

SOUTHERN PLAINS LAND TRUST'S

# PROGRESS FOR THE PRAIRIE



2023  
ANNUAL REPORT



Southern Plains Land Trust  
GAINING GROUND FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE

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EMMA BALLUNEK



# Our Prairie Vision

**SPLT's mission is to protect and restore the Southern Plains: America's Serengeti.**

Despite being one of the largest and most unique biomes in the world, shortgrass prairie is also among the most threatened habitats in North America, with 50% already lost due to human development. Just 150 years ago, immense herds of bison millions-strong roamed the Southern Plains, prairie dog colonies spanned hundreds of square miles, and pronghorn and elk teemed across the shortgrass prairie. We want this biodiversity and abundant wildlife back.

With your support, we were able to make great progress in 2023 to turn more unprotected land into prairie preserves. In addition to buying land, we restore and manage it in a way that allows wildlife to thrive. We worked hard to remove 26 miles of fences, allowing elk and pronghorn to move freely across the landscape, we reintroduced 35 endangered black-footed ferrets onto Heartland Ranch, and we welcomed 12 new bison calves, making the herd 100 bison strong!

This year, we finalized the expansion of Heartland to 43,029.37 acres and grew our total area protected from an initial 1,280 acres in 1998 to 60,140.18 acres in 2023. With your help in 2024 and beyond, we will continue to build our network of

preserves, including shortgrass prairie in other Southern Plains states such as Texas and New Mexico. We are proud of our strong network of partnerships, including our relationships with state and federal agencies such as Colorado Parks and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, who all contributed to our black-footed ferret release. Also, with the help of the Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado and the Biophilia Foundation, we were able to install 11 anti-erosion structures to help restore streams that are essential for beavers and birds. We are fortunate to have a lot of on-the-ground support!

SPLT is overjoyed to announce its renewed accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission this year - which is only awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence. We are a member of the Land Trust Alliance, certified by the State of Colorado to hold conservation easements, and a member of the Nature Needs Half Network. SPLT is also a proud member of Keep It Colorado and the Global Rewilding Alliance, working with partners around the world to recover the natural beauty, diversity, and resilience of Earth.



KAREN VOEPEL



EMMA BALUNEC

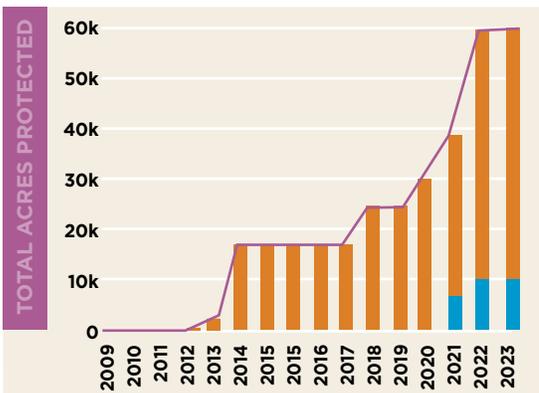


RICH READING

# Our Progress in 2023



LARIEN MCCAIN



- Total acres in conservation easement
- Total acres owned by SPLT
- Total acres protected (combined)



## Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve

- Expanded Preserve: 320 ACRES**
- 26 mi of interior fence + 22 mi of exterior fence removed & replaced with wildlife friendly wire**
- Bird Tracking Tower: Fully Operational**
- Black-footed ferrets: 35 MORE RELEASED**
- 40 lbs. grama seed donated to NPS**
- Bison Herd now 100 strong!**
- 2 miles of streams restored**

**SPLT's preserve network = 60,000+ ACRES**



MICHAEL MEMBER

# Milestones in Conservation



EMMA BALUNER

## A NEW HOME FOR ENDANGERED WILDLIFE

On a beautiful, sunny day in October 2023, 35 black-footed ferrets were given a new home on the Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve. What preceded this reintroduction was years of hard work by SPLT to create a thriving prairie dog population - the main prey of the critically endangered ferret. A third introduction will take place in 2024, followed by a comprehensive assessment of our site's effectiveness as a haven for ferrets.

The highly charismatic black-footed ferret was one of the first species to be listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and is North America's only native ferret. Only 400-500 individuals are thought to live in the wild. We hope to turn the tide for this endangered species!

## RESTORED WATERWAYS

Where there is water, there is life. Especially in an arid region such as the shortgrass prairie. The springs, streams, creeks, and ponds on our preserves are now protected from heavy grazing, which allows riparian zones to be recolonized by native wildflowers and plants. The now-flourishing riparian vegetation stops sediment erosion and prevents streams from turning into deep, narrow channels that can no longer retain water or support healthy plant communities.

To aid stream restoration, with the help of two work parties and 21 volunteers, we installed 7 rock structures and 4 log structures in 2023 that are helping to reverse stream bank erosion. Overall, two miles of stream have been restored in the headwaters of Mud Creek, helping increase sediment capture and beginning the process of riparian vegetation regrowth. This will benefit beetles, birds, bison, beavers and beyond, and is only the beginning of SPLT's ambitious efforts to heal the landscape on our preserves!



KAREN VOEBEL

## MORE PROTECTED LAND FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE

Once again, SPLT was able to expand protected prairie land, by continuing to acquire inholdings within the Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve. This year, we were able to add 320 acres to the existing preserve, after already expanding massively in the previous year from 25,000 to 43,000 acres.

Obtaining a piece of land in the middle of our existing preserve is important. It means that dangerous fences that can entangle wildlife are removed, it means extra access to water sources, and overall more space to run, gallop and jump. We were able to accomplish this by grants from Great Outdoors Colorado and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation\* Spirit of Conservation, as well as support from our donors and help from several other foundations.



## FENCE FREE PRAIRIE HABITAT

By nature, elk, deer, pronghorn, and bison cover large distances across the plains as they migrate in search of food and mates. Fences are major obstructions and can harm these gracious grazers. We were able to remove all interior and exterior fences on our nearly 5,000 acre Raven's Nest property.

At Heartland, we also permanently took down 26 miles of interior fences and replaced 22 miles of exterior fencing with wildlife friendly fencing that permit our large mammals to move freely across the landscape, as they should!

## SOWING NATIVE SEEDS

The Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site in Colorado recognizes the national significance of the massacre of Cheyenne and Arapaho people by American military troops in November 1864. This year, we donated 40 pounds of side-oats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) seed to reseed the Sand Creek Massacre site with native prairie habitat. A wet spring led to a particularly bountiful season of native wildflowers and subsequently prolific seed-heads.

We were honored to partner with the National Park Service and share the fruits of less grazing pressure on native flora.



\*The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation or its funding sources. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute their endorsement by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation or its funding sources

# Building Strength

We were able to expand the SPLT herd with two new staff members and two new board members! Living right in the middle of the Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve are our new Executive Director Dr. Henry Pollock and Assistant Director Dr. Judith Westveer. Within our all-female board, some members got new positions. Lexi Schaefer, board member since 2020, is now our current President. Our former Executive Director Nicole Rosmarino is still working hard and making a huge impact for SPLT in her new capacity as Board Secretary. Hear a bit from the herd!



*I give my time to the cause because the drive to save the shortgrass prairie is clear, focused and fed by the passion of the people who donate time and support Southern Plains Land Trust. Additionally, my lifelong love of prairie dogs is at home with SPLT and my passion for these critters grows with every news alert, volunteer effort, and donation event.*

– Lexi Schaefer, Board President



*I grew up in Colorado Springs, heading south when I got the chance to breathe the air and listen to the sounds of the prairie. I work as a business psychologist helping organizations with their teamwork and also volunteer around ecogrief. I'm excited to support the positive activism of SPLT with my skills and enrich my lifelong love of the prairie ecosystem.*

– Rhiannon Gallagher, Board Member

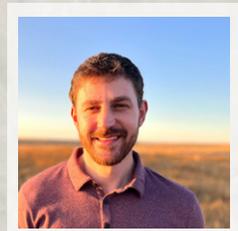


*Since its inception in 1998, SPLT has been pursuing the most tangible and long-lasting way to protect prairie wildlife: buying the land under the animals' feet. What excites me most is that our prairie preserve network continues to grow at an exponential pace. Together, we'll keep up this progress for the wild prairie well into the future.*

– Nicole Rosmarino, Ph.D., Board Secretary

*I have lived all over the world, but never have I inhabited a location like Heartland Preserve. I step outside of my house and see bison grazing and pronghorn galloping over more than 70 square miles of protected shortgrass prairie. It is such a special place, and I'm dedicated to gaining ground for prairie wildlife and continuing to expand SPLT's reach throughout the Southern Plains to bring back the American Serengeti.*

– Henry Pollock, Ph.D., Executive Director



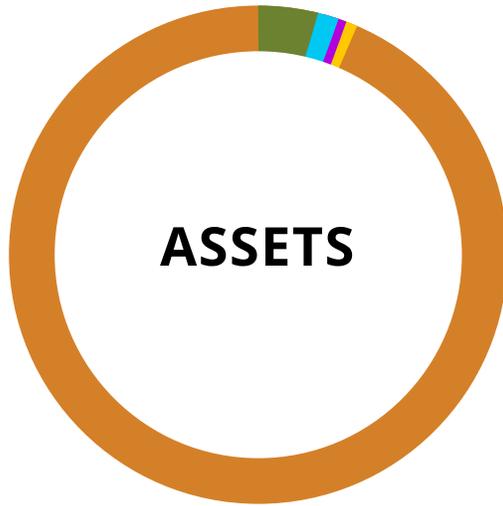
*I was born as a city girl in the Netherlands, but now live on the prairie in Colorado and I've never felt more connected to the elements than I do now. I am a conservation ecologist with a Ph.D. in stream restoration and have worked for various environmental non-profit organizations in the Peruvian Amazon before moving to the United States. My life mission is to protect the last remaining wildernesses on the planet.*

– Judith Westveer, Ph.D., Assistant Director



# SPLT Financials 2022

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION 12/31/2022



## ASSETS

Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$804,121
Promises to Give	\$468,147
Prepayments & Deposits	\$14,969
Investments	\$50,990
Fixed Assets, Net of Depreciation	\$19,467,790
Accounts Receivable	\$176,977
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$20,982,994</b>

<b>Liabilities</b>	\$7,202,675
<b>Net Assets</b>	
Unrestricted	\$13,092,402
Board-designated Restricted	\$175,653
Donor-restricted	\$512,264
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>\$13,780,319</b>
<b>Total Liabilities + Net Assets</b>	<b>\$20,982,994</b>

AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES & CHANGES IN NET ASSETS 12/31/2022

AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES & CHANGES IN NET ASSETS

SUPPORT AND REVENUE	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL
Contributions & Grants	\$2,265,720	\$468,147	\$2,733,867
Contributions of Nonfinancial Assets	\$28,000		\$28,000
Special Events Net	\$62,477		\$62,477
Investment Income	-\$7,032		-\$7,032
Carbon and Tax Credit Sales	\$444,283		\$444,283
Loss on Disposal of Property and Equipment	-\$8,144		-\$8,144
Other Income	\$10,741		\$10,741
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	\$520,659	\$(520,659)	
<b>Total Support &amp; Revenue</b>	<b>\$3,316,704</b>	<b>\$(52,512)</b>	<b>\$3,264,192</b>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>			
Land Program	\$499,442		\$499,442
Other Conservation Projects	\$99,804		\$99,804
Animal Management	\$95,282		\$95,282
Outreach Program	\$22,451		\$22,451
<b>Total Program Expenses</b>	<b>\$716,979</b>		<b>\$716,979</b>
<b>Supporting Expenses</b>			
General Administrative	\$29,511		\$29,511
Fundraising	\$20,152		\$20,152
<b>Total Supporting Expenses</b>	<b>\$49,663</b>		<b>\$49,663</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$766,642</b>		<b>\$766,642</b>
Changes in Net Assets	\$2,550,062	-\$52,512	\$2,497,550
Gain on Insurance Proceeds	\$113,648		\$113,648
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$10,604,345	\$564,776	\$11,169,121
Net Assets at End of Year	\$13,268,055	\$512,264	\$13,780,319



## A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR WONDERFUL PARTNERS & DONORS:

- Biophilia Foundation
- Colorado Open Lands
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Cottonwood Foundation
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Great Outdoors Colorado
- Mile High Youth Corps
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation\*
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Summerlee Foundation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado
- Wright-Ingraham Foundation

# The People Behind SPLT

### STAFF

Henry Pollock, Ph.D.  
*Executive Director*

Judith Westveer, Ph.D.  
*Assistant Director*

Jay Tutchton, Esq.  
*Preserve Manager*

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alexis Schaefer, *President*

Sheree Seabury, *Vice President*

Nicole Rosmarino, Ph.D., *Secretary*

Donna Driscoll, *Treasurer*

*Board Members:* Rhiannon Gallagher,  
Ramona Gaylord, Shannon Ryon, Melinda Redenius,  
Soleil Gaylord (*Junior Board Member*)

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