

Rocky Mountain Youth Corps



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- Thank you for being here
- Thanks to FOSM
- Introduction



- RMYC is a youth corps, working to provide youth development opportunities through meaningful, paid service projects
- Most of our participants are between the ages of 17 and 30, but we can work w/ folks from 16 to 30 (35 for Vets)
- Mostly, we do this through crews of 8 (Supe, ACL, 6 CM)
- Majority of crews work on an 8 on, 6 off schedule. 8 straight 10 hr days on hitch, camping at or near their project site. They work together, cook together, look at the stars together, wake up, do it again.
- Also offer day crew options for HS/College age folks on summer break or individuals who aren't as interested in the camping option for whatever reason
- AmeriCorps organization (Federal funding program, Ed Award)
- We work with a wide range of federal, state, and local entities and we primarily rely on grants and on a fee for service model, so X dollars gets X amount of weeks of crew work.

Over the years...



- Started 30 years ago as a soccer program to give young people in Taos a structured activity, quickly pivoting to community service work then conservation work
- ABQ office celebrating 10 years
- Thousands of corpsmembers, all receiving personal and professional development trainings like Fin. Mgm & Resume/CL
- Over \$13M in stipends paid to corpsmembers
- Over \$4M in education awards
- Long term impact is our alumni base. USFS, NPS, BLM, FWS, tons of state and local agencies dotted w/ RMYC alumni



- Let's talk about the work we do
- We run a robust chainsaw program in both our ABQ and Taos offices
- In 2024, our crews treated 130 acres
- Our chainsaw work is vast, from hazard tree felling to restoration-focused contour felling to non-wilderness logouts to fuels reduction projects
- Worked hard to build up our internal capacity certify in-house through the USFS Developing Thinking Sawyers curriculum
- We have a dedicated staff member, Kate Sorrell, overseeing our Chainsaw Program. Take our role as a cooperator seriously and have been really excited about the strides made over the last few years
- This photo was taken on day 6 of a hazard felling project in the Black Fire burn scar of the Gila National Forest along the Continental Divide Trail



- Our chainsaw training curriculum is robust and built to ensure we're mitigating the risk as much as we can for this work. We have an enormous focus on risk management and that is a really large part of my job and the entirety of our programming staff.
- Here, Kristina, who entered green as green can be, practices using her gunning sights to safely fell a tree in route to her earning her A-Faller certification. Our training coordinator, Nicki, stands behind from a protected location giving some coaching tips and individualized support.



- Sometimes we are piling for prescribed burns, sometimes we are chipping, and sometimes we're able to leave wood for community firewood. In the last year or so, we've provided well over 100 cords of wood to the community
- The largest of our firewood programs however, is our Wood for Good program



- Our Wood for Good Program is a dedicated community firewood program in our Taos office that works to deliver firewood, free of cost, to households who rely on wood as a fuel source
- There's bucking practice and then there's this! It's hard work but it is a fantastic way for our Corpsmembers to directly impact the Taos community



- For some, a crosscut is a burdensome and outdated tool, and for some it is poetry in motion. For others, like Jo, it's a ticket to let it all hang out and be your funky ol' self. Jo just graduated last week and is now in a new apartment in Flagstaff starting a Biology master's degree.
- Our Senior Program Coordinator, Mickayla Hodgman, is a C-bucker and our ability to certify in-house for crosscut is a huge asset and allows us to really throw these crews at some gnarly trails
- If you ask nicely, they'll do trail maintenance and re-establish tread - but what they really love is clearing trails



- Water is a constant for them. Don't try and tell them that NM is working through a dry summer. They had a project recently in the SFNF that required something like 28 water crossings over 8 days
- We're always looking for a sponsorship deal from Crocs



They tend to take what I call an “album cover” photo at some point in each hitch







- But what always impresses me the most is the quality at which they eat.
- The mark of a dialed in crew is when the day to day logistics are buttoned up to the point where the focus can shift to quality of life. They've figured it out.



- Something that RMYC is known for is our trail work. Everyone that puts a blue shirt on gets extensive trails training
- Much more than just somewhere to walk, we teach our crews the theory behind trail maintenance and construction, the importance of soil health, drainage techniques, and how to accommodate and build for different user groups.
- In recent years, we've found ourselves doing a ton of trail work in burn scars which has been an amazing experience for our crews.
- We had a corpsmember who is now at Indiana University pursuing a Master's Degree that said, "If you ever don't know what to do with your life, join a trail crew. That much thinking time tends to straighten you out real quick."



Our crews work in all sorts of terrain all over the state.

- So far this year we've improved around 250 miles of trail and we expect that number to end up around 500 miles by the end of this season
- Currently we have 2 of our crews out in the Mt Taylor R.D. working on a project with Cibola Trails Alliance



- Last year, one of our crews built a trail here in the Sandias alongside Santa Fe Fat Tire Society to connect two downhill bike trails as a spur from the Challenge Trail
- It was a blast for our crews to spend time with Alex Gibson and do some really creative rockwork. We're usually building trails for pack stock and hikers, and creating a downhill trail with a MTB eye was a new challenge that this crew loved



Stream Restoration

- We do a wide range of watershed and landscape restoration work in the Sandias and beyond.
- These are some photos from recent project work with Stream Dynamics here in the Sandia Ranger District to improved drainage in the Cedro Creek area.
- Our crews placed culverts, zuni bowls, one rock dams, and a wide range of wet and dry stone masonry features to reduce erosion and improvise healthy drainage through the system.



- After this project with Stream Dynamics ended, Jacob, the one in the culvert, asked if they were hiring and that this was all he ever wanted to do.
- Bruno, the one standing, is a Crew Lead for us this year who is choosing not to seek out more culvert digging and is going into wildland fire after this season.



- Our crews LOVE the opportunity to work on habitat and stream restoration projects. We have found lots of success working on projects that focus on taking into account a whole system and really working to see the full ecosystem.
- We're in the bosque, we're all along the Rio grande, we're in valleys, and we're in headwater streams all over the state.
- If anyone is familiar with NM Beaver Project, this sort of Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration work that you see above lowers fire risk, improves watershed health, builds habitat, and recharges the water table.
- In a nutshell, crews are replicating the natural processes that historically have influenced and shaped watersheds - most often mimicking the behavior of beavers. As we slow down water and reconnect it back to its ancestral floodplain, the ecosystem blooms back into it's full spectrum.
- Not to mention it's pretty fun to get paid to work in the mud.



And if nothing else, there's never a shortage of things to laugh about when you're working with the people we work with



- This is an example of the types of projects we love. So in 2023, we began a project at Willow Creek in the Gila, which sits in a really big burn scar. This project is still ongoing and we have crews there a few times per year.
- Working with Eric Head, the Project Manager for the Trout Unlimited Gila Trout Restoration Project, crews were based out of the Willow Creek Campground. TU contracted Jim Brooks, a former Gila Forester and a South Valley resident, to help run the project and the camp
- Jim stayed in the old Game & Fish cabin there at Willow Creek Campground and took care of breakfast and dinner every night for our crews.
- At 5 am every morning, Jim got a fire going outside of the cabin and by the time our crew members were out of their tents and dressed for the day at 6:30 am, Jim already had hot coffee made and was working on breakfast. Mind you it was in the low 20's/high teens every morning - quite cold.
- Dinners were fantastic (Green Chile Chicken Enchiladas, fresh tuna from a trip he took to San Diego prior to the hitch, etc.) and offered an opportunity for everyone to sit around the fire together and discuss the work of that day as well as the future work needed to steward the landscape. They ate well and learned so much from Jim and Eric.
- The work was centered on the upper headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Gila with our crews working directly on improving habitat on Little Turkey Creek by placing log veins, rock clusters, securing banks and head cut spots with a huge amount of rockwork, and placing one rock dams to divert water away from spots where it was undercutting the bank in favor of spreading that

water over larger bends with flood-plain access.

- Crews were educated on the sorts of habitat that Gila Trout prefer and used that understanding to inform their work. They learned about how a watershed functions and the variety of impacts fire has had on that specific watershed and area.
- In the morning, they'd see Gila Trout in the areas they'd been working in, immediately taking advantage of the improved flow patterns



- On about day 5, Eric took the crew up to the top of the burn scar to get a better understanding of the scale of the project and to really see the watershed as a whole
- Eric led a conversation around the fire centered on the Gila's bigger picture: That this is essentially ground zero for understanding how a changing climate will affect other mixed conifer forests in the Southwest. What happens in the Gila will most likely be happening in Colorado 15 years from now and so on up the mountain west
- If we can figure out what sorts of restoration and preservation strategies are successful in the Gila, we can be proactive throughout the region in applying those same strategies to other Southwestern Forests and create a blueprint for a sustainable restoration process.



- He helped our crew to understand that this is really the work of a lifetime. I should add that every single member of that crew returned for another season.
- That crew's supervisor is our current Chainsaw & Forestry Program Coordinator, Kate, who is right over there.
- This is the Willow Creek floodplain. It's a really special place.
- We love work that we can really dig into, the stuff that teaches us lessons far beyond the end of the day. Streams teach us a lot of lessons, but those lessons can be found in all sorts of work.



Like our Historic Preservation work

- We work with a wide range of project partners around the state to restore and maintain ancestral dwelling sites.
- This is an opportunity to learn about utilizing traditional building materials and have a role in the living history of New Mexico
- This picture is of our 2025 ASL Crew at Pecos National Historic Park in a keva they had just finished adobe work on.
- But the best example of this sort of work restoration & stewardship work takes place in our Taos office with our Taos Pueblo Program



RMYC and Taos Pueblo are engaged in a really robust partnership called the Taos Pueblo Conservation Corps Program. We work with the Pueblo to secure project funds and put together crews of young folks from the Pueblo to work on culturally relevant projects. Our Taos Pueblo crews do a wide range of work from restoration work to forestry to trails work and much more.

- The type of annual maintenance needed to keep Taos Pueblo looking the way it does is a full community endeavor. RMYC is a way for young folks from Taos Pueblo to get paid to do culturally important work, gain a wide range of skills, and is focused on constantly following the lead of the Taos Pueblo community and adding capacity to the Department of Natural Resources.
- We have a designated coordinator, Dwayne Lefthand, who does a phenomenal job supporting the crews and finding new projects.



Our Pueblo Crew does a wide range of adobe work on the traditional dwellings within Taos Pueblo.

Recently, our crew was engaged on an incredible project where this crew was working on the interior of a room that is culturally sensitive and considered sacred; learning about the process of continual stewardship. In removing the top layer of adobe, they took that loosened material and remixed it, creating new adobe. In that way, they were using the same material to make adobe that has been used for millennia.



Wilderness Rangers

Our Wilderness Rangers program is a really cool partnership between the Carson NF and our Taos Pueblo Cons. Corps program

- Our Rangers patrol through the Carson NF in the ancestral footprint of Taos Pueblo, educating folks they come across about the land they're standing on and ensuring proper land stewardship methods are being followed.
- In the winter, we work with the Taos ski valley and our rangers spend the winter on skis doing the same work within Taos Ski valley
- This is Kayl, one of our Rangers who is actively engaged in the forestry program at NM Highlands



Prevention & Ag

In addition to all of this conservation work, we have a couple of other programs.

- Our Prevention program in our Taos office that aims to educate young folks on the dangers of substance abuse and to reduce the amount of impaired driving occurrences. We're looking to find opportunities here in our ABQ office to expand this sort of programming.
- Finally, we're in the development phase of an agricultural program based around water conservation, soil health, and reducing hunger in our communities. We've been doing ag work for a long time here and there in both of our offices, but we've been hearing a lot about the desire for this be a more robust program.
- Our goal is to eventually develop an agricultural program that is as much of a pillar of our work as our conservation work.



Much more than that!!!

- You've heard me talk about trail work and saw work and stream work and adobe and streams and a multitude of project types, but I want to really underline the why behind all of this.
- We work to make resilient landscapes by creating resilient individuals. We put young people into small, tight-knit communities in the outdoors, shouldered with responsibility and accountability, and support them as they grow into a deeper sense of self, purpose, and maturity.
- Along the way, they'll restore streams and forests, build trails, and work in some of the most beautiful places on Earth. We are so lucky to live here.
- Whether this is just a summer job or the beginning of the work of a lifetime, our staff works to provide meaningful work that allow the young people in our program to embrace the promise of the world with open arms and to find their place in it.



- So what are we? We're a youth development organization.
- We see conservation work as a vehicle for radical amounts of self reflection and growth.
- We provide a supportive space to grow up and step into a more complete version of ourselves.
- We see enormous changes in folks from the beginning to the end of their season with us. They leave with an understanding of who they are and what they want.
- For some, that's a job with the forest service or CABQ Open Space. For others that's the last thing they want, but we celebrate them making decisions either way.
- But more than anything, it's the time and space and community that allows them to see their path forward
- These are the types of opportunities that young folks deserve to have and we recognize what a privilege it is to be able to steward them through it



- So what now? What's the landing I'm trying to stick? LET'S WORK TOGETHER
- I got my first crosscut cert alongside FOSM folks, cross-partner trainings and collaborations are a staple of a healthy forest service unit
- RMYC has seen substantial federal funding impacts and we know the Cibola is not immune to the changes we've all become privy to.
- There's an opportunity for all of us to work together to increase the capacity for the Cibola and the Sandia Ranger District
- In the current landscape of federal funding, showing clear support between orgs like FOSM, RMYC, Cibola Trail Alliance, NM Vol. for the Outdoors is essential. Leveraging grants, reaching out to collaborate when there are ideas, all of this creates a more complete support system for the Sandias.
- Also...help us recruit!!! Refer the young people in your lives and in your communities. Estimates vary but I feel confident that there are less than 50k young people doing this type of work around the country. What a travesty! Let's change that.



- Reach out, don't be a stranger, take my card, email me, call me, text me
- Let's show up for the Sandias and for the young people who call them home
- What questions can I answer?