



2023 Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education Board of Directors Profiles

Chris Aaby (2019-2024)- 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.

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. Currently, she is a Public Engagement Specialist for the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas specializing in volunteer management and school field trip programming. In her free time, she is an avid Flyfisher, hiker, skier, and mom to a beginner outdoor lover and nature enthusiast.

Sue Bonfield (2023-2025)- Sue has over 30 years experience in environmental education, developing and leading EE programs, developing educational materials, and working to improve diversity in environmental education and conservation careers. She was on the Founding Board of the Diversity Joint Venture and has experience collaborating with organizations across the Americas and globally. Prior to founding Environment for the Americas, Sue created the education programs for the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, worked at the Keystone Science School, and helped to develop some of the early bird conservation education materials at the national level.

Chris Cohen (2019-2024)- 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.

Tim Flynn (2023-2025)-Tim's passion for the natural environment, conservation and education originated at an early age through exploration of the outdoors. By combining his passion with degrees in natural and social sciences, his personal and professional focus is to engage individuals and communities through outdoor education and recreation pursuits. As an outdoor enthusiast, Tim has worked in natural resources, education and outdoor recreation for municipal, private and nonprofit organizations for almost two decades. From 2012-2013, he received the Inspire By Example Award, along with the Youth Engagement Award from the City of Boulder for his youth development and leadership efforts. He currently serves on the New America Schools' Board of Directors and the Red Rocks Community College Outdoor Education Program Advisory Board. Tim's purpose is grounded in bringing communities together to expand natural resource awareness, involvement and stewardship, while improving equity in accessing outdoor resources. During his tenure as Director of Programs and Education, Lincoln Hills Cares has been nominated for and received multiple awards including the Outdoor Retailer Inspiration Award in 2019 and the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education Award for Excellence in 2021.

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.

Maya Garcia (2022-2024)- Maya M. Garcia joined the Colorado Department of Education as the Science Content Specialist in 2019, where she leads the implementation efforts for Colorado's Academic Standards for Science and supports CDE's STEM education portfolio. Maya began her career in science education as a middle school science teacher and science department chair, in the District of Columbia, where she taught for over eight years. In 2010, Maya travelled to South Africa as a Fulbright Distinguished Teacher, where she studied how community collaborations could be best leveraged to broaden access to rich and engaging STEM learning experiences in under-resourced communities. In 2013, Maya joined the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), where she led the District's adoption and implementation efforts around the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), Common Core Mathematics, and developed the District's plan for advancing Pre-K- 12 STEM education. Maya also led OSSE's partnership with the Carnegie Academy for Science Education (CASE) to launch the DC STEM Network, a STEM Learning Ecosystem. In addition to her experience in the classroom and state-level work, Maya has also worked at the national level. Maya has served on various national committees and boards, most recently, Maya joined the National Academies Board on Science Education (BOSE). She also serves as a Board Member for the Council of State Science Supervisors and serves as the Board's liaison to the organization's Equity and Access Committee and is co-chair of the Climate Change Education Committee. This organization serves to coordinate and support efforts of the state science supervisors of all states and territories as they work to advance equitable science education for all K-12 students. She is leading the National Stocktake for Science Standards, and also served as a member of the NRC Science Education Board Committee on Out of School STEM Learning, and currently serves as a Co-PI on the NSF funded DRK-12 project "Advancing Coherent and Equitable Systems of Science Education Project". Maya holds a bachelor's degree in Neuroscience and

Behavior from Mount Holyoke College and a Master's in Science Teaching from American University, where she served as adjunct faculty in the School of Education, and is currently pursuing her Doctorate of Education in Leadership for Educational Equity at the University of Colorado, Denver.

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.

Christy McConnell (2023-2025)-Christy has been a Colorado educator since 1999, first as a high school English teacher, and now as a professor of education at the University of Northern Colorado. My research has focused on ecological education and ecological mindedness in teachers. She is also the Executive Director of a new nonprofit organization, The Center for Teacher Growth and Renewal. The Center explores many topics at retreats, such as teacher well-being, ecological and cultural sustainability, and ecological curriculum design. Outside of work, Christy spends time in the mountains and desert hiking and camping with her dogs and son.

Erika Meyer (2019-2024)- Erika joined GOCO in 2016 as the Youth Initiatives Program Officer and spent 5 years working to implement the Generation Wild and School Yard Initiatives. Currently, as the Education and Engagement Officer Erika works to implement and evaluate education and training opportunities for GOCO's partners, staff, and board. Erika also provides central coordination for GOCO's program portfolio implementation. Erika received her bachelor's in Political Science from Marymount Manhattan College and was a 2018 Rising Leaders fellow with Youth Outside. She is a Coloradan and cares deeply about social justice and environmental justice issues.

Sherry Nickolaus (2021-2023)- serves as the Education Director at Bird Conservancy of the Rockies where she and her team focus on immersing children and adults in nature and fostering stewardship values across generations. 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 has worked in the conservation, wildlife and education fields for over 20 years and thrives on sharing her enthusiasm and helping the community make a personal connection with birds and the natural world. When not working, she spends her time with her family hiking, gardening, mini-farming, and enjoying the outdoors.

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.

Kathryn Venzor (2022-2024)- serves as the CSU Spur Director of Education, creating and implementing formal and informal educational programs inspiring youth and the larger community to tackle problems around food, water, and health at the new Spur campus. For over 17 years, Kathryn has been working in program development for K-12 and early childhood students and educators, environmental conservation, and community engagement. Kathryn began her professional career developing educational programs and curriculum and interpretive resources in New York and Philadelphia. Originally from the Southwest, Kathryn moved back to New Mexico where she worked as the Curator of Education at the City of Albuquerque's four BioPark sites. Kathryn also served on the Board of Directors for the Environmental Education Association of New Mexico and worked with community partners in the STEM fields on multiple projects to engage students from all backgrounds in the sciences and art. After moving to Colorado, Kathryn served as the Director of School Programs & Interpretation at Butterfly Pavilion and the Guest Engagement Programs Manager at Denver Zoo. Kathryn holds a Masters in Anthropology and Museum Studies from New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. She grew up exploring the desert mountains in El Paso, Texas, and that love of nature and exploration continues in Colorado. She enjoys taking in the beauty of colorful Colorado while hiking (or snowshoeing) with her husband, Jeff, and their dog, Yoda.