

VERTICAL

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ADVOCATES

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2022 CLIMBING ADVOCATE AWARDS

PAGE 14

**Climbers Donate Land to
Grayson Highlands State Park**

PAGE 4

**Inspiring Climbing
Advocates to Dream Big**

PAGE 6

**Climbers Make History with New
Federal Climbing Legislation**

PAGE 12



Protect America's Climbing

Letter from the Director



The spring climbing season is full of possibilities. It's a time of renewal—renewed passion for time spent outside, for exploration, and, here at Access Fund, for our mission to protect sustainable climbing access and promote conservation of the lands we love.

For me, the springtime usually means I hit the road, often for work and sometimes for climbing. Every once in a while, the stars align and I get to do both at once. This year was unique, as I swung through Horseshoe Canyon for the Arkansas Climbers Festival before flying straight to Washington, D.C., to testify in Congress about our work to protect sustainable Wilderness climbing access. Seeing on-the-ground advocacy work fueled by climbers is the best kind of work travel—it always leaves me energized for the cause. It also gives our advocacy work with land managers and policymakers in D.C. an authenticity that cannot be earned any other way.

The second annual Arkansas Climbers Festival was a big success thanks to the passionate community there. Despite monsoon rains on Friday, hundreds of people showed up over the course of the weekend to take clinics, explore Horseshoe Canyon Ranch, do a little dancing, and roll around in the mud. I had an awesome time and was so thankful for the warm welcome from local climbers.

Arkansas Climbers Coalition recently secured protection for a new climbing area in the northwest part of the state. The new climbing area protects a wide swath of land in the area and provides new recreation opportunities for residents in the Bentonville and Fayetteville region. Right after I left town, the Access Fund Conservation Team arrived to help build out sustainable trails and infrastructure that will set the crag up for long-term sustainability from the get-go.

As the Climbers Fest was wrapping up, I was packing my duffle bag for my flight to D.C., trying to keep my muddy climbing clothes away from my freshly pressed suit. I was on my way to testify in support of the Protecting America's Rock Climbing (PARC) Act. The bill is the first-ever standalone climbing legislation that aims to protect sustainable Wilderness climbing across the country. Arkansas was the perfect prelude to that trip, because Rep. Bruce Westerman, the congressman from Arkansas, is the chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources, which has jurisdiction over the PARC Act.

The climbing community has worked hard to build bipartisan support for outdoor recreation and sustainable access to public lands. Rep. John Curtis (R-Utah) and Rep. Joe Neguse (D-Colo.) have championed the PARC Act, and Sen. John Hickenlooper (D-Colo.) has also stepped up recently as a champion for our community. Climbers around the country, from Arkansas to Colorado, from the Southeast to the Pacific Northwest, have been reaching out to their elected representatives to let them know how much we care about climbing. They are listening, and they are taking action on our behalf.

Thank you for supporting Access Fund and rolling up your sleeves along with us to protect America's climbing. Climbers like you make it all possible—keep up the great work!

Chris Winter
Executive Director

Above: Castle Valley, Utah. Ancestral lands of Timpanogos, Diné Bikéyah, and Níu-agma-tłı̨nı̨nı̨-ꞖꞖ. © Tony Kim.

On the cover: Wild Iris, Wyoming. Ancestral lands of Newe Sogobia, Cayuse, Apsáalooke, Tsésthó'e, Umatilla, and Walla Walla. © Tony Kim.





Building Trails to Take Down Barriers

By Enoch Glidden

With access, I am a climber. Once I'm at a climb and on the wall, I'm like any other climber, working through the beta and finding my path up the wall. The barrier I face most often isn't the climbing itself—it's the dreaded approach.

I started climbing about 10 years ago after losing a friend on Mount Rainier. I had no idea if a wheelchair user could climb mountains, but I made it my mission to find out. Since then, I've had the opportunity to climb in some of America's greatest climbing areas, from the Gunks to Yosemite and many places in between. Sometimes approaches provide easy roadside access. But more often, they pose a serious barrier for wheelchair users like me, requiring an entourage of people to help me get to a climb.

Since 2021, I've been training at a small wall at Cathedral Ledge in North Conway, New Hampshire. I can't reach the wall by myself—I need someone there to help me get to the wall and help me get back out of the climbing area. The trail grade is varied and often steep, with soft terrain covered in natural debris—impossible for a person in a wheelchair to traverse independently.

But with the help of Mike Morin at Access Fund, Mount Washington Valley Adaptive Sports, Friends of the Ledges, and

other organizations, that's going to change. Together, we're spearheading an effort to build a first-of-its-kind accessible approach trail to Cathedral Ledge that will allow people who use wheelchairs to reach the cliff without the help of others.

All grades on the new trail will be 10 percent or less. There will be a wide firm path with resting areas at the top of some of the steeper grades. At the end of the trail, there will be a safe staging area for adaptive climbers to set up their gear and lower into the climbing area safely. With the help of a professional accessible trail builder, we are working to show the climbing community what's possible.

This new trail will mean more than just access—it means independence for adaptive climbers who use a wheelchair. They'll be able to show up like any other climber and get to the wall, climb, get back out, and head home all on their own. Not every climbing area can have an accessible trail, but there are hundreds around the country where it could be done. I believe it should be done—it's our responsibility as climbers to improve access for everyone. More climbers means more climbing advocates, and more climbing advocates means the continued growth of our movement. Get involved with your local climbing organization today to see how you can help improve climbing access and conservation in your local area.



Enoch Glidden topping out on the Wall of the Hurley Morning Light. Ancestral lands of Wabanaki, Ndakina, and Pequawket. © Mike Morin. Headshot © Dave Dostie.

A photograph of a person climbing a large, dark rock in a forest. The climber is wearing a maroon shirt, dark shorts, and a white cap. The rock is massive and textured, with some yellow markers on top. The background is filled with green trees and foliage, suggesting a lush forest environment. The lighting is bright, indicating daytime.

Climbers Donate Land to Grayson Highlands State Park

Access Fund and Central Appalachia Climbers Coalition (CACC) are thrilled to announce a new land donation to Grayson Highlands State Park in southwest Virginia. The parcel buffers state park land from private development, protects an undeveloped hardwood forest, and supports recreational access. It also safeguards an outstanding house-sized boulder known as the AVP Boulder, which boasts more than 20 climbs from V0 to V10, with short approaches and flat landings.

“In Virginia and around the country, climbers are a positive force for conservation,” says Access Fund Executive Director Chris Winter. “Grayson Highlands State Park is already a premier summer climbing destination, and this donation will help the park remain a magnet for climbers in the region, supporting tourism and economic growth.”

Large portions of the Southeast—Appalachia in particular—are pivoting from extractive and damaging industries to a more sustainable outdoor recreation economy. Climbing is a key regional building block that can support that transition. Studies show climbers contribute millions of dollars to the rural areas around climbing hubs like New River Gorge, West Virginia, and Red River Gorge, Kentucky.

“Earlier this year, I visited climbing areas in Breaks Interstate Park with Access Fund, Central Appalachia Climbers Coalition, and the park’s superintendent Austin Bradley—and saw up close how bringing Virginians and folks from around the country to climb in Virginia is good for business, fosters community, and strengthens people’s appreciation for the great outdoors,” says U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia. “I’m thrilled about the donation

of this land to Grayson Highlands State Park, which will help bring those benefits to Grayson County and help more climbers experience all that Virginia has to offer.”

As the popularity of bouldering at Grayson Highlands State Park grew, so did visitation to the AVP Boulders. In 2016, private landowners closed the area and put the entire 29-acre property that included the AVP Boulders up for sale. CACC—with support from Access Fund—acted quickly to carve out and buy the 1.3-acre tract that contains the boulders and their roadside access point. CACC is one of 145 local climbing organizations nationwide supported by Access Fund, the nation’s largest climbing advocacy and conservation organization.

“Since my very first session there in 2008, the AVP Boulders have always held a special presence, even among the other boulder fields in the region,” says Aaron Parlier, CACC board member. “Grayson Highlands is one of the finest examples of partnership between climbers and park managers in the Southeast, and we’re thrilled to make good on our promise of donating this land to the Virginia State Parks system.”

Grayson Highlands State Park will manage this donated parcel for recreation, permanently protecting the land and climbing resource for generations to come. The partnership

between climbers, CACC, and the state park was an important foundation for the land donation.

“Virginia State Parks appreciates the efforts by the Central Appalachia Climbers Coalition to help provide stewardship over the past few years for this natural boulder field adjacent to Grayson Highlands State Park,” says Frank Stovall, deputy director of operations for the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, which manages state parks. “Working with our partners at CACC and Access Fund to properly incorporate the site into the park will allow for additional outdoor recreation opportunities and preserve the site for future generations to enjoy.”

CACC supports the park’s management of bouldering through annual cleanups and trail stewardship days. To open more climbing, CACC and Access Fund have partnered with other Virginia State Parks nearby, like Breaks Interstate Park. They also work with land managers at Hidden Valley, City of Norton, and City of Appalachia.

“Climbing and conservation go hand-in-hand,” says Winter. “In this incredible corner of southwest Virginia, climbers are working hard to ensure that’s the case for generations to come.”

“Bringing Virginians and folks from around the country to climb in Virginia is good for business, fosters community, and strengthens people’s appreciation for the great outdoors. I’m thrilled about the donation of this land to Grayson Highlands State Park.”

— U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine



Left: The AVP Boulder, Grayson Highlands State Park, Virginia. Ancestral lands of ᑕᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ Tsalaguwetiyi, Moneton, and Satsoyaha. © Aaron Parlier. Above: CACC members with the AVP Boulder. Ancestral lands of ᑕᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ Tsalaguwetiyi, Moneton, and Satsoyaha. © Jesse Cheers.

Inspiring Local Advocates to Dream Big



How do you build on a program with more than a decade of great results? The answer for the 2023 Access Fund Conservation Teams is rooted in community.

Access Fund Conservation Teams work with local climbing communities to rehabilitate popular climbing areas. Their technical trail building and conservation work sets climbing areas up for long-term sustainable access that protects the environment. Thousands of climbers volunteer with our Conservation Teams every year through their local climbing organizations.

Our work with local communities and local climbing organizations doesn't just restore beatdown belay areas or repair deteriorating trails—it also helps build a community of inspired advocates. This season, the Conservation Teams will build the same stone staircases, retaining walls, and sustainable trails they're known for, but they're going bigger than ever on something else, too—inspiring local climbing communities to dream big.

Crags in Need

Our most popular climbing areas are seeing more and more traffic, and the effects compound with every passing season. But there is something we can do about it, even in the most dire cases.

These areas need major overhauls—not just a new switchback or belay area—to handle the traffic they're seeing. “One of the early goals of the stewardship program was spreading the importance of stewarding our climbing areas,” says Andrea Hassler, Access Fund stewardship manager. “We can check that box—people get it, and they know how important it is. Now, we're going to give local climbing communities the tools they need to go bigger on their stewardship projects.”

Thinking about the crag as a whole, understanding how climbers will use the crag, and planning a system that can handle the impact of hundreds or thousands of climbers every year is no small feat.

Thinking about the crag as a whole, understanding how climbers will use the crag, and planning a system that can handle the impact of hundreds or thousands of climbers every year is no small feat. And bringing it to life is even more work. That's where the Access Fund Conservation Teams come in.



A Bigger Ambition: Whole-Crag Health

This year, the Conservation Teams will spend up to 10 weeks embedded at crags across the country. “Projects like these take knowledge, they take technical expertise, they take volunteers, but most of all, they just take time,” says Hassler. “Putting our teams in the field for weeks at a time levels up their effect from temporary to profound.”

The Conservation Teams will equip areas that need the most attention with whole-crag infrastructure to withstand the growing numbers of climbers. That’s usually a combination of stone staircases, retaining walls, durable trails, appropriate drainage, and other structures. “If we did it one retaining wall at a time, coming back year after year to do one more small piece of the bigger project, it would take decades,” says Ty Tyler, Access Fund stewardship director. “When the Conservation Teams invest longer periods of time into climbing areas, they can get a spot done and leave it ready for generations of climbers.”

Strengthening Community Capacity

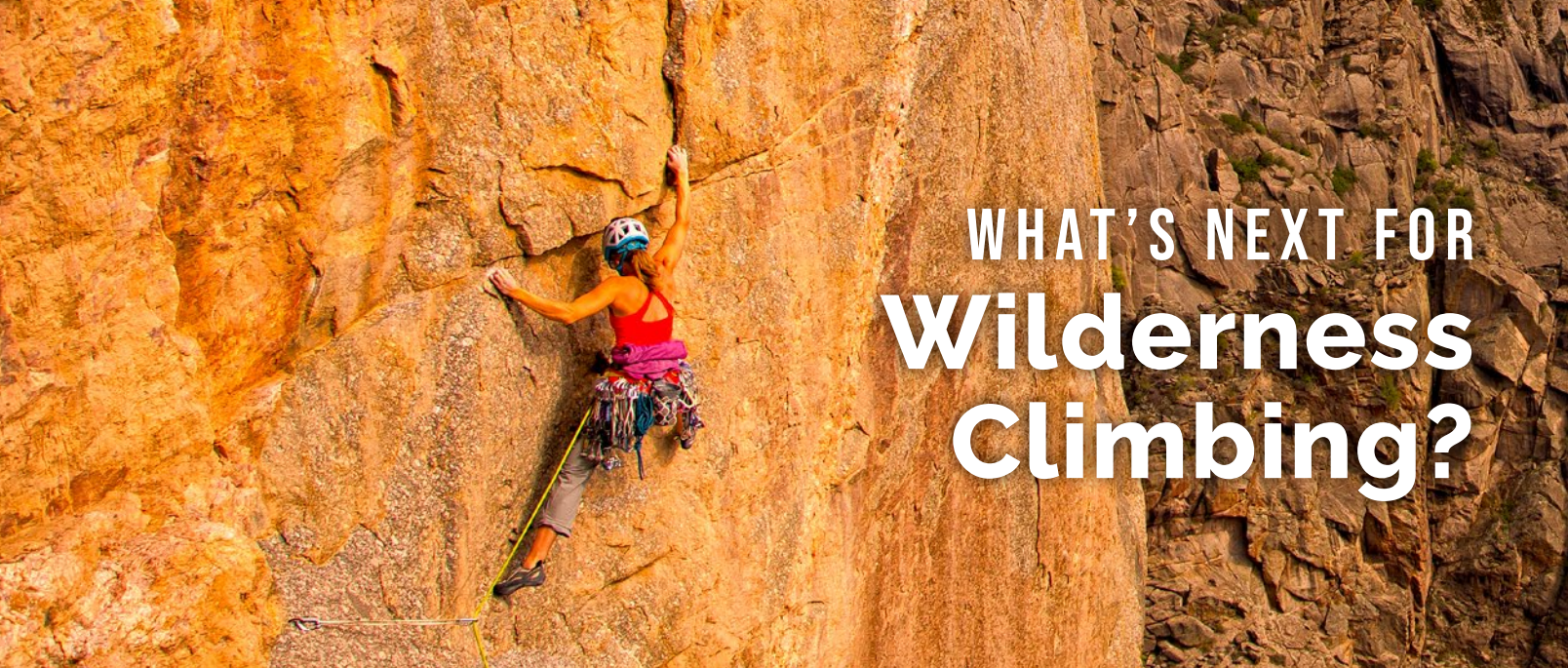
Every crag is seeing the impacts of climbing’s growing popularity and they all deserve restoration. But the Conservation Teams can only visit so many crags in a year. That’s why it’s vitally important that their work not only restore the crags they visit but also strengthen the capacity of local communities to carry this work forward with their own restoration projects.

Local communities will also get the skills and knowledge they need to make those dreams a reality for their local climbing areas.

Local communities will also gain the skills and knowledge they need to make those dreams a reality for their local climbing areas. “Our goal is to build capacity everywhere we go,” Tyler says, “and the longer we stay in an area, the more time local advocates have to work with us and learn the skills they need to carry it forward after the Conservation Teams leave.”

“Every community of climbers is unique,” says Conservation Team member Loryn Posladek. “This year, we’re looking forward to settling into a place for a bit longer, getting to know the local climbers, and helping them tackle bigger projects.” Kyle Leihnsing, a fellow Conservation Team member, adds: “It’s just a lot of fun to get to dig our teeth into a big project and leave behind some cool structures that’ll be there for generations of climbers.”

Left: Ten Sleep Canyon, Wyoming. Ancestral lands of Eastern Shoshone, Apsáalooke, Tsésthóë, and Ochéthi Šakówiŋ. © Kris Ugarizza. Right: Pictured Rocks County Park, Iowa. Ancestral lands of Ioway, Sauk, Fox, Ochéthi Šakówiŋ, and Kickapoo. © Raud Kashef.



WHAT'S NEXT FOR Wilderness Climbing?

By *Laura Snider*

For more than a century, some of the biggest champions for protecting wild places have been climbers—explorers whose experiences on the rock and on mountainsides forged within them a deep and abiding love for the landscapes they traveled.

David Brower, for example, who put up many historic first ascents around the United States, was an executive director of the Sierra Club and early advisor to the Access Fund. The North Face founder Doug Tompkins, who used his personal fortune to protect massive tracts of land in Patagonia, claimed early ascents of the Salathé Wall on El Cap and Fitz Roy in Patagonia, among others. Former U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, who has made a life and career out of connecting people with conservation and the natural world, has an accomplished mountaineering resume that includes an ascent of Vinson Massif, the highest peak in Antarctica.

The opportunity to climb in some of the world's most spectacular landscapes continues to turn individual adventurers into committed conservationists and ensures that climbers as a whole support Wilderness protection and other conservation initiatives.

But that opportunity is currently under serious threat as the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service are working on new national-level guidance that may prohibit fixed anchors in Wilderness areas, which would amount to a fundamental reinterpretation of the Wilderness Act of 1964. In other words, the government would regard bolts as illegal unless federal bureaucrats provide special allowances for individual fixed anchors. At stake is not only the ability to safely climb some of the most iconic routes in America, from big walls in Yosemite and Zion to alpine spires in Rocky Mountain National Park, but also the potential erosion of climbers as Wilderness advocates.

"When the Wilderness Act was being conceptualized in the 1960s, climbers and mountaineers were out exploring these wild places, and their experiences helped build support for the Wilderness Act," says Access Fund Executive Director Chris Winter. "If climbers are no longer welcome in Wilderness areas, the long and rich history of climbers as vocal advocates for conservation will be undermined. We need a broad movement of people working to protect public lands, and it's critical that climbers remain among those numbers."

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The fight to protect bolts and other fixed anchors in Wilderness areas is not new. In fact, Access Fund has been leading this advocacy effort since the organization's inception more than 30 years ago. Through its vigilance over the decades, Access Fund has been able to defend the position that conditional use of fixed anchors is a historic activity that is fundamentally allowed in Wilderness areas. This position has always included necessary restrictions, which Access Fund has largely viewed as appropriate, including a ban on power drills to place bolts in the Wilderness. While challenges to fixed anchors in Wilderness areas have arisen over the years, the current threat is deeply concerning for its scope.

Language Matters

The current threat to climbing in Wilderness first popped up in January 2022, and, as is often the case with these things, it wasn't announced with any sort of fanfare. In fact, for most climbers, it may not have been obvious that there was any threat at all.

The issue began in language used in a scoping document that outlined Joshua Tree National Park's intention to create a Climbing Management Plan, in part to address negative impacts associated with an increase in park visitors, including damage to desert crusts, cultural resources, and desert vegetation. Access Fund and climbers in general have supported reasonable regulations to help manage our impacts, and many climbers' first reaction was to support the broad concepts proposed by the park.

The problem, however, was that the document referred to fixed anchors as "prohibited installations," and according to the Wilderness Act, "no structure or installation" shall be allowed in Wilderness areas, a designation that covers 85% of the park and about a quarter of the established climbing routes. Historically, "structures and installations" have been interpreted as buildings, fences, pipelines, communications



Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Colorado. Ancestral lands of Ute. © Chris Noble.

towers, and the like—not climbing hardware. The language used in the Joshua Tree scoping document would upend 60 years of precedent that pitons, bolts, slings, and other fixed anchors are fundamentally allowed in the Wilderness. Essentially, the park service was now saying they believed fixed anchors were instead prohibited by default.

“We were caught a bit off guard,” says Erik Murdock, Access Fund vice president of policy and government affairs. “All of a sudden, without consulting any national park partners or stakeholders, the park is saying it now considers bolts and other fixed anchors illegal.”

The shift to anchors being banned by default in Joshua Tree’s Wilderness could, at its core, make climbing less safe in the park and even result in the removal of dozens of routes in their entirety. Currently, one-to-one bolt replacement with a hand drill is allowed without a permit.

While any proposed climbing restrictions in Joshua Tree—with its thousands of routes and boulder problems—are a big deal in their own right, Access Fund staff members were immediately concerned that whatever happens in Joshua Tree could set a new precedent for Wilderness areas across the country. It turns out they didn’t have long to wait for affirmation that their worries were valid.

Last June, Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, home to gritty and adventurous multipitch climbs that wander up the tallest cliffs in Colorado, restarted its work to update how it regulates climbing as part of a larger Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan.

The draft plan, similar to Joshua Tree, treated fixed anchors in Wilderness areas as fundamentally prohibited—another domino was falling. Would Rocky Mountain National Park, home of the Diamond on Longs Peak, the Petit Grepon, Sharktooth, and other classic alpine features, be next? Or Yosemite, where El Capitan is designated as vertical Wilderness after you get a couple pitches off the ground?

Marshaling Support

Access Fund is not waiting to find out. The organization launched a vigorous response to the proposed Joshua Tree Climbing Management Plan, which included joining a half-dozen other organizations to protest the interpretation that fixed anchors

are installations. It’s notable that the partnering organizations included The Wilderness Society and the California Wilderness Coalition, among other conservation groups, a testament to the long relationship between climbing and conservation.

Ultimately the response caused the park service to put the Climbing Management Plan on hold while they craft national-level guidance to clarify whether bolts and other fixed anchors should be fundamentally allowed, or not, in the Wilderness. The guidance has yet to be issued, but signals on the Hill have the Access Fund staff preparing for a fight, and in the interim, it’s continuing to mobilize support for fixed anchors.

One powerful advocate for Access Fund’s position is Colorado’s governor, Jared Polis, who sponsored legislation when he served in Congress that designated the vast majority of Rocky Mountain National Park as Wilderness. The legislation was passed relatively recently, in 2009, long after climbing was well established in the park. The intent of the law was never to restrict climbing.

Polis laid out this argument and others in a letter to the secretaries of the interior and agriculture dated December 5.

“I understand that the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service are considering a proposal to change the long-standing considerations and status of fixed anchors in designated Wilderness,” Polis wrote. “I believe this would be a serious mistake, and I urge you to ensure that this does not happen. ... I am deeply concerned about the impact this would have on the ability to manage and designate future Wilderness areas, an effort we must continue to undertake in the face of climate change, impacts to nature and biodiversity, and in efforts consistent with the administration’s own America the Beautiful initiative.”

While Access Fund marshals its supporters, it’s also pursuing another line of defense: a legislative fix. A national law that would enshrine the legality of fixed anchors in Wilderness areas has long been a priority for Access Fund. Last fall, Access Fund successfully negotiated the inclusion of language in the America’s Outdoor Recreation Act that would do just that, allowing for the responsible and sustainable use, placement, and maintenance of fixed anchors in Wilderness areas. The act has yet to pass, but it has bipartisan support and Access Fund and other outdoor recreation groups supporting the legislation are still hopeful that the bill could become law in the future. (Learn more about this year’s efforts on page 12.)

An Unnecessary Change

Access Fund’s full-throated support for fixed anchors in the Wilderness should not be interpreted to mean that the organization does not support limits on anchors—and climbing in general—in Wilderness areas. Climbers, and there are more of us all the time, have impacts, and there may be areas or time periods when climbing is not appropriate. However, Access Fund believes that the National Park Service, the Forest Service, and other agencies that manage Wilderness areas already have the tools they need to effectively manage climbing.

Climbers have impacts, and there may be areas or time periods when climbing is not appropriate. However, Access Fund believes that the agencies that manage Wilderness areas already have the tools they need to effectively manage climbing.

“Land managers are understandably struggling to deal with an increase in recreation of all kinds,” Winter says. “But we believe these agencies already have every tool they need—and all the legal authority—to manage climbing. They can remove routes where the resource is jeopardized, they can remove fixed anchors if they are causing impacts, they can even close whole areas to climbing. There is no reason to reinterpret the Wilderness Act.”

As well, Winter points out that there are times when anchors actually aid conservation. For example, their placement can guide climbers away from more sensitive areas or lessen the erosion that can occur on descents. In fact, Joshua Tree itself specifically authorized fixed anchors in Wilderness areas to protect trees that were used as rappel stations. They can also reduce both the need for rescues—by making climbing and descending safer—and the impacts of the complicated rescues that are sometimes still necessary.

The Fight Will Continue

As Access Fund waits to learn what the national-level guidance on fixed anchors in the Wilderness will be, the threat continues to solidify. In December 2022, just days before Christmas, the National Park Service approved the environmental assessment for the Black Canyon’s Wilderness management plan, which specifically defines climbing anchors as installations.

The plan commits the park to reviewing all existing climbing routes as soon as possible to determine whether existing fixed anchors will be removed. It will also hamper the ability for old and unsafe bolts and anchors to be replaced, and make new

route development unreasonably challenging to get approved.

While permit processes for bolting in Wilderness areas are not new, the elevation of a bolt to the category of “installation” means the bar for a permit becomes much higher and would require an onerous administrative exception process called a minimum requirement analysis (MRA), which is meant for activities that are illegal in Wilderness areas. Instead of asking whether fixed anchors will create impacts to natural and cultural resources, an MRA process asks whether fixed anchors are necessary for the administration of the Wilderness itself. This high and vague bar would be subject to a wide spectrum of interpretation.

What’s Next for Wilderness Climbing

The gravity of the threat is one of the key points Black Diamond athlete Chris Schulte took away from a trip to Washington, D.C., in early December with Access Fund staff. Schulte, known for his bouldering exploits, has been climbing for nearly 30 years.

“I found myself up there realizing, wow, this is a big deal,” Schulte says of his time on the Hill. “I walked away with the realization that I want to be more vocal and share this information with other climbers, in social media, and in presentations. This could be dire, and I want to help educate people.”

Schulte’s entrance into climbing in the 1990s in Durango was driven first and foremost by a desire to get out into stunning places—to be a part of the landscape—and he has an appreciation for the early explorers who felt the same.

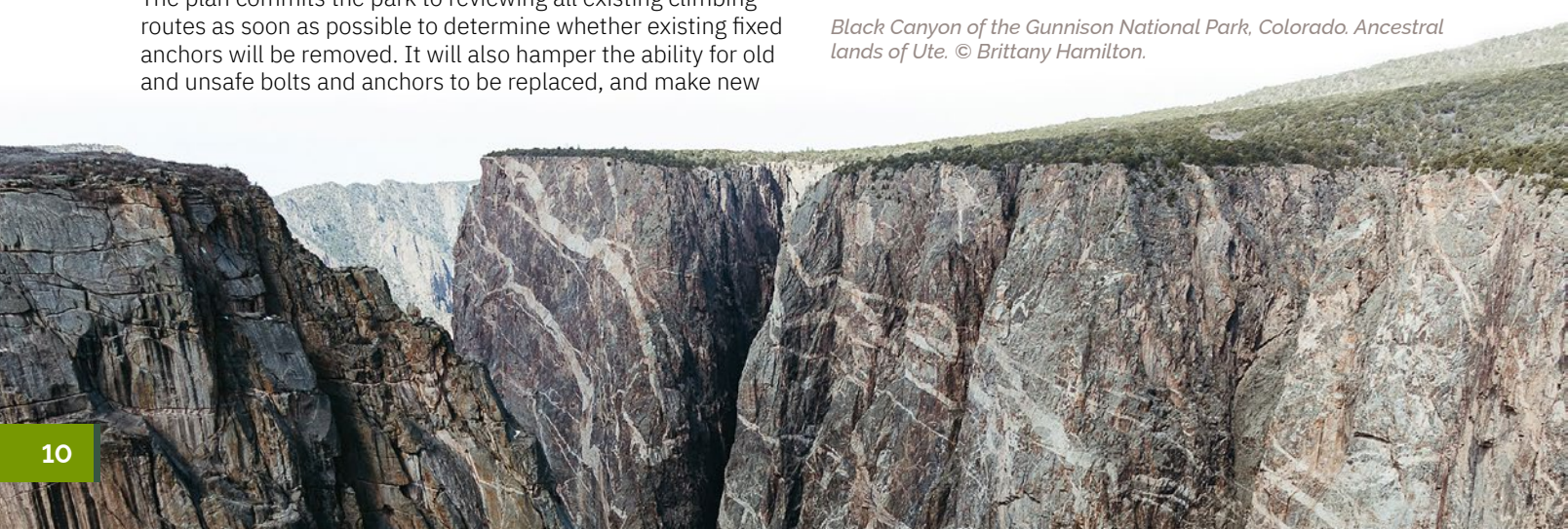
“In old photos of men climbing in bloomers and women climbing in wool dresses, they’re using pitons,” he says. “Fixed anchors have always been part of climbing and part of American outdoor history.”

If the guidance, when it comes, does indeed overrule the current interpretation of the Wilderness Act and classify fixed anchors as illegal installations, the fight will still not be over, Murdock says. The issue is so fundamental to climbing that a ban cannot be left unchallenged.

“We have been dealing with this issue for 30 years, since the beginning of Access Fund,” Murdock says. “We will never stop in this battle.”

Regardless of what lies ahead, Access Fund will need the community’s committed support. When the action alert call comes, climbers need to speak up quickly and loudly, and share broadly within their networks. Our ability to climb in some of the most revered and precious areas in our country—from Yosemite to the Linville Gorge and from the North Cascades to the White Mountains—is at stake.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Colorado. Ancestral lands of Ute. © Brittany Hamilton.



5 Things Every First-Time Conservation Volunteer Should Know

Ready to join your first conservation volunteer day?

Trail work and other stewardship projects are rewarding experiences that benefit you and your local climbing area. Here are five things you need to know to get the most out of your first volunteer day.

- 1. Conservation work is hard work.**

There will be a job for people of all abilities, but everyone can expect to put in a solid day's work. Activities may include trash pickup, moving rocks, clearing brush, building retaining walls, and many other activities.
- 2. Dress appropriately.**

Closed-toed shoes are essential to protect your feet. We recommend long sleeves and pants for extra protection, and extra layers you can take on and off to adapt to the elements will come in handy.
- 3. Be prepared with the essentials.**

Bring snacks, sunscreen, bug spray, and lots of water. Gloves are a bonus if you have your own, but you'll likely be able to borrow some if not.
- 4. Follow instructions to stay safe.**

The coordinators will circle up with volunteers to review safety precautions and equipment. Pay close attention to prevent accidents or injuries to yourself or others.
- 5. Have fun!**

Volunteering for a conservation project is not only good for the environment but also good for your well-being. You will learn new things, meet new people, and have an amazing new experience.

Cathedral Ledge, New Hampshire. Ancestral lands of Wabanaki, N'dakina, and Pequawket. © Cait Bourgalt.





Climbers Make History with Legislation to Protect Wilderness Climbing

A new bill from Reps. John Curtis (R-Utah) and Joe Neguse (D-Colo.), the Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act (PARC Act), would bring consistency to federal climbing management policy and protect some of America's most iconic Wilderness climbing areas. Access Fund brought together these pro-climbing legislative champions, Wilderness policy experts, and everyday rock climbers to develop the contours of this critical legislation. The bill responds to a growing threat from the National Park Service, which has recently moved to prohibit fixed anchors in Wilderness areas in California and Colorado. It is the first-ever standalone climbing bill that provides national-level protections for sustainable Wilderness climbing uses.

"Access Fund's core mission is to protect America's climbing, and we're thrilled to help craft and support a new bill that would do just that: the Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act," says Access Fund Executive Director Chris Winter. "Thanks to the incredible leadership of Reps. Curtis and Neguse, we have an opportunity to protect Wilderness climbing and America's exceptional climbing history."

Wilderness plays an important role in American climbing—past and present. Some of the most iconic climbing in the country is located within Wilderness, including areas like El Capitan, The Diamond on Longs Peak, Joshua Tree's Wonderland of Rocks, and North Carolina's iconic Linville Gorge. Climbers have always relied on the legal and conditional use, placement, and maintenance of bolts and other fixed anchors. These anchors help keep these areas pristine, while still allowing climbers to safely ascend and descend technical routes. The Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act would bring consistency to federal management of climbing in Wilderness areas across land management agencies, including the management of fixed anchors, bolts, and other hardware. It enjoys broad support from recreationists and conservationists across the country.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness, Colorado. Ancestral lands of Ute. © Chris Noble.

“The bipartisan Protecting America’s Rock Climbing Act is anchored to the benefits of rock climbing, which is good for our health, rural economies, and our public lands,” says Winter. “It’s also a testament to the growing power of the climbing advocacy movement, which is dedicated to protecting the land through smart climbing management policy that ensures sustainable access for climbers.”

Curtis and Neguse both represent districts with strong climbing communities and economies that depend on the \$12 billion climbing industry.

“In Utah, recreation on public lands is a large and ever-growing industry,” says Curtis. “Ensuring access to these lands is vital not just for our economy, but also to ensure the millions of Americans who enjoy rock climbing can fully explore our nation’s national treasures.”

“Colorado’s natural areas are home to some world-renowned rock climbing locations. By requiring additional agency guidance on climbing management, we are taking steps to protect our climbers and the spaces in which they recreate,” says Neguse. “I am thankful to Rep. Curtis for his continued partnership in our efforts to bolster outdoor recreation, and am glad to join him in introducing this legislation.”

This is not the first time Western elected leaders have advocated for Wilderness climbing. As Colorado’s governor, Jared Polis, said in a November 2022 letter to land management agencies:

“We should be doing everything we can right now to grow the coalition of champions for public lands and to support our land management agencies in responding to climate change and taking care of the places entrusted to our care. In contrast, a new prohibition on fixed anchors in Wilderness would jeopardize the safety of climbers, harm our recreation economy [...], establish unnecessary bureaucracy, and restrict access to some of the wildest places in America.”

On March 28, Winter testified in support of the PARC Act in front of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Federal Lands. He detailed what the bill would and would not do, emphasizing that climber safety is on the line. “We strongly support the PARC Act,” Winter said, “because it will protect safe and sustainable access for climbers on federal public lands and ensure ongoing support for new Wilderness and land conservation efforts from the outdoor recreation community.”

Curtis, who serves as vice chair of the subcommittee, spoke up during the hearing to highlight climbers’ track record as conservationists: “The rock climbing community [...] are among our most predictable caretakers of these Wilderness areas and [...] care deeply about protecting them.”

The Future of the Bill

Access Fund, our partners, and the climbing community celebrated this milestone in the history of climbing advocacy—but the work is far from done. Right now, Access Fund is working to advance both the PARC Act and the America’s Outdoor Recreation Act through the House and the Senate.



Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness, Colorado. Ancestral lands of Ute. © Chris Noble.

WHAT THE PARC ACT WOULD DO

The PARC Act is a simple and elegant solution that will:

- Require national guidance on Wilderness climbing management that safeguards sustainable climbing access.
- Clarify that climbing and the judicious use of fixed anchors are allowable and appropriate uses in Wilderness areas.
- Preserve agencies’ existing authority to regulate climbing in a way that protects Wilderness characteristics, natural resources, and cultural values.
- Provide for public participation in decisions affecting climbing in Wilderness areas.

The PARC Act will not:

- Amend the Wilderness Act in any way.
- Enable sport-style bolting in Wilderness areas, which would turn them into high-use climbing destinations.
- Overturn the prohibition on power drills in Wilderness areas, which Access Fund supports.



Climbing Advocate Awards

2022



Every year, we honor some of the individuals and organizations who stand out for their exceptional commitment to building communities, stewarding climbing areas, and fighting for sustainable and equitable access. We're all better off for being able to count these talented, motivated, and hardworking individuals among our numbers. Meet the recipients of our 2022 Climbing Advocate Awards.

Josephine Sterr Organizational Leadership Award

While Josephine Sterr's skill set ranges from stewardship to rebolting to fundraising, her biggest impact has arguably been organizing and empowering local climbing organizations to safeguard their foundational health and strength. Her passion for organizational leadership makes her an invaluable asset in any setting. In her 17 years of climbing advocacy, Sterr has served on the boards of three LCOs, grown two of those LCOs to add executive directors and accountants, and led major stewardship projects.



Doug Hemken Stewardship & Policy Award

For more than 30 years, Doug Hemken has been fighting for sustainable access, connecting more people to nature and inspiring them to protect and conserve the lands they love. He has served on the board of Wisconsin Climbers Association since its inception, leading access and stewardship initiatives for the majority of his tenure. Hemken has persevered since the 1990s to help expand climbing access through his tireless work with private landowners and state land managers.



Above: Mazama, Washington. Ancestral lands of Nle?kepmx Tmix^w, Syilx, Cayuse, spa'lmuləx^wəx^w, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Umatilla and Walla Walla. © Tony Kim.

Leandra Hernandez
JEDI & Stewardship Award

Leandra Hernandez has dedicated her time, effort, and energy as a climbing advocate to ensure all climbers have the opportunity to share in the joys of climbing. In her time on the board of directors for Salt Lake Climbers Alliance (SLCA), she co-founded and co-facilitated its Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) committee and worked to bridge the gap between the organization and other affinity groups. Her work with SLCA led her to Salt Lake Area Queer Climbers, where she now serves as co-leader. Her work has improved access for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and queer climbers in the Salt Lake City region.



Adriana Boylan
Bolt Replacement & Mentorship Award

Adriana Boylan is on a mission to make climbers—especially women and youth—the most powerful advocates they can be. She encourages more women to get involved in central Oregon’s rebolting community through education and volunteer efforts. She also founded the Cascades Academy Climbing Club at the middle school where she teaches, working with her students to build wag bag stations around Smith Rock. On top of it all, she is a committed member of the High Desert Climbers Alliance (HDCA) board of directors. Boylan is an inspiring leader in the central Oregon climbing community and a role model for climbing advocates everywhere.



Chris Vultaggio
JEDI & Landowner Support Award

Chris Vultaggio is an accomplished photographer and video editor who donates his time and professional skills to the Gunks Climbers’ Coalition (GCC) to bring new climbers into the advocacy movement. His short film *Conserve: Climbing and Stewardship in the Shawangunks* focuses on the impact of climbing and what we can do as climbers to help protect this fragile landscape. He is also a dedicated advocate for equitable access, working with GCC to arrange free clinic spots for underrepresented climbers at Gunks Fest and pushing the climbing community to address important JEDI issues.



Dan Greenwald
Stewardship & Land Manager Collaboration Award

Dan Greenwald works tirelessly to protect and conserve the unique climbing areas in northern New Mexico. Greenwald’s work reinforces positive climber relationships with land managers through collaborative efforts like working with U.S. Forest Service officials to install peregrine nesting signage and coordinating major trail days with the Bureau of Land Management. He is also a dedicated mentor to climbers in the Taos area, holding workshops and training in his own garage to pass his skills along to others.



Audrey & Curtis Gale-Dyer
Land Management & Stewardship Award

The Red River Gorge Climbers Coalition (RRGCC) owns and manages an ambitious amount of land—over 1,200 acres of forested Kentucky wildlands. The organization couldn’t do it without the stellar efforts of Audrey and Curtis Gale-Dyer, official land managers for RRGCC. Their work includes securing grant money for stewardship projects, organizing volunteer days, maintaining and executing a comprehensive stewardship plan for all of RRGCC’s properties, and so much more. Their work sets a high standard for land conservation and climbing access.



Crystal Hudelson & Keith Murakata
JEDI & Stewardship Award

Climbers of Color (CoC) has made an incredible impact on climbing access for the BIPOC community, and two of its most influential advocates are Crystal Hudelson and Keith Murakata. Their involvement with CoC began with co-hosting BIPOC climb nights at local gyms and blossomed into their current positions as co-directors of Rock at CoC. They now focus on developing instructional programming for climbers, photographers, and guides that promotes a collaborative and nurturing learning environment.



Emily Seelenfreund JEDI & Adaptive Access Award

Climbers are a powerful force for protecting the places and the sport we love—and the more climbers there are, the more powerful our movement becomes. Emily Seelenfreund is leading the effort to bring more climbers with disabilities into the climbing community in the San Francisco Bay area. Her organization, Paracliffhangers, improves access for climbers with disabilities to a range of outdoor climbing areas, including the Berkeley Hills, Yosemite, and more. She also leads the organization’s efforts to partner with land managers to improve accessibility for people with disabilities of all kinds. Her work extends to indoor climbing, where she works with local gyms to facilitate meetups that routinely draw in members of the para community who have never climbed before.



Climbing Resource Access Group of Vermont Land Conservation Award

Since its acquisition of Bolton Dome in 2018, Climbing Resource Access Group of Vermont (CRAG-VT) has worked hard to open the crag for climbing and establish a sustainable trail network. The organization also secured a permanent conservation easement on the Bolton Dome land. CRAG-VT worked with Access Fund to ensure the agreement strengthens conservation and recreation protections, and it also worked with local Indigenous leaders to ensure the agreement wouldn’t interfere with Indigenous uses of the land.



Ryan Kuehn Stewardship & Conservation Award

Ryan Kuehn’s specialty, acquired over the last nine years of trail work, is designing and building technical trails that can stand the test of time. Today, he serves as the stewardship director of Boulder Climbing Community, where he leads a trail crew to build technical, sustainable trails throughout the Front Range of Colorado. As his friend and compatriots like to say, if you’ve ever climbed in the Front Range, it’s almost guaranteed you’ve stepped on a rock that Kuehn quarried, carried, or set into a stone staircase himself.



Western Massachusetts Climbers’ Coalition Land Conservation Award

Western Massachusetts Climbers’ Coalition (WMCC) brought together a group of partners, including Access Fund, to purchase Hanging Mountain in 2019. Once the site was acquired, WMCC put together a group of dedicated volunteers to kickstart sustainable trail work and other climbing infrastructure before the crag opened to the public. After the crag opened, in 2021, WMCC went into fundraising mode and paid off the loan Access Fund provided at the time of purchase. We are honored to recognize WMCC for its collaborative efforts to protect and conserve Hanging Mountain.



Upper Peninsula Climbers Coalition Land Conservation Award

In 2022, leaders from Upper Peninsula Climbers Coalition (UPCC) approached a local family to gauge their interest in selling Slugg’s Bluff, a crag situated on private land. The owners chose to donate Slugg’s Bluff to the climbing community, noting climbers’ consistent stewardship of the area—trail work, graffiti removal, and trash cleanup—as a deciding factor. Access Fund is thrilled to recognize UPCC for its role in securing Slugg’s Bluff and its dedication to protecting sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.



Petzl Corporate Partner Award

We are proud to present Petzl with a Climbing Advocate Award for its dedication to climber safety and climbing advocacy. Petzl’s leadership, support, and vision in creating the ReBolt Trip, which helped rebolters in the Southeast level up with training and gear, addressed a critical sustainability and safety need in our climbing areas. The event displayed Petzl’s hallmark innovation and expertise and left Southern climbing advocates better equipped to tackle rebolting work in the Southeast.



NEWS FROM THE Grassroots Network

Southern Nevada Climbers Coalition

Climbers celebrated a huge victory in Red Rock Canyon thanks to the work of Southern Nevada Climbers Coalition (SNCC). SNCC and Access Fund filed an appeal in June 2022 in response to a proposed fee and reservation system for the traditionally free and open Calico Basin area. Following the appeal, the Bureau of Land Management signed an agreement with Access Fund and SNCC ensuring that climbers will have a strong voice in the final Calico Basin management decision.



New River Alliance of Climbers

New River Alliance of Climbers board members secured meetings with West Virginia Sens. Joe Manchin and Shelley Capito to advocate for climbers in support of the Protecting America’s Rock Climbing Act and America’s Outdoor Recreation Act. Both bills have the potential to secure powerful protections for Wilderness climbing.

Gunks Climbers’ Coalition

Gunks Climbers’ Coalition (GCC) worked with land managers to balance conservation efforts and climbing access during the 2023 peregrine nesting season. Climbers advocated for adaptive management strategies that promote monitoring circumstances and adjusting closures accordingly. Land managers lifted the blanket closures as a result, keeping spot closures in place where birds were actively nesting. GCC’s efforts exemplify how climbers can work with land managers to build trust and collaborate on management strategies.



LCO 101: Joint Membership

Access Fund maintains deep partnerships with local climbing organizations (LCOs) across the country. Our joint membership program is one of the ways we strengthen those LCOs.

The program gives climbers the opportunity to support national and local climbing advocacy with one easy donation. In turn, it gives LCOs an easy and attainable way to start and maintain a membership program. In 2022, Access Fund raised more than \$70,000 for LCOs through joint memberships.

Joint Membership Benefits for Affiliate LCOs

Kickstart a New Fundraising Source

Joint membership provides a new fundraising source for qualifying LCOs that adds unrestricted funds to your budget.

Plug-and-Play Membership Program

Start your LCO’s membership program with minimal overhead and maintenance—perfect for smaller LCOs without the staff or budget to do it independently.

Automatic Renewal Notices

Access Fund sends out co-branded renewal notices to all of our joint members as their memberships approach expiration.

Custom-Designed Marketing Materials

Get a joint membership marketing kit featuring your LCO logo and name.

If your LCO is interested in joining Access Fund’s affiliate network or the joint membership program, please contact localsupport@accessfund.org.

Sunset Alley, Utah. Ancestral lands of Nuwuvi and Pueblos. © Tony Kim.

ADVOCATE SPOTLIGHT: Kendall Martin



Kendall Martin was raised in an environment that inspired him to give back to his community. When he realized he was often the only Black boulderer on any given day at the boulder fields in Chattanooga, Tennessee—a city where roughly 30% of the population is African American—Kendall decided to do something about it.

That something is WeClimb, a nonprofit that Kendall founded while attending University of Tennessee Chattanooga. Over the past two years, Kendall has introduced hundreds of youth in Chattanooga and surrounding areas to climbing, hiking, and stewardship. This past year, he hosted a guest speaker series and several field trips to meet with community members and have them share their stories with the kids. This fall, Kendall presented at the Access Fund Annual Climbing Advocacy Conference just before he completed his undergraduate degree. Now that he's graduated, he has big plans for the future of WeClimb—read on to learn more.

Tell us a little bit about WeClimb and what you do in the community.

WeClimb uses rock climbing to help underserved youth become better versions of themselves and increase diversity in the climbing world. We do this by partnering with local nonprofits and schools that are interested in introducing alternative sports to their youth, bringing local leaders and business owners to talk to our kids and take them climbing outside or inside on a regular basis. Our efforts are currently focused on the Chattanooga metropolitan area, where WeClimb is based.



What surprised you the most about starting a climbing nonprofit?

I was surprised by how quickly the climbing community supported our cause. It confirmed that what we're doing is needed.

What's your advice to new advocates?

Listen and talk to the community you are reaching out to; this is a task I cannot stress enough. I was born and raised in Tallahassee, Florida, and I did not start climbing until I moved to Chattanooga. That means no matter how much I love and care about Chattanooga, there will be things within "Chattanoogan" culture and history that I simply don't understand. This means that I have to constantly talk to community activists, local organizations, educators, parents, children, and others, to make sure that our organization is relevant and useful to the community that we have vowed to help. Talk to as many people as you can.

It's also really important to take time for yourself and learn how to delegate tasks to others. As advocates, we clearly love the outdoors and everything that it has to offer. The last thing we want is to make the space we enjoy being a part of feel burdensome.

What's your favorite cause in climbing advocacy right now?

Adaptive climbing. I just learned about it within the past few years. What that entire cause is doing is truly inspiring; it is extremely difficult to even explain the importance of that cause and the way it has shaped my worldview of outdoor recreation as a person without a disability.

What does it mean to you to be a climbing advocate?

I'm naturally an introvert, which means I had to learn how to fit into the role of an advocate. Even now, after more than six years of climbing, it still feels difficult to settle into. So, what I've done over the past few years is learn to view my role as a climbing advocate as bringing dope people into a sport that I love, nothing more and nothing less. Because the moment I view this role as something more, I will probably pack all my stuff up, throw away my technology, and move to Rocklands or somewhere out of the country.

Who is another climbing advocate whose work is really inspiring you right now?

Tiffany Blount is an amazing climbing advocate and an inspiration to me. She started Black Girls Boulder and organized the Blk Out Fest last year, and has been an inspiration for me. Aside from her being fine with me taking on the role of the annoying little brother she never asked for over the past few months, she has helped me navigate many things within the climbing industry along with helping WeClimb and other organizations do great and amazing things.

Kendall climbing at the Hospital Boulders, Alabama. Ancestral lands of DWJ.ᏊᏊᏊ Tsalaguweti. © Caleb Timmerman.

WAYS TO SUPPORT Climbing Access & Conservation

Ensuring a sustainable future for climbing is our fight together. When you make a generous gift, it helps keep America's climbing protected, open, and conserved for years to come. Our philanthropy team works hard to make the donation process easy, and to provide a variety of ways for you to give. Here are a couple of options that may be a good fit for your giving roadmap.

Start or Renew Your Membership

Members are the lifeblood of our work. Join or renew online, by mail, or by phone!



accessfund.org/donate



Access Fund, P.O. Box 17010, Boulder, CO 80308



303.545.6772

Become a Monthly Donor

You can earn all the benefits of membership by signing up for a monthly sustaining donation. Visit accessfund.org/donate and choose "Monthly" when you begin your donation.

Make a Gift of Stock or Mutual Funds

Giving appreciated securities can save on your tax bill. Please email philanthropy@accessfund.org or visit accessfund.org/support-us/other-ways-to-give to learn more.

Double Your Impact through Workplace Giving

Many businesses and agencies provide easy ways to amplify your donation. Ask your HR department if your donation can be matched, which will multiply the power of your support. Please reach out to matchinggifts@accessfund.org if you have any questions!

Consider a Bequest or Other Transfer of Assets

Whether now or in the future, giving assets is a tax-smart way to support climbing. See our Planned Giving page at accessfund.org/support-us/planned-giving or contact us at philanthropy@accessfund.org.

Snoqualmie, Washington. Ancestral lands of sduk^walbix^w, Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla. © Tony Kim.

FEATURED PARTNERS

Outside

Outside, Inc. explores the intersection between our lives and the natural world with in-depth narrative storytelling, profiles, videos, and authoritative service. Its support for Access Fund is driven by the belief that time spent outside is vital to a healthy, connected, and fulfilled life. Outside, Inc. played a key role in an education and fundraising program centered on human waste management and wag bag access in 2023. For that, and its continued support of our mission, we thank Outside, Inc. and look forward to a lasting partnership.



Epic Water Filters designs revolutionary reusable water bottles with filters, all in the name of reducing single-use plastics. As a supporting corporate partner, it has made an incredible impact on Access Fund's work to protect and conserve the climbing landscapes we love. In April 2023, Epic Water Filters contributed a water bottle incentive for donors and a generous matching donation for our human waste management and wag bag fundraiser. Thank you to Epic Water Filters for helping us educate and build a community of climbing advocates.

OR OUTDOOR RESEARCH

Outdoor Research is committed to working for the betterment of the environment, creating access for all, investing in product sustainability, reducing waste, and collaborating for good. Access Fund appreciates its steadfast partnership. Outdoor Research's generous support over the last decade helped Access Fund scale our efforts to meet the challenges facing climbing areas. Thank you, Outdoor Research—we look forward to another 10 years of partnership.





These partners are businesses that put their money where their mouth is to support the future of climbing. Please consider the important contribution these partners make to your climbing future. They support Access Fund and you. We encourage you to support them!

Titanium - \$50,000+

Black Diamond
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The Spot Climbing Gym
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Estes Park Exposure Festival
Flash Foxy
Gnarly Nutrition
Hangar 18 Riverside
Liberty Mountain
Pacific Edge Climbing Gym
Phoenix Rock Gym
Reach Climbing + Fitness
Rock and Resole
Rock & Snow



Tony Kim

In 2017, I hit the road in a trusty SUV with the dream of climbing the incredible landscapes between Canada to Mexico. It started as a “trip before I hit 30,” and has snowballed quickly to a “trip of a lifetime.” I’ve lived intermittently in vehicles across North America ever since. Along the way, I’ve captured the vibrancy and eclecticism of the transient climbing community, searching for those supposed moments of truth you find chasing them dreams.

In a past life, I was a creative director, architect, co-founded an award-winning non profit, and exhibited artwork in regional Pacific Northwest galleries and exhibitions.

In my current life, I live full time in my van and work in media production for architecture and the outdoors—ranging from VR, CGI, film, and still photography.

Top: Bears Ears National Monument. Ancestral lands of Navajo, Ute, Ute Mountain, Hopi, and Zuni. Photo © Jeffrey Simpson. Illustration © Tony Kim.

Middle: Vedauwoo, Wyoming. Ancestral lands of Tsésthó'e, Ochéthi Šakówir, and hinono'eino' biito'owu'. © Tony Kim.

Bottom: Tony Kim climbing in Squamish, Canada. Ancestral lands of Cayuse, Skwxwú7mesh-ulh Temíxw, Umatilla, and Walla Walla. © Kaya Lindsay.

Staff and Board

Bears Ears National Monument, Utah. Ancestral lands of Navajo, Ute, Ute Mountain, Hopi, and Zuni. © Tony Kim.

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LIMITED EDITION **Water Bottles**

New shipments of limited edition gear are live in the Access Fund shop, like this water bottle featuring climber-artist Vernan Kee's rendition of Cochise Stronghold. Visit accessfund.org/shop to get yours before supplies run out. 100% of the proceeds go toward protecting America's climbing!