

TATER HEAD

**WESTERN SLOPE CONSERVATION CENTER
2019-2020 ANNUAL NEWSLETTER**

Building an active and aware community to protect and enhance the lands, air, water, and wildlife of the Lower Gunnison Watershed since 1977.



FROM THE BOARD:

It has been a joy to volunteer for the WSCC this year.

From our fun events like River Fest and Mountainfilm to hikes and trail days to our educational speaker series, and more, we continue to build an active and aware community to protect and enhance our wild home. Among my personal highlights in 2019, I have relished the opportunity to steward our air through participation in the North Fork Coal Mine Methane Working Group, to protect the land by engaging with BLM and USFS, to monitor our waters through River Watch, and to improve wildlife habitat through sage grouse habitat restoration.

With our highly engaged membership of roughly 600 people, our capacity for impact has never been higher. In April, Ben Katz joined the team as our Public Lands Program Director. Shortly after, Karley O'Connor began revolutionizing our outreach programming as our new AmeriCorps VISTA. Amongst the new faces, Patrick Dooling and Jake Hartter continue to provide leadership and stability for WSCC. But as a place-based grassroots organization, it is you, our members, supporters, and volunteers, who truly power our movement.

With your support, we are looking forward to big things in 2020. With the help of our incredibly generous donors and amazing foundation partners, our financial position is stronger than ever. Read inside to learn about our adventures in 2019 and what's in store for 2020, Be sure to sign up for our email list and follow us on social media for the latest updates. Thank you for sharing your time, money, and spirit with the Center. It is an honor to serve with you.

Cheers,
Christopher Caskey
Volunteer Board Chair

2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

- Chris Caskey, Chair
- Ralph D'Alessandro, Treasurer
- Juli Slivka, Secretary
- Karen Ortiz
- Zach Krapl
- Allison Elliot
- Tracy McCurdy
- Dave Noe
- Jay Simon
- Scott Braden

STAFF:

- Patrick Dooling
Executive Director
- Jake Hartter
Watershed Coordinator
- Ben Katz
Public Lands Program Director
- Viva Kellogg
Accountant
- Karley O'Connor
Outreach Coordinator

Newsletter cover photo taken by WSCC Volunteer Nicholas Turner.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



BEING A BENEFICIAL SPECIES

Raising our collective voice to speak truth to power

As has been the case for 40+ years, we are working at every level to ensure our community's voice is heard as we navigate the environmental challenges on Colorado's Western Slope. Through county land-use regulation updates, state legislation, and federal proposals like the BLM's Resource Management Plan, we are working hard to ensure a sustainable future for our natural resources and communities. While it is easy to feel overwhelmed and isolated in our efforts, you can rest assured that our voice is being amplified by regional and national partners to bring widespread attention to our local movements. In fact, last summer BBC World News featured WSCC on a segment aired in the US & UK detailing how the Trump Administration's rollback of environmental regulations is impacting communities like the North Fork Valley. As long as we continue to speak truth to power, our collective voice will be heard.

On the water side, 2019 brought a much-needed snowpack to counteract the paucity of snow in 2018. Despite the wet winter, we remain in drought conditions across the western slope, a reminder of the delicate and unpredictable nature of our most precious resource. In order to prepare for an uncertain future, the Conservation Center is partnering with the North Fork Water Conservancy District, local ditch companies, and recreationists to create a more sustainable outlook for our watershed. We are also hitting the ground to make tangible improvements to riparian habitats across the Lower Gunnison Watershed by partnering with ditch companies on habitat mitigation projects.

In 2020, we will work to further the community's connection with our wild places through events, film festivals, hands-on volunteer opportunities, and so much more. But, as has been the case for 43 years now, we need your support to protect and enhance the incredible natural resources of our home on the western slope. Check inside for ways to get involved in 2020!

BY THE NUMBERS

Total New Donors:

55

Total Members:

600

Monthly Donors:

51

Volunteer Hours:

1,500+

Community Members Engaged:

1,600+

Social Media Followers:

1,900+

Youth Engaged:

400

Restricted Grant Dollars

Invested in Local Communities:

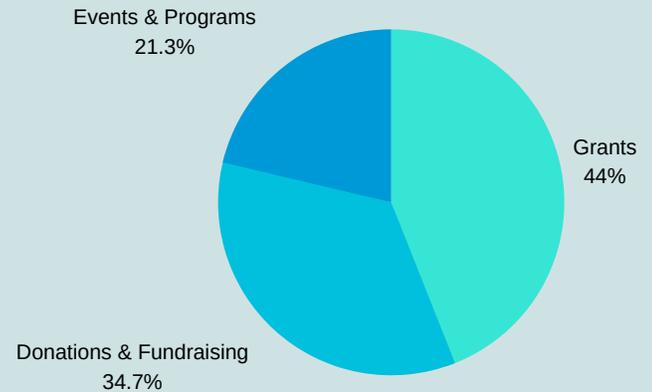
\$250,000+

2019 FINANCIAL RECAP

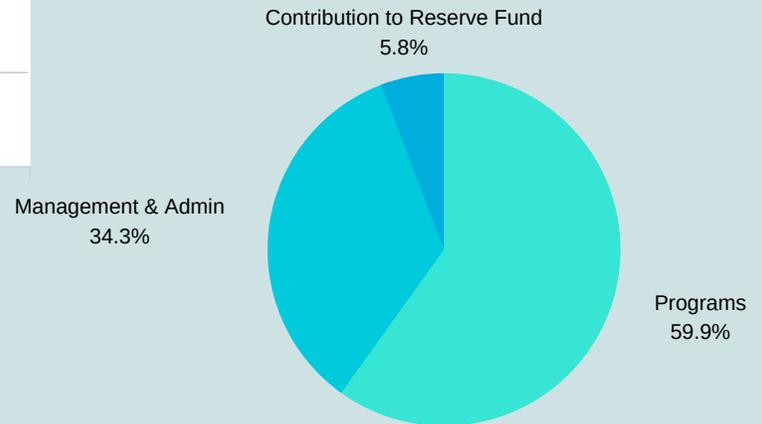
2015-19 YEAR-TO-YEAR FINANCIAL COMPARISON



INCOME - \$161,504



EXPENSES - \$161,504



THANK YOU FOR CONTRIBUTING TO THE #WESTSLOPEBESTSLOPE

2019 WSCC Trailblazers
 2019 WSCC Event Sponsors
 Conservation Lands Foundation
 Resources Legacy Fund
 Colorado Water Conservation Board
 Gunnison Basin Roundtable
 Patagonia
 New Belgium Brewing
 CO Dept. of Public Health & Environment
 High Country Conservation Advocates

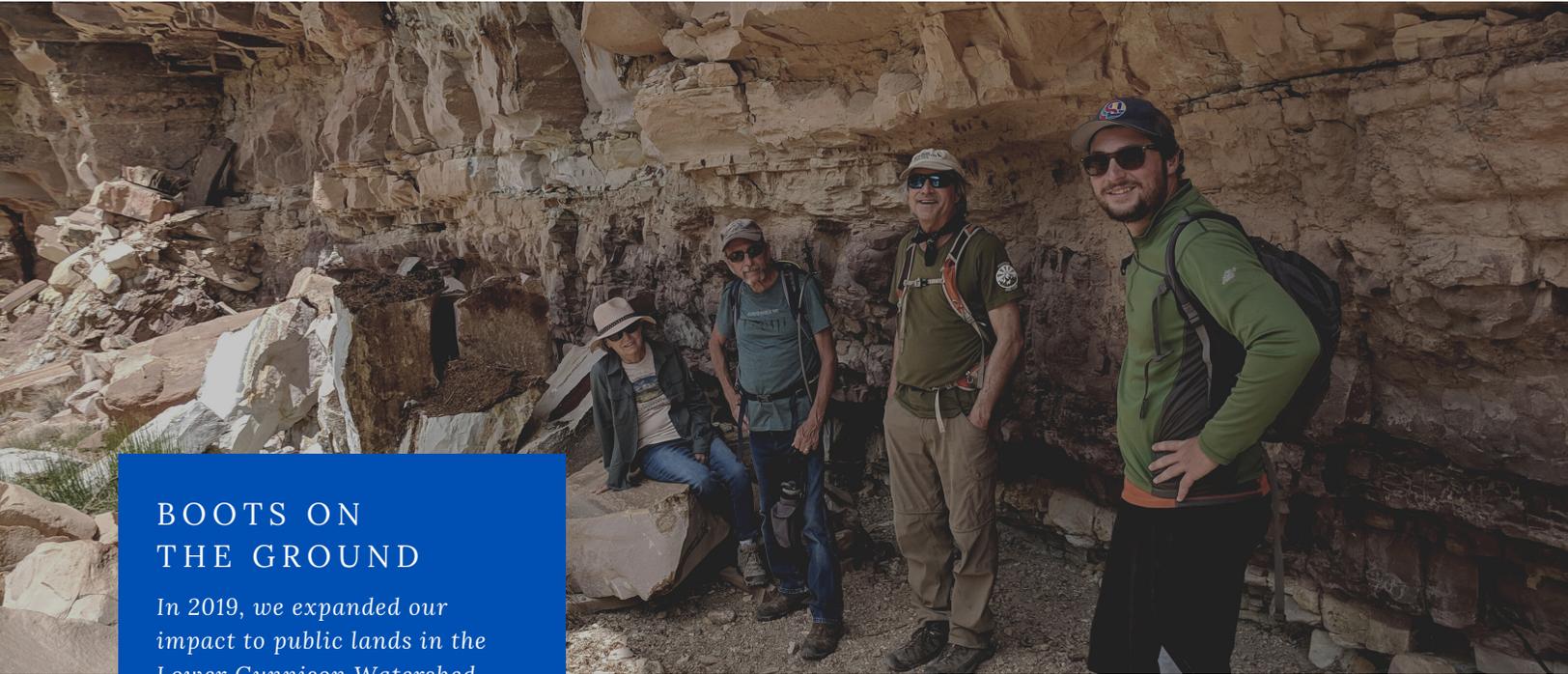
Kampe Family Foundation
 Great Outdoors CO (GOCO)
 The Wilderness Society
 Conservation Legacy
 Friends Grassroots Network
 Roundup Riders of the Rockies
 US Forest Service
 US Bureau of Reclamation
 US Bureau of Land Management
 Moniker Family Foundation

CO Parks & Wildlife
 Telluray Foundation
 Wolcott Family Foundation
 West Elk Community Fund
 Western Conservation Foundation
 Western Slope SUP
 Empowered Energy Systems
 Welfelt Fabrication
 dozens of local businesses
 and our 600+ annual members

2019 HIGHLIGHTS



PUBLIC LANDS PROGRESS



BOOTS ON THE GROUND

In 2019, we expanded our impact to public lands in the Lower Gunnison Watershed through hands-on stewardship.

- 02** USFS trails improved by WSCC volunteers
- 03** Delta County working groups participated in
- 06** Community meetings hosted
- 10** Mike's Hikes coordinated by WSCC volunteers
- 20** Acres of sage grouse habitat restored
- 50** Miles of trail monitored for wilderness characteristics

PROMOTING FEDERAL PROTECTION OF WILD PLACES

RMP Release & GMUG Forest Plan Revision

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and US Forest Service (USFS) are updating their land management plans to guide the use of the public lands on the western slope for decades to come. In June 2019, the BLM released the proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Uncompahgre Field Office. The BLM's proposed RMP fails woefully short of providing the necessary protections to safeguard our natural resources on the western slope. Accordingly, WSCC submitted a formal protest of the plan to the BLM. We anticipate the BLM's response to our protest, along with the final approved plan, in Spring 2020.

Also in June, the USFS unveiled a Working Draft of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest Plan. WSCC, along with our regional conservation partners, organized our community to provide substantive feedback to inform their draft plan. WSCC will continue to advocate for the protection of our incredible natural resources throughout these on-going processes.



ADVOCATING FOR PROTECTED LANDS

Colorado Outdoor Recreation & Economy (CORE) Act

In January 2019, U.S. Senator Michael Bennet and Representative Joe Neguse introduced the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act, a visionary effort to protect Colorado's wild places and outdoor recreation economy. Of particular importance to our watershed, the Thompson Divide portion of the CORE Act would withdraw approximately 200,000 acres of public lands on the Thompson Divide from future mineral development. Key landscapes protected would include portions of the headwaters of the North Fork, Kebler Pass, lands adjacent to the Raggeds and West Elk Wilderness areas, and more. Through the efforts of WSCC with letters of support from the Town of Paonia and dozens of other local governments across the state, and our partners at The Wilderness Society, Wilderness Workshop, Conservation Colorado and more, the CORE Act passed through the House of Representatives in October 2019. Awaiting a Senate hearing of the bill, WSCC will continue to promote this legislation in order to protect the landscapes outside our back door.

"To honor wildlands and wild lives that we may never see, much less understand, is to acknowledge the world does not revolve around us."

- Terry Tempest Williams

TRANSFORMING OUR FUTURE

State Conservation Gains

This year, we have seen the state of Colorado stand up for the environmental values that make our state so unique. In early 2019, Governor Jared Polis signed SB-181 and HB-1261, two bills aimed at transforming oil and gas regulations and climate emissions in Colorado. Furthermore, Governor Polis championed efforts to preserve wildlife habitat and migration corridors, while protecting public safety. WSCC will continue to work with the Colorado General Assembly and Governor Polis to protect and enhance Colorado's iconic landscapes across the western slope.

WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP HIGHLIGHTS



NAVIGATING NEW WATERS

Our Watershed Program is expanding in every direction into 2020.

In 2019, we collaborated with North Delta, Stewart Mesa, and Fruitland Mesa ditch companies to improve over 60 acres of habitat in Delta and Montrose Counties. These projects were completed in partnership with the Bureau of Reclamation's (BOR) Basinwide Salinity Program. When ditch companies get funded through the BOR program to pipe their ditch and thereby reduce salt loads into our rivers, the surrounding ecosystem loses important open riparian habitat which supports wildlife. Replacing this "human created" but vital habitat is an important part of the Basinwide Salinity Program. WSCC planted 1,100 trees and shrubs and improved 60 acres of habitat in areas that sustain the North Fork and Gunnison Rivers.

WSCC's water program extended beyond the rivers and fields, and into the home sector this year. Advocating for innovative water conservation is an important part of what we do. This past October we hosted a full day Greywater workshop & installation with Colorado Greywater's Avery Ellis, and we are looking ahead to supporting a broad array of community water conservation efforts in 2020.

WATER WE UP TO?

Exploring new partnerships to promote sustainable water use in the Lower Gunnison Watershed.

03
RESTORATION
PROJECTS WITH LOCAL
DITCH COMPANIES

05
WORKSHOPS HOSTED

60
ACRES OF HABITAT
IMPROVED

1,100
TREES AND SHRUBS
PLANTED

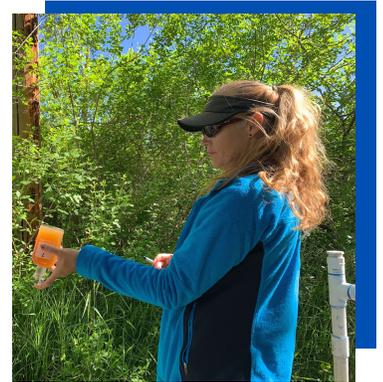


CONNECTING THE COMMUNITY WITH OUR RIVERS

Physically, mentally, and emotionally.

The abundant and much-needed 2019 snowpack brought several challenges to the Paonia River Park last Spring. In April, substantial flooding at the confluence of Minnesota Creek and the North Fork temporarily closed the park. Thanks to our dedicated volunteers and with help from the town of Paonia, we were able to repair the damaged trail, remove flood debris, and re-open the park once flooding subsided. In 2020, we are excited to announce our new two-year project, The North Fork of the Gunnison Community Access Project, which will further local efforts to improve access and recreation safety along the river.

In 2019, River Watch volunteers collected and analyzed samples on 4 occasions from 11 locations across the Lower Gunnison Watershed. Our volunteers collect data on key field parameters that provide valuable information on overall river health. We then send samples to a lab to analyze concentrations of nutrients, inorganics, metals, and more. Now 19 years old, we are proud to host the second longest continually operating River Watch programs in the state. As our program continues to expand, we are relocating to the CSU Organic Agriculture Research Station on Roger's Mesa. Join us in 2020 for our quarterly sampling events; no experience is necessary!



LOOKING AHEAD

Promoting sustainable & safe use of our water resources.

WSCC and the North Fork Water Conservancy District are entering phase two of our North Fork Integrated Water Management Plan. We have received tremendous support for this long-range vision of building on prior river health and irrigation infrastructure assessments to prioritize and plan multi-purpose projects which will meet existing and future irrigation water demands, improve irrigation infrastructure, water use efficiency and reliability while improving environmental and recreational attributes in the North Fork of the Gunnison River.

We will also continue to support local efforts to improve access and recreation safety along the river, which include increasing year-round enjoyment of the Paonia River Park by adding additional shade structures, an outdoor classroom with boulder seating, and replacing the existing Minnesota Creek pedestrian bridge. Additionally, we are working closely with Delta County and Odisea Engineering to complete construction of the boat ramp at the Delta County Fairgrounds in Hotchkiss in early 2020. We look forward to increasing the community's safe enjoyment of our rivers in the near future.



OUTREACH UPDATES



A COMMUNITY PRESENCE

Our events educate, engage, and empower the Western Slope's growing community. This year we challenged ourselves to be a beneficial species.

At our annual Conservation Days, approximately 330 fourth grade students from every Delta County school gain powerful environmental knowledge from regional conservation experts. Taking place at our Paonia River Park, our community's 'outdoor classroom', students learn how to care for the river that sustains us while connecting with the natural world.

For adults who are establishing a mutualistic relationship with the river, we kick off the summer with our Annual River Festival and Float Trip. In 2019, 300+ partiers convened at the Paonia River Park for the celebration of our rivers, while 50 folks braved the roaring North Fork on our annual float led by our friends at Western Slope SUP. We look forward to this event each year to celebrate the rivers of the western slope. Save the date for our 20th annual River Fest this year on June 6-7!

When the water is low and the air cools, we welcome 400 western slope residents and local students inside the Paradise Theatre for two days of Mountainfilm Festival. Our seasonal film festivals remind us why we work to be a beneficial species, to protect wild places, and inspire us to get outside to do it all again in the new year.

WE ARE THE WSCC



COMING IN 2020

Winter/Spring WSCC

Reports from the Field:

Now- April

No Man's Land Film Festival:

March 27

Conservation Days:

May 7-8

Summer WSCC

River Fest: June 6-7

Mike's Hikes

USFS Trail Work Days

USFS Wilderness Monitoring

BLM Land Restoration

Volunteer Appreciation Potluck

Fall

Mountainfilm Festival

Ongoing

River Watch Water Quality
Sampling & Committees

JOIN A COMMITTEE

WSCC is a volunteer-driven organization. The photo above is from this year's Volunteer Appreciation Potluck!

As our staff capacity grows, our volunteer committees serve a constant purpose of bringing the community perspective to the organization and expanding our reach even further. Committee members use their individual skills to promote conservation. We are always looking for new voices to add to our committees, and there's no experience necessary!

PUBLIC LANDS COMMITTEE:

Last Monday monthly

WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE:

Second Thursday monthly

OUTREACH COMMITTEE:

Fourth Wednesday monthly

DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE:

Monthly

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

Nonprofit Org
US Postage Paid
Paonia, CO
Permit No. 33

Website Version

WESTERN SLOPE
CONSERVATION
CENTER



As a result of our work, in 35 years the communities of the Lower Gunnison Watershed will be characterized by intact and functioning ecosystems, clean and abundant water resources, well-managed lands with the highest level of protection that they deserve, and an informed and engaged citizenry who understands the connection between its ecological and social communities.



Become a Member Now!

Name(s) _____

Business Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

Email _____

Send this form to back or join online at:
westernslopeconservation.org
Contact us at: 970-527-5307
info@theconservationcenter.org

Annual Membership/ Donation Level:

- \$100 Sustaining Membership
- \$100 Business Membership
- \$55 Household Membership
- \$35 Basic Membership
- Custom Membership

Please make check payable to Western Slope Conservation Center

- Cash Check Check # _____
- Credit Card

Credit Card # _____

Exp. Date: _____ Security Code: _____

Signature _____