

Get Wild: Supporting those who help our national forests

Jamie Werner



A llama is tied up to a tree during a Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance trail-work trip in summer 2021. Llamas have many unique characteristics that make them a great pack animal for helping in wilderness areas.

Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance/Courtesy photo

The stunning natural landscape of the White River National Forest is the backdrop to life in Summit County, providing scenic vistas, abundant recreational opportunities, clean water and fresh air to locals and visitors alike. As part of our ongoing work to support the stewardship of this landscape, in 2023 the National Forest Foundation is investing over \$1.2 million in forest restoration and sustainable recreation projects via the White River National Forest Ski Conservation Fund.

For those less familiar with the Ski Conservation Fund, the National Forest Foundation partners with Vail Resorts (Keystone, Breckenridge, Vail Mountain, and Beaver Creek), Copper Mountain and Arapahoe Basin to raise funds to support forest stewardship projects. This innovative program enables guests of these resorts to donate a dollar or more when purchasing online tickets or season passes, or when staying at affiliated lodges. The National Forest Foundation provides a 50-cent match on every dollar donated by guests and works closely with the White River

National Forest to invest those funds in projects on the Dillon and Eagle Holy Cross Ranger Districts.

Funding allocations are made with guidance from Community Advisory Committees consisting of representatives from land and wildlife management agencies, local government, tourism and lodging sectors, recreation interests, and ecological health groups. These groups communicate local stewardship priorities to the White River National Forest, who carefully consider committee input in bringing forth potential projects and programs for annual funding consideration.

In the two years that this re-imagined process has been in place, the committees have prioritized projects focused on watershed health, wildlife habitat, education/outreach and sustainable/inclusive access. Stemming from this feedback, this year the National Forest Foundation is investing:

Over \$200,000 in watershed and forest health improvement projects, including noxious weed abatement and projects intended to minimize erosion and protect local water supplies;

Close to \$200,000 in wildlife habitat projects, with specific focus on ungulate habitat (elk, deer, and bighorn sheep), sage grouse, Brewer's sparrow, and aquatic organisms;

Close to \$500,000 in projects and programs designed to provide sustainable and inclusive access to our public lands, including an effort to provide Spanish language versions of trailhead signage and other recreational assets; and

Over \$300,000 in educational, youth, and safety programming, including a new mobile winter backcountry safety classroom to promote avalanche safety and awareness

Ski Conservation Fund support of the Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance in 2023 will treat invasive weeds and support backcountry overnight volunteer trips within the Eagles Nest, Flat Tops, and Holy Cross Wildernesses. The scope of the overnight trips includes backcountry campsite inventory, corridor clearing, drainage establishment, and illegal campsite restoration. These projects benefit our natural resources in primitive, hard to reach areas and improve biodiversity and habitat for wildlife by treating invasive weeds.

The National Forest Foundation strives to partner with local nonprofit partners, youth corps and volunteer groups to fulfill the projects in which we invest. Other organizations receiving Ski Conservation Fund funding support in 2023 include Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, Friends of the Dillon Ranger District, Friends of the Colorado Avalanche Information Center, Wildlands Restoration Volunteers, Eagle River Watershed Council, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, Vail Valley Mountain Trails Alliance and Walking Mountains Science Center.

The National Forest Foundation is grateful to Vail Resorts, Copper Mountain, Arapahoe Basin and their guests for their support of these important projects.



Jamie Werner, a White River National Forest Stewardship Coordinator for the National Forest Foundation, in Glenwood Springs on Friday, June 24, 2022.

Ray K. Erku/Post Independent