

Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions Annual Report 2022



A note from the Executive Director : Jordan Stone

In June of this year, we began our summer staff training. Compared to the previous pandemic-centric years, it felt great. It felt normal and safe. Our staff team was excited to be there, and our incoming trekkers were clearly eager to join their expeditions.

We taught our staff many skills during that training, including a handful of “guiding questions” for their treks. For example, wherever you are, ask: who lives here, and what can we learn from each other? What can I contribute to this community? And my personal favorite: how will you navigate challenge?

A couple of weeks later, the first trekkers arrived. And so did COVID. It started with a single staff member, then another, and then me. None of us got terribly sick — all our staff were vaccinated — but as you can imagine, it created layers of challenges. And it gave me a chance to see how we, as an organization, would navigate those challenges.

The result should make us all proud. First, we took steps to minimize the spread: masks, more outdoor time, distancing where possible. And then the real magic happened. The Gulch community stepped up. Chris Riedel and Camella Rogers came to Basecamp on short notice to fill in for a sick group leader. Board member Austin Troy attended a local funeral on my behalf. Jamie Kresberg, Richard Schultz, and Joe Herrera, Jr. came to Basecamp and helped trekkers create gorgeous works of art. Donna White packed individual meals and had them delivered to those of us who were isolating. Every other staff member kept things running smoothly. In the end, we contained the illnesses to a relatively small number of staff. Most of the trekkers barely noticed.

There are many reasons I love this job, but at the top of the list is working with a community that has my back. We are back to running treks, and in many ways, we are stronger than ever. When faced with a challenge, we don't break. We thrive. In 2022 we saw, yet again, that Gulch treks are exceedingly good at forging strong, lasting communities.

What you'll see in the pages that follow is the latest iteration of a community-centric, 96-year-old organization that supports deep, meaningful outdoor learning. We are in a strong financial position, we have a committed and talented team of year-round educators, and we have a growing list of meaningful partnerships. Thank you for being part of this work.

Trek on,
Jordan



Jordan, Ellen, Josephine and Rowan

Letter from the Board Chair: Marjorie Kittle

Shorter days, yellow cottonwoods, chance of rain, and roasting green chiles. New Mexico knows how to do fall. This is the time when the Gulch takes a deep breath of piñon-scented air and takes stock of our recent successes and challenges. The past 12 months have brought both. We relish the learning experiences of both. This annual report focuses on successes - the growth of students, outstanding support from individual donors, facilities upgrades, and program partnerships.



Yet, as leaders we also review our challenges (in fact, one of our values is to embrace challenge) so that we can grow and improve. Many of this year's challenges are not new to us – keeping our programs relevant, connecting with people to join our programs, rising prices, forest fires. Some of this is in our control, some not. In any case, we move forward by reflecting, adapting, and being resilient – all skills that we teach our trekkers. As we move into the second year of our Strategic Plan, we will use our strengths in building community to work toward collaborative approaches to addressing challenges.

Our board is united in a desire to ensure that the Gulch continues to deepen connections to people and place. Our programs need to respond to emerging needs and to honor our strengths and history. Our people need to exude a joy for learning and support a culture of belonging. Our actions need to steward the public lands of the Southwest, and maintain the Basecamp as a healthy ecosystem.

As stewards of the organization, we are honored to be on this journey with all of you. In 2026, we will celebrate our 100th anniversary. We have grown and changed since 1926. I hope we have retained the spirit of adventure and fun from our early days. As we look to the future, we hope our community will grow and celebrate our success while helping us evolve to meet new challenges.

-Marjorie

Feel free to contact me at GulchBoardChair@gmail.com



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- Naina Panthaki**/Director of Education
- Andrew Pearson**/Director of Operations
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- Olivia Marín**/Enrollment and Communications Manager
- Brad Jeffrey**/Development Coordinator
- Habron Botts**/Enrollment and Outreach Coordinator
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- Marissa Bluestein**/SIWI Lead Educator
- Tanner Johnson**/SIWI Lead Educator
- Donna White**/Food Coordinator
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Wrapping Up the Year and Looking Ahead: An Update on Our Strategic Plan

2022 was a year of many successes, some notable challenges, and full of stepping stones for seasons to come. We broadened our school groups, building upon year-long programs and making a conscious effort to incorporate more service learning into the programming. Our Basecamp saw a flurry of activity this year, with school groups and community members visiting in the spring and fall, and a significantly higher enrollment in summer treks! We invested in infrastructure, successfully hired capable and qualified staff, and enjoyed the exceptional monsoon season that brought an end to forest closures and many a rainbow sunset at Basecamp.

The accomplishments and goals listed below are updates on our organizational strategic plan.

Accomplishments of 2022

- Plans and funding in place to complete prescribed burn on 120 acres of Gulch Basecamp forest in fall 2022 (weather pending)
- Continued partnership with Chizh for Cheii, who have removed close to 2,000 truckloads of firewood from overgrown forests on our property
- Highly successful volunteer weekend with 40+ participants
- Highly successful “visiting scholars” program, especially with Basecamp art projects (pit fire pottery, blacksmith knife making), archaeology (Rob Weiner), Restoration (Carrie House), Navajo Culture (Carrie, Irene Notah and Tom Henio)
- Increased wages by 10-20% for most staff
- Spring 2022 Scholarship Fundraising Campaign raised additional \$30k in scholarship funds

Goals for 2023

- Project-Based Learning: we want to see trekkers accomplish meaningful projects based on topics of interest chosen by them such as: science, art, archaeology, anthropology, cooking, and adventure
- Staff professional development in diversity and inclusion, with a focus on internal culture around communication and feedback
- Incorporate environmental stewardship into program design (e.g. restoration projects)
- Begin work on a comprehensive, science-based land management plan for Basecamp
- Build out second story QM building
- Continue incorporating community service-learning in our programming



Sunrise views on Mt. Taylor

We are *where* we are, we are *what* we do, and we are better when we do it *together*: *The people, places and projects of the Gulch*



Jimmy Herman and Chet Kubit at Basecamp

People

A question: *Why do you keep coming back to the Gulch?*

The most common answer: **The people.** Long-standing, ever-growing relationships with people. People who have been part of this community for decades, and keep coming back. As former Gulch staff member, Nick Novelli put it, “**the best people are here.**”



Views of Basecamp

Places

“There aren’t many better places for sharing the wonders of science and nature than deep in the **Zuni Mountains**. Whether trekking out to the rare flowing stream filled with tadpoles and aquatic insects or slipping logs to find incredible varieties of ants, isopods, centipedes, and many other tiny creatures, there was such a plethora of adventures at and around **Basecamp.**” - Robert Chambliss, Basecamp Naturalist 2022



Tech Leadership student working at the Candelaria Nature Preserve in ABQ

Projects

Our weekly orientation programs for 9th-graders in Albuquerque exposes students to **environmental restorative and science projects around the community**, in collaboration with local experts. We create the typical trek experience over the course of an entire school year, one week at a time. - Brad Jeffrey- Development Coordinator and resident Rock Doctor

Summer 2022 at the Gulch

This summer, 120 Gulch trekkers, staff, community members and families, experienced something both brand new and sweetly familiar. What has been fractured by the chaos of Covid19, is being rebuilt, restrengthened and rebirthed into a resilient and vibrant community. We shared meals in the mess hall, sung songs in the Cha-oh, played games on the field and reconnected with our places and people.



"The Nature Arts Workshop (NAW) became an open house, a place where anyone was welcome to express their authentic selves through art, and maybe make a few friends along the way."

-Flaco, Basecamp Art Specialist

3 words to describe the Gulch?
"I'll be back!"
-WCT 1
Trekker

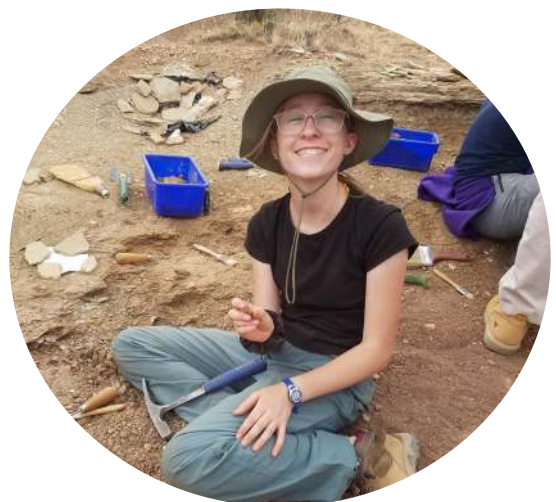


*"Paleo Trek fearlessly hiked up canyons in search of dinosaur bones this summer near Tucumcari, New Mexico, with paleontologist Dr. Axel Hungerbüeller. After brushing off the dust, we spent a night at the museum, and headed to Basecamp to help host the **first Rendezvous in 3 years.**"*

-Brad Jeffrey, Development Coordinator, Rock Doctor, Paleo Trek GL

"I made friends, conquered fears, and found a passion"

-Paleo Trekker



Back to Normal and Better Than Ever!!

“This is so unique, I’ve never done this on any of the other treks I’ve been on.”

*I want to provide unique outdoor experiences to the next generation of environmental stewards. If we’re able to treat an experience like harvesting trout from a backcountry lake with maturity and appreciation for the living things around us, we’re that much more likely to **care for the wild spaces** that they inhabit.”*

-Dylan Hancock, Prairie Trek GL



*“I think I grew a lot, and learned how to have a **good work ethic**”*

- PT Trekker



*“I remember lying down on the ground, just listening to [my group leader] singing this song, and looking up at the stars, a perfectly clear night. I remember thinking I’m not sure **I’ll ever be happier than I am right now.**”*

-Jamie Kresberg, Gulch Alum

“The Gulch is Outstanding! Miraculous!”

-Outfit 1 Trekker



Inspiring Young Leaders in our Own Backyard



While the summer brings trekkers from far and wide, we continue to grow our school programs and invest in the young people who are local to the Gulch. Place-based, community driven learning is what we strive for. Our educators get New Mexican youth into the field throughout the year, inspiring young leaders to work together, develop technical skills, and play in the outdoor classroom. The 2021-2022 school year saw us taking more students into the field than even prior to the pandemic, fostering educational opportunities for youth outdoors and introducing kids to the wondrous public lands in New Mexico.



*“I think I am going to do this again in my free time. **I like hiking now!** All I have to do is drink water and eat snacks and then it isn’t that hard!”*

- El Camino Real Academy
Students In Wilderness Initiative participant,
Spring 2022

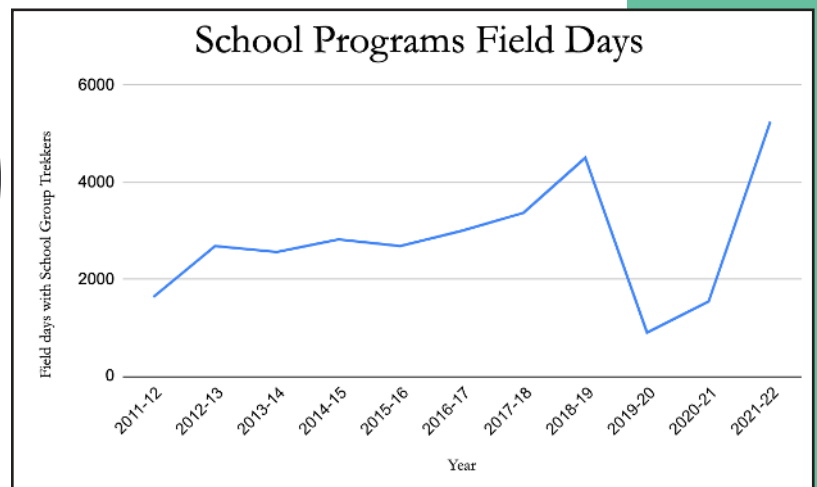
“I didn’t know this even existed, the forest looks like a gateway to a magical world.”

“This place is beautiful, I want to come back with my family.”

- Six Directions Indigenous School SIWI participants, Fall 2022



Students from Amy Biehl HS, Spring 2022



School Programs In the Field

A Parent's thoughts on Cottonwood Gulch programming:

I personally have had the pleasure to watch my child grow after experiencing trips with Cottonwood Gulch. On his first, he returned with stories to tell of being able to utilize his gentle giantness to help his classmates. **He felt very empowered** that someone was able to rely on him for comfort and information. That he was trusted by his peers gave him a great sense of pride, and he was excited to have to be able to be in a position to help individuals that may have needed it.

He informed me that he appreciates the ability to **develop leadership skills** as well as openly communicate with his classmates in a setting outside of school to build relationships that possibly could have never existed unless occurring on one of these trips.

His ability to put forth his energy into nature and physical activities that were occurring rather than electronic devices was something that I was happy to see. I was very impressed with the way the Gulch tries to instill into students a sense of independence via unplugged experiences and encouraging self-reliance and accountability. In short I am very happy that my child has participated in these events and am **delighted to see the growth and personal development** that has come from his participation in these activities.



Trekker conducting water quality tests in the Gila National Forest

SIWI ECRA students on top of Picacho Peak in Santa Fe



Students from St. Clement's Parish School at Chaco Canyon

School Partners in 2022

- Ace Leadership HS
- Albuquerque School of Excellence
- Amy Biehl HS
- eCademy Magnet School
- El Camino Real Academy
- Escuela Del Sol Montessori
- Garfield STEM Magnet School
- Mandela International Magnet School
- Monte Del Sol Charter School
- Moravian Academy
- Mountain Mahogany Community School
- Rio Grande School
- Robert F. Kennedy MS and HS
- Sandia Prep
- Six Directions Indigenous School
- South Valley Academy
- South Valley Prep
- St Clement's Parish School
- Tech Leadership HS

Working Together In Community

Our community is the foundation for the Gulch’s resilience and growth. Families and friends are the heartbeat of this organization, and as we move forward, we want to expand our partnerships and encourage the power of working together. As part of our strategic plan, we are continuing to strengthen our ties with our local community and actively seeking ways to support individuals and organizations who share our values.

“The Gulch is saving lives, man. Thanks for all your good work.”

The Gulch’s response: *“Loren, you’re the one saving lives. It’s an honor to work with you.”*

Loren Anthony (pictured right) is the founder of Chizh for Cheii, a local organization that has partnered with the Gulch since 2020, bringing excess wood from the Basecamp forest to Navajo elders who rely on it for warmth, cooking, and conducting ceremonies (and reducing our wildfire risk in the process). This year, SIWI students worked with Chizh for Cheii, developing leadership skills and fostering connections to place-based learning through service work in their community.



*“I grew up with Cottonwood Gulch. Even before I was born, my dad was working over there making all those cabins, the mess hall. I always think that it’s just **a place of love, a place of sharing, a place of hope, and a place of happiness.**”*

Irene Notah (pictured left) has been dedicated to Cottonwood Gulch since she participated in the 1961 Turquoise Trail. Since then she has led art projects at Basecamp and hosted numerous groups on her family’s land.

Building Partnerships, *Growing Relationships*



The Forest Stewards Guild at Basecamp, Fall 2022. Featuring Talus.



We continue to host NOLS Wilderness Medicine certification courses, prepping staf to manage risk in the field!

Who is the YCC?

The 2022 Zuni Mountain Youth Conservation Corps offered 16-20 year olds the opportunity to engage directly in conservation and park projects throughout the Cibola, Santa Fe and Gila National Forests. Crew members live in community, much like any Gulch trek, developing leadership skills, fostering team-work, social responsibility and a profound respect for the environment. The YCC works alongside professionals of the field, gaining work experience while still embodying the Gulch's core values. We are proud to be investing in young people, to strengthen and diversify our community and to provide opportunities for growth beyond the experience of a traditional summer trek. Moving forward, we hope that the YCC can encourage young adults to invest in stewardship of the outdoors as well as continue to work with CGE. The knowledge and experience gained from a season of working hard are essential to our organization and community's well being.



Youth Conservation Corps crew members, summer season in Cibola National Forest

Development Updates

Grants

We were awarded over \$300,000 in grants this year, including new partnerships with the Environmental Protection Agency and McCune Charitable Foundation, along with ongoing support from the State of New Mexico Outdoor Equity Fund and The Wilderness Society. We are actively seeking additional funding from other foundations and institutions for the upcoming fiscal year.



95th Anniversary Fundraising Update

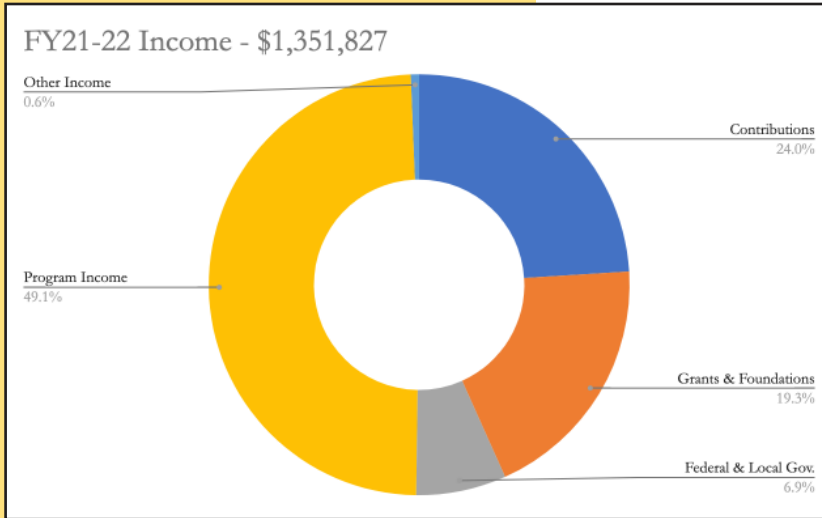
We purchased a new Com truck this year that was supported by donations from the previous fiscal year (summer 2021) during the 95th anniversary virtual fundraiser. We installed a commemorative plaque featuring a list of donors' names who supported the Com. The new Com made its maiden voyage during the fall 2022 staff training field trip to San Lorenzo Canyon, NM.

Annual Appeals

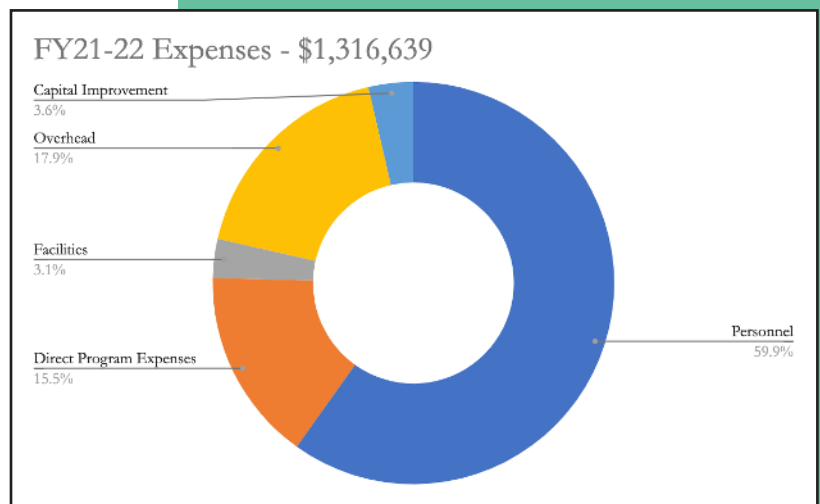
Our fall 2021 fundraising appeal raised \$170,686 (from November 30 - December 31), and our special scholarship-focused spring appeal raised \$30,015 (from May 6-30). Our two annual appeals are communicated using print materials, emails, and social media.



Gulch Numbers



2022 has been a financially strong year for the Gulch. We chose to invest in two main areas: People (substantially higher salaries, two new full-time positions) and “stuff” (new vehicles, new website). Moving forward, we are doubling down on the “invest in people” focus. By adding staff capacity, increasing budgets for staff training and increasing staff salaries, we will make meaningful progress on our strategic plan: improving programs, strengthening and diversifying our community and solidifying our operations. Our numbers show that we are a “people-oriented” non-profit, and we are excited to continue to support those who work hard with us each season!



“The Gulch goes with people everywhere they go”

-Habron Botts, Enrollment and Outreach Coordinator

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Red Rocks Society are donors who have put Cottonwood Gulch in their will or as a beneficiary of their IRA.
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The City of Albuquerque, 2021-2022
The Environmental Protection Agency, 2022
The Franklin Conklin Foundation, 2018-2022
The McCune Charitable Foundation, 2022
The McKee Foundation, 2020-2022
The State of New Mexico Outdoor Equity Fund, 2021-2022
The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2022
The U.S. Forest Service, 2018-2022
The Wilderness Society, 2018-2022

Our Endowment

At our 75th anniversary in 2001, an idea was proposed by then Board Chair Jamey French to create an endowment for Cottonwood Gulch. Today that endowment holds \$1.1 million dollars.

We manage the endowment funds so that we preserve the amount that was contributed, invest the money so that it earns interest, and spend part of the interest every year. Funding from the endowment gives us security and flexibility, and it plays a vital role in the ability of the Gulch to bring high quality outdoor education to an ever-growing number of trekkers.

If you are curious about donating to the endowment or joining the Red Rocks Society of planned giving (see above), please contact Executive Director Jordan Stone (jordan@cottonwoodgulch.org).

This list represents donors to Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions from October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022. If your name or organization's name does not appear here,



Cottonwood Gulch is nearing its centennial celebration!

In 2026, we will have achieved a century's worth of programming in the American Southwest. We hope you will join us in celebrating our 100th birthday. As we near this milestone, we will be hosting events and raising funds to support the second century of Gulch Treks.

Thank you for your support!