

SOUTHERN PLAINS LAND TRUST'S

PROGRESS FOR THE PRAIRIE



2024
ANNUAL REPORT



Southern Plains Land Trust
GAINING GROUND FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE

splt@southernplains.org • southernplains.org



Our Prairie Vision

At Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT), we go above and beyond to protect and rewild the Southern Plains — the least protected ecosystem in the United States.

Just 150 years ago, this region was home to vast herds of roaming bison, prairie dog colonies stretched across the horizon, and prodigious numbers of pronghorn, deer, and elk traversed the plains. Now, this extraordinary biome faces an uncertain future. It is our mission to restore this rich biodiversity and provide native wildlife with a wilderness refuge in perpetuity.

The past year has been a period of growth at SPLT. We have added Conservation Director Kieran Andreoni to the team, who will help build the environmental education and science programs. We were awarded a prestigious Regional Partnership from Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and will be leading future efforts in Southeast Colorado to balance wildlife conservation with outdoor recreation.

In 2024, we were able to get an entirely new preserve under contract! The 493-acre Purgatoire River Preserve will be a critical hub for a myriad of migratory and resident bird species. On our other preserves, we removed 12 miles of dangerous barbed-wire fences, allowing wildlife to roam freely. Beavers and other aquatic animals are helped by our installation of 55 stream restoration structures. We also reintroduced 30 more endangered black-footed ferrets to Heartland Ranch for the third year in a row and celebrated the birth of 25 new bison calves, bringing our herd to 120 bison!

We could not have done this work without our tremendous network of partners. Collaborating with state and federal agencies like Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service successfully facilitated the black-footed ferret release. Many experts from around the country are helping us catalog the tremendous biodiversity on our preserves. And most importantly, we rely on you, our faithful network of stalwart volunteers and donors, to achieve our land acquisition and restoration goals.

Join us in our journey to protect and restore the Southern Plains. Together, we can revive the vibrant ecosystems that once thrived here and ensure a legacy of wildlife for generations to come.

With love for the land,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henry Pollock".

Henry Pollock, PhD.
Executive Director



KAREN VOEFEL



RICH BEADING



JILL SMITH

Our Progress in 2024



SPLT's PRESERVE NETWORK = 60,669 ACRES

Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve

- Beaver** returned, settled & built mud dams
- 12 MILES** of interior fence removed
- BISON** can roam freely throughout the preserve
- one more **inholding** purchased
- Black-footed ferrets: 30 MORE RELEASED**
- Bison Herd now 120 strong!**
- Discovery: **RAINBOW SCARAB DUNG BEETLE**
- Discovery: new population **COLORADO GREEN GENTIAN**
- ACOUSTIC Bat Monitoring Program Started**

NEW! Purgatoire River Preserve

493 acres of Perennial Wetland

- Mature Cottonwoods**
- COMMUNITY ACCESS** to Public Trail & River Access
- BILINGUAL Environmental EDUCATION**
- Future Station for **BIRD BANDING**

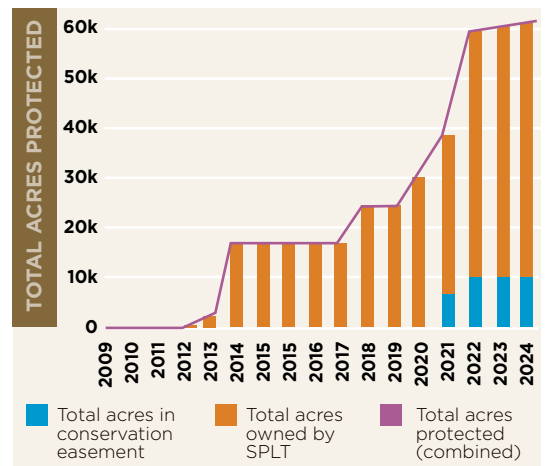


PHOTO: TUP



Milestones in Conservation

RICH READING



1

NEW PRESERVE: THE PURGATOIRE RIVER PRESERVE

The sounds of Western Kingbirds, a rippling river, and wind blowing through cottonwood leaves. These are the melodies you hear from the banks of the Purgatoire River Preserve! SPLT was able to purchase this 493-acre shortgrass prairie property near Las Animas, Colorado, with the help of generous funding by Great Outdoor Colorado, the Gates Family Foundation and many individual supporters.

This preserve will serve as a nature hub for the surrounding community, with publicly accessible trails, informational signs, bird-banding workshops, and a prairie education package for local schools.

BEAVER MADE A RETURN TO HEARTLAND

During a routine inspection of our streams, a surprising discovery was made: a dam built out of grass, mud and twigs of Russian thistle. The beaver (*Castor canadensis*) made an impressive return to the area it used to thrive in!

Despite decades of overgrazing by cattle, overproduction of crops, and persecution of the beaver for its fur in this region, a brave beaver couple decided to build a home on SPLT's protected land. Even without an abundance of trees, this resourceful and industrious mammal made its dam with the supplies at hand and has been building more dams in recent months. The beaver is our biggest ally in prairie restoration, as its dam-building capacity helps to store water and create the riparian habitat that so many other species depend on.

2

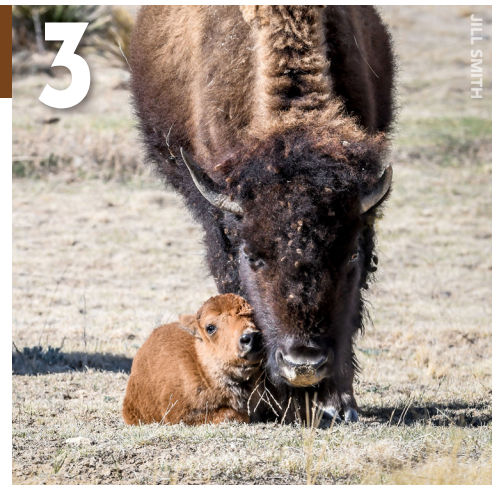


NOW FREE-ROAMING BISON HERD EXPANDED WITH 25 CALVES

After years of hard work on fence removal and replacement, setting up a camera monitoring system, and removing cattle from the land, it was time to set our bison herd free within the perimeters of the Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve.

They now have ~43,000 acres to roam freely. In this area they graze, wallow, rut and reproduce, which they have in healthy numbers. This year, 25 calves were born, growing our conservation herd to 120 individuals.

Bison graze the grasses at different heights, providing nesting grounds for birds. They also roll around and pack down the soil in depressions in the ground known as wallows. Their wallows fill with rainwater and offer breeding pools for amphibians and sources of drinking water for wildlife across the landscape. Their critical role as an ecosystem engineer helps keep the grasslands and its wildlife healthy and diverse.



SIX MILES OF STREAM RESTORED

During five separate volunteer weekends in 2024, great strides were made towards stream restoration. SPLT volunteers installed one-rock dams along a stretch of four miles of Mud Creek, helping to combat the effects of soil erosion.

Additionally, we built Beaver Dam Analogs and log jams with recycled cedar fence posts and willow cuttings. These structures will help slow water down, recharge the groundwater table and create habitat for aquatic wildlife, hopefully attracting more beavers in the future!

THE CREATION OF A NEW REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The Southern Plains Land Trust is proud to be the leader of a new Regional Partnership, the Southeast Colorado Recreation Outdoor Alliance Movement (SECO ROAM), funded by Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The coalition encompasses four counties in the region: Otero, Bent, Baca, and Prowers — and its goal is to build common ground among diverse stakeholders at the intersection of agriculture, recreation, conservation, and economic vitality in the southeast Colorado. Initial funding will provide capacity building for strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and community outreach.



The People Behind SPLT



STAFF

Henry Pollock, Ph.D;
Executive Director

Judith Westveer, Ph.D;
Assistant Director

Jay Tutchtton, Esq;
Preserve Manager

Kieran Andreoni, MSc;
Conservation Manager

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alexis Schaefer, President

Sheree Seabury, Vice President

Nicole Rosmarino, Ph.D., Secretary

Donna Driscoll, Treasurer

Board Members:

Rhiannon Gallagher, Shannon Ryon,
Melinda Redenius, Aubyn Royall

THANKS TO OUR AMAZING PARTNERS AND DONORS:

- Binnacle Fund
- Colorado Open Lands
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology
- Cottonwood Foundation
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Fund for Wild Nature
- Gates Family Foundation
- Great Outdoors Colorado
- KCS Pacific Foundation
- Keep it Colorado
- Land Trust Alliance
- McLellan Wildlife Foundation
- National Fish & Wildlife Foundation*
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Summerlee Foundation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado

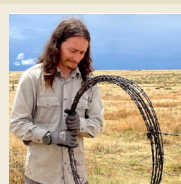
“After winning an educational tour on the SPLT preserves last year, we became inspired to contribute to their effort to buy land, remove fences, and reintroduce native species.”

— Karen and Rainer Gerbatsch,
SPLT Supporters



“By safeguarding critical prairie habitats, SPLT not only protects vital ecosystems, but also provides opportunities for future generations to experience the beauty and biodiversity of the region through responsible travel.”

— Sheridan Samano,
Co-founder of Reefs to
Rockies, SPLT partner



“After having volunteered and worked with many different conservation organizations around the country, I have found SPLT to be an incredible and refreshing change of pace.

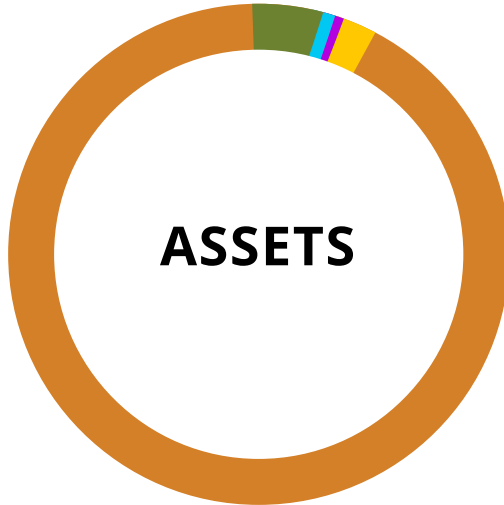
Despite being a small organization with few employees, they have displayed an incredible understanding of cutting-edge and modern conservation. They hit well above their weight class and put their available funds to work in ways that really make a difference.”

— Riley Gronemeyer, SPLT Volunteer

*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.

SPLT Financials 2023

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION 12/31/2023



ASSETS

Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$1,045,380
Promises to Give	\$19,185
Prepayments and Deposits	\$3,844
Investments	\$97,371
Net Property and Equipment	\$19,629,087
Total Assets	\$20,794,867

Liabilities	\$3,582,095
Net Assets	
Unrestricted	\$17,004,485
Board-designated Restricted	\$175,653
Donor-restricted	\$32,634
Total Net Assets	\$17,212,772
Total Liabilities + Net Assets	\$20,794,867

12/31/2023

AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES & CHANGES IN NET ASSETS

SUPPORT AND REVENUE	UNRESTRICTED	TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED	TOTAL
Contributions and Grants	\$541,386	\$19,185	\$560,571
Contributions of Nonfinancial Assets	\$45,000		\$45,000
Special Events	\$73,732		\$73,732
Investment Gain	\$10,149		\$10,149
Carbon and Tax Credit Sales	\$3,128,132		\$3,128,132
Other Income	\$26,535		\$26,535
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	\$498,815	\$(498,815)	
Total Support & Revenue	\$4,323,749	\$(479,630)	\$3,844,119
Operating Expenses			
Land Program	\$401,697		\$401,697
Other Conservation Projects	\$48,872		\$48,872
Animal Management	\$96,563		\$96,563
Outreach Program	\$14,264		\$14,264
Total Program Expenses	\$561,396		\$561,396
Supporting Expenses			
General Administrative	\$44,398		\$44,398
Business Development	\$23,278		\$23,278
Total Supporting Expenses	\$67,676		\$67,676
Total Expenses	\$629,072		\$629,072
Changes in Net Assets	\$3,694,677	\$(479,630)	\$3,215,047
Gain on Insurance Proceeds	\$217,406		\$217,406
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$13,268,055	\$512,264	\$13,780,319
Net Assets at End of Year	\$17,180,138	\$32,634	\$17,212,772

Support SPLT's Mission!

Prairie wildlife is stuck between a rock and a hard place. We need your support to protect the habitat for native flora and fauna, and let the prairie heal.



STEFAN EKENNAS

\$500 helps SPLT purchase an acre of prairie to preserve



\$1,000 builds ten beaver dam stream restoration structures



JILL SMITH

\$2,500 buys plague treatment for 100-acres of prairie dogs



RICH READING

\$5,000 helps build one mile of wildlife friendly fencing



KRISTI ODAM

\$10,000 feeds the refuge animals through the winter

The Southern Plains Land Trust is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization. Your donation is tax-deductible within the guidelines of U.S. law. To claim a donation as a deduction on your U.S. taxes, please keep your donation receipt as your official record. We'll send it to you after receiving your donation. Please use the enclosed envelope to mail us your check, or donate online at southernplains.org/en/give-donate.



Southern Plains Land Trust

P.O. BOX 1016, LAMAR, CO 81052