

## Happy New Water Year!

*by Rick Lofaro, Executive Director*

To say 2020 has been the most interesting and challenging year for many of us would be an obvious understatement, at best. Now, nearly eight months into the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our old habits, routines, and everyday life feel like distant memories. Schools, businesses, families and each one of us have adapted to a new way of living. A few weeks before the pandemic was declared, another challenge was mounting – drought. Following a robust February which recorded 22 days of measurable snowfall, March was almost devoid of precipitation and a familiar and unpopular pattern was again unfolding. The remainder of the spring was warm, dry, and mild, foreshadowing the hot, dry summer to come. The drought persisted and the West was hotter and drier, experiencing wildfires unprecedented in number and size. Summer brought low stream flows and elevated water temperatures triggering voluntary fishing closures on area rivers and streams. By the end of summer, the collective was ready to move on from 2020.

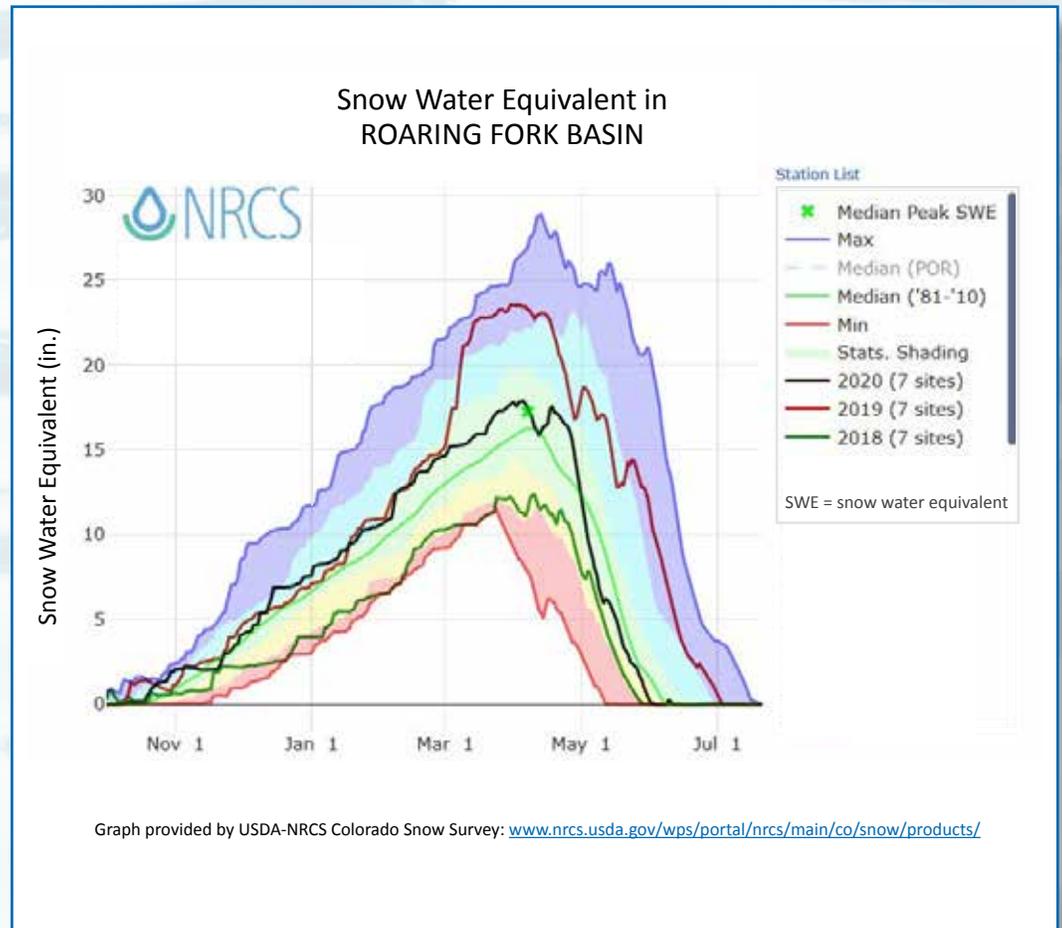
For those of you cursing 2020, allow me to be the first to wish you – Happy New Year! No, you are not so lost in the days of quarantine and social distancing that you have completely lost track of time, January is still a few months away. So allow me to be the first to wish you Happy New WATER Year! The water year (WY), which begins October 1, is a term commonly used to describe a 12-month period for which precipitation totals are measured. Its beginning differs from the calendar year because in the late autumn and winter snow begins to accumulate, creating the first and primary source of moisture that will become

next summer's runoff. The high-elevation Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir forests in the watershed act as frozen reservoirs, collecting and holding the winter snow, then slowly releasing the valuable stores of water throughout spring and early summer.

The 2020 WY shifted quickly from above average precipitation levels in the early winter, to a dry spring and extreme drought. You may recall similar conditions in WY 2018 and the Lake Christine Wildfire. Contrast WY 2018 with the extended runoff, spectacular whitewater, and abundance of WY 2019. In this case, the law of averages worked, as we

saw a very dry year balanced by a cool, wet winter. However, as fall arrived the monsoon rains did not. By the end of WY 2019, drought was beginning to rear its ugly head again. Area reservoirs did not fill, ranchers and farmers saw decreased yields and many streams ran dry.

With the arrival of WY 2021, we happily usher in the cooler weather and beauty of fall colors and the optimism that a new year can bring. Although unforeseen challenges lie ahead, we all remain hopeful for a good or even average water year to replenish the system and our souls.





# Fall 2020 Science and Policy Project Update

by Heather Lewin, Director of Science & Policy

While 2020 continues to challenge us in so many ways, Roaring Fork Conservancy (RFC) continues to work for the rivers, building projects and partnerships that benefit the community and water resources. Current project highlights include:

## Roaring Fork Watershed Interactive Tool

With an update to the Roaring Fork Watershed Plan in 2019, RFC decided to take the plan online with an Interactive Watershed Tool. This tool contains watershed facts, data, projects and modeling allowing the user to get a simple glimpse of the watershed or dig deep into river science and data, depending on the individual's interests and goals. The tool is a one stop shop for all things Roaring Fork Watershed - and has become more relevant and useful in the time of social distancing. Lessons to guide live exploration or to be used virtually during homeschooling can be found at [www.roaringfork.org/activities](http://www.roaringfork.org/activities). Explore the river from the comfort of your own home and see the watershed from a new perspective!

## Fryingpan River:

RFC staff has been working with Ruedi Water and Power Authority and consultant Lotic Hydrological to develop an Environmental Flow (EFLow) tool to help understand the ecological impacts of releases from Ruedi Reservoir. The first facet of the tool will predict water temperature on the Roaring Fork River in Glenwood as a function of air temperature, stream flows on the Roaring Fork, and flow contributions from Ruedi Reservoir. The second tool component predicts the condition of important ecosystem variables - such as macroinvertebrate population, juvenile brown trout population, didymo, etc. - at hydrologic cycles (time and magnitude of flows or releases). This tool will be used to advocate for releases with local environmental needs in mind. We hope to make this tool available to the public in the near future. Thank you to Pitkin County Healthy Rivers Board for their generous contribution towards funding this project.

## Crystal River:

RFC with partners Town of Carbondale, Aspen Valley Land Trust, and American Rivers, is working to restore and enhance a 1/2-mile reach and surrounding 18-acre riparian zone of the Crystal River as it flows through Carbondale and River Valley Ranch. The project will also improve the efficiency and reduce maintenance of the town-owned Weaver Ditch diversion. This project was featured in RFC's Summer 2020 edition of River Currents. At press time, the design phase of the project is fully funded, and consultant River Restoration is hard at work on final design and permitting. Meanwhile, the project team is working on securing implementation and construction funding through grants and foundations.



# Living the Grizzly Creek Fire:

## Fear, Relief, and a Call to Protect

Returning to my home in No Name filled me with relief and hope. While I know that our community still has a long road to recovery, the little piece of heaven that I found 21 years ago survived and remains green. After getting a good night's sleep in my own bed, my husband and I walked down to the eddy to sneak in another afternoon swim. We looked around our little alcove in the canyon and were grateful that we were not surrounded by black ash and dead trees. The cool water of the Colorado enveloped me and helped wash away the tension and stress that had accumulated over nights of watching public information meetings and days of monitoring smoke plumes. It was surreal to be swimming while 400 yards away a helicopter was dropping down and gathering water to douse the flames still burning up the canyon.

The support that we received from friends and community members was humbling. While the Roaring Fork Valley was initially just a steppingstone, to get a couple of years' experience before teaching overseas, this land and community pulled me in tight and became my home. When I met my husband in No Name while working at a rafting company, I never imagined that we would eventually raise a family and create a life in Glenwood Canyon. My girls have grown up playing in our wooded backyard and along the banks of the Colorado River. It has shaped and taught them what is real. We were grateful that during Colorado's shelter in place we were able to continue to do what we always have, watch the wildlife, keep track of river levels, go fishing and play.



After sneaking a quick hike up No Name Canyon before the trail was shut down, I was able to see the fire scars. A forest fire water delivery hose was still lining the trail and I grasped just how hard the fire fighters fought to keep the flames contained to the east side of the canyon. I was grateful to see that a small ribbon of trees still lined No Name Creek. I am not sure if they will be enough to slow down the sediment and mud in the coming rain events, but the root systems and seeds will help. It reiterated just how important riparian areas are in trapping sediment and protecting watersheds.

Forest fires will continue to be part of our reality in the west. Drought conditions, rising temperatures, and increased population impacts, create intense pressure on our natural systems. Now, more than ever, is the time to protect what we can, when we can. The passion that I have always had for watershed education and riparian protection has become even more ardent as I wonder how this fire will continue to affect our neighborhood and Glenwood Springs' water supply. Natural disasters, while devastating, can be time for people to pull together. I have seen the strength and compassion that our community has for one another. It is my hope that this fire strengthens our resolve and commitment to keep our rivers healthy. We need to continue to protect our watershed so it can regrow what has been lost and establish resiliency far into the future.

Megan Dean, Director of Education & No Name Resident

# Hot Spots for Trout

by John P. Newbury, <https://trout-count.web.app/>

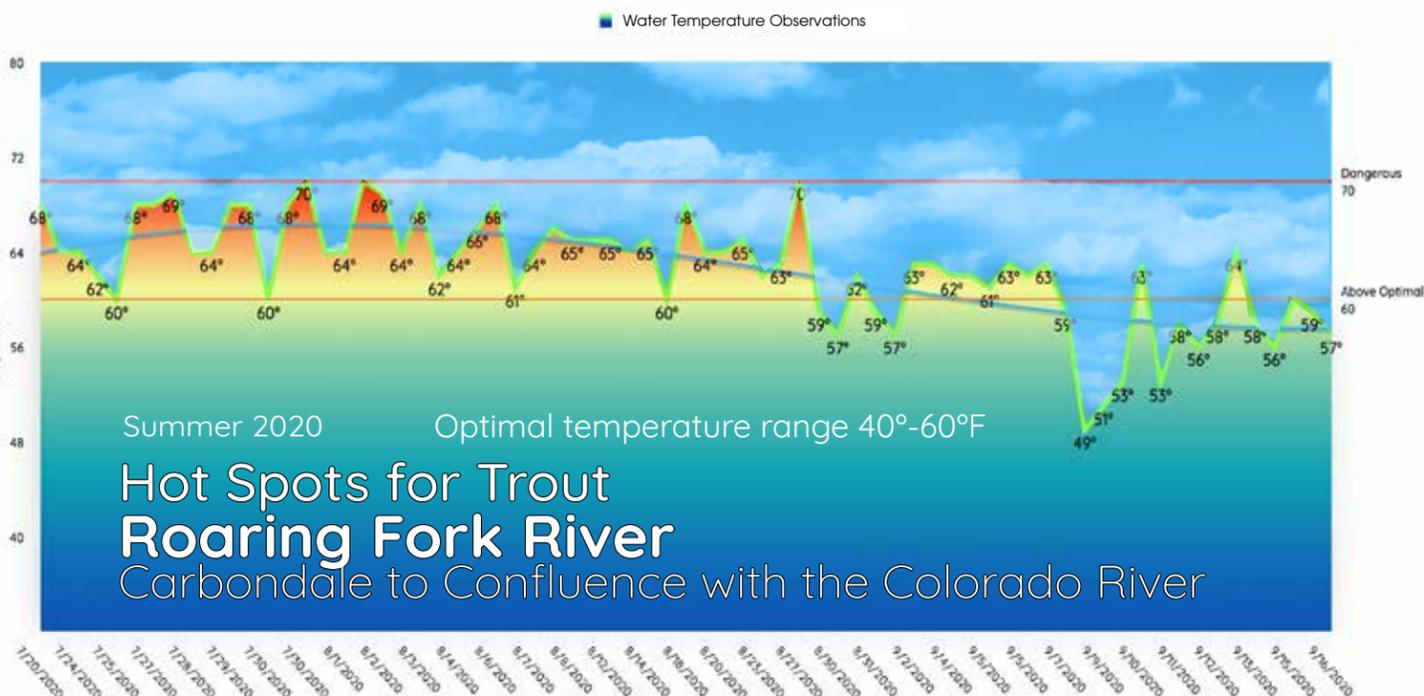
In order to thrive and grow at an optimal rate, trout prefer a water temperature between 40°- 60° F. When water temperatures rise above the optimal range, trout experience increased metabolic demands, converting food energy into life sustaining functions such as respiration, rather than growing into the gold medal trophies we love to catch. When water temperatures rise above 70° F fish become more vulnerable to disease and morbidity rates increase.

It was observed by late winter 2020 that Colorado was in a drought cycle. With drought comes the concern for water quality and elevated water temperatures. I was contacted by friends at RFC to develop an app that can be used for their Hot Spots for Trout citizen science program. Utilizing the new app and just a few button clicks, users can easily log field data and water temperature with minimal effort. The app also displays all the temperatures that have been recorded by volunteers since the launch in July 2020.

Thankfully, we made it through the height of summer with very few recorded temperatures that were dangerous. When we see a trend in high temperatures lingering above optimal with noted mortalities, field biologists can be deployed to locate the area of concern and make in-person observations. This new app enhances RFC's ability to monitor our watershed and engage with volunteers to efficiently identify future water quality and habitat concerns.

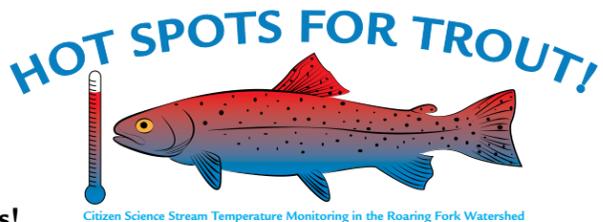
## Thank you to the 2020 Hot Spots for Trout Citizen Scientists!

Dean Armstrong, Ted Behar, Larry Cohen, Jeremy N. Douglas, Lauren Graves, Dick Helmke & Marice Doll, John Hoffmann & Kim Stacey, Greg Jeung, Alexis Kimball, Lani Kitching, Megan Lamb, Jennifer & Greg Long, Elizabeth Malloy, John McDermott, John P. Newbury, Anita Rayburn, Shelly Searles, Tom Skutley, Stephanie C. Stocking, Doug Walker, Derek Weller



### DID YOU KNOW?

- Cold water fish such as rainbow trout, convert food into body mass most efficiently with water temperatures in the 50° range.
- Fish no longer put on weight when metabolic functions convert to fulfilling respiratory demands. This happens when temperatures rise above the animals preferred temperature range.
- Rainbow trout require much colder water than brown trout. Brown trout can out-compete for resources in less than optimal water temperatures.
- Water holds less dissolved oxygen at higher altitudes and temperatures, placing even more stress on fish.
- Higher water temperatures lower fish immune system leaving them vulnerable to disease.
- Time spent not gaining weight during the summer heat is less body mass available for fish to survive winter.
- Warmer water temperatures brings more people to the water, placing an added "stressor" on the fish.



The Brooksher  
Watershed Institute

## Fall 2020 & Winter 2021 Presenters

Roaring Fork Conservancy invites you to join us for virtual presentations addressing our most precious resource, water. We'll discuss the most current water-related issues at the local, state and national level, and provide opportunities for one-on-one dialogue with these water leaders.

**October 15, 2020**  
**Rising Temperatures and Declining Flows: The Current and Likely Future of the Colorado River Basin**

**Andy Mueller**, General Manager, Colorado River Water Conservation District

Rising temperatures are robbing the Colorado River system of flows. Drought, aridification of the West and reduced river flows are driving down Lakes Powell and Mead while impacting local water users at the same time. Andy will discuss the basin wide implications through a West Slope lens.

**November 17, 2020**  
**Economics of Colorado River Recreation**

**Molly Muggleston**, Director of Colorado Policy and Communications, Business for Water Stewardship

Rivers are major economic drivers throughout the West, and as people recreate on or near them they are spending dollars that are not inconsequential to the economy. In this presentation, Molly will provide an overview of a new study on the economic impacts of river related recreation in the state of Colorado. This new study was commissioned by Business for Water Stewardship and undertaken by leading economists Southwick and Associates, who have also worked on economic research for the Outdoor Industry Association and Audubon Arizona among many other groups. Understanding how river related recreation contributes the Colorado's economy helps in making the case for water policy that advances healthy and flowing rivers and encourages conservation and efficiency.

**December 10, 2020**  
**Grizzly Creek Wildfire – Estimating Post Fire Watershed Response**

**Steve Hunter, PE, PH**, Utilities Resource Manager, Water Department, City of Aspen, and Former Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Coordinator and Specialist on the White River National Forest

Before joining the City of Aspen just recently, Steve was the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Coordinator and Specialist on the White River National Forest. Steve still works with the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management on wildfires, including the recent Grizzly Creek Wildfire. With his extensive background as a professional hydrologic engineer and hydrologist, Steve will present a synopsis of what happens after a wildfire, and provide an overview of the three phases of wildfire restoration including: 1. Suppression repair and resource advisors (READS), 2. Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER), 3. Long-term repair and monitoring with the U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), United States Geological Survey Landslide Hazards Program (USGS), and researchers from Utah State University's Utah Water Research Laboratory.

**January 14, 2021**  
**Hot Times for Coldwater Sportfish**

**Kendall Bakich**, Aquatic Biologist, Colorado Parks & Wildlife

Low flow and hot, dry summers can be a challenging time for coldwater sportfish popular in renowned fisheries in the Colorado River watershed. Kendall will discuss fish biology and how our favorite coldwater sportfish are impacted during hot, dry summers on Colorado's western slope. She will also talk about how anglers are key to sustaining Colorado's renowned fisheries for the long term.

**February 2021**  
**(to be announced)**

**March 10, 2021**  
**Monitoring Mountain Snowpack for Water Supply Forecasting and Beyond**

**Karl Wetlaufer**, Hydrologist/Assistant Supervisor, USDA-NRCS Colorado Snow Survey

How do scientists measure snowpack and use that data to forecast spring and summer river flows? Why is this area of science necessary in the West? Who exactly uses this data and what can cause uncertainty in streamflow forecasts? You'll get answers to these questions and more, and find out what is in the 2021 Water Supply Outlook Report.

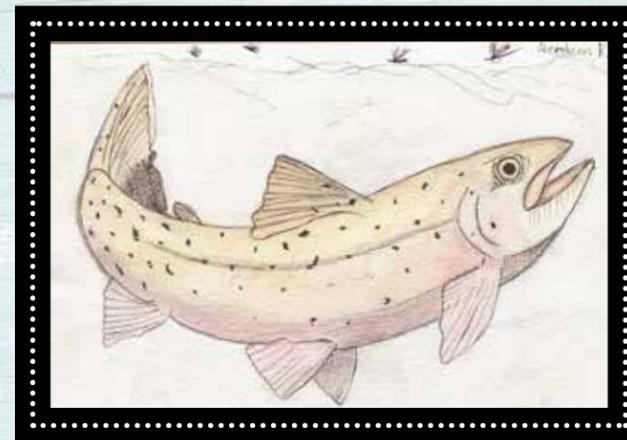
Presentations are free but registration is required to receive log in details. Additional details and registration can be found at [www.roaringfork.org/events](http://www.roaringfork.org/events)



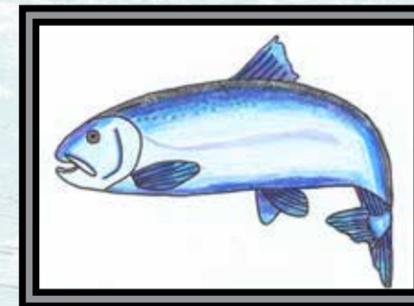
# Riverscapes: A Journey through Art

Riverscapes was a summer community event that brought people together to celebrate our rivers through art, while safely social distancing. The event was kicked off through a collaboration with the Basalt Regional Library. Kristin Doyle, Teen Services Coordinator at the library and Megan Dean, RFC's Director of Education, co-taught live virtual classes over the course of two weeks. The teenage participants were given a free bag of art supplies and were guided through art and science lessons, which they used to complete assignments in the field. After working independently on their projects, they returned each day to virtually share their art pieces and experiences on our Google classroom page. The course culminated in a watershed self-portrait that reflected each participant's connection to our watershed and rivers. Their art pieces were exhibited at a walk-by gallery on the windows of The River Center. The students were excited to have a fun and structured way to connect to other teens and to their environment. Their commitment and hard work showed in the complexity and beauty of their artwork.

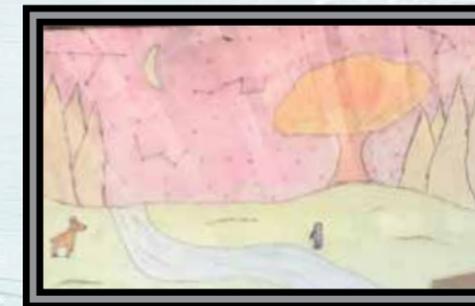
The community was invited to come and view these beautiful pieces of art and stay to create their own sidewalk chalk masterpieces. Sidewalk squares, safely spaced out, were framed in fish scale tape, and reserved for families and individuals who registered for the event. The River Center became a thriving interactive space that allowed our community to take a moment, connect to our rivers, and share that connection through art.



Aberdeen Kennedy



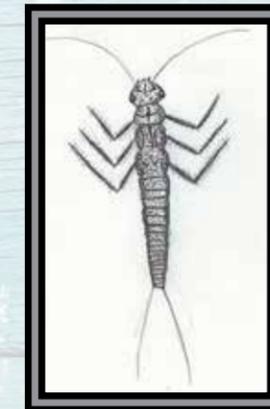
Jesse Lesage



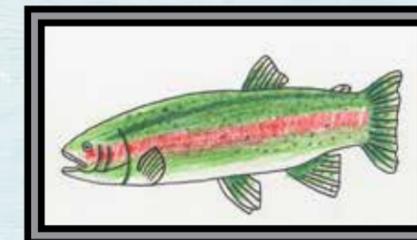
Mackenzie Llewellyn



Madeline Dean



Elora Dean



Jesse Lesage



Joslin Voskull



Aliya Malcolm



# Celebrating 20 Years of Emma Open Space!

RFC, along with Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, Eagle County, Town of Basalt, Great Outdoors Colorado and the Trust for Public Land, is celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Emma Open Space. This unique partnership helps preserve agricultural open space and active production, a wildlife migration corridor, important wetlands and public river access. We salute all of our partners who made this exciting project a reality, and the legacy live on 20 years later.

## Excerpts from The Trust for Public Land

June 21, 2000 -

“BASALT, Colo. Today local conservationists celebrated the acquisition and permanent protection of a significant parcel of Mid-Valley open space adjacent to the historic Emma Township. Roaring Fork Conservancy, Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, the Trust for Public Land and the Town of Basalt, partnering together, purchased the 74-acre Emma Open Space property to preserve wildlife habitat and scenic valley floor, retain active agricultural land, and enhance recreational opportunities along the Roaring Fork River. The Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund, which is funded through State lottery proceeds, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, and Eagle County also contributed significant financial resources to the project, which is dedicated in the memory of Leonard Moorhead Thomas.

The Emma Open Space connects two public lands, a land bridge that represents a critical Mid-Valley wildlife migration corridor between the Bureau of Land Management’s Light Hill property and the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Lake Christine State Wildlife Area. It includes 58 acres that will remain in agricultural production on the valley floor southeast of the Old Emma Schoolhouse. The remaining 16 acres encompass wetlands and river corridor between Highway 82 and Two Rivers Road.

Roaring Fork Conservancy initiated the conservation effort in 1998, seeking to protect the rich wetlands and wildlife migration corridor spanned by the project area.

The Conservancy requested the assistance of the Trust for Public Land, a national land conservation organization, in leading the negotiations for the purchase of the land. Once the Trust for Public Land secured the option for purchase, Pitkin County Open Space and Trails staff resolved the final details of the transaction.

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails acquired 65 acres in fee, with a conservation easement held by Roaring Fork Conservancy. The two organizations will co-hold another conservation easement over 9 acres of the property.”



Want to learn more about what’s happening with the Emma Townsite? Pitkin County Open Space and Trails is currently working with a Steering Committee on future recommendations. Please visit: [www.pitkinOSTprojects.com](http://www.pitkinOSTprojects.com) to learn more.

## A YEAR WITHOUT *River Rendezvous*

In a normal year on July 8 we would be welcoming attendees to our annual event to celebrate the Roaring Fork Watershed, socialize with friends, and raise significant funds for our work throughout the year.

*Although the River Rendezvous couldn’t go on our important work in the Watershed continued and adapted, made possible by dedicated supporters that stepped up when we most needed them.*

## Thank You FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT

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\*National Council Members support RFC at the \$1,500+ level and above on an annual basis. If you have any additional questions, please don’t hesitate to contact Development Director, Sheryl Sabandal, at [sheryl@roaringfork.org](mailto:sheryl@roaringfork.org).

# What Is An Augmented Reality Sand Table?

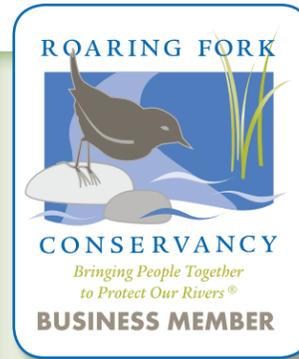
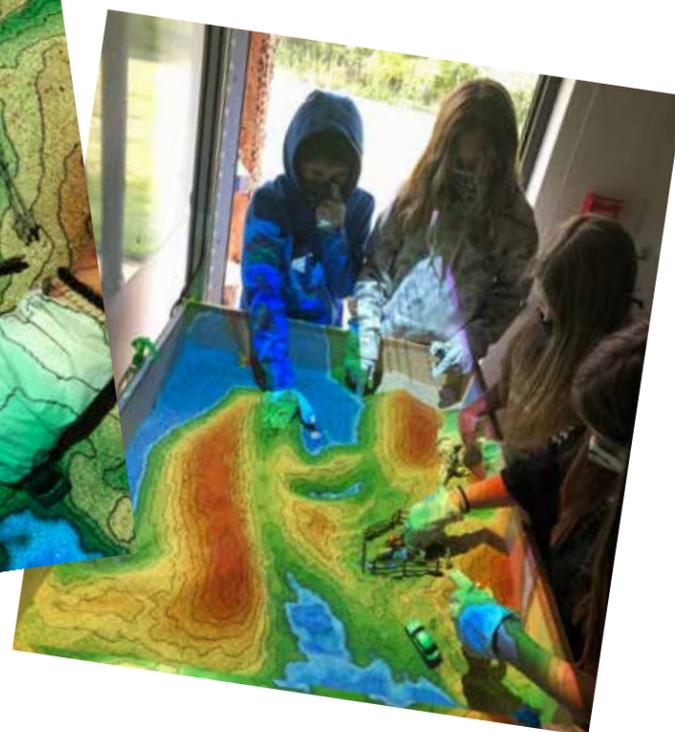
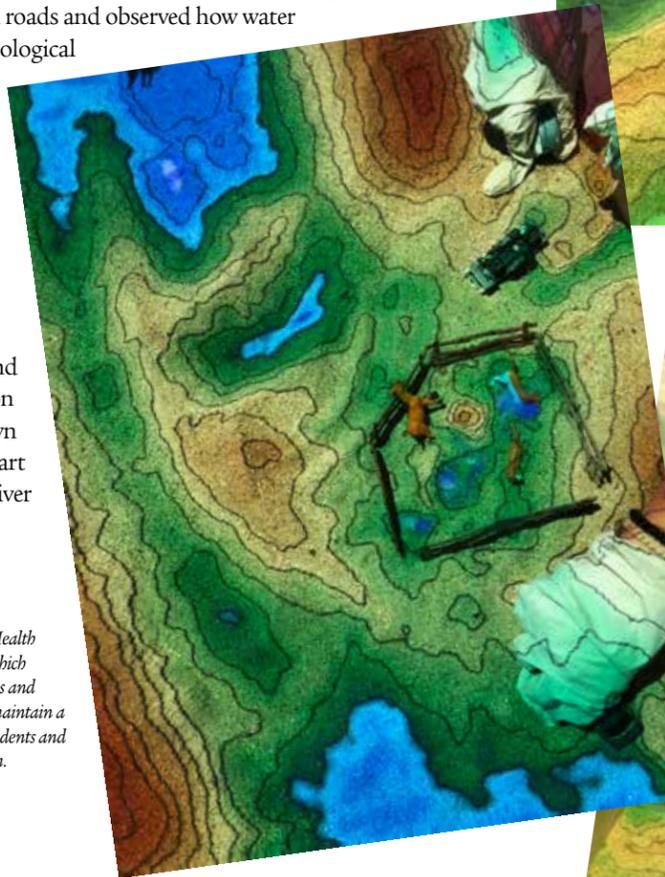
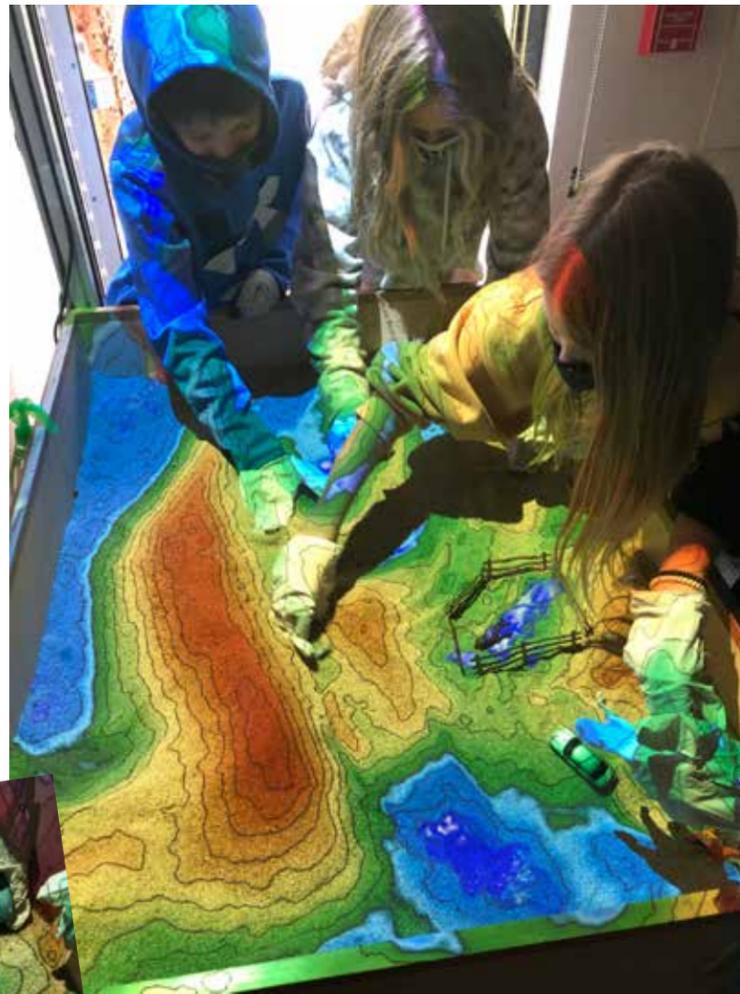
By Megan Dean, Director of Education

An Augmented Reality Sand Table is a 3D educational tool used to help understand mapping, topography, watersheds, natural hazards and more ([www.usgs.gov](http://www.usgs.gov)). Using sand, sensors, and software from an open source project developed by The University of California at Davis with funding from the National Science Foundation, this interactive model reacts to students manipulating sand!

As students create geographic features using their hands (somewhat like playing in a sandbox), topographic lines and lights are projected and layered onto the sand creating multicolored topography detailing peaks, valleys, and water features. Recent funding received from Pitkin County Healthy Rivers will allow RFC educators to give students a hands-on, interactive experience while learning about watersheds. The accompanying curriculum helps the instructor inspire and empower youth to develop a keen awareness of their natural environment and use technology to observe and create, while exploring how geological features form and how water moves through a landscape.

In September, RFC collaborated with Basalt Recreation and offered an after-school program to local 5th graders\*, introducing them to watersheds utilized our new Augmented Reality Sand Table. Students enjoyed creating watersheds, towns, and rainstorms. Working together they were able to design the best places to build homes and roads and observed how water flows through geological landforms. Student's then took a walk along the Roaring Fork River to connect their newly acquired knowledge to a real watershed and gained inspiration to create their own watershed chalk art outside of The River Center.

\*Eagle County Public Health COVID-19 guidelines which required the use of masks and gloves allowed RFC to maintain a safe environment for students and staff during this program.



## 2020 PREMIER BUSINESS MEMBERS

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- Ute Mountaineer

## 2020 STANDARD BUSINESS MEMBERS

- Blue Sky Woodcraft
- Oddo Engineering
- Redstone Mountain Mercantile

*Thank you for supporting essential river research, education and conservation work!*

## Board, Staff & Steward Flows



**David Knight** is a Senior Manager at Cisco Systems and has been working there in program and project management roles since 2008. He graduated from Georgia Tech with a BS in Management in 2001 and earned his MBA from the University of Denver in 2012. David is an Atlanta

area native and moved to Colorado in 2002 to work in the ski industry where he held various IT positions. As an avid percussionist, he still enjoys writing music for school bands, coaching percussion students, and playing his drums as time permits. David serves on Basalt Town Council and joined RFC's Board in 2020. He enjoys skiing, sailing, hiking, biking, and tennis. David lives in Basalt with his wife and son.



**Aaron Abeyta, WATERSHED EDUCATOR** – As a Colorado native, Aaron grew up roaming in the mountains, playing in the snow, camping, and hiking. Originally from Colorado Springs, his roots are in Southern Colorado's San Luis Valley.

He started out seeking an art degree but eventually earned a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, leading him to teach middle school for the past 3 years. By using this art background, he helps share his passion for the natural world through creative lessons. He is happy to move his classroom outside and help show youth and adults what this gorgeous valley has to offer and how we can preserve this place we love.



**Kristin Bielema** was RFC's watershed educator for the last year and recently left RFC to start a private tutoring company. Thank you for teaching hundreds of students, of all ages, about our local rivers!



Check out RFC's online store to purchase one-of-a-kind items allowing you to show your RFC support! *We ship!*  
[roaring-fork-conservancy.square.site](http://roaring-fork-conservancy.square.site)

## RIVER CURRENTS

is published biannually by Roaring Fork Conservancy. Since 1996, Roaring Fork Conservancy has inspired people to explore, value and protect the Roaring Fork Watershed. We bring people together to protect our rivers and work to keep water in the streams, monitor water quality, and preserve riparian habitat. Roaring Fork Conservancy is an independent 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization registered in the state of Colorado.

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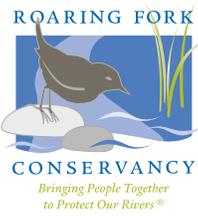
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**Base flows** are the normal flow conditions in a river between storms that provide adequate habitat to support diverse, native aquatic communities and maintain groundwater levels for riparian vegetation.

Learn more at [roaringfork.org/baseflows](http://roaringfork.org/baseflows)