WRV impacted your life?*

A mentor at Front Range CC told me that I needed to volunteer if I wanted to get into the environmental sustainability field. So, I signed up for a WRV project at Boulder Creek Fest in 2004. I so enjoyed my first trip that soon I was engaging in almost every WRV event offered. And in 2006, I won New Volunteer of the Year.

At WRV I received incredible mentoring and professional development from the community. Phil Dougan, in particular, has been a catalyst in my life and is a life-long friend.

My experiences at WRV gave me the confidence to deeply engage in my professional dreams. By the time I applied for my job at CU, I was a WRV Leader Instructor. And this, combined with the technical restoration skills, helped me to get the job at the CU Environmental Center. Without WRV, I could not have gotten where I am in my career.

What is a Possibilities Cartographer?

I call myself a Possibilities Cartographer because I help students to map possibilities for their futures. And I am working with others to create a future that takes care of people, planet, and future generations. I desire a future that considers the health and well-being of all people, not just the privileged.

What are you working on now?

Starting about four years ago, I began focusing on Boulder's housing issues. I care deeply about social justice and wanted to be involved in meaningful ways. Although I volunteered with WRV less during that time, I still strongly believe in WRV's mission of caring for the land through building community. But I wanted that community to be more diverse and to work together to support causes that weren't merely engaging the privileged to restore places for the privileged.

And, to me, housing is an environmental and social justice issue. I was surprised to find that many conservationists, and even some WRV community members, did not share my sentiment that increasing occupancy density in Boulder (through cooperatives) could improve people's lives AND improve our community.

For example, if people live in Boulder, they'll have more time and opportunity to care for Boulder. And if they don't have to commute, they may actually have time to volunteer. I want the WRV community to see that increasing housing density could also increase the diversity and abundance of the volunteer community. We have to Give up on reducing the amount of people moving to Colorado. We should work to instill land ethic and kindness to take care of what is shared.



SarahDawn sharing her love of restoration with Colorado youth



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Dirt Therapy | By Eloy Gutierrez-Vigil

Our family suffered a terrible loss when my cousin Jared Gutierrez died suddenly on July 12th, 2018. As an AP History teacher at Boulder High School, Jared was beloved by colleagues, students, and parents alike.

He was a great storyteller and students told us how he could make history come alive. His death was devastating for us and the community for whom he was a pillar. The outpouring of support was substantial, so we decided that, in lieu of flowers, we would ask mourners to donate to organizations that represented the things that he loved in life. As Colorado natives, we grew up hiking and backpacking in the Rocky Mountains. The love of exploration in pristine wilderness was very

strong for Jared, as it is for me. The family instructed me to find a suitable outdoor organization.

I had never heard of Wildlands Restoration Volunteers (WRV) when I began to search, but friends told me about a recent trail restoration at the iconic Red Rocks Park. It was a unique occasion because the event was led by renowned local music group Elephant Revival, who performed at the trailhead after the work was done. I am a fan of Elephant Revival's music, and I was looking for exactly this type of organization.

On the band's event webpage—under the clever name “Trail Revival”—I discovered that the organization who had facilitated the work was WRV. The family agreed this was a great choice. It felt like kismet to discover a local, grassroots organization based in the community that Jared loved, by way of a local band that I love.

The day we published his obituary, in which the request for donations to WRV in Jared's memory is written, I called Ed Self so the organization would know of our decision. I was contacted the next day by Melinda who is a member of the WRV staff. She told me that her daughter Lauren was one of Jared's former students, and that she and Lauren knew Jared well. Jared supported Lauren last year when she became ill and began to fall behind.

With his assistance, Lauren got past her hurdles and had a successful school year. In appreciation for his advocacy Lauren gave Jared her own tickets to the world-famous musical Hamilton, which was touring in Denver. This was a thoughtful gift because Jared played the musical in his history classes and knew the entire score by heart. He was deeply touched and overjoyed to be able to attend the performance. Our family remembers with fondness how excited he was.

We chose WRV as beneficiary in part because we understood that some mourners cannot afford cash donations, but they may wish to make a donation of their time. In that spirit, five of our family members

worked on the first Indian Peaks trail restoration at the end of July. This wilderness area is where we learned how to make extended backpacking trips across the Continental Divide. Wanting to do more for this sacred place that held a lifetime of memories for us, I came back and worked the next weekend.

Grief is one of the most difficult emotions we can experience. I love to garden so I am familiar with “dirt therapy.” But this was my first opportunity to work on the trails we had traversed so many times. Honoring the symmetry of random kindness we discovered, I decided to give my best effort for the rest of the season. My motivation was based

in gratitude, but in the end, I was the true beneficiary. I discovered that camping with like-minded folks and working together to heal the land is an invaluable outlet for accepting and processing such a tremendous loss. It may have been kismet that led me to WRV, but it is the karma of thoughtful giving that has kept me going.

WRV core values are building community, love of nature, and healing. I understand now that these concepts do not stand alone, they are interdependent. Empowering folks to work on the land, to develop their love of nature, to learn about and give freely of their time for a greater cause, to bond with and celebrate their achievements with a like-minded community; each element supports and strengthens the next. In my experience, healing the land together engenders healing for ourselves which builds cohesive community. It was in this way that WRV helped me find solace and redemption in the aftermath of an incomprehensible tragedy.



Photo by Eloy Gutierrez-Vigil, Indian Peaks Wilderness