



THE DIRT | 2022

AN ANNUAL RESOURCE FOR OWNERS OF CONSERVED LANDS



Kurt Richarz purchased a 175-acre easement property in Larimer County in 2018. His land was severely affected in the 2020 Cameron Peak Fire. He spoke to COL staff about it in an interview conducted in April 2022.

How much of your property was affected?

We lost about 100 acres. Fortunately, it didn't get to any structures, but it did go west to east across the property, including 17 acres of wetlands. The land from my perspective wasn't properly taken care of. It had a tremendous amount of deadfall that should have been tended to. The areas that were taken care of, according to the national forest definition, did not burn. The areas that were just solid trees and fuel below them burned to nothing - literally flat.

We are 360 degrees surrounded by National Forest land. We have a beautiful creek that runs from the top of our property to the bottom. You couldn't see it because it was so overgrown with vegetation. The creek had gone almost sterile from no sunlight - the fish didn't grow. We have a lot of natural brookies. We had approval from Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to restore the creek, but the fire burnt everything left and right of it. The brook trout grew 4-5" in a very short period of time after we started building back the vegetation that they eat. Kind of a miracle in some respects.

Were there efforts that you made pre-fire to reduce your risk?

In a few areas we had done some fire abatement with one of the local experts. Those areas proved to be a lot less damaged than the areas that had not had good attention. The areas where we didn't conduct abatement it largely burned to the ground and killed everything - and the other areas with salvaged green tops on top of the pines had come back.

What immediate impacts did you see to the property? What have been the long term impacts?

Immediate impact is the sheer beauty of the property and the impact to the animals. We used to have three huge male moose that we saw pretty much every day and three females with babies that we saw throughout the week. The males have moved down from us where the willows didn't burn. And the females have largely stayed or used the property as a traffic area going back and forth.

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A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF STEWARDSHIP



With qualities like vision, engagement, diversity, and respect, a team is set up to achieve its goals. The new COL Stewardship team exemplifies these qualities. I'm excited to introduce each of them to you and to share their passion for conservation, commitment to collaboration, and easy-going humor.

We are excited to expand our team with three brand new positions: our first GIS Manager, Jenn, our Restoration Program Manager, Dirk, and our Wet Mountain Land and Water Steward, Karen.

Jenn Murdock brings a systems-based mindset and began identifying process improvements immediately. Within weeks, we had a list of innovative spatial analysis projects that Jenn is ready to develop. As Tony, our President, said after seeing one of her projects, "How did we do this without her?" My response was, "We didn't." In addition to her GIS expertise, Jenn loves a challenge, whether climbing a 5.10 pitch or running a 12-hour race, just for fun.

Dirk Rasmussen, our first Restoration Program Manager, is a geologist through and through. He will not only identify the rock you just picked up and tell you how it came to be, but with much humility he will kindly tell you if your best guess was, well, not close to being accurate, but was a good try anyway. Dirk's first task, an ambitious challenge, is to develop a vision for the expansion and future of our restoration program. The charge is to define our philosophical basis, answer the "why" of our restoration work, and challenge us all to embrace a restorative land ethic.

Karen Foley is our first community-based Land and Water Steward. Based in Westcliffe, Karen serves the Wet Mountain region, walking the land, providing resources, and listening to your stories of the lands' history and future. Her kindness and sincerity will win you over quickly and her understated sense of humor makes even the most routine meeting entertaining. Have you thought about how you would answer, "If you had a mediocre superpower, what would it be?"

In addition, to our new positions, we are thrilled to announce three additional new team members.

Chelsea Collins launched into the Stewardship Program Manager position, bringing her experience to create efficiencies in our processes and improve our protocols. Her attention to every detail and every conservation easement instills confidence that each one will be stewarded. Chelsea's passion for conservation carries through and her thoughtfulness and motivation will inspire you.

Dennis Lyamkin started one year ago as our Morgridge Family Foundation Stewardship Fellow. His quick learning and ability to engage with folks of every background made him an obvious choice for a promotion to our Landowner Liaison. Dennis' focus is on engaging with landowners new to the COL family, such as those who recently purchased a property with a conservation easement. Dennis is curious, a problem-solver by nature, and a strong listener. He will also have you rolling over with laughter until you have tears in your eyes.

While only part of our team for a month, **Chris Hart** has already become a critical member. His experience in assessing rangeland health and familiarity with indicators of sustainability provide us with the knowledge and tools to better support land stewardship. His curiosity, enthusiasm, and motivation are infectious, while his quick mind and quiet nature instills trust and confidence.

With this expanded team, it is our goal to help you care for your property and your easement with skill, humility, and a little dose of fun. I look forward to you getting to know them.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheryl Cufre". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Cheryl Cufre

Director of Land Stewardship

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WELCOME, NEW LANDOWNERS!

In 2021, COL closed 21 new conservation easements, and fourteen conserved properties transferred to new ownership. In addition, COL completed a merger with San Isabel Land Protection Trust, adding over 100 new conservation easements to our family. To all landowners of conserved properties who are new to COL, hello! We're glad you're here.

Our recently closed conservation easements protect habitat for many wildlife species. Populations of bald eagle, ferruginous hawk, American peregrine falcon, northern leopard frog, black bear, elk, moose, mountain lion, and the Gunnison sage-grouse can continue to hunt, migrate, and thrive across Weld, Gunnison, and Baca counties, to name a few.

Additionally, the easements provide important open-space buffers for adjacent public lands, protect productive farmland, and support a rich farming history. Not to mention that they preserve Colorado's stunning viewsheds!

This year, we look forward to shaking hands, exchanging stories, and walking the land with you. The COL family continues to grow, and we couldn't be more excited to work alongside the true stewards of Colorado's precious resources: You!



Colorado Open Lands and San Isabel Land Protection Trust have merged operations, effective Dec. 31, 2021.

San Isabel was founded in 1995 by a group of Custer County residents concerned about increasing development pressures and the potential loss of agricultural lands, scenic vistas, and wildlife habitat. Since then, San Isabel had permanently protected 42,434 acres in Custer, Fremont, Huerfano, and Pueblo counties through partnerships with more than 120 landowners and families.

San Isabel and COL have a long history of collaborating, including on the Bluff Park in Westcliffe. San Isabel partnered with COL to put a conservation easement on its 5-acre parcel at the park, restricting its future use to recreation for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. The easement also permanently preserves the uninterrupted, stunning view of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

COL will keep an office and full-time staff, our Wet Mountain Land and Water Steward, Karen Foley, in Westcliffe. San Isabel board chair Larry Vickerman has been elected to a seat on COL's board of directors, and COL has established a local advisory board to provide area expertise and community connection going forward.

BUILDING? SELLING? RESTORING?

Are you thinking of building a new barn or residence? Selling your property? Or restoring your creek? If so, please reach out and we will guide you through understanding your easement. Our stewardship staff is always available to answer your questions and offer support. If you aren't sure whether to reach out, please give us a call today.

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The moose have started coming back – we’ve still got a lot of restoration to do, but we’ve started to see a little more animals as we’ve planted trees and put down plants for preventing erosion and providing some food.

There’s also a hundred acres of dead trees. The hazard of that is when trees are not burned to the ground you can’t predict when they’re going to fall and block roads. There’s just a safety element to it. It’s more of the aesthetics and the diversity of the property that was put in the conservation easement – plants, animals, fish birds, whatever.

What efforts have you undertaken to help the property recover?

We’ve worked with CPW and Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) to fly a drone over our creek from top to bottom and get a local expert to recommend what needs to be added to the creek to make it a thriving fishery. We’ve put a lot of effort into that. That has been a beautiful recovery story. We have thriving brook trout and rainbow trout.

We’ve done a fair amount of mulching of the fire trees to preserve the water – they help us retain water in the ground. We’re in the process of learning the right way to plant local species of plants and trees. It’s hit and miss – we’re probably getting a 60-70% survival rate. We’re planting from seedlings to mature trees and seeing which ones work best.

We are in an active battle to fire abate the whole property which is time consuming and expensive. That seems to be working. We had one part of the property that had been done and it hardly got harmed at all and everything largely came back. In other parts that hadn’t gotten property attention it was pretty devastating. I wish there were more resources.



Photo during the fire, and the day after



Did you learn anything that would be useful to future landowners affected?

I'm learning every day just because we're new to managing a forest. I think there is a responsibility that comes along with being a landowner with a new world of fires and lack of water. You need to shoulder the responsibility of how you nurture and care for that land. It has to be comprehended as you buy it. You can go back in history and say they used to cut everything down and let it burn. There's some intuitive things when you look at a property like we have and parts of it that were so overgrown, so much fuel on the ground. All of this is based in the role we are playing in nurturing a conservation easement property. There has to be a commitment to play a role in helping the property survive from man's abuse and that is not a "sit back in your lounge and have a cocktail and watch it grow" situation – there's a role to play.

Anything else you'd like to share?

There's a real education that should take place before people are allowed to buy these kinds of properties. It's not sitting back and not really investing your time and money. That's not the way to go at it. We took it on knowing that there was a purpose we had to play and we had no idea with the fire what that was going to be. Through fate somehow we were picked to be the ones to nurture the property and we are madly in love with the property. And we have a role to play for plants, animals, and everything else. I'm a Texas boy that grew up around farm country and hunting, but there truly is a sacred role that you have to play with these places and nurture them and let them take their course. And help things survive and rebuild the balance that's been lost by lots of people doing bad things to the property and to animals. It's fun. It's taxing, but it's fun.



Watering replanted Ponderosa pine



A female moose traverses the property



Regrowth continues on Richarz's property



SEEKING MENTORS IN REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

Photo by Alexis Bonogofsky



The Quivira Coalition builds soil, biodiversity, and resilience on western working landscapes. They foster ecological, economic, and social health through education, innovation, and collaboration.

Quivira Coalition's New Agrarian Program (NAP) pairs experienced land stewards with passionate new agrarians for an 8-month paid, hands-on apprenticeship. They are actively seeking ranches and farms to join as mentors for the next generation of regenerative agriculture practitioners.

NAP mentors are dedicated stewards of the land. They practice intentional, regenerative methods of food production, provide excellent animal care, and are skilled and enthusiastic teachers. Quivira partners with mentors who are full-time, established ranchers or farmers with a minimum

of five years' experience and who are passionate teachers actively seeking to train young people in their field.

Quivira staff provides training and technical support to mentors in:

- Finding apprentices who are qualified and a good fit
- Understanding the legalities and logistics related to having an on-ranch or on-farm employee
- Communicating with apprentices
- Evaluating their work and learning

They currently partner with mentor ranches and farms in New Mexico, California, Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana. Their focus is on operations in the arid to semi-arid west. This apprenticeship is full-time and requires the mentor to provide housing.

If you're interested in the New Agrarian Program, please visit their website at

https://quiviracoalition.org/prospective_mentors/
or email: newagrarian@quiviracoalition.org.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT SOIL HEALTH

The Colorado Saving Tomorrow's Agricultural Resources (STAR) Program is a free and voluntary tool to inspire producers and structure conversations around soil health.

Through a robust partnership between the Colorado Department of Agriculture, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colorado State University, and the Colorado Collaborative for Healthy Soils, around \$5 million in grants has been assembled to help support local efforts to build drought resilience through better soil health. STAR is a practice-based rating system that assigns points for the following soil health practices: cropping, tillage, nutrient application, and other best management practices. Producers fill out a form about a field where they will try new practices. As a result, the farmer or rancher receives a STAR rating from 1-5 stars that help them understand how well they are doing in promoting soil health and upholding the 5 principles thereof:

Soil Armor

Minimize Soil Disturbance

Plant Diversity

Continual Live Plant/Root

Livestock Integration



STAR could become a market motivator to pay producers more for products grown using healthy soil practices and may lead to other opportunities. There are 17 conservation districts and 3 grower groups that are offering incentives and technical assistance for a limited number of growers.

For more information to access the STAR program, please visit: <https://ag.colorado.gov/soil-health>

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is also an excellent source for soil building resources.



MEET THE COLORADO OPEN LANDS STEWARDSHIP TEAM MEMBERS



Chelsea Collins
Stewardship Program Manager
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Chelsea previously worked with the Boulder County Parks & Open Space's Conservation Easement Program. Prior to her time there, she finished her graduate degree in Environmental Sciences at Oregon State, where she studied natural resource management and the conservation of threatened ecosystems on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula.



Cheryl Cufre
Director of Stewardship
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Growing up on a small farm in Wisconsin, Cheryl moved to Colorado in 1996 and fell in love with its short-grass prairies. Cheryl has an M.S. in Rangeland Ecosystem Science from Colorado State University and a B.A. in Geography and Environmental Studies from the University of Colorado.



Karen Foley
Wet Mountain Land and Water Steward
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Karen has a bachelor's degree in environmental studies, with a concentration in conservation and ecology, from the University of Vermont and a master's degree in biology, with a soil ecology specialization, from Utah State University. Karen has fallen in love with the Wet Mountain Valley service area due to the passionate and dedicated people who support conservation there and the beautiful rural landscape.



Chris Hart
Land and Water Steward
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Growing up on a small cattle and horse ranch in southern California, Chris developed a deep appreciation for our open lands when he was very young. This appreciation led him to obtain his master's in Natural Resources from Oregon State University and work for the Bureau of Land Management before coming to COL.



Dennis Lyamkin
Landowner Liaison
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Dennis joined the COL Stewardship Team in April 2021 as part of the Fellowship Program, which prepares recent college graduates for a career in land and water conservation. Dennis was born and raised in Ohio, is first generation Russian-American, and escapes to wild places any chance he gets.



Jenn Murdock
GIS Manager
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Jenn obtained her undergraduate degree in Environmental Science and Economics as well as a master's degree in Geographic Information Science from the University of Denver. She has conducted spatial analyses of land management, including revegetation after Colorado wildfires, the effect of changing snow regimes on ice formation and its impact on winter economies, and global surface water dynamics.



Dirk Rasmussen
Restoration Program Manager
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Dirk grew up in a farming community in rural northwestern Wisconsin and has lived in Colorado since 2009. He holds an M.S. in geology from Western Washington University and a B.A. in geology from Colorado College. Dirk is a Wilderness First Responder and speaks fluent Norwegian.