

THE DONOR NEWSLETTER OF WILDLANDS RESTORATION VOLUNTEERS

Gaining Ground

Winter 2023 Edition

Heal the land. Build community.

You supported volunteers to collect seeds at 324 events over 24 years to sustain native wildlife!

INSIDE

Find out how you foster trees and partnerships with Denver metro communities

You're powering the restoration of rivers and forests in a holistic approach





ON COVER

Volunteer Adriana Karagozian collects seeds the size of an insect wing from the high elevations of Summit Lake Park. These seeds will be cleaned and grown in a nursery for planting to repair this rare plant refuge.

For over a decade, WRV has worked with Denver Mountain Parks on this spectacular but fragile natural gem. Your support allowed Adriana and others to return to steward Summit Lake in 2023.

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This page: You helped WRV train more volunteer leaders and staff in cutting-edge techniques. In 2023, four projects restoring wet meadows and reducing erosion were the result! Near Denver, Craig, Walden, and Boulder, habitat was restored for sage grouse and other wildlife.

Here, a group of volunteers pose with a “wicker weir” they built at North Park near Walden. The weir can be seen already increasing pooling as water meanders more slowly.

Planting Hope:

You Join with Neighbors in Tree Planting to Combat Pollution

“Tree-planting is a sign of hope.”

-Laura Martinez, Cultivando

“I have wanted to plant trees for a while. Doing so in an urban park sounded like a really cool idea. I’m proud to have made a positive difference in a park many people will enjoy.”

“Estos proyectos me gustan porque es muy importante cuidar la tierra y me siento parte de mi comunidad y además puedo incluir a mi familia.” (In English: “I like these projects because it’s very important to take care of the earth. And because I feel like a part of my community, and I can also include my family.”)

These are some of many comments made by volunteers who worked on restoration projects in Commerce City and other Denver Metro cities. You helped make these projects possible.

WRV partners with community organizations Cultivando and Promotores Verdes. These organizations recruit mostly Latinx families in Commerce City, Aurora and Denver. Together, WRV and these organizations restore natural habitat. The volunteers work in those cities, as well as at Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, and Barr Lake State Park.

Laura Martinez, Cultivando’s Manager of Environmental Justice Programs, reports that Commerce City residents have seen family members suffer from negative health impacts in recent years. These include nose bleeds, asthma, and other effects. The community has experienced above-average air pollution, documented by air quality monitoring by Cultivando over the last two years. In response, residents have voiced an interest in more trees.



Your gift provided private match funding for a Great Outdoors Colorado grant to fund a partnership to restore natural areas northeast of Denver. Here, families volunteer together to plant native trees at Barr Lake State Park.

Residents and non-residents alike volunteered to plant trees and pollinator-friendly, drought-resistant native plants. Volunteers have also worked to weed out invasive plants and restore streamside vegetation.

“WRV brings tools and technical expertise—what species to plant, what to remove,” says WRV’s Kevin Pierce. “We also have expertise in managing logistics and volunteer projects.”

The community has experienced above-average air pollution...In response, residents have voiced an interest in more trees.



Trees filter the air and provide shade in southern Commerce City. Here, families volunteer together to plant trees in a park in Commerce City thanks to your support.

Cultivando’s Laura is delighted. “Our families want trees to provide shade, beautify our city, and reduce air pollution. As a mom of three, I can also tell you that it’s also a great way to get kids off their devices and connect with the land.”

“Family-friendly projects always have a higher level of chaos,” says Kevin with a smile. “My background is in youth programming, so I enjoy working with young people. It’s worth WRV’s time to expand urban green spaces. It’s worth engaging diverse, historically marginalized communities. It’s worth it to help people who want to enhance their knowledge and skills.”

Your help, with Great Outdoors Colorado, makes this effort possible. Thank you.

Cultivating Knowledge, Cultivating People:

Your Gift Powers Partnerships Between WRV and Higher Education

“Win-win-win” is how university professors describe their partnerships with WRV. Professors emeriti Tim Seastedt and Rick Knight say they value WRV’s technical expertise and track record of making a difference. The partnerships benefit WRV, the universities, and the environment.

A longtime supporter and former board member, Tim taught at the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and is a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research at CU. Tim encourages CU students to gain experience restoring habitat by joining WRV projects.

“Restoration projects can be useful field projects for ecology students,” he says. “Experiential learning really sticks and enhances education. In the 2000s, I volunteered on a project to figure out whether what WRV does is really effective. And in my experience, [the answer is] yes! WRV’s efforts pulling out non-native Mediterranean sage have made a significant difference. 20 years later, there are far fewer.”

Tim has secured CU Boulder grants for WRV to take part in community outreach. He also leads both graduate and undergraduate students who mentor participants in the WRV Youth Leader Development program. “Some of those WRV youth have gone on to their next great step. For example, one is a naturalist at Rocky Mountain National Park, and another is at Oregon State University for higher education.”

Colorado State University Geosciences Professor Ellen Wohl has seen benefits flow both ways between CSU and WRV.

“My Master’s student Julie Scamardo wanted to study the effects of beaver dam analogs (BDAs),” says Ellen. Julie’s choice of topic led both Julie and Ellen to study WRV BDA projects in Campbell Valley near Fort Collins.

“Restoration projects can be useful field projects for ecology students...Experiential learning really sticks and enhances education.”
- Professor Emeritus Tim Seastedt

By working with WRV, the researchers gained access to an area they wouldn’t have had otherwise. “Studying WRV projects helped our research. We found that the BDAs led to ponding and stored sediment. In turn, these led to diverse habitat for fish, insects, and plants.” Fish were seen in Campbell Creek for the first time after over a decade of restoration work by WRV.

Ellen also provided technical advice to WRV on where to locate post-fire treatments. Record-breaking wildfires in 2020 created an increased demand for BDAs to slow post-fire flooding. That’s because scorched areas have no trees or ground cover to hold back heavy rains. Yet, “you can’t build BDAs everywhere,” says Ellen. “Build one in a steep valley, and it will blow out.” Or build them too far from existing beaver populations, and they’ll have to be maintained by humans.



Professor Emeritus Rick Knight and CSU students pose during a restoration work day. Thanks to your support, WRV hosted this event. Students repaired fencing to protect wetland plants from cattle trampling in Campbell Valley. Campbell Valley is located in the Laramie Foothills Conservation Area of northern Colorado. Knight photo, 2022.



Ellen's fellow CSU professor Rick Knight lights up when talking about taking his students on restoration projects. For the last 30 years, Rick, Professor Emeritus of wildlife conservation, has led CSU students on restoration projects. Many organizations, including WRV, have headed these projects.

"My wife Heather worked at The Nature Conservancy and contacted WRV's Nate Boschmann," recalls Rick. That led to Rick and his students building BDAs to slow stream water flow. "Slowing the water flow can rebuild the land," he says.

Organizations like WRV are our only hope. Three-quarters of the planet is degraded in some way. If we don't restore the planet, our health, happiness, and economy will suffer. If humans are to have a future, we need ecological restoration."
- Professor Emeritus Rick Knight

Rick adds, "Ecological restoration should be the new outdoor recreation! Students come alive on these restoration projects. They're learning technical expertise using tools. They're outside instead of stuck in a classroom. They're exercising. They're with their friends. They're laughing. They're seeing eagles and pronghorn."

"Organizations like WRV are our only hope. Three-quarters of the planet is degraded in some way. If we don't restore the planet, our health, happiness, and economy will suffer. If humans are to have a future, we need ecological restoration."

*Support from donors like you allowed WRV's staff to partner with colleges and universities in projects like this. Rick and the students drive logs into the stream bank in Campbell Valley to create an "induced meander". Structures like these slow and clean the water and nourish streamside plants.
Rick Knight photo, 2016.*



At this event, Rick's students planted willows with WRV. This effort replaced the missing vegetation along re-contoured streams in Campbell Valley. Rick Knight photo, 2016.

Roots, Branches, and Leaves:

Three Generations Give to WRV for a Greener Future

Three generations of the Brock-Courtman family give to WRV. Melinda Courtman credits their collective generosity to her father. “My dad taught his children and grandchildren the importance of giving back. Supporting WRV is something we all do together,” says Melinda, WRV’s Finance Coordinator. “Dad instilled the philanthropy bug in us. He believes we should support our local communities wholeheartedly.”

“My dad taught his children and grandchildren the importance of giving back. Supporting WRV is something we all do together.” - WRV Finance Coordinator and volunteer Melinda Courtman

Melinda is all in for WRV—she’s been a volunteer for nine years on some 150 projects, and a staff member since 2016.

“The WRV community is wonderful. I brought my daughter Lauren, who was then in fifth grade, on my second-ever project. My fellow volunteer Liz Kellogg and colleague Amy Allen have become family friends.” Melinda and her husband Steve’s son

Gavin also joined the family tradition. During high school, he brought eight friends along on a willow-planting project.

Melinda’s dedication inspired her husband, Steve, father, William, and sister, Marcie, to donate to WRV as well.

Melinda’s daughter Lauren became a team leader on seed cleanings for a whole season. She also served as a crew leader and summer intern. Lauren’s love for the work took her to Colorado State University to study Environmental Sustainability.

Melinda is also passionate about the Farms to Pollinators projects. “WRV partners with Mark Guttridge of Ollin Farms. Mark implements traditional practices. He rotates crops and plants pollinator-friendly plants next to crops. It’s so important for farms and business leaders to fight climate change and build habitat. Plus, Mark has been a great partner with youth groups and marginalized communities.”

All three generations volunteered together in October of 2023 at a restoration event. This included family from as far away as Maryland, California, and Florida. When asked how he first got involved in charity work, William said, “Through my love of gardening. I love seeing the tangible results of my efforts.” William has had a huge garden at his home for many years.



Three generations of the Brock/Courtman family pause for a photo while they gather to volunteer together. WRV photo, 2023. Pictured, back row, left to right: Marcie Brock Daniel, Steve Courtman, Gavin Courtman, William Brock. Front row, left to right: Elida Angulo, Melinda Brock Courtman, Susan Brock, and Lauren Courtman.

From Flames to Flow:

You're Powering the Restoration of Rivers and Forests in Colorado

Record wildfires of 2020 consumed hundreds of thousands of acres of forests. They also increased the threat of flash floods in the following years, creating a one-two punch. The question arose, which should we restore first: the forests or the rivers?

Your support helps WRV do both at the same time.

Forest Project Manager Cameron Taylor says, "You have to think of the whole landscape, about both forests and rivers."

"How can we be preventative?" asks Taryn Contento, former River Project Manager, who is now at WRV partner organization Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed. "In the future, we know there's a continued threat of big fires and floods, so how can we make a more resilient landscape?"

With your help, WRV implements joint forest and river restoration projects to do that.

Both Cameron and Taryn agree. Colorado forests need thinning to restore wildlife habitat and reduce the risk of intense mega-fires.

Taryn points out that forests need to be restored to function in the way they have in the past. The U.S. Forest Service notes that in the 1800s, Colorado forests were two or three times less dense than today. They were patchier, with grassy expanses

wide enough to allow for easy passage by horse and rider.

"Fire is a part of nature," says Cameron. "Suppressing fires has only led to bigger fires in the long run." Because fire suppression has caused unnaturally dense forest growth, thinning is necessary. Thankfully, the work of thinning provides materials that help WRV address watershed repair as well. "We take material from thinning forests to make in-stream structures in adjacent areas."

"We use a lot of tree limbs for in-stream structures, and the needles trap more sediment," adds Taryn. "It's very gratifying for volunteers on projects to see immediate effects. The water in the stream channel rises. People can see temporary pools and side channels forming."

Cameron shares, "Our Red Feather Lakes (2022) and Sandman Creek (2023) projects are already slowing the water down. They capture sediment from big rains, as they were designed to do."

"Humans have taken wood out of the river," says Taryn. "But a healthy river system should be wider and shallower. It should have ponds and diverse habitat for wildlife. Woody structures in waterways restore that healthy system."



"It's very gratifying for volunteers on projects to see immediate effects. The water in the stream channel rises. People can see temporary pools and side channels forming." - Taryn Contento

With support from donors like you, WRV volunteers don hip waders and use logs and branches to build woody structures in a stream. The trees were cut to reduce forest density near the Colorado/Wyoming border on the Diamond Peak Ranch. The resulting "in-stream" structure works to slow the flow and rebuild healthy habitat.



Daniel Miller, left, and Mya Wilson seek out plants during a game of “Restoration Bingo” at a recent Heart and Soil Circle event in Apple Valley near Lyons, CO.

WRV’s Heart and Soil Circle recognizes donors who make a significant investment in our mission. These include gifts totaling \$1,000 or more in a year, or a legacy gift left in a will, trust, retirement plan, life insurance policy, or other account.

Circle donors receive special invitations throughout the year and recognition (unless anonymity is requested) in WRV’s Annual Report.

Questions? Please contact WRV Director of Development Sarah Egolf-Tarr at 303-543-1411 ext. 108 or sarah@wlr.org”

Christina Lui photo, 2023

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

List of donors and funding partners now appears in the spring/summer Annual Report edition.

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