



SOUTHERN PLAINS LAND TRUST'S
**PROGRESS FOR
THE PRAIRIE**



Southern Plains Land Trust
GAINING GROUND FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE

The Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT) creates and protects a network of shortgrass prairie preserves, which ensure a future for all native animals and plants.


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Habitat is vanishing, leaving wildlife with no place to go.
Here's our solution:
Buy the Land.

So far, we've protected over 25,000 acres in our preserve network.
Piece by piece, we are restoring the American Serengeti.



Red-tailed hawk. Photo Credit: Norm Lewis



Loggerhead Shrike

Expanding SPLT's wildlife refuges is our top priority, to provide safe havens for the diverse wildlife and plants that make the shortgrass prairie such a fascinating place.

CREATING WILDLIFE REFUGES

In 2019, SPLT embarked on our most ambitious project yet: we placed a 25,000-acre property under contract. This land is adjacent to the 18,000-acre Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve, along its northern border. At more than \$11 million, it is too pricey for SPLT to purchase all at once, but we worked out a deal allowing us to acquire it in three phases over the course of the next 5 years. The first purchase includes 6,600 acres and is set for February 2020. The cost is \$3 million. That's where you come in: we're working to raise the funds right now for this purchase.

The new property fits perfectly into the existing Heartland Ranch Preserve. It adds 7 miles of streams, several prairie dog colonies, cottonwood groves,

gorgeous rock outcroppings, perennial springs, and sand sagebrush. The 2020 purchase will expand Heartland Ranch to 25,000 acres; after all three phases, Heartland Ranch would be 43,000 acres – nearly 70 square miles.

Some of the most exciting aspects of this expansion are advancing conservation of key wildlife species, such as the endangered black-footed ferret, the American bison (the US National Mammal), and prairie elk. The new property can provide habitat for each of these species. It will also increase Heartland's stream miles to more than 31, which we'll work to restore to their former health by allowing them to heal, planting streamside trees, and addressing erosion.

RESTORING THE PRAIRIE

One of the best ways to help the prairie heal itself is to take down hazardous fences. This includes barbed wire and woven wire fences as well as old corrals. SPLT Preserve Manager Jay Tutchton works on this every chance he gets. The result is that our fence density is decreasing, especially within the canyons of Heartland Ranch. With fewer fences and less disturbance, we can reduce weedy plants, which tend to thrive along fences and in corrals. Removing fences is also good news for wildlife, especially pronghorn, for whom these structures can be a daily, and sometimes life-threatening, hazard. Let's take as much fence away so that pronghorn can freely speed through the grasslands.

In the streamside areas, we're seeing changes, too. Under our protection, native trees are starting to flourish. In two cottonwood groves on Heartland East, which SPLT acquired in February 2018, dozens of pretty little cottonwood saplings have sprouted up simply because they are no longer grazed down.

Similarly, throughout our Raven's Nest, Heartland Ranch, and Fresh Tracks preserves, many previously bare stream banks are now covered with thick native grasses and wildflowers, which help to slow down the floodwaters in this flash flood prone stream system.

Our streambank restoration partnership with Defenders of Wildlife continues, with a focus on rock structures to reverse erosion. Ducks Unlimited developed a plan to expand this work in key places on SPLT's Raven's Nest and Heartland Ranch preserves.

We've also been steadily removing salt cedar (tamarisk) in our stream and wetland areas. This non-native plant consumes an enormous amount of water and secretes salt. The result is that almost nothing else can grow. Its days on SPLT preserves are numbered.



We're grateful to Great Outdoors Colorado for funding these habitat restoration efforts.





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Ashleigh Wheeler with a cottonwood sapling.

PROTECTING NATIVE ANIMALS & PLANTS

At the heart of SPLT's work is the wildlife that brings the shortgrass prairie to life. All native animals and plants are cherished on our preserves. This is particularly important for black-tailed prairie dogs, given their 98% decline in population from historic numbers, and the continued persecution of this imperiled, keystone species across the Great Plains. No lethal control of prairie dogs – or any other native wildlife – is allowed on our preserves. We are grateful to Defenders of Wildlife and the World Wildlife Fund for their assistance in addressing the threat from sylvatic plague to prairie dog colonies on SPLT properties. This disease is not naturally found in North America, and prairie dogs have virtually no immunity to it.

With the prospect of expanding Heartland Ranch to 43,000 acres, SPLT aims to reintroduce the black-footed ferret. This highly endangered mammal depends on prairie dogs for prey and burrows. We're excited about the potential to bring this small but feisty carnivore back to the prairie. Other prairie dog associates, such as the burrowing owl, swift fox, and ferruginous hawk, are doing well on SPLT's preserves due to our highly protective policies.



Pepper the bison calf

In December 2018, we accepted 3 bison from the Denver Zoo onto Heartland Ranch: two old females and a calf. All have been accepted into our resident bison herd, for a total of 87 bison. The calf – now over a year old – is a charming and peppy girl that we named Pepper. All of the bison are right at home on our property, dust-bathing to get rid of summer flies and practically dancing with delight when there's a snowstorm.

In August 2019, SPLT adopted 9 mustangs that have endured a gauntlet of challenges. Years ago, they were seized from US Bureau of Land Management land in multiple states. In June 2019, they were rescued from starvation and neglect in Texas by a local sheriff and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). On SPLT lands these noble creatures now have a chance at a better life.

With support from HSUS, the mustangs have settled into life at Heartland Ranch. While distinct from the horse species that evolved in North America, some contend that wild horses deserve a place on the range. We're treading carefully, though: the mustangs are non-breeding, share a pasture with small herds of rescued longhorn cattle and donkeys, and all three herds live in a pasture specifically designed to avoid fragile riparian areas.



Photo credit:Sandy Nervig

SPREADING THE PRAIRIE WORD

We love to introduce people to the wonderful world of the shortgrass prairie. Rewilding Earth ran a podcast and an extended online article by Executive Director Nicole Rosmarino about SPLT's work on "Bringing Back the American Serengeti" and also included the piece as the first chapter in the book, *Rewilding Earth Unplugged* (2018).

SPLT presented talks or informational tables at the Texas Land Conservation Conference, America's Grassland Conference in North Dakota, Land Trust Alliance Rally in North Carolina, Colorado Native Plant Society meeting, and Pedal the Plains in southeastern Colorado. In February 2019, we helped to expand the Northern Plains Conservation Network into the Great Plains Conservation Network. We actively participate in the network, with a seat on the steering committee.

A highlight of 2019 was a September visit by Colorado Governor Jared Polis, First Gentleman Marlon Reis, and their children to Heartland Ranch. The First Family was delighted to meet the Heartland bison herd and the mustangs. First Gentleman Marlon Reis will be the keynote speaker at our 8th Annual Celebration of the Prairie in late October at History Colorado.

This summer, our team of volunteers introduced thousands of attendees at VegFest Colorado to SPLT's work. At our VegFest bake sale in July 2019, we turned sugar and flour into more than 10 acres of permanently protected prairie.

Please help spread the word about SPLT's urgently needed efforts to protect prairie wildlife by buying the land under their feet.

SPLT staff with Colorado's First Family at the Heartland yurt, holding naturally shed antlers or horns from animals who passed away of natural causes.





BUILDING STRENGTH

We have strict marching orders at SPLT: to turn donor dollars directly into land. Our audited financials for 2018 show that we have net assets of \$6.1 million, almost all of which is land.

SPLT's income of \$2.1 million in 2018 came from a variety of sources, including contributions, grants, and carbon offsets. Our financial success has been due to key support from The Summerlee Foundation, Great Outdoors Colorado, and to our network of nearly 300 individual donors.

SPLT also successfully pursues entrepreneurial sources of income, as less than 3% of the philanthropic dollars in the US go to animal and environmental causes. The flip side of fundraising is keeping expenses low, which we do, with a staff of just 3 and annual expenses under \$350,000.

As SPLT strives toward the expansion of Heartland Ranch in 2020, a key approach will be our sale of carbon offsets. SPLT continues to be on the leading edge of this work to simultaneously protect the planet's climate and fund land acquisition.



THE PEOPLE BEHIND SPLT

STAFF

Nicole Rosmarino
Executive Director

Jay Tuthton
Preserve Manager

Ashleigh Wheeler
Programs Manager

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SPLT FINANCIALS 2018

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
12/31/2018



Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$306,232
Receivables	\$13,372
Prepayments & Deposits	\$3,843
Investments	\$29,618
Fixed Assets, Net of Depreciation	\$7,767,586
Total Assets	\$8,120,651

Liabilities	\$1,981,727
Net Assets	
Unrestricted	\$6,043,263
Temporarily Restricted	\$95,661
Total Net Assets	\$6,138,942
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$8,120,651

AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES & CHANGES IN
NET ASSETS
12/31/2018

SUPPORT AND REVENUE	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL
Contributions & Grants	\$586,263	\$111,000	\$697,263
Special Events	\$26,067		\$26,067
Investment Income	-\$3,303		-\$3,303
Other Income	\$1,397,472		\$1,397,472
Net Assets Released From Restrictions	\$307,407	\$(307,407)	
Total Support & Revenue	\$2,313,906	\$(196,407)	\$2,117,499
Operating Expenses			
Land Program	\$215,238		\$215,238
Animal Management	\$56,183		\$56,183
Outreach Program & Other Conservation Projects	\$48,667		\$48,667
Total Program Expenses	\$320,088		\$320,088
Supporting Expenses			
General Administrative	\$19,523		\$19,523
Fundraising	\$8,801		\$8,801
Total Supporting Expenses	\$28,324		\$28,324
Total Expenses	\$348,412		\$348,412
Changes in Net Assets	\$1,965,494	\$(196,407)	\$1,769,087
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$4,077,769	\$292,068	\$4,369,837
Net Assets at End of Year	\$6,043,263	\$95,661	\$6,138,924



GAINING GROUND FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE



Photo Credit: Judy Greenfield

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