

# COALITION FOR RECREATIONAL TRAILS RECREATIONAL TRAILS

## Program Achievement Awards

### 2018 Nomination



## PROJECT:

### SOUTHWEST CONSERVATION CORPS AND THE SAN JUAN NATIONAL FOREST MCPHEE OVERLOOK TRAIL

#### Project Description

From its very inception, extending through the visioning process for the trail, the development of the trail alignment, the fundraising for and the construction of the trail, the McPhee Overlook Trail has been a strong example of realizing the benefits of collaborative conservation work.

The Trail now serves as successful testimony and template for a partnership based approach to conservation project implementation. It is also increasingly rare to construct new multi-use trails on the Forest and this added a very compelling cause for all of the stakeholders involved.

In its visioning process, the construction of a new trail promised local residents unparalleled local access to the San Juan National Forest directly from the Town of Dolores and it offered those same residents the promise of added economic development. As a result, many local stakeholders from a broad spectrum became involved in the project.

In the development of the alignment, to connect the Town of Dolores to the Forest, the Town first had to secure an easement across private property, which it did, to connect the trail to town owned land for the trailhead.

The fundraising involved local stakeholders committing funds and volunteer labor time and to then also work as a group to pursue State, private and Federal dollars to complete the project.

The construction phase also included local volunteer groups, the local youth corps, the local US Forest Service (USFS) trail crew, as well as a specialized USFS technical trails team.

## MCPHEE OVERLOOK TRAIL PROJECT:

### Construction and Design

After years of planning, developing a diverse partnership and securing an easement to connect the trailhead to Town of Dolores property, the Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) first broke ground. SCC spent four weeks connecting the trailhead, through steep slopes and sandstone bedrock, to USFS land on top of the mesa above McPhee Reservoir. A grant from the Great Outdoors of Colorado, secured by the Town Manager of Dolores, funded that first phase of construction completed in the fall of 2014. This first phase was very technical trail work and involved the use of portable winch systems, known as grip hoists, to move large boulders to build massive switchbacks on steep slopes as well as cutting the trail through a narrow sandstone canyon to connect to the Forest.



Also, in 2014, Tom Rice, Recreation Program Manager on the Dolores Ranger District of the San Juan National Forest (SJNF) wrote a Colorado State Trails Grant to fund the next phase of the Trail. In 2015, the SJNF was awarded \$105,600, \$73,312 of which were Recreational Trails Program Funds. This funded the US Forest Service Trails Unlimited Team to do some blasting where the trail corridor needed to go through bedrock in 2015 and for 12 weeks of Regional Conservation Corps (RCC) from the Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) to complete the roughing of the alignment in 2016. In 2015, the SJNF also submitted a grant request

to receive 21st Century Conservation Service Corps funds from the Washington DC Office of the US Forest Service and received \$63,000 more in match to fund an additional 10 weeks of SCC RCC work on the McPhee Overlook Trail which was all implemented in 2016. In total, in 2016, SCC RCC crews completed 22 weeks of trail construction and also worked alongside volunteers from the Southwest Colorado Cycling Association (SWCCA), who put in numerous workdays to help refine tread.

In 2016, the Southwest Conservation Corps wrote and received a National Forest Foundation Matching Awards Program Grant to commit an additional eight weeks of trail construction, tread refinement and cultural resources protection to be completed in 2017. Concluding a three phase, four-year construction effort in 2017, the Forest and community now have a new seven mile singletrack non-motorized multi-use trail!

The completed McPhee Overlook Trail consists of a healthy mix of beginner to advanced terrain for multiple users. Beginning near McPhee Reservoir on Town of nDolores property, it quickly climbs out of the valley via several switchbacks and retaining walls previously constructed by the Southwest Conservation Corps. Once on the mesa top, it winds along the edge of the mesa where it then drops and climbs in and out of Pinyon-Juniper lined canyons. Ultimately, the trail reaches a Forest Service campground, House Creek, and ties into the Boggy Draw trail system, a 35-mile non-motorized singletrack system.

Trail systems are also important to the local economy. Specifically, out-of-town visitors to local non-motorized trails are reported to add an average of \$36.55 per day per person to the local economy, according to a report on the economic impacts of mountain biking completed for the Town of Dolores. This is not only evident in sales at local bike shops, but also in the parking lots of grocery stores, gas stations, restaurants and hotels. Field reviews of vehicles at existing non-motorized trail heads and interviews with trail users show that over one third of trails users come from more than 45 miles away to use local trail systems. The addition of the McPhee Overlook Trail is a boon to the local economy with its trailhead located within the Town of Dolores.



## MCPHEE OVERLOOK TRAIL PROJECT:

### Public-Private Partnerships and Access to/Use of Public Lands

As mentioned thus far, funding for this project has been very diverse. Sources of revenue and partners are listed below. It is worth noting that many smaller contributions from very local partners helped make this project possible by both creating the initial match for the Colorado State Trails Grant as well as building the local goodwill to make the entire project possible.

#### Cash Funders and amounts list:

##### PHASE 1

Greater Dolores Action Coalition: \$1000

SW CO Cycling Association: \$1000

USFS Dolores RD: \$5,000

Great Outdoors of Colorado (GOCO): \$25,200

##### PHASE 2

Colorado State Trails Grant: \$105,000

(\$73,312 RTP, \$31,688 GOCO)

USFS WO 21CSC: \$63,000

##### PHASE 3

National Forest Foundation: \$63,000

**TOTAL CASH: \$263,200**

Many other local groups contributed volunteer labor time as well, valued at the following amounts:

SW CO Cycling Association Labor: \$56,375

Southwest Conservation Corps Labor: \$87,648

Mesa Verde Backcountry Horsemen Labor: \$11,275

Woods Canyon Archaeological Services Labor: \$5,000

USFS Dolores RD Labor: \$22,479

**TOTAL IN KIND: \$182,777**

**GRAND TOTAL PROJECT VALUE: \$445,377**

Other partners involved, but not listed above include the Town of Dolores, who secured the easement on private property to connect the trailhead to the Forestland and who also secured the first GOCO grant to complete the connector segment on private land. Many local residents also voiced support for the trail during planning meetings.



### Community Linkage

The McPhee Overlook Trail provides access for a diversity of local residents. Although over two thirds of the area population is white, nearly one third represent the Hispanic and Native American cultures that occupied this part of the state prior to European settlement. Users of this and other Forest trails truly represent those demographics. For instance, the Dolores District is an important part of Ute Mountain traditional tribal lands; tribal members still use District trail systems for hunting and traditional plant gathering purposes.

The trail also provides local residents with easy access the Forest, walking, biking or horse riding into the Forest from Town without the need to get into a car to drive to a trailhead. This certainly benefits local youth and low income residents who may not own or have regular access to a vehicle.

Being surrounded as it is by the Forest, the residents of the Town of Dolores now have an access that is directly connected to their Town. The identity of many residents revolves around a rural connection to nature and having the outdoors in their backyard. As a result, the McPhee Overlook Trail is widely seen as an asset that has become integral to that identity rooted in the outdoors and there is a consequent source of community pride imbued in the trail. The SW CO Cycling Association, comprised of local volunteers, continues to do trail maintenance on the trail each spring to mitigate winter and snowpack related trail impacts.

Finally, the economic benefits associated with the development of this trail touch even those who may not use the trail directly. The Town of Dolores is small, around a 1,000 residents, with a very small economy and driven by outdoor tourism and recreation. Even a modest boon to the economy would be very noticeable by most residents.

## MCPHEE OVERLOOK TRAIL PROJECT:

### Education and Communication

Interpretive panels have been designed for the trailhead in the town of Dolores that highlight both the natural and cultural resources for user education. Much of the uniqueness of the trail lies in the dense archaeology of the area that required extensive planning and field work in order to avoid cultural resources. The vista is stunning with views of McPhee Reservoir below and the Four Corners in the background. The interpretive panels help ground trail users in the uniqueness of the place and encourage respect for the landscape. The panels also point out the significance of the Dolores River as a watershed and McPhee Reservoir's impact on local agriculture as well as containing language about the human history of the area.



### Youth Conservation Service Corps and Community Outreach

The Southwest Conservation Corps is the local youth serving conservation corps, and also a member of the 21st Century Service Conservation Corps (21CSC). That 21CSC designation was certainly integral to the funding strategy in the Forest being eligible to receive USFS 21CSC funds and SCC made for a very competitive partner to apply for, and receive, NFF Matching Award Program funding.

However, the broader mission of the corps is youth engagement, empowerment and connecting those young men and women to meaningful conservation service projects. Over the four year construction phase of this project, SCC served 64 young men and women and put in a total of 9,479 person hours on this project alone. SCC did most of the heavy lifting in terms of the construction of this trail, serving eight different crews. A few corps highlights from the project: SCC crews used grip hoists (portable human powered hand winch and cable systems) to move large boulders to create massive switchbacks on the steep slopes of the connector trail, SCC crews were boated across McPhee Reservoir to complete early segments in the middle of the alignment and all crews got to build new trail which has become an increasingly rare privilege.



### Multiple-Use Management and Corridor Sharing

The McPhee Overlook Trail was laid out USFS by District trails staff in coordination with District archaeologists and contract archaeologists as well as wildlife biologists. Much of the uniqueness of the trail lies in the dense archaeology of the area that required extensive planning and field work in order to avoid cultural resources.

The area of the Forest that the trail bisects is also winter range for deer and elk. As a result, there are seasonal closures to protect migration corridors and winter forage areas.

Furthermore, The McPhee Overlook trail is part of the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), a term initially derived from wildland fire where communities build near and into the forest. The WUI concept can be applied to the recreational world. For this trail project, the Forest Service and the Town of Dolores plan for trails that integrate both urban and forest experiences allowing the community to benefit from easy access to trails resulting in improved quality of life and health.

### Enhancement of Federal Lands

The previous narrative has made the case that this trail enhances Federal lands. Specifically, the case has already been made for improved access for diverse users, protection of natural and cultural resources as well as local and directly related economic development. However, this project also provided an exciting and compelling project for the employees of the Forest. "Caring for the land and Serving People"—that is the mission of the US Forest Service. Their purpose, as set forth by law, is to achieve quality land management under the sustainable multiple-use management concept to meet the diverse needs of people. The planning process, the fundraising and the construction of the McPhee Overlook Trail, and all of the related benefits already identified here, clearly represent an admirable implementation of that mission.



## MCPHEE OVERLOOK TRAIL PROJECT:

### Conclusion

In conclusion, in addition to all of the points made about the benefits of collaborative conservation work, this project also resulted in a stellar return on investment for the Recreational Trails Program. For an investment of \$73,312 by the RTP, the SJNF Dolores RD was able to leverage an additional \$189,688 in cash and \$182,777 in volunteer labor for a grand total investment of \$445,377. This is almost seven times the investment made by RTP! Tom Rice, the SJNF and all of the local partners truly deserve acknowledgment not only for all of their successes of this project, but also in putting in the hours to work through the challenges associated with the construction of the McPhee Overlook Trail.



**“THE CREW DID A GREAT JOB OF COMPLETING QUALITY WORK THAT WILL ENABLE THE TRAIL TO BE SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE WHEN OPENED TO THE PUBLIC.”**

-Carith Kamermans, San Juan National Forest



Southwest Conservation Corps is a program of Conservation Legacy  
[www.conservationlegacy.org](http://www.conservationlegacy.org)