

SOUTHERN PLAINS LAND TRUST'S

# PROGRESS FOR THE PRAIRIE



Conservation Bison Herd at Sunset  
Photo Credit: Lauren McCain



**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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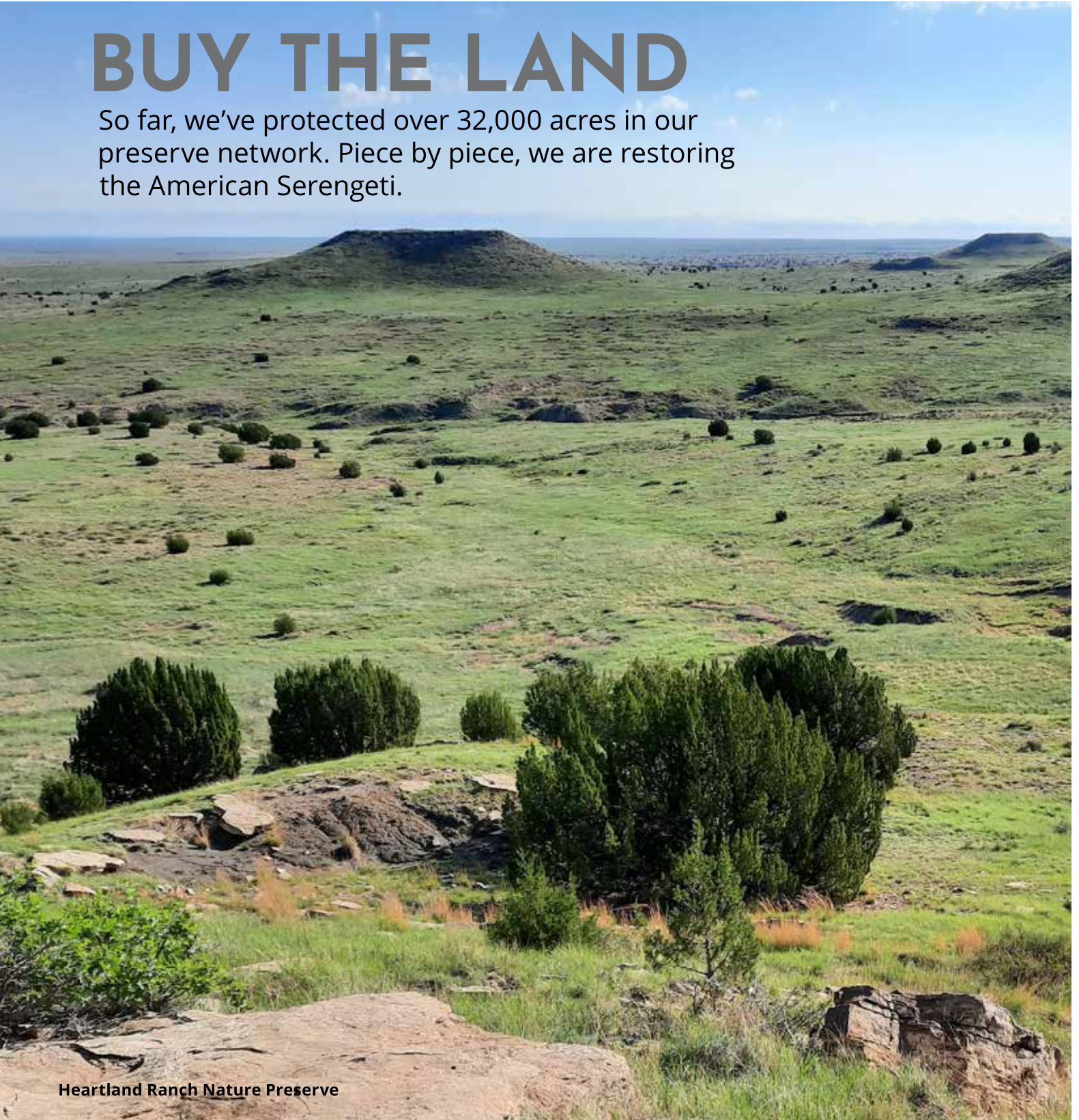


HABITAT IS VANISHING, LEAVING WILDLIFE  
WITH NO PLACE TO GO.

**HERE'S OUR SOLUTION:**

# BUY THE LAND

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







Lesser Earless Lizard  
Photo Credit: Rich Reading

Expanding SPLT's wildlife refuges is our top priority, to provide total refuge for the diverse wildlife and plants of the shortgrass prairie.

## OUR PRAIRIE VISION

Our vision is to restore the southern plains to its previous grandeur as the American Serengeti. Historically, the Great Plains were alive with multitudes of wildlife. Herds of bison, elk, and pronghorn that numbered in the millions flowed across the prairie. Wolves and grizzly bears roamed freely as they hunted prey. Prairie dog colonies extended for miles and supported countless seen – and unseen – species. One of these was the secretive black-footed ferret, now one of the most endangered mammals on our continent.

With your help, Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT) is making this vision a reality. We know that the best, most impactful action we can take is to purchase native prairie and permanently protect it for wildlife. 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.

**You have made it possible to grow our wildlife refuges from 1,280 acres in 1998 to 32,824 acres in 2021!**

We are seeing glimpses of the American Serengeti again on our preserves. Trail cameras have captured images of elk returning to the prairie, including a cow and

calf this summer. Descendants of the Yellowstone bison herd are grazing this land again, and the herd produced three new calves this year. Grassland birds, that are in severe decline across the Great Plains, nest here. We have documented several species of concern, such as mountain plover, burrowing owls, and golden eagles on our refuges. Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve, our largest refuge, has 16 growing, thriving prairie dog colonies. We are working to create a black-footed ferret reintroduction site.

We celebrate our accomplishments with you in this progress report, but we are not done. Our aim is to keep expanding our preserve network to provide the fauna and flora of the southern plains with total refuge.

SPLT's next goal is to purchase an additional 17,887 acres adjacent to Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve. This would expand Heartland Ranch to almost 67 square miles of permanently protected grasslands. Imagine a vast prairie landscape teeming with an amazing diversity of wildlife—swift foxes, badgers, lark buntings, ferruginous hawks, pronghorn, prairie dogs, and bison. With your support, we can make this vision a reality.



# REWILDING THE PRAIRIE

Once we purchase land and put legal protections in place to ensure that it will always be a wildlife refuge, we begin the work of actively restoring the land. This year, we were able to expand our impact by partnering with Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC) and Mile High Youth Corps. In April and October, VOC crews tackled the hard work of building rock and reclaimed wood structures along degraded streams and drainages. These structures will help the prairie capture rainfall by slowing and spreading water out after heavy rains. This will, in turn, create prime habitat for lush vegetation, shrubs, and cottonwoods to grow.

In the fall, we were joined for three weeks by a crew of young adults from Mile High Youth Corps. They removed tamarisk trees that are choking streams and crowding out native species. This work is vital as non-native, invasive species are considered to be the second greatest threat to wildlife habitat after habitat loss.

Riparian areas – the areas along streams and rivers – are important travel routes and habitat for wildlife. Lush plant cover is needed by animals to safely pause for a drink and avoid predators. Trees provide nesting and roosting sites for birds. To restore our riparian areas, we planted hundreds of cottonwood,



VOC volunteers in action helping to restore the prairie.

coyote willow, and three-leaf sumac saplings this year. In this semi-arid environment, not all will survive. But when they do, we know that the birds, mule deer, raccoons and coyotes are celebrating with us!

One of the dangers to prairie wildlife is the proliferation of fences and barbed-wire that remain after a century of ranching. Fences restrict the free movement of wildlife and can cause deadly injuries. Pronghorn, elk, mule deer, and other animals need to be able to safely move across our wildlife refuges and access the surrounding landscape.

This year, we collaborated with neighbors and launched a major fencing removal and modification project. As a result, we have

modified or replaced 15 miles of periphery fences that will allow wildlife to safely cross, while keeping cattle on their pastures outside of the refuges. Another 10 miles of unneeded fencing was removed completely. This is part of a 50-mile fence project supported by a generous RESTORE Colorado grant, funded by 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.

Rewilding also means taking out the trash and cleaning house for wildlife. People have always been part of the southern plains, and unfortunately, we tend to leave behind building materials, farming and ranching implements, and other debris. While we don't count or weigh all the trash that we remove, it happens by the truck load. We have recycled 16,140 pounds (that's over 8 tons) of scrap iron this year, and pulled out another 8 tons or more of other debris.



Miles of dangerous fences were removed so that wildlife can move freely across the prairie.





# Conservation Bison Herd Established

In December 2020, we welcomed ten new bison to the Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve expansion area to establish our conservation herd. These iconic beasts once flowed over the Great Plains by the millions but faced extinction more than a century ago. Over the summer, we celebrated as three calves were born into the herd. Each one carries with it our hope for a future when wild bison will once again roam on the southern plains.

Our conservation herd is significant because it carries the genetic lineage of their wild ancestors that persisted in and around Yellowstone National Park. Bison and cattle were interbred in the early 1900's in an attempt to make bison more docile and to save the species. Today, the majority of bison are part of managed commercial herds. At SPLT, bison will have the opportunity to live and breed on the Great Plains as wildlife, just as their ancestors did.

Bison are also active players in our rewilding plans. Their grazing creates a mosaic of different plant communities. They aerate the



**Bison and Calf**  
**Photo Credit: Rich Reading**

soil with their heavy hooves, and generously apply fertilizer to encourage regrowth. Bison create shallow depressions when they take dust baths on the prairie. Water collects in these wallows, attracting birds and insects. By just doing what bison naturally do, they are improving habitat for grassland birds, native plants, and other wildlife.

We are grateful to our partners that made it possible to establish SPLT's bison conservation herd. These bison were provided by Colorado State University's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. Defenders of Wildlife provided funding to help bring the bison to Heartland Ranch and have long advocated for the restoration of wild bison across their native range.



**Conservation Bison herd**  
**Photo Credit: Rich Reading**

# SPREADING THE PRAIRIE WORD

## PENROSE SCHOOL - CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

Penrose School, built and opened in 1921 – 100 years ago – is now the perfect setting to discover the wonders of the prairie. From 1921 to 1950, local children came here for lessons



in reading, writing, and arithmetic. This spring, local elementary students returned to Penrose School to learn about prairie wildlife and plant adaptations.

This historic, one-room schoolhouse has had many lives. After serving as a school for 29 years, it closed in 1950. Next, it was converted into a two-bedroom family home. Later owners lived out-of-state and used it as an occasional vacation cabin. It was eventually boarded up and abandoned. Cattle grazed outside, and the building was left to face the elements.

Penrose School was in bad shape by the time that SPLT added the land to our refuge network in 2015. The roof had large leaks, windows were broken, and there were several holes in the floor. The building was filled with trash from covert teenage drinking parties and feces from wildlife that took shelter there. Among the residents were cliff swallows, woodrats, and barn owls. No doubt that raccoons, bobcats, ravens, and countless other creatures regularly visited the abandoned schoolhouse.

This year, we concluded a two-year project to fully restore Penrose School. The building is now a charming, inviting space with a new roof, windows, doors, and siding. Inside, refinished wood floors still contain some of the original wood that students walked on in the 1920's. The walls have a fresh coat of robin's-egg-blue paint that brightens the space. The color was selected as a composite of the many layers of old paint left on the walls and in consultation with History Colorado for authenticity. A wood stove sits in the center, ready to warm chilly hands on a winter day.

Penrose School now welcomes students and visiting groups to Raven's Nest Nature Preserve. Instead of lessons on elocution, you can expect lessons on shortgrass prairie ecology. In May, excited fifth graders spotted lizards, found animal tracks, examined a turtle shell they found, and sketched wildflowers during their field trip. When asked what they learned on their field trip, students shared different ways that they could help protect prairie for wildlife.



We are thankful to History Colorado for providing a State Historical Fund grant that helped fund this project. We are also grateful to our partners at Bent County Historical Society. They have been invaluable in helping to collect and retell the story of this historic prairie school.

*\*Visitation to Penrose School and Raven's Nest Nature Preserve must be arranged in advance with SPLT staff. For our full visitation policy, please visit [www.southernplains.org](http://www.southernplains.org).*





*SPLT board of directors and staff at the strategic planning retreat. Front row (left to right): Susan Crick, Taylor Jones, Misty Morehead, Alexis Schaefer, Donna Driscoll. Back row (left to right): Ramona Gaylord, Nicole Rosmarino, Tracy Kessner, Sheree Seabury, Shannon Ryon.*

## BUILDING STRENGTH

SPLT continues to build our financial strength. Our 2020 audited financials show \$11.5 million in assets, nearly all of which is our land base. This reflects our purchase of 6,600 acres in February 2020, which increased Heartland Ranch to its current size of nearly 25,000 acres.

Our income of \$2.3 million came from individual donations, grants, and carbon offsets. The largest grant was \$1 million, from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), toward the Heartland Ranch 2020 expansion. This and a previous expansion of Heartland Ranch supported by GOCO in 2018, earned us the Colorado Lottery's Starburst Award, for excellent use of lottery funds. SPLT's virtual events in 2020 – both

Wine & Wildlife and Celebration of the Prairie – also provided much needed funds to continue expanding our preserve network.

Julee McGinnes joined our conservation staff this year. She has been a powerhouse removing dangerous barbed-wire fences and trash. She spends most days out in the field helping to rewild the prairie.



SPLT is looking forward and planning for the future. In August, the board of directors and staff participated in a strategic planning retreat. We discussed ways to build upon past successes, increase capacity, and gain more ground for prairie wildlife. Executive Director, Nicole Rosmarino, is leading the development of an innovative three-year plan to guide our work and help achieve our prairie vision.

*Not even a flat tire on the ranch truck after a long day of fence work can slow down Julee! She was quickly back on the road and ready to tackle the next project.*

# NELLIE'S REPORT—FROM WILDFLOWERS TO WILDFIRES



Jay promised me more carrots if I gave you a report about the events on the prairie this year. It was a memorable year, and I do love carrots, so here goes...

This spring the storm clouds were angry. My goodness, they dumped buckets and buckets of rain on us. Every drainage was filled, and flowing higher than ever before. It was crazy and one for the record books. If I didn't have this gorgeous, thick fur, I would've been soaked clear through.

The prairie must have loved all that rain because by June it was covered in wildflowers. I have never seen so many different flowers before. The humans that visited were out here oohing and aahing over all the wildflowers and taking pictures. There were even some flowers blooming that I don't remember seeing before. But, then again, I do prefer the grasses.

Now, this fall, that's when the real excitement hit and sent tails on alert and hooves stomping! A storm rolled in and lightning lit up the sky. It also lit up the prairie. This brought out Jay, several kind neighbors, and the local volunteer fire departments from Las Animas and Hasty. They got it under control quickly, with some help from those noisy, little prairie dogs. Who would've thought that a prairie dog colony would come in handy to slow and pretty much stop a grass fire? Can't wait to sample the tasty shoots that come up in the burned areas next spring.

Now where are those carrots?

*—Nellie is a senior bison cow in SPLT's sanctuary herd at Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve. Nellie serves as a spokesbison for the herd in exchange for carrots (her favorite treat) from Jay Tutchton, Preserve Manager.*

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT: DEBBIE DAEHNICK PRAIRIE PROTECTOR-MONTHLY SUPPORTER



"I recently decided to start donating to SPLT monthly, after my business had slowed to a temporary halt. It really sank in how beneficial a regular income is, and how it makes you feel safer financially, and reduces stress. I knew this must also be true for SPLT.

A smaller monthly donation is more doable for me - it's convenient and a lot more affordable since I can pick the amount that fits into my budget.

I support SPLT because I love our Colorado wildlife and want to preserve our wild spaces. Taking action leads to hope that we can make a difference, and I am doing my small part to help. When I pitch in a small amount each month along with lots of other like-minded folks, we become part of a community,

with the power to do so much more for the wildlife."

*Monthly gifts help sustain SPLT throughout the year. You can become a Prairie Protector by setting up a monthly giving plan at [www.southernplains.org/donate](http://www.southernplains.org/donate).*



## DONOR SPOTLIGHT: DR. DEBORAH DAY LIND

### GRASSLAND GUARDIAN-GIFTS THAT LEAVE A LEGACY

"Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT) is my favorite environmental organization. Preserving actual land for the creatures that live on the prairie is as noble a goal as I can imagine. I was a mountain woman for most of my adult life and lived at 10,000 feet. Then, I moved to the front range and became a birder. The eastern plains called and I responded. Discovering that there was an actual group trying to preserve large chunks of short-grass prairie made my heart glad. Taking down barbed-wire fences, creating water holes, planting cottonwoods, protecting insects, birds, rodents, predators, prey, what a great organization!



I am now 100% a prairie woman. So, I'm leaving a bequest to SPLT in my will to buy more land, and since I have advanced ALS, it won't be long. While I won't be around to see the many wonderful changes to come and the flourishing of protective space, I'm happy to do my small part in ensuring that prairie life continues."

*If you would like to become a Grassland Guardian and want more information on how to make a planned gift or bequest, please contact SPLT at 720-841-1757 or [splt@southernplains.org](mailto:splt@southernplains.org).*

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT: SCOTT JONAS

### PRAIRIE HERO-ANNUAL DONOR



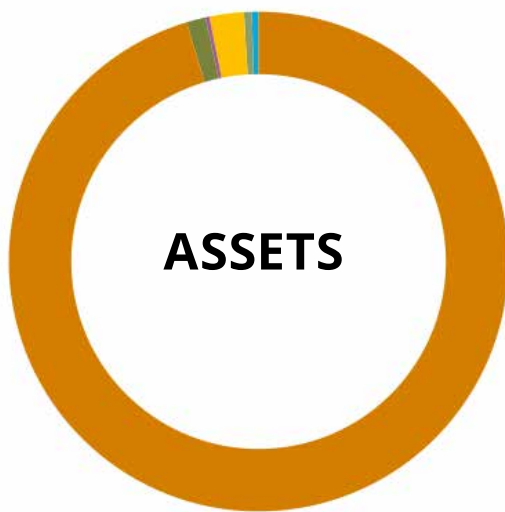
"My life's mission is land conservation. I support SPLT because they do it all and do it well. Conserving land? Check. Restoring habitat? Check. Reintroducing plants and wildlife? Check. Creative, effective fundraising? Check. Engaging social media? Check. Community and member outreach? Check.

Because SPLT is all-in when it comes to prairie conservation, I am all-in in supporting SPLT."

*Every gift brings us closer to restoring the American Serengeti and permanently protects land for prairie wildlife. Make your gift now at [www.southernplains.org/donate](http://www.southernplains.org/donate).*

# SPLT FINANCIALS 2020

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION  
12/31/2020



<b>Assets</b>	
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$142,895
Promises to Give	\$48,980
Receivables	\$256,111
Prepayments & Deposits	\$28,925
Investments	\$58,844
Fixed Assets, Net of Depreciation	\$10,968,275
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$11,504,030</b>

<b>Liabilities</b>	\$2,310,399
<b>Net Assets</b>	
Unrestricted	\$8,927,320
Board-designated Restricted	\$160,800
Donor-restricted	\$105,511
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>\$9,193,631</b>
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>\$11,504,030</b>

AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES & CHANGES IN  
NET ASSETS  
12/31/2020

SUPPORT AND REVENUE	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL
Contributions & Grants	\$1,527,246	\$110,164	\$1,637,410
Special Events (net)	\$44,983		\$44,983
Investment Income	\$13,935		\$13,935
Loss on Sale of Property & Equipment	-\$22,992		-\$22,992
Carbon & Tax Credit Sales	\$632,007		\$632,007
Other Income	\$23,761		\$23,761
Net Assets Released From Restrictions	\$249,145	\$ (249,145)	
<b>Total Support &amp; Revenue</b>	<b>\$2,468,085</b>	<b>\$(138,981)</b>	<b>\$2,329,104</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>			
Land Program	\$289,033		\$289,033
Animal Management	\$85,876		\$85,876
Outreach Program & Other Conservation Projects	\$71,970		\$71,970
<b>Total Program Expenses</b>	<b>\$446,879</b>		<b>\$446,879</b>
<b>Supporting Expenses</b>			
General Administrative	\$38,770		\$38,770
Fundraising	\$13,203		\$13,203
<b>Total Supporting Expenses</b>	<b>\$51,973</b>		<b>\$51,973</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$498,852</b>		<b>\$498,852</b>
Changes in Net Assets	\$1,969,233	\$(138,981)	\$1,830,252
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$7,118,887	\$244,492	\$7,363,379
Net Assets at End of Year	\$9,088,120	\$105,511	\$9,193,631



# THE PEOPLE BEHIND SPLT

## STAFF

**Nicole Rosmarino**  
*Executive Director*

**Jay Tutchton**  
*Preserve Manager*

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

**Julee McGinnes**  
*Conservation Staff*

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Tracy Kessner**  
*President*

**Taylor Jones**  
*Vice President*

**Alexis Schaefer**  
*Secretary*

**Donna Driscoll**  
*Treasurer*

**Ramona Gaylord**  
**Misty Morehead**  
**Shannon Ryon**  
**Sheree Seabury**  
**Soleil Gaylord, Jr. Board Member**

**Heartland Ranch Expansion Area**  
**Photo Credit: Rich Reading**



# GAINING GROUND FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE

[WWW.SOUTHERNPLAINS.ORG](http://WWW.SOUTHERNPLAINS.ORG)

Swift Foxes  
Photo credit: Rich Reading



Clouded Sulphur Butterfly



Oklahoma Brown Tarantula  
Photo Credit: Rich Reading



Prairie Dog  
Photo Credit: Rich Reading

Burrowing Owl  
Photo Credit: Rich Reading

