



# Grasslands Gazette

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~In this issue~

- ☞ A Note From the Director  
~page 2
- ☞ More Changes at SPLT
- ☞ Thank Yous!
- ☞ Importance of Certification  
~page 3
- Life on the Prairie:
  - ☞ JeffCo Students ~pages 4-5
  - ☞ Pronghorn & Safe Places  
~page 6
  - ☞ Exceptional Drought  
~page 7
- Opportunities to Help:  
~page 7



Swift fox near Last Gulch Ranch © Lauren McCain

*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 let your friends and family know about us.*

SPLT's mission was furthered in January 2011, when we were certified by the State of Colorado to hold conservation easements. That means that easements granted to SPLT may qualify for Colorado's generous conservation easement tax credit (story at p. 2). We inspected our conservation easements in August, finding no violations and documenting more diversity than previously recorded. We also furthered our mission in early October, when we monitored our preserves to prevent hunter trespass during pronghorn rifle hunting season (story at p. 6).

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## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR: CHANGES AT SPLT

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### SPLT Vital Statistics

#### *Board of Directors:*

Robert Alsobrook  
Alena Amundson  
Misty Ewegen  
Melissa Hailey  
Jennifer Melton  
Judith Miller Smith, Vice President  
Jay Tutchton  
Daniel Ziskin, President

#### *Volunteer Accountant:*

Donna Mei Lin Driscoll, C.P.A.

#### *Staff:*

Nicole J. Rosmarino, Director

#### **SOUTHERN PLAINS LAND TRUST**

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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. We are very streamlined, putting as much money directly into land acquisition as possible. **All donations are accepted, in whatever amount, and are fully 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. SPLT is certified to hold conservation easements by the State of Colorado.

*Editor: Nicole Rosmarino*

A lot has changed at the Southern Plains Land Trust since our last newsletter. We've said goodbye to three great board members and now welcome three new ones. I stepped down from the board to become our full-time director. We were certified by the State of Colorado to receive conservation easements.

Goodbye to David Krank, Lindsey Sterling Krank, and Dan Rees. Each of these fine individuals gave years of service to SPLT, for which we are so thankful. Lindsey will continue to direct the Prairie Dog Coalition of the Humane Society of the United States, working her magic for prairie dogs and associated wildlife. Dan teaches economics at the University of Denver and continues to press for the protection of prairie properties, particularly those with prairie dogs and cottonwood trees on them. As for Dave Krank, here's what his wife, Lindsey, had to report: "Dave is busy being a sweet father and husband. Doing lots of neat home improvement projects, chopping wood to burn for the winter, fixing everything that breaks at home and working as a project engineer at Merck-Boulder in his spare time."

A warm welcome to new board member Melissa Hailey (pictured right). Melissa is an attorney at the Law Office of W. Randolph Barnhart, P.C. in Denver. She previously worked as a staff attorney at WildEarth Guardians and as a legal fellow at the Center for Sustainable Economy. Her undergraduate degree is in ecology, evolution, and conservation biology from the University of Denver. Melissa is a passionate advocate for wildlife. Her past "clients" have included the Mexican wolf, Gunnison's prairie dog, Chiricahua leopard frog, and, of course, the many-flowered unicorn-plant. What? You haven't heard of the many-flowered unicorn-plant? No matter: if there's a species in need, Melissa goes to bat for it. Melissa also strives toward the bigger picture: aiming to keep ecosystems intact, as well as the native plants and animals depending on those natural habitats. While born in Tennessee, she went to high school in Denver and loves the area. She is well-rounded, volunteering at the MaxFund animal shelter and as a program coach for Habitat for Humanity. Melissa first got interested in SPLT in 2001, when her DU biology class (taught by Dr. Rich Reading) conducted field studies on our preserves in Baca County.



We're also excited to tell you more about our newest board members, Alena Amundson and Misty Ewegen, in our next issue of the *Grasslands Gazette*.

*--Nicole Rosmarino, Director*

**Cover animal:** this beauty is a swift fox (*Vulpes velox*). Weighing in at a petite 5 pounds, this grassland carnivore depends on prairie dogs as prey and remodels prairie dog burrows for his or her own use. This fox has dwindled in numbers and was once a candidate for federal protection. SPLT aims to secure more habitat (and prey) for this gorgeous prairie resident.

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## MORE CHANGES AT SPLT: NEW DIRECTOR

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From the desk of Nicole Rosmarino: On August 1, 2011, I started my very first day as an employee of SPLT. It was equal parts familiar and unfamiliar to me. As a founder of the organization in 1998 (I was part of a wonderful team, including Lauren McCain, Greg Litus, Bettina Rosmarino, Jarid Manos, Robert Ukeiley, and others), the organization's mission and work is something which which I'm intimately familiar. But I've always squeezed the work in during weekends and at night, on top of a day job that kept me very busy. The unfamiliar part has been clearing my desk and thinking about SPLT, and only SPLT, day in and day out. What a pleasure! Also, know that what I've loved about this organization over the years has been how streamlined it is. We are deliberate in keeping overhead low (you won't get mugs or calendars for donating to us!) so that we can maximize the amount of land we protect. You have my pledge that we'll remain true to our ethic of keeping costs low and results high.

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## THANK YOU

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A special thanks to recent adopt-an-acre donors. We're featuring a donation by Ed Lewis, who dedicated two acres in loving memory of his late wife, Mary Ann Lewis (pictured below). Mary Ann lived a life of deep commitment to wild nature and will be missed by her husband and others.



We also thank Judith Miller Smith, who adopted an acre to honor her parents, Dave and Carol Miller; and Nicole Huntley, who adopted an acre in honor of Dr. Farrah Agahi. Adoptions cost \$200 for 1 acre; see our website page at: [southernplains.org/dedicate](http://southernplains.org/dedicate).

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF STATE CERTIFICATION

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Effective January 1, 2011, the Colorado Division of Real Estate certified SPLT to hold conservation easements in the state. With our certification, landowners who donate easements to our land trust are eligible to claim Colorado's generous tax credit. Across the state, only 40 other land trusts and state agencies hold this status (as of October 2011). The certification requirement is relatively new, prompted by the proliferation of fraudulent conservation easements several years ago. Through the certification application process, we streamlined 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 preserve for their native biodiversity. We are proud of our certification, as we had to meet high standards that the state crafted to ensure that conservation easements provide a substantial conservation benefit, are enforced, and are thereby providing a public service. To give you a sense of how tough it was, consider that some Colorado municipalities have been denied certification.



Altogether, the application fees totaled \$7,700. We welcome contributions to offset this expense.



Badger strolls across Two Marys Nature Preserve in August 2011.  
Photo © Nicole Rosmarino.

### JeffCo Students Look Back

By Judith Miller Smith, SPLT Vice President

It's funny that I can't remember the year I got started with prairie dogs, because it changed my life. I was teaching science, with environmental science emphasis, at the Jefferson County Open School. Almost by accident, I ended up at the Bear Creek Greenbelt in Lakewood, where there is a healthy prairie dog town, one of few still to be found today in the city. I realized that I didn't have many answers for the students' questions and started to learn. I haven't stopped.

Some of you who have been involved in prairie dog issues may remember the group – we presented at the Rocky Mountain Animal Defense-sponsored Prairie Dog Summit, which is where we met Nicole Rosmarino for the first time.



The group on Fresh Tracks in 2000. Photo © Wally Schell.

Nicole generously invited us to visit and stay at the buffalo ranch in Baca County, and offered to give us a tour of some land that was actually being protected for prairie wildlife. Thanks to Robert Alsobrook, and his willingness to be invaded by an energetic group of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, we were able to twice visit SPLT properties and to get a feeling for what the prairie could be. We also did some good, hard work. Thanks also to SPLT member Wally Schell, who co-led the trips and helped in every way possible.

As city slickers, we were under the mistaken and naïve impression that we would see lots of prairie dogs once we drove a few miles east. We saw lots of farms and ranches, but not very many prairie dog towns.

Once in awhile as a teacher, one is lucky enough to be a part of something magical and meaningful. This group was like that. We just grew stronger, the more involved we became. One year we raised \$200 for SPLT!

When we left SE Colorado, we hit some bad weather camping in Picture Canyon and ended up also having van trouble, which landed us in the hotel in Springfield for the night. A truck pulled up out front with mounted rifles in the back. One of the boys asked the men in the lobby what they were hunting. Anything that moves was the reply. Next question: where do you go? Prairie dog towns. Those critters attract a bunch of others, ya know? Yep. We know.

I've often wondered how this experience affected the students. I was able to get in touch with a few of them, and hope to recruit them as SPLT members.



Andrea, Sam, and Cole in Picture Canyon on the Comanche National Grasslands in 2001. Photo © Judith Miller Smith.

Here are the thoughts of Andrea, who is now in her third year of college at the Colorado School of Mines.

*"It's difficult to articulate my feelings about the prairie group and our time spent out on the land. My memories of our group and our experiences on land that has been preserved are some of my fondest. All the time we spent in the classroom learning about the prairie, writing letters to legislators for preservation, calling landowners and developers, were experiences that have helped shaped me into the successful person I am today. We worked hard as a group and individuals for a valid cause and we were able to see all of our hard work pay off. It taught me to*

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## LIFE ON THE PRAIRIE

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*pursue my dreams and aspirations and never give up. After all those hours in the classroom, actually being out on the prairie for the first time was magical. We got to see first hand the prairie and all the cobabitations and dependencies for ourselves. Watching prairie dogs, the swift fox, burrowing owls, buffalo, rattlesnakes, etc. working together (in a sense) so that each finds its niche and thrives. I remember being awed by the vastness and then realizing that the majority of the prairie is lost to developed land, and my keen disappointment about this. Late night star gazing to early morning hikes, to hours prairie dog watching, remind me of innocence and sincerity, feelings I have found nowhere else. I often find myself sad that I have not had the time to return to those lands and all the wonders they hold. All that our group accomplished is something I am extremely proud of. It's something that has a permanent spot in my heart – and on my resume.”*

Andrea keeps an eye on prairie dogs every place she goes, and since she is doing lots of geologic mapping, she sees a bunch.

Cole, in graduate school in Portland, and serving as an intern at MercyCorps, wrote:

*“The feeling of being surrounded by such open and natural habitat can easily leave one with a few, fleeting words. Though I was young, I remember how inspiring it was to wander truly native short grass prairie and encounter the native flora and fauna. These inspiring experiences may now be memories, but they stand as testament to the importance and impact of the protective work of SPLT. I am one of few natives of Colorado that is able to experience a formerly abundant habitat that thrived in the state, and I feel overwhelmingly lucky.”*

Samantha, a Denver University graduate (major: Public Policy) is in the process of applying to graduate schools and studying for the Graduate Record Exam. Her Masters will be in Education Policy. She recently left her position with Mercy and Sharing in Aspen.

Samantha credits the activist experiences of the prairie group as her first experience in identifying an issue that she finds important, becoming educated about the topic so that she can “hold her own,” and then acting on it to create change. Looking back on it, she is somewhat amazed that they stood up to bureaucrats and developers, and spoke at public meetings when they were 13 and 14 years old. The skill set that members of this group acquired has definitely stuck with her.

Photo right: JeffCo Students Receive President’s Environmental Youth Award from George W. Bush in 2002 at the Rose Garden at the White House. Student Cassie Keller representing the group.


She has a commitment to *pay attention*, and is at times confounded by the indifference of some of her peers. She has served as an intern in Washington “on the hill,” working with the office of Senator Michael Bennet, and as the Youth Vote Field Organizer for President Obama’s campaign for change in Colorado.

In each arena, she feels that she has been truly active once she identified the issue that motivated her, and she feels that standing up for her opinion in front of adults at a young age, defending prairie dogs and their habitat, helped to lead her along this path. She is firmly committed, as are Cole and Andrea, to public service, and has now decided to move to D.C. again, while she waits to hear from graduate schools and to educate herself about education. She hopes that her future involves promoting environmental-based education as one means of improving our country and the education system. We may all be voting for her someday! Let’s hope so.

This group ended up attending and speaking at city council meetings, confronted the bureaucracy of the General Services Administration at the Federal Center in Lakewood, helped with many prairie dog relocations, taught countless elementary students about the importance of prairie dogs as a keystone species, and won the President’s Environmental Youth Award for Region VIII. I suspect that it may be the only time that President George W. Bush smiled upon a prairie dog!



Photo © Judith Miller-Smith.

Sadly, the Federal Center prairie dogs that we championed have been, for the most part, recently exterminated. I still feel better knowing that young people who invested so heavily in studying and actively saving prairie dogs are in the world. Can one be involved in these issues and not be changed? 

### In Search of Safe Places

By Nicole Rosmarino, SPLT Director

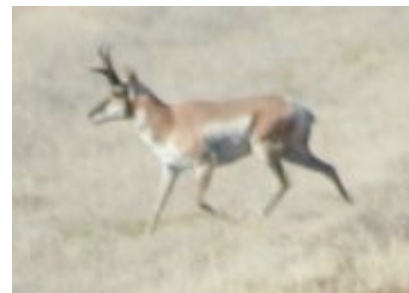
Pronghorn hunting season in southeast Colorado was October 1-7. While there are other hunting seasons here, this was the big one: pronghorn general rifle. On SPLT's four preserves, hunting is not allowed. However, unless you monitor, that amounts to paper protection. Take the pair of men from Montrose I encountered on opening day. Their local guide dropped them off on the Comanche and told them to walk north. They climbed over the fence and dropped onto Two Marys Nature Preserve. I strapped on my blaze orange and walked to meet them. They were embarrassed and courteous as I walked them out of the property. Their guide was clueless and clearly not an adherent to the first thing taught in hunter education courses: don't trespass.

In contrast to the apologies of the Montrose pair was the first person I encountered that morning (at 8am), who leveled his gun across the Marianne Rees preserve, although no pronghorn were in sight. He clearly wanted to chat in a most unfriendly manner. When I drove to meet him and politely asked him about where he was pointing his gun, he began a strange and heated diatribe about how pronghorn and prairie dogs need to be shot. I didn't engage. I merely informed him that, no matter his views, this was a property where no hunting was allowed.

Later that morning, I heard a series of shots. Then some more. A friendly man who approached me reported that "one of the guys thinks he wounded one." All in all, 15 shots to wound one pronghorn. He swore they would hunt the animal down and put the pronghorn out of misery. These men and others had shot from the roadside, against state law. They had shot blindly, against all sense of decency. Neither the hunters nor the (possibly) wounded animal were on SPLT's preserves. Notably, some of the other area landowners are fed up with the way some hunters have behaved and are putting their land off limits to hunting.

At around 4pm, I photographed a big pronghorn buck (pictured top right on page) crossing the road a little over a mile north of Two Marys preserve. He struggled to cross under barbed wire. He got it on the second try.

He looked downright tired. I wished him well and later took in the prairie sunset in his general vicinity, pleased that he had survived the day.




The next day, the pair from Montrose was back. My patience wore thin. Not only had they been warned previously, they had driven right past No Trespassing signs to enter the preserve. This time, they had their rifles leveled at a buck and were ready to shoot. I interrupted their illegal hunt and again escorted them off the property. Thankfully, I never saw them again.

I'd point out that another hunter I talked to was of a different stripe: he had passed up a shot at a pronghorn that morning and instead proudly showed me a photo of a black bear that had crossed just 40 yards from him.

#### **Bison, Prairie Dogs, & Biodiversity**

As mentioned in the last *Grasslands Gazette*, SPLT agreed to participate in studies headed up by researchers at the Denver Zoo and the Wildlife Conservation Society, analyzing biodiversity on lands where bison are and are not. Four teams of researchers are now engaged, studying plants, herptiles, small mammals, and birds. *Look for an update on bison-related research being conducted by the Denver Zoo in our next issue!*

Fancy that: a sighting, not a shooting.

The lowlight of the week was the pile of at least six dead pronghorn I found on the Lone Rock West allotment of the Comanche National Grassland. A tangled mess of heads, limbs, and hides of young pronghorn and does, it looked like a whole herd had been cut down where they had stood. Do you need any more motivation for buying prairie land than this? 

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## LIFE ON THE PRAIRIE

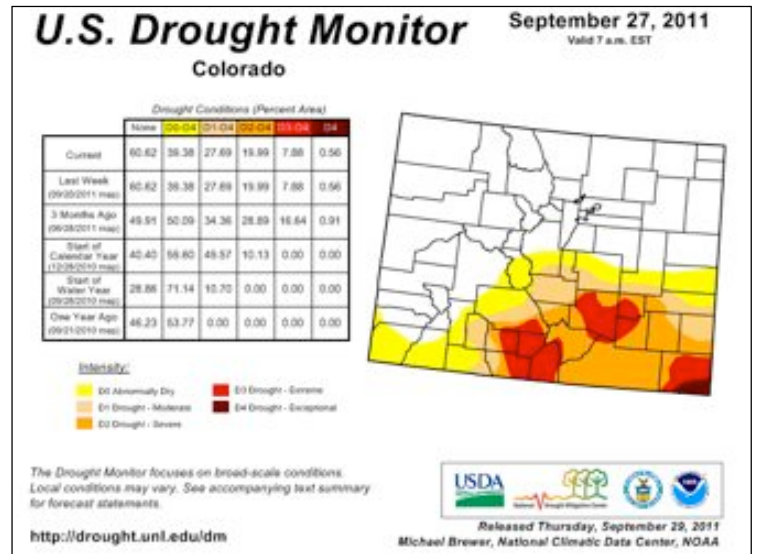
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### “Exceptional Drought”

It’s been a tough summer in southeastern Colorado. The area is experiencing an “exceptional drought,” according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

While we, along with other residents here, hope for rain, it is amazing how nature presses on. In a late August visit to Fresh Tracks, we noticed a proliferation of blooming buckwheat. In early October, the some of the forbs and grasses were positively lush. On the Marianne Rees and Two Marys preserves, there were scores of wildflowers blooming, as well as verdant stands of blue grama.

Graphic right: Closeup on Colorado from U.S. Drought Monitor. The southeasternmost county, Baca, is in extreme or exceptional drought. Three of SPLT’s preserves are in Baca County.



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## OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP SPLT

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\$500 for you,  
\$500 for SPLT!



**JOIN THE  
ROOFTOP  
REVOLUTION**

**FREE iQUOTE**

### Go Solar (on Your Rooftop) & Protect the Prairie

SPLT has partnered with the solar company, Sungevity. If you live in AZ, CA, DE, MA, MD, NJ, NY, or know someone who does, please contact us for information on signing up for a solar lease. SPLT’s office in Centennial, CO has solar panels that were installed by Sungevity in the spring. We went online in May, making our electricity use 100% fueled by the sun. We pay less for energy now than we did when powered by coal. Best of all, Sungevity’s partnership with SPLT supports clean energy without destroying the prairie.

### Donate Your Car or Truck

You’ve heard those NPR ads. Consider donating your old vehicle to SPLT. Whether it’s driveable or a junker, we can put it to good use or sell it and put the proceeds toward prairie protection. We will accept any vehicle.

### Shop at Sunflower Market?

We’ve enrolled in Sunflower Market’s program, where we purchase gift cards at a 5% discount. That means when you buy gift cards from SPLT at their face value (\$25, \$50, or \$100) we’ll make 5% profit!

### SPLT Wishlist

- ☞ Office supplies: printer ink (Lexmark 100), recycled white paper. If you have office supplies, we’ll use them!
- ☞ Electronic equipment: working GPS, binoculars, digital cameras, memory cards
- ☞ Tools: pliers, shovels, pitchforks, and other tools for fence repair or weed removal

### Volunteer Help

SPLT could use your participation in all manner of ways, whether it’s helping us to make fences wildlife-friendly, stuffing envelopes, throwing a house party fundraiser, or whatever else you can come up with!

### Contact Us

If you are interested in any of these opportunities to help SPLT, please contact Nicole Rosmarino at [splt@southernplains.org](mailto:splt@southernplains.org) or 720-841-1757.

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U.S. Postage  
Required



Tarantula in SE Colorado © Richard P. Reading.

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## SPLT T-SHIRTS!

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Buy one of our organic t-shirts, featuring a stunning full-color portrait of the prairie dog ecosystem. Only \$20.



Our models are pretty cool, too!  
From left, Jonathan Proctor of  
Defenders of Wildlife, Lindsey  
Sterling Krank of the Prairie Dog  
Coalition of the Humane Society of  
the United States, her daughter Lucy,  
and Dr. Lauren McCain. Jonathan,  
Lindsey, and Lauren are prairie  
protectors extraordinaire!

