



High School Leadership Corps



June Crew



July Crew



Rocky Mountain Conservancy

Since 1931, Rocky Mountain Conservancy has supported Rocky Mountain National Park and other public land partners through educational programs and philanthropic donations. Early on, the focus of the Conservancy was developing educational materials and publications for visitors to use while in Rocky Mountain National Park. Over the past eighty year, the Conservancy has grown to support its public land partners in a breadth of ways.

Currently, Rocky Mountain Conservancy contains five departments:

- **Retail** – manages nature stores throughout Colorado and Wyoming to provide visitors with educational materials and interpretive products for visitors to learn more about public lands.
- **Publications** – produces nature guides, children’s literature, natural and cultural history books, and more to enrich people’s experience in Rocky Mountain National Park and other public lands.
- **Philanthropy** – connects people to Rocky Mountain National Park and the Conservancy through a membership program and donations supporting RMNP and Conservancy programs.
- **Education** – provides field classes, internships, nature-based activities, and fellowships for people of all ages to further understand and connect with public lands.
- **Conservation** – hosts the High School Leadership Corps, Conservation Corps, and Volunteer Stewardship programs to engage local high school youth, young adults (ages 18-25), and the public (all ages) in conservation work.

High School Leadership Corps Program Outline

The Rocky Mountain Conservancy created the High School Leadership Corps (HSLC) in 2017. The program was established to provide an opportunity for Colorado high school youth to connect with and learn about RMNP, public land management, and natural resource careers. The HSLC serves as a link between the Next Generation Fund’s youth programs teaching audiences age 4-15 about RMNP and the Conservation Corps program offering conservation-based internships to young adult audiences age 18-25. In 2017, the Conservancy hosted one HSLC crew with 10 participants from Colorado’s Front Range. In 2018, the Conservancy added a second crew to the HSLC program. The program is led by two Conservancy staff members.

Program Goals

The Rocky Mountain Conservancy, through the High School Leadership Corps will:

1. Connect new, non-traditional audiences with the outdoors.
2. Develop participant’s understanding of public land and its value.
3. Provide participants with outdoor training, job skills, and career development in the field of natural resources.
4. Expose participants to internship and entry-level positions with the National Park Service (NPS).
5. Promote a more diverse public land workforce that reflects changing demographics

The crews spend twelve days camping in Rocky Mountain National Park. The schedule for the HSLC is:

- Week One (Day 1-4) – Participants develop outdoor leadership skills, learn about RMNP’s ecosystems and history, meet with a variety of NPS staff, and complete half-day conservation projects in RMNP.
- Weekend (Day 5-7) – Participants complete service projects alongside USFS partners and take a rest day.
- Week Two (Day 8-11) – Participants complete full-day service projects with NPS trails staff in Rocky Mountain National Park or USFS partners in the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forests surrounding RMNP.
- Final day (Day 12) – Participants pack up camp, complete reflections, and enjoy a picnic with their families.

The program provides work clothing, camping gear, food, transportation and a living stipend to all members. The program is funded through generous donor support, in-kind gear donations, grant funding, and support from local organizations (Indian Peaks Wilderness Alliance and Poudre Wilderness Volunteers).

June Crew

June 17 - June 28, 2019

Program Summary:

After settling in on Monday, the crew quickly transitioned into their service work. On their first day of on-the-ground conservation work, the crew spent the morning supporting an ongoing restoration project in Rocky Mountain National Park. Over the past few years, the Resource Stewardship division has been conducting restoration work in Moraine Park after a backlogged maintenance project replacing a water line was completed. The water line project disturbed much of the native habitat in Moraine Park making the area susceptible to invasive species growth. To promote native plant regrowth, the vegetation crews worked to mulch, seed, and replant native plants.

To support this project, the High School Leadership Corps began their service work by helping to repurpose the excess mulch brought in for the project. This work required the transport of several truckloads of mulch to "Mulch Mountain," the NPS mulch storage area. By removing the mulch, the crews helped repurpose it for future project. Additionally, removing it from the landscape allows for the areas in Moraine Park previously covered by the mulch to be restored.

Members gained experience using shovels, wakes, and pitchforks, and learned about restoration efforts in RMNP.



Their second day of work brought the crew to the other end of restoration work. Whereas they helped wrap-up a restoration project on their first day, the second day brought them to the prep work before native plants can be restored to a site. This included monitoring and removing invasive plants from a seed plot. This seed plot helps the National Park Service raise native plants in climatic conditions similar to where they will be placed for restoration ensuring they are adapted and resilient plants. During this work, the crews learned how to identify plants and manage invasive species.



During the second half of each of these project days, the June Crew participated in enrichment programming focused on outdoor leadership, environmental education, and career awareness. This included a lesson on the Seven Principles of Leave No Trace along the Fern Lake Trail. The field location allowed participants to begin practicing these principles immediately upon learning them!



Additionally, the crew developed an understanding of their leadership style using a leadership survey and worked through methods for adapting their style to fit diverse situations and groups. Lastly, the crew attended a career tour of the National Park Service, meeting the Chief of Interpretation, Wilderness Rangers, Search and Rescue staff, Law Enforcement Officers, and Wildland Firefighters from the Park. Each NPS staff member discussed their day-to-day work, shared their career pathway, and helped answer any questions from crew members.

After these first couple days of work, the crew has a rest day to explore Rocky Mountain National Park. They travelled over Trail Ridge Road to see the west side of the Park and visit the town of Grand Lake. The day was filled with exploration, education, and lunch in Grand Lake!

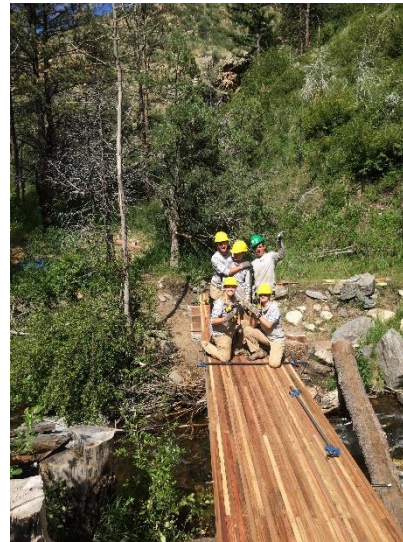
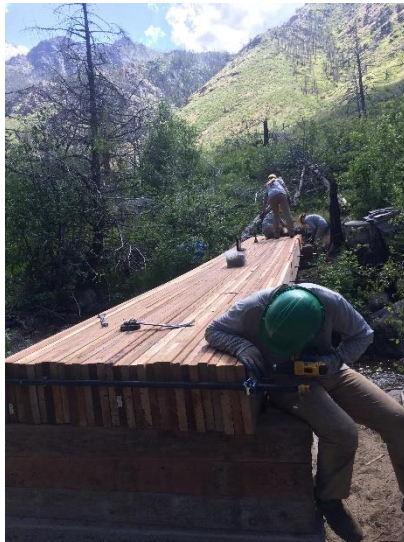
The next few days were challenging for the crew, as Colorado's weather became particularly temperamental. With a snowstorm threatening their workday on Friday, June 21st (the first day of summer), the crew layered up and headed down to the James Peak Wilderness for a project with the U.S. Forest Service. Along the South Boulder Creek Trail, the crew persevered snow, hail, rain, and wind to construct a turnpike through a flooded and muddy section of trail. Over the course of two days (June 21-22), the crew worked to raise the trail using locally sourced rocks, gravel, and mineral soil to establish an elevated trail surface allowing water to drain underneath.



After this project, the crew enjoyed a much-deserved rest day on Sunday. On Monday, they began a week-long project with the Poudre Wilderness Volunteers constructing a bridge on the Young Gulch Trail, west of Fort Collins along the Cache le Poudre River. The Young Gulch Trail was heavily damaged and closed after the High Park Fire in 2012 and the Colorado floods in 2013. Since 2013, the USFS and other conservation organizations, including the Conservancy, have spent thousands of hours rebuilding, rerouting, and restoring sections of trail to reopen it for recreational use. The bridge construction is part of the final phase of the project.

The bridge needed to be rated for stock (horses and mules) use due to the crossings proximity to the Cache le Poudre River. Keeping stock out of the creek mitigates risks of non-point source pollution and erosion, which can come from heavy use. As you might expect, a stock bridge requires substantial structure to ensure it can withstand the impacts and weight of heavy animals. For the first two days of the project, the crew worked to transport materials to the project site (approximately .7 miles up trail).

Once the materials arrived onsite, the crew began assembling the bridge and placing it on the concrete abutments.



Once the crew completed the bridge ahead of schedule, they were able to begin setting the abutments for an additional bridge that was scheduled to be installed later in the summer. This involved framing out a foundation, mixing cement, and setting it. By the end of the week, the crew was proud to show off their work on the bridge and ready to rest!

On the last day of the June Crew's season, the Conservancy invited crew members family and friends to join the crew for a BBQ picnic at the Field Institute. During that time, the crew members had an opportunity to reconnect with their families, introduce their new friends and crew mates, and share stories of their experience on the High School Leadership Corps.

Crew Member Journals

Throughout the season, corps members rotated through serving as “Leader-of-the-Day.” One of the duties in this position was to lead a discussion at the end of each day and provide a journal prompt for every to reflect upon in their journals. Below you will find some of the prompts with a snippet of individual’s responses.

Prompt: Write a haiku or poem about your experience.

“This program has changed me.

It’s brought me close to new people.

This is an unforgettable trip.” – Yasmin (Denver, CO)

Prompt: What is one thing you learned today?

“Something that I learned today is teamwork having someone with you, helping you, and encouraging you to keep going. Today was very tiring. I wanted to give up, but because of my teammates I didn’t. My body was very weak, but in the end I felt accomplished.” – Aracely (Denver, CO)

Prompt: What is one skill you will continue to use after the program?

“This program has taught me so many things. Most importantly, I learned how to open up to new people. I’m really going to miss my new friends. It has been awesome getting to know everyone.” – Will (Louisville, CO)

Prompt: Reflect on your experience?

“I have overall loved my time working in what I think is one of the most beautiful places on earth. Even a task as simple as shoveling mulch goes from tedious to rewarding when you do it for a cause you believe in while taking in the rugged beauty of the Rocky Mountains.” – Carlos (Fort Collins, CO)

“Today is our last day which is sad, but it was an amazing experience. I really enjoyed the time we cooked each night together because it gave us time to bond...We had a good support system from the youth and the adults. We all worked well together which helped me keep up persistence. We made the nights better because we would laugh and learn new stories. Some challenges that I had was the weather during work. It would be too cold or too warm, making it difficult. Also, not being able to shower was difficult...The work itself was rough because it was a lot of things I wasn’t used to. Overall this was an amazing experience that brought me out of my comfort zone with all of the challenges.” – Karina (Denver, CO)

July Crew

July 15 - July 26, 2019

Project Descriptions:

The July Crew began much like the June with a day of orientation and settling in before moving into two half-days of project work with the Vegetation Crew from the Resource Stewardship Division in Rocky Mountain National Park. Their projects included constructing raised beds in the nursery and managing invasive species in Horseshoe Park.

Within the nursery, the crew developed their carpentry skills to cut wood, construct raised beds, and install them to help increase the nursery's capacity to grow native species for restoration projects. By using raised beds in the nursery, the National Park Service helps mitigate risk of invasive species growth and native plant loss due to insects or rodents. With an increased focus on backlogged maintenance and sustained high visitation, it will be more important than ever for the nursery to be full of native plant species ready for restoration projects in impacted or disturbed areas.



In addition to their work in the greenhouse, the crew worked in Horseshoe Park to mechanically remove Musk Thistle and Houndstongue. These two invasive species have impacted natural ecosystems in Rocky Mountain National Park by outcompeting native plants and impacting wildlife habitat. Both species produce hundreds of seeds per plant. Therefore, it is critical to remove the plants by cutting the root and removing flowering parts before they go to seed. While the crew was out managing these invasive plants, they also had the opportunity to identify and enjoy the beauty of Rocky Mountain National Park's native wildflowers, including the Mariposa Lily and Paintbrush.



In addition to their first two-days of service projects, the crew also participated in enrichment activities paralleling the June Crew (see page 4).

After the crew spent a day visiting Grand Lake and exploring Rocky Mountain National Park, they returned to work. This time, they were working at Brainard Lake with the Indian Peaks Wilderness Alliance and US Forest Service helping construct a reroute on the heavily trafficked Mitchell/Blue Lake Trail. The crew spent two days working on this project to help move the trail out of the flood plain and into a more sustainable location away from the river. This will help prevent unnecessary impacts to the riparian areas, including trampling of vegetation and compromising water quality due to erosion and nonpoint source pollution. The project included a Volunteer Stewardship Day for members of the local communities to join in and support this valuable conservation work.



The July Crew spent Sunday resting before beginning a week-long project with Rocky Mountain National Park trail crews on the Cub Lake Trail. This project focused on managing the impacts caused by high use on this popular trail. The crew was able to warm up each morning with a 1.5-mile walk to the project location from their campsite in Moraine Park Campground. The project focused on decommissioning social trails, maintaining trail corridor, and improving trail structures. With this the crew helped remove vegetation encroaching onto the trail, cover up and shut down braided sections of trail, construct check steps, and repair a washed-out culvert crossing. They gained valuable skills working as a team to move large rocks, using technical trail tools, and the principles of trail construction and restoration.



Just as the HSLC June Crew wrapped up with an end-of-season picnic, so too did the HSLC July Crew. On the final day of the program, crew members packed up the campsite, turned in their gear, and completed evaluations and reflections before their friends and families arrived. During the BBQ picnic, the crew reconnected with their families, shared stories, and introduced their crew members as new friends.

Corps Members Testimonies:

Throughout the season, corps members rotated through serving as “Leader-of-the-Day.” One of the duties in this position was to lead a discussion at the end of each day and provide a journal prompt for every to reflect upon in their journals. Below you will find some of the prompts with a snippet of individual’s responses.

Prompt: What was your favorite service project and why?

“I like the service project that I did today. Working on building new steps was actually really fun and I’ll get to come back and take people to it and say I helped build that. Same with making brand new trail last week.” – Rachel (Lakewood, CO)

“My favorite day was definitely today. We worked at the Cub Lake Trail. Me and some others working on adding stairs to the trail. I found it very fulfilling and productive work. It was really cool to think about how many people are gonna walk on these steps and how helpful the steps are for many people” – Aveena (Erie, CO)

Prompt: How can public lands better connect with your generation?

“Programs like RMC are a good way to reach out to youth by engaging them with hands-on experience. Programs like this one do stick with kids and they are bound to talk about their experience, gaining the interest of others.” – Lupita (Denver, CO)

“Some kind of affordable-comprehensive Youth Parks Pass! Get everyone outside!” – Mia (Fort Collins, CO)

“I think if the park found more ways to hold community events, more awareness would be spread, and more people would get involved.” – Peyton (Arvada, CO)

A **SPECIAL THANKS** to those that made this program possible, including:

RMNP License Plate Donors
National Park Foundation
Rocky Mountain National Park - Volunteer Office
Rocky Mountain National Park – Resource Stewardship Division
Rocky Mountain National Park – Trail Crew
Rocky Mountain National Park – Moraine Park Campground Staff
USFS Boulder Ranger District – Recreation Program
Indian Peaks Wilderness Alliance
USFS Canyon Lakes Ranger District – Recreation Program
Poudre Wilderness Volunteers