



Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers

20 YEARS OF TRAIL BLAZING

ARTICLE BRIDGET GREY | PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED

If you have hiked in our valley during the last two decades, you've probably trampled on the work of the Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers. That's a *good* thing.

Since its start, Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers has rounded up 19,416 volunteers who have improved our local hiking/biking scene with 461 trail and restoration projects.

Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers will celebrate its 20th anniversary this summer by doing more of the same: working with the Forest Service at Hanging Lake, building a rock wall on the Crystal River Trail near Carbondale and building a new connecting trail in the Hunter Creek Valley.

In 1990, when David Hamilton, one of RFOV's founders, first trekked up the Mt. Sopris Trail with shovel in hand, he was taking the first steps on a journey of more than a thousand miles. He was lending a hand to Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado then, and he started RFOV along with Michael Hutton and Kevin O'Brien in 1995. Twenty years later, he's still at it, serving as the organization's executive director.

Although RFOV now has a staff of five, "volunteers" is the organization's last name for good reason. "In 2014," says Hamilton, "we had 2,378 volunteers, including 1,668 youth and 140 project days. Compared to 2010, that amounts to a 288 percent increase in volunteers, a 2,453 percent increase in youth participation and a 368 percent increase in days in the field."

The East Elk Creek Trail near New Castle provides an example of what those volun-

teers do. Last July, 16 of them helped Forest Service rangers reroute, rebuild and reopen the East Elk Creek Trail; it had been closed since a half mile of it washed out in 2011.

"We were assigned the toughest and most technical part of the reroute," says Hamilton. "Our section went through a steep and somewhat unstable scree field. That meant carefully rearranging the rock and bucketting in soil to create the trail."

GO BUILD A TRAIL!

The following projects were planned at press time. Check RFOV.org/get-involved/volunteer-for-a-work-day/ for updated volunteer opportunities.

- May 2 - Crystal River Trail Phase II, Carbondale
- May 7 & 14 - Wulfson Trail maintenance, Glenwood Springs
- June 26-28 - Crooked Creek Wetlands, Frying Pan Valley, two days with car camping, family friendly
- June 9, 16, 23 & 30 - Lollipop Trail Extension, Aspen
- July 11 - Hunter Creek Valley Weed Pull - Aspen, family friendly
- July 25-26 - East Elk Creek Trail - New Castle, overnight, car camping
- Aug. 28-30 - Cathedral Lake/Electric Pass Trail - Aspen, overnight, backpack to camping
- Sept. 12 - Hanging Lake/Spouting Rock Trails, Glenwood Springs
- Sept. 26 - Jolley Trail Connection - New Castle

RFOV projects span rivers and wetlands as well as trails, including restoration on Crooked Creek in the Frying Pan Valley, slated for 2015, and work projects the past two years at Rio Grande Park in Aspen.

Happily absent from this summer's agenda is tamarisk removal. An invasive plant imported from Asia in the 1800s, the tamarisk is notorious for sucking up water, out-competing native species and contaminating the soil with salt.

"We don't have a tamarisk project in 2015 because we have removed all of the large stands of tamarisk on public lands in our service area," Hamilton reports. "The last project was in 2013."

Helen Carlsen of Basalt helped remove tamarisks.

"I'm a kayaker and a river person," she says. "It's extremely satisfying looking at banks that were choked with tamarisk and seeing native willows growing back."

Carlsen, who was named RFOV's Volunteer of the Year in 2014, likes the tangible results of the work.

"At the end of the day, you can *see* what you have accomplished. If everybody who used the trails gave back, think what we could do," Carlsen says

Jo-Anne Ahrens, now the organization's development coordinator, began volunteering in 2001 because she loved to work outside.

"I thought it would be fun to help improve trails that I hiked and biked and to work on trails that were completely new to me," she says. "Plus, I knew that I would learn skills – pruning, erosion-prevention tactics and more – that I would use creating my own spaces in my yard. The sense of community at the end of the work day sealed the deal."