



## Statewide Stewardship Initiative (SSI) Regional Workshop Report January – March 2019

### Overview

Six regional workshops were planned and hosted by the Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition (COSC) during first quarter 2019 to promote the tools developed during the 2017 Statewide Stewardship Initiative (SSI). The SSI tools were designed to strengthen the quality of volunteer stewardship work across the state and to meet capacity gaps identified by public land managers. Funded by Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and the Gates Family Foundation and administered by Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC), the six workshops were held in Golden, Colorado Springs, Eagle, Grand Junction, Durango, and Poncha Springs and attended by 164 individuals representing outdoor stewardship organizations and land management agencies from around the state. Each three-hour workshop included a standardized program designed to inform and familiarize participants with *The Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Best Practices Guide* as well as the SSI statewide asset map and accomplishment database in order to facilitate immediate, voluntary use of the SSI tools among participating organizations and agencies.

### Workshop Participants

A total of 164 people attended the 6 workshops with participation as noted below:

Golden (Northeast Region): 46  
Colorado Springs (Southeast Region): 38  
Eagle (Central Mountains Region): 18  
Grand Junction (West and Northwest Regions): 26  
Durango (Southwest Region): 18  
Poncha Springs (South Central Region): 18

The graphic below illustrates the number of attendees by represented organization or agency. 59% of attendees represented outdoor stewardship organizations (OSO's), 29% represented land management agencies, and 12% came as interested individuals or on behalf of businesses or other organizations.

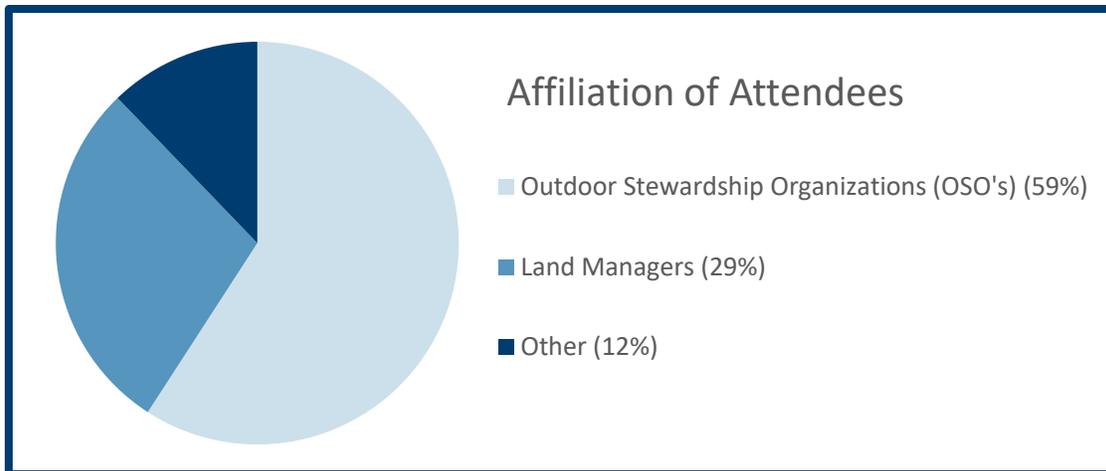


Figure 1: Affiliation of all workshop attendees. Note: 'Other' includes interested citizens, businesses, and governmental agencies that are not land managers. *See the Attached spreadsheet for more details about the attendees.*

## Workshop Summary

Overall, there was positive and enthusiastic support for the SSI effort and an expressed interest by participants in pursuing a more unified way to elevate and promote volunteer stewardship practice in Colorado. Some participants had previously attended the initial SSI workshops in 2017 when focus groups helped to define the needs that these tools would serve once developed. For others, the information was new. Regardless of familiarity, there was overwhelming support and appreciation for the initial roll-out of the resulting SSI tools and a genuine eagerness to continue to work together as the tools are implemented and evaluated in their use.

Feedback collected regarding both the Best Practices Guide and the SSI Database as part of facilitated discussion periods during the 2019 workshops is summarized below.

### 1) Best Practices Guide

Following an overview of the Guide, workshop participants were asked to do a quick self-assessment of their organization or agency's volunteer and organizational practices in comparison with those outlined in the Best Practice Guide. This was intended to help familiarize attendees with the general topics included in the Guide and to help identify areas within their own organization that differed or were lacking. Participants expressed support for the Guide's purpose to more effectively legitimize volunteer stewardship as a critical strategy in caring for public lands, while also serving to standardize practices leading to greater alignment among organizations who undertake these efforts.

Participants were also given the opportunity to identify specific challenges within their organization/agency that require resources in order to implement the best practices in the Guide. Several of the most salient outcomes of these discussions included:

- Lack of financial and human resources to ensure organizational sustainability; often funding for volunteer stewardship projects is insufficient or cannot be used for capacity-building to enable the organization to grow, retain staff, and secure adequate support for long-term volunteer efforts, including securing liability insurance as a risk management practice
- Need for strategies to secure, train and retain volunteer leaders; many organizations are without the resources to train their leaders and/or to train staff to work with specific types of volunteers, such as youth and recreational user clubs
- More specific processes and collaborative efforts between funders and outdoor stewardship organizations to maximize shared resources that can capitalize on more coordinated local and regional stewardship work
- Lack of communication, not only at the statewide level but among local and regional outdoor stewardship groups, that could help strengthen collective efforts in promoting volunteerism; interest was expressed repeatedly to create stronger regional coordination and cohesion through the SSI efforts
- Direct requests for templates and examples of good practices that can be easily adopted by outdoor stewardship groups

## 2) SSI Database

An overview of the SSI database was delivered. Generally, workshop participants expressed merit in the tenets of the database, particularly the asset map and organizational profiles. Some participants were concerned with the metric collection focus being to record annualized stewardship work across the state. In some cases, this may require organizations to maintain additional, independent data from which their annual metrics can be derived for the SSI reporting. Some attendees hoped that the SSI database would serve their immediate, real-time database and metric collection efforts and be integrated into their required agency reporting. Without this, many smaller outdoor stewardship organizations were cautiously reserved about their ability to use the metric accomplishment reporting tool, given the perceived extra work this might require from the organization.

Participants identified ways in which they could envision using the SSI database. The following is a representative sampling:

- Networking with other OSOs; increasing communication between and among organizations locally and regionally
- Using collected data for funding purposes
- Measuring trends and productivity on the ground; setting benchmarks for stewardship work
- Using the data to help determine program development for organizations
- Celebrating accomplishments statewide and regionally
- Improved communications and PR about stewardship efforts taking place around the state
- Identifying and matching volunteer skills with stewardship needs

Some attendees also expressed concerns about the potential limitations of the database and the challenges for many organizations to enter the data, including:

- Lack of time and ability to collect comprehensive data to capture detailed volunteer demographics
- Multiple reporting formats required by land managers and funders that make any standardized data collection difficult
- Limited staff capacity in many organizations to undertake the requested SSI data reporting
- The “what’s in it for me?” quandary – finding the financial and human resource value in doing the data entry

The following technical questions were also raised:

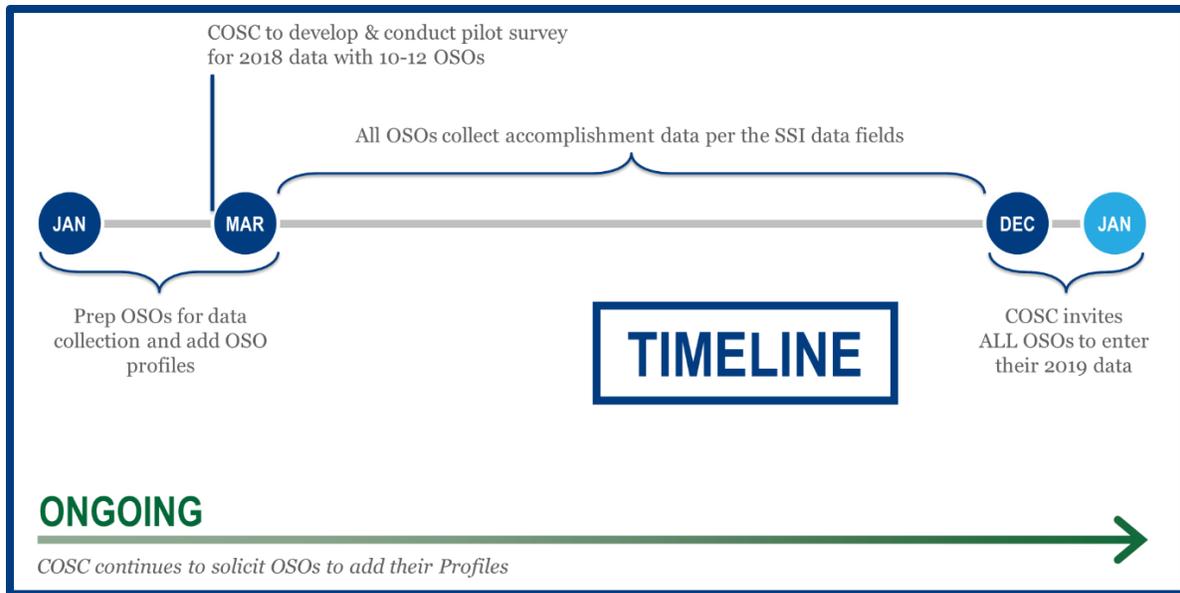
- How to account for work completed by multiple organizations and entities so to avoid “double counting”
- How to account for essential volunteer time related to planning and other work directly related to the on-the-ground stewardship activities
- How to more closely tie SSI reporting metrics to existing federal agency reporting requirements
- Timing of the reporting – use of calendar year versus state or federal fiscal year calendar reporting; more frequent reporting than annual
- How to enter data; Limitations in the database platform and interest in ease of data entry, such as use of an app
- How to filter the reporting by local area/regional areas
- Will there be a dashboard capacity for organizational information and achievement tracking?

### 3) The Future of Stewardship in Colorado

Each workshop concluded with a short discussion on what participants viewed as important to furthering the collaboration efforts in the next 5-10 years. The following represents summary comments:

- Importance of sharing collective information with the public and funders to promote more stewardship work in the state
- Influencing the use of the outdoors so that people care for it beyond recreational use  
*“It’s not just a place to come and take a picture, we want to preserve this for generations to come.”*  
 – Jamie Mallon
- Interest in building regional coalitions to address stewardship issues at a scaled level as well as serve as important local area networking groups
- Increased lobbying and advocacy efforts for stewardship at the state level
- Centralized place (e.g., a new website?) for stewardship groups across the state to share information about funding opportunities, project photos, stories, and videos – can this be linked to an accomplishment map through SSI?

An estimated timeline for immediate next steps for SSI was also shared with all participants.



Through June 2019, SSI will undertake a thorough review of the SSI database platform to better understand its capabilities and its limitations for data reporting in the immediate timeframe and moving forward for the SSI effort in the future. A small statewide workgroup will also focus on refining the metrics for use in the pilot accomplishment survey efforts to be completed using 2018 data.

All workshop participants received a follow-up e-mail thanking them for their participation and suggesting ways that they can help support this movement over the coming year:

- If their organization has not yet entered a profile into the SSI Asset Map, they should do so at [www.outdoorstewardship.org/survey](http://www.outdoorstewardship.org/survey)
- Encourage colleagues at other outdoor stewardship organizations to add their profiles
- Become familiar with the list of database fields for the accomplishment reporting function of the website and work internally to collect the data throughout the 2019 field season

## More Information

For more information about the workshops and the continuing work of the Statewide Stewardship Initiative, please contact:

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Please refer to the COSC website for any updates and links to information pertaining to the Statewide Stewardship Initiative at [www.outdoorstewardship.org](http://www.outdoorstewardship.org).