Between 2013 and 2014, “environmental and animal-related” giving (the heading the IRS gives to the nonprofit classification for tracking giving by issue) from donor-advised funds at The Denver Foundation increased from 3.5 percent to 10.5 percent of overall donor-advised giving. These statistics mirror the national trends, which saw a 7.5 percent increase from 2012 to 2013. According to the 2014 Giving USA study, “compared with many other charitable subsectors, giving to the environment and animal organizations has seen more positive growth since the end of the Great Recession in 2009. Giving to this subsector increased 22.3 percent in inflation-adjusted dollars between 2009 and 2013 … compared with growth in overall giving of 12.3 percent over the same period.”

Given these trends, it isn’t surprising that The Denver Foundation’s newest donor affinity group focuses on environmental and conservation focused philanthropy, or that there are often environmental grants made through both donor-advised and our Foundation’s Community Grants Program, especially in the areas of Economic Opportunity and Education.

**Fundholder Efforts**

Denver Foundation fundholders are providing grants to meet the needs of animals and the environment in all its forms. From national level climate change advocacy to inner city environmental education to wildlife preservation and botanical gardens and zoos, such giving now ranks 5th among Denver Foundation fundholder supported areas at The Denver Foundation.

Fundholders are also using other innovative ways to support their conservation ideals. Four years ago The Denver Foundation created a Sustainable and Responsible Investment (SRI) Pool option for donor-advised funds. This alternative investment option seeks to align investment decisions with grantmaking values by selecting funds that screen for different environmental, social, and governance factors. The pool continues to grow and diversify as more donors choose to invest their funds in this manner.

Last year, The Denver Foundation worked with Eye on the Future Fund to make the Foundation’s first program related investment (PRI) from a donor-advised fund in support of The Alliance for Sustainable Colorado. This project deployed assets from a donor-advised fund for a low-interest loan that will be repaid to the fund over time, supporting the nonprofit now and replenishing dollars available for philanthropic investment later.

The Environmental Affinity Group (EAG) is now 20 members strong, with membership reflective of the varied conservation efforts described above. Similar to other affinity groups at The Denver Foundation, the EAG holds quarterly educational luncheons on different topics and seeks to expand members’ understanding of the different issues in our state, and the ways in which philanthropy can be engaged to address them.
tal Giving

The topics of the educational programs have ranged from a review of public opinion polling on Colorado’s state water plan, to a post-election environmental overview, to a dive into climate vulnerabilities nationally and locally, with a special lens on national parks.

Community Grant Spotlight

Environmental giving is popping up in The Denver Foundation’s Community Grants programs as well. Last year, the Economic Opportunities Committee awarded a grant to Colorado Springs-based Blue Star Recyclers. They are an innovative social enterprise that focuses on recycling electronics and other materials to create local jobs for people on the autism spectrum, to open a new location in Denver. Over the past five years, Blue Star has recycled nearly 7 million pounds of electronics, diverting over 195,000 pounds of hazardous metals from landfills and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 10 million pounds.

“We’re just proud of the good work that Blue Star and Bill Morris do in helping the community recycle electronics and keep toxic materials out of the landfill—two million pounds worth last year,” says Peter Van Genderen, Blue Star trustee and Environmental Affinity Group member. “But equally important is how they do it.” Breaking down electronic components for recycling requires detailed precision, tasks that their workforce is uniquely skilled at doing. Blue Star reaps the rewards of an incredible workforce, made up of adults on the autism spectrum. Since their founding they have had no employee turnover and zero absenteeism. Patrick Horvath, The Denver Foundation’s Deputy Vice President of Programs and Director of Economic Opportunities, explains: “We focus our grantmaking on the most marginalized, hardest to employ populations in Denver. When we learned that 90% of adults with autism are unemployed, and that Blue Star was providing that population with meaningful jobs and wages, it was the perfect fit.”

Blue Star’s new home is in the Social Enterprise Foundry, a shared-space venture financed and owned by Urban Land Conservancy (a supporting organization of The Denver Foundation). Another tenant, Energy Resource Center, is doing home retrofits and upgrades to enhance energy efficiency for low income individuals.

To learn more about any of these efforts, please contact the Philanthropic Services Group at 303.300.1790.