YESTERDAY, TODAY, & FOREVER

SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER
Like many people, I have lots of wonderful memories that involve “place.” My childhood home, my grandmother’s back yard, the small woods behind our farm that seemed endless and wild on summer campouts, the weekend cabin where my own kids spent summers, the deer trails and creeks we would follow on summer days. They all played a big influence on who I am and what I do now. But sadly, most of those places are now gone. Old cabins are scraped and replaced, patches of woods are developed, roads are built and farms become sub-divisions.

It’s why the remaining wild places are so special. For me, it’s a small valley of woods and stream that I used to spend hours exploring as a kid. There was an old abandoned civil-war era rail line running through and artifacts of Native American culture. Once slated to be flooded for a reservoir, it was at the last minute permanently conserved by a group of community activists as a hiking and wildlife preserve. It was a gift – a sort of time capsule – for future generations to be able to see and feel what people experienced in that undeveloped valley for hundreds of years. Even after 50 years of living and traveling around the world, I still make time to go back to that place – to smell the trees, listen to the creek and soak up the landscape that first inspired me as a child.

It is that place that came to mind when I first heard the story of Evergreen residents Dick and Sally Williams when they described finding a time capsule hidden in an old cabin they were working to restore on their recently conserved ranch. I thought about the delight and wonder of holding those relics and experiencing a moment through the eyes of past generations.

I also thought of that place when I read our board member Brian Ross’s heartfelt tribute to his mother and how his support of Colorado Open Lands provides a bridge between the Colorado that his mother experienced in the early part of the 20th century and the Colorado his granddaughter will experience into the next.

Colorado is a special place, but it is changing quickly before our eyes. Whether you came here out of love for all the land and open space of Colorado has to offer, or if you were born here and have been witness to the changes of the past decade, we can all agree that there is no greater urgency than making sure some of the most special and wondrous places in our state are still here for us and all the generations that come behind us to enjoy.

Thank you,
Tony Caligiuri
President, Colorado Open Lands

PRESIDENT’S LETTER
Yesterday, Today, & FOREVER

There is something magical about the discovery of a time capsule. It's a chance to see what the world was like in a different time. It can provide a rare glimpse into what our parents, grandparents, or other generations saw and thought was most meaningful.

This rare opportunity came to one of our landowners in the foothills above Denver. Dick and Sally Williams, owners of the beautiful Singing River Ranch near Evergreen, found a time capsule when they were working to restore an old cabin on their newly conserved land. Nestled in a beautiful meadow along what was once an old stagecoach road that connected Denver to Loveland Pass, the cabin serves as a wonderfully preserved artifact of a long-ago time in what was then the wild backcountry of Colorado.

“Well it was very exciting, I have to say, because we had absolutely no idea it was there. And we’re just sort of watching them very carefully taking out the boards on the hips on the side of the house. And when they were taking these off, we found this big package all wrapped up in a plastic ball, and we took it apart and started looking at it. And it was just like, this is really amazing! We have to do the same thing when we close the cabin up again,” said Sally Williams.

Colorado Open Lands was honored to work with Dick and Sally a few years ago to conserve their parcel of land that provides a home for elk, moose and birds as well as a scenic open view for all those who travel up to the Mount Evans Wilderness Area. What could have become a development of high-end houses will now be preserved forever.

In many ways, conserving land in Colorado is like creating a time capsule for future generations. Just like the wonder and excitement of finding a container of relics and pictures, a conserved slice of land gives you the opportunity to see the majesty of Colorado through the eyes of past generations of settlers and explorers. (cont. next page)

Bridging Generations with a Gift of Love

In December, our board member Brian Ross created a kind of time capsule of his own – making a gift towards conserving Colorado's land. The gift was in honor of his late mother, Maxine, who was born in 1922 in her parents’ farmhouse in Mead.

Maxine lived her whole life in Colorado, and saw much of Jefferson County slowly turn from vast wheat fields to housing and businesses. Her favorite spot was an A-frame cabin the family built on land in the lodgepoles outside Silverthorne that cost just $1,500 in 1962. But Summit County changed as well.

In her waning years, she shared fond memories of the Colorado she had spent her whole life loving: the farm in Mead, the beauty of the eastern plains, the magnificence of the ponderosa pines and the elk in the Estes Valley, the quaintness of rural Jefferson County in the 50’s, the family fun in Summit County in the 60’s, the sunsets over Red Peak in the Gore Range.

Maxine passed just months before her 90th birthday. Two and a half years later, Maxine’s great-granddaughter Caitlin was born, just 24 miles from that Mead farmhouse. Caitlin has much of her great-grandmother’s spirit, and she loves the outdoors just as Maxine did.

As Brian watched his granddaughter play, an idea to honor both of them came to him. A gift of love across generations. A gift from Maxine to Caitlin. A gift to her beloved Colorado—and to the wildflowers, bees, bugs, butterflies, fish, birds and all of Mother Nature’s creatures that depend upon open, natural land for survival.

This idea inspired him and his family to make the largest gift they have ever made to Colorado Open Lands, in honor of both Maxine and Caitlin. And in another 90 or so years from now, Caitlin’s great-granddaughter will get to enjoy the same vast open spaces that so delighted the women that came before them.
At Colorado Open Lands, we work every day with landowners who are willing to put the best pieces of Colorado in a time capsule of conservation for future generations to enjoy. Except these are not places that sit hidden away from us. They are scenic vistas that we enjoy every day, working lands that provide local food and Western culture, and wildlife habitat that sustains the animals we are delighted to see. And for all of us now and for our children and grandchildren, they provide a magical peek into what Colorado once was and, with our stewardship, what Colorado can continue to be.

After Dick and Sally uncovered that time capsule, they quickly decided to place a new one. In fact, this will be their second gift to the future. The first was a beautiful meadow and river corridor that they worked to conserve – a gift to everyone who passes by now and forever.

Today, Colorado Open Lands is blessed to have more than 100 families, who like Dick and Sally Williams, are willing and waiting to conserve scenic working farms and ranches, mountain meadows, vast prairie land and unique places that define Colorado. We are working hard to meet those needs, but we can only do this work with your support.

Five years ago, we set an audacious goal to conserve 800,000 acres of open space in Colorado – more than 3 times the size of Rocky Mountain National Park. We admit, we weren’t sure exactly how we were going to get it done at the time, but we were committed. Since then and with the generosity of supporters like you, we have conserved more than 550,000 acres with a waitlist of nearly 250,000 more acres. We see now that with your help and by working together, we can meet and even exceed this goal to make sure we leave a Colorado where future generations understand why this place is so special.

**Before and After: Colorado**

COL staff pored over historical photos looking for changes to the land over time. As you can see on our cover, some places have changed quite a bit. On this page, you’ll notice others have hardly changed at all. This is due, in part, to conservation efforts of Colorado Open Lands and our partner land trusts. When you look at the Northern San Luis Valley, South Park, and the Gunnison Basin today, know that people are fighting to keep everything that makes them special, today and forever.
New Lands Now Forever Protected
Since our last newsletter just four months ago, COL has protected more than 11,000 new acres!

Batenburg Meadows
“The Batenburg Meadows were like a second home growing up,” says Steven Romero, Costilla County Commissioner. “I’ve been playing in the greenbelt area since I was 8 years old.”

Batenburg Meadows, located northeast of the Town of San Luis, is the newest addition to the public recreation opportunities in the San Luis Valley. Since approximately 99% of the land in Costilla County is privately owned, common places to recreate and gather are limited. There are no federally owned lands for public recreation.

Batenburg Meadows includes beaver ponds, Rito Seco Creek, and open meadows, and serves as a popular fishing spot. The community has long enjoyed picnicking, collecting firewood and piñon nuts, and exploring this land. A youth nature and hunting education camp sponsored by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Fort Garland Community Center has taken place on this property for the past 20 years.

This project is the culmination of over eight years of community meetings, fundraising, and successful partnerships between many groups who wish to permanently preserve land for people to fish, hike, camp, and play. In 2012, Costilla County partnered with Colorado Open Lands and the National Parks Service to create a Trails, Recreation & Open Space plan for the County. The Batenburg Meadows area was identified as a key area to protect for outdoor recreation.

Colorado Open Lands was able to raise over half a million dollars from Great Outdoors Colorado – GOCO, the US Forest Service, and the LOR Foundation to purchase seventeen additional parcels to add to the greenbelt, for a total of over 4,000 contiguous acres for outdoor recreation. The land will be managed as public open space by the county government and is protected by a conservation easement to keep it open in perpetuity.

Costilla County Commissioner Lawrence Pacheco remarked, “What we’ve added to public access in Costilla County within the seven years that I’ve been here I think is probably my greatest accomplishment, something that makes me the proudest, so I wanted to take that opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved with it. It hasn’t been easy, but it hasn’t been completely impossible either.”

Emerald Ranch
There’s a clear feeling of awe in the eyes of Brian and Rosemary Egolf as they survey the Emerald Ranch from atop one of its 11,000-foot peaks. Beautiful views abound on this 507-acre easement in Mineral County, just outside of the town of Creede.

Rosemary shared, “We are in a new chapter in our lives with the conservation easement in place. I feel like a true steward of this land now and, more than ever, want to do the best job possible of caring for the land, the animals, the birds, the fish and all else. What a wonderful gift for us all!”

This high-alpine ranch contains a diverse landscape of aspen forest, meadows, and wetlands, offering important habitat for a wealth of wildlife including elk, mule deer, moose, black bear, and mountain lions. It also features more than ten beaver ponds which support fish habitat and may even be home to lynx and river otter. This habitat is especially valuable because the ranch is surrounded by U.S. National Forest land, providing an even larger area of uninterrupted places for animals to thrive.

The ranch provides stunning views from the heavily trafficked Bachelor Loop, a 17-mile drive through the historic mining district above Creede, highlighting numerous mines and ghost towns from the 1800s. The Egolf family originally purchased more than 60 original mining claims and pieced them together to form this magnificent whole. Previous plans for the land included subdividing pieces of the property into five- and ten-acre ranchettes, but now protected with the conservation easement, the natural beauty will remain - in perpetuity - as idyllic as it is today.

“I have always thought of Emerald Ranch and its unique location in the pristine, high-alpine country as the entryway to America’s greatest untouched wilderness. To preserve this land for all living things is the greatest accomplishment of my life. To that end, I owe a debt of gratitude to the wonderful people of Colorado Open Lands and their sense of purpose that made it possible,” said Brian Egolf.
Allen Ranch Home Place
Allen Ranch is a 5th generation Colorado Centennial Farm and is one of the largest ranching operations in the Gunnison Valley. The ranch operation spreads out through the upper Gunnison River/East River Valley between the City of Gunnison and Mt. Crested Butte. For over 130 years, Allen Ranch cattle have moved up and down this valley as part of their annual grazing – a kind of living time capsule. This latest parcel conserved by the Allen Family serves as the primary base for operations and is the southern-most portion of their ranch, located just north of Gunnison and on the west side of State Highway 135. 1,183 acres of the Home Place were conserved by a COL easement in 2003. This new easement conserves the remaining 592 acres of the Home Place.

The ranch is alive with irrigated meadows and sagebrush shrub lands. The entire property is visible from State Highway 135, County Road 8 and County Road 730, which runs through the Ohio Creek Valley. The property provides significant wildlife habitat for big game species, including elk and mule deer, and includes critical habitat for Gunnison sage-grouse. It is adjacent to other conserved lands, expanding the opportunities for wildlife to thrive.

This project was completed in partnership with Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy, Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Coors Property
COL has partnered with the Coors family to conserve a beloved viewshed along Interstate 70 in Jefferson County. These 81 acres of open space belonged to William K. “Bill” Coors, who passed in 2018. It was his wish to see the property permanently protected under conservation easement with a land trust.

The easement includes a key piece of the view of the mountain foothills from the Denver Metro area and is viewed more than 18 million times annually from travelers along Interstate 70 between Genesee and Golden. The property is near the popular Mother Cabrini Shrine and is highly visible to the shrine’s visitors as well.

Bill’s son Scott and daughters Maggie and May were proud to fulfill their father’s wishes.

Scott remarked, “This property was our father’s crown jewel – he cherished the tranquility, views, privacy and wildlife here and was passionate about ensuring it would never be spoiled by development. Our whole family couldn’t agree more, and we are thankful for the opportunity to protect it in perpetuity through Colorado Open Lands for the benefit of all of our fellow Coloradans and our state’s visitors.”

Additionally, the property provides habitat for a broad range of wildlife, including breeding grounds for elk and mule deer, and habitat for bear, spotted owl, northern goshawk, and wild turkey. It abuts the Jefferson County Apex Mountain Park, which adds to the aggregate viewed and habitat opportunities on the property.

Heartland Ranch Expansion
COLORADO OPEN LANDS

Colorado Open Lands continues its successful partnership with the Southern Plains Land Trust (SPLT) with the conservation of Phase 1 of their Heartland Ranch expansion.

“We are thrilled to once again partner with Colorado Open Lands in expanding the Southern Plains Land Trust’s Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve. The preserve’s nearly 25,000 acres encompass fantastic grasslands, canyons, and cottonwood groves that provide habitat for a wide variety of prairie wildlife and rare plants. We are especially excited by the potential for reintroducing the black-footed ferret, one of the most endangered mammals in North America” said Nicole Rosmarino, Executive Director of Southern Plains Land Trust.

This landscape of shortgrass prairie is located in Bent County, in southeastern Colorado. It is managed by SPLT as a wildlife refuge, nature preserve, and will feature educational programming. It is home to a huge range of wildlife, including elk, mountain lion, and pronghorn, as well as various Colorado Species of Special Concern including black-tailed prairie dog, ferruginous hawk, swift fox, and plains leopard frog.

This project adds to SPLT’s 18,000 acres already under easement with COL, and takes them one step closer to their ultimate goal of more than 42,000 contiguous acres of open space for wildlife to roam.
Preserving wildlife habitats today and tomorrow

The official discovery of Gunnison sage-grouse is newer than New Coke. Never than the Walkman. Newer than e-mail. But just as we’ve discovered them, we find that they’re already disappearing.

In the 1970s, avian researchers began to suspect that there was another species of sage-grouse. It looked a lot like Greater sage-grouse, but this one was smaller and had white banded tufts across its tail fan. It made a hooting gobble sound that was a bit different. And it only lived in some small areas in Colorado and a bit of eastern Utah.

In 1995, Drs. Clait Braun and Jessica Young proposed that the Gunnison sage-grouse was a distinct species and, along with Drs. Jerry Hupp, Sara Oyler-McCance and Tom Quinn, they published their findings in the Wilson Bulletin. They were awarded the Edward’s Prize for the best major article published by that journal that year, and The American Ornithologist’s Union recognized the Gunnison sage-grouse as a newly named species in 2000.

The Gunnison sage-grouse is a diminutive bird, usually weighing under five pounds and spanning less than two feet. They are noteworthy for their elaborate courtship rituals that occur during spring months on their mating grounds, called leks. The males gather in leks and perform an extravagant display to attract females. They have two air sacs in their chest, which they inflate to make a popping noise, while they fan their tail feathers and toss their neck plumes above their heads. What female could resist?

On a glide path to extinction

However, just as the Gunnison sage-grouse made itself known to the world, we found that its habitat was already in peril. The bird was designated Threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act in 2015, with an estimated total population of just 4,000. Audubon estimates that Gunnison sage-grouse have disappeared from all but 10% of their historical range, due to loss of habitat and fragmentation.

Each spring, biologists conduct Gunnison sage-grouse counts, and 2019 brought no good news for the sage-grouse. Researchers counted 35% fewer birds than in 2016. The numbers have been declining every year since the initial count, in fact.

Protecting what remains

Colorado Open Lands has been working to preserve land in the Gunnison Valley for decades and has now completed over 46 conservation easements on Gunnison sage-grouse habitat, for a total of more than 17,600 protected acres. For a bird with a small range, that can make a big impact.

“In the early morning, at daybreak, I daily count the Gunnison sage-grouse that come to the lek, or mating area, on our ranch. Gunnison is a special place. It amazes me how many ranches are permanently protected by conservation easements in our valley. Conserved land is not only good for cattle operations. They also benefit wildlife, water and viewsheds.”

- Sandy Guerrieri, owner of Mill Creek Ranch in Gunnison, under easement with Colorado Open Lands

This work has been accelerated by Colorado Open Lands collaborating with Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy, as well as the Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife, which collaborated to conserve eight new properties over the last two years alone. The final project of this collaboration – the Allen Ranch Home Place – was conserved in just March of this year. (See page 10 for more on Allen Ranch Home Place.)

Conservation preserves more than land. It preserves everything that walks, flies, trots, and swims there. And all of the things that make Colorado a special place – things like unique birds with elaborate feathers and an unusual call – are protected along with it.

To support further work towards protecting wildlife all over Colorado, contact Alyssa Acosta at AAcosta@ColoradoOpenLands.org
A Chance to Make a Transformative Gift to Conservation

As COL continues to build relationships with the Summit County conservation community after our merger with Continental Divide Land Trust (CDLT) in autumn of last year, we’re delighted (although not surprised) to discover their dedication and passion for conservation. One exemplary figure in Summit County conservation was Harriett Bobo, a dedicated volunteer and donor, who sadly passed in 2018.

“Somewhere along the line, a volunteer signed up to help. Her name came over the email: Harriett Bobo. How could you forget that name? And, as we soon learned, how could you forget Harriett?! She made our events fun because she was always so positive, upbeat, and supportive. And her laugh, how could you not laugh with Harriett?”

– Leigh Girvin, former Executive Director, Continental Divide Land Trust

Harriett was a dynamo. She began her long career with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), in the 1960s, and was one of the very few women to do so at the time. Over her decades of service with the government, she often made trips to ski in Summit County and ultimately decided to retire there.

It was then that she became involved with Continental Divide Land Trust to protect the landscape she so loved. She was a frequent donor and volunteer and was especially interested in the plein air and art events hosted by CDLT, capturing the beauty of open space.

But for all the joy, fun, and surprises that Harriett bestowed upon the land trust, she saved the biggest for last.

After Harriett’s passing, CDLT staff was contacted by her estate. The gifts started coming. And it wasn’t until two years later that the final gift arrived. Harriet had opted to give one last gift to the future of Summit County.

“Knowing Harriett, she probably thought about how her estate gift might shock and inspire all of us for years after her passing. I can imagine the twinkle in her eye hinting that she had secret plans for us. Harriett was always up to something important, and I think she knew how life-changing an estate gift of that size can be for a land trust. Harriett’s sure was.”

– Katherine Raffio, Colorado Open Lands Summit County Community Liaison.

It is with profound gratitude that we honor Harriett Bobo’s life and work towards protecting the lands she loved.

Colorado Open Lands’ Centennial Society

Colorado is America’s Centennial State, founded in 1876. We created the Centennial Society to honor and recognize those who create an estate gift for Colorado Open Lands, ensuring our ability to steward and protect conserved lands for the next 100 years and beyond.

Members of our Centennial Society share a passion for the permanent protection of quality of life that our open landscapes provide for Colorado. By joining, you can help landowners protect Colorado’s most valuable treasures – our land and water. Your commitment to including Colorado Open Lands in your estate secures your membership.

Most Popular Ways To Give

• Giving Through Your Will
• Beneficiary Designation (Life Insurance or IRA)

The most popular estate gifts include a Bequest through a Will or Living Trust, or naming Colorado Open Lands as a designated Beneficiary of an IRA or Life Insurance policy. These gifts preserve your full control over your assets for life, protecting you against financial uncertainties.

Other Smart Ways To Give

• Gifts that pay you income (Charitable Gift Annuity)
• Charitable Remainder Trust
• Retained Life Estate

There are ways for you to support Colorado Open Lands and feel confident that you have dependable income in your retirement years. A Charitable Gift Annuity can provide you with regular payments and allow us to further our work. A Charitable Remainder Trust can also provide a variety of tax benefits. A Retained Life Estate allows you to donate a residence while preserving the right to live there for the rest of your life.

Your legal and financial professional advisors can help you explore all possibilities, including identifying ways to maximize the financial and tax benefits of your estate gift.

Estate gifts come in all shapes and sizes. Each is important and appreciated, combining with other gifts in a shared spirit of ensuring that upon Colorado’s next centennial, our state’s most important open lands will look a lot like they did 100 years earlier.

To learn more or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact Alyssa Acosta at AAcosta@ColoradoOpenLands.org or 303-988-2373 ext. 216. All inquiries are held in strict confidence.
Enjoying the outdoors during social distancing!

As of this publication in March 2020, experts say that you can still enjoy Colorado’s open spaces while maintaining a distance of at least six feet from others.

Colorado Open Lands has easements on 54 public parks for over 11,000 acres, including the following:

- Bluff Park, Westcliffe
- Nix Natural Area, Fort Collins
- Gateway Mesa, Castle Rock
- Rio Grande Farm Park, Alamosa
- Willow Grove, Silverthorne

Photo by Bill Gillette