NEWS FROM TREP K COUNTRY

Thoreau, NM
October 2014

Stories and Events from the
Cottonwood Gulch Foundation

www.cottonwoodgulch.org

* Printed on Recycled Paper with Soy Ink
Every morning before heading into the office, I try to get out to one of our local Albuquerque Open Spaces for a walk. This morning was no different, and as I wandered the 4 mile loop with my pup and a dozen other morning walkers, I noticed two coyotes loping along the edge of the fields. They paused on the dirt roadway, raised their heads and glanced in the direction of the couple of us walking dogs nearby. Undisturbed or perhaps unmotivated, they dropped their noses to the ground and kept on moving. This is the season when the Sandhill Cranes return to our area after summering in the northern states and Canada. I don’t know the extent of these coyote diets per se, but I imagine it may be a combination of these cranes, Canadian geese, backyard chickens, and likely the feral cat population from nearby neighborhoods.

In a way, I appreciate the presence of these wild creatures in our urban eco-system. Contentious discussions aside, I am happy to know that this predator, unlike so many others, is not only surviving, but by many accounts, thriving, even when we, as humans, have encroached on their natural habitats and hunting grounds. Adaptable creatures, no doubt. This is not so different from the Gulch and as we quickly near our 90th Anniversary, I am reminded that our centennial is not so far off.

I would venture a guess if someone had asked Mr. Howie in 1926, if Cottonwood Gulch would be here a century later, he might not have had a good answer. Like the coyote, the Gulch’s wild and vast wandering ‘grounds’ have shifted, morphed, reduced, expanded, and at times, burned or been sold. The roads we travel are now partially paved – although many are still notoriously ruggedly New Mexican, as you will remember them! The vehicles we drive are smaller, the tents a lighter weight, and the kids who arrive to become trekkers, less experienced. Like the coyote, however, the Gulch has adapted while maintaining the integrity of what makes the Trek so special. On occasion, over the past 90 years, our stewards, our leaders, like the coyote today, have glanced up to notice the passing culture, technology, trends and shifting values and determined how best to proceed with an ever-present eye to the essence of the Gulch. Mostly, we have seen how essential we are to the youth of today and tomorrow.

Change is inevitable, but only in balance with what has come before. In all of my conversations with Alumni, I have noted a common thread in our underpinnings, a thread that is woven through all the generations of the Gulch. It is one of community, wilderness, investigation and a simpler way of being in life and the outdoors. The innovation is in looking at how to better accommodate the growth we see in the number of interested trekkers, how to make accessible this experience to a diversity of populations, how to preserve and repair our aging buildings and infrastructure, and how to steward our forest and land. These are today’s challenges. These are questions that the board and staff are trying each day to answer while maintaining a keen eye to the question of integrity.

Our species of program - the wild, the unplugged, the rustic, the remote, the scientific - has become ‘endangered’ in current American culture in so many ways, but curiously, like the coyote, we have adapted and find ourselves now an inspirational anomaly to trekkers young and old. We provide opportunities to shed the confines of the indoors for the wild open space of the Southwest. We open the door to discovery of one's connection to the outdoors, one's connection to cultures, one's connection to science and ultimately one's connection to self. And, while our coms look a little different, our trekkers no longer ride in the back atop Baker tents, and the national forest has group size limitations, our essence, which makes the experience so life changing and eye opening, after all these years, remains, just like the coyote within the city limits.

We need your support today and in the coming years to keep our program accessible and to thoughtfully grow in ways that continue to so thoroughly meet our mission at Cottonwood Gulch! Please consider this as you make your year-end donations.

Trek On, Kris Salisbury
Dear Gulch Family,

Snow is headed to the Sandias as a cold blast from the north mixes with some moisture from the Gulf, its winter-like in the Southwest. Our annual Board Meeting is the perfect time to reflect on the past year and make plans for the future. I am happy to report that we had record attendance in our school groups and summer programs for a total of over 6,000 trekker days and 1200 participants! We celebrate these numbers as it means we are further reaching to meet our mission. All good news tends to also have potential for natural consequences. As a Board, we gather this week to make plans so as to not overwhelm our resources and cause collateral damage to the ecosystem or our staff members.

We are bringing on board 2 new board members to work collaboratively with us on our team. Please join me in welcoming David Greenberg, PT Trekker 70-71 and Staff 73-74, 77 and retired FBI agent. He brings a warm commitment for the Gulch and is a local in the greater Albuquerque Gulch community. Also join me in thanks to Steve Robertson, US Fish and Wildlife specialist, who is excited about helping us further our mission to get young people connected with nature and while he has not been a previous trekker, we are excited about his lifelong connection to getting youth engaged in the wilds.

I would also like to recognize one of our Board members for some non-glamorous, but very important work on behalf of the Foundation: Beth Williams-Breault. While earning her Ph.D. at University of New Mexico, and raising two young children with her husband, Josh, Beth gave an undisclosed number of hours to the Gulch community to assist us in getting the Foundation into shape. What kind of shape? The “behind the scenes shape” that is critical to having the best practices among our peer organizations. Beth helped us rewrite our Bylaws, write our Conflict of Interest Policies, and collaborate to draft our Case Statement for the Gulch. On behalf of our Board I want to give a ‘shout out’ to Beth for her extraordinary work on these unglamorous matters.

Oh, and be sure to check out Beth’s interview with Yonaton Weiss and his hike for future trekkers fundraising initiative. Yonaton Weiss, the son of Jane Fleisher Weiss and Sapir Weiss, trekked the Pacific Crest Trail and raised over $4,000 for the Gulch as people pledged per mile to support his accomplishment.

Keep on Trekking,

Henry E. Forser
Hiking through canyons in the Southwest is something that has become near and dear to my heart over the last couple years. In particular, there’s one slot canyon about 30 minutes from Base Camp that we often share with trekkers. In the spring and fall, we frequently guide middle and high school students on this hike, first over a series of massive sand banks and red rock, then up a set of Ancestral Puebloan steps, finally to the summit of a huge stone mesa, and then along the top before descending through the slot itself. About a month ago, I found myself in pure amazement while hiking the slot because I realized that every time I do it, I find something new, something changed, something different. Most recently, I was fascinated by how a recent thunderstorm had sliced through the red rock like a hot knife through butter. The force of nature can be fierce and wild.

One of my favorite things about working with the Gulch in the spring and fall is the diversity of students that attend our school programs. Some of them know how to hike, stay hydrated, how to set up a tent. Some know about art, archaeology, biology or geology. Some know how to bake bread or cook a delicious stew. But every single student we work with seems to leave with some new piece of knowledge, some new skill, or some discovery that they made over the course of a couple days. Sharing in these discoveries and adventures with students is incredible, and it enables kids to go explore on their own after a trip with us.

In the last year, we’ve been able to share the natural world with far more public school classrooms than ever before, through a series of grants that are helping to fund a program we’re calling Classrooms Get Outdoors. The premise behind Classrooms G.O. comes from a need that we hear about from teachers in our local communities—Bernalillo and McKinley Counties—for students to spend more time exploring nature. In the current academic climate, more and more science and history programs, classes, and field trips are being cut from public education. At the Gulch, we’re able to offer a program to students from all backgrounds to not only learn about, but actually experience archaeology, science, and exploration.

We have focused on developing what we hope to be long-standing experiential education programs with Title 1 schools in Bernalillo and McKinley Counties. Title 1 is a national program to assist schools with a high percentage of low income families to help ensure their students receive a high quality education. Recently, we received a generous grant from the Barker Foundation to work with Title 1 schools here in New Mexico, and since then, we have been working with teachers and administrators who are eager to give their students a hands-on educational experience in the outdoors. For example, we’re working on a conservation service program at a rock climbing area near Gallup and a multi-night expedition for students to experience backpacking and cultural sites throughout the state. We are excited to be able to offer the Gulch experience to students throughout New Mexico.

When a teacher or a student becomes curious about their home landscape, it’s thrilling to be able to work with them to plan an amazing trip to explore more of what they’re interested in. With each and every program, our goal is to provide a phenomenal educational experience in science, art, culture, and do it with the flare and character that is so distinctly “Gulch.” As I’m planning wilderness outings and cultural immersions in the spring, I can’t help but hope that some of our trips will include that slot canyon, if, for no other reason than to go back and see what has changed.

To learn more about Classrooms GO or school programs, visit www.cottonwoodgulch.org/classroom-GO, or email matt@cottonwoodgulch.org.
It doesn’t matter what Gulch generation you’re from... there’s one person we all have in common: Chet Kubit.

Chances are he taught you how to hold a hammer. Maybe he’s the one that finally got you to remember “the fork goes on the left.” At some point you’ve told one of his off-color jokes or made Hawaiian delight at home. And, admit it, you’re still a little intrigued by the rope trick.

Of course there’s no way to put a dollar figure on that kind of wisdom, but in honor of Chet’s 50th Year at the Gulch, we’re asking you to try. We will put together a memory book of all your written contributions and we’d like to build a workshop in his honor, but we need your help!

Think of all the ways Chet has influenced your life, try to put a dollar figure on it... and then...

“Cube It for Kubit!”

Examples:
Learning not to be afraid of a hammer and nail ($3)- Cube It! = $27!
Knowing how to choose a seat based on where the sun will hit my back ($4)- Cube It! = $64!
Discovering that piercings can happen at any age ($5)- Cube It! = $125!
Learning how to inspire young people (well, that’s simply priceless)- cube it = ??

We’ll put your memories in the memory book and your donations toward a Kubit workshop!

Thanks to Mike Sullivan and Sidsel Overgaard for this fun idea!

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Chapter 1: Cottonwood Gulch

Y onatan, how have you been involved with Cottonwood Gulch?

My involvement with Cottonwood Gulch started with my mother Jane Fleisher Weiss attending the Turquoise Trail back in 1971. She returned in 1972 as a TT’er and in 1974 was a KP Pusher. My uncle Peter Fleisher attended the Gulch in 1975 and 1976 in Group 2. As for my involvement with the Gulch, in 2002 I was in the Outfit Expedition, 2003 and 2004 Prairie Trek Expedition, 2005 and 2006 I was in the Mountain Desert Trek Expedition and in 2008 I worked as an intern at basecamp.

Can you tell me about your recent Pacific Crest Trail hike?

In April of 2014, I set out to hike the Pacific Crest Trail, a 2,668-mile hiking trail from Mexico to Canada. The PCT is a national scenic hiking and equestrian trail traversing the Sierra Nevada and Cascade mountain range, as well as the deserts on both sides. This incredible journey I was fortunate enough to walk through 25 national forests, 7 national parks, and a seemingly endless number of wilderness areas. It was an incredible journey and I absolutely loved waking up every morning with dew on my sleeping bag, surrounded by friends and a day that would only be filled with hiking, beautiful scenery climbing mountains, moving across valleys and constant laughter. Oh and eating, lots and lots of eating.

What was the most challenging part of the hike?

On my 167 day, I was challenged both physically and mentally every day, which made for an incredibly satisfying journey. Most days I hiked somewhere between 22 and 30 miles a day. While this hike was challenging, earning the right to see what was on the other side of the mountain pass that I had just spent time climbing up, made every step worth it. While the hike was long and difficult, when I look back on my memories, the great times and beautiful sights significantly outweigh the hard times, blood, sweat and tears. The trail lifestyle is rewarding in many ways. I spent all day building endorphins and hiking miles that seem crazy to anyone who is not a ‘thru-hiker’. But your mind adjusts to the task at hand, and by the time the sun goes down, you have made your miles and it is such a satisfying feeling to do this day in and day out.

What impacted your decision to do the hike?

My time spent at Cottonwood Gulch played a significant role in my decision to hike the PCT. I first heard about the trail as a trekker and made a promise to myself to hike the trail right after college as a graduation present to myself. I remember spending my summers out in the southwest having the time of my life, exploring the wilderness with some incredible people. I wanted to experience these types of friendships again as well as spending an extended period of time out in the wilderness. The trail exceeded my expectation for camaraderie and people working together to get to Canada. It was an experience I can only relate to my time spent at the Gulch, and playing rugby for 11 years.

Motivated people like you create amazing opportunities for kids from diverse economic backgrounds. What would be your advice for the Gulch community to get involved Hike for Future Trekkers?

Hike for Future Trekkers is a wonderful fundraiser that was a significant motivator for me while I was hiking the trail. There were countless times where I felt like quitting. When you spend that much time focused on one difficult far off goal the thoughts of quitting cross your mind from time to time. Raising money for the Gulch and having Hike for Future Trekkers on my mind was fantastic. There were a few times where I wanted to stop but one of the major reasons I kept going was because I knew the longer and farther I hiked, then maybe someone else could experience Cottonwood Gulch. Who knows maybe that person will fall in love with the wilderness the way I did and someday hike the PCT as well!

Anything else you’d like to add?

I can go on forever! There are a few sayings on the trail that stuck out that I would like to share.

“hike your own hike”
“the trail provides”
“smiles not miles”
“peace be the journey”

Also the ‘Trail Angels’ are some of the greatest and generous people I have ever met, and they are one of the biggest reasons that I was able to make it all the way to Canada - from random strangers dropping off water to remote waterless areas, to random strangers picking me up for a hitch hike and inviting me into their home for a bed, shower, laundry, and food.

If people have any questions about the trail, about gear or any sections I hiked I don’t mind them emailing me at yonatanvais@gmail.com

Thanks Yonatan for your wonderful inspiration and generous support for our Hike for Future Trekkers scholarship campaign!

To find out more, email kris@cottonwoodgulch.org
One Incredible Summer of Discovery

Gear up for Summer 2015

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July 7th

“...We headed to the Hopi reservation to meet with a woman named Geraldine. She showed us her pottery, an art she learned from her grandmother. Then she showed us and told us how she makes it... the pen of goats and sheep added to the fun of the evening. Lightning storms, crazy calls and not one single ‘shush’. I love A.M.T”

Chloe, Art and Music Trek

“I loved the way the adults were having as much fun as the kids!”

Rhyka N. - Family Trek

Sarah Warren, FAB 2014

I am where the beauty is everywhere.
Where the breeze calms my nerves.
Where the tree is my guard.
Where the world is my restroom but also my home.
Where other creatures live but do not invade.
Where smiles are on faces and hearts are full.
Where the silence is valued and embraces you with peace and warmth.
Where the sun is warm against you – bare skin.
Where games are played and friends are made.
Where you can shake your booty and laugh along.
Where you can climb the scarcest mountain with reassurance.
If you fall someone is there to catch you.
Where you are no longer afraid you can be brave and your peeps have your back.
Where the beauty is beyond what your camera can capture but your mind feeds your heart.
New Mexico is your home so breathe and take it all in.
You may regret it if you hide behind the clouds and you don’t spread light.

6 News from Trek Country OCT 2014
July 22 - TT SOLO

“I woke up right before the sun rose. I could hear bats and the early birds flying around and I was so relieved that I made it through the night alone.”

Nicole, TT log

Let me live in a place of beauty.

Where the only things interrupting my view were carved from the earth millions of years ago.

Where the hills are spotted with structures made by the hand of mother nature, not man.

Make my house with open walls, so the days first and last glimpses of light are welcomed in, not blocked out.

And may my home be filled with noise: the chirps and calls of birds overhead, gusts of wind racing through leaves and branches, and the pitter-patter from droplets of water falling from the thundering sky above.

Lindsey Klaff TT 2014
Nearly a century later, help us locate how far and wide our Gulch community extends!

We will unveil and publish this map at our 90th reunion where you too can see the current location of our alumni and trekkers.

Go to our website to place your pin and reconnect with us! Know someone who has lost touch? Encourage them to "place their pin" as well.

www.cottonwoodgulch.org
Where in the world are you? Nearly a century later, help us locate how far and wide our Gulch community extends!

We will unveil and publish this map at our 90th reunion where you too can see the current location of our alumni and trekkers. Do you too can see the current location of our alumni and trekkers. Someone who has lost touch? Encourage them to “place their pin” as well.
“After a dinner, we had a sweat where many secrets were shared and kept. Once the sweat was over, we went to our shelters, and I just slept in the middle of the forest. The next day, I woke to quite a surprise.”

Hillis Vassilas, PT 2014

“Every square dance we did was a partner dance. It was a very memorable moment; everyone was crying, hugging, laughing.... We still have one week more than the other treks where we will get to know base camp better and get prepared to say good-bye to this wonderful place; and for me, to say good-bye to America.”

Lea, from France, MDT 2014

“It was a lot smaller than I thought it would be considering it is a dinosaur bone. We all licked it because if you lick something and your tongue sticks then it is probably a bone.”

Lenny, Outfit 2 Trek
Abobe, Lintels and Work Parties...

renovating our new

Albuquerque Office/Bunkhouse property

About a year ago, with the help of our board and donors, we were able to purchase a much needed Albuquerque property that, once completed, will allow us to expand our office space, house staff in a bunkhouse and have outdoor space for school group expeditions staging and prep.

The office building is constructed out of 22” adobe blocks and currently thought to be about 100 years or older. This week, our contractor and volunteers have been spending time repairing adobe, raising door heights, and leveling floors this week. We are currently utilizing the future bunkhouse space as our office and hope to be into our future office in January 2015. Stay tuned and stop by to see our progress.

Thanks to our volunteers Gregg Henry, Wenda Trevathian, Art Rohr, Jack, Susan and Peter Oviatt, and Whitney for assisting us in this work day.
Creativity at the Gulch by Carla Jo Ehlinger

The Greeks were aware of the power of creativity. So were the Romans, the Egyptians, and ancient communities all over the world. All of these people created stories and myths to explain the world around them. Before modern science, before the printing press and the internet, we told stories to pass along knowledge. We walked through forests and pointed at the sun; we were all once naturalists, and very good story tellers. Over the next hundreds of years, we stopped telling stories as often, and instead became discoverers and inventors of fire, agriculture, and electricity. Certainly all of this required creative thinking, and creative thinkers still exist today. But for so many modern students and inspired teachers, our education system can seem to focus on other things, like memorizing facts and testing skills, and creativity often seems to wither.

What is creativity? Is it building something with your own hands? A new idea? Is it art? Are people born creative or can you become a creative thinker? I think creativity can mean many things. Anyone can be creative whether you are a musician, an artist, a banker, a car salesman, a police officer, a student. Meriam Webster Dictionary states creativity as “the ability to create new things or think of new ideas.” However, I think a more suitable understanding of creativity is described by the Gulch alum, Kurt Vonnegut Jr:

“We have to continually be jumping off cliffs and developing our wings on the way down.”

Creativity is about taking risks and affording yourself the possibility of failure. When did failure and irrational ideas hold such a stigma in our culture? Perhaps it has something to do with the challenges children are facing in our current educational system. I have not extensively studied modern schools, but I can speak to the system that I have experienced. I can assess where my experience with school fell short of helping me to foster my independence and imagination. After all, I spent 12 years of my early life walking through the shiny, waxed hallways and sitting in the colored desk seats of school buildings. And while I had terrific teachers, requirements for standardized testing and fitness tests seemed to take precedence over creativity. Curriculum circled around history dates and equations that now, for the life of me, I can’t recall. Many of us are familiar with that experience and may agree that teaching to meet standardized test requirements was often not conducive to our creative learning. In my work, I believe the most important thing that I can do for young students is to teach them how to think, not what to think.

The people I call “the great inventors” were able to foster their own creative minds, sometimes in spite of constructs that placed a great deal of emphasis on memorizing facts. They were humoring their irrational ideas and failing time and time again until one of their ideas worked. Is it our unwillingness to be called different and our fear of failure that hinders our own creativity? Sir Ken Robinson, an expert on the subject of creativity and education, shares this sentiment on the idea of failure:

“Kids will take a chance. If they don’t know, they’ll have a go. They’re not frightened of being wrong. Now, I don’t mean to say that being wrong is the same thing as being creative. What we do know is, if you’re not prepared to be wrong, you’ll never come up with anything original. And by the time they get to be adults, most kids have lost their capacity. They have become frightened of being wrong. And we run our companies like this, by the way. We stigmatize mistakes. And we’re now running national education systems where mistakes are the worst thing you can make. And the result is that we are educating people out of their creative capacities.”

Over the last decade, in response to new brain research and a concern over what might be missing in school pedagogy, we have seen an explosion of experiential education. At the Gulch, we believe in the importance of surrounding students with tangible subjects and a place to play out their experiments and theories. We think visually, we think in sound, we think kinesthetically. We think in abstract terms, and sometimes our trekkers experience failure! Creativity then, is the interaction of all of these disciplines to form an idea that has value to the creator.

New brain research indicates that movement assists children in learning. It’s no wonder that our students are easily distracted and anxious to move while they are in sedentary classrooms. Children learn first with their senses, by moving, and we can grow children’s creativity through movement, self-discovery, and experimenting. Each student has the capacity for a mind rich with imagination and independence.

We love to collaborate with inspired teachers looking to bring students outside because we want children to see that they are talented, brilliant, and inventive! We want students to grow up knowing just how valuable their unique mind is!
“What does it feel like?”

Words from our Naturalist

by Cass Landrum

“This place is so BEAUTIFUL,” exclaimed a teacher at Carlito Springs Open Space for the second or third time. As we walked along admiring the trees’ colors, the breeze picked up and one of the students observed, “It’s snowing LEAVES!” Earlier in our hike with this group of 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders, we engaged in a cactus hunt, and I was impressed by how absorbed some of the students were in counting and identifying every cactus we passed.

One especially sharp child had listened intently to my mini-lectures, including my warning about the smaller glochids below the larger spines of the prickly pear cactus. “Those are the ones that really hurt,” I warned. Several minutes later I noticed this curious child lowering her finger to a white prickly pear spine like sleeping beauty to the spinning needle, halting at her friend’s cry of “Be careful!”

Her friend’s instinct to protect epitomizes what David Sobel details in his article “Look, Don’t Touch: The Problem with Environmental Education” in *Ori-on Magazine* from 2012. He claims “Environmental education is one of the causes of children’s alienation from nature,” citing curriculum-based systemic learning as an unengaging effort to encourage interaction with our surroundings. When I encountered this article I was working for a company that revolved around teaching to scientific standards, where warnings such as “don’t touch that” or “don’t go over there” were as prominent as pleas to “play here,” creating mixed messages for young explorers. Cottonwood Gulch is the first place I have worked where Sobel’s ideal type of experience is encouraged.

When I first came to the Gulch and saw someone catch a lizard, I shuddered a bit. “Be careful!” I found myself uttering, not for their sake, but for the lizard’s. By the start of summer, however, I found myself alone in the museum with a lizard cradled between my fingers, my eyes fixed on his every breath and blink. Here I was holding a living, breathing being, other than a human. I watched as it seemingly enjoyed me rubbing its belly, and as it scampered around the tank toward a warm rock, when I placed him back in the terrarium. Although I recognized him as a Western Sagebrush Lizard, he was referred to by the trekkers as Aloicious (ah-loo-ish-us). As the summer went on, I began to appreciate the interactions trekkers had with these scaly creatures, watching children who seem inclined to yell at their peers whisper to their lizard friends, or kids who can’t sit still for instructions remain immobile as a lizard crawls up their arm. Finally, I was able to see these interactions for their true value. There are credible reasons for asking students to stay on trails, or not touch the fragile environment around them. There is evidence that the oils of our hands can harm reptiles, or that trampling off-trail can ruin an imperceptible ecosystem. But, there is also evidence of the benefits of those actions. Prominent authors and researchers like John Muir and E.O. Wilson did much more than run off trail. They caught specimens in jars and invented mechanisms to hunt and trap using nothing but grass and sticks. They might have harmed a few creatures along the way, but as a result of their investigations, they were inspired to dedicate a lifetime to preserving and protecting our ecosystems.

In his autobiography, E.O. Wilson writes “between the ages of six and twelve, learning about nature is less important than simply getting children out into nature.” Many of our trekkers, in both school groups and summer treks, are in this crucial age category, reaping benefit from the playfulness of our program. Trekkers who are thirteen and older benefit just as much by learning knowledge and skills that teaches them to be increasingly comfortable in the outdoors, and they often share their love of being outside with younger siblings and friends. Trekkers investigate the world alongside our staff, who model how not to be afraid, and how to hear and touch the beauty of the world around them inhaling it into their entire life.
A “healthy” ecosystem can be hard to define. Sometimes we simply know it when we see it: a massive parking lot is not an ecological sanctuary, but a lush forest teeming with birds perhaps is. However, even in a seemingly healthy environment, what lies beneath the surface (or underneath a tree’s bark) might signal problems that are not immediately obvious. Over the last several decades, many New Mexican forests have proven to be less resilient than we thought they were to those hidden challenges. There are several culprits: excessive logging, overgrazing, human development. But one miscreant is particularly vexing and unpredictable: bark beetles.

In the last 15 years, bark beetles have killed millions of trees in New Mexico. In most cases, they do not exactly kill trees from scratch, but instead take advantage of drought-stricken trees that are unable to defend themselves, like nature’s version of a grim reaper coming to finish off a specimen whose time has come. A healthy tree will “pitch out” intruders, filling the beetles’ burrows with resin and driving most of them away. But when a tree becomes weak, beetles can gain a foothold and essentially girdle their host, making it impossible for the tree to move water and nutrients through its vascular system. This can be beneficial for the forest as a whole. In a healthy ecosystem, beetles act as natural thinners by picking off ailing trees so young, vigorous ones can take their place.

The recent increase in mortality is not because the beetles are invasive—they are native to New Mexico, and are always present in our forest ecosystems, though usually in low numbers. But when overcrowding, disease, or drought—New Mexico is currently experiencing all three—weaken entire stands of trees, the bark beetle population can expand exponentially. Between 2002-2004, millions of pinons and ponderosas were killed by beetles throughout the state. Recently entomologists have observed another rise in beetle populations, raising concern about another outbreak.

Bark Beetles and Forest Thinning
by Jordan Stone

There are two primary genera of bark beetles in our forests, Ips and Dendroctonus, and the different species within these genera, each with their own cute face and tail, make their home in different trees. Their reproductive methods, though polygamous, are rather cute. For example, the male pinon bark beetle, Ips confusus, will bore a short “nuptial chamber” into a tree’s bark, into which he will invite two or three females by releasing attractive pheromones. After mating, the females will each bore their own galleries, chewing a little niche for each egg. The adults watch over the eggs until they hatch, fighting off any predators that dare enter their nuptial chamber. When larvae emerge they bore yet more galleries, eating the inner tissues of the tree as they grow. The resulting network of beetle paths is impressive.

Thankfully, Cottonwood Gulch has not experienced a large beetle outbreak. But we see their signs each year: small piles of sawdust around the base of a tree, pitch tubes, and the rambling galleries on the underside of a tree’s bark. Again, this is not necessarily bad—beetles are a native component of our ecosystem. But these little signs are good reminders that our forests are not invincible, especially because they are still recovering from massive logging operations 100 years ago.

In order to make our forest more resilient to beetle attacks, the most visible and effective step we have taken is thinning our forests. This spring we received a generous grant from New Mexico State Forestry to thin 25 acres around our cabins and the woods adjacent to our buildings. This project was a continuation of thinning conducted in 2008 and 2009, and our forest continues to grow a little healthier each year. Thinning has myriad positive effects in addition to beetle control, such as mitigating forest fire risk and encouraging a wider variety of plants and animals to find a home at the Gulch. Stop by this winter to see what we have planned for the coming year.
Thanks to our Generous Contributors

The following individuals and families have given generously to the Cottonwood Gulch Foundation during the dates of April 30, 2014 - September 30, 2014. We are extraordinarily grateful for all of the support!

Your contributions are the mortar for our Foundation. Thank you very much!

Stewards ($5000 or more):
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In-Kind Donors:
Molly Madden
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Rob and Vivian Hairston
Beth Williams-Breault

With your help this year we have...

✔ Purchased our new Albuquerque office/bunkhouse
✔ Provided 25 partial scholarships

✔ Re-graded our flood damaged roads
✔ Re-built our flood damaged bridge

✔ Updated and winterized our mess hall plumbing
✔ Thinned 20 acres of drought stressed forest

✔ Preserved wood siding/logs on buildings
✔ Implemented our new Farm and Build Trek

✔ Developed our Classrooms G.o Outdoors program

...and so much more!
Help us “See a Job and Do It”

Your Donation Can...

- Send a PT boy or TT girl to trek $4,150
- Purchase a new Com $30,000
- Build a new Composting ‘Lattie’ $2500
- Upgrade silversmithing/pottery equipment $100 and up
- Reduce Erosive impact on Roads $8000
- Bring a Visiting Scholar to the Gulch $2000
- Thin 20 acres of drought stressed forest $10,000
- Send 25 Title 1 students on a 2-day expedition$3,000
- Build cabinets for our Albuquerque kitchen $7000
- Or donate your gently used 4WD truck or SUV

Check out our Facebook page to identify this location!

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