



COLORADO CRANE
CONSERVATION COALITION



2024 Impact Report

Photo by Shauna Hart (byhartphotography)

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Photo by Amy Tyson





Photo by Gary Tyson

A Letter from the President



Dear Friends,

Looking back over the past 13 years, I am thrilled with all that CCCC has accomplished on behalf of Greater Sandhill Cranes in Colorado. In 2024, we overcame several challenges, including the loss of our board treasurer and the hiring of a new executive director, while remaining steadfast in our mission to conserve and protect Rocky Mountain Sandhill Cranes and their habitat in Northwest Colorado.

In April 2024, we welcomed Meg Karschner as our new executive director to CCCC. Meg brought energy, enthusiasm, and a depth of experience in environmental education and sustainability to our organization. Under her leadership, CCCC has successfully expanded its impact.

In 2024, we reached more children with our crane educational program than in any previous year. Our live-streaming crane nest camera followed three pairs of nesting cranes and brought home both the magic and the challenges of crane nesting to

thousands of viewers. Our Crops for Cranes habitat improvement program provided additional forage for cranes at a critical time in their yearly cycle and offered excellent crane viewing during the Yampa Valley Crane Festival. The five CCCC crane contests held throughout the year successfully raised “crane awareness” in all age groups. The annual Yampa Valley Crane Festival educated thousands about cranes, wetlands, and environmental issues impacting cranes.

As President of CCCC, I am incredibly proud to share with you the achievements of 2024. These successes were made possible by CCCC’s remarkable staff, volunteers, partners, and by you, our dedicated supporters. I am sincerely grateful to all of you for your generosity and commitment to these iconic birds.

Sincerely,

Nancy Merrill
President
Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition, Inc.





OUR MISSION

Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition (CCCC) conserves and protects the Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes and their habitat using science and education to connect people with this iconic species.

GOALS

- 01 Achieve crane awareness, education, and appreciation among people in Northwest Colorado and beyond
- 02 Better ascertain the status of cranes in Northwest Colorado and increase conservation actions
- 03 Have a sustainable population of Greater Sandhill Cranes along the Rocky Mountain flyway with sufficient habitat available for them to thrive

OUR VISION

CCCC is the collaborative leader in fostering long-term sustainability of the Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes.



Photo by Morning Light Photography - YVCF 2024

FUNDRAISER HIGHLIGHTS



CCCC's second annual Crane Migration Celebration took place on March 8th at the conclusion of Greater Sandhill Crane Week. This event celebrated the return of Sandhill Cranes to the Yampa Valley and served as a fundraiser for CCCC. The sell-out crowd enjoyed dishes inspired from areas along the crane migration route of our Rocky Mountain Sandhill Cranes as well as music from Steamboat Folk. Thank you to all who attended and helped us successfully raise funds for our Vision 2024 Programs; a crane viewing blind, the live streaming nest camera, and refurbishing of our educational materials. Special thanks to our event sponsor, Abby Jensen Photography.

Jensen PHOTOGRAPHY



Abby Jensen, event sponsor and Dona Steele, volunteer. Photo by Morning Light Photography

POINT6 SOCKS



POINT6
a wool lot more.

Point6 Socks and CCCC partnered to design a special wool sock featuring our Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes. The design was created by Stephanie Appel and produced by local company Point6, which generously donated a portion of the proceeds to CCCC.



EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Delivering quality education and increasing awareness about cranes and their habitat needs is at the core of CCCC's work, and is an essential strategy to ensure long-term appreciation and conservation of the species. CCCC accomplishes this by delivering both school-based and community education programs to a variety of audiences.

3RD GRADE EDUCATION PROGRAM

This free program is offered to all third grade classrooms in Routt and Moffat counties and teaches students about crane biology and habitat needs through engaging activities.



Presentation to a local 3rd grade classroom.

8 Volunteers
& 2 staff delivered
19 programs to
21 classrooms;
371 children
& 22 adults



UYWCD Yampa Youth Water Fest

OTHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- Soroco 7th Grade
- Oak Creek Library Program
- Yampa Elementary Preschools
- Yampatika Summer Camp
- Casey's Pond
- The Haven Senior Lunch Program
- The Haven Assisted Living Program
- Yampatika's Fall Fest
- UYWCD Yampa Youth Water Fest
- Craig Halloween Carnival (new program this year)



FARMERS MARKET

CCCC offered educational information and conservation resources at the local farmer's market booth.

CCCC works to build awareness of Greater Sandhill Cranes through a variety of community events to help instill appreciation and understanding of cranes.



GREATER SANDHILL CRANE WEEK For the 4th year, GSCW was proclaimed in both Routt & Moffat Counties during March 1-8 to welcome cranes on their migration back to the Yampa Valley and kick-off the season with a variety of programming.



SNOW DRAWING

At winter's end, CCCC volunteers gathered to create a one-of-a-kind snow drawing to welcome back the cranes. This year, the craniacs' first attempt at a crane snow drawing was obliterated by a wind and snowstorm. Not to be deterred, CCCC volunteers re-grouped a few days later and created this beautiful snow drawing to honor the returning cranes.

You can watch the creation of the snow drawing here:



BEST OF THE BOAT
The Yampa Valley Crane Festival was ranked third among summer festivals, and CCCC was recognized as one of the top five best non-profits.



4TH OF JULY DANCE

CCCC staff and dedicated volunteers bring crane-inspired dance to the Steamboat Springs 4th of July parade. This performance is a community favorite!

You can watch the 4th of July Dance here:



TREAD OF PIONEERS FESTIVAL OF TREES

CCCC volunteers created a "Merry Migration" themed Christmas tree for this community event. The tree showcased flying cranes and the various destinations where our Yampa Valley cranes spend their winter.

CCCC hosts five annual contests that engage the Yampa Valley community in celebrating Greater Sandhill Cranes, blending scientific learning with artistic expression and creativity.

1

The **First Crane Sighting Contest** raises awareness and excitement about cranes returning to the Yampa Valley each spring. Reported sightings help track arrival timing and habitat use, contributing to long-term knowledge of phenology and habitat changes. CCCC received 23 reports, with the earliest sighting on March 7 in Craig, CO.

2

The **Crane-inspired Creative Arts Contest** promotes awareness of Sandhill Cranes and youth engagement in the arts. CCCC received 13 written and visual art entries and awarded \$10,000 in scholarships to high school seniors in Routt and Moffat Counties. Student artwork was displayed in a special gallery at the Art Depot in April. Much gratitude to program sponsor, Gail Jensen.



Migration by Sloane Speer

3

The **Yampa Valley Crane Festival Poster Contest** promotes crane awareness and engages youth ages 10-15 in the arts. The winning poster is awarded a \$100 cash prize and is displayed throughout the region. CCCC received 13 stunning entries. Special thanks to contest sponsor, Jo Smith.



The winning poster was created by Avery Marsh


5 Contests
226 Entries
\$10K In Scholarships Awarded

4

The **Crane Coloring Contest** raises awareness among children and featured artwork by local artist, Megan Westerkamp. 136 entries were displayed at the Yampa Valley Crane Festival, with over 30 children receiving prizes. Thanks to program sponsors OmniGraphics for printing coloring pages, to Lyons Drugstore for providing prizes, and to our local libraries for helping to facilitate the contest.



*Sampling of 2024
Coloring Contest Entries*

Sponsors



Photo: Karen Mack

5

The **Crane Photo Contest** is an opportunity for both amateur and professional photographers to showcase their photos of cranes from within the Yampa Valley and throughout the range of the Rocky Mountain Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes. 42 entries were received in 5 categories, with contest prizes provided by PhotoGraphics Art and CCCC.

Sponsor

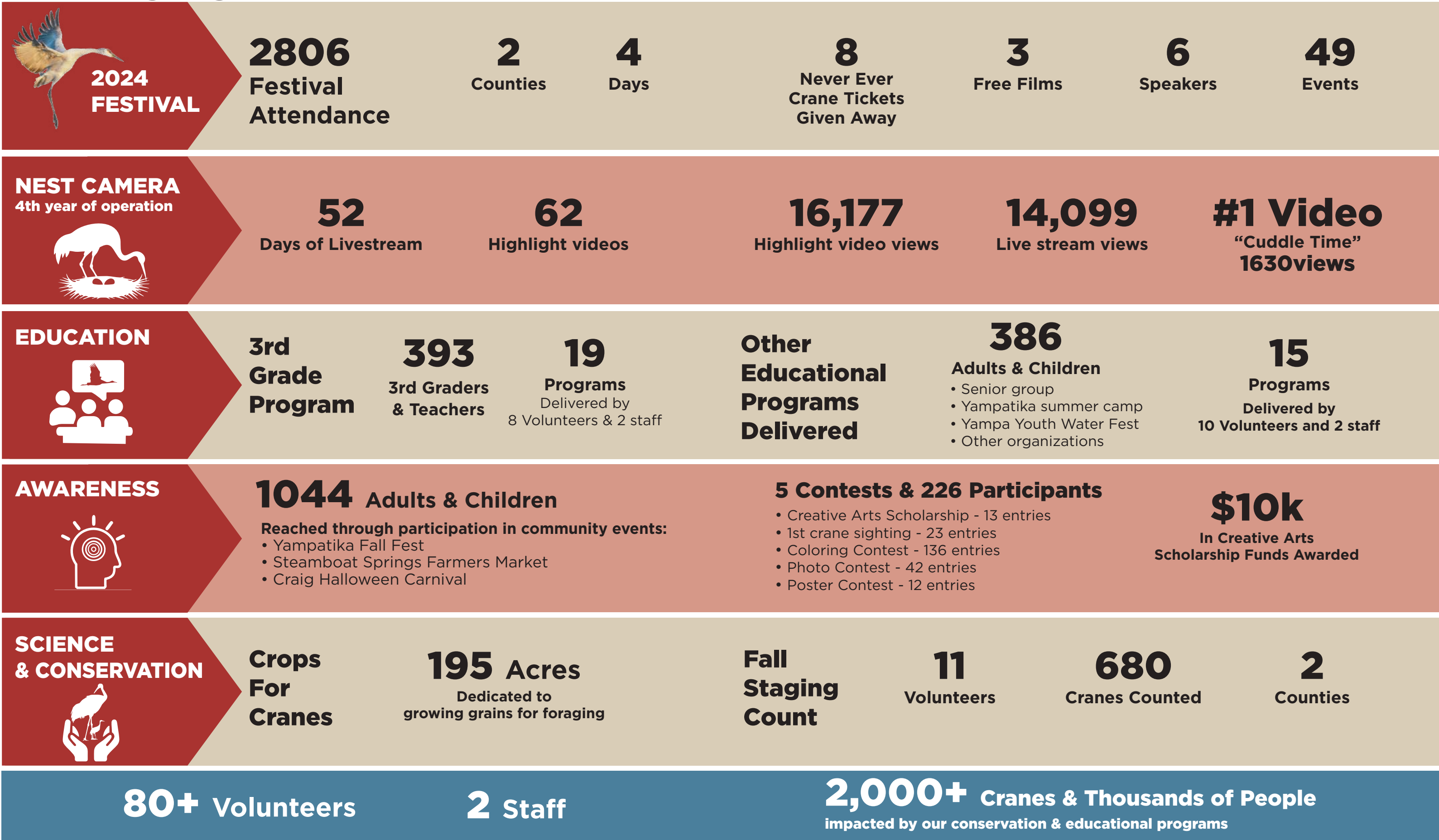
photo.**graphics**.art



**View the 2024 Winning
Photo Contest Entries:**

**Thank you to all
contest participants,
judges, and sponsors
who help to make these
contests possible!**

2024 Highlights In Numbers



The 13th annual Yampa Valley Crane Festival was held over Labor Day weekend in Steamboat Springs, Hayden, and Craig, CO and coincides with the



cranes' fall staging - when cranes gather in large numbers to feed and gain energy - before migration south. This four day event is CCCC's largest education and outreach effort and

featured 49 events, including guided crane viewings, films, bird & nature walks, workshops, crane art, children's activities, and expert speaker presentations.



Michael Forsberg presents in Library Hall

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Liz Smith, International Crane Foundation Senior Research Associate and Whooping Crane expert presented “A Community Approach for Whooping Crane Conservation Along the Texas Coast”

Michael Forsberg, conservation photographer and filmmaker presented “Into Whooperland: A Photographer’s Journey with the Rarest Crane in the World”

Noah Strycker, author, photographer, and bird man presented “Birding Without Borders: An Epic World Big Year”

Paul Tebbel, crane expert presented “Why We Love Cranes”

Rebecca Weiss, author presented “An Author’s ‘Book Big Year’ in a Small Valley”

Ted Floyd, author and editor of *Birding* magazine, and his son Andrew Floyd presented at the Carpenter Ranch near Hayden

Meg Karschner, Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition Executive Director, presented “Sandhill Crane Conservation in Northwest Colorado”

Nature's Educators' presented "What a Hoot" starring live raptors

CCCC extends deep gratitude to the flock of supporters that makes this treasured community event possible: Bud Werner Memorial Library, festival headquarters host, and our generous sponsors, community partners, speakers, event leaders, artists, judges, and volunteers!

Flyways – Conservation saving shorebirds.

The Crane Dance – Courtship of the crane and inspiring dance cultures around the world.

Under the Wire – Community working together to improve wildlife habitat.



CCCC's Crane Yard Art Auction featured 25 local artists who donated their time and talent to decorate a crane and raised over \$3,000 to benefit the festival and CCCC.

Annalouiza Armendariz	Glenna Olmsted
Terri Ayers	Suzy Pattillo
Erin Bauscum	Victoria L Rudolph
Leslie Belle	Erica Saylor
Missy Borden	Rick & Nancy Spencer
Steve Cobb	Jillian Tomlinson
Bill Dring	Tony Urbick
Janet Dring	& Tino Urbick (age 9)
Greg Effinger	Arnold Vest
Emma Friedland	Gigi Walker
Neely Hatchel	Megan Westerkamp
Susie Jackson	Susan Wohlgenant
Kristi O'Neal	Bart Dring
& Sherrie Golobish	

In 2024, CCCC launched a new program to inspire the next generation in crane education and conservation, offering eight free guided crane-viewing tickets to young adults in the Yampa Valley experiencing their first such event.



Crane-viewing during the 13th annual Yampa Valley Crane Festival

"I am so grateful to the Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition for providing an opportunity for me to attend a guided sunrise crane viewing as someone who has never before attended an event like this. As a resident of South Routt County, I've grown to love and appreciate the sandhill cranes, especially on my drives into Steamboat every morning. However, to learn first-hand from a crane expert all about this special species and then to see many of the behaviors and observations that we learned about in action, it was a real treat. The Yampa Valley Crane Festival is a wonderful event for people of all ages, and the work that the Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition does is so important. Protecting the landscapes that are essential for the survival of sandhill cranes is a great step in ensuring biodiverse and healthy landscapes that can be enjoyed by all for generations to come."

- Kate Brocato, First Time Guided-Crane Viewing Tour Participant

CCCC focuses on science to better understand Greater Sandhill Cranes and their habitat needs and promotes conservation efforts to improve habitat in Northwest Colorado.

FALL CRANE STAGING COUNT

Greater Sandhill Cranes of the Rocky Mountain Population stage in the Yampa Valley from mid-August through October, with numbers peaking in late August to early September. CCCC began annual crane counts in 2022 to track long-term trends and habitat use patterns. During fall staging, the valley serves both local nesting cranes and migrants stopping over from northern states, with each count yielding valuable data to guide conservation efforts.

**11 Volunteers
& 1 staff counted
680 cranes across
Routt & Moffat County
in 2024**



Photo: Alan Gourley



Volunteers work on wet meadow restoration



Nancy Merrill - President of CCCC

2024 RICH G. LEVAD AWARD

CCCC co-founder Nancy Merrill received the prestigious Rich G. Levad Award from the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, recognizing her outstanding contributions to bird conservation, education, and stewardship. The award honors those who, like Rich Levad, have advanced ornithology and inspired others through their dedication—highlighting the lasting impact of Nancy and CCCC’s work for Greater Sandhill Cranes in the Yampa Valley and beyond.



You can read more about Nancy’s accomplishments and the Levad award here.

WET MEADOW RESTORATION

For the third year, CCCC assisted with Yampa Valley Sustainability Council’s Wet Meadow Restoration project by providing education on Sandhill Cranes, refreshments for volunteers, and helping to construct Zeedyk rock structures in California Park, an area of great significance to Sandhill Cranes. These structures restore wet meadow habitat reducing soil erosion, downstream sediment load, and promote vegetation growth. This ongoing habitat improvement project supports healthy habitat for cranes and a variety of other wildlife. Thank you to Honey Stinger for providing snacks and to YVSC for leading this important project.



Photo: Anita Merrigan

Crane parent teaches young chick to forage



Crane Family Feeding in a Beautiful Setting

NEST CAMERA

CCCC’s live-streaming Nest Camera offers an intimate look at crane nesting behavior and the importance of wetland habitats to biodiversity. It educates the public while providing valuable scientific insights into this typically secretive period of the crane life cycle without causing disturbance to the birds. The fourth season of the Nest Camera was unlike any before, filled with both joy and loss, offering powerful lessons about the challenges cranes face in the wild. The camera followed two nesting pairs, revealing moments of courtship, territorial displays, nesting, foraging, predation, chick rearing, and a diversity of wildlife in the wetland.



View 2024 season highlights here.



Since 2015, CCCC has collaborated with state wildlife agencies, conservation organizations, farmers, and private landowners to provide grain crops for cranes during late summer and early fall—coinciding with peak staging before migration.

Cranes rely on this waste grain to build the energy reserves needed for their long journey south. However, as grain production in the Yampa Valley has declined over the years, available forage has diminished. Through Crops for Cranes, CCCC helps meet this critical need by supporting both crane nutrition and community engagement. The program creates reliable feeding areas for cranes, safe public viewing opportunities, and financial incentives for participating landowners.

In 2024, 195 acres were enrolled in the Crops for Cranes program at 5 different sites with partners dedicated to growing grain crops that sustain cranes during the staging season.



THE GREATER SANDHILL CRANE SANCTUARY

In 2023, CCCC began leasing and managing land in Hayden, Colorado, to expand the Crops for Cranes program. Each year, 30 acres are planted with winter wheat while another 30 acres are left fallow in accordance with good agricultural practices.

This property also serves as a testing ground for innovative, climate-friendly farming practices. In partnership with The Land Institute, CCCC planted 5 acres of Kernza®, a perennial grain with deep, 10-foot roots that prevent erosion, improve soil health, and sequester carbon. Monitoring is underway to determine whether cranes will forage on Kernza.

If successful, this project will demonstrate how agriculture and conservation can work hand in hand—providing vital crane forage while enhancing soil health, climate resilience, and biodiversity.



CRANE VIEWING BLIND

Thanks to a generous donation during CCCC's 2024 Crane Migration Celebration, a new crane-viewing blind was installed and piloted at the Greater Sandhill Crane Sanctuary. During the festival, guests were able to observe and photograph cranes staging and foraging at the sanctuary.

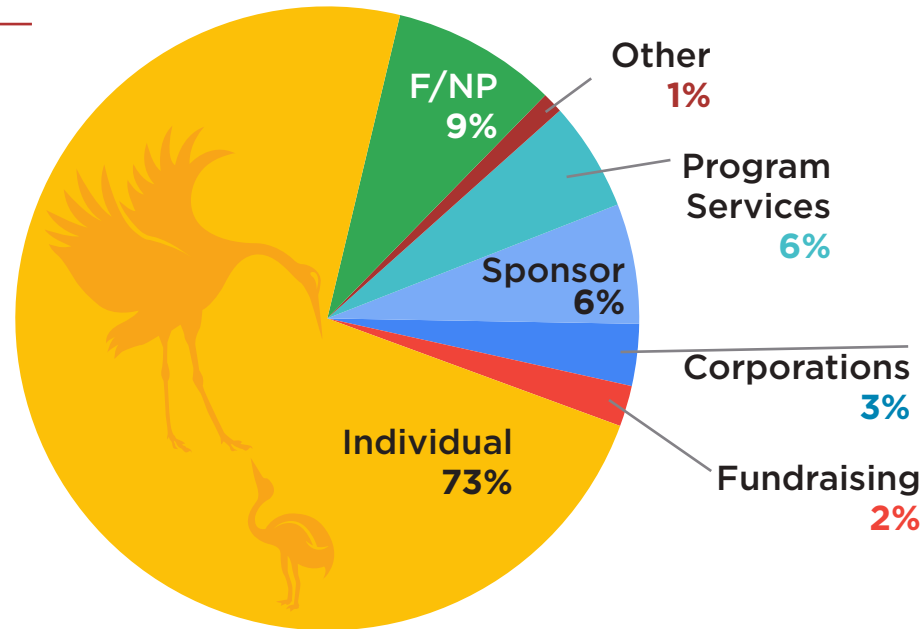
Board directors Nancy Merrill and Harvey Goertz evaluate the Kernza field at the GSCS in early summer.



Crane-viewing blind with Kernza in the foreground and wheat field beyond.

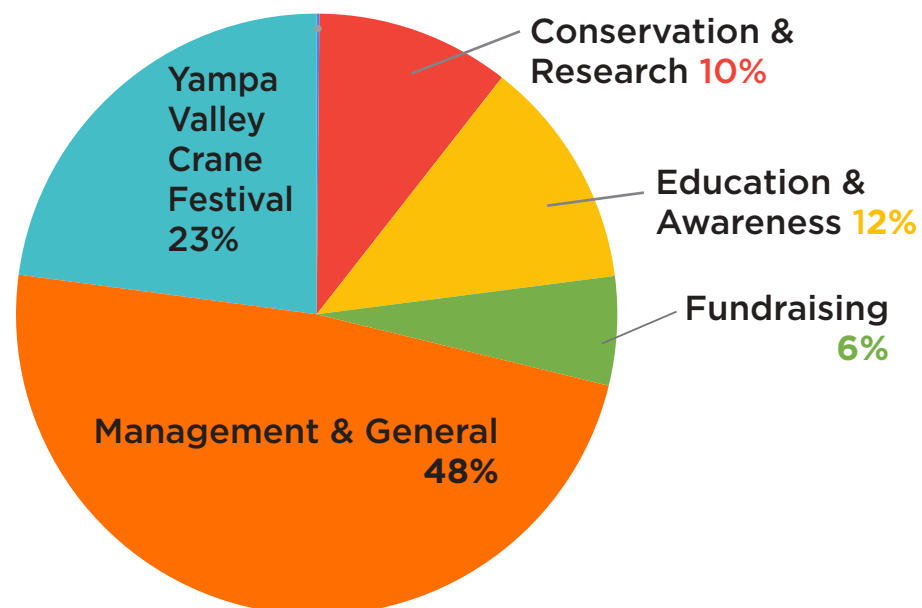
REVENUE SOURCES

- Corporations 3%
- Fundraising 2%
- Individual 73%
- Foundations/Non-Profits 9%
- Other 1%
- Program Services 6%
- Sponsor 6%



REVENUE USES

- Programs
 - Conservation & Research 10%
 - Education & Awareness 12%
 - Yampa Valley Crane Festival 23%
- Fundraising 6%
- Management & General 48%



CCCC

The Colorado Crane Conservation Coalition, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Gifts are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

CCCC continues to provide the public with new opportunities to learn about Greater Sandhill Cranes and the challenges they face today. CCCC aims to contribute to the scientific knowledge base to better protect cranes and their habitat. Generous support from volunteers, sponsors and individuals makes this work possible.

STAFF

Meg Karschner, Executive Director
Stephanie Appel, Operations Coordinator

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OFFICERS

Nancy Merrill, President, Hayden, CO
Barry Kaplan,
 Vice President, Steamboat Springs, CO
Karen Whitney,
 Secretary, Steamboat Springs, CO
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Barbara Hughes, Steamboat Springs, CO
Nancy Merrill, Hayden, CO

DIRECTORS

Karl Mayer, Steamboat Springs, CO
Pam Rolfes, Steamboat Springs, CO
Katie Weeks, Steamboat Springs, CO



Photo: Fred Hodder

NEW LOGO FOR CCCC

When CCCC was established in 2012, the organization benefited from the generous contribution of an original logo created by artist-photographers Tom and Linda Litteral. Their design has served as a defining element of CCCC’s brand and has played a significant role in promoting Rocky Mountain cranes and enhancing the organization’s identity as a leader in crane conservation.

In recent years, it became evident that the logo did not always adapt well to emerging digital marketing formats. During the same period, CCCC also gained wider recognition for its unique live-streaming crane nest camera, which highlights the cranes’ nesting cycle each spring, including the much-anticipated hatching of crane chicks.

In alignment with CCCC’s 2024 vision and commitment to effective communication and public engagement, the Board of Directors decided it was time for an update. This new logo aims to better support contemporary communication needs while honoring the legacy established by the original design. The new crane & chick logo image is symbolic of the intention to spark connection with the next generation to the “crane cause.”

OLD LOGO



NEW LOGO DESIGN



Photo by Mike Endres

*Colorado Crane
Conservation Coalition,
Inc. works to conserve and
protect Rocky Mountain
Greater Sandhill Cranes and
their habitat through science
and education.*



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