

San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLV GO!)

Since its inception, SLV GO! has been involved in the coordination, fundraising and design of numerous trails and trail systems in the San Luis Valley. In 2020, SLV GO! decided to expand its capacity to provide local communities with safe, accessible trails by employing a six-person professional trail building, stewardship and restoration crew. In its inaugural year, the Great Outdoors Action Team (GOATs) was responsible for a variety of projects on federal, county and city lands; utilizing hand tools and small machinery and employing skills in trail design, layout and construction. GOATs provided an opportunity for SLV community members who may otherwise have had difficulty finding employment to build a foundation for a career in outdoor stewardship; work that has immense benefits for psychological and social health, in a field projected to boom.

San Luis Valley Great Outdoors reached out to the Kenneth King Foundation to support the Great Outdoor Action Team. The foundation rose to the occasion to support GOATs with a grant of \$15,000, providing SLV GO! with a strong financial buffer to get the GOATs crew moving.

With support from Kenneth King Foundation, SLV GO! was able to work with a full crew of seven from August through the first week of November 2020. Two of the crew members were local college students: one who was laid off from her on-campus job in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak in March; and another who was furloughed in April from a local business. The other five members were local community members. One had been laid off from his job in oil and gas and was excited for an opportunity to work in a more environmentally friendly position. Another, a previous volunteer with SLV GO!, excitedly joined the crew after retiring from his job in early spring. A shift in funding due to the pandemic at another local nonprofit; a long stretch of unemployment and odd jobs to make ends meet; and yet another COVID-19 lay-off from the local ski area brought the other three members to the crew.

None of the seven crew members had gainful employment before working with SLV GO!, save for the recent retiree. The diversity of the multi-generational and multi-talented crew made for an incredibly successful season, with 35,894 feet (8.6 miles) of trail constructed or maintained, 538,410 square feet (12.4 acres) of activated public open space created, and invaluable learning and gained experience across all levels. After completing the project at SLV, some of the GOATS got employed with similar organizations while two others are working on potentially opening their own businesses.

Without funding from the Kenneth King Foundation, SLV GO! would have only been able to sustain a six-person crew for 4 weeks. With the support, the seven-person Great Outdoors Action Team was able to make a deeper impact across 12 weeks of gaining experience and creating new outdoor opportunities in their communities.