



# Rocky Mountain Conservancy

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CONSERVATION CORPS

## 2023 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 2023. 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 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 free camping, work clothing, and gear for the experience. In 2023, there were two HSLC crews... Here they are!





## June 20<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> Crew







**Name:** Zoe Kugler

**Hometown:** Lafayette, Colorado

**School:** Monarch High School Sophomore

**Favorite Memory:** Working with crewmates and Poudre Wilderness Volunteers to flatten a log and build a bridge with crosscut saws.

**Testimonial/ Quote:** "Don't be afraid to speak your mind and lead by example."



**Name:** Shira Nathan

**Hometown:** Lafayette, Colorado

**School:** Centaurus High School

**Favorite Memory:** It was satisfying to see my skills improve and feel that I was contributing to the bridge construction. Like when Zoe and I were Sawing lots of cuts in a row using the crosscut saw after struggling to do even one in the morning.

**Testimonial:** "Keep a pair of clean socks in your pack at all times!"



**Name:** Alejandra Gonzales Espinosa

**Hometown:** Denver, Colorado

**School:** DSST: Elevate Northeast High School

**Favorite Memory:** Meeting Frank from the Poudre Wilderness Volunteers and him helping us build a bridge.

**Testimonial/Quote:** "Get ready to hike a lot!"



**Name:** Zev Gatto

**Hometown:** Greely, Colorado

**School:** First Year Student at Windsor Charter Academy

**Favorite Memory:** Solving riddles with other crew members while working with the National Park Service fire crew. And the ten mile hike!

**Testimonial/Quote:** "This program gave me an opportunity to meet new people from other places. This was my first time seeing and camping in a national park!"





**Name:** Jupiter Mefford

**Hometown:** Austin, Texas

**School:** Liberal Arts and Science Academy Junior

**Favorite Memory:** Helping to build a stringer bridge with the guidance of the Poudre Wilderness Volunteers

**Testimonial/Quote:** "I learned that my body could handle more than I thought! And to never feel guilty about asking for breaks in the mountains."



**Name:** Jesus Rodriguez

**Hometown:** Lafayette, Colorado

**School:** Centaurus High School 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Favorite Memory:** Hiking and playing Spikeball.

**Testimonial/Quote:** "Explore more nature!"



**Name:** Carlo Garcia-Gallegos

**Hometown:** Longmont, Colorado

**School:** Centaurus High School Sophomore

**Favorite Memory:** Building a bridge and hanging out at camp.

**Testimonial/Quote:** "Ask questions!"



**Name:** Antuan Vargas

**Hometown:** Erie, Colorado

**School:** Centaurus High School Sophomore

**Favorite Memory:** Playing Spikeball with the Crew!

**Testimonial/Quote:** "It was hard to not sleep in a bed. But, we got to do different jobs all over the National Park and learn so much and meet new friends!"



## June Crew Highlights

The crew arrived in Estes Park on Tuesday morning and hit the ground running! After picking up their new hiking boots from the Estes Park Mountain Shop, they headed to Rocky Mountain National Park to set up camp at Glacier Basin Campground. The sun was hot as they began their first tasks as a crew: setting up tents, creating a shade shelter and organizing the bear boxes. Throughout camp set up, they endured constant reminders to drink water and put on sunscreen. After getting to know each other through afternoon games and activities, they had a delicious pasta dinner before setting personal goals for the session and heading off to sleep.

Day 2 was spent exploring Rocky Mountain National Park and learning more about living and working outside. After doing their first Job Hazard Analysis (JHA), by stretching and discussing safety concerns for the day, the crew hiked from Glacier Basin Campground to Bear Lake. Along the way we had discussions about Leave No Trace, the importance of keeping a neat camp, and, of course, plenty of riddles.

Day 3 began Phase Two of the session: Service Projects. The crew spent the day in Rocky Mountain National Park's Hidden Valley doing a trash cleanup. Since Hidden Valley is the National Park's official sledding location, trash melts out of the snow throughout the spring. The crew collected over 10 buckets of trash and earned their junior ranger badges!



Day 4 was spent with the NPS Fire Crew working on fuels mitigation in Horseshoe Park. Before heading out to work, we sat down for the daily weather report and 6 Minutes for Safety discussion provided by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group. Through this discussion, the crew learned how important it is to be aware of the weather forecast, especially regarding fire danger and mitigation. Next, they headed into the park to create piles of logs, sticks and other natural materials to be burned over the course of the winter. Throughout the day, the crew learned all about fire ecology through asking thoughtful questions about how fires interact with surrounding plants and animals.





Days 5, 6, and 7 were spent outside of the National Park. The crew traveled to the Poudre River canyon to work on US Forest Service land with a nonprofit called the Poudre Wilderness Volunteers (PWV), to build a stringer bridge on the Fish Creek Trail. The Crew learned how to use a variety of tools, like a rock Austin, log lifters and a crosscut saw! There was also a surprise guest at the worksite one evening: a moose! We quickly cleaned up the worksite and headed to camp upon the moose's arrival. Upon arrival back to The National Park's Glacier Basin Campground, the crew had a relaxing pizza party before setting up their tents and heading to sleep.



Day 8 was restful. After a morning spent doing laundry, showering, and swimming at the Estes Park Community Center, the crew headed to the Estes Park Library for a resume training and a financial literacy session. The crew learned about how to apply and interview for jobs, as well as the different types of bank accounts they can have!

Day 9 was a field trip to the West Side of Rocky Mountain National Park, driving to an elevation of 12,000 feet over Trail Ridge Road. After stopping at numerous pull-offs and viewpoints (and building a snowman at lunch) the crew headed down to Holzwarth historic site, to learn about the history of human occupation in (from indigenous tribes to 1800s homesteaders) in Rocky Mountain National Park. They even got to practice their lasso skills!





Day 10 was a long 8-mile hike in Rocky Mountain National Park to Timberline Falls. Although the crew was attempting to reach Sky Pond, there was too much snow, and the waterfall too dangerous to climb up. After a long, relaxing lunch at the falls, we hiked back to the trailhead and took the shuttle back to Glacier Basin Campground. We spent the afternoon reflecting through a final journal prompt before celebrating the last night with delicious nachos back at camp.



The final day (11) was packing up camp, organizing all materials for the next session, and setting up the end-of-session cookout in Lyons! Parents and family members were invited to eat food, hang out, and share stories of the adventures of the last two weeks.













## July 17<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> Crew







**Name:** Laurel Williamson

**Hometown:** Estes Park, Colorado

**School:** Estes Park High School Junior

**Favorite Memory:** Hiking to Sky Pond with the crew and getting to know everyone.

**Testimonial/Quote:** "Some of the best personal growth comes from pushing yourself out of your comfort zone, so don't be afraid of challenges and always keep an open mind."

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**Name:** Sergio Dorantes Carmona

**Hometown:** Aurora, Colorado

**School:** DSST Conservatory Green High School

**Favorite Memory:** Hiking to Bear Lake

**Testimonial/Quote:** "Be sure to be safe and think of your other crew members. Be calm and warn others if you see a moose."

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**Name:** Carlos Carrillo

**Hometown:** Denver, Colorado

**School:** North Field High School

**Favorite Memory:** Using an axe to cut a tree down with the Poudre Wilderness Volunteers

**Testimonial/Quote:** "Walk slow, stop, and enjoy what life gives you. It may be too late when you realize what you lost."

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**Name:** Quiness Jackson

**Hometown:** Longmont, Colorado

**School:** Montbello High School Sophomore

**Favorite Memory:** Shopping in Estes Park

**Testimonial/Quote:** "Push through while hiking, I am realizing I am capable of walking long distances."





**Name:** Renee Vazquez

**Hometown:** Denver/Auora, Colorado

**School:** DSST Conservatory Green High School Junior

**Favorite Memory:** Working on the mountain with the Poudre Wilderness Volunteers and building the bridge.

**Testimonial/Quote:** "I learned how to enjoy nature with and without the people around me. I learned to enjoy nature how it is and respect it."

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**Name:** Sawyer Witbeck

**Hometown:** Lyons, Colorado

**School:** Longmont High School Senior

**Favorite Memory:** going on a hike, swimming at the rec center and being part of a crew, working as a team and learning new things.

**Testimonial/Quote:** "SEND IT!"

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**Name:** Sasha Trask

**Hometown:** Lafayette, Colorado

**School:** Centaurus High School Senior

**Favorite Memory:** The hike to Sky Pond - it was one of the longest hikes I have ever been on, and we got to climb a waterfall.

**Testimonial/Quote:** "Anyone can be a leader if they choose to be. Act with confidence and listen and you will do just fine. Don't be shy about voicing your opinions. I also loved working with the Poudre Wilderness Volunteers and meeting so many different people. I loved that we could help build a bridge with them and see our progress."

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**Name:** Mason Shore

**Hometown:** Lafayette, Colorado

**School:** Centaurus High School Junior

**Favorite Memory:** The final hike to Sky Pond was a lot of fun, and I enjoyed scrambling up the waterfall and taking some photos with the crew.

**Testimonial/Quote:** "Be sure to always push yourself, because you most likely can achieve more than you thought you could."



## July Crew Highlights

The July crew arrived in Estes Park on a hot and windy day. After huddling in the shade for lunch, the crew got to work setting up camp and Glacier Basin Campground. After setting up tents, the crew managed to fit most of the food and all personal smellable items into one bear box, which was no easy feat! Once camp was all set up, they played some games to get to know each other, set personal goals for the session, and enjoy a nice, warm dinner.

Day 2 was spent exploring Rocky Mountain National Park and learning more about living and working outside. After doing their first morning safety meeting, the crew hiked from Glacier Basin Campground to Bear Lake. Along the way the crew had discussions about Leave No Trace, and the importance of keeping a neat camp.



On day 3, the crew had their first day of work, with the Rocky Mountain Conservancy – Conservation Corps' Vegetation Crew, and the National Park Service Weed Warriors team. The day was spent removing invasive musk thistles from Moraine Park.

This was done by walking in a grid, so that the removal of invasives can be mapped using GIS. With shovels and loppers, we removed the plants from the ground below the root and removed the flowering heads to be incinerated.



Day 4 was spent with the NPS Fire Crew, working on fuels mitigation in Horseshoe Park. Before heading out to work, we sat down for the daily weather report and 6 minutes for safety provided by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group. Through this discussion the crew learned how important it is to be aware of the weather forecast regarding fire danger and mitigation. Next, we headed into the park to create piles of logs, sticks and other natural materials to be burned over the course of the winter. Throughout the day, the crew learned a ton about fire ecology through asking thoughtful questions about how fires interact with surrounding plants and animals. While a storm did end our working day early, crew members got an in-depth tour of the fire station, all the equipment kept on the engines, and even a chance to spray the fire hose!



Days 5, 6, and 7 were spent outside of the National Park. The early morning was spent taking down tents and packing backpacks for a 3-day backpacking "hitch" in the Poudre Canyon. The crew worked on US Forest Service land with a nonprofit called the Poudre Wilderness Volunteers (PWV), to build a stringer bridge on the Fish Creek Trail. In addition to learning how to backpack, members learned how to use a variety of tools, like a rock Austin, log lifters and a crosscut saw! After work, the crew spent the evenings playing cards, hanging out, and taking shelter from afternoon thunder storms. When they got back to Glacier Basin Campground, the crew was met with a relaxing pizza party before setting their tents back up and heading to sleep.



Day 8 was full of rest and education! The crew spent the morning doing laundry, showering (for the first time in a week!) and swimming at the Estes Park community center. In the afternoon, they headed to the local library where they learned how to build a resume and interview for jobs! They also attended a financial literacy session to learn about different types bank accounts and how to budget properly.

Feeling relaxed and refreshed, day 9 was spent driving up and over Trail Ridge Road – one of the highest paved roads in the United States. The crew spent the windy morning stopping at overlooks, searching for marmots, and taking in the views. After a restful lunch and good search for wild strawberries, they headed to Holzworth historic site. Here, the crew learned about ecology of the Colorado River's Kawuneeche Valley from a National Park Ranger.



This crew had discussions about the impact of homesteaders on the area, the introduction of nonnative moose, and current attempts to create habitat that will welcome wolves and beavers back into Rocky Mountain National Park.







On the final morning, the crew got up bright and early to clean and pack up camp. Once tents were down and gear was loaded into vehicles, everyone participated in a trash pickup line before heading down to Lyons to meet their families for a cookout to celebrate their experience and share memories.

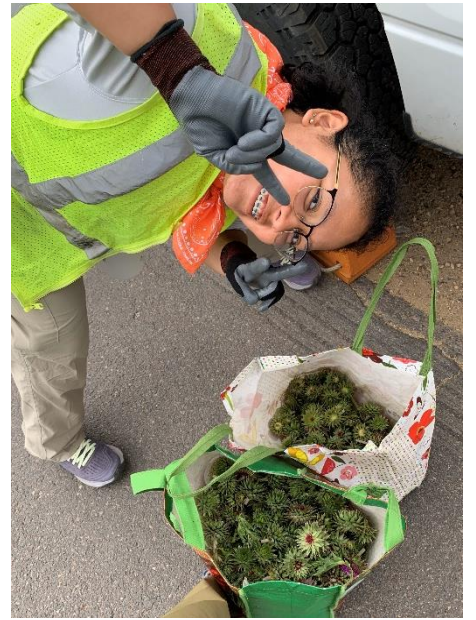
Just like that, the July session of the Rocky Mountain Conservancy's 2023 High School Leadership Corps was complete!



The last day, the crews final challenge was the trek up to Sky Pond, which includes scrambling up Timberline Falls in the final mile of the hike. After fighting off the mosquitos during lunch at the Loch Vale, they headed up the waterfall and ultimately to Sky Pond to take in the breathtaking alpine views (and meet Marty - the marmot!). At the end of the day, the crew headed to Lily Lake to do some final reflection in their journals. After a long day, everyone headed back to Glacier Basin for the last few games of chess and uno before sleeping in their tents one last time.













## HSLC Staff Members



**Name:** Maddy Brunson

**Employer:** Rocky Mountain Conservancy

**Position Title:** High School Field Coordinator

**Education:** Vanderbilt University, B.S in Child Studies

**Testimonial/Quote:** "I had a great time working with the High School Leadership Corps this season. It was wonderful to bring the groups of students into the park and give them a place to explore and discover the landscape while learning about conservation. I can only hope that when they returned home, they continue to spread awareness about caring for our world, in big and small ways."

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**Name:** Verenice Galvan

**Employer:** Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK)

**Position Title:** Urban Ranger Program Assistant

**Favorite Memory:** Working with the Poudre Wilderness Volunteers as they cracked jokes, told us about their lives and built the bridge together!

**Testimonial/Quote:** "Bring any card games you'd like to play with the group and talk to EVERYONE at least once a day to develop your friendships. You got it!"

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**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 year were hard workers, philosophers, and comedians. They made the program a positive place for **everyone** to learn and grow, together!"





**Name:** Grace McMahon

**Employer:** Rocky Mountain Conservancy

**Position Title:** Field Coordinator

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

**Testimonial/Quote:** “This program reminds me of the joy and love I discovered for natural areas at a young age. I’m happy to help others find their love for these spaces!”



**Name:** AJ Lullo

**Employer:** Rocky Mountain Conservancy

**Position Title:** Field Coordinator

**Education:** University of Illinois, B.S. in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences

**Testimonial/Quote:** “This program is so important for the development of responsible and caring young adults. I’m thankful to have met such inspiring folks!”



**Name:** Anna Wright

**Employer:** Rocky Mountain Conservancy

**Position Title:** Field Coordinator

**Education:** Regis University, B.S. of Peace and Justice Studies

**Testimonial/Quote:** “I’m thrilled to have the experience to work with such a stellar group of young adults.”



## 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 2024 High School Leadership Corps, please visit the RMC website at <https://rmconservancy.org/work-with-us/high-school-leadership-corps/>





## Special Thanks

The 2023 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](#)

Jim Bromberg, Natalie Chiapperi, Steven Stanovich, National Park Service Vegetation

Katie Phillips, Kurt Baze, Jordan Downie, National Park Service Interpretation and Education

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

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

Christian Vargas, Rachel Brett, [Thorne Nature Experience](#)

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



**Poudre Wilderness Volunteers**  
Caring For Northern Colorado Wilderness



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**Congratulations 2023 High School Leadership Corps!**

