

Estes Valley Land Trust

June 2021 Newsletter



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Our mission is to conserve land throughout the Estes Valley and surrounding areas for current and future generations.



Estes Valley Land Trust

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Above: David, Wells and Lisa happily monitoring an easement.

Front Cover: The Thumb rock formation is now part of the Town's Thumb Open Space. Photo by Marsha Hobert.

Monitoring Season is Here!

Summer has arrived and so has our conservation easement monitoring season. Thank you to over 100 volunteers that monitor each of our conservation easements every year. Following are some of the most frequently asked questions we receive about the upcoming monitoring season.

What is different about this year's monitoring protocol?

Monitoring safety is the land trust's top priority and therefore we are taking precautions to avoid the transmission of COVID-19. Our office is open Tuesday-Thursday and we ask visitors to wear masks unless everyone is fully vaccinated. We also ask volunteers to avoid entering homes and to complete the monitoring event fully outdoors.

Why not use satellite imagery or remote monitoring tools?

Technology has changed conservation easement monitoring and many land trusts are using drones and satellite imagery to monitor conservation easements. For now, we will continue to monitor each easement on foot. Our eased properties are generally smaller, steeper and forested, which makes remote monitoring more difficult. Plus, we like working with volunteers!

Does my monitoring really make a difference?

Last year, our monitors identified three minor easement violations. Documenting these issues early allowed us to contact the landowner and prevent small problems from becoming major violations. Our volunteer monitors are crucial to our mission of preserving land forever.

Summer Events



Hermit Park Breakfast

When: Saturday, July 24, 9-11 AM

Topic: Reintroducing Colorado's State Fish

Speaker: Boyd Wright, *Native Aquatic Species Biologist, Colorado Parks and Wildlife*

Details: Hermit Park Open Space is a public park that is protected with an Estes Valley Land Trust conservation easement. No entrance fee is required for this special event. However, the cost for the breakfast is \$15/person and can be paid via check or cash on the day of the event. Breakfast includes fresh coffee, fruit, eggs, bacon or sausage. Seating is limited and we recommend bringing a camp chair.



Bulwark Ridge Trail Hike

When: Tuesday, September 21, 10 AM - 3 PM

Topic: Land Conservation Near Glen Haven

Speaker: Jeffrey Boring, *Executive Director, Estes Valley Land Trust*

Details: The Bulwark Ridge Trail is located off Dunraven Glade Road and provides access to the Comanche Peaks Wilderness Area of Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest. This is a steep hike and impacts from the Cameron Peak Fire are visible. The land trust will discuss their conservation efforts near the North Fork of the Big Thompson. This hike is free of charge and includes a complimentary lunch.

Registration is required. The Hermit Park breakfast will take place at the Hermit Park Open Space pavilion. Registration for both the breakfast and the hike is required.

Register online at evlandtrust.org/rsvp, via email (evlt@evlandtrust.org) or via phone (970-577-6837).

Thumb Open Space

Over 20 Years in the Making

Every conservation transaction is different and that is certainly the case with the Thumb Open Space. The Thumb Open Space was purchased by the Town of Estes Park last month and concludes a twenty-year effort to preserve the southern portion of Prospect Mountain.

The Early Years

Prospect Mountain serves as the geographic centerpiece of Estes Park and is highly visible from Rocky Mountain National Park and the Peak to Peak Scenic Byway. Jim White, former President of the land trust's Board of Directors, began working with a Prospect Mountain landowner to conserve land and prevent additional subdivision and development.

"Jim realized that conserving just one parcel of land on Prospect Mountain could lead to additional land conservation and ultimately protecting the scenic views of the mountain", said Ken Oldham, former member of the land trust Board of Directors. Jim's instincts were right, between 2003 and 2013, the land trust closed on four conservation easements that cover more than 65 acres. "Jim's knack for developing relationships with landowners really paid off and his work on Prospect Mountain is a great example", said Oldham.

Change in Family, Change in Plans

After Jerry Solomon donated the first conservation easement in 2003, he intended to develop a large home on the 65 acres. "Jerry spent time in Estes Park as a child and talked a lot about building a home on Prospect Mountain and that incredible view of Longs Peak", said John Curry, son-in-law of the landowner. "Once he passed away in 2018, the family revisited those plans and we reached out to the land trust to brainstorm other ideas."

New Opportunity

For many years, the property has been a popular local hiking and rock climbing area. A platted trail provides public access to the property but does not reach the Thumb or Needle, two of the large rock outcrops on the property. Climbing has always been allowed, with permission from the landowner.



Above: Young climber testing her mettle at the Thumb Open Space.

The family was proud of the property's climbing history and was open to amending the conservation easement to prohibit any development and permanently allow hiking and climbing. "You don't often get a chance to improve a conservation easement and enhance the conservation values like this", said Jeffrey Boring, land trust Executive Director. "We're grateful to the family for working with us to ensure this property remains undeveloped and accessible forever."

What's Next

Now that the Town of Estes Park owns the property, they will develop a community-driven management plan to protect the natural resources and provide sustainable hiking and climbing. The first step in developing the management plan is to complete an ecological assessment, to fully understand the extent of any sensitive habitat. This study will be used to help minimize impacts to wildlife, flora and fauna and the property's scenic resources. "The Town's management plan will be based on input from the public and guided by the ecological assessment and conservation easement", said Brian Berg, Parks Supervisor, Town of Estes Park. While the existing trail will remain open during the management planning process, the rest of the property will remain closed to the public until the management plan is adopted and additional trails can be properly constructed.

New Initiative Launched to Increase Pace of Conservation

As development pressure along Colorado's Front Range, and in the Estes Valley, continues to increase, land conservation organizations need to be more strategic and focused to protect lands with the most critical wildlife habitat, open space, and other conservation values. To meet this need, over the past two years the Estes Valley Land Trust has worked with the community to create a strategic land conservation plan. This comprehensive plan will guide EVLT's work for the next decade.

5,000 Acres in 10 Years

The Estes Valley Open Space Plan was developed through a collaborative effort with area residents, natural resource agencies, and others, and reflects shared land conservation goals. "During two years of planning and speaking to hundreds of people throughout the Estes and Tahosa valleys, I heard a common theme that we need to conserve more land to maintain the beauty and unique character of our area," said Jeffrey Boring, land trust Executive Director. "In response, we set an ambitious goal of preserving an additional 5,000 acres over the next ten years."



The Estes Valley Open Space Plan highlights critical wildlife habitat and scenic areas. Also, it recommends conserving areas of historic significance and creating additional publicly accessible parks and trails. Currently, over 20,000 acres of land in the Estes Valley are undeveloped and have not been conserved. Development of these lands would fundamentally change the area's natural character and impact wildlife.

To increase the pace of conservation before those lands are lost forever, the land trust must develop new partnerships and seek new funding opportunities. "We have to be proactive in reaching out to landowners and educating them about the considerable financial benefits of conserving their land. Also, we need to make the initial cost of donating a conservation easement less financially burdensome," said Jan Swaney, member of the land trust's Board of Directors. "To meet this need, the Board recently redirected more than \$100,000 into our land protection fund to help finance conservation projects."

In addition, the Estes Valley Land Trust is supporting state legislation to increase the amount of tax credit that a landowner can claim when conserving their property. "Providing financial incentives to landowners and reducing their transaction costs are two steps that will increase the pace of conservation and help us achieve our ambitious goal of preserving 5,000 acres in the next ten years," said Boring.

The Estes Valley Open Space Plan can be viewed at evlandtrust.org.

Hondius Land Protection Fund

The Land Protection Fund is now known as the Piet and Helen Hondius Fund. Piet is one of the founders of the Estes Valley Land Trust and Helen was a former member of the Board of Directors.

"The land trust simply wouldn't be here today without Helen and Piet Hondius; they have done so much for this community," said Vaughn Baker, President, Board of Directors. "The Board of Directors thought it was fitting to recognize them by naming our land protection fund after them." The Hondius Land Protection Fund will be used to protect more land throughout the Estes Valley.

New Core Values

Help Define the Estes Valley Land Trust

The Board of Directors recently updated the land trust's mission statement to keep the focus on permanent land conservation and to recognize that our work serves everyone. Our new mission statement is:

To conserve land throughout the Estes Valley and surrounding areas for current and future generations.

The updated mission statement prompted more change and the Board of Directors decided to develop a set of core values to ensure the land trust Board of Directors, staff and volunteers operate effectively and in unison. We encourage our members to hold the staff and Board of Directors accountable for these core values.

We Are Passionate

We are in awe of nature and conserving land is a labor of love. Our work is inspiring, it changes lives, and our results last forever. We share our passion for nature by getting outside together.

We Strive for Excellence

We strive to always be better, to grow as professionals, and to develop new tools to conserve land and connect people with nature.

We Include Everyone

We serve all members of the community by listening actively and finding common ground. People come first and we intend to better understand and find solutions that serve all.

We Succeed by Working Together

As an apolitical force for land conservation, our approach is collaborative. We realize that we can go farther together and therefore we cultivate lasting relationships with volunteers, landowners, and public and private partners.



Above: Bear Gulch Ranch, near Twin Sisters, is permanently protected by the land trust.

We Permanently Protect Land

Our conservation agreements with landowners are permanent and remain with the land. We defend the terms of those agreements, work with legal professionals as needed, and utilize all tools to steadfastly enforce each land protection agreement.

We Focus on Healthy Land

We are all intimately connected to the land. Healthy land provides healthy wildlife habitat and benefits humans in many ways. Numerous threats, both local and global, impact land and threaten biodiversity. We work with others to reduce those impacts and restore land.

We Honor Our Past

The Ute, Arapaho, and other American Indian tribes were the first to call this region home. We are committed to working with the tribal communities to protect and interpret these cultural landscapes.

We Are Financially Strong

We give generously and depend on the generosity of others. We maintain the highest financial discipline to ensure the long-term viability of the organization.

Endowment Over \$782,000

The Perpetuity Fund, the land trust's operating endowment, received contributions in 2020 and now exceeds \$782,000. Once the fund reaches \$1 million, it can be used to help cover annual operating expenses.



Restricted gifts to the Perpetuity Fund ensure the Estes Valley Land Trust will:

- Remain your local, independent land trust
- Monitor and defend each conservation easement
- Forever preserve the spectacular Estes Valley

Please contact the land trust to make a restricted gift to the Perpetuity Fund.

To learn more, go to evlandtrust.org/donate.

Land Trust Receives Grant

The land trust received a \$50,000 grant to help cover the transaction costs for a new conservation project.

"The Estes Valley Land Trust submitted a compelling application for a conservation easement that will preserve nearly 200 acres of incredible wildlife habitat," said Melissa Daruna, Executive Director, Keep it Colorado. "Our grant will significantly reduce the landowner's costs to donate an easement."

Stay tuned for more details about this project.



Above: Amelia takes her dog canoeing.



Above: Peyton competes in a mountain bike race.

Land Trust Scholarships Awarded!

Amelia Westley and Peyton Wilkerson are each recipients of the 2021 Estes Valley Land Trust Scholarship.

The two \$1,000 scholarships are awarded to Estes Park High School graduates that pursue a degree at a university, college, or trade school.

Amelia considers herself a tomboy at heart and enjoys almost anything outdoors, including hiking, skiing, kayaking, or as she likes to say, "just strolling through the woods." She intends to major in Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management.

Peyton is an avid mountain biker and races competitively. Biking has taught him discipline, focus and the rewards of hard work. He hopes to open his own bike shop someday.

Amelia is choosing between a couple of schools in Colorado and Wyoming and Peyton plans to attend Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Congrats Amelia and Peyton!



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Once your loved ones are provided for, giving a planned gift to the land trust is a powerful way to help preserve land forever.

Go to evlandtrust.org/donate for details, or contact the land trust for sample bequest language.



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