

VOLUNTEER VIBE

Newsletter 'for volunteers by volunteers'

In this edition, we're highlighting our two partner volunteer programs—Bluebird Monitoring with Douglas Land Conservancy and the Astronomy & Dark Sky Program with the Denver Astronomical Society—whose passion and expertise help protect and celebrate our natural resources.

We're also previewing new volunteer opportunities in 2026. The OSNR team is grateful for your time and dedication, and we're excited for another great year of volunteering together!

Clean-up at Iron Horse Open Space

On January 20, OSNR volunteers and staff removed a large pile of lumber, chain-link fencing, cement and other debris along the Front Range Trail at Iron Horse Open Space - filling an entire dumpster by day's end. This effort made the area safer for wildlife, improved habitat health, and more welcoming for visitors. Thank you to everyone who braved the chilly weather—we look forward to the next clean-up!



WHAT'S NEW IN OSNR?

Meet our new Land Manager/Ranger!

We're excited to welcome Cassidy Brown! Cassidy brings ranger experience, leadership, and a passion for land stewardship and habitat restoration to the team. After moving to Colorado in 2021 with AmeriCorps, Cassidy built her career through roles with the City of Aurora and Denver Water at Waterton Canyon. She holds a master's degree in Natural Resource Stewardship from CSU. Cassidy will oversee the Weed Warriors and the Resource Steward volunteer programs.



NOW RECRUITING FOR...

Volunteer Mountain Bike Patrol

Do you love to mountain bike? Then check out our new Volunteer Mountain Bike Patrol!

Patrol members will support staff by promoting public safety, protecting natural resources, and serve as friendly, knowledgeable points of contact on the trails. You'll educate visitors, help share OSNR's values, and assist with Search and Rescue efforts.

If you're an experienced rider looking to make a difference, this is your chance to ride with purpose—and help keep our trails safe!

If you're interested in volunteering, please sign up on Douglas Volunteers or contact Chase Everly at ceverly@douglas.co.us for more information.

Resource Steward Volunteer Program

We are thrilled to relaunch the Resource Steward program, and we want YOU to be part of it! If you love the outdoors and enjoy sharing your passion with others, this is your chance to make a real impact. Resource Stewards play a vital role in protecting DC's open spaces by promoting Leave No Trace (LNT) principles and inspiring responsible recreation.

As a Resource Steward, you'll connect with visitors at trailheads through fun and informative LNT Table Talks and help support restoration projects that protect habitats and wildlife. The goal is simple, but powerful: advocate for open spaces through science-based LNT education and encourage practices that keep our lands healthy for generations to come.

Ready to make a difference? Check out the updated Resource Steward description on Douglas Volunteers or contact Cassidy Brown at cbrown@douglas.co.us.

Paw-trol Volunteer Program... woof!

If you and your pup enjoy Glendale and Greenland Open Space dog parks then we have an opportunity for you! Join our dog waste clean-up volunteer team and help keep our dog parks clean, safe, and welcoming for everyone—two-legged and four-legged, alike. Yes, you can bring your dog with you!

As a Paw-trol volunteer, you'll help pick up waste around the dog park (proper PPE will be provided, of course), greet fellow visitors, and share friendly tips on dog park etiquette and responsible trail use. You'll be a canine-powered ambassador for OSNR—leading by example, spreading good vibes, and protecting the spaces we all love to explore. Grab a leash, bring your best friend, and help keep our dog parks healthy, happy, and poop-free.

If you're interested in volunteering for this program, please sign up on Douglas Volunteers or contact Janee Petersen at jpetersen1@douglas.co.us for more information.

Bluebird Monitor Volunteer Program

Partner Program with Douglas Land Conservancy (DLC)

Written by Leslie Clemensen

On a warm spring morning in Douglas County, volunteers fan out across open spaces, fence lines, and trails to check small wooden boxes mounted on posts. From Prairie Canyon Ranch and the trails at Dupont Open Space to the rolling grasslands between Spruce Mountain and Hidden Mesa, these nest boxes hold signs of success: eggs, nestlings, or newly fledged birds that represent one of the county's quiet conservation victories—the return of bluebirds.



Bluebird populations declined sharply in the mid-20th century as open habitat disappeared, and natural nesting cavities were lost to development and competition from non-native species. In Douglas County, as in many parts of Colorado, residents responded with a simple but powerful solution: installing nest boxes in suitable habitat and committing to monitoring them year after year - that model still works today. Today, local volunteers monitor 10 bluebird routes across the county and do far more than collect data. They maintain nest boxes, manage predators, record nesting outcomes, and ensure bluebirds have safe places to raise their young.

Since 2019, Douglas County monitoring routes have documented more than 4,000 fledglings. Annual totals have risen from 538 fledglings in 2019 to 794 in 2025, nearly a 50 percent increase. After a temporary dip in 2021 and 2022, productivity rebounded strongly, with consistent year-over-year gains that reflect healthy habitat and attentive stewardship.

Each nest box represents an intentional effort to increase habitat where bluebirds can succeed. Across Douglas County's monitored routes, productivity averages about four fledglings per box per season, a strong indicator that local conditions are supporting nesting success. As new routes are added, bluebird presence continues to expand into additional open spaces and wildlife corridors throughout the county.

But the story isn't only about birds—it's also about people. Many volunteer teams form lasting bonds through their shared work. Some groups gather socially before the season begins or celebrate together afterward. Others make monitoring days a tradition, sharing meals and stories after checking boxes. One Douglas County team has grown so close that they now travel together outside of monitoring season. Bluebird monitoring shows what can happen when conservation is local, personal, and sustained.

With continued volunteer involvement and protection of open habitat, Douglas County's bluebirds are not only surviving but thriving—proof that community-led conservation can change the landscape, one nest box at a time.

Astronomy/Dark Sky Volunteer Program at Sandstone Ranch

Partner Program with Denver Astronomical Society (DAS)

Written by Dena McClung

Since 2018, OSNR volunteers and members of DAS have been hosting monthly star parties at Sandstone Ranch, weather permitting. The distance from major cities and the ridges that block most of the manmade light make Sandstone's skies among the darkest to be found so close to home for many guests. During that time, over 360 people have attended these stargazing events, many of them multiple times.

Most of the telescopes and binoculars are brought by DAS members. Some astronomers do astrophotography while there, sharing their photos as they develop. Sandstone Ranch has also hosted DU Astronomy Professor Dr. Jennifer Hoffman and some of her astronomy students on additional nights.



DAS member, Mike Legary with telescope. Photo Credit: Leon Roybal



Joe Godwin-Austen helps youngster. Photo Credit: Dena McClung

In addition to the educational value of interacting with astronomers, Douglas County guests (who make up half of those in attendance) bear witness to seeing the Milky Way, the vast population of stars, the planets, and meteors that streak overhead. There's always a palpable sense of wonder among those at the ranch, and since we meet near sundown, many people also see wildlife as the deer and elk make their way to the creek for an evening drink.

A dozen or so regular volunteers facilitate the events on a come-as-you-can basis, ensuring that coverage is always adequate. This partnership between Douglas County OSNR and the DAS has been beneficial for both groups. We plan to offer some daytime solar observation (the sun!) and nighttime Full Moon Hikes as volunteer participation permits.

If you wish to be invited to an upcoming star party, email info@denverastro.org for signup details.



Photo Credit: Daniel Lee



Lemon Comet, SS Ranch October 18th. Photo Credit: Rick Pohlman



Star-filled Sky. Photo Credit: Michael Seal