

Estes Valley Land Trust

Fall 2024 Newsletter



Estes Valley Land Trust

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Recognizing our Donors



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



Jeffrey Boring (left), Executive Director, and Chris Berry (right), Highlands Camp monitor, celebrate a successful monitoring season.

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Front Cover: Rock Creek runs through the Highlands Camp and Retreat Center property. Photo by Charlie Johnson.

MONITORING SEASON ATTRACTS NEW VOLUNTEERS

Thanks to our recent success in conserving the Highlands Camp and Retreat Center, our volunteers monitored more than 10,000 acres of land in 2024. This is the largest number of acres the land trust has monitored in a single year. Good news, we also had a larger number of volunteers to tackle this big project!

In 2024, 126 volunteers participated in our conservation easement monitoring program, our highest number to date. New volunteers even drove from Fort Collins and Berthoud to monitor, suggesting that our mission and conservation success is gaining regional interest. Most easement monitoring in Colorado is completed by staff, satellites, or even drones, but conservation easements in the Estes Valley have been monitored by volunteers for nearly 40 years.

“Our volunteers attend a training program and we always partner new monitors with a veteran monitor for safety and to ensure quality control,” said Alicia Rochambeau, Community Engagement Coordinator. **“Our community is service-oriented and monitoring conservation easements is something they look forward to every summer.”**

Final review of the monitoring reports is underway and at press time, there were no major conservation easement violations observed in 2024. Thank you volunteers for your dedication to conservation!

RESTORATION UNDERWAY AT HIGHLANDS CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER

The Estes Valley Land Trust closed on the nearly 300-acre Highlands Camp and Retreat Center conservation easement earlier this year, propelling the land trust across a major threshold: more than 10,000 acres are conserved by the land trust forever! Conserving land serves the public in many ways. Restoring conserved land enhances those public benefits by improving biodiversity, reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfire, and providing a refuge for native plants and animals.

Efforts to restore stream and forest health are already underway at the Highlands Camp and Retreat Center. **“The Highlands leadership team is moving quickly and methodically to enhance the conservation values that our easement protects,”** said Jeffrey Boring, Estes Valley Land Trust Executive Director. **“They see the big and long-term picture and have developed regional and local partnerships to make this needed restoration possible.”**

Forest Health

Ponderosa pine and mixed conifer are the predominant forest types at Highlands, which are fire-adapted plant communities. Based on fire scars and other data, these types of forests generally burned every 10-50 years, depending on elevation, slope and other factors. The Longmont and Boulder Valley Conservation Districts prepared a Forest Management Plan and are overseeing all the forest restoration work. **“More than a century of fire suppression in the West has allowed fuels to accumulate in our forests, and our plan was to create a fuel break that mimicked a natural disturbance and encouraged growth and regeneration of more fire-resistant and adapted species like ponderosa pine and quaking aspen,”** said Rob Walker, District Director of the Longmont and Boulder Valley Conservation Districts.

Historical forest structure was generally more open which resulted in low-intensity ground fires. Today's fires can be catastrophic, destroying forests and threatening public safety and infrastructure. Implementing the Forest Management Plan by creating forest gaps will help prevent mega-fires and better protect the environment.



Fire-suppressed forests can be dense and create catastrophic fire conditions.



Managed forests create gaps, improve biodiversity and help prevent catastrophic fire. Graphics by The Nature Conservancy.

Firewood for the Community

Slash and logs are the byproducts of forest restoration and can be costly to dispose of. At Highlands, the understory was reseeded with native seed and slash was mulched and spread across the forest floor. Logs were cut to firewood length and offered to local residents.

“Many of our neighbors are year-round residents and heat their homes the old-fashioned way, with a fireplace or stove,” said Mike Doyle, Moderator of the Highlands Administration Commission.

“We’re happy to provide firewood free of charge and help our neighbors stay warm.” Serving the local community by providing firewood was not one of the original goals outlined in the Forest Management Plan, but it has turned out to be a winning proposition. Dozens of cords of wood have been collected by local residents and are curing for future winters.



Year one of the Forest Management Plan with forest gaps, healthy ponderosa pine trees and a reseeded understory. Photo by Charlie Johnson.

Stream Health

Like fire, beaver are a native agent of change and improve stream health by creating wet meadows, riparian areas and refugia for fish and other animals. Satellite imagery shows that Rock Creek, which flows through the Highlands property, was home to a colony of beavers as recently as 1988. Field work conducted earlier this year confirmed their historical presence, yet there is no explanation for why they have not inhabited the property in more than 30 years. In 2024, two beaver were reintroduced to Rock Creek at the Highlands Camp and Retreat Center. **“Based upon our research, the Highlands Camp reach of Rock Creek provides excellent beaver habitat and they appear to be settling into their new home,”** said Preston Brown, Watershed Program Specialist with the Boulder Watershed



Collective. **“Rock Creek could be a pilot project for reintroducing beaver elsewhere, such as in the Tahosa Valley or on other properties that are conserved by the Estes Valley Land Trust.”**

“It’s fantastic when one conservation project can piggy-back on another,” said Boring. **“The leadership team at the Highlands Camp and Retreat Center have a great vision for this property, one that includes healthy wildlife habitat. I’m thrilled that the Estes Valley Land Trust can support critical restoration projects like this.”**

Preston Brown with the Boulder Watershed Collective checks for beaver activity at the Highlands Camp and Retreat Center, the land trust’s newest eased property.

Photo by Charlie Johnson.

LAND TRUST RECEIVES GRANTS TOTALING \$107,000

The pace of land conservation is increasing across Colorado and the Estes Valley Land Trust secured two grants to help fund a new conservation easement transaction. **“The Larimer County Natural Resources Department has worked with the Estes Valley Land Trust for more than 30 years to conserve land,”** said Meegan Flenniken, Land Conservation, Planning & Resource Division Manager. **“We’re really excited to help fund this key priority conservation easement.”**

Larimer County will contribute up to \$32,500 from Help Preserve Open Space sales tax funds and Keep it Colorado, a Colorado non-profit corporation, will contribute up to \$74,550 to cover the transaction costs of a new conservation easement. Donating conservation easements can be expensive due to the professional services that are required to qualify for a state conservation easement tax credit. These services include completing an appraisal, property survey, minerals assessment and baseline report. The Estes Valley Land Trust is state-certified and nationally-accredited and must follow industry standards and practices when completing a new conservation easement transaction.

“It can be very expensive to donate a conservation easement,” said Boring. **“It’s also extraordinarily valuable to conserve land forever. I’m grateful to Larimer County and Keep it Colorado for making this new transaction possible.”**



Grants will help protect steep slopes and critical habitat near Drake. Photo by Charlie Johnson.

New Conservation Easement Area Identified

The two grants are dedicated to conserving land near the North Fork of the Big Thompson River. This area has tremendous conservation value. The property is composed of lodgepole pine, ponderosa pine, foothill and mountain grasslands, mixed conifer and riparian woodlands and shrublands. These native plant communities are highly resilient to a drying and warming climate and form a connected landscape that sustains biodiversity.

The property also abuts nearly four miles of roadless United States Forest Service lands and serves as a buffer to thousands of acres of public land. Based upon available data, species that inhabit this area should be able to disperse, migrate and adapt to a changing climate, as long as their habitat is conserved. Additionally, no or very low land disturbance has occurred on these properties, suggesting the plant community is intact and highly functioning.



Fall colors reach their peak on properties identified for conservation.

Photo by Charlie Johnson.

Changes in Tax Credit Program Help

Colorado has the most generous conservation easement tax credit program in the country. And rightfully so, Coloradans value the scenic beauty, wildlife viewing and outdoor recreation opportunities that abound here. There were more than 50 tax credit bills introduced during the 2024 legislative session and Colorado's conservation easement tax credit program was threatened. However, not only was the program protected, it was improved and these changes enable the Estes Valley Land Trust to preserve additional land, such as the property near the North Fork of the Big Thompson River.

The biggest improvement to the program was the increase in the annual tax credit cap. The cap is now \$50 million a year, which enables more landowners to donate a conservation easement and use the tax credit immediately, instead of



having to join a waitlist to receive a tax credit. Many land trusts are conserving more land across the state and an increase in the cap was needed to maintain the pace of conservation.

Land conservation in Colorado is “white-hot”, thanks to the efforts of so many conservation partners. Funding is available to complete these conservation transactions and the Estes Valley Land Trust is discussing easements with a number of landowners across Boulder and Larimer counties. Stay tuned and we look forward to sharing more about this new conservation project soon.

The new conservation easement will preserve healthy shrublands, grasslands and mixed conifer forests. Photo by Charlie Johnson.

LEARNING FROM TRIBAL PARTNERS

The Estes Valley Land Trust hosted a summer breakfast with guest speakers Fred Mosqueda of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma and Dr. Nicki Gonzales, a Professor of History and Vice Provost at Regis University. Mr. Mosqueda and Dr. Gonzales spoke about their work to rename Mount Evans, a Colorado 14er. Dr. Gonzales is a member of Colorado's Geographic Naming Advisory Board, which recommended changing the offensive names of many landmarks across the state.

Mr. Mosqueda, on behalf of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, and the Wilderness Society submitted a petition to rename Mount Evans to Mount Blue Sky. Mount Evans was named after John Evans, the former territorial governor of Colorado who authorized the indiscriminate murder of American Indians and was responsible for one of the worst atrocities in American history, the Sand Creek Massacre.

The Blue Sky name holds significance with both the Arapaho and Cheyenne Tribes. The Arapaho were known as the Blue Sky People and the Cheyenne have an annual ceremony of renewal of life called Blue Sky. On September 15, 2023, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names officially renamed Mount Evans to Mount Blue Sky.

The Estes Valley Land Trust works closely with tribal and federal partners, and our public lands are an indispensable part of the conserved lands we all share. Thank you Fred and Nicki for reminding us that the names we attribute to our public lands should dignify the place and people that came before us.



Nicki Gonzales (center) and her family (left) and Fred Mosqueda and his wife (right) spoke about the origin of the Mount Blue Sky name.

FOREVER ESTES CIRCLE GIFTS RECEIVED



Stacey Harding (front) and Gail Albers (second) practice perfect bow form at a Forever Estes Circle picnic.

The Forever Estes Circle is the Estes Valley Land Trust's planned giving society which has recently grown to more than 50 members. Thank you to our new members Debby Hughes, Bill Sweet, Gary Miller and Jonathan and Andrea Hauger for notifying the land trust of your planned gift.

In 2024, the land trust received three planned gifts that totaled more than \$350,000. One of the gifts was restricted to our Stewardship and Legal Defense Fund, to help defend every acre conserved. Another gift was restricted to our Perpetuity Fund, an endowment that helps fund operations. A final gift was unrestricted, allowing the Board of Directors to be opportunistic and restrict or use the funds in a manner that is most impactful to our mission. All three gifts were extremely generous, support the work of the Estes Valley Land Trust and create a legacy of giving beyond each donor's lifetime.

If you would like to learn more about the Forever Estes Circle or have already made a planned gift to the Estes Valley Land Trust and would like to be recognized, please contact Jeffrey Boring.

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!

Your support enables us to conserve more land, like the forests and meadows at our newest conservation easement.

Photo by Charlie Johnson.

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"Estes Park is special because of the views and natural beauty. EVLT's work is vital to prevent overdevelopment and protect Estes Park lands forever. We enjoy the programs and comradery with fellow members and are delighted to be a part of this organization."

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"We have supported the Land Trust for over 30 years now, and we have been in the area since the 1950s. With time it has become obvious that any parcel in the entire area that can be developed WILL be developed. The portions that the Land Trust has saved become more and more valuable with each year and the land available to protect continues to shrink."

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"Andrea and I have chosen to support EVLT because the staff and volunteers are contributing to an invaluable connection to the community, Nature. The conservation and appreciation for nature brings our community and spirits together for a common cause that is in agreement with the earth and our senses. We feel fortunate to live here in the Estes Park community that prioritizes the land and animals that teach us what is important."

- Jonathan and Andrea Hauger

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"I am a fourth-generation land steward on a slice of shared family property. Grandmothers, summers with second cousins, and big views have inspired me to take some responsibility for preserving the good fortune in this valley. I am honored to support the Estes Valley Land Trust's mission through planned giving."

- Karen McPherson on behalf of the Sweet/McPherson family

**These pages include
all gifts received from
11/1/2023 - 10/31/2024**

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Abbie Todd Singer in memory of Marvin Gee
John Vernon in memory of Ann Vernon
Carol Wagner in memory of Dr. Grant Hulse Wagner
Joann Welton in honor of Art and Marsha French
Nettie Wood in honor of Donna Shavlik

Join us in remembering the members who passed away this year:

Sidney Brown	Alta Wachs
Peggy Burch	Carolyn Warner
Gordon MacAlpine	Guy Zimmerman
Jack Overly	

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Thank you to our FEC members for pledging to make a lasting impact through legacy gifts.

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Please contact us if you have made a planned gift to the Estes Valley Land Trust and are not listed here.



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UNLOCK \$35,000 IN MATCHING FUNDS!

Two of the Land Trust's generous donors pooled matching funds totaling \$35,000 for Colorado Gives Day, the largest match challenge we've ever had! With your help, we can unlock the full \$35,000 and raise a total of \$70,000 to support the Land Trust! Any gift made for Colorado Gives Day from November 1st through December 10th will count towards this match challenge. Each donation will be boosted by an additional donation from the Colorado Gives Foundation.

To learn more and to donate, search for Estes Valley Land Trust on **ColoradoGivesDay.org**