



COLORADO WEST LAND TRUST

2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT



Conserving Land. Connecting People. Enriching Lives.

Greetings, friends of the Colorado West Land Trust.

None of us could have anticipated the enormous changes that 2020 brought to us. In every facet of our personal and professional lives, we've had to adapt. Often these changes have been unpleasant at best, and harmful to our ways of life and our livelihoods at worst. We are happy to report that Colorado West Land Trust has adapted quite well and has forged ahead with exciting projects across the Western Slope.

Adopting the necessary health and safety guidelines has forced big changes in the way we work. The office is officially closed for business. Our staff work remotely from home or in the office one or two at a time. All of our social events—where we get to mingle with you, our dear friends—have been canceled. Board and staff meetings take place on Zoom. Perhaps most disappointingly, we've had to cancel the many in-person events we'd planned to celebrate our 40th Anniversary.

Fortunately, thanks to dedicated staff members and our supporters, 2020 has been an extraordinarily productive year, full of exciting accomplishments. We trust that you'll enjoy reading about the Land Trust's work in the pages that follow. You will see how we've gained ground in protecting critical landscapes, fostered stewardship of our natural resources, and connected our community to nature.

Agriculture, outdoor recreation, wildlife, scenic beauty—these features define western Colorado, and we are committed to preserving them. Our determination to protect the character of western Colorado never wanes. With you beside us, we will continue to succeed.

THANK YOU. You have made these accomplishments possible. Your continuing enthusiasm for our mission has allowed us to keep moving forward.

With gratitude,

From the staff and the board of CWLT,



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Janine Rider
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Rob Bleiberg
Rob Bleiberg
Executive Director



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*Pictured on the cover: Libby Collins, George & Judy Callison, and Ilana Moir at the newly conserved Jurassic Flats property along Monument Road, Mesa County. Photo by Robb Reece Photography.
Annual Report Design: Amy Nuernberg Marketing | Design | Web



Celebrating 40 Years of Conservation

Unless you lived through it, it's hard to imagine the oil shale boom tsunami that washed over western Colorado in the late 1970s and into early 1980s. Thousands of workers from around the country poured into the region, the first wave of an estimated 1.5M new residents that would transform the Western Slope. Led by Exxon spending of \$1M per day, more than a dozen oil companies made plans to invest over \$20 billion to extract oil from the ubiquitous "rock that burns."

While some envisioned riches and progress, a group of Palisade farmers saw something else: an existential threat to their heritage and way of life. Harry & Bonnie Talbott, John & Doris Butler, Ivan & Jane Wood, Herman Allamaras, Blaine Derrick and others organized and took action to protect farms. Some joined the county planning commission while others made proposals to the general county commission. They learned a discouraging truth—local government was ill-equipped to conserve important places in the face of intense development pressures. "Wild-eyed radicals" is how Harry Talbott says he and the other founders were regarded by many in town.

Through a series of serendipitous events, the founders learned about land trusts. And thus in 1980, seated around Ivan & Jane Woods' kitchen table, they established Mesa County Land Conservancy, one of the nation's first conservation groups created by farmers to protect agricultural land. Then the boom went bust.

Harry Talbott likes to say that persistence alone is omnipotent, and the story of the Land Trust is a case in point. For more than a decade, the all-volunteer conservancy made modest progress. But the founders, joined by Mike & Blakely Mechau, persisted, understanding that a next boom would come and that Palisade's farmland represented an enduring value worthy of long-term protection.

Fifteen years after its founding, and still led by dedicated volunteers, the Land Trust secured funding from Great Outdoors Colorado and began a new chapter as a professionally staffed organization. With increasing community support and an infusion of new board members, the organization flourished. »



Current and former board members at our 2019 Luminaries Luncheon event to celebrate their contributions over the years.

Celebrating 40 Years ~continued

"I had the good fortune of being the second attempt at a first hire, and joined the organization in 1996," says Rob Bleiberg, the current executive director. "Two things amaze me about the founders. First, their dedication and stamina—they wandered in the desert for more than a decade during the quiet years, but they never lost faith. Second, they embraced new leadership and change. Stories of *Founder's Syndrome*—when passionate founders won't let go of power and stifle an organization's development—are legion in the nonprofit world. This group of Palisade farmers, however, enthusiastically welcomed new leaders and new ideas."

A remarkable group of respected, effective individuals followed the founders and guided the Land Trust forward. Skip Mottram, Lee Ambrose, Mel Rettig, John Pabst, Bill Prakken, Miffy Blozovich, Max Stites, Van Graham, Steve McCall, Chuck McDaniel, and Janine Rider have all served as board presidents, contributing invaluable leadership and representing dozens of board members who've quietly worked on behalf of the community and shaped the region's future. For the Land Trust's Founders, the organization's broad community support and achievements validate their years of hard work.

The past four decades of active conservation on the Western Slope demonstrate the power of our mission. We have grown steadily and now boast a region of protected lands that reach from just over the Utah state line to Blue Mesa Reservoir, from the Book Cliffs to heart of the San Juans.



We share a love of western Colorado—be it with a farmer, rancher, recreationist, or conservationist—and we all want to protect what we have here: a place to call home.

This year, we celebrate all of you who have brought us this far: the founders who dreamt of protecting their peach farms; the board members who have guided the organization; the farmers who have protected their farms and sustained our local food supply; the ranchers who have preserved their family's heritage and vast swaths of wildlife habitat; the local governments and public partners who have enhanced access to the outdoors; the landowners who protect scenic open space, rivers, and wildlife corridors; and the many others who have donated, volunteered, or shared their support.

Ultimately, the story of the Land Trust is one of community coming together to protect what we hold precious.

And it is your story, too. For decades, you have stood sentinel, keeping watch of the landscapes that sustain and inspire us. 📍



Adaptation & Preparing for the Future

This March, as the pandemic upended our world, the Land Trust quickly transitioned to life behind a computer screen. We had to change in many ways— by cancelling events, slimming down budgets, drafting contingency plans, and finding alternatives to in person meetings, for example—but we have fared well, thanks to generous support from our many friends and partners. The Land Trust continues to adjust to our changing environment and 2021 is bright with potential.

Our ability to adapt has been crucial to our resilience and success this tumultuous year. Here are a few ways we've risen to the challenges of 2020.

MERGING

Black Canyon Regional Land Trust and Colorado West Land Trust merged this fall, creating a more efficient organization better equipped to meet the challenges of protecting the incredible landscapes of the Western Slope.

REMOTE MONITORING

In response to the pandemic, CWLT shifted to satellite imagery to monitor conserved properties. This safety-driven change made us more efficient and provided us experience with new tools that we'll incorporate in our future work.

Adaptation and the identification of new opportunities to serve the

community have been hallmarks of the Land Trust's work over the past 40 years, so its ability to thrive in changing conditions should not be surprising. During this year of uncertainty, the organization continues to chart its course forward.

CONSERVATION PLANNING

As the newly merged CWLT embraces its six-county region, the organization is developing a new conservation plan to identify priorities and focus resources. In the face of population growth, increased demand for water resources, development pressure on farmers and ranchers, a surge in outdoor recreation, and warmer, drier conditions, the new plan will equip us to make the greatest conservation impact for this precious region. We expect to have a completed plan by this coming spring.

IMPROVING LANDSCAPES & ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

Once a new conservation project is complete, our work is just beginning. We routinely partner with landowners to pilot stewardship projects that will improve habitat and landscape resilience. Our forest health work, featured on page 12, is one example of this. With 125,000 conserved acres, this presents a wonderful opportunity to make a lasting impact at scale.

Moreover, to ensure our work is viable over the long-haul, we have developed a financial model that will inform and guide future decisions. We will soon embark on a fundraising effort to capitalize our stewardship fund so we are best able to fulfill our promise to protect lands in perpetuity.



An example property as seen during an aerial monitoring visit.

Our success relies upon building and maintaining relationships with ranchers, farmers, outdoor recreationists, conservationists, and our many other partners and supporters. As we move forward, we remain focused on serving the conservation needs of the Western Slope in an inclusive and effective manner. Land conservation is long-term, and we are relentless so our communities can be resilient. 📍

The Living Farm



By Dillon Robertson

In a rapidly urbanizing world, Paonia is still the kind of place where neighbors know each other by name and people offer friendly waves as they cross paths on quiet roads.

If this relaxed and friendly demeanor is born of rural etiquette, it is cemented by the scenery. It is gorgeous in the North Fork Valley, as the last bits of snow from a late-October squall melt in patches of shade. Country roads weave through flannel plains with a skyline marked by Mount Lamborn and Landsend Peak, not far off.

A long dirt road leads the way to The Living Farm, where owners Tom and Lynn Gillespie run an impressive operation alongside their grown children, Mike, Ben, and Jenny.

Lynn is waiting to greet me as I park the car in front of their shop. After exchanging pleasantries, I ask her to lead the way and she takes me to the middle of a nearby field. Sheep begin

to gather around us and Lynn politely greets them: “Hi Bunny! Hi Moon! Hello Marsha. Autumn, do you want to say ‘hello’ too?”



Tom and Lynn in the doorway of one of their greenhouses.

She knows them all by name, I’m convinced, and they continue to crowd around us as Lynn tells me about the farm.

Here is a quick tally of the facts: they have 9,000 square feet of indoor greenhouse space and 11,000 square feet of outdoor vegetable gardens; they operate a CSA; they service a couple restaurants; they grow hay, grains, and silage; they have around 50 cows, 100 sheep, thousands of chickens, and a few pigs. Wool from the sheep is used to make felted products: mittens, hats, gloves, and slippers. Mike is the owner and executive chef of The Living Farm Café and Inn in downtown Paonia. Lynn is also an author, blogger, vlogger, teacher, and mother.



Lynn showing how to use a carding machine to clean and disentangle wool fibers.

There is simply too much credit to catalogue here, so let's just call the Gillespies hard workers.

Tom and Lynn first heard about the Land Trust—in this case Black Canyon Regional Land Trust—around 2005 and subsequently decided to conserve their property.

Lynn explains their motivation: “We wanted this farm to stay a farm and to pass it down through the generations but don’t want it to get divided up.

So, we went ahead and conserved the land and were able to take the proceeds from the tax sales and get the mortgage off the farm. We are pretty much mortgage free now.

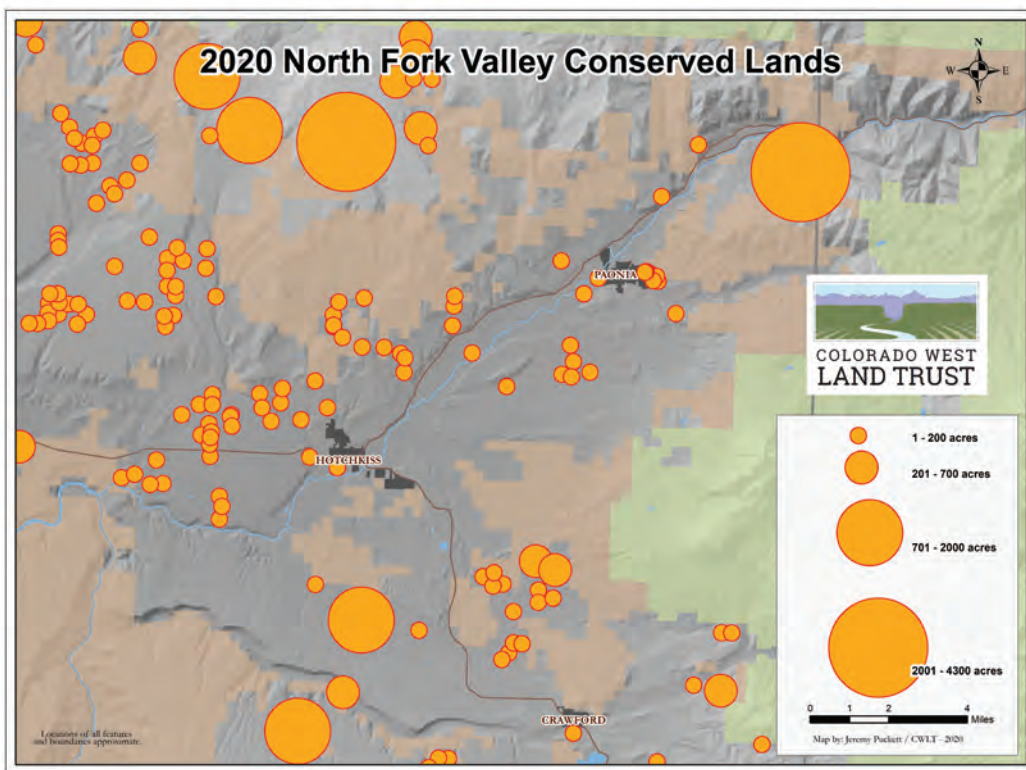
That’s huge. If you want to survive in farming you can’t carry a debt load. So that was our decision, and we are pretty happy that we did it.”

The Gillespie’s neighbors took notice: “When you look out, we’ve got Dave Herz up on the hill, Karl Burns right next to us, and Willy Kistler right behind us,” says Lynn, as she points in different locations around us. “We told them, ‘You guys ought to check this out,’ and they did. These are the last few big farms in terms of acreage around here; all the others are already split up.”

The process of landscape-scale private conservation across the Western Slope often happens like this: clusters of landowners in the same region will contact the Land Trust after seeing what their trusted neighbor has done. The justifications may be nuanced and many, best understood and communicated by farmers and ranchers who serve as local expertise. In short, landowners are our best advertisement.

When I asked Lynn what she would say to other landowners looking to conserve their land, she didn’t hesitate to share her thoughts: “I would say do it. You only have this opportunity to keep it from getting developed. We need open space and we need farms. Living here is the best thing that’s ever happened to us; look at what we get to see every single day.”

With their land in a conservation easement, the Gillespies can rest assured that their farm—and their view—will remain protected by the Land Trust for generations to come. 📍



To learn more about The Living Farm, visit their website at thelivingfarm.org.

Clusters of conserved properties form where neighbors are trusted, as one can see from this map of the North Fork Valley.

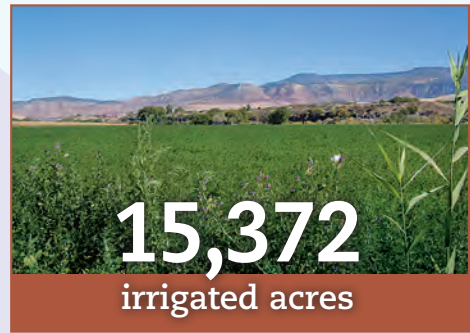


Photo by Malcolm G. Childers

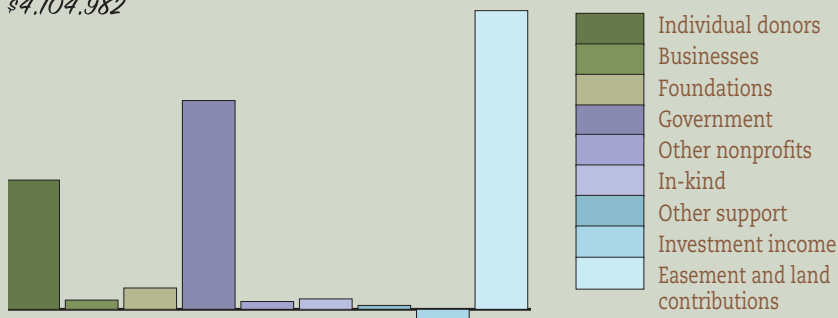


Photo by Dawn Reeder

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT*

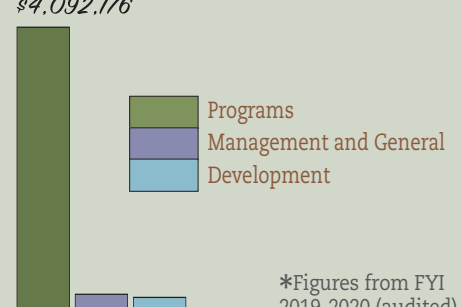
Income

\$4,104,982



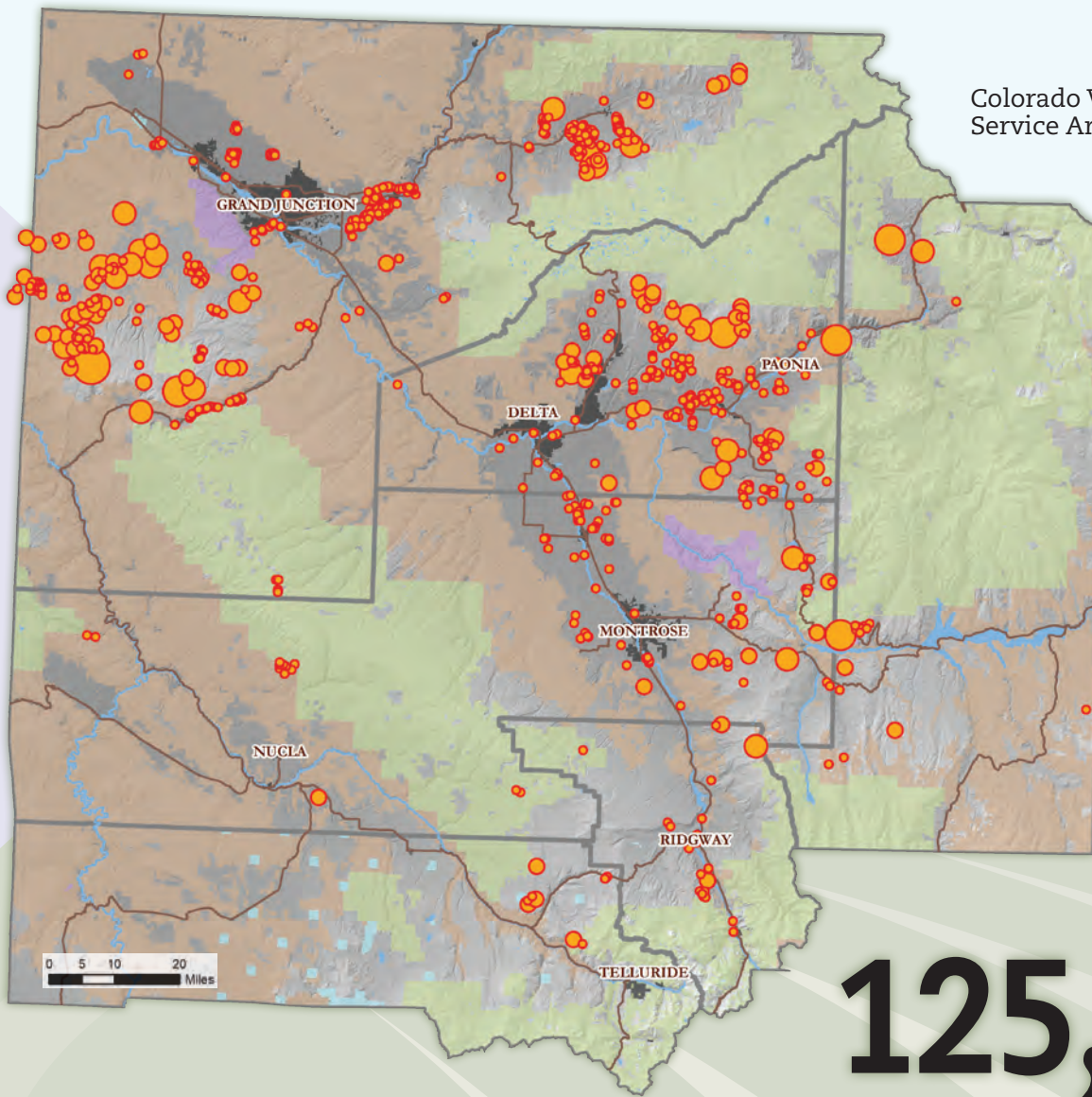
Expenses

\$4,092,176



*Figures from FYI
2019-2020 (audited)

Colorado West Land Trust
Service Area Map 2020



Conserved Lands	
	1 - 200 acres
	201 - 700 acres
	701 - 2000 acres
	2001 - 4300 acres
	4301 - 9000 acres
	Lakes
	West Slope Rivers
	US & State Highways
	County Boundary
	Towns
	US Forest Service
	Bureau of Land Mgt.
	National Park Service
	State of Colorado

125,000
acres preserved



112,532 acres
of winter range for big
game animals



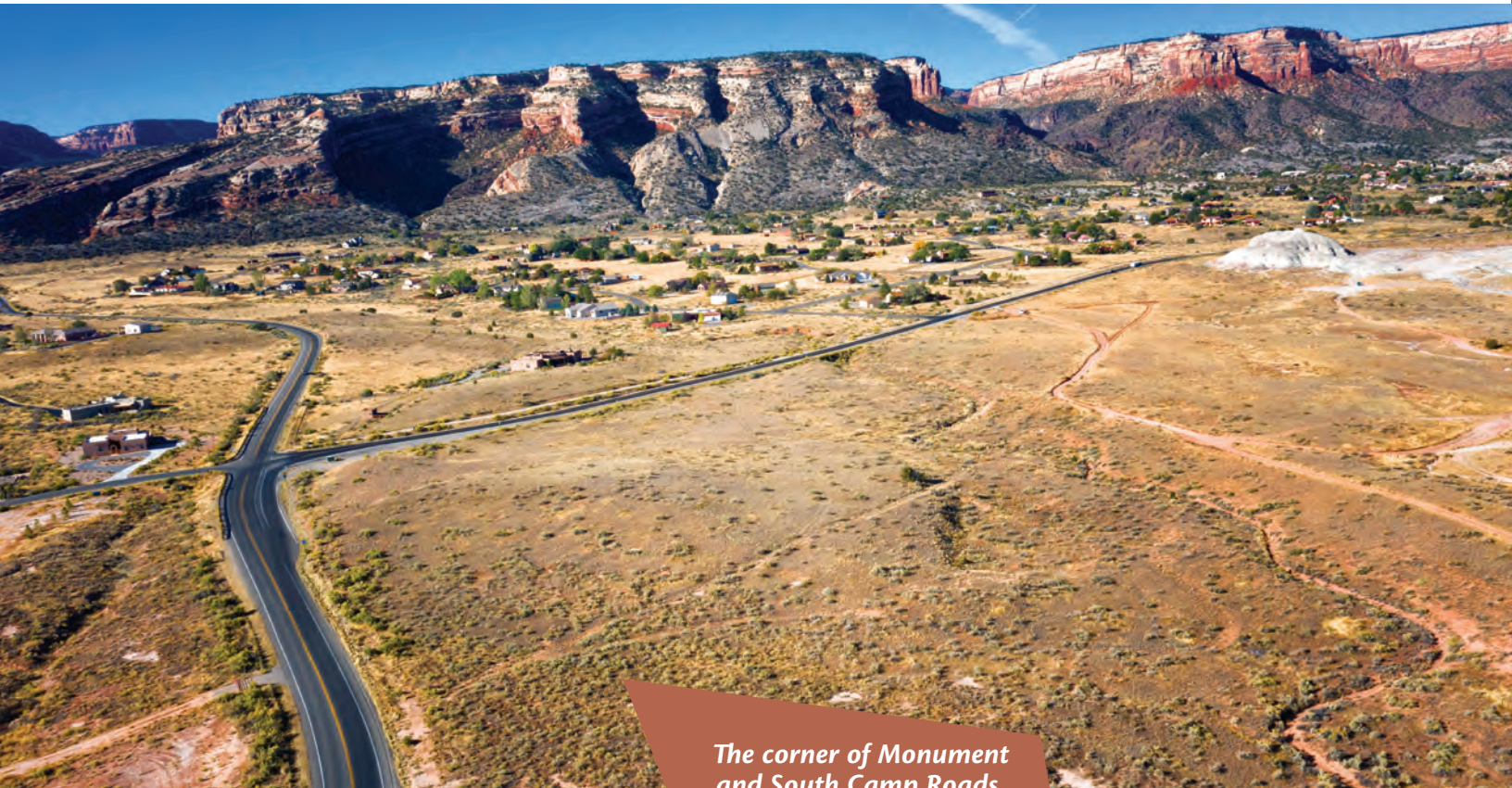
600
conservation agreements

Ways to support Colorado West Land Trust

📍 **Donate today** 📍 **Leave a Legacy** 📍 **Volunteer**



The Monument Corridor: Building Community by Enhancing Access



*The corner of Monument
and South Camp Roads.
Dubbed Jurassic Flats by locals.*

Photo by Robb Reece Photography

Never before has our mission to connect people to nature and the outdoors been so important.

The pandemic restrictions have driven residents to seek out nearby open space for exercise, peace of mind, and safe socializing. Convenience and proximity of trails make the Lunch Loop trails along the Monument Corridor a favorite community destination. The concrete Monument Trail and extensive trailhead improvements were completed just in time to accommodate the significant uptick of use this year at the Grand Valley's most popular trailhead. Crowded trails alive with people of all ages and abilities demonstrate the urgent need to add to the City's open space network and infrastructure.

The Monument Trail and Lunch Loop Shade Shelters

Last February, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and funders from across the state joined Colorado West Land Trust,

the City of Grand Junction, Mesa County, and many other partners and supporters for a grand opening of the concrete Monument Trail and Lunch Loop Trailhead shade shelters.

The ceremony marked an important milestone in the community's work to conserve the Monument Road corridor and connect the Riverfront Trail to Lunch Loop and South Camp Road.

To complete the first phase of this vision, over the past decade Colorado West Land Trust acquired close to 200 acres of land and right of way for the paved trail, partnered with the City of Grand Junction to raise the \$2.4 million to construct the paved path, and raised an additional \$55,000 to construct shade shelters at the Lunch Loop Trailhead.

What was once a wide spot in the road is today an attractive trailhead that serves as a favorite outdoor recreation hub and provides access to a world-class trail network.



The new Monument Trail sign during the ribbon cutting event.

Monument Road conservation has led to opportunities to involve youth in recreation and stewardship activities.



Cycle Effect girls on the trail.

Completing the Vision

Thanks to the generous local donors, the Land Trust has purchased two additional properties over the past 14 months that will provide critical access to open space, preserve views, and improve trail connectivity with the next phase of the paved Monument Trail.

Dubbed Jurassic Flats to celebrate its geologic past, the undeveloped 16 acres on the corner of Monument and South Camp Roads will remain as a critical piece of the City's public open space network. Planning is in progress to create an official trailhead and parking area that will also provide staging for road riders and access to the next phase of the Monument Trail. A 20 acre parcel purchased by CWLT just last month will provide the missing link to extend the concrete Monument Trail to South Camp Road.



Eureka! students working to restore native vegetation along the new Monument Trail.

Working to Restore Native Vegetation

Historically, the Lunch Loop and the Three Sisters areas have been used for motorized and non-motorized recreation—social trails, double track jeep roads, and invasive vegetation have peppered the landscape for decades. Since the purchase of the Three Sisters property in 2011, however, the Land Trust has partnered with experts to address unsustainable trails, erosion, and non-native vegetation.

Today, the Land Trust leads a robust restoration effort with its partners, the City of Grand Junction, Eureka! McConnell Science Museum, Western Colorado Conservation Corps, Riverside Educational Center, Colorado Mesa University faculty and students, and the Grand Valley Audubon. Students, WCCC's Youth Corps, and a small group of regular volunteers called Monument Stewards, have also partnered with us to install native plants, pull weeds, remove tamarisk, install willows, and more.



Restoration Ecologist, David Varner, receives a helping hand from his daughter, Lucia.

Restoration enhances local bird and wildlife habitat and provides an outdoor classroom for our community! 📍



An interdisciplinary team of experts met with CWLT and landowners to discuss methods for addressing certain vegetation conditions that lead to extreme fire behavior.

Wildfire Mitigation is a Team Effort in Ouray County

By Libby Collins

Colorado West Land Trust is partnering with the owners of conserved land in Ouray County and the West Region Wildfire Council (WRWC) to improve forest health and wildlife habitat on a spectacularly scenic 140-acre property overlooking Dallas Divide, while significantly mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfire for neighboring ranch land and residences.

This work is part of a larger collaborative effort by CWLT and WRWC to expand forest health stewardship on private conserved lands throughout the region. Through extensive GIS mapping, the two organizations are assessing conserved properties and determining where they can have greatest impact on reducing the threat of wildfire and safeguarding important habitat. CWLT will reach out to the owners of priority

properties and partner with those interested in improving the health of forests on their land.

A demonstration project north of Ridgway illustrates the potential of this collaboration. Landowners Jay and Kathy Montgomery, their son Nathan and daughter Ashley, and cousin, John Fick, have worked intensively with CWLT, WRWC, and local wildlife and plant experts to plan wildfire mitigation treatments that enhance the conservation values of the property. With funding from Great Outdoors Colorado, CWLT and the WRWC plan to complete work over the winter months that will include thinning and removing invasive species, reseeded for native vegetation, and creating a strategic fire break. 📍



COLORADO WEST LAND TRUST
Conserving Land. Connecting People. Enriching Lives.



PLANNED GIVING

Document Your Conservation Legacy Goals

Last year, Colorado West Land Trust lost a dear friend and committed supporter. Following her passing, we were notified that her estate plans included one last gift to the Land Trust—the organization had been named as a beneficiary on both an annuity and a retirement account.

This unexpected gift was transformative for CWLT, allowing us to better serve regional conservation needs and helping to secure the Land Trust's future. Though we were never able to thank that donor during her lifetime, the impact of this donation cannot be understated.

As we celebrate Colorado West Land Trust's 40th anniversary this year, we are planning for the next 40 and beyond. As I think about this donor and her incredibly generous gift, and about the others who have told us that they are making provisions for the Land Trust in their estate plans, I am humbled and thankful that so many share our vision for the future of western Colorado.

If you are considering naming Colorado West Land Trust in your will or estate plans, or if you would like more information about leaving a charitable bequest, please let me know; Rob or I would be delighted to visit with you. If you have already provided for CWLT in your future plans, please let me know. I would love to add you to our growing list of Legacy Society members. 📍



Mary Hughes

Mary W. Hughes

Mary Hughes, Development Director
mary@cowestlandtrust.org

Become a Monthly Sustaining Partner

Pam and Malcolm Childers built their home and moved to the Grand Valley in 2008 because it was one of the most diversely beautiful places they had ever seen. As an artist and photographer, Malcolm describes it as "an endlessly changing heaven."

They both became involved in Colorado West Land Trust's work to conserve, preserve, and share "what matters most to us all." Pam began as a volunteer and continues her support on the Board of Directors because "I want to protect the wild spaces for plants and animals as the population grows." Malcolm's photographs celebrate the beauty that the Land Trust has already preserved. They both value all that CWLT does, so donating monthly is one of the important ways they support the Land Trust throughout the year.

The Land Trust's efforts preserve the lands that produce local food and wine, the scenic open space and recreational areas, and the natural wildlife and riparian habitats that are this region's heritage.

Pam and Malcolm "wish to sustain our environment for future generations, and we encourage you to join us as Monthly Sustaining Partners." Visit cowestlandtrust.org/donate to get started. 📍



YOUR DONATIONS MATCHED!

Become a Monthly Sustaining Partner by the end of the fiscal year, April 30, 2021, and **your donations will be matched each month for one year.**

Visit www.cowestlandtrust.org to get started.

Thank you to our generous supporters*

**We honor those who have asked that we not publish their names. This list represents donations from Oct. 1, 2019 – Sept. 30, 2020. If we have omitted or misspelled your name, please let us know.*

Conservation Easement Donors

Colorado West Land Trust (Jurassic Flats)
Johnson Ranch
Menoken Farms

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Great Outdoors Colorado
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Sundown With a Hint of Peach. Photo by Malcolm G. Childers

It all started back in 1980, when a group of farmers from Palisade gathered around a kitchen table and signed the trust document that would permanently protect their farms from development pressure.

Today, 40 years later, Colorado West Land Trust has grown into an organization that serves its mission by providing critical resources for ranchers, farmers, outdoor recreationists, and wildlife advocates across the region.

The Land Trust's legacy is one of a community coming together to protect treasured landscapes, and it is with a full heart that we thank and celebrate all who have brought us this far. Here's to 40 more.

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FOR UNDERWRITING THIS ANNUAL REPORT