TATER HEAP

WESTERN SLOPE CONSERVATION CENTER
2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Photo Credit: Robin Lewis

Western Slope Conservation Center

Based in the North Fork Valley, the Western Slope Conservation Center builds an informed and engaged community to protect and enhance the lands, air, water and wildlife of the Western Slope.

2022 STAFF

TANYA HENDERSON
Executive Director

JAKE HARTTER
Watershed Program Director

BEN KATZ
Public Lands Program Director

KAREN TARNOW
Outreach VISTA

HEIDI HUDEK
Bookkeeper

MEGAN RANDALL

KATE GRAHAM

JAY SIMON

JULIE SAPENA

2022 BOARD MEMBERS

MIKE BURKLEY
Treasurer

ALLISON ELLIOT
Co-Chair

ALEX JOHNSON
Co-Chair

COBUN ZWEIFEL-KEEGAN

Dear Members,

Last year was a breath of fresh air for WSCC. After two years of COVID holding patterns, we were excited and gratified to be once again able to host Conservation Days and RiverFest. Thank you to all who participated and otherwise made those events possible. And be in touch if you'd like to help with either or both of these events this year, we can always use volunteers! We are also deeply proud of settling our lawsuit against the BLM's Uncompahgre Field Office's 2020 Resource Management Plan. We are looking forward to an amendment process starting in earnest this fall.

It is with very mixed feelings that I must admit, I also need a bit more fresh air and will be stepping away as I know that I cannot provide the leadership that WSCC needs right now. It is a hefty job and I find my time and energy pulled thin by obligations unrelated to the strong conservation work WSCC is doing. The organization needs and deserves an Executive Director who has more to give than I am currently able. This work has never been more important than it is now and I care deeply enough to make space for the next leader at WSCC and the organization's next inspiring chapter. Our board is already deep in the hiring process and should have exciting news to share soon.

I am grateful for the little over two years I've been able to serve with WSCC and looking forward to continuing to serve conservation and our community in a different capacity.

Tanya Henderson, Executive Director

Get involved in our work!

Join the Public Lands or Watershed Committee, become a Mike's Hikes volunteer leader, sign petitions, and more!
Visit www.westernslopeconservation.org/volunteer to find our how you can participate as a volunteer with WSCC today.

YOU MAKE WHAT WE DO POSSIBLE!

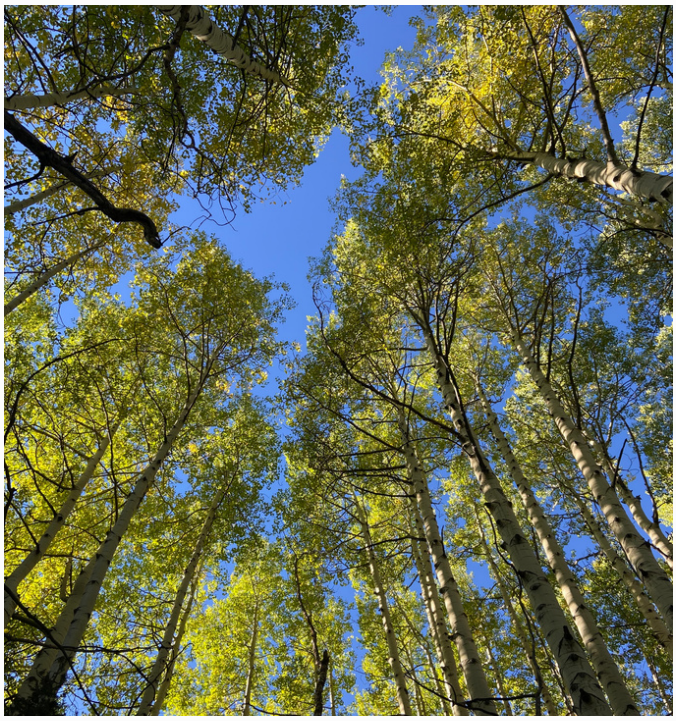
THANK YOU TO OUR 2022 GRANTORS, PROJECT FUNDERS, AND BUSINESS SPONSORS OF OUR 2022 EVENTS

Advocates for the West
Alpine Bank
Aspen Environmental Fund
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Big B's Delicious Orchards
BLM Uncompahgre Field Office
Brin Finnigan Millworks
Bucy Family Fund
Cassandra Shenk Services
Citizens for a Healthy Community
Colorado Canyons Association
Colorado Dept. of Public Health and Environment
Colorado Farm and Food Alliance
Colorado Gives 365 - Community First Foundation
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Colorado River District
Colorado River Watch
Colorado Rural Water Association
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Colorado Wildlands Project
Conservation Colorado
Conservation Lands Foundation
Crane and Associates
CSU Organic Ag. Research Station
Delta Conservation District
Delta County Libraries
Delta County Memorial Hospital
Delta County Schools
Delta County Tourism Board
Dependable Lumber
Desert Weyr
Elderberrys
Empowered Energy Systems
ERO Resources
First Colorado National Bank
Forever Our Rivers Foundation
Four Seasons Investment Advisors
Fruitland Irrigation Company
Fund for Wild Nature
Green Bloom Wellness
High Country Conservation Advocates
High Country News
High Wire Hops
Holder Family Foundation
Ira Housweart Metalworks
Joslyn Creative LLC
Kevin Parks State Farm Insurance Agency
Longmont Community Foundation
Maki Foundation
Mayfly Outdoors
National Forest Foundation
National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance
Needle Rock Ditch Company
New Lands Foundation
North Delta Ditch Company
North Fork Water Conservancy District
North Fork Farmer's Ditch Company
Odesia Engineering
Pittsburgh Foundation Four Corners Fund
Redwood Arms Motel
Rhode Island Foundation
River Restoration
Root and Vine
Round Up Riders of the Rockies
Rub'n Restore
Seek Outside
Solar Energy International
Somerset Domestic Water District
Steady Hand Carpentry
Stewart Ditch Company
Telluray Foundation
The Learning Council
The Nature Connection
The Wilderness Society
Tipi Haven
Town of Paonia
Trout Unlimited/Gunnison Gorge Anglers
US Forest Service Paonia Ranger District
Valley Organic Growers Association
Western Colorado Alliance
WCCF: Dave & Mary Wood Fund
WCCF: Misc. Grants Fund
WCCF: West Elk Community Fund
WCCF:Pass It On Fund
Western Colorado Realty
Western Conservation Foundation
Western Slope Stand Up Paddleboards
Wilderness Workshop
Wisehart Springs Inn
Wolcott Family Foundation
Wright Ingraham Institute
Yoka Design

THANK YOU!

We are so grateful for the community support we received last year.
Local businesses, partners, grantors, volunteers, members and Trailblazers make WSCC's work possible.

A Message From WSCC's Board:



With Tanya's departure from WSCC, it is a good time to reflect on and celebrate the many gifts she is leaving behind. From implementing more organized tracking systems in the office to seeing through perhaps the organization's most detailed strategic plan yet, Tanya was always thinking ahead and thinking of the bigger picture. She engaged 100% in her work at WSCC, often working long hours to achieve the high standards she sets for herself. As anyone that works in the conservation world can confirm, nature advocacy work pays in quiet moments in an aspen grove or along a babbling river, but it is certainly not easy work. Tanya endured, as many executive directors before her have, with the added difficulty of taking on a job during a lockdown and transitioning out of the pandemic. Her commitment and meticulous management will leave the organization in a more secure place that can better weather the changes that can affect small, grassroots nonprofits such as ours.

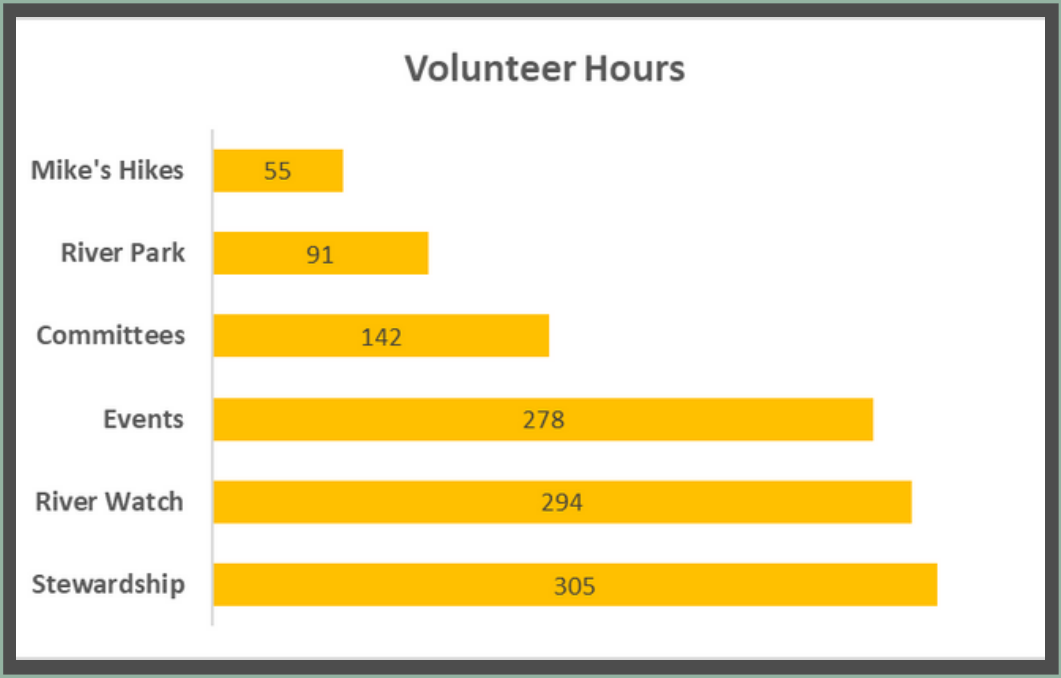
Our board has embarked on the hiring process for our next executive director, who will carry the torch brought by his/ her/ their predecessors. In the interim, the work will be executed by our capable staff, including our program director Ben, who has been assuming more leadership responsibilities during this time of transition. Our adept Americorps VISTA, Karen, will be extending her work into the summer months, and our previous Watershed Director, Jake, is now contracting with us through his new and innovative LLC: Terra Firma Land Stewardship. We also have the support of our dedicated board members, who volunteer countless hours of their time to fulfill various organizational needs. In short, we have a great team to do the work that is ahead of us.

I'm looking forward to 2023. Our 10+ years of advocacy work fighting oil and gas development in our headwaters is coming to a head via the BLM Resource Management Plan amendment process, and we will need all-hands-on-deck from our supporters to continue to hold government agencies accountable to doing what is best for our air, lands, water, and wildlife. We are also reaching a tipping point in our watershed work, where years worth of planning and coalition-building are resulting in exciting new avenues for restoration projects. Rachel Carson once said, "Conservation is a cause that has no end. There is no point at which we say our work is finished." During this time of unprecedented change in a world of finite resources, that cause is important now more than ever. WSCC, meaning all of us: our staff, board, sponsors, membership, and our oh-so essential volunteers, will continue to lead the way.

Megan Randall, Board Member

BY THE NUMBERS 2022

1165 VOLUNTEER HOURS



9
Mike's Hikes

13
Stewardship Days

83
Volunteers

1090
Newsletter Subscribers

3000+
Social Media Followers

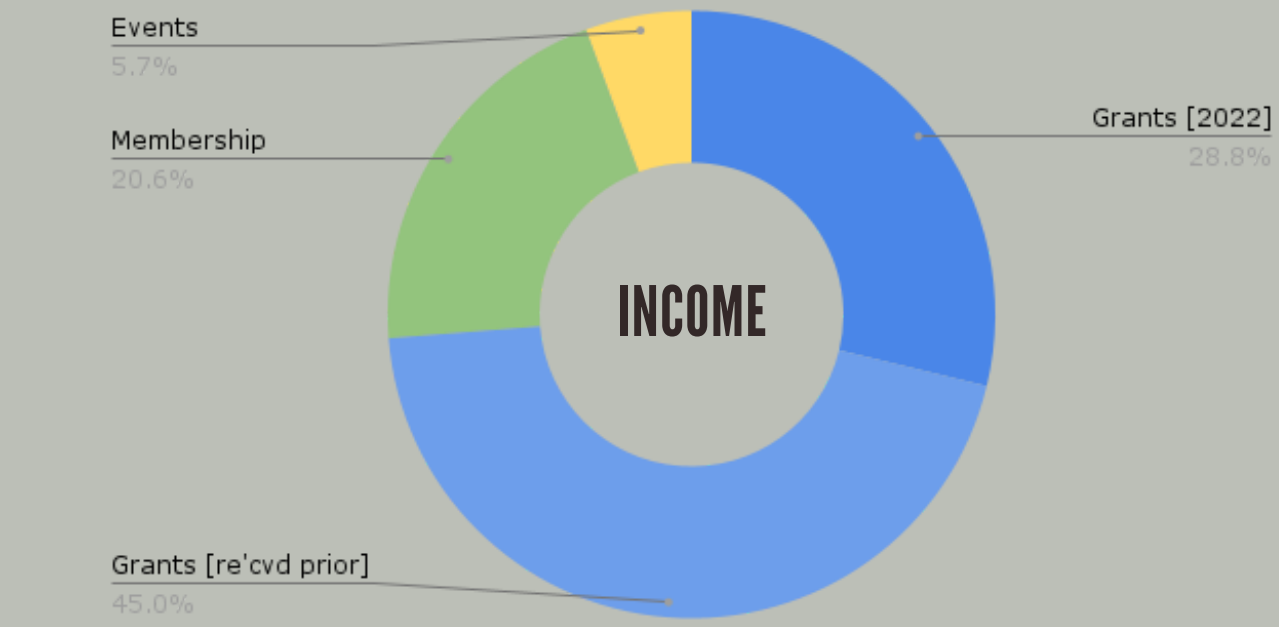
Want to get involved?
Join a hike?
Volunteer?
Stay informed?
Check out our website and sign up for our monthly e-newsletter to keep up on the news and events!

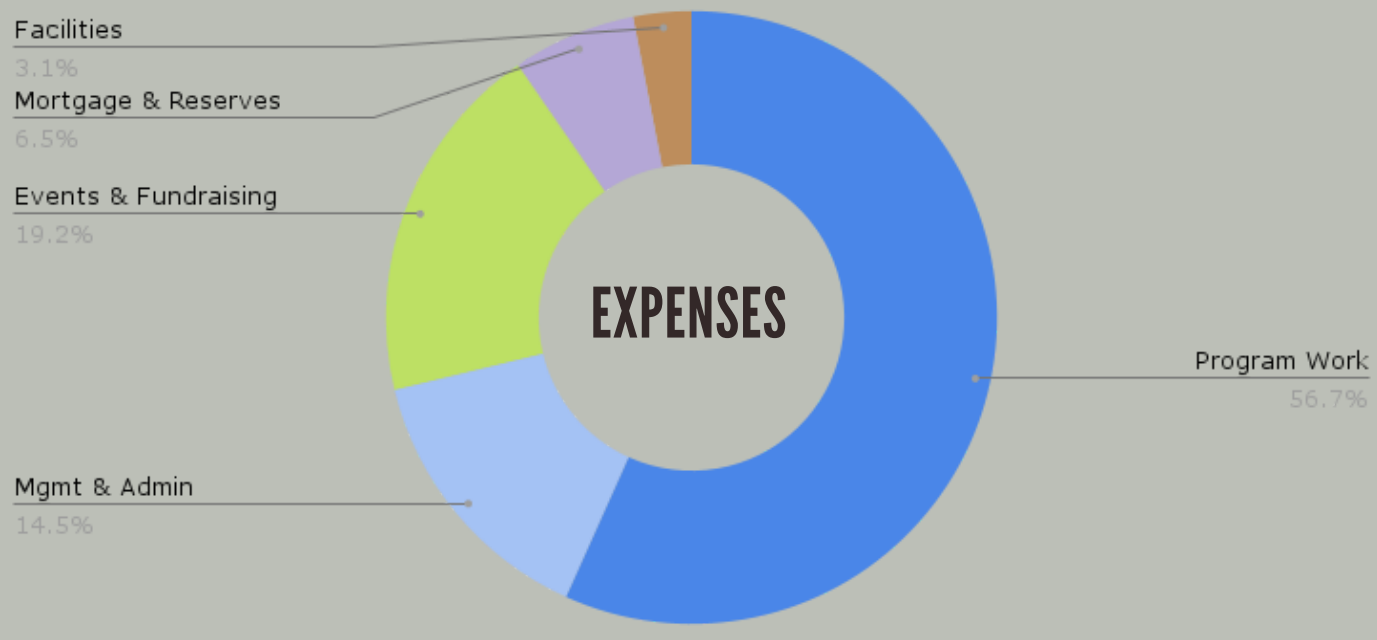
westernslopeconservation.org

2022 FINANCIAL RECAP

WSCC has been very fortunate in the last few years to have had consistent support from our membership and very understanding grantors who allowed extensions for work that was delayed due to COVID. We've continued the work that is at the core of our mission with water quality sampling, advocating for stronger public land protections, and enticing people to experience our open spaces and wild places through our Mike's Hikes, river access points, and continued improvements at the Paonia River Park. In 2022 we were overjoyed to bring back our community events RiverFest and Conservation Days and to be able to represent our mission at other various events throughout the region.

Overall, WSCC is financially stable. We are a small organization that does a lot of work. We are proud of the work we do and grateful for all of you in our membership base. Your contributions, and a number of grantors that we have built long-standing relationships with, are as close as an organization like ours gets to baseline funding. Thank you. If you have further questions, please contact us directly!

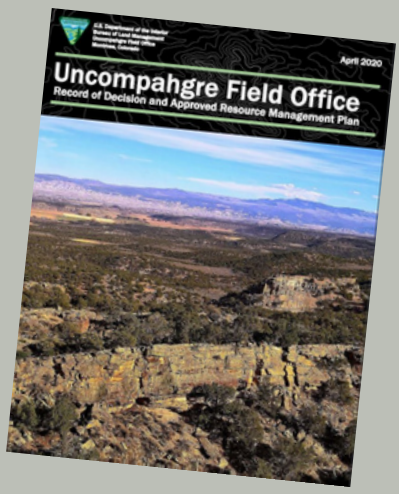




PROTECTING PUBLIC LANDS FOR OUR WATER, WILDLIFE, AND WAY OF LIFE

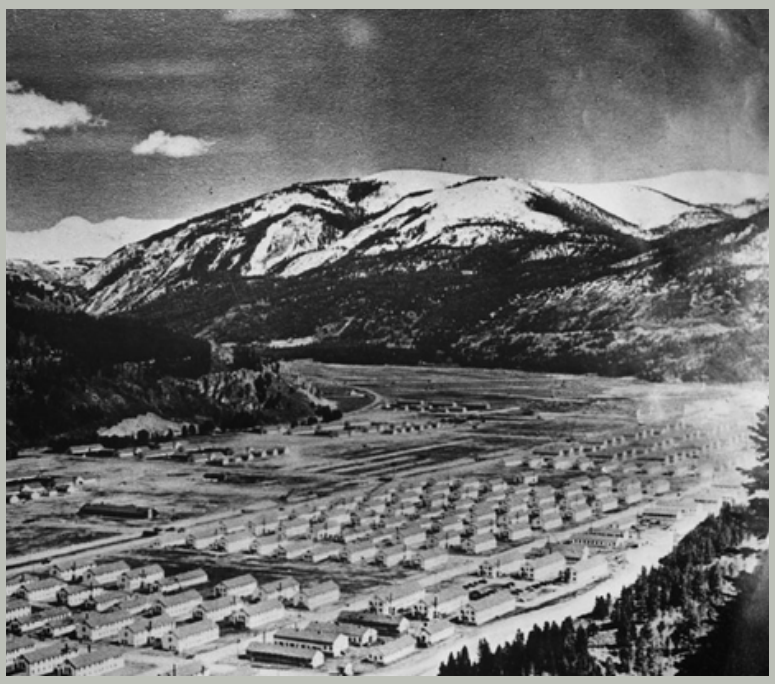
DEFENDING THE NORTH FORK

After more than 10 years of sustained grassroots community advocacy for responsible management of the North Fork of the Gunnison River watershed, signs of tangible results are starting to emerge regarding the Bureau of Land Management's Uncompahgre Resource Management Plan. The incalculable effort that the community invested in giving back, and advocating for a sustainable future for public lands in the plan, is paying off.



WSCC joined partners the Wilderness Society and Wilderness Workshop in successfully litigating the 2020 plan, which opened the entirety of the North Fork watershed to oil and gas development. Our settlement requires the BLM to begin an amendment process to re-examine the Uncompahgre landscape, create new alternatives relating to oil and gas development, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, and ultimately choose a new plan for our community. WSCC will be monitoring the whole process. We are powerful when we unify around a shared vision for protecting our resources, sustaining our livelihoods and securing our future. Join us in our public lands advocacy work in 2023 to ensure that the BLM adopts a plan for our area that accurately reflects our desired future that includes protections for watersheds, wildlife corridors and healthy forests.

REFLECTING ON A NEW NATIONAL MONUMENT IN COLORADO



For years, WSCC has joined forces with a myriad of groups to advocate for Congress to pass the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act. The work that has happened on the ground organizing around this bill led to President Biden establishing the Camp Hale National Monument outside of Leadville, CO.

Following this announcement, the BLM announced a new process to administratively protect the Thompson Divide, nearly 225,000 acres of prime, mostly roadless, wildlife habitat, including a dozen watersheds that provide clean water to domestic and agricultural users in the North Fork Valley. We should certainly allow ourselves to bask in the win regarding a new national monument in Colorado, while also continuing the fight and pushing the US Forest Service to withdraw the Thompson Divide from future oil and gas development.

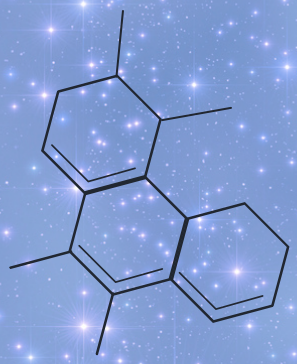
MONITORING OUR ENVIRONMENT

DARK SKIES ACROSS THE WESTERN SLOPE

For almost two years, WSCC has been working with the Bureau of Land Management and Colorado Canyons Association to achieve a Dark Sky Park certification for the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area. While much of this process has been creating the application - which we plan to submit in 2023 - it also included taking night sky measurements within the NCA and leading educational events to teach people about the importance of night skies for people and animals. These activities will continue after certification is achieved; in fact, they are required to maintain certification.

In a study published in Science Advances magazine, it is projected that the Milky Way is hidden from more than one-third of humanity, including 60% of Europeans and nearly 80% of North Americans. Achieving Dark Sky certification will help protect a valuable resource for our communities. Not everyone has the ability to connect to the stars above us. We're proud to be a part of this initiative to teach our community about this valuable resource and work to maintain it for future generations.

TRACKING WATER QUALITY CONDITIONS

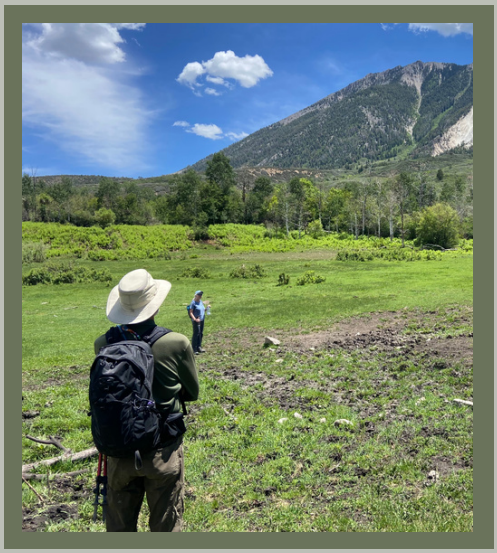


WSCC's River Watch volunteers have been monitoring water quality conditions of the North Fork and tributaries for over 20 years! Regular sampling allows you to understand what "normal" water quality conditions are, and also to recognize when something has changed. This happened in 2018 when WSCC was contacted by Somerset Domestic Water District with concerns about an unusual substance in their raw water supply causing trouble in their domestic water treatment process. Bromide is a naturally occurring compound more often found in intercoastal waters, but was showing up in the raw water intake of Somerset's drinking water system. WSCC responded with several rounds of water sampling over the next few years to try to determine the source. The results showed an intermittent concentration but was inconclusive regarding the source. More study was needed.

In 2021, a group of agencies and organizations came together to make strides towards a solution. A stakeholder group led by the Colorado Rural Water Association developed a Somerset Source Water Protection Plan, which identified bromide as a "very high risk" to community health. Following that, WSCC and SDWD undertook a study in 2022 with the goal of determining where, and how, bromide was entering the watershed and impacting SDWD's water system. The study will soon be completed. It will include a summary of pre-existing and recently collected data, and recommendations for bromide mitigation and future action steps to address the concern.

River Watch volunteers analyzing samples

GETTING OUT ON OUR PUBLIC LANDS AND WATERS



In the midst of advocating for public lands protections, WSCC was also able to get volunteers out on the land, hiking to far flung areas of our area while also doing some good stewardship work. Our Mike's Hike program continued for a fourth year, leading 66 participants a combined total of almost 350 miles! From the beginning of the program in 2018, the WSCC Mike's Hike series has hiked 1,800 miles!

In early 2022, WSCC joined with partners Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and Colorado Parks and Wildlife to host two fence removal projects in and around Paonia. The two projects resulted in two miles of fence being removed, opening up significantly more habitat and migration corridors for mule deer and elk in our valley. WSCC also continued our second season of Trail Ambassadors, who hiked 73 miles in our West Elk and Raggeds Wilderness, monitoring conditions and observing visitor use of the wildlands.

A NEW DELTA COUNTY BOAT RAMP AND HABITAT SITE

Just outside of Delta, CO, is a piece of land along the Gunnison River owned by Delta County, along G50 Road. In May 2022, WSCC and partners Delta County and Colorado West Land Trust began to brainstorm about ways to create an easily accessible boat ramp aimed at serving local communities who would otherwise have a difficult time getting out on the river. This location, just 3.5 miles downstream of Delta's Confluence Park, is ideal for short floats or tubing runs from town. Shorter floats, easy shuttles, calm and flat water with official "put-ins" and "take-outs" provide safe and accessible river recreation opportunities for all ages and backgrounds.

Because the site is in a conservation easement, WSCC worked closely with the CWLT to create a habitat restoration plan that would preserve existing habitat values and improve wildlife habitat. Implementation of this project will engage local youth and adults, including BIPOC and underserved communities, in educational and volunteer programs to provide hands-on learning about wildlife habitat and instill balance between recreation and stewardship. Delta County has already broken ground on this exciting project and we look forward to hosting workshops in the spring to showcase riparian restoration techniques - as well as getting out on the river!

A LOOK AHEAD TO 2023

WSCC expects a big year for public lands on the western slope in 2023. We plan to continue advocating for the Gunnison Outdoor Resource Protection Act, originally introduced by Senator Michael Bennet in 2021. This bill would protect several landscapes in our area, including Mt. Lamborn and Kebler Pass. We plan to see a final Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest plan from the US Forest Service in 2023, which we hope will provide critical protections for wildlife, water resources, and wilderness.

YOU ARE THE WSCC.

We could not do our work without the support of you, our members, partners, and friends. To learn more about WSCC and get involved, visit westernslopeconservation.org.

Western Slope Conservation Center westernslopeconservation.org @westslopecenter

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WESTERNSLOPECONSERVATION.ORG

WEBSITE VERSION

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Join online at
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Questions? Call (970) 527-5307

Become a member:

Name(s): _____

Business Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Annual Membership/Donation Level:

[ ] $120 Sustaining Membership
[ ] $100 Business Membership
[ ] $55 Household Membership
[ ] $35 Basic Membership
[ ] Custom Membership

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