



# MESA LAND TRUST

Connecting Us With the Lands We Love

## Lands for Tomorrow

Photo courtesy of Rob Reece Photography





## 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 land for generations to come.*

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DEAR FRIENDS,

Historian Wallace Stegner got it right when he wrote that "cooperation, not rugged individualism, is the quality that most characterizes and preserves" the West. Reminders of this surround us. Parents and children ride bikes at Lunch Loop on trails constructed by volunteers across land purchased through community fundraisers. Fruit-growers enter into conservation agreements with your local land trust, ensuring future harvests. Ranchers partner with the land trust to protect habitat that forms critical migration corridors for elk and mule deer. These are but a few examples of the power of cooperation and how it shapes our future.

We have taken this lesson to heart and over the past year, Mesa Land Trust and Black Canyon Regional Land Trust have explored how we might cooperate to increase our impact and better serve our region. We are pleased to announce the creation of Colorado West Land Trust, a new umbrella under which we will work together to

conserve the region's landscapes and connect our friends and neighbors to the natural lands that surround us.

The region we serve together, from the San Juan mountains to the Bookcliffs, from the state line to Blue Mesa Reservoir, encompasses the best of Colorado. Our high alpine peaks, desert canyons, fertile irrigated valleys, and wildlife-rich rivers define our region and make it a great place to call home.

But today these lands and waters face unprecedented threats. According to our state's projections, millions of new residents are headed to Colorado. We must act today to conserve the lands we love for future generations.

Colorado West Land Trust aims to do just that. I invite you to read about our work in the following pages and ask you to support our efforts. Only by working together can we conserve the magnificent landscapes that surround us.

Warm Regards,

**Chuck McDaniel**  
Board President

**Rob Bleiberg**  
Executive Director



Current and former board members gathered at Ruckman Farms in Palisade for Mesa Land Trust's Fifth Annual Luminary Luncheon. Standing left to right: Chris Muhr, Lee Ambrose, Hawk Greenway, Mike Mechau, Kathryn Stubler, Janine Rider, Bill Findlay, Pam Childers, Gus Sublette, Bill Prakken, Harry and Bonnie Talbott, Miffie Blozovich, Belle Chesnick, Sherry and Dave Farny, Nancy Wilson, Steve McCall, Nancy Ellyson, Guy Parker, Steph Durno; Seating left to right: John and Doris Butler, Barb Chamberlin, Zach Eyler, Merce Cameron, Sandie Cooper, Margery Fillinger.

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By Sharon Sullivan

# Enjoying Local Food Through Preserving Local Lands

On a gorgeous September afternoon 100 people gathered for dinner at Colterris Winery in Palisade. Held outside in the vineyard on land conserved by Mesa Land Trust, the tickets sold out quickly. Renowned Grand Junction chef and restaurateur Josh Niernberg showcased his flair for crafting gourmet dishes using Colorado-sourced foods. Additionally, each course was paired with a different Colterris wine - made with grapes grown at the winery.

Niernberg is known for serving “seasonal Colorado cuisine” at his trendy Grand Junction restaurants, Bin 707 Foodbar and Tacoparty. Niernberg believes strongly in buying his ingredients from local farmers and ranchers, and he also supports Mesa Land Trust for its work conserving agricultural lands, open space, and important wildlife habitat in western Colorado. For that reason, he donated his labor and all the food for the multi-coursed meal at Colterris Winery.

“Every piece on the menu was from western Colorado,” Niernberg said.

Western Colorado is a local foods oasis thanks to dedicated, hard-working farmers like Scott and Jessica Washkowiak, owners of Field to Fork organic farm in Palisade.

The Washkowiaks sell a wide range of produce via a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program. Their produce is also sold at Natural Grocers in Grand Junction. Local restaurants such as Café Sol, Pablo’s Pizza, 626 on Rood, il Bistrot Italiano, and Bin 707 Foodbar occasionally use Field to Fork produce as well.

The farm additionally supplies cherry tomatoes and romaine lettuce for the Mesa County Valley School District’s salad bar program.

The Washkowiaks grow more than 60 different fruits and vegetables – including various tomato types, a gourmet salad blend, cucumbers, summer and winter squash, basil, peppers and root vegetables such as radishes, carrots and beets; plus, stone fruits like peaches, pears, apples, plums and cherries.



Photos courtesy of Lorna Reed



The couple got their start farming six years ago when they leased the conserved property of Mike and Blakely Mechau – land the Washkowiaks continue to farm, along with another conserved piece of land belonging to Lorna Reed. Both pieces adjoin Field to Fork’s own seven acres.

Access to affordable land is one of the greatest barriers that young farmers face. Leasing conserved land is often more affordable, and in this case allowed the Washkowiaks to build a flourishing CSA.

Another Palisade farming family, Claire and Rob Talbott, of C and R

farms, also grow food on conserved land. The couple decided years ago that Palisade’s notable good farmland should be preserved. In fact, the Talbotts bought a portion of their property from a developer who had intended to turn the land into a mobile home park (before the oil shale bust), Rob Talbott said. Instead, the 33 acres were protected in a conservation easement.

The Talbotts grow apricots, cherries, pears, Jonathon apples, and peaches – which they sell out of their packing shed and occasionally to The Palisade Café. Their fruit is also sold at farmers markets and to grocery stores in Denver.

During an era when more people are seeking to reduce their carbon footprint, many are choosing local foods over produce trucked in from thousands of miles away.

Many people find that local foods taste better (because vegetables and fruits are harvested when mature). Plus, consumers like getting to know the farmers who grow their food. ♦



# Colorado West Land Trust

A COLLABORATIVE  
EFFORT TO  
BETTER SERVE  
THE REGION

By Sharon Sullivan

With the goal of increasing the pace, quality and permanence of conservation in western Colorado, Mesa Land Trust and Montrose-based Black Canyon Regional Land Trust are entering into an innovative partnership to better serve the region.

The two land trusts are consolidating operations with the creation of Colorado West Land Trust. This umbrella organization will serve a region that spans the Book Cliffs to the San Juan mountains, from the Colorado-Utah border to Blue Mesa Reservoir on the Gunnison River. The service area includes all or part of Mesa, Montrose, Ouray, Delta, San Miguel



and Gunnison counties.  
“Our region faces incredible

pressures in the coming years,”  
said Rob Bleiberg, Executive

Director of Mesa Land Trust. Two million new residents are expected to relocate to Colorado in the next 25 years. During that period Mesa County is expected to grow the equivalent of the current city of Grand Junction; Montrose County is projected to add one and a half times the population of today’s city of Montrose; and Delta County will increase in population equal to another city of Delta, Hotchkiss and Paonia combined – that’s all according to the Colorado State Demographer’s Office.

Fortunately, Mesa and Black Canyon Regional land trusts are working together to ensure that western Colorado – despite future population increases – retains precious agricultural lands, as well



as its scenic beauty and important wildlife habitat.

“This unprecedented threat to our natural heritage demands a strong response,” said Rob Bleiberg, MLT executive director. He will serve as Executive Director of the new effort.

The collaboration will increase our ability to protect “the precious landscapes that surround us,” Bleiberg said. Western Colorado has some of the country’s most stunning landscapes, as well as some of the most productive agricultural land in the state.

The two land trusts began discussions in 2015 to explore ways that they could work together to be more effective.

“We talked about how to be more efficient and open up new areas for conserving lands,” Mesa Land Trust board president Chuck McDaniel said. “We’ll be creating a new identity that encompasses both organizations while (each) remaining independent.”

Mesa Land Trust was founded in 1980 by a group of Palisade farmers; Black Canyon formed in 2000 as a result of a merger with a Paonia-based group, Three Rivers Land Trust (North Fork, Gunnison and Uncompahgre rivers), and the Montrose-based Valley Land



**Colorado West Land Trust staff, left to right: Mary Hughes, Julie Barger, Allison Rehor, Jeremy Puckett, Rob Bleiberg, Ilana Moir, Libby Collins, Diana Cort**

Conservancy.

Mesa Land Trust has conserved more than 65,000 acres through 200 conservation transactions in and around Mesa County. In Montrose, Delta and Gunnison

counties, Black Canyon has protected 55,000 acres via 300-plus transactions.

Six staff members will remain in Grand Junction with Mesa Land Trust, while two will continue

to operate in Montrose at the Black Canyon office. Colorado West Land Trust advisory committees will work across the region to engage in dialog with Western Slope residents to learn communities’ priorities.

“It is critical that our work be informed by local community members,” Bleiberg said. “We recognize that Ridgway conservation priorities might be different from Grand Junction’s. We want to be responsive to each community’s goals and priorities. This (collaboration) provides a path forward that will increase our capacity to serve.”

Consolidating operations will save money and time by eliminating redundancies within the two organizations and helping them achieve economies of scale.

“It’s exciting, and a positive answer to our administrative needs,” said BCRLT board of directors’ president Tom McLeod. “This collaboration can be a role model for other land trusts in rural Colorado.”

“Land trusts are a positive answer to what we need in this nation,” said Steve Smith, BCRLT board treasurer. “If we can keep Colorado beautiful as it is we’ve really accomplished something terrific.” ♦



**Parker's Heaven Ranch on Miller Mesa near Ridgway, Ouray County.**



# MAKING THE CONNECTION

## Great Outdoors Colorado grant will help connect Lunch Loop to Riverfront Trail and Downtown

By Sharon Sullivan

Bicyclists headed toward the Lunch Loop Bike Park will soon have a safe alternative to riding on Monument Road once a shared-use path linking the Riverfront Trail to the popular trail area is

completed.

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) recently awarded Grand Junction a \$1.5 million grant to extend a trail that currently dead-ends at D and Monument roads. The new connector path will continue under the D Road bridge

then follow along the south side of Monument Road to the Lunch Loop's Three Sisters area.

Mesa Land Trust worked with the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance, to survey residents to learn what they wanted regarding trails in the area.

"We asked people what they wanted the Monument corridor (the gateway to Colorado National Monument) to look like," Mesa Land Trust project manager Libby Collins said.

Residents said they wanted to access the Lunch Loop area via an off-road bike path. They also asked for additional hiking and mountain biking trails and preservation of open space, said Collins.

"We want to connect downtown and its hotels and businesses first to Lunch Loop and ultimately we want to see the off-road shared-use trail reach South Camp Road's paved path," she said. "That will form the Redlands Loop Trail – a 10-mile paved path connecting Lunch Loop, Connected Lakes State Park and the Riverfront Trail."

The project is a result of years of partnerships between Mesa Land Trust, Grand Junction, Mesa County, the Bureau of Land Management and the Riverfront Foundation and Commission, city recreation superintendent Traci Wieland noted.

"This really is a community-

Image of future Monument Road bike path.





**Family enjoying hike at Three Sisters.**  
Photo courtesy of Alpine Bank Page



wide effort,” Wieland said. “It’s very exciting. From the city’s perspective, the connections will serve underserved neighborhoods. These public lands are literally in their backyard but as is, they’re not accessible.”

Completion of the connector trail will close a gap that the public has requested for years, Collins said. According to family surveys and a Mesa County

Health Department study (Pathways to Nature, 2016), lack of transportation is one primary barrier for under-resourced communities’ ability to access public lands.

Trails advocate Jen Taylor, who spearheaded the Lunch Loop bike park’s creation, said the vision was always to make outdoor recreation more easily available to youth of all ages and socioeconomic

backgrounds.

“Young kids can’t drive, and parents who don’t ride do not have bike racks on their vehicles. A safe corridor for kids to ride from downtown to the trailhead will complete and celebrate this vision.”

Grand Junction and Mesa Land Trust are partnering to raise the remaining \$1 million needed to complete the connector trail, with help from Mesa County and the

Riverfront Foundation, as well as other private foundations.

Trails bring economic benefits as well, Collins noted. Trails, open space, and beautiful scenery help to attract visitors, young professionals and families and new businesses, she said.

Construction of the new connector trail will begin in January 2018, with completion expected by 2020 or sooner. ♦



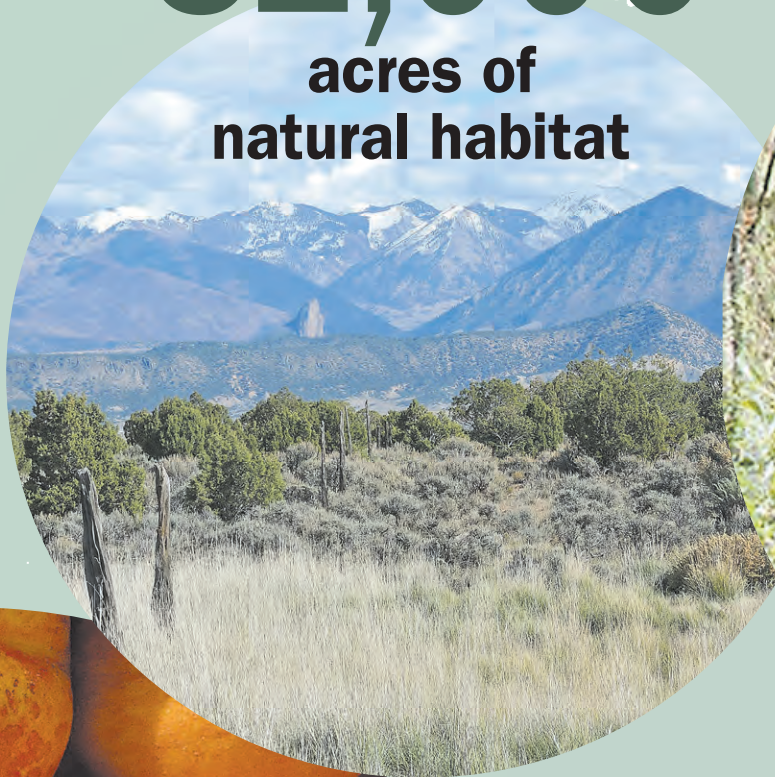


COLORADO WEST  
LAND TRUST

# PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

82,000

acres of  
natural habitat



500

conserv  
agreen



88,000

acres of  
winter range

20,000

irrigated acres

1,870

acres preserved fruit land  
in Mesa and Delta counties





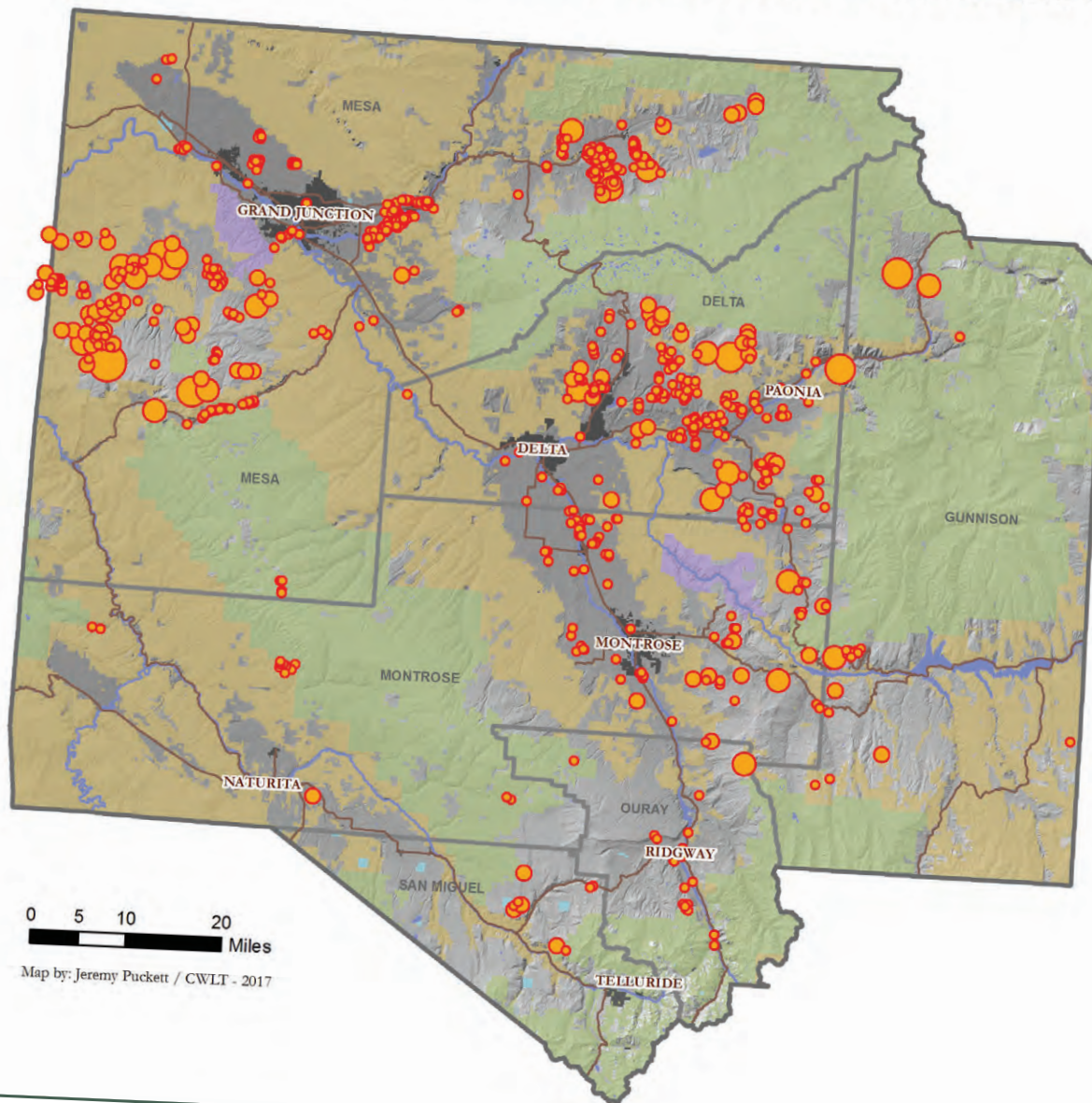
# PRODUCES REGIONAL RESULTS

## Conservation Success on a Landscape Scale

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### Colorado West Land Trust Conserved Lands



COLORADO WEST  
LAND TRUST



#### CWLT Properties

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

0 5 10 20  
Miles

Map by: Jeremy Puckett / CWLT - 2017

Locations of all features  
and boundaries approximate.

# 120,000

total preserved acreage



# Wildlife Conservation Success

The Aubert-Hawks conservation work was partially funded with a grant from GOCO, Delta County.

## GREAT OUTDOORS COLORADO, MESA LAND TRUST AND LANDOWNERS PARTNER TO PROTECT WILDLIFE

By Sharon Sullivan

As a longtime hunter and fisherman and conservationist, preserving wildlife habitat is important to Tom Burke, who was appointed to the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) board six years ago by Governor John Hickenlooper. The Grand Junction businessman previously served as a Colorado Wildlife Commissioner for nine years.

Private land conservation is critical to wildlife in western Colorado. This can be seen west of Grand Junction on Glade Park, where more than 40,000 acres of privately owned habitat has been conserved. A GOCO-funded conservation easement now in the

works builds on this success.

The 680-acre property “connects a couple of other conservation easements on Glade Park, so it doesn’t break up the landscape for wildlife,” Burke said. “Deer, elk, they have migration patterns they have used for eons.”

“Deer and elk give birth at Glade Park’s higher elevations in the spring, and migrate to the lower ground to find food in the fall. In some parts of Colorado that migratory path has been disturbed, splitting up males and females,” Burke said.

“These conservation easements, in many cases, help protect areas where they calve and where their food sources are,” Burke said. “It also protects the migration path.”

A number of Glade Park landowners have ensured healthy wildlife habitat by conserving all or a portion of their property with Mesa Land Trust and other conservation agencies. The area is home to mountain lions, black bears, elk, deer, foxes, coyotes, beavers, badgers, turkeys and all kinds of rodents, small birds and raptors, plus the threatened Gunnison Sage-Grouse.

Conservation easements also protect riparian areas by maintaining minimum stream flows that benefit all kinds of creatures such as trout, for which Colorado is famous. Rainbow, cutthroat and brook trout thrive in some of the larger Glade Park drainages.

Conserving these landscapes additionally protects western Colorado’s ranching heritage, Burke said. GOCO and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) funding go toward the purchase of landowners’ development rights, often providing much-needed revenue for ranchers and farmers to continue their rural lifestyle.

With lands abundant in wildlife, some ranching families earn additional income by allowing guides and outfitters to hunt on their conserved properties.

“The whole mountain is an ecosystem for wildlife,” where animals eat grasses, forbs and shrubs such as oak brush, serviceberry, bitterbrush and sagebrush, retired CPW biologist



and past Mesa Land Trust board president, Van Graham, has noted. "A large portion of Glade Park land is held privately. If not for the vision of those

landowners, the area's critical habitat would likely be developed because of its stunning scenery," Graham said. Funded through the sale

of Lottery tickets, GOCO has spent \$39 million in Mesa County for playgrounds, conservation easements, and other outdoor-related projects. ♦

**"These conservation easements, in many cases, help protect areas where they calve and where their food sources are. It also protects the migration path."**

*– Tom Burke,  
Great Outdoors Colorado board member*



Conserved land provides excellent habitat for elk and deer on Pinon Mesa, Mesa County.



## LEGACY SOCIETY

We would like to thank those who have included Mesa Land Trust their estate plans. Your future gift will help preserve our heritage and is a lasting investment in the future of our community. The following are members of our Legacy Society:

**Mercedes (Merce)  
Cameron and Roberta  
(Bert) Nieslanik**

**Barbara and Ed  
Chamberlin**

**Suzi Evans**

**John and Linda Geer**

**Paul and Mary Hughes**

**Jan Muyskens**

**Verda Patterson**

**Wayne and Joyce Smith**

**Helen Stenmark**

**Ken and Kathryn Stubler**

**Anonymous (3)**

If you have included MLT as part of your estate planning and would like to be recognized as a member of our Legacy Society or if you would like more information about how you can remember the Land Trust in our will contact Mary Hughes at 970.263.5443.



## REMEMBERING LAND TRUST IN ESTATE PLANS

By Sharon Sullivan

Ed Chamberlin grew up in San Jose, California in the middle of a cherry orchard that he walked through daily to get to school. Nowadays, when he visits the city he says you can't find a cherry tree.

"It used to be a rich agricultural area – now it's wall to wall development – the entire valley. It broke my heart. It was a beautiful area," Chamberlin said. "That could happen here," if not for the work of Mesa Land Trust, which has helped conserve more than 65,000 acres in and around Mesa County.

Chamberlin, founder of Chamberlin Architects, and his wife Barb, decided to support the things they care about, such as agricultural lands and open space, by leaving a portion of their estate to Mesa Land Trust. The nonprofit works with farmers to ensure that property remains forever in agriculture, as open space, or as an important wildlife habitat.

When creating their will, "Barb and I agreed that we didn't want our kids to be trust-funders," Ed said. "We wanted them to work to earn their own way and have the confidence you derive from that."

Both of their children are adults with careers of their own who

**"Both Republicans and Democrats are supporters and landowners. In agriculture, you need critical mass (of farms, or ranches) to be economically viable, so they all work together, regardless of politics."**

*– Ed Chamberlin*

also give their time and money to causes they believe in. Barb said she learned from her parents that "It's important to save some, spend some and give some," which is "part of our legacy to our kids."

MLT relies on donations from individuals and families like the Chamberlins – "people who want to see our beautiful valley retain its character," as Ed says.

Barb, a retired nurse and teacher, also donates her time as a MLT board member. She remembers "solid urbanization" growing up in the northeastern United States and was amazed to see the open space of the West when she moved here decades ago.

As a volunteer with Mesa Land Trust, "I enjoy meeting the property

owners," she said. "They love their land and take impeccable care of it. They're hardworking, honest, and friendly. It's an honor they became my friends."

Getting involved with Mesa Land Trust means becoming part of a community, adds Ed. He appreciates the nonpartisan nature of the organization and its mission.

"Mesa Land Trust preserves property rights on one hand, yet also preserves open space," Ed said. "Both Republicans and Democrats are supporters and landowners. In agriculture, you need critical mass (of farms, or ranches) to be economically viable, so they all work together, regardless of politics. It's fun when we all come together for our spring picnic, and fall open house." ♦



# Become a Monthly Sustaining Partner and Alpine Bank Will Match Your Contributions!



Ken and Mary love living in western Colorado. They appreciate the work that Mesa Land Trust is doing to preserve the landscapes that add to the quality of life that makes the Grand Valley special.

That is why they became Mesa Land Trust Monthly Sustaining Partners. By signing up online they were able to have a specified amount charged to their credit card each month and they don't have to think about whether they are up to date on their membership.

It also saves the Land Trust time and postage so that more resources go to land conservation.

**"We became Monthly Sustaining Partners because Mesa Land Trust is protecting the places that are important to us – the lands that produce local food and wine, the scenic open space and recreational areas on Monument Road, and the wildlife and riparian habitat that are western Colorado's heritage. We encourage you to sign up today and let Alpine Bank match your donations for 1 year."** — Ken Scissors and Mary Thom



## Alpine Bank

Alpine Bank is pledging up to \$10,000 to match dollar for dollar, for one year, all new Monthly Sustaining Partners or any increase in your existing monthly donation. Sign up by December 31, 2017.

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Mesa Land Trust is pleased to partner with Bin 707 and TacoParty. We truly appreciate Josh and Jodi Niernberg and their many years of support.

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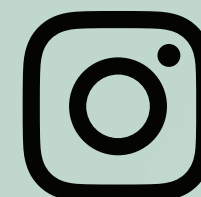
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View of Grand Valley from Ladder Canyon Ranch.

# WILDLIFE NEED SHELTER, FOOD 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. This past spring, in an effort to preserve

even more habitat, they added the remaining 160 acres to a revised conservation agreement in 2015, which also removed subdivision rights on those parcels.

## SHELTER

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 Bert.

## FOOD

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 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 constructed a pipeline to carry water from springs on the property to watering troughs and ponds for use by wildlife.

Merce and Bert like to joke that they bought their land "used" just like everyone else. After learning about the extensive habitat restoration the two have completed it would be fair to say that Ladder Canyon Ranch is in "like new" condition.

Merce joined the Mesa Land Trust board of directors last year, and Bert volunteers time on the fundraising committee. ♦



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