

RPCVLA, Jean Yamanaka Fund  
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Greetings from Romania!

My name is Kelly Nafie, and I am a third year Peace Corps Volunteer from Riverside, California, serving in this gorgeous part of Eastern Europe. During special leave in California this May, I met with Miki Shaler, a volunteer and member of RPCVLA with whom I served from February 2000 until her COS last June. She mentioned the Yamanaka Fund and suggested I contact you with this proposal.

I am working with the Regional Center for Ecological Survey (CRSE) in Oradea, Bihor, located in the northwest of Romania near the Hungarian border. CRSE is a non-profit, non-government organization started in 1995 which exists to protect and conserve the karst region of Bihor County: the Apuseni Mountains. Among its many accomplishments this year, CRSE has explored and mapped caving areas of interest, worked with local councils to build trust and pull in greater community support, blazed hiking trails, planned and arranged campsites, built a rest area complete with showers and toilets at a popular campsite, made maps of the campsite including a topographical map, and highlighted danger zones for rock climbing. Signposts for hiking trails have been carved from discarded lumber, three small informational centers were built, rock climbing trails rearranged, new areas for camping established and negotiations begun with the local Ministry of Education to convert a dormitory camp into a recreational center. At a key cave, Pestera Ungaru Mare (Hungarian Cave), following extensive plans, a footbridge was built across the Crisul Repede (Fast Cris), archeological sites inside the cave cordoned off and highlighted and lights installed to spotlight major areas of interest.

One of CRSE's projects is the creation of an ecotourism business, offering products such as guided hikes, caving, kayaking and rockclimbing excursions, and accommodations. Starting this business is a long-term approach to the rapid development problems facing the area. In addition to providing supplemental income to local residents as guides and local hosts, ecotourism emphasizes preserving the area for generations to come. Profits from the business will help to diversify CRSE's funding base.

As part of this business, CRSE plans to provide mountain equipment rental services to visitors. Currently, CRSE is able to offer this service at a minimum level to visitors. Unfortunately, the organization's equipment supply is limited, and is divided amongst its many activities, so it does not have a full set of rental gear that can be left at any one of its bases in the Apuseni Mountains, available for visitors to rent at any time. The only way for a tourist to partake in climbing activities if they do not bring their own equipment is to reserve the gear through CRSE in Oradea in advance and arrange to have it delivered to the mountains or lug the equipment via train or car on their own.

Suncuius, where CRSE has built and runs a chalet and small camping area, welcomes over 1500 tourists per year, 10% of whom request to rent climbing equipment and are turned away because equipment is not available. A small operation which makes safe, reliable climbing equipment available for rental to tourists in Suncuius would both answer a demand from visitors as well as provide a much needed sustainable source of income to help CRSE continue its projects.

One full set of climbing equipment, including 3 harnesses, one rope, 3 helmets, 3 pairs of climbing shoes, 1 descender and 6 carabiners, costs \$376. **CRSE is asking for \$100 from RPCVLA to purchase one climbing rope (life expectancy = 1-1 ½ years under normal rental conditions) and one descender (life expectancy = 3-4 years under normal rental conditions).** Three pairs of climbing shoes have been donated by Adventure 16 in Southern California, and CRSE will contribute the remaining \$186 to complete the set. (Please see attached budget in Microsoft Excel.) This set will be sufficient to meet visitors' demands for the next three years, apart from ropes, which will be replaced more frequently (approximately one rope per year, depending on usage). Profits from the rentals will be used to replace and purchase additional equipment as needed.

CRSE proposes to store and rent the equipment out of its chalet, located within a 5 minute walk from Suncuius's most popular climbing area. Equipment rental will be charged on an hourly basis – at \$1.50 per hour per person. We estimate that the rental business has the potential to bring in a starting minimum of \$500 per year, which will be funnelled directly back into the eco-tourism program, providing money to help maintain trails, construct ecologically-friendly camping facilities and certify and hire locals to be full-fledged mountain guides. As eco-tourism services and facilities expand and improve, the project will directly benefit the economy of the local mountain community, as visitors to the area spend money on food, lodging, guides and other local services.

This rental business is an essential part of developing eco-tourism in the Apuseni Mountains. \$100 from RPCVLA would be of significant help to CRSE in its endeavors. Thank you in advance for considering this request. Should you have any questions or need further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me at [knafie@lycos.com](mailto:knafie@lycos.com), or my colleague, Paul Iacobas, at [lifeapuseni@rdsor.ro](mailto:lifeapuseni@rdsor.ro). We look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

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