

7 ways to volunteer on Colorado public lands

From native seed collection to trail maintenance, here are some ways to give back to the outdoors



People donate their time to work on a trail project with Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado. (Mindy Sink, Special to The Denver Post)



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I've hiked hundreds of miles of trails over the years, and taken for granted that those trails existed at all. The fact is, it takes planning and a great deal of manual labor to build a trail, not to mention the maintenance once it's done, and much of this is done by a network of volunteers.

“Volunteers are essential because land management agencies at the federal, state and local levels often lack the time, staffing or budget to complete all the critical stewardship work that needs to be done,” said Kimberly Gagnon, director of marketing and communications for Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC).

And this year, overall funding, [particularly at the federal level](#), has declined, leaving gaps in trail building and habitat work, she said. “Volunteers play a vital role. The outdoor spaces we all treasure require ongoing care and maintenance to remain accessible, safe, and healthy.”



Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado invites people to work on projects such as trail

completion at Golden Gate Canyon State Park. (Mindy Sink, Special to The Denver Post)

There are opportunities for volunteers of all ages, abilities and interests across Colorado in state parks, county open spaces, national parks and more. Volunteers can pick what projects appeal to them and where they are most comfortable spending their time.

I volunteered on a trail rebuilding project in Golden Gate Canyon State Park with VOC. It was perhaps harder work than I am cut out for, but I found odd jobs to do during the day that contributed to the overall effort, and I enjoyed having a purpose other than hiking to the finish and back.

Consider signing up with one of these organizations if you're interested in volunteering on public lands, too:

VOC

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado is a non-profit organization that has been around for over 40 years.

"Each year, we engage around 1,500 unique volunteers," said Gagnon. "These are individuals who show up for Colorado's outdoors. However, many of them return again and again, resulting in nearly 3,000 volunteer days each year."

The result is an estimated annual \$28.18 million in donated labor. Volunteers can show up once or many times or even go on to train to be a leader. Projects include native seed collection, butterfly monitoring, trail maintenance, tree removal, erosion control, wildfire mitigation, flower maintenance at Denver's Civic Center and more. Each project will have minimum age requirements, so read the details before signing up the whole family.

"We're proud to have volunteers who've been with us since the beginning, many of whom are still active in their 70s and 80s, and some who still serve in volunteer leadership roles," she said, adding that crew leaders can range in age from their 20s to their 70s. "Our volunteer community spans from ages eight to over 80, and we work hard to make space for everyone to get involved. We also offer roles beyond trail work, such as crew chefs, photographers, ambassadors, and administrative volunteers, each with different levels of physicality."

Volunteer in Parks

Rocky Mountain Conservancy partners with Rocky Mountain National Park on volunteer events and to support the [Volunteer in Parks program](#). This is the fourth-largest park-based volunteer program in the National Park Service.

In 2024, the 450 recurring volunteers and 218 event volunteers provided an estimated \$2.7 million of labor value.

“Recurring volunteers serve a variety of functions, from answering the park’s information phone line to supporting scientific research to helping with search and rescue, said Kaci Yoh, communications manager for the Rocky Mountain Conservancy. “Event-based opportunities are focused mostly around litter clean-up in the park and restoring native plant species to Rocky.” She noted that there can be some light to medium lifting required for some of the event-based volunteering.

Upcoming events include planting willow saplings in the park’s Kawuneeche Valley on [Sept. 16](#) and [Sept. 22](#). Explore the website to learn about recent projects — such as native plant revegetation and invasive plant control — and plan ahead as more events come available.

CPW



Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado projects include native seed collection, butterfly

monitoring, trail maintenance, tree removal, erosion control, wildfire mitigation, flower maintenance at Denver's Civic Center and more. (Mindy Sink, Special to The Denver Post)

[Colorado Parks and Wildlife](#) has an array of volunteer options throughout the year and across the state. They estimate a \$10.3 million impact annually thanks to 283,000 volunteer hours.

Upcoming trail and habitat work includes sites at Barr Lake State Park, Boyd Lake State Park, Castlewood Canyon State Park, Lake Pueblo State Park and more. Beyond the types of jobs, people can apply to be campground hosts, wildlife monitors (this category ranges from bluebird monitoring to transporting injured wildlife and much more), training to be a naturalist, and more. The website has a calendar to check specific dates, not just activities.

Park People

[The Park People](#) is a Denver-based non-profit that works with local communities to add trees and improve local parks. It might be best known for its signature program, Denver Digs Trees, which brings affordable trees to neighborhoods in need. First-timers must fill out an application and then be notified of the available positions that include training to become a community forester, neighborhood ambassador, social media associate, and more.

Bird Conservancy

[The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies](#), based in Brighton, has volunteer opportunities that will depend on each individual's background, interests and willingness to travel to where the need is. It has education volunteers, bird banding volunteers, and community scientist volunteers.

These experiences occur at state parks and natural areas, and go from recording data, opening and closing nets, handling birds safely, and banding birds. Depending on the preferred activity, there might be a requirement to commit to coming consistently during a season.

Denver Audubon has similar volunteer opportunities to band birds, along with more unusual tasks such as pedaling a "trishaw" to allow those with mobility issues to have birding experiences, or maintaining the garden at their nature center.

Open space

[Boulder County Open Space & Parks](#) has recurring and one-time volunteer opportunities that include picking up litter, being a museum guide, monitoring raptor nests, working on trails and more.

Similarly, [Jefferson County Open Space](#) has space for volunteers to do things like collecting data about wildlife and visitor behavior, monitoring frogs and raptors, restoring trails, and patrolling parks. On National Public Lands Day on Sept. 27, they will be leading volunteers to pick up trash along Lookout Mountain Road all morning. “The value of volunteering is almost immeasurable,” said Gagnon of VOC. “Volunteers gain hands-on skills and develop a deeper connection with Colorado’s public lands, waterways, and wildlife through the physical nature of the work. They also join a like-minded community and experience a real sense of purpose and accomplishment. In a time when many people seek meaningful ways to reconnect with nature, with others, and with themselves, volunteering offers a unique and rewarding path.”

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