

# Huerfano Youth Conservation Corps



## 2023 Summer Season Review

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# Our Purpose

**"The HYCC experience will provide our youth the opportunity to develop resilient behavior, interact with successful role models, experience a supervised work experience with compensation, and learn valuable life and occupational skills."**

Description from HYCC Founding Documents

The purpose of the HYCC is three-fold.

First, the purpose of the program is to provide a unique and memorable summer work experience to provide high school students in Huerfano County and to instill in them a sense of connection to the land and a feeling of ownership and environmental stewardship.

Second, the program exists to serve the Huerfano County community, and to beautify and make more sustainable our various outdoor spaces.

Third, the program provides students with structure, exposure to role models, possible jobs or career paths, and opportunities to build relevant personal and professional skills.



# Challenges we faced

One of the main aspirations for the summer was to involve HYCC members in the community input and the planning and design process for expanded facilities and an ADA-accessible trail system at the site of the “Walsenburg Riverwalk” behind Fiesta Park.

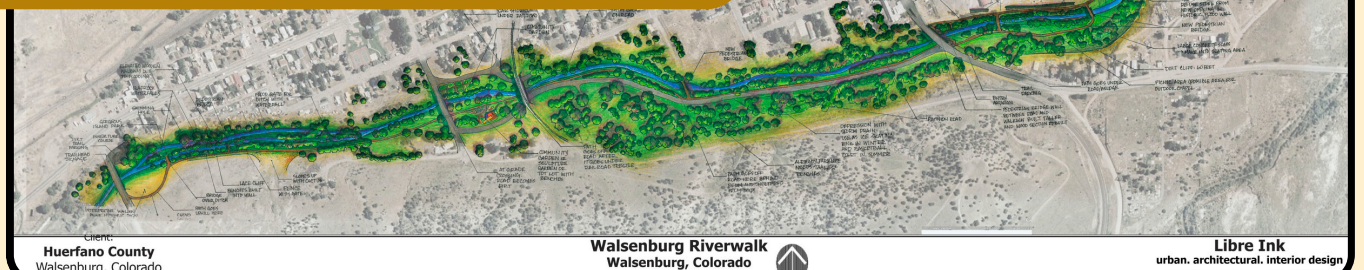
In March of 2023, Huerfano County was awarded \$40,000 in funding for the planning stage of this project by CPW through the non-motorized trail grant.

Unfortunately, the correct processes for using grant funding were not adhered to and the project had to be brought to a halt before any work could be done with a landscape architect. As of yet, no work relevant to this grant has been performed at the Riverwalk.

Luckily, there is still time left in the grant to accomplish the goals we set out with, and better communication about this project has been established and will be maintained throughout the rest of this year and next. Doing this work will be a top priority for the Youth Corps in the coming season, especially since this project has the potential to be of significant benefit to the citizens of Walsenburg and Huerfano County. In the meantime, the HYCC did significant work at the Riverwalk site to make the area more safe and scenic for the public to use in its current primitive state.



Proposed work site for the scope of this grant



Original, larger scope plan for Riverwalk developed back in mid-2000s

# Highlights

**Despite the setback to our aspirations, we managed to go ahead and have a great summer anyway.**

- All of our four Corpsmembers with the exception of one were previous members of the Youth Corps, so we had an organized and effective team.
- We were much more focused on conservation-oriented projects this year than in 2022.
- This summer, for the first time, we had a crew lead who had additional responsibilities above and beyond the other crewmembers, and this crew lead performed admirably.
- There were zero injuries this summer.
- We beautified and made safer the Riverwalk site to a significant degree. Many bags of trash were removed, a great deal of scattered tree branches were consolidated and chipped, several dead widow-maker trees were sawed down and processed into firewood and wood chips, and numerous beaver-felled trees were pulled out from in and along the river and processed into firewood and woodchips.
- We performed a Fuels Reduction Project in conjunction with Colorado State Forest Service, improving upon our relationship with them and paving the way for paid projects in the future.
- At the end of the summer, most of the crew took part in an excursion up to the summit of the West Spanish Peak, a first for every member.

# Our Projects

This summer, we enjoyed a much more focused, conservation-oriented set of projects. We worked primarily in Walsenburg along the Riverwalk and did some work in Cuchara, both in the CMP and along Hwy 12.

We did some conceptual work in furtherance of the goal to transform the Riverwalk area into a proper and respectable park.

We worked to recover the river from damage done by beavers over the course of the last year. This involved a great deal of swamping fallen trees out of the river, cutting them up, and then chipping what could be chipped. We also installed nine chicken wire cages around 14 of the trees closest to the river to prevent beavers from cutting down more.



I felled two “widow-maker” trees and the crew chipped up what could be chipped.

We lined a bit of a spur trail with mulch and armored a patch of trail prone to mud..



We generally cleaned the area, pulling out and disposing of a large amount of garbage and debris.

We did weed and garbage removal in the alleyway behind Fiesta Park and removed thistles from a few other spots around town.

# Walsenburg Riverwalk



Crewmembers wrapping a couple of bank-side trees



Beaver-felled tree which landed in the river



Crewmember removing low-hanging branch over muddy but well-frequented section of trail



Same section of trail with low branches removed over trail and with armoring in low spot

# More of our Projects

In Cuchara, we performed trail maintenance along the Baker Creek Trail and hauled fallen logs out of the river to restore an undisturbed flow.

We assisted CMP maintenance staff in the installation of several heavy snow-machine arms.

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We performed Fuels Reduction work along Highway 12 in conjunction with the State Forest Service.



A section of cleaned-up Baker Creek Trail

**The Youth Corps' relationship with the State Forest Service has a lot of potential to be expanded upon. Already, the Forest Service has offered contracts, training, and used equipment. In future seasons, this partnership can be strengthened and lead to valuable career opportunities for Corpsmembers.**



Crewmembers chat with Paul Branson of the State Forest Service at a Fuels Reduction Site

# Fuels Reduction in Cuchara





# Takeaways and Next Steps

This summer, the program employed fewer students than in the last couple of seasons, and most of the members were previous corpsmembers. This was a bit of a mixed basket. On one hand, the members worked very well together and were more organized and focused than in previous years. The team was easier to manage. On the other hand, this was a less diverse group than last year, and nobody on the team was particularly interested in the sciences associated with conservation work.

It was nice to be more focused on outdoor conservation work this summer, although it was a hot summer to be spending increased time working in Walsenburg, as opposed to in the cooler Cuchara. It was also nice to have only a few large projects to work on, as corpsmembers were able to see the fruits of their labors, especially at the Riverwalk site, and especially after mowing the grass in an area that was previously overgrown with weeds and covered in trash and fallen tree branches. Already, before any additional infrastructure has been put in place down there, it is a much nicer place to spend time.

It was a shame not to be able to do the work associated with the CPW Planning Grant as had been anticipated, but the whole affair was a learning experience and will lead to the more professional and procedure-oriented operation of the Corps going forward.

Overall, the program was a great success this year and should serve as a model for how the program should be run in the future. Having just a few large projects to work on was good for the group's sense of accomplishment. While this small group was effectively managed, a few more members, particularly from School District Re-2, would be appreciated. Next year, more new members should be recruited and trained, and the partnership with Colorado Forest Service should be explored and expanded.

