



Fall/Winter 2010

# Grasslands Gazette

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Prairie rattler on Two Marys Nature Preserve, May 2010 © Jay Tutchton

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*The Southern Plains Land Trust's mission: To create a shortgrass prairie reserve network that enables native plant and animal communities to once again thrive, with minimal human intervention. Join our membership to enact effective, permanent protection for prairie wildlife. If you're already a member, please spread the word.*

**SPLT's mission was furthered at our work party in June**, where we mapped prairie dog colonies on Fresh Tracks, Marianne Rees, and Two Marys Nature Preserves and cleaned up the old corral on Fresh Tracks, removing a truckload of old fencing and assorted metal debris. We also recorded blooming wildflowers and other plants, which will further prairie research.

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## A Note from the Board

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### SPLT Vital Statistics

#### *Board of Directors:*

Robert Alsobrook  
Melissa Hailey  
David Krank  
Jennifer Melton  
Judith Miller-Smith  
Dan Rees  
Nicole J. Rosmarino, President  
Lindsey Sterling Krank  
Jay Tutchton  
Daniel Ziskin, Vice President

#### *Volunteer Accountant:*

Donna Mei Lin Driscoll, C.P.A.

#### **Southern Plains Land Trust**

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[splt@southernplains.org](mailto:splt@southernplains.org)

SPLT's mission is to create a shortgrass prairie reserve network that enables native plant and animal communities to once again thrive, with minimal human intervention.

SPLT is a 501(c)(3) organization. All donations are tax-deductible. Donors may specify whether they wish their contribution to be applied exclusively for land acquisition. In addition, you may choose to "adopt an acre" for \$200. You can dedicate the acre to whomever or whatever you choose.

SPLT is a member of the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts and the Land Trust Alliance.

The most important project we've undertaken this year is to gain certification for the Southern Plains Land Trust. Sound remote from prairie conservation? Here's the connection: we must be certified in order to provide conservation buyers with the ability to claim Colorado's generous tax credits when they donate conservation easements to us. This is a new requirement, prompted the proliferation of fraudulent conservation easements several years ago. We're using the certification application process as an opportunity to streamline SPLT's operations, in service of the conservation easements we currently hold, which safeguard nearly 1,400 acres of prairie grasslands and resident wildlife, and also future lands we hope to safeguard for their native biodiversity.

We'll get a decision from the state in December. In addition to the many volunteer hours our Board contributed, the application fees totaled \$7,700. We welcome contributions to offset this expense. Or, if you'd rather make a donation directly to the land acquisition fund, we'd of course welcome that as well!

But our year has been more than paperwork. We visited a large ranch that is for sale just an hour east of Denver. With prairie dog colonies and beautiful native grassland, this property is our highest priority for acquisition. Please let us know if you'd like to join others in making its protection a reality (see Conservation Buyers Alert on p. 6). We also had a wonderful work party in June, as mentioned on the cover. Visiting SPLT-protected land this spring and summer has been a delightful, given the profusion of wildflowers in bloom (see story at p. 3).

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### Thank you

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**A special thanks to the Denison Montessori school and Abe's Givers for supporting SPLT.** We very much appreciate your efforts! **Another hearty thanks to Tom Butler** and the folks that made *Wildlands Philanthropy* (see p. 6) such an incredible book. Not only did Tom choose to feature us among the preservation efforts profiled in the book, he gave SPLT special recognition at a packed book reading in Boulder and joined us for a house party in August 2009. Tom's vision for preserving wildlands has reinvigorated us in protecting the prairie in the truly great southern Great Plains.

### Life Abounds!

Spring and summer this year saw an absolutely dazzling array of prairie wildflowers on lands that SPLT owns or manages. Allow us to take you on a tour:

#### Ten-petal Mentzelia (*Mentzelia decapetala*)

If you've ever toured the shortgrass prairie at dusk in the summer, you might be stopped in your tracks by the sight of *Mentzelia decapetala*. It opens in late afternoon or at dusk and is well worth the wait. With a palm-sized bloom, ten lovely creamy white petals surrounding an egg-yolk yellow center, what a show-stopper this is.



Blooming mentzelia in author's front yard, photo by Jay Tutchton; mentzelia plant with blooms not yet open, on Fresh Tracks, photo by Nicole Rosmarino.



Fresh Tracks has a profusion of ten-petal mentzelia. At one spot on the ravine, you can count more than 20 plants. With each plant boasting 20, 30, or more blooms, you can just

imagine how these blossoms light up the prairie landscape on a sultry summer evening.

#### Stiff Flax (*Linum rigidum*)



On Two Marys, we found late blooming stiff flax. This low-growing flax has warm orange cups that can provide a soft glow across the prairie when profuse in early spring, which was the case on Fresh Tracks this year.

#### Penstemons (*Penstemon* spp.)

And then there are penstemons, of which numerous species flowered on SPLT's land this year, in various purples, whites, and blues.



We haven't done justice to the bounty of blooms. From white milkwort to yucca, to everything in between, we salute you!

*Printed on recycled paper*

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## Life on the Prairie

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Wildflowers don't exist in a vacuum. In addition to treasuring native plants for their own sake, we appreciate that SPLT's efforts provide forage for pronghorn, berries for coyotes, nectar for butterflies, and an absolute bounty for the variety of furred, feathered, winged, and scaly creatures in our midst.



In addition to prohibiting major land disturbances on our land, including building, energy development, agriculture, and off-road vehicles, we don't use pesticides or herbicides. We think freedom from chemicals gives fragile insects such as bees and butterflies room to work their pollinating magic.



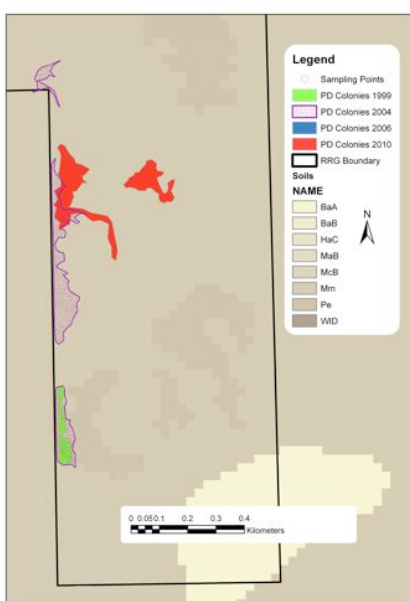
Our caution around chemicals is particularly important, given what our friends at the Xerces Society have found out about pollinators in peril. Xerces writes, "In many places, the essential service of pollination is at risk from habitat loss, pesticide use, and introduced diseases." For more information, visit: <http://www.xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/>.

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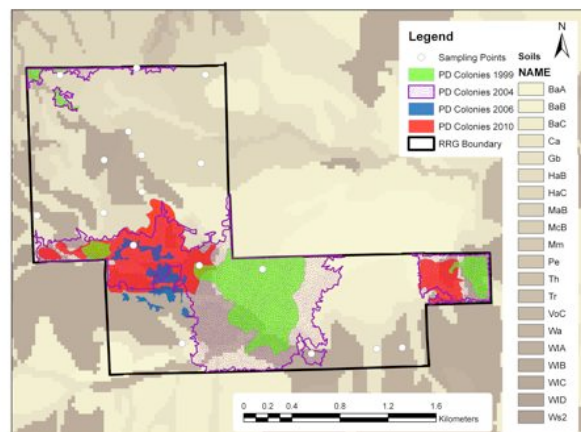
## Life on the Prairie

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We've saved the best for last. Prairie dogs are making a comeback on Fresh Tracks, Marianne Rees, and Two Marys Nature Preserves. After they were hit hard by sylvatic plague in 2005/2006, we were devastated by the deathly silence of colonies formerly vibrant with life. But at our June 2010 work party, volunteers, lead by Dr. Rich Reading, mapped the colonies on all three properties.



**Fresh Tracks Prairie Dog Colonies**



**Two Marys & Marianne Rees Prairie Dog Colonies**

We observed burrowing owls on the prairie dog colonies at Fresh Tracks and noticed that the prairie dogs seem to be moving more to the interior of the property, which is likely a safer place.

We'll continue tracking these prairie dog colonies closely, as they are at the heart of our effort to protect shortgrass prairie and its full complement of native animals and plants. Stay tuned for updates.



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## Prairie Research

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### WHAT A DIFFERENCE BISON CAN MAKE!

SPLT has agreed to participate in studies being undertaken by researchers at the Denver Zoo and Wildlife Conservation Society, which analyze biodiversity on lands where bison are and are not. We've agreed to allow this team of researchers - Jonathan Dees, Kevin Ellison, Lauren McCain, Brian Miller, Rich Reading, and Steve Zack - to conduct plant and bird surveys on Fresh Tracks Nature Preserve. They'll compare findings on Fresh Tracks, which does not have bison, with other sites, such as the Two Marys and Marianne Rees preserves, where bison reintroduction is planned. We're also discussing (non-invasive) herptile and small mammal surveys with these scientists as well. Stay tuned for updates on this exciting chance to further scientific knowledge on grassland ecology.

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## Conservation Buyers Alert

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Ever hear of “conservation buyers”? They are regular folks who want to buy land for the purpose of conserving it. When a few conservation buyers team up, they can do great things. About a half-dozen conservation buyers within SPLT’s network are working together to purchase the first piece of a large ranch just an hour east of Denver.

This ranch is a really extraordinary place: it hosts several vibrant prairie dog colonies and has never been plowed. Once the first piece is secured, we hope to organize additional sets of conservation buyers to buy the entire ranch. It would provide a wonderful refuge to prairie dogs, coyotes, pronghorn, and other persecuted wildlife. In addition, we think it would make a wonderful outdoor classroom for children to connect to the prairie.

If you’d like to participate in this effort, please contact SPLT’s President, Nicole Rosmarino at [nrosmarino@wildearthguardians.org](mailto:nrosmarino@wildearthguardians.org) or 505-699-7404. We’ll put you in touch with other members of the network, who share with you the desire to protect prairie dogs and the community of life they support!



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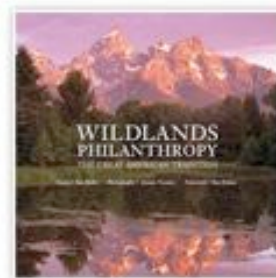
## Shout Out For SPLT

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Tom Butler is a very special person. He spent years writing the book, *Wildlands Philanthropy: the Great American Tradition*, in which he profiles the efforts of Americans – some with deep pockets, others with humble beginnings – to buy land in the United States and far, far away. Why are they buying land? Out of love: for treasured landscapes and irreplaceable wildlife.

We were honored to be part of Tom’s book. But he went even further: to a packed house (of hundreds of people) at the Boulder Public Library in March 2009, he told the audience that he would begin his story of wildlands protection not with Aldo Leopold or John Muir, but with the Southern Plains Land Trust. You can imagine the flush on our faces!



Tom returned to the area in August 2009 and spoke with a group of our conservation buyers at a house party in Centennial. Inspired by his visit, we immediately set to work on targeting new properties to protect, as you read about at the top of this page! Thanks a million (acres), Tom.

Visit [wildlandsphilanthropy.org](http://wildlandsphilanthropy.org) to order this special book.

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## Opportunities to Help SPLT

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### Save the Date: Show Your Love for the Prairie on February 12, 2011

SPLT will be holding a fundraiser in the Boulder/Denver area in February. All proceeds will be put toward furthering our mission, foremost of which is acquisition of land to benefit prairie wildlife. As an all-volunteer land trust, we have extremely little overhead.

You can be confident that donations to our organization flow to those who need it most...prairie wildlife in search of a secure refuge.

Icons by <http://dryicons.com>

### Seeking Nominations for SPLT Board

Are you or someone you know interested in joining the SPLT Board? Please email [splt@southernplains.org](mailto:splt@southernplains.org) or call 505-699-7404 for information.

### SPLT Wishlist

- ☞ Your car or truck: we'll sell it and put the proceeds toward prairie protection
- ☞ Office supplies: printer ink (Lexmark 100), recycled white paper
- ☞ Electronic equipment: working GPS, binoculars, digital cameras, memory cards
- ☞ Tools: pliers, shovels, pitchforks, and other tools for fence repair or weed removal
- ☞ High-quality photos of prairie wildlife: we're always looking to expand our portfolio of prairie wildlife (and plants!)

### Volunteer Help

SPLT could use your participation in all manner of ways, whether it's helping us to make fences wildlife-friendly, botanizing on SPLT land, participating in SPLT work parties, alerting us to good conservation properties, or helping out on our February 12 Love for the Prairie Event. If you are interested in volunteering in these or any other ways, please contact Nicole Rosmarino at [nrosmarino@wildearthguardians.org](mailto:nrosmarino@wildearthguardians.org).

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U.S. Postage  
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Yucca in bloom on Fresh Tracks (*Yucca glauca*). © Lauren McCain