



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

Pronghorn  
Photo Credit: Rich Reading



*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.

  
PO Box 1016  
Lamar, CO 81052

  
splt@southernplains.org

  
720-841-1757

  
Tax ID #84-1470479

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

So far, we've protected over 32,000 acres in our preserve network.  
Piece by piece, we are restoring the American Serengeti.



Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve  
Photo Credit: Dale Ball



Burrowing Owl  
Photo Credit: Norm Lewis

Expanding SPLT's wildlife refuges is our top priority, to provide safe havens for the diverse wildlife and plants that make the shortgrass prairie an ecologically important and exciting place.

## CREATING WILDLIFE REFUGES

Our most urgent priority is expanding our nature preserves to provide refuge for prairie wildlife. Grasslands are among the most endangered ecosystems on the planet, and we have already lost about 50% of native shortgrass prairie on the Great Plains. Bison, pronghorn, prairie dogs, swift foxes, and countless more species need protected areas where they can be wild and raise future generations. The southern plains region holds great promise. There are still extensive native prairies and diverse habitats that can be saved.

With your support, our Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve grew to 25,000 acres in 2020! We have a visionary plan in front of us to expand this property to 43,000 acres by 2024. Southern Plains Land Trust already has the next two adjacent land purchases under contract. Our goal is to raise \$5.2 million over the next four years to secure these additional

properties and provide for their restoration. With your help, we will add 8,720 acres in April 2022 and 9,167 acres in 2024. This will create a wildlife refuge that covers 67 square miles of native prairie. Imagine standing on the edge of the mesa near the headquarters of Heartland Ranch. The valley stretches out before you as far as the eye can see. This is a special place where wildlife is protected and given the freedom to live undisturbed from destructive human activities.

In coming years, Heartland Ranch will host a breeding conservation herd of bison that are descendants from purebred lineages. The endangered black-footed ferret can be reintroduced in coming years on thriving prairie dog communities. Elk, originally a prairie species, will have a safe haven to expand their range. Ferruginous hawks, badgers, bobcats, pronghorn, and burrowing owls - all animals that are wary of human presence - will have resilient, safe habitats.



# RESTORING THE PRAIRIE

As stewards of the land, our goal is to help restore the prairie and native plant communities. When streambanks are degraded from past land uses, wildlife habitat is lost. Water, a valuable commodity of the plains, rushes away in flash floods. Replanting stream sides with trees and shrubs creates nesting sites for birds and cover for visitors, such as deer and coyotes. Cottonwood groves help slow the water as it moves downstream, giving it time to soak into the prairie and encouraging shrubs and wildflowers to fill in.

This spring, staff planted 440 cottonwood saplings! These saplings are vulnerable for the first couple years until their roots are firmly established. We created temporary cages around them for protection. We were thrilled to find previously planted cottonwoods thriving this year. Areas such as Heartland Ranch's West Spring are now lush with vegetation. We are grateful to our partner, Defenders

of Wildlife, for continuing to support our streamside restoration project.

Another stewardship goal is to ensure that wildlife can move freely across the landscape. Barbed wire, old fences, and corrals are dangerous for wildlife and can be deadly for pronghorn. To date, we have removed 2.5 miles on Raven's Nest and 8.5 miles on Heartland, for a total of 11 miles of fence.

Pronghorn, elk, mule deer, and other wildlife need wide open spaces, and their territories extend beyond our nature preserve boundaries. Southern Plains Land Trust is partnering with neighboring ranches to remove, replace, or modify 50 miles of fencing to improve wildlife habitat while still managing livestock. We were awarded a RESTORE Colorado grant that will help fund this important collaboration. RESTORE Colorado is a partnership between Great Outdoors Colorado, the

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Gates Family Foundation, Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

The pandemic has prevented us from welcoming volunteers to the nature preserves this year. We greatly miss the energy and hard work of our volunteers. During the COVID-19 outbreak, our Executive Director and Preserve Manager have been safely isolated in their residence adjacent Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve. They stepped up to the challenge and put in extra sweat equity to complete restoration projects.

Executive Director Nicole Rosmarino with a cottonwood sapling in Heartland Ranch's West Spring



**We remain grateful to Great Outdoors Colorado for funding these habitat restoration efforts.**



# PROTECTING NATIVE ANIMALS & PLANTS

Bison and prairie dogs are engineers of the prairie and essential to healthy grassland ecosystems. We gained eight new bison in our sanctuary herd this year, growing our herd to a total of 90. These new bison include six females that are “retiring” from a captive breeding program at the Colorado State University College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Services and two young bulls. One of the youngsters had a bit of a feisty attitude when he first arrived (or maybe he was just overwhelmed with his new home!), but he quickly got settled in.

The bison are actively helping to restore the land and create wildlife habitat for other species. Their grazing behaviors, which are very different from cattle, stimulate a mosaic of native plant communities. As they move over the landscape, their heavy hooves help aerate the soil. When they drop and roll, throwing up dust in all directions, bison create shallow depressions that retain rainwater. Birds and insects flock to these wallows.

We continue to monitor the health of our prairie dog colonies and actively work to prevent plague, which can wipe out entire



Prairie Verbena & Western Wallflower

prairie dog towns in just days. Prairie dogs are a keystone species and part of a healthy, resilient grassland ecosystem. Burrowing owls and swift foxes live in prairie dog burrows. Many species, such as ferruginous hawks and badgers, feed on prairie dogs. Coyotes, bison, pronghorn, and scores of other animals benefit from the unique habitat that prairie dogs create. Healthy, thriving prairie dog towns are a prerequisite to the reintroduction of black-footed ferrets.



Mustang Herd

Photo Credit: Rich Reading

Update: The nine mustangs that arrived in 2019 suffering from starvation and neglect are now healthy and living their best life on Heartland Ranch. They seem to relish being “wild” on the prairie again and have regained their trust of humans, or at least they know that we usually have treats when we check on them.



Prairie Dogs

Photo Credit: Sandy Nervig

# SPREADING THE PRAIRIE WORD

It goes without saying that the pandemic curtailed our planned outreach efforts this year. Keeping everyone in our community safe and healthy has been the priority. While we have not been able to meet people in person at festivals and public events, we have increased our efforts to connect with current and potential supporters through social media. We have also missed working side by side with volunteers in the field. This has put an added strain on staff, who have done an amazing job keeping our land restoration projects on track.

This year, we learned to adapt and find new ways to connect. Originally, our “Wine & Wildlife on the Prairie” event was to be hosted at the Governor’s Mansion in Denver. Instead, we launched our first-ever virtual event and were overwhelmed with the positive feedback. We were welcomed into people’s homes from Maryland to Hawaii, which was an unexpected surprise for us. We hope you will join us at our upcoming “Celebration of the Prairie” virtual event on Saturday, December 5th.

Southern Plains Land Trust continues to actively participate in partnerships that are important to prairie and wildlife conservation. Collaborations include Keep It Colorado, the Great Plains Conservation Network, and Prairie Dog Coalition. Governor Jared Polis appointed Jay Tuthton, our Preserve Manager, to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission this year. We know that Jay will be a strong voice for all of Colorado’s wildlife.

Looking to the future, exciting plans are already in motion to complete renovations on the Penrose School at Raven’s Nest Nature Preserve. The Penrose School is an historic one-room schoolhouse that had been abandoned and was deteriorating badly when we acquired Raven’s Nest. In early 2020, we replaced the roof, windows, doors, and siding on this charming building in a way that honors its past. This project was paid for in part by a History Colorado – State Historical Fund grant. In August 2020, History Colorado awarded us a grant to complete the restoration. This final stage of work will include masonry on the beautiful sandstone walls and a complete overhaul of the interior. The Penrose School will become a welcoming space for visiting students and adults. The Bent County Historical Society has been a key partner in this project.

## THE PENROSE SCHOOL



# SPLT WINS A STARBURST AWARD

We are honored to have been chosen as a 2020 recipient of the Starburst Award by the Colorado Lottery. The award recognized projects that positively impact the community and create a lasting legacy for future generations. Here is what the Lottery had to say:

*“...[The projects to expand Heartland] provide a testament to the hard work the Southern Plains Land Trust is doing to protect such a pristine piece of Colorado. The numerous benefits to native wildlife, the local economy, and environmental education are felt throughout the state.”*



Mentzelia Blooms

## BUILDING STRENGTH

**The Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT) continues to build a strong financial foundation to propel the expansion of our network of prairie preserves. Our 2019 audited financials tally over \$9 million in assets, nearly all of which is our land base.**

SPLT's income of over \$1.6 million in 2019 came from individual contributions, grants, and entrepreneurial revenue, such as the sale of carbon offsets. Our partnership with NativeEnergy helped to make possible the expansion of Heartland Ranch to 25,000 acres in February 2020, through a 20-year forward sale of carbon credits. SPLT has also worked closely with Natural

Capital Partners over the past several years to sell our carbon credits to companies such as Microsoft and Workday in order to bolster our ability to protect prairie land and wildlife.

In 2020, we created a new staff position, the Development & Communications Director, and hired Susan Crick for this post. Susan comes to us with over 20 years of experience in environmental non-profits and a passion for the shortgrass prairie. She has jumped in with both feet. In September 2020, Great Outdoors Colorado

provided us funding to create another new position, Restoration Manager, to advance our work to heal prairie streams, remove fences, and reintroduce native wildlife.

We continue to trim costs wherever we can so that we can transform our donors' dollars into permanently protected land. Our total expenses in 2019 were less than \$425,000. The bulk of the cash on hand at the end of 2019 was spent on our expansion of Heartland Ranch in February 2020.

# THE PEOPLE BEHIND SPLT

## STAFF

**Nicole Rosmarino**  
*Executive Director*

**Jay Tuthton**  
*Preserve Manager*

**Susan Crick**  
*Development & Communications Director*

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Tracy Kessner**  
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**Taylor Jones**  
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**Ramona Gaylord**

**Misty Morehead**

**Shannon Ryon**

## TREASURER

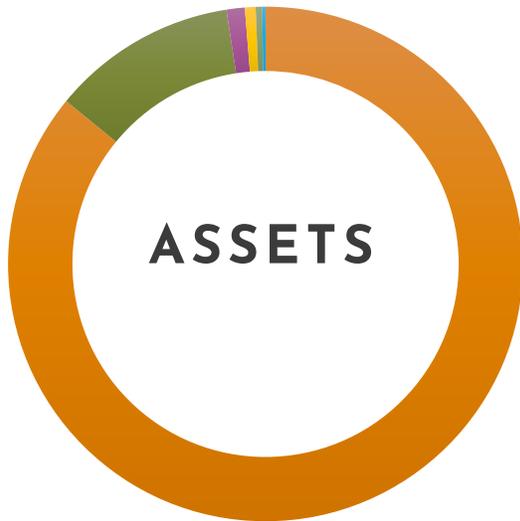
**Donna Driscoll**



Bison  
Photo Credit: Sean Boggs for EDF

# SPLT FINANCIALS 2019

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION  
12/31/2019



<b>Assets</b>	
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$1,054,777
Promises to Give	\$18,199
Receivables	\$60,792
Prepayments & Deposits	\$103,843
Investments	\$37,202
Fixed Assets, Net of Depreciation	\$7,771,937
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$9,046,750</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>	<b>\$1,683,371</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	
Unrestricted	\$6,958,087
Board-designated Restricted	\$160,800
Donor-restricted	\$244,492
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>\$7,363,379</b>
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>\$9,046,750</b>

AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES & CHANGES IN  
NET ASSETS  
12/31/2019

<b>SUPPORT AND REVENUE</b>	<b>UNRESTRICTED</b>	<b>TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Contributions & Grants	\$179,864	\$272,870	\$452,734
Special Events (net)	\$36,585		\$36,585
Investment Income	\$18,404		\$18,404
Loss on Sale of Property & Equipment	-\$42,457		-\$42,457
Carbon & Tax Credit Sales	\$1,155,347		\$1,155,347
Other Income	\$27,920		\$27,920
Net Assets Released From Restrictions	\$124,039	\$ (124,039)	
<b>Total Support &amp; Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,499,702</b>	<b>\$148,831</b>	<b>\$1,648,533</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>			
Land Program	\$236,523		\$236,523
Animal Management	\$86,279		\$86,279
Outreach Program & Other Conservation Projects	\$64,824		\$64,824
<b>Total Program Expenses</b>	<b>\$387,626</b>		<b>\$387,626</b>
<b>Supporting Expenses</b>			
General Administrative	\$27,961		\$27,961
Fundraising	\$8,491		\$8,491
<b>Total Supporting Expenses</b>	<b>\$36,452</b>		<b>\$36,452</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$424,078</b>		<b>\$424,078</b>
Changes in Net Assets	\$1,075,624	\$148,831	\$1,224,455
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$6,043,263	\$95,661	\$6,138,924
Net Assets at End of Year	\$7,118,887	\$244,492	\$7,363,379

# WHAT THE PRAIRIE MEANS TO US



NICOLE ROSMARINO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When I walk on a Southern Plains Land Trust preserve, my heart races with both fulfillment and a sense of work yet to be done. Here's the fulfillment part: the protection for wildlife these refuges provide is not theoretical or abstract - it is as tangible as the buffalograss springing under my feet or the tarantula hawk wasp buzzing by my ear. As I reach a prairie dog town, each bark and cry reminds me that these animals have language and society and deserve our respect. When a pronghorn rushes past, I think of their long evolutionary path that shaped them to be the legendary runners that they are. Coyote song in the distance signals that the spirit of the wild prairie is still intact.

I am at once pleased, knowing that these animals I'm sensing are safe, but also unsettled, as that security vanishes once they leave our preserves. That's where the work yet to be done enters in: I want us to deliver ever more land to them. It's the least we can do, as Alice Walker put it, to pay our rent for living on the planet.

Nicole Photo Credit: Sean Boggs for EDF



TRACY KESSNER, PRESIDENT,  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Life hurtles along at breakneck speed in the city, where I often feel like I'm not doing enough to make the world a better place. Out on the southern plains, surrounded by miles and miles of unbroken grasslands and immersed in the natural world, I reset. The scale of the preserves reminds me that while I'm just a small part of a larger whole, through the Southern Plains Land Trust I can actively help make one small part of the world a better place.

I'd never spent any time on the prairie prior to my first work party in 2012, even though I'd lived in Colorado for 25 years by that point. A simple invitation to escape the city and remove barbed wire fence is what brought me to the Southern Plains Land Trust. Out on the prairie, I learned about the flora and fauna that the land trust protects, marveled at the expanse of the Milky Way, and after seeing my first herd of pronghorn racing toward the horizon, learned why it was so important to create wildlife-friendly fences. After those three days, having experienced the prairie firsthand, I wanted to help protect it. I'm still honored to be part of Southern Plains Land Trust, working to preserve its quiet beauty for future generations.



**JAY TUTCHTON, PRESERVE MANAGER**

If one were to rank the inventions that destroyed most of America’s native grasslands, and particularly our wildlife, the barbed wire fence would appear near the top. That is why when the Southern Plains Land Trust acquires new land, one of the first things we do is to determine which fences we can remove and get busy. The work itself is hard and a bit boring, cutting and rolling wire, pulling posts. I’ve gone through dozens of gloves and even worn out wire cutters. But the rewards are immediate. Gone are grid lines signifying human control and, as the song goes, once again the buffalo can roam and the deer and antelope play - in safety.

Volunteers often help with this work and many friendships are begun or renewed over a disappearing fence. Other days, however, I work alone in cathartic monotony. It gives me a chance to revel in the prairie, watching clouds and shadows under a blue dome, and listening to the wind. Other sounds come occasionally: birds sing, insects hum, and small creatures rustle in the grass reminding me I’m not truly alone. Indeed, my largest office in the world is crowded and I like to imagine my fellow tenants are thanking me for cleaning the place up.



**SUSAN CRICK, DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR**

On my first visit to the Southern Plains’ nature preserves, I couldn’t get over how green the prairie was. The grasslands had soaked up rain showers from the previous week and were putting on a glorious show. Colorful wildflowers were blooming, dotting the plains with splashes of purples, pinks, and yellows. Prairie dogs were happily chattering as they foraged. Burrowing owls glided from fence post to burrow. A swift fox tried to disguise itself behind a cholla cactus making it difficult to photograph. That is the magic of the prairie - the plants and wildlife that have adapted to survive drought, harsh winds, and a relentless sun by concealing themselves underground. When the conditions are right, they burst forward with astonishing beauty.

It is an exciting time to be a part of Southern Plains Land Trust. We have the incredible opportunity to protect land that still boasts native prairie plants and wildlife. As stewards of the land, we are also watching species rebound and return that had been pushed out over the last century. It is amazing to experience and I hope you will join us in this adventure!



**NELLIE:** I have been enjoying my retirement here on Heartland Ranch. Last spring, though, my back leg started to hurt something fierce! I couldn’t put any weight on my hoof and didn’t even feel like eating. But the humans here, well, they took care of me. Now I’m back on my feet, feeling good and I’ve got the run of the place. Wide, open prairie, so when the others in the herd are annoying, I’ve got the space to go off on my own for some peace and quiet.

The best part is I’ve got the one they call Jay trained pretty well. He knows I like sunflower cake. I know how to get him separated from the herd and focused on me so I get extra treats and attention!

# GAINING GROUND FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE

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Juniper Hairstreak Butterfly on Hairy False Goldenaster



Bee Fly on Sunflower



Badger  
Photo Credit: Rich Reading