

ROARING FORK



CONSERVANCY

2022 Annual Report

EXPLORE | VALUE | PROTECT



Photo: Mary Caperton Morton

Message from Board President and Executive Director

Lately, every discussion about water in the west leaves us feeling like the grumpy uncle no one wants to sit next to during the holidays. Headlines with words like “crisis,” “drought,” “shortage,” and “deadline” tend to leave us feeling like the situation is hopeless. The problem is too big. Compromise is a thing of the past. There will never be enough water. And then it starts to snow... and for a moment, we remember the promise and possibility that each new year brings. The year 2022 brought many of these water issues to the forefront of local and national news. While they may be late to the party, increasing media coverage of the crisis facing western water gives Roaring Fork Conservancy (RFC) and our many partners the opportunity to raise awareness, grow understanding, and highlight the potential we have when we work together and succeed locally.

While the news media reported on dwindling levels in Lakes Powell and Mead, RFC education staff were bridging the divide between east and west slope through our Watershed Pen Pals program. At the same time, our water quality staff was participating in a coordinated effort to document and better understand potential impacts and threats to the stream health in the Roaring Fork headwaters. Meanwhile,

our board president was planting low water use turf at the Basalt Regional Library. And, science and policy staff were working with multiple partners to improve stream health in the Crystal Valley. Unlike that grumpy uncle, we are not drowning our sorrows in another glass of eggnog - we are taking action, growing partnerships, and facilitating change.

We do not take the dwindling supply, growing demand, and uncertainty of western water’s future lightly. RFC has intentionally chosen a path of local action to do our part to positively impact our watershed. While many aspects remain out of our control, we are dedicated to action, education, and cooperation on behalf of the rivers and all those who love, use, and rely on them.

We are proud of our accomplishments and the work we continue to do to bring people together to protect our rivers. We are humbled by the support of our donors, partners, and associates, knowing that we have accomplished so much more by effectively working together. Going forward we intend to continue to foster long-term relationships and create new connections, working together to explore, value, and protect the Roaring Fork Watershed.



Pat McMahon

Pat McMahon
President,
Board of Directors



Rick Lofaro

Rick Lofaro
Executive Director

RFC prides ourselves in “bringing people together to protect our rivers.” But what does that really look like? As we reemerge into a time of gathering, we continue to find innovative ways to bring diverse groups together, united by the river.

Together to Monitor
Robust Water Quality
Monitoring Creates a Legacy

RFC staff began monitoring water quality in Basalt in 1997. From those humble beginnings, RFC’s water quality monitoring program has grown to include 22 sites throughout the watershed - one of the most comprehensive and consistent monitoring programs in the state. Long-term water quality monitoring allows RFC to watch for changes, both abrupt and over time. From this, targeted studies have been created to further investigate areas of concern. Results from these studies are used to foster best management practices and inform policy decisions.

Together to Collaborate
Part of the Bigger Picture

RFC regularly partners with cooperative groups to both help represent our watershed and participate in the collaborative efforts in our region and the larger Colorado basin. RFC actively participates in the Colorado Basin Roundtable including Basin Implementation Plan and Colorado’s Water Plan updates, Northwest Colorado Council of Governments Water Quality and Quantity Committee, Roaring Fork Watershed Collaborative, Glenwood Canyon Restoration Alliance, and the Future Forest Roundtable.

Together to Study
Lincoln Creek Coordinated
Water Quality Sampling

RFC joined a diverse collaborative to monitor and study water quality concerns on Lincoln Creek in response to potential impacts from upstream historic mining. Read more about this project on page 15.

Together to Enhance Restoration and Efficiency Project at Riverfront Park The Crystal River Restoration and Weaver Ditch Efficiency Project will restore and enhance the riverine and riparian corridor through an impaired half-mile, 18-acre reach of the Crystal River through the Town of Carbondale. Based on the findings of the stakeholder-driven 2016 Crystal River Management Plan, this project brings together several identified management priorities in a cohesive project that is both beneficial to its target reach and a replicable demonstration of multi-benefit restoration. The project will increase aquatic habitat structure and in-stream connectivity, improve channel and bank stability, and enhance riparian buffers. Over 1,000 native plants of more than 25 different riparian species will be introduced to the site. In addition, the improvements to the adjacent Riverfront Park will provide an accessible path to the river and floodplain bench, improve the rustic trail, add dedicated angler access points, and create a natural outdoor classroom space. The modifications to the park will create the only location within the Town of Carbondale for people of all abilities to access the Crystal River, providing a unique opportunity for all valley residents to experience the Crystal River corridor, fostering the creation of future river stewards and inspiring protection of critical riparian and riverine environments. Over four years of planning and outreach contributed to the current project using feedback and input from the stakeholder group, including the Town of Carbondale, RFC, Aspen Valley Land Trust, American Rivers, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. With diverse stakeholders, multiple funders, and several site-specific constraints, the complex planning and design process required extensive collaboration to bring together a project to benefit the Crystal River.



Together to Protect

Ice Jam Release Warnings Keep Winter River Users

Safe For many years, RFC staff have taken an interest in ice jam releases on the Roaring Fork River. These captivating events occur when a rise in temperature releases ice built up in the river. As the ice breaks up it flows downstream and can get wedged in other moving or fixed pieces of ice. The now jammed ice can form an impromptu dam, sealing the downstream flow into a pool. As temperatures continue to rise, the ice continues to melt, and the dam eventually breaches, sending a slurry of large slabs of ice and debris downstream in a frozen tidal wave. Through years of observation, RFC has come to understand the circumstances that make the river ripe for such events. Working with Pitkin County Emergency Management, National Weather Service, Town of Basalt Police, Pitkin Sheriff and Eagle County Sheriff, RFC's on the ground observations are instrumental in a warning system sent out through Pitkin Alerts to inform the public when ice jams are likely or in progress. This helps local emergency workers clear dangerous riverfront areas, and alert anglers to exit the river ahead of hazardous conditions.

Together to Grow

Going Green at the Basalt Regional Library

Sometimes, with less water, the grass is actually greener. Amidst persistent drought in the American West, the custom of growing a lush green lawn has come into question in the conservation community. However, old habits die hard, and sometimes these lawns are functional and perhaps necessary community gathering places. So in cases where a lawn is justified, how can one maintain an ethic of water conservation? One way might be to change the type of grass without changing its function. This summer, RFC partnered with Basalt Regional Library to remove a section of traditional blue grass and replace it with a tall fescue mixture that requires only half the water to produce the green grass aesthetic and feel. Haven't noticed the new grass outside the library? Well then, perhaps the low water grass might not be any greener... but it also isn't any less.

Together to Preserve Outstanding Waters

RFC joined the Colorado River Basin Outstanding Waters Coalition, a group of local, state, regional and national NGOs, working together to evaluate eligible reaches for "Outstanding Waters" designation in the Colorado River Basin. The process includes significant water quality monitoring, stakeholder outreach, and submittal to the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission. Streams designated as "Outstanding Waters" receive additional protections to safeguard their high quality and unique natural resource values.

Together to Inform A Voice for the River

RFC continued to serve as a technical advisor for the City of Glenwood Springs and Glenwood Springs River Commission on river health, outreach, and policy projects, Middle Colorado Watershed Council's implementation of post Grizzly Creek Fire water quality monitoring, and for Colorado River Watch's development of new online water quality data tools.

Together to Connect Crossing the Divide by Snail Mail

In 2022, RFC Education staff shared a connection between Basalt Middle School and Vista Peak Exploratory School (Aurora, CO) students that they may not have been aware of: Fryingspan River water. The Fryingspan River, which flows through Basalt, also flows through the Busk-Ivanhoe tunnel to provide water to residents of Aurora. Armed with a pen and paper, students shared different experiences and ideas related to water through old fashioned letter writing. This innovative and unique program emphasizes how water connects us, and at the same time sheds light on water management. Students and teachers from both schools fostered valuable relationships and gained new understanding about different communities united by water.

Together to Improve Out of the Reservoir and into the Fryingspan

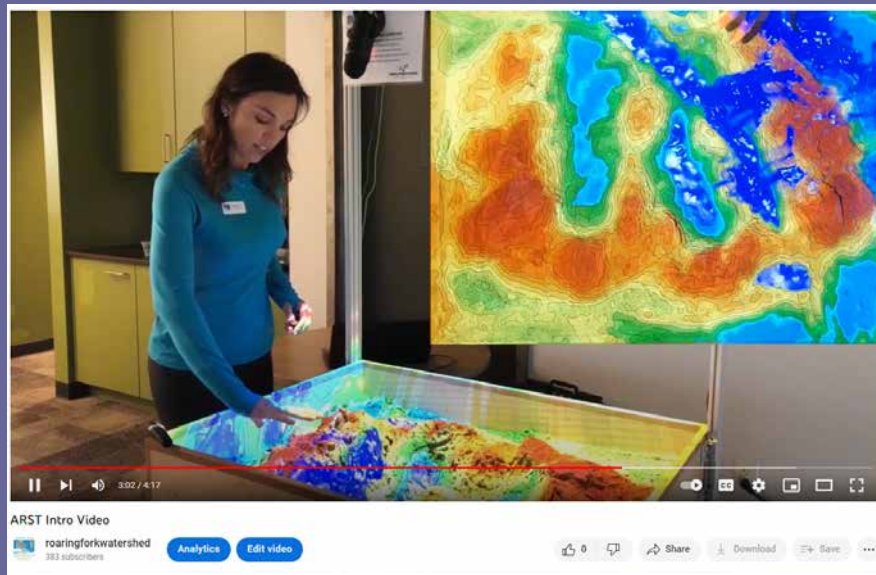
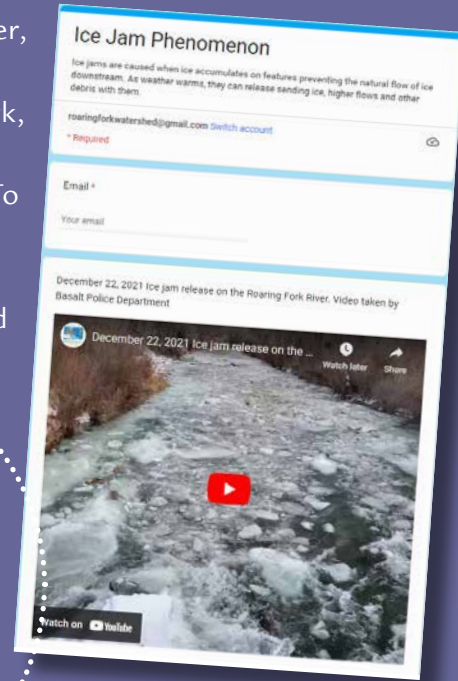
Since 2019, RFC has been working with partners at the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) and Colorado River Water Conservation District to supplement winter flows in the Fryingspan River. Studies commissioned by RFC in the early 2000's showed increased anchor ice can detrimentally affect the macroinvertebrate community and diversity in the Fryingspan River. However, maintaining flows at 60-70 cfs can both minimize anchor ice formation and increase resiliency in recovery from previous ice related impacts. RFC has monitored anchor ice weekly every winter since November 2020, providing results which informed management practices for Ruedi Reservoir. In 2022, with additional partnership from the Colorado Water Trust, releases from Ruedi Reservoir began in December, a time when, historically anchor ice has been a concern but water was not available. In addition, RFC showed local support for this ecologically beneficial program through funding partners in Pitkin County Healthy Rivers, Town of Basalt, City of Aspen, and Roaring Fork Fishing Guide Alliance to supplement the generous funding from the CWCB's River and Lake Protection Section.

Staying Current

As the Roaring Fork Valley's population changes so do the needs of the river, and in turn, the needs of watershed education. Over the last few years, the student population has changed with more students coming from New York, Texas, California, the Midwest, and Central America. RFC recognizes that there is a disparity of baseline understanding of mountain environments. To bridge this gap RFC has developed short, fun videos, and online activities for students before they join us in field programs. Providing these pre-session opportunities can level the playing field and increase the depth and impact of programming for all participants.

RFC educators are constantly assessing group dynamics to gauge if the content being presented is understandable. Over the past year, there have been many times when students have not had the opportunity to see wetlands, riparian animals, and other keystone species during their formative years. Students have also experienced an increase of screen time which has presented both benefits and challenges. RFC's educational goal is to reach and connect with every student.

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It is a joy to watch the light turn on and the excitement grow as students discover a reference point, allowing them to really dive into the concepts. The best teaching takes place not through teachers lecturing but through self-connections as the human brain has evolved to learn through real experience and play. These connections are then shared and transferred to friends and family helping those new to the valley understand the importance of healthy rivers.



Snow Crystals & Avalanches!

In this program, students study snow crystals and learn about how snowflakes form. They identify states of matter, dig a snow pit, and create a class size snow crystal. A perfect pairing with this program is the Avalanche class where students learn about the effects of natural disasters by studying avalanches.

Effects of Fires On Watersheds

What are the benefits and consequences of forest fires on watersheds? How is the changing climate influencing fires? Students learn all this and more through art projects and even by visiting a burn scarred landscape.



Photo: CDOT



Photo: Rachel Thompson

Streamgages: Measuring the Dynamics of A River

Measuring stream flow in rivers is similar to taking the pulse of blood flow in a human body. It is important to measure flow so that scientists and water managers can make informed decisions about a stream's health. Students measure velocity and learn about Newton's Laws of Motion as they study hydrology.

Beavers as Ecosystem Engineers

Beavers are a keystone species in stream ecosystems and by playing a giant Jenga®-type game created by RFC educators, students come to understand how beavers create valuable wetlands that protect our rivers.



Photo: Megan O'Leary



Photo: Sonya Hemmen

Playful Otter

Students spend some time by the river learning about the North American river otters' relationship with other animals, discovering how specialized they are for living in rivers, and mimicking an otter's sensory adaptations. Students are amazed to find out otters reside in local rivers!

RFC's innovative educators created 5 new programs in 2022!

EDUCATION IMPACTS



75 First-year raft guides representing **6** outfitters participated in interpretive River Ecology training



662 children attended **47** RFC led Summer Camps

RFC educators taught **236** river and watershed related school programs reaching **4,719** students



46 anglers participated in RFC's Youth and Adult Fly Fishing Clinics

37% of school programs took place at The River Center



22 Watershed Explorations reached **338** residents and tourists

Roaring Fork Conservancy taught **297** education programs making over **6,205** contacts in 2022!



Photo: RFOV



The Brooksher Watershed Institute

The Brooksher Watershed Institute is a series of presentations from local, state, regional, and national water leaders addressing our most precious resource, water. In its fourth year, RFC offered three virtual and two in-person presentations and each program provided opportunities for participants to engage in dialogue with these water leaders. The topics included measuring soil moisture to understand a changing water supply, how earlier summers and nutrient enrichment are promoting algae blooms in alpine lakes, binational collaboration in restoring the Colorado River Delta, understanding the science of snow, and author talk and book signing with Kirk Wallace Johnson. The presentations had over 285 attendees from around the world and recorded presentations were viewed over 300 times.

The Brooksher Watershed Institute recorded presentations, slides, or related reports are available at www.roaringfork.org/education-and-outreach/brooksher-watershed-institute/.

24th Annual Fryingpan & Beyond River Cleanup

For a third year in a row, the Fryingpan & Beyond River Cleanup took place over the course of a week allowing individuals and families to space out while collecting roadside debris. Over 125 residents and visitors picked up trash along 14 miles of road adjacent to the Fryingpan River, the Roaring Fork River from Aspen to Glenwood Springs, the Crystal River all the way up to Redstone – a cleanup first! - and even along the Colorado River.



Photo: Lucas TenHarmsel

City of Glenwood Springs

RFC partnered with the Glenwood Springs River Commission on community outreach and education projects:

- Participated in the Glenwood Springs annual RiverFEST event. Over 200 volunteers, the largest turnout ever, worked to clean up trash along streams and rivers throughout Glenwood Springs and ended with lunch and festivities.
- Assisted in a riparian planting project by planting native shrubs and grasses around the Two Rivers Park boat ramp on the Colorado River.

Programs with RFC & RFOV

Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers (RFOV) invited RFC to partner on the following projects in 2022:

- Approximately 30 volunteers and staff worked to improve the Maroon Creek wetlands and riparian habitat by removing an outdated sprinkler system, beaver fencing that was impacting tree growth, invasive plants, and accumulated dead undergrowth.
- Volunteers spent the day at Coffman Ranch and removed 200 feet of fencing, built 264 feet of trail, removed 14 bags of thistle, and installed bird boxes.
- Over 30 volunteers restored the pond area at Coal Basin Ranch with seeding and planting of over 85 native plants. That was only after they removed the clover and thistle and moved over 62 wheelbarrows of soil and compost.

Hot Spots for Trout

For the third year in a row, the lack of precipitation led to below average stream flows, resulting in increased water temperature. Higher water temperature holds less dissolved oxygen, which can stress fish and other aquatic life. To monitor these conditions, RFC staff and eight volunteers collected over 200 water temperature data points from around the Roaring Fork Watershed. Data collected by volunteers enhanced RFC's ability to monitor the watershed, engage with the public, and identify future water quality and habitat concerns.

River Stewards

RFC's River Stewards, a dedicated group of young professionals, spearhead community engagement events to inspire young river enthusiasts to explore, value, and protect the Roaring Fork watershed. These passionate individuals helped kickoff the Fryingpan and Beyond River Cleanup, ran several social media campaigns, and volunteered at river restoration projects. This fun, multi-talented, and committed cohort meets monthly.

"Iron Fly" Fly Tying Competition

Roaring Fork Valley Fly Fishing Club and RFC co-hosted the 6th annual Iron Fly Competition at the Topsy Trout in early February. Iron Fly is a fly tying event combined with a little, friendly competition. Competitors are provided with secret and "funky" materials that must be used in each creative fly tied. Over 100 people attended this fun-filled annual fundraiser for both organizations.



Collaboration is the Key

Lincoln Creek, in the upper Roaring Fork Watershed, faces numerous water quality and quantity challenges. The headwaters of the creek contain historic mining areas, including Ruby Mine, which are on the state list of abandoned mines. Ruby Mine historically produced silver, lead, zinc, copper, and manganese. Further downstream sits Grizzly Reservoir, where water diverted from the upper Roaring Fork River, Lincoln Creek, and numerous other tributaries, is collected and sent through a transmountain diversion to the Arkansas River Watershed.

In late summer 2021, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) documented a fish kill in Grizzly Reservoir and implemented follow-up water quality monitoring and fish surveys. Results showed numerous water quality impacts, particularly elevated dissolved copper concentrations. This, along with other observations, has caused concern that something has changed at Ruby Mine, potentially impacting Lincoln Creek and affecting aquatic life.

In response, a large collaborative formed to evaluate water quality conditions more thoroughly. The collaborative grew to include numerous government agencies and two non-profit organizations, with every partner providing their own area of expertise throughout the planning and monitoring process. Partners include:

- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
- Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Pitkin County Environmental Health
- Roaring Fork Conservancy
- Trout Unlimited
- United States Environmental Protection Agency
- United States Geological Survey
- United States Forest Service

In 2022, two intensive water quality and quantity surveys were conducted by the collaborative. Staff from nearly every agency worked together to conduct monitoring activities along Lincoln Creek from above Ruby Mine down to the confluence with, and including, the Roaring Fork River. A significant number of water quality constituents, flow measurements, and even soil samples were collected/measured during the field work. Automated samplers were also installed to continue documenting water quality conditions throughout the winter.

The outcome of all this work is a huge array of data, which is currently being analyzed by the Environmental Protection Agency. Results and analysis are due in early 2023, at which time the collaborative will evaluate the findings and explore next steps. This partnership between multiple government agencies and RFC, highlights how the collaborative process can be implemented to successfully respond to stream health concerns, with the whole truly being greater than the sum of its parts.



Water Quality Accomplishments



Colorado River Watch

- RFC staff and volunteer stream teams conducted regular water quality monitoring at 22 Roaring Fork Watershed sites totaling 106 sample events. Thirteen dedicated volunteers worked a combined 134 hours.
- Implemented fall macroinvertebrate sampling at 8 locations on the Roaring Fork and Fryingpan Rivers in cooperation with River Watch. RFC also assisted two local River Watch schools as they conducted macroinvertebrate sampling at their designated sites.
- Taught water quality monitoring and in-stream measurement protocols to 40 students, teachers, and watershed groups at the annual River Watch State Training in Cedaredge, CO.
- Hosted a one-day River Watch Training at the River Center. This training was provided to local teachers, organizations, and citizen science volunteers participating in the River Watch program.
- Trained Middle Colorado Watershed Council staff and Glenwood Springs Middle School students as they worked together to monitor Mitchell Creek in Glenwood Springs.

Cattle Creek

RFC conducted an eighth year of targeted biological and chemical monitoring at 3 Cattle Creek sites with funding from Garfield and Eagle Counties. This study has now documented several consecutive years of drought and corresponding low flow conditions and their potential impacts on water quality.

Fryingpan River

- For the ninth consecutive year, RFC monitored levels of the algae *Didymosphenia geminata* (didymo) in the Fryingpan River. Surveys of didymo stream bed coverage and basic water quality monitoring were conducted at 7 locations in spring, summer, and fall.
- RFC maintains temperature loggers at 3 sites within the Fryingpan River. These loggers measure stream temperature every hour and have operated year-round since 2013.
- For the third consecutive year, RFC monitored winter anchor ice at 7 locations along the lower Fryingpan River.

Temperature Monitoring

RFC maintained temperature loggers on the lower Roaring Fork River and Crystal Rivers in response to ongoing drought conditions leading to stream temperature concerns. In 2022, water quality staff replaced aging loggers and installed two new loggers. One logger was installed on the Roaring Fork River at Coffman Ranch in partnership with Aspen Valley Land Trust. The other was installed at RFC's conservation easement on Cattle Creek. Data is shared with CPW in a joint effort to monitor potential impacts on aquatic life.

Alpine Lake Algae Monitoring

Continued partnering with the Independence Pass Foundation and the Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research at University of Colorado to study the presence of algae and algae blooms in remote alpine lakes. Conducted a second year of algal and water quality monitoring at Independence Lake.



SHAWN CHEADLE

National Council Supporter Spotlight



WHAT HOOKED YOU WITH RFC?

Early on I learned water conservation, environmental conditions, and healthy water resources should be common desires for anyone fishing or enjoying water sports, snow skiing, or drinking clean water. RFC hooked me with its zealous advocacy of healthy and abundant Roaring Fork Valley water resources. Improving public access, protecting private access, cleaning and restoring riverbanks, RFC has transformed policies, rules and physical access to the Roaring Fork Valley's water resources unmatched by historical efforts in the Valley.

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO GIVE YOUR FIRST GIFT?

Discussing RFC's mission with its leadership and acquiring real estate in the Valley informed my decision to give to RFC. Resonating with RFC's efforts, **I felt in my heart a desire to empower RFC**, in my own small way, to continue its mission for the community, for my friends and family, and for the future use and enjoyment of these important waters for all. **I trust RFC as my advocate to protect and improve these resources for years to come.**



WHAT DO YOU WISH PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT RFC?

I wish people knew more about the people of RFC. Having met many of the staff over the years, from Rick Lofaro on down, they live their lives for the mission of conservancy, and they're fueled by a passion for the preservation of our precious water resources. Their personal drive to succeed in RFC's mission is equal to the most ambitious people I've ever met, from rocket scientists to lawyers and professional athletes.

People should know, RFC is its people.



Thank You to our 2022 National Council!

Representing all parts of the United States, RFC National Council members make annual membership contributions of \$1,500+. This support serves as the foundation of our funding, enables us to serve as a voice for the rivers, execute sound river science, inform decision-makers, and educate the next generation of river stewards.

- | | | |
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If you'd like to join RFC's 2023 National Council, please contact Sheryl Sabandal at sheryl@roaringfork.org. Above reflects November 2021-November 2022 membership term.

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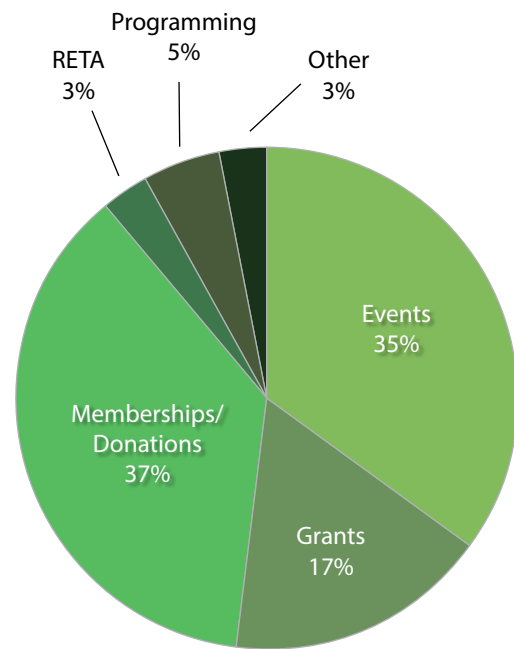
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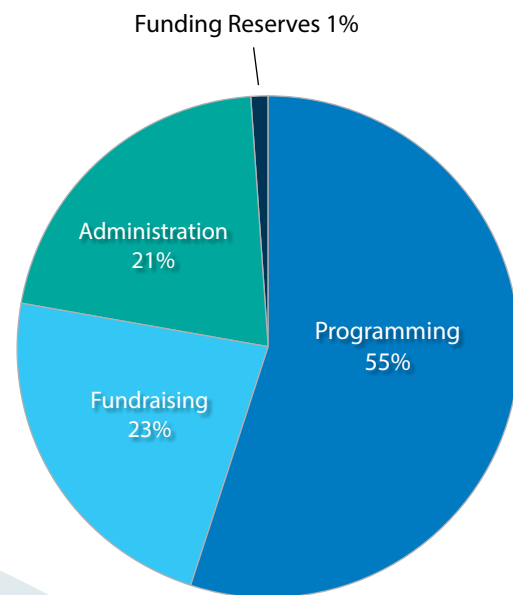
2022 Revenues

Events	\$385,300
Grants	\$191,173
Memberships/Donations	\$408,911
RETA	\$32,410
Programming	\$58,983
Other	\$37,391
Total	\$1,114,168

2022 OPERATING EXPENSES

2022 Expenses

Programming	\$613,121
Fundraising	\$259,328
Administration	\$234,621
Funding Reserves	\$7,000
Total	\$1,114,070



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As one of the largest watershed organizations in Colorado, Roaring Fork Conservancy serves residents and visitors throughout the Roaring Fork Valley through school and community-based Watershed Education programs and Watershed Science and Policy Projects including regional watershed planning, water resource policy initiatives, stream management, and restoration.



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