

# Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



# Why Do We Keep Coming Back to Cottonwood Gulch?



Prairie Trek pictured with Benny Henio in front of the newly renovated Hogan at Basecamp

## LEGACY

Year after year, for nearly a century we have witnessed people falling in love with Cottonwood Gulch. They become deeply invested in what happens here. They care about the people, the place, the experiences that are shared in this tiny part of our big world. To join a CGE trek is to follow in the footsteps of inspiring young leaders. To visit Basecamp is to encounter a space that has been cared for and played in for decades. When you choose to become a part of our community, you are welcomed by generations of trekkers, teachers, leaders, cooks, artists, scientists, friends, and family.

*“It’s the feeling that it was the first place that I ever felt like myself. That’s the thing that continues to pull me back.”*

*- David, Silver Buckle Award recipient, 2023*

## LEARNING

Whether it is a six-week camping trek or a day in your local park, a Gulch experience means learning about the world around us and the potential within us. Place-based education is the foundation of our programs. Becoming self-proficient and capable individuals is the groundwork for participating in our community. Observing and interacting with our environment can awaken interests that propel trekkers into a future of genuine curiosity and amplified capability.



A Black-throated Gray Warbler enjoys a snack at Basecamp

## LOVE

Smiles. Songs. Shared meals. Challenging limits. The Gulch cultivates special experiences. We build spaces for people to be their authentic selves; to create communities that honor individuals discovering who they are and who they want to be. Friendships are formed here that last lifetimes. Our community fosters a deep love for the people and places we encounter. These relationships cultivate a sense of inclusion, acceptance and most of all, a willingness to share our truest selves with each other.

*“What keeps me coming back is the community I know will form each year...we can continue life-changing relationships. The Gulch gives me something in my life that nowhere else has been able to give me.”*

*- Kate, Staff, 2023*



*Turquoise Trail in the Weminuche Wilderness*



## **OUR MISSION**

Cottonwood Gulch creates outdoor learning adventures for youth from all backgrounds that foster personal growth, strengthen community, and inspire stewardship of the natural world.



## **OUR VISION**

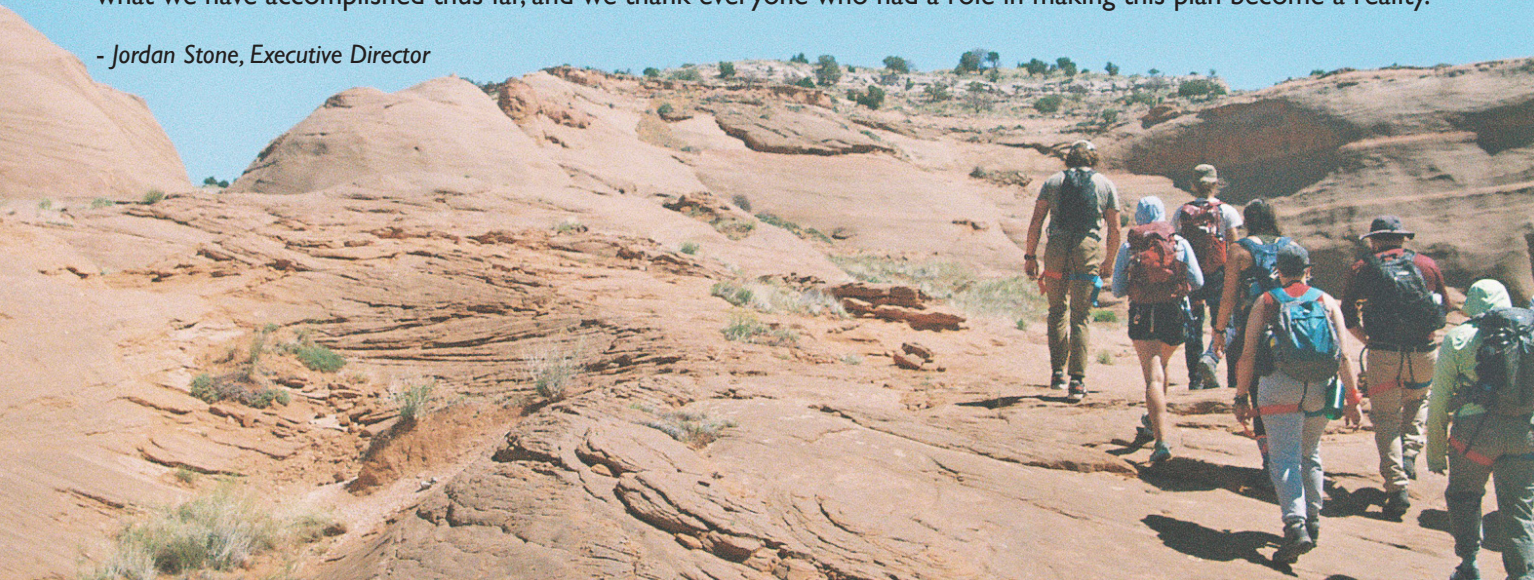
Cottonwood Gulch envisions a global community grounded in reverence for the Southwestern U.S., and respect for the lands, waters, and human cultures of the world.

*The night sky at Basecamp, photo by James Lowenthal*

# A Living Strategic Plan

A strategic plan should never sit on a shelf and collect dust. A plan should be used enough that it's crinkled around the edges, its nuanced directives questioned and debated and ultimately alive. We are proud to say that our strategic plan, finalized in 2021, is such a plan; alive and well. It guides us in the creation of new budgets, the prioritization of programs, and the work we do each day. The Cottonwood Gulch board of directors and staff created this strategic plan to take us through our 100th anniversary year in 2026. We compiled feedback from over 200 individuals – current and former trekkers, staff, board members, school partners, and others. We are proud of what we have accomplished thus far, and we thank everyone who had a role in making this plan become a reality.

- Jordan Stone, Executive Director



2023 Summer Staff training at Slot Canyon

## Our 2023 Accomplishments

### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #1: OUR PROGRAMS, IMMERSIVE LEARNING FOR A CHANGING WORLD**

- Summer Trekkers served: 139.
- Created a series of school program offerings including Every Kid Outdoors, Community Camping, Plan Your Own Adventure, a revamped Students in Wilderness Initiative (SIWI), and more.
- Launched two new summer treks: Quartz Trek and Blue Corn Trek.
- Increased staff wages 7-15%.
- Began partnering with Sunny505, a local, woman-owned, marketing firm, to better share the impact of our programs.

### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #2: STRENGTHEN AND DIVERSIFY THE GULCH COMMUNITY**

- Completed the first Quartz Trek for non-binary youth.
- Reached over 1,700 youth in our school programs.
- Awarded over \$110,000 in scholarships to summer trekkers.
- Hired our first ever Development Director.
- Convened a Cultural Advisory Group; current discussions include cultural awareness around naming conventions and renovation guidelines for Basecamp.
- Conducted our third annual volunteer work weekend with 40+ participants.

### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #3: MODEL ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

- Secured \$150k in funding from the State of New Mexico for vehicles; plan to purchase organization's first electric vehicle.
- Completed a prescribed burn on 120 acres at Basecamp to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk
- Incorporated environmental stewardship into our program design and initiated staff stewardship projects at Basecamp.
- Created the Environmental Restoration school trek for high school students.



*Fall 2023 Prescribed Burn at Basecamp*

### **STRATEGIC DIRECTION #4: INVEST IN OPERATIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

- Revamped our internal staff structure to create more transparency and professional development opportunities for our year-round staff.
- Created a “Gulch Way Drive” to house our agreed-upon internal processes, templates, checklists, and resources.
- Updated our staff manual.
- Added \$150k to our cash reserve fund; Implemented a new financial tracking system, “Divvy,” which allows us to better budget and track direct program expenses.
- Selected a new database system to allow more comprehensive alumni, trekker and constituent tracking, improve our reporting capabilities, and increase efficiency of work. Implementation of the new system will begin in January 2024.
- Basecamp improvements included: replacement of the Hogan roof, increased OSHA compliance for worker safety, replacement of caretaker's well pump, removal of defunct latrines; foliage thinning, gravel firebreak, and dead tree removal around core buildings, rebuilding the bouldering wall, and construction of benches and tables.

## 2023 PROGRAM STATS

- Number of School Treks: **94**
- Number of Students Served: **1,774**
- Number of Schools: **25**
- Number of School Field days: **159**
- Number of Summer Scholarship recipients: **42**
- Number of Summer Trekkers served: **139**
- Number of Summer Treks: **13**



Milan Elementary 4th graders visiting Basecamp through the Evey Kid Outdoors program, Fall 2023

*“I’m really grateful for this experience. Being with my classmates in the outdoors allows me to get to know them in new ways that we don’t always have the chance to at school.”*

*- Oliver, Mandela International Magnet School*

*“Nature keeps us safe”*

*- Ralph, Mt. Taylor Elementary School*

# Empowering our Community

The creation and growth of school year programming at the Gulch over the past 17 years has resulted in a new era of treks that have reached thousands of students. School programs target students in our home state of New Mexico who were woefully underrepresented at the Gulch in prior decades. A greater diversity of trekkers has benefited all of our groups, and has increased public awareness about CGE. More than ever, we are witnessing the value of providing opportunities for youth to get outdoors; the social emotional learning benefits, the calmness that kids identify when having a chance to be “unplugged,” and the connections that occur when youth are introduced to green areas in their own neighborhoods. We are inspired by these experiences and are dedicated to continuing school partnerships and further empowering our community.



Madela International Magnet School 11th graders returning from Slot Canyon, Spring 2023



# Cultivating Accessibility

**SABA PRESLEY:** MOUNTAIN MAHOGANY  
COMMUNITY SCHOOL SCIENCE TEACHER

Interviewed by **TANNER JOHNSON**

Tanner: *How did you find out about Cottonwood Gulch?*

Saba: I found out about CGE through my school, Mountain Mahogany. It was my first year there, in 2016, and I was a 4th grade teacher. The middle school was really excited because the 8th graders were getting ready to go out on their capstone 3 day trek.

T: *What are some of your favorite memories with CGE?*

S: My favorite memories revolve around interactions that I have with students outdoors. ***Its just a whole different world being out in nature with students vs having them in the classroom.*** Being outside with them is so different, and ***you get to see strengths that you wouldn't witness in the classroom.***

T: *How did your time at CGE impact your life today?*

S: Well, I feel like I have to mention that we are currently at Basecamp, with 60 kids, so definitely impacting me today. I was just mentioning to a coworker how this is my favorite way to spend a day. I feel a profound sense of pride knowing that I am able to help usher in this experience for kids. A lot of these kids have gone out and done this before, but a lot have never even been camping before. So just ***being able to increase access, and give these opportunities and experiences to kiddos is really... I don't know if its changed my life, but its definitely something that I am proud of, and I wouldn't be able to do it without the Gulch.***



Mountain Mahogany SIWI 8th graders during their capstone backpack in the Chiricahua Wilderness, Spring 2023



**OPHELIA LOTT:** Trekker, TT 2023,  
WCT & GO 2 2022, Outfit 1 & 2 2021

Interviewed by **CLARA BEWLEY**

Clara: *What are some of your favorite memories with the Gulch?*

Ophelia: One day on Outfit I was feeling stressed, missing home, having a bad day, and needed some time on my own. I took a walk to the Cha'oh during golden hour, laid down and it started raining. I loved taking alone time with a beautiful sky in the Southwest and rain on the metal roof. **It felt really special, happy and peaceful.**

C: *How has your time with the Gulch impacted your life today and back at home?*

O: It's changed everything a lot. **Cottonwood Gulch is a place where I feel happy, somewhere I feel brave, and where I feel I belong and can connect with the nature and people around me.** When I think about my time with the Gulch and what it has taught me: being with people, spending time in Wilderness, skills I've built, time with myself and the group and in nature, **it feels grounding and that it's what it's like to actually live.**

C: *What keeps you coming back to the Gulch again and again?*

O: There's something about Basecamp that feels super special. **It brings me home** and it is really incredible. On the road, we built our little routine and got to connect so well as a group and it made me realize how much I can interact with people and connect with them, especially doing things in nature that aren't easy. Some of the friends I have made at the Gulch I am still in contact with and connected with, it's nice to be able to have a way to build community and friends.



2023 First Rendezvous

# Coming Back to Our Roots: Summer at the Gulch

# Innovative Tradition

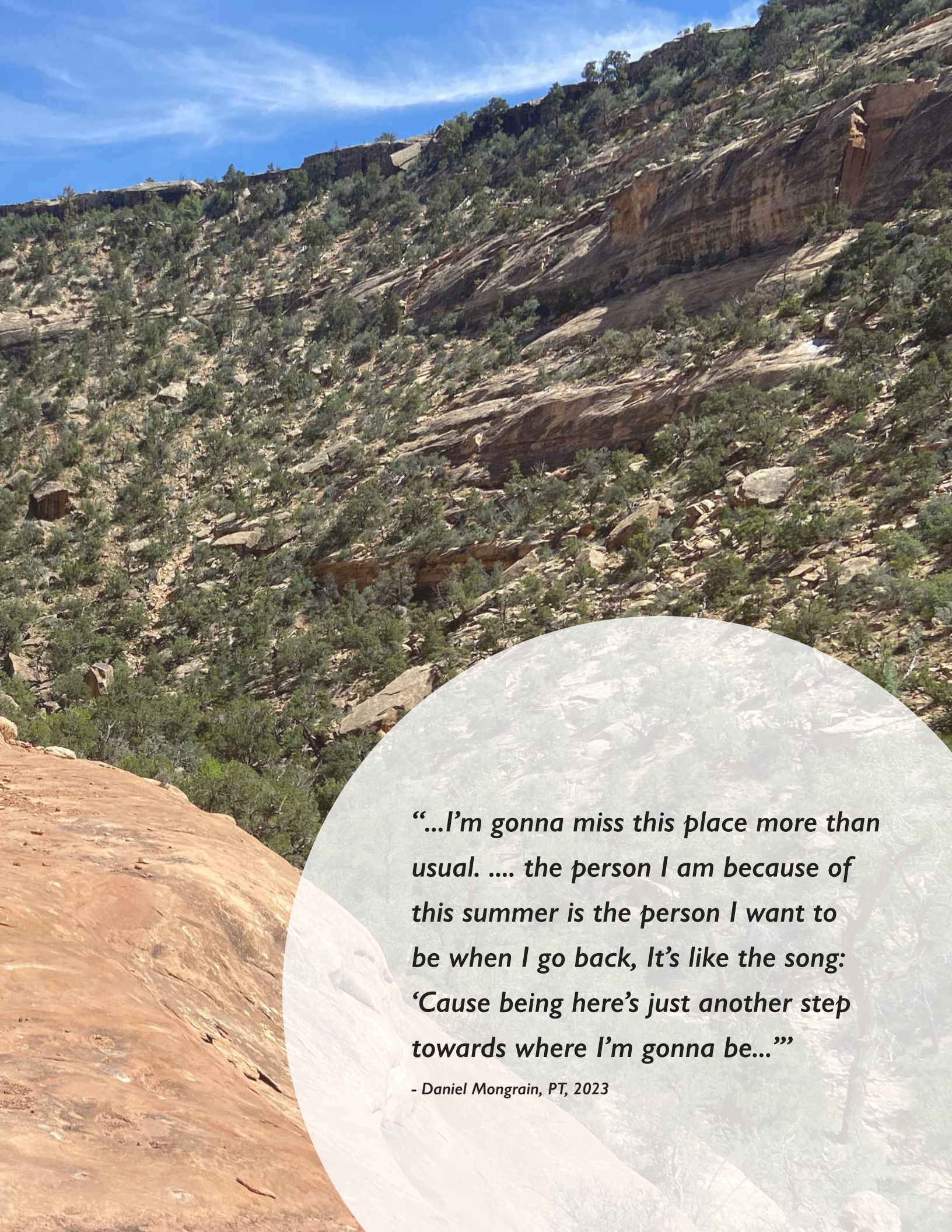
Our 97th summer was a shining success thanks to our dedicated seasonal staff team and our expansive community partners. From stunning sunrises over Muley Point to camping at a ghost town in Hermosa, NM, each trek experienced an amazing array of adventure, science and cultural experiences. Our pilot year of Blue Corn Trek brought aspiring foodies and farmers together to learn about and taste food systems in the Southwest. We also added Quartz Trek which invited non-binary and genderqueer youth to have the same life-changing shared experience as our boys' trek and girls' trek. All of our trekkers spent the summer living in community, laughing, learning and singing many a "Ghost Riders" around the campfire.



*“Ever since I went to CGE and went on the Paleontology Trek, I have been waiting to go back. The friends and memories that I made there will stick with me forever.”*

*- Sam, Paleo Trek 2023*





*“...I’m gonna miss this place more than usual. .... the person I am because of this summer is the person I want to be when I go back, It’s like the song: ‘Cause being here’s just another step towards where I’m gonna be...”*

*- Daniel Mongrain, PT, 2023*

# The Silver Buckle Award

## Why Do We Keep Coming Back? The People.

And we always want to honor the people who have given years of service to Cottonwood Gulch.

This year, the Cottonwood Gulch staff and Development Committee created a new award, based on a very old award: the Silver Buckle. The Silver Buckle Award is a time-honored tradition at Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions, historically presented to trekkers who distinguished themselves in some way over the course of the summer. The original Silver Buckle continues to be awarded to trekkers whenever summer program staff feel it is warranted.



The 2023 Silver Buckle.

In 2023, Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions created an additional version of this award, designed to recognize excellence in volunteers, staff, and/or donors who have demonstrated an impactful pattern of service to the Gulch. The award honors years of contribution and sustained support of the Gulch.

We initiated a formal nomination process, open to the public, and we received numerous inspiring nominations. From that list, the Development Committee chose 4 awardees from among those nominated. The awardees were ratified by the Cottonwood Gulch Board of Directors and each presented with a custom-made silver buckle, crafted by a Native New Mexican silversmith at the annual Board meeting in October, 2023.

### HERE ARE THE 2023 SILVER BUCKLE AWARDEES

#### Tom Hyde:

*“Tom Hyde has been a constructive advocate and friend of the Gulch since he first landed there in the 1960s...What is truly extraordinary is that he has mastered the Gulch donor database and refined it regularly and reliably for well over 10 years. He has sent thank you notes to donors for ~20 years and calls donors to help maintain positive relationships. He is the convener of Gulch Taco Nights in his hometown of Burlington, VT, bringing together trekkers from New England to further build and maintain the Gulch Community. Tom is known and loved by generations of trekkers... He is a reliable, trusted Ambassador for the Gulch, has committed a good part of his life to its success and stayed true through good times and bad. If ever anyone is deserving of the Silver Buckle Award it is Tom Hyde!”*

- Stephen Sedam

## Jimmy Herman:

*“Jimmy has been an invaluable part of the Gulch for many, many years. Having so many conversations with Jimmy and seeing his dedication and support for the Gulch over all these years is truly remarkable and inspiring. His family’s dedication and commitment to the Gulch community, staff and trekkers alike, is awe-inspiring. His knowledge and expertise has in so many instances kept a trek on the road and made the experience memorable.”*

-Walter Cloud



*John and David after receiving their Silver Buckle Awards*

## John Bloch:

*“John benefited enormously as a young trekker.. In later years, John joined the Board, has made significant financial donations, and with his leadership basically resurrected Cottonwood Gulch. The icing on the cake is Flocks and Rocks for us Old Guys!”*

- Leslie Gordon

## David “Doc Sal” Salmanson:

*“David goes out of his way to lend his experience, his stories, and his heart to the Gulch... Throw him onto a trek- not only will he do it, but he’ll be happy about it. He joined my Wild Country Trek one year for an overnight so that he could teach my trekkers about Canyon de Chelly. His love of the Gulch goes beyond the trekkers and staff, it pours out into the traditions, and it runs like water through the history and landscape of this place. He is an institution in his own right; A kind and generous man whose heart and brain will never stop giving and giving to this place. I can’t think of anyone more deserving.”*

- Kate Cumberpatch

# Development Updates

It's been an eventful year for development activities at Cottonwood Gulch. We created a new position: Development Director and hired Carrie Dalrymple to fill it. We received funding from the US Forest Service to start our Every Kid Outdoors program; and selected a new database system to record and track our donors and grants. Below are some development highlights from 2023.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Institution of an additional Silver Buckle Award to recognize excellence in volunteers, staff and/or donors who have demonstrated an impactful pattern of service to the Gulch.
- Over \$366,000 in donations from 315 individual donors.
- Spent \$343,956 of grant funds awarded by 7 different funding partners to support our school year programming, Summer Youth Conservation Corp, and programming at Bachechi Open Space.
- Nearly \$56,000 raised for scholarships for summer trekkers.

*“I was really nervous coming here, because I don’t spend a lot time outside. After doing EKO I realized I had a great time, I enjoy being outside and I cant wait to come back!”*

*-Joseph, San Rafael Elementary School, 2023*



GO Trek visiting Chaco Canyon



# Notable Gulch Numbers



**\$112,300** awarded in Scholarships

over **4,000** individual meals served

over **2,000** trekkers in school and summer programs

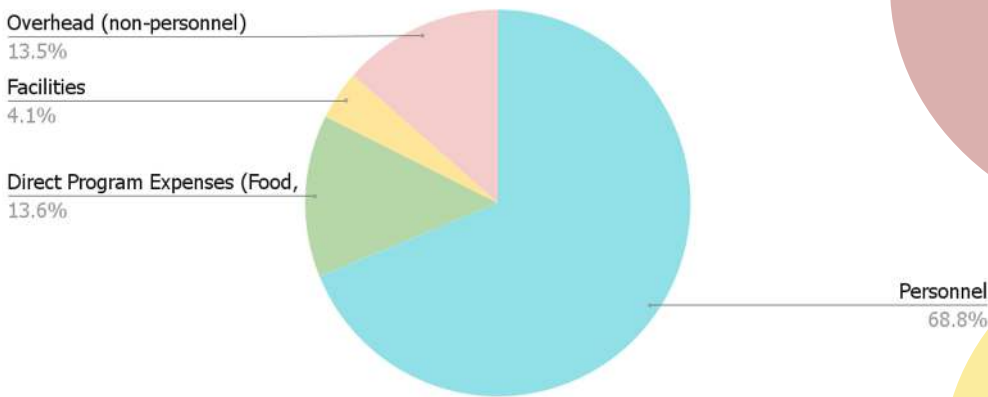
**6,364** total user days in the field

**30** seasonal staff facilitating stellar outdoor experiences

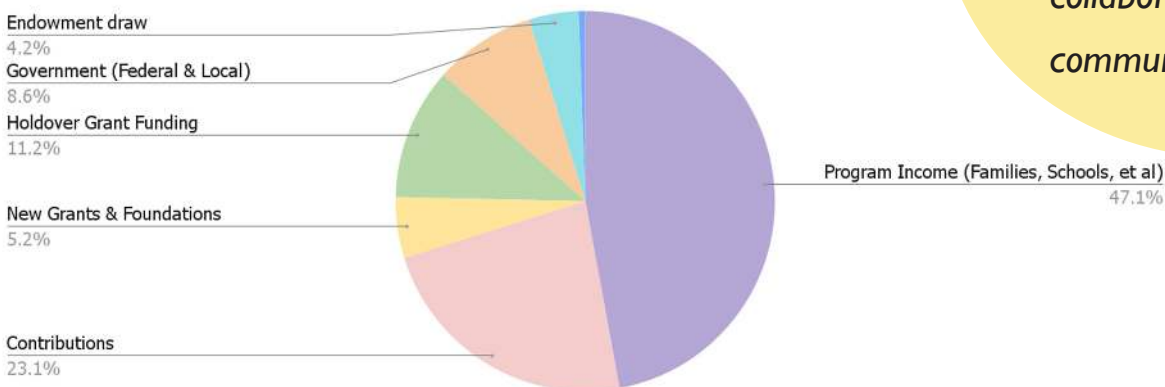
collaborated with over **45** community partners

## PRELIMINARY NUMBERS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

### EXPENSES: \$1,472,833



### INCOME: \$1,472,833



# Thank you to our Donors

## **Cottonwood (\$5,000 and up)**

Betsy and John Bloch  
Daniel Aibel  
Thomas and Michele Davidson  
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Peter and Joan Fortune  
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## **Ponderosa (\$2,500-\$4,999)**

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## **Douglas Fir (\$1,000-\$2,499)**

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**El Morro Society**

*El Morro Society donors have given annually over the past 5 years.*  
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 Tracy and Henry Hooper  
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 Marjorie Kittle and David Williams  
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**Red Rocks Society**

*Red Rocks Society are donors who have put Cottonwood Gulch in their will or as a beneficiary of their IRA.*  
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 Wenda Trevathan and Gregg Henry  
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 Erv Peterson  
 Henry and Tracy Hooper  
 Margaret Macneale  
 Thomas Hyde  
 Larry Barker  
 Lucy Kluckhohn Jones  
 Michael Hays  
 Danila Oder  
 Alice Lesney  
 Leslie Gordon

**Foundations and Institutions**

Outdoor Equity Fund, State of NM Economic Development Department FY23  
 USDA Forest Service: Every Kid Outdoors and YCC  
 Environmental Protection Agency: Environmental Justice Small Grants Program  
 The Wilderness Society: SIWI FY2024  
 ABQ Involved  
 The McCune Foundation  
 Bernalillo County

*This list represents donors to Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions from October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023. If your name or organization's name does not appear here, please contact us. Thank you for your support!*

## 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](mailto:jordan@cottonwoodgulch.org)).**



9223 4th St NW  
Albuquerque, NM 87114

**COTTONWOOD GULCH  
IS NEARING ITS  
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION,  
CELEBRATE WITH US BY  
JOINING THE RED ROCKS SOCIETY!**

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. We are inviting our community members to contribute to our endowment and provide impactful support for our programs.

The Red Rocks Society is comprised of donors who have put Cottonwood Gulch in their will or as a beneficiary of their IRA. Planned giving gifts such as this can support our endowment and play a vital role in the cultivation of life-changing experiences that keep trekkers, families and community members coming back to the Gulch. Thank you for your support!

If you are curious about donating to the endowment or joining the Red Rocks Society, please contact Executive Director Jordan Stone ([jordan@cottonwoodgulch.org](mailto:jordan@cottonwoodgulch.org)).

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