
Rio Grande Watershed Conservation & Education
Initiative

Annual Report

2020



www.rgwcei.org / 125 Adams Street Monte Vista, CO / P.O. Box 142



A Note on 2020

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.

As everyone across the world knows, the impact of 2020's health crisis was unforeseen and at the same time, pushed us to work with more creativity and resolve than ever before. RGWCEI welcomed the opportunity to re-visit educational strategies, onboarded our former volunteer into a new full-time program coordinator position, and introduced a new service member to our organization and the San Luis Valley. We experienced positive change along with the negative.

I am grateful for the flexibility and support of our board of directors, partners, and participants. We are truly part of an amazing community and I was reminded of that in multiple ways throughout this tumultuous year!

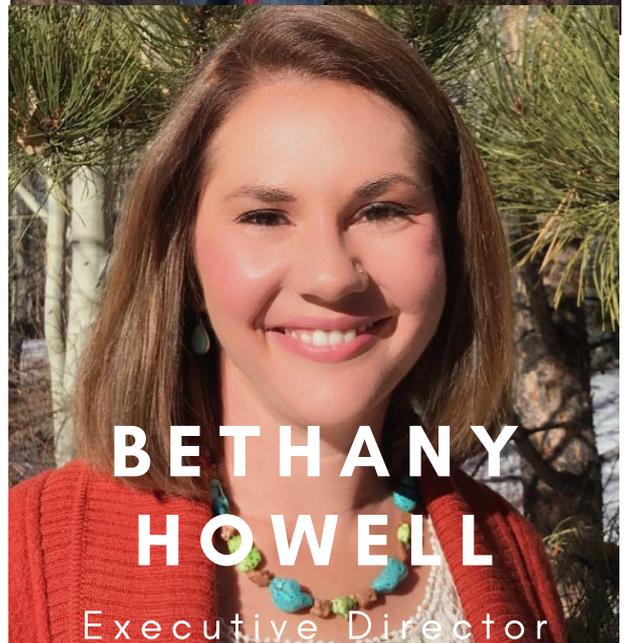
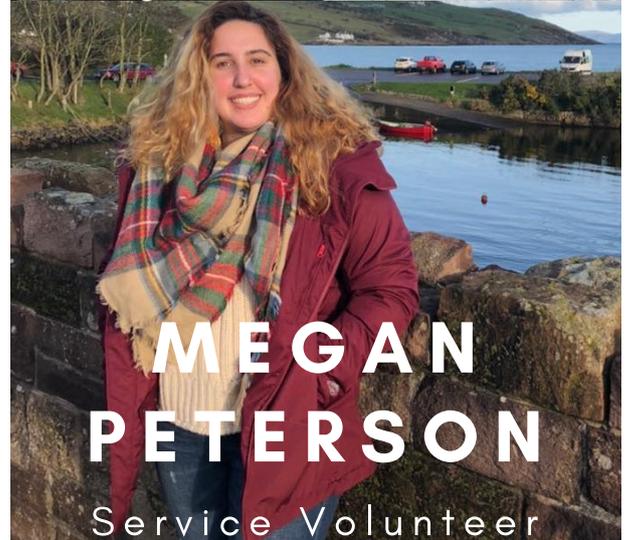
Bethany Howell, Executive Director

Staff News

Hannah Thill, our longtime service volunteer, came on board in August as our first full time Program Coordinator. She was joined by a volunteer through the AmeriCorps Service program, Megan Peterson. Megan and Hannah have worked diligently throughout the fall to create online learning resources and activities for all grade levels.

Working with the Community

Executive Director Bethany Howell has been working with the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable as the public education, participation, & outreach liaison and expanded that role in August. She continues to administer grants and work with partners for community education & funding opportunities with RGWCEI.



Program Highlights

In January, we hosted a Winter Field Workshop with the High Valley Community Center from Del Norte on a private conservation easement at the 4UR ranch. It was the last in person program we were able to hold until September, when we launched a brand new field trip option: Explore Your Watershed.



990

KIDS IMPACTED BY PROGRAMS

Kids snowshoed, conducted snow science experiments, and observed water quality issues.



20

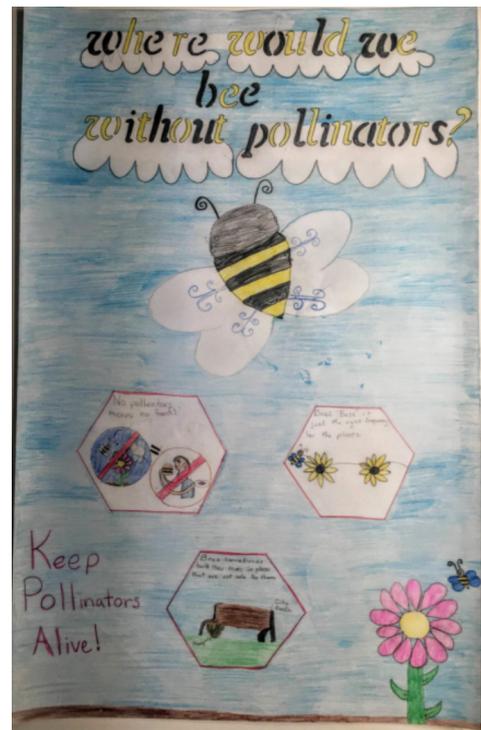
FIELD TRIP PARTICIPANTS

Field trips included a state wildlife area for aquatic ecology, a local potato farm at harvest, a city park for snow science, and a farm park to harvest root vegetables!



Regular Programs

Some traditional fall programs were still able to take place thanks to their outdoor nature or easy transition to an online format. These included the SLV School Pumpkin Patch and the 5th & 6th Grade Conservation Poster Contest.



273

CONSERVATION POSTERS MADE

This year's theme was "Where would we BEE without pollinators?" Students were able to access the presentation, videos, and additional resources online. This contest is sponsored by local, state, and national conservation districts.



392

SCHOOLCHILDREN IN THE PATCH

Approximately 200 students from grades PreK-5 found their own pumpkins at the patch, while 192 more were delivered to schools for those who weren't able to make the trip.



Digital Learning

Like many of our educational counterparts, virtual learning options became more of a need than we'd anticipated. In February 2020, our board agreed to focus on digital strategies - a prescient decision as all schools in our area moved to online learning the next month.

20+

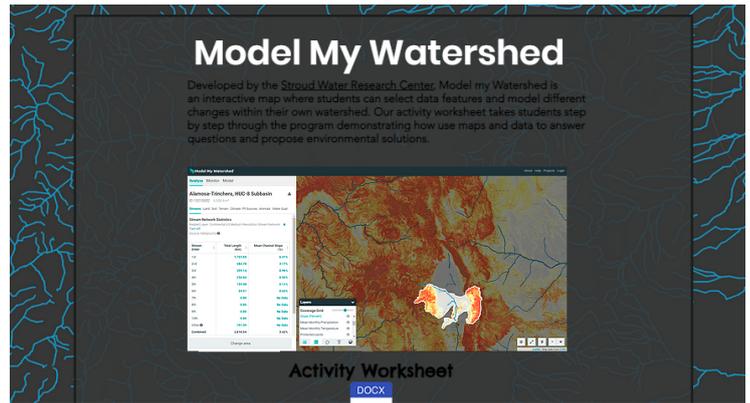
NEW ONLINE ACTIVITIES

Our re-designed website www.rgwcei.org now hosts a multitude of online resources like an interactive watershed model and staff videos for teachers, parents, and other educators.

66.7%

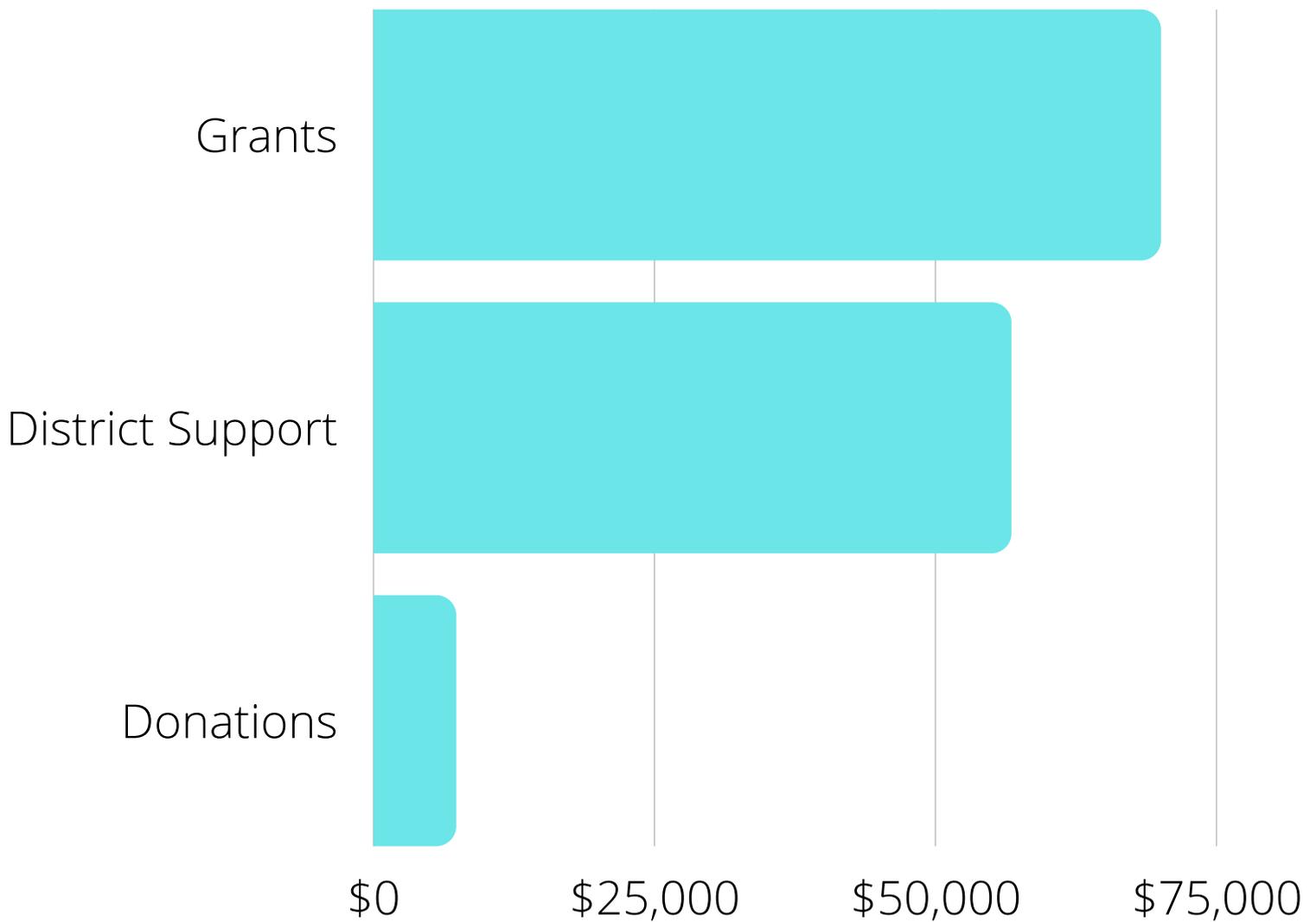
NEW SITE VISITORS

Teachers were still able to participate in the 2020 poster contest by accessing the entire presentation online. RGWCEI staff narrated the presentation with local emphasis.



Funding

Through the pandemic, our funding partners stood by us. We were fortunate to still hire our full time position and meet expenses.



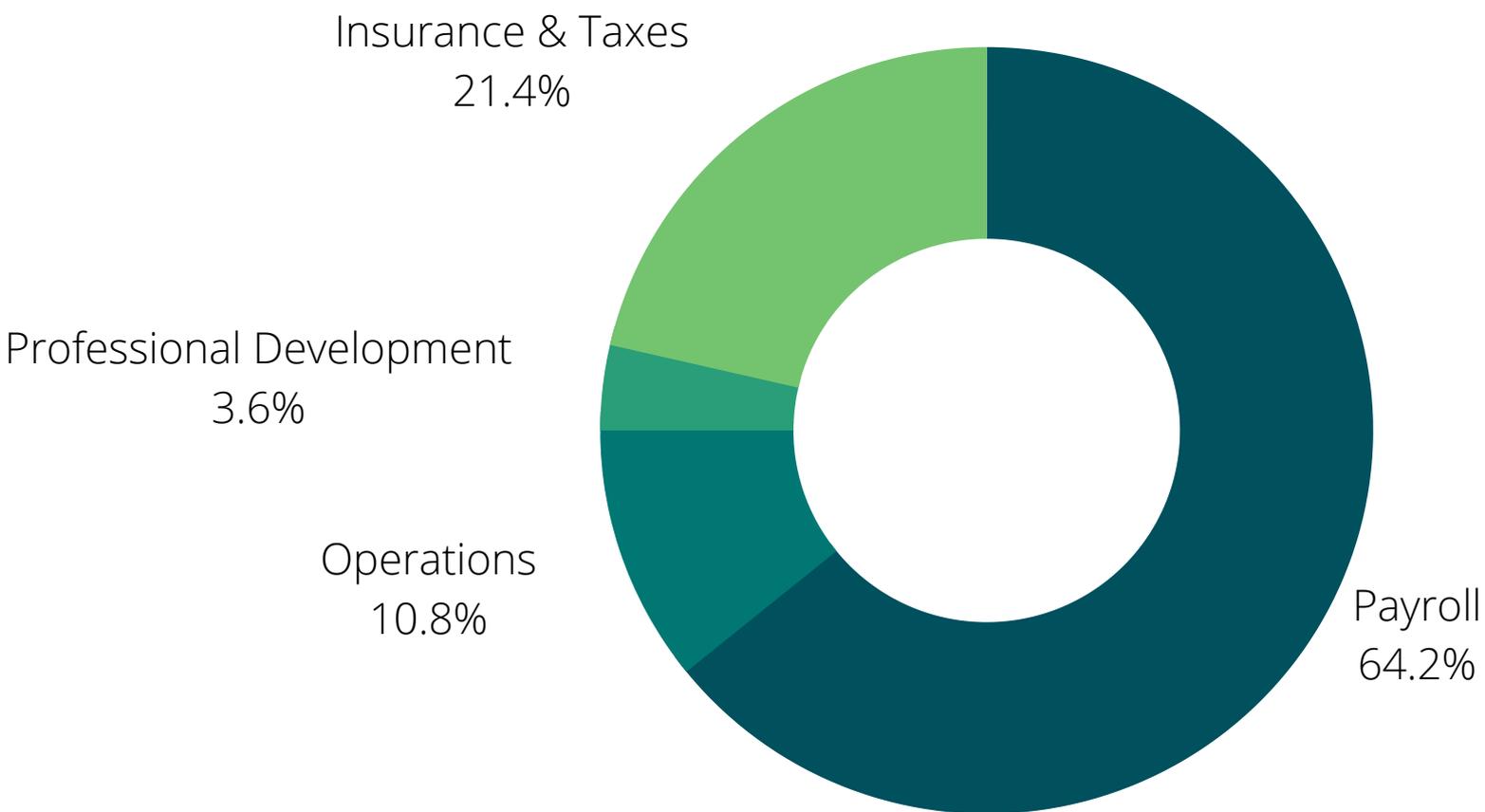
Funding Partners:

Environmental Protection Agency
Great Outdoors Colorado Generation Wild
Trinchera Blanca Foundation
CLIF Bar Family Foundation
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Saguache County

Rio Grande Watershed Association of Conservation Districts
SLV Irrigation District
SLV Water Conservancy District
Conejos Water Conservancy District
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee
Costilla County Commissioners

Expenses

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



\$134,066



-\$120,381



Rio Grande Watershed Conservation & Education Initiative

Thank You!

To Our Board, Partners, & Program Participants

