



Rocky Mountain Field Institute

Strategic Plan

2020-2024

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Executive Summary

The Rocky Mountain Field Institute (RMFI) has experienced significant growth in recent years. This growth has largely been fueled by a number of different factors including greater support for and awareness of the importance of public lands stewardship in the region; a continual decline in capacity and available financial resources within local, regional, state, and federal land management agencies; the ability of RMFI to deliver highly quality and much-needed programs and projects related to environmental stewardship, education, and research; and a growing community awareness about RMFI as a whole.

Throughout this recent growth, RMFI has stayed true to its mission of conserving and protecting public lands in Southern Colorado and the Pikes Peak Region, areas of the state that have also experienced their fair share of challenges. Major wildfire and flooding events in 2012, 2013, and 2015 caused significant damage to properties and the environment; recovery is ongoing and will likely take decades. Coupled with natural disasters are the increasing recreational demands being placed on the state's trails, parks, forests, and open spaces. The Pikes Peak Region alone sees an estimated 24 million visitors per year, many of whom are drawn by the area's diverse and vast expanse of public parks, open spaces, forests, and other outdoor recreation amenities. With greater use and demand comes an increased responsibility to care for and maintain these treasured natural landscapes so they continue to provide valuable ecosystem services and high quality visitor experiences.

Since 1982, RMFI has been a key player in the conservation and stewardship of Southern Colorado's public landscapes that not only define Colorado Springs, but the surrounding communities and region as well. Our restoration model centers on community involvement as a means of connecting people to the outdoors, promoting a healthy lifestyle, developing the next generation of environmental leaders, and fostering an ethic of environmental responsibility and stewardship that can be passed down from generation to generation.

In early 2015, RMFI embarked on its first formal strategic planning process, the result of which was a plan that guided the organization through the end of 2019. This new plan is intended as an update to the first plan, recognizing the many accomplishments RMFI has been able to achieve in the last 5 years, but also the vast potential that exists for strategic growth and improvement in the next 5 years.

RMFI's new strategic plan is anchored by 4 overarching goals:

1. Protect and enhance the ecological health of land and water resources in Southern Colorado.
2. Develop a sustainable and healthy organization in terms of finances, facilities, staff, and Board.
3. Grow a regional reputation for completing exemplary trail and restoration work, environmental education, and restoration research.
4. Increase regional awareness of RMFI's mission, purpose, projects, and programs.

Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision

The Rocky Mountain Field Institute envisions a world where our work fosters vibrant and healthy natural systems that are respected and cared for by the public.

Mission

Rocky Mountain Field Institute conserves and protects public lands in Southern Colorado through volunteer-based trail and restoration projects, environmental education, and restoration research.

Values

Excellence in programs. We are committed to providing the highest standard of programming for our project partners, supporters, and participants.

Volunteerism. We will implement a restoration model that centers on community involvement as a means of connecting people to the outdoors, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and fostering an ethic of environmental responsibility and stewardship.

Outdoor recreation and education. We respect the natural environment and seek to provide the opportunity for youth and adults to enjoy our natural world. Through our educational efforts, we will seek to develop the next generation of environmental leaders and stewards.

Science-based solutions. We are committed to furthering the field of restoration through the study and application of science-based solutions.

Inclusiveness in partnerships. We encourage strong and diverse partnerships through broad stakeholder and public participation.

Integrity in actions. We are committed to holding ourselves to the highest degree of responsibility and accountability.

Courage. In furthering our mission, we will have the courage to undertake difficult and complex projects.

Generosity of others. We are committed to being responsible stewards of the time, money, and gifts entrusted to us.

Organizational Attributes

History

Founded in 1982 as the American Mountain Foundation, the Rocky Mountain Field Institute was originally established to provide funding for international climbing expeditions. During the mid-1980s, AMF Executive Director, Mark Hesse, began to notice the environmentally degrading impacts of climbers and other recreationists. He observed these beautiful and treasured landscapes were quickly at risk of losing the very characteristics that drew people to them. In 1989, Mark catalyzed a group of friends and fellow climbers and began building trails and restoring impacted areas in Indian Creek Canyon, an internationally renowned climbing mecca in the dramatic desert landscape of Utah. In 1997, AMF officially changed its name to Rocky Mountain Field Institute and has grown to encompass a larger and more diverse skillset, tackling projects in the alpine, montane, foothill, and desert ecosystems.

What We Do

We scope, design, and implement science-based, technically proficient trail and restoration projects through a community of volunteers, youth conservation corps, and RMFI's own "Stewardship Crew". We bring a values-based approach to our work that seeks to educate our volunteers and partners about the vital importance of stewardship. We conduct our work within the bounds of the Rocky Mountain Region with specific emphasis on Southern Colorado and the Pikes Peak Region. We vigilantly monitor the effectiveness of our projects to ensure the work we produce is durable and effective over time. We also seek to inform our work with the most relevant and salient scientific research as well as best practices for trail design, trail construction, and landscape restoration. We work on a seasonal model that relies on identifying and retaining superlative field staff that can implement high-quality trail and restoration projects.

Who We Serve

We serve land management agencies, diverse community members passionate about the environment, and students interested in conservation. We seek to elevate the importance of public lands stewardship and respect for ecology, the environment, and especially the Rocky Mountain Region among all people.

How We Will Succeed

We will differentiate ourselves by:

- Implementing high-quality trail and restoration projects.
- Employing exemplary staff with relevant skills and experience.
- Cultivating durable relationships with land management entities, funders, volunteers, and other key partners.
- Providing effective and affordable services.

- Utilizing the most efficient and effective tools and technology.
- Monitoring the impact and effectiveness of our on-the-ground projects and regularly communicating that impact through diverse outreach channels.
- Utilizing a values-based approach that helps to foster stewardship in everything we do.

Summary of Strategic Goals and Priorities

The following 4 overarching goals and 10 associated priorities serve as the framework for Rocky Mountain Field Institute's strategic direction over the next five years:

GOAL 1: Protect and enhance the ecological health of land and water resources in Southern Colorado.

PRIORITY 1: Develop a diverse project docket year-to-year that addresses critical and emerging restoration and outdoor recreation needs in Southern Colorado including watershed restoration, forest health, sustainable recreation access, and habitat protection.

PRIORITY 2: Prioritize the involvement of community volunteers and youth in all suitable projects to help foster an ethic of environmental stewardship and responsibility.

GOAL 2: Develop a sustainable and healthy organization in terms of finances, facilities, staff, and Board.

PRIORITY 3: Develop sustainable project funding to ensure full project expenses are covered.

PRIORITY 4: Grow organizational flexibility by developing and increasing sustainable funding mechanisms above and beyond restricted project/program funding including general stewardship (SGEN funds) and operating functions (OHD funds) for the organization.

PRIORITY 5: Investigate options for an alternative RMFI office, teaching, and storage facility.

PRIORITY 6: Ensure RMFI staff have the skills, expertise, knowledge, and support to be effective and successful in their job function.

PRIORITY 7: Ensure RMFI Board of Directors have the skills, knowledge, and experience required to effectively lead the organization.

GOAL 3: Grow a regional reputation for completing exemplary trail and restoration work, environmental education, and restoration research.

PRIORITY 8: Cultivate strategic partnerships with institutions of higher learning and other similar entities in the Pikes Peak Region (i.e., Colorado College, Pikes Peak Community College, University of Colorado - Colorado Springs, QUAD Innovation Partnership, U.S. Air Force Academy, etc.) for the purpose of fulfilling the stewardship, educational, research components of RMFI's mission.

GOAL 4: Increase regional awareness of RMFI’s mission, purpose, projects, and programs.

PRIORITY 9: Utilize multifaceted, targeted marketing approach to better communicate RMFI’s mission, programs, projects, and capacities.

PRIORITY 10: Pursue and cultivate new and existing partnerships (volunteers, funders, land management agencies, organizations) that increase support, collaboration, and efficiencies.

While unique efforts will be taken to achieve each goal and priority, none will thrive or endure without the others. Collectively, the goals and priorities represent a complete and interconnected organizational vision for conservation, stewardship, and volunteerism. These goals and priorities will be implemented through RMFI’s current funding and investment opportunities and through strategic initiatives and objectives as outlined below.

Strategic Goals, Priorities, and Actions

GOAL 1: Protect and enhance the ecological health of land and water resources in Southern Colorado.

Rationale: This is RMFI's mission. Consequently, all strategic initiatives, directions, projects, decisions, and programs should be guided by this goal to ensure RMFI is fulfilling its mission and having a positive impact on the ground.

PRIORITY 1: Develop a diverse project docket year-to-year that addresses critical and emerging restoration and outdoor recreation needs in Southern Colorado including watershed restoration, forest health, sustainable recreation access, and habitat protection.

Actions:

- Continue work and evaluation of long-term project sites (i.e., Garden of the Gods, Barr Trail, Pikes Peak, Sangre de Cristos), but be proactive in seeking new and diverse project opportunities in Southern Colorado that parallel RMFI's mission, enhance staff skillset/expertise, and allow for sustainable organizational growth.
- Integrate monitoring protocols at suitable project sites to evaluate the impact of trail and restoration treatments and techniques implemented on the ground.
- Utilize current climate science to:
 - Ensure RMFI is well-positioned with the skills and knowledge to effectively respond to potential impacts and threats from a warming climate.
 - Inform organizational actions and best practices as they relate to global climate change.
 - Annual report on carbon component of RMFI activities (vehicles usage, fuel consumption, etc.).
 - Investigate charge for carbon offsets.

PRIORITY 2: Prioritize the involvement of community volunteers and youth in all suitable projects to help foster an ethic of environmental stewardship and responsibility.

Actions:

- Continue to offer youth-specific workdays at suitable projects sites, and offer family friendly workdays that offer more in-depth and meaningful experiences.
- Enhance overall volunteer experience (registration, workday, follow up, communication, etc.) to encourage volunteer growth, retention, and to promote giving. Evaluate and adjust current feedback and evaluation mechanisms.

- Grow reputation and awareness of Earth Corps program through testimonials, presentations at conferences, targeted marketing to college-aged students, scholarship funds and other mechanisms.
 - Establish funding goals including program needs and scholarship fund.
 - Re-evaluate program as Kit Carson/Challenger Point nears endpoint.
- Continue refining the citizen science program to put monitoring in the hands of local citizens and volunteers; where possible, have higher-level research conducted at restoration areas (i.e., graduate student projects with their own funding).
- Integrate environmental education lessons at a level commensurate with program audience, structure, and needs that are based on the type of project site (fire, flood, recreation, alpine, wetland, etc.).
- Cultivate and enhance RMFI relationship with conservation corps organizations (i.e. Mile High Youth Corps, Southwest Conservation Corps, others, where appropriate).

GOAL 2: Develop a sustainable and healthy organization in terms of finances, facilities, staff, and Board.

Rationale: This ensures that RMFI has the financial resources, staff positions, and leadership to ensure it remains viable and sustainable well into the future.

PRIORITY 3: Develop sustainable project funding to ensure full project expenses are covered.

Actions:

- Seek project funding and support through a diverse set of partners including land management agencies at the local, county, state, and federal levels; foundations; corporations; individuals; and other sources.
- Continue to utilize internal controls, budgeting mechanisms, budget variance analysis, and protocols that increase organizational efficiency and effectiveness to reflect informed estimation of true costs and charges associated with work requirements and expectations.
- Implement effective and efficient project planning, communication, and reporting strategies that document impact to project partners and funders.

PRIORITY 4: Grow organizational flexibility by developing and increasing sustainable funding mechanisms above and beyond restricted project/program funding including general stewardship (SGEN funds) and operating functions (OHD funds) for the organization.

Actions:

- Build \$1 million combined Weggel PPCF/self-managed internal endowment.
- Continue to investigate new and untapped revenue sources.
- Assess feasibility of new “Corporate Sponsorship” program where local/regional corporations invest in RMFI’s mission at an annual rate.
- Actively seek out and develop relationships with philanthropic individuals who believe in and are passionate about RMFI’s mission.
- Continue to seek out and apply for granting opportunities that specifically fund operating expenses.

PRIORITY 5: Investigate options for an alternative RMFI office, teaching, and storage facility.

Actions:

- Assess program needs as they relate to the limitations of current buildings and make short-term fixes where possible.
- Use program needs to investigate appropriate locations and timeframe for securing new facility.
- Seek to develop strategic relationships with non-profit organizations, private for-profit businesses, and others to potentially partner on new facilities.

PRIORITY 6: Ensure RMFI staff have the skills, expertise, knowledge, and support to be effective and successful in their job function.

Actions:

- Continue to support training opportunities (i.e., workshops, conferences, trainings, etc.) to develop expertise and skillset of staff to become effective leaders, and to increase capacity to deliver high quality trail and restoration projects, educational programs, and restoration research.
- Ensure staff wages keep up with nonprofit compensation trends, minimum wage standards, and cost of living.
- Ensure benefit package meets or exceeds nonprofit standards and investigate the potential to grow benefit package (i.e., maternity/paternity leave).
- At least every 2 years, poll similar organizations regarding benefit package, compensation, and other metrics.

- Develop Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access (IDEA) plan to encourage diverse workforce to bring IDEA to the forefront of decision-making protocols and actions.
- Ensure workload of staff encourages and supports healthy work/life balance.
 - Investigate the need for additional staff positions (i.e., development director, marketing/outreach coordinator, etc.).

PRIORITY 7: Ensure RMFI Board of Directors have the skills, knowledge, and experience required to effectively lead the organization.

Actions:

- Encourage and support attendance at Board development workshops offered by the Colorado Nonprofit Association and/or other similar organizations.
- Encourage Board members to attend at least one stewardship workday every year.
- Complete annual evaluation of Board performance.
- Coordinate annual Board orientation training/meeting for new Board members.

GOAL 3: Grow a regional reputation for completing exemplary trail and restoration work, environmental education, and restoration research.

Rationale: This is how RMFI sets itself apart from other similar organizations in Colorado Springs, Southern Colorado, and the Pikes Peak Region. It has taken years to develop the reputation RMFI currently has. Maintaining and enhancing this reputation is critical as RMFI seeks to establish itself as the preeminent conservation and stewardship organization in the region.

PRIORITY 8: Cultivate strategic partnerships with institutions of higher learning and other similar entities in the Pikes Peak Region (i.e., Colorado College, Pikes Peak Community College, University of Colorado - Colorado Springs, QUAD Innovation Partnership, U.S. Air Force Academy, etc.) for the purpose of fulfilling the stewardship, educational, research components of RMFI's mission.

Actions:

- Develop a collaborative course/training in environmental stewardship with RMFI acting as the primary convener, teacher, and instructor (topics to include restoration, trail construction, etc.).
- Give presentations to existing classes/courses/trainings on topics related to environmental stewardship.

- Provide internship/jobs/career pathways for recent graduates and Earth Corp/summer field staff opportunities for undergraduate enrollees.
- Have RMFI presence at key community events, programs, initiatives, etc.
- Promote RMFI mission and impact through regular communication efforts in print, radio, social media, e-newsletter, and other channels.

GOAL 4: Increase regional awareness of RMFI’s mission, purpose, projects, and programs.

Rationale: Awareness of the RMFI brand has grown fairly significantly in the last several years. However, RMFI is still plagued with being relatively unknown to a large swath of the general public – those community members who are not necessarily conservation-oriented, but who likely recreate in the very places RMFI has projects and who likely support these places being conserved for future generations. Growing community awareness and recognition of RMFI will be essential to securing new projects opportunities, diversifying our funding base, recruiting/retaining volunteers and staff, and expanding our reach in the region.

PRIORITY 9: Utilize multifaceted, targeted marketing approach to better communicate RMFI’s mission, programs, projects, and capacities.

Actions:

- Continue to maintain up-to-date website with publications, staff, and other organizational information that will expand organization’s profile. All staff to be familiar with the “elevator speech.”
- Utilize data from monitoring protocol, which effectively demonstrate on-the-ground impacts and successes – and can be leveraged in our marketing materials, grant applications and final reports.
- Better define who RMFI’s audiences are from a demographic standpoint for each project (i.e., Garden of the Gods, Barr Trail, Pikes Peak, etc.) or type of project (front country, backcountry, etc.).
- Explore new partnerships that target underrepresented audiences (social media, purchasing email lists, newspaper, radio, television, banners, etc.). Look into data sets from Inspire/Generation Wild program, participating school demographics (free and reduced lunch).

PRIORITY 10: Pursue and cultivate new and existing partnerships (volunteers, funders, land management agencies, organizations) that increase support, collaboration, and efficiencies.

Actions:

- Explore, initiate, and continue partnerships with potential sectors, such as:
 - Health Care Industry
 - Outdoor Industry/Brands
 - Schools/Higher Education
 - Other Non-profit Organizations
 - Military bases/contractors
 - Community businesses (i.e. banks, breweries, coffee shops)

Conclusion

This strategic plan expresses RMFI's continued commitment to providing exemplary conservation and stewardship initiatives in Southern Colorado through volunteer-based trail and restoration projects, environmental education, and restoration research.

We are proud to present this plan, yet it is only that – a plan. The plan will not achieve success unless we widely communicate these strategic goals and priorities with funders, partners, volunteers, and other supporters, and incorporate them into the day-to-day activities of RMFI.

RMFI expects this strategic plan to guide the organization as it continues carrying out its mission in Southern Colorado and the Pikes Peak Region, and strives to establish itself as the preeminent conservation organization in the region.

We will monitor this strategic plan on a regular basis and update it as needed. One of RMFI's strengths has always been its ability to adapt to new challenges and opportunities. We will continue to update and adapt this plan each year as new issues emerge, but will continue to stay true to our vision, mission, and strategic goals.

Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Environmental Trends

Colorado offers a vast amount of recreational opportunities including hiking, boating, fishing, camping, horseback riding, and motorized recreation. Of nearly 30 million acres of public lands in Colorado, 83 percent are open to outdoor recreation pursuits (approximately 36 percent of the entire state). These lands are managed by different agencies that supply a range of services and uses to create a vibrant and diverse outdoor recreation network in Colorado.

The 2019 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) charts the course for conservation and recreation in the state for the next 5 years. The most recent plan provides information on demographics and outdoor recreation trends, documents the economic importance of outdoor recreation to the state, addresses the challenges of providing quality outdoor experiences while conserving natural resources, recommends shared strategies for maintaining Colorado's conservation and outdoor recreation heritage, and highlights local and statewide initiatives guiding the long-term stewardship of Colorado's outdoor recreation resources.

General findings from the 2019 SCORP include:

- Approximately 92% of Coloradans recreate in the outdoors at least once every few weeks and some four or more times per week.
- The most common recreational activity statewide and regionally is walking, followed closely by hiking/backpacking and then picnicking and tent camping.
- The top three barriers to Coloradans' recreation participation were limited time, traffic congestion, and crowding.
- The top issue for land managers is maintaining existing recreation infrastructure and resources, followed by challenges adapting to changing user needs or preferences, coordinating with other outdoor recreation agencies and organizations, and the capacity to serve a growing population.
- The top 4 priority areas the state will focus on over the next 5 years include sustainable access and opportunity; stewardship; land, water, and wildlife conservation; and funding.

General findings from the 2019 SCORP related to economic impacts of outdoor recreation include:

- \$62.5 billion in economic output.
- \$35.0 billion in Gross Domestic Product (10% of the entire state GDP).
- \$9.4 billion in local, state and federal tax revenue.
- 511,000 jobs in the state (18.7% of the labor force) – a majority outside of Metro Denver.

In addition to impacts from a growing population and increased outdoor recreational pursuits, Colorado continues to face impacts from a warming climate. The following is taken from a

recent paper titled, “[Climate Change in Colorado: Recent Trends, Future Projections and Impacts](#)” written by Lukas et. al (2018).

In the past 30 years, Colorado’s climate has become substantially warmer. The recent warming trend in Colorado is in step with regional and global warming that has been linked to increasing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases. Annual precipitation, which has high natural variability, has not seen a statewide trend over that period. However, some drought indicators have worsened due to the warmer temperatures.

As greenhouse gases and other human effects on the climate continue to increase, Colorado is expected to warm even more by the mid-21st century, pushing temperatures outside of the range of the past century. The outlook for future precipitation in Colorado is less clear; overall increases or decreases are possible. The risk of decreasing precipitation appears to be higher for the southern parts of the state.

The future warming is projected to generally reduce Colorado’s spring snowpacks, cause earlier snowmelt and runoff, reduce annual streamflow volumes, and increase the water use by crops, landscaping, and natural vegetation.

Observed climate trends in Colorado include:

- Statewide annual average temperatures have increased by about 2°F over the past 30 years, and this trend is statistically discernible from the year-to-year variability. Four of the six warmest years on record (since 1895) have occurred in the period from 2012 through 2017. Temperatures have increased in all seasons. At the local scale, warming trends have been observed for most parts of the state.
- Warming temperatures alone have a widespread impact on the water cycle. A warmer atmosphere has greater “thirst” (higher vapor-pressure deficits) and tends to cause higher evaporation from snowpacks, soils, vegetation, and surface water.
- No significant long-term trends in annual precipitation have been detected for Colorado, even with the relatively dry period since 2000. The high variability in precipitation means that trends have to be large to be statistically discernible.
- Snowpack, as measured by April 1 snow-water equivalent (SWE), has been mainly below average since 2000 in all of Colorado’s river basins, and it is likely that warmer winter and spring temperatures are leading to an overall decline in the spring snowpack. However, the likely warming-induced changes in Colorado’s snowpack have been more modest than those in other regions of the Western US (Sierra Nevada, Cascades, Northern Rockies) where the winter climate is warmer than in Colorado (Lute et al. 2015, Mote et al. 2018).
- While the high variability makes it very difficult to detect trends in streamflow, there is evidence that warmer temperatures have already caused some reduction in annual streamflows in Colorado. Recent analyses by McCabe et al. (2017), Udall and Overpeck (2017), and Woodhouse et al. (2016) suggest that the below-average streamflows in the Upper Colorado River Basin since 2000 are partly attributable to the above-normal temperatures over that period.

- The timing of snowmelt and peak runoff has shifted earlier in the spring by 1–4 weeks in most of Colorado’s river basins and watersheds over the past 30 years, due to the combination of lower snowpacks since 2000, the warming trend in spring temperatures, and enhanced solar absorption from dust-on-snow events.
- The Palmer Drought Severity Index (PDSI) shows a trend towards more severe soil-moisture drought conditions in Colorado over the past 30 years, reflecting the combined effect of the warming trend and below-average precipitation since 2000.
- No long-term trends in heavy or extreme precipitation events are detectable in statewide composites of multiple station records. The evidence suggests that there has been no statewide trend in the magnitude of flood events in Colorado.
- Tree-ring records and other paleoclimate indicators for Colorado show multiple droughts prior to 1900 that were more severe and sustained than any in the observed record. These droughts would be even more severe if they recurred in a warmer climate.

Projections of Colorado’s future climate:

- All future projections from global climate models (GCMs) indicate continued warming in Colorado over the next several decades, regardless of the greenhouse-gas emissions scenario. Scenarios assuming higher emissions of greenhouse gases lead to greater warming.
- The statewide average annual temperatures are projected to warm by +2.5°F to +5°F by 2050 relative to a 1971–2000 baseline under a medium-low emissions scenario (RCP 4.5). Under a high emissions scenario (RCP 8.5), the projected warming is larger at mid-century (+3.5°F to +6.5°F), and much larger later in the century as the two scenarios increasingly diverge.
- Summer temperatures are projected to warm slightly more than winter temperatures. Typical summer temperatures by 2050 are projected under RCP 4.5 to be similar to the hottest summers that have occurred in the past 100 years.
- Climate model projections show less agreement regarding future precipitation change for Colorado. The individual model projections of change by 2050 in statewide annual precipitation under RCP 4.5 range from -5% to +6%. Projections under RCP 8.5 show a similar range of potential future changes (-3% to +8%).
- Nearly all of the climate model projections indicate increasing winter precipitation by 2050. There is weaker consensus among the projections regarding precipitation in the other seasons, but most indicate less precipitation falling during the growing season (May–September).
- Most projections of future Colorado hydrology show decreases in average annual streamflow for Colorado’s river basins by mid-century, by up to -30%, due mainly to the detrimental impact of warmer temperatures on streamflow. Some projections show large enough increases in precipitation to overcome the impact of warming, leading to increases in runoff, by up to +10%.