

New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors



NMVFO
Celebrating 40 years of service
on New Mexico public lands



NMVFO's Formative Years

Commemorating the 40th anniversary of New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors in 2022 is an opportunity to look back at how NMVFO came into being and began its mission to help maintain and improve New Mexico's public lands. Its formation was jump-started by a century-old association headquartered 2,000 miles away on historic Beacon Hill in Boston. That was the home of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), the nation's oldest and most active outdoor recreation and conservation organization. The AMC had a long history of successfully conducting conservation and recreational programs, especially in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service in the White Mountains of New Hampshire during an era when such close relationships were uncommon elsewhere. With tightening federal budgets for recreation and land management in the early 1980s, some at AMC headquarters, notably Executive Director Tom Deans, recognized the potential benefits of such partnerships to promote stewardship of public lands in other parts of the country. This led to establishment of the National Volunteer Project (NVP), funded with an initial \$625,000 grant from the Richard K. Mellon Foundation, to foster the establishment of new volunteer groups.

New Mexico was the first of seven locations initially chosen for setting up such a group.* This happened because of Paul Weingart, who was director of recreation for the Forest Service's Southwest Region headquartered in Albuquerque. He had worked closely with the Appalachian Mountain Club for many years while Supervisor of the White Mountain National Forest. When he became aware of the NVP, he strongly encouraged AMC to consider New Mexico as one of the sites. As a result, Roger L. Moore, the AMC's Director of Volunteer Services for the National Volunteer Project, came first to Albuquerque to meet with public land managers, local recreation and conservation groups, and elected officials to begin preparations for what would become Volunteers for the Outdoors.

* As of 1987, the other locations were Denver, CO; Seattle, WA; Gainesville, FL; Allison Park, PA (near Pittsburgh); South Lake Tahoe, CA; and Los Altos, CA (near San Jose).

Getting Started in 1982

After a get-acquainted meeting with over 20 outdoor volunteers, agency employees, and other interested New Mexicans at the Mesa Verde Community Center in Northeast Albuquerque on January 7, 1982, Roger chaired the inaugural meeting of a steering committee at the same location on April 23 to begin establishing the new volunteer group. Along with another AMC associate, he was joined by 14 New Mexicans: two representatives from the Sandia Ranger District, two from the N.M. Mountain Club, five from the N.M. Ski Touring Club, and one each from the NM State Parks and Recreation Department, the Albuquerque Open Space Task Force, the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club, and the Central NM Audubon Society. The meeting discussed the need for better maintaining and improving public lands and recreation areas and began brainstorming ways to mobilize volunteers for such activities.

At the next meeting on May 21, Roger Moore presided over only six local attendees, perhaps a worrisome sign that gaining community support might be a challenge. They once again included George Barr, Dan Thompson, and Sam Beard of the Ski Touring Club. Sam, who had led the club's campaign to build 30 miles of cross-country ski trails in the Sandia Mountains (also used by hikers), would remain very active in establishing and building up the new organization. An influential conservation advocate who attended the January and April meetings was Rex Funk, the leader of Albuquerque's Open Space Task Force, who would become Superintendent of the city's new Open Space Division when it was formed in 1984. Other repeat attendees included John Southwick of the Sandia Search and Rescue Team and Barbara Hussey of the Audubon Society, who would be one of the new group's most active contributors. The attendees at the early meetings might be considered the founding members of NMVFO. They began to work out key details about forming the new organization, including its goals, major functions, and types and locations of potential projects. They agreed that it would be most effective to initially focus on projects in Central New Mexico and proposed a dozen ideas for doing a highly visible and well publicized project in the Albuquerque area to begin attracting attention and recruiting volunteers.

Roger Moore (who had now relocated to Albuquerque) was again joined by Rex, Sam, Dan, and Barbara, as well as Jean House of the Open Space Task Force, John Lewis of N.M. Citizens for Clean Air & Water, and Wendell Nelson of the N.M. Mountain Club at the next meeting on June 30. After considering six alternative names, such as New Mexico Outdoor Volunteers or New Mexico Outdoor Club, they decided "New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors" would be the most descriptive designation for the new organization. They also began planning the format of a newsletter to publicize

its goals and objectives, list upcoming events, and describe accomplishments, as well as starting to design a logo. Some of these local representatives and five more New Mexicans, including Nick Nicolaus of the Sierra Club and John Shunny of the Sandia Ski Patrol, joined Roger at the next meeting on July 22 to build upon these proposals, especially starting the newsletter, which John agreed to edit. They also narrowed the choices for the first volunteer service project and agreed to shorten the organization's name to Volunteers for the Outdoors (VFO) to more easily fit in the headings of articles and promotional materials and make an easier-to-pronounce acronym.

The Embudo Canyon Recovery Day

By the next meeting of the steering committee on August 24, VFO had become a member of the Greater Albuquerque Volunteer Association, a 3-year-old alliance representing a combined membership of 18,000 people. Among them, nine outdoor and nature organizations with a total of 3,200 members had already agreed to share their mailing lists with VFO, and five other groups were being asked. Barbara Hussey took on the task of compiling the addresses and deleting duplicates. In this way the fledgling VFO now considered itself to be part of a coalition of volunteer groups. Based on the work of a subcommittee led by Rex Funk, VFO now planned its first major project to be an "Embudo Canyon Recover Day" on Saturday, October 30, with a leader training session the week before.



View of lower Embudo Canyon in 1982 (before the great flood of 1988 and subsequent construction of a massive flood control dam and a large water storage tank)

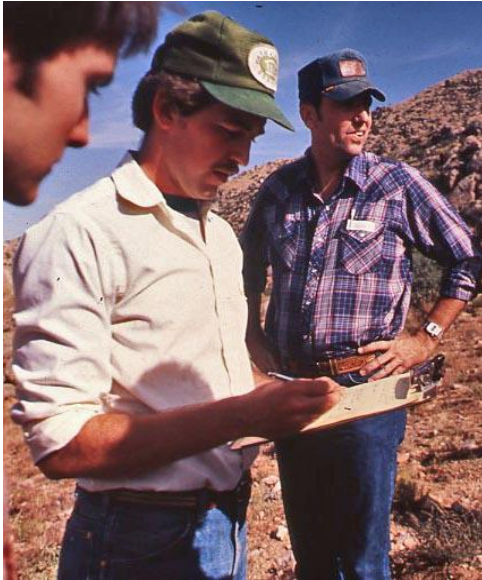
Extending far into the foothills of the Sandia Mountains on the eastern edge of Albuquerque, the upper part of the Canyon was in the Cibola National Forest while the City of Albuquerque owned 146 acres at the mouth of the canyon, which it had purchased for \$150,000 in 1972. This area badly needed to be cleaned up and undergo erosion control measures and be protected from dirt bikes, off-road vehicles, and pickup trucks dumping trash. Experts from the Soil Conservation Service, the Forest Service, and the Parks and Recreation Department helped plan the work. In a campaign to ensure a large turnout, publicity would include press releases, radio talk show presentations, flyers in public buildings, and announcements in other organizations' newsletters.



Some of the 200 people who worked at the Embudo Canyon Recovery Day.

VFO's first newsletter was edited by John Shunny and printed by the Appalachian Mountain Club in October. Barbara Hussey and Sam Beard mailed it to 2,300 addresses. It displayed the new VFO logo (designed mainly by Barbara) of a crossed shovel and pick mattock in front of a river and mountain with a simplified Zia sun sign in the sky beyond. The inaugural issue spread the word about the new organization as well as upcoming volunteer activities offered by the Forest Service, the Ski Touring Club, the N.M. Mountain Club, the Audubon Society, and the Rio Grande Nature Center. And of course, it invited recipients to come to VFO's Embudo project at the end of the month. The types of work there would include building erosion control mini-dams, removing or obscuring graffiti, collecting litter, repairing fences and signs, and improving existing trails. Volunteers were asked to bring their own shovels, rakes, hoes, and mattocks to supplement what the city and other agencies could provide. A front-loader and dump truck would do much of the heavy rock and earth moving. The Embudo Canyon Recovery Day attracted about 200 volunteers and agency personnel. Their work included construction of 12 erosion-control berms along the main road and another dozen rock and brush barriers in eroding arroyos, gathering 50 pounds of native vegetation seeds for future planting, reinforcing 3,100 feet of

concrete fences on the city's property, making repairs to more than a mile of Forest Service wire fencing, and constructing nine large erosion-control barriers of wire-covered rocks stabilized with rebar stakes. The accomplishments of the project received favorable publicity in state and local media, including a page 1 story in the Sunday edition of the *Albuquerque Journal*. Sadly, much of this work would be washed away just six years later by a massive flash flood.



Roger Moore with clipboard



Erosion control barrier designed by Soil Conservation Service.



Linda Misenko and Orlie Sedillo of Albuquerque Parks & Recreation with Rex Funk at podium.

The VFO leadership was eager to build upon the success of the Embudo Canyon project in 1983. The announcement for their next meeting on December 14 asked attendees to “come loaded with ideas for large, small, near or far projects or long-term efforts that we can make as fun and successful as the Recovery Day.” Meeting once again at the Mesa Verde Community Center, fourteen people attended. With the AMC’s National Volunteer Project now also setting up organizations in Washington and Florida, and others expected to start in Colorado, California, and Pennsylvania in the new year, Roger Moore explained that he would now be able to work in Albuquerque only about one week per month. The meeting addressed preliminary lessons learned at Embudo, such as on how to better organize and supervise such a large number of volunteers.

Planning for the Future in 1983

At this time VFO’s immediate goal was to establish relationships with New Mexico’s existing volunteer groups and government agencies. The long-range planning subcommittee envisioned VFO’s major roles as supporting other organizations in maintaining partnerships with land management agencies, initiating new partnerships through joint sponsorship of projects of mutual interest, and organizing large-scale projects involving many volunteers and multiple groups and agencies, such as the Embudo Canyon Restoration Day, and conducting other projects by itself as needs arose.

For its first project in 1983, VFO began planning a somewhat modest “Bosque Day” along the Rio Grande in March, with another larger project planned to follow later in the fall.^{*} The quarterly newsletter was expected to serve as a clearinghouse for advertising the projects of other organizations as well as VFO’s. With help from the Forest Service, VFO planned to also conduct training workshops for new volunteer leaders. The steering committee also envisioned hiring a seasonal trail crew foreman (at an estimated cost of \$2,000-3,000) to supervise groups of about ten volunteers over the summer. They would first work in the Pecos Ranger District of the Santa Fe National Forest, which would provide per-diem reimbursement and logistical support to the volunteers. The steering committee recognized that paying the trail leader’s salary would be an early test of VFO’s fund-raising ability, and that such expenses would require registering VFO as a tax-exempt organization to help attract donations.

^{*} Bosque is a Spanish term for the primarily Cottonwood forests that grow in the Rio Grande’s old flood plain.

With so much to be done, 17 people attended the next VFO meeting on January 18, 1983. Rex Funk was able to get many of them to volunteer for a “pop-up” project in February to install a new smooth wire fence on the boundary of the Elena Gallegos Land Grant property that the city had recently acquired from the Albuquerque Academy (which had inherited the land from a former student). The group continued to explore how to organize and fund a seasonal trail crew. In addition to the Pecos Ranger District, Bandelier National Monument had expressed interest in VFO helping to maintain trails there, which motivated the steering committee to begin seeking volunteers from nearby Los Alamos and Santa Fe.

A subcommittee chaired by Minda Stillings also reported on its vision of VFO’s future organization. It recommended retaining the structure of a steering committee of up to 20 members representing existing groups and unaffiliated volunteers – much as it had been operating. It would act primarily as an initiator and facilitator to help local groups and volunteers develop meaningful relationships among themselves and with public land agencies. Some concern was raised, however, that the primary allegiance of volunteers would be to their own organizations rather than being shared with VFO.

Since Roger Moore had to move on at the end of the year to help start the next NVP organization in Colorado, a subcommittee was formed to evaluate VFO’s need for a staff person and how to pay his or her salary, especially after 1984, when funds would no longer be available from the R.K. Mellon grant. This funding issue also applied to the proposed trail crew chief. Roger, Dave Westerfield (a high-school teacher who became chair of the projects subcommittee) and Larry Larrichio (another high school teacher and Peace Corps veteran) met with the Pecos Ranger District, which liked the idea. They submitted the plan for a VFO summer trail crew of up to ten members serving at least a week at a time. Because most of the work would be in the Pecos Wilderness, the trails there would be built and maintained to the minimum extent necessary for backcountry hikers and horse riders.

After planning with the N.M. Parks and Recreation Division, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, and the Rio Grande Nature Center, the first Bosque Project was held on March 12. Approximately 100 volunteers completed a one-mile nature trail with signage, cleared out about a mile of an irrigation ditch, gathered hundreds of pounds of trash, and transplanted and watered 200 young Russian Olives for erosion control. (This was many years before these trees would be recognized as an unwelcome invasive species.) VFO garnered some favorable publicity from this effort, but it learned a

valuable lesson when the Nature Center's volunteers reported disappointment that their participation was inadequately recognized. VFO tried to rectify this by apologizing and sending a letter of appreciation to the volunteers.

The 13 attendees at the steering committee's meeting on March 22 focused on determining the future leadership of VFO when Roger Moore would no longer be available. Roger reported that the new Volunteers for Outdoor Washington (VOW) in Seattle had already recruited as its chairperson a well-known publisher of a regional outdoor magazine with numerous contacts for recruiting volunteers, fund raising, and publicity. VFO formed a nominating committee to draft a job description, determine what would make an ideal leader, and begin searching for nominees, with a goal of having someone on board by 1984. Another order of business was to begin preparations to incorporate in the state of New Mexico as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

The next meeting on April 26 revealed progress on several issues. The trail crew subcommittee led by Harold Anamosa and personnel at the Pecos Ranger District had written a job description for the crew foreman and planned to start interviewing applicants in May. To help recruit trail workers, Harold passed out copies of an announcement that would be mailed to 2,000 people on VFO's original mailing list and to also post locally, while the Pecos Ranger District would also distribute them in its area. To begin addressing fundraising needed to pay for the trail crew, Tim and Kim Villa had called 225 of Albuquerque's major companies from a list provided by the Chamber of Commerce to find out who to contact about donations to nonprofits. Roger indicated that the AMC's contacts might be able to help as well.

Meanwhile a nominating subcommittee led by Allen Templeton, a member of the Bosque Society, had followed VOW's example by endeavoring to recruit an eminent chairperson to increase VFO's visibility and help with fundraising. A number of potential candidates were discussed. Marc Koenigs, attending for the first time, advised that this meant the future VFO structure would also need a formal Board of Directors, and agreed to help in forming one. With only ten people at this meeting, Roger warned that if VFO was to continue its role as a clearinghouse among volunteer groups, the decline in representation from many of the groups that previously attended steering committee meetings was a cause for concern. Sam Beard volunteered to work with Barbara Hussey to contact and encourage other organizations in the area to be represented at future meetings.

Nine people, most from this previous meeting, showed up for the next one on May 23. Roger reported that groups at all six locations chosen so far for AMC's National Volunteer Project were now operating. Volunteers for Outdoor Washington had received a grant from Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI) to fund a summer trail crew. In Colorado, the Governor's Office of Voluntary Citizen Participation had given the group there a head start in forming a council of agencies and volunteer groups to plan future demonstration projects. After being contacted by Harold Anamosa, the Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM) had donated \$1,000 for the summer trail crew, and several qualified people had already applied to be crew chief. Sam Beard emphasized that all VFO people needed to be involved in fundraising to prepare for the end of AMC's support.

The consensus of the steering committee was now that it should evolve into a board of directors, hopefully with chapters in other parts of the state eventually conducting local projects. It was also agreed the BOD should include a salaried executive assistant who would maintain contacts and coordinate activities much as Roger had been doing. It was expected this person might first have to work as a volunteer until more funds were raised. Meanwhile, Marc Koenigs was now working on VFO's future structure and the legal details involved to incorporate as a non-profit.

The summer of 1983 was a season of major accomplishments for the now year-old Volunteers for the Outdoors, both in the field and at the steering committee. There was more to report on the summer trail crew at the next meetings on June 20 and July 25. After interviewing candidates, a four-person panel had selected Andy Goldbloom as the trail crew boss. He was a teaching assistant at the University of New Mexico's Physical Education Department working on a Master's degree. Among his other qualifications, Andy had backpacked the Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to Canada. Andy began on the job training with the Pecos Ranger District in May. Helped by publicity from a front-page article in the *Albuquerque Journal*, the first team began camping out and doing trail work in the Pecos Wilderness starting June 9.

As reported at the August 22 committee meeting (attended by 18 people) and the October newsletter, 24 different volunteers had participated in one of seven weeks of trail work and camping, while eight others worked for two weeks. Many of them were students brought by Larry Larrichio from the Menaul School, where he had an outdoor education grant. The participants received a per-diem of \$8.00 a day from the Forest Service. Among their accomplishments was rerouting a badly eroded trail 2.2 miles from the Iron Gate campground to Mora Flats. VFO paid \$2,020 of their total costs (including

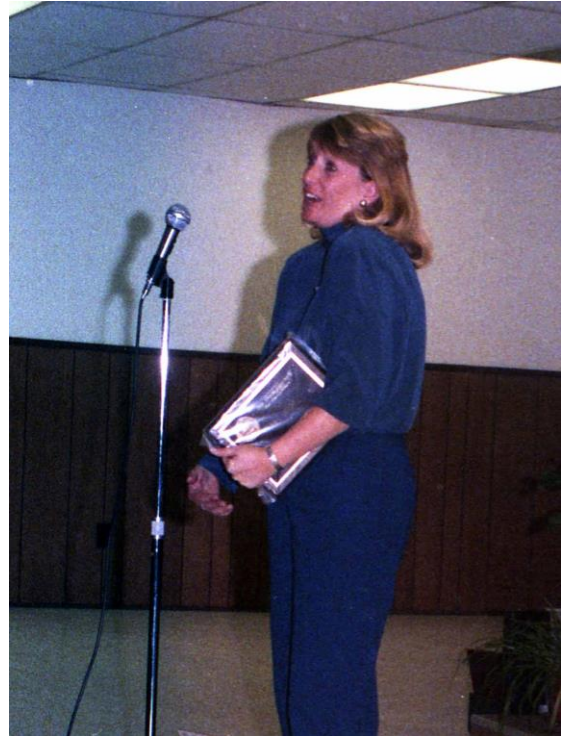
Andy's wages) while the Pecos Ranger District covered \$2,476 in other expenses. A concluding event on August 20 called Pecos Trails Day, attended by 24 volunteers and six personnel from the Forest Service, wrapped up the work by building 23 water bars and rebuilding a bridge. (The VFO's young summer crews in some ways presaged the operation of the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, founded in 1992.)



Pecos crew members and others. Dave Westerfield is first on left, Larry Larrichio is fourth from left wearing straw hat), Roger Moore is fourth from the right, and Forest Ranger Sam Stockton and his wife are on the far right.

Building on progress and decisions made at the August 22 meeting, the future course of VFO had become much clearer by its next meeting on September 26. Most importantly, Dr. Alan Reed was introduced as the new chairperson and Karen Voigt as what was then called the staff coordinator (later executive director). At first Karen began working for VFO half-time. Alan was the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and a professor of public administration and political science at the University of New Mexico (where he had been Rex Funk's thesis advisor.) Alan was well connected politically, having served on the Albuquerque City Council from 1975-1979, which was very helpful in raising VFO's profile among Albuquerque's civic leaders and business community. Karen held a degree in recreation management from UNM and had worked for the U.S. Forest Service and most recently as acting

manager of Bottomless Lakes State Park near Roswell. She was obviously highly qualified and ready to work closely with federal and state land agencies.

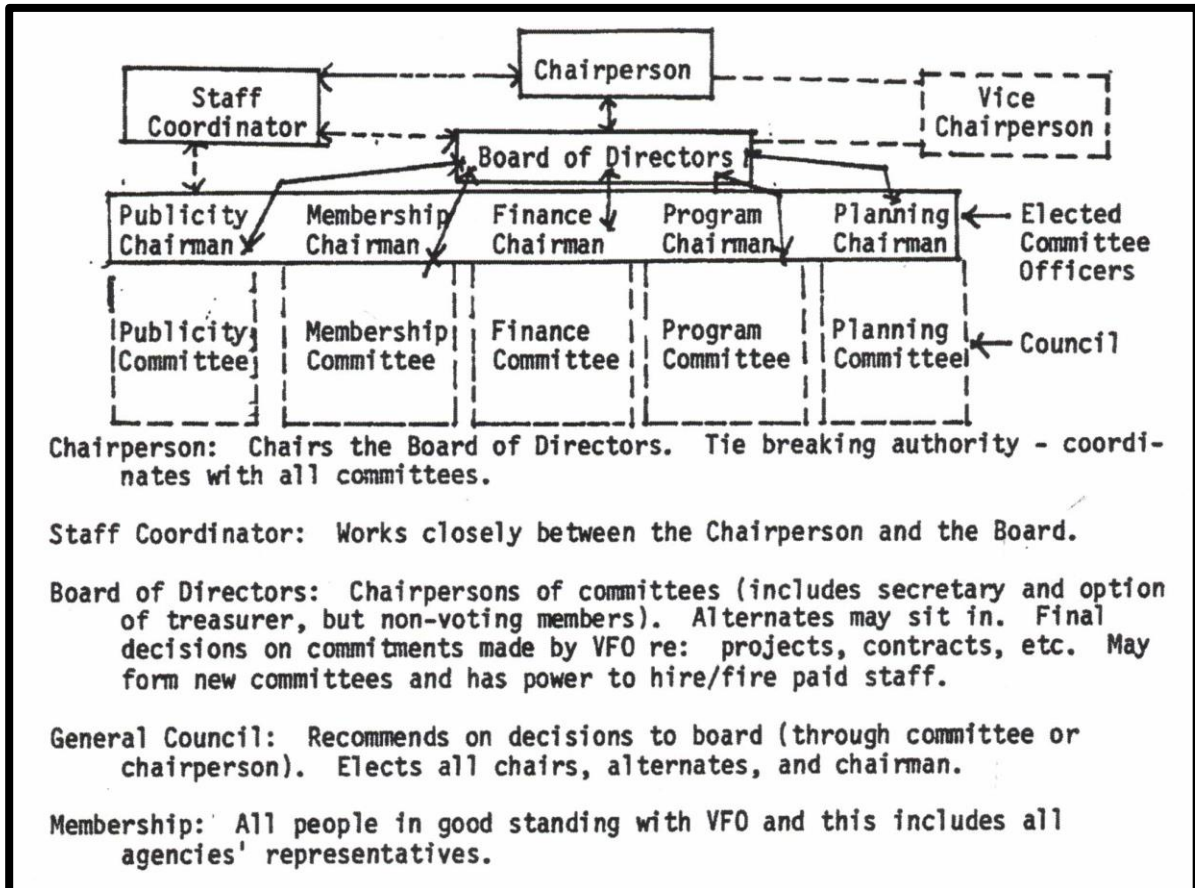


Dr. Alan Reed, VFO's first chairperson and Karen Voight (later Baker), its first and only executive director

Another milestone in the evolution of VFO toward a more permanent organization was securing its first office, courtesy of the Morrow and Worley Landscape Company at 116 Industrial Avenue in Northeast Albuquerque. Everyone at the September 26 meeting agreed that VFO membership should be open to all willing to participate. Alan Reed agreed with a policy that VFO should have representatives attend meetings of other related organizations. In that regard, Karen would be attending a Governor's Conference on Volunteerism and the N.M. Association of Environmental Education, increasing VFO's visibility. The next meeting on October 25 was held in VFO's new office. After many months of study and discussion, the steering committee approved an organizational structure (below on next page) proposed by a subcommittee led by Floyd Thompson of the USFS Southwest Regional Office. When filling positions, it was later decided to elect board members for staggered terms.

The funding situation also seemed to be more stable, with the AMC having given VFO a \$1,000 grant of seed money to help challenge other agencies and businesses to donate to VFO. The City of

Albuquerque would also be paying VFO \$2,000 for the upcoming Bosque Recovery Day in November, anticipated to be much larger than the one in March. With managing a growing budget now required, Karen Voigt was pleased to announce that Anne Hopper, an accounting major at UNM, had volunteered to serve as the VFO's first treasurer and bookkeeper.



VFO's organizational structure and responsibilities approved on October 25, 1983.

The big Bosque Recovery Day on November 5 was a great success -- perhaps even more so than the Embudo Canyon Recovery Day the year before. The work was carefully planned in advance. Dave Westerfield was VFO's chief organizer, and Barbara Baca of the Open Space Task Force coordinated the effort among the various government agencies, especially the Albuquerque Parks and Recreation Department. Bernalillo County provided a front loader, the U.S. Army Reserve brought a couple dump trucks and some additional personnel, and the State Parks Department provided a Bobcat, trailer, and

another truck. Volunteers were asked to wear work gloves and bring available tools such as shovels, rakes, and pitchforks to supplement those that the agencies and VFO could provide.



Tony Baron (left), Open Space Maintenance Supervisor, showing a typical trash dump in the Bosque.

The main work was conducted at three separate sites along the Rio Grande: one near the Rio Bravo Bridge supervised by Pete Pankuch, another on the west side of the Central Avenue Bridge adjacent to Atrisco Drive, supervised by Larry Larrichio, and the third west of the historic Barelás neighborhood south of Tingley Beach, supervised by Harold Anamosa. With the parks department and VFO heavily publicizing the project, more than 200 people joined in the work, including both soldiers and cub scouts in uniform. The clean-up tasks included collecting and removing large piles of trash, scrap metal, old tires, fences, and other ubiquitous litter. One task that many found unpleasant was having to dismantle the campsites of homeless people.

The steering committee meeting on October 25 had listed that VFO's top project priorities for 1984 would be developing an Adopt-a-Trail program with the New Mexico Natural Resources Department, renewing the summer trail crew operation, and planning at least two major one-day projects. The minutes of the next steering committee meeting scheduled on November 22 and VFO's first annual report covering 1983 prepared by Minda Stillings (which would surely have been valuable

sources of information) are unfortunately missing from NMVFO's archives. So, there's a gap in covering some of the planning, decisions, and other developments near the end of 1983 and providing more details about its activities during the year. An announcement in the AMC's December volunteer newsletter reported Roger Moore's move to Fort Collins, Colorado, in late November with his wife Annette and their month-old baby daughter Sarah. VFO held a big going-away dinner party for them in late October, which included a proclamation from Mayor Kinney declaring the date "Roger Moore & Volunteers for the Outdoors Day." Although Roger would now focus on developing Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado while pursuing a Master's Degree part time at Colorado State University, he was still available to help VFO and the other new organizations, but to a lesser degree than before.



Albuquerque Mayor Harry Kinney talking to Alan Reed at Bosque Recovery Day; Karen Voight and Roger Moore at right.

In the December 1983 edition of the AMC volunteer newsletter, Tom Martorelli, the National Volunteer Program Director, well stated the challenges of launching self-sustaining volunteer organizations like VFO and the other new NVP groups:

There is a big difference between getting people out on a Saturday to pick up litter in a park and the more complex challenge of developing a group of volunteers who can assess the quality of available recreation resources, identify a role for themselves in improving those resources, and then go out and perform the work required to carry out those improvements..... The difference may be summarized in terms of active versus passive groups of volunteers. Active volunteers develop their own plans and carry out the work they decide to do; passive volunteers exist as a kind of “reserve unit” waiting to be mobilized on a project-by-project basis by people other than themselves.... So far, the good news for the NVP has been solid progress toward the development of volunteer organizations which will take the initiative for active citizen participation in land management.

Getting Established in 1984

VFO got off to a good start in the new year, with a general membership meeting on January 23 attended by 20 people. The group approved proposed articles of incorporation to be submitted to the state. Karen Voigt, now a full-time Executive Director, led a discussion about various bylaws still to be completed. They agreed on two levels of membership: dues-paying members with voting privileges and volunteer members who would mainly participate in field projects. The approved annual dues ranged from \$5.00 for students and \$10.00 for adults up to \$50.00 for corporations and benefactors. Various other provisions were also approved. The new Board of Directors held its first meeting on February 6. By the end of 1984 it consisted of Alan Reed (Chairperson), Barbara Baca (Vice)*, Dave Westerfield (Projects), Allen Templeton (Finance), Wendy Osorno (Publicity), Mike Brown (Membership), Julia McKinstry (Secretary), and Jacque Swanner (Treasurer), with Karen Voigt (who became Karen Baker in early 1985) as the non-voting Executive Director. In March the State of New Mexico granted VFO a certificate of incorporation as a 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization and approved its set of bylaws three months later. VFO was now up and running as an independent charitable organization with a growing membership.

From March 16-18, 1984, the Appalachian Mountain Club hosted a conference on the National Volunteer Project at its Boston headquarters, including an evaluation by a group of outside experts. The

* Barbara would later become Director of Albuquerque’s Parks & Recreation Department and serve on the board of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District.

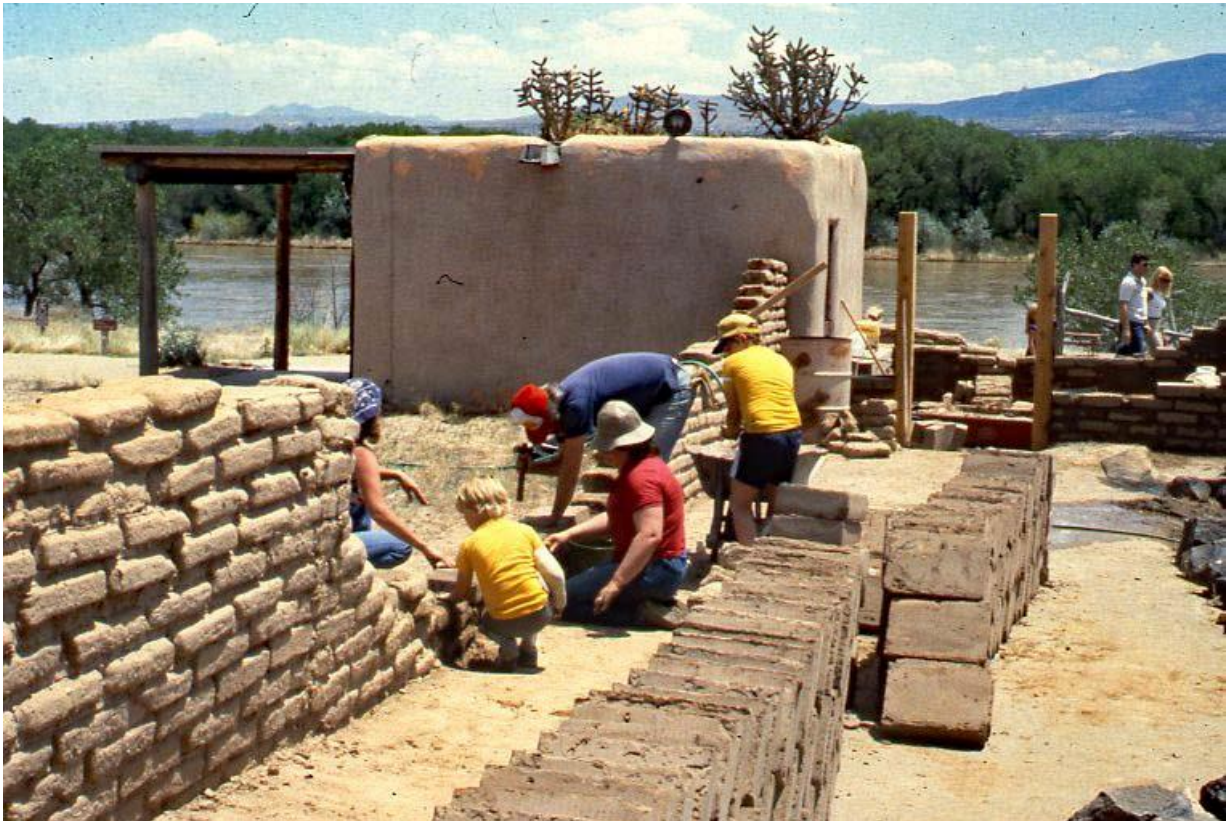
meeting's main purpose, however, was for representatives from the new NVP organizations to network and attend training sessions. About 40 people from the seven demonstration programs and the NVP staff attended the meeting. It was the first opportunity for participants to meet and mingle with their counterparts from around the country as well as NVP management. Peter Oliver, the AMC president, stressed the importance of effective planning before acting. Workshop topics included fundraising, communications, setting realistic goals, running efficient offices, volunteer-agency partnerships, and running successful large volunteer events. Representatives from each of the seven new organizations, including VFO planning chair Floyd Thompson, made presentations about their plans for the rest of the year. Summaries of these talks as well as the workshops and other sessions were published in conference proceedings. With their expenses paid by the AMC, four VFO members (shown below on the second step) attended.



Dave Westerfield, Floyd Thompson, Karen Voigt, and Allen Templeton in the back row, along with Roger Moore at the entrance to the Appalachian Mountain Club in Boston's Beacon Hill district in March 1984.

The year's first major project, Coronado State Park and Monument Beautification, was held on May 12. This historic site is located on the Rio Grande near the town of Bernalillo. In a partnership with the New Mexico State Museum and the N.M. Museum Foundation, 75 volunteers helped rebuild adobe

walls that protect the part of its ancient prehistoric adobe ruins from visitors, and spread special slurry on some of the ancient walls restored in the 1960s to protect them from erosion. They also planted 250 Scotch Pine and Russian Olive trees donated by the Forest Service and spread native grass seeds. Two weeks later, a smaller group followed up with additional plastering of the walls in a new reception area. Below are some adult and youth volunteers laying adobe bricks.



On June 30 VFO participated in a Sandia Mountains Discover Day, hosted by the Sandia Ranger District (with help from Floyd Thompson from the USFS regional office). Other organizations involved included the Albuquerque Parks and Recreation Department, Albuquerque Public Schools, the New Mexico Association for Environmental Education, and the New Mexico Game and Fish Department. Over 1,000 visitors and volunteers participated in a variety of environmental education activities ranging from bird-watching to wilderness ethics and trail building. Near the end of the day, about 200 of the attendees enjoyed an outdoor meal on a deck at the Sandia Ski Basin. Following on the next page is a photo of one of the presentations (which may have been taken at the next “open house” in 1985).



Following up on the Pecos Trails Days of 1983, about 100 volunteers participated in the second such event from August 11-19, 1984. Accomplishments during the nine days included construction of a hundred water bars, dismantling of 27 fire rings, building 140 check dams, re-routing 1,000 feet of trail, improving creek crossings with additional stepping rocks, and removing 100 pounds of trash. The project wrapped up with a campfire cookout and songfest, with awards presented to volunteers.



Volunteers clearing a new trail segment in the Pecos Wilderness, 1984

Also during 1984, VFO volunteers began to help the Forest Service construct the soon to be very popular Pino Trail, which began in the Elena Gallegos Picnic Area (managed by the new Open Space Division led by Rex Funk). It extended through the Cibola National Forest's Sandia Wilderness, climbing almost 3,000 feet up Pino Canyon to a relatively low section of the Sandia Mountains' South Crest Trail. The year's major fall project was an Elena Gallegos Park Day on October 20. Seventy-six volunteers helped city employees construct the first phase of an interpretive trail and dig a ditch for a new water line. A sudden early season snowfall cut short the workday, but 20 volunteers returned later in the month to help finish the project.



Volunteers arriving at Elena Gallegos Picnic Area on a cold and overcast October morning.

The most significant and propitious of VFO's activities of 1984 was its extensive participation in an ambitious Adopt-a-Trail program. In early 1983, representatives from various land management agencies and concerned citizens formed the New Mexico Trails Task Force to address the problem of maintaining recreational trails. The participating agencies included the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, City of Albuquerque Parks & Recreation Department, and the N.M. Department of Game and Fish. The New Mexico Department of Natural Resources (DNR), a key agency for this effort, proposed

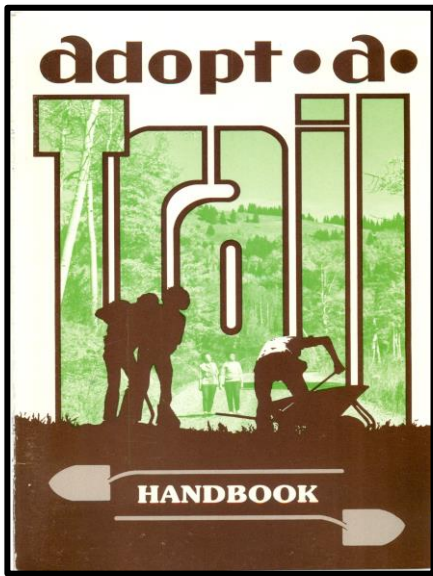
that VFO lead the project. Adopting trails was believed to be a promising way of getting more local participation for improving trails throughout the state. The Sandia Ranger District of the Cibola National Forest had recently formed one of the nation's first formal Adopt-A-Trail programs for its 66 miles of trails in 1981. So it was fitting that Floyd Thompson chaired VFO's Adopt-A-Trail Committee which would oversee and coordinate planning and preparations for implementing the program.

Karen Brown of the DNR helped VFO finalize plans for the state-wide program at its board meeting on February 13. VFO would provide the expertise in writing a compact and heavily illustrated handbook on the principles and techniques of constructing and maintaining hiking trails, another shorter manual for agency and volunteer personnel on how to start up and operate a basic Adopt-a-Trail program, and a brochure about the program. VFO also agreed to promote and conduct three regional training workshops at different locations in the state. The DNR would reimburse VFO for its work, using a 3-contract package. By the time of a general membership meeting on March 26, the Phase I contract was about to be signed, with VFO scheduled to receive \$10,000 upon its completion on June 30. Phase II was scheduled for July through October.

Producing the handbook was a group effort led by Floyd Thompson with Helen Rynaski as editor-in-chief and Sam Beard as writer/editor, aided by several assistant editors. The U.S. Forest Service granted permission for unlimited use of its publications as sources, with the AMC and Volunteers for Outdoor Washington also contributing materials. The 52-page booklet covered a wide range of topics: adopter and agency responsibilities, trails design, basic maintenance of hiking trails, maintenance of other types of trails, safety practices, and common trail-working tools. Printed by the University of New Mexico Press on durable glossy paper, the compact 52-page handbook was convenient to use for reference in the field, as well as a short but informative textbook for educating those interested in trail work. Although some of the techniques and practices covered in the booklet were later de-emphasized (such as the use of timber water bars), it was undoubtedly one of the best guides of its type available at the time. For example, the first edition of the widely distributed Department of Agriculture/U.S. Forest Service's *Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook* was not published until 1992.

Copies of *The Adopt a Trail Handbook*, subtitled *A Guide to Volunteer Trail Maintenance in the Southwest*, were distributed at regional educational workshops held in Albuquerque on November 10, Taos on November 17, and Alamogordo on December 8. This essentially completed Phase III of VFO's

contract with the DNR. In addition, Dave Westerfield joined Roger Moore to do a workshop in Pittsburgh, site of the seventh NVP organization. .



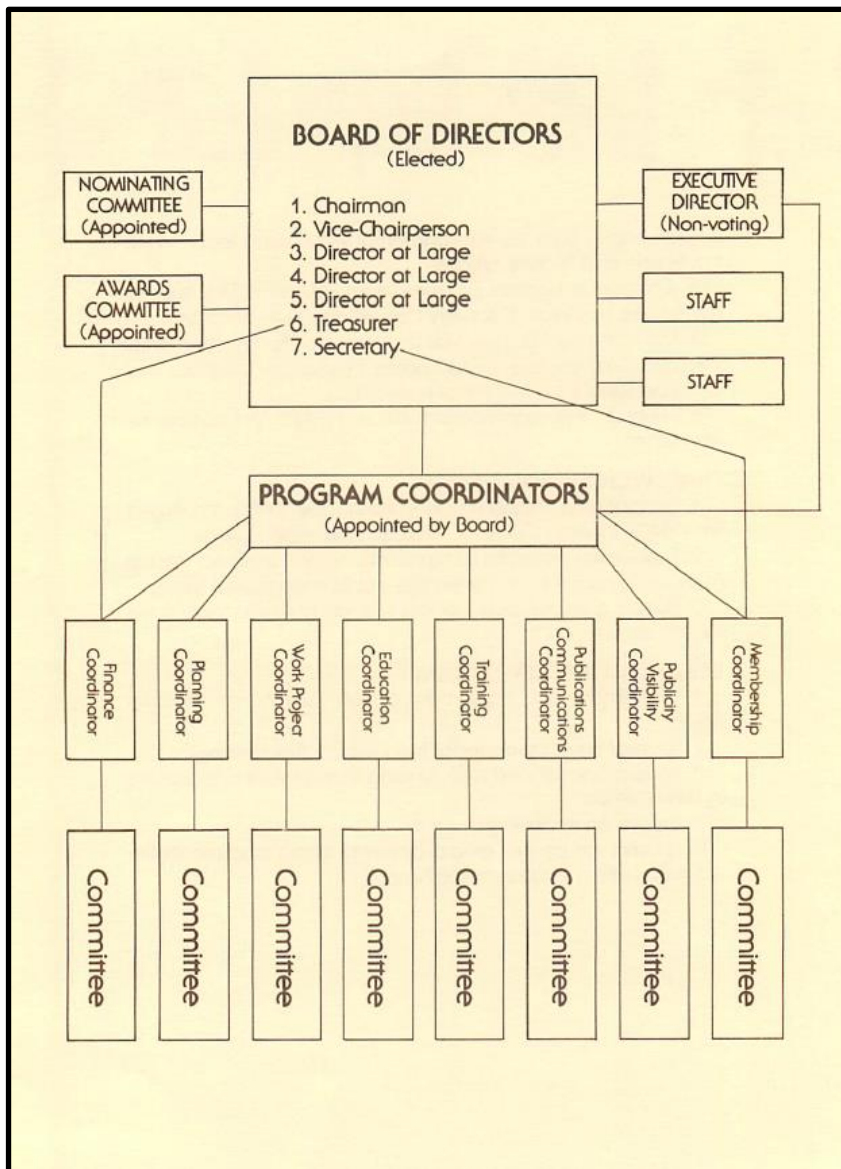
An Adopt-a-Trail Workshop presentation.

VFO's contributions to this program did not go unrewarded. With the completion of Phase III of the Adopt-a-Trails contract, the State of New Mexico finished paying VFO a total of \$25,000 for its efforts. Other contract income during the year included \$2,000 from the City of Albuquerque and \$750 from the Forest Service for projects on their lands. VFO's fundraising efforts also bore fruit. Cash donations for 1984 totaled \$6,255 including \$3,000 from Public Service of New Mexico (PNM) and \$1,000 from the Albuquerque Community Foundation. In-kind donations totaled \$3,540, including \$2,396 for use of its office at Morrow & Worley Landscape Architects. This income allowed VFO to pay \$15,778 in salaries and \$19,500 in other expenses and end the year with a cash balance of \$4,179

No longer receiving financial and administrative support from the National Volunteer Project in 1984, VFO had begun to stand on its own two feet. Partnering with federal, state, and local agencies in New Mexico on major cooperative projects and events and attracting a growing number of volunteers and members, its future appeared bright. It opened 1985 with more than 200 members and guests enjoying its first annual meeting and dinner in January at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, where Dave Westerfield introduced renowned author Tony Hillerman as the featured speaker.

VFO's leadership planned to build upon its successes and ambitiously pursue new endeavors. These activities included conducting a high visibility membership drive; organizing more trail projects

and major public land improvement and beautification events; continuing the summer wilderness trail crews; expanding the Adopt-a-Trail program with classes, on-site training, and videos; developing the curriculum for and begin teaching a class on outdoor volunteerism; sponsoring a state-wide magazine or newsletter on environmental and recreational topics; exploring management of recreational facilities such as a campground or ski touring center under a non-profit contract, and creating an endowment fund. The latest VFO organization chart (shown below), approved in November 1984, reflected its future ambitions to become a large and versatile public service association with an extensive committee structure that could perform a wide variety of worthy activities for outdoor recreation and stewardship.



By starting up seven new volunteer groups, the National Volunteer Project had accomplished quite a lot in just three years. The R.K. Mellon Foundation extended its grant for another two years, especially to help establish the newest of the groups, but at a reduced funding level. No matter what the future held, however, the team of New Mexico private citizens who donated their time and energy to creating their new organization, and the government agency personnel who supported and partnered with it, had laid a solid foundation. They began this effort when communication relied on letters and phone calls, documents were typed and reproduced on paper, photos and slides were developed with chemicals, and such outdoor gear as mountain bikes, all-terrain vehicles, and snowboards were just being perfected. New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors would build upon their work in future years, eventually as a more modest organization that endured and evolved to become the state's most active and versatile all-volunteer outdoor group, working on every category of public lands throughout the state. Here are some members of VFO's Board of Directors who had got the new organization up and running during 1984 and 1985.



Back row: Dave Westerfield, Alan Reed, Barbara Baca, Floyd Thompson, Allen Templeton, and Jacque Swanner. Front Row: Julie McKinsty (probably) and Karen Voigt/Baker.

Epilogue

VFO's mission statement at the time, "to increase citizen participation in the care of public lands through partnerships with land management agencies," could accommodate a wide variety of activities. During the next two years, VFO continued organizing many special events with partner agencies as well as doing more major trail projects. One of these was a month-long project to begin what became a multi-year effort to renovate and improve the La Junta Trail in the Rio Grande Gorge, shown below in 1985. The Bureau of Land Management may otherwise have had to close the trail because of safety concerns. The BLM paid VFO \$3,000 in 1985 for this much needed work and rewarded volunteers with free commercial rafting trips down the Rio Grande through the "Taos Box."



La Junta Trail above the Rio Grande

VFO members also performed badly needed repair work on Albuquerque's popular La Luz Trail to the top of Sandia Crest, led by Attila Bality, and finished building a cross-country ski and biathlon trail in Fenton Lake State Park in a project led by Sam Beard, that required construction of two bridges. VFO's continued involvement in the Pecos Wilderness, coordinated by Dave Westerfield, was much

appreciated by its Ranger District. This included recruiting several “wilderness hosts” (who received \$10.00 per-diem reimbursement from the Forest Service) during the next several summers. After being thoroughly trained in various outdoor skills, including first aid, they were assigned individual areas in which to camp out for a week or more at a time (often too remote for radio contact). There they patrolled and lightly maintained trails while interacting with day hikers and backpackers -- emphasizing the “leave no trace” philosophy, staying on trails without “shortcutting,” and not polluting streams and lakes. Dealing with large groups, sometimes of 20 or 30 people, often posed a challenge. In 1985, VFO was paid \$4,650 for the wilderness host program and another major Pecos Trails Days volunteer event. In the photo below are some of the wilderness hosts in that year.



For 1985 VFO intended to raise its public profile and promote outdoor education and recreation while at the same time helping earn money to sustain its operations. For example, the organization began sponsoring annual photography contests featuring New Mexico’s scenery. The winners received gift certificates donated by local camera and outdoor equipment stores, and their photos were displayed in venues such as the N.M. Museum of Natural History and the UNM School of Architecture and Planning. The photos were also featured in calendars published by VFO that listed various outdoor events scheduled during the year. VFO also began producing other publications, for example, a

brochure for visitors to the new Elena Gallegos picnic area under a contract with the Open Space Division. Another interesting fundraising initiative was holding raffles for stays at a condo in Vail, Colorado, donated by Alan Reed.

The most challenging of VFO's ventures was accepting a Forest Service contract to operate and maintain two campgrounds and three picnic areas in the Jemez Mountains. A rotating group of VFO volunteers served as hosts during the summer camping seasons. They were responsible for keeping the facilities clean and functional, collecting fees, and performing and arranging weekend nature walks and campfire talks on such topics as local lore, flora, and fauna (which proved popular with visitors). But there were a lot of expenses involved, such as hiring and overseeing a manager and paying for maintenance, repairs, supplies, and other essentials, to include hiring a truck to pump sewage from the toilets. By the summer of 1986, recruiting volunteer camp hosts was becoming more difficult and usually rainy weather had significantly reduced revenue from camping fees.

The dues-paying membership of VFO had increased to 158 by the summer of 1986 but other sources of income had not. With the Jemez operation now losing money, no more lucrative contracts such as the Adopt-A-Trail program to draw upon, and with the amount of donations declining, VFO's income proved unable to keep up with its expenses. Cash-flow problems had become serious by late 1986, with a large deficit projected by year's end and a \$1,000 loan coming due. VFO had to take painful cost-cutting measures, such as eliminating the valuable and productive executive director position and vacating VFO's office, as well as emphasizing intensified fundraising efforts. The Board of Directors went through changes as the year ended with many terms coming to an end, including that of Alan Reed.

After spending \$56,000 in 1986, the reconstituted BOD soon approved what Treasurer Kirk Minnick called a "bare bones budget" of less than \$14,000 for 1987 as it focused on conducting eight projects during that year. The BOD, which operated with only vice-chairpersons for more than two years, still managed to keep VFO operational. Its newsletters, edited by Jan Underwood, were especially important for communicating with members and volunteers. The board began the practice of selecting chairpersons from the Board of Directors in March 1988, when Pete Pankuch volunteered to be what might be considered a caretaker chairperson. Then Kirk Minnick, who had been especially helpful in both fundraising and managing finances, became the new chairperson at the start of 1989 and continued to lead the organization into the next decade.

In retrospect, the talented and creative leadership of the early VFO had hoped to emulate a more sophisticated, multifaceted, umbrella type organization than a small sparsely populated state like New Mexico could apparently sustain. By way of contrast, the venerable Appalachian Mountain Club had many thousands of members and volunteers, generous donors, and multiple chapters throughout the Northeast. It employed a large headquarters staff and numerous employees in the field, including professional trail crews and employees operating income-generating mountain huts and other recreational facilities. Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, which was formally established in 1984, was able to grow into a very active and sophisticated organization in a more populous and prosperous state than New Mexico, benefitting from an unsurpassed abundance of mountain trails and an extensive outdoor recreation industry.



Orlie Sedillo and Karen Brown presenting Kirk Minnick with a Take Pride in America Award.

By 1988 VFO had changed its name back to the geographically defined “New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors” (NMVFO), which has been its designation ever since. It did nine projects and events that year, some of extended length, while accumulating revenue of just over \$9,000 and spending only \$7,800. Its major expenses were devoted to basic needs, including rent for an office at 207 San Pedro Dr NE (shared with the Sierra Club and others) in which to conduct business, and a self-storage unit for its growing inventory of tools and other equipment. Its largest expense was paying for general liability insurance. NMVFO was quickly evolving into a more streamlined, modestly funded and self-sufficient organization that focused mainly on doing projects using its own volunteers while partnering with other groups when possible.

As the years passed, NMVFO steadily increased the number of projects it performed, both large and small, at locations all around New Mexico in support of the entire gamut of federal and state land agencies as well as local governments and some non-profit facilities. To keep attracting volunteers, NMVFO endeavored to make its projects as enjoyable and rewarding as possible for individuals of various ages and physical abilities. Since the majority of volunteers lived in Albuquerque, many of these were one-day projects within a convenient drive from the city. In late 1988, for example, NMVFO adopted the very popular Pino Trail. NMVFO also held a growing number of more distant weekend projects in all parts of the state—some in scenic locations not open to the general public—with overnight camping and hearty meals prepared by volunteer cooks. Its most adventuresome outings were strenuous backpacking projects lasting several days to a week, often in remote Wilderness areas.

As an all-volunteer organization, NMVFO has relied on two generations of public-spirited private citizens to donate their time and talents as chairpersons, treasurers, secretaries, directors, administrators, fund raisers, webmasters, equipment custodians, project leaders, camp cooks, organizers, trainers, and all the other duties needed to run a sustainable nonprofit organization. They and the thousands of its project volunteers have moved dirt, carried rocks, built walls, sawed timber, planted trees, transplanted cactus, spread seeds, built bridges, repaired buildings, painted walls, dug postholes, installed signs, put up fences, and removed trash. For the opportunity to enjoy these rewarding experiences, we all owe a debt of gratitude to those early visionaries who, four decades ago, launched NMVFO on its journey.



I would like to thank the following early members and supporters of NMVFO (all of whose names appear in the narrative) for reviewing drafts of this history and providing comments and corrections: Karen Baker, Attila Balint, Sam Beard, Rex Funk, Andy Goldbloom, Larry Larrichio, Kirk Minnick, Roger Moore, Pete Pankuch, Alan Reed, Floyd Thompson, and Dave Westerfield. I would also like to thank fellow NMVFO members Jim Sells and Don Lemke for scanning the organization's paper records and slides into a digital archive convenient for my research. If future readers of this history would like to provide additional information, please contact L.Benson@nmvfo.org.

Lawrence R (Larry) Benson, April 2022