



# QUARTERLY

Autumn | 2021



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### LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*Wildfires? Check. Pandemic? Check. And still — nothing can keep a good organization down.*

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*Hey! You might  
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*It's been an uphill climb, but  
our donors keep pushing  
us forward*

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## Celebrating 90 Years of Support for Rocky

by Walter Borneman,  
Conservancy Board Member

Rocky Mountain National Park is one of Colorado's premiere wilderness areas and, undeniably, its most popular tourist destination. For 90 years, the Rocky Mountain Conservancy has been the major nonprofit partner of the National Park Service protecting this extraordinary place.

In 1931, the park's first chief naturalist, Dorr Yeager, led the effort along with Joe Mills, younger brother of Enos Mills, to establish what was then called the Rocky Mountain Nature Association (RMNA), to educate visitors about protecting the park's resources. From the start, the Nature Association mission to publish informational brochures was the ticket: here was the perfect way to reach the people visiting Rocky Mountain National Park. The nonprofit concept also provided an expedited venue outside of government processes that was less restrictive. First up: learn about the geology of the park through this informative booklet! Next: explore early Native Americans of the area in this handy brochure! Thus began the story of the Rocky Mountain Nature Association.

From its beginning, the RMNA was modeled after the Colorado Mountain Club (CMC), a friend-generating hiking club that had been operating since 1912. Some of the same people involved with the CMC were also instrumental in the development of the Nature Association's bylaws and business strategies, so it's not surprising that they also brought with them the concept of a friend-raising organization. The idea of reaching out to people through publishing was a valuable asset and expanded the efforts of the park staff considerably. Eventually, this effort would lead to so much more.

Sales of the booklets and brochures started small — the Moraine Park Museum was the first sales area established in the park in the 1930s. Other RMNA stores were built into later visitor center designs as the park developed its infrastructure. In 1962, to help the park expand its educational reach, the RMNA launched a unique program of educational field seminars, bringing in local authorities to teach weeklong natural history classes in

*This year was  
a wonderfully  
productive sort of  
chaos.*



## A Message from our Executive Director



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Dear Friends,

Here we are again, at the end of another year – but where did 2021 go? We are happy to report, however, that unlike last year’s season of horrific fires and on-going crisis management, this year was a wonderfully productive sort of chaos; a re-centering of the organization’s work into strategic priorities, increased support for our public lands partners, and record-breaking energy and accomplishments from our Conservation Corps.

The Conservancy’s fall board meeting in early October set our funding priorities for 2022, which resulted in an exciting and ambitious slate of critical work to support the landscapes, historic structures, trails, visitors and critters in Rocky Mountain National Park. We are planning on hosting our largest cohort of Conservation Corps crews in 2022: nine college-aged crews in the park and surrounding forest, as well as resuming our High School Leadership Corps. Our pilot 2021 Wildland Fire Corps was a splendid success, and the park has asked us to double the program next year to expand the pipeline of future wildland firefighting staff while accomplishing meaningful fire mitigation in the park.

In 2022, we will also begin funding numerous critical research projects related to the fire recovery projects in the park. With Conservancy support, the park will respond to severe wood frog declines connected to the East Troublesome Fire as an add-on to the continuing multi-year boreal toad re-introduction projects. Additionally, they will be studying food-web recovery in more than 26 streams in the park, particularly related to trout populations and health. Be sure to join us at the 2022 Park Research Conference in Estes Park to learn more about this work!

After years of educational consultations with Native tribes, the Conservancy will be supporting the park’s efforts to develop new or improved exhibits in all the park visitor centers, including information and stories that are significant to the tribes so as to better understand the unique relationships they have with these important places.

Thank you for all you have done for the Conservancy and our public lands this year, either as a member, a donor, or a volunteer. This work was only possible with your strong support for these places that we all love dearly. As the last of the aspen leaves fall from the trees, we have much to look forward to in the coming year together, and I’m ever grateful for your partnership in stewarding these wild lands.

Warmly,



*Estee Rivera Murdock*

Estee Rivera Murdock

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





Quarterly Editor Nancy Wilson attempts to unearth answers to any questions asked by Conservancy members and park visitors. If you are curious about something in or about the park, email [nancy.wilson@rmconservancy.org](mailto:nancy.wilson@rmconservancy.org) or write: Nancy Wilson, Rocky Mountain Conservancy, PO Box 3100, Estes Park, CO 80517.

## Shop Conservancy Nature Stores

For ALL Your RMNP Memorabilia

### Rocky has a very nice museum storage facility, but what is being archived inside it? Are these objects ever displayed for the public?

The Rocky Mountain National Park museum and archives storage facility is home to geology, mammal, insect, and botanical specimens, collected by park staff and permitted researchers since the 1920s. In addition there are archeological objects, historic photographs and objects, and federal records generated by park staff in the accomplishment of park resources management. Museum programs store most objects in storage facilities. This collection is housed in climate-controlled rooms that protect all the objects in perpetuity. During the period 2018 – 2021 the museum collections have been photographed (about 70% complete to date). This helps with inventory, accountability, condition assessment and access. During 2020 – 2021 collections slowed, allowing for some key elements of the archival documents to be scanned for staff and researcher access. Traditionally artworks were displayed throughout the park in visitor centers during summer months, rotating by park theme, such as “Wilderness, Wildlife and Wonder.” Holzwarth Historic Site is home to the largest number of museum objects on exhibit. Objects can help tell the story that setting, buildings and Interpreters tell. During Covid times park staff and partners have been planning for exhibit upgrades at some of the visitor centers. It’s good for the objects and specimens to return to collections to be cleaned, conserved, and rested from uneven heat and cold, dust, and light exposure. Museum staff hope to get information online soon. — *RMNP Museum Curator Kelly Cahill*

### What signs of climate change are being seen in Rocky Mountain National Park? Is there currently any research being conducted about its effects in the park?

Several weather/climate stations located in and around the Rocky Mountain National Park collect a variety of climate data and have observed temperatures rising during the past several decades, changes to precipitation and snow timing and volume, and earlier spring runoff. Understanding any effects of changing climate on park resources has been an emphasis for research in recent years. Studies looking at changes to ptarmigan populations due to more variability in annual snow, warming of streams and lakes to understand any impacts to fish populations, warming temperature effects on pika, and changes to ranges and elevations of mammals and forest tree species are just a few studies conducted. While many of these studies are looking at the potential impacts of climate change its not all doom in gloom today. While glaciers are retreating globally in response to warming atmospheric temperatures. In recent decades, RMNP’s glaciers have been less impacted, likely due to their high-elevation shaded locations and the abundant accumulation they receive from wind-blown snow and avalanches. While today glaciers are stable, continued monitoring is needed since predicted atmospheric warming through the end of the century will lead to pronounced decreases in seasonal snow and the likely demise of glaciers. — *Director, Continental Divide Research and Learning Center, Scott Esser*



#### ROCKY MAP BULB ORNAMENT

This golden holiday orb will illuminate whatever it decorates – featuring a detailed map of Rocky, too! Lightweight, gilded,

3.5” in diameter.

Price: \$16.95; **Member Price: \$14.41**



#### RMNP XPLORER MAP FLEECE BLANKET

What better way to cozy up than with this soft and fluffy fleece map of Rocky! Made of 50% Berber fleece and

50% microfiber fleece. Dimensions: 58” x 50”.

Machine washable in below 85 degree water

— do not tumble dry or iron. Price: \$36.99;

**Member Price: \$31.44**



#### RMNP XPLORER MAP MUG

This colorful and generously sized ceramic mug designed with a colorful map of Rocky is sure to become a favorite.

Price: \$18.99;

**Member Price: \$16.14**

#### AMERICA’S NATIONAL PARKS

FROM LONELY PLANET KIDS

From Acadia’s seaside cliffs and coves to Zion’s enchanting red valleys, take a journey through the United States’ most spectacular and exciting landscapes with awesome facts, photos and illustrations on every page.

America’s national parks are bursting with gasp-worthy wonders — let your kids explore! Hardcover; 255 pages.

Price: \$22.95; **Member Price: \$19.50**



**More memorabilia at  
RMConservancy.org or  
Call 970-586-0121 to order.**

*The Beaver Meadows Entrance Station on a Friday morning in June of this year.*



by  
Noah Creany and  
Christopher Monz  
Utah State University

## Rocky Mountain Transportation and Visitor Use Study: Initial Findings

*Utah State University, in partnership with Rocky Mountain National Park and the Rocky Mountain Conservancy, is studying the effects of the pilot reservation system on patterns of vehicle use and various aspects of the visitor experience in the park.*

*Female smooth flower crab spider hiding in a thistle, waiting for food to come to her.*

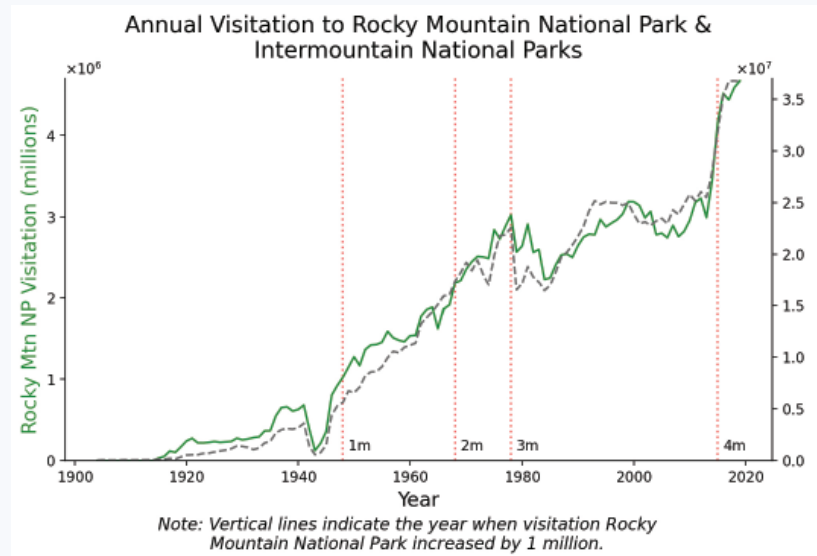


Rocky Mountain National Park draws visitors from across the United States and around the world for its iconic views of mountain peaks, scenic alpine lakes, and charismatic Rocky Mountain wildlife. Millions of visitors come to the park each year, some of them returning year after year and sharing the grandeur of the park with children and grandchildren. However, one thing most visitors don't expect out of their park experience is city-like traffic congestion and damage to park resources.

For most of the last 40 years, Rocky Mountain National Park has hosted approximately 3 million visitors each year. Between 2014 and 2015, visitation increased by nearly 750,000 and surpassed 4 million in 2019. This corresponded with an increase in visits to national parks across the

Intermountain West. Between 2014 and 2019, parking lots along the Bear Lake corridor of Rocky Mountain National Park were full before noon, and visitors hoping to visit this area of the park at peak times were redirected and asked to return later in the day. The physical limits of Rocky's infrastructure, such as parking lots, trails and restrooms, had been reached and exceeded at times, which resulted in concerns of increased level of visitor impact and a diminished quality of the visitors' experiences.

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, visitation to Rocky dropped to 3.3 million visitors in 2020, but the park also introduced a pilot Timed-Entry Permit System (TEPS) for visitors to make a reservation, like they would with a popular restaurant, prior to visiting. The TEPS







*"Huffer's Hill" is a popular visitor hike from the Alpine Visitor Center.*

system allowed the park to spread use throughout the day and throughout the park to balance the millions of visitors with park infrastructure and to mitigate impact on park resources while simultaneously maximizing the quality of their experience. The TEPS system reinforces the first principle of Leave-No-Trace ethics for sustainable outdoor recreation "Plan Ahead and Prepare."

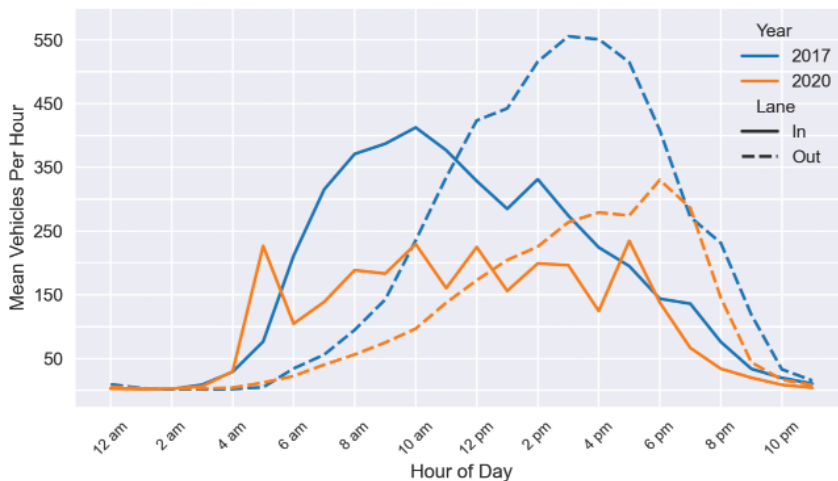
When the visitors plan ahead for their experience, it also minimizes the burden on emergency response teams, and helps protect the park's resources for future generations to enjoy. The visitor reservation system also enables the park to maintain conditions that will ensure a safer, high-quality visitor experience. For example, below is a figure summarizing vehicle entrances at Beaver Meadows Entrance Station, one of the most popular entrances to the park. With the TEPS system (2020; orange line) arrivals and departures are distributed more consistently throughout the day, which leads to shorter wait times at the

entrance station, and greater availability of parking spaces. It also reduces the need for closures of popular areas of the park like the Bear Lake Road Corridor.

Utah State University, in partnership with Rocky Mountain National Park and the Rocky Mountain Conservancy, is studying the effects of the pilot TEPS system on patterns of vehicle use and various aspects of the visitor experience. During the fall of 2021, researchers will be conducting surveys to understand from the visitor's perspective whether TEPS improves the traffic congestion, ecological and recreation resource conditions, and opportunities to enjoy outdoor recreation in the park.

Taken together, this study will help inform the sustainable management of the millions of visitors to Rocky Mountain National Park, which ultimately will ensure that future visitors and generations to come can more likely experience our incredible public lands, its alpine grandeur, as well as some amazing recreational opportunities.

**Beaver Meadows Entrance  
Hourly Vehicles: 2017 vs 2020**



## Support the Conservancy on Colorado Gives Day, December 7, 2021

On Tuesday, December 7, your donation to the Rocky Mountain Conservancy through [coloradogives.org](http://coloradogives.org) gets an extra boost thanks to help from the \$1 Million+ Incentive Fund from Community First Foundation and FirstBank. This is a great opportunity to stretch your dollars a little further to leverage your gift AND help us meet our goal of \$100,000 to support Rocky.

### Pre-Schedule Your Donation

Colorado Gives Day is powered by [ColoradoGives.org](http://ColoradoGives.org), a year-round website which allows you to schedule your donation at any time before December 7. While your gift will not be processed until December 7, you can conveniently pledge and schedule your donation early with a credit card.

### Your Dollars Matched!

Thanks to Community First Foundation and FirstBank, Colorado Gives Day features a \$1 Million Incentive Fund, one of the largest gives-day incentive funds in the country. Every donation on Colorado Gives Day receives a portion of the Incentive Fund, which increases the value of your gift to the Rocky Mountain Conservancy.

Pre-schedule your gift today at [coloradogives.org](http://coloradogives.org) and search for the Rocky Mountain Conservancy

Classic pika terrain  
is found at Andrew's  
Tarn in Glacier Gorge.



by  
2021 Hilary Rinsland,  
Justine Fidel Bailey  
Research Fellow

## 2021 Bailey Research Fellow Hilary Rinsland Running With Pikas in RMNP

*Each year the Rocky Mountain Conservancy funds a research fellowship opportunity for one graduate level student to spend three to four months conducting research in Rocky Mountain National Park.*

*The Rocky Mountain Research Fellowship is an endowed program funded by the Leslie Fidel Bailey Charitable Trust. It is designed to encourage highly qualified graduate students to apply their talents to conducting research in the national parks.*

*Collecting "haypiles" for their winter sustenance is what a pika does.*



When the words "climate change" are spoken, many different images come to mind. Some people think of rising global temperatures, wildfires, inclement weather, or drought. I inevitably think of the American pika.

American pikas (*Ochotona princeps*) are adorable alpine tundra critters. They are small, grey, and tan, with round ears, and most closely resemble a very fluffy potato. Pikas are cold-adapted rabbit-like animals (NOT rodents!) whose ancestors migrated to North America from Asia. They now primarily live in high-elevation rock patches called talus, which are spread across the mountain ranges of the American West. If you've hiked through Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) during the summer or stopped at Rock Cut, you have most likely seen pikas scurrying about, collecting grasses and flowers to cache in mounds referred to as hay piles. Even if you didn't see them on your trip through the park, you probably heard their characteristic, squeaky toy "EEEE!" call from the rocks around you. Their presence is just one of the many things that make Rocky's alpine tundra such a unique environment.

How are climate change and pikas related? In simple terms, they are related to temperature change and habitat loss. Pikas rely heavily on the cooler temperatures, talus and snowpack of alpine environments for survival, and pikas have relatively high metabolic rates, which makes them heat sensitive. They are so sensitive that if they are

exposed to 74°F for more than two hours, they can overheat and die. Because of this, during the summer, pikas need cooler temperatures at high elevations to protect them. But they also need the talus. If it gets too hot on a sunny afternoon, pikas can cool off by crawling under the rocks where the temperature can be 20 – 30°F lower than at the surface. This is also where they stash their hay piles, which give them a source of food during the long, cold winter. Pikas do not hibernate but spend their winters deep in this rocky environment protected from the cold by the insulation provided by the snowpack. As you can imagine, these three vital components cannot be found just anywhere.

Unfortunately, because of climate change, existing patches of pika habitat are being degraded in parts of the country. Models based on past extirpations (local extinctions) of pikas in the Great Basin predicted that heat stress and cold stress, and especially the loss of snowpack, were the most likely drivers. Though the American pika conservation status overall is still designated as "least concern," there are five subspecies that are genetically and geographically distinct and likely to be affected differently by global temperature increase. Some, like those in Grand Teton National Park, are expected to maintain enough habitat to survive as the climate continues to warm. However, in Rocky Mountain National Park, the distribution and connectivity of suitable pika habitats are expected to decrease





*Bailey Research Fellow Hilary Rinsland in her element among the high country talus.*

enough over the coming decades to cause local extirpations by the year 2100. This is especially true in the southern-most area, which is occupied by subspecies *O. princeps princeps* that has a much smaller geographic range than the more northerly distributed subspecies (*O. princeps saxatilis*) that is also found in the park.

During the summer I spent as the Bailey Research Fellow with the Rocky Mountain Conservancy in Rocky, I conducted fieldwork to investigate elevational occupancy differences between the two subspecies in RMNP. My goal was to determine if there are distinct ecological features of the subspecies that could support a change in the conservation status of the southern subspecies.

The Colorado River is considered the boundary between the southern pikas and their northern cousins. Working with Dr. Chris Ray and Airy Gonzalez Peralta from the University of Colorado, Boulder, I designed a randomized study to survey thirty sites of potentially suitable pika habitat for both subspecies over three elevational gradients. These sites were distributed evenly throughout the park, to obtain the best representation of RMNP pika occupancy possible. I used the survey protocol defined by the Colorado Pika Project (CPP), an ongoing research program that trains volunteers to perform Citizen Science-based monitoring of pika occupancy throughout the mountains of Colorado. This allowed all of my collected data to be seamlessly integrated into that long-term project.

On July 5, I hit the trails to begin my study. During the five weeks that I spent surveying, I hiked more than 300 miles and surveyed 36 sites for pikas. Some days, I was able to easily survey several sites full of pikas. On other days, I hiked five miles into the alpine tundra and got just within striking distance of the survey site, only to

be chased back down the mountain by one of our frequent afternoon thunderstorms. The highest survey site on Mount Ida took me three attempts to reach due to weather. But then I got there! I had to leave my home base of McGraw Ranch at 3 A.M. to make it happen, but I got there! That morning, I was rewarded with a beautiful sunrise drive on Trail Ridge Road and a curious pika that came and hung out with me for the entire 30 – 45 minutes it took to complete the CPP survey. I even saw the elusive Mount Ida band of bighorn sheep on the way down the mountain. These efforts paid off with a trove of new data on pika populations in RMNP.

While in Colorado with this fellowship opportunity, I was able to make connections with many pika-loving researchers, volunteers and visitors. Most of the time I was on the trails alone, but the days that I spent hiking with others were my favorite. On those days, I was able to share my excitement when, after a long and grueling hike, the talus patch would come into view and we would hear the distinctive “EEP!” of a nearby pika. No one could do anything but smile. My fluorescent researcher vest prompted many conversations with visitors about pikas, climate change, and habitat loss. I was asked thought-provoking questions and was frequently reminded of why I was moved to study pikas. These encounters were a blessing, especially after so many months of isolation due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

I am now back at sea level, at Northern Michigan University in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, where I am beginning my master’s program in biology and starting to analyze the data that I collected throughout the summer. Before I left Rocky, I was able to survey all of the southern subspecies sites targeted in my research plan but ran out of time to survey



the rest of the northern sites. It turns out that RMNP is actually a pretty large park! Luckily, Allie Chipman, a CPP intern, graciously volunteered to finish surveying those northern sites for me, and because of her exceptional efforts, we now have a full data set for analysis. I look forward to finding out if there is evidence to support the hypothesis that the southern pikas are currently undergoing significantly different range change than the northern species in the Rocky Mountains, and I can’t wait to share my results with the Conservancy, the CPP, and all of my fellow pika lovers out there.



# Rocky Mountain Conservancy Park Puzzler

## Across

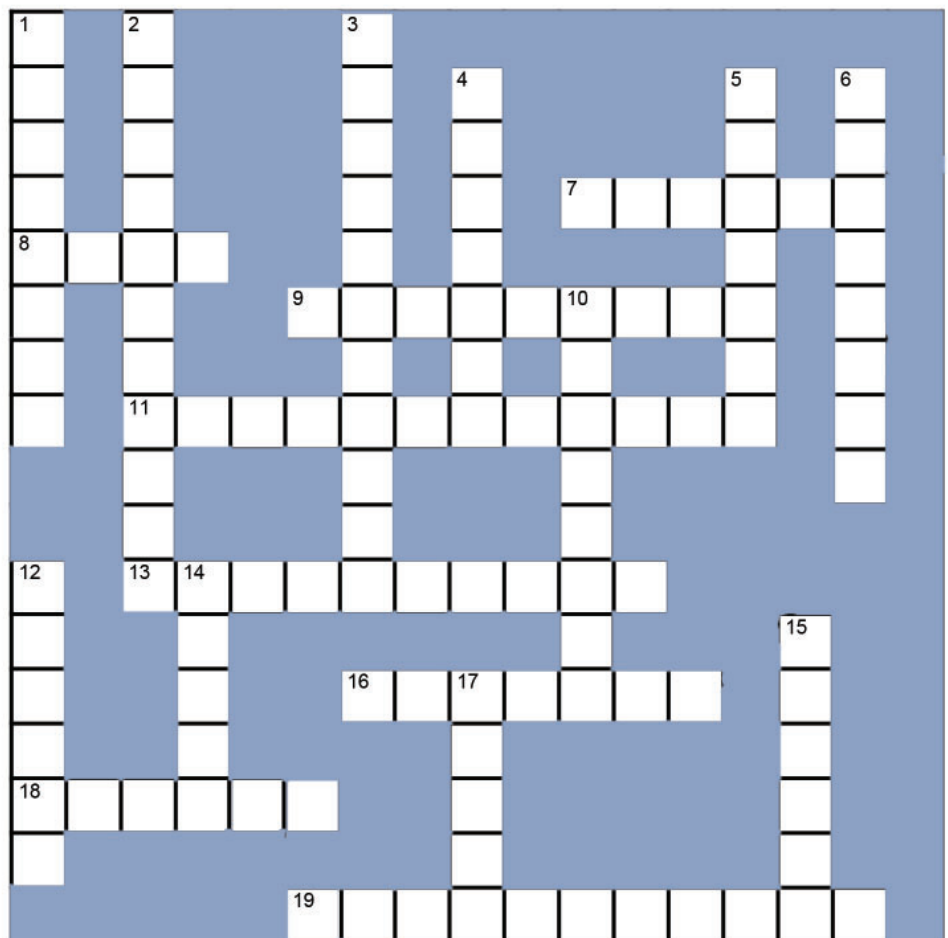
- 7.** With the launch of a new campaign celebrating the \_\_\_\_\_ in 2021, the park focused on fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of a unique ecosystem.
- 8.** This year, the Conservancy hosted the first RMC – Fire Conservation Corps, which provided a working crew for on-the-ground mitigation and prevention in the park.
- 9.** Fungi break down organic matter by releasing enzymes that help dead trees and other plant life \_\_\_\_\_, after which they absorb the nutrients in the decaying material.
- 11.** Another pigment present in plants called \_\_\_\_\_ makes the red color in some aspen leaves, and makes apples and cherries red.
- 13.** The Conservancy invited American University student Cody Allen Rogers to photograph Rocky this summer as a volunteer photo \_\_\_\_\_.
- 16.** \_\_\_\_\_ produce acids that breaks down rocks by the excretion of various organic acids, particularly oxalic acid, which can dissolve minerals.
- 18.** Long, slender mounds of earth called \_\_\_\_\_ are revealed after snowmelt, and are made by the underground tunneling of northern pocket gophers.
- 19.** The different hums, buzzes, trills, etc., made by different \_\_\_\_\_ species and sexes is primarily the result of differences in the shapes and stiffness of their wing feathers.

## Down

- 1.** The Continental Divide runs north – south through the park, and marks a climatic division, as well as a point of diversion for \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2.** In the autumn, bears enter a

- phase of constant eating known as \_\_\_\_\_ during which they are eating more than 20,000 calories every day in preparation for winter hibernation.
- 3.** The reduction of chlorophyll in plants in the fall allows the \_\_\_\_\_ pigments to shine, making aspen leaves turn a yellow or orange color, just as it makes corn and carrots yellow and orange.
- 4.** The first publication produced by the Rocky Mountain Nature Association was a booklet about the \_\_\_\_\_ of the park.
- 5.** Chickarees, a.k.a. red squirrels or pine squirrels, form mounds of pinecone pieces called \_\_\_\_\_ on the forest floor as they tear apart the cones to find the nutritious seeds.

- 6.** Cold water temperatures and lack of spawning habitat prevent native trout populations from thriving in many of the higher elevation lakes in Rocky.
- 12.** Mountain goats can carry \_\_\_\_\_ disease, which is readily transmitted to bighorn sheep herds, and which is why the park does not welcome this itinerant species.
- 15.** The first RMNP chief park naturalist was Dorr \_\_\_\_\_. He established the nonprofit Rocky Mountain Nature Association (now the Conservancy) in 1931.
- 17.** \_\_\_\_\_ Lake is a stunning high country lake found at the foot of Longs Peak that is fed by snowmelt from the surrounding slopes.







The Boulder Crew in the Rawah Wilderness

# An Epic Year for the Rocky Mountain Conservancy Corps

by Ian Stafford,  
Conservancy  
Stewardship Director



This summer was a summer of opportunity, growth, and good old-fashioned life experience for the select group of 41 individuals from 20+ states who made up the 2021 Rocky Mountain Conservancy – Conservation Corps (RMC-CC). Split into seven different crews, Corps members took part in a wide variety of projects across six different counties, two different land agencies, and on tasks focused around trail development, wildfire mitigation, erosion control, stair building, recreational access, and just about anything else one could do with a shovel, pulaski or mcleod — a type of hoe/rake tool.

Each year, the RMC-CC program faces new and unprecedented challenges, and 2021 was no exception. After COVID-19 caused the previous year’s Conservation Corps to be reduced by half of its typical capacity, this year witnessed a return of the program that was completely in-person and COVID – free throughout the summer. Overall, these crews worked on more than 40 trail sections in Rocky Mountain National Park and surrounding U.S. Forest Service land. By the season’s end, we were able to provide invaluable work experience

to everyone in the program and inspire many to further pursue careers in the conservation sector.

As crews were hard at work in Rocky and in select Forest Service areas in some of Colorado’s most legendary landscapes, we were proud to introduce the first Conservancy Wildfire Crew. After the terrible wildfires of 2020, the primary RMC-CC program adjusted its program to focus the seven crews on burn-impacted zones: reconstructing trail, installing trail drainages and building rock walls. The new fire crew, however, partnered with Rocky Mountain National Park’s wildfire team. This group of four members worked, and eventually became certified, in wildland fire fighting and chainsaw use. Said one 21-year-old fire crew member, “I learned an incredible series of lessons about leadership, accountability, and ownership that I’ll carry with me forever.”

This program thrives with the commitment and determination of each of the Conservation Corps members. The work that they accomplish is as impressive as it is vital, and we hope you’ll join us in saying “thank you” for the invaluable efforts of these amazing young people.

As the summer came to a close, nostalgia and the awareness of personal development rose to the forefront for every Corps member.

*“This whole season has been life-changing for me and I am extremely thankful for all the people who worked with me this summer...each of them had a positive impact on my life and made me laugh harder than I ever have.” — Crew Member, Pennsylvania*

*“My favorite memory from the season is when we worked on the Blue Lake trail, and it ended up being the main reason it was reopened after the Cameron Peak Fire.” — Crew Leader, Florida*

*“Though the going was a little rough at times (mosquitoes, scraped by trees, steep ascension, wet socks), the sense of accomplishment, serenity, and togetherness of being on that ridge with my crew members, who were now some of my closest friends, was unparalleled.” — Crew Member, California*



The Moraine Park crew in Rocky

**Support the  
Conservation Corps  
program by donating  
to the Rocky Mountain  
Conservancy at  
[RMConservancy.org](https://RMConservancy.org),  
or call 970-586-0108**

## Celebrating 90 Years

*Continued from page 1*

educational field seminars, bringing in local authorities to teach weeklong natural history classes in the park. The renowned authority of tundra ecology, Dr. Bettie Willard, brought expertise and credibility to the program. And in 1985, the RMNA began fundraising for significant park projects through the affiliated Rocky Mountain National Park Associates. Ultimately, the two organizations recombined as the Rocky Mountain Conservancy in 2014.

Over the course of its 90-year history, a core strength of the organization has been its retail operations, which support the myriad philanthropic and educational efforts of the organization. All the visitor centers in the park host retail areas, and the Conservancy also partners with other public lands agencies, like the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service, in Colorado and Wyoming with site-specific retail sales to support their educational goals. Today, the Rocky Mountain Conservancy operates six retail outlets in visitor centers in Rocky Mountain National Park, and 17 more at Forest Service locations throughout Colorado and Wyoming, and at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument.

Since 1962, however, it's the educational programs through the Field Institute that have embodied the partnership with Rocky by providing in-depth natural history learning opportunities to the public — a mission that harkens back to the very origins of the organization. "The National Park Service's most important mission is to protect the resource," said Estee Rivera Murdock, the Conservancy's current executive director. "The education programs we provide in conjunction with our Park Service partners may well be the most



*Nurturing young people through the park's Junior Ranger Program is one of the cornerstone programs of the Rocky Mountain Conservancy.*

important thing that we do because we are encouraging new generations to be good stewards of our lands and environment."

Today, Field Institute programming, much of which is made possible through the Conservancy's Next Generation Fund (a donor-funded program which was established to support park and Conservancy educational activities), is being reinvigorated and expanded following the COVID interruption for rollout soon. Also funded through the Next Generation Fund is the park's Junior Ranger program, which continues to delight and inspire children each summer. And, of special note, the Conservancy continues to fund the park newspaper that Dorr Yeager first edited in 1931.

Among the Rocky Mountain Conservancy's many successful programs is its Conservation Corps, initiated in 2004 to introduce college-age youth to the park through a work program. This puts them in the field, building and maintaining trails, and working alongside park staff to stabilize historic buildings, and getting a close-up, intimate park experience — garnering an unrivaled tutelage that is intended to nurture the next generation of park stewards.

In 2021 alone, six trail crews totaling 41 members worked in the park and on adjacent national forests, clearing downed timber and repairing damage from the recent fires. Recently, a high school crew was added to this program.

Over the years, Conservation Corps crews have worked at the Boulderfield, Glacier Gorge, Lake Haiyaha, Onahu Creek, and the Loch-Sky Pond area, as well as with accessible trails built around Lily Lake and Sprague Lake. The program also now partners with adjacent Forest Service areas to expand the scope of projects available to the crews. At the end of the day, the most significant result of this program, above and beyond the impressive amount of work that is accomplished, is that many Conservation Corps members return to become crew leaders in subsequent years, after which they often take their acquired skills to careers in outdoor-related endeavors. This program is made possible by the many donors that support this kind of experiential education.

Beginning in 1985, the Conservancy added fundraising for special projects to its list of park-supported programs, and again the Conservancy is strongly backed by its donors. Since its inception, more than \$33



million has been raised for more than 50 significant projects in Rocky Mountain National Park. Some of the Conservancy's major successes include land acquisitions to protect perimeter locations and inholdings, such as the area around Lily Lake, the Cascade Cottages property on Fall River, and ranch properties in the Kawuneeche Valley on the park's west side. Historic structure restoration and stabilization efforts include the Holzwarth Ranch and the Shadow Mountain Fire Lookout on the west side of the park.

On the east side of the park, the Wigwam Tea Room on the Wind River Trail, the William Allen White cabin above Moraine Park, and park headquarters building are just the tip of the iceberg. And an innovative effort in 2000 resulted in the partnering of the Conservancy and Rocky Mountain Gateway and a private trust to design and build a uniquely beautiful park visitor center at the Fall River Entrance.

The Conservancy also has funded the development of many exhibits for park visitor centers over the years, including Moraine Park, Fall River,

and Kawuneeche. Most recently, the Conservancy is supporting new exhibits at the Kawuneeche Visitor Center that will help to interpret the 2020 fires.

All of these special projects in the park have been made possible through the support of thousands of Conservancy donors and members over the years. These are true "Friends of the Park," people that truly grasp the significance of investing in Rocky's future. "After 90 years, the good news is that as an organization we are well-positioned to continue to support the long-term viability of Rocky Mountain National Park," noted Brian Ross, current president of the Conservancy's board of directors. "As visitation increases, more people need to learn how to take care of this precious resource. There always will be a role for the Conservancy – and we need our members and donors now more than ever," commented Ross.

We invite those willing to support the Rocky Mountain Conservancy in its continuing mission by becoming members or donors to its programs at [RMConservancy.org](http://RMConservancy.org).



*Supporting the park's Heart of the Rockies educational programs helps the park extend its reach into distant schools.*

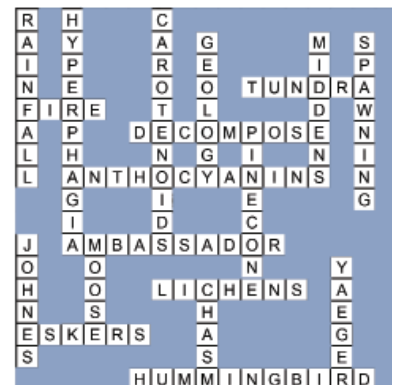


*Land protection, exemplified by the Miller Tract on the park's west side, has been a strength of the organization since 1985.*



*The Conservancy's recent Cascade Cottages campaign protected 40 acres in Horseshoe Park from potential development.*

## Park Puzzler Solution



*The Rocky Mountain Conservancy expresses special thanks to the following people for their donations supporting Rocky Mountain National Park: August 13, 2021 – September 26, 2021*

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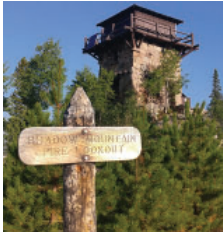
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To make a gift to support Rocky Mountain National Park, visit [RMConservancy.org](http://RMConservancy.org), or call 970-586-0108

# YOU can make a difference in Rocky Mountain National Park!



## ✓ Best Use

Help the park where support is needed the most. Selecting this option for your donation allows the Rocky Mountain Conservancy flexibility to respond quickly when new or urgent needs arise in the park, including trail restoration, youth education, land protection and historical preservation.



## ✓ Next Generation Fund

The Next Gen Fund is all about using your support to connect youth with nature. Your gift provides meaningful learning experiences for kids, such as the Junior Ranger Program, park internships and much more.



## ✓ Trail Improvement Fund

Rocky's beloved trails are always in need of repair and maintenance. With your support in 2022, we will continue the next phase of work on the Longs Peak Trail, and continue to rebuild other popular trails in the park.



## ✓ Conservancy Conservation Corps

Next year, we plan to expand the Conservation Corps program to 56 young stewards in the park and surrounding national forests. Additionally, the new Fire Corps will double in size, focusing on preventing future unwanted fire spread in dense, dry forests within the park.



## ✓ Wildfire Recovery & Healthy Forests

Your gift to this fund supports wildfire recovery from the devastating East Troublesome and Cameron Peak fires, as well as strategies to prevent future fire spread in the park.



## ✓ Wildlife Conservation Fund

Next year, we have several wildlife-focused projects planned, including important research and reintroduction efforts to ensure ecological integrity in the wake of last year's fires.

## Your contributions at work

### Conservation Corps Snapshot



*Each summer, young adults from all walks of life spend ten weeks living and breathing public lands stewardship. Here's a snapshot from the Boulder Crew:*

*"I learned that it is never too late to try something new," noted Kat, when reflecting on her season.*

*Similarly, Kat's fellow crew member Gracie remarked, "The greatest lesson I learned this summer is that confidence should outweigh fear."*

*Those two sentiments go hand-in-hand as Corps members tackled new and daunting challenges in daily life. From hiking countless miles and carrying tools and heavy backpacks, to using crosscut saws and chainsaws, working outside the comfort zone was the norm. Yet, with teamwork, they all grew in capacity as their comfort zones increased.*



# Make a gift to support the park



Please give a gift to Rocky using the handy envelope attached.

Dear Friends,

In many ways, this year has been one of recovery at Rocky Mountain National Park. Last year, the relentless East Troublesome and Cameron Peak wildfires devastated big swaths of pristine forests in Rocky, burning approximately 30,000 acres inside the park. Answering a call for help, the Conservancy created the **Wildfire Restoration and Healthy Forests Fund** and helped to seed the recovery effort, as well as develop strategies to prevent future widespread devastation in the park.

In addition to wildfire recovery, with donor support, the Conservancy continued to fund improvements to the Longs Peak trail to guide new generations of hikers through its pristine tundra. In all, this year, the Conservancy helped to rehabilitate 41 different trails in Rocky, including many of those damaged in last year's wildfires. Your support made great things happen in 2021! Here are a few highlights:

- Nearly \$1.6 million spent this year in support of Rocky, including visitor center improvements, trail improvements, wildlife conservation and much more
- Installed 30 new bear-proof food lockers in the park to protect bears and visitors
- \$382,000 spent on wildfire recovery and prevention, including the launch of Youth Fire Corps

**NOW we need your support more than ever.** Looking ahead to next year, and with your help, the Conservancy is planning several initiatives to protect and conserve Rocky. Here are a few:

- Expanding the youth Conservation Corps to 56 crew members
- Funding critical and time-sensitive research to determine the impact of wildfires on plant and animal life to help restore ecological integrity in the park
- Doubling the number of Fire Corps crew members to help reduce forest fire fuels
- Funding next steps toward restoring the historic Shadow Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
- A third season of trail improvements on the Longs Peak Trail and in burn-impacted areas of the park

With your help, the Conservancy stands ready to seize opportunities for land protection, stewardship of beloved park trails, and the protection of valued park resources so they may be enjoyed for years to come.

With gratitude,

*Estee Rivera Murdock*  
Estee Rivera Murdock  
Executive Director

**YES!**

I want to make a difference in Rocky Mountain National Park with a donation to the Rocky Mountain Conservancy!

\$5,000    \$1,000    \$500    \$250    \$100    \$50    Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I want my gift to support the following project in 2022:

- Best Use    Next Generation Fund    Wildlife Conservation  
 Trail Improvement    Conservation Corps    Wildfire Recovery and Healthy Forests Fund

Credit Card    Check enclosed (*Payable to Rocky Mountain Conservancy*)

Visa    Mastercard    Discover    American Express

Card # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Rocky Mountain Conservancy

Estee Rivera Murdock, executive director  
Nancy Wilson, *Quarterly* editor  
PO Box 3100  
Estes Park, CO 80517  
(970) 586-0108

*The last hurrah ...*

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## Nature Notes


**The portends of winter are lurking in the high country: sparring elk in the valley, Old Fall River Road closed for the season, swirling winds of a more relentless caliber, and park seasonal staff gone with the winds**

• RMNP Interpreter **Kathy Brazelton's** son **Micah** and his buddy watched a black bear make a run at a flock of turkeys on Prospect Mountain in Estes Park — but it caught only feathers • In early September, RMNP Facilities Manager **Danny Basch** spotted a healthy bobcat loping through the grass near his home in Estes Park. He looked behind it and saw the young buck deer that was chasing him! Apparently, the buck was protecting a spotted fawn that showed itself just a few seconds later • **Danny** also enjoyed watching the silhouettes of two great-horned owls hooting against a darkening sky at a nearby pond • Conservancy Member/Donor Services Associate **Madison Abbott** woke up one morning in early September to what she thought was rain but looked outside and saw instead a huge herd of about 80 elk stampeding through her yard in Estes Park. They had been frightened by something, but she was in awe to see, feel (her place was actually shaking), and hear this unique phenomenon • At another point, Madison was driving down Highway 36 in early September when she observed a raven drive a red-tailed hawk out of the tree in which it was perched. The raven continued to chase the hawk for a little while to really get its point across • Madison also witnessed a bull elk charge

a Suburban vehicle when the driver apparently thought it was a good idea to drive between the bull and his harem — silly human • As reported by Conservancy Member **Marlene Borneman**, one mid-September morning in Estes Park, she and her husband, Conservancy Board Member **Walt Borneman**, heard something making big noise out in their garage, and when they narrowed the noise down to their vehicle, they lifted the hood and out popped a marmot. They had been at the Dunraven Trailhead the day before and assumed that it climbed in while it was parked. Colorado Parks and Wildlife would not make a house call for a marmot, and since pest-control had never heard of a marmot, Marlene borrowed a live trap from the neighbors — they'd seen marmots in their yard during the previous two summers, so it's possible the marmot was a local. When she returned with the trap, the marmot was out of the car and eating on the side of road, running around like a healthy marmot • RMNP Woodcrafter **Cory Johnson** was hiking through an area in the Cameron Peak fire scar on the North Boundary Trail in early September, and he was delighted to see that already there are areas that have 3' aspen shoots, and the wild rose and huckleberry plants were regenerating nicely • Also on this backcountry trip, a herd of seven regal-looking bighorn sheep rams took an interest in the group at the campsite, but didn't seem to be stressed out. They also observed a family of ptarmigan — a mom and five nearly grown chicks — pass about 5' in front of them on their way to sip



*This marmot was taking advantage of its situation — hunkered down in an engine compartment is definitely one way to stay warm...*

 Marlene Borneman

water from a melting snowfield • Conservancy Development Assistant **Victoria Johnson** and her her husband, Cory, were climbing a route on the Upper Great Wall on Twin Sisters when Cory said, “Look! A bald eagle!” Victoria looked down to see a bald eagle soaring below her, and then noticed a juvenile bald eagle being chased by ravens above Cory. They also spotted an ouzel swimming like a duck in Dream Lake the same weekend • **Brace yourselves for the coming of winter, but don't forget about the public lands near you to enjoy the seasonal changes in your neck of the woods!**