

Estes Valley Land Trust

Spring 2024 Newsletter



**We Conserved
10,000 Acres!**

**Inside:
10,000 Acres Conserved!
Summer Breakfasts and Hikes– Join Us
Land Trust Focus on Bison**



Estes Valley Land Trust

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Front Cover: The Eagle Rock CE was one of the land trust's earliest conservation successes.

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



Walt and Marlene Borneman monitor the Thumb Open Space CE.

SUMMER BEGINS WITH EASEMENT MONITORING

Summer in Estes Park is delightful. Stunning wildflowers, adorable elk calves testing their new legs and long days spent hiking breathtaking trails make each summer unforgettable. It is also the time of year when land trust volunteers spread across the valley and monitor more than 170 conservation easements. Alicia Rochambeau is the land trust's new Community Engagement Coordinator and will manage the conservation easement monitoring program this year.

"I'm excited to work closely with so many Estes Park volunteers," said Rochambeau. **"I volunteered as an easement monitor and know how gratifying it is to complete a monitoring report and help the land trust fulfill its commitment to defend each easement."** Annual monitoring ensures that the land trust remains nationally accredited and certified by the state of Colorado.

As a thank you to all conservation easement monitors, a picnic is scheduled for June 5th at the O'Connor Pavilion. **"We're so grateful for the army of volunteers that monitor with us each year, so we are continuing the tradition of thanking them with a summer picnic,"** said Rochambeau. A separate online training session is also scheduled for June 10th to review the land trust's monitoring protocol.

The online training is a good reminder for returning volunteers and a comprehensive overview for new volunteers. The land trust still requires volunteers to monitor in pairs or small groups for safety purposes and to ensure the monitoring reports meet quality assurance standards.

We look forward to seeing all of our monitors this summer!

ATTEND OUR EDUCATIONAL SUMMER BREAKFASTS



Rocky Mountain National Park remains one of the most visited National Parks.



Newly renamed Mount Blue Sky is sacred to many Tribal Nations.

SUPERINTENDENT INGRAM REFLECTS ON FIRST YEAR AT ROCKY

When & Where:

Bear Gulch Ranch
Saturday, July 20, 8AM

Cost:

\$20/person

Speaker:

Gary Ingram

Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park

RENAMING A 14NER: THE STORY OF MOUNT BLUE SKY

When & Where:

Hermit Park Open Space,
Saturday, August 17, 8AM

Cost:

\$20/person

Speakers:

Fred Mosqueda

Arapaho Language and Culture Program
Coordinator, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of
Oklahoma

Dr. Nicki Gonzales

Associate Professor of History, Regis University
and Member of Colorado's Geographic Naming
Board

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 with limited or no seating. Please bring a chair, jacket, sunglasses, hat and sunscreen.

WE DID IT!

LAND TRUST EXCEEDS 10,000 ACRES CONSERVED

The Estes Valley Land Trust closed on a new conservation easement earlier this year, protecting the nearly 300-acre Highlands Camp and Retreat Center near Allenspark. With this latest transaction, the land trust has conserved more than 10,000 acres across Larimer and Boulder counties.

MacGregor Ranch Sparks Change

In many ways, the milestone of conserving more than 10,000 acres can be attributed to MacGregor Ranch, most of which is protected with a conservation easement held by the National Park Service. In the late 1970's, MacGregor Ranch began selling off parcels to pay off debt. In 1983, a coalition of leaders including Governor Lamm, other elected officials,

Congress, and environmental organizations including the Rocky Mountain Nature Association and the Colorado Mountain Club worked together to complete the 1,200-acre MacGregor Ranch Conservation Easement, the first privately owned and permanently conserved property in Estes Park.



The Hermit Park CE protects vital wetlands and critical wildlife habitat.

The MacGregor Ranch easement inspired Piet Hondius, President of the Colorado Mountain Club and longtime Estes Park resident, to form an organization that could protect land throughout the Estes Valley. In 1987, Piet joined forces with Mary Lamy, another local conservation advocate, and others, to form the Estes Valley Land Trust.

Big Easements and Big Bucks Follow in the 1990s

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the Estes Valley Land Trust closed on its first conservation easements, protecting land along the Big Thompson River, in the Tahosa Valley and north of town. The Eagle Rock Conservation Easement marked a major milestone for the organization. **“Piet suggested that the Eagle Rock Conservation Easement was a watershed moment for the land trust,”** said Jeffrey Boring, Executive Director of the Estes Valley Land Trust. **“To Piet, it meant that the Estes Valley Land Trust had arrived and was capable of big things.”** The Eagle Rock Conservation Easement is over 450 acres and involved negotiating with a major corporate entity, the American Honda Motor Company.

In the 1990s, the land trust began leveraging grants and other financial tools to complete major conservation projects. In 1992, Colorado's Constitution was amended to provide a state-supervised lottery and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) was formed to preserve open space. Meadowdale Ranch, one of the largest conservation easements in the land trust's portfolio, was conserved with help from GOCO. In 1999, the Colorado Legislature approved a state-income tax credit for qualified conservation easement donors. The land trust worked closely with partners to make new conservation easement transactions pencil-out for the donor and by 2000, the Estes Valley Land Trust had conserved more than 3,500 acres.

21st Century Brings National Recognition

The land trust has always been true to its roots, recognizing that the Estes Valley is a special place that should be conserved and local residents and landowners are most qualified to do this work. In the 2000s, the land trust industry began to evolve. The Estes Valley Land Trust was one of the first land trusts in the nation to receive accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance.

Today, there are more than 450 accredited land trusts across the US. National accreditation is a mark of distinction, proving that the Estes Valley Land Trust meets high standards for land conservation related to sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance and lasting stewardship. This award put the Estes Valley Land Trust on a national stage for the first time.

New conservation opportunities emerged, such as Hermit Park Open Space and Opal Ranch, two large, highly visible (and highly developable) properties. As the first decade of the 21st Century ended, the land trust was on the cusp of conserving nearly 10,000 acres of land.

10,000 Acres is Exceeded

In the last five years, the land trust has been able to work with new partners and leverage the Conservation Easement Tax Credit Program and other incentives to conserve large properties. A portion of the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park Center, private properties that abut USFS lands and Rocky Mountain National Park and most recently, the Highlands Camp and Retreat Center near Allenspark, have all been conserved by leveraging tax credits and support from conservation partners, like Keep It Colorado, Larimer and Boulder Counties and GOCO.

After more than 30 years, and 170 conservation easements, the Estes Valley Land Trust has conserved more than 10,000 acres. Each acre is important to protecting wildlife and the scenic views that make Estes Park special and hundreds of people have volunteered thousands of hours to achieve this conservation goal.

“Our members and the support the Estes Valley Land Trust has received over the years is another measure of success,” said Boring. **“Conserving a single acre isn’t possible without community support. And now we’ve conserved more than 10,000 acres.”**

INVESTING IN CONSERVATION PAYS OFF

Colorado has invested significantly in land conservation since the Conservation Easement Tax Credit Program was established. Conservation easements protect ecologically significant areas that serve the public and since easements are permanent, the public benefits accrue over time. These benefits, often referred to as ecosystem services, include clean air and water, carbon sequestration and storage, and agriculture and wildlife habitat preservation, to name a few.

A recent study conducted by Colorado State University titled “Investing in Colorado” measured the return on investment from protecting 2.3 million acres across Colorado, since the Conservation Easement Tax Credit Program was established in 2000.

The results show that the public benefits that derive from protecting these lands are worth between \$35-\$57 billion. In other words, for every \$1 invested in the conservation easement tax credit program since 2000, \$31-\$49 in ecosystem services is generated. Protecting wetland and forested ecosystems, like those found in the Estes Valley, provide the highest yield because they provide the most valuable public services such as preventing soil erosion, protecting water quality, removing air pollutants and storing carbon.



\$1 to preserve land results in at least \$31 in public benefits.

Photo by Charle Johnson

LOCAL YOUTH SPOTLIGHTED AT FILM FESTIVAL

The Estes Valley Land Trust, Estes Park School District and Bird & Jim co-sponsored the third annual Student Environmental Film Festival on April 25. The purpose of the festival is to give youth in the Estes Park community a stage to express themselves and their perspectives on a variety of issues impacting the environment.

Eighteen students produced 10 films that were included in the festival. Each student or team of students wrote, directed, starred-in and recorded the short films, generally five minutes or less in length. A total of \$8,000 in scholarships were awarded to students who created the top three scoring films, as judged by a panel of volunteers. The volunteers included Nick Mollé, a local filmmaker; Steve Johnson, retired school teacher; Rut Miller, Program Director with EVICS Family Resource Center; and Melissa Strong, owner of Bird & Jim.



Student filmmakers competed for \$8,000 in scholarships.

Photo by Visit Estes Park

“I was really impressed with the students this year, especially during the festival’s panel discussion,” said Steve Johnson. **“They were inspiring and articulate when speaking in front of the live audience. It makes me hopeful for the future to see kids that care so much about the environment.”** View the winning films and all festival entries on the Estes Valley Land Trust’s YouTube channel.

SUMMER HIKES (ALMOST) HERE!

The land trust is hosting two member hikes this summer and we hope you can join us. These hikes allow members to see our conserved properties. 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.

Highlands Camp and Retreat Center – June 26

The Highlands Camp and Retreat Center is the land trust’s newest conservation easement. This hike will focus on the ponderosa pine forest and beautiful Rock Creek. A steeper hike through the lodgepole pine forest to the boundary of the National Forest is also planned. Overall, this is a moderate hike and participants should plan to return to Estes Park around 2 PM.

Blue Star Conservation Easement – July 17

The Blue Star Conservation Easement is located off Hell Canyon Road between Estes Park and Pinewood Springs. The easement was donated to the land trust in 2005 and protects a small stream and habitat for black bear, moose and other species. This is a special opportunity for land trust members to see an area of the Estes Valley that is off the beaten path. Overall, this is a moderate hike and participants should plan to return to Estes Park around 2 PM.

LAND TRUST

SPRING EVENTS HIGHLIGHT BISON

Although reintroducing bison to the Estes Valley may not be feasible, the land trust recently provided two opportunities for our members to learn more about reintroduction efforts across Colorado. **“Bison are the largest land animal in North America and were nearly wiped-out in the 19th Century,”** said Boring. **“Our members expressed a lot of interest in learning more about this species and how it evolved to play a crucial role in the prairie ecosystem.”**

Bison are also important to Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities in the West. Bison provided nutrition, hides for clothing, lodging and blankets as well as bones for tools and other implements. Bison also remain a spiritual and cultural symbol and many Tribes advocate for reintroduction.

The first bison related event was a virtual breakfast hosted by the Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT), an organization that operates near Lamar, in southeastern Colorado. SPLT is one of more than 20 land trusts in Colorado, and like the Estes Valley Land Trust, it has a relatively small geographic service area. The breakfast focused on bison as a keystone species and how their behavior creates and sustains habitat for other plants and animals. The breakfast was also a great primer for a tour to Soapstone Prairie Natural Area in May.



Bison are vital to the prairie ecosystem and Tribal and Indigenous cultures.

Soapstone Natural Area and neighboring Red Mountain Open Space are home to the Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd. The bison of the Laramie Foothills Conservation Herd are descendants of the Yellowstone National Park herd. However, the Yellowstone herd also carries brucellosis, a devastating disease to cattle that has been eradicated elsewhere in the United States.

Land trust members met scientists with Colorado State University's Animal Reproduction and Biotechnology Laboratory and learned about assisted reproductive technologies that created disease-free embryos and offspring that preserve the Yellowstone herd genetics. Currently, both natural breeding and the use of assisted reproductive technologies are used in the herd. Thanks to the success of these efforts, nearly 100 bison have been rehomed to Tribal, federal, and private conservation herds.

The land trust is grateful to work with so many conservation organizations across Colorado and want to thank the Southern Plains Land Trust, Colorado State University and the Larimer County Natural Resources Department for hosting these member events.



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INTERESTED IN MAKING A PLANNED GIFT?

Bequests and other planned gifts to the land trust can create rare conservation opportunities and help ensure the land trust continues to meet national standards. 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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