



WILDERNESS VOLUNTEERS

2025 ANNUAL REPORT





A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2025 was a unique year for Wilderness Volunteers: one that started with deep cuts to our National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service partners and ended with a record-breaking 43-day shutdown, making our projects this year more critical than ever.

This year, despite cuts and uncertainty, Wilderness Volunteers completed 35 week-long service projects across 16 states. 305 passionate, hard-working volunteers logged a collective 8,517 hours for our public lands. Among these volunteers were 70 brand-new volunteers and a record 16 scholarship recipients!

Behind these numbers is a deeper story: one of volunteers from all walks of life, hailing from across the country, coming together to give their time, sweat, and care to our public lands. They made new friends and built community, challenged themselves and learned new skills, and gained a deeper commitment to protecting wild lands.

Looking ahead to 2026, we are committed to expanding opportunities for those who have financial barriers to participating in stewardship projects, maintaining a balanced budget, and providing vital hands-on support to places that need it the most during continued uncertainty and escalating threats to our public lands.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carrie Henderson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

CARRIE HENDERSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MISSION & VISION

The mission of Wilderness Volunteers is to engage people in meaningful service that conserves and protects America's wild lands.

Our vision is to be a national leader in providing meaningful volunteer service to conserve and protect wild lands.

We achieve our mission through coordinating volunteer service projects in partnership with public land management agencies, including the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management. We believe that all people benefit from healthy and resilient wild places, and are dedicated to increasing access to our volunteer service projects. We are committed to keeping volunteer costs low and increasing opportunities for financial assistance and scholarships. We believe that America's wild places are deserving of our stewardship and that we can contribute to their conservation and protection through providing meaningful and needed volunteer support.





305
volunteers
engaged

16
scholarship
recipients



53
miles of trail
maintained



44
campfires
remediated

2,271
ft of trail
re-routed

944
ft of new trail
built

5,104
ft of fencing
removed

87
native trees
planted

327
acres of invasive
plants removed



100

*new caves
identified*

54

*monuments
installed*

2,604

*lbs of trash
removed*



80

*acres of land
seeded*



100

*drainage
features built*

72

*downed logs
removed*

5,984
*ft of user-created
trail closed*

23

*steps
installed*



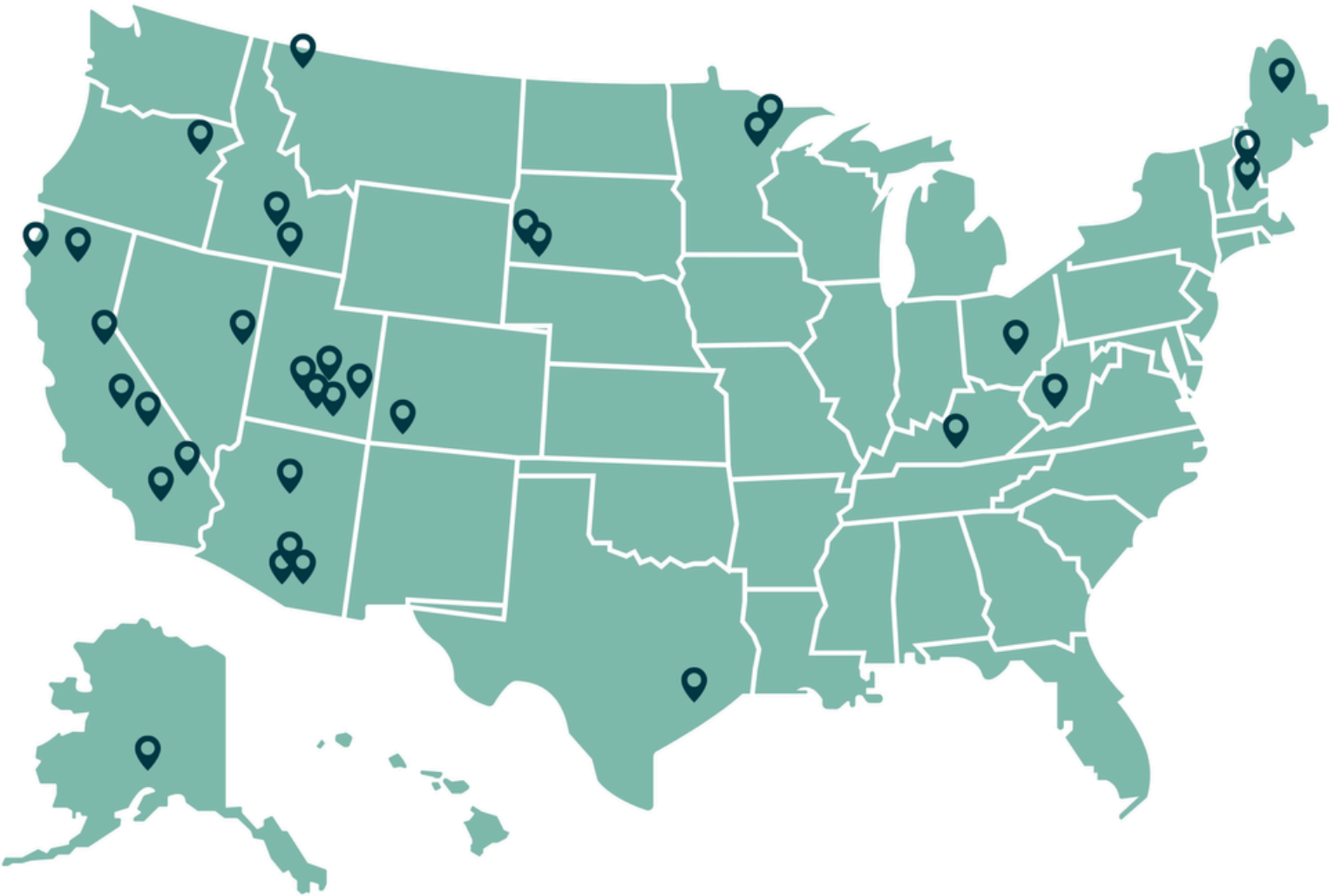
16

*campsites
remediated*

\$296,306

*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 16 different states and 32 unique locations. We continue to forge new partnerships with public land management agencies across the country, providing volunteer support where it is most needed.





EMPOWERING WOMEN & DEVELOPING LEADERS

PROJECT SPOTLIGHTS: BUFFALO GAP NATIONAL GRASSLAND & BLACK HILLS NATIONAL FOREST

This year, Wilderness Volunteers offered our first-ever women-only projects, with the goal of empowering women and developing leaders through outdoor stewardship. Partnering with the Black Hills Parks & Forests Association, our all-women crews completed high priority trail work and campsite rehabilitation projects in Custer State Park and Buffalo Gap National Grassland in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Our women's project in Custer State Park also served as a Leader Training project, preparing participants to become Wilderness Volunteers project leaders or acquire basic outdoor leadership skills, from risk management to backcountry food preparation.

With funding support from the National Forest Foundation and Athletic Brewing's Two for the Trails grant program, we were able to offer full scholarships to 14 women, 10 of whom completed our Leader Training program.

Our all-women stewardship projects gave participants a safe space to voice their ideas, take the lead, and flex their muscles. Volunteering alongside other women fostered a welcoming, collaborative environment where the volunteers felt comfortable and empowered.

EMPOWERING WOMEN & DEVELOPING LEADERS

PROJECT SPOTLIGHTS: BUFFALO GAP NATIONAL GRASSLAND & BLACK HILLS NATIONAL FOREST

In addition to empowering women and developing leaders in outdoor spaces, our two stewardship projects accomplished high-priority, backlogged maintenance needs for two public lands in western South Dakota. Despite being impacted by the government shutdown, our Black Hills National Forest volunteer crew was able to pivot to working in Custer State Park, completing trail maintenance on the popular Trail #4, which provides access to South Dakota's highest peak: Black Elk Peak. Volunteers maintained 1.5 miles of trail, removing two downed logs and improving 81 drainage features, and closing one user-created social trail.

In Buffalo Gap National Grassland, staff were dealing with public safety and erosion issues caused by the overuse of the Pinnacles dispersed camping area, located just north of Badlands National Park. The Pinnacles sees over 400 campers most weekends during peak season, who typically park on the east side of the road that overlooks the Badlands "wall" (cliff face). Increased use had



prevented grass from growing, leading to increased erosion of the loose soil, which also becomes slippery with a small amount of rain. These conditions became a public safety concern: users were parking too close to the eroding cliff and 25 ft.-long campers had gone over the edge.

Our volunteers were tasked with closing campsites along the cliff's edge, and then creating a designated dispersed campground. The all-women crew designed and built over 800 ft. of fencing to create seven new pull-through campsites and five back-in campsites. They also constructed 342 ft. of log worm fencing to create a picnic table and native grass area for campers to enjoy. Additionally, the group closed and naturalized 10 campsites along the dangerous cliff, and spread native seed in a 63 sq. ft. area. The crew was invited to give the designated dispersed campground a name - and they annointed it "Shee-Rah Campground!"

DISCOVERY TO PROTECTION IN CRATERS OF THE MOON

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT & PRESERVE (IDAHO)



Among the many new agency partnerships Wilderness Volunteers developed in 2025 was Craters of the Moon National Monument & Preserve (CRMO). Located in central Idaho, CRMO is home to thousands of caves, many of which may contain significant yet undocumented resources, including water sources, cultural materials, unique geological features, endemic invertebrates, and critical bat habitat such as hibernation sites, maternity colonies, and day roosts. To date, only a small portion of the preserve has been systematically surveyed for caves, and nearly all of the 669 currently known caves were discovered incidentally.

In 2025, with the help of our Wilderness Volunteers crew, CRMO began a systematic approach to finding caves for the first time in its 101-year history. Systematically hiking across lava fields and using a mapping app, our volunteers surveyed approximately 260 acres - and found 100 caves in just four days! Our crew covered areas that were thought to be well-explored and well-documented, but still found dozens of new caves. Our volunteers even discovered 19 caves in a grid-cell that was considered one of the most explored areas in the park.

DISCOVERY TO PROTECTION IN CRATERS OF THE MOON

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT & PRESERVE (IDAHO)

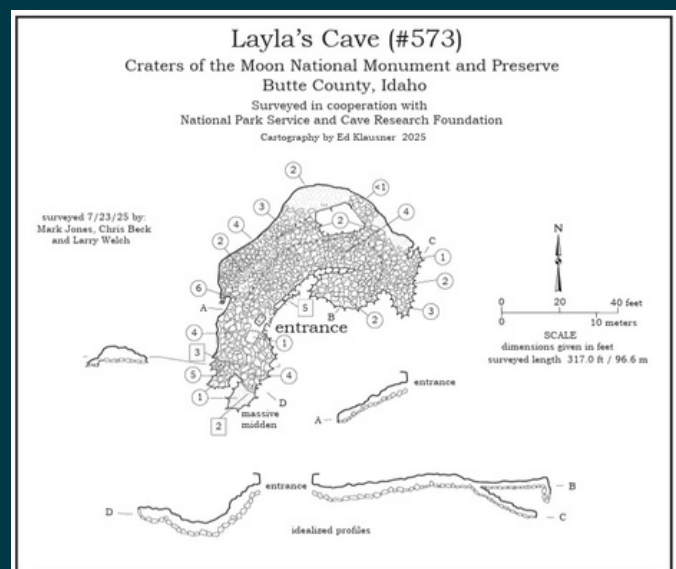


A nonprofit called the Cave Research Foundation [CRF] was in the park the same week and some of our crew's most exciting cave leads were passed on to them. One cave found by WV had an additional passage that took CRF two days to map. They mapped 430 feet of cave, saw two bats, recorded three maternity colony-sized piles of guano, & pike scat: all vital findings to the park's cave research and future protection.

The park's wildlife biologist, Todd Stefanic, said: "This new partnership between Wilderness Volunteers and CRMO has great potential to go along with the park's 10-year partnership with the CRF. A pipeline is now in place to find caves, get them assessed for resources and professionally mapped so that the park may prioritize them for study and protection."

Layla's Cave

The most exciting cave discovery made by Wilderness Volunteers is called Layla's Cave. The Cave Research Foundation followed up on this promising lead, marking survey locations, taking measurements, and sketching and recording data. Extensive woodrat middens and scat were found throughout the cave. After surveying hundreds of feet in multiple directions, the data was sent to CRM's Chief Cartographer. Layla's Cave as discovered by Wilderness Volunteers on Monday, surveyed on Wednesday, and mapped on Thursday!



FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

- The 43-day government shutdown at the end of 2025 impacted our budget in several ways - the most notable being a month-long delay in releasing our 2026 Project Schedule. This resulted in our Project Revenue being ~\$30-40K lower than in a typical year.

INCOME

DIRECT CONTRIBUTIONS

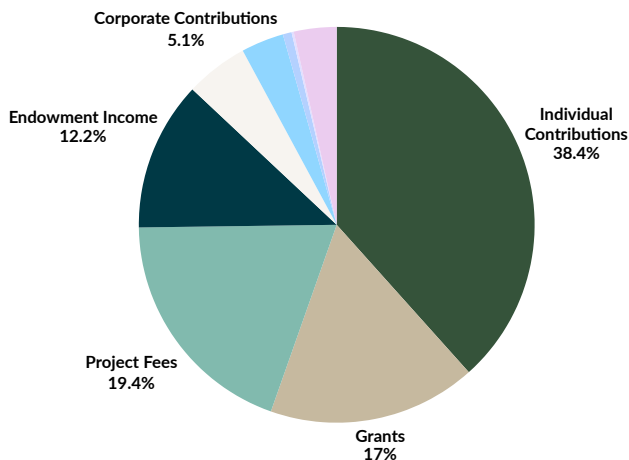
INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS	\$106,812
CORPORATE CONTRIBUTIONS	\$14,499
PROJECT SPONSORSHIPS	\$13,063
FOUNDATION/TRUST GRANTS	\$47,468
AGENCY FUNDING	\$1,990
EVENTS	\$9,758
IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS	\$3,800

PROGRAM REVENUE

PROJECT FEES	\$53,900
MERCHANDISE	\$538

ENDOWMENT INCOME	\$33,922
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TOTAL \$285,750



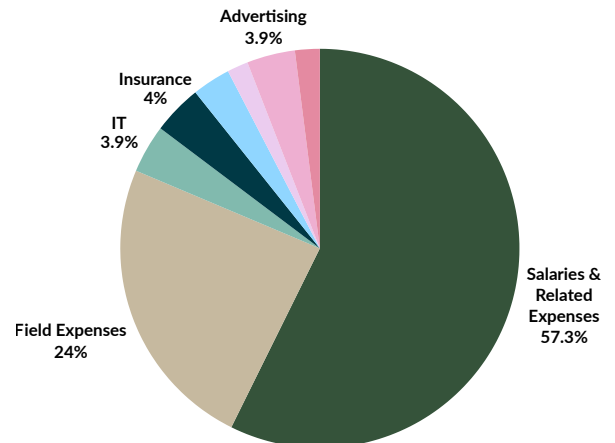
EXPENSES

OPERATIONAL EXPENSES

SALARIES & BENEFITS	\$161,814
ACCOUNTING FEES	\$8,808
INSURANCE	\$11,400
OFFICE EXPENSES	\$4,738
IT	\$11,136
ADVERTISING	\$10,941
ORGANIZATIONAL EXPENSES	\$1,176
FIELD EXPENSES	\$68,007
FINANCIAL FEES	\$2,907

OTHER	\$1,780
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TOTAL \$282,707



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WILDERNESS VOLUNTEERS

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