

# 2023 Climbing Advocacy Report

YOUR SUPPORT MADE A DIFFERENCE



## OUR MISSION

# Protect America's Climbing

Access Fund is the national advocacy organization that leads and inspires the climbing community toward sustainable access and conservation of the climbing environment. We represent more than 8 million climbers nationwide in our work to protect and conserve the land, fight for sustainable access, and build a community of inspired advocates.

Access Fund was founded in 1991 to fight for legal and physical access to the places we love to climb. We've made great progress in that work, but the risks to climbing are greater than ever before. Alongside increasing threats to access, we must also tackle the broader challenges facing the sport we love.

We must work to manage our impacts, instill a conservation ethic within the climbing community, and collaborate with land managers and lawmakers to ensure they see us as good stewards, so that we can enjoy these places for generations to come.

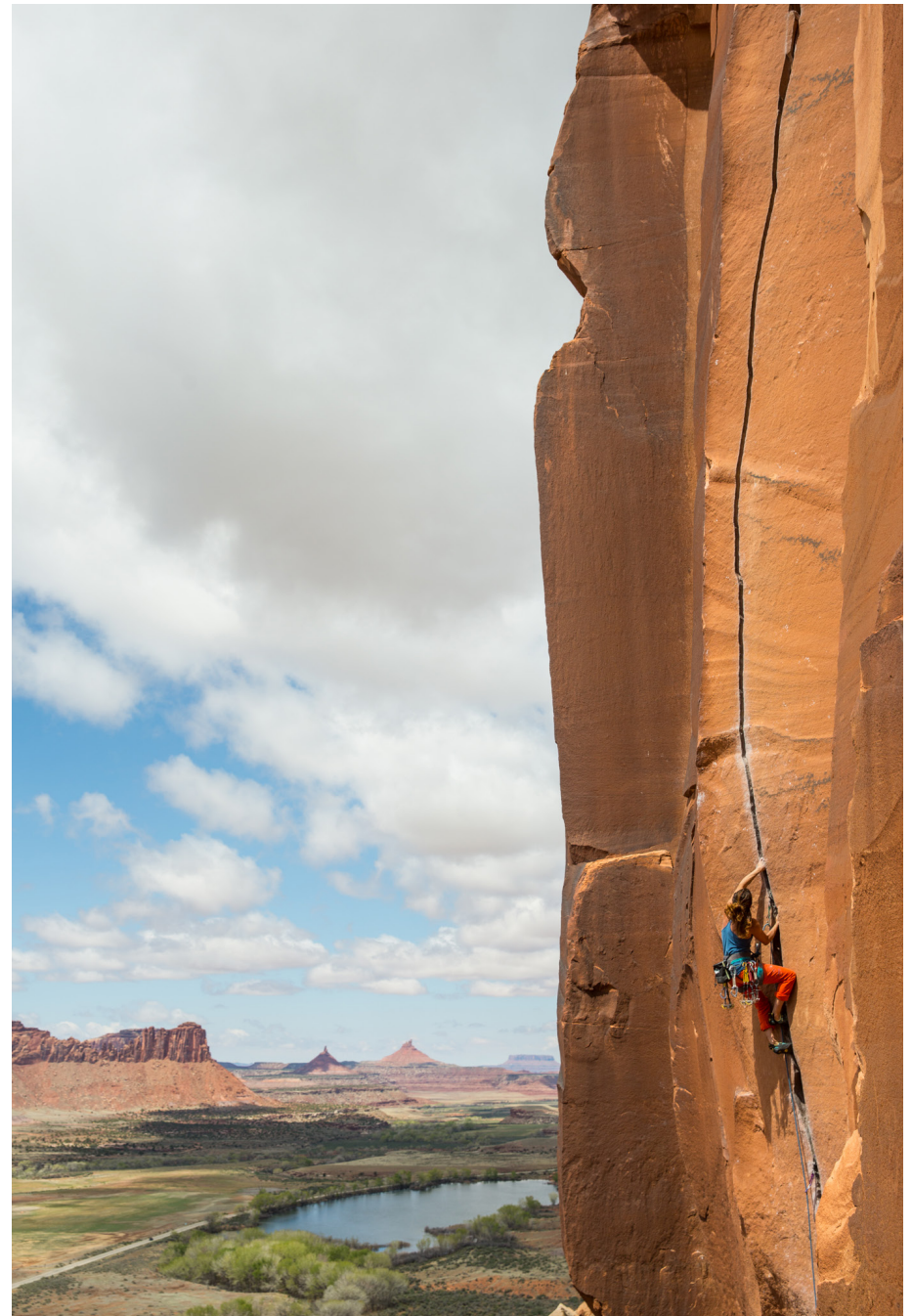
Access Fund is working to ensure a sustainable future for climbing by bringing our community together to protect these incredible landscapes and the experiences they offer.

## OUR CAUSES

- Protect and Conserve the Land.
- Fight for Sustainable Access.
- Build a Community of Climbing Advocates.

*Cover: Index, Washington. © Irene Yee.*

*Right: Bears Ears National Monument, Utah.  
© Andrew Burr.*



## Building on Success

Since 1991, Access Fund has played a critical role in keeping the gates to America's climbing open. And while some of the ways that we do that work have evolved, our commitment to protecting and conserving the land, fighting for sustainable access, and building a community of climbing advocates remains unchanged.

This past year was one of transition and change for Access Fund. Former Executive Director Chris Winter departed after five years at the helm, and I joined the team in January 2024. I appreciate everything the team did to keep the organization humming along, particularly Vice President of Policy & Government Affairs Erik Murdock, who volunteered to serve as interim executive director. I'm thrilled to step in and lead this storied organization and deliver for the climbing community.

In 2023, we preserved access at 172 climbing areas and opened eight new ones. Our team helped move a landmark climbing bill through Congress and galvanized the climbing community and our partner organizations to oppose proposals from the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service that would prohibit fixed anchors in Wilderness areas. And we expanded our successful Climber Stewards program to a third location—Kentucky's iconic Red River Gorge, helping educate climbers at this world-renowned area about low-impact climbing practices. We bought two new climbing areas with local partners in Alabama and Washington, awarded more than \$75,000 in grants for conservation and bolt replacement, and worked with a historic coalition of advocates to secure \$1 billion for Texas State Parks. And these are only a few of the highlights. It's a year that should make us all proud.

Behind the scenes, we invested in systems and technologies to enable Access Fund's growth and ensure that we're able to effectively serve our members. These investments were funded through unrestricted cash reserves and helped bring our operations in line with best practices. We expect them to serve us for many years to come.

As we look ahead to a new year of climbing advocacy, I want to express my gratitude to our members, supporters, and all of the local climbing organizations around the country. None of the work we do would be possible without you.

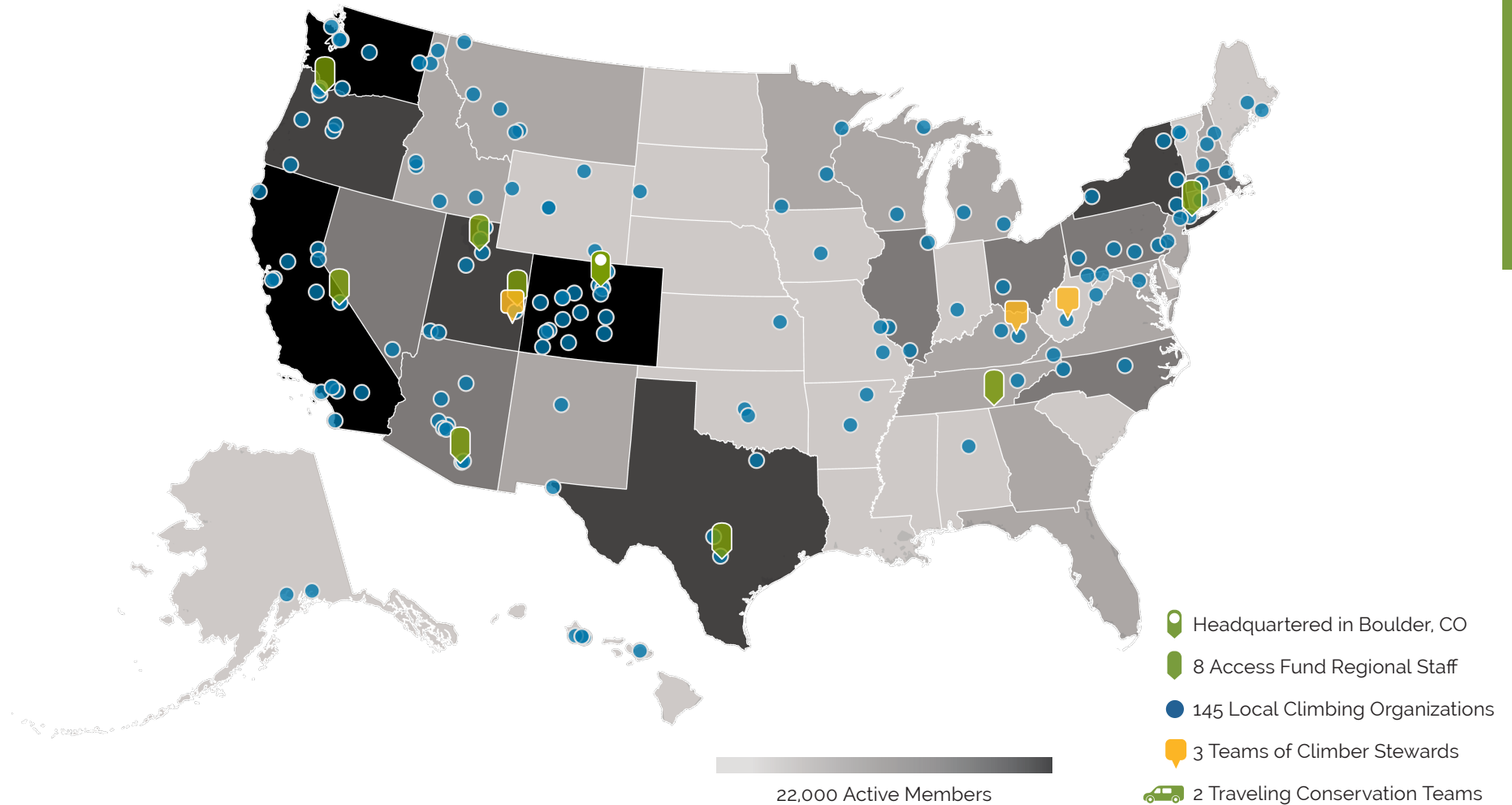
Thank you for your support, and climb on!



**Heather Thorne**  
Executive Director, Access Fund

## A Thriving Network of Climbing Advocates

With the support of 22,000 Access Fund members across the country, and the combined impact of our work with nearly 150 local climbing organization partners, we're poised to bring the next generation of outdoor climbers into the fold to instill the ethics of sustainable climbing and ensure access for years to come.



## Protecting America's Climbing Areas

In 2023, Access Fund and our incredible network of local climbing organizations worked together to preserve sustainable access to 172 climbing areas across the country and to open eight previously closed or threatened areas to climbing.

Bankhead National Forest, AL • Buck's Pocket State Park, AL • Chandler Mountain, AL • The Citadel Boulders, AL • Little River Canyon National Preserve, AL • Moss Rock Preserve, AL • Noccalula Falls Park, AL • The Homestead, AZ • Pinal County, AZ • Upper Sullivan Canyon, AZ • Bush Crag, AR • Fitzgerald Mountain, AR • Horseshoe Canyon Ranch, AR • Lincoln Lake, AR • Bishop, CA • Buttermilks, CA • Castle Rock State Park, CA • Chuckwalla National Monument, CA • El Cajon Mountain, CA • Joshua Tree National Park, CA • Lover's Leap, CA • Mount Saint Helena, CA • Riverside Quarry, CA • Santee Boulders, CA • Shadow Rock, CA • Shell Road, CA • Sierra-Sequoia National Forest, CA • Summit Rock, Sanborn County Park, CA • Vent 5, CA • Yosemite National Park, CA • Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, CO • Blob Rock, CO • Boulder Canyon, CO • Overlook, CO • Rocky Mountain National Park, CO • Shelf Road, CO • Staunton Rocks, CO • Tan Corridor, CO • Thumb Open Space, CO • Wolcott, CO • Ragged Mountain, CT • West Rock Ridge State Park, CT • Boat Rock, GA • Jake's Woods, GA • Mount Yonah, GA • Tallulah Gorge State Park, GA • Zahnd Boulders, GA • Black Cliffs, ID • Dierkes Lake, ID • Massacre Rocks, ID • Owl Rock, ID • Fountain Bluff, IL • Muscatatuck Park, IN • Ashland WMA, KY • Cliffview Resort, KY • Cumberland Mountain, KY • Hunters Bluff, KY • Muir Valley, KY • Oil Crack, KY • Pendergrass Murray Recreational Preserve, KY • State of Maine Climbing Management Policy, ME • Alberton Rock, MD • Northwest Branch, MD • Rocks State Park, MD • Wishing Rock, MD • Farley Ledges, MA • Slugg's Bluff, MI • Interstate State Park, MN • Sugarloaf-Winona, MN • Winona Ice Park, MN • Bitterroot National Forest, MT • Kootenai, MT • Ely, NV • Cathedral Ledge, NH • Fall Mountain, NH • Frankenstein/Mount Willard Ice Climbing, NH • Longstack Precipice, NH • Merriam Woods, NH • Pawtuckaway, NH • Rumney, NH • Whitehorse Ledge, NH • Caja del Rio, NM • Diablo Canyon, NM • Mentmore Crag, NM • Mills and Mesteño Canyon, NM • Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, NM

**172 CLIMBING AREAS – ACCESS PRESERVED**  
**8 CLIMBING AREAS OPENED**

• The Overlook, NM • Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, NM • Ant Lion - Gunks, NY • Millbrook - Gunks, NY • Mohonk Preserve - Gunks, NY • Powerlinez, NY • Asheboro Boulders, NC • Craggy Mountain, NC • Ghost Town, NC • Linville Gorge, NC • Hickory Creek Boulders, NC • Pilot Mountain State Park, NC • Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests, NC • Raven Rock, NC • Table Rock Mountain, NC • Kiedaisch Point, OH • Logtown, OH • Mad River Gorge & Nature Preserve, OH • Mill Creek Metroparks Bears Den, OH • Sawyer Quarry Nature Preserve, OH • Chandler Park, OK • Cane Creek, OR • Katsuk, OR • Lookout Point, OR • Mount Hood, OR • Smith Rock State Park, OR • Birdsboro Climbing Quarry, PA • Boxcar Rocks, PA • Donation Rocks, PA • High Rocks Vista, PA • Mocanaqua, PA • Dells of the Sioux River Climbing, SD • Palisades State Park, SD • The Boulders on Old Wauhatchie Pike, TN • Duskin Creek Boulders, TN • North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park, TN • The Obed Wild and Scenic River, TN • Pickett State Forest, TN • Pogue Creek State Natural Area, TN • Savage Gulf State Park, TN • Sequatchie Valley, TN • Stone Fort, TN • Walden's Ridge Park, TN • Woodcock Cove, TN • Hueco Tanks State Park & Historic Site, TX • Inks Ranch, TX • Monster Rock, TX • Indian Creek, UT • Little Cottonwood Canyon, UT • Manti-La Sal National Forest, UT • Moab, UT • Zion National Park, UT • Breaks Interstate Park, VA/KY • Goshen Pass, VA • Great Falls Park, VA • Guest River Gorge, VA • Hidden Valley, VA • James River Park, VA • Springfield Boulders, VA • Bolton Dome, VT • Pinneo Brook, VT • Leavenworth, WA • Lower Lump, WA • Mount Erie, WA • Mount Rainier, WA • North Cascades, WA • Buzzard Point, WV • Hawks Nest State Park, WV • Meadow River Gorge, WV • Needleseye Park, WV • New River Gorge, WV • Pendleton County, WV • Summersville Lake State Park, WV • Whippoorwill, WV • Grand Teton, WY • Lander, WY • Rock Springs, WY • Ten Sleep, WY •

## Protect & Conserve the Land

Whether we're seeking adventure at a backyard boulder or a towering cliff in America's vast Wilderness, climbers love the land and all of the natural wonders that make it unique. Access Fund works to protect and conserve all the beautiful places that make the climbing experience so special. That means showing up in Washington, D.C., to protect public lands and advance climate action. It means buying threatened climbing areas that are about to be sold off for trophy homes. And it means rolling up our sleeves and working in the dirt to build sustainable trails and climbing areas. Access Fund is here for all of it and more. Job number one is to protect and conserve the amazing lands that give so much to climbers.

### OUR 2023 WORK AT A GLANCE

- 58 acres of land purchased at The Citadel Boulders, Alabama.
- 20 acres of world-class climbing saved at Index, Washington.
- 10 climbing areas stewarded by 2 Conservation Teams.
- Helped secure \$1 billion for Texas State Parks.
- 8,886 feet of sustainable trail constructed or restored.



*Work Week in the Creek in Bears Ears National Monument, Utah. © Access Fund.*

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

### Climbers Save Alabama Boulder Field

After two decades of work, Access Fund and Southeastern Climbers Coalition (SCC) purchased and saved the iconic Citadel Boulders in Alabama. The acquisition includes 58 acres of undeveloped land surrounding an incredible boulder field—yet another landmark victory for climbing and conservation in the Southeast. Centrally located between Chattanooga, Birmingham, and north Georgia, this additional resource solidifies Fort Payne as a regional destination for climbing. SCC will manage The Citadel Boulders alongside its eight other land holdings for climbing and conservation.



*The Citadel Boulders, Alabama. © Caleb Timmerman.*

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

### Climbers Buy Lower Lump at Index, Washington

Access Fund and the Washington Climbers Coalition teamed up to buy a critical swath of the Lower Lump and Inner Walls areas in Index, Washington. The area encompasses 20 acres of beautiful forest and more than 30 independent routes, including Toxic Shock and Even Steven—two of the most popular trad climbs in Washington state. The acquisition also saved the Field of Dreams area, which features more than a dozen fully bolted sport climbs, including a few multipitch routes.



*Lower Lump, Index, Washington. © Marty Gunderson.*





## Fight for Sustainable Access

At Access Fund, we believe that sustainable access to climbing is good for people and good for the environment. But climbing access isn't guaranteed. It's something we have to work hard for. It's hundreds of hours negotiating with lawmakers in D.C. and land managers at parks and forests around the country. It's thousands of climber advocacy letters to Congress. It's partnerships with Tribal governments and other conservation organizations. It's helping private landowners manage risk and liability. It's maintaining bolts. And it's developing smart climbing management strategies that protect the plants and animals that share these incredible landscapes and honor the values of Indigenous peoples who have stewarded these lands since time immemorial.

### OUR 2023 WORK AT A GLANCE

- Landmark climbing bill introduced and moved through Congress.
- Access secured at 8 new or previously closed climbing areas.
- 4,025 online actions to support sustainable climbing access.
- Engaged on 26 climbing management plans.
- 1,682 bad bolts replaced thanks to anchor replacement grants.

Access Fund on Capitol Hill to advance landmark climbing legislation.  
© Kennedy Carey.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

### **The Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act**

With Wilderness climbing under threat, Access Fund worked with a bipartisan group of elected leaders to introduce legislation—the Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act—to safeguard sustainable climbing access in these places. The bill would establish consistency in how different federal land agencies manage Wilderness climbing and codify the long-standing federal policy that climbing activities, including the conditional use, placement, and maintenance of climbing anchors, are appropriate in America's Wilderness areas, subject to reasonable rules and regulations to protect Wilderness character.



Meeting with U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington. © Kennedy Carey.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

### **Big Wall Victory in Yosemite National Park**

Yosemite National Park's new big wall Wilderness climbing permits are a win for sustainable access thanks to climbers' persistent advocacy. The permit system applies to the park's iconic big walls, including El Capitan, Half Dome, and Washington Column. Access Fund, along with our partners at the American Alpine Club and Yosemite Climbing Association, collaborated directly with park managers, urging them to manage the new program in a way that worked for climbers. Park managers addressed the climbing community's concerns. Permits are intended to facilitate climber education and not restrict appropriate access to Wilderness climbing opportunities. The permits are unlimited, free, and do not require a reservation.



Yosemite National Park, California. © Francois Lebeau.

## Build a Community of Inspired Advocates

Every day, climbers all across the country are taking action to protect the lands and outdoor experiences we love. At Access Fund, our job is to make sure you're the most effective climbing advocate you can be—whether that's elevating your voice to lawmakers on urgent conservation and access issues, providing grants for local projects and rebolting efforts, connecting you with volunteer opportunities at your local crag, or helping you minimize your environmental impacts. We are climbers, and we are a powerful force for protecting the places and the sport we love. Each of us has an incredible opportunity to influence the future of climbing and the greater conservation movement.

### OUR 2023 WORK AT A GLANCE

- New Climber Stewards program launched in the Red River Gorge.
- 9,617 climbers reached with responsible outdoor ethics.
- 11,136 volunteer hours caring for crags.
- \$75,675 in grants awarded for local climbing conservation projects.
- Helped 7 new LCOs launch and begin protecting local climbing.



Access Fund trail day in Estes Park, Colorado.  
© Emily Nelson.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

### Climber Stewards Program Launched in Red River Gorge

The Red River Gorge Climbing Conservation Initiative is a joint project of Access Fund, Red River Gorge Climbers' Coalition, Daniel Boone National Forest, and Friends of Muir Valley. Launched with the support of everyday climbers around the country, this new initiative put a team of Access Fund Climber Stewards on the ground at popular crags in the Red to educate visitors about minimizing their impacts. In 2024, the initiative will also secure an Access Fund Conservation Team to install sustainable climbing infrastructure, fix eroding access trails and base areas, and mitigate climber impacts. Climbers from around the country came together to get the new initiative up and running.



Red River Gorge Climber Stewards Nick Hollander and Emma Paden. © Access Fund.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

### Advocates Rally Together in Arkansas

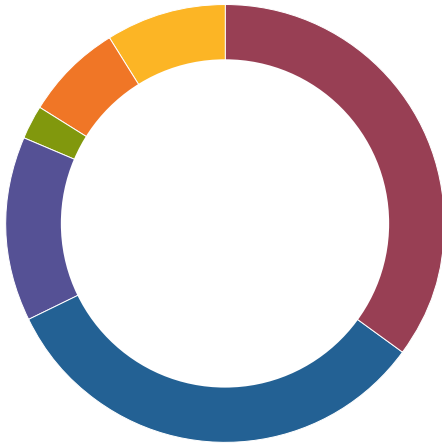
In November, more than 120 climbers from around the country descended on Bentonville, Arkansas, for Access Fund's annual Climbing Advocacy Conference. Attendees learned from experts around the country how to be better advocates, communicators, and stewards, all while taking a moment to celebrate each other's achievements. Arkansas was the perfect conference location. Friendly local climbers shared how they have successfully worked to protect and conserve the state's pristine woodland areas and fought for sustainable access at the state and local level.



Climbing Advocacy Conference attendees. © Dustin O'Reilly.

## 2023 Climbing Conservation & Anchor Replacement Grants

Each year, Access Fund provides financial assistance to support the work of local climbing organizations and other partners across the country. Our Climbing Conservation and Anchor Replacement Fund grants help advance the work of local climbing advocacy.



Trail Work & Stewardship .....	\$25,703
Parking Solutions .....	\$23,897
Anchor Replacement .....	\$9,996
Education Signage & Kiosks .....	\$1,950
Research .....	\$5,295
Advocacy & Outreach .....	\$6,334
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$73,175</b>



Volunteers hard at work on a stewardship project in the Red River Gorge, Kentucky. © Tiffany Nardico.

## Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (JEDI) in Climbing Advocacy

To protect the future of climbing, we need all climbers to see the important role they play in caring for the land and advocating for sustainable access. That's why Access Fund is proud to lift up the work and vision of the many affinity and advocacy groups working to make climbing and our community more inclusive, equitable, and diverse from the ground up. In 2023, our programmatic work included JEDI-focused stewardship projects and workshops in partnership with Flash Foxy in Bishop, California; United in Yosemite; and Blk Out Fest in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

### PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

#### Growing Stewardship Expertise

Access Fund recognizes the importance of affinity spaces in the climbing community, and we are honored to participate in events around the country when invited to do so by JEDI-focused and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-led organizations. In March, Stewardship Manager Andrea Hassler traveled to Bishop, California, to co-lead a stewardship workshop at the annual Flash Foxy climbing festival alongside Agnes Vianzon, founder and executive director of the Eastern Sierra Conservation Corps. The pair taught more than 30 volunteers critical conservation skills, and workshop attendees put those skills to good use right away. They helped address the impacts of unprecedented flooding in the area and shored up a local creek at the Bishop Paiute Conservation Open Space Area, as requested by members of the Tribe.



Access Fund Stewardship Manager Andrea Hassler leads a training at the Flash Foxy Festival in Bishop, California. © Cat Runner.

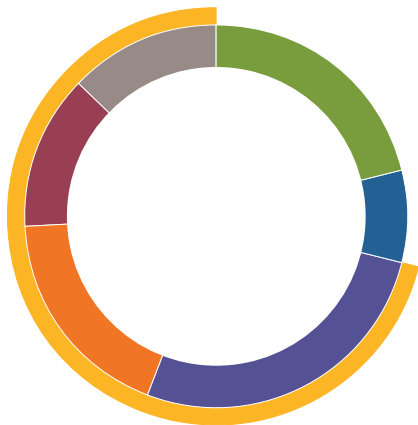
## By the Numbers

In 2023, Access Fund made planned one-time investments in systems and technologies from our cash reserves. Coupled with more than \$3M in donations from individuals, foundations, and organizations, these investments will set Access Fund up for success in the years ahead.



### TOTAL SOURCES OF SUPPORT

■ Individuals, Foundations & Organizations	\$1,955,000
■ Member Dues	\$471,000
■ Corporate Support	\$356,000
■ Stewardship Contract Revenue & Project Funding	\$70,000
■ Events	\$25,000
■ In-Kind Contributions	\$56,000
■ Other Income	\$71,000
■ Transfer from Cash Reserves*	\$897,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,901,000</b>



### OPERATIONAL EXPENSES

■ Philanthropy	\$828,000
■ General and Administration	\$308,000
■ Program Expenses	
■ Stewardship	\$1,052,000
■ Policy	\$715,000
■ Acquisition & Access	\$501,000
■ Local Support	\$497,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,901,000</b>

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 75% of expenses dedicated to mission-related programs.
- \$1M spent stewarding climbing areas.
- \$715K spent on policy initiatives.
- \$500K to support local communities.

\*Access Fund reported net operating revenue of -\$897K in fiscal year 2023. For more information, please see our 2023 audited financial statement.

## Board of Directors

### OFFICERS

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Hilary Harris (Colorado)

#### Vice President

Shelma Jun (New York)

#### Treasurer

Josh Friedman (Oregon)

#### Secretary

Bethany Lebewitz (Colorado)

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### Dustin O'Reilly

Strategic Partnerships Manager

### Loryn Posladek

Conservation Team Field Coordinator

### Jose Rodriguez

Finance & Business Operations Manager

### Holly Smolenski

Vice President of Marketing & Philanthropy

### Brian Tickle

National Acquisitions & Texas Regional Director

### Jenna Winkler

National Affiliate Director

### GENERAL COUNSEL

#### Chris Archer

Archer Law Offices, P.C.



Staff trail work day at Thumb Open Space, Colorado. © Emily Nelson.



## Supporting Partners

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  
REI

### DIAMOND - \$25,000+

adidas TERREX  
Archer Law Offices  
Outdoor Research  
USA Climbing

### PLATINUM PLUS - \$15,000+

GU Energy Labs  
Hydro Flask's Parks for All  
Program  
Touchstone Climbing Inc.  
VF Corporation - The North Face

### PLATINUM - \$10,000+

Athletic Brewing Co.  
EPIC Water Filters  
KAYA  
La Sportiva  
Mellow Climbing  
Microsend  
onX Backcountry  
Osprey Packs  
Outdoor Alliance  
The Spot Climbing Gym  
Trango  
YETI

### GOLD - \$5,000+

5.Life  
American Alpine Club  
Arizona Wilderness Brewing  
Metolius Climbing  
Mystery Ranch  
SCARPA North America  
Trekroll

### SILVER - \$2,500+

Alaska Alpine Adventures  
Alliant Insurance Services  
Beta Rock Climbing  
Blue Lizard Climbing & Yoga  
*The Climbing Zine*  
Liberty Mountain  
Rock Creek  
RXR Sports  
*Summit Adventure Journal*



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

## Individual and Foundation Donors

Every contribution Access Fund receives helps protect and conserve America's climbing. These individuals and organizations made especially generous contributions in 2023. We do our best to ensure that all donors are recognized properly. If you find an error on this list, please accept our apologies and contact [philanthropy@accessfund.org](mailto:philanthropy@accessfund.org) to make a correction. Thank you for your support!

### \$100,000+

Freyja Foundation  
Anonymous

### \$50,000+

Roy & Barbara Adams Remainder Trust  
Walton Family Foundation

### \$25,000+

First Ascent Charitable Foundation  
The Tumbleweed Fund

### \$10,000+

Bodenhamer Foundation  
Kenton & Amy Brown Fund  
John Connor & The Climbing Stewards  
Epispace Foundation  
Everest '96 Memorial Gift Fund  
Friends of Indian Creek  
Google Matching Gifts Program  
Jonathan Gopel  
Cindy Hintz  
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Land Trust Alliance  
The Lightner Sams Foundation of Wyoming, Inc.  
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Microsoft Matching Gifts Program  
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The Nature Conservancy  
New River Alliance of Climbers  
Reed Family Foundation  
Schweinsberg Pereira Fund  
Donette & Todd Swain  
Wurster Giving Fund  
Anonymous

### \$5,000+

Alpenglow Foundation  
Amazon Smile  
Bank of America Charitable Gift Fund  
Boger Family Foundation, Inc.  
Dandy Charitable Fund  
Michael & Emily Eberle-Levine  
Timothy Forbes Family Fund  
Leo & Rhea Fay Fruhman Foundation  
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MyClimb Fund  
The Naktens Family Foundation  
Naoe Sakashita  
William H & D'Marcel Napier Family Trust  
Outdoor Alliance

Plant the Future Foundation  
Stephen & Laura Rice Family Fund  
Carl Sampūrna  
The Smith & Witt Family Foundation  
Mr. & Mrs. Dirk Tyler  
Visit Tuolumne County Community Investment Fund  
John Winsor  
Anonymous

### \$2,000+

Apple Inc. Company Gift Matching  
Catherine A. & Mark W. Baum Family Fund  
Benjit Hull  
Bloomberg Company Gift Matching  
Michael Burns  
Will Butcher  
Lucia Christensen  
Cooper Family Charitable Fund  
Sandy & Gale Dunlap  
Ever Loved, Inc.'s Fund  
Timothy Farinholt  
Matt Gowie  
The Eric & Katia Janecek Fund  
The Linda Q. Lee, Charles W. Lamb Charitable Giving Fund  
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Robert Price  
Julie Reed  
Teresa & Mark Richey Charitable Fund  
Sahai-Choong Family Charitable Giving Fund  
Paul Shanahan  
Roanne Sones  
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The Ticknor Foundation  
Tolley Putnam Fund  
Aundra Tomlins  
Laura Veltz & Wesley Blaylock Family Fund  
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Peter Croft  
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\* Gifts of \$2,000+ made in honor of specific individuals



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