

THE DONOR NEWSLETTER OF WILDLANDS RESTORATION VOLUNTEERS

# Gaining Ground

Winter 2026

Heal the land. Build community.

You supported WRV's Youth & Families Program participants to plant more than 53 acres!

## INSIDE

Forest thinning and river restoration:  
a powerful synergy

You're essential to Buffalo Willow Trail  
and Eagle's Nest Wilderness

If restoration giving makes  
you happy, clap your hands

There's no place like home -  
and you brought WRV there





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This page: Your support enabled WRV to partner with Northern Arapaho tribal members, the Wyoming Food Bank, the City of Longmont, the City of Loveland, and Boulder's Community Fruit Rescue to harvest chokecherries for both ceremonial and food use on the Wind River Reservation. Volunteers picked ripe chokecherries and cleaned them for freezing and delivery. This was the second year of the partnership.

### ON THE COVER

**Your support allowed WRV to partner with the City of Lafayette to host a youth corps for the sixth year! Here, the 2024-2025 school year cohort poses near Coal Creek during a willow-planting project to stabilize the banks and restore habitat.**

## FROM THE FARM TO THE FRONT RANGE

# Mary Balzer Nurtures Nature with a Sustaining Gift

Values learned on her father's organic farm inspire her steadfast support as a WRV monthly donor

When Mary Balzer gets involved, she means it! After her first WRV event, she was so impressed with the Executive Director, staff, and board that she joined the Board of Directors. "I wanted to be part of the vision," she recalls

Mary soon became a monthly donor to provide meaningful support in a budget-friendly way. "It's automatic, so I don't have to worry about it, and WRV can count on that support," Mary explains.

Mary is pleased that WRV has grown into a "major force in restoration on the Front Range." She's inspired by "seeing the Spanish-speaking community and young people get involved."

**"I learned a lot about how you must care for nature, to enjoy what you have worked hard for."**

Her commitment to the land began in childhood in New Mexico. "My dad was a very early organic farmer," she says. "I learned a lot about how you must care for nature, to enjoy what you have worked hard for."

That lesson fuels her. "It's wonderful to see that nature can be restored, even after fires and floods, by people who feel the same way." While Mary has since retired from the board, she still gives.

Mary says, "monthly giving is easy as pie." She offers a simple tip: "Add another 3% to cover the processing fee." For her, being part of the Heart and Soil Circle of donors allows her to take part in special activities. But it's also about sustained impact. "It doesn't prevent me from giving special gifts, but it means I'm consistently helping."



Monthly donor and event organizer Mary Balzer (left) with Nancy Walker at a 2023 Heart & Soil Circle event. Mary's efforts were central to the day's success, which included a playful game of "Restoration Bingo" at a past WRV restoration site in Apple Valley.

WRV is deeply grateful to Mary and all our donors and volunteers!

Inspired by Mary's story? You can become a monthly donor by selecting "Monthly" as your gift frequency at [wrv.org/donate](http://wrv.org/donate).



Mary (left) and Kristin Lopez welcome guests to this summer's building dedication and community potluck celebration.

YOU HELPED RESTORE FIRE-RESILIENCE IN HABITATS!

# Playing Beaver Can Save Communities and Ecosystems



*Volunteers mimic beavers with playful gestures. The structures they built in the creek mimic the work of beavers in historic habitats where beavers have been eradicated. Beaver ponds and meadows are extremely effective in creating habitat for other wildlife. Where some ponds and cover are re-established, beavers often arrive to maintain them.*

*WRV Volunteer Jackie Schwartz grins through a bundle of willow branches, which will be woven around short poles sunk into the riverbed to hold and catch mud and vegetation.*



*Volunteer Laura Anderson crouches to tweak the mud and plants making up a new Beaver Dam Analog (BDA). The water pooling behind the structure shows the BDA is already making a difference.*

## Outdoor Play

Did you play in the mud as a kid? Can you remember the squish between your fingers; the smell of wet dirt; or maybe watching the trickling or pooling of water in the shapes you traced? Now, did you ever imagine that this playtime could save places from wildfires? For volunteers on WRV's Beaver Mimicry Projects, this scenario is a reality.

Long-time volunteer Doug Swartz has loved to play in the water his whole life. He gets a thrill of instant gratification watching water flow change as a Beaver Dam Analog (BDA) structure takes shape. "The absolute coolest thing is that we can do this with our own hands at small scale and have a huge impact."

## BDAs Make a Difference

WRV staff member Elle Bergley calls BDAs "a 'lasagna' of willows, wood, gravel, and sod." The structure is designed to slow and spread water over an area like a beaver dam does, giving the water more time to sink into the earth. This increases the level of the water below ground and makes affected areas more resilient to wildfires and droughts. It also improves an area's ability to handle flood surges by increasing the soil's ability to absorb water. That resilience to extremes can save lives.

Doug speaks passionately about the benefits of these projects. "I understand that beavers have now moved right into the reach we were working on and have taken over the process, which is exactly what we were trying to set the stage for. These projects "fluff the pillows" –they kickstart natural processes so nature can accelerate



*Volunteers pose next to an in-stream structure they just built using materials generated by other volunteers thinning a nearby stand of conifers. The structure will slow the flow of the creek, spreading the water out. The result will be a less flammable forest with fire breaks that replace missing riparian habitats. These habitats are crucial for declining wildlife, such as amphibians.*

the work.” Doug hopes more landowners will leave their minds open about beavers. The large rodents have had a bad reputation as pests for too long.

### **Mimicry Fun for Volunteers**

A dedicated group of WRV volunteers, including Doug, have become “beaver believers.” They enthusiastically attend BDA projects, where you can frequently find them chest deep in the water, weaving together branches from the trees that were cut to reduce fire risk. Volunteers transplant wetland plants with roots still packed in mud to the top of the structure. Elle says, “It’s great for puzzlers: people who like to build things. You’re trying to move the mud and use tools. You’re just like a beaver.” The increase from five BDA project days in 2024 to 11 in 2025 shows that puzzling is clearly popular with both volunteers and partners.

And Elle continues to plan for future projects. “We are trying to go back to each project, funding-dependent, to build off of the structures in future years.” With your help, the beaver believers will keep increasing Colorado’s resilience by healing the land!



# Finding A New Path: The Buffalo-Willow Connector Trail

## Your Support Restores Wilderness Quality, Prevents Rescue Calls

### Willow Falls Was a Hazardous Destination

Every hiker's nightmare is losing their way. WRV Trails & Habitat Program Director Nate Boschmann knows something about that. He recalls a frantic search after a hike to Willow Falls in spring of 2004. A fellow hiker struck out ahead of the group but missed a turn, leading to a four-hour rescue mission. The trail's confusing nature caused more search and rescue calls than any other in the Dillon Ranger District.

### Trail Threatens Wildlife and Water Quality

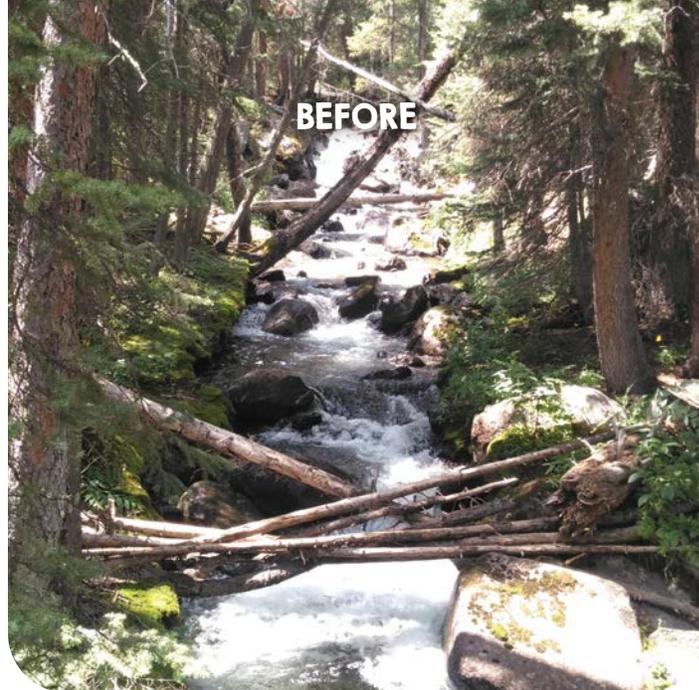
This popular trail was dangerous for visitors. And it was damaging to Eagles Nest Wilderness. It encroached on wildlife habitat. It featured failed stream crossings. It forced hikers to create a web of eroding spur trails. Yet, it was the only access point to Eagles Nest Wilderness from a bus stop.

### Your Help Offered Hope

That's why in 2022, when the Ranger District sought a solution, WRV's trail community answered the call. With your support, staff and volunteers designed and built a sustainable re-route.

### A New Path Emerges

After three years of work by volunteers and Youth Corps crews, the new route is complete. It features consistent grades, bypasses sensitive wetlands, and includes a new bridge. The new path will safely guide hikers and backcountry skiers, and protects the wilderness.



BEFORE

*When work on this trail was started, this stream crossing was just logs laid loosely across the stream.*



AFTER

*Now the stream crossing is a sturdy bridge with a railing, secured into the stream bank on both sides.*

### Sustainable Trails Expertise was Necessary

This effort was possible because people like you helped WRV build expertise. Training volunteers to build stable rock walls without mortar in the backcountry is one example. Using ropes, pulleys, and tripods to move heavy materials is another. Safe use of vintage hand saws to fell, buck, and shape logs was also vital.

### Thank You

The project is a testament to how you are building resilient landscapes and safer access for all. Thank you for making this possible in partnership with the National Forest Foundation, the USFS Dillon Ranger District, and the Summit Foundation.



*Sawyers Jon Gardner and Laura Sedlacek team up to saw through the pair of logs that now make up the base of the bridge.*

IF HELPING NATURE MAKES YOU HAPPY, CLAP YOUR HANDS!

# The science of happiness: why giving back to nature feels so good

## The Happiness Equation

We see it all the time: the joy on a volunteer's face after a hard day's work. The satisfaction of knowing they've made a difference. Did you know this feeling is backed by science? According to research, people who engage in "prosocial" behaviors - helping others - are more likely to be happy than people who don't.

## The Giving-Happiness Connection

One aspect of prosocial behavior is prosocial spending. That is, directing your hard-earned dollars to causes that benefit others.

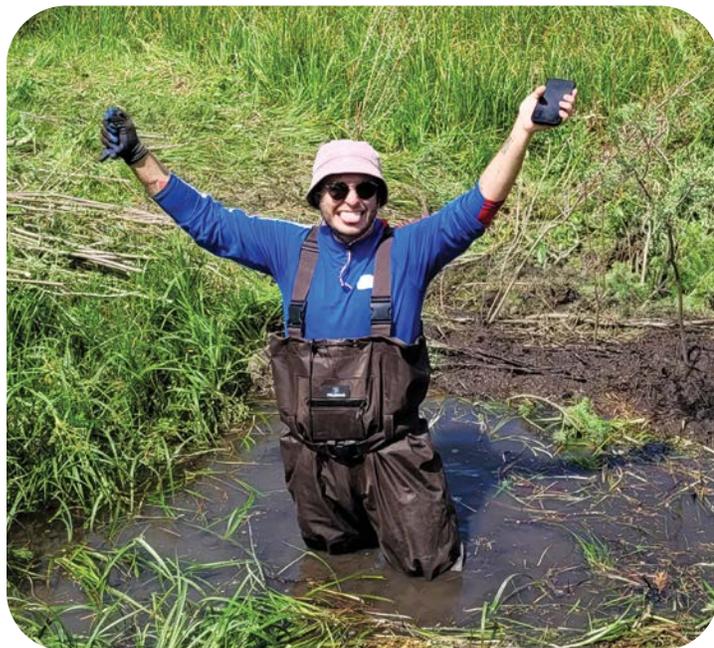
Studies support the idea that prosocial spending promotes greater happiness. As sometimes happens, early reports suffered from defects including small sample sizes and data mining. That is, doing calculations until something statistically significant shows up. The psychological research community is upgrading the standards of its research. This includes two key changes: 1) Increasing sample sizes to 200 participants. 2) Pre-specifying statistical tests used to analyze the data.

## More Robust Studies Confirm the Connection

A recent article by psychologists in Canada and the U.S. reviewed experimental studies with adequate sample sizes and pre-registered analysis plans. They found that prosocial spending still predicts greater happiness.



*Alan Carpenter, author of both this article and the book Choose Better, Live Better: Nine Healthy Choices that Nurture Body, Mind, and Spirit. Here, Alan holds the skeleton of a sagebrush, along with a PVC pipe transect to help evaluate the efficacy of WRV's work restoring wet meadows for sage grouse in North Park.*



*Volunteer Glenn Hartman stands in a creek he helped to transform using beaver mimicry (building in-stream structures using wood) near Cal-Wood Education Center. These efforts re-connect the stream to its floodplain, thereby creating larger fire breaks and improving habitat.*

## “We rise by lifting others” - Adam Grant

The benefits of prosocial behavior have even spread into popular culture. For example, business guru Adam Grant authored the book *Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success*.

## From Helping People to Healing the Planet

At WRV, this concept takes on a new dimension. When you give to WRV, your prosocial act ripples outward. You're not just helping one or two people, but also other living beings and future generations..

We see the impact of your joy in every project we complete. **We'd love to hear what inspires your generosity!** What does supporting WRV's mission mean to you? Please share your story with our Director of Development, Sarah Egolf-Tarr, at 303-543-1411 ext. 108. Or email [sarah@wrv.org](mailto:sarah@wrv.org).



*WRV Director of Development Sarah Egolf-Tarr speaks about Katherine's legacy next to the plaque honoring her and donors like you, who gave in her memory.*

**THEY SAY THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME...**

# And WRV is home, thanks to you!

Enthusiastic donors like you helped WRV establish a fund to pay off the mortgage on our Longmont office building! You also covered future costs of ownership. This means more of WRV's budget goes directly to restoration! This community effort reduces costs and makes our organization more resilient.

Over the summer, we dedicated the building in honor of WRV's late executive director, Katherine Postelli. Katherine spearheaded the campaign to find a property where WRV could face new challenges. She aspired to a home for both equipment and programming. After negotiating the purchase in 2019, Katherine oversaw renovation from 2020-2022. Professional contractor Paul Liscom volunteered to build a tool shed for our gear. Katherine worked to create a special space for our community. She even arranged a surprise art installation on the wall. Volunteer Bronc McLaughlin helped his friends and artists Michael and Nancy Linsley install hundreds of handmade tiles to make a wall of aspen as a gift.

This property is a crucial "basecamp" for all WRV's efforts. From here, we heal habitats, educate youth, improve trail access to nature, and MORE. Volunteer cooks now prepare camping meals in the facility's professional-quality kitchen. Volunteer leaders have training space. The Katherine Postelli Memorial Building provides so much! WRV extends our deepest gratitude to the many people who helped bring Katherine's dream to life.



*Former WRV staff member Rachel Brett provides a musical interlude honoring Katherine at the dedication.*



*Katherine's daughters, Sydney and Lucy Thompson, and father, Ron Postelli, pose beneath the new sign honoring her name.*

## Gaining Ground

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Printed on recycled paper.

*WRV volunteer Barb Kirchner, along with former WRV volunteer Ed Secor and fiddle player Sandra Wong, play lively tunes for the dedication.*

*WRV Program Director Morgan Crowley speaks about the vision for a memorial garden behind the building.*

