

# VERTICAL TIMES

NEWS FOR  
CLIMBING  
ADVOCATES

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Protect America's Climbing





## Letter from the Director

There is something so beautiful in the simplicity of climbing. When you strip away all the commotion of daily life, minimize the rack, and travel freely over technical terrain, you feel wild and unburdened. It's just you and the rock and the wind.

There is something even more beautiful about climbing in a wild landscape. Often, we are just as moved by the chance to connect with the old-growth forests, mountain streams, and the untamed wildlife we experience through our pursuit of climbing.

What a simple joy it is to climb with a friend in a beautiful place.

At Access Fund, our mission is to protect that magical experience for you and your friends and the millions of climbers all across the country. We fight for sustainable access for climbers, and we care for the land that inspires us. And we do all that work together as a community of friends and advocates.

While climbing itself can be so simple and pure, the work to protect America's climbing grows more complicated by the year. There are more and more people out enjoying the land than ever before—hikers, backpackers, picnickers, bikers, hunters, anglers, and, yes, even more climbers. There is increased pressure from development and resource extraction. Climate change is threatening wildlife habitat and causing more intense wildfires, floods, and droughts.

In many cases, land managers are completely overwhelmed, and the easy answer is to just say no. To close the gate.

Access Fund has been working for 30 years to keep the gate open, and as we look ahead to the next 30 years, we must stop to reflect on the work we need to do together to ensure a sustainable future for climbing ... and for the land that sustains us. And it doesn't mean access at all costs.



*Canyon De Chelly  
Spider Rock*

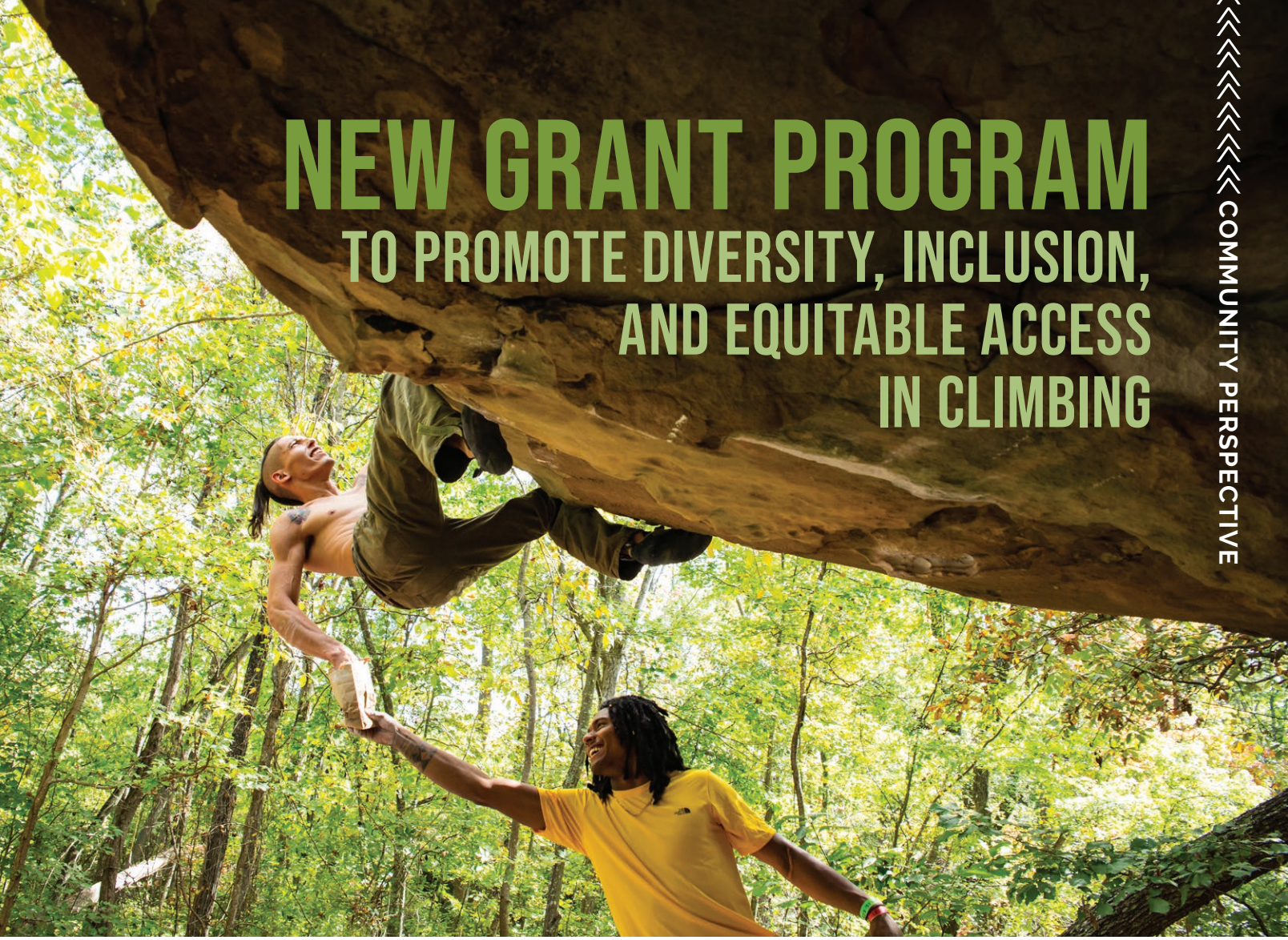
As climbers, we must have a seat at the table when land managers make decisions about access. And we must lead the way by putting our values of conservation and stewardship into practice each and every day. Those values must guide us as we look for creative solutions to some pretty difficult challenges.

As you read this issue of the *Vertical Times*, keep this big picture in mind. Whether it's climbers buying a boulder field in Illinois (yay!), or protecting Wilderness climbing in Joshua Tree, or respecting the temporary closure of Bear Lodge (aka Devils Tower), I think we have the solutions, but it's going to take hard work, tough conversations, and a strong commitment to our values to find the line. In this issue, you'll also learn about some inspiring advocates who have embraced this challenge—the winners of our annual Climbing Advocate Awards.

We don't have to settle for a closed gate. On the other hand, sometimes we might have to allow the land to rest, our friends to pray, the birds to nest. Thirty years from now, those decisions may very well prove to be the most important ones we have made for the next generation of climbers.

Chris Winter  
Executive Director

# NEW GRANT PROGRAM TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND EQUITABLE ACCESS IN CLIMBING



In April of this year, Access Fund opened its new Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Grant Program to applications. The pilot program will bolster the efforts of advocates who are working to promote diversity, inclusion, and equitable access within climbing.

Local climbing organizations spoke up, and we listened. “Loads of grant requests were coming through that expressed a big need to get underrepresented climbers outside,” says Jenna Winkler, Access Fund national affiliate director. “It was clear we needed a way to directly support JEDI projects.”

***Access Fund will award funding to projects that address social and cultural barriers to climbing participation—especially those that incorporate elements of education and advocacy around conservation and stewardship.***

The goal of this new grant program is to fill that funding gap in order to inspire and empower climbing organizations to work toward a future in which all climbers can enjoy sustainable access to climbing and feel welcomed into the advocacy community. “We’re most excited to fund projects that engage historically underrepresented communities with climbing and with advocacy and stewardship,” says Taimur Ahmad, Access Fund JEDI & policy associate. “This funding will be something grassroots advocacy organizations—from affinity groups to local climbing organizations—can use to boot up new JEDI-focused projects and enhance the great on-the-ground work they are already doing.”

Access Fund will award funding to projects that address social and cultural barriers to climbing participation—especially those that incorporate elements of education and advocacy around conservation and stewardship. A wide variety of projects will be considered as long as they promote JEDI values—things like scholarships, facilitated access, gear libraries, JEDI training, events with JEDI components, and similar projects.

Grant applications will be evaluated by the Access Fund JEDI committee. During the pilot year, \$10,000 in funds is available, with the average grant expected to fall in the \$2,500-\$5,000 range, with two to four grants being awarded funding.



# Climbing and Wilderness Together to Protect Wild

Climbers have long been among the nation’s leading conservationists, and the climbing community staunchly supports Wilderness protections in particular. The dual values of both recreation and environmentalism have led our community to cultivate strong and long-standing bonds with many of the nation’s foremost conservation organizations.

*The dual values of both recreation and environmentalism have led our community to cultivate strong and long-standing bonds with many of the nation’s foremost conservation organizations.*

Reflecting this shared history, a remarkable coalition of climbers and mainstream wilderness advocacy groups has recently come together to oppose a misguided proposal that represents one of the most serious threats to Wilderness climbing in decades. A new Climbing Management Plan (CMP) for Joshua Tree

National Park (JTNP), currently in its drafting phase, proposes to classify fixed anchors as “prohibited installations” in Wilderness areas. Under the plan, fixed anchors would require specific administrative exceptions to be allowable. This proposal goes so far as to call for the removal of certain fixed anchors already in place in the JTNP backcountry, possibly resulting in the removal of hundreds of climbing routes.

Access Fund joined forces with The Wilderness Society, California Wilderness Coalition, the National Parks Conservation Association, and Outdoor Alliance, along with the American Alpine Club, The Mountaineers, the American Mountain Guides Association, and Friends of Joshua Tree to go on the record in opposition to JTNP’s proposal:

“We do not support a reinterpretation of the Wilderness Act that treats fixed anchors as installations,” our joint coalition letter states. “Instead, we support smart, effective climbing management strategies that address the entire climbing activity, from parking areas and access trails to staging areas and the summits of climbing routes, in a manner consistent with the Wilderness Act and accepted Wilderness management principles.”

# Access Advocates Come to Wilderness Climbing

## Regulation, yes. But prohibition? No.

Fixed anchors are an essential part of the climbing tool kit, both within and outside of Wilderness areas. Bolts and other forms of fixed gear have been used in the Wilderness for over 80 years, and despite occasional controversy, the careful, regulated, and limited use of fixed anchors to facilitate outstanding opportunities for backcountry recreation has never been prohibited more than temporarily.

Access Fund supports the regulation of fixed anchors in the Wilderness, including permitting systems where necessary and even removal in very specific cases where climbing facilitated by fixed anchors unacceptably damages cultural or natural resources. JTNP's proposal, however, goes far beyond this. It changes the status quo around fixed anchors from something that is permissible, with restrictions where necessary, to something that is fundamentally prohibited. As a flagship climbing park with extensive Wilderness areas, JTNP will set a precedent, should this CMP be enacted as proposed, that is a major threat to fixed-anchor use and Wilderness climbing nationwide.



Top photo: Climbing at Joshua Tree, California. Ancestral lands of Serrano and Western Shoshone. © Chris Burkard. Photo above: Wilderness climbing within Linville Gorge, Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest, North Carolina. Ancestral lands of Tsalaguwetiyi (Cherokee, East). © Shannon Millsaps.

***Access Fund supports the regulation of fixed anchors in Wilderness—but Joshua Tree’s proposal goes against the well-established policy of the last 80 years.***

Such a precedent could also cause significant damage to long-standing partnerships between climbing/recreation organizations, federal land managers, and the conservation community. The Wilderness has traditionally been something climbers celebrate, but if JTNP’s treatment of fixed anchors is emulated by other land managers, new Wilderness designations could conflict with climbing access—something no one in either the recreation or conservation community wants to see happen.

***A Foundation of Collaboration***

This is not the first time the climbing community has partnered with Wilderness advocacy organizations either. Access Fund collaborated with The Wilderness Society, for

example, on previous policy work concerning fixed anchors in Wilderness areas. Our two organizations jointly supported language—passed into federal law in conjunction with several new Wilderness designations from the 2019 Dingell Act—that enshrines the notion that the limited and regulated use of fixed anchors is appropriate in Wilderness areas. There is similar language in other pending legislation, such as the Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act. Such partnerships speak to our long and robust relationship with the conservation community, as well as our own history of advocacy for the Wilderness.

Access Fund believes that there are better ways to manage fixed anchors in the Wilderness and protect the incredible JTNP backcountry that don’t require such an extreme step as prohibiting fixed anchors, a move that is out of line not only with the interests of climbers, but of everyday Wilderness advocates and environmentalists. We are immensely grateful for the support of our coalition partners in the Wilderness advocacy space and are committed to continuing to work with both them and JTNP to find management solutions that protect access and promote conservation and sustainability in the backcountry.



*Wilderness climbing within Yosemite National Park, California. Ancestral lands of Sierra Miwok. © Francois Lebeau.*









the individual and the group as a whole. [It] takes away the pain of the universe or damage to nature. The Sun Dance is ‘... the supreme rite of sacrifice for the society as a whole [and] a declaration of individual bravery and fortitude. ...’”

## The Cost of Ignoring the Voluntary Closure

Practices like the Sun Dance are existential for those who engage in them. To wilfully ignore the importance of these practices by climbing on Devils Tower in June is selfish and only serves to damage relationships between climbers and Indigenous communities. Sacred spaces have special and elevated norms of conduct. No one would think it is acceptable to climb on or otherwise recreate within a church, mosque, synagogue, or other place of worship during services. The Indigenous community views Bears Lodge as a place of worship, and the climbing community should respect and honor Indigenous peoples’ connection to the land and their traditional practices.

There are other outstanding crags—like Rushmore, Ten Sleep, Vedauwoo, and Spearfish Canyon—a short drive away that provide plenty of opportunities for high-quality summer climbing in the region.

***We have a choice: Access Fund is asking the climbing community to step up and make an intentional decision to refrain from climbing on Devils Tower during the month of June to show respect for Native Tribes.***

In the past, the climbing community—including Access Fund—has made mistakes regarding respect for Indigenous sites and culture. We are learning and growing, and we have a long path ahead. Access Fund is working hard to collaborate with Native American Tribes, and to fund research that benefits Indigenous people. We also are committed to sharing information with the climbing community on best practices for recreating on sacred lands.

We have a choice: Access Fund is asking the climbing community to step up and make an intentional decision to refrain from climbing on Devils Tower during the month of June to show respect for Native Tribes.

# Access Fund Climber Stewards: Inspiring a Sense of Place

Access Fund’s presence at local climbing areas is often behind the scenes, working to build relationships with land managers and partners, doing trail work, building infrastructure, and supporting local climbing organizations. That all changed in 2021 with the Climber Stewards program, an initiative that connects with climbers—where and when they’re climbing—to share must-know information and insider tips on access and conservation issues specific to the area.

Unlike what you find at many recreation areas—an old wooden bulletin board with outdated information tacked to it—a human presence is a proven way to help people better understand an area and their potential impacts there.

## The Human Message Board

Lauren Hebert and Johanna Cogen, the 2021 Indian Creek Climber Stewards, both saw firsthand the positive impact of a human presence. While stationed in the Creek, they thought of themselves, in Hebert’s words, as the “human message board,” where climbers could find information on anything and everything to do with the Creek.

“We talked to everyone from first-timers to old-timers about everything from wag bags to dinosaur bones,” Cogen says. The fragility of the desert begs the utmost respect from climbers and other visitors.

Here are a few of the hot topics the Indian Creek Climber Stewards fielded:

- Where and how to dispose of waste.
- The importance of staying on trail.
- How to interact with cultural resources.
- Appropriate dispersed camping locations.
- Information about Bears Ears National Monument and what the designation means for climbing.

Just by interacting with the Climber Stewards, visiting climbers were prompted to think critically about their impact on the climbing area while they were in it. When they inevitably found themselves with a question throughout the day, they knew exactly where to get the answer.

*“We talked to everyone from first-timers to old-timers about everything from wag bags to dinosaur bones.”*



## Stewards Beget Stewards

The most impactful part of the Climber Stewards program is its ability to give climbers a stronger sense of place. It's that extra nudge that helps them connect impact issues with their own effects on the landscape, from every crimp they crank to every poop they take—making climbers into stewards in their own right.

*It's that extra nudge that helps climbers connect impact issues to their own effects on the landscape—from every crimp they crank to every poop they take.*

Taking care of the fragile places where we climb is an integral part of protecting America's climbing. And every climber we can inspire to be a better steward of the land is a victory.

## Bridging the Gap

Building partnerships—with land managers like the BLM, The Nature Conservancy, and other stakeholders—is another key component of the Climber Stewards program. “I want the climbing community to be looked upon as not only a good user group of the lands, but also as good stewards, a resource that land managers and stakeholder groups can rely on,” says Ty Tyler, Access Fund stewardship director.

The Climber Stewards program is proof positive that the climbing community recognizes and takes responsibility for climbing's impact on natural spaces, that we see the education gaps that land managers are struggling to fill, and that we're willing to do something about it.



Climber coffee with the Indian Creek Climber Stewards.  
© Brittany Hamilton.



## Expanding the Program

This spring, with the support of New River Alliance of Climbers and the National Park Service, Access Fund deployed two Climber Stewards on the ground in the New River Gorge region of southern West Virginia.

“The New River region is one of the most visited climbing destinations East of the Mississippi—it offers excellent sport, trad, and bouldering, and climbers flock there,” says Tyler. The park has seen an uptick in traffic with a new National Park designation and the growing popularity of climbing. With increased traffic comes increased impact. “Each pack placed on the ground, each rope bag dropped at the crag, each cathole dug, each plant crushed by a tire all leave an impact,” Tyler says. “But we can take an active role in mitigating these impacts and protecting the places we love.”

While the dense forest there might appear to rebound quickly from climber impacts, increasing visitation is taking its toll and needs to be addressed. “Climbers can be better informed about Leave No Trace ethics, land management issues, and respecting private land and the local community,” Tyler says.

This new Climber Stewards program has roots in similar, long-standing programs in Joshua Tree and Yosemite. Access Fund studied those initiatives and modeled our own program on them, designing it from the ground up for scalability.

***“This is just the beginning. We’re taking what we learned from Indian Creek, and the visionary programs at Yosemite and Joshua Tree, and expanding this program to other popular climbing areas from coast to coast.”***

“This is just the beginning,” says Chris Winter, Access Fund’s executive director. “We’re taking what we learned from Indian Creek, and the visionary programs at Yosemite and Joshua Tree, and expanding this program to other popular climbing areas from coast to coast.”



# Climbers Buy New Bouldering Area in Illinois



**W**orking together, Access Fund and the Illinois Climbers Association (ICA) purchased and protected House Boulders, a new bouldering area and conservation corridor in southern Illinois. The climbing area resides in the Mississippi Bluffs region, named for its stunning views over the Mississippi River valley, on the western edge of the Shawnee National Forest. This acquisition conserves 20 acres of land—which has the potential for approximately 70 boulder problems at all levels—for recreation and wildlife habitat. It shares the same high-quality, fine-grained gray sandstone as the adjacent Holy Boulders, but stands alone in its unique setting—a tightly stacked boulder field on a steep, west-facing hillside nestled among hardwoods.

***While a handful of people have climbed on the property with landowner permission in the past, this purchase secures permanent climbing access for all.***

While a handful of people have climbed on the property with landowner permission in the past, this purchase secures permanent climbing access for all. In the fall of 2020, ICA heard that the property was up for sale, and after connecting with the landowner, they reached out to Access Fund for financial backing through the Climbing Conservation Loan

Program (CCLP). With Access Fund’s support, ICA was able to buy the property for recreation and conservation.

“We are committed to conserving climbing in Illinois,” says Phillip Carrier, president of the Illinois Climbers Association. “And we’re proud that this purchase allows climbers in the Midwest and beyond to play a critical role in preserving not only their climbing future, but also the health of the land.”

The House Boulders area is in a conservation corridor that provides natural habitat for tremendous native biodiversity, including state-threatened and state-endangered species. It also resides in an economically depressed region and will help bolster the growing outdoor recreation and tourism economy in southern Illinois.

The House Boulders is ICA’s second land acquisition, the first being the Holy Boulders transfer from Access Fund in 2016. House Boulders is the 33rd climbing area conserved through Access Fund’s Climbing Conservation Loan Program. ICA will fundraise to repay the conservation loan over time, returning money to help Access Fund save another new or threatened climbing area in the future. Since CCLP’s inception, Access Fund has loaned nearly \$3.3 million to protect more than 4,000 acres and over 5,000 climbing routes, at an overall value of \$7.5 million.

*Photo: ICA board member Kevin Sierzega on Best in Show, one of the classic boulder problems secured with the House Boulders acquisition. Ancestral lands of the Kiiikaapoi, Kaskaskia, Osage, Myaamia, O-ga-xpa Ma-zho, and Ochéthi Šakówiŋ. © Kevin Sierzega.*



Talented, dedicated, hard-working, motivated, unwavering—we could fill the pages of a spiral notebook and then some with superlatives about the climbing advocacy community. Even if we did, it still wouldn't do justice to the climbers and conservationists we're lucky enough to work with. 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. Meet the recipients of the 2021 Climbing Advocate Awards.



### **Heidi, Matt, & Kristen Redd** **Menocal Lifetime Achievement Award**

The Redd family's lifelong commitment to the conservation of Indian Creek in southern Utah earns them a special place among our awardees this year: the Menocal Lifetime Achievement Award. Their management of Dugout Ranch's 5,200 acres and conservation efforts in the adjacent 300,000+ acres of public land represents a forward-thinking approach to land management and stakeholder partnership. Over the years, the family has developed—and continues to support and nurture—partnerships with the climbing community and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), working closely with Access Fund and Friends of Indian Creek to address changes and shared concerns in Indian Creek.

*Photo from left: Kristen, Matt and Heidi Reed, in Indian Creek, Bears Ears National Monument. Ancestral lands of Ute and Pueblo. © James Q. Martin.*

**Phillip Carrier**  
**Bebie Leadership Award**

Presenting this year’s Bebie Leadership Award recipient: Phillip Carrier, a board member of the Illinois Climbers Association (ICA) for over 10 years. His exemplary leadership guided the organization through several successful acquisition projects, including permanent protection of the Holy Boulders and House Boulders. Major bolt replacement efforts, opening climbing access in state and local parks, expanding equitable access, and managing relationships with land managers are among his many accomplishments with ICA.



**Eric Barnard**  
**Climbing Access & Organizer Award**

Nominated by the local community, Access Fund is excited to honor Eric Barnard’s advocacy and conservation efforts for both rock and ice climbing in southeast Minnesota. Barnard played a pivotal role in forging a partnership with the city of Winona to form the Recreation Alliance of Winona, which created and maintains the Winona Ice Park. Today, Barnard continues to volunteer his time as part of the board of the Minnesota Climbers Association.



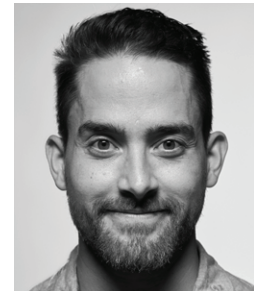
**Kate Beezley**  
**Local Leader & Stewardship Award**

We’re thrilled to honor Kate Beezley, an outstanding leader who was nominated by the climbing community. As executive director of Boulder Climbing Community (BCC), Kate has put in years of hard work building relationships with land managers in the area, professionalizing the BCC, pushing for diversity and inclusion within the organization, and expanding its programmatic capabilities.



**Tim Golden**  
**Local Leader & Organizer Award**

Tim Golden receives this award thanks to his decade of leadership in California climbing advocacy. He helped form two of the largest climbing organizations in the state. As the second president of the Bay Area Climbers Coalition, Golden doubled the team and the organization’s capacity. He then went on to help found Bishop Area Climbers Coalition. Golden’s admirable leadership and organizational skills have guided his community through countless advocacy projects.



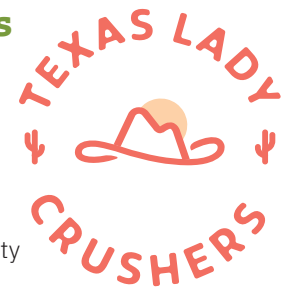
**Tom Caldwell**  
**Local Leader & Stewardship Award**

Leader, steward, and climber Tom Caldwell served the climbing community as president of Carolina Climbers Coalition (CCC) for three years, guiding the group’s programmatic work to steward and protect the climbing areas of the Carolinas. He played a key role in a diverse set of CCC initiatives, including forming the C4 Trail Crew, which hired locals who had lost their income during the pandemic; opening new climbing areas; and working with biologists to monitor raptor progress—handling all of these projects with decisive leadership.



**Texas Lady Crushers**  
**Equitable Access Award**

Though founded only a few years ago, Texas Lady Crushers (TxLC) has already made a huge impact. The rapidly growing Texas climbing community has a great need for inclusivity, education, and community building—precisely the gap that TxLC’s founder Emilie Hernandez envisioned the organization would fill. Since 2018, TxLC’s climbing meetups, community events, and partner events with other organizations and guide companies have helped educate a wide swath of Texas women and gender nonbinary climbers.



**Rep. Joe Neguse**  
**Bebie Leadership Award**

We’re thrilled to present the Bebie Leadership Award to Colorado Congressman Joe Neguse for championing climbing, outdoor recreation, and public lands. Not only is he leading the charge on climate change legislation, but he is working toward a positive vision of the future in which all Americans are deeply connected to the outdoors.



**Red River Gorge Climbers’ Coalition**  
**Land Conservation Award**

This year, the Red River Gorge Climbers’ Coalition (RRGCC) made its final payments on the Access Fund loan that helped the group acquire Bald Rock Recreational Preserve, closing the books on its latest successful acquisition project. Home to some of the Red’s most popular crags, Bald Rock is yet another feather in the cap of an organization that goes above and beyond its mission of protecting public access to rock climbing in the Red River Gorge.



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## **Travis Peckham** **Climbing Access & Organizer Award**

Several conservation projects—both big and small—in Vermont bear Travis Peckham’s fingerprints. His leadership with Climbing Resource Access Group of Vermont (CRAG-VT) ushered the organization through several key conservation, acquisition, and stewardship projects to help protect, preserve, and open climbing access throughout the state. His almost two-decade stint as a board member of CRAG-VT ended in 2021, but we have no doubt he’ll be front and center for many volunteer projects to come.



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## **Andrea Ramos Campos** **Local Leader & JEDI Advocate Award**

Andrea Ramos Campos’ service on several committees with Salt Lake Climbers Alliance (SLCA) earned her a well-deserved nomination from the climbing community. We’re thrilled to honor not only her work with the SLCA’s events committee to engage the Salt Lake climbing community, but also her work forming and leading the organization’s JEDI committee. Her unwavering dedication to climbing and her local climbing organization sets an incredible example for all climbers.



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## **Tiffany Blount** **JEDI Advocate & Local Organizer Award**

Torne Valley Climbers’ Coalition, Brown Girls Climb, Black Girls Boulder, Try Hard Crew, Young Women Who Crush—the list of organizations Tiffany Blount dedicates her time to, as everything from board member to volunteer, leaves no doubt as to why her community nominated her for an award. Her efforts to increase education and opportunities for Black women to not only climb but also learn to develop routes has had a positive and meaningful impact on the inclusiveness of the climbing community.



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## **Northern Arizona Climbers Coalition** **Local Organizer & Steward Award**



A single award is hardly enough to honor the great work that Northern Arizona Climbers Coalition (NAZCC) does on behalf of climbers in the area, but it’ll have to do for now. Its reach extends beyond the organization’s billboard projects—like protecting The Pit and Oak Creek Canyon—spreading across the vast and varied climbing through northern Arizona. Its comprehensive programming includes stewardship events, extensive rebolting projects, and partnership building with local land managers, among other initiatives dedicated to climbing advocacy.

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## **Nate McKenzie** **Climbing Access & Equitable Access Award**

Nate McKenzie received this award thanks to community nomination—a surefire sign of a standout advocate. Through years of service to Ragged Mountain Foundation, he’s played a critical role in protecting climbing access throughout the Northeast. His work with Paradox Sports to create climbing opportunities for adaptive climbers contributes to the important work of fostering a diverse and welcoming environment for all climbers.



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## **Epic Water Filters** **Corporate Responsibility Award**

Epic Water Filters and Access Fund share many of the same values—chiefly, the desire to leave the planet a little better than we found it—and we’re proud to have the brand as a partner. The company’s water bottles with built-in filters are designed to reduce the need for single-use plastic water bottles, a mission with clear benefits for the environment. Its support for Access Fund’s mission to protect America’s climbing is exceptionally beneficial to not only the climbing community but to the preservation of Earth’s wild places.





# NEWS FROM THE Grassroots Network

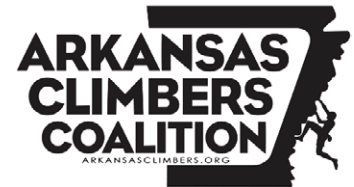


## Southern California Mountaineers Association

SCMA hosted the Access Fund Conservation Team for an ambitious series of Adopt a Crags and large-scale stewardship projects in southern California. The events targeted some of the busiest crags in the area that were in need of rehabilitation and restoration in order to handle increased traffic. These efforts—and future ones—are crucial to keeping southern California's most popular crags open and sustainable.

## Arkansas Climbers Coalition (ARCC)

Shout-out to ARCC for hosting its first Annual Climbers Festival! The event drew climbers from across the state for climbing and advocacy clinics that covered topics from Leave No Trace ethics to rebolting best practices. Attendees also spent a morning doing trail maintenance and learning what goes into building a sustainable trail.



## Eastern Pennsylvania Alliance of Climbers (EPAC) & Ragged Mountain Foundation

Continuing the vital work of engaging the community in hot advocacy topics, EPAC hosted a conversation in collaboration with Colorado State University, Climbers for Bat Conservation, Slippery Rock University, Access Fund ambassador Ken Hull, and Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Pennsylvania Game Commission to showcase how climbers can lend a critical hand in protecting bats. The Ragged Mountain Foundation followed suit in an event, with support from Western Massachusetts Climbers' Coalition and the Climbing Resource Access Group of Vermont about how recreational ecology can help climbers reduce their impact. Congrats on these successful events that empowered local climbers to take part in advocacy work.

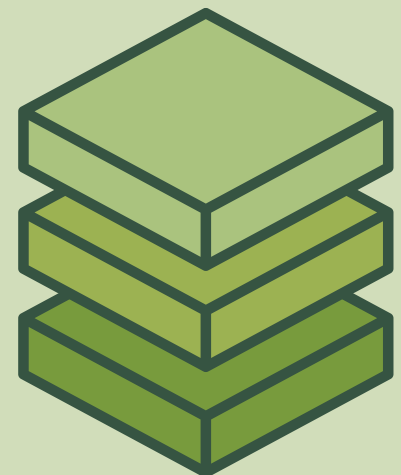


## LCO 101: Your Tech Stack

A tech stack refers to your local climbing organization's lineup of technology components. It has an effect on almost every facet of an LCO's work: donor relationships, member and volunteer databases, marketing, communications, website, and much more. When your LCO's tech stack products are matched with your needs, things are easy, efficient, and effective—but when they're not, it can make even the simplest task seem like a burden.

We get a lot of questions from LCOs about what tech stack products to use and how to put them to work in order to make their advocacy easier and more effective. To answer those questions, we reached out to our greater LCO network to source key advice. Here are three key takeaways:

- **Know what you need before you start.** Meet with your board and other stakeholders to nail down not only what you need your tech stack to accomplish, but also how much budget you have.
- **Keep it simple.** Your tech stack doesn't have to be a complicated web of products working together. Often, organizations are able to get everything they need in a single product with comprehensive capabilities.
- **Try before you buy.** Many companies allow you to set up a sandbox environment to demo their products before you buy, allowing your organization to work with those products before you fully commit.



For a full list of product recommendations and more tips, visit the LCO 101 Blog section at [accessfund.org](http://accessfund.org). Reach out to [localsupport@accessfund.org](mailto:localsupport@accessfund.org) for help with any specific questions.

# ADVOCATE SPOTLIGHT: Eric Ruljancich



When it comes to being a protector of sustainable climbing areas, Eric Ruljancich is a pure role model. With a long track record of climbing advocacy in the Tucson region, Eric sets a high bar for anyone committed to keeping climbing areas open and conserved. Not only did Eric play a critical role in the founding of the highly successful Climbing Association of Southern Arizona (CASA), he continues to lead its stewardship and volunteer trail efforts every season. Eric somehow manages to continue sharing his expertise and leadership while running a full-time trail construction business—he's a true advocate and dedicated steward that the climbing community is lucky to count as one of our own.

## 5 Questions for Eric:

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

While there are many worthwhile causes, my favorite is stewardship. I believe that engaging people to help protect our climbing areas—and in turn protecting access to our climbing areas—is paramount. Once you spend a few hours building steps or picking up trash, you'll never look at climbing areas or trails the same. Embedding a sense of ownership and responsibility within our climbing community will go a long way to ensuring that we all get the opportunity to experience the joy of climbing. Stewardship is a small example of a community coming together collaboratively to build a better future—something that goes way beyond climbing.

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

Personally, I simply see myself as a person who loves climbing, being in the outdoors, and helping my community. With that framework, many of us are already advocates—we just aren't actively embracing it. When I started climbing, I didn't realize that I could be an advocate, that I could become part of the climbing community that was giving back. And that to me is what being a climbing advocate means: giving back to a sport and a community that gives us all so much.

### What's your advice to new advocates?

Pace yourself. There is much to do, but you don't have to carry all the gear. Realize your limitations and set reasonable goals about what you wish to accomplish. Recognize that you don't have to do it all yourself. Look for support from other advocates and your community. If you burn out quickly, you won't be able to do all the good things you want to. Make sure to keep climbing and doing the things you love—motivation and excitement are important parts of being an advocate.

### What challenged you the most about getting into the advocacy world?

One of the challenges I see in the climbing community is a lack of knowledge about the public land that we climb on. A better

understanding of the land management systems that take care of the land we use—whether federal, state, Indigenous, or private—can go a long way to helping climbers work with them to protect climbing areas and access to them. At the same time, it's exciting because through the work of advocates and local climbing organizations (LCOs), this knowledge gap is beginning to close up. Many land managers are starting to work with climbers on a collaborative basis to help each other. This work and education are critical as more and more climbers discover the joy of climbing on public lands.

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

In some ways, I'm more inspired by all those who support climbing advocacy with small and large contributions than by those who take the spotlight. Every single person who has supported me in my advocacy has made my work possible. Without the help of the community, my goals for stewardship could not be achieved. Advocates depend on everyone contributing time, energy, or money to make good things happen. While I'm honored to be recognized as an advocate, I'd be remiss to not recognize everyone who has helped and supported my efforts. The generosity of my community is what inspires me the most.



## WAYS TO GIVE:

# Planned Giving and Donor-Advised Funds

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—some of which can be more advantageous than others. Here are a couple of options that may be a good fit for your giving roadmap.

### Planned Giving

Since Access Fund was founded 30 years ago, we’ve taken the long view—not just access, but sustainable, durable access that will keep climbing areas open for future generations as well as our own. As a member of Access Fund, a great way for you to take the long view of your support is to consider a bequest or other transfer of assets. When you make these gifts now or in the future, giving assets is a tax-smart way to support climbing.

A planned gift is easy to set up and gives you the satisfaction now of knowing you’ve provided for the future of climbing. A minimal effort—often as easy as filling out an online form—can designate Access Fund as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy, a bank or retirement account, or other financial assets. Alternatively, you can include Access Fund in your will or trust.

Just a sentence or two can add open and sustainable climbing areas to your legacy.

See our Planned Giving page at [accessfund.org/plannedgift](https://accessfund.org/plannedgift) or contact [development@accessfund.org](mailto:development@accessfund.org) with any questions.

### Donor Advised Funds

Donor-advised funds (DAFs) are a popular tool for managing philanthropy and minimizing taxes. The main benefit of a DAF is the ability to make a donation and take an immediate tax deduction for it while waiting to decide where you should do your giving. Since the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in 2017 changed the standard tax deduction, donor-advised funds have become a key component of an advantageous financial strategy that includes charitable contributions. Many financial institutions and community foundations hold donor-advised funds, but they’re popular among individuals as well. You can start one today for as little as \$1,000.

If you have questions about starting a DAF, we’d be happy to provide some thoughts on how to go about it. If you already have one, we hope you’ll consider using it to make a gift to Access Fund. Either way, get in touch with us at [development@accessfund.org](mailto:development@accessfund.org) for more information.

## Your Philanthropy Team



**Heather Distad**  
Director of Philanthropy

Heather leads Access Fund’s fundraising engagement with individual donors, foundations, and other partners to advance Access Fund’s strategic vision. She also oversees fundraising events and works on community-based outreach efforts. In her spare time, you’ll find Heather running, climbing, or skiing in the high alpine.



**Scott Dissel**  
Senior Giving Advisor

Scott Dissel works directly with major donors, foundations, and select industry brands to raise financial support for Access Fund and its strategic vision for sustainable access and conservation of the climbing environment. A life-long conservationist, Scott’s passion is connecting people with nature and watching them thrive.



**Emily Nelson**  
Membership Coordinator

Emily works closely with our members to answer any questions about their membership and Access Fund’s work, including policy, stewardship, and other programs. She grew up in Minnesota and now lives in Boulder, Colorado. Devil’s Lake State Park in Wisconsin and the Red River Gorge in Kentucky are her favorite climbing areas, and she looks forward to exploring the climbing in her new home of Colorado.

# FEATURED PARTNERS



REI believes that a life lived outdoors is a life well lived, and that we find our best selves in wild, untamed, and natural places. REI knows that connection to nature is important not just on an individual level, but on social, cultural, and economic levels as well. To that end, REI is committed to facilitating action on behalf of the outdoors through its Cooperative Action Network, advancing inclusivity in the outdoors and embracing a circular economy. Access Fund is thankful for REI Co-op's long-standing support of our mission, and we're grateful to be partnered with a company dedicated to advocating for wild spaces.



The North Face is a premier manufacturer of gear made for exploration and a longtime Access Fund partner. It believes that exploration has the power to change lives and connect communities, and it works to empower people to search out new experiences, overcome obstacles, and connect with each other. The North Face is committed to making the best products on earth, with communities, nature, and the future in focus. At Access Fund, we understand the power of rallying our communities, for the future of land and our people, and we're thankful for The North Face's continual support over the last decade.



YETI was founded with the simple mission of building products for the serious outdoor enthusiast that could survive rough conditions in the field, whether that means remote wilderness excursions or coastal fishing trips. Today, they're committed to not only making the best coolers they can, but also to embracing sustainable manufacturing practices and supporting organizations working on conservation and representation in the outdoors. Access Fund is grateful to partner with YETI, and we're proud of our work together over the last six years. We look forward to deepening our partnership to support people recreating outside in the natural world while actively caring for and protecting our special wild places.



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 Five Ten  
Backcountry  
Outdoor Research  
Petzl America

**Platinum Plus - \$15,000+**

USA Climbing  
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**Platinum - \$10,000+**

EPIC Water Filters  
La Sportiva  
Mammut  
OnX Maps  
Touchstone Climbing Inc  
Trango  
YETI

**Gold Plus - \$7,500+**

Osprey Packs

**Gold - \$5,000+**

American Alpine Club  
Arizona Wilderness Brewing  
COROS Global  
Escape Climbing  
Metolius  
Microsend  
Parks Project  
SCARPA North America

**Silver - \$2,500+**

Pacific Edge Climbing Gym  
Planet Rock  
Variner

**Bronze - \$1,000+**

Beta Rock Climbing  
Blue Ice North America  
Flash Foxy  
Gnarly Nutrition  
Granite Arch Climbing Gym  
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Riverfront Rock Gym  
Rock and Resole  
Spire Climbing Center  
The Vansmith  
Vertical Adventures INC  
Wazee Crane





*Monument Valley  
Navajo Nation*



# Vernan Kee



Vernan Kee is a climber, artist, dog rescuer, and advocate for access and conservation. With a passion for design and a knack for illustration, he’s made a career out of what he loves as a freelance graphic designer.

His graphic design work with Natives Outdoors—a creative collective that works directly with Tribal governments, community organizations, and individuals on increasing access to outdoor recreation—connects him with Access Fund’s mission on a deep level. His illustrated take on the soaring domes of Cochise Stronghold grace our 2022 member T-shirt, and we’re grateful to have his artwork throughout the pages of this issue of Vertical Times.

“Climbing on native land as a person of native heritage puts a different perspective in my mind with each climb,” Kee says. “My ancestors used climbing to escape enemy invasions and would climb down canyon walls to seek refuge in hidden caves. Now I have so much respect for these places and do my best to educate others.”

When asked how climbers can be respectful when climbing on native land, his answer was simple: “Don’t just read the climbing books—do your research on the land.” See his full artist spotlight at [accessfund.org/vernank](https://accessfund.org/vernank) for some resources on doing just that.

Learn more about Kee and see his work at [vernank.com](https://vernank.com). Follow Kee on Instagram at [@vernank](https://www.instagram.com/vernank).



# Staff and Board



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## Protect America's Climbing

P.O. Box 17010  
Boulder, CO 80308



## Limited Edition 30th Birthday Tees

The best way to support Access Fund's mission to protect America's climbing is through membership and direct donations. The second-best way? Pick up some of our excellent gear at [accessfund.org/store](https://accessfund.org/store). We turned 30 this year, so right now you'll find a limited edition run of tees and long-sleeves alongside the hoodies, stickers, and tees you know and love.

