



**WILDERNESS
VOLUNTEERS**

2023 ANNUAL REPORT





A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As 2023 comes to a close, I could not be any more excited about the future of Wilderness Volunteers. In just a couple of years, I have seen our organization grow in name recognition, cultivate new partnerships, diversify our funding, and reach new people passionate about protecting the outdoors.

This year saw many changes: we codified a new 5-year strategic plan, adopted a new logo, and even updated our mission and vision statements to better represent who we are.

Amidst these changes, one thing remained the same: our volunteers are unmatched in their dedication, work ethic, and commitment to our wild lands. We hear time and time again from our agency partners that working with our crew is the highlight of their season, that our volunteers accomplish an incredible amount of high-quality work, and that they couldn't do it without us.

As our organization continues to grow and evolve, our volunteers will always stay at the center of what we do. I am so grateful for the support of every person who contributed their time, money, and sweat (hopefully not tears!) to the wild places we all cherish.

Thank you for your support!

CARRIE HENDERSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MISSION & VISION

We began 2023 with the Board and staff refreshing our organization's mission and vision, and setting some specific goals for achieving that vision. Engaging people in meaningful service that conserves and protects America's wild lands is a mission that seeks to honor the energy and commitment of our many volunteers, while also acknowledging the service we provide to our country's many parks, forests and wilderness areas. To achieve our vision to be a national leader in providing meaningful volunteer service to conserve and protect wild lands requires expanding both our cadre of volunteer project leaders, and the pool of volunteers we rely on for our many accomplishments.

In 2023 we trained nine new project leaders, and many of them are already scheduled to lead projects in the coming year. We had 277 volunteers participate in projects in 2023. With even more projects scheduled for 2024, we hope to see further increases in both leaders and volunteers.





BY THE NUMBERS

282

volunteers engaged

8,764

volunteer hours
completed

77 miles

of trail maintained

1,695

plants or trees
planted

319

steps installed

132

water bars maintained
or constructed

55

acres of invasive
plants removed
*+300 cubic feet

211

illegal fire rings
removed/naturalized

1.6

miles of user-created
trails closed

30

erosion control
features installed

1,520

lbs of trash removed

31

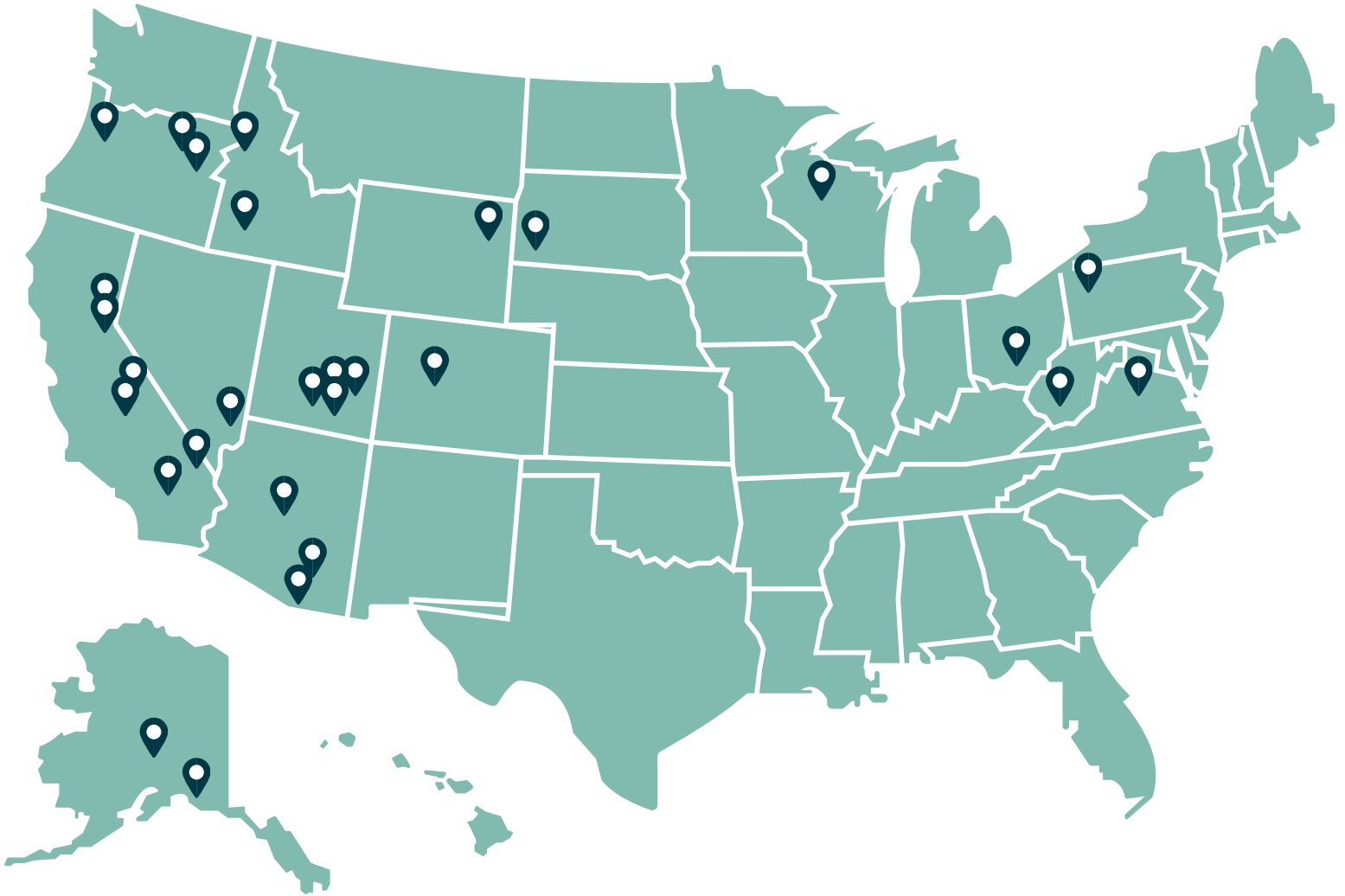
signs installed

*AND MUCH MORE!



\$278,695

in volunteer labor for public land management agencies



WHERE WE VOLUNTEERED

This year, we revisited many of our favorite locations, and also added projects in new regions of the country. Our projects took us to 15 different states and 29 unique locations. We continue to forge new partnerships with public land management agencies across the country, providing volunteer support where it is most needed.





PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: MT. HOOD NATIONAL FOREST

MT. HOOD NATIONAL FOREST (OREGON)

The Zigzag River, part of the Sandy River Basin, is home to three endangered species of salmonids. Mt. Hood National Forest manages about 70% of the Sandy River Basin, including the Zigzag River. The decline in the Sandy River Basin fish population has been well documented. Approximately 11.5 miles are accessible to salmon and steelhead, all of which has to some extent been degraded due to removal of large wood from the rivers, channelization of the river, development and road construction in the floodplain, logging, and recreational impacts. The Forest Service is involved in a years-long restoration effort to recreate salmon habitat. Part of this effort involves cutting down trees and placing the logs in the river, making wood jams that create small pools for salmon to lay eggs.

Our volunteer crew assisted Mt. Hood National Forest in restoring the ecological function of the Zigzag River and improving aquatic habitat by removing invasive species from the riverbanks, planting native trees and saplings, and spreading native seed. Aquatic habitats and land habitats are closely connected – essentially everything that happens on land ends up one way or another in the water. Having a healthy native riparian plant community keeps the river shaded and the stream cool. These plants support native insects, which can provide food for fish and help stabilize the soil

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: MT. HOOD NATIONAL FOREST

MT. HOOD NATIONAL FOREST (OREGON)

to prevent erosion and keep the water clean and clear. Moreover, a robust, diverse native plant community is far more resistant to being overtaken by invasive plants, which often change the characteristics of the riparian habitat and compete for resources. Invasives outcompete the native plants and tend to leave large areas of single species plant communities, which in many cases can have directly negative impacts on the aquatic community. Invasive plants can also increase risk to wildfire as they tend to grow in thick clusters and can transform a naturally fire-resistant riparian area into an area much more susceptible to burning. Lastly, the aquatic program plays a special role in combating the spread of invasives more broadly because rivers can be a natural corridor for them to spread, as water brings plant material downstream and deposits it in areas ripe for plants to take hold.



Leader Training

In addition to assisting with the Zigzag River's riparian restoration work, our Mt. Hood National Forest project this year was also our in-field Leader Training project. As a small organization with a staff of two full-time employees, Wilderness Volunteers relies on our Volunteer Leaders to lead a majority of our projects. We facilitate 1-2 Leader Training courses per year, training the next generation of wilderness stewardship leaders. Trainees learn how to plan menus, prepare meals for a group, manage safety and risk management, cultivate an inclusive and respectful group environment, and so much more. Five volunteers graduated from this Leader Training course, and are ready to lead for us in 2024 and beyond!

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: OAK CREEK CANYON

COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST (SEDONA, ARIZONA)

Oak Creek Canyon is a 12-mile-long gorge carved into the edge of the Mogollon Rim of the Colorado Plateau. Oak Creek Canyon sees over two million visitors each year, and the creek is experiencing harmful effects of being “loved to death.” SR-89A, the road adjacent to Oak Creek, is a thoroughfare between Flagstaff and Sedona. Visitors to Oak Creek Canyon park along the 89A, in day use areas, pull outs, or just on the side of the road, to access the creek, usually taking the most direct path from their car to the water rather than following an established trail. In 2021-2022, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) inventoried user-created (social) trails along Oak Creek Canyon and identified over 400 unsanctioned, user-created social trails leading from a parking area or the road down to the creek. For context, there should be about 50 established trails in the 12-mile-long canyon.

Foot travel, particularly on loose, steep user-created trails, from the road down to the creek creates erosion. As the steep slopes along the 89A erode, sediment from the road and microtrash are carried down to the creek, contaminating the water and ecosystem. Additionally, more user-created trails inevitably lead to more human use, increasing the amount of human waste, dog waste, and litter in the watershed. Recent ADEQ surveys have found that Oak Creek is impaired with *E. coli* along its entirety. *E. coli* not only makes humans sick, it is harmful to native species, including the protected narrow-headed garter snake that calls Oak Creek Canyon home.

Wilderness Volunteers became involved in the Oak Creek Canyon Watershed Restoration project in 2022. This year, we came back again to continue contributing to the larger effort to reverse the long-term trend of declining water quality in Oak Creek. The goals of our project were to close user-created trails, improve and stabilize selected trails to maintain access to the creek and prevent future erosion, and install features to capture sediment. This project will help improve the water quality in Oak Creek, making it safer for recreators and protecting critical aquatic habitat for the narrow-headed gartersnake and other native species.



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: OAK CREEK CANYON

COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST (SEDONA, ARIZONA)

With the guidance of Natural Channel Design Engineering and the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, our crew used a low-impact engineering approach utilizing natural materials to stabilize slopes, capture sediment, and obscure the trails. Most materials used were locally-sourced rock and locally-harvested vegetation.

Sustainable Materials

Our crew spread wood chips and mulch along the road, on top of steep slopes, to act as a natural filtration system, catching roadside debris and microtrash before it can get washed down into Oak Creek during monsoons or heavy rains. These wood chips came from the Wood for Life program, which uses wood from forest restoration efforts to provide free fuel for local Indigenous communities that rely on firewood to heat their homes. Coconino National Forest cuts timber during wildfire prevention efforts and donates it to local tribes to assist in heating their homes. There was unused timber left



over that was chipped and transported down to Oak Creek to help aid in watershed restoration efforts. Talk about zero waste!

Another example of multi-purpose local materials is the tree cuttings that our volunteer crew used to obstruct social trails. The local Yavapai-Apache tribe traditionally harvested walnut trees in the Sedona area. Junipers, manzanita, and other trees have been crowding out the walnut trees in recent years. The tribe asked Coconino National Forest if they could thin the junipers and manzanitas. The Forest said yes and contracted with an indigenous consulting group to perform the thinning operation. Our crew was able to use these cuttings to close user-created social trails and protect Oak Creek from further contamination from erosion. Now the walnut trees will have a better chance of thriving and fewer social trails will help protect Oak Creek!



FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

- This year, we saw an overall improvement in our financial position. Compared to 2022, we saw a 62.6% increase in project fees and an 8.4% increase in direct contributions.
- Despite an increasingly competitive grants atmosphere, we were able to bring in over \$30K in grant funding, a slight increase from 2022.
- This revenue was partially offset by an 11.8% annual increase in operational expenses.
- Our endowment fund increased by 7.2% to nearly return to its valuation at the end of 2021.

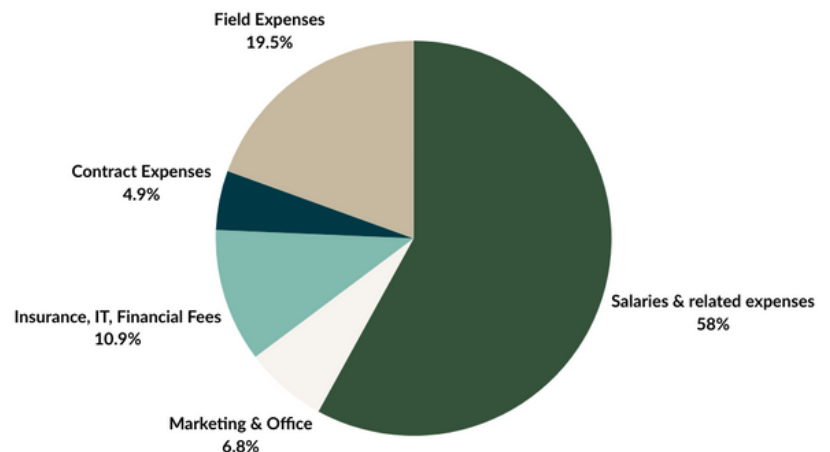
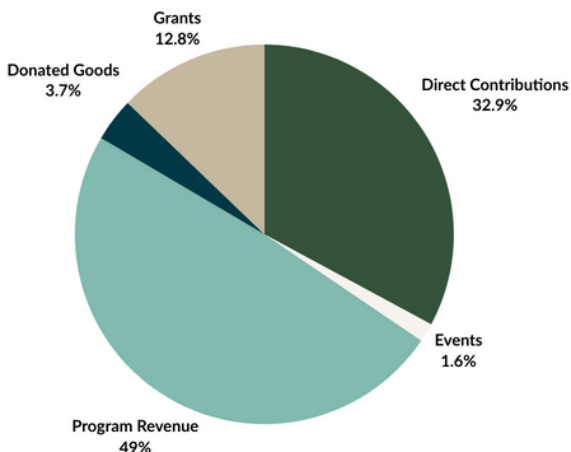
INCOME

DIRECT CONTRIBUTIONS	\$77,323
GRANTS	\$30,505
PROGRAM REVENUE	\$115,139
EVENTS	\$3,674
<u>DONATED GOODS</u>	<u>\$8,786</u>
TOTAL	\$235,427

OTHER INCOME \$30,710
 *Unrealized gain, interest, gifted securities, etc.

EXPENSES

SALARIES & RELATED EXPENSES	\$138,209
CONTRACT EXPENSES	\$11,526
FIELD EXPENSES	\$45,710
INSURANCE	\$9,031
IT	\$10,996
FINANCIAL FEES	\$4,245
MARKETING	\$7,559
<u>OFFICE SUPPLIES</u>	<u>\$9,257</u>
TOTAL	\$236,533



OUR 2023 BUSINESS SPONSORS



Hello Promo was founded in 2014 to make a positive impact by creating custom promotional products that inspire joy. Hello Promo helps boost companies' brands with

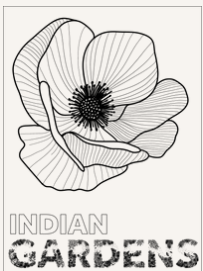
promotional products to generate positive results. Environmental impacts and sustainability are big core values at Hello Promo. Promotional products can be wasteful but we believe in finding promotional products for our clients that have less impact on our planet and has utility past an event or single use. Hello Promo is women-owned and a 1% for the Planet business member! In 2023, Hello Promo donated warehouse space to Wilderness Volunteers, covered all shipping and fulfillment, and printed various merchandise and marketing materials for us!

Naturepedic specializes in the design and manufacturing of quality organic mattresses for children and adults that promote natural and organic materials, a non-toxic design, fire-safety, and overall health & safety. Since 2003, Naturepedic has been on a mission to transform the lives of our customers through safer, healthier sleep. By eliminating materials like flame retardants and polyurethane foam from our line of certified organic natural mattresses, Naturepedic supports an organic holistic lifestyle while protecting the environment. Naturepedic has been a project sponsor for the past two years, sponsoring five projects in total from coast to coast!



Starting in Black Canyon City, AZ and ending at 7,000 feet in Flagstaff, AZ, Cocodona 250 is an epic adventure from start to finish. The Cocodona 250 ultramarathon race links together some of the most iconic trails and towns in Arizona for one monumental undertaking of 250 consecutive miles on foot. Cocodona 250 has partnered with Wilderness Volunteers for two years, supporting us through their charity bib program and donating proceeds from their annual training run. We have also partnered with Cocodona 250 on trail work days in Sedona, assisting us with our Oak Creek Canyon Watershed Restoration project!

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR SPONSORS!





STAFF

- Carrie Henderson, Executive Director
- Aidalicia Swertfeger, Program Director
- Jaclyn Kennedy, AmeriCorps Outreach Associate

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