



Rocky Mountain Conservancy

CONSERVATION CORPS

2022 High School Leadership Corps





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. Over ninety years, 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.
- **Stewardship** – 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

The Rocky Mountain Conservancy hosted two sessions of our High School Leadership Corps in 2022. This unique program provided incoming or current high school students (under the age of 18) with an immersive experience in Rocky Mountain National Park. Students participated in hands-on service-learning projects, professional development opportunities, and interactive educational programming. In total, 10 participants in two different sessions each spent 11 days in Rocky Mountain National Park and advanced their understanding of the natural world while making friends, having fun outdoors, learning about careers, and developing their small group leadership styles.

- **Environmental Stewardship**
 - Participants developed an understanding of natural systems and an awareness of public land agencies by completing service work and participating in educational programs. Service work included trail maintenance, habitat restoration, fire management and mitigation, and historic preservation.
- **Personal and Team Leadership**
 - Youth practiced valuable leadership skills related to communication, teamwork and group management through in-classroom workshops and field-based skills training sessions.
- **Outdoor Skills**
 - Students became competent in the skills required to comfortably travel and camp in the outdoors through experiential learning opportunities while camping and engaging in programming focused on backcountry skills.

The High School Leadership Corps (HSLC) is an immersive 11-day camping experience in Rocky Mountain National Park. During the program, youth complete service projects, participate in a variety of professional and career trainings, and camp in the backcountry. The experience culminates with a picnic, and youth are invited to reflect on their experience with their families and Conservancy staff. Participants receive a \$400 stipend upon successful completion of the program. Additionally, the Rocky Mountain Conservancy provides housing (camping), work clothing, and gear for the experience. In 2022, there were two HSLC crews... Here they are!

June 20th-30th Crew





Name: Bernadette Moreno

Hometown: Denver, Colorado

School: North Denver High School Junior

Testimonial/ Quote: “This program taught me that leadership comes in many forms and not just one. It is okay to ask for help! Working on trails showed me that working together and relying on each other was able to keep us safe and get the job done.”



Name: Eve Weklser

Hometown: Boulder, Colorado

School: Boulder High School Sophomore

Testimonial: “I learned that leadership is not always obvious and is a part of a complex group dynamic that must be figured out over time. Leadership is about adaptation, and that sometimes involves stepping back and opening the floor to someone else.”



Name: Fiona Schreiber

Hometown: Boulder, Colorado

School: Boulder High School Sophomore

Testimonial/Quote: “I have realized that leadership is not about being the “boss” of a group, but about being the “base”. Moving forward, I will continue to develop my skills as a “base” leader, allowing others to find support and helpful information from my skills. Being a leader isn’t about dictatorship, it’s about friendly, helpful guidance. This is what I will take away from this program.”



Name: Jesse Holtsnider

Hometown: Lafayette, Colorado

School: Centaurus High School Sophomore

Career Goals:

Testimonial/Quote: “I practiced prioritizing progress over a perfect plan. I had opportunities to lead while being able to know when I need to step down and be an active follower, supporting someone who has a better handle on the situation.”

June Crew Highlights

The crew arrived in Estes Park on Monday morning with excitement truly radiating from their faces. It was a brilliant sunny day with a slight breeze; things were off to a great start! Day 1 was an adjustment day. The crew set up camp in Rocky Mountain National Park's Moraine Park Campground, discussing what factors to think about when selecting a campsite. After some teambuilding games, an overview of the week's schedule, and a hike around the Big Thompson River valley, the crew cooked a hot dinner and settled in for the night.

Day 2 was skills training and education. The crew practiced several different knots, discussed the importance of Leave No Trace ethics, and how humans can have positive interactions with their environment. Then the crew went on a behind-the-scenes tour of the National Park Service (NPS) headquarters and discussed with Park professionals the dozens of career opportunities within the NPS.

Day 3 began Phase Two of the session: Service Projects. The High School Leadership Corps spent the day working alongside the NPS Vegetation Department. Hundreds of native plants were planted in the nursery for future seed collection and reintroduction to the natural environment of Rocky National Park.



Day 4 was spent with the NPS Fire Crew, who begin each day with a physical training workout of running, pushups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, and more. After PT, the crew sat down for the daily weather report, where they were surprised at how closely firefighters pay attention to weather forecasts. Later, both NPS and HSLC Crews ventured into the forest, where the large group worked on fuels mitigation. They learned that, essentially, wildfires need three things to happen: heat, air, and fuel. Firefighters can't really prevent the heat and air needed for a fire to start, but they can control the amount of fuel a potential fire can burn. Removal of this fuel is called "fuels mitigation" and is very helpful to both the health of natural areas, and the safety of the people who give care to them.



Days 5, 6, and 7 were spent outside of the National Park. The crew worked on US Forest Service land with a nonprofit called the Poudre Wilderness Volunteers (PWV). Folks learned the differences between federal and nonprofit agencies and set to work on some trail building. Using tools like pick-mattocks, Pulaski, rock bars, and Mcleods, the crew moved dozens of boulders to build rock steps along 2-mile-long Lily Mountain trail in southern Estes Park. This was hard work, but it sure was rewarding as the crew took ownership and honor in building a safe, sustainable trail that would last for thousands of hikers in the decades to come.



Day 8 was restful. The crew slept in, took showers, did laundry, journaled, and joined a resume building session at the Estes Park Library. This began Phase Three of the program: Personal Development and Reflection. Through the resume workshop, the crew learned about the specific formatting required for federal jobs on USAJobs.com. This helped prepare them for future jobs and career opportunities.

Day 9 was a field trip to the less-visited West Side of Rocky Mountain National Park, over the famous (and high alpine) Trail Ridge Road. At over 12,000 feet elevation, Trail Ridge Road is the highest paved road in North America. After stopping at numerous pull-offs and viewpoints, the crew headed down to Holzwarth historic site, to learn about fly fishing, ecology, and the history of human occupation in (from indigenous tribes to 1800s homesteaders) in Rocky Mountain National Park.



Day 10 was a long day hike around Bear Lake, Fern Lake, Odessa Lake, and the plenty of hills and valleys along the way. After a week and half of hiking, working, and living in the sunshine and heat, the crew deserved a pizza party. Good times and merriment were had by all, and the session ended on a happy note with movie night in the RMC Field Institute.

The final day 11 was packing up camp, organizing all materials for the next session, and setting up the end-of-session picnic! Parents and family members were invited to eat food, hang out, and share stories of the adventures of the last two weeks. Everyone headed home with full hearts and happy smiles.





July 18th-28th Crew





Name: Blessing Ngalame

Hometown: Denver, Colorado

School: First Year Student at Regis Jesuit High School

Testimonial/Quote: “The HSLC program taught me that leaders bring people of different strengths together and that, by working together where each person contributes their own leadership skills, the team can accomplish many things. Carrying heavy boulders on the trail showed me this. Without our individual contributions, we wouldn’t have been able to do it.”



Name: Gina Gersabeck

Hometown: Golden, Colorado

School: D’Evelyn High School Senior

Testimonial/Quote: “I realized how important it is to see what needs to happen before it needs to happen, to think a few steps ahead. It also became apparent how speaking up for each other is so important. This can be done by checking in on people and determining what needs to happen for them to be happy and healthy. This was especially important when backpacking!”



Name: Mateo Eggen Huerta

Hometown: Estes Park, Colorado

School: Estes Park High School Junior

Testimonial/Quote: “I think the most memorable moment is when we all opened up and had a deep thoughts kind of talk. We all had to step it up individually on the backpacking trip, and it was helpful that we all knew we could count on each other as leaders and friends. The kind of leadership skills I practiced will certainly help me deal with situations in the future but will also help me help other people who may be in the official leadership position.”



Name: Matthew Bendzel

Hometown: Longmont, Colorado

School/Area of Study: I want to go to University of Wisconsin Stevens point for conservation law enforcement.

Testimonial/Quote: “My favorite memory was working with fire crew and doing the 3-day hitch on the north fork trail. I was able to take the outdoor skills I learned in Scouting and apply them to this trip, while learning other skills of trail building and styles of leadership.”



Name: Noah Sumayasa

Hometown: Hawaiiikai, Honolulu and Denver, Colorado

School/Area of Study: Henry J Kaiser High School Junior

Career Goals: I want to work with forestry and wildlife in any capacity during my career.

Testimonial/Quote: "My favorite memory of the program was when our group went hiking to Sky Pond in Rocky Mountain National Park. The hiking trip was amazing and the biggest highlights from it were the pine marten I saw crossing the trail, the colorful wildflowers, and the view of the lake at the top of the mountain. One thing that has changed as far as my perspective on leadership is the reciprocity between you and your peers and how the leadership roles move fluidly between one person to another."



July Crew Highlights

It was a cloudy Tuesday when the July Crew arrived in Estes Park. Moraine Park Campground soon became a home as tents were pitched, tarps were set up, and the bear boxes were filled with food for the week. A group of high school students from all over the Front Range of Colorado (and Hawaii) would soon become fast friends.

On Day 2, the crew hiked from Moraine Park to the National Park Headquarters area, where they embarked on a tour of various departments and offices. In the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center, the crew watched the movie “Spirit of the Mountains”, a film about Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP), its history, and future.

The next day, the crew began their working experience with a volunteer trash cleanup in Hidden Valley. There, they cleaned up the landscape, learned about the National Park, and became official Junior Rangers (and found plenty of wild strawberries).

Fire Prevention in Rocky Mountain National Park is a main priority for the health and safety of the landscape and the NPS staff. The high school crew joined forces with the RMNP fire department to complete fuels mitigation service work. It was fascinating for all to learn about the history of fire in the Park and fulfilling to make a meaningful difference in the Park’s future.

Many Park Service staff enjoy days off on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday... But not the July High

School Leadership Corps. The crew ventured to the US Forest Service’s North Fork trail near (Glen Haven, CO) to complete a 3-day backcountry “hitch”, where they camped in the backcountry and completed a variety of trail maintenance and construction projects. For a few folks on the crew, this backpacking trip was a brand-new experience of learning, working, and living as a team. Late nights talking under the stars, waking up with the sunrise, and falling asleep to the sound of the stream were some of the most peaceful highlights of this trip.



After the backcountry hitch, the crew took some well-deserved showers and had a restful morning. Later in the day, a resume building workshop was held in the Estes Park Library and the crew learned some key tips and tricks on how to develop professional skills.

With many days of conservation work, career development training, and personal teambuilding behind them, the crew had entered the final stages of the program, where friendship and fun were number one! A field trip over Trail Ridge Road and a Ranger-guided hike in the Holzworth historic area were awesome and educational experiences for everyone involved.

On the last full day of the program, the crew decided to go on a hike to Sky Pond in Rocky Mountain National Park. Thanks to the shuttle bus system in RMNP, it was very simple to ride from Moraine Park campground over to the Glacier Gorge trailhead. The all-day hike to and from Sky Pond was a highlight for everyone on the crew as they saw towering granite spires, lush meadows, a massive alpine waterfall, and the beautiful, protected landscape. Heading back to camp, the crew packed up and had a movie night pizza party at the RMC Field Institute building.

The next day was the closing picnic, where parents and families commuted up to Estes Park for a lunch of burgers, chips, and homemade apple pie. Each student in the HSLC gave a short presentation about their experience of the last 10 days, sharing lessons of leadership, teamwork, communication, and newfound friendships. Everyone headed home with a belly full of food, a \$400 check, countless stories, memories, and new friends.







HSLC Staff Members



Name: Verenice Galvan

Employer: Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK)

Position Title: Urban Ranger Program Assistant

Education: I am currently not in school but if I could minor in something it would be horticulture or botany.

Testimonial/Quote: "This RMC trip is great chance to get away from the city and meet new people from all over Colorado! Playing card games, making smores, star gazing, singing songs by the campfire, identifying cute wildflowers, playing by the river, and hiking beautiful trails in Rocky Mountain National Park is better than staying home and being on your phone all day. I really enjoyed the course and being able to gain some insight on the various careers in the National Park Service."



Name: Nathan Morrow

Employer: Rocky Mountain Conservancy

Position Title: Field Manager

Education: Montana State University, B.S. in Conservation Biology and Plant Science

Testimonial/Quote: "The students in the HSLC this summer reminded me of the wide-eyed joy and wonder I experienced as a kid. It is that passion and excitement for exploring natural areas, camping outdoors, developing as a team, and growing as an individual that guided me in designing and running this program. It's about being safe, having fun, and maybe even learning something!"



Name: Charlotte Graeve

Employer: Rocky Mountain Conservancy

Position Title: Field Coordinator

Education: Texas A&M University, B.S. in Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences

Testimonial/Quote: "I'm so glad I got the chance to work with the High School Leadership Corps this season. It was amazing to watch a group of once strangers come together to form a truly cohesive team. This was an opportunity for growth all around- they learned so much from each other, and I learned a lot from them."



Name: Grace McMahon

Employer: Rocky Mountain Conservancy

Position Title: Field Coordinator

Education: Arkansas Tech University, B.S in Environmental Science

Testimonial/Quote: "I'm really grateful I got to be involved with the HSLC program. Spending time with young people who are excited about the outdoors reminded me why I do what I do and getting to be part of a lot of folks' first times in Rocky was so special. These are extraordinary kids, and I'm excited to see where they go from here."

History, Information, and Applications

The Rocky Mountain Conservancy's High School Leadership Corps (HSLC) was started in 2017 as a program devoted to helping young people from urban Colorado get outside. It ran in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Then, the program took a break for a couple years. In 2022, the RMC was able to restart its High School Leadership Corps.

The HSLC is a program for Colorado students who are excited to try something new, develop as young adults, and have an unforgettable outdoor teambuilding experience. There are no requirements or prerequisites for this program; all are welcome!

RMC provides hiking boots, work clothes (shirt, pants, socks, hat) safety equipment, transportation, housing, and food for the program. Camping equipment (tent, sleeping bag and pad, backpacking equipment, stoves) is rented at no cost.

Participants will earn \$400 upon completion of the 11-day session and will keep their boots and work clothes for future careers and camping trips.

For information about the 2023 High School Leadership Corps, please visit the RMC website at <https://rmconservancy.org/work-with-us/high-school-leadership-corps/>



Special Thanks

The 2022 High School Leadership Corps would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their invaluable contributions to this program. Thank you!

Mike Corbin, Jeanne Corbin, [Poudre Wilderness Volunteers](#)

Cat Eaton, Michael Mueldener, Kevin Gaalaas, National Park Service Vegetation

Katie Phillips, Ben Holt, Maria Lally, National Park Service Interpretation and Education

Kevin Riggs, Ethan Daley, National Park Service Fire and Fuels Module 32

Jeremy Sifuentes, Verence Galvan, [Environmental Learning for Kids \(ELK\)](#)

Michele Bratschun, National Park Service [Historic Preservation Training Center](#)

Angela Meyers, [Thorne Nature Experience](#)

Erin Angel, [Cottonwood Institute Changemakers Program](#)



Poudre Wilderness Volunteers
Caring For Northern Colorado Wilderness

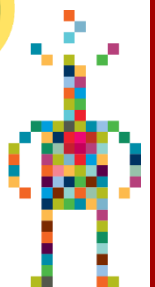


Environmental Learning for Kids



skcratch LABS

Smartwool
Go far. Feel good.™





Congratulations 2022 High School Leadership Corps!

