

SOUTHERN PLAINS LAND TRUST'S

PROGRESS FOR THE PRAIRIE



LIZ YOUNG

2022
ANNUAL REPORT

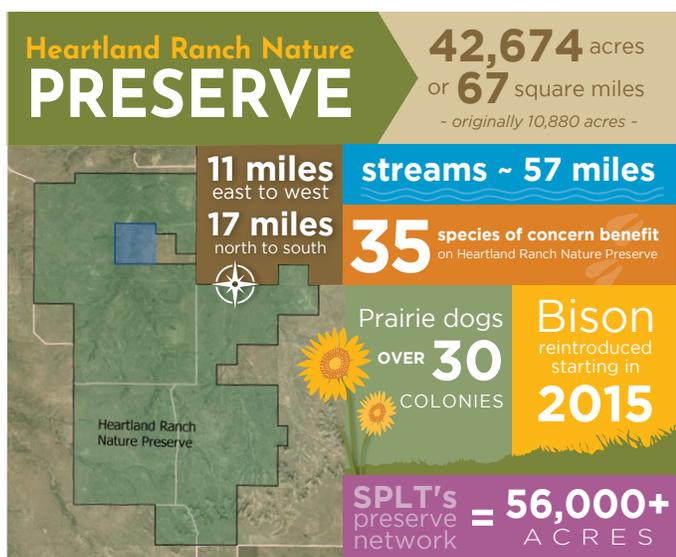


Southern Plains Land Trust
GAINING GROUND FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE

southernplains.org

HABITAT IS VANISHING, LEAVING WILDLIFE WITH NO PLACE TO GO.

OUR SOLUTION: BUY THE LAND



OUR PROGRESS

The Southern Plains Land Trust purchases land for prairie wildlife. It's that simple. In 2022 we boosted our protected preserve network to over 56,000 acres providing urgently needed refuge to a wide variety of native grassland animals and plants. Piece by piece, and with your help, we are restoring the American Serengeti.



By working together to gain ground for prairie wildlife, we ensure that all creatures, from tarantulas to burrowing owls to bison, will have a home for generations to come.

Our Prairie Vision



Our vision is a network of truly wild prairie preserves in the southern plains: an American Serengeti. We aim to bring back the abundant and diverse wildlife native to the shortgrass prairie: herds of numerous bison, elk, and pronghorn. A vibrant prairie dog ecosystem is also a crucial part of a wild prairie. Historically, prairie dog colonies covered millions of acres, allowing associated wildlife, including the now-endangered black-footed ferret, to flourish.

With your support, the Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT) is making strides toward turning this vision into reality. The most effective way we've found to help prairie wildlife is to purchase native prairie and permanently protect it for wildlife.

You have made it possible to grow our wildlife refuges from 1,280 acres in 1998 to over 56,000 acres in 2022. Our top milestone over the past year was to expand Heartland Ranch to nearly 43,000 acres. We also hold a conservation easement on The Wild Animal Refuge in Baca County.

With SPLT's expansive network, we are advancing our highest priority conservation goals, including recovering the American bison and reintroducing the endangered black-footed ferret.

SPLT is a vibrant part of the community in southeast Colorado through our rewilding efforts. For instance, we've partnered with neighbors of our Raven's Nest and Heartland Ranch preserves to replace or modify border fences to be more wildlife-friendly. We've also held work parties during which SPLT and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado volunteers have worked to restore prairie streams. On these and other projects, we source materials and labor locally whenever possible. We are a proud sponsor of the 2022 La Junta Tarantula Festival.

As a member of the Global Rewilding Alliance, SPLT is excited to be part of a world-wide effort to provide refuge for the wild ones. And the southern plains is among the best places to do just that.

Milestones in Conservation



RICH READING

EXPANDING HEARTLAND RANCH

Our largest stride forward yet to advance SPLT's vision was the expansion of Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve from approximately 25,000 acres to nearly 43,000 acres. We accomplished this land purchase in July 2022. We were two years ahead of schedule, and many of you helped through our Together campaign, in which we raised over \$200,000 in donations for this land purchase.

Heartland Ranch now extends across almost 70 square miles, making it larger than some countries in the United Nations, some national parks, and all but one of Colorado's state parks. We established this preserve in 2015 due to the generosity of the Summerlee Foundation. We have expanded it ever since through donations, grants, and carbon offset sales. Great Outdoors Colorado has supported three expansions of Heartland Ranch, and the project won the Starburst Award in 2020 for excellent use of Colorado Lottery funds.

Prairie wildlife needs as much room as we can give them, but in particular, the expanded size of Heartland Ranch is furthering our goals for rewilding bison, a vibrant prairie dog ecosystem, refuge for prairie elk, hope for grassland breeding birds, and opportunities to revitalize prairie streams.

REINTRODUCING BLACK-FOOTED FERRETS

After years of protecting Heartland's prairie dog colonies from threats such as lethal control and plague, the prairie dog populations have rebounded, enabling SPLT to participate in the black-footed ferret recovery program. October 19, 2022 was the historic day, on which the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Colorado Parks and Wildlife reintroduced 30 ferrets to our preserve.

The highly charismatic black-footed ferret was one of the first species to be listed under the US Endangered Species Act and remains among the most endangered mammals in North America. Our continent's only native ferret utterly depends on prairie dogs for their survival. Over 90% of its diet is prairie dogs, and they can't survive in the wild outside of prairie dog towns.

The black-footed ferret's historic decline is directly traced to the dramatic decline of prairie dogs, and we are happy to be a part of turning that tragic story around.



KAREN VOEPPEL



BRINGING BACK THE BISON

For the second year, a new generation of calves was born into our conservation bison herd. Most were born in June and July, but there was a late birth, too – in September. This herd is part of a west-wide effort at recovering the American bison. We aim to open more of Heartland to this growing bison population, as they are the focus of our vision of rewilding.

Bison on Heartland create wallows through their dust-bathing activities, knock down junipers and pull out yuccas, and establish a mosaic of lightly and more heavily grazed areas. In all of these ways, they are playing their keystone ecological role. They also seem to go out of their way to destroy prairie dog mounds, much to the displeasure of hard-working prairie dogs.

Our partners, Defenders of Wildlife and Colorado State University, are crucial to the continued success of this effort.

RESTORING PRAIRIE STREAMS

At its expanded size, Heartland Ranch now contains 57 stream miles within its borders. That provides plenty of opportunities to revitalize prairie streams. We do this by returning the native grazer, American bison, which passes through, rather than lingering in streams.

As a result of this reduced grazing pressure, we've seen our stream beds fill in with native wildflowers and grasses. This helps slow down a very flashy stream system and makes those areas more of a precipitation sponge rather than a racetrack. The cottonwoods, willows, roses, and wax currants are also coming back now that there is less grazing impact.

We also use more active methods to repair our streams, such as installing natural rock and log structures that help to reverse stream bank erosion. At 6 work parties held over the past 2 years, dozens of hard-working SPLT and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado volunteers have installed over 120 such structures on our Heartland Ranch and Raven's Nest preserves.



MAKING FENCES WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY

SPLT Preserve Manager Jay Tutchton is on the final stretch of a project to remove, modify, or replace 50 miles of fence to make it easier for wildlife to flow across the landscape. Pronghorn, in particular, benefit from fewer fences and improved fence design, as they almost always cross under fences, rather than over. Placing the bottom rung at least 18-20 inches from the ground helps them navigate fence lines. Smaller creatures, such as coyotes, badgers, swift foxes, jackrabbits, and others can similarly pass under. Our well-designed fences also allow elk and mule deer to jump over.

We're pleased to partner with several ranching neighbors of Heartland Ranch on this project. In our effort to source materials locally wherever possible, Jay purchased large fence orders with several local suppliers.

In other exciting news, at our request, the local utility company removed over 2 miles of powerlines from Heartland. This reduces electrocution dangers to raptors and makes the preserve more wild.

Building Strength

SPLT continues to thrive financially. Our 2021 audited financials show net income of over \$1.5 million, which helped put us in a position to succeed on our purchase of 18,000 acres to expand Heartland Ranch in 2022.

Our total income of \$2.5 million came from individual donations, grants, and sale of carbon offsets and tax credits. Many of you contributed to our Together Campaign to expand Heartland Ranch, which provided a boost of over \$200,000 toward that important land acquisition.

Amy Wildgrube joined our staff as Communications Director. Amy designed our original logo in 1998 and brings 25 years of expertise in communications and design, as well as passion for our mission, to SPLT. She's also responsible for the revamping of our gift shop, where you can find a series of Amy's wildlife designs on t-shirts, post-cards, posters, and other merchandise.

We've expanded our board to nine women – all passionate and hard-working ambassadors of SPLT. Joining the board in 2021 is Sheree Seabury and in 2022 is Melinda Redenius. In their own words, here's why they are excited to join the SPLT team:



"Prairie means grassland and comes from the French word for 'meadow.' I have always loved wide-open spaces; the joy of being able to see for miles. My introduction to SPLT started with my passion to help save prairie dogs. As a member of the SPLT Board, I am excited to be a part of saving not only prairie wildlife but also the prairie itself. Buying land is the best way to preserve this beautiful, natural landscape, and I am committed to being a part of this important vision and mission!"

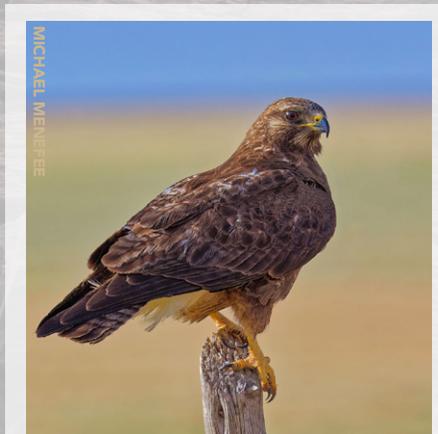
– Sheree Seabury



"In just months of sitting on the board, I have met some of the most dedicated, intelligent and passionate women in my life. I feel the amalgamation of our individual expertise creates the perfect coalition of strength, emotional intelligence, creativity and patience needed to promote the preservation of native shortgrass prairies.

With each meeting I find new strengths in fellow board members and myself while we dissect, negotiate, and produce creative solutions for a plethora of issues, many that I have never been exposed to. I am honored to join this cause, restoring the Colorado wilderness and perhaps a bit of myself, acre by acre. When lands thrive, we all thrive."

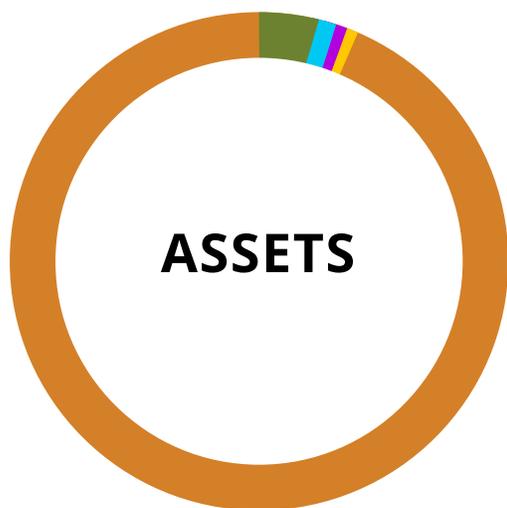
– Melinda Redenius



SPLT Financials 2021

12/31/2021

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION



ASSETS

Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$574,121
Promises to Give	\$72,226
Prepayments & Deposits	\$53,925
Investments	\$60,386
Fixed Assets, Net of Depreciation	\$11,174,198
Total Assets	\$11,934,856

Liabilities

Liabilities	\$765,735
Net Assets	
Unrestricted	\$10,428,692
Board-designated Restricted	\$175,653
Donor-restricted	\$564,776
Total New Assets	\$11,169,121
Total Liabilities + New Assets	\$11,934,856

12/31/2021

AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES & CHANGES IN NET ASSETS

SUPPORT AND REVENUE	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL
Contributions & Grants	\$620,943	\$553,776	\$1,174,719
Special Events Net	\$14,607		\$14,607
Investment Income	\$13,227		\$13,227
Carbon and Tax Credit Sales	\$1,246,169		\$1,246,169
Other Income	\$48,152		\$48,152
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	\$94,511	\$(94,511)	
Total Support & Revenue	\$2,037,609	\$459,265	\$2,496,874
Operating Expenses			
Land Program	\$278,424		\$278,424
Animal Management	\$111,467		\$111,467
Outreach Program & Other Conservation Projects	\$78,682		\$78,682
Total Program Expenses	\$468,573		\$468,573
Supporting Expenses			
General Administrative	\$42,129		\$42,129
Fundraising	\$10,682		\$10,682
Total Supporting Expenses	\$52,811		\$52,811
Total Expenses	\$521,384		\$521,384
Changes in New Assets	\$1,516,225	\$459,265	\$1,975,490
New Assets at Beginning of Year	\$9,088,120	\$105,511	\$9,193,631
Net Assets at End of Year	\$10,604,345	\$564,776	\$11,169,121



KAREN VOEPFL

LAUREN MCALIN

THE PEOPLE BEHIND SPLT

SPLT Staff Jay Tutchton (at left) and Nicole Rosmarino (at right), and Board President Tracy Kessner (at center) spending time with guest photographers during the June 2022 SPLT Blitz.

STAFF

Nicole Rosmarino, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Jay Tutchton,
Preserve Manager

Amy Wildgrube,
Communications Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Tracy Kessner, *President* • Taylor Jones, *Vice President*

Alexis Schaefer, *Secretary* • Donna Driscoll, *Treasurer*

Ramona Gaylord • Misty Morehead • Shannon Ryon

Melinda Redenius • Sheree Seabury

Soleil Gaylord, *Junior Board Member*



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