
Rio Grande Watershed Conservation & Education Initiative

Annual Report

2023



6th graders investigate soil texture during a field trip along the Conejos river.

High school FFA students at the SLV Regional Range Judging Competition. RGWCEI assisted in the planning and preparing test materials.



A Note on 2023

The Rio Grande Watershed Conservation & Education Initiative's mission is to increase awareness and understanding of natural resource stewardship and working landscapes for San Luis Valley community members, particularly K-12, through education, connections, and collaboration.

This year marked a significant stride as we expanded our most-loved program, Conservation Camp. We could not have done this without our partnerships and investing in longstanding relationships. At the beginning of the year, we moved locations to the Natural Resource Conservation Service office, renewing an arrangement we had at RGWCEI's founding. Sharing space makes it far easier to stay connected to on-the-ground conservation work and engage with field staff who are excellent youth program presenters. Additionally, we entered a staff-sharing agreement with the Center and Rio Grande Conservation Districts, strengthening our capacity and opportunity for future collaboration with the districts. I am grateful for everyone who helped us in this year's transitions, and I am excited to see community momentum for place-based conservation grow.

Hannah Thill, Executive Director

Staff News

We are excited to add Mattea Freel to our team. She is the District manager for Center and Rio Grande Conservation District and assists with our programming on a part-time basis. Mattea is a Colorado native with an extensive background in agriculture and sustainable crop and livestock practices. Mattea came to the San Luis Valley to attend Adams State University and graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Agribusiness and a Master of Business Administration in Leadership and Public Administration.



HANNAH THILL
Executive Director



**MATTEA
FREEL**
Parttime Staff

Board of Directors

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Brian Neufeld, Chair | Center Conservation District |
| Tyler Neely, Vice Chair | Rio Grande Conservation District |
| Jim Rutgers, Treasurer | Board Member at Large |
| James Fischer, Secretary | Costilla Conservation District/Trinchera Ranch |
| Patrick O'Neill | Mosca Hooper Conservation District |
| Sherry Haugen | Center Conservation District |
| Mark Franchi | Board Member at Large |
| Connor Born | Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project |
-

Program Highlights

2,600

INDIVIDUAL YOUTH INTERACTIONS

From 2015-2019 we organized training for local high schools to compete in the state Envirothon competition. 2023 was the first time since the competition was held since 2019. We supported and provided training to Del Norte Highschool who won first in the oral argument portion of the contest.



Nathan Coombs explains how an automated headgate helps to administer water.

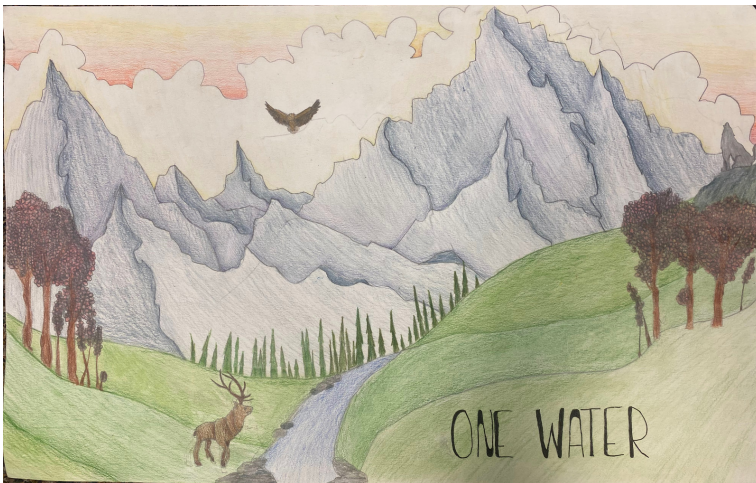


Our river trailer, an interactive watershed model, received a lot of visibility this year as we took it to the South Rocky Mountain Ag conference, the Crane Festival, the Youth Ag Fest, the Potato Festival, and schools.





Students learn about native rio grande chub and sucker before releasing them into the river.



First place at Centauri Middle School for the NACD Poster Contest



A highschool biology class collects field data to learn about rangeland ecosystems, forests, and aquatic health at Beaver Creek Youth Camp

200

FIELD TRIP PARTICIPANTS

Field trip locations included Rio Grande state wildlife area for aquatic ecology, the Conejos river, and Rio Grande National Forest!

195

CONSERVATION POSTERS MADE

This year's theme was "One Water". We prepared a lesson to help understand healthy watersheds and their importance to everyone living within in one. This contest is sponsored by local, state, and national conservation districts.



1200

SCHOOLCHILDREN IN THE PATCH

Youth Camp Expansion

After several years of reaching a camper waiting list and working to accommodate the needs and interests of both 8 and 13-year-olds simultaneously, the board and stakeholders decided to expand the camp into two sessions. It was a big commitment from our volunteers and presenters, but everyone gladly pitched in to bring this one-of-a-kind program to more youth.

The campers enjoyed new and old activities like catching aquatic insects, setting up wildlife cameras, visiting Beaver Creek reservoir, and playing *animal survival!* Thanks to our presenters from USFS, CPW, Boys & Girls Club, CSU extension, NRCS, and many others for sharing their passion for natural resource conservation with the next generation.



"Sprouts" Camp; Ages 8-10



72 campers total



"My child truly enjoys camp every year, and can't wait to come back". - camp parent

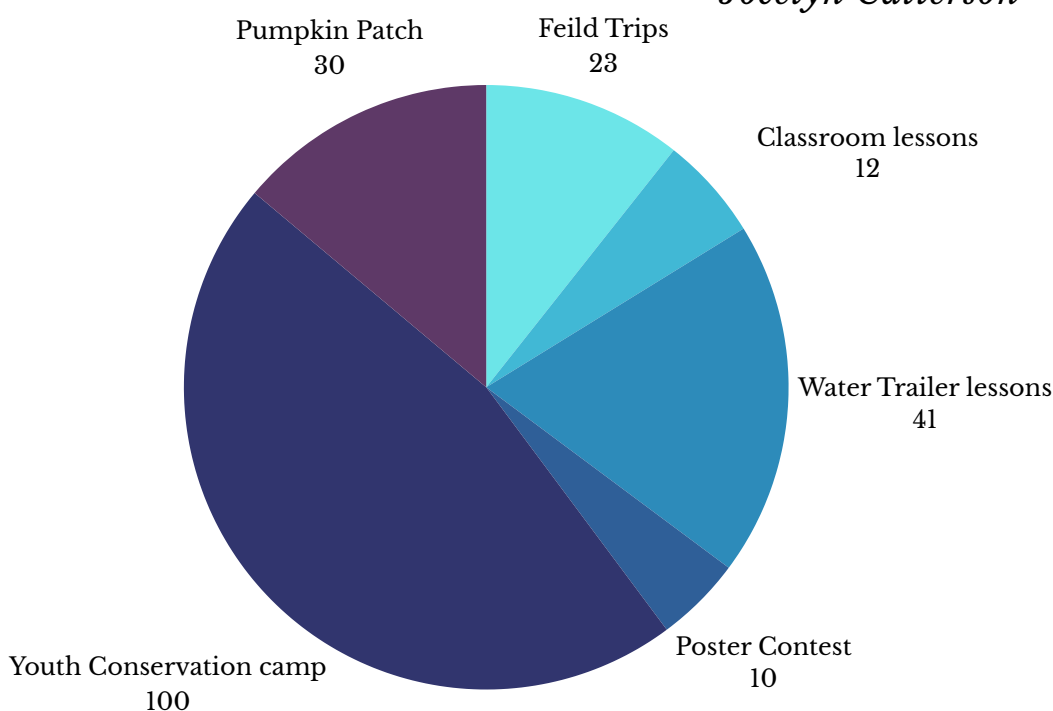
Groups reached

Alamosa FFA
 Alpine Achiever’s homeschool program
 Del Norte Schools
 Centennial Schools
 Centauri Middle school
 Center Consolidated Schools
 Center Headstart
 Creede School
 High Valley Community Center
 Monte Vista FFA
 Marsh Elementary
 Moffat Schools
 Mountain Valley School
 Sangre De Cristo Elementary
 Sangre De Cristo FFA
 Sargent School
 Sargent FFA
 South Conejos Schools
 Sierra Grande School
 WECO Water Fluency 101 course

Additional educational partners

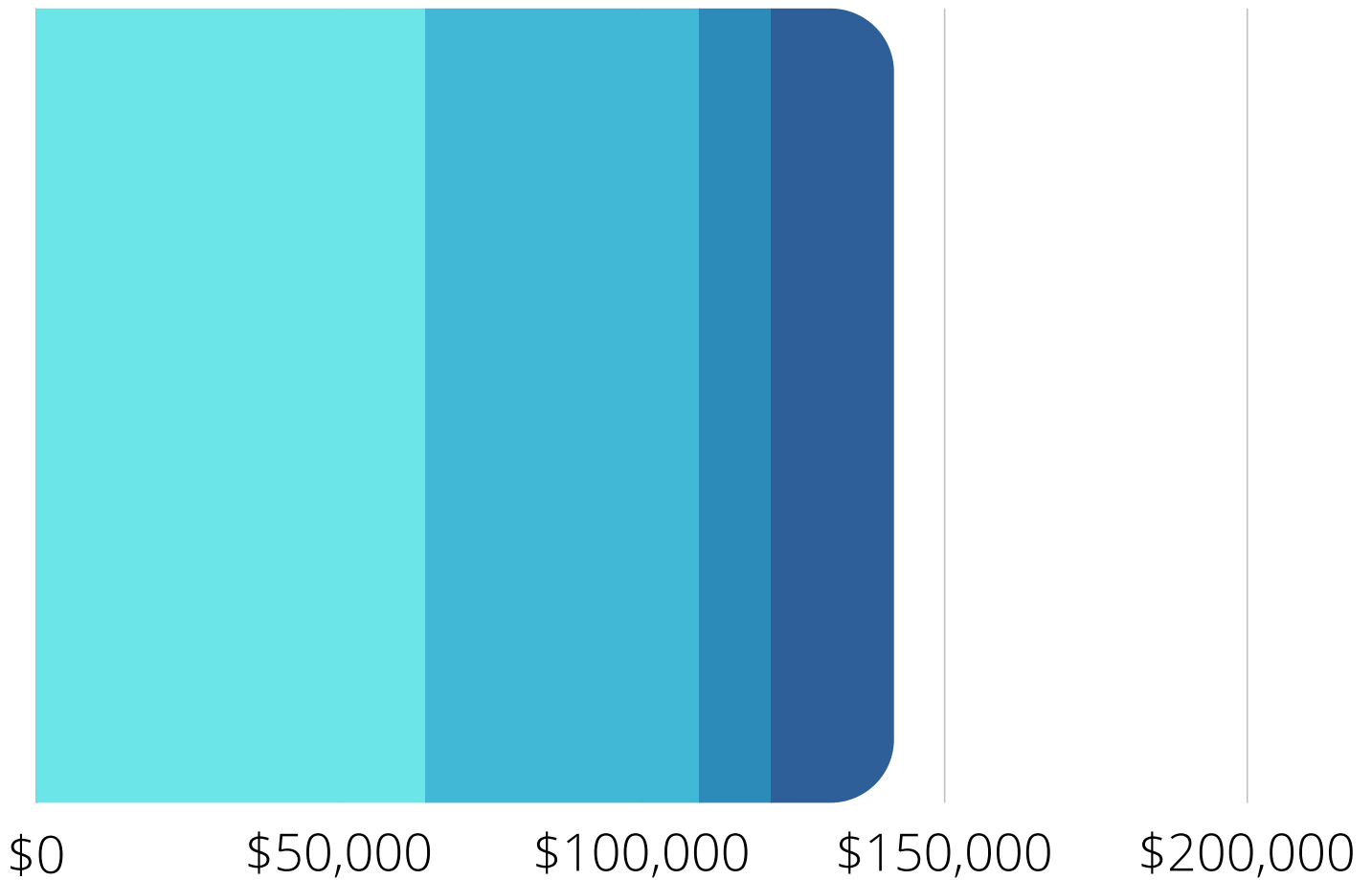
CSU Extension youth program
 Colorado State Forest Service
 NRCS
 SLV Water Conservancy District
 Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project
 Wetlands dynamics LLC
 Rio Grande Basin Roundtable
 US Forest Service
 Colorado Parks and Wildlife
 Boys & Girls Club of the SLV
 Conejos Water Conservancy District
 Center Conservation District
 Mosca Hooper Conversation District
 Rio Grande Conservation District
 Jared Myers Farms
 Peter and Leah Clark
 SLV Great Outdoors
 SLV Generation Wild Coalition
 Trout Unlimited, SLV Chapter
 Division of Water Resources
 Rio Grande Water Conservation District
 Rio Grande Farm Park
 Valley Educational Gardens Initiative
 Adams State Adventure Program
 Alpine Achievers Initiative
 Jocelyn Catterson

Education Programs Hours
Total : 216 hours



Funding

- Grants
- District Support
- Program Income
- In-Kind Support



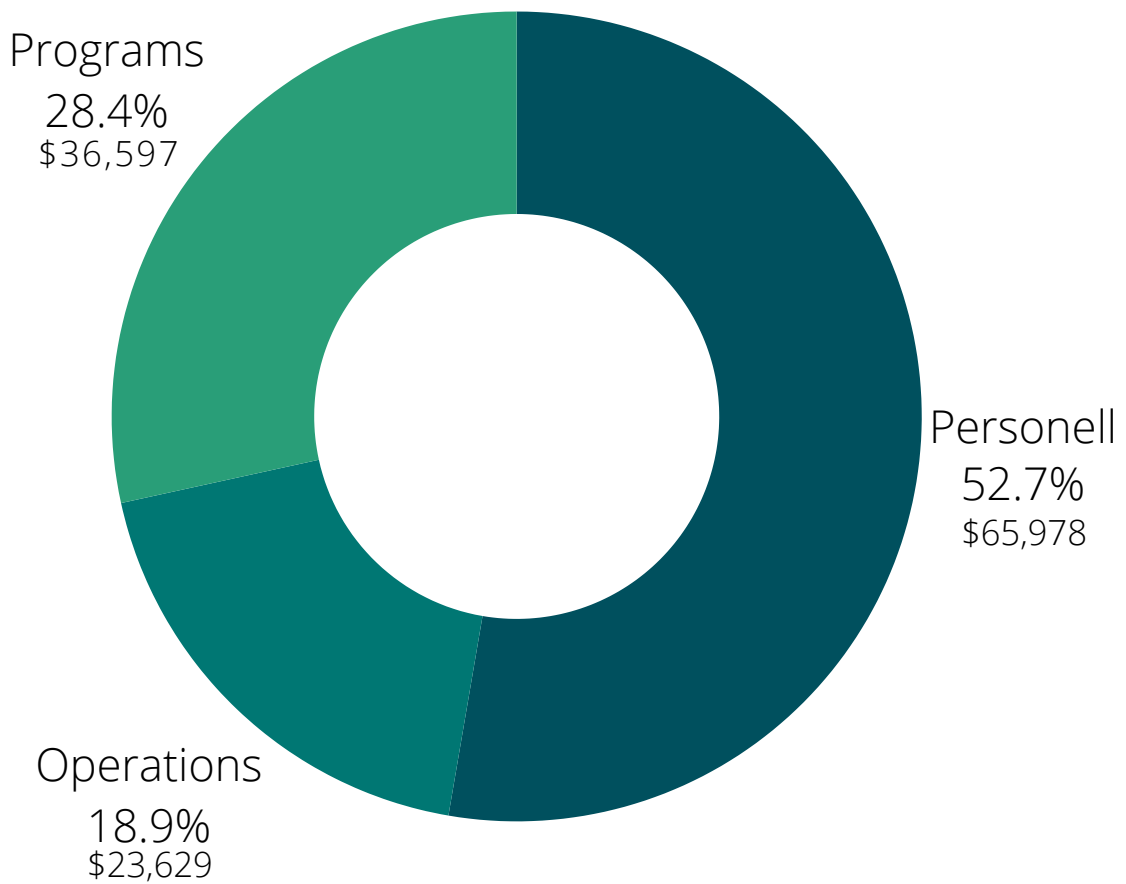
Funding Partners:

Great Outdoors Colorado
Generation Wild
Trinchera Blanca Foundation
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Rio Grande Basin Roundtable
Rio Grande Water Conservation District
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical
Campus: School of Public and Environmental
Health

Mosca Hooper Conservation District
Center Conservation District
Rio Grande Conservation District
SLV Water Conservancy District
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee
Neufeld Farms
Farm Credit of Southern Colorado
M.V. CO-OP
SLV Federal Bank

Expenses

RGWCEI works with a third party accounting firm alongside our contract accountant to ensure financial transparency & adherence to grant financial requirements.



\$145,133



-\$125,205



Rio Grande Watershed
Conservation & Education Initiative

Thank You!

*To Our Board, Partners, Sponsors
& Program Participants*

