

NRF[®]

NATIONAL RECREATION FOUNDATION



ANNUAL REPORT 2022



NRF[®]

NATIONAL RECREATION FOUNDATION



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“During this time of unprecedented mental health challenges for our nation’s young people, we are more committed than ever to providing all youth with access to these important programs.”



Chair, Board of Trustees

Joseph B. Anderson, Jr.

The National Recreation Foundation had a lot to celebrate in 2022. Thanks to collaborations with other funders and a strong investment market in 2021, NRF was able to invest \$2,408,515 in programs getting kids active and outdoors in 2022. That’s the most NRF ever has distributed in one year. We couldn’t be more thrilled to be infusing more dollars into the sector, because we know that providing kids with meaningful experiences in the outdoors is life-changing. During this time of unprecedented mental health challenges for our nation’s young people, we are more committed than ever to providing all youth with access to these important programs.

2022 also was significant because NRF received \$1,046,250 in donations. NRF does not actively seek donations, but the importance of our mission attracts contributions. We take the duty to deploy these funds in the most impactful way possible seriously, and we thank those donors who have entrusted us to shepherd these dollars wisely.

NRF welcomed a new trustee in 2022. Track star and Olympian, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, was elected at NRF’s Annual Meeting. Growing up in East St. Louis, Illinois, Jackie’s life was transformed by her ability to access a local park with a track during her childhood, opening the door to an extraordinary life. And, Jackie is holding that door open for young people today in East St. Louis through the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation. We look forward to learning from and working alongside Jackie to advance NRF’s mission of youth development through outdoor recreation.

This year felt special too because NRF’s Board of Trustees and staff were finally able to meet again in-person for NRF’s Annual Meeting in November. NRF trustees come from all over this vast country. Representing diverse professions, life experiences, expertise and worldviews, the common thread linking us together is our profound commitment to NRF and its ability to serve young people. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, we had been

unable to meet in-person since 2019. It was a thrill to come together again after three years. We met in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the joy of being together was palpable, which I think is evident from the photo at top left. We capitalized on our time together, dedicating our time to thinking creatively and ambitiously about NRF’s future.

My term as NRF’s Chair now comes to a close. I pass the baton to fellow Trustee Chip Davison, who will guide the next two years. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as NRF’s Board Chair. Thank you for the opportunity.

Joe Anderson



President and CEO

Sophia B. Twichell

It's been a strange few years. The COVID-19 pandemic locked us down and isolated us. Thank goodness for Zoom, which brought us together virtually and created a new form of business communication. (I confess, I'm a big fan of Zoom meetings when compared to those decades of conference calls previously.) As NRF Board Chair Joe Anderson outlines in his letter (page 5), NRF achieved many significant milestones in 2022 (most grant dollars distributed, most donations received). NRF is thriving, and I am enormously proud of its accomplishments. For me personally, however, the most exciting thing about 2022 was NRF's return to travel.

Since March 2020, NRF staff was grounded. We stopped traveling to visit trustees, applicants, grantees, partners. I convinced myself that NRF staff could do its work remotely, virtually. Our work is national. Our systems are cloud-based. We can do this. And, we did. In fact, I'm proud of the creativity our staff brought to board meetings and grantee workshops.

Under the circumstances, NRF flourished.

In spring of 2022, staff returned to travel. Wow, did that feel good! I was surprised at how good. My first trip was to Arizona to connect with two NRF trustees, Lee Storey and Freddie Valenzuela. Freddie and I have worked together for years, but Lee joined the NRF Board in 2020. This was my first opportunity to connect with her in-person. Zoom is great, but I quickly realized, it just doesn't hold a candle to in-person connection.

Together, we met with NRF grantees in Arizona. We toured Grand Canyon Youth's facilities, spent time with staff and met student leaders. We hiked Walnut Canyon National Monument with youth from Kids in Focus.

Meeting the leaders of organizations NRF supports and engaging with the young people these programs touch is a privilege and inspiration. This positive experience was replicated as I visited people and programs from Maine to New Mexico. I now better appreciate how much this

time together, these shared experiences, cultivate trust and understanding. And, sharing trust and understanding with trustees and grantees makes me better at my job. I can be a better advocate. Knowing more about programs, operations and challenges, I am able to link grantees with relevant resources and opportunities. Sharing space with others committed to bright futures for today's youth energizes me. Feeds my soul. Brings me joy.

No question, the challenges facing our young people today are vast. But, I feel intense gratitude for my good fortune in working for an organization propelled by the vision of a country where all our young people have the opportunity to thrive. Great people are working hard every day to make this vision a reality. This work is joyful. And, I am thrilled that every now and then I'm able to ditch Zoom and meet face-to-face with the everyday heroes making it happen.

Sophia Twichell



Balancing Eco-Anxiety & Climate Joy

Caitlin Reilly

Charles E. Hartsoe Fellow

Climate change is one of the most critical issues we are facing in the 21st Century. It is important that we face difficult truths and take large-scale action to reduce the harmful impacts of human-caused changes to our global environment. However, we also need to recognize the mental health impacts that a problem as monumental as climate change generates. Finding the balance between reckoning with the harsh

reality of environmental degradation and fostering hope and sense of community is not easy. While there is no single correct approach to achieving this balance, two important aspects of understanding the mental health impacts of climate change are eco-anxiety and climate joy.

Eco-anxiety is a form of chronic stress and anxiety fueled by a fixation on environmental doom and a loss of hope for our collective future due to

large-scale environmental destruction. The American Psychiatric Association now identifies climate change as an important contributor to mental health trends. Eco-anxiety often affects adults deciding if they want to become parents or making choices about how many children they want to have. It is most prevalent, however, among youth. This is because young people are often better informed about climate change and environmental issues than people in older generations and because youth have the most to lose from a lack of action. Youth may experience eco-anxiety as an acute fear of an environmental disaster, obsessive tracking of events like severe storms or localized environmental changes, or a more general lack of hope when thinking about their futures.

Fear and stress are in some ways reasonable reactions to the crisis of climate change. When adults teach young people about environmental issues or talk to them about climate change, it is important to be honest

ECO-ANXIETY

and take the emotional concerns of kids seriously. Dismissing worries or minimizing how scary climate change is will not help kids feel better. Instead, educators and adult caregivers can support youth in learning more about environmental topics and fuel their curiosity about the natural world, while also emphasizing the hope we can find in ecosystem resilience and ongoing human action to protect natural places.

This focus on hopeful action is a key ingredient of successful pro-environment messaging and environmental education. Many activists and educators call it **climate joy**. Climate joy can be found in community-building through environmental action, enjoying time in the places we care about and are working to preserve, and in recognizing the countless people past, present, and future who have and will continue to make the world a better and more sustainable place.

Climate joy does not mean erasing the very real need to be worried about climate change. We should all be concerned about our environmental future, but we should also be hopeful about our ability to have happy and fulfilling lives as we address these issues. Climate joy is about taking time away from thinking about the things that scare us to enjoy the people, places, and creatures that led us to care about creating a better future in the first place.

NRF strives to achieve the delicate balancing act between facing environmental realities and finding joy in nature through the grantees that we support. We seek out grantee partners that provide outdoor and environmental education experiences to young people and give them the tools to understand key issues and take action to better their communities. We also look for organizations that allow kids to be kids and help them connect to each other and natural spaces through fun and exploration. We want youth to be active, spend time outside, and be prepared to create lives that are healthy and joyful. NRF is a small piece of the puzzle when it comes to environmental issues and youth mental health, but we are dedicated to finding new and creative ways to spur climate action and open up conversations about the complicated emotions related to facing environmental crises.

The reality is that previous generations have led us down a path towards climate crisis, and future generations will have to deal with the consequences of those decisions in ways we can currently only imagine. That is a harsh truth that we cannot avoid. However, adults have a responsibility to equip young people, not only with the scientific information they need to protect their communities, but also with the tools to care for themselves and protect their mental health along the way. We need to find ways to face the seriousness of the climate crisis and invite new people into a hopeful and joy-filled movement that celebrates a diversity of natural environments and acknowledges the beauty of seeking justice for human communities left to face the consequences of climate change on their own. Joy, even in the face of climate change, can still be abundant.



CLIMATE JOY



Reflections from Grantee Reports

Pandemic Impact

Every year, NRF grantees tell us about the work that they have accomplished over the course of their grant period. Every year, we get the opportunity to appreciate all the effort each organization puts into making their community a better place for kids to live and reflect on how things are going for our cohorts more broadly. Upon reflection, we noticed two throughlines evident from the information submitted by grantees in their final reports. Those trends are the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of kids and the function of youth-focused programs and an increased focus on equity in the youth recreation sector.

COVID-19 drove a lot of immediate changes when the pandemic hit in 2020. Although we have largely returned to in-person events and



programs over the past two years, the challenge of dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 is not behind us. For many grantees this meant recognizing that kids are different as a consequence of their pandemic experiences. Many youth missed developmental milestones, fell behind academically and socially, and had their foundational sense of safety and security rocked. As a result, youth programming needs to be different to respond to new needs among young people. Lots of programs have reduced the number of youth they serve in their programming and have lowered the staff-to-participant ratios in order to provide more support and individualized attention as kids transition back into group-based in-person recreation.

Many NRF grantees have long emphasized equitable access to recreational opportunities as part of their missions. Recently, however, we have seen growth in the number of organizations reckoning with the reality that the youth recreation sector needs to engage with historical and current injustices in order to truly be effective. This means that even organizations that do not directly address social justice issues now are integrating equity principles and concerns into their missions and programs. The movement to think more deeply about structural inequities and cultural biases is great news for youth recreation — we are making progress towards meeting the real needs of more young people who were previously overlooked. NRF applauds the organizations which have been thinking about equity in their work for many years and is excited to support grantees who are starting to incorporate more equitable practices into their programs.

The past few years have been both challenging and rewarding. Continued impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and pivots to make youth recreation more meaningful and accessible to all young people are two trends we saw across grantees, but each organization faced obstacles specific to the communities it is situated in and serves. Grantees were creative and resilient in overcoming challenges and ultimately provided fun-filled, growth-oriented recreational experiences to youth as a result.



Grants Overview



2022 TRUSTEE GRANTS — \$745,365

19

Aspen Institute/Forum for Community Solutions
Atabey Outdoors
Backyard Basecamp, Inc
Bike Works Seattle
Brown Girl Surf, a fiscally sponsored program of Social Good Fund
Catalina Island Conservancy
Cheyenne River Youth Project
Chicago Training Center
Chicago Voyagers
Cincinnati Squash Academy
City Kids Wilderness Project
Colorado Springs Youth Sports
Courage Ranch
Detroit Hives
Detroit Horse Power
First Tee of North Florida
Gardeneers
Girls on the Run of the Triangle
Glacier Peak Institute
Grand Canyon Youth
Grow Dat Youth Farm
Ironwood Tree Experience
Kids in Focus
Living Classrooms Foundation
Minnesota Landscape Arboretum
Minnesota Zoo Foundation
Montezuma Land Conservancy
Muddy Sneakers
National Parks of New York Harbor Conservancy
Openlands
Radical Monarchs, a fiscally sponsored program of Community Initiatives
SailMaine
Saved By Nature
SHAPE Community Center
Solar Youth, Inc
Soul River Inc
Together We Rise
Walltown Children's Theatre
West End Neighborhood Association
We've Got Friends

2022 SPECIAL GRANTS — \$472,000

Camping & Education Foundation
 Environmental Law & Policy Center
 Harlem Grown
 Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles
 Latino Outdoors, a fiscally sponsored program of Community Initiatives

2022 OUTDOOR GRANTS — \$1,082,000

Atabey Outdoor
 Backyard Basecamp
 Black Outside, Inc
 Bridge Outdoors at The Beth
 CatRock Ventures
 Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute
 Children's Forest of Central Oregon
 Community Nature Connection
 Cool Learning Experience
 Conservation Legacy
 Coombs Outdoors
 Cultivating Community
 Diamond Willow Ministries
 Duamish River Community Coalition
 Eden Place Nature Center
 Field Institute of Taos
 Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida
 Friends of Organ Mountain-Desert Peaks
 Generations Indigenous Ways, a fiscally sponsored program of
 Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples
 GirlVentures
 IDEA Public Schools
 Le Semilla Food Center
 Native Like Water, a fiscally sponsored program of One World Bridge
 Outward Bound Adventures
 Park Pride
 Red Cloud Renewable
 Rios to Rivers
 Rocking the Boat
 See You At The Top
 Sherwood Forest
 Sicangu Community Development Corporation
 Sol Collective
 The Center of Southwest Culture
 Tree Street Youth, Inc
 Trekkers

Western National Parks Association
 Wild Diversity
 Wilderness Inquiry
 Yellow Bird Life Ways
 YES Nature to Neighborhoods
 YMCA of Greater Seattle
 Youth Opportunities Unlimited
 Zuni Youth Enrichment Project

2022 OTHER GRANTS — \$109,150

Blue Sky Funders Forum
 Brick City Rowing
 Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum
 Forefront
 Friends of Garden of the Gods
 Heart of Los Angeles
 Latino Theater Company
 SOS Outreach

THE Robert W. Crawford



Crawford personified those qualities of leadership and commitment that the Foundation seeks to foster, which is why this achievement prize is named in his honor.

PRIZE

For 60 years, Robert W. Crawford served others through his role as Commissioner of Recreation in Philadelphia and as Executive Director of the National Recreation Foundation.

As the Commissioner of Recreation, Crawford established a national model for local government's provision of recreational services for all citizens. His creativity and innovative ideas won him international recognition. He also played an important role in the development and growth of the National Recreation Foundation.

The purpose of the Prize

The purpose of the prize is to recognize a living person who is dedicated to enhancing recreation opportunities for youth, making it possible for more young Americans to live healthy, participatory lives, thus reinforcing the work of the Foundation.

Each year the prize is awarded to that person, whether professional or volunteer, who has made an extraordinary contribution in advancing recreation programs for youth.

The prize consists of a \$50,000 cash award to support the recreation-related project of the recipient's choice and is presented at the Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees.

Celebrating 20 years in 2022

Arshay Cooper 2022 Recipient

Growing up on the West Side of Chicago in the late 1990s, Arshay Cooper witnessed firsthand the devastating impact that poverty can have on a community. Cooper and his fellow students at Manley High School were living in a war zone, where hopelessness was ever present; opportunity was not. "At fourteen years old in my neighborhood, kids had experienced what most soldiers witnessed in war. At fifteen, I had already run for my life, had bullets fly straight past my head, skipped over pools of blood, and witnessed dead bodies on the street," Cooper wrote in his book, *A Most Beautiful Thing*.

Opportunity for Cooper arrived in the form of a boat sitting in his school's lunchroom alongside a sign that read, 'Join the Crew Team.' "The moment I wrapped my hands around those oars, my life changed. I went to college, I traveled the world, I started a foundation, I wrote a book. I was able to do all of these amazing things," said Cooper. "It wasn't, 'am I smart enough?' I was just looking for an opportunity. And that's the story of so many young people out there. So, let's give them an opportunity."

To help provide that opportunity, Cooper coached rowing at the Chicago Urban Youth Rowing Club and worked as the youth program guidance counselor for Victory Outreach's Midwest/Gulf Coast region. He also founded or helped start several rowing programs for youth from low-income communities across the country so that other young people can experience the profound change that happens on the water.

"Arshay always believed that rowing was not only about developing athleticism, but also professionalism, discipline, community, and a love of nature. More and more, in recent years, he has felt compelled to tell his story and to create opportunities for others to be introduced to nature and the wealth of opportunities he believes can come through rowing," said National Recreation Foundation Trustee Lila Leff, who nominated Cooper for the award.

Cooper's award-winning memoir, *A Most Beautiful Thing*, was recently adapted into a film by the same name, narrated by the Academy and Grammy

Award-winning artist Common, produced by NBA Stars Grant Hill and Dwyane Wade and Grammy Award-winning 9th Wonder, and directed by award-winning filmmaker and Olympic rower Mary Mazzio.

Today, Cooper travels across the United States encouraging youth of color to explore rowing and share the healing benefits of recreating on the water. Through his nonprofit organization, A Most Beautiful Thing Inclusion Fund, Cooper works to break barriers within the sport of rowing by increasing sustainability, access to rowing, and diversity in youth rowing programs. "The idea is to make sure that every boathouse in our country reflects the diversity of its city, at every level of competition, from recreational rowing to the Olympics," said Cooper.

"Every year we go into five different cities and start a rowing program. We go into communities that are neglected, public schools that don't have resources, and we introduce young kids to swimming, rowing, college and beyond. It's been powerful," said Cooper.

In its inaugural year, the organization has supported 20 coaches of color, introduced 2,000 kids of color to the sport of rowing, and built partnerships to secure nearly \$1 million in funding and supplies. And this

the new boats, the extra tours, the college trips that the kids will receive because of this Prize.

I'm so excited to give this award to more young people to provide access and opportunity through



is just the beginning. "There's never been an African-American male who rowed in this country in the Olympics on American soil," said Cooper. "We're building the pipeline for the Los Angeles 2028 Summer Olympics."

Reflecting on receiving the Crawford Prize, Cooper said, "Right away, I thought about

the life-changing sport of rowing."

Cooper directed the \$50,000 cash prize to Brick City Rowing in Newark, New Jersey. Brick City Rowing was founded in 2020 to bring competitive rowing to Newark students in middle school, high school, and college.



- 2002 (1) Dr. David McLone Chicago, Illinois
- 2003 (2) Jane G. Pepper Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- 2004 (3) Peter A. Witt, PhD College Station, Texas
- 2005 (4) Ronnie Lott Redwood City, California
- 2006 (5) Margaret C. Daley Chicago, Illinois
- 2007 (6) J. Kent Hutchinson, PhD Denver, Colorado
- 2008 (7) Sidney Epstein Chicago, Illinois
- 2009 (8) Robert Kohel Marquette County, Wisconsin
- 2010 (9) Melissa T. Harper Boston, Massachusetts
- 2011 (10) Eleanor M. Josaitis Detroit, Michigan
- 2012 (11) Lt. General John B. Conaway Betheny Beach, Delaware
- 2013 (12) Harrison I. Steans Chicago, Illinois
- 2014 (13) Jackie Joyner-Kersey St. Louis, Missouri
- 2015 (14) Khary Lazarre-White New York, New York
- 2016 (15) Michael "Spike" Lobdell Stonington, Connecticut
- 2017 (16) Susan Teegen Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- 2018 (17) Peter Westbrook New York, New York
- 2019 (18) Richard Louv Julian, California
- 2020 (19) Derwin Hannah Baltimore, Maryland
- 2021 (20) Tyrhee Moore Washington, D.C.

Prior Crawford Prize Recipients

Jackie Joyner-Kersee Named to the Board

NRF's predominant purpose is to support nonprofit organizations engaged in youth development through recreation — changing young lives and building life skills.

As an informed partner, we invest deeply in understanding our grantees' challenges, and we apply due diligence and care in selecting organizations with a record of achievement and the potential for even more.

We know our success can only be measured in terms of our grantees' success. And based on NRF's model, this is only possible through the engagement of an informed and active Board of Trustees.

NRF trustees are responsible for managing and directing the significant resources we deliver to our grant partners and the youth they serve. Pooling their talents, our experienced board members ensure the continued success of NRF's work. Their accomplishments attest to the contributions they will make in fulfilling our mission.

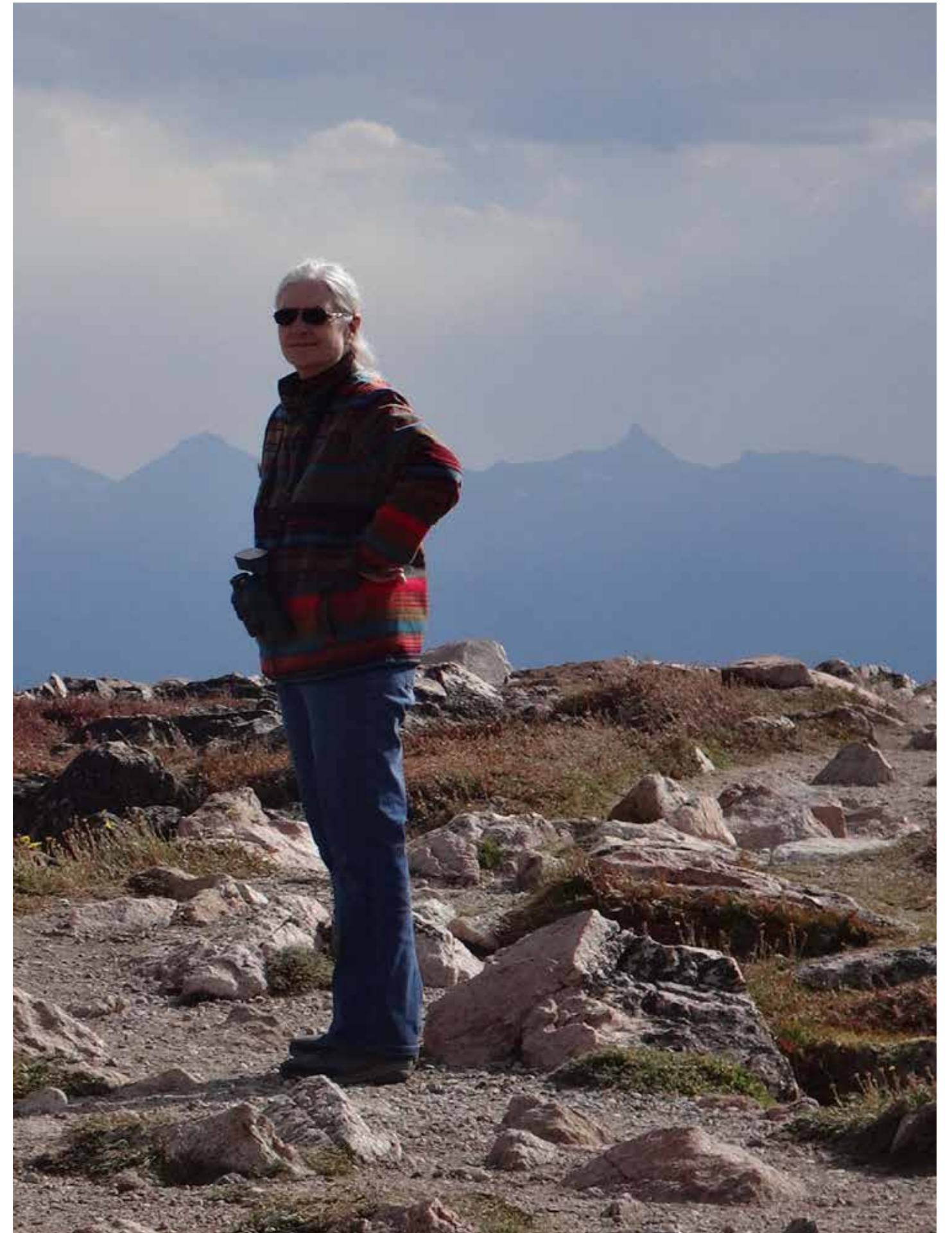


NRF is honored to announce that **Jackie Joyner-Kersee** has joined the National Recreation Foundation's Board of Trustees. Jackie, the Olympic and world champion heptathlete, is a youth advocate, author and philanthropist who founded the Jackie Joyner-Kersee Foundation to provide support to youth in her hometown of East St Louis, IL. She brings dedication and expertise in the youth recreation sector to her work with NRF. We could not be more delighted to have her serve on the Board where she will share her knowledge, expertise, and sense of care for young people.

Welcome to our newest advisor

Teresa H. Horton Joins NRF Advisory Council

NRF is excited to announce that Dr. Teresa (Terry) Horton has joined the NRF Advisory Council. Horton is an accomplished researcher with a background in evolutionary biology, physiology, ecology, and animal behavior. In her current position as an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at Northwestern University, Horton investigates the psychological and physiological connections between time in nature and our mental and physical health. She is also the founder of the Nature, Culture, and Human Health Network, which supports relationship-building among people in the Chicago region who are interested in the health benefits of nature. Horton is passionate about building connections and will be an asset to NRF through her expert perspective on data and research.





Beyond the Check

NRF envisions a future where all youth in the U.S. can safely get outdoors and active on a regular basis. To this end, NRF awards grants to organizations providing youth access to meaningful outdoor recreation experiences. With the goal of strengthening the sector, NRF not only supports grantee partners with grant dollars but also with professional development opportunities. Each year, grantees complete a survey sharing which types of trainings would be most valued by their staff. In response, NRF develops a slate of trainings to address those needs. Workshops offered in 2022 included:

Coaching Can Battle Racism, led by Positive Coaching Alliance, explored ways to create an inclusive environment and provided historical context on how sports have been used to battle racism.

Building Resilience and Supporting Healing, led by The Trauma Foundation, helped youth development organizations develop skills, tools and resources to build resilience and support the healing of youth struggling with chronic symptoms from unresolved trauma.

Peer Leadership Circles provide a space for leaders to focus on their needs, connect and build community with their peers, engage in open and honest dialogue, and leverage the knowledge of peers to solve real-time challenges.

Take a New Path: Tools for Increasing Your Philanthropic Bottom Line, led by Loring, Sternberg and Associates, shared the information needed to make fundraising decisions and create a dynamic board that can fundraise.

Trauma Training for Youth Development Staff and Volunteers, in conjunction with The Trauma Foundation, provided an understanding of, insight into and skills to support youth challenged by trauma, chronic stress and adverse childhood experiences.

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Colorado

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Illinois

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Caitlin Reilly
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Foundation*

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