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LAND STEWARDSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH IN 2013

*Great Outdoors Colorado Approves Funds for
Trail Development and Fire Restoration and Mitigation
in El Paso County Trails and Open Space Areas*

December 12, 2012, DENVER – The Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA) has announced that young people ages 18 to 24 will get jobs next spring and summer thanks to funding approved by the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) board yesterday. The GOCO board voted to disperse a total of \$85,411 in lottery funds to local governments to improve several outdoor areas in El Paso County. Of those funds, El Paso County will receive \$24,954, the City of Colorado Springs will receive \$44,464, and the City of Manitou Springs will receive \$15,993.

These government organizations will hire Mile High Youth Corps-Colorado Springs in 2013 to complete a variety of projects, including:

Bear Creek Nature Center Trail Development. This El Paso County project will employ youth corps over a period of four weeks to develop a regional trail connection and loop trail at the Bear Creek Nature Center. First, the crew will build a quarter-mile, eight-foot wide, crusher fine regional trail that connects to inter-city trails. An additional 280-linear-foot, single-track trail will create a quarter-mile, looped pedestrian trail linking the Bear Creek Nature Center and outdoor classroom to the existing regional open space trail network, while eliminating social trails in areas that are prone to erosion.

Blodgett Peak Open Space Fire Restoration. The 2012 Waldo Canyon Fire consumed more than 86 acres of Colorado Springs' pristine Blodgett Peak Open Space. Vegetation and wildlife habitat was lost, trails were destroyed, and erosion threatens the property and nearby homes. For six weeks during spring 2013, this project will engage a youth corps saw crew to use felled trees to establish strong erosion control structures in drainage ways, along with installing erosion

control matting and straw bales. A pesticide-trained youth corps crew will spray to control invasive species and spread a locally appropriate seed mix to revegetate burn areas.

Iron Mountain Fire Mitigation Project. This two-week project entails fire mitigation on approximately 20.5 acres on the Iron Mountain Open Space. Youth corps crews will remove ladder fuels, cut dead snags and thin underbrush with the intent of creating more natural tree stands in an area that consists of steep slopes with extremely dense underbrush and tree fuels. This project will also create a firebreak to better defend the City of Manitou Springs, and will enhance views and support more healthy habitats for the area's wildlife.

Nancy Wilson, regional director for Mile High Youth Corps-Colorado Springs, said of these projects, "We are thrilled that the review committee has recognized the need for these projects in the Pikes Peak region. The Waldo Canyon Fire has left us with not only a huge amount of restoration work, but the potential for even more ecological destruction and damage to our watersheds and personal property due to erosion and flooding. Through this funding, we now have the opportunity for more youth to become involved. They will provide meaningful service to our community by providing weeks of the wildfire restoration and mitigation work so badly needed in our region."

Corpsmembers and project sponsors alike appreciate the value of corps experiences. Christian Ndushabani, a corpsmember, said, "My youth corps crew was evacuated from our worksite because of the Waldo Canyon Fire last summer. I'm excited I might be able to go back now and help our town recover from it." According to Kurt Schroeder, manager of Parks Maintenance, Open Space and Trails for the City of Colorado Springs, "The importance of this project to our community cannot be overstated. Not only will we be restoring our natural environment that was lost in the fire but we will be engaging youth in the rebirth of this important open space."

The projects are among 45 statewide projects totaling \$6.2 million, awarded by the GOCO board on December 11. In addition to supporting youth corps, projects funded by GOCO will help purchase land in a low-income Denver neighborhood to be used for environmental education; protect 6,720 acres of open space in perpetuity; renovate existing parks; and allow planning for future outdoor recreation projects.

Of the \$6.2 million, the GOCO board dedicated \$500,000 in grants to local governments and land trusts for projects that employed Colorado youth corps crews. It was the second such initiative by GOCO: The

organization awarded a \$1 million grant to CYCA in fiscal year 2011, which created nearly 500 land stewardship jobs statewide for youth and young adults throughout the state at no cost to taxpayers.

“The GOCO board is enthusiastic about funding Colorado youth corps projects because they are such sound investments in our outdoors and our youth,” said Lise Aangeenbrug, GOCO’s executive director. “Youth Corps participants perform vital work for local governments and land trusts, including fire mitigation, trail maintenance and water conservation. Through this funding, GOCO is helping to train the next generation of land stewards.”

Youth corps teaches job readiness and leadership skills with the goal of preparing young people to be productive and ready for the work force. It also gives them important time in the outdoors and educates them about a range of stewardship issues, including water conservation, land use, fire danger and the impact of invasive species. While in the corps, members can receive high school or college credits or prepare to take their GED. They are also eligible to receive AmeriCorps education awards for college, trade school or student loans. Corpsmembers earn a living allowance for their service.

Youth corps conservation crews throughout Colorado perform land, water, and energy conservation projects to benefit residents, visitors, and wildlife. Making this work available to young people contributes to lowering the youth unemployment rate, which is about 20 percent, more than twice that of the general population.

El Paso County young people ages 18-24 who would like to join the Mile High Youth Corps-Colorado Springs are encouraged to visit www.milehighyouthcorps.org for application information.

About Great Outdoors Colorado

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) is the result of an initiative passed by the voters in 1992. As the recipient of approximately half of Colorado Lottery proceeds—\$57 million in fiscal year 2012—GOCO awards grants to local governments and land trusts, and makes investments through the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife. Since 1994, nearly 3,500 projects in all 64 counties have benefited from GOCO funding. Learn more at www.goco.org.

About Mile High Youth Corps-Colorado Springs

Mile High Youth Corps-Colorado Springs strives to meet the needs of the Southern Front Range by offering *Summer of Service* and a *Fall Land Conservation Program* to disconnected youth (those not in school and not working), college-age youth, returning young veterans, and young people hoping to pursue a career in land

management or an ecological field. The Land Conservation Program provides opportunities for young people to work alongside land conservation managers in a variety of crew-based environmental rehabilitation, habitat restoration, trail building and fire mitigation projects. Learn more at www.milehighyouthcorps.org.

About Colorado Youth Corps Association

The Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA) is a statewide coalition of 10 accredited youth conservation corps that employ and train youth and young adults on land, water and energy conservation projects. Youth corps is a proven strategy for engaging young people in service to their communities and stewardship of their environment while cultivating valuable skills to meet the challenges of the 21st century. For more information about CYCA or the statewide youth corps coalition, visit www.CYCA.org.

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