

Non-Motorized Trails Stewardship Program



2023 PILOT PROGRAM APPLICANT INTEREST FORM

Submit this completed form to be combined with a Non-Motorized Maintenance Application to trails@state.co.us by October 3, 2023.

APPLICANT

Type Land Manager Non-Profit

Organization The Nature Connection / Delta County School District

Postal address 397 Miners Way

City Hotchkiss State CO ZIP Code 81419

Contact name Ben Graves

Contact email bgraves@deltaschools.com Phone (970) 985-3107

FUNDING

Grant request for 2 - 4 person crews
(max \$75,000) \$

Grant request for 5-8 person crews
(max \$150,000) \$ 75,000.00

Match (min. 25% of grant request) \$ 34,436.00

Total \$ 109,436.00

STEWARDSHIP ELIGIBILITY

Why is this program a good fit for your organization?

The CPW Stewardship Program is a good fit for the Nature Connection's (NC) Wilder Bunch for a number of reasons. Our vision is to have students who grow up with NC programs to progress from "consumers" of outdoor recreation (as participants in camps and field trips) to "stewards" of local trails and parks. The Wilder Bunch is a key part of this stewardship pathway for youth interested in hands-on outdoor work. Additionally, in our 2022 NM grant, the NC struggled to fit the activities of the crew with specific grant deliverables. Since NC manages a number of trail projects at 4 sites, work can often shift from site to site depending on the particular needs of each project or partner or extreme weather. Funding the Wilder Bunch as a "standing crew" for Delta County allows the crew to shift resources to projects that need attention (like responding to flood damage in Paonia) and also to implement the trail management plans we have developed with our municipal partners. Finally, our hope is with dedicated year to year funding from the CPW Stewardship Crew Program, we can demonstrate that we have the capacity to expand and take on additional projects that further our mission.

STEWARDSHIP WORK PLAN

Describe the type of trail stewardship and the anticipated work plan your organization would perform if funded by this opportunity.

Hotchkiss: Improve tread (24") and manage vegetation (48") on over 9 miles beginner-friendly singletrack at Crossroads Park/ NF High School. Control weeds and improve jumps, wood features and pumptrack in the 0.5 acre bike park. Additional projects include treating wood structures/berms/bridges/turnpikes, flash flood repair/mitigation, and native habitat restoration with high schoolers. Paonia: Clear and repair tread on 1.25 miles of ADA-accessible crusher-fine gravel trails (5' tread, 8' corridor) and multiple outdoor learning spaces in the Paonia River Park/K 8 School along the Gunnison River. Lead school groups in continued native plant establishment throughout the 17 acres of riparian habitat on school property. Delta: Control tamarisk and weeds along 4 miles of singletrack at Confluence Park to ensure trails have a minimum 24" tread and 48" corridor. Manage the 6 acre bike park by improving dirt jumps, maintaining the pump track and planting Cottonwoods with school groups.

STEWARDSHIP CREW

Describe your current ability to hire and support trail crews who perform non-motorized trail maintenance.

The Wilder Bunch Crew has been a key Nature Connection program for 6 years. The Wilder Bunch helps us achieve our mission of breaking down barriers to getting outside by coupling the maintenance/development of recreational trails with mentoring and training in outdoor jobs. Since 2017, 65 teenagers have worked on Wilder Bunch crews and the program has growing support from students, parents and community partners. Each summer, the NC hires, trains and mentors a total of 50 young people in our Job Pathways program. Teens support all aspects of the NC summer programs. We partner with the DCSD for payroll, HR and many other administrative support tasks, which reduces our overhead and streamlines the process of supporting crews. The technical ability of the crew is supported by NC staff, who have backgrounds in trail construction and maintenance; partner organizations like the WSCC, who have ample volunteer capacity; municipal governments who have access to heavy equipment and materials; and local contractors, who are hired for direct supervision.

AREA OF IMPACT

Describe the importance of the trail system that would be positively impacted by this work to both the local community and the State of Colorado.

The Wilder Bunch crew has built some of the only purpose-built, beginner-friendly singletrack on the Western Slope. In many places in Colorado, the only trails for beginners are two-track access roads, which lack variety or features to engage new riders. This is not the case in Delta County thanks to the Wilder Bunch! Hundreds of students across all grade levels get safe access to outdoor spaces for environmental education thanks to the Wilder Bunch and in the summer, NC offers low-cost summer programs where 500 students per summer learn to ride on the Hotchkiss or Delta trails. A key NC program is our K-3rd Learn to Bike program which teaches 1200 students per year to pedal on the schoolyard and culminates with an all day field trip for 3rd graders. The majority of this program is offered on trails maintained by the Wilder Bunch. Without ongoing maintenance of the Crossroads and Confluence Trails and Bike Parks, it would be nearly impossible to offer this program safely and successfully.

Application form



NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS GRANT APPLICATION - MAINTENANCE

PROJECT BASICS

Title Wilder Bunch Stewardship Crew

Type Construction Planning
 Maintenance Support

Phased project Yes No If yes, Phase # of

Brief summary

This funding will support the Wilder Bunch, a high school trail crew that maintains trails and bike parks near schools. This work makes it possible for the Nature Connection to offer school and family programs for the rural, low-income communities of Delta County and beyond.

Grant request	\$ 75,000.00	Grant ratio ¹	69 %
Match	\$ 34,436.00	Match ratio	31 %
Total	\$ 109,436.00	Total	100 %

APPLICANT

Type Local County Federal Tribal
 Recreation and Metro Districts Non-Profit

Organization The Nature Connection / Delta County School District

Postal address 397 Miners Way

City Hotchkiss State CO ZIP Code 81419

General email Jessica.Finnigan@deltaschools.com UEI # VGR7DM974S55

Lead contact Ben Graves Title Director of Partnerships and Development

Telephone (970) 872-5910 Email bgraves@deltaschools.com

Project manager Same as above Title

Telephone Email

PARTNER OR CO-SPONSOR

Organization Delta County School District (Fiscal Agent) N/A

Postal address 145 W. 4th St

City Delta State CO ZIP Code 81416

Contact name Michael Madden Title Finance Director

Telephone (970) 874-4438 Email michael.madden@deltaschools.com

¹ Grant ratio = grant request / total. Match ratio = match / total.

PROPERTY			
Nearest town or city	Hotchkiss	County	Delta
Latitude/Longitude	38°47'23; 107°41'50	Congressional district	3
Name of property owner	Delta County SD; NF Rec.; WSCC; Town of Paonia; City of Delta		
Trail Corridor controlled by	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fee simple	<input type="checkbox"/> Lease	<input type="checkbox"/> Easement
	<input type="checkbox"/> License	<input type="checkbox"/> ROW	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:

TRAIL			
Uses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hiking, walking, running	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Biking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Equestrian
E-bikes allowed?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Snow sports (non-motorized)
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: Bike Park/Pump Track		
Estimate percentage by type (e.g.,) 50% hiking, etc.	75% mountain biking; 25% hiking		
Surface	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Natural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Crusher fines	<input type="checkbox"/> Asphalt
	<input type="checkbox"/> Concrete		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:		
Size of new trailhead (sq. ft.)	0	Length of trail being planned	0
Length of new trail construction ²	0	Length of trail maintenance	10
Length of inter-connecting trail	0	Length of trail reroute	0
Length of decommissioned trail	0	Length of restored trail	0
Length of trail to be signed	0	Length of trail grooming	0
Other:	Number of paid internships for teens each year: 10		
Estimated amount of paid crew hours:	Grant 3000	Match:	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On behalf of the applicant entity, I certify to the best of my knowledge that the information in this application is true and correct.

Authorized Representative

Signature	Date	10/03/2023
Name	Ben Graves	Title
		Director of Partnerships and Deve

² Length of trail – use miles, square feet, linear feet

Resolution Text:

The Delta County School District Board is aware of and supports the application of the Nature Connection for the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Non-Motorized Maintenance/Stewardship Grant. The Board recognizes the financial and legal obligations as the fiscal agent for this grant and supports the project's completion and long-term maintenance by Nature Connection staff. With funding from this grant, the Wilder Bunch Crew will maintain various trails on Delta County School District Property including the Paonia River Park Trail that passes through Paonia K8 School, the Crossroads Trails which encircle North Fork High School and the "Curious Cub" Nature Trail at the Crawford School. It is our intention that these school properties will continue to be under the control of the Delta County School District for the next 25 years. Trails built on school district property are generally open to the public, but subject to closure as needed by school district personnel.

Timeline

NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS GRANT APPLICATION



PROJECT DETAILS

Organization The Nature Connection / Delta County School District

Project title Wilder Bunch Stewardship Crew

TASK <small>Mobilization, staffing, construction or maintenance elements, planning phases, etc.</small>	Dates*	Dates	Dates	Dates	Dates	Dates	Dates
Pre-season meetings with partners	March	April					
Recruit and Hire Wilder Bunch Crew	March	April					
Train crew (WFA and tool safety)			Late May				
Wilder Bunch Crew Work @ 4 sites				June	July	Aug	
Crew Work ends						Mid-Aug	
Quarterly Reporting				June		Aug	
NC Learn to Bike Programs	Mar	Apr	May				Sept-Nov.
NC Summer Camps				June	July	Aug.	
Administrative Close-out							Dec. '24

*The timeline is an estimate of your project completion. Remember the project must be completed within 2.5 years of the award date. Suggestion - use quarterly or multiple month time frames [Q2/XX; Jun-Sept XX]. Initial grant expiration date will be June 30th or December 31st, dependent upon assigned funding source.

Criteria Questions



NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS GRANT APPLICATION - MAINTENANCE

Organization The Nature Connection / Delta County School District

Project title Wilder Bunch Stewardship Crew

1. PROJECT NEED

15 points

- A. Give a detailed description of the project, including information such as mileage or width of trail maintenance, re-route or restoration plans, and any other trail components/structures.

Hotchkiss: Improve tread (24") and manage vegetation (48") on 9 miles beginner-friendly singletrack at Crossroads Park/ NF High School. Control weeds and improve jumps, wood features and pumptrack in the 0.5 acre bike park. Additional projects include treating wood structures/berms/bridges/turnpikes, flash flood repair/mitigation, and native habitat restoration with high school students. Paonia: Clear and repair tread on 1.25 miles of ADA-accessible crusher-fine gravel trails (5' tread, 8' corridor) and multiple outdoor learning spaces in the Paonia River Park/K8 School along the Gunnison River. Lead school groups in continued native plant establishment throughout the 17 acres of riparian habitat on school property. Delta: Control tamarisk and weeds along ~4 miles of singletrack at Confluence Park to ensure trails have a minimum 24" tread and 48" corridor. Manage the 6 acre bike park by improving dirt jumps, maintaining the pump track and planting Cottonwoods with school groups. Crawford: Improve tread (24"), clear corridor (48") and improve habitat along the ¾ mile Nature Trail.

- B. Describe the project's urgency and why it is being pursued at this time.

The Wilder Bunch was formed by the Nature Connection (NC) in 2018. Between 2018-2021 this crew constructed over 10 new miles of beginner-friendly trails and bike parks across Delta County. Over half of these trails originate on school grounds, providing teachers and students direct access to outdoor classrooms for nature-based learning and for NC programs. In 2022-23, the Wilder Bunch received CPW NM funding to increase accessibility and complete reroutes. Work completed with that funding made it clear that local municipal governments and volunteer groups do not have the capacity for maintaining these trails to the degree necessary to keep them accessible to beginners, seniors and children. Without the Wilder Bunch, these trails will quickly fall into disrepair, making it challenging for the public to have easily accessible recreation and nearly impossible for the NC to offer school and summer kids programs.

- C. Describe the current condition of the existing trail. Include how it arrived at its current condition.

After 5 seasons of construction, reroutes and dogged effort by the Wilder Bunch, the singletrack at Crossroads Park is in very good condition. The soils in Hotchkiss have a high rate of erosion and little natural vegetation, except along spring-fed riparian areas. In June of 2022, monsoon rains nearly destroyed the sports fields, community pool and the bike park. Luckily, the Wilder Bunch was trained and mobilized through an existing CPW grant and quickly remediated most of the damage. At Confluence Park, trails are always choked with tamarisk and weedy grasses by mid-summer. Flooding in 2023 destroyed large sections of the Paonia River Park trail and the Wilder Bunch quickly mobilized to repair with support from the community. Finally, our bike parks need routine maintenance to be safe. Since teens are the primary users it's appropriate that they are involved in the construction, maintenance and improvement of jumps.

2. COMMUNITY BENEFIT**15 points**

- A. Describe the community that will benefit from this project. Include relevant demographic and economic data.

Kids and families in Delta County and Olathe will benefit from this project. Delta County has one of the highest childhood poverty rates in the region at 27% with almost 75% of children on Medicaid. Per-capita and median household income are roughly half the state average. Our community is also diverse with 42% of kids attending the two Delta Elementary schools identifying as BIPOC (including dozens of newcomer Karin refugee families) and 69% of students at Olathe Elementary identify as Latinx. Since the collapse of the coal industry in 2012, Delta County is slowly making a transition to tourism and services for retirees and remote workers. The Nature Connection is at the vanguard of this transition by providing competitive wages and ample professional development opportunities for HS students to work in the growing outdoor recreation economy. The Wilder Bunch serves to not only maintain trails but also address systemic inequity in the outdoors by providing competitive wages for low income teens to gain work experience and job certifications in a growing career field.

- B. Outline any deficiencies or barriers to access this project would address or improve for the abovementioned community.

Despite being surrounded by jagged peaks and red-rock canyons, accessing these places requires a vehicle, expensive gear and family members with time and confidence. For these reasons, so many kids in our community spend little time outside. To address this barrier to getting outside, NC has developed free school year programs at all grade levels and subsidized outdoor summer programs. The trails constructed and maintained by the Wilder Bunch are essential to our mission to break down barriers for getting outside. NC offers outdoor summer camps in Delta, Hotchkiss and Cedaredge, that give hundreds of kids a year the opportunity to regularly get outside and build the confidence to explore on their own. To reliably offer these camps and school field trips, we need to make sure the trails and bike parks are accessible to all children. Without routine, annual maintenance, NC would have to bus students over 1 hour away to reach a bike park or beginner trails for summer programs. This would increase costs and make summer programs unaffordable for many families.

- C. Estimate the number of people and/or types of user groups that will have access to recreational opportunities as a result of this project. Include methods for determining this estimate.

NC offers Learn to Bike programming to 1200 students per year. All 3rd graders (~400) ride at either Crossroads or Confluence Park. These two parks are also the site for summer camps that serve 500 kids per year. Nature Connection partners with various organizations to host trail races (100 participants/year) and the Delta/Montrose HS Mountain Bike Team (30) practices at both Confluence and Crossroads Park. The Paonia River Park serves 95% walkers and is the only ADA trail in the North Fork Valley. The trail is used by hundreds of locals each week, primarily seniors, throughout the year. Actual use data has not been collected on this trail. Two Paonia Elementary schools (365 total) use the trail through the school year for curricular activities. One Paonia Kindergarten teacher spends every Friday, all year on the trail with her 25 students. NC uses the Paonia River Park for bike programs serving 200 students/year. In Crawford, the Nature Trail is used weekly by all 128 students from the NF Montessori School. Through matching funds towards this grant, NC plans to purchase a trail counter to capture actual data on public use at each of the trail sites.

3. PROJECT MANAGEMENT**10 points**

- A. Give a detailed description of who will oversee the trail work. Include who will perform the maintenance activities (staff, volunteers, conservation corps, contractors, etc.)

The NC recruits and trains up to 10 local HS students for summer-long positions on the Wilder Bunch to work approximately 30 hours per week for 10 weeks. This crew is part of a larger Outdoor Job Pathways Program (see Wilder Bunch and other Youth Pathways video here: <https://thenatureconnection.net/student-jobs/>) Teachers and school counselors help NC recruit students from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds in order to help them build job readiness and career pathways. To supervise the day to day work of the Wilder Bunch, NC contracts with a local professional trail builder/designer. Additionally, this contractor trains the crew in tool use, designs reroutes and all bike park/pump track features managed by the Wilder Bunch. Overall project management, including communication with partners, implementing trail management plans and grant reporting is done by NC full time staff, supported through the Generation Wild grant. To plan and supervise habitat restoration projects, NC contracts a restoration ecologist. NC then works with teachers to incorporate these habitat stewardship projects into the curriculum with students. NC works with partners to write additional grants to support habitat stewardship that are outside the ability of volunteers, students or the Wilder Bunch (e.g. chainsaw work.) At Crossroads Park, NFPPRD contributes a tractor and ATV for hauling rocks, tools and supplies. In Paonia, the WSCC utilizes volunteers (Friends of the River Park), supported by WSCC staff, NC and Town of Paonia, to do simple habitat projects and monitor trail conditions at the Paonia River Park and School Loop. At Confluence Park in Delta, City staff conduct any tree removal, chipping/hauling and manage all herbicide application on trails and around the bike park.

- B. Outline any CPW State Trails funding received in the last five years and if the project(s) were completed on time, on budget and within scope. For applicants without prior State Trails funding, provide examples of similar grant funded projects. Include project title, year of award, grant amount, and grantor for each.

2022 CPW Non-Motorized Trail Maintenance Grant- Provided 2 summer seasons of funding for maintenance projects completed by the Wilder Bunch crew in the same project locations. Project is on time and within budget. Scope has minor changes due to flood events and to address safety/maintenance needs from partners. The proposed 2024 Stewardship Crew Program will address the issue of scope changes to respond to community needs.

2020 CPW Trails Planning Grant- Deadline extended to 2024 due to COVID. Scope changed due to CDOT involvement in Miners Trail. Helped jump start the extension of the Paonia River Park and led to raising over \$2 million from CDOT for the Hotchkiss / North Fork Miners Trail. Both projects are or will soon be sites where the Wilder Bunch will perform construction and maintenance activities.

2018-2021 GOCO Generation Wild Grant: Funding from GOCO helped establish the Wilder Bunch. 2018-2021 Wilder Bunch completed the construction of most of the projects listed for maintenance in this application. All projects were under budget (less cost/mile) and over scope (more total miles completed) due to NC utilizing teen labor instead of contracting professional trail construction services.

4. PLANNING **10 points**

A. Discuss the process that identified this maintenance project as a priority.

Having accessible trails near schools meets the needs identified in the GOCO-funded needs assessment which led to the formation of the Nature Connection in 2016. In the spring of 2020, through a multi-month strategic planning process, youth, families and community partners all asked the NC to continue support for the Wilder Bunch that provides job opportunities for local youth in trail building, maintenance and stewardship of recreational trails close to schools and communities. Since the pandemic, the increased recreational use of trails in our community, coupled with labor shortages, have made it very difficult for our municipal partners and volunteer groups to maintain the miles of singletrack and bike parks that NC relies on for our outdoor programs. For example in 2021, the City of Delta was unable to complete any maintenance on the singletrack or bike park at Confluence Park due to COVID-related labor shortages. This prevented NC summer camps from being able to use the singletrack trails. Since the Wilder Bunch was funded through CPW in 2022, NC has taken the lead in developing Trail Management Plans at Confluence, Crossroads and Paonia River Park to ensure long term sustainability and viability. The Paonia River Park Management Plan was put to the test in 2023 after historic flooding. As decided on in the management plan, WSCC took the lead in fundraising for additional supplies and equipment rental; Wilder Bunch/NC contributed labor and trail design and municipal partners contributed gravel. After only 4 weeks, almost 1000 ft of trail was rerouted/reconstructed and NC managed the final volunteer day and ribbon cutting at the start of school (see photos.)

B. List all approved internal master our outdoor recreation plans and/or any external area, regional, or statewide plans this project supports.

All Projects are part of the following plans:

SCORP 2019 - Priority 1 Sustainable Access and Priority 2 Stewardship.

2017 Delta County Recreation and Trails Master Plan - listed all four sites as priorities.

Generation Wild (2017) / NC Strategic Plan (2020): Through the Generation Wild program, GOCO committed to supporting NC with full time staff and benefits designing and managing an outdoor job pathways program, but not the seasonal salaries and crew necessary to maintain trails.

The Crossroads Trails were part of the 2011 and 2023 revised North Fork Pool Park and Recreation District Plan.

Paonia River Park trails were first in the "Flight of the Eagle" Paonia School Master Plan (2012) and a priority in the 2021 Paonia in Motion Recreation Master Plan.

Confluence Trails were part of the 2017 City of Delta Recreation and Trails Master Plan.

5. MAINTENANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

10 points

- A. Explain how the site will be maintained and monitored after the grant funded work is complete (operation and maintenance plans, future budgeting commitments, etc.)

The NC has the staff capacity to monitor conditions at all four trail projects through Generation Wild funding. This includes keeping a list of safety and maintenance needs on trails and bike parks, communicating and mitigating wildlife/environmental concerns with partners and coordinating school year habitat stewardship projects. To formalize this commitment, NC has authored Trail Management Plans with the support of partners for each of the four trail projects: Confluence Park, Paonia River Park, the Crossroads Park and the forthcoming Miners Trail. In each plan, the NC has committed to fundraising for the Wilder Bunch Crew in order to accomplish the majority of annual maintenance tasks. Each municipal partner or volunteer organization has been assigned other responsibilities based on their capacity. To implement these plans, the NC receives a small amount of funding from each municipal partner for supplies and materials for the Wilder Bunch. The majority of the teen labor and supervision costs will be funded through grant requests- including CPW. In the event that NC does not receive CPW Stewardship Crew funding, it is very unlikely that these trail projects will receive the attention necessary to keep them accessible to beginners. The financial contributions from each municipal government could be utilized to address major safety concerns. As part of the cash-match contribution, the Western Colorado Community Foundation will be funding a trail counter to be used at all of the sites to better quantify the use of these trail projects to aid in future fundraising. This data will help NC and partners quantify use of trails and lobby for additional support from municipal partners, donors and agencies.

- B. Describe the best management practices that will be used to construct the trail to ensure that the trail and its amenities will be sustainable.

All of the singletrack constructed by the Wilder Bunch meets IMBA standards for accessibility and sustainability. All bike park features are built with lumber treated annually by the Wilder Bunch.

Crossroads: Appropriate drainage features and armored crossings of alluvial washes help the trails withstand minor flood events. Grades rarely exceed 8% to prevent erosion and to make climbs accessible to beginners. On the few steep trails, wood berms have been constructed to further prevent erosion. Turnpikes and low bridges keep walkers and riders out of wet areas caused by ephemeral seeps during “mud season.” The NFPPRD has developed a mitigation plan to prevent future flash flooding of the Ballfields and Pool. This includes the installation of engineered culverts, water diversion structures and holding ponds. The Wilder Bunch will be involved in rerouting singletrack trails around these features.

At the Paonia River Park all trails are all built above the 100-year floodplain. The tread surface is elevated, lined with a weed barrier and constructed of compacted road base, topped with compacted fines. The flooding in 2023 was unprecedented; with nearly twice the volume of average high water flows. The river cut a new channel that carved away a cottonwood grove and close to 700 linear ft of trail. The newly re-routed trail is now constructed behind a historic gabion wall to further protect it from high water.

Confluence: Trails are all constructed in low-lying cottonwood groves alongside the Gunnison River. Trails are all built within the floodplain and have minimal structures that can be damaged. Minor flooding occurs in most years and crews “open” the trails in June by clearing the debris that washes in with the flood waters.

6. WILDLIFE AND NATURAL RESOURCES**15 points**

- A. Describe how potential impacts to wildlife and natural resources were evaluated during the project scoping phase (using 'Planning Trails with Wildlife in Mind', mapping tools, etc.). Include any positive impacts this work will showcase.

These trail projects give students and teachers the opportunity to access unique habitats directly from their schoolyards. For example, science teachers in Paonia can walk on a trail to collect river water and teach about riparian systems. After learning about the river, students participate in habitat restoration projects with the NC to reduce erosion and increase biodiversity. In constructing and maintaining the Paonia River Park, NC has consulted with Adam Petry, a threatened and endangered species expert specializing in the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo (YBC) and the FWS, to ensure that trail management goes above and beyond best practices to protect riparian birds. NC has developed a management plan outlining adaptive management for both the YBC and a unique adaptive seasonal closure for wintering elk. In 2023 NC successfully implemented both aspects of this plan. The trail was closed from Feb-March after DWMs found wintering elk on site and a nesting YBC was discovered by Petry in early September during a routine survey. NC rescheduled trail work and developed an adaptive management plan with input from FWS (see letter in NFEF document.)

- B. Describe any wildlife and natural resources issues raised by CPW staff during the application consultation.

All of these projects were designed with input from local DWMs, conservation organizations and the public in prior phases of trail design. No concerns were shared with NC during this application cycle. In prior years, DWMs shared a concern for noxious weeds at all sites and potential wildlife impacts (birds, winter big game) in the riparian zones in Paonia and Confluence Park. Besides improving accessibility to nature for kids, our hope was that in developing close-to-home recreational trails, we can decrease the pressure from dispersed/off-trail recreation in the more sensitive habitats surrounding our populated towns. DWMs have shared anecdotally that since the public has more developed sites for walking and riding close to Paonia and Hotchkiss, there is less pressure to recreate in the Roeber Wildlife Refuge and Lone Cabin BLM lands outside of town.

- C. Explain how potential wildlife and natural resource impacts will be avoided, minimized, and/or mitigated (trail realignment, seasonal closures (include dates), signage, gates, game cameras, etc.)

All sites: NC will contract pre-season nest surveys and crews will only cut vegetation when permitted to do so by the MBTA. The fact that the Wilder Bunch maintains multiple sites at different elevations/ecosystems makes shifting project work extremely easy. To manage weeds, a retired DWM (NC Board Member) or a municipal partner has committed to treat with herbicides twice a year. A seed mix for each project site has been designed in consultation with Jim Garner, CPW Seed Warehouse Manager. In the fall, NC staff will work with students at the local school sites to monitor and report on the success of the plantings and inform the following year's seeding efforts.

In Paonia, trails will be closely monitored for wintering big game (Dec 1-April 15) and YBC (June 1-Sept. 15) Big Game: DWM will communicate with NC staff during particularly cold winters. Trails will be closed at DWMs discretion if elk are using the site. Summer: FWS will monitor nesting YBC. If birds are observed, NC will work with WSCC volunteers to close the trail

7. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS**15 points**

- A. Outline public engagement activities for this project (public meetings, comment periods, surveys, etc.)

The Nature Connection has a successful track record of leading productive dialogs and generating diverse community input for planning processes. For example, NC led and developed an extensive outdoor needs assessment that surveyed every child in DCSD schools in 2016 (over 4000 respondents) and in 2020 NC led a highly successful strategic planning process attended by 40+ stakeholders including agency partners, students, teachers and parents. In these surveys, the community wanted the NC to continue providing job pathways in outdoor careers. Since 2017, the NC has hosted over 150 paid job opportunities for teens including 65 on the Wilder Bunch. We have met the community's need for a reliable and capable youth trail crew that could partner with multiple municipalities to increase access to trails near our schools and communities. None of our municipal partners has the capacity, nor the breadth of trail projects to have a standing stewardship crew. Since the NC is involved in environmental education and trail projects across Delta County it makes sense that we are the host organization for the Wilder Bunch.

- B. Describe any partnerships that will ensure the project's success (public agencies, conservation or recreation groups, local businesses, etc.)

Since receiving a NM Maintenance grant in 2022, the NC has built strong partnerships with the City of Delta, Town of Paonia, Western Slope Conservation Center, North Fork Pool, Park and Rec. District and Delta County to support the Wilder Bunch. Each organization collaborated on trail management plans and committed cash support and significant in-kind contributions of labor and equipment (see letters.) The NC has established partnership/assistance agreements with the BLM and USFS for other projects including trail maintenance, environmental education and stewardship. For example, in 2022 the USFS and Wilder Bunch partnered on building an ADA trail segment at Lost Lake that NC uses in school programs. In future seasons, the BLM is planning to contract the Wilder Bunch for maintenance, construction and reroute projects on Jumbo Mountain. Wilder Bunch has also conducted summer trail clearing for the Grand Mesa Nordic Council which helps both of our organizations offer accessible XC ski programs. Having an established stewardship crew has and will continue to strengthen these relationships and lead to increased outdoor opportunities for local youth and families.

- C. Describe how potential opposition to this project or its implementation will be identified, addressed and managed.

NC believes that having the local teens of the Wilder Bunch be the face of trail stewardship helps ensure these projects have little opposition. Since we recruit locally from our small towns, most residents have a personal connection to crew members. Second, the NC pays competitive wages making these jobs very desirable. In this way, we can both recruit students from all backgrounds and extend an olive branch to populations and political identities who otherwise are excluded from the culture of outdoor stewardship.

We have experienced very little opposition to specific maintenance projects listed in this application. The biggest issue is communicating the importance of balancing wildlife and recreation to the public in the Paonia River Park. NC works with the WSCC and Town of Paonia to communicate and enforce seasonal closures to protect wintering big game and nesting YBC. Members of the public often intentionally or unintentionally ignore posted signs and gates. A trail counter will help us better quantify this impact and understand the times of day we need to recruit volunteers to help enforce closures.

8. BUDGET AND FUNDING**10 points**

- A. Describe the source of match for the project and when it will be secured. Include in-kind donations and partner contributions.

The Nature Connection has secured over \$34,000 of matching support, which amounts to nearly twice the required match. The salaries and benefits for all full time staff including those that will report and manage this grant (\$12,500) are paid with funds from the Generation Wild program which have been secured from GOCO through June of 2025. DCSD supports NC with financial accounting, payroll, auditing, HR, IT and building maintenance (\$4000.) In addition (and important to this grant) DCSD covers general liability insurance for vehicles, outdoor programming and staff. We have secured matching contributions from each of the municipal partners, commensurate with the amount of supplies required on each of these properties. The matching funds from each of the municipal partners (a total of \$8,500) will be used for vehicle expenses, materials and supplies and matched with a contribution from the Western Colorado Community Foundation (\$6000) for the purchase of a trail counter and hand tools to continue to build the capacity of the Wilder Bunch. The WSCC manages the "Friends of the River Park" volunteer group that contributes to maintaining the Paonia River Park. The in-kind contributions include volunteer labor and staff time for coordinating and publicizing volunteer projects. Town of Paonia supports the Wilder Bunch with cash and in-kind hauling and equipment use. In Delta, the City contributes cash toward the crew and approximately \$6,300 in-kind for clearing hazard trees, spraying herbicide and chipping refuse from trail clearing. At Crossroads, the NFPPRD contributes cash toward crew supplies and also 100 hours of use of an ATV and tractor valued at ~\$2,500 for the summer.

- B. Describe any consequences if this funding application is unsuccessful (loss of partner funds, staff capacity, expiration of surveys, etc.).

If this request is not funded, the cash contributions from the municipal partners will not be sufficient for the Nature Connection to hire a crew. Our job pathways program is built around offering competitive wages for mostly full time (>25 hrs/week) of summer work. Most teens in our community are expected to work to support themselves and often their families. In order to recruit a diverse workforce, the NC strives to provide paid job opportunities. None of our municipal partners has the administrative capacity to hire teen workers nor the funding to supplement crew salaries without the support of this request. For this reason, without funding the NC will be unable to fulfill its obligations in the various trail management plans. This will impact NC programming and result in fewer opportunities for diverse, low-income kids and families to access outdoor recreation near schools and communities.



145 West 4th Street, Delta, CO 81416

970-874-4438

www.deltaschools.com

10/1/2023

Trails Grant Committee
Colorado Parks and Wildlife: State Trails Program
13787 S. Hwy 85
Littleton, CO 80125

I am pleased to submit this letter of support on behalf of the Delta County School District/The Nature Connection for a Colorado Parks and Wildlife Non-Motorized Maintenance Grant for the Wilder Bunch Stewardship Crew.

Delta County School District takes pride in providing experiences for students to learn, grow and excel. The trails developed by the Nature Connection's Wilder Bunch Trail Crew have allowed our teachers and students to have direct access to living laboratories to study the ecology and rich cultural history of Colorado. Furthermore, the maintenance of these outdoor spaces not only provides meaningful jobs to our older students but also helps our whole community stay active by providing accessible outdoor recreation opportunities close to our rural towns. Trail maintenance is far outside the scope of work for our grounds staff and we need the support of this grant to keep these spaces safe and open to the public.

The Nature Connection is authorized to apply for and administer grants and donations using the Delta County School District 50J or the County of Delta as fiscal agents. The District pays salaries of the Nature Connection's leadership staff through a GOCO/Generation Wild Grant. From this grant, approximately \$16,000 will go toward project management and reporting. Additionally, the School District commits to the in-kind services of our District Payroll and Accounting staff to provide invoicing, auditing, and other financial support as well as vehicle maintenance, IT, office space, and other administrative overhead (valued at least \$4,000 in-kind for this grant period.) Finally, the District covers all Nature Connection programs and vehicles under its comprehensive general liability insurance and all youth workers under its worker's compensation policy.

Thank you for supporting this important community project. Enclosed is a resolution from the DCSD School Board passed on the 19th day of September.

Respectfully submitted,

Caryn Gibson

**NORTH
FORK**



**RECREATION
DISTRICT**

P.O. Box 2093,
Hotchkiss, CO
81419

970-872-6122

September 28, 2023

Trails Grant Committee
Colorado Parks and Wildlife: State Trails Program
13787 S. Hwy 85
Littleton, CO 80125

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the North Fork Pool, Park and Recreation District we are pleased to submit this letter of support on behalf of The Nature Connection for a Colorado Parks and Wildlife Non-Motorized Maintenance/Stewardship Grant.

The North Fork Pool, Park and Recreation District has been funding and managing recreational facilities in the North Fork Valley since 1994. Our mission is to provide our community with a variety of activities and programs that enhance healthy lifestyles, build strong families and provide a sense of community pride. We maintain 65 acres at Crossroads Park in Hotchkiss CO, providing invaluable opportunities for recreation.

Hotchkiss is located at the "crossroads" of the North Fork Valley. Surrounding the town are exceptional opportunities for outdoor recreation- from hiking, river rafting, camping, hunting, fishing, mountain biking and cross-country skiing in the North Fork of the Gunnison River. However, the town itself has few accessible recreation opportunities close to town and schools. We are proud to have partnered with The Nature Connection to construct the bike park and 10 miles of singletrack, providing a draw for both residents and visitors to 'get outside and play!'

Communities across the state, particularly on the Western Slope, are investing in trails to increase access to recreation, improve wellness and attract visitors. The Crossroads Trails are unique in that all features are beginner-friendly and built by teens on the Wilder Bunch crew. Our trail system was designed in partnership with The Nature Connection to not only provide recreation but also showcase the unique biodiversity of the Colorado Plateau. The Nature Connection hosts Learn to Bike and other environmental school programs and summer camps for over 500 kids annually, using these trails. The Wilder Bunch provides jobs to local students and prepares them with career skills to succeed in the growing outdoor recreation industry in our community.

Without this grant, the District cannot maintain the number of trails or provide accessibility to beginners. The children of our community will lose a tremendous recreational resource as District staff work hours are commensurate with limited public funding.

We are confident in The Nature Connection's ability to manage another diverse and complex trail planning process. As part of our commitment to this grant NFPPRD will provide in-kind support valued at \$4000 for the youth trail crew consisting of use of NFPPRD equipment, in accordance with NFPPRD policies for use. We will also provide a cash contribution toward trail crew supplies and materials of \$3000.00.

If you have any questions, please contact us at info@northforkrecreation.com or call (970) 872-6122. Thank you for supporting our community!

Sincerely,

Stephanie Bureau
District Administrator



September 29th, 2023

Trails Grant Committee
Colorado Parks and Wildlife: State Trails Program
13787 S. Hwy 85
Littleton, CO 80125

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the City of Delta and in partnership with the Nature Connection and the Delta County School District, we are proud to submit this letter of support to Colorado Parks and Wildlife for a 2024 Non-Motorized Trails Maintenance/Stewardship Grant. This funding will not only help us provide a safe and accessible trail and bike park but also allow our Parks Staff to focus on the other 5 miles of walking paths and 274 acres of fields and playgrounds that our community depends on for wellness and recreation.

The City of Delta has partnered with the Nature Connection on both outdoor programs and trail projects that help break down barriers for the diverse families in our community to get outside. These projects were informed by the thousands of surveys completed through a GOCO Planning Grant (2017), the 2018 Delta County Trails and Recreation Master Plan and our own Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan (2017.) These plans received broad community support and addressed how to increase economic development and improve quality of life through recreational trails. The City of Delta, with the assistance of numerous funding partners including the Nature Connection, the Colorado Health Foundation, and volunteers from the Delta Area Mountain Bikers have constructed 3.5 miles of family-friendly singletrack and a bike park at Confluence Park. These trails are not only an incredible community asset, but they also expand environmental education opportunities for students, teachers, and community members in Delta. The Nature Connection hosts school-year learn-to-bike programs with local elementary students and a popular summer camp at the bike park. Each year since construction. The use of trails has increased and we need support to keep these projects accessible to all ages.

As part of our commitment to this grant, the City of Delta will provide a cash contribution toward trail crew supplies and materials of \$3000. Additionally, the City pledges in-kind support valued at (\$6300) toward non-motorized trail maintenance at Confluence Park including biannual herbicide application on singletrack trails and bike park, hazard tree removal, and hauling/chipping of refuse. Thank you for supporting our community!

Sincerely,

Elyse Ackerman-Casselberry





Town of Paonia

Offices of the Mayor & Board of Trustees

Mary Bachran, *Mayor*

Dave Knutson, *Mayor Pro-Tempore*

Rick Stelter, *Trustee*

Paige Smith, *Trustee*

John Valentine, *Trustee*

Morgan MacInnis, *Trustee*

Kathy Swartz, *Trustee*

Trails Grant Committee
Colorado Parks and Wildlife: State Trails Program
13787 S. Hwy 85
Littleton, CO 80125

9/27/2023

Dear Chair Brenda Mallory,

On behalf of the Town of Paonia we are proud to submit this letter to Colorado Parks and Wildlife in support of the Nature Connection's Wilder Bunch Stewardship Crew. Paonia is located at the heart of the North Fork Valley. Surrounding the town are unlimited opportunities for outdoor recreation - from world class hunting and fishing to mountain biking on Jumbo Mountain and cross-country skiing on the Grand Mesa. Unfortunately, our town has few accessible trails or beginner-friendly recreation opportunities located close to town and our schools.

To address the growing need for accessible recreation in our community, our town has supported the Nature Connection and the Western Slope Conservation Center (WSSC), in expanding and maintaining the Paonia River Park Trail System along the North Fork of the Gunnison. This ADA accessible soft-surface trail crosses WSSC, Town and Paonia K8 School property and provides the only public access to the river in Paonia. Enhancing and maintaining this valuable trail project has been a central part of multiple master plans including the Paonia in Motion Recreation Master Plan adopted in 2022. The Wilder Bunch Crew has been essential in the initial construction, expansion, and maintenance since 2018. This past spring, historic flooding eroded almost 1000 ft of riverbank on Town property and the Wilder Bunch, with support from our Town, volunteers and donations from the community was able to repair and reroute the trail.

The Town of Paonia does not have any dedicated trail maintenance or recreation staff and our Public Works department is overburdened with maintaining our aging water, sewer, and street infrastructure. Currently, we are in the final stages of drafting a Trail Management Plan to outline roles and responsibilities for each of the landowners and organizations dedicated to improving and expanding this trail system. It is our hope that this grant will not only help us provide safe and accessible trails, but also ease the burden so our Town staff can continue to focus on the many parks, fields, and playgrounds that our community depends on for wellness and recreation.

We are confident in The Nature Connection's ability to manage this grant. As a show of our commitment, the Town of Paonia will provide a cash contribution toward trail crew supplies and materials of \$2500. Thank you for supporting our community!

On behalf of the Board of Trustees as unanimously approved during a regular meeting on 9/26/2023,


Mary Bachran, *Mayor*

CC: Paonia Board of Trustees; Natasha Leger, *Executive Director*, Citizens for a Healthy Community

October 2, 2023

Trails Grant Committee
Colorado Parks and Wildlife: State Trails Program
13787 S. Hwy 85
Littleton, CO 80125

Dear Trails Grant Committee Members,

On behalf of the Western Slope Conservation Center (WSCC) I am proud to submit this letter of support for the Nature Connection's application to Colorado Parks and Wildlife for support for the Wilder Bunch Stewardship Crew. The WSCC was founded in 1977 by local residents concerned about environmental impacts from coal mining activities. Since then, the mission has broadened to include public lands advocacy, watershed stewardship, environmental education, and low-impact recreation on our lands and watershed. We represent over 600 members who live in Delta County and across the Western Slope..

Beginning in 1996, the WSCC spearheaded the effort to transform a former in-stream gravel mine into a public open space with 1.75 miles of trail and a functional and thriving riparian ecosystem. The Paonia River Park opened in 2013, and the new Paonia K8 School Loop Trail, opened in 2019, provide crucial public access to the North Fork of the Gunnison River for students and families in Paonia and beyond. This riverfront trail system has been designed, built and maintained by volunteers and youth crews sponsored by the WSCC and the Nature Connection. Major flooding demolished large parts of the trail system in the spring of 2023 and the Wilder Bunch crew, with funding from the 2022 CPW Non-Motorized Trail Maintenance Grant, was essential to the rebuilding effort. WSCC contributed by raising over \$37,000 from community members and local business for gravel, equipment rental and intensive repair of the trailhead parking area. Having an experienced maintenance crew ready to mobilize once the water receded was an invaluable asset. It is apparent that we need continued funding for the Wilder Bunch so that this valuable community asset remains safe and accessible to all.

Our shared goal for this trail system is to provide access for our whole community, especially students, teachers, families and seniors. For this reason, the trail has been designed to ADA-standards, which requires regular, consistent maintenance to stay accessible. Many of these projects are outside the capacity of our small volunteer organization. Our community also appreciates and values the intact riparian woodland which is home to unique and threatened species like wintering big game and nesting yellow-billed cuckoos. Further complicating maintenance and conservation is the fact that this trail crosses through WSCC, Town of Paonia and Delta County School District properties. The Nature Connection has taken the lead in writing and implementing a Trail Management Plan that ensures both wildlife and recreation interests are compatible through seasonal closures, habitat restoration, volunteer stewardship and educational opportunities.

The WSCC is proud to partner with the Nature Connection and confident they can manage this valuable community project. As part of our commitment to this grant the WSCC staff and volunteers will provide 100 hours of in-kind support valued at (\$3,436) for the Wilder Bunch including 50 hours of stewardship project management and coordination from our staff along with 50 hours of labor from volunteers with our "Friends of the River Park" working group and other community members.

Thank you for supporting our community!
Sincerely,



Hannah Stevens
Executive Director
Western Slope Conservation Center

Document checklist



NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS GRANT APPLICATION – CONSTRUCTION OR MAINTENANCE

PROJECT DETAILS

Organization The Nature Connection / Delta County School District

Project title Wilder Bunch Stewardship Crew

DOCUMENTS

PRE-APPLICATION - SEPTEMBER

Document	Source	Submission format
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1. Scope of work	Applicant's own	PDF
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2. Project map	Applicant's own	PDF

FULL APPLICATION - OCTOBER

Document	Source	Submission format
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3. Application form	CPW template	PDF
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4. Timeline	CPW template	PDF
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5. Budget	CPW template	Unprotected Excel file
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 6. Photographs & maps	Applicant's own	Merged PDF (5 pages max)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 7. Letters of support	Various	Merged PDF (5 letters max)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 8. Resolution	Applicant's own	Signed PDF
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 9. Environmental forms	CPW Template	Signed PDF
<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Formal EA or NEPA*	Federal Template	Web link or PDF

ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION

11. Required match funding secured (including cash match funds)
12. Construction projects have been evaluated for permits and, if required, permits obtained.
13. Project area is owned by a public land agency or has an easement that designates the area be open to the public for at least 25 years.
14. Conservation/Youth Corps or other organization will be used on the project.
Name of organization:
15. Volunteers will be utilized on the project
Name of organization: Students from DCSD and Western Slope Conservation Center

*Must be completed prior to application presentations in January.