

Estes Valley Land Trust

Spring 2023 Newsletter



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New Conservation Easements
Summer Breakfasts and Hikes – Join Us
Student Filmfest Winners Announced



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



Jan and Jim Swaney have monitored easements for nearly 20 years.

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Monitoring Season is Here!

Dust off your hiking boots and grab that sunhat—monitoring season has arrived! Each summer, nearly one hundred Estes Valley Land Trust volunteers support land conservation and protect our beautiful valley by walking and monitoring the 170 conservation easements held by the trust. Not only is this a fun way to get involved with a local conservation organization, it ensures that EVLT remains nationally-accredited and certified by the state of Colorado.

“Over many years, my husband, Jim, and I have made more than 50 site visits to conservation easements. It’s an excellent way to support the land trust,” said Jan Swaney, member of the Board of Directors. **“This area would look much different without EVLT’s easements that conserve nearly 10,000 acres of land.”**

The land trust has an easy monitoring protocol that involves walking the property, taking a few photos and completing a short report. In the rare instance that the wildlife habitat or scenic views of the property might be compromised, follow-up actions are taken by staff. It’s a great opportunity to visit the beautiful properties EVLT and landowners jointly conserve.

Training is provided and new monitors are paired with experienced monitors. Interested in joining our team of conservation easement monitors? Contact the Estes Valley Land Trust for more details.

Attend Our Educational Summer Breakfasts



The Gray Wolf is the world's largest canine predator.



Fishers Peak is a new state park in Trinidad, CO.

REINTRODUCING WOLVES IN COLORADO

Speaker:

Eric Odell

Species Conservation Program Manager
Colorado Parks and Wildlife

When:

8-10 AM

Saturday, July 15

Where:

Hermit Park Open Space

Cost:

\$20/person

Reservations are required for each breakfast.

Breakfast will be catered by Big Horn Restaurant and includes eggs, bacon, fresh fruit, pastries, and coffee. Visit evlandtrust.org/RSVP to register. All events are outdoors. Please bring a chair (at Hermit Park Open Space breakfast only), jacket, sunglasses, hat and sunscreen.

NEW STATE PLAN TO CONSERVE 3.3 MILLION ACRES

Speaker:

Tony Caligiuri

President and CEO
Colorado Open Lands

Carlos Fernández

Colorado State Director
The Nature Conservancy

When:

8-10 AM

Saturday, August 12

Where:

High Peak Camp, Salvation Army

Cost:

\$20/person

New Projects Expand Existing Conserved Lands

In December, the Estes Valley Land Trust completed two real estate transactions that protect more than 350 acres of land adjacent to Rocky Mountain National Park and Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forest. **“Our public lands are the region’s crown jewel and it’s important to buffer those lands with additional conserved acreage,”** said Jeffrey Boring, Executive Director, Estes Valley Land Trust. **“Conserving these properties allows wildlife to continue migrating between public and private lands and provides additional refuge when the Park or Forest receive a lot of recreation use.”**

Cheley Conservation Easement

The Cheley Conservation Easement is located near the Dunraven/North Fork Trailhead, east of Rocky Mountain National Park. The property is relatively steep and forested and contains open meadows and patches of downed timber, due to the Cameron Peak Fire. While the property is zoned to allow rural residential development on 10-acre lots, the conservation easement limits development to a single homesite on a small building envelope.

“In addition to the conservation values we protected, we also thought about public safety and risks of building many homes on a steep and forested hillside in the Wildland Urban Interface,” said Boring. **“The Cameron Peak, East Troublesome and other fires were front and center when we were negotiating this conservation easement.”** The easement encourages the development of a forest management plan to improve biodiversity and ecosystem health and recommends management actions that mimic natural disturbances, like wildfire.

Childers Conservation Easement

Protecting biodiversity was also a critical component of the Childers Amended Conservation Easement, which conserves 161 acres in the Tahosa Valley. The Childers property is extraordinary because it contains nearly half a mile of Alpine Brook, the stream that drains the eastern portion of

Rocky Mountain National Park, near the Longs Peak Trailhead. The property is composed of a variety of wetland types and was home to a large beaver colony. **“Since the property abuts Rocky Mountain National Park, the land trust would like to partner with the family and the Park to explore improving the habitat and possibly reintroducing beaver,”** said Boring.

“We often think of a conservation easement as the endgame of all the good work the land trust does, but what if it’s just the beginning?” said Boring. Both the Childers and Cheley easements provide opportunities to expand conserved lands and improve the wildlife habitat through restoration and forest health projects.



Signs of wildlife, including moose, can be found throughout the Childers Easement.

Join us for a full day of hiking on July 20th to learn more about the Cheley Conservation Easement, and be on the lookout for future trips to the Childers Conservation Easement.

Land Trusts Uniting To Protect 3.3 Million Acres

We are lucky to be Coloradans; we live in a uniquely beautiful and diverse place. From the expansive eastern plains to the west slope's Grand Mesa and the dozens of 14,000-foot peaks in between, Colorado's forests, canyons, rivers and agricultural areas sustain us all year long. Since 1965, more than 3 million acres of private land have been conserved in this state. But is it enough?

Leaders of the conservation community don't think so, and have united to create a statewide private lands conservation plan that builds from the decades of conservation success and accelerates future land conservation efforts. **"The next decade will be particularly important for securing a healthy and livable future in Colorado,"** said Linda Lidov, Interim Executive Director with Keep It Colorado.

Keep It Colorado is a coalition of more than 20 land trusts and 13 public agencies, including Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Larimer and Boulder counties, the Estes Valley Land Trust, Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy, that are dedicated to conserving land. **"We are all experiencing the impacts of climate change every day, from record breaking wildfires, extreme drought and dwindling water supplies; there has never been a more urgent moment for a coordinated, strategic and collaborative approach to private land conservation,"** said Lidov.

The new plan includes strategic pillars that focus on protecting biodiversity and climate resilient landscapes, creating collaborative water solutions, protecting farm and ranch land and ensuring a lasting conservation movement. The plan identifies areas across the state that are more resilient to climate change, meaning their ecological integrity can be sustained even with a warming climate. **"Targeting these areas, along with lands that sequester carbon, such as forests and grasslands, can help mitigate climate impacts and help us prepare for an uncertain climate future,"** said Jim Petterson, Vice President of the Mountain West Region and Colorado and Southwest Region Director of the Trust for Public Land.



Large open spaces remain unprotected across Colorado.
Photo courtesy of Charlie Johnson.

One of the pillars also focuses on growing the conservation community by being more inclusive and creating outcomes that better serve everyone. The benefits of conservation can be subtle and serve all, such as clean air and water, while more tangible conservation benefits, such as access to trails, local parks or food may not be available to everyone. Expanding the number and diversity of people engaged in conservation will result in projects that continue to be locally driven and community-centered. With an increase in engagement, the conservation movement will have the support it needs to stay responsive for generations to come.

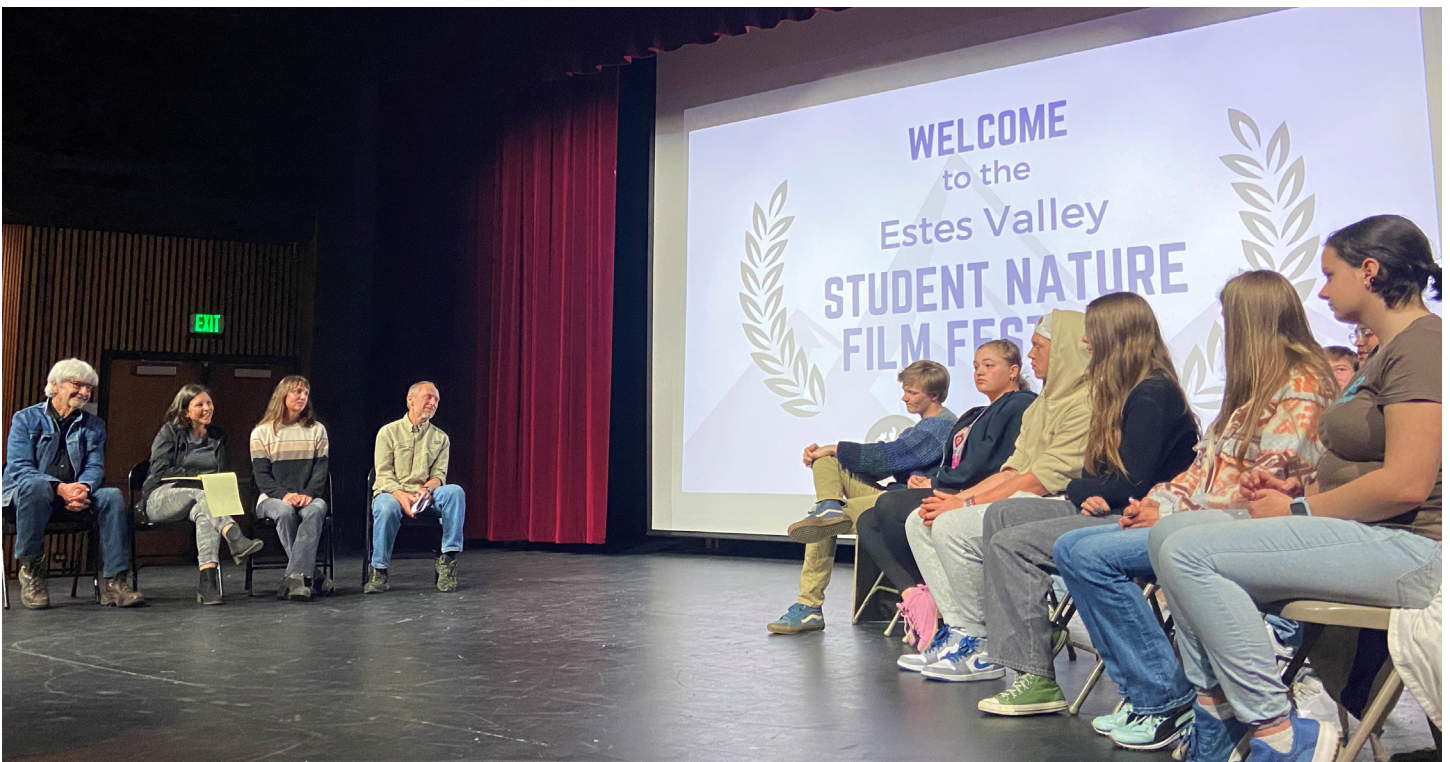
In some ways, the Estes Valley Land Trust is a model for a highly strategic land conservation organization that is driven by the local community. EVLT, although small, is an important player in this strategic effort.

As Colorado continues to change, the conservation community must adapt and become more relevant in the lives of the people that call the Centennial State home. Join us on August 12, 8 AM at the High Peak Camp to hear from The Nature Conservancy and Colorado Open Lands, two of the largest land trusts in Colorado, about the strategies needed to double the number of conserved acres in Colorado in the next 10 years.

Local Students Tell Their Stories

Young filmmakers unveiled their unedited films earlier this spring at the second annual Student Nature Film Festival, a partnership between the Estes Park School District, Bird & Jim and the Estes Valley Land Trust. The purpose of the festival is to give youth in the Estes Park community a stage to express themselves and their perspective on a variety of issues impacting the environment.

Eleven student teams wrote, directed, starred-in and recorded short films. A total of \$8,000 in scholarships were awarded to student filmmakers who plan to pursue a college degree. Anonymous donors approached the land trust and made restricted donations to support this project. **“We intentionally avoided editing and modifying the films because we wanted the kids’ voices to be heard, in their own way, and that led to some unique messaging and storytelling,”** said Nick Molle, one of the judges for the festival.



High school filmmakers answer questions from local judges at the film festival.

The films were screened in front of a local audience and a panel of four judges. The judges included local nature filmmaker Nick Molle, retired school teacher Steve Johnson, land trust member Alicia Rochambeau, and Bird & Jim co-owner and land trust board member Melissa Strong. Each film was scored based upon its cinematography, editing, complexity, and originality. The judges also considered the student’s participation in the film festival’s panel discussion before finalizing their scores. The scores of the three winning films were very close.

The three winning films were produced by five students: Lily-Ann Smith (grand prize of \$4,000); Joseph Patrick Cramer (2nd place prize of \$2,500); and Michael Bird, Lucy Leija, and Olivia Shirk (3rd place prize of \$500 each). **“High school senior Lily-Ann won this year by a razor thin margin. Ultimately, her thorough research, variety of credible sources, and her film’s strong connection to the natural environment won her the grand prize,”** said Executive Director Jeffrey Boring.

The three winning films can be viewed on the Estes Valley Land Trust’s YouTube page.

Let's Go For a Hike!

The land trust is hosting two member hikes this summer and we hope you can join us. These hikes give our members a memorable opportunity to see properties conserved by the land trust. All hikes are limited to 15 people, are free of charge and include a complimentary lunch. Please limit your registration to just one hike so we have enough space for everyone. Both hikes leave the Estes Valley Land Trust office promptly at 8 AM. Registration information will be announced via email before each hike.

Posey CE and Historic Lab Tour - June 22nd

The Posey Conservation Easement is located in the Tahosa Valley just east of the Wild Basin entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park. This easy hike will follow Horse Creek down to the mighty North Saint Vrain Creek and site of a historic hydrological laboratory. Meet the landowners that recently purchased the lab property and learn how it was used in the 20th century as an outdoor classroom. Participants should plan to return to Estes Park by 2 PM.



The North Saint Vrain cascades from Rocky Mountain National Park near the Posey CE.

Cheley Conservation Easement Tour - July 20th

This is a difficult hike towards Signal Mountain on the Bulwark Ridge Trail with the total length estimated at about 8 miles, as we will stop short of the summit of Signal Mountain. Elevation gain is estimated at about 2,500 feet. Hikers will see the effects of the Cameron Peak fire, nearly three years later, as it burned in patches across the Cheley Conservation Easement and the Comanche Peak Wilderness. Participants should plan to return to Estes Park by 4 PM.

Get To Know

Our New Member Cheryl Sarnwick

Cheryl became a member of the Estes Valley Land Trust after serving on our Stewardship Corps, a program designed to help Estes Park residents that were furloughed during COVID-19, in return for 20 hours of service. Stewardship Corps members helped the land trust remove barbed wire and bag noxious weeds on conserved lands. **“After my experience with the Stewardship Corps, I started my own business and one of my core values was to give back to the community. The land trust is a group I believe in and respect and that’s why I decided to become a member,”** said Sarnwick.

Cheryl continues to volunteer with the land trust and often helps with our summer breakfasts. **“This year’s July breakfast is looking like another great line-up with Colorado Parks and Wildlife set to discuss the Wolf Management Plan and I’m excited to attend again!”**



Cheryl's new business plan includes supporting the Estes Valley Land Trust.



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New IRS Notice

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) recently published Notice 2023-30 which references a safe harbor option available to a landowner that has donated a conservation easement and has or is pursuing a federal tax deduction. The notice provides substitute language regarding boundary line adjustments and extinguishment proceeds that could be inserted in an amended conservation easement. If you donated a conservation easement and have pursued or plan to pursue a federal tax deduction for your gift, we recommend you consult with an attorney. The Notice requires the amendment to be recorded by July 24, 2023.