



2021 Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education Board of Directors Profiles

Chris Aaby (2019-2021)- Chris Aaby is a long time resident of Colorado Springs and is an active supporter of environmental sustainability. Chris was born in Norway and spent his summers there hiking and exploring while growing up. Chris has been at Catamount Institute for over 7 years. Chris started as Marketing Manager and was promoted to Executive Director in 2015. Chris works hard every day so the education staff have the resources they need to work with over 8,000 youth each year. Additionally, Chris serves on the board of the Peak Alliance for a Sustainable Future, is a member of the Southeastern Colorado Environmental Education Leadership Council, and is on the regional council for Project Angel Heart. Chris was named a 2017 Colorado Springs Business Journal Rising Star, has received the Colorado Springs Independent Inclusion Award, and received the 2018 Leadership Pikes Peak Community Inspiration Award. In his free time, he enjoys baking cupcakes, hiking, and perfecting his photography skills.

Melanie Armstrong (2016-2021) - Melanie moved to Colorado in the summer of 2015 to join the faculty in the Master in Environmental Management (MEM) program at Western Colorado University. At Western, she directs the Center for Public Lands and teaches courses in environmental policy and politics, skills for resource management, and environmental studies. Prior to taking this position, she worked for nearly 15 years with the National Park Service, most recently supervising the interpretation and education activities in the Island in the Sky District of Canyonlands National Park. In her NPS career, she was a certifier with the Interpretive Development Program, Eppley coach, interpretive trainer, and part of a national committee to innovate new platforms for resource education and science. While pursuing her PhD in American Studies at the University of New Mexico, she worked with UNM's Natural High Program, an outreach program aimed to teach alternatives to at risk behavior through experiential and environmental education. Melanie's academic pursuits have involved studying questions of nature and how our ideas about the environment are culturally constructed. In her position at Western and through involvement with CAEE, she aims to explore the role of higher education in supporting environmental educators, leaders and decision makers, as well as the unique ways EE works to create more just and sustainable futures for residents of my new home state and all people. Melanie's interest in serving on the CAEE Board stems from the creative and intellectual excitement she has found working on a national NPS committee to review the agency's programs for environmental education and interpretation. In the coming years, she would like to see CAEE engage in a dialogue with institutions of higher education about the potential of EE/university partnerships to impact both the EE field and communities. She is excited about CAEE's interest in expanding provider services around the state.

Rachel Balduzzi (2021-2023)- Rachel's educational background is a Bachelor of Science in Natural Resources with a focus on Environmental Education, Communications, and Interpretation. She also holds a Master's degree in Education and Teaching. Rachel has been involved in the environmental education community within Colorado for the past 20 years as both an educator and manager of an educational program. She began my career as the Lead Education Technician for Rocky Mountain National Park before becoming a classroom teacher for Estes Park Elementary School. After teaching, she became the Membership Manager, and shortly after, Education Director for the Rocky Mountain Conservancy, a position she held for 11 years. As the Education Director, Rachel coordinated the educational efforts that complemented the ranger led programming in Rocky Mountain National Park. This included, internship management, program development and management, budget management, volunteer management, grant writing, partnership development, in-field instruction, program evaluation, and a variety of other tasks to support a robust environmental education

program. In her free time, she is an avid flyfisher, hiker, skier, and mom to a beginner outdoor lover and nature enthusiast.

Natalie Brower-Kirton (2016-2021)- Natalie is currently the Environmental Education and Outreach Program Manager for Aurora Water. She is a Colorado Native and has a bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado in Environmental Conservation and Theater. As a Sr. Water Conservation Specialist with Aurora Water for twenty years, Natalie had the opportunity to develop and coordinate a wide range of environmental education and outreach programs from Xeriscape Seminars and Conservation Rebates to the City of Aurora's Drought Management Plan. In addition she developed the Aurora Water Department's award winning Youth Education Programs, which include school presentations for K-12 students, assemblies, field trip experiences, an outdoor water camp for high school students, teacher professional development workshops and the Aurora Youth Water Festival focused on water conservation and water pollution prevention. Most recently her work has culminated in the creation of a new division within Aurora Water specifically focused on Environmental Education and Outreach. Her creativity, collaboration and enthusiasm for water efficiency and protection continues to grow the education and outreach programs at Aurora Water with the Education team reaching over 13,000 Aurora students and over 400 adult learners last year. CAEE has provided Natalie with support, training and networking opportunities that have been extremely valuable in creating programs and she would like to have the opportunity to give back to the organization and further its mission. As CAEE continues to partner with organizations such as the Colorado Foundation for Water Education, Natalie is interested in fostering these connections by representing water education in Colorado as part of the board of directors. She would like to see CAEE expand its membership to education experts in positions with organizations that may be nontraditional participants.

Chris Cohen (2019-2021)- Chris first came to Colorado in 2008 to participate in the Gore Range Natural Science School's Graduate Fellowship program through which she earned her M.S. in Human Dimensions of Natural Resources from Colorado State University. Prior to this graduate experience, Chris gained a wide variety of experiences teaching and managing at nature centers and science schools across the country including WI, CT, WA, PA and DC. Chris served as the Rock Bottom Ranch Programs Manager at the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies and recently rejoined the Walking Mountains (formerly Gore Range Natural Science School) team as Youth Programs Director in 2018. Through this position, Chris oversees a wide variety of programming including Field Science Programs, Summer Camps, Sowing Seeds Garden Programs, and Girls in Science and STEM after-school programs. Chris also plays an active role in the Graduate Fellowship Program at Walking Mountains Science Center. She loves to teach about the natural world and hopes to inspire students of all ages to become stewards of their own backyards. Chris has been involved with CAEE for over 10 years and is a Master Certified Environmental Educator. She brings experience on a variety of non-profit boards as well as a wealth of experience with special events, marketing, digital media and photography. Chris has been actively involved in the CAEE Northwest EE Leadership Council and the Western Slope Conference planning committee. Chris hopes to bring her interest in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to the CAEE Board in order to forward state-wide initiatives toward engaging diverse audiences in environmental education.

Shannon Francis (2021-2023)- Shannon Francis is Dineh (Navajo) from Shiprock, New Mexico, and Hopi from Kykotsmovi, Arizona. She is Towering House clan born for Red Running through the Water clan. Her Hopi clans are Massau', Bear Sand, and Snake Clan. Shannon comes from twelve generations of earth caretakers, ethnobotanists and seed keepers. Shannon is an active educator and has presented and taught widely on permaculture design. Her passion is instilling reciprocal relationships by connecting people to the natural world through seeds, soil and the elements. Shannon has been a member of the Denver Native community for thirty years and serves on the Winds American Indian Council as Chair and is the Director for the Indigenous Agricultural project at Four Winds. In 2014, Shannon received the Justin B. Willie humanitarian award on the Navajo Nation in Arizona. More recently, she received the 2015 Cesar E. Chavez female leadership award for her work with Indigenous gardening, food justice and community building projects. Shannon is a certified Permaculture Design Instructor, focusing more on Indigenous Permaculture, the weaving of Traditional Ecological Knowledge with innovative science, and she is one of the few female Indigenous Permaculturists in the Rocky Mountain and Southwestern regions.

Liz Houston (2021-2023)- Liz is a Colorado native with three decades of experience in management, strategic planning, resource development, communication, and community engagement. She is currently the Partnerships Manager for the Early Childhood Health Outdoors (ECHO) program at the National Wildlife Federation. ECHO works with child care programs, community centers, libraries, and other partners to create, enhance, and activate nature-based outdoor play and learning settings for young children. For six years, Liz managed the statewide advocacy network for the Colorado Children's Campaign, supporting local leaders in promoting public policies and investments to support children and families through data-informed advocacy. Liz has been a fundraiser at the Denver Art Museum, the National Sports Center for the Disabled, and Colorado School of Mines. She worked for an EPA contractor providing litigation support and information management services, and her career started as park ranger at the City of Lakewood. Most recently, she served as Executive Director of Colorado's Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance. Liz received her B.A. in Environmental Conservation and M.S. in Technical Communication from the University of Colorado, she attended Semester at Sea and has a certificate from the El Pomar Nonprofit Executive Leadership Program. Liz lives in the woods of Evergreen with her family and enjoys adventures in backpacking, paddle boarding, snowshoeing, and skiing.

Erika Meyer (2019-2021)-Erika joined Great Outdoors Colorado in 2016 as the Youth Initiatives Program Officer and works to implement the Inspire and School Yard Initiatives. Before joining GOCO, Erika worked in education in a variety of roles: she was the program coordinator at the Advocacy Lab in NYC and worked at Get Smart Schools through the AmeriCorps VISTA program. Erika received her bachelor's in Political Science from Marymount Manhattan College and was a 2018 Rising Leaders fellow with Youth Outside. She was born and raised in Colorado and cares deeply about social justice and environmental justice issues.

Sherry Nickolaus (2021-2023)- Sherry grew up with a love for all things wild, leading her to acquire a Bachelor's Degree in Wildlife Science from the University of Washington and a Master's Degree in Conservation Biology from Miami University. Working with animals and children has always been a passion and she firmly believes children are our future and our hope. Sherry looks forward to sharing her enthusiasm and helping the community make a personal connection with the natural world through field trips at our Environmental Learning Center at Barr Lake. When not working, she spends her time with her family playing, gardening, reading and enjoying the outdoors.

Michelle Schrote, CPA (2020-2022) – Michelle and her husband moved to Colorado in 2015. She is currently the Finance Manager at Elbert County Government, and prior to her career in government finance, Michelle focused her accounting career in taxes and audit. Her love and passion for agriculture and the outdoors, as well as her professional expertise in finance and budget, is what brought her to CAEE. Michelle and her family live on a small ranch in Elbert County, where there is plenty of space to enjoy their hobbies and practice sustainable land management. Michelle's favorite pastimes include barbequing with friends and family, hiking, horseback riding, and taking in the Colorado sunsets from their front porch.

Susan Taylor (2021-2023)- Susan is a Colorado native who loves teaching locals and visitors about the environment. Susan graduated from Franklin and Marshall College with a degree in Environmental Studies and enjoyed two decades of experience in Outdoor Education and summer camping. She has worked for many organizations throughout Colorado, including YMCA of the Rockies, Cheley Colorado Camps, Geneva Glen, the Telluride Academy, and the Rocky Mountain Conservancy. In Key West, Florida, she worked for the Key West Botanical Gardens and volunteered for Reef Relief, a non-profit for conserving the nearby coral reef. Susan also worked for several years in marketing and content writing, helping to promote large scale events and programs. Susan returned to the YMCA of the Rockies in 2019 as Program Director, overseeing a vast program department, including a Day Camp with over 2,000 unique kids each summer, and an outdoor education department that serves nearly 8,000 students in a typical year. In her free time she loves hiking, backpacking, and skiing in her backyard of Rocky Mountain National Park.