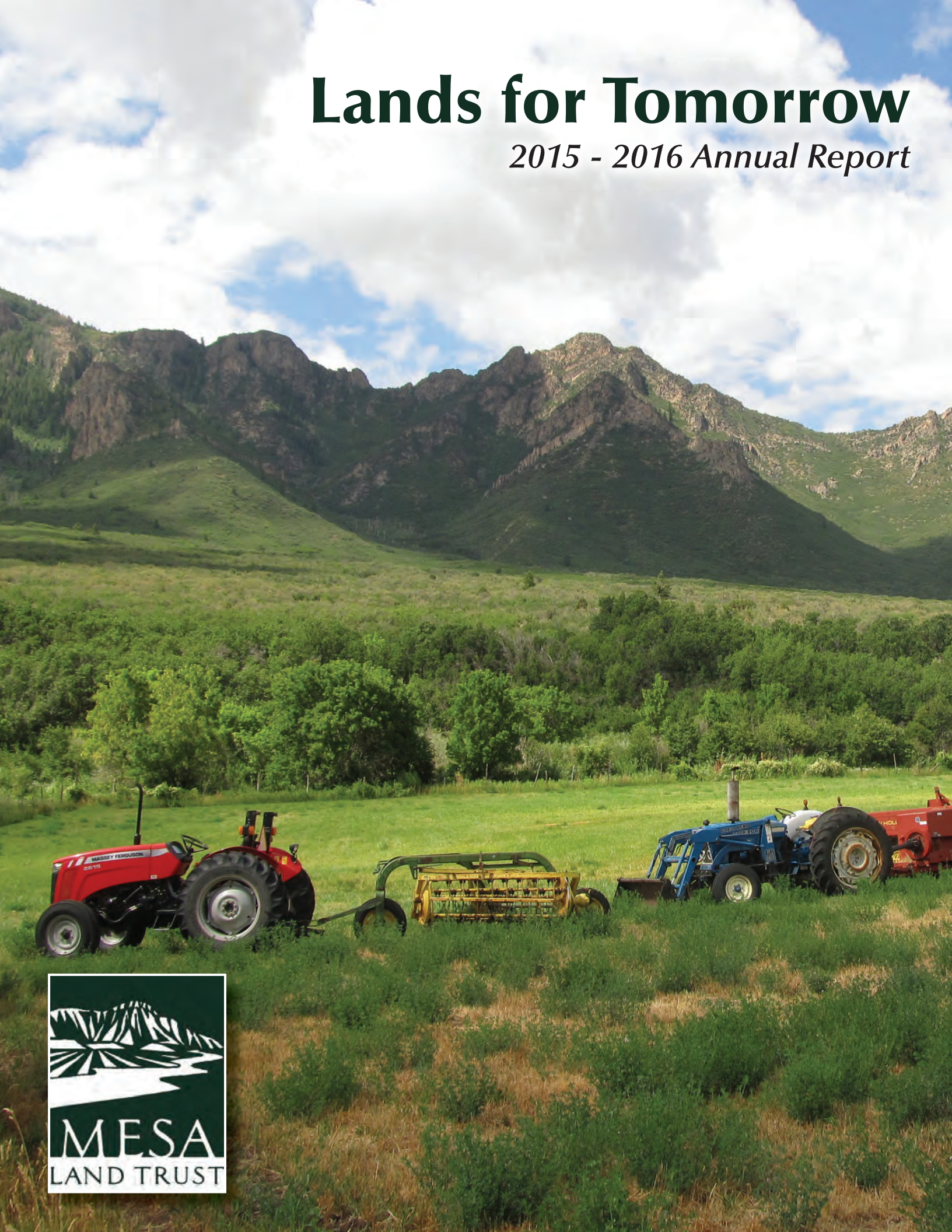


Lands for Tomorrow

2015 - 2016 Annual Report



Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

This past year marked a year of progress and change for Mesa Land Trust. With your support we gained ground in our work protecting the best of our community's natural lands. I trust you'll enjoy reading about conservation agreements near Palisade, in Unaweep Canyon, and on Glade Park in the pages that follow. We also laid the groundwork for conservation projects set to close after our 2016 fiscal year.

Along Monument Road, we partnered with organizations and volunteers to enhance the wonderful asset that is the Lunch Loop trail network and Three Sisters Park. With your help we built trails, restored vegetation and engaged the community in stewarding this backyard wilderness.

Change can be seen in our work with the RIO (Recreation Inspired by the Outdoors) collaboration. In our digital, device and screen-dominated world too many kids spend too little time playing outside. With support from Great Outdoors Colorado's Inspire Initiative, we are now working to introduce a new generation to the wonders and joy of outdoor play.

Change is also found in our developing partnership with Montrose-based Black Canyon Regional Land Trust. From the Bookcliffs to the San Juan Mountains, we are surrounded by incomparable beauty and bounty. We are exploring how we can best serve the region and increase the pace, quality, and permanence of our work. Stay tuned for more information as the regional collaboration develops.

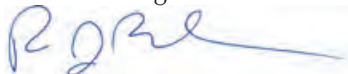
Land conservation is a long-term endeavor. Conservation projects can literally take years from initial conversations with landowners to closing a transaction. Our conservation agreements are written to stand the test of time. We are grateful and humbled by the steadfast support that you provide.

With your help we have now conserved 65,000 acres of land that define western Colorado. This reflects 36 years of work and over 200 conservation agreements. This is possible, of course, only because of you. Year after year, your financial support sustains this organization and empowers it to conserve the lands we all love. On behalf of the board and staff, thank you.

Warm Regards,
Steve McCall



Rob Bleiberg



Our Mission

To protect and enhance agricultural land, wildlife habitat and scenic lands in western Colorado to benefit the community at large, enrich lives, provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, and ensure our connection to the land for generations to come.

Palisade Fog Avant Farm
Photo by Diana Cort



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Front Cover:

Casto Ranch,
Photo by Ilana Moir

Ranching Conservation Generates Wonderful Public Benefit

By Sharon Sullivan

Beeman and Jessie Casto celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary in May 2015 by placing 740 acres of their Unaweep Canyon property in a conservation easement with Mesa Land Trust.

“Beeman lived here all his life and wanted this to always be a ranch – that was the determining factor,” in signing a conservation agreement, Jessie said. “As we grew older it was clear we would not be able to tend the ranch forever. We didn’t want it to be developed.”

At 82, Beeman saddles his own horse to move his herd of 300 cows to grazing areas. He continues to put up hay and tend to the irrigation.

The grandkids and great grandkids help with chores. “We want to keep it going,” said Beeman and Jessie’s granddaughter Lisa, who lives just up the road from her grandparents. Conserving the property with the Mesa Land Trust will make it possible for their grandchildren to someday take over the ranch.

Beeman grew up working on the ranch alongside his parents Byrl and Vivienne Casto. The landscape is lush with oak brush, rabbit brush, sagebrush, birch and juniper trees, as well as aspen. Protecting the box elders and riparian habitat growing along West Creek, that runs through the middle of the Casto property, ensures water quality important to the wild trout fishery downstream on BLM public land.

“I’ve had bear and elk peeking in my windows,” Beeman said. Plus, “we have birds of all kinds, including wild turkeys.”

The Casto’s conserved ranch provides outstanding views along the Unaweep-Tabeguache Scenic Byway on Hwy 141. The grey granite slopes and red sandstone cliffs iconic to Unaweep Canyon, abundant wildlife, and spectacular fall colors greet anyone traveling the byway toward Gateway.

Experience the Castos ranching life through a short video at www.mesalandtrust.org

Jessie and Beeman Casto with Illana Moir
Photo by Josh Duplechain



Wood ducks on West Creek

Preserving Fruit Land for Family Farms

By Sharon Sullivan

On a sunny September morning Al Ruckman shares his bounty with a visitor to his East Orchard Mesa farm – a handful of blackberries from the patch near his house; a ripe peach plucked from the orchard just beyond the front pasture.

A box of newly harvested tomatoes, cucumbers and jalapeno peppers sit in the barn waiting for family members to drop by and help themselves.

Like a lot of farming families, several of Ruckman's grown children and grandchildren live within a few miles of one another. They grow much of their own food, including chickens and steer for protein.

Roses grow in front of Ruckman's Victorian-style house that his late wife Sue designed and son Terry built. Looking north toward the peach orchard, Mt. Garfield looms impressively above the trees.

As a teenager Ruckman worked on his family's farm north of town – a farm that gave way to development years ago. A civil engineer by trade – his business Geo Stabilization fixes landslides – Ruckman also loves farming. He passed on the heritage to his son Ted and grandson Nick.

Together, the family took measures to preserve prime farmland on East Orchard Mesa when they placed 17 of their acres in a conservation easement in 2016. The Ruckmans farm a total of 45 acres, 18 of which is owned by Bob Barrett, and was already conserved.

"You can't develop it. That's what we want – for it to stay in farming," Ted Ruckman said. "It gives you a sense of long-term security to know it will always be in agriculture."



Nick, Al and Ted Ruckman
Photo by Sharon Sullivan

His father Al adds: "In the 1970s, and early 80s, they were carving up East Orchard Mesa severely. If they'd kept going there wouldn't be a fruit business here anymore."

Proceeds from selling their development rights to Mesa Land Trust will allow the family to purchase additional property for Nick, who plans to continue farming. That land, too, will be conserved, said his dad.

The Ruckmans first heard of Mesa Land Trust from neighbors who had conserved their property. Family members learned more about the program while attending a Western Colorado Horticultural Society convention in Grand Junction, where they met Ilana Moir, Mesa Land Trust Director of Conservation.

"Our whole intention," said Ted Ruckman, "is we don't want it to be developed. We want to keep it in the family and keep it in farming."



Ruckman's Orchard
Photo by Mary Hughes

Wildlife need food, shelter and water—just like humans

In 1999, Mercedes (Merce) Cameron and Roberta (Bert) Nieslanik purchased Ladder Canyon Ranch with the goal of improving habitat on the 1,760 acre Glade Park property. Since that time they have focused their energies on enhancing wildlife habitat on this vast landscape, which is surrounded by over 30,000 acres of public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Located 3,000 feet above Grand Junction on the eastern flank of Pinyon Mesa, Ladder Canyon Ranch has breathtaking views of the Grand Valley, Bookcliffs, and Grand Mesa. When Merce and Bert acquired the property, 1,600 acres were protected through a conservation agreement. In June 2015, in an effort to preserve even more habitat, they added the remaining 160 acres to a revised conservation agreement, which also removed subdivision rights on those parcels.

Food

Merce is a retired physician and Bert is a longtime criminal defense attorney. However, you don't have to spend a great deal of time with them to realize that they consider it their real life's work to provide an ideal environment for wildlife, especially the deer and elk that depend on the ranch for winter habitat.

In order to protect wildlife, they need open land to roam and raise their young and critical winter habitat to provide refuge from the harsh weather at higher elevations.

"Winter habitat is scarce and much of the loss of habitat in Colorado is related to fragmentation caused by development.

There has to be land designated for wildlife. By partnering with Mesa Land Trust we are assuring that this land will forever be undeveloped and available for use by wildlife," said Merce.

Shelter



At one time the property was overgrazed by livestock, causing a loss of native grasses and an overgrowth of pinyon pines and sage. However, in recent years Merce and Bert have worked with CSU Extension, NRCS, and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to return the land to the original native grasses, including Indian ricegrass, needle and thread, and galleta. In an effort to control the pinyon pines, a Christmas tree cutting party is held every December.

Water

In a high desert climate like Glade Park, adequate water for cattle, irrigation, wildlife, and human use can be in short supply throughout the year. To address this issue, Merce and Bert, and their friends and family, constructed a pipeline to carry water from springs on the property to watering troughs and ponds.

Merce and Bert like to joke that they bought their land "used" just like everyone else. They have just begun their long term plan for the extensive habitat restoration that, once completed, will restore Ladder Canyon Ranch to a "like new" condition.

Merce joined the Mesa Land Trust board of directors this past May and Bert volunteers time on the fundraising committee.



View from Ladder Canyon Ranch
Photo by Diana Cort

To be in the wilderness, yet so close to town...

Recreational opportunities to expand in Monument Road area

By Sharon Sullivan

The Lunch Loop-Three Sisters area off Monument Road is bustling most mornings and afternoons with mountain bikers, hikers, runners, and dog walkers. With more than 50 miles of trails, there's plenty of room to enjoy its wide-open spaces.

Mesa Land Trust added nearly 200 acres to the Lunch Loop area when it purchased the adjoining Three Sisters, and Bookends properties in 2012 and 2014, respectively. Nearly 1,000 donors helped raise the \$2.4 million for the purchase. Today the city owns these parcels with conservation agreements that preserve trail-based recreation forever.

Through acquiring this land, Mesa Land Trust has worked with Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association Inc. (COPMOBA) to build trails for beginners, kids, and families to add to the vast collection of aggressive and challenging trails at Lunch Loop.

"We really wanted to make this incredible area more available for a wider range of trail users, including families and kids. We want to help connect people to place to build even deeper connections to the land," said Libby Collins, Mesa Land Trust's community engagement and outreach coordinator.

The Land Trust engages community members of all ages – through restoration projects, trail building and on guided interpretative hikes.

Mesa Land Trust has long sought public input to learn what community members want to see happen along Monument Road, the gateway to Colorado National Monument's east entrance. The Land Trust learned via public meetings that residents would like a path connecting the Riverfront Trail to the Lunch Loop-Three Sisters area.

Harry and Joann Hotimsky, owners of 1st Choice Real Estate Company, reside within two miles of the Lunch Loop – Three Sisters area.

"Our kids grew up on those trails. We run and walk our dogs there every day," Hotimsky said. "It's amazing how much usage has grown," since he and his family moved to the area in 2001.

As realtors, the Hotimskys work with people from all over the world that are interested in moving to Grand Junction, specifically for its trails and open space, Hotimsky said.

"It's huge – people don't understand what a true economic boost it is," Hotimsky said.

"Originally the Three Sisters was going to be a subdivision of homes – now it's bike paths and trails for the entire community to enjoy."

Because of their appreciation for open space, the Hotimskys have supported Mesa Land Trust with financial contributions and as volunteers building trails.

"It's amazing what Mesa Land Trust has done in this community," Hotimsky said.



*Native Plant Interpretative Hike at Three Sisters,
Photo by Alicia Langton*

Welcome to Our Newest Board Members



Mercedes "Merce" Cameron arrived in Western Colorado (Telluride, to be exact) in 1973 for a 2-week ski vacation and never left, except for a "short" stint in Denver for medical school. She graduated from the University of California at Santa Cruz, and attended medical school and did her family practice residency at the University of Colorado. She practiced family medicine in Grand Junction for over 20 years, after which she worked as a travelling physician in several towns throughout Colorado while working with Heart to Heart International, a disaster medicine organization. Merce and her partner own land on Glade Park which is preserved with a conservation agreement through Mesa Land Trust. They focus on enhancing their property for wildlife. Now retired, she finally has time for some long dreamed of ranch projects and volunteering with Mesa Land Trust



Laurian Unnevehr has been a resident of the Grand Valley since 2012, when she and her husband realized a lifelong dream to retire in the west. Laurian is a retired agricultural economist and Professor Emerita of the University of Illinois. A native of California, she has lived and worked in southeast Asia, the Midwest, and Washington DC. Her research has focused on food policy, including promotion of value-added agriculture. She has been a consultant to both the private and non-profit sectors on food policy issues, including food safety management and the role of local foods in nutrition. She enjoys hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, kayaking, wine tasting, and peach pie baking opportunities in this unique region. Since moving to the Grand Valley, she has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Mesa Land Trust and their vision for a vibrant agricultural community.

2015–2016 Board and Staff



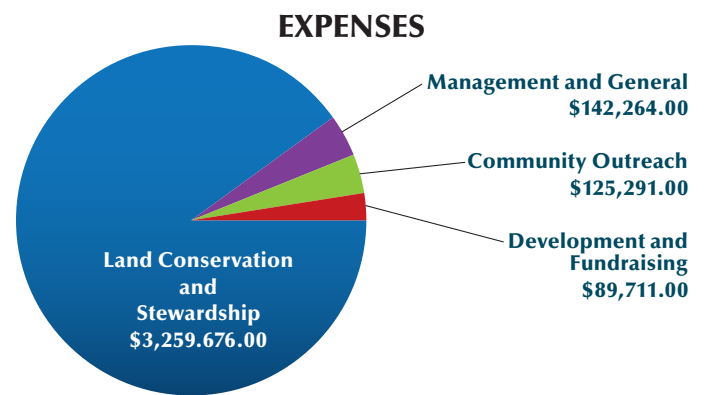
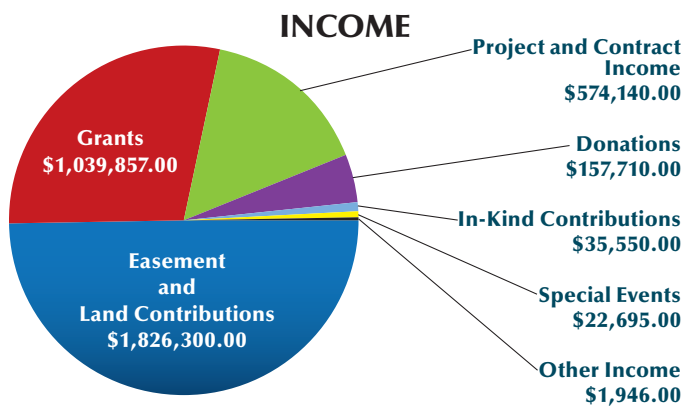
Pictured L-R: Mary Hughes, Ilana Moir, Bill Prakken, Libby Collins, Chuck McDaniel, Barb Chamberlin, Van Graham, Diana Cort, Jane Quimby, Steve McCall, Russ Walker, Guy Parker, Margery Fillinger, Pam Childers, Sandie Cooper, Zach Eyler, Belle Chesnick, Janine Rider, Allison Rehor, Mike Sewell, Bill Findlay, Rob Bleiberg.

IN MEMORIAM

The Land Trust is sorry to report the passing of Nancy Distefano of Palisade in September; she was 81 years old. Nancy and her husband George placed a conservation easement on nearly 17 acres of their peach and cherry orchard at the mouth of Debeque Canyon in 2005. She and George were married 66 years and have two daughters; their grandson Derek Selan is also an owner/operator of the orchards. Nancy's husband and family, including her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, were the focus of her life. We appreciate the commitment Nancy and George made to the future of farming in Palisade. It was a privilege knowing her and she will be greatly missed.

2015 - 2016 Fiscal Year Financials

Mesa Land Trust is pleased to report that 2015-2016 was a very successful year. Over 94% of our expenses went toward land conservation, education and outreach. Only 2% went toward fundraising expenses and 4% toward administration.



Contributions In-Honor Have a Lasting Impact

Julie Malingowski and Brian Buechler love living in western Colorado and have a passion for outdoor recreation, especially for biking the trails at the Lunch Loop area on Monument Road. They also appreciate the role that Mesa Land Trust has played in conserving nearly 200 acres of adjoining land to expand the trail network and preserve scenic views.

When the couple planned their June 2015 wedding, they decided they had all that they needed to begin their lives together. With the beautiful lands that they love to play on in mind, Julie and Brian decided that instead of wedding gifts they would create a campaign to ask family and friends to contribute to Mesa Land Trust. They asked that gifts be donated to help expand the trails and preserve even more of the scenic views that make Grand Junction and the surrounding landscape a wonderful place to live work and recreate.

To manage the campaign Julie and Brian set up their own fundraising page at ColoradoGives.org. Throughout the campaign period, leading up to their wedding, their family and friends donated to the Land Trust, simply by going to this page, and Julie and Brian received the joy of knowing that recreational trails and spectacular scenery will forever remain a part of the Monument Road landscape.

Mesa Land Trust truly appreciates Julie and Brian and this very thoughtful expression of thanks for our conservation work. These generous contributions in their honor will have a lasting impact on the future of our community.

ColoradoGives is a statewide online giving website and a program of Community First Foundation that encourages charitable giving and provides information about Colorado nonprofits to support them online.

If you would like to create a fundraising page to support our conservation work please contact Mary Hughes, MLT Development Officer at mary@mesalandtrust.org or 970.263.5443.

Julie Malingowski and Brian Buechler



Leave a Legacy

Remembering Mesa Land Trust in your estate plans is a wonderful way to create a personal legacy. The Land Trust is pleased to accept gifts of stock, mutual funds, and insurance. We would also be delighted to talk to you about a real estate gift or help you set up a charitable gift annuity. Contact Mary Hughes to learn more.

Contributions

Thank you to Our Donors and Partners in Conservation! We recognize the following gifts received between October, 2015 and September, 2016. We apologize if we have omitted or misspelled your name. Please feel free to call Mesa Land Trust and let us know!

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Our Monthly Sustaining Partners are providing a regular source of income that Mesa Land Trust can count throughout the year. Visit www.mesalandrust.org and click donate to enroll. Please join our growing list of Monthly Sustaining Partners.

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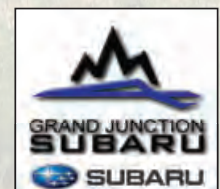
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Looking Forward – Community coalition aims to get kids outside

By Sharon Sullivan

American kids spend an average of four to seven minutes playing outside each day – a fraction of the time their parents spent outdoors as children. Even though research shows that being outdoors benefits children physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively.

Mesa Land Trust believes all kids deserve access to the great outdoors – including the public lands that exist in our own backyard. For that reason the Land Trust is partnering with a Great Outdoors Colorado Inspire Initiative to nurture in children a strong connection to the natural world.

The Land Trust is part of a broad coalition called RIO (Recreation Inspired by the Outdoors) that includes Grand Junction Parks and Recreation, Riverside Education Center, Colorado Canyons Association, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Healthy Mesa County, Mesa County Partners, and the Riverside Task Force. The coalition received a GOCO Inspire grant to create a plan for improving access to existing outdoor parks or trails, and bolster youth programs.



Mesa Land Trust is committed to connecting young people with nature and promoting healthy outdoor activities. We look forward to continued work with our RIO partners in the coming year. Visit our website to learn more about Project RIO and our work with local youth, www.mesalandtrust.org