

Students become heroes for water with the help of Caring for Our Watersheds

Deep inside so many of us is the instinct that we've got something to give that can change things for the better.

So why don't more of us do it? Other responsibilities, lack of resources, an absence of guidance and fear of failure — or of just wasting our time — all conspire to hold back even the most ambitious among us.

But what if there were a way to make a difference that overcame many of those obstacles for us, clearing our paths for the great things we've always known we were meant for?

That's what Caring for Our Watersheds Colorado does for students in this region. It's what the program did for Ivonne Morales.

In 2013, Morales was a high school senior feeling these same feelings. But making a difference on a large scale seemed out of reach. Then, Caring for Our Watersheds provided the then-Greeley Central student with a path to greatness.

The program solicits project proposals from young people for the purpose of protecting critical water sources in Northern Colorado, provides constructive feedback for each proposal, and then helps fund the best ones and direct them toward completion. Morales was an international award winner seven years ago.

"This program being available for me as a high school student changed my world," said Morales, now the program coordinator for Caring for Our Watersheds Colorado.



Evening sun shines on rushing Big Thompson River at Moraine Park in Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado, USA.

A hero's journey usually includes a guide. Caring for Our Watersheds seeks to be that guide for ecologically conscious students.

"We're told when we're little that we can make a difference," Morales said. "But not often are we given means and resources to do so. This program provides that. Implementation, funding for ideas, mentors, all the support that they need."

Finalists earn a monetary prize of up to \$1,000, plus a

matching amount for their school. More than \$11,000 of the program's funding is awarded to schools, and Nutrien, the primary sponsor of the program, provides \$10,000 to fund realistic projects.

All high school students are welcome, but most will register through a teacher or advisor, Morales said. Educators are critical to the mission.

"There's always concern for including a new program in the classroom," Morales said. "But

the impact this program has is so important. My high school teacher took the risk. She's the reason for where I am today."

Volunteers are also a huge part of the effort. Mentors, proposal judges and feedback writers — including those who are bilingual — are always in demand, and are heroes unto themselves for helping students succeed.

Interested future heroes of the watershed may begin by contacting Morales herself at imorales@plcoutdoors.org or

970-352-1267, or at the website, CaringForOurWatersheds.com.

Those without a project already in mind are invited to the Poudre Learning Center to learn more.

Sometimes, heroes need a nudge. Caring for Our Watersheds is ready to provide it.

Many heroes have already stepped forward. Some, the finalists and honorable mentions of this year's contest, are presented below.



CARING FOR OUR Watersheds®

Thank you to all the students, teachers, volunteers, and partners who participated in this year's Caring for Our Watersheds contest, sponsored by Nutrien and hosted by the Poudre Learning Center. Over 650 students from Weld, Larimer, and Adam counties entered the contest this year. Congratulations to this year's winners!

Due to COVID-19, this year's finals was cancelled and project implementation has been paused. To recognize and support our winners, please visit the Poudre Learning Center's Facebook page where their posters will be shared for the public to view.



Todd Allen Buseman
Finalist
Plastic Saver
Northridge High School
Teacher:
Dr. Yajaira Fuentes-Tauber



Karina Castro-Castaneda
Finalist
EDUCATE!
Northridge High School
Teacher:
Dr. Yajaira Fuentes-Tauber



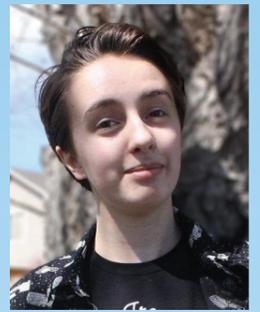
Erik Hernandez
Finalist
Reusable Bags
Northridge High School
Teacher:
Dr. Yajaira Fuentes-Tauber



Hope Jackson
Finalist
Operation Pollinator
Roosevelt High School
Teacher:
Jeremy Yarrow



Jeb Matthews
Finalist
Building a Poudre
Watershed Board Game
Greeley West High School
Teacher:
Corrine Yahn



Kelsey Mettler
Finalist
Efficient Water Practices
and Appliances
Campaign
Mountain View High School
Teacher: Mallory Bau



Nathaniel Perez
Finalist
Don't Let the Water run in
the Sink
Northridge High School
Teacher:
Dr. Yajaira Fuentes-Tauber



Jorge Rubio
Finalist
Replacing Sinks will
Preserve our Watershed
Greeley Central High School
Teacher:
Dr. Yajaira Fuentes-Tauber



Rachel Troyer
Finalist
Reel 'Em In and Clean
'Em Up
Northridge High School
Teacher:
Dr. Yajaira Fuentes-Tauber



Gwen Turney
Finalist
Children's Book About the
Danger of Plastic
Fort Collins High School
Teacher:
Peter Workman



Ryan Suckow
Honorable Mention
Don't Waste your Waste
Fossil Ridge High School
Teacher:
Steven Walder



Cadence Wood
Honorable Mention
Think Before You Throw
It Out
Union Colony Preparatory
School
Teacher: Eileen Marie Duncan