



# RiO GRANDE

HEADWATERS LAND TRUST



**2021**  
ANNUAL REPORT



## Greetings New Friends in the San Luis Valley!

Andy Brown here, new Executive Director of the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust. Thanks for the warm welcome I have already received from so many of you. I look forward to meeting others of you soon - perhaps at the Headwaters Hoedown on October 1 or at one of the Open Houses we are hosting at our office later this fall.

Having arrived in early May, my personal experience with v work over the last year is limited. Yet, take a look in this Annual Report and you can see examples of what attracted me here.

RiGHT closed on its 50th conservation easement in July 2021, and this was just one of three easements we completed last year! These conservation successes add significantly to RiGHT's already impressive history of collaboration with a diversity of landowners and other partners to protect working farms and ranches and significant ecological areas throughout the San Luis Valley. The protection of almost 30,000 acres and ~55 river miles over two decades is no small feat! RiGHT's excellent reputation facilitating conservation easement land deals as a community land trust is well deserved, and it would not have happened without your support.

Much land in the valley can also benefit from restorative actions that enhance the vitality and function of soils, vegetation, streams, wetlands, riparian zones and other groundwater re-charge areas. Through the same collaborative and voluntary approach that has always defined RiGHT's work, we are working to restore the Valley. The Lower Alamosa River Restoration Project undertaken last year with the Valdez family along 1.5 miles of the Alamosa River is one exciting example. Look inside to learn more!

While conservation is simply good for its own intrinsic benefits, RiGHT's other motive for doing this work is to leave the Valley's beauty and integrity intact for the next generations. We have been working to cultivate a healthy land and water stewardship ethic among our young so they can pass it on to their children and grandchildren. Two of our hands-on youth engagement activities are described in here.

While we are proud of the on-the-ground results we are producing together, it is also very important to take a pause at times, examine the state of our interior condition and make adjustments where needed that will help us remain healthy and responsive to our community over the long term. We've initiated this deeper reflective process and will continue these internal investments into 2023 so that we can continue to serve the San Luis Valley as Your Community Land Trust for a long time to come!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy Brown', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andy Brown, Executive Director



**Pages 4-5:  
Lower River Alamosa Restoration**



**Pages 6-7:  
50th Conservation Easement**



**Pages 8-9:  
riGHT Outside**



**Pages 10-11:  
Headwaters Hoedown**

# Board + Staff

## BOARD

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*Vice President*

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Kyler Brown

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## STAFF

Andy Brown,  
*Executive Director*

Sally Wier,  
*Conservation Manager*

Rosalee Reese,  
*Stewardship + Community  
Conservation Manager*

# Lower Alamosa River Project

In 2021, RiGHT was awarded funding from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) to restore and enhance riparian habitat along the lower Alamosa River. This funding is dedicated by CDPHE to recover and restore the river corridor following impacts from the Summitville mine, located at its headwaters. In many parts of the river corridor, tree and vegetation loss have resulted in bank erosion, loss of wildlife habitat, and loss of scenic areas, impacting river health and the communities who rely on the river for their livelihoods and enjoyment.

Throughout the summer, RiGHT worked with the Valdez family, San Luis Valley G.O.A.T.S. crew and local volunteers to complete a range of restoration activities along 1.5 miles of the river corridor on the Valdez family property. We installed 1.5 miles of riparian fencing, planted 200 trees, stabilized streambanks, and installed a solar well and stock tank to reduce livestock pressure in sensitive riparian areas, improve stream health, and restore riverine forest and wildlife habitat.

This project showcases how collaboration between local landowners and San Luis Valley partner organizations can be a win for conservation and our communities. It is also an exciting step forward for RiGHT as we expand our work to include larger restoration projects. As willows and cottonwoods take root, we look forward to watching this work grow.

## How has this project helped wildlife?



Bears find refuge in and travel along the river corridor



Wetland birds need this habitat for nesting and migration



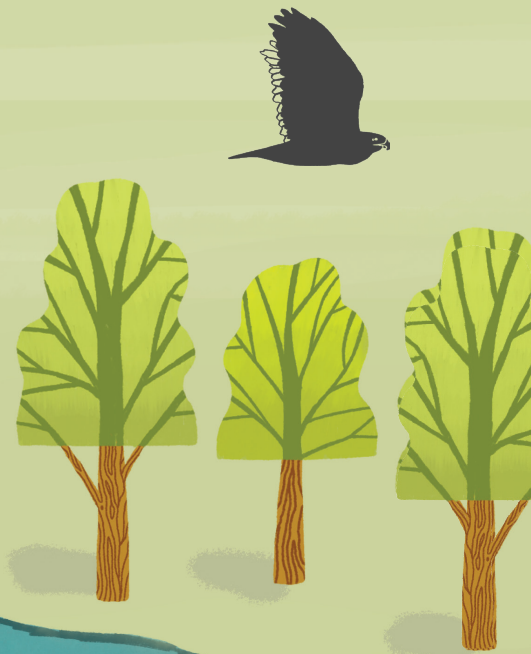
Birds of Prey use high cottonwood branches, and dead trees to perch in search of prey



Deer use riparian areas (cottonwood & willow habitat) for shelter and browse



Fish use shade from trees which keep water temps down, downed brush and trees in the stream provide shelter and food, and backwater sloughs provide nesting habitat



### WILLOW PLANTINGS

- STABILIZE RIVER BANKS & SHADE THE STREAM
- SHADE KEEPS WATER TEMPS COOL FOR FISH
- PROVIDE WILDLIFE HABITAT & INSECTS FOR FISH TO EAT



### NEW FENCE & GATE

- FENCED OFF RIPARIAN CORRIDOR TO CONTROL GRAZING PRESSURE
- SLV GOATS CREW INSTALLED NEW FENCE + GATES
- ALLOWS SELECTIVE GRAZING TO CONTROL WEEDS, BUT PROTECTS SENSITIVE RIPARIAN AREAS

### COTTONWOOD PLANTINGS

- STABILIZE RIVER BANKS & SHADE THE STREAM
- SHADE KEEPS WATER TEMPS COOL FOR FISH
- IMPROVE RESILIENCY OF COTTONWOOD FORESTS FACED WITH DROUGHT, FEWER FLOOD EVENTS, & GRAZING PRESSURE
- PROVIDE HABITAT FOR BIRDS, MAMMALS & OTHER WILDLIFE

### STREAMBANK STABILIZATION

- SMOOTH ERODED BANKS
- PLANTED WILLOWS & SEEDED NATIVE GRASSES & SHRUBS
- PLACED ROCKS TO PREVENT EROSION
- WORKED WITH THE VALDEZ FAMILY & LOCAL VOLUNTEERS

### BACKWATER SLOUGH HABITAT

AMOSA

### BACKWATER SLOUGH

- PLANTED WILLOWS + FENCED TO LIMIT GRAZING PRESSURE
- IMPORTANT HABITAT FOR JUVENILE FISH + AMPHIBIANS

### BACKWATER SLOUGH HABITAT

### IRRIGATION IMPROVEMENTS

- REPLACED IRRIGATION STRUCTURES
- SUPPORTS FLOOD IRRIGATION ON THE PROPERTY & MORE
- FLOOD IRRIGATION = HEALTHY PASTURE & HABITAT

### SOLAR WELL + STOCK TANK

- INSTALLED A SOLAR POWERED PUMP & A STOCK TANK
- PROVIDES EASY WATER ACCESS FOR LIVESTOCK AWAY FROM THE STREAM BED
- PREVENTS TRAMPLING OF STREAM BANK



# RiGHT Completes 50th Conservation Easement

Conservation is a slow and patient process that involves a lot of leg work, passion, and time. Hitting 50 easements as an organization is a huge milestone that we couldn't have done without the support of so many along the way! Sims Ranch, Jasper Springs, and Crowther Meadows Ranch are the latest additions to the RiGHT conservation easements here in the San Luis Valley.

## 50th Easement: Sims Ranch

July 2021 was an exciting time in RiGHT's history – we closed on our 50th conservation easement with the Sims family on their 160-acre ranch south of Monte Vista, Colorado! Reaching this important conservation milestone in this part of the San Luis Valley was both special and fitting as it brought us full circle back to the place where RiGHT's conservation work began in 1999: the Rock Creek corridor. Protecting the land, habitat and water rights on the Sims Ranch adds important connectivity to the area's expanse of privately conserved lands and the neighboring Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge. It also ensures another generation of San Luis Valley ranchers can do what they love: create a lasting legacy and livelihood with working lands.

## 51st Easement: Jasper Springs

Next to the small mining settlement turned mountain getaway of Jasper, Colorado, the Jasper Springs conservation easement protects 54 acres of riparian, meadow, and forest habitat along the Alamosa River. Called 'Jasper Springs' because of a reliable, artesian spring on the property, the easement protects this enduring water source for wildlife, like bighorn sheep, while ensuring

the spring remains open to Jasper residents as a source of drinking water. The property's open meadows, wetlands, and forests are home to bears, bobcats, turkeys, and bighorn sheep, and its aspen stands are visited each spring by calving elk. Jasper Springs is adjacent to the Rio Grande National Forest, and though small in size, it is big on impact with a wealth of conservation values.

## 52nd Easement: Crowther Meadows Ranch

The seasonally-flooded wet meadows of the Crowther Meadows Ranch lie northeast of Manassa and touch the Conejos River as it flows north towards its confluence with the Rio Grande. The 160-acre ranch provides important habitat for migratory birds, especially Mallards, Northern Pintail, teal, and geese that use upland brush within the wet meadows for breeding and nesting habitat. Also used for grass hay production and livestock grazing, the undeveloped ranch will remain protected as development pressures increase across Conejos County.



Sims Ranch preserves scenic viewsheds, with Bennett Peak in the distance.



The Jasper Springs conservation easement borders the Rio Grande National Forest within the San Juan Mountains.



A misty morning on the Crowther Meadows Ranch in Conejos County.



The flood-irrigated meadows on Crowther Meadows Ranch are great for a variety of bird species.



**28,578**

acres protected

**25,000+**

acres conserved along the Rio Grande and its tributaries

**4,356**

acres enrolled in the SLV Habitat Conservation Plan

**103**

acres restored/enhanced



**6**

public access easements completed

**52**

easements across 6 counties



**7,023**

acres of wetland habitat conserved

**55**

miles of river and stream corridor conserved

# Connecting Kids to Conservation



One of the best things about our conservation work is sharing it with others, especially the young people in our community. Last summer, RiGHT and the Rio Grande Watershed Conservation Education Initiative (RGWCEI) held a furry and fun youth education event on the Cactus Hill Farm. You might remember Cactus Hill from our 2020 Annual Report – we conserved this property at the end of 2020. Owner, Elena Miller-ter Kuille, kicked the day off with a tour of her sheep and wool operation. Students had a chance to be hands on as they used wool sheered from Cactus Hill sheep to create a felted wool craft. After some furry fun, we moved down to the Alamosa River, which runs through the property, to talk about the importance of riparian forests for river stability and wildlife habitat. Students helped transplant willows into suitable areas along the river and collected water samples to investigate and learn about macroinvertebrates. We had a lot of fun enjoying the river together, too.

On another river-focused adventure, RiGHT partnered with RGWCEI and the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project (RGHRP) to engage Del Norte high school students in a river education day at the Encantada Ranch on the Rio Grande. The main focus of the day was the importance of the Rio Grande to the health and livelihood of the San Luis Valley. Students donned waders, examined the stream bed, and used non-toxic water dye to calculate river flow as they discussed

fish habitat and learned about hydrology, stream channel morphology, and substrate. The Encantada Ranch was another of RiGHT's 2020 conservation easements.

By providing youth with learning opportunities on our conserved properties, we aim to instill a lasting knowledge and understanding in the next generation about the importance of land and water conservation to our community and demonstrate that working lands can exist in balance with conservation to achieve common goals.

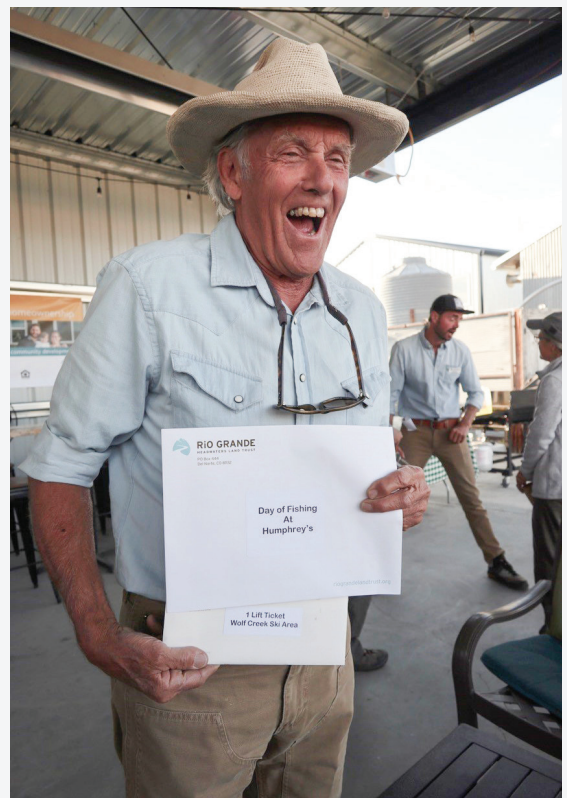
*Photos left to right: Del Norte high school students enjoyed splashing around in the Rio Grande after finishing activities about river channel morphology and hydrology; Elena Miller-ter Kuille teaches youth about the operations on her sheep ranch, Cactus Hill Farms, and how to felt wool; Aerial footage taken by the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project drone show students collecting substrate data along a transect across a dry river oxbow channel; Youth from the Alamosa Boys and Girls Club and Capulin plant willow trees along the Alamosa River to help stabilize the banks.*





Photos top left clockwise: Children at the event had plenty to keep busy: a scavenger hunt, playgrounds, and SLV grown hay bales; It was a beautiful fall day for a cornhole throwdown; Local auction items were a big hit. Mark Hagan bid on and won a day of fishing at Humphrey's Ranch; The RiGHT staff and board members enjoy the autumn evening.

Opposite Page: The Spurs of the Moment entertains the crowd with bluegrass tunes; The Colorado Farm Brewery offered a fun outdoor setting for the event.



# 2021 Headwaters Hoedown

After a year of pandemic restrictions, we were excited to get back together with our friends and supporters (outdoors, of course) for the 2021 Headwaters Hoedown, but with a new twist. Generously hosted by the Colorado Farm Brewery, the 2021 Hoedown featured the Spurs of the Moment, great local brews and venue supplied by the Farm Brewery, food trucks, pumpkins, and a cornhole tournament. Thanks so much to everyone who came out to support RiGHT, we're looking forward to this year's Hoedown!



**Special thanks  
to our sponsors!**



Save the Date for our  
**Headwaters Hoedown 2022**

Saturday, October 1  
Colorado Farm Brewery  
Featuring the band Wood Belly



# Thank you Allen + Joelle!

This annual report would not be complete without a big shout out to Allen Law and Joelle Marier for their dedication, initiative, long hours, creative collaborations, and care, both for RiGHT and for our conservation community. Both Joelle and Allen have moved onto new adventures ending their tenures at RiGHT.

Allen was promoted to RiGHT's Executive Director position in 2019, stepping in to fill the big shoes of RiGHT's long-time leader, Nancy Butler. In his time here, he became incredibly close with not just our staff but also our community. He was instrumental in securing new funding sources and initiating new programs, like RiGHT's growing groundwater easement program. Perhaps most importantly, Allen is an excellent collaborator. With this strength, he forged many successful partnerships that continue to serve not just RiGHT but our entire San Luis Valley conservation community as we work to achieve landscape-scale conservation outcomes for our land and water resources.

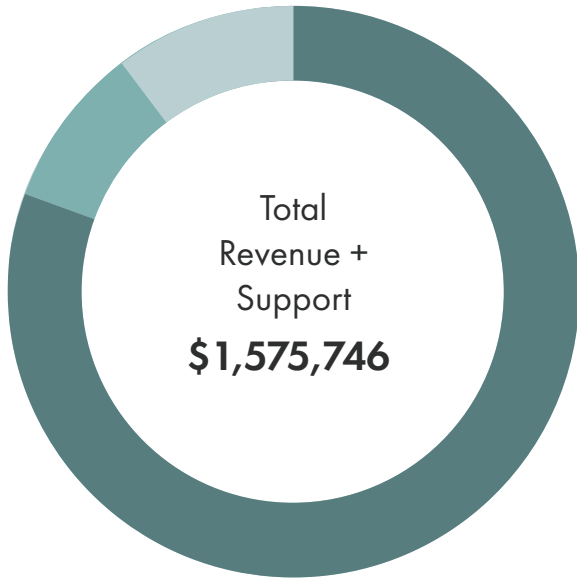
Joelle became RiGHT's Associate Director in 2020, bringing to the role incredible experience, attention to detail, a great sense of humor, and a willingness to do whatever was needed for the organization to succeed. In her time at RiGHT, she made tremendous contributions to both the organization and to conservation in the Upper Rio Grande region. Most notably, she took the lead on strengthening RiGHT's internal operations and financial systems, leaving RiGHT with a solid foundation from which to grow, while providing steady leadership during events like major staff transitions and a global pandemic.

As we wish Allen and Joelle the best of luck on their next exciting endeavors, we say a big THANK YOU for all they have invested here. RiGHT wouldn't be the organization we are today without their thoughtful leadership, drive, and commitment to conservation in the San Luis Valley!



*Photos top to bottom: Allen and Nancy Butler; Joelle talks about cranes and conservation on the conserved River Valley II Ranch during the Monte Vista Crane Festival; Allen describes the unique features of the Encantada Ranch to representatives from Great Outdoors Colorado and other partners; Allen laughs with Ken and LeRoy Salazar at the 2019 Headwaters Hoedown at the Cross Arrow Ranch; Joelle and Josie Abeyta at the conserved Enos Ruybal Fox Creek Ranch.*

# Financial Highlights 2021



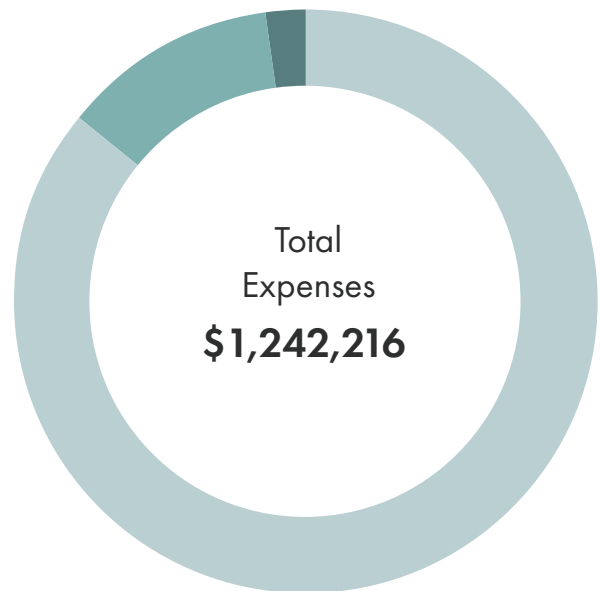
## Revenue + Support

Land and Water Conservation	80% — \$1,268,176
Non-Program Grants + Donations	9% — \$142,467
Investment Gains/Interest	10% — \$165,103

## Expenses



Land + Water Conservation	86% — \$1,067,821
Management + General	12% — \$143,633
Fundraising	2% — \$30,762



### Landowner Donations of Conservation Easement Value: \$299,000

RiGHT's work would be impossible without the generosity and conservation ethic of landowners. In 2021 landowners matched every conservation easement grant dollar with an equal donation of land value.

### Stewardship Endowment 2021 Year-end Value: \$1,368,008

RiGHT's Stewardship Endowment is a Board-Designated investment fund dedicated to ensuring the perpetual stewardship and defense of the conservation easements we hold.

# Thank You to our Donors!

Your support helps to conserve our land, water, and way of life here in Colorado's San Luis Valley for the generations of today and for generations to come.

## \$10,000+

Anonymous  
Harry Auger

## \$5,000 - \$10,000

Kay Collins

## \$2,000 - \$5,000

Margaret Biles

Trinchera Blanca Foundation

Fran & Glen Clark

## \$1,000 - \$2,000

Anonymous  
Elaine Blumenhein  
Kerry Butterfield  
Matthew Dixon

*In Honor of Hobart N. Dixon*  
Jim Gilmore  
Lindsey & Pete Leavell

Ann K. & Jamin B. McNeil  
*In Honor of Nancy Butler's birthday*  
Bonnie Orkow

## \$500 - \$1,000

Lin Barrett  
*In Memory of Nancy Butler*  
Beach Family Fund  
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Pat & Tom Gilmore  
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*In Memory of Nancy Butler*

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Leigh Anne Lobato  
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Peter Nichols  
Stephanie & Doug Ouren  
*In Honor of Travis Ouren*  
Powell and Murphy Attorneys

Elaine Regan  
*In Honor of Nancy Butler*  
Cynthia Rivera  
*In Honor of Scott Rivera*  
Nancy Starling & Wayne Ross  
Tom & Michele Schrandt  
Greg Thompson

## \$200 - \$500

Julia & Harry Augur  
Lou & Scott Bailey  
Andrea & Michael Banks  
*In Memory of Nancy Butler,*  
*In Honor of Rosalee Reese and RiGHT*  
*riparian conservation projects*  
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Lois & Bob Kirkham  
Angie Krall & John Evaskovich  
Sherry & James Lavender

Connie Law  
*In Honor of James Law & Orvil Creager*  
Frank Lee  
*In Memory of Nancy Butler*  
Judy Lopez  
Lynette Nichols  
Peter Norton  
Shawna Off & Kent Ford  
*In Honor of David G. Colville, best uncle*

Dianne & Hal Ozanne  
Dale & Anne Pizel  
Ann Rhodes  
Katherine Rhodes  
Rio de la Vista  
*In Honor of Cathy McNeil  
and Nancy Butler*  
Rio Grande Bank

Gordon Rowe  
*In Honor of Doug "Water Dog" Shriver*  
Elise & Neil Rudolph  
Carol and Dan Russell  
Leroy Salazar  
Kristina Steinberg & Bill Brinton  
Mona Syring  
Wetland Dynamics, LLC  
Jeannine Willett

## Up to \$200

Anonymous (2)  
Susan & Robert Anderson  
Jim Armstrong  
Cat & Avery Augur  
Ron Beane  
Allan Beezley  
Courtney Bennett  
Mike Blakeman  
Christi Bode  
Brendan Boepple  
Bill Boortz  
Joanna Bruno  
Al Carson  
*In Memory of David Colville Sr.*  
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*In Memory of Nancy Butler*  
Tammy Cliche & Andy Peirce  
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Dallas Cox  
*In Memory of Nancy Butler*  
Lorrie Crawford  
Mick Daniel  
Lugail & Rick Davie  
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Mark DeSanto  
Suzanne DeVore & Mark Seaton  
*In Honor of Headwaters Hoedown!*  
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Molly Fales  
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*In Honor of Zola Shriver*  
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Patricia Flood  
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Denyse Herrmann  
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Angie Jenson  
Art Jones  
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Diana & Marty Jones  
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Emilee Rowe Kellogg  
*In Memory of Nancy Butler*  
Karen Knight  
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*In Honor of Nancy Butler*  
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Liza Marron  
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Judith & James Mietz  
*In Memory of Cathy McNeil*  
Paul Minow  
L. J. Mix  
*In Memory of Bunky Arnette*  
Sylvia Moran  
Kathryn Mutz  
Nancy & David Neal

*In Honor of Headwaters Hoedown*  
Carolyn Norblom & Janice Barbee  
Marcy Peterson  
Christine Quinlan  
Emma & John Reesor  
Cindy Reinhardt  
Marcy Reiser  
*In Honor of Virginia Blunt*  
Ellinor Reiser  
*In Honor of Colorado Ranchers*  
Patricia Richmond  
*In Honor of Ellen Simpson,  
In Memory of Richard C. Richmond*  
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Margy Robertson  
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Andrea West & Alex Daue  
Karen & Robert Willis  
Karen Wolf  
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Carol and Stan Wolkow-Price  
Janice & Alan Wuckert  
Marianna Young  
Tim Zvada



# RiO GRANDE

HEADWATERS LAND TRUST

P.O. Box 444

Del Norte, CO 81132

## Leave a legacy of land, water, and way of life in Colorado's San Luis Valley.

Make a donation today using the enclosed donation envelope or by following the DONATE button on our website. Looking toward the future? **Become a sustaining member by setting up a recurring monthly gift.** We also accept donated assets such as stock or land and offer a variety of planned giving options. Call our office at 719.657.0800 or visit our website [riograndelandtrust.org](http://riograndelandtrust.org) for more information.