

# ARKANSAS BASIN CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

*A conservation vision  
for the Arkansas Basin*



**“Conservation is not a luxury.  
It’s vital to our quality of life.”**

*– Rebecca Jewett, Palmer Land Conservancy*



**Produced by**  
Keep It Colorado

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# A New Kind of Collaboration

The Arkansas Basin Conservation Alliance (ABCA) is a new coalition formed by a group of Colorado land trusts dedicated to conserving private lands in the Arkansas Basin, with a goal of working more strategically and collaboratively across the region. Particularly in the face of threats such as climate change, population growth and development pressure, these land trusts see an urgent need to meet their conservation goals – and make the Arkansas Basin’s landscapes and communities more connected, more resilient and more sustainable for the future.

The ABCA was created in 2019 with goals to significantly improve the rate, rigor, relevance and resilience of conservation actions throughout the Arkansas Basin. In 2020, the group kicked off its efforts in earnest.

Land trusts and their partners have collectively conserved over 1,125,000 acres of natural habitats and agricultural lands in the basin. These organizations acknowledge that while the basin is deeply diverse – geographically, culturally and economically – their work is deeply interconnected. By coming together rather than working individually, they can conserve even more land, connect larger landscapes, protect even more critical habitat – and have greater, longer-lasting impacts on their communities.

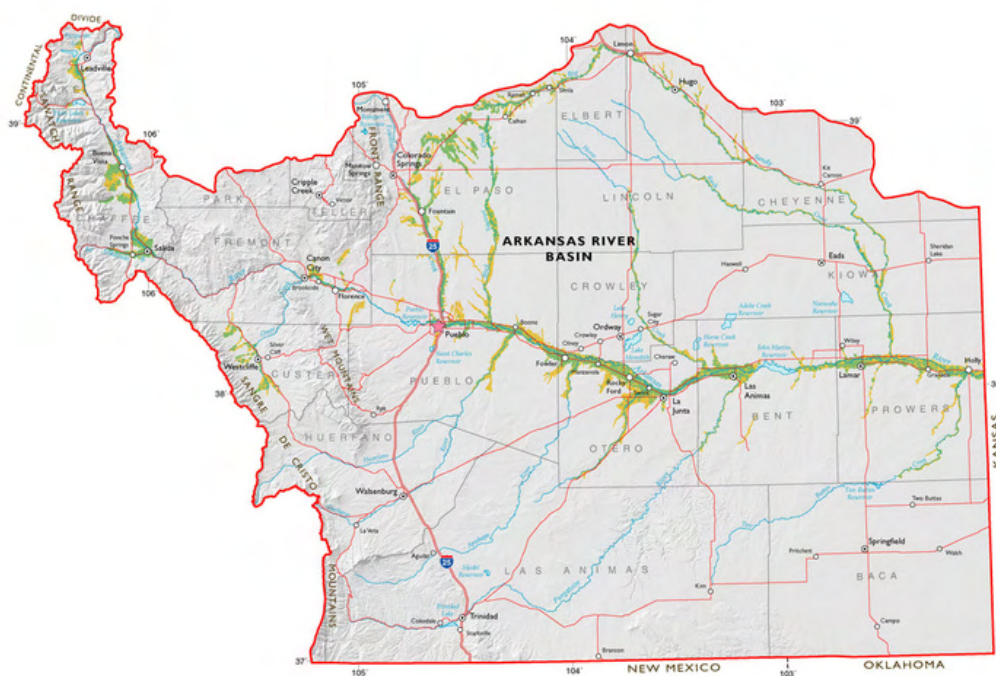
## Vision

An Arkansas Basin where landscapes are **protected, connected and resilient**; communities are **economically, ecologically and socially healthy**; and people – those who live there and those who visit – embody **an enduring culture of conservation**.

**1,125,000+**  
ACRES CONSERVED  
IN THE  
ARKANSAS BASIN



# The Arkansas Basin: A Lay of the Land



The Arkansas Basin is Colorado's largest basin by area. Accounting for 27 percent of the state's total land area, it covers more than 28,000 square miles and comprises 19 counties. The basin features dramatic elevation differences, dropping from over 14,000 feet at the river's highest point to around 3,300 feet at the Colorado-Kansas border.

The Arkansas River is a major tributary of the Mississippi River, and is one of the four major drainages that flow out of Colorado. Its source basin is in Colorado's Arkansas River Valley. As the river flows east and southeast, it moves through the varied landscapes of our state before crossing into Kansas – from the high mountain peaks near Leadville, to the valleys of Salida, to the urban areas of Pueblo and Colorado Springs, and through the vast, rolling prairies of Colorado's southeastern plains.

The river itself is multi-faceted and serves many diverse interests. It is the most commercially rafted river in the United States, is a popular fishing river, and supports critical agricultural lands. On the southeastern plains, the Arkansas River corridor is surrounded by landscapes featuring unique irrigated and non-irrigated cropland, riparian areas and critical wildlife habitat.

The Upper Arkansas Basin is an outdoor recreation wonderland, offering opportunities for camping, hiking, picnicking, wildlife watching, mountain biking and rock climbing. In the Lower Basin, the shortgrass prairie – home to the "American Serengeti" – is alive with bison, pronghorn and hundreds of other animals for which America's Great Plains are famous.

Agriculturally, the Arkansas Basin is one of the most productive regions of the U.S., with large swaths of land dedicated to local farm and ranch operations, many of them multi-generational. In addition to producing food for tables across Colorado and the U.S., these lands are home to critical wildlife and offer some of Colorado's most iconic viewsheds.

The basin has a rich cultural history. Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site in the Lower Basin straddles the north and south sides of the river. It features a reconstructed 1840s adobe fur trading post along the Santa Fe Trail, where traders, trappers, travelers, and the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes came together for trade. Across the basin, several other Native American tribes – including the Ute, Cherokee, Osage, Kiowa, Comanche, Pawnee and Apache peoples – have inhabited parts of the region since the 16th century. These tribes have deep histories with sacred connections to and a legacy of conservation and protection of the land.

**The Arkansas Basin's rich geographic, ecological and historic features make the region both fascinating and unique – and worth protecting.**

# Fundamental Drivers

## *of Conservation in the Arkansas Basin*

### **ECONOMIC VITALITY**

The basin's rural economies that rely on agriculture have been hit especially hard by ongoing drought, unstable commodities markets and other pressures, making it financially harder for farming and ranching families to stay on working lands. The pandemic has created further economic hardship.

Conservation is a proven economic catalyst. Studies show that for every \$1 invested in conservation, the public receives up to \$12 in benefits. Conservation helped Colorado communities recover from the last recession by supporting working lands and bolstering recreation and tourism opportunities - and will help with recovery from the pandemic too.

Conservation must be a high-priority investment in the Arkansas Basin.

### **RESILIENCY & ADAPTABILITY**

Like everywhere in Colorado and across the globe, the basin is experiencing the impacts of more extreme weather patterns, chronic drought, a longer and more intense wildfire season, and diminished snowpack. These threats are growing and severe, with profound impacts on the resources people and wildlife need to survive: land and water.

Conservation alone cannot end threats associated with climate change. However, coordinated and strategic conservation can and does play a key role in helping landscapes and communities become more resilient and adaptable. Investing in natural solutions and other land protection and management strategies can mitigate the impacts of climate change and help maintain the integrity, functionality and resiliency of the natural resources Coloradans rely on.

## ..... **High-value Outcomes**



### **Food production**

Agricultural operations are the economic and cultural heartbeat of communities across the basin. Local farms and ranches put food on Coloradans' tables. Coordinated conservation solutions help keep vital water sources intact, address water scarcity and preserve a critical mass of irrigated farm and ranch land - requirements for diversifying crops, enabling sustainable livestock production and keeping these operations going.



### **Forest and prairie sustainability**

A healthy ecosystem is made up of diverse plants and animals, and relies on intact soils, good watershed health and safe habitat - from the forests to the plains. For example, the shortgrass prairie, in the southeastern part of the basin, is an essential wildlife corridor. While the prairie is arguably the best equipped landscape to tolerate drought and wildfire due to the unique root systems of plants that sequester water and carbon, prairies are among the country's most threatened ecosystems. Concerted conservation and restoration efforts protect these areas against short- and long-term threats.



### **Rural community vibrancy**

The Arkansas Basin is home to landscapes and natural resources that define Colorado and that people depend on economically, socially and culturally. Locally-based, coordinated conservation strategies feed that vibrancy by locally sourcing labor and materials; putting people to work stewarding and restoring lands; keeping local working farms and ranches in production; fostering an ethic of conservation and greater support for it; and attracting new visitors to the beauty and wonder of these landscapes.

# Five-year Outlook



## CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

- Keep working lands working by helping farmers and ranchers keep their operations in production.
- Preserve and restore wildlife habitat where natural ecosystems can fully function.
- Thoughtfully expand recreation opportunities and access on land and water, through trail connectivity, voluntary land purchases and river access – while balancing critical habitat protection.
- Protect source and tributary waters and adjoining properties to benefit agriculture, wildlife, plant life and human populations.

### ***Goals: What we need to achieve***

- Increase the pace of voluntary private land conservation by exploring and developing tools and incentives in addition to conservation easements.
- Connect conserved land and pursue landscape-scale projects that meet conservation and protection objectives.
- Expand conservation opportunities that support landowners and create economic vibrancy in rural communities.

### ***Strategies: How we'll make it happen***

- Initiate joint projects with fellow land trusts to reduce competition and create large-scale impact.
- Partner and collaborate with landowners, nonprofits, businesses, higher education institutions and funders.
- Conduct educational outreach among local communities.
- Elevate local community voices that speak to the importance of conserving land in this region through voluntary landowner and community-driven conservation efforts.
- Engage tribal communities in discussions and strategies for the future, while honoring their historical connections and role as protectors of the land.
- Develop creative conservation and stewardship tools, approaches and funding solutions.

# Current and Ongoing Initiatives

ABCA land trusts are currently working on several innovative, community-driven projects – many in the works for years – that align with the ABCA's identified priorities. With an infusion of support in the immediate term, these projects could be expanded for further impact.

## Expanding recreational opportunities

### Ring the Peak

An initiative 20 years in the making, with goals to connect trails through conserved properties and provide public access in the Pikes Peak region.

### Arkansas River access

A project to identify, purchase and protect acres of land along the Arkansas River in Lake County, meant to promote public access and preserve land.



## Protecting irrigated farmlands/working lands

### Bessemer Ditch

A project to ensure a critical mass of irrigated farmland in eastern Pueblo County, with goals to balance the needs of a growing municipality and keep the local farming community in production.



## Community Conservation Connection

A program to enable shorter-term land conservation arrangements with landowners in an effort to slow down the accelerated rates of land and resource conversion.

## Restoring and protecting wildlife habitat

### Heartland Ranch Nature Preserve expansion

An effort to expand this shortgrass prairie preserve to 43,000 acres – protecting critical biodiversity and providing a refuge for wildlife and native flora.

### Wildlife-friendly fence modification

A restoration project focused on removing, modifying or replacing 50 miles of fence, allowing pronghorn, elk and other wildlife to move freely and safely.



# A History of Collaboration in the Arkansas Basin

Land trusts large and small have a history of collaborating on a project-by-project basis. A primary objective of the ABCA is to identify projects to pursue together on an equally large scale as the examples below, given adequate funding is available.

The 9,633-foot Fishers Peak is a flat-topped mountain that sits within a 30-square mile ranch land property featuring spectacular mesas, canyons and valleys just south of Trinidad. Prior to 2020, visitors could not access the peak from Colorado. In early 2019 The Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy purchased the private ranch land, and in 2020 Fishers Peak was officially named Colorado's newest state park.

*Partners:* City of Trinidad, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Great Outdoors Colorado, community members and stakeholders.



Central Colorado Conservancy partnered with The Trust for Public Land and Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust to protect 2,400 acres spread across four local ranches near Browns Canyon in Chaffee County. These easements will protect critical agricultural lands, water and wildlife habitat, including several miles of stream, wetland, and riparian corridors along the Upper Arkansas River – a stretch of the river with headwaters essential to overall watershed health.

*Partners:* Great Outdoors Colorado, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Chaffee County Common Ground Funds and private foundations.



# *What are some collaboration possibilities to explore?*

Collaborations with landowners and better public-private partnerships on landscape-scale land conservation and ecological restoration initiatives will be keys to slowing down the accelerated rates of ecosystem and resource conversion. Coordinated public outreach and education will be essential.



**Land protection.** Through voluntary efforts, conserve important landscapes in the basin that preserve the ecological integrity, cultural heritage, and economic viability of the region.

**Riparian restoration.** Implement landscape-scale projects that link the Upper and Lower Arkansas Basins and adjacent private and public lands.

**Recreation access.** Explore opportunities for landowners to increase access to their property; identify where increased access is appropriate; and coordinate efforts to secure resources for access management and enforcement.

**Natural and heritage tourism.** Draw attention to the full basin for its rich cultural and ecological history; tell the story about connections to the land throughout time; attract people to the basin who may not otherwise visit.

**Indigenous history.** Engage communities with ties to the land's Indigenous history, recognize their role in protecting and conserving those lands, and develop ways to advance this work together.

**Public benefits of private lands.** Develop common language and messaging that communicates the benefits of conserving private lands that are not open to the public, with goals to protect wildlife, critical habitat and iconic viewsheds.



# Community Engagement

Recognizing that change comes from the community, ABCA land trusts and their partners employ several strategies to engage with their communities to meet unique regional needs. Organized collaboration could replicate these efforts on a broader scale across the basin.

- ✓ Soliciting input from community members about their land conservation and outdoor recreation priorities as part of visioning and strategy initiatives.
- ✓ Encouraging community members to hire and buy locally.
- ✓ Cooperating with neighboring landowners on projects that meet shared interests.
- ✓ Organizing and hosting environmental education programs.
- ✓ Involving landowners in land trust programs designed to encourage more conservation.
- ✓ Organizing coffee gatherings and “fireside chats” to discuss conservation with public agencies, county commissioners, landowners and members.



# The ROI of Conservation Investments

Conservation tells a clear and strong economic story in Colorado.

The **agriculture, tourism** and **recreation** sectors generate billions of dollars in economic activity for the state.

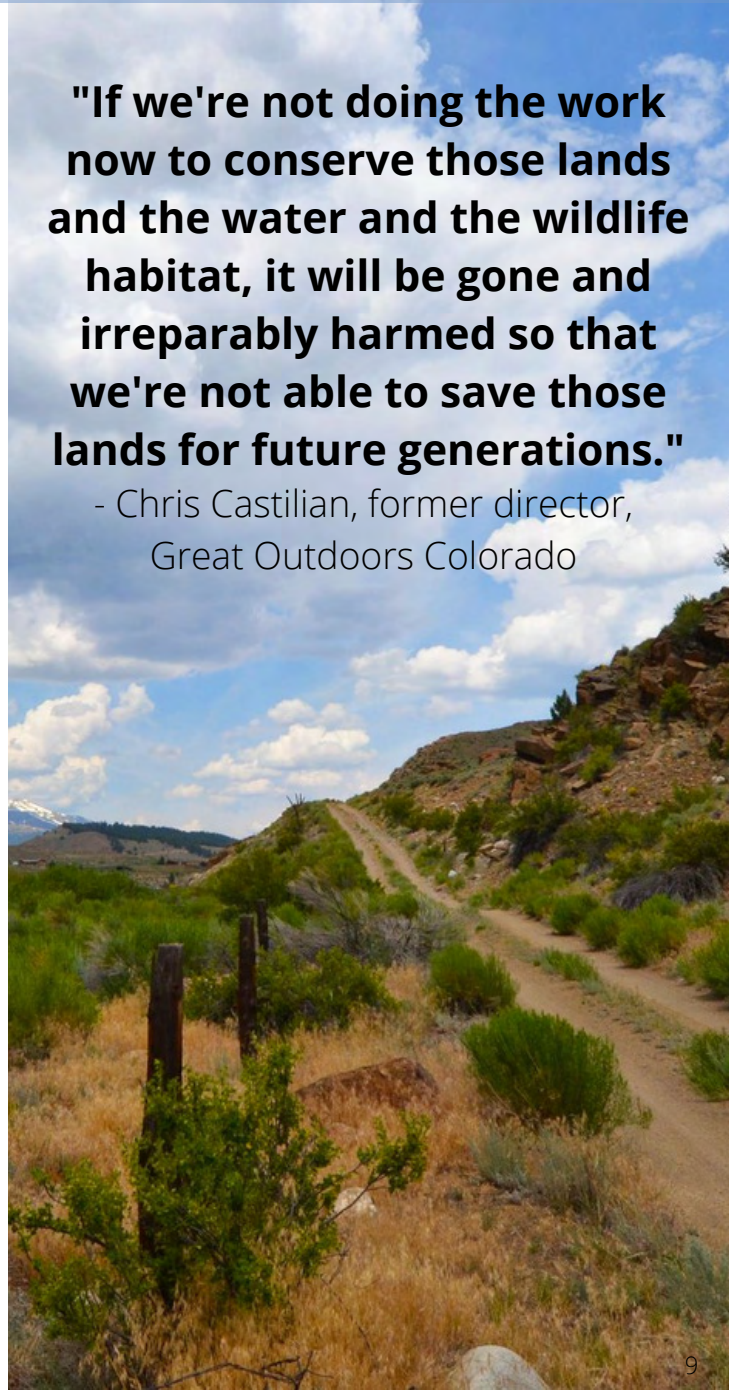
Economies in the Arkansas Basin rely on all three of these sectors.

The **economic return of more investment** in conservation in the basin is potentially significant.

- For every \$1 invested in conservation, the public receives up to \$12 in benefits. (A CSU Study: Investing in Colorado, 2017.)
- **Recreation:** 90 percent of Coloradans participate in outdoor recreation activities in Colorado each year. Conservation creates opportunities for people to hike, camp, see wildlife, fish and hunt, and for companies that manufacture and sell equipment for those activities – pumping dollars into our state’s economy. (The Economic Benefits of Great Outdoors Colorado and the Conservation Trust Fund, 2018.)
- **Tourism:** 15 percent of leisure visitors to Colorado come specifically for the parks, trails, rivers, open spaces, recreation amenities, and wildlife. People who come primarily to visit the outdoors are estimated to spend \$1.21 billion annually in Colorado, generating tens of millions of dollars in state and local tax revenues. (The Economic Benefits of Great Outdoors Colorado and the Conservation Trust Fund, 2018.)
- **Agriculture:** In the agriculture sector alone, new investments in conservation programs have the potential to pump hundreds of millions of dollars into Colorado’s economy, and give a much-needed boost to our rural communities, too. (Economic impact of future federal conservation easement investments on (rural) Colorado communities, 2020.)

**"If we're not doing the work now to conserve those lands and the water and the wildlife habitat, it will be gone and irreparably harmed so that we're not able to save those lands for future generations."**

- Chris Castilian, former director,  
Great Outdoors Colorado





# Land conservation and outdoor recreation are local economic drivers.

A research study found that parks, trails and open spaces in Colorado Springs:

- Raise the value of nearby residential properties by \$502 million and increase property tax revenues by \$2.58 million a year.
- Provide health benefits and reduce pollution control costs by \$201,000 per year and equate to an annual medical cost savings of \$56.5 million.
- Provide residents a benefit of \$58.7 million annually for the use of these facilities.
- Are frequented by visitors who are estimated to spend \$135 million annually in Colorado Springs and generate \$6.36 million in local tax revenues.
- Support \$32.4 million in resident spending on sports, recreation, and exercise equipment annually at 88 sporting goods stores that generate \$178 million in sales and provide 986 jobs.

Source: Trust for Public Land

**Greater investments in conservation across the Arkansas Basin would have measurable social, economic and health benefits for Coloradans – and should be a priority.**



# Open space sales tax programs are effective and accepted tools for advancing conservation.

A case study in Chaffee County showed that:

- In 2018, 52 percent of residents voted “yes” on a ballot measure to incur a ¼-cent sales tax in perpetuity.
- In 2019, the first year of collection, the tax generated \$1.1 million revenue.
- Of that revenue, at least 25 percent was devoted to improving forest health, at least 25 percent to preserving working ranches/farms, and at least 5 percent to providing greater stewardship for public recreation lands.

Public support of conservation is growing, as evidenced by approval of open space sales tax programs. Unfortunately, only 23 Colorado cities and counties\* have a tax program that supports conservation or open space acquisitions, and the majority of those are in the Front Range and resort communities. **Only three such programs are in the Arkansas Basin** – Chaffee County, City of Colorado Springs and Park County – with a sparse presence in the Lower Basin.

Source: Trust for Public Land

\*Great Outdoors Colorado informal research

**Access to local funds through tax programs as matches for other funding could make a meaningful difference in advancing conservation in the Arkansas Basin.**



# ***What are some potential solutions to explore?***

The Arkansas Basin's conservation community can make substantial conservation gains by pursuing and leveraging **innovative programs and tools**. For instance:

- Programs that **pool resources from multiple funders** could stimulate additional conservation projects, cover costs associated with transactions, encourage community-informed conservation planning, and ensure continued, coordinated conservation leadership – amplifying the impact of the investments and maximizing conservation efforts on the ground.
- As a result of legislation passed in 2021, landowners are eligible to receive a **90 percent tax credit** in exchange for voluntarily donating a conservation easement. This tool incentivizes rural landowners to voluntarily conserve critical landscapes in communities where fewer financial incentives may exist.

## ***Additional solutions and ideas for regional challenges***

In **Bent County**, the poverty rate is three times higher than the state average. There, the lack of growth, lack of a strong tax base and high poverty rates are barriers to economic health. With a historically strong agricultural focus, the region could benefit from a more vibrant service sector to infuse dollars into the local economy. For example, natural and heritage tourism programs on large, conserved wildlife preserves could attract people who otherwise might overlook this region as a destination – and create important cultural links between the Lower and Upper Basins that could result in greater economic vitality regionwide.

In **Crowley County**, a loss of 90 percent of the county's irrigated water supply has led to the highest poverty rates in the state and devastated a once-productive farming community. Additionally, its landscape has never recovered to its native ecosystem. To avoid similar situations from happening elsewhere, farmland protection projects and innovative agricultural conservation practices, and partnerships between the public and private sectors and community members, can create water-sharing strategies while simultaneously working to find alternative paths to a future with no water.

In the **Upper Basin**, the economy historically relied on extractive industries. A shift to an economy based on natural amenities has created abundant need to manage the impacts of recreation, steward open spaces and conserve the lands that draw so many to Colorado. Open space tax programs are one solution that can bolster conservation efforts tied to the management and protection of those lands, with significant economic benefits.

**ABCA members and their partners have much to learn and gain by working together and exploring solutions for large-scale impact.**

# Challenges

What are the challenges to achieving the ABCA's goals and vision?  
ABCA members have identified five areas to address.

## Limited funding.

The costs and fees associated with land purchases, conservation easement transactions and conservation implementation are high and serve as barriers to completing conservation. In the Arkansas Basin, these expenses don't balance out in the absence of dedicated open-space tax dollars and lack of local matching dollars, regional high poverty rates, and a dearth of private foundations focused on local and regional financial support. Competition against fellow land trusts and open space agencies for project grants or for remediation and restoration efforts creates missed opportunities for larger, collaborative efforts.

## Insufficient incentives.

Landowners and communities need more incentives to conserve land. For example, landowners receive state tax credits in exchange for donating conservation easements to land trusts. But currently, the value of those conservation easements is based on the lost opportunity to convert the lands to other uses. Conservation brings many non-financial benefits to communities that can be used as incentives, such as healthy wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, clean water and reduced soil erosion. Finally, the basin's widespread lack of state and local tax programs means that the region misses out on significant financial resources to conserve and steward more land.

## Missing connection and collaboration.

There is a lack of a shared strategy and bold vision among land trusts in the Arkansas Basin; they have good relationships with each other, but their conservation efforts are often fragmented. Disjointed efforts will lead to less overall conservation impact and less connection across communities that share many common values about what makes Colorado special. Similarly, the funding community is fragmented; funders must come together in collaboration to support conservation for deeper, more strategic impact.

## Development pressure.

Ongoing pressure on landowners to subdivide and sell their properties is significant given population growth, increased housing needs and energy development. These result in dramatic increases in recreation visitation; acute impacts on wildlife populations and their habitats; and water speculation due to increased demand for water. In parts of the basin where residential development pressure is relatively low, the potential for energy development is high. This creates longer-term challenges for protecting open space and plant and wildlife habitat, and for creating resiliency to drought and wildfire.



**From a sheer acreage perspective, many opportunities to conserve lands in the basin will disappear unless they are seized now.**

## Lack of broad support for conservation.

Conservation is not seen as a high-priority investment. Less recognition and appreciation for the importance of this work leads to less financial support and engagement. Across the basin, many people do not understand the work of land trusts and the public benefits of private land conservation, and there is a misconception about the role conservation plays in protecting these places.

# ABCA Member Snapshots

## Local and Regional

### Central Colorado Conservancy

[www.centralcoloradoconservancy.org](http://www.centralcoloradoconservancy.org)

**Area served:** Upper Arkansas Headwaters region (Chaffee and Lake counties); Park, Fremont, Saguache and Gunnison counties.

**Mission:** To protect the lands, waters and quality of life of central Colorado as our communities face pressure and rapid growth.

**Goals and priorities:** Protect and restore land at a landscape level, including source water and tributary protection and adjoining properties, specifically working lands; provide financial incentives for shorter-term land protection opportunities as a complement to traditional conservation easements; and acquire land.

### Watch:

[Now More Than Ever - A Documentary](#)



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### Palmer Land Conservancy

[www.palmerland.org](http://www.palmerland.org)

**Area served:** The full Arkansas River Basin with focus areas in Pueblo, Rocky Ford and Colorado Springs/Pikes Peak Region

**Mission:** To protect southern Colorado's lands for present and future generations.

**Goals and priorities:** Expand outdoor recreation and access; conserve local agriculture and water; and protect inspiring scenic views. Goals are currently focused on the Pikes Peak Region and Pueblo area.

### Watch:

[It's Why We Live Here](#)



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### Southern Plains Land Trust

[www.southernplains.org](http://www.southernplains.org)

**Area served:** Lower Arkansas Basin, primarily Bent, Baca and Prowers counties

**Mission:** To create and protect a network of shortgrass prairie preserves, which ensure a future for all native animals and plants.

**Goals and priorities:** Acquire land to establish shortgrass prairie preserves; ecologically restore those properties; and conduct community outreach and education to create new generations of leaders and deepen support for the work.

### Watch:

[Gaining Ground for Prairie Wildlife](#)



# ABCA Member Snapshots

## Statewide and National

### Contribution to the conservation landscape in the Arkansas Basin:

#### Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust | [www.ccalt.org](http://www.ccalt.org)

**Area served:** Statewide

**Mission:** To conserve Colorado's western heritage and working landscapes for the benefit of future generations.

Partnership-building, collaboration, strategic development.

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#### Colorado Open Lands | [www.coloradoopenlands.org](http://www.coloradoopenlands.org)

**Area served:** Statewide

**Mission:** To preserve the significant open lands and diminishing natural heritage of Colorado through private and public partnerships, innovative land conservation techniques, and strategic leadership.

Partnership-building, support of targeted acquisitions and other land trust priorities, and implementation of community outreach.

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#### The Conservation Fund | [www.conservationfund.org](http://www.conservationfund.org)

**Area served:** Statewide/National

**Mission:** To protect America's legacy of land and water resources through land acquisition, sustainable community and economic development, and leadership training, emphasizing the integration of economic and environmental goals.

Implementation partner for complex or larger-scale conservation acquisition projects, and conservation loan program partner.

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#### The Land Trust Alliance | [www.landtrustalliance.org](http://www.landtrustalliance.org)

**Area served:** Statewide/National

**Mission:** To save the places people need and love by strengthening land conservation across America.

Strengthening Colorado land trusts' skills and capacity to increase the rate, relevance, rigor and resilience of land conservation statewide.

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#### The Nature Conservancy | [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)

**Area served:** Statewide/National

**Mission:** To conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

Direct conservation action and parallel support of conservation partners to grow overall conservation capacity; innovation of strategies for direct land/habitat conservation, land management, and conservation-compatible community development.

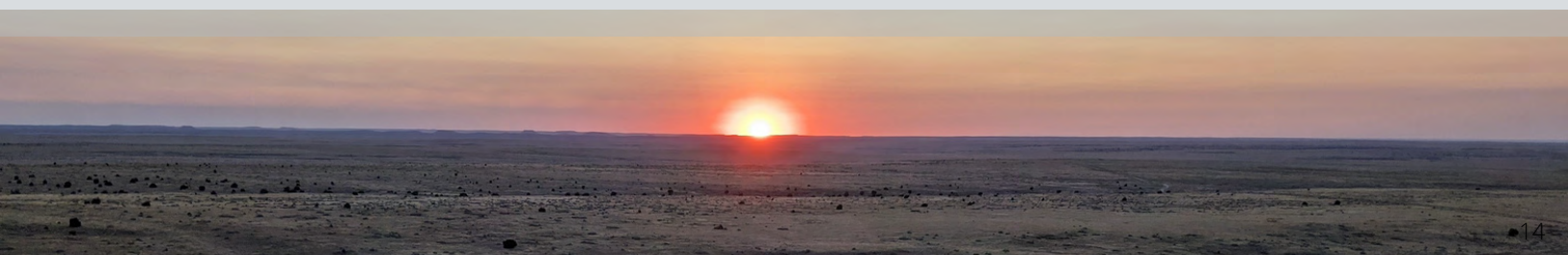
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#### The Trust for Public Land | [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org)

**Area served:** Statewide/National

**Mission:** To create parks and protect land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come.

Conservation real estate, conservation finance and advocacy.



# Partnerships

Collectively, land trusts serving the Arkansas Basin have partnered on conservation initiatives with dozens of local, regional, state and national organizations over the decades. Here are just a few.

## **Public Agencies**

Bureau of Land Management  
City of Colorado Springs  
Colorado Dept of Public Health & Environment  
Colorado Parks & Wildlife Wetlands and Wildlife Habitat Programs  
Colorado Water Conservation Board  
El Paso County  
Great Outdoors Colorado  
National Park Service  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Upper Arkansas Conservation District  
U.S. Forest Service - San Isabel

## **Conservation organizations**

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies  
Colorado Natural Heritage Program  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Ducks Unlimited  
Humane Society of the United States  
River Network

## **Nonprofits with common ground**

Bent County Historical Society  
Chaffee County Community Foundation  
Colorado Youth Corps Association  
Envision Chaffee County  
National Park Foundation  
Share the Spirit  
Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado

## **Community stakeholders and leaders**

Landowners/neighboring ranchers  
Local elected officials  
Local residents  
School teachers

**“We need the involvement of others to elevate the discussion, create priorities and be champions to push this effort forward.”**

*– Adam Beh, Central Colorado Conservancy*





# Looking Ahead

To date, ABCA activities have focused on organizing facilitated meetings to develop and discuss strategies, collaboration opportunities, and a vision for long-term conservation success in the Arkansas Basin. As a next step, one near-term objective is to leverage partners' tools such as The Nature Conservancy's Resilient and Connected Networks tool to identify priority landscapes, habitats and focus areas for coordinated work. The group will also identify co-projects or initiatives already underway as potential opportunities for collaboration.

In 2021 and beyond, the ABCA is committed to seeking on-the-ground opportunities to come together in collaboration, engage in conversations to learn how their individual efforts can be replicated for landscape-scale impact, and seek funding for their efforts.

**Economic vitality. Resilience to climate change. Healthy ecosystems. Cultural identity. Quality of life.** These are what's at stake in the Arkansas Basin without coordinated efforts and a vision to protect the region's lands for the future.

With their collective expertise in private lands conservation, community-focused work, built-in relationships and strong network of partners, the ABCA members are well-suited to take on the challenge. Through strategic coordination and financial support, they will be able to connect their conservation efforts and create new and innovative opportunities in conservation – forever protecting the lands, waters and wildlife that define the Arkansas Basin.

A woman wearing a dark field hat and a dark jacket is shown in profile, looking through a telescope. The background is a bright, hazy outdoor setting, possibly a field or a forest edge, with sunlight filtering through. The image is partially obscured by a large, semi-transparent yellow speech bubble containing text.

**“We're very excited about this budding alliance and opportunities for collaboration with other land trusts working in the Arkansas Basin.”**

*– Nicole Rosmarino,  
Southern Plains Land Trust*

**Join the conversation! Please contact us.**

Questions about the ABCA: Nicole Rosmarino at Southern Plains Land Trust ([spplt@southernplains.org](mailto:spplt@southernplains.org)) or Rebecca Jewett at Palmer Land Conservancy ([rebecca@palmerland.org](mailto:rebecca@palmerland.org))

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