



THIS IS YOUR PLACE

2025/2026 WINTER NEWSLETTER

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Supporter Spotlight

photo: Xavi Fane



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR A YEAR OF PROGRESS

photo: Xavi Fane

As winter settles into the Gunnison Valley, I'm reminded that conservation - like the seasons - is a long, steady cycle. Each project we complete builds on decades of work, ensuring that the landscapes that define our community remain healthy, connected, and productive. This year, the cycle came full circle, connecting our roots to our future.

In the **Slate River Valley**, where the Crested Butte Land Trust began more than 30 years ago, we are once again investing in the heart of our mission. The upcoming protection of the **Kapushion-Spehar Wetlands** is one of our most significant conservation opportunities. Working with the Spehar and Kapushion families, and with support from the Town of Crested Butte, the Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund, and 1% for Open Space, we're safeguarding 90 acres of wildlife habitats, water rights, and working agricultural land in the very place that started it all.

South of town, in the **Cement Creek Valley**, two key projects are preserving one of the most ecologically diverse corridors in the Upper Gunnison Basin. A conservation easement on **Cement Creek Ranch**, 120 acres surrounded by the Gunnison National Forest, will protect two miles of creek, 80 acres of wetlands, and critical habitats for elk, moose, bear, and many more species. Nearby, the Land Trust's acquisition of a **17-acre parcel near the Caves Trail** secures a vital migration pinch point for the East Gunnison Elk Herd, keeping ancient wildlife pathways open and intact.

At **Long Lake**, a place central to summer recreation in Crested Butte, we completed

the purchase of **Pristine Point Lot 18**, protecting public access and expanding the footprint of conserved land around the lake. This milestone advances our ongoing effort to balance recreation with stewardship, ensuring that Long Lake remains a welcoming yet well-cared-for landscape.

High above the valley, we marked the first anniversary of **Red Lady's permanent protection**. The Mt. Emmons Conservation Easement and Mineral Extinguishment Agreement safeguarded 885 acres of alpine habitats and winter recreation. One year in, our stewardship work is well underway: monitoring the easement, maintaining public winter access, and ensuring that Red Lady remains a symbol of lasting conservation success.

Each of these projects, whether in the wetlands of the Slate River, the migration routes of Cement Creek, the waters of Long Lake, or the snowpack on Red Lady, reflects the same core principle: lasting conservation depends on partnership. Families, local governments, conservation groups, and community members have all played essential roles in these achievements.

As we look ahead, the Land Trust will continue to focus on projects that protect water, wildlife, and working lands - the foundation of life in this valley. Thank you for being part of this ongoing effort to keep the Gunnison Valley wild, connected, and thriving.

Jake Jones,
Executive Director

SLATE RIVER WETLANDS PRESERVE

There was a time when industry defined the Gunnison Valley, and the Slate River floodplain echoed with the sound of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad hauling coal from area mines to the steel mills in Pueblo. Today, those tracks have long since disappeared, and the Slate River that we know and love is alive again with migratory songbirds, waterfowl, elk, and moose. Alongside the wildlife, cattle still graze in its meadows, carrying forward an agricultural tradition that continues to shape the land. For the people, Slate River Valley is iconic: clean water, local trails, sweeping views, and a daily reminder of why we call this place home.

For the Crested Butte Land Trust, the Slate River is where it all began. Inspired by the vast wetlands and uninterrupted views of Paradise Divide, the Land Trust's founding board of directors embarked on our first project to purchase 55 acres of land rich with water and wildlife at the confluence of the Slate River and Coal Creek. That early project launched more than three decades of conservation in the Gunnison Valley, protecting thousands of acres within the Slate River watershed. "If there is a bullseye for conservation in the upper Gunnison Valley, it's the Slate River watershed. Thanks to 34 years of persistence, you can encounter animals in the wild, world-class trails, and generational ranching immediately outside of Crested Butte", says Land Trust Executive Director, Jake Jones.

Now, we come full circle. The Land Trust's most recent project will protect 90 acres of irreplaceable land in the heart of our valley. Once acquired, the parcel will be known as the Kapushion-Spehar Wetlands. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity safeguards clean water, wildlife habitats, agricultural heritage, and the community values that define us. Protecting the Slate River is not only a victory for our organization, but for the entire Gunnison Valley.

The Land Trust is working with the Spehar and Kapushion families to purchase the parcel, which has been in the family for generations. They have ranched, cared for, and cherished this land, and their decision to work with the Land Trust reflects deep love and stewardship for the valley they call home. As Gerry Spehar explains, "Since the 1880s, Crested Butte has been home to our family, and for generations we have owned, worked, and loved this beautiful land. It is sacred to us, and we are thrilled to have it protected and preserved in our name by the Land Trust."

We are excited to share the strong community support from our partners at the Town of Crested Butte, Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund, and 1% for Open Space, joining supporters like you who recognize the importance of protecting this valley for future generations.

Every contribution ensures that clean water, healthy wildlife, and working lands endure in our valley. Please consider adding your name to the list of supporters who are making this vision a reality. Together, we can honor the valley that began our story and secure its future.



**Scan to Give to the
Slate River Wetlands**

WHERE THE WILD STILL MOVES: **CONSERVING CEMENT CREEK**

Where do you go to get “off the beaten path”? We all have a favorite place to seek solace and step just outside the edges of the everyday. For many, that area is the Cement Creek Valley. Just south of Crested Butte, the valley stretches far and wide, with miles of trails through public lands. Though often a quieter alternative to more well-trodden areas, Cement Creek is alive with movement.

Elk, moose, and bear travel this corridor seasonally, as they have for centuries. In the Gunnison Basin, elk are known to migrate as much as 70 miles twice a year, from high-elevation summer feeding grounds in Paradise Divide to wintering areas around Saguache. Cement Creek Valley is a vital part of the migration paths for a large portion of the estimated 15,000 elk in the Gunnison Basin. This fall, the Crested Butte Land Trust took a major step to ensure those ancient pathways remain unbroken.

While public lands define Cement Creek Valley, the 120-acre Cement Creek Ranch stands out as a privately owned gem in the heart of the wild Gunnison National Forest. Working with the Baxter family, who own Cement Creek Ranch, the Land Trust is nearing completion of a conservation easement on the Ranch. The easement will protect the parcel from subdivision as well as preserve incredible natural resources, including 80 acres of rich wetlands, two miles of meandering Cement Creek, and irreplaceable views of Italian and Cement Mountains. Recognized by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program as having very high biodiversity significance, conserving Cement

Creek Ranch also protects a connected landscape of public lands. By placing a conservation easement on the ranch, the Baxter family has ensured that its wetlands, water resources, and pastures will remain intact forever.

To add to this milestone in 2025, the Land Trust also purchased a small but important 17-acre parcel near the popular Caves Trail at the mouth of Cement Creek Valley. To many, it may look like a simple hillside, but for the East Gunnison Elk Herd, it is a critical pinch point, a pathway through an increasingly developed and heavily recreated corridor. Protecting this parcel means migration routes remain open and intact, ensuring elk can move safely between National Forest lands and their winter range. For residents, it also protects our ability to view and hunt wildlife while contributing another piece of the ever-growing puzzle of protected lands in the Gunnison Valley.

Together, these two projects highlight what makes conservation in Cement Creek Valley so powerful. They’re about more than protecting open space, scenic views, or agricultural heritage. They’re about connection: wetlands to rivers, ranchlands to forests, animals to their historic migratory paths, and people to the landscapes that shape our sense of place. Your continued generosity will help ensure these landscapes remain wild, connected, and cared for. Forever.

In a valley that sits just outside the beaten path, it is easy to overlook the importance of these hidden places. In protecting them, we keep the wild moving.





IT WAS GREAT TO SEE YOU!
Thank you to this community for a season full of fun, conservation, and connection!





LONG LAKE LEGACY CONTINUES

photo: Trevor Bona

For many, Long Lake is synonymous with summer in Crested Butte. Whether it's the cold, clear water after a ride or a still morning on a paddleboard, generations have come to this place to swim, hike, fish, and simply take in the beauty of a high-country lake that feels both wild and welcoming.

This year, the Land Trust is proud to share a new milestone: the successful purchase of the 14-acre Pristine Point Lot 18, a critical parcel at the top of the Long Lake access road above Meridian Lake Reservoir. With this purchase, we not only protected the public access and user experience at the community's favorite swimming hole, but we also expanded the Land Trust's footprint of protected land around the lake. Lot 18 will join the Land Trust's adjacent 120-acre property, purchased in 2020, under one conservation easement, ensuring that this treasured landscape will remain open, scenic, and protected forever.

The journey to this point has been years in the making. Protecting Long Lake has always been about more than just land. It's about balance, welcoming the public to a beloved recreation area while safeguarding the wildlife and the peaceful character that make this place special. Long Lake sees thousands of visitors each summer, and

the Land Trust is committed to thoughtful stewardship that balances enjoyment with responsibility. That means working with partner organizations, neighbors, and the community to encourage Leave No Trace practices, manage impacts, and ensure that future generations will experience the same sense of wonder that draws us here today.

With the purchase of Lot 18 completed, we are turning the page from acquisition to long-term care. Conservation is forever, and the Land Trust is committed to perpetual care for this invaluable community resource. Together, these measures safeguard world-class scenery, thriving habitats, and public access that will never be lost to private development.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of community members like you. Every contribution, whether through donations, volunteer time, or spreading the word, has helped make Long Lake a forever place. When you hike the trails, launch a paddleboard, or watch the sunset shimmer across the water, know that you are part of the reason this sanctuary will always be here.

Thanks to you, Long Lake will continue to be Crested Butte's summer tradition, year after year, forever protected.

RED LADY: YEAR ONE OF FOREVER



photo: Trevor Bona

August 29, 2025 marked one year since Red Lady, the mighty mountain at the head of our watershed, was permanently protected. On that day in 2024, the Mt. Emmons Mining Company extinguished its rights to mine Red Lady through a Conservation Easement and Mineral Extinguishment Agreement with the Crested Butte Land Trust. As stewards of the easement, our responsibilities began the moment it was signed, and they will last forever.

This landmark conservation project was a true team effort. Along with the Mt. Emmons Mining Company, the Land Trust partnered with the US Forest Service, the Town of Crested Butte, Gunnison County, and local conservation champions, including High Country Conservation Advocates and the Coal Creek Watershed Coalition. Together, we ensured that the Red Lady Bowl would remain open for winter recreation while protecting 885 acres of high-alpine habitat from mining and development in perpetuity.

While this project has been the culmination of decades of work, the year since has been about the trail ahead. Our stewardship now is ongoing, monitoring the property, caring for the land, and safeguarding Red Lady for generations to come. Installed last winter, backcountry travelers will notice a new sign at the beginning of the Red Lady skin track that highlights responsible recreation and shares the story of Red Lady's conservation.

Red Lady stands as a symbol of what's possible when community, partners, and landowners come together. One year later, the mountain continues to inspire thoughtful stewardship, support winter recreation, and protect critical habitat. Here's to year one of forever, and all the years ahead.



CBLT BY THE NUMBERS

- / **34** years in operation
- / **6,554** acres conserved forever
- / **85** individual properties conserved
- / **12.5** miles of rivers and streams protected
- / **446** acres of wetlands protected
- / **22** miles of trails protected
- / **3,735** acres managed for cattle ranching
- / **19** scientific research sites hosted on conserved land
- / Over **100,000** recreational users on conserved lands each summer



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THE OPPORTUNITY FUND

Born from the Land Trust Board of Directors' vision for lasting conservation, the Opportunity Fund is our most flexible, forward-looking tool. It allows us to move quickly when new conservation opportunities arise, fueling land acquisitions that safeguard the Gunnison Valley's most treasured places. With your support, we can ensure that Crested Butte's open spaces and wild lands are protected today and for generations to come.

Scan the QR code to support the conservation successes of tomorrow.



SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT: KENDALL & SHERRY MIKESELL



Sherry and Kendall Mikesell



Julie and Sean Maloney of Montrose with their children, Sloane (3) and August (1)

If you've ever met Kendall and Sherry Mikesell, you know two things immediately: they care deeply about people, and they care deeply about place. Since the 1960s, the Gunnison Valley has been a part of their family story. For all of those decades, their generosity has supported land conservation, outdoor opportunities, and the community that makes this valley so special.

Much of their support to local organizations in the Gunnison Valley is through the Chris Mikesell Foundation, created in 2008 in memory of their son, Chris, who loved this valley. Kendall and Sherry, along with their daughters, Laura Egedy and Julie Maloney, are officers of the Foundation. The Foundation reflects Chris's adventurous spirit and carries forward the values he held close: environmental preservation; outdoor opportunities for youth; support for students at his alma mater, Western Colorado University; and humanitarian aid. Through this work, Kendall, Sherry, Laura, and Julie continue Chris's legacy.

Chris's love of the outdoors was evident everywhere he went. Through his many travels and time spent as a river guide, Chris cared deeply for his environment and community. Kendall remembers hiking near Italian Mountain with Chris, when he insisted they pick up the pistachio shells they had dropped. "He took stewardship seriously, but always with a smile," a gentle



Laura and Josh Egedy of Mt. Crested Butte with their children, Willa (9), Ellis (6), and Callen (3)

lesson in caring for the land that has stayed with the family.

Today, that spirit of stewardship continues. At their home in Kansas, Kendall and Sherry are restoring 40 acres to native prairie, and here in Crested Butte, they typically direct their gifts to the Land Trust's stewardship program. This program was established to care for the thousands of well-loved acres available to the public, such as the Lower Loop, Long Lake, and the Lupine Trails.

Kendall and Sherry love sharing special places with family and friends, places they're protecting and caring for through their support of the Crested Butte Land Trust. "Whenever we have visitors in the valley, we go to Gunsight Bridge," Sherry says. "It's amazing to see the places that have brought us so much joy conserved and taken care of."

For the Mikesells, supporting the Crested Butte Land Trust isn't just about the past; it's about the future. Chris's values live on through his family, including his young nieces and nephews. The family's philanthropy is as much for their grandchildren as it is for today's community. As Kendall puts it simply, "The future is the most important."

To learn more about the Chris Mikesell Foundation, visit www.chrismikesellfoundation.org.



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GET INVOLVED!

DONATE OR VOLUNTEER

Invest in your community! There are lots of ways you can support your local land trust.

LEAVE A LEGACY

Please consider the Crested Butte Land Trust in your will or retirement plan.

EVENTS

We hope to see you soon at one of our field trips, the Starry Evening Gala, the Caddis Cup Fly Fishing Tournament, and more!

Visit cblandtrust.org or contact Development Director Ashley UpChurch at ashley@cblandtrust.org or 970-349-1206 to learn more.



**SCAN TO
DONATE**



Thank you to all photographers
who submitted photos for CBLT to use.
Designed by Tyler Hansen.