

Gaining Ground

Fall/Winter 2021

Heal the land. Build community.

You empowered 433 volunteers, residents and staff to restore after 2020's historic fires



INSIDE

YOU:

supplied bilingual restoration crew leadership
created an epic, accessible boardwalk
are protecting prairie meadows for birds and wildlife



Your support trained and supplied volunteers to treat steep slopes burned at high intensity. Here, they secure a straw wattle – a 25 foot tube of straw – into the soil with stakes. The wattle can slow floodwaters and debris in coming rain events.

ON COVER

Sadie Schwartz, member of WRV Youth Leadership Development, takes a moment from clearing nature trails at CalWood Education Center. 10,000 acres were scorched in a wildfire in fall 2020. Sadie and her fellow team members moved sooty, burned trees and debris to restore trails at the outdoors education nonprofit.

In 2020 the Largest Wildfires in Colorado History Wreaked Havoc. Thanks To You, Healing Has Begun.

Seared into memory

In 2020, residents of Colorado saw devastating smoke and ash out our windows. We felt the smoke in our lungs. The Cameron Peak Fire, centered west of Fort Collins, quickly became the largest wildfire in recorded Colorado history. The East Troublesome Fire, northeast of Kremmling, was the second largest, growing from 18,000 acres to 187,000 acres in just over three days. Along with the Lefthand Canyon Fire west of Ward, and the Cal-Wood fire near Jamestown, these fires forced the evacuation of tens of thousands of people, burned over a thousand homes and structures, and

decimated both vegetation and soils. They torched over 400,000 acres and killed two people.

Amy Williams and her family were evacuated for 75 days from their home and ranch near Pingree Park, outside Fort Collins. Amy remembers, “It was scary, and that October sky was terrible. Now we look out the window and see how the mountainside is all burned to a crisp.”

“We were fortunate not to have lost structures or our home,” continues Amy. “[Others] up in Monument Gulch suffered pretty bad and lost homes and cabins.”

Neighbors and municipalities alike feared what might come next; floods and mudslides typically follow wildfires.



A volunteer takes a break for a photo while working to restore slopes near Fort Collins that were burned by the Cameron Peak Fire in 2020. WRV photo, 2021.

“What I learned from WRV made a really big difference”

Help emerges from the ashes

Fast-forward to a brisk, windy day in April, 2021, when 27 WRV staff and volunteers, public land agency partners, and local residents gathered on top of a hill scorched by the Cameron Peak Fire.

“It was gut-wrenching to witness the artifacts of people’s homes and lives,” recalls WRV Program Manager, William Vieth. “It was all ash and husks of trees left and right. You’d see melted bits of metal turned into complete slag and see half a tool sticking out.”

To reduce future flooding and mudslides, attendees learned and got hands-on experience dispersing native seeds,

State Farm Insurance, First to Respond

State Farm Insurance was the first funder to support our post-fire restoration work in 2020. This vital support helped WRV protect water quality and prevent soil erosion.

Community Foundation of Northern Colorado Provided Crucial, Early Funding

Community Foundation of Northern Colorado preceded federal government emergency funds. Their support made a huge difference for WRV and for our partners’ ability to get boots on the ground

mulch, and installing straw wattles (25-ft long tubes of straw). They also learned about which areas would benefit most from these treatments.

After three trainings like this, 433 WRV volunteers accomplished 16 post-fire restoration and trail projects, seeded and mulched over 35 high-priority acres of burn scar, planted 1,670 native plants, shrubs and trees, and installed 106 straw wattles and 28 rock or log dams within the season.

Doug Swartz, volunteer leader, explains that steep locations were prioritized for treatment, “These steep locations are high in the watershed, so they’re important places to get revegetated to hold that soil together.”

You helped WRV be proactive

Unrestricted support from caring community members like you helped

“What you’re doing is so critical...We’re so blessed to have you there doing this work”

fund WRV’s emergency response planning efforts, which were undertaken in partnership with Larimer County and other groups long before the 2020 fires began. Most foundation and government funding is earmarked for specific efforts for just 1-3 years following a fire, leaving nonprofits to play catch-up rather than being proactive.

Your support enabled WRV to coordinate with other agencies, share the latest restoration research, and work with partners including Serve 6.8, which provides a great deal of materials for restoration projects, and Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed, an organization that is instrumental in training and restoration events.

Three or more years of continued post-fire restoration treatments will likely be needed, and WRV is excited to have the support of the American Red Cross as we continue this important work in 2022.

WRV helps impacted residents use newfound skills

Amy continues to use techniques learned at WRV’s sprint training; on the 800 acres she leases to run her grass-fed cattle business. “This fire affected every piece of land we graze.”

“What I learned from WRV made a really big difference. The seed [we cast] germinated and slowed water flow. The rock and log dams [we built] caught

sediment when the water sent some debris down the mountainside. It spread the water out and slowed the water down.” Seeing what the rain can do after a fire in a short amount of time gave Amy ideas about other locations across her land where treatments were needed.

“It’s easy to get overwhelmed, but the more we do, the better the land will be, and eventually it will all be done...**thank you for what you are doing.** What you’re doing is so critical; it’s needed. We’re so blessed to have you there doing this important work,” says Amy.

WRV is deeply thankful to you and our other partners including: Nutrien Ag Solutions, State Farm Insurance, Community Foundation of Northern Colorado, Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed, Big Thompson Watershed Coalition, Rocky Mountain National Park, Boulder County Parks & Open Space, Cal-Wood Education Center, Serve 6.8, and individual residents and landowners.



Volunteers team up to carry a bale of mulch up a drainage burned by the Calwood Fire near Boulder in 2020. Because of you, these volunteers and others of all ages were able to help restore land around the Cal-Wood Education center, near where the fire started. WRV photo, 2021.

Nutrien Invests Heavily in WRV Post-Fire Restoration

Global agricultural services company Nutrien played a crucial role in funding WRV's post-fire and sustainable agriculture programs this year. Nutrien helped WRV restore damage after last year's devastating wildfires, thanks to their timely and generous investment.

"Having been personally impacted by a wildfire, I know how it can affect the people and the environment, so I brought [this opportunity to support WRV] forward," says Holly Nequette, Nutrien's Community Relations and Investment Adviser. "Nutrien services farmers, growers, and environmental forestry projects. In northern Colorado and the Front Range, I saw an opportunity to help remediate those damaged areas."

Holly says, "Everyone at Nutrien was super supportive. A lot of employees are spread out across northern Colorado, and we all enjoy the beautiful views of the mountains and can also see the devastation. [Valuing nature] is not just about what we do on weekends: this work will mitigate flood risk for our grower-customers downstream. The whole organization was able to support being part of the solution and prioritizing waterways."

"This work will mitigate flood risk for our grower-customers downstream"

The challenge? "Given COVID, it was tricky to gather people together," reports Holly. "But we were able to get twenty volunteers to a June event and that was very successful."

If your company is interested in making a contribution to WRV, we look forward to putting their investment to work. Please contact Sarah Egolf-Tarr at 303-543-1411, ext. 108 or sarah@wlr.org.



A volunteer carefully navigates the Cameron Peak Fire-burned forest to gather large stones to build a rock dam in a drainage to slow flooding and debris in the future. WRV photo, 2021.

YOU HELPED WRV MEET A MILESTONE IN 2021!

WRV Bilingual Crew Leaders Bring Communities Together

You help supports diverse groups work together to celebrate natural areas.

On a cool, humid morning in May, nine members of Lafayette's Latinx community gathered at Coal Creek to learn about crew leadership with WRV. Some participants preferred to speak Spanish and others English, but everyone spoke some of both. The creek babbled in the background. This was the beginning of WRV's first bilingual crew leader training.

"Having a crew leader who doesn't speak your language makes things tricky and creates an unnecessary power differential," says staffer, Anna DeGolier. When asked why this training was such an important bridge to the future, Anna replied, "Bilingual staff can run around and interpret, but there's a limit."

Anna and fellow project coordinator, Kevin Pierce, are WRV's bilingual staffers. They translate detailed project instructions for Spanish-only volunteers and families. For this event, they compiled a Spanish-language training manual as well.

At the first day of training, bilingual crew leader trainees learned about tool safety, seed broadcasting, willow transplanting, noxious weed identification, and container-stock planting.

After the initial event, trainees were asked to support established crew leaders at one of twelve bilingual volunteer restoration projects during the field season. Trainees then gathered again in August for a second day of training, and to provide feedback for future bilingual trainings. At the end of the final day, each participant received a crew leader hat and a certificate.

"Vero," Veronica Sangabriel, a liaison from Nature Kids/

Jovenes de la Naturaleza (NKJN), became a crew leader that day. NKJN is a WRV partner in Lafayette, the home base for most of the trainees.

"This is very physical work we're asking of folks, and the trainees are people coming from diverse backgrounds—Vero was hyper aware of the context. WRV was new to many in this community, and Kevin and I needed an introduction," says Anna of the support offered by NKJN.

WRV and NKJN worked to establish a relationship of trust and respect in the training. Participants expressed interest in improving future trainings for others in their community.

"People were very excited to be part of WRV." reports Anna. "Now, every time I see them around, they are wearing their WRV crew leader hats."

It's no surprise that speaking one's language is a key to making volunteers feel at home. Language has been a barrier for WRV to welcome the gifts of a growing Spanish-language population of our community—despite years of effort. WRV's

"People were very excited to be a part of WRV...now every time I see them around, they're wearing their WRV Crew Leader hats"

general registration volunteers rarely meet Spanish-speaking volunteers in the field, because limited staff and crew leaders have resulted in separate projects for each group.

For example, Anna invited the newly-trained bilingual crew leaders and their families to join a restoration project near their neighborhood in Lafayette this summer – the Waneka Lake Habitat Structure project. All ages showed up with enthusiasm! Younger children participated in a nature scavenger hunt with parental supervision, and older kids took part in work building structure for birds, turtles, and aquatic life.

In addition to your support, major funders for these efforts include Great Outdoors Colorado, City of Lafayette, Xcel Energy, and Thorne Nature Experience.



Restoration crew leader trainees take a break to pose for a photo during their training during one of three days of Spanish/English bilingual crew leader workshops held in 2021 by WRV's Youth & Families Program. Your support made this event possible. WRV photo, 2021.

AN EPIC PROJECT:

Beaver Creek Boardwalk

Three-year project saves stream, creates accessible trail

A few miles down a bumpy dirt road just northeast of the town of Fairplay, CO, you can find local favorite Beaver Creek trailhead. The trail crosses – you guessed it – Beaver Creek, which does indeed support quite a few beavers. These beavers have had an unusual supply of building materials for their dams in recent years: pallets. Prior to 2019, Beaver Creek Trail crossed over Beaver Creek and wetlands via a dangerous, makeshift boardwalk consisting of pallets, railroad ties and other rotting lumber. But October of this year saw the completion of a replacement world-class accessible boardwalk, built thanks to your donations, which supported a partnership between WRV, U.S. Forest Service and other local partners and funders.

You preserved natural and cultural values

Over the past three years, you helped create a vital resource for people with disabilities that lack access to so many natural areas, and a critical connection to a trail system that will someday connect the towns of Fairplay and Breckenridge.

In addition to benefits for humans, getting trail users up out of the muck preserves water quality and high elevation wetland habitat. Beaver Creek will no longer be filled with sediment and its vegetation will not be trampled by hikers or cyclists. This type of habitat is perfect for birds, amphibians, moose, and other wildlife—some species of which are rare or threatened.

The boardwalk spans just under 600 feet, featuring a small overlook deck with views up the valley toward Mount Silverheels.

An epic challenge required heroic volunteers and supporters

During three years of construction, you made it possible for WRV to overcome several challenges, including beavers and the pandemic.

WRV originally planned to build the boardwalk in sections, while retaining the original surface trail. But leave it to beavers to change the plans of humans! They forced us to build the boardwalk to span the whole valley by flooding previously dry sections. The total length of boardwalk to be built more than doubled!

In 2020, there also were major delays resulting from COVID-19: lumber shortages, price increases, and limits on



Beaver Creek Boardwalk was celebrated with a Grand Opening in October of 2021 thanks to your support over the past three years. WRV photo, 2021.

the numbers of volunteers who could gather.

The beavers kept very busy, stealing lumber overnight during projects, and flooding worksites by morning. One day, volunteers arrived to find one of the boards being used as a stream crossing with large, comical bite marks out of it where the beavers had nearly gnawed through it. A piece of that board now serves as a plaque at the boardwalk, recognizing funders and partners—complete with bite marks. At another point, work was paused to rescue an abandoned rooster who was wandering the forest near the worksite.

This is one of the most complex projects that WRV has managed, and the product is truly beautiful, even more so because of who made it happen: you.

In addition to you, WRV is deeply grateful to other partners who made the Beaver Creek Boardwalk possible: Mosquito Range Heritage Initiative, Wild Connections, Park County Land and Water Trust Fund, South Park National Heritage Area, National Forest Foundation, Park County Taxpayers, and especially super volunteer and master carpenter, Paul Liscom. Thank you!



Volunteers prepare a turn in the boardwalk as it snakes between wetland plants. WRV photo, 2021.



Paul Liscom, boardwalk volunteer leader extraordinaire, displays the plaque made from a beaver-chewed piece of lumber at the worksite. USFS photo, 2021.

‘Beaver,’ the Chicken of Beaver Creek

Personal story by WRV Program Manager Morgan Crowley

My first encounter with Beaver occurred near the Beaver Creek trailhead. I was heading to a WRV boardwalk construction site a few miles northeast of Fairplay. Paul Liscom, WRV Technical Advisor and 2019’s Volunteer of the Year, reported he had seen a chicken in the woods.

You might think Paul had been working too hard. He must have seen a small turkey. Or perhaps it was a large quail, or a misplaced ptarmigan?

Indeed, it was a chicken.

A young silkie rooster, to be exact. We next spotted him during a hailstorm. If you ever see a sopping wet rooster alone in the forest, I challenge you not to take pity.

Paul and I built a trap. We attempted to lure the bird. Ultimately, I chased Beaver around the trees while Paul filmed with his cell phone.

Night fell. I, too, was sopping wet. We reluctantly left the bird to his fate, certain he would not live through the night.

But Beaver was a survivor.

Two days later, Paul reported a sighting. I turned to the internet to rally support. A small cadre of local poultry enthusiasts arrived that evening.

With more people and better preparations, the rooster was surrounded. He made a final attempt to escape a makeshift enclosure, but I am told he was snatched out the very air by a woman with exceptional reflexes.

Thus, a rooster was saved from the woods.

Epilogue

WRV is not a chicken rescue. But we can never fully know what challenges will be presented to us in the field. Beaver now resides with a flock of 26 hens in Fairplay, a lucky bird, indeed.

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We welcome content and images for future editions of the newsletter. Please submit materials to info@wlrv.org.

Printed on recycled paper. 

From The Sky to the Earth

Meet volunteer and donor Scott James

“Volunteering outdoors saved my soul from being lost,” says Scott James. Scott retired from the aviation industry in 2017 and moved from Atlanta to Loveland, CO. The transition wasn’t easy at first.

“I wasn’t able to pass my flight physical and that meant I can’t fly planes anymore. I literally bawled like a baby as my plane taxied away. It was the culmination of my career. That happened right before I moved to Colorado, so I was kind of lost.”

Scott is now an avid trail volunteer and chain sawyer with WRV “I was raised hunting and fishing,” says Scott, whose phone is now filled with photos taken during outdoor volunteer projects. “Obviously, I believe in WRV,” says Scott. “We evolved to be outdoors, not in big buildings with fluorescent lights.”

Scott says his philanthropy has changed since getting involved in volunteer work.

“This kind of thing [restoration volunteering] just isn’t done on the East Coast...Most of my giving now is going to groups that are really hands-on. It makes a big difference to give to groups that get people involved...it’s much more satisfying. You can see what you’re doing. [I can say,] ‘I worked on that trail.’”

When asked what he would say to someone considering a gift to WRV, Scott simply replied, “Do it!”

In addition to making gifts to WRV during his lifetime, Scott has included us in his estate plan. WRV is deeply thankful to Scott, whose gifts have made a significant difference in our ability to meet our mission.

If you’d like to make a legacy gift to WRV, please contact Sarah Egolf-Tarr, Director of Development, at 303-543-1411, ext. 108.



Scott James carries an armload of wooden stakes for use pinning straw wattles to the contours of a high-intensity burn site from the Cameron Peak Fire. WRV photo, 2021.

You are Protecting Rare Wetland Habitat on the Pawnee National Grassland

Grasslands are under threat worldwide but you make a difference in Colorado

If you've not spent much time in Colorado's northeastern plains, you may have missed the birder's paradise known as the Pawnee National Grassland. This publicly owned land contains areas important to wildlife. These areas have been fenced off to prevent overgrazing by cattle to preserve creeks, seeps, springs, and wet meadows. The water and vegetation in these areas provide habitat for birds and other species.

One by one, the fences had been overcome by debris from flooding, or from vegetation growing through and mangling the posts and wires. Damaged fences put wildlife habitat at risk of being trampled and overgrazed. Unfortunately, the budget of the Pawnee has been repeatedly cut. That's where your support--combined with that of Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment--have made a big difference!

Fencing project a surprise volunteer favorite

The Pawnee fencing projects were so popular, they filled with volunteers and resulted in long waitlists. Volunteers eagerly took on strenuous labor, including digging fence post-holes in heavy clay, constructing braces, pounding in T-posts, gathering coils of rusty barbed wire removed from old fences, and tightening connections.

Nate Boschmann, WRV Program Manager explains the project's popularity with volunteers, "You get to build something. It looks good when you're done. There's satisfaction in that."



Your support, and that of CDPHE, made it possible for volunteers work together to repair a fence to protect springs, seeps and wetlands from cattle. WRV photo, 2019.

In addition to the satisfaction of a job well-done, pronghorns and birds of prey often show up at projects and thrill volunteers. In fact, the wildlife areas are closed to people from January through June to prevent disruption of raptor nesting, so most WRV projects occur in fall.

When WRV volunteers encounter broken down fences, they replace them with "wildlife friendly fencing." They replace the wires on the top and bottom of a fence with smooth wires, leaving barbed wire in the middle. This way, species such as pronghorn can go under or over without injury.

Grasslands such as the Pawnee are the most threatened habitat type on earth

There are eight miles of habitat-protection fencing on the Pawnee, protecting 213 acres spread across 193,000 in total. WRV, and partner organization Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC), have each taken responsibility to restore fences – VOC in the eastern parcel, and WRV in the west. In 2019, volunteers accomplished many fencing projects, but in 2020, weather was a challenge. Another six to ten years of work may be necessary to repair all the fences.

You're making a difference for native wildlife

Grasslands such as the Pawnee are the most threatened habitat type on earth – historically, prairie grasslands covered one fifth of North America – and a huge loss of habitat has resulted in the disappearance of many birds and wildlife. The wetland areas within grasslands serve as biological hotspots for diversity. The Audubon Society has identified the Pawnee National Grassland as globally important for bird conservation. Grasslands also store an enormous amount of carbon, almost as much as forest ecosystems. Most is stored beneath the ground in extensive root systems.

Coyotes, mule deer, rodents, and snakes make their homes in the Pawnee, but so do rarer species such as the swift fox, burrowing owl, mountain plover, horned lizards, many birds of prey, and the prairie dog. (While prairie dogs may be plentiful in some counties, they are missing from more than 91% of their original habitat, and 150 other grassland species depend on prairie dogs for their habitat.)

Many miles of fence remain in need of repair, and WRV volunteers are up for the challenge, with your help, and the help of CDPHE.



Pawnee Buttes. WRV Photo, 2021.

Pawnee’s Original Stewards and the Origin of the National Grasslands System

When WRV volunteers work on the Pawnee Grassland, we are working at the location of both an important Pawnee tradition, as well as an inauspicious series of events in American history.

Pawnee tradition holds that members of a Skidi Pawnee band were surrounded on Pawnee Rock by an alliance of hostile tribes. Spider Woman came down a rope from the moon and instructed their leader in a dream. She showed him how to escape down the side of the rock at night. Various interpretations of this tradition gave Pawnee Rock, Pawnee Creek, and Pawnee Buttes their names, according to Pawnee author, Roger Echohawk. The National Grassland is named after Pawnee Creek.

Spider Woman came down a rope from the moon and instructed their leader in a dream

In addition to the Pawnee, the Grassland was also a part of the traditional territories of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Lakota. The Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute are the only two federally recognized tribes of Colorado, however there are 47 nations who claim a legacy to the state of Colorado. Indigenous people are land-based cultures. The land informed their language, way of life, and ceremonies. These Indigenous groups maintained the grasslands using fire as a management tool.

White immigration and forced relocation of other tribes from the East brought devastating disease and warfare to the peoples of the Plains. After enormous losses, broken treaties, and the intentional extermination of bison, the tribes were moved away from the Grassland. White settlers, brought west by the Homestead Acts which guaranteed them land, replaced native grasses with crops. However, the land was inappropriate for the plow, and the resulting mismanagement led to the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. The U.S. government took emergency measures by purchasing damaged lands and resettling white families, while the purchased lands became the National Grassland system, including Pawnee National Grassland.

Indigenous people, including those who maintained the land that is now Pawnee National Grassland, have survived hundreds of years of attempted genocide. Indigenous people are still here. They have a connection to this land. WRV acknowledges these connections and the ways of life that the grassland once supported. The story of the grassland isn’t over. WRV knows that healing the land at Pawnee National Grassland—and everywhere else we work—involves knowing the people of that land. Our journey and responsibility begin with an accurate history of the nations who are the original people of this land base.

Authenticity of Indigenous knowledge provided by Vivian Delgado, Ph.D., Native American Philosophy/Indigenous Studies. Ret. professor of Languages and Indigenous Studies, Bemidji State University, a member of Minnesota State.



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Looking for your name on a list of WRV supporters? See the spring/summer Annual Report edition in 2022! Thank you!

STAFF PROFILE:

Former Philharmonic Director Conducts WRV Programs

Meet Kevin Shuck

You might see Program Director Kevin Shuck when he is checking in on a WRV volunteer project or meet him when he is filling in when there's a last-minute crunch. But mostly, Kevin's role is behind the scenes. Since 2017, it's been Kevin's responsibility to make sure restoration projects are well-planned and implemented, and that volunteers are connecting with WRV and having engaging experiences. He works with our 15-person Program Team to plan, supervise, trouble-shoot, and schedule volunteer projects. (He had to reschedule projects 47 times in 2021 alone – thanks to our mercurial Colorado weather!).

Since he joined us, Kevin has improved how WRV implements restoration projects. In fact, he created an operation

system that facilitates the launch of projects all over the state. Dubbed “Mission Control,” his system has allowed our staff and volunteers to scale up to over 200 projects from 150—amidst a pandemic no less!

Kevin earned his Ph.D. in biology and honed his nonprofit administration skills in the arts and culture sector, most recently as Executive Director of the Boulder Philharmonic.

**Dubbed “Mission Control,”
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A world traveler and adventurer in his spare time, Kevin has a mission to backpack in every designated wilderness in Colorado, and to visit 50 countries and all 50 states by the time he's 50. When he drives up to a project site, chances are he's listening to a podcast in one of the three foreign languages he strives to master.



A waterlogged Kevin Shuck works to restore a trail between two 14,000-foot peaks, Grays & Torreys. WRV photo, 2019.