



**COLORADO OUTDOOR  
STEWARDSHIP COALITION**

**Colorado's Public Lands:  
Keeping Colorado's Outdoors Special**

**Report on the Impact of  
Volunteer Stewardship in 2012**



This report has been compiled and publically released in April, 2013 through the combined efforts of the Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition, a collaboration staffed and organized by Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado.

The Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition includes representatives from the following participating organizations and agencies:

- Bureau of Land Management
- Colorado Fourteeners Initiative
- Colorado Mountain Club
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Colorado State Forest Service
- Colorado State Trails Program
- Colorado Youth Corps Association
- City of Fort Collins
- International Mountain Biking Association
- Jefferson County Open Space
- National Park Service
- Responsible Recreation Foundation
- Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers
- Rocky Mountain Field Institute
- US Forest Service
- Wildlands Restoration Volunteers
- Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado

Many thanks to all of the organizations that provided data, answered questions and posed new ones. These organizations are listed in the appendix.

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Of the many challenges facing Colorado's outdoors, the combination of budget cuts to land management agencies, environmental stressors, population and development pressure, and increasing use of our public lands are a challenge to manage. These issues create an environment in which local volunteers are a critical resource to ensure the continued protection of our public lands.

The good news is that our communities care tremendously about these public lands, are willing to help at the federal, state, and local levels, and in 2012 contributed over **1.2 million hours** of volunteer labor. Volunteers cared for habitats, restored burn areas, built and maintained trails, preserved historic structures, educated the public about the environment, acted as trail ambassadors, lived as campground hosts, staffed visitor centers and much, much more. The combined value of these volunteer stewardship efforts equates to over **\$28 million** added to increasingly tight budgets.

While total volunteer numbers fluctuate slightly from year to year, people are giving a significant amount of their volunteer time to Colorado's outdoors, especially to state and local agencies. Volunteer hours increased slightly in 2012 for many possible reasons including that more people want to volunteer to protect their environment and recreation resources and that agencies are finding better ways to report their data. This aggregate data has only been collected at a statewide level for the past three years and there are still many inconsistencies as to how data is collected within the agencies. As a Coalition, we are still working to foster accurate reporting and data collection systems across all agencies.

The Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition, a partnership of stewardship organizations and land management agencies at the federal, state and local levels has come together to prepare this report about volunteer stewardship. We are working together to enhance community partnerships that will benefit Colorado's outdoors, to highlight the importance of volunteer stewardship efforts and to find ways to build our collective capacity to engage our communities in caring for our public lands and natural resources. We are also working to increase the visibility and appeal of public engagement in stewardship activities.

There are enormous benefits of outdoor stewardship volunteerism. The amount of work done is a huge asset to land managers and of great benefit to our natural resources. It allows land managers to extend the reach of their budgets extensively. The intangible benefits to the volunteers themselves from their heightened connection to the land are also tremendous and as important, volunteers are voters.

There continue to be significant challenges. Volunteer labor is not free. It requires sufficient capacity to manage and train skilled volunteers to be as effective as they can be and to ensure that they have a great experience in order to maintain a high level of repeat volunteers. Volunteer management and training programs require sufficient funding and support. With enough investment of both financial resources and intent, volunteer contributions can be leveraged many times over.



## **Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition**

### **Identifying Needs within the Stewardship Community**

A collaboration of non-profit stewardship organizations and federal, state, and local land managers has been convening for the past three years as members of the Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition. This group organized the November 2010 Stewardship Forum where participants noted several ongoing areas that stewardship efforts will need to focus on in the coming years. These areas include ensuring that there is sufficient skilled volunteer capacity that is effectively coordinated across the state, as well as launching a public awareness and education campaign for stewardship work. There was also a call for understanding what we are currently doing collectively around stewardship and the impact of that work.

Stewardship Forum participants issued a collective challenge: *to engage a million Coloradans in taking care of our state's outdoor resources, helping to preserve, protect and sustain our natural resources for generations to come.*

The outdoor stewardship movement needs to be strengthened. The challenges faced in collecting consistent data demonstrate the need for more cohesion and collaboration between organizations and agencies and across sectors. By working together more effectively and creating collaborative efforts, we can mobilize a million people who love Colorado AND we can also put them to work to make their experience both productive and educational.

### **KEEPING COLORADO'S OUTDOORS SPECIAL**

Everyone who lives in, or travels to Colorado knows that it is a one-of-a-kind state. From our expansive plains, our mountains that have inspired patriotic songs, to glacier-carved valleys, and river canyons, as well as over 300 days of sunshine, Colorado inspires awe in visitors and residents alike. Tens of millions of people travel to Colorado in order to recreate in our parks and national forests, on our trails, in our high peaks and in our urban green spaces each year. Nationally, outdoor recreation contributes over \$788 billion to the economy, and 12 million jobs, and \$197.4 billion in federal, state and local tax revenue.<sup>1</sup> Collectively, outdoor recreation activities contributed over \$9.8 billion to the state's revenues, or 10% of the state's total economy. While there has been little comprehensive research to assess the impact of total economic activity generated by recreation in Colorado, estimates from 2008 vary between \$10-\$15 billion dollars every year, which support about 107,000 jobs across the state.<sup>2</sup>

Colorado has seen significant growth over the past several decades, and it is increasingly important for Coloradans to contribute to the protection of our state's natural resources and public lands through volunteerism, advocacy efforts, voting for conservation measures, and financially supporting local stewardship groups. As governmental budgets struggle to keep pace with demands, new strategies for managing lands for the public benefit need to be developed based on prioritization of needs and assessment of the current environment. As we are

faced with ongoing financial challenges and competing priorities, non-governmental place-based stewardship organizations are needed to fill the gaps. However it is often challenging for these organizations to raise the needed finances to take on this work.

<sup>1</sup> Outdoor Industry Association. "Outdoor Recreation Economy." August 31, 2012, <http://www.outdoorindustry.org/pdf/OIA-RecreationEconomyReport2012-TechnicalReport.pdf>. (accessed Apr. 5, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Colorado Parks and Wildlife. *Colorado Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*, 2008. <http://parks.state.co.us/SiteCollectionImages/parks/Programs/LWCF/SCORP/Section%204%20Economic%20Activity%20Attributed%20to%20Outdoor%20Recreation%20in%20Colorado.pdf> (accessed Apr. 5, 2013).

In early 2011, early 2011, the Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition worked to establish the first aggregated baseline of annual volunteer information and data from federal, state and local public land agencies, non-government organizations (NGOs) and recreational user groups working for the protection of Colorado’s public lands. We have found that in 2010 and 2011, volunteers contributed over **1.3 million hours**, and **1.2 million hours** of stewardship work in the outdoors. This 2013 report aggregated data based on 2012 volunteer activity, and found that almost 50,000 people again volunteered over **1.2 million hours**. This year’s report builds on the 2011 and 2012 reports, and addresses the importance of volunteers for our public lands. Everyone involved in this study understands and appreciates the heightened need to manage public demand and provide access to our vast natural resources with sustainable practices and methods, with engagement of the public and with creativity. There are no easy solutions; particularly as public land management agencies and NGOs continue to experience diminishing resources that force decisions resulting in workforce reduction, fewer dollars for materials acquisition, and the need to engage more volunteers without the required internal resources to do so. Narrowing this capacity gap is critical for all of us and there are no easy or “free” ways of doing that. It should be noted that the Coalition is undertaking a large gap and capacity analysis of outdoor stewardship currently and results will be available in late 2013 or early 2014. This study should help with regards to future planning around how to fill the gaps.

### **VOLUNTEERS: VALUABLE, BUT NOT FREE**

Now more than ever, Coloradans want to get involved and give back to their communities, their state and the outdoors. Every year increasing numbers of volunteers get involved in causes ranging from veteran’s services, tutoring children, and stewardship work. In 2011, Colorado ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of volunteer service, with a third of our state population participating in some sort of volunteer activity. These 1.3 million Coloradans volunteered 145 million hours in human service, health, education and environmental service, which equates to \$3.2 billion of service to our state economy.<sup>3</sup> *The Independent Sector*, the national coalition of nonprofit organizations that establishes IRS approved volunteer labor costs, valued volunteer labor in Colorado in 2012 at \$22.43 per hour.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES: FIRE!**

##### **VOLUNTEERS WANT TO HELP!**

Although we highlighted this issue in last year’s report, we believe that this continues to be a dramatic risk facing Colorado communities. In the twelve largest fires that burned in Colorado last year, at least 202,425 acres were burned across the state, resulting in the destruction of 600 homes, and tragically claiming the lives of five people.

These fires were so damaging in part because Colorado had a dry winter in which it received only 13% of its average precipitation. Fires that could have been contained in wetter years were quickly raging out of the control of firefighters as they consumed dry trees.

In the coming years, restoring burn areas will consume an increasing amount of volunteer time. These volunteers will have to spend many hours re-seeding, re-forestation, controlling erosion and more to restore these areas and protect water supplies from damaging runoff.



*Volunteers control erosion and re-vegetate burned areas at Waldo Canyon Fire Restoration project, March 2013.*

<sup>3</sup> Volunteering In America, “Volunteering in Colorado.” n.d. <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/CO> (accessed Apr. 5, 2013).

*“Volunteers are an integral and vital aspect of the stewardship operations at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Without the generous support of partners and volunteers in communities across Colorado, the BLM would be hard pressed to keep up with the increasing demands for access, maintenance, and usage that our public lands currently face.”*

-Jack Placchi  
Travel Management and Trails  
Coordinator  
BLM, Colorado State Office



*Volunteers repairing rock steps on a project in Clear Creek.*

In Colorado, outdoor volunteering is an increasingly popular activity and is often a vehicle for expanding opportunities for children to learn about the environment, for families to improve their physical health, and recreationists to give back to places they fondly and regularly use. For some, it is a form of recreation in and of itself. Outdoor volunteering, among other direct experiences with nature, also provides opportunities to strengthen the public’s awareness and concern for environmental issues, encourage behaviors consistent with stewardship and increase conservation activism and advocacy.

Many people assume that because a “volunteer” is someone who is giving their time and/or resources for free, there are no costs associated. However, there are costs involved in engaging volunteers, particularly at the scale required by many natural resource management agencies. Volunteer management at a larger scale requires professional paid staff members who invest time, energy, and resources in the goal of building and retaining a reliable and trained volunteer workforce and the organization of quality volunteer projects. Volunteers need to be trained in order to be most effective. Trained, skilled volunteer leaders can lead and train other volunteers, but the training takes time and skilled instruction. Increasingly sophisticated outreach

efforts to recruit volunteers are paramount in an age with many competing needs for people’s spare time and energy. Nonprofit organizations that specialize in volunteer management also do a great deal of educational and public awareness work and are required to raise their funds annually, both of which require sufficient capacity.

## **COLLECTIVE IMPACT STUDY: 2012 OUTDOOR VOLUNTEERING IN COLORADO**

The collection of aggregate data about volunteer conservation stewardship across public agencies in Colorado has been collected for the past three years, in an effort to provide a clear picture of how many people are volunteering and how much. Data was collected for the 2012 season to learn the total number of unique volunteers, number of volunteer hours, and how those volunteers spent their time in the field. As we have found previously, the differences in the data collection processes for many stewardship groups, and federal, state, and local agencies limit our ability to have a completely accurate picture of what type of specific work the volunteers were completing, but gives us a good estimate of what is happening across agencies.

### **Data Collection Process**

Similar to data collection completed for the 2011 report, a brief survey was developed to assess volunteer activity on public lands, surveying land managers, stewardship and volunteer organizations,

recreational user groups that actively use volunteers, as well as youth corps and AmeriCorps programs engaging community service stipended<sup>4</sup> individuals for outdoor stewardship work. Survey questions were distributed electronically with follow-up phone research to:

- Federal, state and local county and municipal land management agencies that utilize volunteers directly and/or who rely on volunteer groups as part of their management functions;
- Non-governmental organizations including non-profit volunteer organizations whose missions are to engage the public in acts of stewardship and who work primarily in partnership with public land management agencies;
- Public and private agencies that use paid volunteers such as AmeriCorps and youth conservation corps, whose members are paid small stipends as part of their national or community service efforts.

The aggregate data from the public land agencies demonstrates the total number of volunteer hours contributed in 2012. Follow-up questions included: how did these volunteers come to that land agency to perform stewardship work? In general, we learned that volunteers come to work on public lands through three primary routes:

- 1) The volunteer has a direct relationship with the land agency, such as living nearby or recreating frequently on land that the agency manages and is recruited and managed by land agency staff;
- 2) The volunteer comes through a volunteer opportunity organized by a non-profit stewardship organization or recreational user group or another typically non-profit partner entity;
- 3) The volunteer participates through a stipended community service program such as a Youth Corps, Student Conservation Association or AmeriCorps program.

## **Measures**

The data that was collected from participating agencies, based on 2012 volunteer activity included:

- Number of unique volunteers,
- Number of volunteer hours,
- The number of hours worked in different kinds of stewardship volunteer work, such as trail building, environmental education, historic preservation, and habitat management.

<sup>4</sup> Stipended individuals refer to people who are monetarily compensated for their time and efforts, usually through an AmeriCorps or Youth Corps program.

*“Volunteerism is one of the most important activities Back Country Horsemen can use in our effort to perpetuate enjoyable common sense use of horses in the backcountry. A central point of our mission statement is to assist government agencies in maintenance and management of public lands. By using our time and resources, we can help ensure that public land remains open to recreational stock use by earning us a seat at the table where we can influence agency decision concerning access to public lands by pack and saddle stock users.*

*The value of being able to speak with public land managers from the position of having provided volunteer service cannot be overstated, whether it is on the local ranger district or in Washington D.C.”*

-Larry Zauberis  
Backcountry Horsemen of Colorado



*Volunteers having fun while replanting willows and restoring a riparian habitat.*

There are no standardized process across agencies or organizations for how and what volunteer data is collected, even ones within the same governmental department. Volunteer hours and number of unique volunteers are the most accurate of all data reported as these two measurements are the most widely reported and collected across almost all agencies and organizations. Some agencies use volunteers, but do not collect any data about them and their work. Other agencies did not respond to requests for information or the correct person may not have received the data request.

The data collection process that was conducted for this report demonstrates the very issue of organizational capacity: most agencies and organizations struggle in their ability to effectively record data as they prioritize internal resources to get work done on the ground. Even collecting the data and accurately reporting takes time and capacity. Despite data collection and reporting challenges, we were able to gather sufficient data to extrapolate and apply some uniform findings.

### **Primary Respondents**

#### Federal Agencies

*USDA U.S Forest Service  
Bureau of Land Management  
The National Park Service  
US Fish and Wildlife Service*

#### State Agencies

*Colorado Parks and Wildlife  
Colorado State Forest Service*

#### 22 Municipal and County Government Agencies

(note: some of these agencies represent multiple smaller agencies)

#### 70 Non-Governmental and Nonprofit Stewardship Organizations

(Note: some of the smaller groups belong to coalitions)

#### National and Community Service Stipend Volunteer Programs:

*AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps  
Colorado Youth Corps Association*

### **Data Highlights**

#### ***Volunteer Hours***

Volunteer hours and total number of unique volunteers were the only recorded fields that were consistent within each collected dataset. Table 1 illustrates hours of volunteer labor organized through agencies. Approximately 50% of total of 1,265,496 recorded volunteer hours were working on federal lands; about 23% on municipal and county open space and park lands; and the remaining 27% on state lands.

*"Trails don't build or maintain themselves! Without the support of our wonderful volunteers and partners, we would not be able to accomplish the many projects we work on every year. These projects allow us all to get outside and recreate in Colorado's beautiful outdoors."*

-Amy Agapito  
Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Association



*Two volunteers maintaining a trail on a project in Gateway, Colorado.*





**Table 1: Total Recorded Volunteer Hours during the 2012 Volunteer Season**

AGENCY	Total Volunteer Hours for 2012	Percentage of total	Total Volunteer Hours for 2011	Total Volunteer Hours for 2010
Federal Land Agencies	637,772	50%	610,201	721,075
State Land Agencies	342,749	27%	320,872	271,304
Local and County Municipal Agencies	284,975	23%	274,105	310,290
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,265,496</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,203,927<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>1,302,669</b>

The total labor value rate of volunteer work throughout all agencies in 2012 equates to **\$28,385,075** based on the volunteer labor rate of \$22.43 – which is the rate for Colorado volunteers that is used by *Independent Sector*.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 2: Source of Volunteers**

Volunteer Source	Volunteer Hours for 2012	Percentage of total	Volunteer Hours for 2011	Volunteer Hours for 2010
Direct Agency Volunteers	366,168	29%	242,445	256,662
Nonprofit Stewardship Organized	409,576	32%	475,470	360,332
Stipend Volunteers	489,935	39%	486,012	685,675
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,265,496</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,203,927</b>	<b>1,302,669</b>

The three different primary sources of volunteers, those organized by non-profit stewardship groups, direct agency volunteers or stipend volunteers are all important to the public land agencies with which they work. These groups and individuals do a wide variety of stewardship work. As evidenced by Table 2 above, the stipend volunteers and those managed by non-profit groups represent the largest groups of volunteers contributing to public lands work with 489,935 hours and 409,576 hours respectively. The volunteers organized by state and federal land managers contributed 366,168 hours. Land management agencies vary as to whether they have volunteer coordinators within their offices and some are more able to manage volunteers directly than others. There is a great deal of variability as to the size and number of group volunteer opportunities and number of ongoing kinds of individual volunteer roles.

<sup>5</sup> There was an error in the 2011 data, but this number reflects the true number of volunteer hours.

<sup>6</sup> The Independent Sector, "State Values for Volunteer Time." *Independent Sector's Value of Volunteer Time*. 2012. [http://independentsector.org/volunteer\\_time](http://independentsector.org/volunteer_time) (accessed Apr. 5, 2012).



**Table 3: Total Number of Volunteers**

Volunteer Source	Number of Volunteers 2012	Number of Volunteers 2011
BLM	5,016	4,488
USFS	6,270	6,194
NPS	2,739	2,677
USFWS	430	Did not provide
CPW	6,511	9,561
CSFS	739	822
Local Agencies	26,107	21,018
<b>Total</b>	<b>47,812</b>	<b>44,760</b>

**Notes about the Data**

*"I originally decided to participate in an AmeriCorps program through Mile High Youth Corps because I was looking for a different experience than anything I had had before. I wanted to know that I was making a difference in the things that I really believed in, and I wanted to make a lasting contribution to my community that I could be proud of. Mile High Youth Corps provided these opportunities for me, and much more.*

*After working in at-risk neighborhoods changing light and water fixtures to be more energy efficient, I really enjoyed working outdoors constructing a dirt bike trail, building a staircase at Red Rocks, and clearing invasive species from our national parks and forests. By the end of my program, not only had I found a close-knit group of friends, but I had also made a positive and long-lasting impact on the experiences of recreational users on our beautiful Colorado public lands".*

-Casey O’Kane  
 AmeriCorps Conservation Leadership  
 Corps Member  
 Mile High Youth Corps

Thousands of people throughout Colorado donated 1,265,496 of hours in 2012 to outdoor volunteer projects, valued at \$28,385,075. These numbers increased between 2011 and 2012, by 61,569 hours. We believe that this is because of several important issues.

**Data Reporting:** Reporting inconsistencies likely accounts for a great deal of variability between years, and with differing systems in place to collect data and different individuals tasked with this responsibility, varying methods may be used. This last year saw a slight decrease in the number of nonprofit stewardship organizations that participated in the survey, most likely due to the fact that many are led by volunteers themselves, have tightening budgets, and increasing demands placed on employees if they have them.

**Where People Volunteer:** There were more hours reported across the state and there were also roughly 3,000 more people who volunteered in 2012. Data for federal agencies as well as local and county agencies show more volunteers in 2012, than 2011. These numbers dropped somewhat for state agencies in 2012. One possibility that can account for differences in numbers of volunteers is variability in size and number of volunteer opportunities from year to year. More research is needed to determine what might account for the change in numbers, but it is good news that more people are volunteering.



## CONCLUSION

Not only did the total number of volunteer hours increase from 2011 to 2012, it is important to note that even more people were willing and able to get outdoors and volunteer in 2012 than in either of the previous years of this study. Funding has, in many cases, become more challenging in the past several years, but that has not stopped agencies from finding resourceful ways to utilize more volunteers. This suggests that with sufficient resources, there is likely room for growth in how many people are able to volunteer in Colorado's outdoors from year to year. It is necessary and essential that we give all of our land management agencies the capability to support public engagement and for organizations to work together to help complete a goal all of us hold important: *to engage a million Coloradans in taking care of our state's outdoors resources, helping to preserve, protect and sustain our natural resources for generations to come.*

There are many benefits of outdoor stewardship volunteerism. The amount of volunteer work done provides people a way to give back to the lands they love and enjoy recreationally, and is a huge asset to our public lands by allowing land managers to extend the reach of their budgets. In 2012, volunteers contributed over **1.2 million hours** to the stewardship of our public lands. These volunteers spent crucial hours caring for habitats, restoring burn areas, building and maintaining trails, preserving historic structures, educating youth and adults about the environment, acting as trail ambassadors, and living as campground hosts, staffing visitor centers and much, much more. The combined value of these volunteer stewardship efforts equates to over **\$28 million.**

We know that capacity is a critical issue for land managers in meeting their required and expected demands on them. We also know that there are many people who want to volunteer in different ways and capacity to absorb and effectively utilize these people is a key question here as well. Understanding the gaps for land managers and the community capacity to fill these gaps will help us to plan more effectively for engaging the public effectively to extend the reach of land management budgets and human capacity. Volunteer labor is not free, but it can be leveraged extensively to get the job done and contribute to our communities and our natural resources in many ways.