

The Nature
Conservancy



COLORADO.

2022 Year In Review

Dear Friends,

The Nature Conservancy in Colorado

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The mission of
The Nature Conservancy
is to conserve the lands
and waters on which
all life depends.

ON THE COVER The sun rises over Ice Lake in the San Juan Mountains. © John Devlin/TNC Photo Contest 2022 THIS PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM Carlos Fernandez © Lauryn Wachs/TNC; Kestrel preening on a snowy branch © Robert Palmer/TNC Photo Contest 2022



The decade for action is no longer approaching—it's here. Our changing climate continues to affect our lives, from record drought in the Colorado River Basin to longer, more intense wildfires. Yet, I am hopeful that there is more progress and momentum toward climate action than ever before.

This year, we saw the passage of the historic Inflation Reduction Act, dedicating billions of dollars across the United States to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. In Colorado, our legislature passed 15 bills that will reduce emissions while helping our economy thrive.

At the root of all this progress is the underlying truth that to address these threats, we need support from people—from all backgrounds and all parts of Colorado—to succeed. In this Year in Review, you will see how we are working across the state and across boundaries to achieve lasting, tangible results for Colorado and beyond.

While what we do is critical, how we approach our work and who we work with is just as important to making the difference we need.



We are evolving our approach to conservation to better reflect the perspectives and needs of everyone in our state. Part of this is acknowledging our history. While the conservation movement has sought to protect our planet, we have not always created systems that benefit all people. Across the United States and in Colorado, communities of color are more likely to suffer health impacts from air pollution, hazardous waste, or water pollution in their neighborhoods. As we experience more extreme weather due to climate change, these same communities will be disproportionately affected.

We have an opportunity to do things differently and make a positive impact for both nature and people. I'm proud that at TNC in Colorado we have committed to a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan that involves all our staff and incorporates strategic changes in how we do our work.

I am grateful to you for supporting us as we continue to do the critical work of protecting the future for Colorado's lands, waters, and people. You are an important partner in helping us speak up for nature and meet the urgency of the moment. We can't do it without you.

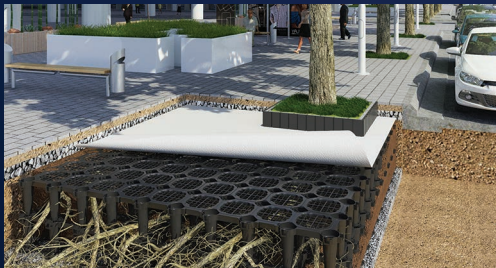
Thank you,



Carlos E. Fernández,
Colorado State Director

Innovating Toward the Future

As our work becomes ever more urgent, we must find innovative methods and technologies to rapidly scale our solutions for nature. We launched a Catalyst Fund this year that is supporting seven projects to enable innovation and rapid learning, both to test new ideas and to build greater capacity for innovation over the long-term. Below are three examples of these projects.



New Technology for Downtown Denver Trees

Trees in cities help make neighborhoods cooler while also improving physical and mental health, economic vitality, air quality, and wildlife habitat. Yet, downtown Denver's tree canopy coverage is only 4%. Soil volume for urban trees is often limited by competing infrastructure. With the Downtown Denver Partnership, we will install and monitor "structural cells" in tree pits that provide more soil volume for trees to live longer and grow larger. We will help Denver better understand how to integrate this technology to support a greener, healthier city.

Improving Equity in Conservation

As TNC continues to center diversity, equity and inclusion in our work, it has become clear that we must incorporate equity aims into our projects from the start. To make these values more embedded in our planning processes, we are creating and testing an Equity Tool that will accelerate these efforts. The tool will include guiding questions and frameworks to integrate diversity, equity and inclusion into projects from inception to completion. We will share our learnings with others across TNC for a broader impact.



Virtual Fencing for Bison

Fences are costly to build and maintain, can harm wildlife, and can't easily be moved. By installing and testing virtual fencing at our Silver Mountain Preserve in south-central Colorado, we hope to improve the ecology and operation of the ranch. Virtual fencing involves satellite collars on each animal that are programmed to direct the animals where to graze. This has worked well for cattle, but it has never before been tested on bison. We are testing this technology to allow for more natural bison grazing patterns, which can improve the diversity of grassland plants while allowing free movement for the elk, pronghorn, coyote, and other wild species that live there.

Crisis on the Colorado River



The average flow of the Colorado River has already declined nearly 20% since 2000.

The word “drought” no longer describes what’s happening in the Colorado River Basin. The Basin is becoming permanently hotter and drier due to climate change—putting major cities, some of the largest food producers in the country, and a vast river ecosystem at risk.

After 22 years of drought conditions, water levels in the Colorado River are so low that downstream states like Arizona aren’t getting the water they expected. Rising temperatures have accelerated evaporation from reservoirs, sped up snowmelt so rivers run dry earlier in the year, and parched soils so they soak up precipitation before it reaches the river. This means less water in rivers for wildlife, agriculture, drinking water, and more.

The average flow of the Colorado River has already declined nearly 20% since 2000, with half of that attributable to rising temperatures. As the population in the Colorado River Basin continues to grow, demands for water will continue. Colorado River water serves municipal, agricultural, Tribal and recreation needs, while supporting fish and wildlife, including more than 150 at-risk species. It’s a dire situation with no easy answers.

But that doesn’t mean there’s no hope. Although the problems are serious, there are many potential tools we can use to manage water in the basin, and there is a growing collective desire to address the problem. Here, we share some of the solutions we are pursuing in Colorado.

Tribal Engagement

Respectfully engaging Tribal Nations is essential to create more effective, durable, and equitable solutions to the river’s toughest challenges. This is important for Tribal rights and benefits as well as for helping the river. TNC in Colorado has been partnering with Tribal Nations in southwest Colorado to explore innovative water projects that provide benefit to both nature and people.

It was a huge step forward when recently, six Tribal Nations and 10 conservation groups, including TNC, came together in a working group to develop a shared vision for the river’s future. That vision includes ensuring the spiritual, cultural, and ecological integrity of the Colorado River Basin while providing water for Tribal homelands and other human uses, among other priorities.

We launched a San Juan River trip series to bring together natural resource management representatives from four Tribal Nations with state and federal agency leaders and TNC staff. We are aiming to build relationships and a transformative vision for cross-boundary freshwater conservation.



“Water truly is the essence of life, and we all have a role to play in helping protect it,” says Lorelei Cloud, member of the Southern Ute Tribe and Tribal Council, and board member for TNC in Colorado.

Upgrading the Maybell Diversion

The Maybell ditch project on the lower Yampa River in Colorado will upgrade a century-old diversion dam and headgate while improving flows in critical habitat for endangered fish. The project was recently awarded \$1.92 million from the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART program, which aims to preserve local water supplies in response to drought across the West. This funding brings us closer to our goal of raising \$6 million for the project. The upgrade will create a safe passage for boats and fish while improving control for diversion flows.

“We are at a crucial point in history where we need to implement long-term solutions to address water use and needs in the face of climate change. Our partnership with Maybell Irrigation District is a great example of community-driven, long-term freshwater protection that supports local economic stability,” says Jennifer Wellman, TNC's freshwater project director.

Three Years of Success for the Yampa River Fund

Supported by a community coalition, TNC's Yampa River Fund provides sustainable funding for projects that benefit people and the health of the river. The Fund's first three rounds of grants have supported projects such as river restoration to protect fish, increased stream flows and improved recreation opportunities. These include elements of the Maybell diversion rehabilitation, engineering for a new whitewater park in Craig, and much-needed water releases from Stagecoach and Elkhead reservoirs.

We're proud of our impacts with the Yampa River Fund through strong partnerships and support from the community. We are hopeful for its future now that we have transferred management of the Fund to Friends of the Yampa, building ongoing capacity within the local community to steward both the Fund and the river.

Green Mountain Reservoir © Jason Houston; INSET TOP TO BOTTOM The Maybell Ditch runs parallel to the Yampa River © Jennifer Wellman/TNC; Rancher Paul Bruchez walks around his ranch, where he tests concepts for saving water while operating a ranch. © Jason Houston; The Yampa River © Mark Godfrey



35 Years of Conservation in the Laramie Foothills

TNC's partnerships in northern Colorado helped give rise to a new model for conserving lands at the scale of the landscape.



It started with a small, yellow flower found almost nowhere else on Earth. Growing along the rocky canyon walls, this rare flower—*Larimer aletes*—was one of the original reasons for The Nature Conservancy's efforts to conserve Phantom Canyon 35 years ago. But as science and our conservation vision evolved, this place became a catalyst for action at a much larger scale: looking at how to benefit the larger landscape instead of just one property.

Phantom Canyon is one of the last remaining roadless canyons on the Front Range. Amidst the grasslands of the Laramie Foothills, this canyon provides habitat for mountain lion, bighorn sheep, and other grasslands species.

"In the early 1990s, TNC in Colorado was starting to look beyond the boundaries of the properties that we owned to understand the impacts of conservation in a larger landscape," says Nancy Fishbein, director of resilient lands.

Phantom Canyon's 1,200 acres were the focal point for a conservation effort, led by local governments, land trusts, landowners and supporters, that protected over 140,000 acres of land.

"At that time, we were losing a lot of working rural lands to exurban development," explains Heather Knight, of Natural Conservation Solutions, LLC, who was TNC's Phantom Canyon steward for over 20 years. "When everything was under a lot of pressure to grow and change, people collectively saw a common need and an opportunity to work together and achieve something greater than if we were at odds with each other."



The committed partners advanced conservation in the Laramie Foothills and advocated for local policies to fund land protection.

In 2004, Great Outdoors Colorado funded the Mountains to Plains

Project—the organization's largest grant up to that date. These efforts stitched together a vast, conserved landscape that literally connects the mountains to the plains and provides a vital corridor for wildlife movement along the rapidly developing Front Range.

"At the beginning, Phantom Canyon was just one small piece, but it became a springboard for something much larger," says Knight.

The work that TNC and our partners do in this area continues. Each year, we host hundreds of visitors at our Phantom Canyon preserve, including anglers, interns, scientists, volunteers, students, birding and plant interest groups, and more. In the summer, students with The Greenway Foundation join TNC and Wildlands Restoration Volunteers for a day of trail work and canyon enjoyment.

As one student said on this year's River Rangers trip, "I think my favorite thing about Phantom Canyon is that you never finish getting to know the place. Being here for three years has definitely changed my view, and I had never seen most of the things I got to see this time."

Enjoy These Places Today

You can visit the Laramie Foothills today to see the legacy of this conservation work. Places like the Soapstone Prairie and Red Mountain Ranch are open to the public year-round. Keep an eye out for golden eagles, pronghorn, and bison as you explore these places that have been protected.

The lessons learned from this conservation story impact our work today. Now, TNC's focus is on conserving resilient, connected landscapes—expanding core conservation areas with connecting corridors that provide space for wildlife adaptation and movement in a changing climate.

"Now that we are feeling the impacts of climate change, places like the Laramie Foothills are even more critical," says Fishbein.



2022

YEAR IN PICTURES



SOUTH PLATTE STEWARDSHIP

Volunteers help improve urban parks in north Denver during a South Platte Stewardship Day, hosted by The Greenway Foundation and supported by TNC. © The Greenway Foundation



SOCK CELEBRATING GRASSLANDS

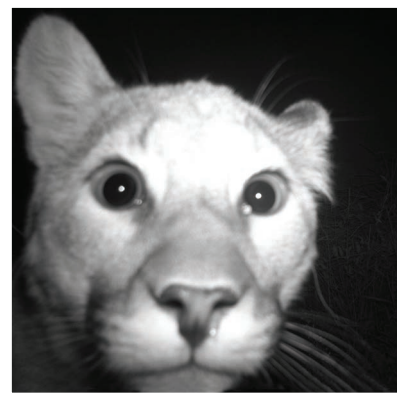
Our partners at Smartwool took their inspiration from Colorado's grasslands to create their latest TNC limited-edition sock, which is available at [smartwool.com](https://www.smartwool.com).



See the latest Colorado photos! Follow us at [instagram.com/co_nature](https://www.instagram.com/co_nature)

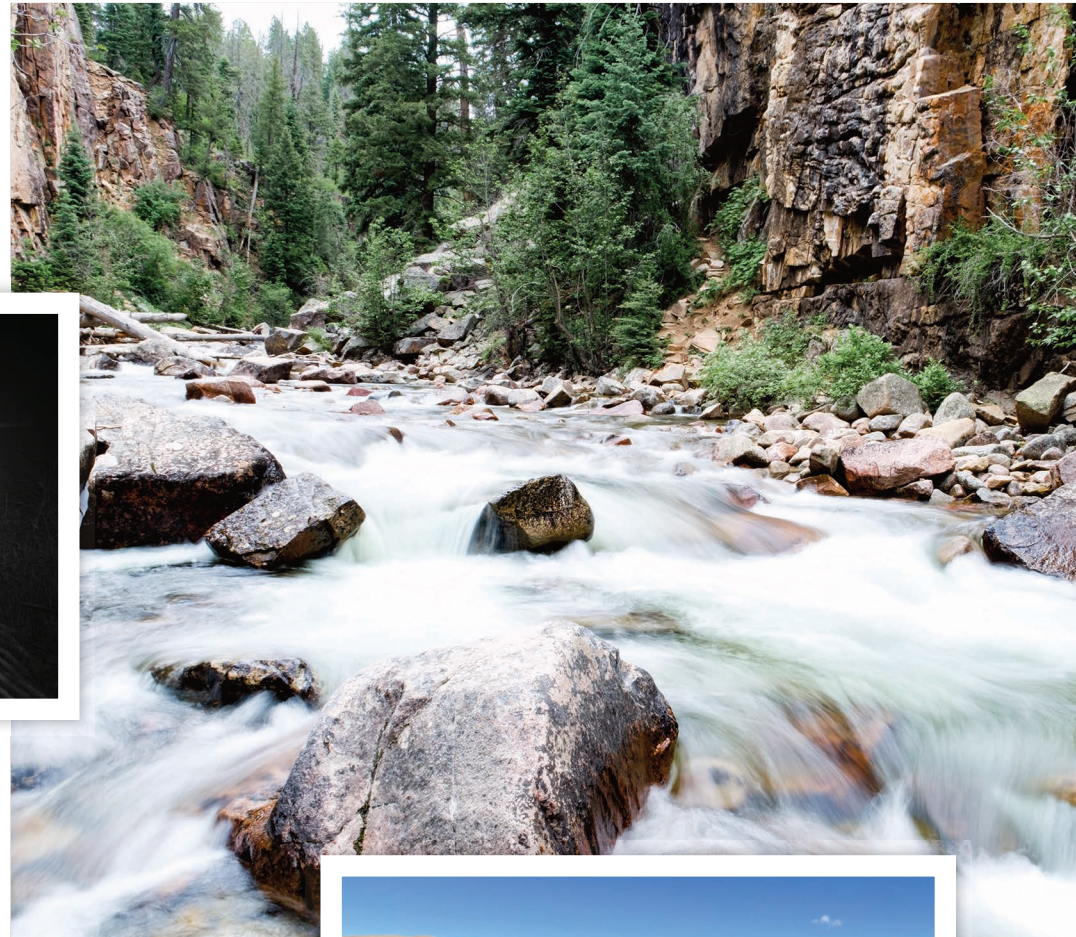
SELFIE MODE

A mountain lion gets up close and personal with a game camera at TNC's Phantom Canyon preserve in the Laramie Foothills. © TNC



FLORIDA RIVER

The upper headwaters of the Florida River in southwest Colorado, where TNC is helping test reservoir releases to improve river health © Jason Houston



GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK

Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (second from left) joins TNC staff to celebrate the transfer of 9,362 acres from TNC to Great Sand Dunes National Park, supporting a rich diversity of wildlife including elk and wetlands used by many migratory birds. This is the latest chapter of a land conservation project that began decades ago when TNC helped with the national park's creation.

© Nancy Fishbein/TNC



GLOBEVILLE TREE PLANTING

Volunteers work together with community members to plant a tree in north Denver's Globeville neighborhood.

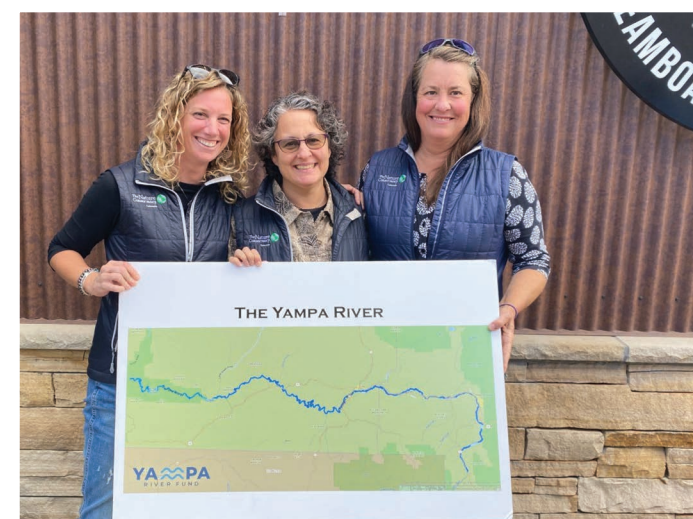
© Maria Kopecky/TNC



YAMPA RIVER FUND

TNC staff joined community members to celebrate the third year of the Yampa River Fund supporting local projects to protect river health.

© Lindsay Schlageter/TNC



SANDHILL CRANES

Sandhill cranes migrate through TNC's Zapata Ranch next to Great Sand Dunes National Park.

© Hannah Floyd



BARTLETT MESA

Working across state boundaries to accelerate land conservation is exactly what we set out to do with our Southern High Plains Initiative. This year, TNC and The Trust for Public Land purchased the 2,224-acre Bartlett Mesa Ranch just south of the Colorado border, with plans to add it to New Mexico's Sugarite Canyon State Park and perhaps one day connect with Fishers Peak State Park.

© Brad Cory/TNC

Forests of the Future

Collaborating for a bigger impact on our forests



Fueled by climate change and prolonged drought, wildfires are continuing to set records across the West. Our goal is to create a better future for forests and communities—one where we are prepared for inevitable wildfires and we collaborate to reduce threats to people, water and wildlife. The urgency of our changing climate requires all hands on deck. We are collaborating with partners to develop policy solutions, improve forest management, and train more fire practitioners so we can prepare for and prevent catastrophic wildfires.



Bringing New People into the Workforce

While federal funding has increased to help fight and prevent wildfires, capacity has not kept up with the need. For example, we need more trained fire practitioners to both implement prescribed burns and manage wildland fires. The Nature Conservancy is aiming to increase the number of people who can do this work by supporting a program for socially just workforce development.



We are supporting The Ember Alliance in their new partnership with Front Range Community College to offer students the technical and interpersonal skills that are foundational to a career in wildland fire. This program works to attract and serve traditionally underrepresented students and provides them with the hands-on experience needed to enter the job market. TNC has helped fund the

program, and staff have been involved as trainers with the community college. “We’ve seen a lot of interest and enthusiasm in wildland fire management with students at FRCC and are excited about continuing to grow and expand the program,” says Jennifer Mueller, director of fire management at The Ember Alliance. “Students come away from the program with wildland firefighter training skills that can lead to careers in natural resources management.”

Policy Solutions for Wildfire Resilience

TNC and the Aspen Institute have launched a new partnership to improve wildfire resilience in the United States. This has included bringing together local, state and federal governments as well as Tribal Nations, nongovernmental organizations, utilities, insurance companies and other businesses. These convenings will inform a Roadmap for improving wildfire resilience—and therefore community safety and forest health—that we will share with policymakers and other leaders.

We hosted a workshop in Colorado to support this partnership which had 44 participants from 14 different agencies and organizations. “It’s important to ramp up action and investment in wildfire resilience,” says Paige Lewis, deputy director for TNC in Colorado. “We must ensure that attention is given to the unique needs and opportunities related to management in both pre- and post-fire environments.”

Shifting Our Cities

Creating a Greener Future for Urban Communities

Our future in Colorado and around the world will be shaped by the ways we adapt and harness the potential of cities to address the dual challenges of climate change and a biodiversity crisis.

Balancing the Needs of People and Nature

In partnership with the Metro Denver Nature Alliance, The Nature Conservancy is leading a Regional Conservation Assessment that will help identify lands and waters to connect, protect, restore, and enhance across the Denver metro region. With input from ecological experts and community leaders, this process will help ensure

that our region provides connected habitat and more equitable access to nature for all people to the benefits of nature.

“A dynamic regional vision for the Denver metro area will set us up for transformative change that leads toward a place where nature and people thrive,” says Chris Hawkins, Colorado urban conservation program manager for TNC.

Growing a Healthier, More Equitable Denver

Trees keep neighborhoods cool, improve air quality, and make people happier and healthier.

TNC has been working with local communities in Denver neighborhoods, including Globeville and Elyria-Swansea, to expand the tree canopy. TNC has helped organize tree plantings and built partnerships with nonprofits and community organizations like Globeville First.

“TNC understands the neighborhood’s dynamics and needs, and responds with honesty and compassion,” says Gayle LeRoux, Globeville resident and member of Globeville First. “Our partnership is more than building a healthy tree canopy. It’s about building healthy people.”

TNC also worked with students in the University of Colorado’s Masters of the Environment program who interviewed more than 50 urban forestry leaders across the country and researched best practices for a more equitable urban forest. The students presented their findings to Denver leaders at the first-ever Urban Forestry Roundtable. Their recommendations will inform the city’s first urban forest master plan, which will kick off in the coming months.

As the report says, “Denver has an opportunity to set the bar high as a national model for community-based, equitable climate resilience and the time is ripe for action. The planning Denver does today will lead to a greener, more equitable tomorrow.”



Big Year for Climate

TNC developed a climate policy platform and weighed in on more bills than ever before at the state legislature—15 of which passed.



This year, climate change was once again all around us, in the form of wildfires, drought, floods, high temperature records, and extreme weather events. After years of effort, The Nature Conservancy celebrated when Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act and finally invested \$369 billion into energy security and climate change action. This marked an exciting milestone—but the work continues.

States and local governments continue to have an outsized role in climate action. States can be a testing ground for policy solutions like free fares on public transit or funding to help coal-dependent communities transition their economies. What we do in places like Colorado has an impact at the national scale.

Colorado Climate Policies

We are thrilled that major progress was made this year at the Colorado state capital. TNC developed a climate policy platform and weighed in on more bills than ever before at the state legislature—15 of which passed.

We supported legislation that reduced emissions and improved air quality, as well as the following bills.

Providing additional support for a just transition: As the state transitions to clean, renewable energy, two bills passed that will fund workforce training programs for rural communities whose economies are impacted by the energy transition.

Protecting disproportionately impacted communities from air toxics: A bill passed that requires monitoring air toxics, develops health-based standards, and requires companies to cut pollution to protect communities' health.

Funding free transit for bad ozone days: This bill passed to reduce harmful ozone pollution by making transit free this summer in the Denver region with the “Zero Fare for Clean Air” campaign.



Advancing Renewable Energy

As cities, counties and states race to meet renewable energy deployment targets in line with climate goals, TNC is advancing research, policies and projects that ensure new energy generation and transmission projects are sited to avoid negative impacts to nature. We are engaging partners, designing policy concepts, and starting the conversation in Colorado to make sure

clean energy is developed in the smartest way possible. For example, this year we launched a partnership with Jack's Solar Garden and Drylands Agroecology Research, in which the same area of land is used for both solar energy and agriculture.

Project partners will convert fallow land underneath an existing ground-mounted solar array in Boulder County into a functional agrivoltaics system that produces native, medicinal perennials, provides pollinator habitat and provides work and educational opportunities for community partners. Projects like this showcase how land used for solar energy production can bring additional benefits to people and nature. We are also building interest in the national community of practice on how agrivoltaics may accelerate renewable energy deployment and improve renewable energy siting outcomes.

Nature-Based Climate Solutions

Our science team completed an analysis on the potential for natural and working lands in Colorado to sequester carbon emissions. As the state of Colorado determines how it will reach its ambitious climate goals of reducing emissions 50% from 2005 levels by 2030, there was a need for data to understand how natural climate solutions—ways to capture or store carbon in nature by improving management of grasslands, forests, or wetlands—could help meet these goals.

TNC brought together partners to inform our approach for modeling natural climate solutions pathways in Colorado. The model highlights several “no regrets” opportunities that benefit biodiversity and soil health along with the climate, such as planting trees in urban areas to benefit people as well as nature. Our research is being used to inform the state's Natural and Working Lands Strategic Plan and advances the scientific understanding of natural climate solutions.





VOLUNTEER

Matt Nuñez

Matt Nuñez gives back by volunteering as a member of The Nature Conservancy's 13ers Advisory Council. The 13ers is a group of emerging leaders who advance our mission through events and outreach for young professionals. Matt works as a program manager for the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office. He was born into a military family in Colorado but spent most of his childhood elsewhere.

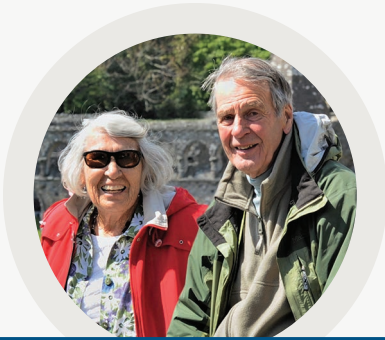
After moving back to Colorado after college, he explains, "That's when I really started to find connection in the outdoors and learn to respect the lands and the wildlife around me." This connection aligned with his love of landscape photography, which got him out and exploring many of Colorado's iconic places.

He sees a connection between TNC and photography. "I've wrestled with the idea of how recreation and art play a role in how we interact with the natural world. Now I'm more conscientious when I'm in the field with my camera. I feel a responsibility through sharing my images to help promote stewardship and a good land ethic."

Matt says he loves being part of the 13ers, especially "the social aspect, and driving a mission forward with like-minded young professionals. I've learned more about the work TNC does and I've been able to feel like I'm part of that mission."

"I have a very strong sense of place that goes hand in hand with my passion for the outdoors and conservation. I want to make sure that I'm helping make Colorado a better place to live by conserving the outdoors both at work and in my personal life."

THIS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT Matt's photo of Mt. Sneffels won the Colorado Division of Motor Vehicle's "Iconic Colorado" contest in 2021 and appears on thousands of Colorado driver's licenses. © Matt Nuñez Photography; Matt Nuñez © Courtesy of Matt Nuñez



LEGACY DONORS

Bob & Audrey Enever

Originally from the U.K., Bob and Audrey Enever have supported conservation locally in Steamboat Springs and around the world through The Nature Conservancy for decades. They both trace their passion for nature back to childhood. Audrey grew up in industrial South Wales but her home was near open hillsides. Meanwhile, Bob grew up outside London in a house surrounded by cow pastures where he could wander the fields and woods.

From his time as a young soldier in Austria and his time in West Africa, to their two years in British Columbia and eventually to their trips around the world, Bob says, "We traveled with our eyes open to the topography, the flora and fauna of every place we visited."

They moved to Steamboat Springs in 1971 and became involved in local conservation efforts. In 1992, they donated six acres of land to the City of Steamboat Springs and personally created the Yampa River Botanic Park as a "serene oasis of nature within the city," says Bob. The park today sees 35,000 visitors a year and supports alpine plants found in the Yampa Valley and around the world. Bob has published three photography books featuring birds, plants, and wildlife around Steamboat Springs.

They are proud to support TNC as members of the Legacy Club. This means they have named TNC a beneficiary of their estate plans.

"TNC uses science and does things for nature in a way, and on a scale, that individuals cannot," says Bob. "We have given steadily for many years. Every year has a conservation crisis."

Bob and Audrey join thousands of Legacy Club members around the world who are committed to giving in a way that lasts into the future.



BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Joanna & Stuart Brown

Joanna and Stuart have served as volunteers, board members and donors to TNC in Colorado, the Africa Program, Alaska, Kentucky, Tennessee, Massachusetts, and the Caribbean Program. Their passion for conservation runs deep and their commitment is demonstrated through their actions and long legacy of impact with TNC.

Stuart grew up on a farm in Prospect, Kentucky with cattle grazing and a hardwood forest full of biodiversity. "My grandmother, Sally Brown, who co-founded the Kentucky chapter of TNC in 1977, taught me to value nature and fight for it," reflects Stuart. "She was a great voice for the natural world and taught me the difference between good and bad conservation policy at the state and federal levels."

Joanna's passion for conservation also came from her family. "The freedom I felt as a child while enjoying summers

on my grandparents farm in western Massachusetts has stayed with me throughout my life," she says. She inherited a love for the mountains and wide-open spaces from her parents who loved to take her skiing and camping. "I've always enjoyed volunteering for TNC wherever we have lived and, more recently, my work in Kenya has exposed me to landscapes of incredible size and diversity, some healthy and some in great need of conservation."

They are motivated to be a part of TNC, because, in Stuart's words, "We believe that scale matters in conservation. We've come to know the people of TNC, the scientists, and the beneficiaries of their work. We trust them with our investments in nature and we believe TNC is the most capable conservation organization to bring positive change at scale."

This year, they were energized to make their most significant financial commitments to TNC Colorado because of the urgency of climate change. "The timeline for climate action is very different from other conservation timelines," says Stuart. "The scientific facts are clear and we feel the need and importance of funding TNC's climate priorities now. We hope that our actions will inspire others to do the same. There is no time to waste on this topic."



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Follow Us on Social Media: Follow along with our work and latest updates on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter! Plus you can see incredible images of iconic Colorado wildlife and landscapes, many taken by our members and supporters.

Find Volunteer Opportunities and Events: Visit our website to read more about our work throughout the year, find preserves you can visit around the state, and learn more about volunteer opportunities and events. Visit us at nature.org/Colorado.