

OUR BACKYARD

The Newsletter of Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers

Summer 2009



Silt Tamarisk Removal, Ashcroft, and Scout Trail were just a few projects completed by our volunteers in 2008.

THE LEAN, MEAN TRAIL MACHINE

Billowy gray clouds salted the air with fluffy snowflakes and the ground swelled quickly with a blanket of snow. It was 7:30 a.m. on a Saturday in May, and the Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers trail work day at Red Hill in Carbondale was scheduled to happen rain or shine. But blizzard?

Yet, typical of all **RFOV** projects, more than 45 volunteers braved the elements to haul rocks, heave pickaxes and help maintain the popular hiking, running and mountain biking trail.

RFOV's ability to churn out so much work every year on so few dollars has prompted community members to dub the nonprofit the "Lean, Mean Trail Machine." And it's true. Since it was founded in 1995, **RFOV** has:

- completed more than 125 projects;
- engaged more than 11,000 volunteers,

- including 1,100 youth;
- worked on more than 215 miles of trail;
- built 20 miles of new trail;
- planted more than 10,000 trees and shrubs and 11 acres of wetlands; and
- completed projects worth several million dollars in value to public lands.

"... they bring 40 volunteers in and they get so much accomplished in one day. My crew . . . would take four to five weeks to do that work, and that would be a big cost..."

*—Gary Tennenbaum
Pitkin County*

"We've always wanted to be a volunteer-driven organization, not staff-driven. It's a pretty dynamic structure; we've been able to build quite an organization on very little, in terms of staff," explained Executive Director David Hamilton.

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**WE DO TRAILS—
together!**

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OUR MISSION

To promote stewardship of our public lands by creating volunteer opportunities for trail work and conservation projects

MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

In last summer's issue of "Our Backyard," the **RFOV** Board of Directors announced the new Strategic Plan. The board has discussed in great depth and worked very hard to develop a strategic plan to grow **RFOV** while preserving our core mission. Our plan is to encourage the stewardship of our outdoors by growing our membership and participation through the addition of more



A note from Todd Richmond

and larger multi-year projects, recruiting more groups into our Adopt-a-Trail program, and fostering a proactive youth program.

But timing can be everything! Just as we were planning the rollout on our plan, the economy took its nosedive and we prudently decided 2009 would not be the best time to launch this expansion. It is truly amazing how much has changed in our valley and the surrounding areas over the last year. Many of us are faced with professional challenges unimaginable just a short time ago. Particularly challenged are the local non-profit organizations.

RFOV is not immune to the economy but we are lucky in that we truly revolve around our volunteers. We want to share, teach and encourage people to respect the playground nature provided for us. By participating in projects, not only are we achieving our goals, but volunteers are able to become more involved with their community. Every project I have been on has been rewarding, not just for what was accomplished, but for whom I met or got to know better.

Even with the current economic challenges we face, our new Strategic Plan remains sound, we just won't be able to do everything as quickly as we had hoped, but

we will eventually do them. We did manage to test one element of the plan this year by scheduling one month of weekday evening work projects.

Every Thursday in May, volunteers gathered at 5:30 on Red Hill in Carbondale and worked till sundown. No pre-registration was required; volunteers could just show up, sign in, grab a tool, and join a trail group. The goal was to provide an alternative for those of

us whose weekend schedules are already bursting at the seams.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly

Every project I have been on has been rewarding, not just for what was accomplished, but for whom I met or got to know better.

positive, with participants noting that they like the two-hour evening options (and the pizza and beverages afterward, too). **RFOV** completed all of the intended work—rehabbing six of the popular trails into the best shape ever. Better yet, the Red Hill concept has helped us get a start on that big goal in our Strategic Plan to expand our base. We had more than a dozen new volunteers, several of whom returned for more Red Hill work or indicated that they want to stay involved.

It is the volunteers and the spirit that they share that makes **RFOV** what it is today and what it strives to be tomorrow. With that said, how can you support the Strategic Plan? Easy, tell a stranger, bring your family,

AHEAD: MORE GREAT SATURDAYS!

► Hay Park Trail

Mid-Valley • August 1

Help perform much-needed trail maintenance on the interior of one of our favorite mid-valley trails.

► Smuggler Mountain Restoration Project

Aspen • August 22

Help restore the scars left over from Aspen's mining days and other human activities. The project will include native planting, seeding, and other restoration techniques.

► Arbaney-Kittle Trail

Basalt • September 12

We'll continue to work on bringing this very popular trail up to a sustainable standard and fixing some sketchy sections.

► White Hill Trail

Carbondale • September 26

This new nature trail behind Carbondale Elementary School will serve as an outdoor educational and recreational area for the students and the community, and provide a new route to the top of White Hill and Saint Mary's Catholic Church. (Kid-friendly project)

► Colorado River Tamarisk Removal & Restoration

Glenwood Springs •

October 10

Help continue our efforts to eradicate the invasive Tamarisk and Russian-olive along both banks of the Colorado River between West Glenwood and the hot springs.



Help us reach our goal of 50 new members this summer!

No matter where you live between Aspen and Rifle, if you enjoy hiking or riding trails, then you benefit from **RFOV's** work. Over the last 14 years, we've organized volunteers to construct, refurbish or simply help maintain more than 75 different trails.

RFOV relies on volunteers to complete these valued projects, and our members help sustain those long-lasting projects by providing approximately 26% of our operating expenses.

Your membership is important to **RFOV** in two ways: Your contribution enables us to help maintain and enhance our trail system, and your contribution is a powerful demonstration of our community's support for **RFOV**. Both show a commitment to the preservation of recreational opportunities on our public lands.

We currently have more than 360 individual and family members, down a bit from our peak last summer. Achieving our goal of 50 new members by August 30 would put us over 400 members and back to our long-term trend of increasing our membership every year.

If you use our valley's trails we believe you have a responsibility to help maintain them. You can do that by volunteering and/or contributing to **RFOV**. Please use the enclosed envelope or contribute online at www.rfov.org today!

If you're already a member, thank you!

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PROTECTING SMUGGLER

RFOV helps achieve a community's goals



It's been a long road to secure public ownership of the Smuggler Mine and Open Space—an area scarred by a heavy mining past but now safely in public hands.

“Significant urban development” could have enveloped areas like Hunter Creek and Smuggler Mountain, according to Aspen Parks and Open Space Coordinator Brian Flynn.

In the late 1960s, much of Smuggler and Hunter Creek was owned by McCullough Oil Company and other private parties. The Hunter Creek lands were largely acquired by the U.S. Forest Service with critical assistance from Pitkin County, the City of Aspen, and the Aspen Valley Land Trust, which jointly secured the Hummingbird and Little Chief in-holdings. Flynn said that these three local partners would also lead the way in protecting Smuggler.

Although negotiations with landowner Wilk Wilkinson have dominated the public's attention of late, the effort to secure the mountain began much earlier, in 1974 when Herbert Bayer donated 10 acres to Pitkin County. Over the next 33 years, the county, AVLTI, and the city would continue to piece together acquisition of what now totals 170 acres in public land.

Now that we've acquired the land, “the goal is to provide a framework for managing Smuggler Mountain Open Space to ensure the legacy of all those who donated their lands, or otherwise contributed to this stunning community

success story,” Flynn said.

In 2006, the county and city began a public process to identify ways to restore the area and have created the Smuggler Mountain Open Space Master Plan. Part of this plan was to close unsafe mine areas and restore the natural landscape.

RFOV has continued its commitment to improve this valuable public asset with a trail-building project on July 11 and a restoration project on August 22. **RFOV's** efforts will be the first steps in implementing the master plan approved last

fall. Long-term, **RFOV's** involvement is exciting.

“We will be one of the critical partners in Pitkin County's strategic plan to develop long-lasting recreational and conservation opportunities on Smuggler,” said Executive Director David Hamilton.

The open space is situated on the northwestern-most flank of Smuggler Mountain in unincorporated Pitkin County. It is embedded within a landscape that transitions from an urban setting to a rural national forest ecosystem. Flynn noted that the acquisition protects wildlife habitat and viewsheds and allows for continued outdoor recreational opportunities.

Hamilton concurs, stating: “The newly acquired land is a huge addition of prime real estate in Aspen's backyard. It will be a legacy to be enjoyed by generations to come.”

► Kathleen Wanatowicz & Trina Ortega

“... the goal is to provide a framework for managing Smuggler Mountain Open Space to ensure the legacy of all those who donated their lands, or otherwise contributed to this stunning community success story.”

— Brian Flynn
Aspen Parks & Open Space

A SENSATIONAL SIX-PACK

From trail work, to preparing food, to committee meetings and leadership, **RFOV** is a community of volunteers who contribute time and expertise for a great cause. In October 2008, **RFOV** honored six extraordinary people at the annual Volunteer Recognition party. It's just another way for us to say: We couldn't do it without you!

Melenda Ness was recognized as the Volunteer of the Year. She first hit the trails with **RFOV**—along with husband Brendan—in 2007. Melenda is the general manager of Water Works in Basalt, and is also well-known for her great cooking. She has served up some of the best after-project meals for **RFOV** and received the Food Sponsor Award in 2007. As co-chair of the Town to Town Tour, Melenda ensured that skiers, snowshoers and volunteers had a fabulous time. She has also served on the Crew Leader Development Committee.



Gerry VanderBeek of Glenwood Springs was honored for his longtime commitment with **RFOV** and named Trail Steward

of 2008. A native of Holland, Gerry first worked with us in 2001 on the Flat Tops Archeological Survey and the Storm King Trail. He's completed at least one project with **RFOV** every year. Gerry is an active volunteer with other community organizations as well, and is a member of the 100 Club that has adopted the Jeanne Golay Trail through **RFOV**.



Self-employed private investor **Tony Battaglia** powered out six projects as crew leader in 2008 to earn the Pulaski Award, which goes to the volunteer who works on the most projects

in a season. Tony began working with **RFOV** in 2003, becoming a crew leader in 2004 and receiving the Crew Leader of the Year Award, too. In 2006, he joined the Board of Directors.

The Crew Leader of the Year went to **Dr. David Guinnee** of Animal House Veterinary Clinic in Grand Junction. David launched his trail career with **RFOV** in 2004, and received the Pulaski Award for participating on the most projects: Red Hill, Eagle Lake, Colorow, Arbaney-Kittle and Independence Ghost Town. David became a member in 2004 and a crew leader in 2006. Other volunteers can't seem to say enough about his leadership.



The Bureau of Land Management's **Brian Maiorano** was our 2008 Agency Person of the Year. From the beginning, Brian hit the trail running, taking over as our BLM contact only 10 days before the 2006 Scout Trail Project on National Trails Day. A dedicated partner, he helped grow our relationship with BLM, increasing the number of projects completed together, asking **RFOV** to facilitate a series of meetings to draft a Citizen's Alternative Plan for The Crown near Carbondale, and increasing BLM's funding for **RFOV**. Brian moved on from the BLM in late September to pursue a career in fitness writing, but his legacy with **RFOV** lives on.



The Food Sponsor of the Year was **Su Casa Restaurant** in Aspen. **RFOV** tries to spread

around the recognition of volunteer efforts, so it's unusual to grant an award more than once. But Su Casa is a great exception. Chris Casper (a longtime member and trails volunteer) and his mom, Mary Ellen (above), supplied dinner for the 2008 Hunter Creek Project. For those of you lucky enough to be there, it was quite a treat, complete with shrimp ceviche and tons of food, all served on linen tablecloths with silverware!

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2009 TAMARISK PROJECT

The Colorado River's headwaters form just west of the Continental Divide, high in Rocky Mountain National Park. It courses its way through towns like Granby and Dotsero before paralleling I-70 through Glenwood Canyon and meeting the swift Roaring Fork in Glenwood Springs, a community that values its healthy river basins.

Whether you're a boater, a hiker or angler walking the banks, or a naturalist calmed by the water's whisper, the Colorado River and its tributaries are essential to our local communities.

On Saturday, Oct. 10, RFOV will continue its efforts to improve the health of the Colorado River with its Tamarisk Removal and Restoration Project.

RFOV participants will work with project partners, including the City of Glenwood Springs, Garfield County and Trout

Unlimited, to help reverse the spread of this invasive tree. We'll start at Two Rivers Park and focus on both banks of the river between the Grand Avenue and Midland Avenue bridges. The project will also include revegetating the riverbanks with indigenous trees and shrubs.

"The City of Glenwood and RFOV have coordinated tamarisk projects in the past, so we have made some progress and reduced its spread. It's gotten better by virtue of hard labor and some herbicides," said Glenwood Springs Community Development Director Andrew McGregor.

He said that because the city doesn't have the staff, RFOV has helped the community make headway on the problem.

"Tamarisk is incredibly tenacious. It's an extremely labor-intensive process to eradicate it," McGregor explained.

Also known as salt cedar, this Asian

native was introduced into the U.S. where, ironically, it was used for erosion control along irrigation ditches in Southern California, according to McGregor.

Its shrub-like form has become dominant in the Upper Colorado River Basin. It spreads through its roots, trunk sprouts and seed, which is carried for hundreds of miles by waterways.

Tamarisk chokes out native vegetation by dropping salts from its foliage. The ground becomes highly alkaline—deadly for native plants. One mature plant can use 200

gallons of water a day during growing season.

Additionally, tamarisk has become a ladder fuel, putting forests and the people who live in those watersheds at risk from the effects of unnatural wildland fires. And although it provides some shelter for birds and small mammals, it has almost no nutritional value for local wildlife.

While the emphasis of RFOV is building and maintaining trails, the organization has included two to three long-lasting conservation projects in its seasonal work since 2006.

"Projects such as habitat restoration, establishing wetlands and tamarisk removal fit our capabilities and have tremendous conservation values. These values are the key element of our mission," said Executive Director David Hamilton.

Tamarisk removal efforts will improve habitat for wildlife and humans alike.

"The beauty and vitality of our area is driven by rivers and mountains. Everybody can make an impact on the rivers by being good stewards, and this is one way to demonstrate your commitment and your stewardship—by coming out and removing the evil tamarisk," McGregor said.



THE LEAN, MEAN TRAIL MACHINE . . . from page 1

For every hard dollar donated to **RFOV**, about \$6 in value goes back into public land and trails, according to Hamilton.

That efficiency translates to savings for land management agencies such as the City of Glenwood Springs that might otherwise be too strapped to build and improve trails. **RFOV** has been instrumental in a three-year project on the city's Wulfsohn Ranch property (see page 8).

"**RFOV** was successful in recruiting citizens to come out and participate, and without that coordination effort, I don't believe the trail would be constructed," said Parks Superintendent Al Laurette. "Without a wealth of government money on our end, we wouldn't be doing it."

Gary Tennenbaum, land steward for Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, agrees that **RFOV** brings great value to public lands. The organizations have partnered on Aspen-area projects for 10 years, and **RFOV** volunteers pitched in last summer to build a rock wall and steps and reconstruct a bridge and board-

walk on the Hunter Creek Trail.

"It does save the county money. When you cannot use heavy equipment on some of these projects, they bring 40 volunteers in and they get so much accomplished in one day. My crew of four to five people would take four to five weeks to do that work, and that would be a big cost," Tennenbaum said.

. . . the real value of the Lean, Mean Trail Machine is that those trails we do together lure us outdoors, which ultimately fosters a sense of stewardship that lasts for generations.

Even better, those cost-savings can go toward establishing new trails, he noted.

For Red Hill Council President Davis Farrar, a little sweat equity from residents yields good trails on which to play. From big projects, such as re-routing Three Gulch, to maintenance, including

building water bars and trail edging, **RFOV** has provided the council with support for nearly a decade.

"Collaboration with other partners is very valuable," Farrar said. "They bring physical bodies. They bring planning and trail expertise. We marry our experience and their expertise to come up with the best trails for user recreation."

The tangible effects can be felt under your feet while hiking through the sweet-smelling sage meadows on Red Hill, jogging the soft path of the Wulfsohn Trail, climbing through juniper on the Colorow or pedaling a ridge on the scenic Arbaney-Kittle.

But the real value of the Lean, Mean Trail Machine is that those trails we do together lure us outdoors, which ultimately fosters a sense of stewardship that lasts for generations.

"Our real mission is to create a sense of ownership and stewardship among our members and volunteers, and we do that through building and maintaining trails," Hamilton said.  Trina Ortega

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WULFSOHN CONNECTS

A three-year project comes to fruition



In 2002, the Wulfsohn Mountain Park arose from a 215-acre parcel of land, dedicated to the City of Glenwood Springs by the Glenwood Meadows development.

A concerned group of citizens formed to guide the development of the park, one of the largest areas of dedicated open space in the city. The Friends of Wulfsohn Mountain Park wanted to make sure trail routes were designed and developed in a manner that would be stable and benefit a multitude of users.

Enter **RFOV**. Friends of Wulfsohn Mountain Park contacted us to collaborate on trail layout and development, and to help recruit the volunteers needed to make the plan a reality. Three years, five project work-days, and many volunteer hours later, the Wulfsohn Trail is complete!

The eastern trailhead for the Wulfsohn Mountain Trail is near the Glenwood Springs Community Center. The trail traverses the hillside above the Glenwood Meadows Shopping Center before dropping down to meet Midland Ave on the west past the Glenwood Springs Municipal Operations Center. It is approximately two miles long and winds through groves of Gambel oak and colorful patches of seasonal flowers, offering views of the valley below and the

red hillsides above. Charred remnants of oak trunks from the 2002 Coal Seam Fire are still visible among the lush new growth of green. Hikers and cyclists alike enjoy the moderate grades of the soft-surface trail.

The Wulfsohn Mountain Trail will also serve as the future start to the Lower Valley Trail (LOVA) system, which will extend west along I-70 to South Canyon, and eventually all the way to the Mesa County Line.

And there's more to come: Wulfsohn Mountain Park is about to begin a master planning process to explore more opportunities for the large property.

Many hours were contributed and all types of weather challenges met in order to finish

trail construction. Volunteers cleared substantial amounts of Gambel oak, and built rock walls to support and even out the trail grade.

Glenwood Springs Park Superintendent Al Laurette commented, "**RFOV** is a much-appreciated group, not only on this project, but for their expertise on other projects as well. It is always appreciated when a well-run organization comes in to help complete a project that everyone will enjoy."

Charred remnants of oak trunks from the 2002 Coal Seam Fire are still visible among the lush new growth of green



► Lindsey Utter