



# RIO GRANDE

## HEADWATERS LAND TRUST

2018 ANNUAL REPORT





## On Our Cover

High Valley Community Center kids from Del Norte, CO snowshoeing on the 4UR Ranch, at an event with our partners Rio Grande Watershed Conservation and Education Initiative and Adams State Adventure Program. We had a great day snowshoeing, doing crafts, and learning about wildlife and their winter habitat.

*Photos by Dani Gronhovd*



**High Valley kids** having fun in the snow! By the looks on these kids' faces, the event was a success!

## Executive Director's Letter



Last year was a reminder that you take the bad with the good. 2018 was one of the worst drought years on record in the San Luis Valley. The Rio Grande was at winter flows for much of the summer. Aquifer levels dropped.

The Spring Fire was devastating for many people. Still, we made it through, and by October the mountaintops were white again.

Things at RiGHT weren't so different. Saying goodbye to longtime staff members Rio de la Vista and Katherine Brown was hard. While rebuilding our team by adding Joelle, Dani, and Linda, we kept up the conservation, working together with landowners to protect four spectacular ranches in three different counties on the Conejos River, Rio Grande, and La Garita Creek.

Another highlight of 2018 was working with our *Cathy McNeil Summer Super Intern* Brendan Boepple to gather input from you all - our community stakeholders - to guide RiGHT as we kick off a new strategic plan.

Thanks for all of your support in 2018. We look forward to an exciting and much wetter next year!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allen Law".

Allen Law  
Executive Director

***“Conserving our land, water and way of life in the San Luis Valley.”***

## RiGHT Board of Directors

Cathy Morin, *President*

Doug Clark, *Vice President*

Linda Schoonhoven, *Secretary*

Lyle Hood, *Treasurer*

Kyler Brown

Pete Clark

Guy Keene

Steve Russell

Mark Smith

## RiGHT Staff

Allen Law, *Executive Director*

Nancy Butler, *Conservation Manager*

Joelle Marier, *Stewardship Coordinator*

Dani Gronhovd, *Events & Outreach Coordinator*

Linda Ahrens, *Office Administrator*

# Engaging the San Luis Valley

*A community engagement and feedback process*

WRITTEN BY BRENDAN BOEPPLE,  
RiGHT Conservation Planning Intern

In the middle of a stressful two years of graduate school, I was fortunate to spend the summer of 2018 in the San Luis Valley working with RiGHT to begin planning a new conservation initiative. Throughout the summer we developed and implemented a community engagement process to better understand RiGHT's strengths and weaknesses and the natural resource concerns of the community. We conducted over 30 interviews with diverse stakeholders to guide the future of RiGHT.

Major valley-wide concerns included addressing aquifer sustainability, ensuring river health, and reaching all communities within the Valley. Suggestions for future programming ranged from proposals to support new and beginning farmers to getting kids out on the land more often. Many people we spoke with pointed to a need for more impact within the community—that conservation isn't purely a natural concern but also a social one.

A resounding sentiment from the interviews was that RiGHT's previous conservation plan, the *Rio Grande Initiative*, was a major success and elevated the organization's profile both locally and state-wide. Additionally, conservation easements are now an accepted and important conservation tool in the Valley. As we continue the conservation planning process, our hope is to highlight two or three initiatives that continue to address the need for land conservation while also making RiGHT's work increasingly relevant to people living here in the Valley.

**Remember to donate to the *Cathy McNeil Stewardship Fund* to help us offer professional development opportunities for others and to help build our stewardship capacity.**



**Joelle Marier**  
Stewardship Coordinator

Much of Joelle's previous work has focused on public lands management and she's been fortunate to work in states across the West including New Mexico, Colorado, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho. She has a B.A. degree in Environmental Studies and Geographical Information Systems from the University of Montana. Born and raised in Minnesota, she feels strongly about conserving agricultural communities, lands, and lifeways and looks forward to working in the San Luis Valley to further the mission of RiGHT.



**Dani Gronhovd**  
Events & Outreach Coordinator

Dani moved from Minnesota to Colorado in May of 2016, and began serving with the Southwest Conservation Corps. She immediately fell in love with Southern Colorado and wanted to continue doing conservation work in the region. Dani completed her Master's in Conservation Leadership at CSU this past December and joined the RiGHT team. Dani will plan events, engage with the community, and work with landowners on conservation projects.



# A Place to Call Home

*How author and ranch owner Pam Houston came to conserve the Houston Ranch*

WRITTEN BY PAM HOUSTON

In 1992, I sold my first book, a short story collection called *Cowboys Are My Weakness*, to W.W. Norton for \$21,000.00. I was fresh out of graduate school, was living in my lemon yellow Toyota Corolla and my VE-24 North Face tent, and when my agent handed me the check - more money than I had ever seen - she said, "Don't spend it all on hiking boots."

I drove the Rocky Mountain West that summer, giving readings in bookstores, looking for a place to put that money down and call home. Three months into that journey, on a bright September day, the aspens at the peak of their color, I found my way to Creede and the old Pinckley place, 110 acres of high mountain meadow, ringed around by aspen groves and 12,000 foot peaks on three sides, Bristol Head and the Rio Grande marking the fourth. My 21K represented less than five percent



of what Dona Blair was asking for the ranch, but the realtor said Dona might like the idea of me. He asked me to sign a copy of *Cowboys* for her, said he'd see what he could do. I had no job and not three pages of a second book to rub together, but Dona sold me the ranch and she carried the note herself because no bank would have lent me five dollars.

Being in that much debt taught me the meaning of hard work. I wrote anything anyone would pay me for including an insert to an ant farm. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 2013, 20 years after I took ownership of the ranch, I drove through two road blocks and the thick smoke of the West Fork Fire to give Dona the final check, every cent earned from my writing and

*“...the ranch would heal me, would shelter me, would give me a place in the world to stand.”*

my teaching. I didn't know anything about ownership when I bought the ranch, about stewardship, about all the things dedicating myself to 110 acres of land would demand of me, how it would grow me up and turn me into someone who showed up even when it was hard or painful. Nor did I know in how many ways the ranch would heal me, would shelter me, would give me a place in the world to stand. I took the advice of my neighbors, and what I lacked in know how I make up for in determination. What I wanted more than anything was to do right by the land and with the help of RiGHT and its donors I have been able to do that. Somewhere along the way, the ranch became the greatest love story of my life.



### The 2018 Houston Ranch Conservation Easement, Mineral County, CO

- Protects **scenery** that you can see from the Silver Thread Scenic Byway and Middle Creek Road on your way to Love Lake
- Preserves important **wildlife habitat** for elk, mule deer, and even the occasional moose
- Conserves **110 acres** of ranchland and **0.3 miles** of Lime Creek

▶ “One of my favorite things was getting to meet Pam’s sweet - and occasionally mischievous - friends.”

-Allen Law





# RiGHT's 20th Anniversary

WRITTEN BY NANCY BUTLER,  
Conservation Manager

2019 marks the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! It has been an amazing 20 years, and it all started with the germination of an idea by RiGHT founder, Cathy McNeil. Twenty years ago there was a major effort going on to take water out of the San Luis Valley by a group called American Water Development Inc. (AWDI). It was a true David vs. Goliath story. The people in the Valley rallied together, fought, and won that fight, which got Cathy thinking about how we could protect our water. One of the tools that was emerging at that time were conservation easements. Conservation easements are one of the only ways to tie water rights to the land so it can never be exported. Cathy McNeil got together with some other forces in the Valley at that time, Karen Henderson, Christine Canaly, and Susan Pierce, and together they dreamed up RiGHT.

We still have serious water issues facing the San Luis Valley. More recently, another attempt from an outside group to export water from the Valley has started. Clearly our work isn't finished, but what we have been able to accomplish in the last twenty years has been a testament to our community, our founders, our Board members, our donors and funders, and our staff.

Our very first conservation easement was in 2001 and protected the 220 acre Clark Ranch southeast of Monte Vista next to the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge. At the time there were fewer than 10

conservation easements held by other organizations in the whole Valley, so committing to this new idea and program took a big leap of faith.

To date, we've worked with landowners to conserve over 43 properties and have protected over 26,000 acres in the Valley, with much of that work occurring along the Rio Grande and Conejos rivers as part of our successful *Rio Grande Initiative*. The *Rio Grande Initiative* began in 2007 as a landscape scale effort to protect 25,000 acres of private land and senior water rights along the Rio Grande and its tributaries. By working with farmers and ranchers along our rivers, we've protected 6,581 acres of wetlands, which only occur on 3% of land in the Valley but support 75% of the wildlife here. As the Valley's lifeblood, protecting the Rio Grande is pivotal for the conservation of agriculture, wildlife habitat, and our way of life.

Equally as important as the number of acres are the relationships built. Just as Cathy McNeil envisioned, we continue to focus on protecting water rights by working closely with families to help protect their ranches. It is their ranching heritage we are helping to preserve, and the community - whether you own a ranch or not - who benefits when we protect these special places for

future generations.

We are excited to look back on what RiGHT has accomplished and equally as excited to embark on the next 20 years.



# Thank you!

Support from individuals like you is what allows us to conserve our land, water, and way of life here in the San Luis Valley. The people on this page generously donated to RiGHT in 2018, and we are thankful for their commitment to and the impact they make on land and water conservation.

## Up to \$49

Mary Bloxom  
Julia Bowman  
Daniel Boyes  
Bill and Kay Crowder  
Mick Daniel  
Robert and Robyn Duda  
Christine Evans  
Molly Fales  
Robert and Betty Felmlee - *In memory of Ralph Curtis*  
Donna Ford - *In memory of Ralph Curtis*  
Karen Frei  
Bruce Goforth  
Debbie and James Gribble  
Lyle and Liz Hood  
Judy and Bobby Jones - *In memory of Ralph Curtis*  
Julie Kove  
Elinor and Richard Laurie  
Dianne Le Zotte - *In honor of Dave and Margaret Le Zotte*  
Brian Lockhart - *In honor of Rio de la Vista*  
Alex Lukens - *In memory of Joe Gallegos*  
James and Judith Mietz  
Jan Oen and Don Thompson  
Marie Patterson - *In memory of Ralph Curtis*  
Cille Pritchard-Hoback  
Archie and Rosemary Provan  
Ellinor Reiser  
Patricia Richmond - *In honor of Ellen Simpson*  
Bob Sanders  
Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area  
Anjillee Schwarz  
Chris Shaffer and Kay Wenzel - *In memory of Kanga*  
Quade Smith - *In honor of Laura Embleton*  
Irena Subotic  
Jon and Linda Treibly  
Karen Wolf - *In honor of John Graeser*

## \$50-99

Cat and Avery Augur  
Rob Bleiberg - *In honor of Nancy Butler*  
Charlotte and Tom Bobicki  
Keri Brandt and David Off  
Charla Brown and Robert Burnett - *In honor of Rio de la Vista*  
William Carden  
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee - *In memory of Ralph Curtis*  
Gary Conover  
Andrea West and Alex Daue  
Lyla Davis  
Glenn DeRussy  
Carrie Elliott  
Roger and Lila Jean Escherman - *In memory of Ralph Curtis*  
Melody Feniks - *In memory of Doug Shriver*  
Debra Fleming and John Taggart - *In memory*

*of LoRee Taggart*  
Jule and Clinton Gronhovd  
Doug Clark and Christa Gulaian  
Sabra Hall  
James Hammerberg  
Jean Hancock  
Ed and Sharie Harmon  
Kim Smoyer and Bill Hatcher  
Patricia Henschen  
Ingrid Hernandez  
Chris Herrman - *In honor of Rio de la Vista*  
Roger and Louise Hill  
Forrest Jones  
Richard Jones  
Lynn and Jane Kircher  
Timothy Kirkpatrick and Wendolyn Michnay  
Mark and Karen Knight  
Dennis Lamb - *In honor of Critter, Riddy, Fluffy, and Sparky*  
David Lichtenstein  
Samantha Lopez  
Anita McDaniel - *In honor of Jessie and Roscoe McDaniel*  
Dawn McKnight  
Mountain, Valley and Plains, Inc.  
Kathryn Mutz  
Suzie and Gordon Off  
Glenn and Betsy Pense  
John and Emma Reesor  
Terry Richey  
Jolene Robinson - *In memory of Clarence Robinson*  
Neil and Elise Rudolph  
Steve and Mary Russell  
Carol Schoonhoven  
Leonard Velasquez  
Melissa Vuto  
Robert and Karen Willis  
Dia Winograd - *In honor of Mike Blakeman and Pam Houston*

## \$100-199

Lin Barrett - *In honor of Nancy Butler*  
David Becher  
Mike Blakeman  
Nancy Butler and Lee Carpenter  
Marge Carrico and Jim Traylor  
Jane and John Caruthers - *In honor of Mike and Cloetta Spearman*  
Cynthia Cherubino and David Lehr  
Pete and Leah Clark  
Mary Collins  
Jan Crawford and Jim Loud  
Martin and Darlene Danko  
Rick and Lugail Davie  
Rio de la Vista - *In memory of Cathy McNeil*  
John Evaskovich and Angie Krall  
Patricia Flood - *In honor of Rio de la*

*Vista*  
Lary Floyd and Pat Meador  
Kent Foster  
Tim and Marsha Gallagher - *In loving memory of Ralph Curtis*  
Glen and Beatrice Getz  
Glenda Fletcher and Virginia Gaffney - *In honor of Pam Houston and Mike Blakeman*  
Franz Gross and Christina Faia - *In honor of Susanna Gross*  
Margery Herrington  
Tom Holmes  
Robert and Jill Homer  
Dan Jones - *In honor of Nancy Butler*  
Martin Jones  
Joel Kaufman  
Allen Law  
Jennifer Love - *In honor of Pam Houston and Mike Blakeman*  
Betty Manville - *In honor of the Willetts*  
Jack Martin  
Donald and Kathy McFarland  
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Lucy Moore  
Cathy Morin and Ian Rich  
Nancy and David Neal  
Dennis Neuhaus and Judie Rose  
Hal Ozanne  
Rare Earth Science, LLC  
Elaine Regan - *In honor of Nancy Butler*  
Marcy Reiser - *In honor of Virginia Blunt*  
Katherine Rhodes  
Elizabeth Richardson  
Margy Robertson - *In memory of Ralph Curtis and in honor of Elizabeth Richardson and Rio de la Vista*  
Randall Rutsch  
Scott and Connie Scidmore  
Karla Shriver  
Russell Smith  
Mark and Darlene Smith  
The Nature Conservancy - *In honor of Rio de la Vista*  
Mike and Marilyn Willett - *In memory of Ralph Curtis*  
Alan and Janice Wuckert  
Fred Zietz - *In memory of Carl Zeitz Jr.*

## \$200-350

Aiaz Ansari  
Allan Beezley - *In honor of Nancy Butler*  
Michael and Peggy Blenden - *In memory of Ralph Curtis*  
Bill Brinton and Kristina Steinberg  
Emily and Kyler Brown  
Rolf and Judy Dercum  
Hobey and Ruth Dixon - *In memory of Cathy McNeil*  
Bob and Carol Lee Dugan  
Mary Susan Eldredge

Thad and Deanne Elliott - *In honor of Rio de la Vista*  
Lindsay Faulkner and Peter Hagen  
Gates Family Foundation - *In honor of Rio de la Vista*  
David and Susan Geiger  
Bob and Pam Gjellum  
Tom Gougeon  
Susie Harvin and Guy Keene - *In memory of Ralph Curtis*  
Barbara Ivey - *In memory of Judge Pat Hayes*  
Doug and Judy Knudson - *In honor of Nancy Butler*  
Renae Kofford and Brian Larsen  
Michael and Connie Law - *In memory of Orvil and Izoa Creager*  
Teri McCartney and Don Richmond  
Mountain West Consulting, LLC  
Peter Nichols  
Tom Peal - *In honor of Sandy and Evelyn Peal*  
Rhea Environmental Consulting  
Gordon and Jane Rowe - *In honor of Doug Shriver*  
Linda Schoonhoven  
Mona Syring - *In memory of Cathy McNeil and Ray Wright*  
Donna and David Wehe - *In memory of Ralph Curtis and Ben Konishi*  
Jeannine Willett

## \$500-750

Elaine Blumenhein  
Ann and Bill Boies  
Gigi Darricades and Mike Gibson  
Tom and Pat Gilmore  
Janezic Family Foundation  
Patrick and Paula Murphy  
Stephanie and Doug Ouren - *In memory of Travis ouren*  
Fred and Roslyn Rabalais  
Tom and Michele Schrandt

## \$1,000 and up

4UR Ranch - *In honor of Nancy Butler and Rio de la Vista*  
Diana and Tim Anderson - *In memory of Ray Wright*  
Margaret Biles  
Greg Cheyne and Gladys Richardson - *In memory of Cathy McNeil*  
Glen and Fran Clark  
Kay Collins  
Matthew Dixon - *In honor of Hobart N. Dixon*  
Chris and Christy Hayes  
Duane and Susan Larson  
Mike McNeil  
Nancy Starling Ross and Wayne Ross  
The Ruth H. Brown Foundation - *In honor of Rio de la Vista*  
The Trinchera Blanca Foundation, LLC



**Annual Report**

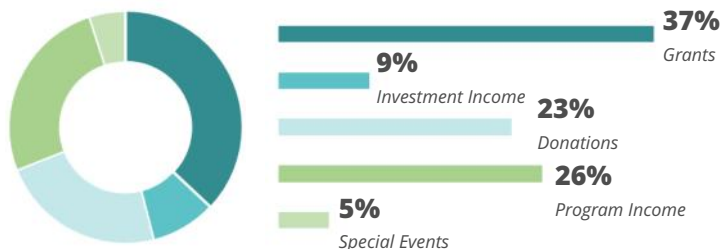
# Annual Report

## It's more than your Valley, it's your legacy.

Make a difference in your community today with a gift to the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust. You can give by making a one time gift by mail, online, or in person, donate assets like stock or land, or become a sustaining member with a recurring monthly gift. If you're feeling *extra* generous, you can build a legacy representing your lifelong values through a variety of planning giving options including bequests and beneficiary designations. **Call our office at 719.657.0800 or visit our website [www.riograndelandtrust.org](http://www.riograndelandtrust.org) for more information.**

## Financial Highlights

**2018 Sources of Funds**



**2018 Uses of Funds**

