

# WESTERN SLOPE CONSERVATION CENTER



**The Tater Heap *40th Anniversary Edition***

*WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP + PUBLIC LANDS ADVOCACY + EDUCATION*

**Plus: 2017 Annual Report**



204 Poplar Avenue  
PO Box 1612  
Paonia, CO 81428  
Tel (970) 527-5307

[www.westernslopeconservation.org](http://www.westernslopeconservation.org)  
[info@theconservationcenter.org](mailto:info@theconservationcenter.org)

**The Western Slope Conservation Center builds an active and aware community to protect and enhance the lands, air, water and wildlife of the Lower Gunnison Watershed.**

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Healthy Forests Initiative  
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The title of this newsletter is taken from a 10,981-foot peak in the West Elk Mountains that goes by the same name. Every year, Conservation Center staff climb the peak to pay homage.

**Tater Heap 2017-2018**

**Photo Credits:**

Lehman Images  
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WSCC Staff

**Building Power, A Message from the Executive Director**

What comes to mind when you think about the Western Slope? Maybe the iconic landscapes surrounding your home, along with the incredible locally grown food, the wide open ranges, and the hard-working rivers. You probably also think of our colorful little towns with their unique histories and the equally unique and colorful characters who inhabit them.

Lately, I've been admiring some of the less well-celebrated features about our home: our orneriness, for one, and our gumption, too. I like the long-standing penchant for arguing when it's something worth arguing about, which around here quite often has to do with how we use and protect our shared land, water, and air.

I've also been thinking about how powerful we've been over the last 40 years in making our farms, ranches, rivers, and homes what they are today. We have protected our water. We have advocated for wildlife and the wild places in which they live. We have stopped irresponsible oil and gas developments. We have educated generations of land stewards. And we continue to carry on each of those tasks today.

Arguing for arguing sake isn't very helpful, of course. But I don't think there's enough of the kind of arguing - let's call it civic engagement - that still happens on a regular basis within our Western Slope communities. We talk and then listen. We try to work out our differences eye-to-eye. And we band together when our collective interests are at threat. In so doing, we create a collective voice that gives us power in determining our shared future.

So here's the warning: we're going to need our collective power in 2018. We will need to rally our orneriness and gather our gumption. We'll need to look each other in the eye and speak and hear truth, and then turn to our decision-makers and speak - not out of anger or fear - but out of passion for the future of our home which we love.

Alex Johnson

**Finding Inspiration, A Message from the Chair**

Over the coming year, we will continue amplifying our local voice on a regional and national level to watchdog our watershed and find collaborative solutions to permanently protect our home. We will offer educational programs - Conservation Days, the Youth Outdoor Network, the Float Fest, Mountainfilm, and more. We will champion the North Fork Alternative in the BLM's final RMP. We will engage in the GMUG Forest Plan Revision process and Gunnison Public Lands Initiative. We will promote renewable energy practices. We will build a boat ramp at Hotchkiss Fairgrounds. We will maintain and expand features of the Paonia River Park. We will monitor North Fork River water quality and summarize 15 years + of data. And so much more! But only with your help.

2017 marked the 40th Anniversary of WSCC's work to protect and advocate for the lands, water, wildlife of the watershed of the Lower Gunnison Basin. Many of you live here... have lived here... or visit here... and you've played on the rivers, adventured in the mountains, or used the local trails. Think about those delightful moments right now and use them to inspire you to stay active with the Western Slope Conservation Center in 2018.

Karen Ortiz

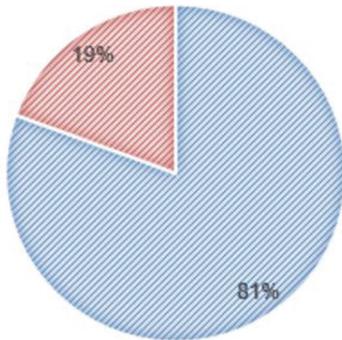
# 2017 WSCC Annual Report



## 2017 Financial Summary

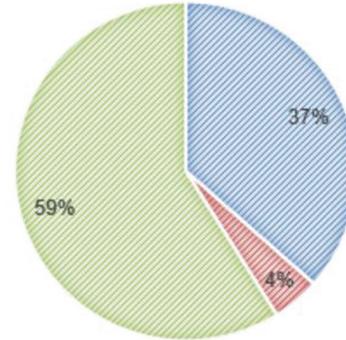
**EXPENSES \$155,281**

■ Programs ■ Management and Admin



**INCOME \$160,401**

■ Donations & Membership ■ Event & Program Income ■ Grant Income

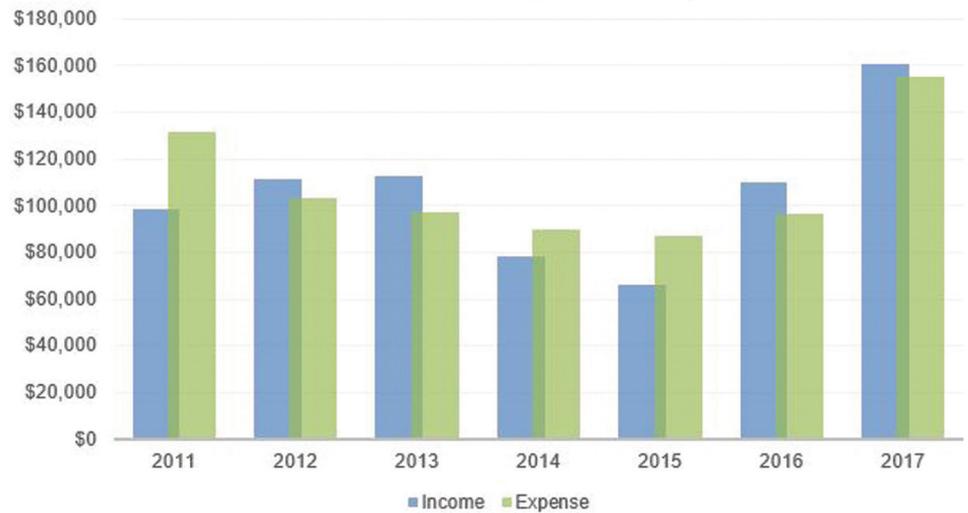


*Financial summary does not include restricted program grant income and expenses.*

### 2017 By the Numbers

- Total New Donors: **101**
- Total Members: **600+**
- New Monthly Donors: **15**
- Giving Tuesday: **\$6,040**
- Annual Appeal: **\$11,055**
- Trailblazer Campaign: **\$20,035**
- Volunteer Hours: **1,266**
- Youth Engaged: **800+**
- Community Members Engaged: **1200+**
- Restricted Grant Dollars Invested in Local Communities: **\$170,802**

### 2011 to 2017 Year-to-year Comparison



## Many Thanks to Our Partners

- 2017 Conservation Center Trailblazers
- 2017 Cons. Center Event Sponsors
- Conservation Lands Foundation
- Western Conservation Foundation
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife
- GOCO
- El Pomar Foundation
- Wolcott Family Foundation
- Kampe Family Foundation
- Patagonia
- Odell Brewing
- New Belgium Brewing
- The Wilderness Society

Thanks to the generous contributions of individuals and businesses - along with support from many partnering public and private entities - we continue to protect and steward the land, water, and air on the Western Slope of Colorado. Please visit [westernslopeconservationcenter.org](http://westernslopeconservationcenter.org) for more info on our partners and how you can build upon our shared conservation legacy.

- Trout Unlimited
- Colorado Water Conservation Board
- North Fork Water Conservancy District
- Delta County School District
- Smith Fork Ranch
- Wishart Springs Inn
- US Forest Service

- Delta County
- Bureau of Land Management
- Colorado Canyons Association
- The Nature Connection
- CO Dept. of Public Health & Env.
- Friends Grassroots Network
- Rocky Mountain Roundup Riders

# Public Lands

## NORTH FORK GOES TO DC

A delegation from the North Fork Valley traveled to Washington D.C. to raise the profile of our remarkable home, advocating for a productive and vibrant future. North Fork delegates represented solar, agricultural, recreation, and conservation groups. They met with western CO's congressional delegation including Senator Michael Bennet (pictured below) and staff of Rep. Tipton and Sen. Gardner.



## GRAND MESA, UNCOMPAHGRE, & GUNNISON (GMUG)

### FOREST PLAN REVISION

In June 2017, the GMUG Planning team kicked off its Forest Plan revision process to update the existing plan, which was created in 1983. The Conservation Center, along with our regional conservation partners, provided recommendations for potential wilderness and special management designations to the GMUG planning team. We will keep advocating for administrative protections for our forest's incredible natural resources throughout this multi-year process.



## WHAT TO WATCH FOR IN 2018

**GUNNISON PUBLIC LANDS INITIATIVE (GPLI)** - A diverse coalition of stakeholders representing 10 public-land-based organizations in Gunnison County have been working for multiple years on a consensus-based process developing comprehensive management recommendations for the public lands in the county. This includes lands within the North Fork watershed.

**BLM RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN (RMP)** - The RMP will soon be back. We are expecting a final proposed RMP to be released in 2018. Stay tuned for ways to show your support for sensible public land protections.

**Methane Working Group** - WSCC is engaged with Delta and Gunnison Counties and local coal mines to find win-win solutions for mitigating and capturing the large amounts of methane being vented by the mines.

## NORTH FORK VALLEY IS TOO WILD TO DRILL

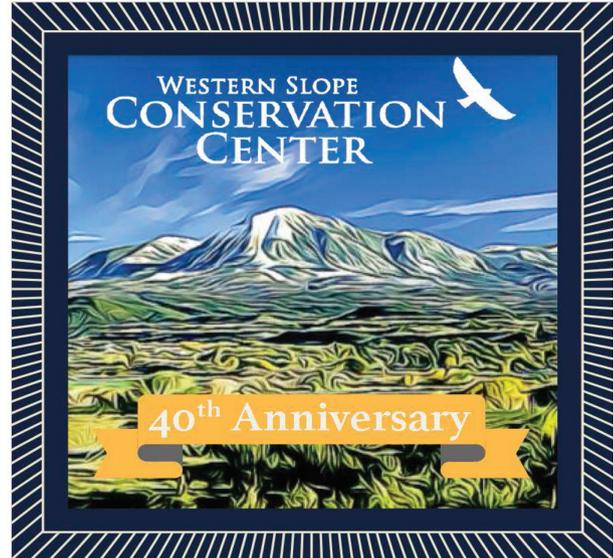
In 2017, The Wilderness Society released their *Too Wild To Drill* campaign, which chronicles our nation's last remaining wild places that are under tremendous threat from pressures for oil, gas, and mineral extraction on public lands. The North Fork of the Gunnison - along with iconic landscapes like the Arctic Wildlife Refuge and the Greater Grand Canyon Watershed - has the bittersweet honor of being *Too Wild To Drill*. This campaign has elevated our local voice of opposition to oil and gas extraction, bringing national attention to our fight to protect our home.

**JOIN US FOR A HIKE!** In 2017, WSCC co-hosted a number of hikes on our local public lands with Dr. Noe, WSCC board member, as geologic interpreter.





**CELEBRATING  
40 YEARS &  
40+ MORE!**

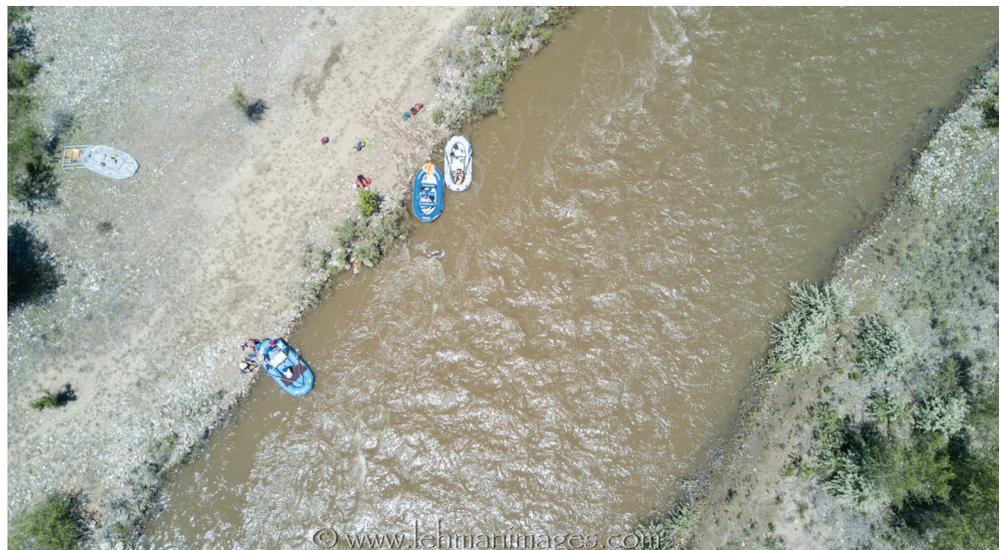


# Watershed

## North Fork Environmental & Recreation Needs Assessment

Thanks to a 2016 grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board, WSCC and the North Fork Water Conservancy District worked to take the first steps in developing a plan to address water infrastructure needs and mitigate conflicts between water users in our local watershed.

The groups produced two parallel assessments to identify current agricultural, environmental, and recreation needs along the North Fork of the Gunnison. These assessments synthesize all pre-existing inventories of the North Fork, assess current stakeholder concerns regarding agricultural, environmental and recreation needs, and recommend priorities for addressing those needs according to eight river segments newly designated for future implementation of recommendations included in the assessments.



## Paonia River Park Working Group

In 2017, WSCC established a River Park Working Group made up of local residents. The Working Group is focusing on the next phases of the River Park, including improvements to park infrastructure, replacing the old Minnesota Creek bridge, erecting a new entrance sign, and installing dog stations for bags and leashes. Maintaining our community connection to the river corridors remains an essential need on the Western Slope.

## Event-Based Water Quality Monitoring

In 2017, WSCC implemented a new type of water quality monitoring to supplement our River Watch program: Event-Based Water Monitoring. To prepare for an abnormal event in the watershed, we developed a protocol to collect samples at specific locations outside of our regular sampling windows. Our event-based water quality monitoring program helped us collect important data on turbidity during the much needed construction repairs that took place during the draw-down at Paonia Reservoir this fall.





*The Nature Connection*

### \$1.7 MILLION FOR WESTERN SLOPE YOUTH!

In December, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) announced their decision to award a \$1.72 Million Inspire Initiative grant to The Nature Connection (TNC: [thenatureconnection.net](http://thenatureconnection.net)). In the coming years, this grant will allow TNC and partners, including WSCC, to formalize outdoor education programming across Cedaredge, Crawford, Delta, Hotchkiss, Olathe, and Paonia. It will connect the traditional educational programming offered to students in the region, to match winter ecology, canyon trips, outdoor days, and more to grade-level-specific goals. The inspire initiative is also providing funding for a "Gear Library" for students, and place development across the county.

# Education



Thanks to funds appropriated from the state lottery, GOCO's Inspire Initiative supports community coalitions in connecting youth to Colorado's outdoors. To this end, the Inspire Initiative establishes "places for kids and their families to play and connect with the outdoors, programs that activate those places, and pathways to outdoor stewardship and leadership roles."



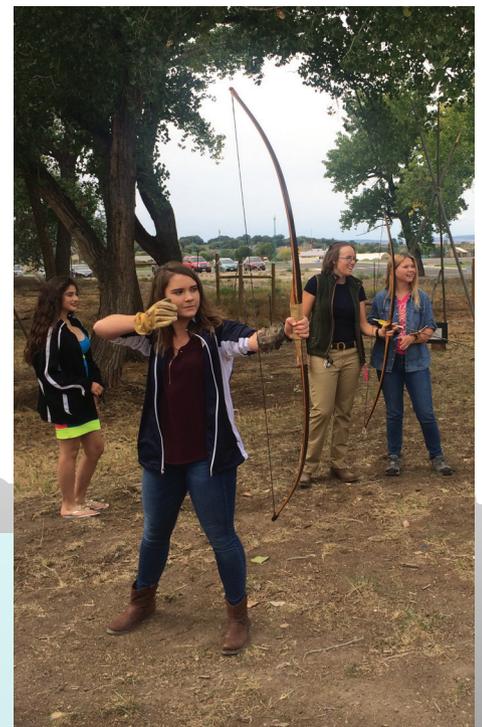
The Nature Connection Youth Outdoor Network (YON) is a group supported by WSCC and many TNC partners for high school students in Delta County + Olathe with an interest in outdoor recreation, public lands, and natural resource careers. The goal of YON is to get students outside and gain exposure to internships and career opportunities in the natural resources sector on the Western Slope. In just its second year, YON is already a hit with students, parents, and educators alike!

#### YON By the Numbers

- 75+ student members
- 40 classroom events featuring guest speakers from the Natural Resources sector
- 500+ students engaged in field trips across the region, including from Forestry days on Grand Mesa, rafting the Gunnison River, archery, and so much more!

*"If it weren't for the Youth Outdoor Network, I would've been playing video games at home instead of rafting."*

High praise from a Delta High School Student!



# WESTERN SLOPE CONSERVATION CENTER



204 Poplar Ave  
PO Box 1612  
Paonia, CO 81428  
**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

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## Get Involved in 2018!

### *Winter/Spring*

WSSC Annual Meeting - Feb. 11  
CO Environmental Film Fest - March 30  
USFS GMUG Forest Plan Revision  
Volunteer Days at Paonia River Park  
Conservation Days at Paonia River Park  
Nature Connection Programming

### *June 2*

Annual River Float & Fest!

### *Summer*

Member Hikes and Outings  
US Forest Service Trail Work Volunteer days  
Volunteer Appreciation Potluck

### *Fall*

Fall Fundraiser  
Mountainfilm Festival

### *Ongoing*

Watershed, Public Lands, and Outreach  
Committee Meetings (Monthly)  
River Watch Water Quality Sampling - March  
14, June 13, September 12, October 10