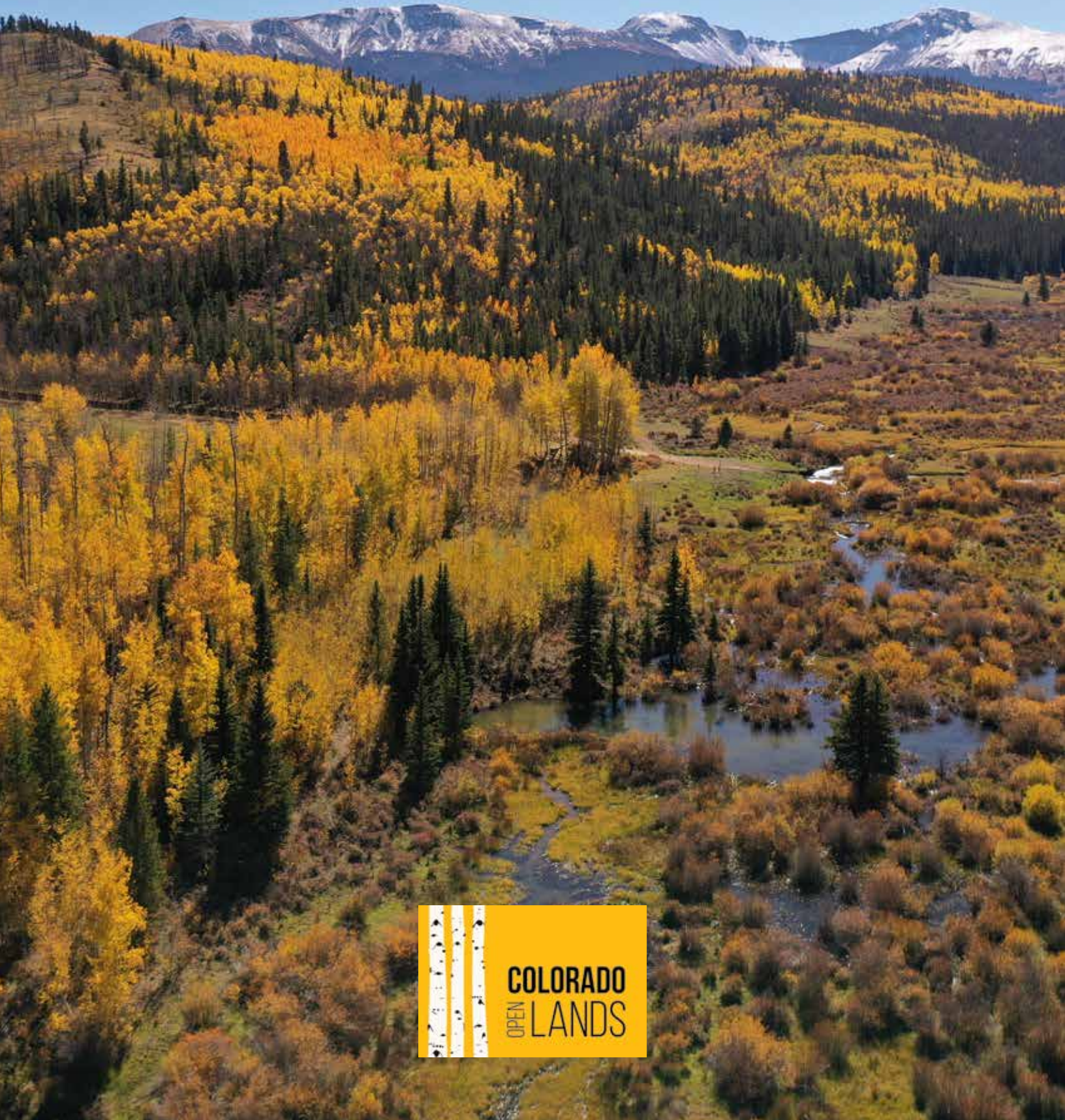


IMPACT REPORT

A successful year of protecting land and water for people and wildlife

Fiscal Year 2023





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In our recently completed fiscal year, Colorado Open Lands continued to conserve significant land and water throughout Colorado, including:

- *Completing 16 new conservation projects totaling 17,128 acres*
- *Advancing a pipeline of 94 potential projects totaling 255,100 acres*
- *Stewarding 693 COL easements*
- *Expanding land and water restoration to include 15 active restoration projects around the state*
- *Engaging more than 1,000 financial supporters to grow our statewide work*
- *Meeting and exceeding all non-profit compliance and financial standards*
- *Supporting state and federal legislation to expand the incentives for land and water conservation*

NEW INITIATIVES IN THE COMING YEAR



Photo at left: Home Place, Moffat County, protected in 2023. Courtesy D. Reeder, Rare Earth Science

LOOKING AT CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH THE LENS OF WATER

We are realizing that more and more, the future of conservation in much of Colorado will be shaped as much by water use as by land development. Understanding the increasing pressure on water and re-imagining our conservation toolbox will be important to achieving outcomes that protect our rivers, streams, and irrigation systems, in turn protecting the open space, rural economies, and wildlife habitat so important to us.

COL has been successful in leading innovative water conservation concepts like water sharing agreements and groundwater conservation. With that experience, we will now look at conservation planning through the lens of water systems to further grow this work. We will begin this effort in the South Platte River Basin, which has both the most complex water administration and is arguably under the greatest threat in the state as Front Range cities look for more water to feed their fast-growing communities.

COL will engage partner organizations to help us identify and map identified threats to our water systems; overlay other important conservation values such as prime soils, wildlife habitat, natural floodplains, and community open spaces; and identify opportunities for water conservation and water sharing. At the same time, we will explore new conservation strategies that pair public and private funding to purchase farms with water rights, protect that land and water with flexible conservation easements, and then sell those farms at a reduced cost to the next generation of farmers and ranchers. This approach will bring together historically competing interests

to encourage joint investment in smart water use – farmland with water rights that can support multiple uses while protecting local agricultural and conservation values on those properties.

IMPROVING LAND AND WATERWAYS

As we successfully protect more land and water in Colorado, we are seeing a need to go back to some of those properties to help restore ecological functions that have been lost. To address that need, we have launched COL's "Healthy Lands and Water" initiative. This



South Platte River, Logan County

EXPANDING CONSERVATION IN NORTHWEST COLORADO

COL's decision to invest in building relationships with the local agricultural community in Northwestern Colorado has paid off with a plethora of opportunities for large-scale conservation projects that protect open space and key wildlife corridors. The region of Colorado from Steamboat Springs west to Dinosaur National Monument is home to Colorado's largest elk herd and significant populations of moose, black bear, and pronghorn. COL is focused on protecting some of the largest remaining undeveloped tracks of land in this region to protect wildlife, water, agriculture, and the rural economies that depend on these important natural resources.

Since COL began focusing on this region, we have completed four projects protecting 22,945 acres in Routt and Moffat Counties and generated a pipeline of six potential projects totaling nearly 28,000 acres.



program has attracted significant government and private support to help us launch restoration projects in South Park, Middle Park, North Park, the Upper Arkansas River Basin, and the San Luis Valley. In the past year, we developed a statewide strategic plan for restoration, managed 15 restoration projects around the state, and engaged 10 different public funders to raise an additional \$2 million for future projects.

To help continue growing this program, we were recently funded to hire an additional restoration staff member for three years who will be based in the BLM's Kremmling office and expand our restoration work in North Park. We are also working to build additional funding to recruit a dedicated Dryland Restoration Manager in the coming year. This will enable us to address the growing list of projects and need for restoration.



Restoration on Rough & Tumbling Creek revitalized this waterway in 2023

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT (PHOTO AT LEFT): Following COL's successful groundwater conservation easement at the 1,897-acre Peachwood Farms property, restoration has begun on three of the 12 irrigation circles through re-seeding grassland vegetation. Long term, this grassland restoration will transition the farm from irrigated cropland to native rangeland habitat. This is a multi-year project requiring intensive management.

GROWING COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR CONSERVATION

To round out our commitment to growing the conservation movement through increased outreach and education, this year we launched a **Conservation Ambassador Network** to help advance our mission through the engagement of a network of COL's most active supporters and community leaders. In our inaugural year, we have engaged several dozen participants from around the state. This network of volunteers will help us grow support for conservation through community outreach, advancing pro-conservation public policy, and expanding our base of supporters.

CELEBRATING A YEAR OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

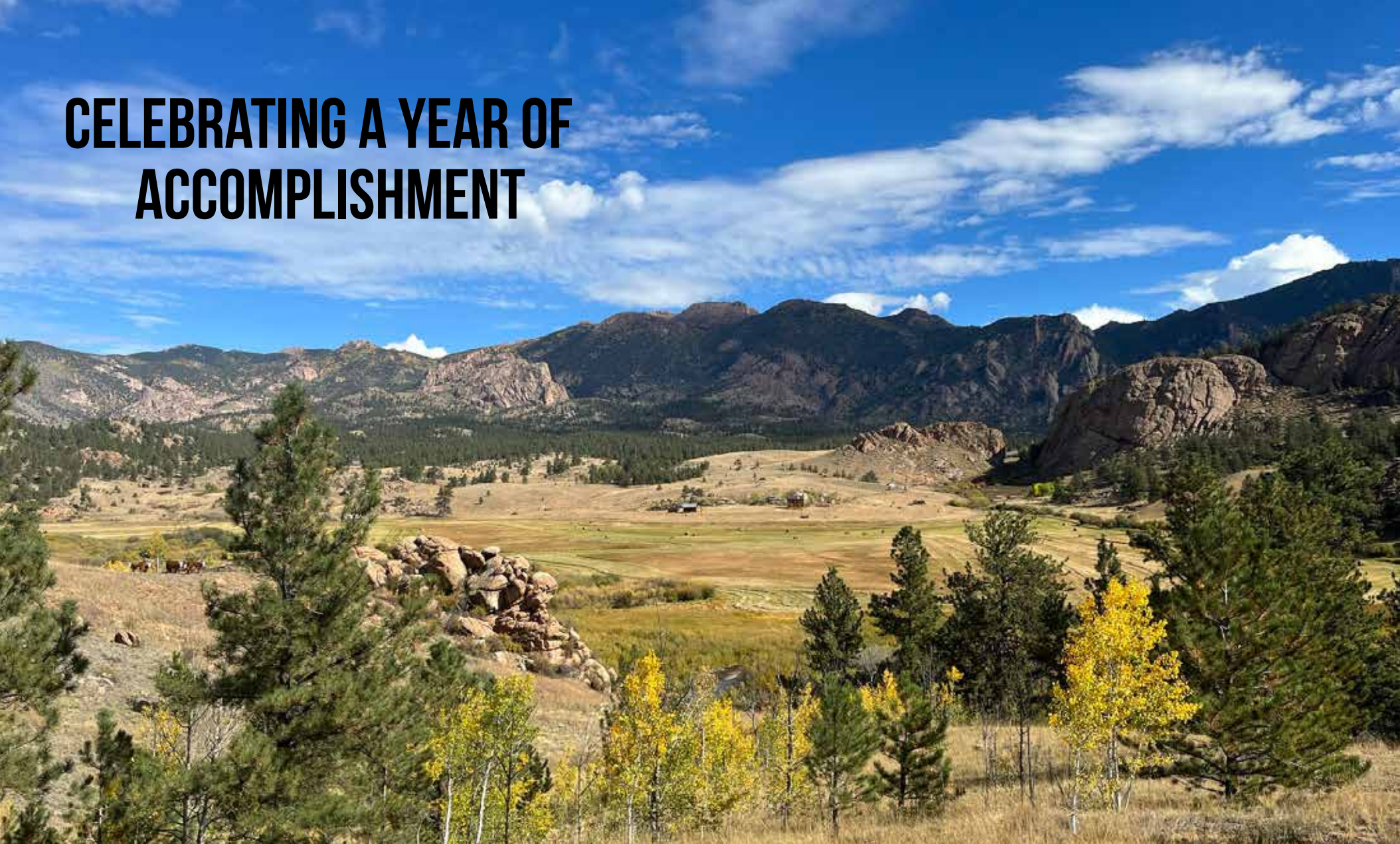


Photo at left: Gold Nuggets River Ranch, Park County, protected in 2023

Gunnison Basin

COL has been working in the Gunnison Basin for more than 30 years, helping to create one of the greatest conservation success stories in the nation with nearly 50% of the working ag land in that region now conserved. It is seen as the perfect convergence of conservation values, development pressure, and available federal and local funding to purchase easements that protect sage grouse habitat. Conservation also preserves big game habitat which supports the hunting economy, along with agriculture and tourism. Going forward, COL seeks to build on the success in this region by protecting the remaining properties that provide connectivity for wildlife and support this important agricultural community.



Park County

Park County is another landscape with deep COL roots (see photo at left of Gold Nuggets River Ranch, protected in 2023). COL is focused on protecting the scenic views and significant wildlife habitat of this region, while also focusing on protecting the last remaining lands that have not been impacted from buy-and-dry practices. In the past 40 years, COL has successfully protected 25,562 acres of open space in the South Park region.

CONSERVATION

In the coming year, the Conservation team will seek to complete 24 new conservation projects protecting 24,228 acres, while advancing a pipeline of 88 additional projects totaling 228,616 acres.

The conservation team continued to leverage our private philanthropy dollars to raise significant public funding for completing new conservation easements. For every privately donated dollar to COL, our team has leveraged another \$12 dollars in public funding to help support conservation.

REGIONAL UPDATES

Northwest Colorado

This region continues to offer the opportunity to conserve some of the largest intact landscapes that are home to the largest herd of elk in North America, as well as important populations of mule deer, pronghorn, and other iconic species. Our focus in this community has led to a quickly growing pipeline of future conservation projects.

San Isabel & the Wet Mountain Valley

The positive impact of our merger with San Isabel Land Protection Trust (SILPT) has exceeded our greatest expectations by catalyzing new conservation projects in the Wet Mountain Valley. Since the merger in 2021, COL has generated a pipeline of projects with more than a dozen landowners totaling 15,000 acres. Maintaining a local office in Westcliffe and engaging deeply with the community has not only renewed interest in conservation, but continued financial support from this community has remained strong, comparable to the peak success of SILPT.



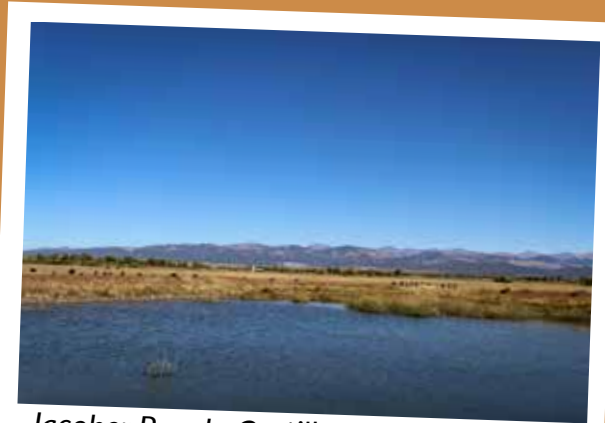
Farisita Ranch, Huerfano County

Northern Colorado & the South Platte Basin

As the fastest growing region in the state, development pressure and the threats to water have made Northeast Colorado some of the most threatened and therefore most costly land to protect, creating some of the greatest pressure on the state tax credit program. With some of the best soils in the state and some of the most threatened water rights, our work here is geared in large part toward protecting the \$5 billion ag industry and the local economies that depend on it. This region is also where COL plans to begin a new look at land conservation priorities through the lens of threatened water, as detailed earlier.

San Luis Valley

COL engages in the San Luis Valley to protect a number of traditional and non-traditional conservation values, including the support of a historically underserved but culturally significant community around San Luis, the protection of dwindling groundwater supplies, and the conservation of important wildlife habitat, including that of migrating Sandhill cranes. Like the Northern Front Range, much of our conservation work is driven by water, whether the protection of historic water rights in acequia communities, the protection of aquifers that the local ag community depends on, or the protection of shrinking riparian and wetland habitat that species depend on. The region is now served by three COL staff, including a local Land & Water Steward.



Jacobser Ranch, Costilla County

One new initiative in the region is a partnership around improving soil health in the San Luis Valley. Last year, COL and the Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association (SdCAA) partnered with the Colorado Department of Agriculture to launch the Colorado Soil Health Program (CSHP) in Colorado's acequia communities. The CSHP provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers who are interested in taking steps to improve the health of their agricultural land. Ten acequia producers will be selected to participate in the first round of the program which will include direct funding to those farmers to incorporate new soil health practices such as increasing plant species diversity, reducing topsoil disturbance, and integrating rotational livestock grazing.



Peachwood Farms before reseeding (See after photo p.6)

STEWADING PROTECTED LANDS

Colorado Open Lands now stewards more than 700 conservation easements throughout Colorado, providing support to conservation-minded landowners and their families in stewarding their properties forever. Annually, we distribute a specialized landowner newsletter offering tailored information and resources to owners of conserved properties.



As COL's portfolio of conservation easements expands, we continue to innovate and adapt our monitoring procedures to best utilize our resources. While satellite monitoring has become an effective stewardship tool, on-the-ground site visits remain a critical aspect of our stewardship program and how we engage with landowners. Last year we met with over 175 landowners on their properties, sharing their stories and hearing their perspectives of the land.

HEALTHY LANDS AND WATER

An area of our Healthy Lands and Water program where we expect to see considerable growth is our emerging dryland restoration work.

Dryland restoration involves finding a sustainable future for land that has had irrigation or water removed or reduced. Without active attention paid, these sites could easily devolve into fields of dust. With proper planning, dryland sites can be reseeded with native grasses that are drought-tolerant, provide forage and cover for wildlife, and offer a more attractive backdrop for the local communities. COL's Restoration Program Manager is actively seeking capacity to grow this work. Early seed funding from private donors has allowed COL to become an emerging leader in this space, as Colorado grapples with what to do with land that has had water rights permanently severed and removed.

BUILDING A STRONG ORGANIZATION

In the coming year, we will formally launch an expanded planned giving campaign, expand our Evergreen giving society into the Denver Metro area (donors that give between \$1,000 and \$5,000), and again run the Juniper Series to engage women in conservation.

Our biannual gala, For Love of the Land, is in May. The gala provides our board and other generous supporters with an opportunity to showcase COL's work and introduce COL to new high-capacity donors.

To learn more about the Evergreen Society or the Juniper Series, contact Elizabeth Silverman at ESilverman@ColoradoOpenLands.org or 303.988.2373 ext. 222

COMMUNICATIONS, OUTREACH & EDUCATION

In 2023, we fully built out our vision for a comprehensive education and outreach program, including the Conservation Leadership Series (CLS), Teacher Workshops, an updated Conserved Colorado directory, the management of three regional advisory boards, and the addition of the Conservation Ambassador Network. In the coming year, we will be expanding to a second Teacher Workshop in South Park to engage more students in learning about conservation.



CLS 2023 Cohort



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