



# JUNIOR RANGER

## 2022 PROGRAM REPORT



We're teaching Boulder youth valuable work and life skills while they explore the city's open spaces and serve their community.

**LEARN MORE AT** [OSMPJuniorRangers.org](https://OSMPJuniorRangers.org)





# Background

## PROGRAM MISSION

At the City of Boulder Junior Ranger Program, we create an enriching service-learning work experience dedicated to preserving land through trail maintenance, stewardship and resource management service.



## PROGRAM HISTORY

Our program offers paid jobs for teens (ages 14 to 17) to work with the City of Boulder's Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) department. Each summer, hardworking Junior Rangers on each of our 12 crews complete trail maintenance and construction, forestry, vegetation, and ecological restoration projects. Junior Rangers will learn critical work skills, support department and Master Plan goals, serve the Boulder community, and have fun! We also provide career and leadership development from natural resource professionals.

Since our program was established in 1965, we have employed well over 4,000 youth. This has built a legacy of community stewards who are personally invested in the future of OSMP and all public lands.

## SERVICE LEARNING MODEL

The day to day operations of our program are based on a service learning model combining education with community service. Our model provides a pragmatic, progressive learning experience while still meeting societal needs. As Junior Rangers, youth gain practical work skills and learn how their work impacts larger environmental systems.

We hire for two main types of Junior Ranger crews: the well-known legacy Trail crews and the Youth Ranger crew.

## TRAIL CREWS

Our Junior Ranger Trail Crews (100 members per year) work on trail maintenance and construction, forestry, vegetation, agriculture, fencing, and ecological restoration projects. We provide Junior Rangers the opportunity to explore careers in natural resources, steward their public lands, and become leaders in their community.

## YOUTH RANGER CREW

Our Youth Ranger Crew (12 members per year) works directly with Rangers on field-based community Ranger projects and skills-based training. Through experiential learning, youth discover the diversity of Ranger work and what other career options exist in conservation, parks, land, and natural resource management.



# Program Goals



## **WE DEVELOP COMPETENT, WORKFORCE-READY YOUNG EMPLOYEES.**

We teach essential work skills like timeliness, work ethic, professionalism, communication, and conflict resolution.

## **WE PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH TO DEVELOP SKILLS IN LAND MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION.**

Our Junior Rangers gain useful skills while they work on projects in forest management, trail maintenance, environmental interpretation, and more.

## **WE CONTRIBUTE TO HIGH PRIORITY OSMP PROJECTS.**

Every day, every summer, there are 50+ Junior Rangers out working on Tier 1 and Tier 2 OSMP Master Plan objectives.

## **WE FOSTER CONFIDENCE AND PERSONAL GROWTH.**

Our program creates a place where young people can try out new skills, push themselves, and build confidence. They learn the value of teamwork, and then learn how to lead their peers. They watch their leaders tackle difficult problems, and then get to try out problem solving themselves.



Photo: Nancy Lindo

## **WE CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH TO EXPERIENCE COMMUNITY RANGER WORK & NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION.**

Working side-by-side with our talented OSMP Rangers gives youth direct experience in leadership, teamwork, communication, environmental conservation, land stewardship, natural resource management, and emergency response.

## **WE GROW A CULTURE OF STEWARDSHIP.**

When we give youth the chance to work outside, having fun, on meaningful projects, they build strong connections to nature and they leave caring about stewardship of the land.

*“At the end of Junior Rangers, I find myself not quite ready to leave. Just as I hoped, I was able to be somewhat of a teacher to my crewmates and they trusted me to lead them in the right direction. I figured out that leading by example was my way of leading. It’s where I felt the most comfortable and successful. I feel so fulfilled with all I was able to accomplish and I feel stronger and more competent.” - Nataly V, 2nd year*



# OSMP Master Plan Alignment

In September 2019, City Council accepted the new OSMP Master Plan. Our program is special within OSMP because we have a role in so many areas of the organization. We contribute to Master Plan priorities within CCEI, (Community Connection, Education, and Inclusion), EHR (Ecosystem Health & Resilience), and RRSE (Responsible Recreation, Stewardship, and Enjoyment). We've chosen to focus our attention, effort, and funding on these Tier 1 and Tier 2 priorities:

## CONNECT YOUTH TO THE OUTDOORS

The Junior Ranger Program has long been a critical component of OSMP's ability to connect youth to the outdoors. The Junior Ranger program is one of Boulder's best entry points for young people to discover other stewardship-focused work and volunteer opportunities, learn to recreate responsibly, and participate in OSMP's educational program offerings. (CCEI.3, Tier 2)



## REDUCE TRAIL MAINTENANCE BACKLOG

We are part of a trail maintenance approach that fixes immediate needs and contributes to projects that increase the sustainability and longevity of our existing trail network. (RRSE.2, Tier 1)

## PRESERVE AND RESTORE IMPORTANT HABITAT BLOCKS AND CORRIDORS

Our Junior Ranger crews support forest thinning projects, help close undesignated trails, and remove priority invasive plant species. (EHR.1, Tier 1)

*“Junior Rangers are integral in helping OSMP Trails accomplish our workplans. They bring an excellent attitude, a desire to learn and integrity to complete their work to our high standards. I get psyched every time I see Junior Rangers on our projects because they bring me back to a time when working hard with your friends and going home dirty was not only the best job ever, but also the start of a lifelong appreciation for the outdoors.” - Beau Clark, Trails Coordinator*

## WELCOME DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS AND ABILITIES

Welcoming everyone into the Junior Ranger program is not a one-year task and is a process we strive to improve over time. In collaboration with community partners, we aim to make the hiring and selection process more accessible and value a diversity of backgrounds and experiences. Once we've selected a group of Junior Rangers, it is our responsibility to create an environment where everyone can thrive, push themselves, and feel safe. (CCEI.1, Tier 1)





# Recruitment & Hiring

## RECRUITMENT

Historically, our biggest source of recruitment has been word-of-mouth (thank you, alumni!), but we recognize this means the majority of applicants learn about Junior Rangers from the same social, socio-economic, religious, cultural, or school-affiliation circles. The Junior Ranger job is a competitive position. While we don't necessarily need to recruit applicants, we strive to do targeted outreach in communities that are underrepresented within the program demographics, especially the Latino & Spanish speaking communities. For three years, we've provided family programming in Spanish & English as a founding partner of Nature Kids Boulder to help introduce teenagers and their families to the Junior Ranger Program.



## HIRING PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

To the goal of welcoming diverse backgrounds and abilities, we have worked to make the process of being hired as a Junior Ranger - the application, interview, and selection - more accessible. This year, with advice and input from our community partner, El Centro Amistad, we completed a cultural audit of our entire program. We put special attention towards each stage of the hiring process to ensure that the words we use, decisions we make, and communication with our applicants all combine to create an equitable, rewarding, and accessible experience for all.



### Application

We rewrote the job posting to be more in line with our target audience (youth looking for a first job working outdoors), created a Spanish language version of the job description, removed the reference letter requirement, shortened the application questions, and raised Junior Ranger wages to match the market rate. Our program staff team also worked 1:1 with young people to complete the Junior Ranger application knowing that, despite our changes, it is still a complex and bureaucratic government application.

### Interview

As a program, we choose to offer all Junior Ranger applicants an opportunity to interview because it is a critical job skill to develop. We support applicants by providing the interview questions in advance and offering practice sessions. Junior Ranger applicants have the option to submit their interview questions in written form, as well, if it helps them represent themselves better.

We also adjusted our interview questions to reveal foundational job skills that youth develop in all aspects of their daily lives. For example, they can show leadership skills not just in an activity such as a sports team, but also through responsibilities like afterschool childcare for their younger siblings.



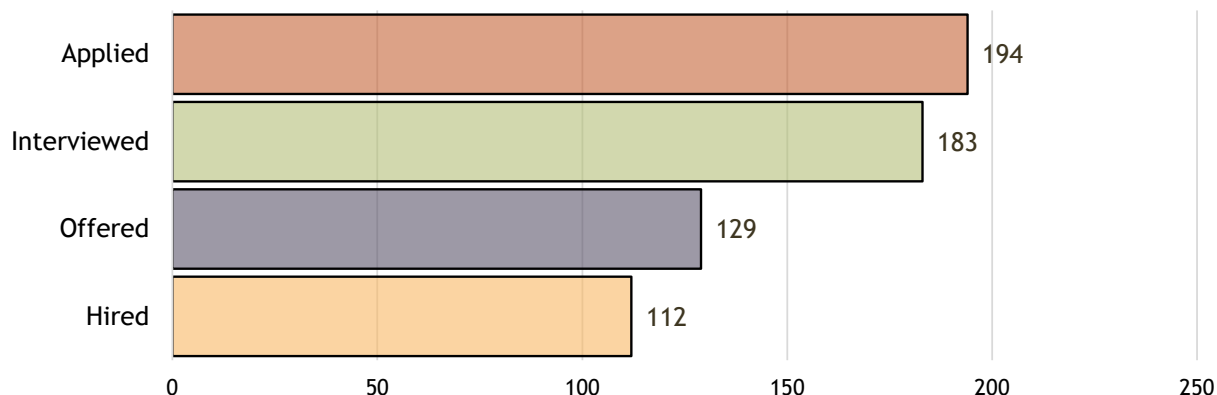
*"Never stop the Junior Ranger program because it has changed the lives of so many people for the better" - Linda B, 2nd year Junior Ranger*



## Selection & Hiring Philosophy

The vast majority of Junior Ranger applicants each year are highly qualified, highly motivated, and would greatly benefit from the opportunity. However, we cannot hire everyone who applies. We designed our scoring rubric to prioritize potential over prior experience, knowing that this is a first job for many youth who apply. We base our decisions on candidates' **foundational skills and their capacity to grow**, such as their ability to be: team players, respectful of others, committed & motivated, coachable and willing to learn, and personally responsible for something.

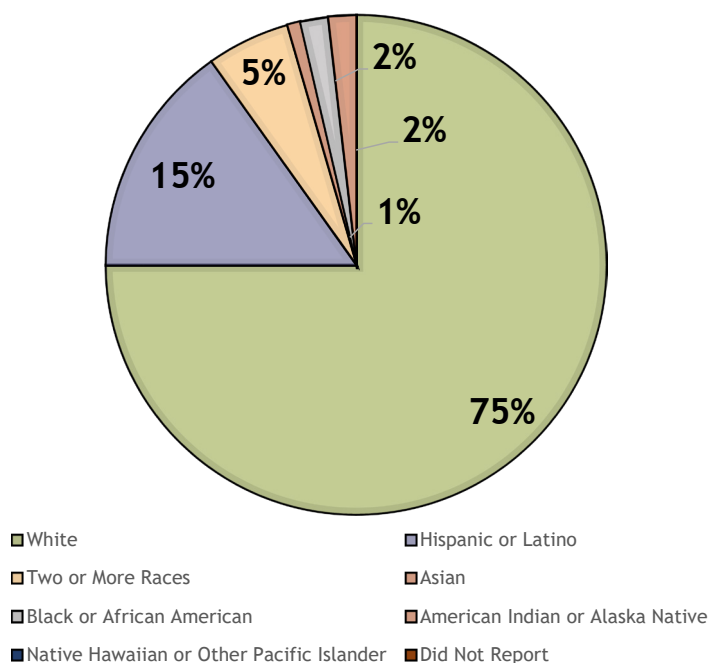
## APPLICANT NUMBERS THROUGHOUT HIRING PROCESS



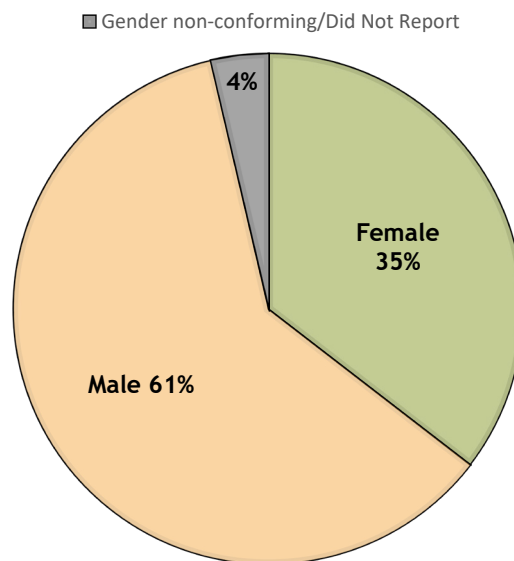
## 2022 DEMOGRAPHICS OF HIRED YOUTH

Our hope is that these changes - from recruitment, through the application, and the selection process - allow us to minimize bias and hire a diverse group of highly motivated youth - diverse in age, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and prior program experience (to name a few). In the last few years, we saw the data reflect this goal, with increased diversity of race and ethnicity among hired Junior Rangers.

## 2022 RACE/ETHNICITY OF JUNIOR RANGERS



## 2022 GENDER OF JUNIOR RANGERS





We know these steps aren't the end. Equitable hiring and welcoming diverse backgrounds is a long-term process. We are tracking aggregated demographic information over multiple years, looking for trends, and working with the City to improve data collection. We know that this information is directionally accurate, but is not perfect, and some years (such as this year's gender balance) will be outliers.

## ON THE JOB

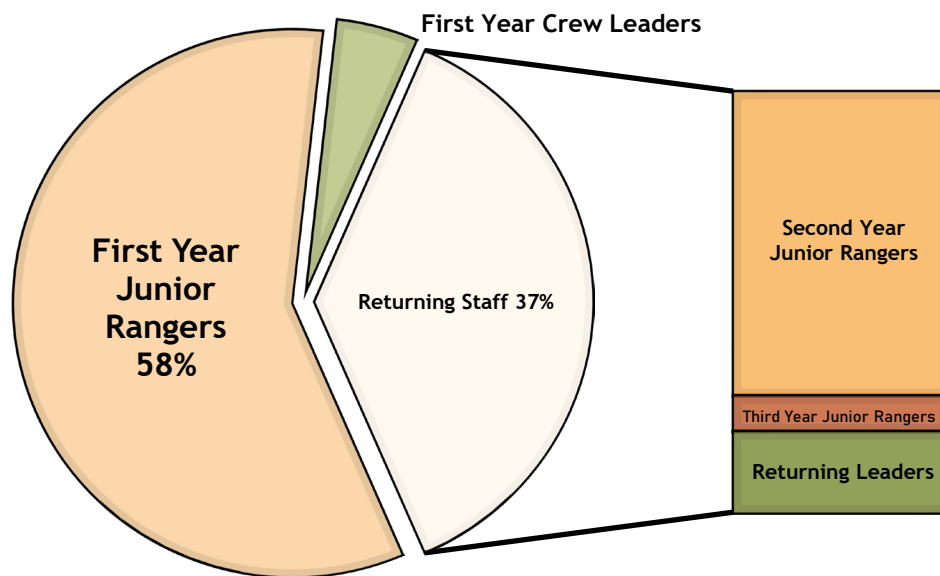
Creating an inclusive program doesn't stop after hiring. Once we've hired our group of Junior Rangers, it is our responsibility to create an environment where everyone can thrive, push themselves, and feel safe at work.

## COMING BACK YEAR AFTER YEAR

In a typical year, we strive to hire 50% returning staff and 50% new staff. We aim to balance **exposure** (for as many youth as possible) and **expertise**. Hiring returning staff supports new Junior Rangers in learning their job, lowers training costs, and produces higher quality work. Each year that a Junior Ranger returns provides new opportunities for leadership, career exploration, and skill development. These scaffolded opportunities build leaders in stewardship (CCEI.7, Tier 3) and provide meaningful career ladders for young adults. Many graduates motivate others to serve in the program, seek jobs in conservation, or return to OSMP as team leaders or full-time staff.



## RETENTION OF JUNIOR RANGER STAFF



*“Giving Junior Rangers more responsibility and treating them as mature adults manifested in them rising to those expectations. Not just leadership and professional development, but personal growth as well. Believing they can handle a tough discussion about mental health led to deeper emotional maturity. We practiced soft skills with them like emotional intelligence, empathy, vulnerability, which I hope will serve them better, and impact them more. They like to think about their place in the world and social dilemmas, and there is no other place for that.” - Fiona R, Crew Leader*



# Youth Impact: Testimonials

## **WE PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP SKILLS IN LAND MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION.**

“Before Junior Rangers, I was thinking about pursuing a career in the outdoor industry, but I didn’t have much knowledge on how outdoor jobs work. I didn’t know a lot about land/resource management. After Junior Rangers, I know more about how these kinds of careers work and learned how people build careers.”

- Anna M, first year

## **WE GROW A CULTURE OF STEWARDSHIP.**

“Before Junior Rangers, I was definitely more insecure in myself than I am now. This experience has helped show me that I can do things that I never thought I could do. Before Junior Rangers, I loved nature, but now I have the vocabulary and knowledge to educate others, too! After Junior Rangers, I have started thinking about my future more. This program has opened my eyes to other opportunities the City offers and I’ve found them very inspiring. Thanks to this job, I am pretty much certain that I want to work outdoors, using science, to save the environment.”

- Tessa N, first year

## **WE TEACH THE IMPORTANCE OF TEAMWORK, COMMUNICATION, AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS.**

“After Junior Rangers, I grew into being a better teammate by skills of communication and listening. I learned to pace myself and take better care of my needs.”

- Sophie J, first year

## **WE FOSTER CONFIDENCE AND PERSONAL GROWTH.**

“My crew leads were so kind and welcoming with being a safe place for everyone. Their supportive check ins really helped me grow as a person and helped me believe in myself more. I was surprised to see how much I grew throughout the session and proud of myself for sticking through it. I did not think I would be able to last all 5 weeks so I’m really happy I did.”

- Ali T, first year

## **WE DEVELOP COMPETENT, WORKFORCE-READY YOUNG EMPLOYEES.**

“After Junior Rangers, I feel like I am more prepared for life and future jobs. I had the skills to show up on time and work efficiently.”

- Hayden L, first year

## **WE DEVELOP YOUNG LEADERS**

“This summer, I was able to learn so much about myself and the things I am capable of. I am beyond happy with myself. I learned I don’t have to be loud at all to influence others. I simply have to be myself and lead by example.”

- Nataly V, second year





# System Impact: Work Accomplishments

In 2022, 112 Junior Rangers worked 640 crew hours on high priority OSMP projects. They built 2,448 linear feet of new trail, repaired 4,297 linear feet of trail, and constructed 561 feet of trail ditch. These projects included 70 hours spent dispersing rocks and dirt.

Junior Rangers chipped branches for over 50 hours for the Forestry crew and closed 2183 feet of undesignated trail.

Junior Rangers also removed 2,900 gallons of invasive plants with Vegetation Management and built or removed 880 feet of fencing on Agricultural lands.

Youth Rangers contributed to a graduate research project on grasshopper respiration, and measured forest regeneration a decade after the Flagstaff Fire. They also created and delivered an education program on the NCAR Fire for Junior Ranger crews.



What trails did Junior Rangers work on this year? The list is long! Ski Jump, Bluebell Mesa, Bear Peak West Ridge, Mesa, Marshall Valley, Marshall Mesa, Doudy Draw, Bear Canyon, Crown Rock, Cragmoor Connector, Enchanted Mesa, 1st/2nd Flatiron, Wonderland Lake



# Project Snapshot

## SKI JUMP & BLUEBELL MESA REROUTE



Photos: Nancy Lindo



Junior Rangers supported the Ski Jump and Bluebell Mesa trail reroutes this summer. This large, capital project is rerouting a severely eroded and damaged Ski Jump trail from Chautauqua. At least one crew was working on this project every week this summer, making a huge amount of progress on the new trail. Our crews did corridor clearing (removing vegetation from the new trail alignment), rough cut the trail, backsloping, and outsloping and refining the tread of the trail. Once the new trail was constructed, our crews helped move an incredible amount of rock and dirt from the new trail to the old trail to close it down.



Photo: Nancy Lindo



**SYSTEM IMPACT:** Reduce trail maintenance backlog, restore trail functionality, spread out user density among many trails, reduce future maintenance & personnel costs.

**YOUTH IMPACT:** Team work, problem solving, project management skills, developing patience & determination, practicing leadership roles, building and practicing new skills.



# Project Snapshot

## BEAR PEAK TIMBER STEPS

Photo: Nancy Lindo



Bear Peak West Ridge, a popular hiking and running trail, leads to the top of Bear Peak. Sections of the trail have become incut and eroded. This summer, Junior Rangers took on the project of fixing up this trail alone, with input from the trails team. Our crews placed 75 timber steps and 42 rocks over 8 weeks. The timber check steps will stabilize the tread, while also preventing water from channelizing the trail. On the side of some timber steps, Junior Rangers paced 42 pin rocks through a complicated rock setting process. Those pinning rocks will keep the timber steps in place and deter trail users from cutting around the steps.

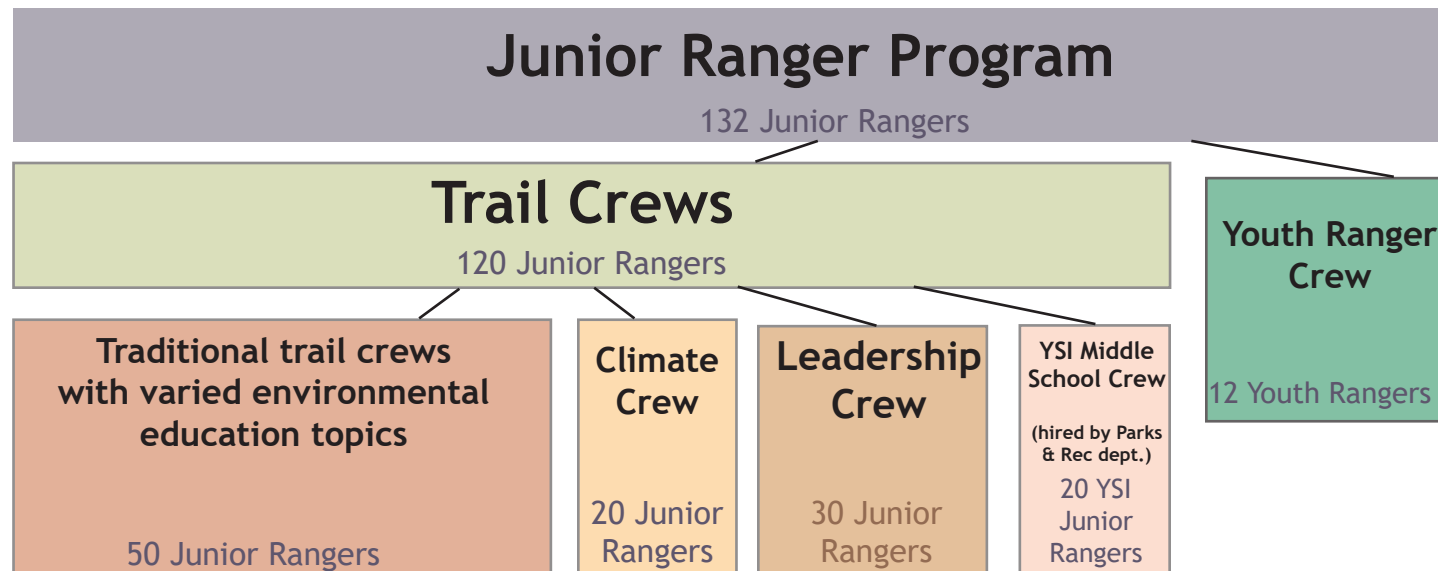


**SYSTEM IMPACT:** Reduce trail maintenance backlog, improve trail usability, retain & improve trail conditions (getting water off, keeping people on), restore trail functionality.

**YOUTH IMPACT:** Acquire technical building skills, improve patience, teamwork, and goal setting skills, learn how to assess quality, and complete a task to specifications with pride.



# Crew Structure



## Specialized Crews

### CULTIVATING LEADERS IN STEWARDSHIP

In addition to the four Master Plan priorities mentioned earlier, the Junior Ranger program also aims to create a continuum of learning that cultivates leaders in stewardship. As part of our 10 year plan, we have been piloting and developing various specialized crews that meet specific department needs and goals, or specific youth interests. (CCEI.7, Tier 3)

Examples include: the Youth Ranger Crew (first piloted in 2017), the Climate Crew and the Leadership Crew (both Trail Crews that primarily do trail maintenance but with a specific educational focus). This year, we continued each of these specialized crews while also adding a middle school aged crew, the YSI Junior Rangers. Keep reading to learn more about each!

**Youth Ranger Crew (12 youth this year):** This crew works directly with Rangers on field-based community Ranger projects and skills-based training. See what they learned on pages 15 - 16.

**Weather and Climate Crew (20 youth this year):** In partnership with Professor Cassano at CU and OSMP's Brian Anacker, Junior Rangers on this crew practice the scientific method by creating a research project to collect weather data across OSMP land.



During the summer, the weather and climate crew focuses their environmental education on climate science and climate action. At the end of the summer, the crew spends a week to organize, analyze, and visualize the weather data. Through this project, the crew is able to engage hands-on with climate science, develop critical thinking skills, practice scientific writing, and present their research project through a written report and final presentation.



*"After Junior Rangers, I am far more confident as a leader. I clarified my leadership style and learned about making trails." - Nile H, 2nd year*

### Leadership Crew (30 youth this year):

The Leadership Crew dedicates their education time to leadership development and career exploration. Their curriculum covers topics like leadership styles, communication, resume writing, and more. They introduce guest speakers each week who share their winding career paths with Junior Rangers. On this crew, youth develop more complex trail building techniques and take turns functioning as "crew leader of the day". This gives Junior Rangers a chance to put their education into practice and lead their peers.

### YSI Junior Rangers Middle-School crew (20 youth this year):

This crew is led and supported by the City of Boulder's Parks and Recreation department. The Youth Services Initiative (YSI) offers recreational and educational opportunities for children ages 6-18, living in Boulder's public housing sites who are also predominantly from low-income and/or Spanish-speaking families. This year, YSI and Junior Rangers partnered to make this unique crew experience a reality. See more about their accomplishments on the next page (14).



*"Before I was a Junior Ranger, I really thought that the amount of helpfulness that you were was solely based on how many logs you carried, how many water bars you finished, or how fast you completed the project. I now understand that it's not just about that. It's also about being a leader, being supportive, and helping others. At first I was afraid of being seen as weak and small. Now I am more aware of the people around me and I now realize what being a good worker means. Not pushing others to go beyond their physical or mental limits, and not putting too much pressure on yourself. You don't need to be the best, you should do YOUR best. It doesn't matter if you're the shortest, youngest, smallest person. It's about the attitude you bring every day and the team member you can be." - Portia R, 1st year*





# Crew Snapshot

## YSI/MIDDLE SCHOOL CREW

This is the YSI Summer Mentorship Program's tenth year, but the first year partnering primarily with the Junior Ranger Program. Together, these two programs provided a structured and trusting environment that matched middle school youth with adults who guided them during work projects and recreational activities outdoors. The YSI Junior Rangers are ages 11-14, which brings workforce development to youth who aren't necessarily age eligible for our JR crews. This cohort of youth worked twice per week during June and July. Their schedule was a blend of paid work projects with OSMP and unpaid recreation days with Parks and Recreation, including: the new reroute for Bluebell trail at Chautauqua, education sessions with an OSMP expert, paddleboarding and open water swimming at the Boulder Reservoir, and more. All 20 youth successfully completed their summer commitment with us, and each earned their full stipend funded by the Health Equity Fund.



### YOUTH IMPACT:

Supported by compassionate adult staff, youth develop valuable work skills, learn about environmental topics, increase their fitness, and gain confidence.

### SYSTEM IMPACT:

Introduces stewardship and love of the outdoors to a younger audience, giving them the skills to become life-long stewards and future leaders of our natural lands.





# Crew Snapshot

## YOUTH RANGER CREW

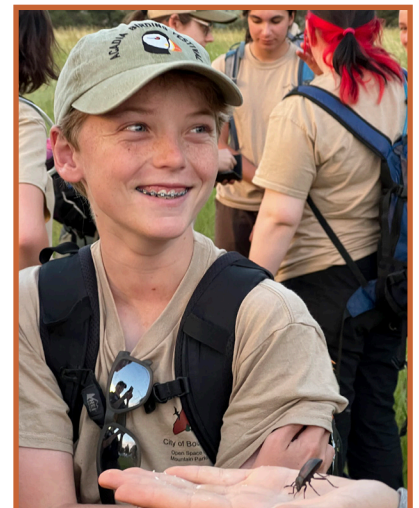


### YOUTH IMPACT:

Side-by-side with OSMF rangers, real-life experience in natural resource protection, leadership, and emergency response. Youth gain life skills while exploring new career paths in the outdoors.

### SYSTEM IMPACT:

Transforms youth into life-long stewards of open space and creates future leaders who will help protect and preserve our natural resources in perpetuity.



*"This program has made me interested in medicine and being a first responder, and it introduced me to a lot of different careers. Because of YR, I'm taking an Emergency Medical Responder class next year and I'm super excited! I also have a greater respect for law enforcement and how much effort, courage, and belief in humanity goes into that job. I've gained a lot of confidence in myself, being a leader and diving into new situations that make me uncomfortable." - Dana D, 2nd year Youth Ranger*



## YOUTH RANGER CREW LEARNING & WORK HIGHLIGHTS

The 2022 Youth Ranger Program had a variety of different activities over the session. Each day was a unique experience encouraging the crew to explore new ideas and incorporate what they had just learned into the work. Some highlights included:

**Search and Rescue** - Using skills learned in the First Aid/CPR class, Youth Rangers conducted a mock search for lost hikers. Youth Rangers met the Boulder County Sheriff's Office Search & Rescue Dogs and watched the dogs perform a skills demonstration.

**Flight for Life** - A Flight for Life helicopter crew landed on OSMP property and talked with the Youth Rangers about the world of emergency air transport and their use in search and rescue.

**Bat Ecology Night** - During a night hike, Youth Rangers observed bat behavior and learned about the importance of bats' roles in the ecosystem.



**Scientific Research** - On the 10-year anniversary of the Flagstaff Fire on Bear Peak, Youth Rangers conducted a research project to measure forest regeneration and analyze post-fire ecosystem recovery.

**CPR/First Aid** - Youth Rangers completed a course to earn their CPR certification.

**Wildland Firefighting** - Youth Rangers worked on a fire mitigation project at the Cal-Wood Education Center. Ranger-Naturalists taught the YR crew how to build a fire line to simulate working on a real fire.

**Overnight Trip** - In partnership with the University of Colorado, Youth Rangers spent a night at the Mountain Research Station near Nederland where they completed a work project and assisted with research in grasshopper respiration.

**Interpretive Naturalist Program** - Youth Rangers learned how to develop an educational program for the public, and they created and delivered their own education program on the NCAR Fire to Junior Ranger crews.



*"It helped me gain confidence about both my leadership and followership skills, along with my ability to work smoothly as part of a team. It has opened my eyes to the large number of like-minded people out there, and the multitude of jobs, volunteer positions, hobbies, and opportunities in general that are deeply satisfying, fun, and genuinely helpful. It has affirmed my belief that this, working outside in the natural world (preferably with birds!) is where I belong. Overall, this program has helped me to grow towards the person I want to be, and has guided me to new skills, ideas, and beliefs, all applicable in daily life (except for CPR, hopefully!)."*

- Owen R, 1st year Youth Ranger

# Land Acknowledgement

The City of Boulder acknowledges the city is on the ancestral homelands and unceded territory of Indigenous Peoples who have traversed, lived in and stewarded lands in the Boulder Valley since time immemorial. Those Indigenous Nations include the: Di De'i (Apache), Hinono'eiteen (Arapaho), Tsistsistas (Cheyenne), Numunuu (Comanche), Kiowa, Čariks i Čariks (Pawnee), Sosonih (Shoshone), Oc'eti S'akowin (Sioux) and Núuchiu (Ute). We honor and respect the people of these Nations and their ancestors. We also recognize that Indigenous knowledge, oral histories, and languages handed down through generations have shaped profound cultural and spiritual connections with Boulder-area lands and ecosystems – connections that are sustained and celebrated to this day. The City of Boulder recognizes that those now living and working on these ancestral lands have a responsibility to acknowledge and address the past. The city refutes past justifications for the colonization of Indigenous lands and acknowledges a legacy of oppression that has caused intergenerational trauma to Indigenous Peoples and families.

## Partnerships

This program would not be possible without all the hard work and time from dedicated City of Boulder staff, conservation professionals, emergency responders, and other professionals who helped with this program. Thank you to all of our partners from 2022!

