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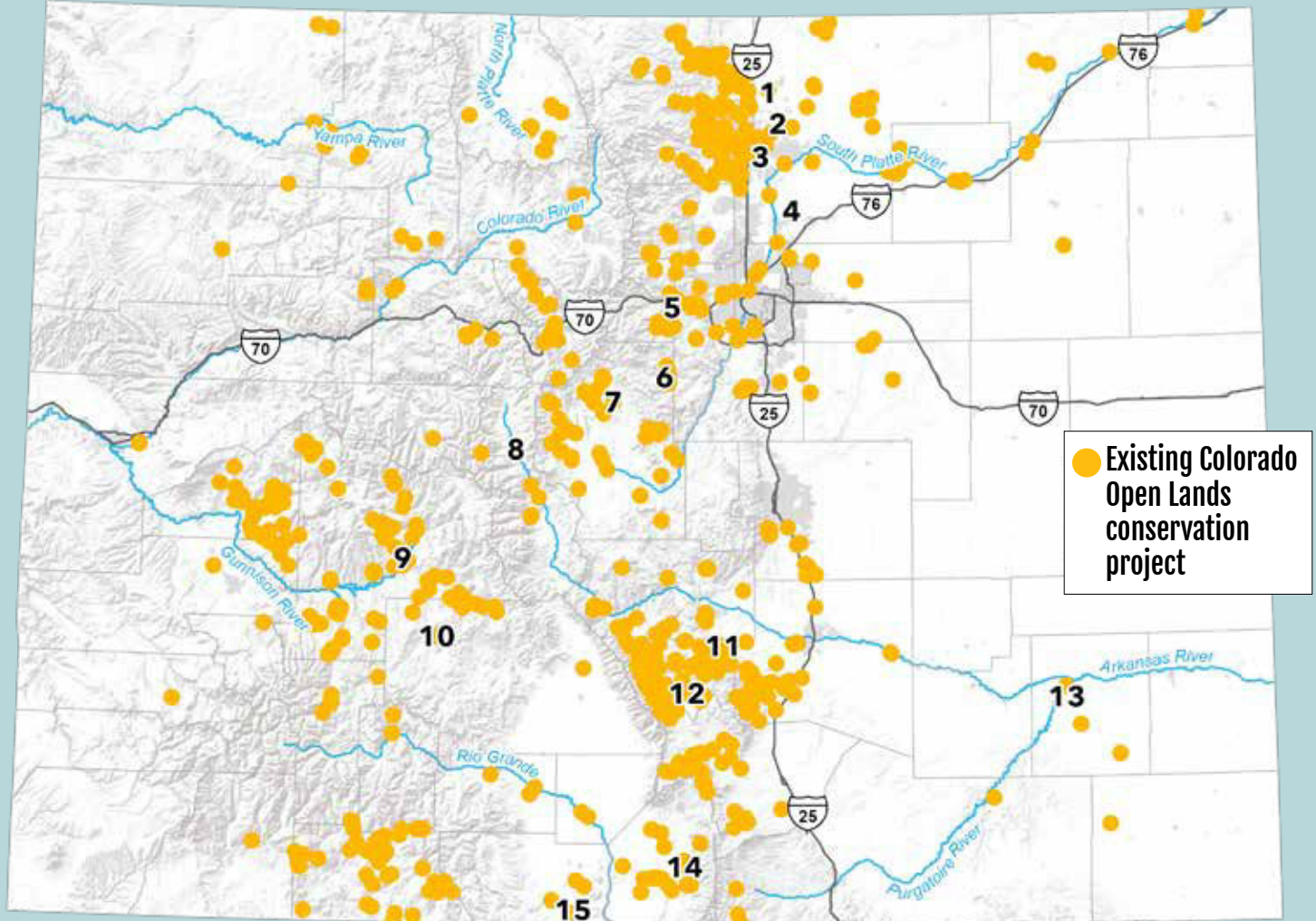
AND MORE!



**SPRING 2025
NEWSLETTER**

An Incredible Year for Conservation!

We're celebrating spring at Colorado Open Lands, along with the annual sense of renewal and optimism that comes with it. This spring in particular, we're excited to share with you 15 new conservation projects since our last issue. That brings the total projects completed for the year to 26 exceptional lands and waters in Colorado! See the map below for a guide to where these projects lie, and on what pages you can learn more.



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COLORADO OPEN LANDS IS PROUD TO HAVE PERMANENTLY JOINED FORCES WITH THE ORGANIZATIONS BELOW
TO ADVANCE THE PACE AND QUALITY OF CONSERVATION IN COLORADO.



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Friend of Colorado Open Lands,

We've got 700,000 reasons to celebrate this spring.

Colorado Open Lands has achieved a remarkable feat in conservation - more than 700,000 acres of land permanently protected! This accomplishment was achieved through projects large and small - 800 of them over 44 years, in fact. And the work is picking up steam. Our fiscal year has just ended on March 31st, with a record high of 26 distinct projects in a single year. Colorado Open Lands is deeply grateful to our partners, our donors, and the extraordinary landowners that steward this land in partnership with us.

Let's think about what 700,000 acres looks like. A single acre is just about the size of a football field. There are 640 acres in a square mile. COL's body of work, in total, is larger than all of Jefferson, Gilpin, Broomfield, and Denver Counties, combined. We at COL, of course, prefer to put things in terms of open space, however.

Think about all the vast and wild reaches of Rocky Mountain National Park. **That's 250,000 acres on its own.** Put that together with three more Colorado national parks - Great Sand Dunes, Black Canyon of the Gunnison, and Mesa Verde. The total grows. Then toss in your favorite Colorado state park. In fact, add in **all of the 54 state parks** in Colorado. That still doesn't add up to the total acres that COL has protected. It's that much land. So please forgive our urge to celebrate!

We hope you'll celebrate with us this year. On the back cover of this newsletter, you'll see a few highlighted of ways to engage with COL in 2025. Make sure you're subscribed to our email newsletter for information on even more opportunities throughout the year. We hope to see you on the land in 2025 and look forward to celebrating what we've been able to accomplish together!

Sincerely,



Tony Caligiuri
President





Photo by Spencer George



Protecting the Headwaters Region of the Colorado River

The headwaters of the Colorado River are a testament to nature's resilience and quiet power. Nestled high in the Rocky Mountains, the headwaters begin their journey, drop by drop, flowing from snowmelt and rainfall into the rushing river that will shape the land and sustain life for hundreds of miles. The headwaters serve as a reminder of the strength that lies in small beginnings, and the possibilities that can unfold when nature thrives.

In 1995, a group of concerned citizens in the Colorado headwaters area saw the changes occurring in their community and felt the need to take action. They founded the Grand County Land Conservancy "to conserve and steward the open lands and natural character of the headwaters of the Colorado River in partnership with the local community." Over time, the land trust changed names twice as clarity of mission evolved. In April 2013, the board of what was then called the Middle Park Land Trust decided to change the organization's name to Colorado Headwaters Land Trust (CHLT).

And at the end of 2024, that highly effective entity evolved once again, through a merger with Colorado Open Lands.

The CHLT board and staff were keenly aware of the river's challenges. From its headwaters in Rocky Mountain National Park in Grand County, the Colorado River is struggling to retain its valuable natural attributes: critical cold-water aquatic habitat, wetlands, vital water rights, working ranches, scenic open space, and world-class rafting and fly fishing.

Stewart McNab, who served as president of the Colorado Headwaters Land Trust Board of Directors, said, "After almost 30 years in which CHLT has protected over 10,000 acres, our mission to conserve and steward open lands

County is at an all-time high, particularly on ranch and agricultural land which is a fundamental part of our heritage. By merging with Colorado Open Lands from a position of strength we can best meet the challenges facing Grand County and the headwaters of the Colorado River.”

CHLT achieved significant accomplishments in land conservation, protecting vital landscapes, water resources, and wildlife habitats in Colorado. It had completed nearly 70 land protection projects totaling over 10,000 acres, including many of the critically important waterways, wetlands, and riparian areas within. CHLT’s conservation successes included productive agriculture land, significant wildlife habitat, scenic viewsheds, and treasured public recreation spots.

COL staff is ready to continue this legacy of vitally important work on Colorado’s most iconic river.

Paul Phillips, president of the board of directors of Colorado Open Lands, said, “Grand County is home to some of Colorado’s most spectacular vistas, productive ranch lands and wildlife habitat, not to mention the headwaters of the majestic Colorado River. Colorado Open Lands is thrilled to be joining hands with Colorado Headwaters Land Trust to continue their legacy of outstanding work to protect these treasured resources.”

COL is well-positioned to continue the legacy of careful stewardship of landowner and community relationships that CHLT has built. We have new staff dedicated to land and water conservation in CHLT’s service area. We have also established a local advisory board to provide area expertise and community connection going forward. The advisory board is comprised of members of CHLT’s outgoing board of directors – those that have the keenest sense and institutional knowledge of the area’s opportunities and challenges.



**Meet Courtney Bennet,
Upper Colorado Region
Senior Conservation
Project Manager**



More on page 15!

Courtney remarked of the merger, “COL is thrilled to be joining an exceptional network of conservation practitioners serving the Upper Colorado River Basin. We are eager to build on the foundation established by Colorado Headwaters Land Trust and increase the pace and scale of land and water conservation in this dynamic region. Our goal is to create a strategic conservation vision and identify how conservation easements can be used as a tool to have watershed-level impacts.”

Much like the tributaries of the Colorado River, land trusts are more powerful and have a greater impact when they join forces and work together. Colorado Open Lands is honored to join with Colorado Headwaters Land Trust to support the health of the lands and waters of Grand County and beyond.

This merger was supported by a variety of public and private sources, including the Walton Family Foundation and Great Outdoors Colorado.



Get acquainted with Colorado Headwaters Land Trust's final conservation easement project: **Granby Highlands-Trails**

The protection of this 743-acre property, formerly known as the Horn Ranch, was many years in the making. The Town of Granby has owned the property since 2016. It lies north of the intersection of US-40 and US-34, making it highly accessible from town. With the conservation easement now complete, the Town will provide public access on just over half the property, and may build up to 10 miles of nonmotorized trails for usage by residents and visitors. The remaining portion will be restricted from public access to protect local wildlife and maintain the spectacular viewshed around Granby. The property also borders Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land.

Conserving the property guarantees more contiguous open space and migratory pathways for all the resident species, which include big game and migratory birds.

The easement was donated in part by the Town of Granby, with significant funding by the Open Lands, Rivers, and Trails Fund (OLRT) of Grand County, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Devil's Thumb Ranch, Mountain Parks Electric, the Gates Family Foundation, the Hughes Charitable Trust, Country ACE Hardware, the Grand County Wilderness Group, and many private donors.



Northeast Colorado Region

Arroyos del Sol

This nearly 1,000-acre property in the Town of Greeley has now been forever protected for public open space and recreation. A robust public engagement period is shaping future uses, which include multi-use trails with scenic bluffs and prairies, central gathering spaces for picnics, habitat for 91 identified wildlife species and one rare plant, and accessible paths and interpretive signage to make this community asset more inclusive.

Project partners include Great Outdoors Colorado, Trust for Public Land, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and Ducks Unlimited, which collaborated to acquire the land for the Town.

Warner Ranch

Warner Ranch is a Centennial Ranch located outside of Fort Lupton and owned by Bob Warner. Mr. Warner has a long history of being active with the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts and as a board member for the National Association of Conservation Districts. The 1,809-acre Warner Ranch features a mix of pastureland and irrigated cropland that supports a cow/calf herd of Angus cattle. The ranch includes senior water rights that support the conservation values of the property and will be protected in perpetuity. Project partners include Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Stromberger Farm

This property is a third-generation farm located on the edge of Windsor in Weld County. The family purchased the 152-acre farm in 1943 and have since grown a variety of crops, including sugar beets, beans, corn, alfalfa, and even hops. With prime soils and a variety of senior water rights, the farm is important for local food production. Part of that water rights portfolio includes Windsor Reservoir water, which enables the farm to be irrigated early and late in the growing season when other farms often struggle to get water. The abundance of water on the Stromberger Farm will allow it to be a viable operation well into the future. Natural Resources Conservation Service was a project partner.

Occidental Farm

This 593-acre property is situated between Fort Collins and the Pawnee National Grasslands and operates as a dryland wheat farm. The farm is an important piece of the scenic viewshed from local county roads, given the relatively flat topography of the area. The farm serves as habitat for fox, coyote, and various waterfowl and birds of prey, and is an especially important migration corridor for pronghorn that roam the Pawnee National Grasslands. Conservation of this farm helps solidify the farming legacy of Weld County, known as Colorado's bread basket.





San Luis Valley and Southeast Colorado

Salazar Ranches Conejos

The ranch consists of 698 acres in Conejos County east of Antonito. Current uses include center-pivot irrigated crop fields, with fields currently in organic alfalfa production. Peas, oats, sorghum, and seed potatoes are also planted. The conservation easement includes surface water rights from one ditch system and four groundwater wells. The ranches provide winter habitat for elk and pronghorn, and habitat for mule deer and sandhill crane. Pronghorn, which bed down in the South Piñon Hills, are often observed grazing on the property. The property provides beautiful views of the southern Sangre de Cristo mountains to the east, open expanses in northern New Mexico to the south, and the Los Mogotes area to the west. Numerous conservation easements are within the vicinity of the property, adding to the benefits for wildlife.

Rito Seco Park Expansion

Opportunities to acquire land for public access are extremely rare in Costilla County. COL collaborated with a private landowner to protect 398 acres adjacent to Rito Seco Park. Now conserved, the landowner will sell the land to Costilla County to expand the park. Trail expansion and public access planning for this parcel will begin later in 2025.

The Rito Seco (meaning “dry creek”) twists its way through the property for 0.75 miles before entering the valley floor and flowing through the town of San Luis. The parcel is surrounded on three sides by the Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Open Space. In addition to the benefits for people, the mosaic of vegetation types on the property provides winter habitat for mule deer and elk, as well as summer habitat for bear and Canada lynx. The stream corridor provides plenty of aquatic and riparian habitat as evidenced by the multiple active beaver ponds.



Purgatoire River Property

The Purgatoire River property is owned by our partner and frequent collaborator, Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT). It consists of 493 acres in Bent County and features shortgrass prairie habitat, a large pond, 0.75 of a mile of the Purgatoire River, and associated floodplains. These varied habitats support a variety of wildlife species, including some designated “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” by the State of Colorado: black-tailed prairie dog, swift fox, burrowing owl, golden eagle, ferruginous hawk, Cassin’s sparrow, lark bunting, loggerhead shrike, long-billed curlew, northern harrier, prairie falcon, plains leopard frog, and Texas horned lizard. The Boggsville Historic Site is adjacent to the property.

SPLT intends to allow future public access to the property for education and recreational purposes. They also intend to engage in restoring native vegetation to enhance the education value of the site. GOCO was a project partner.

Photo by Rich Reading





Wet Mountain Valley

Lower Pasture of the HG Vickerman Ranch

This property south of Westcliffe encompasses 1,232 acres. It features a mosaic of montane grasslands, piñon-juniper woodlands, stands of conifer and aspen forests, a small canyon with rocky outcroppings, and wetlands along Lapin Creek which traverses the property for one mile. The property has three springs for livestock and wildlife watering, and big views of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains across the Wet Mountain Valley. This parcel is surrounded by development on three sides and would face substantial pressure to be subdivided without the conservation easement. This easement adds to the previously protected parcels that make up HG Vickerman Ranch. The family agricultural operation began in 1918, with parcels added over time until they totaled over 3,600 acres. This project is the third and final portion of the historic family ranch to be protected. Previous parts of the ranch were protected by San Isabel Land Protection Trust (SILPT) and are now under the stewardship of COL.

Sanders Property

The Sanders Property consists of 229 acres in the small community of Wetmore, west of Pueblo. The land is adjacent to San Isabel National Forest and connects the Wet Mountains to the sloping Front Range heading toward Pueblo. The landowners, Tom and Cec Sanders, started with a 10-acre parcel where they live and operate the Wet Mountain Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. The Center tends to rescued injured or malnourished animals, including bears, large cats, deer, birds, and reptiles. Over the course of 30 years, the couple acquired six additional adjacent parcels, which now make up the 229 acres they own today. When appropriate, the Sanders use their contiguity to the National Forest as the release location for the animals they have nursed back to health.

Texas Creek Ranch

Texas Creek Ranch includes two miles of Texas Creek and associated senior water rights, rolling grasslands, riparian wetlands and aspen groves. In 2012, 600 acres of the ranch were protected by SILPT. This easement adds the remaining 394 acres, protecting the entirety of the ranch. The property is contiguous with three other COL-held conservation easements which also originated with SILPT. SILPT's key initiative, the Wet Mountain Valley Ranchland Preservation Program, was started in the early 2000s with a goal of protecting as much of the valley floor as possible to

protect views of the Sangre de Cristos beyond. With the completion of this project, the initiative now encompasses nearly 10,000 contiguous protected acres! Previous owners of the ranch, Smokey and Bill Jack, were some of the founders of SILPT and hosted its early meetings in the cabin on site. When they sold the ranch in 2010, the community held its breath with concerns about potential development. Locals were delighted when the current owners, Larry and Annie Gerdes, purchased the property, continued its good stewardship, and ultimately protected it.





Gunnison Basin

Cochetopa Dome Ranch

The ranch consists of 1,609 acres and features outstanding senior water rights. It is surrounded on three sides by Gunnison National Forest and BLM land, making for excellent habitat and migration connectivity. The ranch features irrigated pastures, hay meadows, sagebrush, and three miles of West Pass Creek flowing through it! It provides habitat for Gunnison sage-grouse, elk, mule deer, pronghorn, black bear, mountain lion, and waterfowl which frequent the numerous ponds.

Project partners include Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Keep it Colorado.

McDermand Silver Springs Ranch

This scenic 113-acre ranch is just two miles north of the Town of Gunnison and is highly visible from the main thoroughfare connecting Gunnison to Crested Butte. The property is irrigated pastureland leased and grazed by a local conservation-minded ranching family. The property is bordered to the west by Highway 135 and bordered to the east by approximately 2/3-mile of the Gunnison River. Development pressure is high in this area, and significant, long-standing conservation efforts have protected ten projects on 6,500 acres of agricultural land within five miles of the property. This parcel is an excellent buffer to wildlife from the highway, providing an oasis in the riparian foliage and open meadows situated below the bustling road above. The property provides habitat for Gunnison sage-grouse, bald eagle, ferruginous hawk, greater Sandhill crane, and northern leopard frog (all Colorado Species of Concern), and provides habitat for a resident herd of elk. The landowner has now completed two conservation easements with Colorado Open Lands and plans to do more in the future.

Project partners include Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy and the Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund.



South Park Region



Michigan Creek Fishing Preserve

The Michigan Creek Fishing Preserve is a 120-acre property in Park County, seven miles south of the town of Jefferson along Michigan Creek near its confluence with Tarryall Creek. The property is located off the well-traveled CR 77 and features a scenic meadow, meandering creek, and jugged rock outcroppings. About 0.3 miles of Michigan Creek flow through the property, making it an excellent fishing location. It is adjacent to Pike National Forest to the north and BLM land to the south, creating an ideal wildlife corridor.

This property was donated to Western River Conservancy (WRC), a river ecosystems nonprofit, which partnered with COL to protect this parcel. WRC has donated the land to Colorado Parks & Wildlife which will make the property a future State Wildlife Area, adding to the public benefit for all!

Project partners include Western Rivers Conservancy, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, and the Park County Land and Water Trust Fund.

Rosalie

This 72-acre property near Bailey is adjacent to the Woodward family's home ranch, Deer Valley Park Association, a Centennial Ranch that was previously protected with COL. The Woodwards operate Hi-Altitude Cattle, LLC, raising beef on their ranch and other leased properties in the area. The Woodwards purchased this additional property in 2022 to expand their pasture and have additional space for future generations of family who wish to continue their ranching legacy. Development pressure around Bailey is high, and this easement will help ensure a future for local agriculture, as well as for the herds of elk which are known to roam the property.

The Park County Land and Water Trust Fund was a project partner.



Front Range and Central Colorado



Arkansas River Community Preserve Expansion

Colorado Open Lands continues our partnership with Central Colorado Conservancy on this important public access project. This latest phase adds 74 acres to bring the total protected area to 345 acres, encompassing nearly all of the private lands in this stretch of the canyon along almost three miles of the Arkansas River. In 2025, the preserve will open to the public, providing access to gold-medal trout fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing. The preserve is visible to drivers on US-24, the Top of the Rockies Scenic Byway.

In this final phase, Central Colorado Conservancy purchased two additional private parcels, helping to connect the preserve and in total putting 20 previously subdivided parcels back together. The property is valuable to wildlife, with habitat for bighorn sheep, elk, beavers, ospreys, golden eagles, and numerous other species. The preserve connects the river to lands managed by the BLM and San Isabel National Forest, creating a large contiguous protected area.

Funding was provided by GOCO, the Natural Resource Damages Trustees, and private donors.

Floyd Hill Meadow

Colorado Open Lands collaborated with partner Mountain Area Land Trust, which owns Floyd Hill Meadow, to protect these 18 highly visible acres along I-70. For over 30 years, local residents vigorously opposed high-density development plans for the meadow, also known for a time as the Homestead Parcel.

The protection of Floyd Hill Meadow will have a long-lasting impact for local wildlife, neighbors, recreational enthusiasts, and travelers along the I-70 corridor. Along with the devastating ecological impacts of development, the community understood that potential development of this parcel threatened access and availability of water resources, open spaces, scenic vistas, and quality of life.



Join Our Giving Societies and Make a Lasting Impact

At Colorado Open Lands, we are grateful for the support of our community. Our Giving Societies recognize those who make lasting contributions to help us advance our mission. Whether through monthly donations, annual contributions, or legacy gifts, you can play a vital role in preserving Colorado's natural beauty. We invite you to join one of our giving circles today and receive personal updates on the impact you are making with your gift!

PERENNIAL PARTNERS

Perennial Partners are essential to our work, providing ongoing monthly support that enables us to grow our programs year round. Your steady contribution—at any level—helps us respond to immediate needs and plan for the future.

EVERGREEN SOCIETY

Members of the Evergreen Society donate \$1,000 or more annually and play a key role in expanding our impact. Your generosity keeps our mission steady, strong, and vibrant, just like Colorado's evergreen trees. As a member, you'll receive exclusive invitations to events and experiences.

CONSERVATORS SOCIETY

The Conservators Society honors those who contribute \$5,000 or more annually. These visionary supporters help us achieve long-term goals and create lasting change. As a member, you'll receive invitations to special events and experiences, including our annual Conservators dinner in April.

CENTENNIAL SOCIETY

The Centennial Society recognizes those who include Colorado Open Lands in their will or estate plan. Your planned gift ensures sustainability for generations to come. As a member, you'll receive exclusive invitations to events and tours throughout the year.



WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR SUPPORT. YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE CRUCIAL IN HELPING US PROTECT COLORADO'S LAND AND WATER FOR THE FUTURE.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JOINING A GIVING SOCIETY OR MAKING A LEGACY GIFT, PLEASE CONTACT ELIZABETH SILVERMAN, OR SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.

Elizabeth Silverman
Director of Philanthropy
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New Faces at COL

NEW BOARD MEMBERS



Cat Augur

Cat Augur moved to Creede in 2007 because she thought it was the most beautiful place she'd ever seen. She started working at Creede Repertory Theatre, first as Development Director, and later as Executive Director. Under her leadership, Cat shepherd-

ed the company to state and national recognition for its theater and education programs. She met her husband Avery in Creede, and it is here they raise and homeschool their two sons Ted and James. Most weekends, they can be found hiking, fishing, cross-country skiing, and generally appreciating the expansive public lands that surround their backyard. Cat serves as Trustee and Executive Director for the Eleanor and Henry Hitchcock Foundation. She is a graduate of the Institute for Leaders in Development, and holds an MSW from University of Denver and a BFA from University of Illinois.



Peggy Montaño

Peggy E. Montaño is a shareholder with the Denver law firm of Trout Raley Montaño Freeman Sinor Thompson P.C. Her practice specializes in state and federal court litigation, and federal administrative and legislative strategy. Peggy has practiced law for over 35 years including defense against massive federal water right claims by the U.S. Forest Service, numerous water rights adjudications,

interstate water issues including compact issues, and water related administrative and federal and state legislative matters. She spent three years representing the State of Colorado as an Assistant Attorney General assigned to the Department of Natural Resources and principally represented the Colorado State Engineer and the Colorado Water Conservation Board. She is General Counsel to the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District. Peggy has practiced water and environmental law in private practice since leaving the Attorney General's Office. Peggy's hometown is Durango and she enjoys many outdoors activities, including skiing, hiking, and enjoying the beauty of our state where she often finds peace from the frenetic world.

NEW STAFF MEMBERS

Courtney Bennett
Senior
Conservation
Project Manager



Courtney joins COL as a dedicated land conservation professional in over 14 years of experience with Colorado's conservation community, including more than six years with Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, five with Great Outdoors Colorado, and three with the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program. Courtney has an MS in Environmental Science, Graduate Certificate in Sustainable Agriculture from Washington State University and a BS in Biology from Fort Lewis College. In her free time, she enjoys gardening, biking, skiing, hiking, and camping.

Hannah Brown
Stewardship
Monitoring
Program Manager



Hannah grew up in the Pacific Northwest where she developed a deep appreciation for wildlife and the natural world. Hannah graduated with a BS in Biology and a concentration in Field and Wildlife Biology from California Polytechnic State University in 2017. Since college, she has worked a variety of jobs related to the field of wildlife biology, including educational positions in Alabama and Dubai, as well as seasonal field wildlife biologist jobs across the United States. She has a passion for the local Colorado wildlife and has a particular affinity for insects and birds.

Campbell Clynnh
Philanthropy
Coordinator



Campbell is originally from the Chicagoland area, but a single week in the mountains before college completely altered her path. She went on to attend Colorado State University, earning a BA in Communications Studies with a minor in Science Communications. She spends her free time hiking and trail running. She's immensely passionate about protecting Colorado's breathtaking landscapes, its wildlife, and the beauty that surrounds us.

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Coming this year at Colorado Open Lands!

Later this Spring | COL's new podcast

Providing you with a deeper look at the issues, challenges, and opportunities for our land and water.

July 28 | Conservation 201 Webinar

Join us online to take a deeper dive into the work we do at COL.

August 21 | South Park Hike: From History to Restoration, Kenosha Pass

Join a hike to a beautiful overlook to learn more about one of our priority landscapes.

September 18 | Cheers for Conservation

Our annual celebration of the people and partnerships that make conservation happen in Colorado

Make sure you follow our email updates for more on all of the above! Visit coloradoopenlands.org/subscribe or scan the QR code to sign up!

