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

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

-Rachel Hutchens, Executive Director

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

VISION
A place where people and nature coexist and thrive.

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

**85,863 Site Visitors**
- +1,000 from 2020
- 40% increase from 2019

**Caught on Wildlife Cameras!**
- Deer
- Raccoons
- Cottontail Rabbit
- Coyote
- American Beaver
- Cooper’s Hawk
- Eared Grebe
- Tiger Salamander

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Before Cattail Removal

After Cattail Removal

Buckthorn Removal

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

Red Rocks Community College Intern Greg facilitating a Saturday Welcome Booth.

Girls Inc. Summer Camp Interns Jacinta and Rey assisting with Summer Camp.

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

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

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

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

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

EXPLORING and LEARNING

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING (PBL)

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

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

PBL Problem Statements

"Bluff Lake needs a way to honor human interaction while keeping our environment and waterways clean. How can Bluff Lake protect the environment (plants and animals) while allowing people to enjoy the area?"
-Human Environment Interaction PBL with 1st graders

"Bluff Lake needs a way to reduce nutrient contamination, because actions by people in the neighborhood around Bluff Lake are impacting the water quality of the lake. How can this contamination be reduced?"
-Water Quality PBL with 8th and 9th graders

"Bluff Lake needs a way to reduce nutrient contamination, because actions by people in the neighborhood around Bluff Lake are impacting the water quality of the lake. How can this contamination be reduced?"
-Cultural Inclusiveness PBL with 8th-12th grade English Language Learners

SCHOOLS

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

FAMILIES

SUMMER CAMP

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407 Summer Campers (103 more than 2020)
37 Junior Counselors
2 Girls Inc. Interns
30 Full or Partial Scholarships Totaling Over $7,100
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PROGRAM PARTNERS

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

8
"The kids absolutely LOVED camp. They said it was their favorite camp ever (and they've gone to a lot of camps!!)."

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

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

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

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

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

"The kids are still talking about it."

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

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

**Wetland Habitat**

**Hábitat de Húmedales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Lain</th>
<th>Date: 12-14-22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Observations**

What animals and plants do you see? (Draw or write)

- **Food Comida**
  - From the river/stream
  - Hooves

- **Water Agua**
  - Hooves

- **Shelter Refugio**
  - All of the animals eat here

- **Healthy Habitats have four parts:**
  - Food, water, shelter, and space.

Los Hábitats Saludables tienen cuatro partes: Comida, agua, refugio, y espacio.

**LEARNING TOOLS**

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

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

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

**2021 Financials have not yet been audited**

| 2021 Income | $546,000 |
| 2021 Expenses | $520,400 |

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"2021 Financials have not yet been audited"
“Since joining the Bluff Lake team in May, I’ve loved hearing the stories of the families and kids who connect with the site. I’m looking forward to telling these stories to a bigger audience in 2022, and showing more people what a special place and valuable resource Bluff Lake is for our community.”

-Leila, BLNC Development Manager, helping facilitate after school programs

“Every day at Bluff Lake I am infected by the joy, energy, and curiosity of kids, and inspired by the passion, generosity, and brilliance of volunteers and staff. My days are filled with learning, purpose, laughter, play, movement, natural beauty, and meaningful connections. I am profoundly grateful to have found this place and this community.”

-Heidi (front left), BLNC Education Manager, all smiles with our camp staff
Questions about this report?

Email us  info@blufflake.org
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Check out our website  www.blufflake.org

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