



Rocky Mountain Field Institute

Strategic Plan

2015-2019

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rocky Mountain Field Institute (RMFI) has seen significant growth, transition, and change in recent years. Throughout these challenges, 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 and 2013 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 5.3 million visitors per year with Garden of the Gods, Barr Trail, and Pikes Peak accounting for at least half of these visits. 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 a strategic planning process to help guide the organization into the future. The plan is anchored by three overarching goals:

1. Protect and enhance the ecological health of land and water resources in Southern Colorado.
2. Develop a regional reputation for completing exemplary trail and restoration work, environmental education, and restoration research.
3. Increase regional awareness of RMFI's mission, purpose, and programs.

To achieve these goals, we will focus on the following priorities:

1. Establish a diverse project docket year-to-year that addresses critical and emerging restoration needs in Southern Colorado including watershed restoration, forest health, sustainable recreation areas, and habitat protection.
2. Prioritize the involvement of community volunteers and youth in all projects to foster an ethic of environmental stewardship and responsibility.
3. Develop sustainable organizational financial capacity to tackle diverse projects in diverse areas, as well as increase flexibility through unrestricted funding mechanisms to develop new skills and project areas.

4. Develop technical expertise of field and office staff to increase capacity to deliver high quality trail and restoration projects, educational programs, and restoration research.
5. Establish solid internal controls and protocols that increase organizational efficiency.
6. Utilize multifaceted, targeted marketing approach to better communicate RMFI's mission, programs, projects, and capacities.
7. Pursue and cultivate new and existing partnerships (volunteers, funders, land management agencies, organizations) that increase support, collaboration, and efficiencies.

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 is dedicated to the conservation and stewardship of public lands in the Southern Rocky Mountain region 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, and climber and mountaineer, 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 skills set, tackling projects in the alpine and montane, watershed ecosystems, riparian zones, and sensitive foothill environs.

What We Do

We scope, design, and implement science-based, technically proficient trail and restoration projects through a community of volunteers. 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 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, community members passionate about the environment, and students interested in conservation. We seek to elevate the ideals of care and love of the natural world 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 staff with relevant technical skills.
- Cultivating durable relationships.
- Providing effective and affordable services.
- Monitoring the impact and effectiveness of our on-the-ground projects.
- Utilizing a values-based approach that helps to foster stewardship in everything we do.

COLORADO OUTDOOR RECREATION 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 2014 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) provides strategies for sustaining Colorado's outdoors heritage for current and future generations. The most recent plan identified outdoor recreation trends and issues, detailed demand for and supply of outdoor recreation resources, and quantified economic impacts of outdoor recreation.

General findings from the 2014 SCORP related to outdoor recreation trends include:

- 90% of Coloradans participate in some form of outdoor recreation activity every year.
 - 66% of all Colorado residents recreate outdoors at least one day a week.
 - 60% of Colorado residents are likely to increase their participation in outdoor recreation over the next five years.
- Walking, hiking/backpacking, and picnicking are the most popular outdoor recreation activities.
 - 83% recreate on trails, 57% enjoy water activities, 50% engage in winter recreation, and 29% participate in wildlife activities.
- 53% rated "Wilderness areas or open lands with little to no development and opportunity for solitude" as extremely important.
- When asked to prioritize future investments in their own backyards, more than 40% supported dirt walking trails and paths; nature and wildlife viewing areas; and playgrounds made of natural materials.

General findings from the 2014 SCORP related to economic impacts of outdoor recreation include:

- Outdoor recreation contributes over \$34.5 billion in annual economic activity and creates 313,000 jobs.
- 5.3 million people visit the Pikes Peak Region annually with a direct economic impact of \$1.3 billion.
- Garden of the Gods Park sees 2 million visitors per year with an estimated economic impact of \$520 million.

Millions of visitors and residents enjoy the wide array of outdoor recreational activities available in Colorado every year. Much of the outdoor recreational use in the state occurs on publicly owned and managed forests, parks, trails, and open spaces. However, providing sustainable and quality outdoor recreation experiences continues to be a challenge. A growing and diversifying population, as well as recent natural disasters, has strained outdoor recreation resources. Budget cuts and economic hardships have increased deferred maintenance and reduced staffing, resulting in an inability to provide sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities. More than ever, nonprofits like Rocky Mountain Field Institute are being relied upon to fill the gaps and leverage resources.

SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The following three overarching goals and seven 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 public land and water resources in Southern Colorado.

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

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

PRIORITY 3: Develop sustainable organizational financial capacity to tackle diverse projects in diverse areas, as well as increase flexibility through unrestricted funding mechanisms to develop new skills and project areas.

GOAL 2: Develop a regional reputation for completing exemplary trail and restoration work, environmental education, and restoration research.

PRIORITY 4: Develop technical expertise of field and office staff to increase capacity to deliver high quality trail and restoration projects, educational programs, and restoration research.

PRIORITY 5: Establish solid internal controls and protocols that increase organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

GOAL 3: Increase regional awareness of RMFI's mission, purpose, and programs.

PRIORITY 6: Utilize multifaceted, targeted marketing approach to better communicate RMFI's mission, programs, projects, and capacities.

PRIORITY 7: 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: Establish a diverse project docket year-to-year that addresses critical and emerging restoration needs in Southern Colorado including watershed restoration, forest health, sustainable recreation areas, and habitat protection.

Actions:

- Maintain high level of knowledge of the field of restoration and conservation and applicable restoration and conservation issues within the Pikes Peak Region through continual reading, research, and networking.
- Continue work at long-term project sites (Garden of the Gods, Barr Trail, Pikes Peak), but be proactive in seeking additional project opportunities in Southern Colorado that parallel RMFI's mission and continue to challenge, improve, and hone skillset/expertise.
- Plan for projects in multi-year phases rather than one year at a time to build sustainability and long-term planning into projects, budget, and overall organization.
- Create a rubric by which to start, expand, or discontinue work in a particular type of project site.

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

Actions:

- Better define who RMFI's volunteers 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 marketing and outreach ideas that target underrepresented audiences (social media, purchasing email lists, newspaper, radio, television, banners, etc.).

- Continue to offer youth-specific workdays in Garden of the Gods and other applicable project sites; offer family friendly workdays that offer more in-depth and meaningful experiences.
- Grow reputation and awareness of Earth Corps program through testimonials, presentations at conferences, targeted marketing to college-aged students, and other mechanisms.
- Continue to place emphasis on enhancing overall volunteer experience (registration, workday, follow up, communication, etc.) to encourage volunteer growth, retention, and potential giving.
- Explore new volunteer incentive ideas to encourage continued and repeat volunteers (after workday parties, beer, discounts, etc.).
- Actively seek and join corporate volunteer/matching programs.

PRIORITY 3: Develop sustainable organizational financial capacity to tackle diverse projects in diverse areas, as well as increase flexibility through unrestricted funding mechanisms to develop new skills and project areas.

Actions:

- Develop new “Corporate Sponsorship” program where local/regional corporations invest in RMFI’s mission at an annual rate.
- Incorporate recurring giving and “In Memoriam” giving options on RMFI’s online donation page.
- Actively seek and implement new fundraising initiatives (Shift Thrift Store, RMFI beer, Indy Give! events, Bonfirefunds.org, etc.).
- Actively seek out and develop relationships with philanthropic individuals and who believe in and are passionate about RMFI’s mission.
- Actively seek out and apply for granting opportunities that specifically fund operating expenses.
- Initiate and implement email fundraising campaigns.

GOAL 2: Develop 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 4: Develop technical expertise of field and office staff to increase capacity to deliver high quality trail and restoration projects, educational programs, and restoration research.

Actions:

- Provide opportunities for staff to attend conferences, workshops, trainings, courses, and other educational events to learn new approaches and methodologies in trail and restoration, education, and restoration research.
- Regularly communicate and network with other experts (professional trail builders, university professors, educators) to learn new ideas, techniques, and approaches.
- Regularly communicate with funders, partners, and supporters about new and ongoing projects, outcomes, and initiatives.
- Prepare and submit timely final reports for all projects, grants, and other initiatives.
- Maintain up-to-date website with publications, staff, and other organizational information.
- Integrate environmental education lessons into every program at a level commensurate with program audience, structure, and needs.
- Create formal lesson plans for each type of work site (fire, flood, recreation, alpine, wetland, etc.).
- Integrate a monitoring component into every stewardship project at a level commensurate with project funding and needs.
- Develop a monitoring/assessment protocol that is easy to implement, but effectively demonstrates on-the-ground impacts.
- Develop a 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).
- Conduct all RMFI business in a professional manner – email and written communication, meetings, reports, grants, etc.

PRIORITY 5: Establish and follow internal controls and protocols that increase organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

Actions:

- Implement effective and efficient project planning strategies (make sure funders and partners have been communicated with concerning work objectives and workdays; assign volunteer groups to appropriate project sites; before/after project photos; GPS points for all treatments; having project factsheet detailing goals; funders, objectives, timeframe, etc.).
- Maintain up-to-date and accurate records (agreements, policies, Board meeting minutes, Board notebooks, financials, etc.).

GOAL 3: Increase regional awareness of RMFI’s mission, purpose, and offerings.

Rationale: Awareness of the RMFI brand has grown fairly significantly in the last several years, primarily due to RMFI’s work in the Waldo Canyon and Black Forest burn scars. However, RMFI is still plagued with being relatively unknown to 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 gain future projects, diversify the funding base, recruit/retain volunteers, and expand our reach in the region.

PRIORITY 6: Utilize multifaceted, targeted marketing approach to better communicate RMFI’s mission, programs, projects, and capacities.

Actions:

- 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 marketing and outreach ideas that target underrepresented audiences (social media, print material, event attendance, purchasing email lists, newspaper, radio, television, banners, etc.).
- Regularly train staff in communicating RMFI’s mission – “the elevator speech.”

PRIORITY 7: Pursue and cultivate new and existing partnerships (volunteers, funders, land management agencies, organizations) that increase support, collaboration, and efficiencies.

Actions:

- Explore partnerships with entities such as the Botanic Gardens, Boys & Girls Clubs, colleges and universities, Colorado Department of Transportation, Colorado Health Foundation, Colorado Open Lands, CPW, Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA), the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, Kaiser Permanente, Local Governments, local and regional nature centers, Mile High Youth Corps, Outdoor Industries, The Trust for Public Land, etc.
- Promote and discuss RMFI's mission, projects, and initiatives at every formal and informal opportunity.
- Regularly recognize funders, volunteers, partners, and other supporters on social media and in e-news.
- Pursue opportunities to join committees, advisory boards, etc. as a representative of RMFI.

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.