

Gunnison County STOR Committee 2020 Report



Gunnison County cherishes its sense of community and place.

We strive to preserve and promote the well-being of the County's citizens, natural environment and rural character. We will deliver services and set standards that reflect our values and preserve our unique quality of life for present and future generations to enjoy.



GUNNISON COUNTY

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The Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee (STOR Committee) is a community coalition, created by the Gunnison County Board of Commissioners to improve and maintain tourism and outdoor recreation in a manner that is sustainable (environmentally, socially and financially) and aligns with our community values.

STOR COMMITTEE REPORT

The Gunnison County Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation (STOR) Committee was established by the Board of Commissioners in December 2017. The Committee includes representation of 22 members that represent a wide array of community stakeholders. The Committee has been meeting monthly for the past three years and in that time has accomplished significant goals that will have long term benefits for Gunnison County, our natural resources, and our recreation experience.

The Committee initially set forth four overall goals for their work:

- 1. Ensure the Valley's tourism sector of the economy is resilient, vibrant, and supports our community values.*
- 2. Foster a resident and visitor culture that demonstrates respect for our community, culture, and environmental stewardship.*
- 3. Support collaboration between federal land agencies, local government, nonprofit and user groups to improve management of recreation and natural resources.*
- 4. Be proactive in management of private and public natural and recreation assets to minimize degradation and enhance quality.*



Gunnison Valley

Our community is an increasingly popular destination for visitors and residents to camp, recreate and enjoy our public lands.

For each of these goal areas the Committee identified specific actions, strategies and results to achieve the goals.

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STOR COMMITTEE 2020 REPORT

STOR Committee Significant Achievements

Gunnison Stewardship Fund. The Gunnison Stewardship Fund was established in 2018, in partnership with the National Forest Foundation. While the National Forest Foundation has long had partnerships with ski resorts for the Ski Conservation Fund, the Gunnison Stewardship Fund is the first of its kind in the country. The fund is based on partnerships with outfitters, guides, and others in Gunnison County. This fund is generated through the voluntary contributions of partner organizations who have either made a specific financial commitment or have included a voluntary donation added to their guest receipts (i.e. \$1/receipt). Partners included below pooled funds through Gunnison Fund for our community.



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Gunnison Stewardship Fund

Since the partnership began, the Fund has collected approximately **\$200,000** in business and local government contributions. Funded Grants: The funding raised by Fund participants was leveraged by NFF matching funds making possible unique work benefiting the Gunnison Ranger District and adjacent public lands, and employing and involving local and regional individuals.

Results of 2018 and 2019 Projects:

- 70.8 Miles of Trail Improved
- 1,498 Pounds of Trash Removed
- 1,450 Volunteer Hours
- 54 Illegal Campsites Obliterated
- 2 Trailhead Toilets Installed

For 2020, just over \$104,000 was allocated by the Fund's partners to implement five priority projects:



Crested Butte Conservation Corps, a program of the Crested Butte Mountain Bike Alliance will work alongside the Forest Service, Gunnison Ranger District to provide a robust field presence across Gunnison Ranger District lands from May through October. The Corps will mitigate resource damage, complete regular trail maintenance, educate users, and reduce impacts to Gunnison Valley public lands.

Gunnison Trails' Professional Trail Crew will maintain and increase access to Gunnison basin trails on Bureau of Land Management and National Forest System lands, and will also collect seeds of native shrub and grass species for revegetation and habitat improvement.

Gunnison County will begin construction of Shady Island River Park, a river park and river access area that will include nineteen campsites, a camp host, picnic shelters and tables, restrooms, trails, fishing access, kids nature play areas, and a boat staging area. The facility will serve residents and visitors of the Gunnison Valley.

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Gunnison Stewardship Fund

Crested Butte Land Trust will implement the Gunsight to Oh-Be-Joyful Connector Trail- Community Construction Project to connect the Lower Loops to the Oh-Be-Joyful (OBJ) Campground/ Recreation Area by constructing a roughly 0.75-mile non-motorized, natural surface connector trail to link the Land Trust's Gunsight Bridge trailhead with the BLM's OBJ Campground. With the construction of this connector trail, the Raggeds Wilderness, managed by the Forest Service would be accessible via non-motorized natural surface trails from Crested Butte.

The Coal Creek Watershed Coalition will coordinate with the Gunnison Ranger District to install a permanent vault toilet on Forest Service land in Washington Gulch. The toilet was donated by the Town of Crested Butte and will be refurbished and installed with support from the Stewardship Fund.



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GOCO Stewardship Impact Grant \$350,000

In 2019 Gunnison County and the STOR Committee were awarded a \$350,000 Stewardship Impact grant from GOCO—the largest amount awarded to any of the recipients. Matching funds and in-kind work from STOR Committee members include an additional \$100,000+ in funding. Since the award of the grant multiple projects and programs have been funded:

- The Stewardship Coordinator position held by Joe Lavorini. The Coordinator position also included funding support from the National Forest Foundation.
- In collaboration with the US Forest Service and Crested Butte Conservation Corps, funds are being utilized to establish designated dispersed campsites in the north valley. This designation will reduce the negative impacts of dispersed camping on the landscape, vegetation, and waterways. Work is expected to be completed by 2022.
- Support of the planning, design, and implementation of trailhead infrastructure in the Slate River and Peanut Lake recreation areas outside of Crested Butte.
- Funding for the STOR Corps which kicked off in July 2020. This crew of ten individuals worked for twelve weeks on stewardship and outreach projects throughout Gunnison County.

Additional projects are expected for 2021 and 2022 as prioritized and recommended by the STOR Committee.



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GOCO Resilient Communities Grant \$450,000

In September 2020 Gunnison County was awarded a \$450,000 GOCO Resilient Communities grant—the largest award given to any of the recipients this year.

Funding from this grant will be used to support the development of the Shady Island River Park, 2021 STOR Corps, winter access and outreach, Slate River trailhead improvements, and additional bathrooms at busy trailheads.

The STOR Committee came together to present a compelling application demonstrating the impacts of COVID-19 on our community and how the proposed programs and activities.



Total Outside Funding

In less than three years the STOR Committee has brought in over **\$1.1 million in outside funds** to be used for on the ground project in Gunnison County!

Additionally, local partners have contributed approximately \$400,000 in funds to support stewardship, maintenance, and restoration of our public and conserved lands in the County.

This is an incredible accomplishment in a short amount of time and demonstrates that collaboration, cooperation, and strategic planning yield big results.

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STOR Corps

In June 2020 the Board of County Commissioners gave the green light to create the STOR Corps, a conservation corps dedicated to work in Gunnison County promoting stewardship. With the support of the National Forest Foundation, the Tourism and Prosperity Partnership (TAPP), and the GOCO Stewardship Impact Grant the Corps began in July 2020 with ten paid staff members working through the end of September.

As with many mountain communities in Colorado, visitation to the Gunnison Valley is at an all-time high. Land managers observe that they have never seen our public lands as busy as they have been in recent years. While this trend has been established for at least a few years, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a flurry of domestic travel. Residents of Colorado and surrounding states recognize the benefits of the open space, clean air, and endless recreation opportunities that are available in the Gunnison Valley. To prepare for what many anticipated to be the busiest tourist season on record, and to provide employment opportunities for those facing economic hardship due to the pandemic, Gunnison County and the National Forest Foundation (NFF) acted urgently this past spring to launch the Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation (STOR) Corps – aka the STOR Corps. The Corps is a jobs-creation program modeled in-part after the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930's and in-part after the youth corps model that is so successful today.



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STOR Corps

Scope of Work

The program was established to mitigate the impacts to the County's natural resources caused by the increased visitation to the area's public lands. The Corps' scope of work fell into two buckets: stewardship and outreach. Stewardship work includes on-the-ground improvements such as trail construction, habitat protection, fencing, trash clean-up, and road decommissioning. Outreach activities included tabling and roving at high-use recreation areas to engage with the public to spread an ethic of responsible and sustainable use of the landscape.

The Corps worked autonomously and alongside project partners to accomplish objectives that were established by land management agency and non-profit partners.



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STOR Corps

Stewardship Accomplishments

The following is a list of the stewardship projects and number of workdays the STOR Corps accomplished this season:

Bureau of Land Management Projects

- Construction of the Coyote Den Trail at Hartman Rocks (8 days)
- Distribution of prairie dog vaccinations at various areas (6 days)
- Road decommissioning at Gold Basin (4 days)
- Campsite and fire ring clean-up at Hartman Rocks (3 days)
- Construction of the Coaltrain Trail at Oh-Be-Joyful (3 days)
- Fence construction at Oh-Be-Joyful Campground (1 day)

Crested Butte Land Trust Project

- Ditch repair and fence installation in the Slate River drainage (1 day)



National Park Service Projects

- Fence removal at Dillon Pinnacles (1 days)
- Noxious weed removal at Curecanti National Park (1 day)

U.S. Forest Service Projects

- Lynx habitat monitoring at Wilder timber sale (4 days)
- Goshawk habitat surveys at Spring Creek timber sale (1 day)
- Construction of “houses for grouses” at Flat Top (3 days)
- Water bar construction at Middle Quartz Creek (3 days)
- Timber cruising at Spring Creek (3 days)
- Sign installation at Cottonwood Pass (2 days)
- Tree planting on Slumgullion Pass (2 days)

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STOR Corps

Outreach Accomplishments

The primary focus of the STOR Corps this season was to develop outreach strategies to engage with the public out on the landscape. To prepare, the Corps completed Leave No Trace and interpreter training and dedicated countless hours to the development of outreach materials and tactics.

The following is a list of the locations and number of days where outreach activities occurred, and the number of visitor contacts made on those days:

- Brush Creek (2 days & 26 contacts)
- Copper Creek Trail (1 day & 28 contacts)
- Hartman Rocks (1 day & 27 contacts)
- Judd Falls (2 days & 193 contacts)
- Kebler Pass (3 days & 125 contacts)
- Lost Lake (2 days & 108 contacts)
- Oh-Be-Joyful Campground (1 day & 22 contacts)
- Ohio Creek Pass (1 day & 22 contacts)
- Slate River Drainage (1 day & 40 contacts)
- Taylor Park Trading Post (2 days & 24 contacts)
- Washington Gulch (1 day & 27 contacts)

TOTAL: 17 days & 642 contacts



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STOR Corps

Partners

The 2020 STOR Corps would not have been possible without the support of the following partners:

Danguole Bockus	National Park Service
Tammy Brand	Taylor Park Trading Post
Ted Brand	Taylor Park Trading Post
Andrew Breibart	Bureau of Land Management
Kathy Brodhead	Bureau of Land Management
Joe Carlson	U.S. Forest Service
Theresa Childers	National Park Service
Jennifer Fenwick	U.S. Forest Service
Art Haines	U.S. Forest Service
Ashley Hom	U.S. Forest Service
Paul Jones	UGRWCD
Tim Kugler	Gunnison Trails
Tim Leishman	U.S. Forest Service
Brian Lieberman	CB Land Trust
Ashley Merkel	U.S. Forest Service
Kristi Murphy	BLM
Dave Ochs	CBMBA
Delaney Rudy	U.S. Forest Service
Nate Seward	CPW
Justin Spitz	NPS
Matt Vasquez	U.S. Forest Service
Sue Wallace	STOR Committee



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STOR Corps

2020 STOR Corps Members

The following STOR Corps members contributed a total of 3,205 hours to the program this season:

Marissa Markus, Crew Leader
Hannah Schaeffer-Tibbett, Crew Leader
Raeanna Anglen
Hunter Benkoski
Kylie Hester
Colin McCullough
Jack Morgan
Ty Sanderford
Madelyn Tormasi
Dylan Wood

Recognition

The STOR Corps received media attention with a feature story in the Gunnison Country Times and coverage in the Crested Butte News. The program was highlighted in blog posts on the National Forest Foundation website and via social media channels.

The STOR Corps program was recognized with the Governor's Award for Outstanding Sustainable Tourism Program through the Colorado Tourism Office.

