

# VERTICAL TIMES

NEWS FOR  
CLIMBING  
ADVOCATES

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## CLIMBERS: PUTTING CONSERVATION INTO ACTION

PAGE 4

**Climbers Buy New Boulder  
Field in North Carolina**

PAGE 3

**Fighting for the Long Haul**

PAGE 12

**The Bears Ears Saga Continues**

PAGE 14



Protect America's Climbing

# Letter from the Director



I love it when a plan comes together. Picking your route, finding the right time, dialing in the gear, and getting ready for the send—it's such a sweet moment when you execute the plan to perfection and take in the views from the top. But sometimes, despite our best efforts, things that are bigger than climbing—weather, injuries, work, or a hundred other things—manage to get in the way.

Right now, as climbing advocates, we're facing a similar situation. Decades of climbing advocacy work has protected access to the places we love, but all that progress is at risk as climbers square up to some of the biggest issues we've ever had to overcome.

Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of wildfires in the places we climb. Massive development projects threaten climbing areas from coast to coast. And every day we're seeing more and more impact on soils, vegetation, and wildlife habitat as more and more people get out on the land. Climbers know the benefits of time spent outside—so how do we ensure that access for everyone is equitable and sustainable while still protecting the incredible places that inspire us for the long term?

These are monumental challenges, perhaps the most important ones of our time, and they are pushing the boundaries of our work as climbing advocates. Climbers are starting to realize how many of these issues that once seemed far removed from racking up and sending a beautiful line actually intersect with climbing and threaten to take away everything that connects us together as a community.

We can't be afraid to take the sharp end on these larger issues of conservation, protection of public land, and equitable access to the outdoors. We have to work with those who share our values. We have to invite every last person in this country into the conservation movement to protect the outdoors so generations to come can have sustainable access to the wild landscapes that climbers cherish.

We've proven we can do it. In the last several years, climbers have played a leading role in protecting more than 4 million acres of public lands across the country. We have helped to secure over \$15 billion to support the care and management of public lands. And Access Fund has been invited to the White House three times in the last year alone to represent climbers on important policy initiatives.

So keep plugging cams and clipping bolts. Keep building trails and using wag bags. But you can also send advocacy letters, talk to your elected representatives, and chip in on these larger issues of conservation, access, and equity. The future of climbing depends on it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris".

Chris Winter  
Executive Director

*Above: Mount Lemmon, Arizona. Ancestral lands of O'odham Jeweé, Ndee/Nnēē, Sobaipuri, and Hohokam. © Jenny Walters.*

*On the cover: Sinks Canyon, Wyoming. Ancestral lands of Eastern Shoshone, Apsáalooke, and Tsésthó'e. © Jenny Walters.*





# CLIMBERS BUY NEW BOULDER FIELD IN NORTH CAROLINA

**C**arolina Climbers’ Coalition (CCC) and Access Fund closed the books on the purchase of the Maibauer Boulders in North Carolina. The purchase secured a compact cluster of high-quality granite boulders that sit atop 32 acres of hardwood forest within the Brushy Mountains. In an area of the state without many climbing destinations, conservation of the Maibauer Boulders will provide sustainable recreation for generations to come.

The bouldering area was virtually unknown to North Carolina climbers until the owners decided to sell the property. CCC and Access Fund worked quickly to secure the area for conservation and sustainable climbing access, leading to CCC’s purchase of the property using an Access Fund conservation loan.

Development of the Maibauer Boulders began in the 1990s. Today, more than 100 boulder problems can be found scattered along the ridge. The problems range from V0-V9, including many excellent lines in the V3-V6 range.

“Sometimes the only way to protect a climbing area is to buy it,” says Access Fund National Acquisitions Director Brian Tickle. “If climbers weren’t able to purchase this area, it could have easily been lost to development or logging.”

CCC now needs the help of local climbers and conservationists to raise \$135,000 to pay back the loan used to purchase the property, to build the parking lot, and to fund the long-term stewardship and legal defense costs associated with owning the Maibauer Boulders. For more information on how to ensure the permanent protection of the Maibauer Boulders, visit [carolinaclimbers.org/maibauer](http://carolinaclimbers.org/maibauer).

***Thanks to a long-standing partnership between Access Fund and CCC, North Carolina is gaining yet another free and open climbing area that was once only accessible to those fortunate enough to have known the landowners.***

# Climbers: Putting Conservation into Action

Climbers are more than just climbers. We're hikers, mentors, guides, trail-builders, Leave-No-Tracers, and so many other things—including conservationists.

From the days of hobnailed boots, hemp ropes, and hip belays, protecting the land has been a core value of climbers. It's why climbers were at the heart of the effort to pass the Wilderness Act, establishing the means to protect wide swaths of America's wildlands. It's why Access Fund sued the federal government to defend the irreplaceable rock art, dwellings, and artifacts in Bears Ears National Monument. And it's why climbers have volunteered tens of thousands of hours all across the country building trails, picking up garbage, and stewarding public lands.

Climbers have played a critical role in the conservation movement since its inception, protecting millions of acres from coast to coast. As we look to the future, we must continue to embrace this conservation legacy. We must be willing to tackle the big environmental challenges of our time in order to protect the outdoor climbing experience and the lands we love.

## What's at Stake

Climbers have a front-row seat to what's at stake when the environment is threatened. A hawk's call echoing through the valley, the rich ecosystem of an old-growth forest, rock art that reminds us that Indigenous people have been caring for these places since time immemorial. Without intentional efforts to protect them, the treasures that make these landscapes and the climbing experience so special can disappear in the blink of an eye.

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Every day, cash-ready developers are gobbling up more open spaces. Public lands are under constant threat from industry and damaging extraction. More people are out on the land creating greater impacts. And climate change threatens to push everything over the edge. The climbing landscapes we love are caught in the crossfire.

## How Climbers Are Fighting Back

Climbers are leading the charge in conserving, restoring, and protecting climbing areas across the country—often assuming the conservation mantle for lands where no one else is willing or able to step up. And we are playing a critical role in boosting campaigns to protect the larger landscapes and ecosystems that we all cherish.



*Climbers moving stone during a trail day in Ten Sleep Canyon, Wyoming. Ancestral lands of Eastern Shoshone, Apsáalooke, Tsésthó'e, and Ochéthi Sakówiŋ. © Kris Ugarizza.*

At Access Fund, our job is to make sure that climbing advocates like you are the most effective conservationists you can be—whether that's amplifying your voice to lawmakers in Washington, D.C., helping your local community buy a threatened climbing area, or bringing in professional trail and restoration crews to help rehabilitate your backyard crag.

## Mobilizing to Protect Public Lands

In the last two years alone, climbing advocates have influenced hundreds of policy decisions to protect America's public lands. By plugging into Access Fund's action alert network, more than 10,000 climbers were able to quickly speak up and influence lawmakers in Washington, D.C., and policymakers at parks and forests across the country. Climbers have a powerful story to tell, and when we speak up, government officials listen.



## Buying and Conserving Threatened Climbing Areas

Buying a threatened climbing area doesn't just protect climbing access—it also protects the land and the plants and animals that call it home. Over the last 30 years, Access Fund has helped climbers purchase and protect over 18,000 acres of land across the country. That's 18,000 football fields worth of forest, streams, mountains, desert, and cliff line that will never become a strip mall, a sand mine, or an office park. These purchases protect the natural habitat of native plants and animals, promote climate resiliency, and give climbers the opportunity to safeguard the land against future environmental threats.

## Restoring Climbing Areas

Any time humans are out on the land there will be environmental impact, and climbers are no exception. We have the means and expertise to manage these impacts so that the landscapes we

love can thrive—but we have some catch-up work to do. Access Fund's Conservation Teams are working with local climbing communities across the country to rehabilitate popular climbing areas and equip them with smart recreation infrastructure that keeps climbers concentrated to areas where they'll have minimal impact. This technical trail-building and conservation work sets climbing areas up for long-term sustainable access that protects the environment.

## How You Can Help

We've got climbers covered on the big stuff—buying and conserving threatened climbing areas, professional crag restoration, and mobilizing the community on policy threats—all you have to do is plug into this work. But you can make a big difference, every time you climb, by putting a few simple conservation strategies into practice. The Climber's Pact is a great place to start. Sign the pact today at [accessfund.org/thepact](https://accessfund.org/thepact) to pledge your commitment to conserving the climbing environment.

*Above: Mt. Lemmon, Arizona. Ancestral lands of O'odham Jeweꞑ, Ndee/Nnēē, Sobaipuri, and Hohokam. © Eric Fallecker.*



# Mentoring Responsible Climbers in the New River Gorge

**T**his summer, the New River region welcomed a brand new resource for climbers: a team of Access Fund Climber Stewards. Following on the success of the program in Indian Creek, Access Fund deployed two Climber Stewards to the area with a mission to educate climbers on responsible recreation and local access issues.

“We’re here to approach climbers about access issues and Leave No Trace principles, trying to light the fire in others to care for our climbing areas and be as stoked about sustainability as we are,” says Bill Barham, New River climber steward. “That’s the energy I’m trying to put out into the world as a climber steward.”

Doing that means meeting climbers where they’re at—in more ways than one.

*Above: The New River Gorge, West Virginia. Ancestral lands of Moneton, S'atsoyaha, Shawandasse Tula, and Yesan. © Daniel Gajda. Right: Bill Barham and Ryan Schmitt, New River Gorge climber stewards, at their station ready to answer questions from climbers about stewardship, conservation, and how to climb responsibly in the New River Gorge, West Virginia.*

## The Value of a Human Presence

In one sense, meeting climbers where they are means literally meeting them in the parking lot, at the trailhead, or at the crag itself. Having a human presence on the ground in sensitive areas is a proven way to influence recreationist behavior. Educating climbers on what makes an area sensitive—which can be different from crag to crag, even within the same climbing area—before they ever hit the trail makes a huge difference.

“It’s the best when we connect with climbers in the parking lot about something and then see the proof that our interaction made a difference,” says Ryan Schmitt, New River’s other climber steward. “After handing out wag bags one morning, we were tossing some garbage in a dumpster near a popular parking area and saw a bunch of full wag bags in the bottom.”

Human waste at the crag is a problem throughout the New River region. Digging a cathole and doing your business used to be a standard practice in forested areas, but increased numbers of climbers makes the sheer amount of waste going into the ground unsustainable. It has the potential to contaminate water sources, spread disease, ruin other people’s experience, and raise the alarm of land managers.

When they’re on the ground and talking to climbers before they start hiking to the crag, the Climber Stewards have the chance to not only educate climbers on best practices, but hand them the tools they need to do so. In the case of human waste, being able to physically hand climbers a wag bag to pack out their waste makes it that much easier for them to decrease their impact on the land.

## “What’s Leave No Trace?”

Many of the climbers who visit the New River Gorge are from the metro areas surrounding the region. Urban climbing gyms are an easy entry point to climbing, but the transition to the outdoors drops many climbers into a sensitive ecosystem without the knowledge they need to recreate responsibly.

“I’ve been surprised at how many people are coming outside for the first time—not just their first time climbing outside, but their first time recreating outdoors,” Schmitt says. “We’re meeting lots of people who haven’t had the opportunity to learn Leave No Trace principles from hiking or camping and aren’t yet familiar with how to conduct themselves in the outdoor environment.”

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The need for climber education is clear in the New River region—beat down belay areas, human waste, trash on the trails and at the crags, high visitation numbers, social trails with trampled vegetation.

But the good news is that most climbers are open to learning about low-impact strategies. “Most people don’t know about the impacts their actions are having on the area,” Schmitt says, “and once informed, most are more than happy to change up what they are doing for the benefit of the area and others.”

## Sharing the Stoke

Barham’s enthusiasm for the New River region is infectious. He’s ready to talk at a moment’s notice about green salamanders, how the New River is older than the Nile, or about how glaciers formed the cliffs at the retreat of the last ice age. Inspiring reverence for the land can feel like the biggest challenge they face, but it’s also one of the most rewarding aspects of being a Climber Steward.

“I’m very excited about all of the positive interactions we’ve had,” Schmitt says. “The majority of the time, we’re met with excitement and people who are willing to do whatever they can to help care for these special places.”





Climbing is growing, and so is our political influence. Access Fund has become a regular fixture at the White House and in the halls of power—to the benefit of the entire climbing community.

“Protecting America’s climbing and conserving public lands go hand in hand, and we’re proud to work with federal leaders to promote our vision for sustainable climbing,” says Access Fund Executive Director Chris Winter. “Climbing—and the climbing community—adds tremendous value to America’s portfolio of outstanding recreation opportunities on public lands.”

***Climbing access isn’t a fundamental right—on private or public land. It’s a privilege the climbing community works hard for.***

Climbing access isn’t a fundamental right—on private or public land. It’s a privilege the climbing community works hard for. Every year, Access Fund spends hundreds of hours collaborating with lawmakers, land managers, and Tribal governments to advocate for sustainable climbing access. We do this because we believe in a collaborative process for developing smart climbing management strategies that protect the plants, animals, Indigenous values, and climbing experiences that all share these landscapes.

“When you walk into a room on Capitol Hill with Access Fund, you know you’re going to make a difference. They’re in regular touch with—and well respected by—federal leaders with the power to protect public lands, Wilderness climbing, and America’s climbing history,” says professional climber and

Access Fund member Tommy Caldwell. “I’ve done a lot of lobbying as a climate, conservation, and climbing advocate, and I’m so impressed that Access Fund continues to raise the bar on behalf of the climbing community.”

Caldwell visited Washington, D.C., with Access Fund in October to celebrate the Inflation Reduction Act—a landmark investment in climate action, public lands, and environmental justice. Access Fund and our partners at Outdoor Alliance fought hard to get the bill across the finish line because it’s a landmark investment in climate action, public lands, and environmental justice. It isn’t perfect, but it’s a step in the right direction.

While there, the team met with key federal leaders, including Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, National Park Service Director Chuck Sams, and White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory, among others. All of these officials have important roles to play in protecting public lands and promoting sustainable climbing access.

At the same time, threats to climbing access are on the rise from land managers strapped for cash and skeptical of climbing. Wilderness climbing and decades of climbing history are on the line in places like Joshua Tree and Black Canyon of the Gunnison national parks. For climbers, the stakes are very high.

“Designated Wilderness areas are gateways to some of America’s wildest and most inspiring climbing locations,” says Access Fund Vice President of Policy & Government Affairs Erik Murdock. “We’re working to make sure that our federal administrators manage Wilderness climbing in a way that prioritizes sustainable access, protects climber safety, strengthens the conservation movement, and benefits local economies.”



# bers in the Halls of Power



Opposite: Access Fund Executive Director Chris Winter shows off his Access Fund tee in front of the White House. Ancestral lands of the Nacotchtank and Piscataway. © Access Fund.

Left: Erik Murdock, Brenda Mallory, Tommy Caldwell, and Chris Winter outside the White House. © Access Fund.

***We're working to make sure that our federal administrators manage Wilderness climbing in a way that prioritizes sustainable access, protects climber safety, strengthens the conservation movement, and benefits local economies.***

Access Fund was also at the White House earlier this year to celebrate the revival of the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR). The council is officially back in action and charged with researching the benefits of outdoor recreation for communities around the country and recommending policy best practices.

“Climbing’s growing popularity means that everyone in Washington, D.C.—from congressional staffers to administration officials to powerful elected leaders—has a connection to our community and a story to tell,” Winter says. “These connections open important doors for climbers. They ensure that we have a seat at the table when big decisions are made.”

Advocating for climbing in Washington, D.C., is like a long alpine climb—you never know for sure what’s around the next corner and there are always objective risks to manage. But as the climbing community’s power grows, Access Fund and our allies in the nation’s capital stand ready to fight for climbers’ interests.

## How Legislation Protects Climbing for Future Generations

Federal land managers play a critical role in creating and shaping climbing policy. Access Fund works with these officials year-round to care for climbing landscapes, minimize climber impacts, and develop smart climbing management policies. There is no success without these important leaders, but sometimes we need to think bigger.

Federal legislation—an act of Congress—is the most resilient protection for climbing and the climbing landscapes we love. It’s how we create national parks and Wilderness areas. It’s how we decide how much money the National Park Service and United States Forest Service have to manage and protect the land. And it’s how we can protect the climbing experience and conserve climbing landscapes for future generations.

In 2022, we focused on two pieces of legislation: the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the America’s Outdoor Recreation Act (AORA). We helped get IRA across the finish line, but as the 117th Congress comes to an end, we’re still fighting to pass AORA.

The America’s Outdoor Recreation Act has enormous potential to:

- **Protect sustainable Wilderness climbing activities in a way that avoids unnecessary bureaucracy and applies consistency to Wilderness area management**—all while allowing for site-specific policy that reflects local conditions and communities.
- **Provide climbers certainty regarding the future of Wilderness climbing.** This certainty allows climbers, and all human-powered recreationists, to maintain unwavering support for Wilderness designations and other conservation initiatives.
- **Support gateway communities and rural economies.** Research shows that the outdoor recreation economy supported 4.3 million jobs through \$689 billion in consumer spending in 2020 alone.

Through dedicated advocacy, climbers stand to have a positive impact on the laws and policy that protect and conserve climbing in America’s wild places. Access Fund is leading the climbing community toward effective advocacy at the highest levels of government.

# Popular Midwest Climbing Area Gets a Makeover

Loryn Posladek and Kyle Leihnsing are the expert trail-builders and all-around awesome folks who make up one of Access Fund's Conservation Teams. This past summer, they completed a three-week crag rehabilitation project in Pictured Rocks, Iowa.

Pictured Rocks County Park is a shady limestone cliff along the Maquoketa River in eastern Iowa. It's home to over 100 routes of pumpy sport climbing and pocketed bouldering, making it an invaluable climbing resource for those in the region. The Comic Gallery area, home to the classic Flash route, was in desperate need of rehabilitation—years of heavy traffic had taken a huge toll on the crag's belay areas and trails, leaving them eroded, unsafe, and unsustainable.

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The Conservation Team arrived in Iowa to lend its trail-building expertise to the ambitious project to reinforce Comic Gallery's trails and belay areas against the high numbers of climbers that the crag attracts.

"The success of the project hinged on the community showing up," says Andrea Hassler, Access Fund stewardship manager. "It's an excellent example of how a small climbing community can make a big difference in its local climbing area."

Read more about the project in this dispatch from the field in the Conservation Team's own words.



*Climbers at work in Pictured Rocks County Park, Iowa. Ancestral lands of Ioway, Sauk, Fox, Ojibwe, and Kickapoo. © Raud Kashef.*

One of the most common questions we get asked is, "What's your favorite place to work?"

Over the last three years, we've worked at crags across the country—from big to small, from world-famous to unknown—alongside hundreds of amazing volunteers. In other words, it's a difficult question to answer.

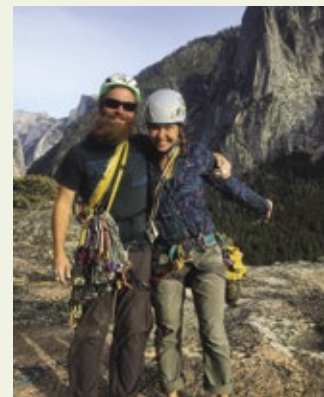
But after working with the Iowa climbing community, who rallied around this ambitious project by the Iowa Climbers Coalition (ICC), we definitely have a new contender for our favorite place to work.

The hardest part of life on the road is the lack of community, but Raud Kashef, the ICC, and all the local climbers we met welcomed us into theirs without hesitation. We worked with over a hundred volunteers, never once working alone over the three weeks we were there—something that's never happened before. Down to the very last, they inspired us with endless psych, faces that were always smiling, and backpacks full of snacks to share.

The first step was moving the 15 tons of quarried rock from the parking lot to the crag. Speaking from experience, it's hard to keep the stoke high when you're moving heavy rocks day after day. But everyone we worked with danced and laughed their way through it, coming up with some of the craziest ways of moving rocks we've ever seen.

The beautiful stone was a ton of fun to build with, and it was even more fun to teach all of the volunteers how to work with stone—they were jazzed to learn new skills they could use in the future to steward their local crags. In the end, we built two huge retaining walls and 45 stone steps, reinforcing the belay area for generations to come.

Neither of us flashed "Flash," but at the end of the day, we were happy to leave a stable belay platform behind for it—a platform big enough for handstands, backflips, and a whole crew to cheer you through the crux. We are so incredibly appreciative of the hard work the ICC members put in to protect their crag. Halfway through the season when our morale is typically low and temps are high, this experience was just what we needed. Thank you Raud, Jaimie, Adam, Daniella, Patrick, Lukas, and everyone else who put in the time, effort, money, and backs to make this project a success.



# Indigenous Field Guide

Access Fund believes that the climbing community should take its lead from the Indigenous community on issues of Native lands conservation and safeguarding cultural and sacred sites. The Indigenous Field Guide is a set of resources, educational materials, and best practices created by Indigenous climbers to help others respectfully recreate in places with sensitive natural and cultural resources.

Access Fund has proudly signed the Indigenous Field Guide pledge, a set of actions and commitments we can all incorporate into our recreation habits to ensure that we are respecting and protecting the lands we love. Read the pledge below, and learn more at [indigenousfieldguide.com](http://indigenousfieldguide.com).

## The Indigenous Field Guide Pledge

- I pledge to take the time to understand that land is family to Indigenous communities. By doing so, I will treat the space with respect.
- I will comply with access regulations when recreating in outdoor spaces.
- I understand that some places are sacred to the Indigenous community and do not have the protections in place to handle a large amount of visitors. I will reach out to Indigenous leaders and conservation professionals before publicly sharing specific geographic coordinates.
- I will honor closures for Indigenous purposes and/or native species.
- I will preserve and protect Indigenous homes and will engage with the people, places, and wildlife in a kind and respectful way.
- I will enjoy cultural sites from afar. I will not recreate in/on cultural sites/structures/formations because they are extremely fragile and still used in traditional ceremonial practices today.
- I will give fish and other wildlife space. I understand feeding any wildlife can damage their health and disrupt their behavior.
- I will give space to the local fishermen/hunters so I do not scare anything away. I understand Indigenous communities feed their families this way.
- I will support Indigenous owned businesses and will only patron legal licensed visitor accommodations.
- I will not touch or damage rock art. These images hold a paramount of significance to the Indigenous people of the land.
- When possible, I will stay on marked trails and roads and I will not make my own trails.
- I will clean and decontaminate all of my footwear and gear to prevent disease spread and stop other invasive species from spreading.
- I will not take or remove cultural objects as souvenirs. I will leave the items in their place of rest and understand that they are now a part of the landscape.
- I will always leave places the way I found them, pack my trash, and will even pick up the trash of others I may pass along the way.
- I will not stack rocks or take apart rock walls as it is offensive to the Indigenous peoples.
- I promise that exploration and first ascents are never more important than cultural resources.



*Ten Sleep, Wyoming. Ancestral lands of Eastern Shoshone, Apsáalooke, Tsésthó'e, and Ochéthi Sákówinj. © Jenny Walters.*

# Fighting for the Long Haul

Advocacy wins don't typically happen quickly—especially at the federal level. The glacial pace of bureaucracy, mountains of red tape, and steep time investments can be major barriers to advocacy efforts with federal agencies. The key to overcoming them? Expertise, persistence, commitment, and power in numbers.

That's where Access Fund comes in. Our public lands policy team monitors conservation and access issues so that we can activate the national climbing community at a moment's notice. We connect climbers with state and federal legislators, as well as high-level decision-makers at the National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Forest Service (USFS), and other federal agencies.



*Red Rock Canyon, Las Vegas, Nevada. Ancestral lands of Southern Paiute and Western Shoshone. © Andrew Kornylak.*

## Red Rock Canyon, NV

### Timeline: 20+ years

From trad test pieces to five-star sport climbing to double-digit boulder problems, Nevada's Red Rock Canyon offers something for every kind of climber imaginable. Access Fund has been advocating for climbing-friendly policy in this sprawling recreation paradise since the first climbing management plan was proposed—but never finalized—in 2002.

Earlier this year, the BLM announced that it intends to make major changes to how it manages Calico Basin. They want to add a gate, entry fee, restricted hours, and a reservation system to the recreation area. Access Fund and Southern Nevada Climbers Coalition mobilized thousands of climbers who asked the BLM to consider other options. Now, we've filed an official appeal to the BLM's plan, encouraging them to find more appropriate solutions for equitable access.

## Oak Flat, AZ

### Timeline: 18+ years

Permanent protection remains elusive for the sacred Apache lands and vast climbing, hiking, camping, and birdwatching opportunities of Oak Flat, Arizona. Climbers, Tribes, and other conservation groups have been fighting for over two decades to prevent the complete destruction of the area by foreign-owned mining interests.

The USFS is almost done with the bureaucratic process that is required by law in order to transfer Oak Flat to Resolution Copper, which is owned by a multinational mining conglomerate. An initial environmental impact statement (EIS) from the USFS included serious deficiencies that Access Fund and our partners identified and amplified. The administration saw those comments and asked the BLM to conduct an independent analysis, which found that the original EIS failed to take crucial factors into account that would have disastrous environmental results. The land transfer process is now on temporary hold to allow the USFS to address the BLM report, keeping Oak Flat safe for now and buying more time to pass legislation that would provide permanent protection.



*Oak Flat, Arizona. Ancestral lands of Apache, Akimel O'odham, and Hohokam. © James Q. Martin.*



*Unaweep Canyon. Ancestral lands of Nuu-agma-tv-p.*  
© Joe Sambataro.

## Unaweep Canyon, CO

**Timeline: 30+ years**

*As this issue of Vertical Times headed to print, we received some fantastic news.*

On November 2, Xcel Energy withdrew its plan for a massive energy development project in Unaweep Canyon, citing “multiple concerns with the potential site.” Access Fund holds conservation easements on property that the Western Colorado Climbers’ Coalition (WCCC) owns in the area. Xcel’s announcement is a win for climbers and conservation.

Unaweep Canyon is the only two-mouthed canyon in the world. It contains more than 2,000 climbing routes and boulder problems on both public and private land. In 1991, Access Fund began purchasing threatened areas in Unaweep Canyon for conservation and sustainable climbing access, later partnering with WCCC to protect a total of six parcels from development.

While Xcel’s next moves are unknown, Access Fund, WCCC, and local climbers will continue to protect and defend Unaweep Canyon for current and future generations.

## Joshua Tree National Park, CA

**Timeline: 30+ years**

Access Fund and the local climbing community have developed a strong partnership with Joshua Tree National Park officials over the course of 30 years of policy, research, and stewardship work in the park. However, a forthcoming climbing management plan proposes policies that will jeopardize climber safety and climbing history.

In March, climbers and mainstream Wilderness advocacy groups came together to oppose the plan, speaking out against one of the most serious threats to Wilderness climbing in decades. The proposed plan would prohibit fixed anchors in Wilderness areas and require specific administrative exceptions for new fixed anchors and even the replacement or maintenance of existing fixed anchors, and park officials promise to remove hundreds of routes. Access Fund worries that this policy on fixed anchors in the Wilderness could spread throughout America’s Wilderness areas. If it does, it will impact other destination climbing areas—a list that includes Yosemite and Rocky Mountain national parks.

Access Fund expects to see a draft of the plan in early 2023. We will mobilize climbers to weigh in when it’s released.



*Joshua Tree National Park, California. Ancestral lands of Serrano and Western Shoshone.* © Christian Sanchez.

## Black Canyon of the Gunnison, CO

**Timeline: 10+ years**

The Black Canyon is one of America’s most adventurous climbing destinations. It’s frequently bold, often difficult, and always thrilling. Access Fund has been advocating for sustainable, collaborative climbing access to the Black Canyon since 2011.

Today, updates to the park’s Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan are underway. Park leaders have a chance to build on their track record of collaborating with climbers, but it looks like they might go the other way. A draft plan makes major changes to how fixed anchors are managed in Wilderness areas, continuing the trend we first saw in the Joshua Tree proposal mentioned above.

During the summer 2022 public comment period, climbers highlighted the plan’s significant shortcomings, including the way it treats fixed anchors in the Wilderness, antiquated raptor management strategies, and arbitrary limits on new routes and new access gullies. Access Fund will keep climbers updated on the final plan when it comes out, expected sometime in 2023.



*Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Colorado.*  
*Ancestral lands of Ute.* © Brittany Hamilton.

# Access Fund Will Fight New Bears Ears Lawsuit

In August, the state of Utah announced a new lawsuit attacking President Biden’s decision to restore Bears Ears National Monument. Bears Ears is a sacred landscape to Native American Tribes and home to world-class rock climbing. With this lawsuit, Utah is attempting to undo permanent protections for this fragile and culturally significant landscape, which could eventually pave the way for extraction of natural resources.

***This move by Utah is totally out of step with what the outdoor community wants for this incredible landscape.***

“This move by Utah is totally out of step with what the outdoor community wants for this incredible landscape,” says Access Fund Executive Director Chris Winter. “When Access Fund asked the climbing community, 95% wanted to see Bears Ears restored or expanded. Climbers will continue to defend Bears Ears and support the Tribes who have led this campaign from the beginning.”

At the request of Native American Tribes who have cared for this landscape since time immemorial, executive action under the Antiquities Act in 2016 protected Bears Ears as a national monument. Access Fund led the climbing community in its vocal support for permanent protection of Bears Ears.

Along with our partners, Access Fund filed a lawsuit just days after former President Trump’s December 2017 executive order to reduce the monument. In it, we argued that the president’s order violated both the Antiquities Act and the United States Constitution. As a result of former President Trump’s 2017 executive order, a vast majority of Bears Ears lost landscape-level protections and approximately 40% of the climbing areas in the original Bears Ears National Monument lost national monument status—including Valley of the Gods, Harts Draw, Lockhart Basin, and a portion of the climbing at Indian Creek.

In October of 2021, President Biden restored Bears Ears National Monument. Access Fund joined the historic White House celebration on behalf of the climbing community. Beyond just celebrating, Access Fund’s Climber Steward program—founded in 2021—works hard to educate climbers on low-impact practices and responsible recreation. And we have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years in building sustainable trails and recreational infrastructure that protect natural and cultural resources.

“In recent years, a growing contingent of special interest groups has launched a sustained attack on public lands—eroding environmental protections and trying to open these places to damaging extraction and exploitation,” Winter says. “At Access Fund, we’re fighting back, representing the collective voice and interests of American climbers. Together, we can protect the land and develop smart climbing management policy that ensures sustainable access for climbers.”

# Climbing Advocacy 101: How to Make a Difference

Climate change. Damaging extraction. Rogue land managers. Floods, wildfires, and cash-ready developers. America's climbing areas face serious threats. Without focused advocacy from climbers, we could lose these battles. But there is good news.

Climbers just like you are mobilizing all around the country. There are 8 million of us now, and our sheer number and our connection to the land make us a powerful force for good. Access Fund is a constant watchdog for critical conservation and access threats, and our job is to activate the climbing community's voice at critical moments.

We are climbers, and we all have a role to play in protecting the places and the sport we love. Each of us has an incredible opportunity to influence the future of climbing and the greater conservation movement. Ready to add your voice?

**1. Plug into the advocacy network**

Our email and social media action alerts make it easy to get involved, no matter where you are. They include a detailed breakdown of the issue, as well as talking points and an easy letter-writing tool that gets your message to decision makers. Sign up for action alerts at [accessfund.org/action-alerts](https://accessfund.org/action-alerts).

**2. Act fast when you get an alert**

Time is always of the essence. Act fast when you receive an action alert to make sure your voice is heard before conservation and access decisions are finalized. With the easy letter-writing tool that we include with action alerts, it only takes a few minutes to speak up.

**3. Make your advocacy personal**

Review the talking points we provide, but don't just copy and paste them into your message. Put your own personal spin on the issue, including details on how a decision will affect you and your climbing community. Personalized messages are much more effective advocacy tools than form letters.

**4. Share with other climbers who care**

Take the time to spread the word to other climbers who care about climbing access and are ready to take action. Forwarding the action alert with a personal note to some of your close contacts is the first and best way to get the word out, and sharing on social media is a close second.



*Mt. Emerson, Sierra Nevada range, California. Ancestral lands of Numu and Eastern Mono/Monache. © Ken Etzel.*



# Behind the Bolt

## How to Deal with Good Bolts Gone Bad

If you've been climbing long enough, you've probably found yourself looking up at an amazing rock face, inspired to step off the ground and launch up a beautiful line. But did you stop to wonder: How old are those bolts up there? Can you trust them to hold body weight? How about a fall?

It's easy to become so inspired by the climbing above you that you forget to think about the hardware. Or maybe you never learned what goes into placing and maintaining fixed anchors. You're not alone—it's difficult work that often goes unseen and unappreciated. From trade routes to long-forgotten classics, it's tough to tell what's behind a bolt hanger.

But our safety depends on it. And so does sustainable access to the places we enjoy as climbers.

It's important for all climbers to realize that we can encounter bad bolts anywhere—even in places with dedicated rebolting volunteers and local climbing organizations. The most egregious examples come from wetter and coastal environments. But start poking around in the Mountain West and you're sure to come across incredible routes with outdated fixed anchors. In some cases, these anchors are so bad that any climber with a functioning sense of self-preservation will consider other options. In other cases, you might not know a bolt is bad until you hang on it.

The impact of bad bolts is more than a brief moment of sadness that a rad line isn't available to climb. This is a growing threat to the safety of climbers across the country. Lost opportunities for great climbs also push climbers toward a finite number of other routes—and toward other parties. At popular crags, this problem compounds. Over time, what started as a minor inconvenience becomes a widespread problem.

Even when fixed anchors function as intended, they still wear out in time. Bolt type, material composition, environmental factors, and regular use impact every anchor at a crag.

Around the country, the need to support fixed anchor replacement is clear.



## What Access Fund Is Doing

Access Fund works with the American Safe Climbing Association, local climbing organizations, and industry partners to tackle this problem. It's a big job, which is why we've broken it into three key areas: technical training, hardware grants, and on-the-ground support.

### Technical Training

Even longtime bolt replacement experts can learn new techniques. In June 2022, Access Fund convened rebolters from around the country at our third Future of Fixed Anchors conference. Attendees discussed fixed anchor policy, rebolting, and rope access, sharing best practices that everyone could bring home. They also had a chance to learn new techniques for working at height, thanks to support from the Petzl Technical Institute.

Helping rebolters operate in line with best practices is one way we're working to keep climbing areas open. Bolt replacement can be a thankless job—but only if you let it be that way! A simple “thank-you” to these under-the-radar climbing heroes can go a long way.

### Hardware Grants

Climbing hardware isn't cheap. A glue-in bolt costs \$8-\$12, but that doesn't include the glue, which can run \$40 per cartridge. Then there's the top anchor setup, which can cost \$60 or more for all the hardware required. Replacing a single route with 10 lead bolts and a top anchor may cost \$200. Include the cost of a drill, batteries, and specialized tools needed to complete the task, and it all adds up. Your support can make a difference.

Last year, Access Fund awarded \$15,000 in grants to replace aging bolts. Since the Anchor Replacement Fund's inception, we've awarded over \$80,000 in grants to replace over 10,000 aging bolts. Our Anchor Replacement Fund gives annual grants to help local climbing organizations address the problem of aging fixed anchors. The fund is made possible, in part, by support from the American Alpine Club and by climbers like you.

### On-the-Ground Support

If you've ever thought, “Somebody should do something about that bolt,” you're not alone. There are things you can do yourself, like bringing a crescent wrench to the crag to address simple maintenance issues like a spinning hanger, but sometimes a situation needs professional support. That's where our regional staff can help.

Access Fund staff live and work in communities across the country. From the West Coast to the Deep South, Texas to the Northeast, we climb where you climb. Because of that presence in our communities, Access Fund staff are always ready to connect national resources to local opportunities.





# ADVOCATE SPOTLIGHT: Donald “DJ” Grant



It would be hard to overstate the effort and work Donald “DJ” Grant has put into fostering a more equitable and inclusive climbing community across the Northeast. His volunteer work has had a positive impact on those around him and a ripple effect throughout the region. DJ helped bring equitable climbing to students at Pittsburgh City School, and he helped form the first JEDI committee at the New River Alliance of Climbers, among many other projects, initiatives, and roles.

In his new home of New York City, DJ works with the NYC Climbers Coalition (NYCCC) and the Gear Fund Collective to redistribute outdoor gear to those who need it most. Beyond his work with NYCCC, DJ promotes equitable access for BIPOC climbers by organizing, fundraising, and promoting in his community, including founding the new Amy Stone Foundation nonprofit.

## 5 Questions for DJ:

### What’s your favorite cause in climbing advocacy right now?

Introducing BIPOC/underserved children to climbing and making them feel welcome.

### What does it mean to you to be a climbing advocate?

Being the example that I wish I had seen when I started climbing. I wanted to see people who looked like me on the wall doing things I didn’t think were possible. I wanted someone who looked like me to come up and have a conversation with me. I wanted to not feel like I was the only cloud in the sky. I wanted to feel like I was part of a community, so I try to create community around me and be the person I wish I had.

### What’s your advice to new advocates?

Be the example you want to see and make the change you want to happen. Be patient and empathetic, and always persevere. Change doesn’t happen overnight, and it is hard fought. Don’t be afraid to be vulnerable. Being vulnerable allows people to empathize, and with this understanding they can be willing to help facilitate change. This alone won’t always be sufficient, there will be times when vulnerability isn’t enough. As climbers, we all know we have to get back up and try until our fingers bleed.

### What surprised you the most about getting into the advocacy world?

I was surprised by the willful ignorance of the larger climbing community not understanding what outlying groups feel.

### Who is another climbing advocate whose work is really inspiring you right now?

There are many organizations doing amazing work right now. Organizations like Brown Girls Climb and The Gear Fund Collective have helped expand the community to a wider demographic.

*Powerlinez, New York. Ancestral lands of Munsee Lenape. © Nick Fargo.*



# NEWS FROM THE Grassroots Network



## New Coalition Seeks to Build Inclusive Access in Oklahoma

Oklahoma Climbers Coalition recently formed to represent the climbing community across the state. Their initial focus is formalizing climbing opportunities in the region, and their long-term mission is to build inclusive relationships with a diverse set of advocacy groups.



## Northwestern California Has a New Climbers' Coalition

Northwest California Climbers Coalition (NWCCC) was created to work with local landowners, land managers, and other recreationists. NWCCC's mission is to promote access to outdoor spaces while encouraging responsible climbing practices and land stewardship.



## Eastern South Dakota Coalition Forms to Address Increased Impacts

Great Plains Climbing Coalition (GPCC) is the newest Local Climbing Organization (LCO) in eastern South Dakota, formed to improve climbing opportunities and educate the climbing community, landowners, and local government about climbing issues, responsible climbing practices, and conservation.

## LCO 101: How LCOs and Gyms Can Work Together

"Gyms create climbers much faster than LCOs can create stewards," says Dana Caracciolo, LCO board member and a gym manager in Pennsylvania. "It's imperative that LCOs have a presence in gyms since that is where the majority of new climbers are learning to climb. We need to plant the seed about outdoor ethics and conservation as early as possible." Here are five ways LCOs and gyms can work together to have the biggest impact in their communities.

### 1. Host Events Together

Fundraisers, community nights, dedicated stewardship days—anything that increases your LCO's visibility to your local gym's membership base is a good way to support each other.

### 2. Don't Be Afraid to Talk Money

Not every gym will be able to provide direct financial support, but other resources such as access to gear vendors and reps, relationships with local businesses, and other connections can prove just as valuable.

### 3. Maintain a Constant Presence in the Gym

Ask for a dedicated space to post LCO information, arrange to sell merchandise on consignment, and ask them to share social media content—for the scrappy and creative LCO, the possibilities are endless.

### 4. Set Up Regular Check-In Meetings

Communication goes a long way toward maintaining a partnership that benefits both parties. Keep a recurring meeting on the books where you can check in with each other to review how things are working and brainstorm new ideas.

### 5. Work Together on Climber Education

Leverage each other's knowledge, abilities, and resources to equip climbers with need-to-know information through clinics and education on responsible outdoor climbing.



© Eric Fallecker

# FEATURED PARTNERS



Based in Salt Lake City, Utah, Petzl was built on four pillars: remaining a stable family business, encouraging innovation, industrial excellence, and community engagement. Together, Access Fund and Petzl put these values into practice with the Fixed Anchor Replacement Program. Hundreds of climbers have learned fixed hardware best practices and replaced thousands of aging bolts through the program's support of over 35 local climbing organizations. We are thankful for Petzl's dedication to protecting America's climbing and its support over many years.



Backcountry believes in connecting people with their outdoor passions, getting people outside on the trails, mountains, and landscapes in which they thrive. Its dedication to sustainable access and conservation makes Backcountry an ideal partner in Access Fund's Climbing Conservation Grant Program, which provides grants to local climbers across the nation to improve and enhance their local crags. Backcountry's support of the program dramatically increased Access Fund's ability to help local climbing advocates open new climbing areas and restore existing ones.



**MAMMUT®**

Mammut's commitment to sustainability aligns perfectly with Access Fund's mission to lead and inspire the climbing community toward sustainable access and conservation of the climbing environment. Mammut's support for the Climber Stewards program has allowed us to prioritize and expand environmental stewardship, climbing policy, and cultural lands preservation. Access Fund is thankful for Mammut's partnership and its dedication to ensuring that crags and wild places are cared for into the future.



These partners are businesses that put their money where their mouth is to fuel the future of climbing. Please consider the important contribution these partners make to climbing and conservation. They support Access Fund and you. Join us in giving them a well-deserved high five!

**Titanium - \$50,000+**

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Ten Sleep, Wyoming. Ancestral lands of Eastern Shoshone, Apsáalooke (Crow), Tsésthó'e (Cheyenne), and Očhéthi Šakówiŋ. © Jenny Walters.

## Jenny Walters

Jenny Walters is a traveling photographer who has been on the road since 2019. Her photography work and passion for climbing sees her frequently in Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Virginia. Read more about her work in her own words below.

“I am a filter, an excavator; a searcher and a researcher. Through the lens, I investigate myself and the world around me. I want my work to recognize and celebrate new forms of strength and bravery, new faces and bodies, new voices and imagination, new narratives and dreams, new obstacles and new joy.

“My photography aims to affirm that everyone has a home in climbing by challenging who and what we see as ‘deserving’ to be highlighted. I want to show that there is so much to adore, applaud, respect, and admire in the vast individuality of the climbing community, and that there are as many ways to be a climber as there are climbers. I’m not willing to continue replaying what’s already been established or to only faintly nod to diversity initiatives as a display of involvement without further intention and action.

“Underrepresented people claiming space at the forefront—as well as being hired behind the lens, included as a part of creative teams, and receiving leadership roles in the industry—is an act of genuine, subversive, and necessary inclusion. The result expands our definition of ‘climber,’ ‘athlete,’ ‘photographer,’ ‘artist,’ ‘director,’ and even ‘worth,’ ‘beauty,’ and ‘inspiration.’ It’s incredible to see that expansion at work in the community around me, and I’m just honored to bear witness to it.”

Expand your definitions at [jenniferwaltersphotography.com](http://jenniferwaltersphotography.com) and [@roarkfitness](https://www.instagram.com/roarkfitness) on Instagram.



Jenny Walters. Traveling photographer and adventur(her). Queer and proud. Rock climber and outdoor admirer. Joe’s Valley, Utah. Ancestral lands of Núu-agma-tv-p (Ute). © Austin Keith.



Ten Sleep, Wyoming. Ancestral lands of Eastern Shoshone, Apsáalooke (Crow), Tsésthó'e (Cheyenne), and Očhéthi Šakówiŋ. © Jenny Walters.

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Red River Gorge, Kentucky. Ancestral lands of Tsalaguwetiyi (Cherokee, East), S'atsoyaha (Yuchi), Shawandasse Tula (Shawanwaki/Shawnee), Adena culture. © Jenny Walters.

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**IN STOCK NOW:**

# Gifts for Every Climber

This holiday season, when people ask you for your gift list, just point them to the Access Fund online store. We've got a selection of gifts that any climber will love—like the recently restocked Bolton Dome sweater in the cool new color seen here. As always, all proceeds support the Access Fund's mission to protect America's climbing.

