

PROTECT • RESTORE • EDUCATE

ANNUAL REPORT



Colorado Fourteeners Initiative
A Partnership for Preservation

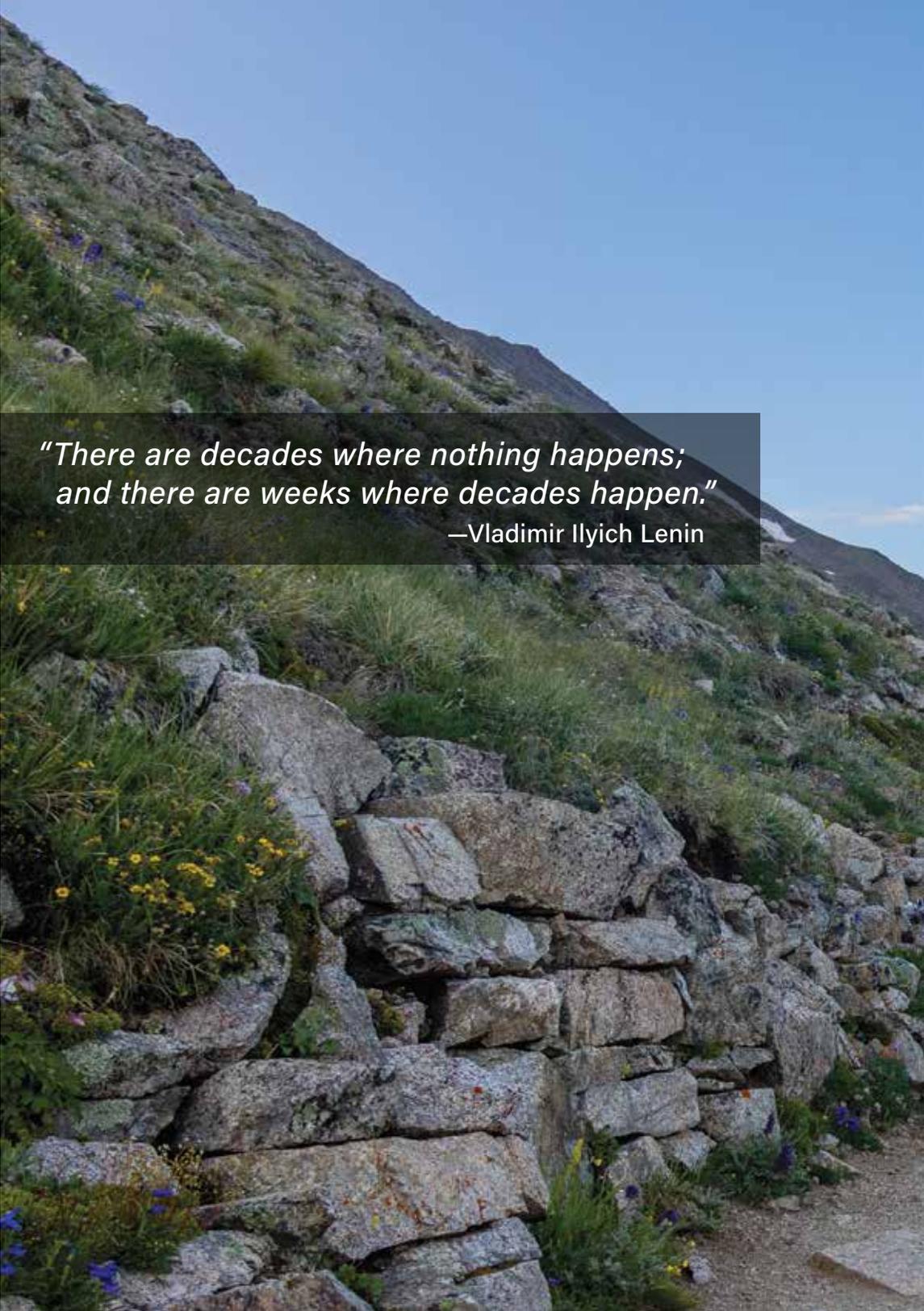
From the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Working in nature, one acutely feels the passage of time. Slight changes from day to day lead to bigger changes from season to season. The annual emergence of plants as the winter snowpack melts builds to their glorious summer flowering and then their eventual deaths with the coming of the first snow. These passages of time are amplified at elevation, where so much activity is compressed into a few short weeks. When the weather is good, you make the most of it, knowing that it is ephemeral and that without notice you could be scrapping plans due to an incoming storm.

Over CFI's 30 years of working on the fourteeners, we have mastered how to maximize efficiency in our work given the constraints of toiling at lofty heights. Year after year, we do the best we can to match the rhythms and cycles of nature. Snowfall on potentially any day of the season? Yep. Lightning-filled summer thunderstorms? No problem. Keeping bears out of basecamps? We've got that one covered, too. However, for a few weeks during summer 2024, it seemed like more tectonic changes were underway—or at least became more visible.

On July 11, roughly 120 people joined us to celebrate CFI's 30th anniversary at 14er Brewing in Denver. It was a time to raise glasses and toast those who had played formative roles in the founding of the organization and helped achieve our many successes over the previous three decades. While we reveled in the amazing things CFI has done for Colorado's highest mountains, it also became apparent how many founding visionaries were no longer with us. So many of the people who saw the need for CFI's existence—and mapped out a course that hasn't changed substantially—were not there to join in the celebration. As President John F. Kennedy once remarked, the torch had been passed to a new generation.

Then, in August, at a going-away party held near Leadville, I wished Loretta McElhiney well as she embarked on her retirement from the



*"There are decades where nothing happens;
and there are weeks where decades happen."*

—Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

U.S. Forest Service. As the longtime manager for the agency's Colorado Fourteeners Program, Loretta was the visionary who climbed all over the fourteeners for three decades in pursuit of planning a network of summit trails that would replace the unsustainable social trails that climbers had created over the prior century. With an agency hiring freeze in place, we knew her position would not be filled quickly. Several capable and committed agency staffers are bootstrapping the program along as best they can, but the void Loretta left is great. And with subsequent federal agency purges, it seems improbable that her position will ever be filled.

By September, it also became clear that general Forest Service financial support for CFI and other partners would be eliminated starting in 2025. Since the Fourteeners Program's inception, the six national forests in Colorado that harbor fourteeners provided funding to support both Loretta's position and partners like CFI. Progressively deeper cuts in agency budgets made it more difficult for agency leaders to direct funding to the program and partners. After CFI expends existing Great American Outdoors Act funds in 2026—for work on Mount Shavano—it's highly unlikely that CFI will receive Forest Service funding in the future.

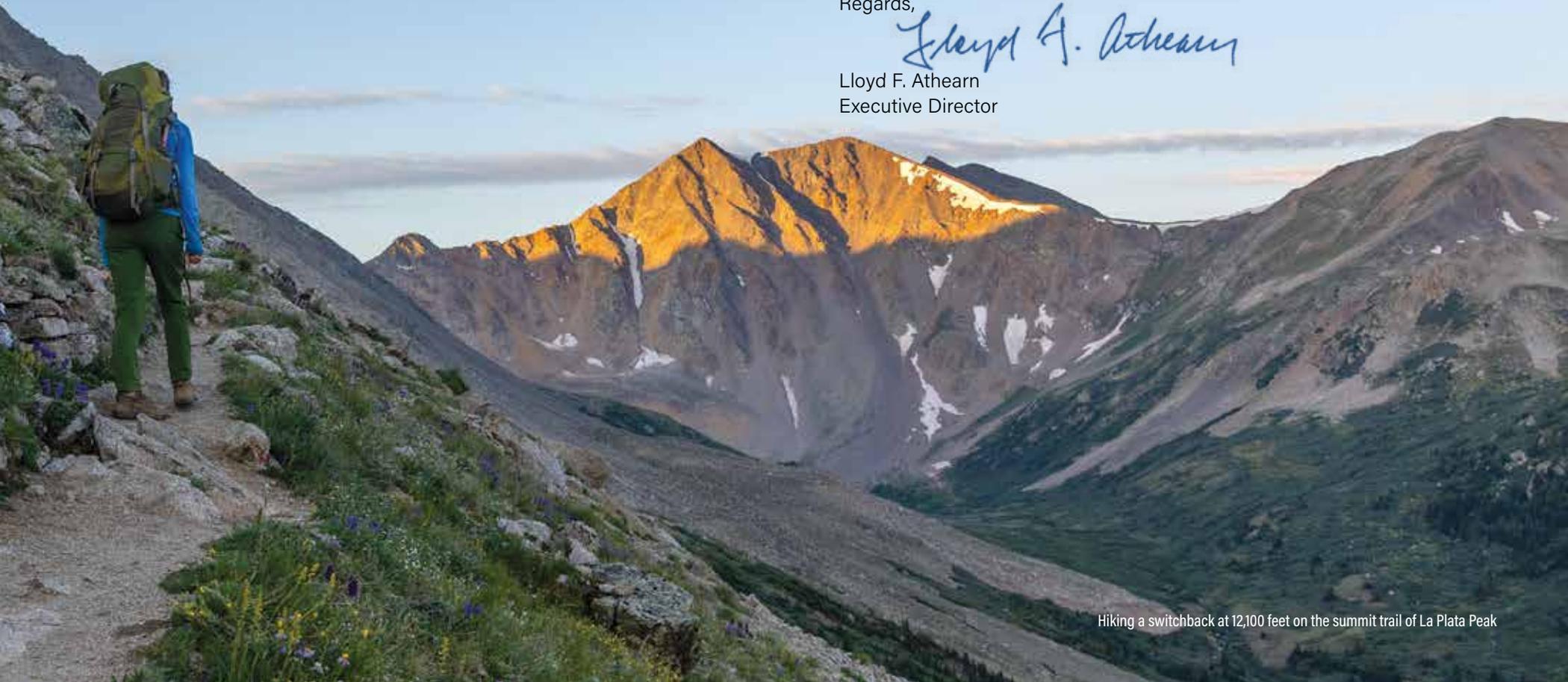
As disruptive as these recent changes have been, CFI has created a culture that anticipates possible shifts—and prepares for them. Working in the alpine hammers home the need for everyone to be adaptable to and primed for almost any possibility. This spirit courses through the organization's veins. Although we miss the founding generation profoundly, successive waves of passionate enthusiasts inspire us by showing their love for the peaks as volunteers, directors, donors, and staff. As large as Loretta's boots were, they will be sufficiently filled by CFI's field leadership team, which is more than capable of stepping in to plan the few new routes that Loretta did not complete. And while the loss of federal funding will be difficult, the 15-year effort—one that largely focused on individual donors like you—to diversify funding that we began in 2009 has provided CFI with a stable financial base that is the envy of many peers. We may not know exactly what changes will come with the next season (or the one after that), but we embrace the opportunities that change presents and look forward to the challenge.

Thanks for being a part of this amazing journey!

Regards,



Lloyd F. Athearn
Executive Director



Hiking a switchback at 12,100 feet on the summit trail of La Plata Peak

“There’s no place like home” was the prevailing sentiment as CFI began its 2024 field season, the plans for which had fixed-site trail crews returning to the same two mountains they’d worked on in 2023. One route on Mount Shavano and two on Mount Elbert had received poor marks on CFI’s 2019 14er Report Card. Those bad grades led us to schedule a significant amount of work on these Sawatch Range peaks between 2021 and 2025. Efforts in 2024—led by three CFI staffers and muscled into being by a seasonal crew of 24, not to mention a slew of volunteers—focused on continuing to reroute several sections of trail and mitigating erosion caused by both human footfalls and Mother Nature herself.

Mount Shavano : LOW CREW

CFI’s third season on Shavano—where, once again, one crew worked above timberline and one toiled closer to the base of the route—was definitely the charm. After two seasons of difficult labor, both projects began to materialize in ways that made all of the earlier effort seem worthwhile.

On the lower part of the mountain, a six-person squad picked up their stone sledgehammers and McLeod rakes and grub axes and continued its work on the second of what ultimately will be three trail reroutes below treeline. In July, CFI officially opened the second bypass to eager hikers—and closed off access to the old social trail. As the field season grew short, the lower Shavano crew began construction on the third and final section of new trail. This sustainable path, which CFI plans to complete in 2025, will move footfalls out of a sensitive riparian zone and away from a stream that often overflows during early season runoff. By the time the leaves began taking on their signature golden hue, the lower crew had removed more than 9,000 cubic feet of soil, used compact explosive charges to blow up rocks that were too large to be relocated, completed 2,200 linear feet of new trail, installed 23 timber check steps, and restored roughly 2,000 square feet of the old user-created route.

1. Crew members David Precour and Chris Bjork make stump removal look easy—OK, *easier*—using a griphoist
2. Unstable terrain on Mount Shavano requires trail crew members Tyler Warren and Chris Bjork to erect a timber retaining wall to mitigate erosion
3. A handy-dandy McLeod rakehoe does the trick for establishing tread
4. If a tree falls in the forest, does it make a sound? David Precour breaks out the chainsaw to find out
5. CFI field programs manager Tom Cronin drills holes into a large boulder in preparation for using small charges to blast it out of the trail





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Construction

MAJOR FUNDERS:

USFS–Great American Outdoors Act, Colorado Parks & Wildlife State Trails Program, Saguguachipa Foundation, American Trails–Legacy Trails Program, Chrest Foundation, Meta Alice Keith Bratten Foundation, individual CFI donors



Mount Shavano : HIGH CREW

The eight crew members who called upper Shavano home in 2024 had a similarly successful season, despite chilly temps, unrelenting squalls, extremely high elevation (roughly 13,500 feet), and challenging terrain. The group built more than 1,900 linear feet of trail, constructed more than 2,700 square feet of rip-rap walls, installed 64 rock steps, spent 734 person-hours quarrying rocks, and excavated 2,900 cubic feet of soil. They did all of this in addition to undertaking a grueling daily round-trip hike that took an average of 2.5 hours. With roughly 1,700 linear feet of trail left to build, it's all but guaranteed that CFI will need at least two more summers to take the trail all the way to the 14,230-foot summit. Fortunately, we know from experience that it'll be worth the wait.

- 1/2. Before/After: New tread cut through the tundra and talus on Mount Shavano
3. Trail crew member Seth Foltz illustrates why the term “dirtbag” means something else entirely in the trail building world
4. Coiling griphoist wire in the sunlight
5. Relocating massive stones, sometimes with the help of heavy-duty slings, is de rigueur for the crew working at high elevations on Shavano
6. Sometimes big rocks need to be small rocks—and that’s when the double-jack sledgehammer comes out to play





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2

Mount Elbert: Northeast Ridge Route

For many years, this 14,438-foot behemoth had been in desperate need of attention. Mount Elbert hosts between 20,000 and 25,000 annual hikers—many of whom are undoubtedly drawn to the idea of summiting Colorado’s tallest peak—and the wear and tear was evident. That’s why, for the past eight years, CFI has been delivering some necessary TLC.

After spending many years improving the mountain’s East Ridge route, CFI zeroed in on another route in need of a renovation: the standard Northeast Ridge route. Between 2021 and 2023, CFI battled a high-elevation worksite with a long, physically arduous hike to build a reroute at roughly 13,000 feet. In 2024, crews returned to Elbert to execute upgrades along the existing route, focusing on a long section just above treeline that’s been not-so-lovingly dubbed the Switchback of Death.

Littered with loose rock and rapidly losing soil and vegetation, the switchback had long been on CFI’s to-do list. When the U.S. Forest Service committed additional Great American Outdoors Act funding, CFI’s six-person crew—supported by a Rocky Mountain Youth Corps squad and a U.S. Forest Service team—geared up to bring that section of the Northeast Ridge back to life.

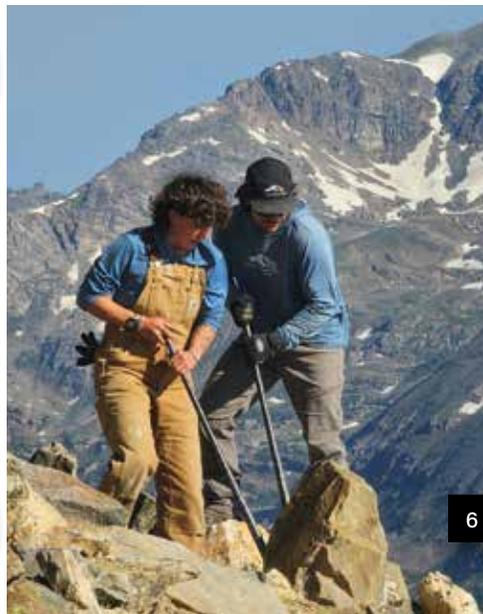
Reconstruction of the area required quarrying rocks for a long staircase of rock check steps as well as for a backwall that would stabilize the backslope and protect vegetation. Crews constructed rip-rap walls to better delineate the corridor and deployed coconut fiber mats to control erosion and encourage revegetation. It ultimately took building 2,365 square feet of backwall, completing 1,465 square feet of restoration work, constructing 81 cribbed rock steps, installing 23 gabion baskets, and enduring 1,558 hours of rock quarrying to revitalize the Switchback of Death and turn it into something much more inviting.



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4/5



6

MAJOR FUNDERS:

USFS—Great American Outdoors Act, Chrest Foundation, individual CFI donors

1. CFI trail crews fight gravity whether they’re moving boulders uphill or downhill
2. The crew experimented with coconut fiber mats to stabilize soil, protect seeds, and help control the erosive forces of water after downpours and during snowmelt
3. Trail crew member David Sandberg artfully arranges quarried rock into a sturdy, tundra-supporting backwall
- 4/5. Before/After: Crews deployed gabion baskets—rectangular, wire mesh cages filled with rocks—to build a small staircase
6. Trail crew members Heather Johnson and David Sandberg use rock bars to position a giant boulder

Mount Elbert: Black Cloud Route

CFI's founding mission in 1994 was to create at least one sustainable route to the summit of every fourteenner that needed one. That route has often been the so-called standard route, typically the most established, safest, and most frequently used path to the summit. However, circumstances sometimes give us the chance to choose a trail less traveled. In 2023 and 2024, that lesser traveled trail was the Black Cloud route on 14,438-foot Mount Elbert.

Despite the fact that this remote, exceptionally steep route only hosts about 2,500 climbers each summer, the path's surrounding ecosystem was suffering greatly. That's not unusual, because resource impact isn't always linear: More impact can come from fewer hikers, particularly if they're traveling on an unplanned trail. Significantly eroding soil, thigh-deep ruts, and badly damaged alpine tundra begged for aid—and in our first season we responded by delineating 900 linear feet of new trail, building various retention structures, and installing 3,002 square feet of rip-rap wall. But that was just a start.

This year, we returned with a four-person crew—and a Rocky Mountain Youth Corps team—to cut new tread and connect adjacent talus fields to route the path over more durable surfaces, which helps keep native vegetation safe from roving hiking boots. In doing so, the crew also built roughly 3,200 square feet of rip-rap and backwalls, constructed 40 cribbed rock steps, moved 2,404 cubic feet of soil, and restored 3,200 square feet of tundra so that local plant populations can once again take hold and thrive. And for both climbers and the surrounding ecosystem, it has made all the difference.

MAJOR FUNDERS:

USFS–Great
American
Outdoors Act,
Chrest Foundation,
individual CFI donors

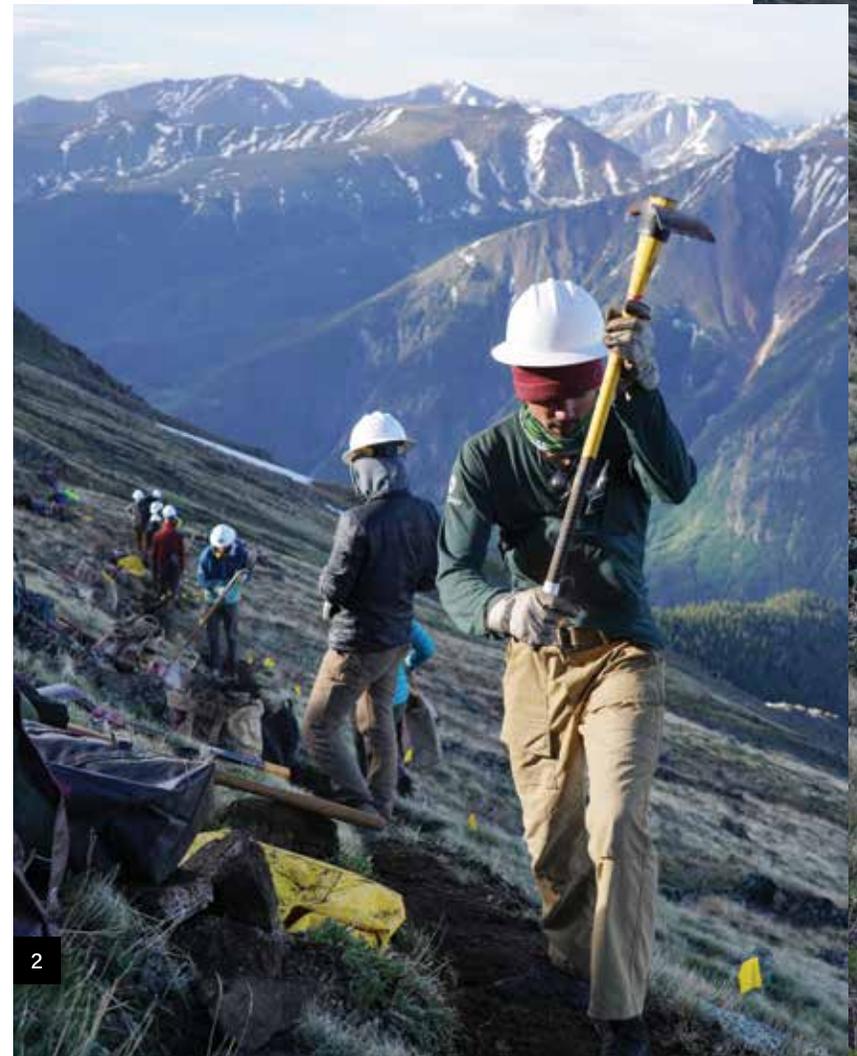
1. If you have to pound rocks into submission, at least the work comes with a gorgeous view of the Sawatch Range
2. A Rocky Mountain Youth Corps crew helped CFI seasonal staffers construct 1,431 linear feet of new trail
- 3/4. Before/After: Behold, the magical transformation of steep tundra into a cribbed rock staircase
5. Using shovels, McLeods, and Pulaskis, trail crews cut new tread high in the alpine



3/4



1



2



Protect
TRAIL
Construction

Protect

TRAIL Maintenance





MAJOR FUNDERS:

Colorado Parks & Wildlife State Trails Program, High Lonesome runners, onX Maps, Inc., TINCUP Whiskey, Town of Breckenridge, The Summit Foundation, Aspen Skiing Company Environment Foundation, National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, Boa Technologies, City of Aspen, Pitkin County, Kimberly Appelson and Nicholas Feinstein endowments, other corporate donors

In the world of finance, maintaining a capital investment refers to a strategic approach focused on protecting the principal amount of an investment and minimizing losses. The tactic isn't so different in the world of trail building. Once CFI has spent the time and resources—anywhere from \$250,000 to well over \$2,000,000—to build a sustainable trail, we don't just sit back and relax. Through the Adopt-a-Peak program, we execute ongoing maintenance operations and smaller reconstruction projects so that we preserve the original investment for the long term. This not only serves peakbaggers in their summit quests, but it also benefits trailhead communities that rely on the economic impact delivered by these recreational trails that wind through some of the planet's most beautiful ecosystems.

Adopt-a-Peak Program

While our fixed-site crews become intimately familiar with one mountain each season, our eight-member-strong Adopt-a-Peak crews get on a first-name basis with roughly a dozen different peaks each year. In 2024, CFI sent these nomadic squads on trips to Capitol Peak, Mount Blue Sky, Mount Democrat, Grays and Torreys peaks, Mount Harvard, Handies Peak, La Plata Peak, Missouri Mountain, Quandary Peak, Mount Sneffels, Mount Shavano, and Uncompahgre Peak. But they didn't go alone.

The Adopt-a-Peak program is where CFI harnesses the public's undying affection for the fourteeners. Led by CFI crew members, individually recruited volunteers as well as trail lovers from partner organizations, youth groups, and corporate collaborators quickly become experts in the language of trail building. They learn that "batter" refers to the inward slope of a retaining wall, leaning into the hillside it supports. The phrase "blood bubble?" That's important because it indicates the invisible 360-degree safety zone around an individual working with a trail tool. And, despite its tender connotation, the term "crush" describes the sledgehammered-into-being rock particles that trail crews use to line the surface of trails.

And if volunteers didn't already know that building a hands-on relationship with a mountain is hard work, they received an education in that, too—at head-spinning elevations. In 2024, the Adopt-a-Peak program benefited from 526 individual volunteers who put in 1,058 days of service. During those long days, they collectively and lovingly maintained 16.08 miles of trail and improved 33,168 linear feet by installing 756 square feet of backwall, building 423 timber check steps, constructing 101 crib and rock check steps, restoring 10,389 square feet of tundra vegetation, cleaning 1,055 linear feet of drains, felling 80 trees, and quarrying for rocks for 1,387 hours.

The value of all that effort: \$327,837, according to Independent Sector estimates for the state of Colorado. That donated in-kind time allows CFI to spread the love to more fourteeners than would ever be possible without these dedicated volunteers.

1. Using a rock net, CFI's Adopt-a-Peak crew finds a new home for a colossal stone on La Plata Peak
2. Carrying a three-foot log—destined to become a timber check step on Uncompahgre Peak—using a pack frame makes the uphill hike slightly less arduous
- 3/4. Before/After: A section of the Mount Democrat summit trail morphs from slippery, loose scree into a series of easy-to-negotiate timber check steps

Protect
SUSTAINABLE
Trails





For more than a decade, CFI has used complementary tools to assess changing conditions on Colorado’s fourteeners summit trails. Combined, these instruments— infrared trail counters and GPS-based inventories that document changing trail conditions—allow CFI’s Sustainable Trails Program to provide ongoing guidance for where our trail crews are most needed to reduce hiker-caused impacts on the state’s highest peaks.

Sustainable Trails Program

Estimated Hiking Use on Colorado’s 14ers
Total Hiker Use Days: 260,000 (2023 Data)

Front Range	Best Est: 84,500
Longs Peak	10,000-15,000*
Pikes Peak	10,000-15,000*
Torreyes Peak	20,000-25,000*
Grays Peak	10,000-15,000
Mount Blue Sky	10,000-15,000
Mount Bierstadt	25,000-30,000*

Tenmile Range	Best Est: 27,000
Quandary Peak	25,000-30,000*

Sawatch Range	Best Est: 84,000
Mount Elbert	20,000-25,000*
Mount Massive	5,000-7,000
Mount Harvard	3,000-5,000
La Plata Peak	5,000-7,000*
Mount Antero	1,000-3,000
Mount Shavano	5,000-7,000*
Tabogauche Peak	
Mount Belford	5,000-7,000
Mount Oxford	
Mount Princeton	5,000-7,000*
Mount Yale	5,000-7,000
Mount Columbia	3,000-5,000
Missouri Mountain	3,000-5,000
Mt. of the Holy Cross	3,000-5,000
Huron Peak	7,000-10,000*

San Juan Mountains	Best Est: 32,500
Uncompahgre Peak	3,000-5,000
Mount Wilson	1,000-3,000
El Dierite Peak	1,000-3,000
Mount Eolus	1,000-3,000
Windom Peak	1,000-3,000
Sunlight Peak	1,000-3,000
Handies Peak	7,000-10,000*
Mount Sneffels	3,000-5,000*
Redcloud Peak	3,000-5,000*
Sunshine Peak	
Wilson Peak	1,000-3,000*
Wetterhorn Peak	3,000-5,000
San Luis Peak	1,000-3,000

Mosquito Range	Best Est: 14,500
Mount Lincoln	7,000-10,000
Mount Bross	
Mount Democrat	
Mount Sherman	5,000-7,000*

Elk Mountains	Best Est: 7,500
Castle Peak	1,000-3,000*
Maroon Peak	1,000-3,000
Capitol Peak	1,000-3,000
Snowmass Mountain	1,000-3,000
Pyramid Peak	1,000-3,000

Sangre de Cristo Range	Best Est: 10,000
Blanca Peak	1,000-3,000*
Ellingwood Point	
Crestone Peak	1,000-3,000
Crestone Needle	1,000-3,000
Kit Carson Peak	1,000-3,000*
Challenger Point	
Humboldt Peak	1,000-3,000
Culebra Peak	<1,000
Mount Lindsey	<1,000*
Little Bear Peak	<1,000

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.

^Indicates National Park Service trailhead counter data adjusted for summit success rate based on prior studies.

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

Ask people you find on fourteeners and in communities near these mountains how hiking trends have changed over the past decade, and the safe money is on people thinking trail use continues to climb steadily. However, CFI’s hiking use report issued for the 2023 hiking season found just the opposite. Estimated use in 2023 was identical to what CFI projected for 2015: 260,000 hiking use days. It was like stepping into a time machine and coming out eight years earlier and finding the same number of people hiking our 14,000-foot peaks.

How can this be? Well, in this case, perception isn’t reality. Here’s why: More than half of statewide fourteener hiking occurs on the 12 peaks closest to the Denver metro area, and some of those trails have become more difficult to access. Many of those trailheads have had parking restrictions, parking fees, and greater enforcement of bans on parking along adjacent county roads imposed over the years. Much of this kicked in after the pandemic boom year of 2020, when use peaked at 415,000 hiker days. Add in the closure of the popular Decalibron Loop near Alma (Mounts Democrat, Cameron, Lincoln, and Bross) for the first half of the 2023 season, and it is easy to see how the numbers of people climbing the fourteeners fell again.

To ascertain these numbers, CFI has a goal of deploying 23 hiker counters statewide each year. That, of course, doesn’t always mean we get the data we desire. For the first time in three years, the Mount Bierstadt trail counter wasn’t stolen, so data from passing hikers on what historically has been either the number one or number two most popular fourteener was available. Due to staffing issues, however, the Blanca Peak/Ellingwood Point and Mount Lindsey counters were not installed.

CFI’s capacity to collect updated trail inventories on several peaks in 2023 was similarly limited by staffing shortages, particularly the loss of the field programs coordinator position just before the field season began. Despite those minor hiccups, we hope to have a new trail condition report card out in early 2026 to see how trails are changing based on maintenance enhancements in recent years.

1. CFI executive director Lloyd Athearn places Challenger Point’s infrared trail counter
2. Hiking use was down on the Decalibron Loop in 2023 due to restricted access on private lands
3. The 2023 Hiking Use Report shows an all-time low for fourteener hikers

Educate

HIKER Education





2

There's an old saying that goes something like, *What people don't know can't hurt them*. Unfortunately, that doesn't hold true for Colorado's fourteeners. What people don't know *can* hurt the mountains they love to climb. Without understanding the basics of Leave No Trace principles and/or not comprehending the importance of keeping boots solidly on a trail, people can unintentionally harm some of the state's most fragile environments. It's part of our mission to make sure that everyone who aspires to peak-bag knows how to care for the ecosystems they encounter.

Educate

CFI has a three-prong mission: protect, restore, and educate. What most people likely don't understand is that without educating the public about what the nonprofit does, protecting and restoring the fourteeners becomes more much difficult. That's why we pour so much effort into outreach initiatives that explain the finer points of what we do and why we do it. We made no exceptions in 2024—and the fact that the year marked the organization's 30th birthday meant we had even more reason to get the word out.

In July, CFI threw its own birthday party of sorts, inviting friends, family, volunteers, donors, founders, partners, supporters, and anyone who might be trail-building curious to a shindig that not only celebrated the nonprofit's long history, but also raised a glass to its future. It is in moments like this that we realize the impact CFI has had not only on the precious landscapes we are so fortunate to steward, but also on those who've taken part in that stewardship with us.

We're grateful that others have realized that impact as well. *5280*, the city magazine of Denver, felt strongly enough about marking CFI's three decades that it published a 5,500-word article that was part profile of the nonprofit's work and part profile of its longtime executive director, Lloyd Athearn. The story was viewed 2,393 times on 5280.com and landed in the mailboxes of more than 65,000 subscribers. The magazine wasn't the only way CFI garnered attention, though. Lots of eyeballs also found their ways to the 90-some videos on CFI's YouTube channel, which received 47,860 views in 2024, and to several segments on local news channels, including a lengthy profile story on CBS4 Denver about the project on the Northeast Ridge route of Mount Elbert. Almost 30 other news stories also featured CFI's work.

The spotlight is nice, but we don't just leave it to others to spread the gospel of sustainable trails and Leave No Trace principles. In 2024, 41 individual volunteer Peak Stewards—sometimes accompanied by canine Peak Stewards—put in 131 days at trailheads and on trails. They connected with 7,796 climbers, speaking with them about everything from why dogs need to be leashed to how staying on durable surfaces helps protect fragile plant life. Getting out there also means planning and manning outreach events. This year, Peak Stewards did what they do best at 19 gatherings, including clinics held at REI and local farmers' markets.



3



4

1. Loretta McElhiney, the longtime Colorado Fourteeners Program manager for the U.S. Forest Service, teaches participants about endemic species found only on Pikes Peak
2. Glacier, one of CFI's four-legged Peak Stewards, waits patiently for the opportunity to teach climbers about hiking the peaks with pets
3. Peak Stewards Von Campbell and Mary O'Malley lead a class at REI in Colorado Springs called Discovering the 14ers, which covered topics on the 10 essentials, Leave No Trace principles, and CFI's mission
4. CFI operations manager Hannah Clark speaks with Peak Steward trainees at Mount Bierstadt

After 30 years in business, CFI's current and future challenges differ markedly from those it faced in 1994. The good news is that most of the fourteeners now have some form of sustainable summit route, which means we're well on our way to realizing our founding mission. The bad news is the peaks that still lack sustainable routes present more complex challenges. Fortunately, CFI took steps in 2024 that have the potential to remove obstacles to access for some of these mountains, getting us closer to accomplishing our goal.

Gaining Access To Private 14ers

Contrary to popular belief, not all fourteeners are legally summittable—yet. In fact, more than 10 percent of Colorado's fourteener summits are privately owned, a situation that in recent years has made some of them off-limits to public access. After two years of effort by CFI, the Fix CRUS Coalition, and supportive legislators, the Colorado Legislature passed Senate Bill 58 during the 2024 legislative session without any “no” votes cast along the way—a true rarity! The law provides greater landowner protection from liability and allows them to approve access points, routes, and types of recreation on their properties. It also sets standard warning language for signage that landowners must post to warn recreationists of inherent hazards.

Governor Jared Polis signed the bill in March, and it became law in August. That set the stage for efforts to persuade landowners to reopen closed peaks. The Decalibron Loop, which was off-limits during parts of the 2021 and 2023 seasons, reopened for the entire 2024 hiking season under an electronic waiver system. (Note: While the summit of Mount Lincoln and the Mount Bross bypass trail were reopened, the summit of Bross remains closed.) We are hopeful that the expanded landowner liability protections will result in Mount Lindsey—which has been closed since 2021—being reopened in the near future.

Exploring Mosquito Range Land Acquisitions

Most Coloradans probably aren't keeping track of an epic legal battle surrounding lands owned by the now defunct Leadville Corp., but CFI certainly is. Why? Because the former mining company's bankruptcy process remains unsettled after many years, leaving unresolved the status of 14,043-foot Mount Sherman and surrounding high-elevation lands. Once the bankruptcy process resolves the issues, The Conservation Fund, CFI, and funders like the Gehres Fourteeners Fund at the Colorado Mountain Club will make acquiring the 1,000-plus acres and bringing them into public ownership a high priority. CFI is also helping The Conservation Fund's ongoing negotiations with landowners on the Decalibron Loop to acquire mining claims from willing sellers.

Planning Future Trail Projects

The magnitude of recent trail construction projects has meant that CFI has been focused on the same peaks—Mounts Elbert and Shavano—for a very long time. However, exciting new projects are on the horizon, even if some involve returning to peaks we have worked on in previous years.

MOUNT DEMOCRAT: The 2023 land acquisition and eventual sale to the U.S. Forest Service energized funders to support long-needed trail work on the western half of the Decalibron Loop. A grant from the National Forest Foundation and Great Outdoors Colorado will fund a dedicated CFI crew to work on the 14,154-footer for at least two seasons starting in 2025. Additional work in the area will focus on improving the road, camp sites, parking lots, and toilet facilities. Expect a lot of changes in the area over the coming years, with access getting worse before it gets better.

MOUNTS BIERSTADT AND BLUE SKY: CFI plans to have a dedicated crew working during the 2025 field season that will split time equally between both peaks over the summer. Focus areas include reconstructing the Bierstadt boardwalk and building structures through the 2013 Blue Sky mudslide above Chicago Lakes.

MOUNT COLUMBIA: CFI spent five seasons rebuilding the Columbia trail to about 12,800 feet. A lot of work remained, but by 2020, enthusiasm was flagging on what can be a cold, harsh worksite. After a much-needed break, in 2027 we hope to begin what will be a two-year-long project to construct 1,200 linear feet of new trail and install high priority structures to stabilize the newly constructed reroute. As one climber commented in a recent survey: “The new part [of the trail] was great, a huge improvement. When we reached the end of the work, we went a little farther, and the trail was so nasty we just turned around without going to the summit.” Soon that “nasty” route will be a distant memory.

MOUNT PRINCETON: This project is planned, permitted, and a top priority for the U.S. Forest Service. The implementation timeline, however, is unclear and depends upon funding becoming available. What looked like committed funding from the Great American Outdoors Act now seems uncertain.

1. Colorado Governor Jared Polis signs Senate Bill 58 into law in March 2024
2. Mount Bierstadt's iconic boardwalk will get a facelift in 2025

Plan
**LOOKING
Ahead**





Organization
OUR
 People

2024 Core Staff

- Lloyd Athearn**, Executive Director
- Hannah Clark**, Operations Manager
- Tom Cronin**, Field Programs Manager
- Gii Grimes**, Interim Controller (July to November)
- Ben Hanus**, Field Programs Director
- Megan Poole**, Controller (through July)
- Brian Sargeant**, Development and Communications Manager
- John Skadow**, Controller (November and December)
- Miriam Venman-Clay**, Field Programs Manager

Core Staff (from left)
 Brian Sargeant, John Skadow, Tom Cronin, Lloyd Athearn, Hannah Clark,
 Miriam Venman-Clay, Gii Grimes

Board of Directors

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
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| Clint Emmerich , Secretary | Leonard Madrid |
| Dan Brown | Morgan Mahoney |
| Jason Coccia | Heidi Ruckriegle |
| Josh D'Souza | Wagner Schorr-Ratzlaff |
| Vanda Lewis Dyson | Jim Skelding |



2024 Seasonal Staff

- Back Row (from left)**
 Olivia Ryschon, Katherine Paul, Samir Gulati, Riley Olds, Gibson Kenney, David Precour,
 Trey Thompson, Owen Roberts, Tyler Warren, Nick Wotell, Ben Weber, Seth Foltz,
 Chris Bjork, James Boardman
- Middle Row (from left)**
 Eve Monaghan, Griffin Ganz, Frank "James" Boyle, David Sandberg, Mac Gibson, Parrish Garver,
 Grace Wotell, Kim Cathcart, Heather Johnson, Danny Walsh
- Front Row (from left)**
 Mel Elbert, Kate Barrett, Marilynn Velvin, Emma Waldhoff, Grace Larson, Erin Millsapps,
 Carlie Harrison

2024 Project Teams

MOUNT SHAVANO—Upper Crew

Mac Gibson
Carlie Harrison
Katherine Paul
Griffin Ganz
James Boardman
Olivia Ryschon
Seth Foltz

MOUNT SHAVANO—Lower Crew

David Precour
Kate Barrett
Chris Bjork
Grace Larson
Tyler Warren
Riley Olds

MOUNT ELBERT—Black Cloud Crew

Trey Thompson
Eve Monaghan
Ben Weber
Gibson Kenney

MOUNT ELBERT—Northeast Ridge Crew

Heather Johnson
Parker Smedley
David Sandberg
Frank "James" Boyle
Emma Waldhoff
Samir Gulati

ADOPT-A-PEAK—Marmot Crew

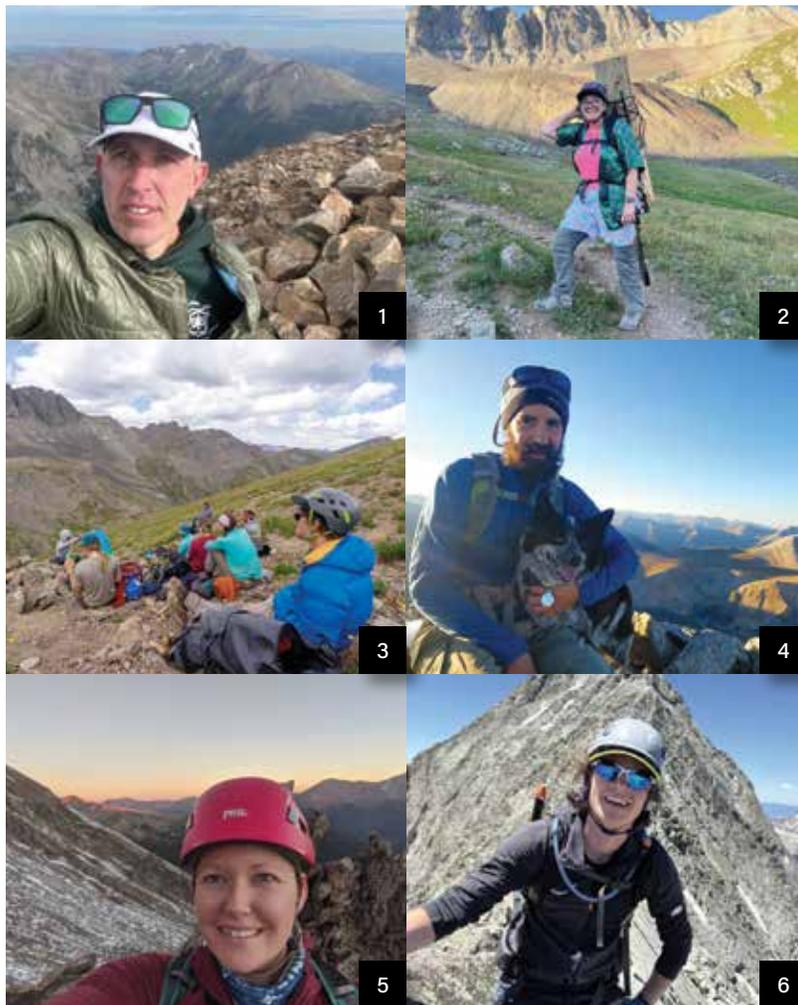
Nick Wotell
Kim Cathcart
Grace Wotell
Bryan Lambert

ADOPT-A-PEAK—Pika Crew

Melissa Elbert
Danny Walsh
Parrish Garver
Ryan Kunish

2024 Award Recipients

Agency Partner of the Year: Patrick Mercer | 1
Corporate Partner of the Year: Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck
Foundation Partner of the Year: Laura Jane Musser Fund
Adopt-a-Peak Volunteer of the Year: Melinda Callender | 2
Adopt-a-Peak Partner of the Year: Osprey Packs | 3
Peak Steward of the Year: Steve O'Clair | 4
Special Recognition Award: Anneliese Steel | 5
Special Recognition Award: Dan Harris
Rookie of the Year: Dean Roysse | 6



2024 Volunteer of the Year

KARL ZIPF

If there were ever such a thing as a professional volunteer, Karl Zipf would qualify. Since 2017, the 73-year-old former Ph.D.-level mining engineer has spent 53 days on 25 different projects for CFI. But it's not just about the time Zipf has donated, it's about the skill he has brought to the trail.

Over time, Zipf has become something of a specialist in installing timber check steps, a trail structure that involves embedding large logs perpendicular to the tread. Their primary purpose is to create a series of steps to aid climbers in traversing inclines and control water runoff and erosion. Zipf has become so adept at digging the hole with the correct dimensions—such that when a log is dropped into the hole it fits perfectly—that CFI crews have dubbed the maneuver the Karl Plop. "At my age, I cannot lift heavy logs out of a hole anymore," Zipf says, "so it must go in right the first time!"

Age, of course, is just a number, and Zipf explains that doing trail work keeps both his body and mind young. He says he has returned to CFI each season for several reasons, not the least of which is he finds that the people attracted to CFI's mission are an interesting bunch. He remembers a volunteer who was beginning Ph.D. studies in mathematics, many who had completed the Pacific Crest Trail, and others who had traveled around the world. "I even met a guy on Capitol Peak who had been working in pharmaceuticals and had just decided to go to medical school," Zipf says. "And I was like, 'Good on you, mate!'"

After all the time Zipf has put into CFI's trails—not to mention the financial support he has provided over the years—it seems like it's time for us to say the same thing. Good on you, Karl. And thank you.

FINANCIALS

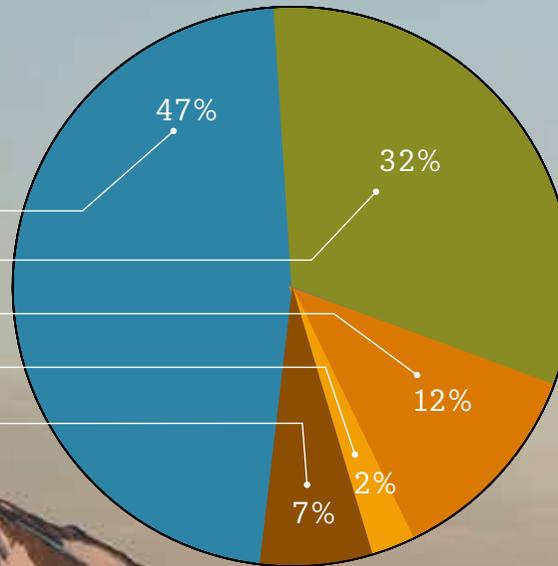
Continued growth in revenues and programmatic investments in 2024 resulted in another year of tremendous positive impact on Colorado's fourteeners. This was the second consecutive year in which revenues and expenses both exceeded \$2 million. The net surplus of \$139,674, up \$58,770 (73 percent) compared to 2023, helped CFI grow its net assets to a record \$2,214,669.

Individual Donations: \$1,062,180
Government Grants: \$695,990
Foundation Grants: \$274,276
Corporate Donations: \$48,446
Other Income: \$127,230

Operating Revenues: \$2,208,122

CFI finished 2024 with operating revenues of \$2,208,122, which were up \$109,424 (5 percent) compared to 2023. This was an all-time high and the third consecutive year in which revenues topped \$2 million. Individual donations for the year totaled \$1,062,180, which represented 48 percent of total revenues, and was the first year over \$1 million. Individual gifts led all revenue categories for the sixth year in a row. The number of individual donors fell 19 percent compared to 2023 (1,706 vs. 2,104), but the value of individual gifts increased by \$186,249 (21 percent). Three received planned gifts accounted for \$183,358 of the total. Revenues from government grants totaled \$695,990, an increase of \$16,950 (2.5 percent) over the prior

year. Government grants accounted for 32 percent of total revenues, up 3 percent over the long-term average. Continued financial support from the federal Great American Outdoors Act for fixed-site projects was a major factor, as were two Colorado Parks & Wildlife State Trails Program grants totaling \$238,500. Foundation grants dropped by \$65,332 (19 percent) to \$274,276 for the year, accounting for 12 percent of revenues. This was a two-year reduction of 48 percent and a low not seen since 2009, reflecting the end of the National Forest Foundation's multi-year Find Your Fourteener campaign. The Chrest Foundation was the top foundation donor at \$100,000. Corporate giving, historically a smaller share of CFI's funding, plunged to a record low \$48,446, accounting for just 2 percent of total revenues. A \$25,000 competitive grant from onX Maps, Inc. was the sole corporate gift exceeding \$10,000. Returns on CFI's consolidated endowment, reserve fund, and other invested funds, combined with the value of in-kind gifts and other miscellaneous income, totaled \$127,230, which represented 6 percent of all revenues.

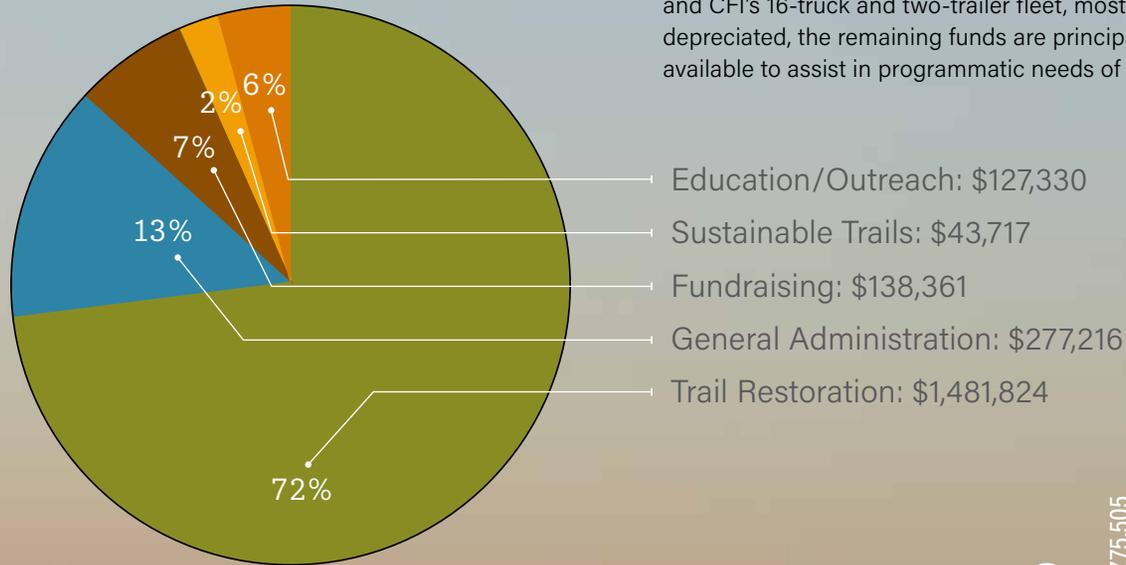


Audit

CFI received a clean, GAAP-based audit from JDS Professional Group for its 2024 financial statements. This marks the organization's 16th consecutive clean audit.

Operating Expenses: \$2,068,448

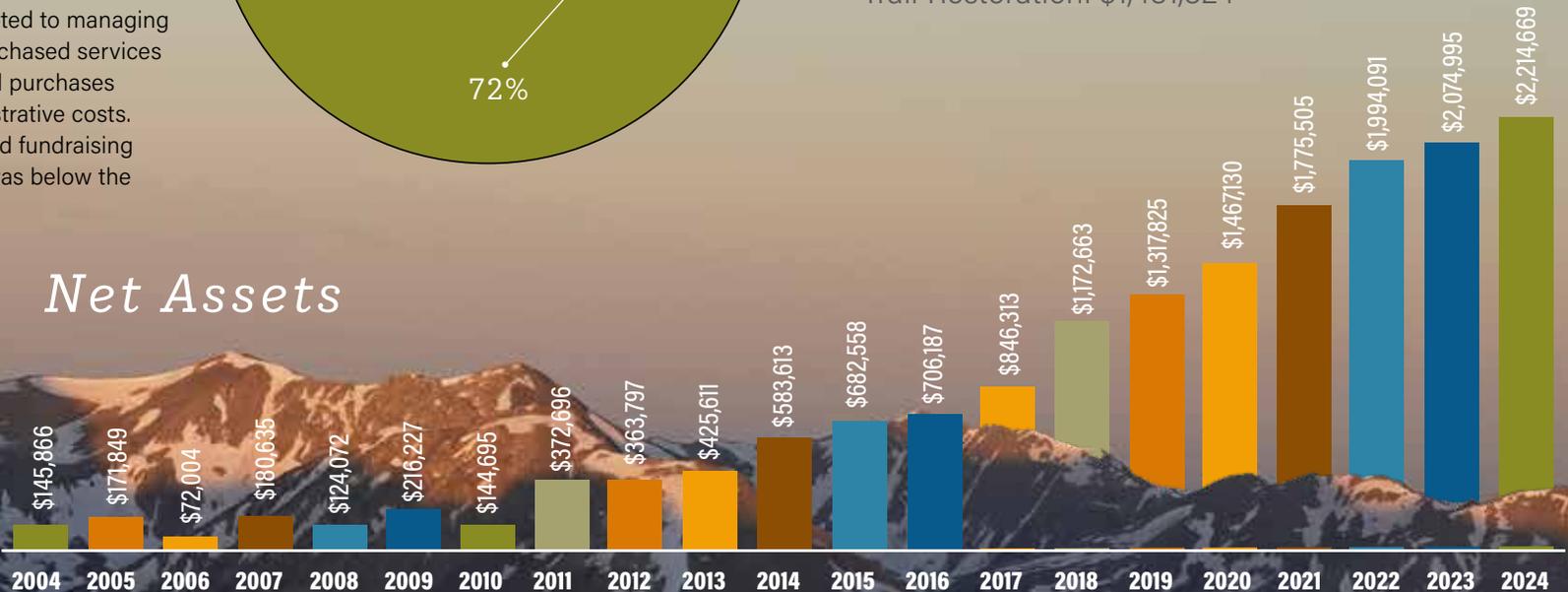
The continued influx of funding from the Great American Outdoors Act—including an unanticipated extra season of work on the Northeast Ridge route on Mount Elbert—boosted operating expenses in 2024 to \$2,068,448, another record high. This was an increase of \$50,654 (3 percent) compared to the prior year. It was the second consecutive year in which operating expenses exceeded \$2 million. Funds devoted to programs (\$1,652,871) accounted for 80 percent of all expenses, just shy of the 10-year average of 81 percent. The \$1,481,824 spent on trail restoration work—building out and maintaining the network of sustainable trails and restoring closed routes—represented 72 percent of total expenditures. These funds supported four dedicated crews working on Mounts Shavano and Elbert (two crews on each peak), as well as the two mobile maintenance crews. A further \$127,330 (6 percent) was spent on education and outreach work, which jumped 39 percent (\$35,407) compared to 2023. Greater staff time devoted to education and outreach, including July's 30th anniversary celebration event, accounted for most of the increase. Work on CFI's Sustainable Trails Program expended \$43,717 in 2024, which constituted 2 percent of the organization's expenses. Most of this paid for staff time maintaining the network of thermal trail counters and analyzing fourteen hiker count data. Sustainable Trails expenditures were down 25 percent (\$14,447) due to not collecting trail condition inventories during the 2024 season. Fundraising costs (\$138,361) represented 7 percent of organizational expenditures, which was up 8 percent (\$10,501) compared to 2023. Over the past 10 years, fundraising costs have averaged 9 percent of the budget. Expenditures for general administration were up \$57,790 (26 percent) in 2024 to \$277,216. Increased pay for the controller position, more staff time spent devoted to managing a larger organization, as well as purchased services to manage employee payments and purchases all contributed to increased administrative costs. Nevertheless, the administration and fundraising (AFR) rate was 20 percent, which was below the 10-year average of 21 percent.



Total Net Assets

Continuing to run a tight ship financially during 2024 allowed CFI to increase net assets by \$139,674 at year end (6 percent of revenues). This brought total net assets to a record \$2,214,669. Total net assets contained \$429,578 in endowments, including CFI's general endowment and the Nick Feinstein Memorial Endowed Fund, as well as \$385,760 in the Mathews Reserve Fund. Most groups would call this a "rainy day" fund, but since CFI's operational risks are more likely to come from summer wildfires, we often refer to this as our "smoky day" fund. There is a further \$373,195 in funds received that are restricted for specific projects and work to be performed in future years. CFI also owns land atop Mount Shavano valued at \$55,841. Aside from office equipment and CFI's 16-truck and two-trailer fleet, most of which are heavily depreciated, the remaining funds are principally unencumbered cash available to assist in programmatic needs of the organization.

Net Assets



DONORS

Organizational Donors

SUMMIT CIRCLE (\$20,000+)

American Trails Legacy Trails Program
Harlan E. Anderson Foundation
Meta Alice Keith Bratten Foundation
Chrest Foundation
Colorado Parks and Wildlife State
Trails Program
Davis Graham & Stubbs, LLP
onX Maps, Inc.
Saguguachipa Foundation
USDA Forest Service

54 CLUB (\$10,000-\$19,999)

Anonymous (1)
Town of Breckenridge
William Kistler Coors Foundation
The Gateway II Fund of the Denver Foundation
National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance
The Summit Foundation

MOUNT ELBERT CLUB (\$5,000-\$9,999)

Aspen Skiing Company
Environment Foundation
Janus Henderson Investors
Japanese Auto Service
Osprey Packs
Pitkin County Heathy Communities Fund
TINCUP Whiskey

MOUNT MASSIVE CLUB (\$2,500-\$4,999)

City of Aspen
Boa Technology, Inc.
Brinkmann Constructors
Colorado Gives Day Foundation
FirstBank Holding Company
Hamill Creative, LLC
MET Foundation
Peak State Coffee
Plante Moran
S&P Global

SUSTAINING PARTNER (\$1,000-\$2,499)

14er Brewing Company
Bonfire Burritos, LLC
CLAD AD, Inc.
Ernst & Young, LLP
Golden Civic Foundation
Jewish Community Center
Mountain Freedom Coins
Open Creative
Rocky Mountain Sunscreen

Individual Donors

SUMMIT CIRCLE (\$5,000+)

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Barney Family Fund
Mark B. Blackburn
Christopher Bouck
Culp Franke Giving Fund
Emmerich Family Charitable Gift Fund
Jane Q. and Robert E. Gallagher, Jr. Gift Fund
James Patrick Griffith Foundation, In Memory of J.P. Griffith
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Richard E. Hoffman
Eric Charles Jensen and Teresa Bernadette McCann
David Kennedy
Adelaide Leavens
The Estate of Anne Lutz
Brad and Melissa McQueen
The Estate of Bill Moore
Moormeier Family Foundation
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Dolores Schlessman
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Jim Skelding and Tracy Holland
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The Bob and Janette Strode Charities
Terry Sullivan
Ann and John Turner
The Estate of Ashton J. Villars, Jr.
Hunt and Carol Walker Family Fund
Keith Walters

54 CLUB (\$2,500-\$4,999)

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Charlie and Norma Carter
Sandra Dallas,
In Honor of Forrest Athearn
Bob and Laurie Dolian, In Honor of Ray Aberle
Alex Etkin Advised Fund
Covey Gant Foundation

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Steve and Jenny Hoerger
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Howard and Gayle Mayson
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The Laura Jane Musser Fund
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Pericle Communications Company
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Laura Schafer
Jack and Carol Shreffler
Michael and Jill Trotter,
 In Memory of Nicholas Feinstein
Herb and Karen Vogel
 Family Charitable Fund
Dr. Sheila Ohlsson Walker Family Fund
Kathryn E. Williams Advised Fund
Rich and Kelly Woessner
Karl Zipf

MOUNT ELBERT CLUB (\$1,000-\$2,499)

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Sarah and David Barnes
Jack Berryhill
Jon Bitler and Alison Jumper
Blees Family Fund
Josh and Anne Bonkowsky
Steve Bonowski
William Bootz
Walter R. and Marlene M. Borneman,
 In Memory of Jim Gehres
Frederick and Wendy Boutin
Aaron and Andrea Boyles
Jeff and Kate Brandel
Cary Brown
Dan Brown
Brown-McNitt Family Fund

John Brownlee,
 In Memory of Ben Brownlee
Warren Buettner
John and Candace Burnett Family Fund
Castle Family
David and Lindsey Cerullo
Carlos Clark
Nathaniel and Roxane Collins
Barbara J. Coyle Foundation
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Gurney and Lisa Sloan
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 In Memory of Jeffrey Swanson
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Jim Wason and Nancy Cohen
WD "Dan" Weaver
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Rory Williams
Wood Realty
Brandon Yonke, Run Infinite, LLC,
 In Honor of High Lonesome 100
Charles and Stephanie Zakhem
Win Zoellner

MOUNT MASSIVE CLUB (\$500-\$999)

129 Donors

SUSTAINING PARTNER (\$250-\$499)

192 Donors

SUPPORTING PARTNER (\$100-\$249)

616 Donors

PARTNER (\$50-\$99)

345 Donors

DONOR (<\$50)

243 Donors

DONORS

The numeral listed signifies the number of years—in our 30-year history—that these donors have given to CFI.

Loyal Donors

29 Steve Bonowski

28 David Muller

27 Paul Berteau
Kay D. Christensen
Scott E. Davis

Larry Kock
Jan Oen and Don Thompson

26
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James Eagan
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Harold Hays

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Lisa Vasquez
Jim Wason and Nancy Cohen

20

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Kathleen Decker
Mark and Erica Hammer
Marcia Huber

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John McCabe
Ron and Jean Meyer
Jan Rastall
Tom Renner

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Virginia Gebhardt
Rob Hutchinson
Robb Krenz

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Kent Obee
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Caesar and Peggy Sweitzer
WD "Dan" Weaver
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18

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C. Lynne Majure
Bruce and Debra McHugh

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John Salvatore
Gurney and Lisa Sloan
George and Kay Wieder

17

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Phil Lakin
Barbel O'Connor

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Michael Rees
Ingrid Reid
John and Jane Steiner
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Clayton and Nancy Cole
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Anne and Mike Crowley
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Patricia and Thomas Hagerty

Dan and Jennifer Kellogg
Kim and Connie Marvel
Glenn Morris and Virginia Boyle
Art Roberts
Wes Schuneman
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John and Dennice Soderberg
Jim Stackhouse
Thomas C. Trauger

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Jon Bitler and
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Dea Family Foundation

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Kent F. Drotar
Evan Ela
Steve Grundmeier
Jim and Kay Hibbetts
David Kennedy
Bill and Susie Lacock
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Bryan Mannlein
Michael and Meaghan
McCabe

Cameron Miller and
Bertina Minjares
Jean Mortensen
Bill Oliver
B. Stephens Parker
Brian Robinson
Charlie and Paulette
Schmalz
Fred Uehling

Legacy Society Endowment Donors

Taking care of the fourteeners is a forever task. Yet even the most passionate CFI supporter will not be able to do so forever.

We were reminded of that disconnect in recent years with the passing of important CFI founders. In 2023, we lost Jim Gehres, who, along with Steve Bonowski, had supported CFI for 28 of its 29 years. We also lost founding director Anne Vickery. And these are just two of many.

In 2024, CFI received gifts totaling \$183,358 from the estates of three longtime donors: Anne Lutz, Bill Moore, and Ashton Villars, Jr. These donations alone grew CFI's general endowment by 79 percent. When combined with investment earnings and other donations, the consolidated endowment grew by 85 percent to close the year at \$571,039.

Anonymous (1)

Kimberly Appelson

Jim DiNapoli

Dan Fischer

Anne Lutz

Terry Mathews

Bill Moore

Steve Ovel

Anne Vickery

Ashton J. Villars, Jr.

Fourteeners Forever Legacy Society Members

To help CFI protect the fourteeners for decades to come, CFI's board of directors set up the Fourteeners Forever Legacy Society to recognize people who make legacy gifts through their wills, estate plans, life insurance policy or retirement plan beneficiary designations, as well as through other methods. Unless otherwise directed by the donor, all received planned gifts will be added to CFI's consolidated endowment to support CFI's general operations.

Anonymous (4)

Lloyd Athearn

Tom and Wendy Barney

Wendy and Fred Boutin

Warren Buettner

Krista Hall

Richard Heppe

Mandy Hughes

Stanley E. Jones

David Kennedy

Adelaide Leavens

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ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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- **Front Cover:** The trail to 14,318-foot Uncompahgre Peak
- **Back Cover:** Inversion clouds visible from 14,438-foot Mt. Elbert's Northeast Ridge route
- Design by OPEN Creative

Scan the QR code to
make a donation to CFI.



Colorado Fourteeners Initiative
A Partnership for Preservation