COVER: As dangerous as it is beautiful. The north face of Capitol Peak was the location for five climber fatalities in 2017, half of an all-time-record 10 deaths on 14ers. Photo by Cameron Miller Photography.
“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” --Helen Keller

Collaboration has been a hallmark of Colorado Fourteeners Initiative’s 14er stewardship work dating back to our inception in 1994 as “a partnership for preservation.” With a very short alpine field season and more than 50 peaks spread across the state, CFI has always relied on partnerships with other groups to bring out as many people as possible and make the greatest impact. From youth corps crews to volunteer stewardship organizations, businesses to individual enthusiasts across the country, CFI has worked with just about any willing partner to protect the 14ers.

In 2017, however, CFI’s focus on collaboration expanded significantly thanks to the first year of the National Forest Foundation’s “Find Your Fourteener” campaign. The first season of this multi-year effort injected additional funding, fostered creative new approaches to getting work done and generated considerable enthusiasm that allowed Colorado Fourteeners Initiative to significantly boost project work on several 14ers.

Collaboration on Mount Elbert saw CFI fielding two separate leadership teams on the mountain (one working at timberline, one near the trailhead), two separate Rocky Mountain Youth Corps crews, a youth corps “Peak Apprentice” position helping coordinate crews and volunteer projects, a prison work crew cutting and delivering logs, and multiple collaborative projects with statewide and local trail stewardship organizations. Many of these were entirely new concepts or scaled-up versions of tried-and-true approaches.

Another example of new forms of collaboration was pre-season technical rigging training for crew leaders working on CFI’s Mount Columbia project and Rocky Mountain Field Institute’s Challenger Peak project. Even though neither project was formally adopted by the Find Your Fourteener campaign, the NFF-paid training boosted skills of CFI and RMFI leaders working on these very complex trail-building projects, as well as the Southwest Conservation Corps crew leaders who would assist both projects.

As a result of these innovative approaches, CFI posted its best year ever in terms of volunteer engagement and on-the-ground work performed. CFI also plans to utilize collaboration in future fundraising efforts and in developing mountain safety videos to address the record number of 14er fatalities that occurred this summer.

As the saying goes, “Many hands make light work.” CFI will always strive to be the national leader in technical trail building at high altitude. However, we will always look for ways to partner with others in a collaborative manner to get the most, highest-quality work done in the shortest time possible.

Thanks for collaborating with us to make a difference on the 14ers!

Regards,

Lloyd F. Athearn

Lloyd F. Athearn, Executive Director
Building sustainable summit trails and protecting fragile alpine terrain received a big boost in 2017 thanks to the first year of the National Forest Foundation’s “Find Your Fourteener” campaign. NFF ramped up funding, organized a technical rigging training and fostered new ways of partnering with other stewardship organizations that assisted on all three peaks. NFF also helped fund CFI’s new Field Projects Coordinator position and allowed for experimentation with youth corps “apprentices” on two peaks to provide continuity between fixed-site crews that work midweek and volunteer projects that occur over weekends.

Using the tram to transport rocks. Photo by Eli Allan, www.eliswindow.net.
MOUNT COLUMBIA. CFI fielded a crew of five experienced trail builders, including one technical rigging expert, who worked with a six-member youth corps crew on the second of four seasons of new trail construction. The trail is possibly the most technically demanding ever built by CFI. The crew used a highline tram and griphoist system to move more than 500 large rocks from higher on the mountain to a section of the route almost devoid of natural building material. Ensuring crew safety was paramount during this slow process. Retaining walls and trail features needed to be scaled up from initial plans so that they would not fail due to the very steep side slope on the mountain. The crew cut 1,800 feet of new trail, installed 93 rock steps and built almost 1,500 square feet of walls.
MOUNT ELBERT. The first of four seasons revamping the East Ridge route occurred last summer. Since this project is located outside of wilderness (and has no group size limits), CFI was able to experiment with using multiple crews simultaneously to maximize speed in delineating two major bypasses. Five CFI leaders and two youth corps teams cut more than 2 miles of trail over the season. The lower bypass, which winds through an aspen forest from the Colorado Trail almost to timberline, was opened in early August. This allowed CFI to close and begin stabilization of the old, unplanned route. Most of a second bypass above treeline was cut, but not opened due to the need for additional trail features to be installed in 2018. A Rocky Mountain Youth Corps apprentice helped coordinate 577 volunteer days of work that were run by CFI’s Adopt-a-Peak crew.
QUANDARY PEAK. In the second of three planned years of intensive trail reconstruction, a two-person crew and RMYC apprentice performed work over the full length of the summit trail. Due to lack of rocks on the lower portion of the route, CFI felled trees and used dimensional lumber to construct almost 200 wood steps and several soil retention walls along the route. Proximity to Denver allowed crews to engage 334 days of volunteer labor on the project.
CFI continued its four-year expansion in volunteer trail maintenance work during 2017 by engaging another all-time-record number of people in reconstructing and maintaining summit trails. A total of 946 individual volunteers put in a combined 1,952 days working on the 14ers last year. This was a 25 percent increase above 2016’s previous record. Volunteers worked on 74 projects located on 21 peaks across the state.

Most volunteers continue to come through organized groups. CFI’s project season aligns well with youth camps that generally provide volunteers for multi-day backcountry projects. Business groups find CFIs’ trail stewardship projects to be fun team-building events for employees. The first year of the “Find Your Fourteener” campaign saw several long-time stewardship partner groups, including Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, Wildlands Restoration Volunteers and Friends of the Dillon Ranger District, commit to organizing increased numbers of large collaborative trail projects with CFI.
Volunteers build a rock staircase on the approach route to Maroon Peak.
To help ensure that trail maintenance efforts are deployed in ways that maximize impact, CFI surveyed 14er enthusiasts to gauge their opinions about where and how maintenance work should be targeted. More than 220 people responded to the survey. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed on the following approaches: 1) Focus on routes in the worst condition (D and F Sustainable Trails ratings), 2) Concentrate efforts on a smaller number of high-priority peaks, and 3) Prioritize work on high-use peaks in the most-accessible ranges. This feedback helped guide a State Trails grant request that will drive future maintenance priorities.
Once CFI gained legal access to three mining claims atop Mount Shavano in early 2017, the Forest Service began planning a new summit route. Since it will take several years for the route to be planned and constructed, CFI installed warning signs in June highlighting the inherent risks of recreating on the peak. This is a requirement of Colorado’s recreational use statute. The summit signs also inform hikers about the project and how they can get involved.

Later in the summer a reception was held in Salida’s Riverside Park to celebrate the successful land acquisition and to thank the people who played roles in helping make the transaction happen. The following morning a small party climbed the mountain and had a celebratory brunch featuring champagne and cinnamon rolls. Participants included Hunt Walker, CFI’s Board Chair and one of the experts on the lands team, as well as Adelaide Leavens of the Meta Alice Keith Bratten Foundation, one of the major project funders.
Last year was a pivotal one for CFI’s Sustainable Trails Program that seeks to better understand how Colorado’s 14er trails are faring given increased hiking use. A major Colorado State Trails grant helped begin a second round of trail condition inventories on at least 30 routes and will also help fund monitoring 14er trail use levels through 2018.
Tom Cronin, a long-time trail project leader, hiked more than 250 miles and climbed almost 89,000 vertical feet while completing 21 inventories during the summer field season. This included 9 baseline condition inventories and 12 secondary inventories. He recorded more than 5,250 GPS-based data points on 83.1 miles of trail that will be added to CFI’s accumulating database of trail condition scores.

Data collected during the 2017-18 period will help CFI issue an updated “14er Report Card” by early 2019. The second phase of data collection will ensure that every major 14er route has had at least a baseline assessment. Several peaks will also have had a secondary assessment. The follow-up inventory will help show where CFI’s investments in trail reconstruction and maintenance since 2011-13 are improving conditions, as well as where the impacts of hikers and weather may be deteriorating trail conditions.

The hiking use report released last year estimated that 311,000 people hiked 14ers during the 2016 season. This use contributed to an estimated $84.3 million in economic impact to Colorado through gas, food, lodging and gear-related purchases. This was the first hiking use report that factored in a doubled number of trail counters (20 vs. 10 for the first report), which utilized a broader network of counter locations.

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**Estimated Hiking Use on Colorado’s 14ers**

**Total Hiker Use Days: 311,000 (2016 Data)**

**Front Range**

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**San Juan Mountains**

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**Mosquito Range**

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<td>Mount Sherman</td>
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**Sangre de Cristo Range**

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<tr>
<td>Unnamed Peak</td>
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**Approximation Notes**

*Indicates data drawn from CFI TRAFx recorders, with data gap and early/late season infills from either previous years or nearby peak data. All other estimates are interpolated from a correlation between TRAFx data and reported 14ers.com peak use statistics.

Range and overall totals are adjusted to account for the frequent practice of summiting multiple peaks in one day.

**Estimated Hiker Use Days Estimate.**
Restoration of closed social trails is a vital part of protecting Colorado’s 14ers. A social trail that has been used for decades becomes a steep, heavily compacted conduit for fast-flowing water unless CFI intervenes to assist in the restoration process. If left unaddressed the old trail will continue to erode soil and smother plants with silt in the deposition zones.
CFI’s biggest restoration effort in 2017 was starting the closure, stabilization and restoration of the roughly mile-long old social trail on Mount Elbert’s East Ridge route. Once the new bypass trail opened in early August, CFI crews and volunteers set to work installing log check dams, importing fill soil to restore the natural contours of the hillside, and transplanting vegetation to start the naturalization process. They were able to restore 1,480 linear feet of trail by installing 275 log restoration check dams and transplanting more than 600 vegetation plugs.

Restoration was also a part of the intensive reconstruction effort on Quandary Peak. Crews and volunteers restored more than 1,500 square feet of trail braids on this route through transplantation of 286 vegetation plugs. Smaller scale restoration projects occurred on numerous Adopt-a-Peak trail maintenance projects.

Restoration is a slow process. It will take years before the old trails have been consumed by spreading vegetation. It is vital for hikers to avoid entering closure areas, as any disturbance will set back the restoration process.

Restoration is a great project for youth volunteers since it is less physically demanding than trail work.
Since its inception more than 20 years ago, CFI’s educational focus has been imparting Leave No Trace messages to protect the fragile alpine terrain. The volume of current hiking use requires that all 14er hikers understand the importance of staying on developed trails and using minimum impact practices while recreating on these fragile peaks.

Inappropriate human activity in alpine zones and sub-alpine forests can cause lasting damage. For example, initials carved into tree trunks will endure as long as the tree survives. In recent years some 14er hikers have begun using permanent markers to tag summit rocks with their names or to write the peak name as a more permanent summit sign. All of these actions cause long-term impacts that degrade the peaks for future visitors. CFI continues to advocate the #Cleaner14er message.

The record number of 14er hiker fatalities last year, however, caused CFI to spend more time addressing hiker safety subjects than LNT. CFI was featured in more than 30 news stories across print, radio and television. Most stories related to the inherent hazards of hiking 14ers and what might be the cause for the rash of 10 hiker deaths. CFI’s prior accident analysis of the Elk Mountains 14ers helped put these fatalities into a historical context.
Since many of those who died appeared to have had minimal knowledge about general and specific risks of climbing Colorado’s high peaks, CFI raised funds from the Colorado Tourism Office and Aspen Skiing Environment Foundation that will fund the roll-out of several mountain safety videos in 2018. Completed videos will be added to CFI’s YouTube library of more than 40 existing subjects.

CFI crews and volunteer Peak Stewards continued to provide on-mountain hiker education. Season-long projects on Quandary and Elbert, among the most-climbed 14ers in the state, allowed CFI crews to make more than 13,000 hiker education contacts. This was the third-best year ever for crew contacts. Volunteer Peak Stewards put in 43 days on the 14ers and made more than 1,700 hiker contacts.
If past trends continue, hiking 14ers will only grow in popularity in the years ahead. That means it is vital for CFI to tackle remaining projects as quickly as possible. The challenge is that future projects are increasingly technical and often located in more logistically complicated areas. CFI is evolving in ways that will allow us to be better positioned across the state to support this work. Here are some snapshots of future projects and facilities that you will hear more about in the future.

Mount Shavano. The Forest Service did preliminary on-the-ground scouting of a potential new route on Mount Shavano, which remains one of the 14ers in greatest need of a new summit trail. CFI’s purchase of three summit area mining claims spurred the Forest Service to pursue acquisition of four additional mining claims on the saddle through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. If successful, the Forest Service and CFI will own eight of the 11 parcels on the peak that will be open to legal public access.
TRAIL PLANNING. Planning new sustainable 14er summit routes is a known Forest Service roadblock that CFI is hoping to support through hiring a future core staff position. Route planning assistance is needed for forthcoming projects on Mounts Wilson and Shavano, which we hope to launch in the field as early as 2020, as well as projects on Castle Peak, Mount Princeton and Snowmass Mountain. The envisioned position will also be involved in managing CFI’s growing field programs and technical training of seasonal staff.

PRIVATE LANDS. Directors with experience in private land transactions continue to delve into how CFI can help provide legal public access to a few 14ers. After years of reaching out, CFI officials are set to meet with the Blanca Ranch in early 2018 to discuss access to Mount Lindsey, which is entirely located on Ranch property. Directors have also dug into land ownership information for Mount Sherman. While all relevant mining claims are owned by one corporation, the number of individual parcels and the presence of significant past mining activity may make any easement tricky to pull off.

BASE FACILITIES. For many years CFI has used a Forest Service cabin, garage and land near Twin Lakes to support operations. Use of the “Cabin Cove” facility has been authorized annually, which means that CFI has no guaranteed use of this convenient location. Discussions are under way on a long-term lease whereby CFI would have exclusive, year-round access to this facility in return for undertaking facility maintenance and capital improvements. Last year CFI bought a new 30-foot yurt to house our growing seasonal staff. CFI’s existing 20-foot yurt will be moved in 2019 to BLM land near Lake City to support growing work in the San Juans.
2017 SEASONAL PROJECT MANAGERS
Members of CFI’s 2017 seasonal staff at the season-ending BBQ.


2017 CORE STAFF

2017 BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Hunt Walker, Chair
Tom Barney, Vice-Chair
Brad McQueen, Treasurer
Tim Rampe, Secretary
Christopher Bouck
Wendy Boutin
Lynn Guissinger
Richard Heppe
Mandy Hughes
Ben Krasnow
Craig Mackey
Andrew Mahoney
John W. Mill
Nate Palmer
Laura Schafer
Jim Wason
Stephanie Welsh
Len Zanni
Marty Zeller

Organizations
2017 SEASONAL PROJECT MANAGERS

MOUNT ELBERT CREW
Eric Haggstrom, Lead Project Manager
Kristine Velez, Assistant Project Manager
Kevin Langevin, Crew Member
Spencer Phillips, Crew Member
Macey Wiley, Crew Member
Hannah Clark, RMYC Peak Apprentice

MOUNT COLUMBIA CREW
Eli Allan, Lead Project Manager
Steena Cultrara, Assistant Project Manager
Wade Frisbee, Lead Technical Advisor
Pat Hall, Crew Member
Eric McSwan, Crew Member

QUANDARY PEAK CREW
Margaret McQuiston, Lead Project Manager
Timo Holmquist, Assistant Project Manager
Jack Paskin, RMYC Peak Apprentice

ADOPT-A-PEAK CREW
Christopher Kucich, Crew Leader
Taylor Beeson, Crew Leader
Abby Mortimer, Crew Member
Roslyn Peters, Crew Member
Sarah Rockford, Crew Member
Brennan Turner, Crew Member
Shelby Johnson, Outdoor Leadership Intern
Riley Nicolay, Outdoor Leadership Intern

SUSTAINABLE TRAILS
Tom Cronin, Sustainable Trails Coordinator

TRAIL PLANNING
Dana Young, CFI-USFS Design Assistant

2017 VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: BILL ANDERSON (Colorado Springs, Colorado)

Bill’s fascination with Mount of the Holy Cross was what drew him to CFI three years ago. Though born in Minnesota, Bill’s family moved to Pueblo when he was a child. He spent many days during his childhood hiking 14ers with his father, initially in the Sangres. He learned about Holy Cross while looking through maps and guidebooks, eventually becoming “infatuated” with the mountain, its secluded location and the history of exploration and pilgrimages. In fact, the desire to sign up for a CFI volunteer project on Holy Cross three years ago was what connected Bill to CFI.

When not volunteering with CFI or working as a heavy equipment operator in the construction field, Bill is likely to be found working his smoker to create the perfect barbeque. He’s been fired up about barbecue for 20 years, and began entering competitions five years ago. For the past couple of years he has hosted a season-end trailhead cookout for the Adopt-a-Peak crew, which has received rave reviews. Sign up for that project next season and you might have the opportunity to sample brisket or pulled pork prepared by one of CFI’s most committed volunteers.

2017 AWARD RECIPIENTS

ADOPT-A-PEAK VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR:
Sarah Seibold (Longmont, Colorado)

ADOPT-A-PEAK ROOKIES OF THE YEAR:
Wes Cochran and Rachael Aronson
(Salida, Colorado)

ADOPT-A-PEAK PARTNER OF THE YEAR:
Friends of the Dillon Ranger District
(Silverthorne, Colorado)

PEAK STEWARD OF THE YEAR:
Terry Mattison (Arvada, Colorado)

OUTSTANDING AGENCY PARTNER:
Jim Lovelace, BLM Gunnison Field Office
(Gunnison, Colorado)

CORPORATE PARTNER OF THE YEAR:
14er Brewing
(Denver, Colorado)

FOUNDATION PARTNER OF THE YEAR:
National Forest Foundation (Missoula, Montana)

SPECIAL RECOGNITION FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICE:
Luis Benitez, Director, Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office (Denver, Colorado)
Glenn Randall, Glenn Randall Photography (Boulder, Colorado)
Colorado Fourteeners Initiative enjoyed a ninth year of exceptional financial performance during 2017. Operating revenues increased 16 percent compared to 2016, while operating expenses were up 6 percent. Total revenues and expenses were both all-time highs. This was also the second year in the organization’s 24-year history in which revenues and expense surpassed $1 million. CFI ended the year with an operating surplus of $140,126 (11 percent), which was almost six times larger than the 2016 operating surplus.

Total net assets grew for a fifth consecutive year to an all-time high of $846,313 at year end. This represents a one-year increase of 20 percent. The total net assets figure includes $175,329 in grants obtained to fund work in future years, $116,612 in property and equipment, $111,079 in a reserve fund to ameliorate seasonal cash-flow swings, $46,014 in land owned on Mount Shavano, and additional retained cash reserves to cushion the organization from unanticipated revenue downturns or uncontrollable events such as forest wildfire closures.

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OPERATING EXPENSES
Total operating expenses in 2017 were $1,131,609, another all-time high, reflecting CFI’s biggest year ever in work protecting the 14ers. Programs represented 82 percent of all expenditures last year ($929,753), a 2 percent increase over 2016. Funds invested in trail restoration work increased by $64,960 last year, but remained stable at 87 percent of all programmatic expenses. This reflected the expansion in trail crews as part of the “Find Your Fourteener”-funded work. Hiring staff to embark on a second phase of trail condition data collection boosted Sustainable Trails expenditure by $23,399, an increase of 59 percent compared to the prior year when only hiker counts were performed. Education and outreach-related expenditures declined to $58,566, a reduction of 13 percent. Much of this represented staff time working with the media due to the record number of 14er fatalities. No educational videos or trailhead kiosks were produced in 2017.

General administration ($101,454) and fundraising ($100,402) each represented 9 percent of all 2017 operating expenses. Despite fundraising expenses declining 14 percent due to consolidating annual and year-end reports into one direct mail solicitation, total revenues increased by 17 percent. Administrative expenses increased $3,568, a jump of 4 percent, but supported 9 percent more program-related spending. CFI’s administrative and fundraising expense ratio (referred to as “AFR” in the nonprofit sector) was 18 percent last year. CFI’s AFR has fallen 7 percent over two years, largely attributed to increased individual donations and bigger foundation giving. CFI is always at a disadvantage based on this metric since most of our programmatic work is performed for only four months, but fundraising and administrative work occurs for a full year.

CFI received a clean, GAAP-based audit from JDS Professional Group for its 2017 financial statements. This marks the ninth consecutive clean audit for the organization’s financial reporting.
A passing storm on the Wilson Massif.

Photo by Cameron Miller Photography