



BLUFF  
LAKE  
NATURE  
CENTER

*Wildlife Refuge ~ Outdoor Classroom*

# BLUFF LAKE NATURE CENTER



# 2021 IMPACT REPORT

# BLNC TEAM

## STAFF

RACHEL HUTCHENS  
*EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR*

LEILA REGAN-PORTER  
*DEVELOPMENT MANAGER*

HEIDI PFEIFFER  
*EDUCATION MANAGER*

ERICKSON SMITH  
*LAND MANAGER*

WYATT ELLISON  
*AMERICORPS EDUCATOR*

LAUREN GODFREY  
*AMERICORPS EDUCATOR*

GARRETT BROWN (not pictured)  
*AMERICORPS EDUCATOR*

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, State of Colorado*

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STEVE HEBERT  
*Town of Bennett*

KATIE ROBB DAVIS  
*Wellshire Presbyterian Church*

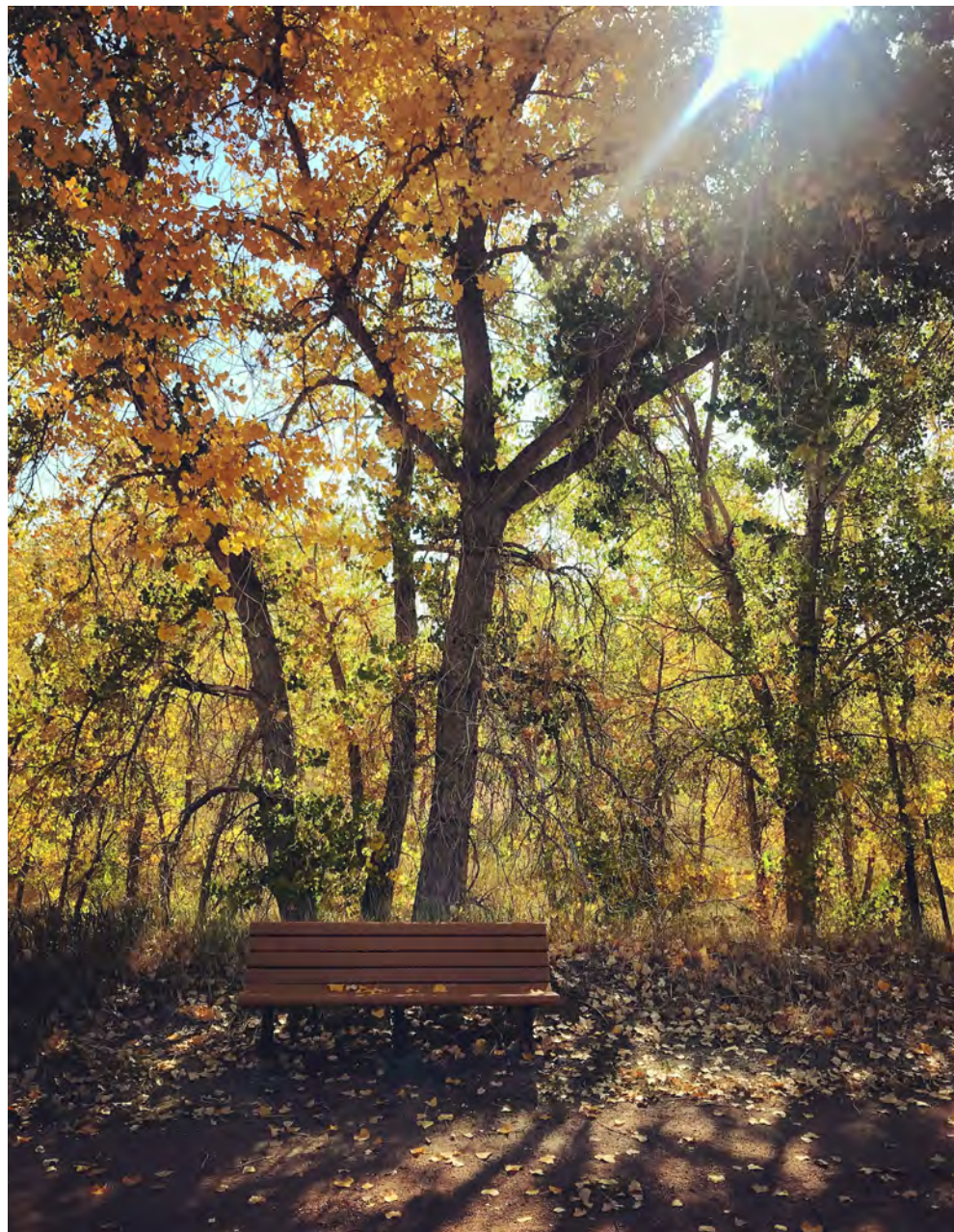
TINA LANDERS  
*Adobe Inc.*

Outgoing board members, thanks for a total of 21 years of service!

BRITTA BLODGETT  
HAROLD SKRAMSTAD  
JENNIFER THURSTON



(L - R) Front: Lauren, Rachel, Leila  
Back: Wyatt, Erickson, Heidi



## Executive Director Note



The growth that Bluff Lake Nature Center has seen over the past handful of years is showing no signs of slowing down. Much of 2021 was spent strengthening our organization, ensuring that we will be here long into the future. Our staff and Board of Directors engaged in an analysis of our Mission, Vision, and Core Values, giving them thoughtful updates that better reflect the important work we are doing. We also invested significantly in our staff and volunteers, providing more intentional trainings that included topics such as diversity, equity, and inclusion; child mental health and development; and working with individuals experiencing homelessness.

As our organization has grown, so has the team that supports us. Our current team includes four full-time staff members, three full-time AmeriCorps environmental educators, a 10 person Board of Directors, multiple committees, eight full-time summer camp staff, and a dedicated cadre of both site and education volunteers and interns. Together we are able to manage our site, which had more visitors in 2021 than ever before, engage with thousands of kids and families through programming, and further our mission of making nature accessible in the city. I am so proud of what we have been able to accomplish and excited for what's next!

-Rachel Hutchens, Executive Director



### MISSION

BLNC educates individuals to be engaged, resilient, and curious; conserves a natural area in the city; furthers equity in outdoor access; and nurtures the health and well-being of communities and ecosystems.

### VISION

A place where people and nature coexist and thrive.

### CORE VALUES

Education      Conservation  
Equity          Community Wellbeing

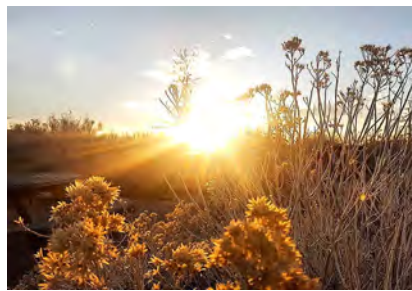
# NATURE in the CITY

As thousands of families continue to seek refuge in nature for comfort and solace, Bluff Lake is here. Visitation numbers are still rising as we strive to conserve this sanctuary and offer our diverse community a breath of fresh air in the middle of Denver.



**85,863**  
Site Visitors

+1,000 from 2020  
40% increase from 2019



## Caught on Wildlife Cameras!



Deer



Raccoons



Cottontail Rabbit



Coyote

## Understanding Our Site

We are constantly learning more from our site thanks to the hard work of our staff, volunteers, interns, and other community scientists.

**83,187** Research grade observations made through eBird and iNaturalist by the public, volunteers, and staff to date

**677** Documented plant and animal species on the site.



Coopers Hawk

American Beaver

Eared Grebe

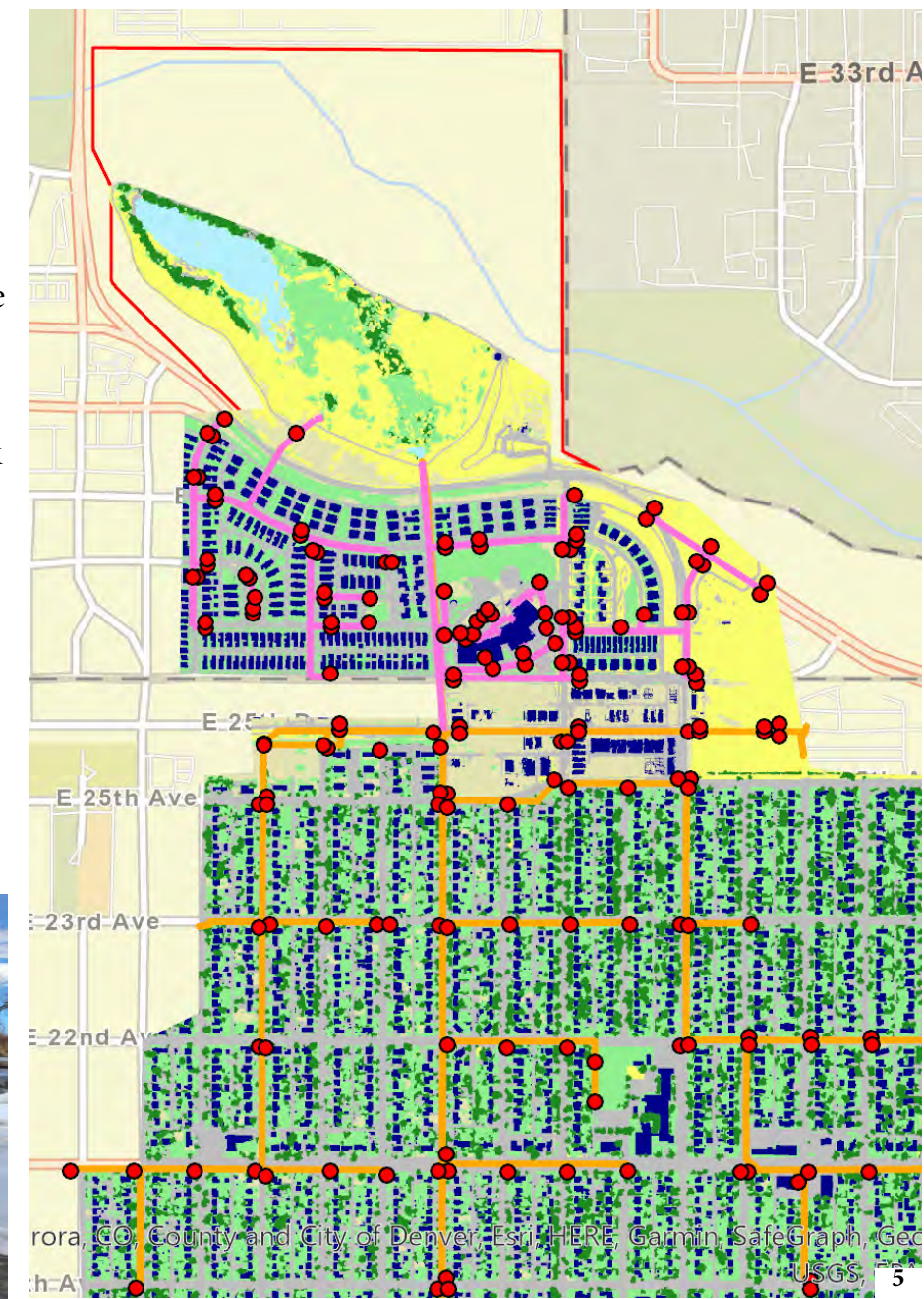
Tiger Salamander

BLNC Land Manager Erickson and our Natural Resource and Site Management Committee have been hard at work developing a lake management plan now that we have a year-round lake!

One key component of this research is understanding where the water in our lake comes from. The map to the right shows a portion of the storm drains (red dots) that currently feed directly into the lake. By knowing this information we can work to improve water quality and ensure a healthy habitat

**247** Storm drains from Denver and Aurora drain directly to Bluff Lake running through a total of **11.55** miles of storm pipes!

**766** Acres is the size of the Bluff Lake watershed



# Volunteers and Interns

Our amazing volunteers and interns spent 2021 doing everything from pulling up invasive species and cutting back trees to translating countless materials into Spanish and leading nature walks to facilitating the many engaging educational programs we provide for schools and families.



"Stewardship of Bluff Lake Nature Center wouldn't be possible without the help of our community. Thank you to all the volunteers, school groups, interns, and youth corps members that contributed their time, passion, and knowledge to this special place over the past year!"  
-Erickson, BLNC Land Manager

**240** Volunteers  
**2,260+** Hours of Work  
**\$57,500+** Value of Volunteer Time

- 14** -Week Red Rocks Community College Spring Intern
- 2** Girls Inc. Summer Camp Interns
- 7** -Week Denver Public Schools Summer Land Stewardship Intern
- 8** -Week Denver School of Science and Technology Fall Education Intern
- 3** 10-Week Mile High Youth Corps Crews (Spring, Summer, & Fall)



BEFORE Cattail Removal



AFTER Cattail Removal



Buckthorn Removal

Volunteers help maintain Bluff Lake habitats and keep them healthy. Our weekly Weed Warriors helped trim back overgrown cattails providing shoreline access for wetland animals, removed invasive buckthorn from the willows, and countless other important site management projects.

Red Rocks Community College Intern Greg facilitating a Saturday Welcome Booth.  
(top left)



Girls Inc. Summer Camp Interns Jacinta and Rey assisting with Summer Camp.  
(top right)



A HUGE THANK YOU to our 2020-2021 AmeriCorps educators Carly and Chira who worked with over 5,600 people during their service term!  
(bottom left & right)



# EXPLORING and LEARNING

We have continued to expand our educational programming to meet the increasing popularity of nature-based learning. Our summer camp filled up in record time and we've increased our after school offerings. We saw so many kids enjoying the opportunity to share what they've learned with family after their Bluff Lake experiences. Our accessible outdoor classroom, field trips, and classroom visits gave kids the opportunity to have hands-on experiences with nature and involve them in solving real-world problems.



"After our field trip, one of my students told me that they wanted Ms. Carly to come teach us another lesson. She asked the students a ton of questions so they could interact instead of just sitting and listening. These lessons really helped our students understand the problem so that they can be successful in completing their PBL."  
-1st Grade Teacher



## PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING (PBL)

As a part of our inquiry based educational programming, Bluff Lake has worked with local STEM schools to develop a new field trip model called Problem-Based Learning (PBL). Complex real-world problems are used as the vehicle to promote student learning of concepts and principles, as opposed to direct presentation of facts and concepts.

Bluff Lake is able to provide students with these real-world "problem statements" and we are thrilled to work with students as they help develop exciting and innovative solutions to our questions through visits to our site, experiments, and their own imagination and curiosity.

We completed nine PBL units in 2021, spanning elementary school, middle school, high school, and teacher professional development, reaching 643 students and completing 1,452 total student interactions (two to three visits with each class).

### SCHOOLS

- 8,200+ Students Learning In-Person or Virtually
- 1,200+ Problem-Based Learning Program Participants
- 80% of Field Trip Programs FREE
- 38 Unique Schools Served
- 47 Virtual and 214+ In-Person Programs
- 850+ Hours of Facilitated Programs
- 37+ FREE Onsite Family Programs
- 137 Girl Scout Participants
- 440 After School Students
- 838 Participants at Boo on the Bluff

### SUMMER CAMP

- 10 Weeks of Summer Camp
- 407 Summer Campers (103 more than 2020)
- 37 Junior Counselors
- 2 Girls Inc. Interns
- 30 Full or Partial Scholarships
- Totaling Over \$7,100
- 100% of Parents Likely or Highly Likely to Recommend BLNC Camp to a Friend

### PROGRAM PARTNERS

- |   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| The Urban Farm                                | Denver Forest School              |
| Sand Creek Regional Greenway                  | Struggle of Love                  |
| Mile High Youth Corps                         | SOLE- Colorado Parks and Wildlife |
| Nature's Educators                            | Environmental Learning for Kids   |
| Girls Inc.                                    | Boys and Girls Clubs              |
| Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education | EarthEcho                         |

### PBL Problem Statements

"Bluff Lake needs a way to honor human interaction while keeping our environment and waterways clean. How can Bluff Lake protect the environment (plants and animals) while allowing people to enjoy the area?"

-Human Environment Interaction PBL with 1st graders

"What are the major cultures and languages in the Denver area that we should be most conscious of, especially within a 15-mile radius of Bluff Lake?"

-Cultural Inclusiveness PBL with 8th-12th grade English Language Learners

"Bluff Lake needs a way to reduce nutrient contamination, because actions by people in the neighborhood around Bluff Lake are impacting the water quality of the lake. How can this contamination be reduced?"

-Water Quality PBL with 8th and 9th graders





“What an amazing place. So calming and peaceful. It’s places like this that show us that we can take care of nature.”



“Thank you so much for the amazing day at Bluff Lake! The kids are still talking about it.”

# LEARNING TOOLS

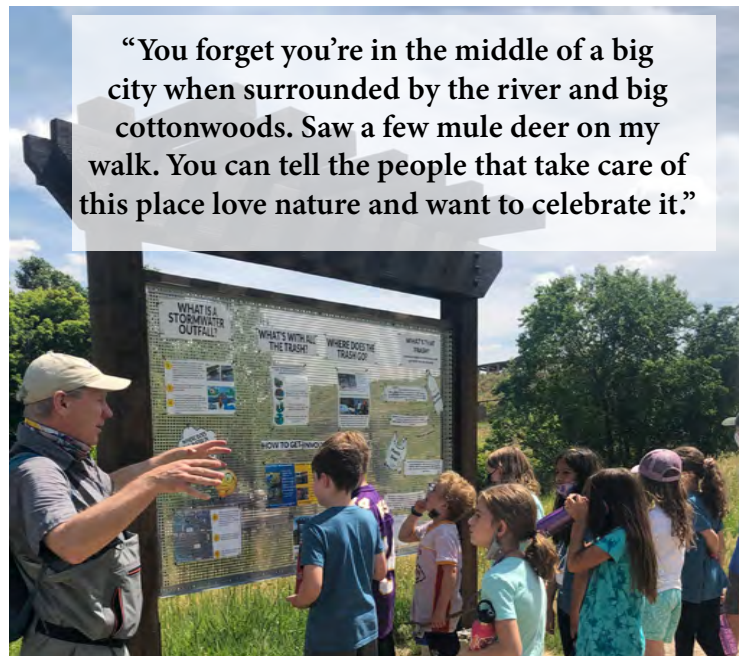
Students learn in a lot of different ways while at Bluff Lake, from exploring the creek to learning how to make observations to synthesizing their experiences with knowledge they have learned back in the classroom.

Check out what these two students observed and learned while on programs.

<p><b>What I Learned</b></p> <p>I learned that my favorite butterfly is milkweed.</p>	<p><b>My Favorite Part</b></p> <p>My favorite part is when we got to see the dam.</p>
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“The kids absolutely LOVED camp. They said it was their favorite camp ever (and they’ve gone to a lot of camps!!).”



“You forget you’re in the middle of a big city when surrounded by the river and big cottonwoods. Saw a few mule deer on my walk. You can tell the people that take care of this place love nature and want to celebrate it.”

### Wetland Habitat / Hábitat de Humedales

Name: Lara | Date: 12-14-21  
 Nombre: Lara | Fecha: 12-14-21

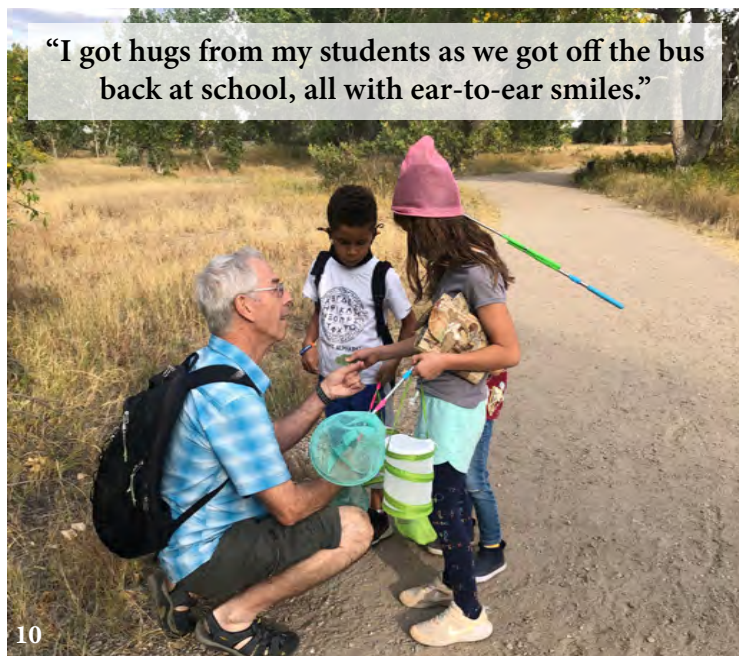
Describe the Weather: cloudy and a little sunny.  
 Describe el Clima: cloudy and a little sunny.

<p>Where can animals find these things? (Draw or write)        ¿Dónde pueden los animales encontrar estas cosas? (Dibujas o escribes)</p> <p>Food / Comida: <u>food from dam</u></p> <p>Water / Agua: <u>from the river/stream</u></p>	<p>Shelter / Refugio: <u>in dirt dam holes</u></p>
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Observations / Observaciones: Lara Lara

<p>What animals and plants do you see? (Draw or write)        ¿Qué plantas y animales ves? (Dibujas o escribes)</p> <p>beaver made Dam.</p> <p>Shelter: <u>in dam</u></p> <p>Dead flies</p> <p>Green plants</p> <p>Rocks</p>	<p>prairie dog hole 15 feet!</p> <p>Weeds</p> <p>all of the animals are hiding from the cold</p>	<p>prairie dog poo very over and small!</p> <p>snow</p> <p>Cat tails/ corn dogs sticks</p>
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Healthy Habitats have four parts: Food, water, shelter, and space.  
 Los Hábitats Saludables tienen cuatro partes: Comida, agua, refugio, y espacio



“I got hugs from my students as we got off the bus back at school, all with ear-to-ear smiles.”



“Every day, they return dirty, sweaty and smelling like nature from the long day outside, and we love it!”

# NATURE PLAY STATIONS

This summer, Bluff Lake unveiled a series of five nature play stations that have sparked the imagination of so many young visitors. Inspired by the animals that call Bluff Lake home and the ways that kids naturally want to play outside, the nature play stations encourage kids to engage in exploring the outdoors by climbing to see Bluff Lake from the point of view of a hawk, building shelters using branches, crawling through prairie dog tunnels, and more.

## Calling All Kids! Special Places to Play

Bluff Lake is for the plants and wildlife—and you. Look for Nature Play areas as you explore today. They're meant specially for kids and families.

**What to do at these Nature Play stations?**  
¿Que hacer en estas estaciones de Nature Play?

- ▶ Get off the trail (but only at these special zones).  
Sal del sendero (pero solo en estas zonas especiales).
- ▶ Observe what's around, using all your senses.  
Observa lo que hay alrededor, usando todos tus sentidos.
- ▶ Can you think like an animal?  
¿Puedes pensar como un animal?

**Hawk-Eye View**  
Hey kids—Climb up into this hawk nest and check out the view! If you were a bird, you could fly up.

This project funded by **GOCO** **GENERATION WILD**

Para español, vea esta página web: blufflake.org/np-espanol. This experience recommended for children over age 5. Play at your own risk.

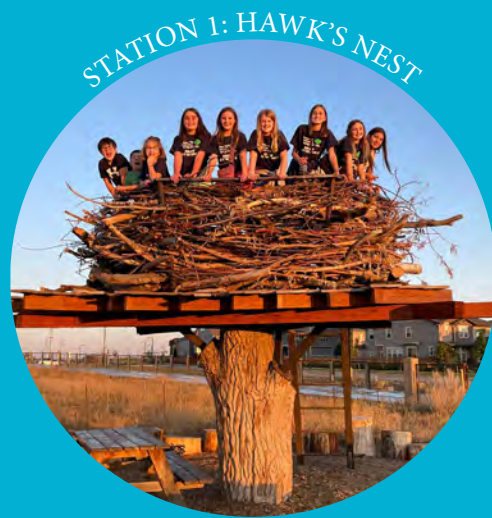


This project was funded in part by Great Outdoors Colorado through their Generation Wild funding initiative. Special shout out to Chris Story and Denver Parks and Rec for their in-kind contributions to help us build all five stations!

“The placement and activities were wonderful. We loved all stations and each were so unique and used the landscape so well!”

“The play stations are so fun and really get the kids excited about continuing along the trail!”

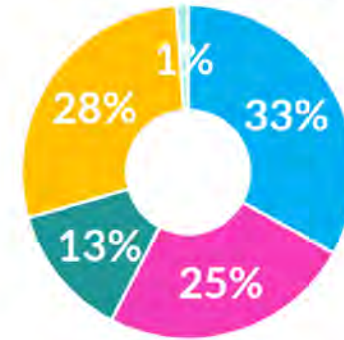
Photo Credit: Front Porch



# FINANCIALS

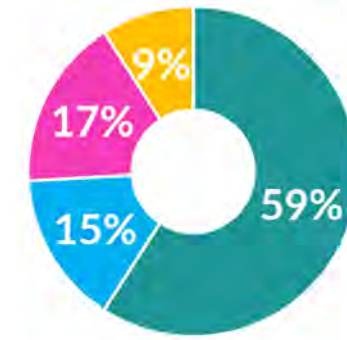
\*\*2021 Financials have not yet been audited

2021 Income \$546,000



- Grants \$180,500
- Donations \$134,200
- Site Contracts \$70,700
- Earned Income \$154,400
- Other \$6,200

2021 Expenses \$520,400



- Educational Programs and Site Management \$307,600
- Site Contracts \$78,000
- Administrative \$87,700
- Fundraising/Events \$47,100

Community support makes our work possible. Thank you to our 2021 donors and sponsors over \$1,000!



David and Jody Smith  
Hillary and Aron Dobos  
Scot and Karen Barker  
Peter and Terri Konrad  
Jonathan and Mollie Fitzpatrick  
Katie Robb Davis and Bill Davis  
Harold and Susan Skramstad  
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Tania Zeigler and Kenneth Ho  
Ann Lederer and Robert Hickler  
Mark and Jann Engelstad  
Eleanor and Bill Revelle  
Maggie Rohs  
Linda Brown  
And all of our anonymous donors



# 2021 in PHOTOS



“Since joining the Bluff Lake team in May, I've loved hearing the stories of the families and kids who connect with the site. I'm looking forward to telling these stories to a bigger audience in 2022, and showing more people what a special place and valuable resource Bluff Lake is for our community.”  
 -Leila, BLNC Development Manager, helping facilitate after school programs



“Every day at Bluff Lake I am infected by the joy, energy, and curiosity of kids, and inspired by the passion, generosity, and brilliance of volunteers and staff. My days are filled with learning, purpose, laughter, play, movement, natural beauty, and meaningful connections. I am profoundly grateful to have found this place and this community.”  
 -Heidi (front left), BLNC Education Manager, all smiles with our camp staff







# Questions about this report?

Email us [info@blufflake.org](mailto:info@blufflake.org)  
Give us a call (720) 708-4147  
Check out our website [www.blufflake.org](http://www.blufflake.org)

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Photos in report courtesy of:

Lisa Pera, George Ho, Peter  
Konrad, Jason Bidgood, Amanda  
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Liz L, Andy Leach, and BLNC  
Staff

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