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Corporate Partner

Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust

Winter 2018 News



Nancy celebrating the completion of a conservation easement with landowner Reyes Garcia and Rio de la Vista, at the 2013 Headwaters Hoedown.

RiGHT Staff

Nancy Butler, Executive Director
Allen Law, Conservation Director

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**CONSERVING
OUR LAND,
WATER, AND
WAY OF LIFE IN
COLORADO'S
SAN LUIS
VALLEY**

STAFF TRANSITIONS: NANCY STEPS DOWN... ALLEN STEPS UP

Next year will be the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust's (RiGHT) 20th Anniversary and I've been here for 17 of those years. While I plan to stay on a while longer, I do want to let you all know that I will be stepping down as Executive Director effective January 1st, 2019 and our current Conservation Director, Allen Law, will be stepping up into that role. For those of you familiar with my cancer journey, having been originally diagnosed in 2003 just a few months after I started at RiGHT and then on and off (mostly on) chemotherapy since then, I am mostly not stepping down because of my health. My health is relatively stable and thankfully continues to allow me to work. The main reason I am turning over the reins is because I think it is the healthy thing for RiGHT and it is the right time.

Allen Law has been a big part of our work for the last three years and I believe in and am excited about his leadership and vision for RiGHT going forward. This is an exciting time for RiGHT, with seven conservation easement projects and a new conservation and strategic plan in the works. Allen thinks big and his passion for conservation will take our work into deeper levels with our Valley communities.

I'm not going anywhere, at least for a while yet, and will be concentrating my time more strictly on direct conservation easement projects, which is something I've always loved doing. My new job title will be Director of Conservation Easement Transactions and we will be hiring a new Stewardship Coordinator to take over Allen's stewardship duties. So join me and the rest of the RiGHT team in welcoming Allen to the great role of being RiGHT's new Executive Director.

Some of Nancy's Legacy			
.5 - 4.5	Number of employees from when Nancy started to today.	Acres protected by RiGHT's conservation easements today.	25,700
3 - 41	Number of conservation easements from when Nancy started to today	Acres of land protected through the <i>Rio Grande Initiative</i> by RiGHT and its partners.	27,000
34	The number of families helped through RiGHT's conservation easements.	Number of river miles protected.	40

Pictured on the Cover: Elena Miller-terKuile and her father Allan Miller, checking the sheep on Cactus Hill Farm

Born and raised in small town Ohio, I never dreamed of being the executive director of a land trust when I grew up. In fact, I'd never heard of a land trust. The West, with its vast and beautiful mountains and deserts, was a picture on a postcard that you hoped to visit once or twice in your life.

What I did have growing up was a dad who was a committed sportsman and a mom from a farm in the middle-of-nowhere. As soon as I was old enough and tough enough, Dad and I started spending ice-cold sunrises hunting and fishing. He and I studied 'ecosystems' way before either of us would have used that word. On the holidays Mom would take us out to Grandpa and Grandma's to spend time with aunts, uncles, and cousins who all shared a tie to the family farm. That patch of dirt fed countless thousands of people Kellogg's Corn Flakes, all while putting a whole generation of our family through college.

With that as my starting point, once I heard about land trusts, the idea immediately clicked. If you're going to protect a place, which we need to do, who better to work with than the families who rely on, know, and love that place more than anyone else?

After showing up in the San Luis Valley, I learned pretty quickly that it's not always that simple. This place is postcard beautiful, but it's hard and dry too. Conservation takes more collaboration than I ever expected. And I cannot thank all of you enough for teaching me the Valley's most important lesson: here, at least as much as the land, it's our water that needs saving.

Of course, one person has taught me more than any other, and that's Nancy. She's not only schooling me on the ins-and-outs of running a land trust, she has already taught me that leadership doesn't have to be a rousing speech or crazy idea. It's about putting in the extra work to listen to others, know what you're talking about, stay organized, and always keep the ball rolling. I'm still working on the staying organized part.

I feel incredibly lucky to be so far from home and have still found a community and a place that matches my values in the Valley. It only made sense to take the next step in my career here.



Nancy celebrating another conservation easement getting completed with the landowners of the Rainbow Trout Ranch in 2016 with (from left to right) Nancy, Mike Spearman, landowner Doug Van Berkum, Allen Law and landowner, Linda Van Berkum

Don't forget to...



2018 Save the Ranch and Farm



Photo by Christi Bode

Making a living in agriculture has never been easy, and each new generation of ranchers and farmers faces their own challenges. Margins get tighter. Commodity prices are a rollercoaster, while the price of everything else seems to steadily rise. Future water supplies are much more likely to shrink than grow.

Fortunately the next generation is up to the task. At the 360 acre Cactus Hill Farm on the Alamosa River near the small community of Capulin in Conejos County, the Miller-terKuile family has worked their land for nearly a hundred years. As Alan Miller began to think about retirement, his daughter Elena chose to come back to the farm. She's brought a new herd of grand champion sheep and creative marketing ideas, like using their wool to handcraft beautiful yarns to sell direct to consumers at fiber fairs.

Conserving the Cactus Hill Farm will keep the land together and allow the family to reinvest in the farm so that Alan and Elena's transition will be as smooth as possible. The Miller-terKuile's and RiGHT are working together because we share their vision that sustainable agriculture isn't just about healthy land and water - every farm needs a farmer too. Family agriculture is the backbone of our way of life in the San Luis Valley, and RiGHT is thrilled to help Elena continue her family's legacy.



Photo by Christi Bode

That's one of the reasons why the Cactus Hill Farm is RiGHT's 2018 Save the Ranch and Farm project. Each year we highlight a special project that we are working on that we feel is a little extra special. In addition to the family's and Elena's story, Cactus Hill Farm is a special place too. Despite its name, the farm has a beautiful stretch of the Alamosa River that is unique because it is just downstream from a major spring and, unlike the majority of the river, never runs dry. This area was the site of extensive restoration work and now supports a high water table and ten to fifteen acres of wetlands, which in turn support lots of wildlife.



Photo by Christi Bode



We are excited to be working on this project and hope that you will consider a donation to our 2018 Save the Ranch and Farm campaign either through the enclosed envelope or on Colorado Gives Day on December 4th. As an added bonus, everyone who donates to the 2018 Save the Ranch and Farm campaign will be invited to a private picnic on the Cactus Hill Farm hosted by Elena and her family next spring or summer. So donate today to make a difference and support family agriculture in the San Luis Valley.

More Work To Be Done



RiGHT will complete this conservation easement project, which can be seen from the Silver Thread Scenic Byway in Mineral County at the end of 2018.

With all this transition and strategic and conservation planning coming up, we are still in the middle of seven active conservation easement projects representing 2,200 acres stretching from Mineral to Conejos County and everywhere in-between. Some of the impact these conservation projects will have includes:

- Protecting views in Mineral County along the Silver Thread Scenic Byway;
- Protecting five river miles and all the senior surface water rights, habitat for big game and small endangered birds and beauty that comes with land along rivers;
- Keeping 2,000 acres of land in the Valley agriculturally productive;
- Creating corridors of conservation since all but one of these seven projects are next to existing conservation easements.



New Board Members

RiGHT is extremely pleased to add two new Board members to our all-local Board of Directors: Lyle Hood and Kyler Brown. Lyle and Kyler both bring a wide range of diverse backgrounds, experience and energy to our work. Lyle originally came to the Valley to teach taxation at Adams State University, but is more known for having worked at the Alamosa certified public accounting firm of Wall, Smith and Bateman for the nearly 40 years. His knowledge of land trust work comes from having developed a niche for conservation easements and having consulted on over 40 conservation easements throughout the state of Colorado, as well as having placed a conservation easement on his own ranch along the Rio Grande just west of Del Norte in 2011.

Kyler lives just east of Del Norte, but grew up in the Midwest and graduated from Colorado State University. He ranches and is a potato and barley farmer – so he brings a great perspective to our Board, which always helps keep what we do grounded. He is also involved in soil health, holistic management and being an advocate for farmers through the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union. Recently he spent a week in Washington D.C. talking to legislators about the Farm Bill. So you know when a farmer leaves the Valley for a week and spends it in Washington D.C., that's commitment!

“Land and water are the foundations upon which our Valley communities are built. I look forward to working with RiGHT on the stewardship our natural resources and empower our communities to thrive.”
—Kyler Brown



All Hoedown Photos by Christi Bode

For eight years straight, we've been celebrating conservation in the San Luis Valley with folks from all across the San Luis Valley, the rest of Colorado, and New Mexico at our annual Headwaters Hoedown. Every year is a blast, and this year's Hoedown was one of our absolute favorites.

It was a beautiful Colorado blue sky day and being on the Cross Arrow Ranch in Conejos County, near the village of La Saucos, we had to kick the party off with tours celebrating the area's rich history and culture and the festive music of the Mariachi San Luis.

Nearly 200 people attended and enjoyed the beautiful setting with gorgeous views of the Sangre de Cristo mountains, the locally prepared meal from Pepitas Catering and Jessica Willett's delicious hand-made delicacies, the music of the Mariachi San Luis Luis and Don Richmond and the Riflers, locally grown beer from the Colorado Farm Brewery, a robust and fun live and silent auction with 50 items in it, and a heartwarming and compelling story from Cactus Hill Farm owner, Elena Miller-terKuile.

All told we raised more than \$26,000 making this one of the most successful Hoedowns to date! We are deeply grateful for all your support, from our Title Sponsor, the Trinchera Blanca Foundation, as well as long-standing local sponsor San Luis Federal Bank, and all our other sponsors to the silent auction donors, tour leaders, volunteers, partners and a special thanks to the Willett Family for hosting this year's Hoedown on their ranch. Most of all we want to thank you for coming out celebrate RiGHT and this wonderful Valley.

