

A photograph of a mountain stream flowing over mossy rocks. The water is clear and fast-moving, creating white rapids. The rocks are large, grey, and covered in green moss. The background is a soft-focus view of more rocks and greenery.

Enlisting Sound Science, Exceptional Partners and Broad Expertise to Build a Brighter Future



**Peaks to People
Water Fund**

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

The cultivation of deep, long-lasting partnerships with a diverse group of stakeholders - including you - is our top priority now and into the future.

As our list of generous benefactors and partners continues to grow, it's impossible to resist optimism. We are grateful for your continued support.

Thank you.



Our Solution

Peaks to People is committed to protecting Northern Colorado's water supplies from the devastating effects of severe wildfires. Wildfires - followed by post-fire flooding - threaten our forests, our wildlife and our water supplies. As the size and severity of wildfires continue to grow, so does the importance of our work. Our goal is to generate new and sustainable funding for large-scale forest and watershed restoration treatments. With budget strains on agencies that manage Colorado's forests, we cannot rely on the government alone to tackle this issue. It will take Peaks to People working together with our partner agencies to increase the scale and scope of forest restoration in order to reach our goal.

Overview

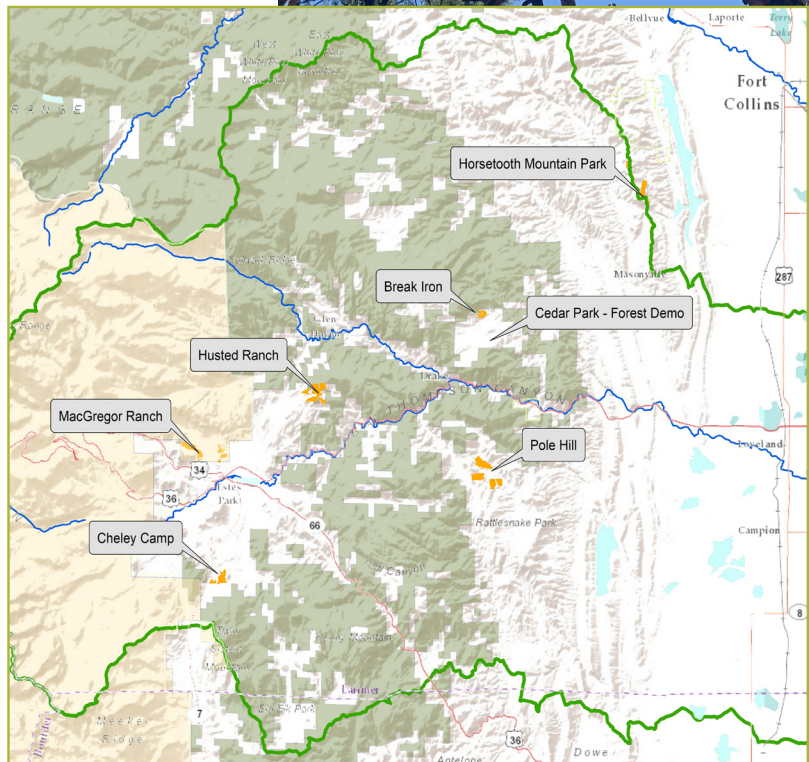
The benefits of restoring the health of our forests far outweigh the costs. Forested watersheds serve as nature's reservoirs, providing freshwater for communities and businesses downstream. Wildfires can significantly affect the ability of watersheds to meet municipal, industrial and agricultural water uses. Although a dramatic 2020 wildfire season created challenging conditions for 2021, we continued our project development work to broaden forest restoration efforts.

During our Fiscal Year 2022 Peaks to People secured a significant three-year grant from Gates Family Foundation, expanded our Big Thompson Initiative partnerships and continued to make strategic investments in forest health projects in our priority areas.

Big Thompson Initiative Active Projects*

- Project Area
- Big Thompson River
- Big Thompson Watershed Boundary
- Rocky Mountain National Park
- National Forest

*Current projects as of October 2022,
in partnership with Larimer Conservation
District, Larimer County Natural Resources,
Big Thompson Watershed Coalition,
and The Nature Conservancy



FY22 Impacts

Projects funded by Peaks to People Water Fund not only protect water from sedimentation and debris, but also improve forest health and wildlife habitat, decrease firefighting costs, and reduce home loss and infrastructure damage.

INVESTED \$815,000 in new and leveraged funds

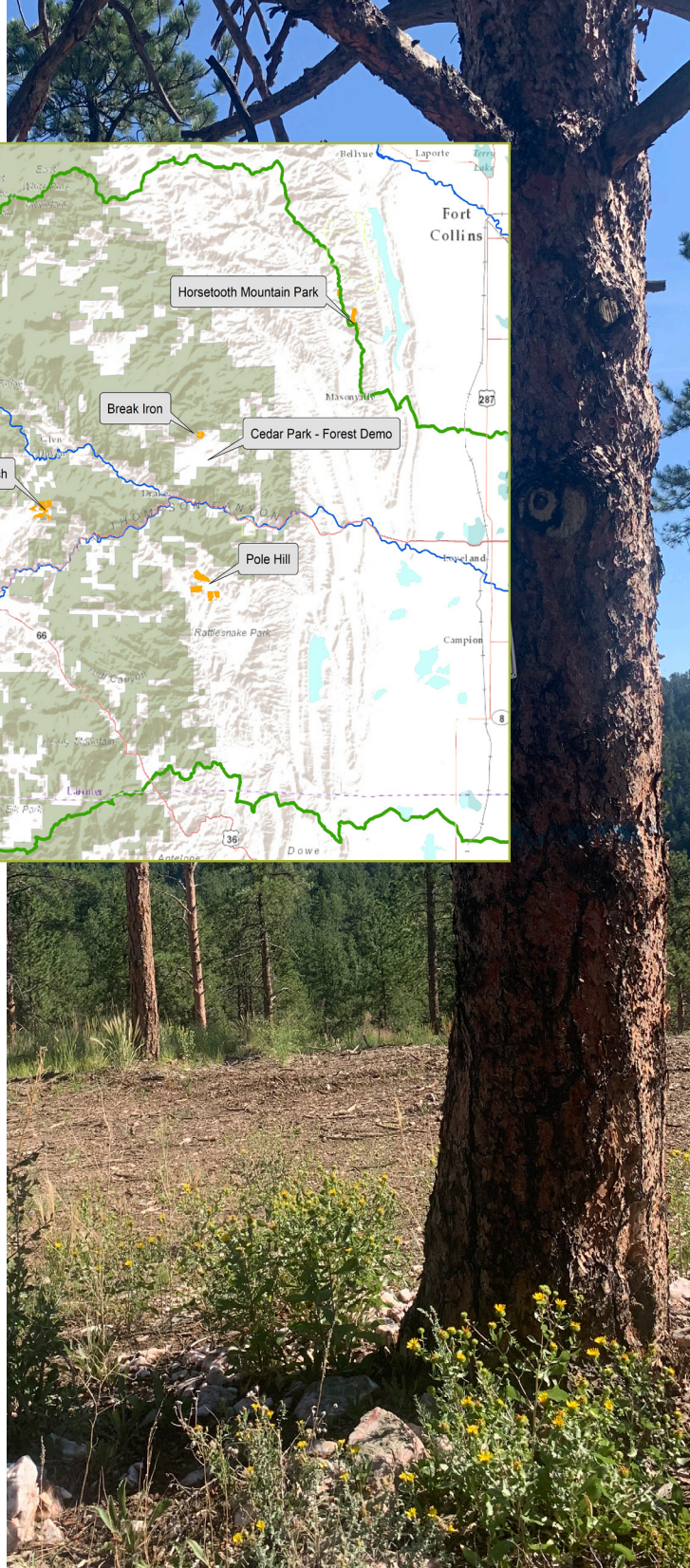
311+ acres of forest restoration/fuels reduction work funded

916+ metric tons of sediment avoided into water supplies

83+ acres of active crown fire avoided

166+ acres of critical wildlife habitat protected from severe wildfire

1,059+ homes within 1km of treatment areas influenced



"Peaks to People adds a tremendous amount of value to conservation efforts in northern Colorado as an organizing force and umbrella under which collaborative forest management projects can be developed and implemented among a broad range of agencies and organizations."

Rob Addington, Forest Program Director,
The Nature Conservancy of Colorado and Peaks to People Board Member

Highlighted Projects

POLE HILL FOREST HEALTH PROJECT

Our Big Thompson Initiative partners at Larimer Conservation District (LCD) have been working to restore forest health, protect water supply infrastructure and critical wildlife habitat in the Pole Hill community since 2017. Peaks to People is pleased to have provided funding for this important work over the past three years.

Pole Hill is located just west of Loveland, Colorado in the Wildland Urban Interface. The project area is a priority for Peaks to People due to the high fire risk in close proximity to a residential community, the Pole Hill Powerplant, Pinewood Reservoir, and Carter Lake. In addition, Pinewood Reservoir is a key component of the Colorado Big Thompson Project power system and helps regulate water for peak power demands. Pole Hill borders U.S. Forest Service in most areas.

This area is heavily overgrown with dog hair Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. The forest management plan created by the team at LCD aims to reduce tree densities with the goal of increasing resistance to wildfire, pest, and disease, while also increasing understory biodiversity and improving wildlife habitat.

The multi-year Pole Hill Forest Health Project is an excellent example of how we can leverage funds to increase the scale and impact of work being done across a larger landscape. Together with our partners we are working to accomplish cross-boundary wildfire risk reduction and enhance landscape-scale resiliency in this area. To date, more than \$1,580,000 in funding has been secured for work in this area to treat over 560 combined acres. There are currently three local contractors working within the Pole Hill community and progress is being made daily.



"These restored places are an extremely rare place on the landscape. By restoring the forest and leaving it in a functional state, we are setting the land up for success in the event of the next wildfire. A functional forest will have much greater tree survival, leave better wildlife habitat in place, and prevent the soil from becoming sterilized for years to come."

Matt Marshall, Forestry Program Director,
Larimer Conservation District

Highlighted Projects (cont.)

HORSETOOTH MOUNTAIN OPEN SPACE FOREST HEALTH PROJECT

Our Big Thompson Initiative partners at Larimer County Natural Resources have engaged in forest management projects focused on wildfire risk reduction and forest health improvement on Horsetooth Mountain Open Space (HMOS) for several decades. This project area is approximately three miles southwest of Fort Collins, Colorado in the Wildland Urban Interface and adjacent to Horsetooth Reservoir, the largest reservoir in the [Colorado-Big Thompson Project](#) East Slope distribution system.

Peaks to People has supported HMOS forestry work since 2020. The management goal here is to improve overall forest ecosystem health while reducing fuels to protect both on-site and adjacent water storage supplies and infrastructure. Fort Collins, Greeley, the Tri-Districts and additional downstream municipal, industrial, and agricultural water users all depend on Horsetooth Reservoir.

The close proximity of this Open Space to the City of Fort Collins and the highly valued water resource make this project a high-ranking priority for Peaks to People. In addition to protecting more than 100 homes within 1km of the treatment area, this project will also impact 80 acres of critical wildlife habitat that will be protected in the event of a severe wildfire.



"The matching funds piece is a really important part (of the grant process). Everybody scrambles to find that match. When smoke is coming over the hill, everyone thinks it's a good investment but it's a little late then to get the work done. So the matching funds piece is just huge."

Michael Lester,
Director Colorado State Forest Service (retired) and
Peaks to People Board Member

Measuring Performance

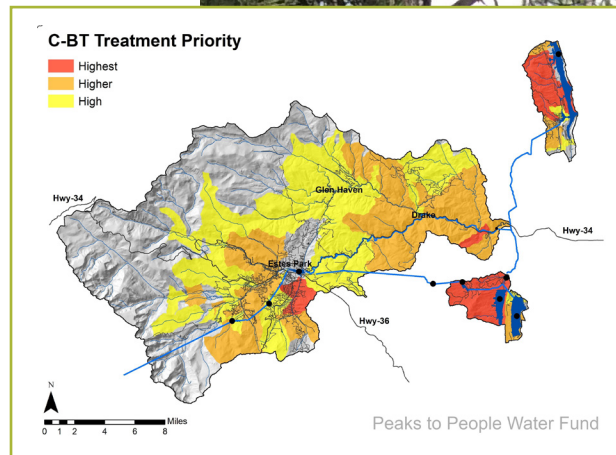
Monitoring and evaluating treatment outcomes are critical steps in the adaptive management process. Peaks to People evaluates the outcomes from forest health treatments in collaboration with Colorado Forest Restoration Institute (CFRI).

CFRI monitors individual projects supported by Peaks to People to assess their ecological and wildfire risk reduction benefits. We utilize these monitoring results to inform progress towards our project and program goals using the [Watershed Investment Tool](#). The aim of our multi-year monitoring program is to ensure investments are developed to be strategic and impactful, to measure progress towards stakeholder goals, and to support continued learning and improvement with Peaks to People partners.

In 2019, CFRI installed 22 monitoring plots on four private properties, each approximately 30 acres in size, in the Pole Hill treatment area. Plots were measured again in 2021 following treatment. During both pre- and post-treatment sampling visits, CFRI took a series of pictures at each monitoring plot, recorded topographical information, and assigned a fire behavior fuel model. During our FY22, CFRI processed and presented their findings.

The [Pole Hill Monitoring Report](#) prepared by CFRI summarizes changes to forest structure, surface fuels, and modeled fire behavior following treatment. In addition, the report compared modeled fire behavior informed by field monitoring data to the fire behavior predictions from the Watershed Investment Tool (WIT) to measure the accuracy of the model.

Field monitoring results indicate that overall the forest thinning and fuels reduction treatment at Pole Hill was beneficial and met the majority of the project's goals, including a reduction in the potential for high severity wildfires which would threaten nearby homes and water resources. The treatment affected stand structure and composition by reducing the number of trees, especially those of smaller diameters. Furthermore, old trees were retained, which will maintain the age diversity at Pole Hill over time.

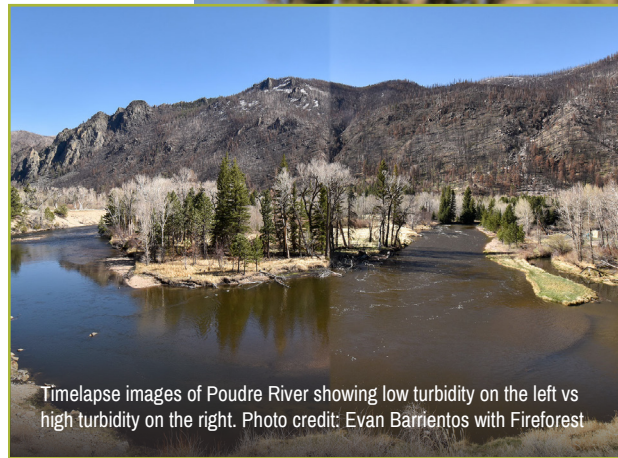


"Our team focuses on creating benefits for multiple resources, which includes wildfire risk reduction, but also puts a heavy emphasis on forest composition and spatial heterogeneity to boost wildlife habitat and understory plant diversity. Though our team uses the best available science to inform our management decisions, we are always looking for ways to improve our processes. This is why the CFRI monitoring component funded by Peaks to People is so critical."

Gretchen Reuning, Natural Resource Programs Director
Larimer Conservation District

Community Outreach and Education

Helping community members understand the intricate link between forests, fire and water is a pivotal part of our communications and outreach program. During the summer of 2021 we provided funding support for Fireforest, a new multimedia project exploring wildfire recovery in northern Colorado. We all rely on healthy forests for our water, but over the past two years we witnessed our waterways turn black with sediment from the Cameron Peak Fire. Our forests have become prone to megafires and desperately need our help to restore their resilience. Fireforest is raising community awareness by showing the relationship between water, forests, and fire in new and fascinating ways and advocating for the public support needed to conduct forest and watershed restoration on a larger scale. Learn more about this exciting project at <https://www.fireforestphoto.com/>.



Timelapse images of Poudre River showing low turbidity on the left vs high turbidity on the right. Photo credit: Evan Barrientos with Fireforest

Funder Spotlight

In April of 2022, Gates Family Foundation (GFF) joined our growing list of strategic investors with a generous grant to support our work in Northern Colorado for the next three years. The funding from this grant closes a critical gap in operations funding and allows additional funds raised to go directly into projects on the ground in support of the Big Thompson Initiative.

GFF is committed to Colorado and plays an active role in conserving Colorado's unique landscapes, waterways, and agricultural heritage. In 2021, GFF awarded more than \$2.2 million in strategic grants to Natural Resources projects. They believe that collaboration, innovation, and non-traditional partnerships are the key to balanced management of limited resources.

When we work together, we can take on big, complex problems. We have more reason than ever to feel positive, even as we face enormous challenges created by past forest management decisions and a rapidly changing climate.

Thank you to Gates Family Foundation for joining us on this journey.



"Everybody has their own purpose for what these projects are. For some it's a wildlife project, for some it's a watershed project and for others it's a wildfire project. It doesn't matter because it benefits all of them and that's the cool part."

William Owsley,
Resource Team Lead at USDA - NRCS

Special Thanks to Our Partners

The Nature Conservancy of Colorado

Colorado Forest Restoration Institute

Larimer Conservation District

Larimer County Natural Resources

Northern Water

Colorado State Forest Service

Big Thompson Watershed Coalition

Estes Valley Watershed Coalition

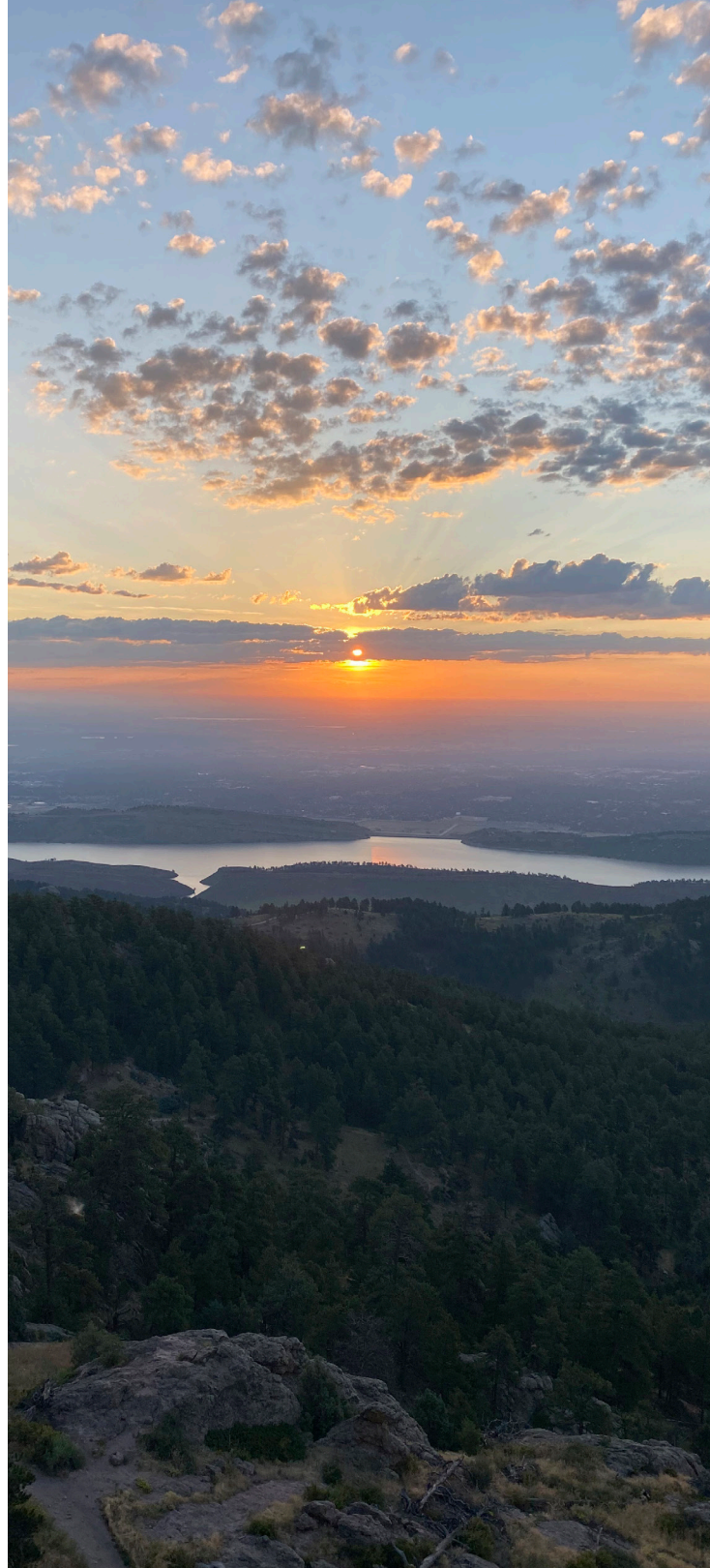
The Ember Alliance

Brendle Group

Center for Collaborative Conservation

Join the Effort

We offer several levels of participation through our [Partner Program](#). Your investment in this crucial conservation effort will not only improve our region's water security, it will also ensure our businesses and communities continue to thrive. This is unquestionably our best opportunity to protect our water, and with it our recreation, commerce, and prosperity.



"What has struck me related to water quality is that in most contexts, there are surprising numbers of individuals and entities who are motivated to organize, come together, and do hard work to try to address big concerns. It can be challenging and frustrating at times, but it's also inspiring to be surrounded by people and organizations who are passionate about water."

Dr. Mark Eiswerth, Visiting Professor at Colorado College,
Professor of Economics at the University of Northern Colorado and Peaks to People Board Member



Peaks to People Water Fund

PROTECTING WATERSHEDS | SUSTAINING HABITATS | ENRICHING COMMUNITIES

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