

**Ian Stafford, Director of Stewardship, Nathan Morrow (New Stewardship Field Manager), Charlotte Graeve and Grace McMahon (Corps Field Coordinators), 52 members of Conservation Corps**

- Have recruited, interviewed, onboarded, and provided an in-person orientation to 52 Corpsmembers across 9 different Conservation Corps Crews (4 in RMNP, 5 on ARNF) for the 2022 season
- Volunteer programs and High School Leadership Corps are all on track to be carried out
- Developing lands prioritization tool that will allow RMC and ROMO to collaborate on future acquisitions

### Recent Accomplishments and Current Activities

- Beginning on Tuesday, May 24<sup>th</sup> the 2022 Rocky Mountain Conservancy-Conservation Corps season officially kicked off. The 2022 season will be marked as the Conservation Corps' largest season on record in terms of Corpsmembers employed, and crew deployed into the field. We welcomed our 9 Crew Leaders for a 4-day, in-depth Crew Leader Week. Then over the week of May 31<sup>st</sup>, we welcomed 43 Conservation Corps Members to experience our first in-person Orientation Week since 2019. Through this two-week experience, we were able to provide a comprehensive training that teaches all of the RMC and AmeriCorps polices, provided education sessions taught by park officials, introduced Corpsmembers directly to their agency partners, and provided a program that evaluations have shown received 8/10 stars.
  - Stats for 2022 Conservation Corps Season
    - 23 states represented
    - Ages between 18-27
    - 13% returning staff (5/9 Crew Leaders are returning staff)
    - 2/3 of crews are Lead by female Crew Leaders
    - 5+ LGBTQI+ Corpsmembers
- To commemorate National Trails Day, on June 4th RMC partnered with RMNP for its first volunteer event since 2019. We were able to bring in more than 45 volunteers to come to the Hidden Valley area and pick up litter. During the event, we were able to bring in people of all ages to come and take part. Entire families were able to attend, including a board member, RMC staff, RMC Members, and the general public. During the event, we were also able to get multiple kids taking part in the event to get registered as Junior Rangers, and have already seen a strong interest in future events.
- Rocky Mountain Conservancy-Conservation Corps has been awarded grants totaling over \$180,000 in awards to help support this year's Conservation Corps and High School Leadership Corps programs. These awards have been provided by National Park Foundation and New Belgium Brewing. Partnering those funds with task agreements and partnership agreements that have been in place, we have been able to fully fund the Conservation Corps and High School Leadership Corps for the entire 2022 season. We also have several conversations with prospective funding opportunities lined up in the coming weeks to begin funding the 2023 season, and other Stewardship Projects.
- RMC is a proud partner of the recently acquired and opened Thumb Open Space area in Estes Park. For the past 18+ months, RMC has worked closely with the Town of Estes Park, Estes Valley Land trust, and The Access Fund to finalize this project and get an open space management plan approved by the Town Board of Trustees. The Open Space is available for the public to use, and will have a grand opening ribbon cutting ceremony to commemorate this open space on Thursday, June 30<sup>th</sup>. This project has proven to be a fantastic collaborative project that will now protect 65 acres of open space, including a historic climbing area, and invaluable trails to help disperse crowds in the Estes Valley.

### Upcoming Activities and Projects

- RMC will be reintroducing its first High School Leadership Corps program since 2019 at the end of June. This program will take place from June 20<sup>th</sup>-June 30<sup>th</sup>, and will involve 6 high schoolers in the program. The first session of this summer will include a diverse group of students from the Front Range area. There will be a second program taking place July 18<sup>th</sup>-July 28<sup>th</sup>.
- Working in partnership with the Park Planner, we are beginning to develop a lands acquisition prioritization tool. This tool will allow RMC and RMNP to work in tandem with the park to plan for the future, identify potential properties that could be acquired, and develop a method to have a proactive approach to growing the park in an unprecedented way.
- In order to help RMC become more involved in policy work, we're beginning to develop a policy framework document, which will outline the priorities and focuses RMC will take in getting involved in policy issues. This will allow RMC to be clear in our intentions and involvement in the policy realm, while also allowing us to provide clear understanding to elected officials on how we can help develop and advocate for legislation at the local, state, and federal levels of government

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

- Recruiting and retaining Corpsmembers for future seasons is going to prove to be more difficult unless we consider raising the weekly stipend amount for our Conservation Corps programs. Currently a Crew Member receives \$300/wk which is not competitive enough with other Corps programs. As we prepare for the 2023 season, we will need to revisit the compensation package we are providing Corpsmembers of all levels, and how we can better incentivize recruitment and retention.
- While being allocated 56 AmeriCorps slots for the season, we were only able to utilize 52 of the positions. Having hired the Corps program to completion and closed the application process at the end of March, we had multiple potential Corpsmembers inform us within 2 weeks of the start of the season that they would no longer be able to take their positions. With such a short amount of time before the season, we were unable to fill those positions, and will not have a completely full season for the summer. The positions that were not filled, will be able to be utilized in the extended season that will take place in the fall, so there will be no issues with AmeriCorps regarding unfulfilled positions.
- With the Stewardship Program nearing pre-pandemic levels of activity, we are going to need to have an intentional conversation about how to grow the program sustainably. This will involve conversations with our agency partners, community partners, and internal staff to identify what ways we can grow for the future. Growth could involve the expanding the Conservation Corps programs, increasing the amount of High School Leadership Corps programs we run, increasing volunteer programs that we hold, or creating new programs and events altogether.

### **Program Financials**

- As stated in "Recent Accomplishments" section, the Conservation Corps and High School Leadership Corps have been fully funded for the entire season through generous gifts from National Park Foundation (\$176,707) and New Belgium Brewing's community grants program (\$4500). Along with grant awards, The Conservation Corps and High School Leadership Corps were able to receive \$5000 worth of product donation from Skratch Labs to provide nutrition and hydration support in the field, and \$3200 worth of product from Smartwool to provide quality socks for all participants in each program.