

A Letter from the Executive Director

It feels as if the world is full of uncertainty these days, across so many aspects of our lives. As we face another likely major drought year, huge shifts to federal funding patterns impacting conservation, and societal tensions, our work is facing many challenges but has also never been so important. Through it all, there is one thing that seems to always remain clear, it is the land that connects us all and remains, for many, a place of respite, joy, safety, and escape. I know that I often turn to wild places, or pockets of nature in my community to find a moment of quiet or to get outside and enjoy time with my friends or family. Our connection to the natural world feels more and more critical, every day, and not only do these connections support our mental and physical health, but the land we work to conserve supports life on this planet.

We're excited and motivated this year to continue our efforts to conserve this beautiful landscape and work to make sure our entire community can enjoy the benefits of conservation. With three amazing projects in the works for 2025, MLC hopes to conserve nearly 7,000 acres before the year closes and our mission of community conservation continues to expand including our work with youth at Fozzie's Farm, our budding farmland access program, and our Traditional Harvest Project with the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. Helping to create these opportunities for the community to access land and enjoy the ways it enriches our lives is deeply important and part of the core of MLC's mission. Your ongoing support ensures this work can continue to thrive. I encourage us all to dig in this year – to expand our minds and our actions for conservation and community work, and to connect and support this work more, in whatever ways possible. Thank you for being a part of a brighter future for land and people.

With dedication and gratitude,

Travis Custer, Executive Director



Year in Review: 2024

Last year was really one for the books here at Montezuma Land Conservancy (MLC)! Thanks to the many members and partners like you who support our work, we accomplished a ton in 2024. Here are 10 of our favorite highlights from last year.



Permanently protected 2,000 acres of land including a property bordering Mesa Verde National Park and another on the West Fork of the Dolores River.



Permanently protected nearly 2 miles of river on the West Fork of the Dolores.



Engaged with over 400 youth & young adults through community programs based at Fozzie's Farm.



Hosted the 4th Annual Cross-Cultural
Programs Fall Event with the Ute
Mountain Ute Tribe.



Launched a new internship program offering career exploration experiences in agriculture, recreation, and conservation.



Moved into our new office in Cortez!



Planted 300+ native plants with 30 volunteers as part of restoration efforts supporting the Traditional Harvest Project with the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.



Offered new program opportunities in Spanish.



Hosted the 2nd Annual Cycle for Conservation bike tour presented by our Next Generation Advisory Board.



Got a tractor and side-byside to support work and access at Fozzie's Farm.



Looking south from the classroom at Montezuma Land Conservancy (MLC)'s Fozzie's Farm, a five-acre field stretches out, waiting to turn a long-held vision into reality. For years, Fozzie's Farm has been more than just an educational hub—a place to discuss regenerative farming, soil health, water and life in the rural West—it has also been a space where dreams take root. Today, Fozzie's stands near an exciting tipping point, poised to transform a vision into action by opening opportunities for young, diverse, and eager producers to begin their agricultural careers in a setting where the barriers to entry are significantly reduced.

A Changing Landscape

Across the country, including here in Southwest Colorado, a generational shift is reshaping agriculture. According to the Agrarian Trust, "An estimated 400 million acres—more than 40 percent of U.S. farmland—will change hands in the next 15 years as the average age of farmers in the U.S. approaches 60 years old. Next generation farmers, meanwhile, struggle to access land due to skyrocketing costs and insecure, short-term leases." Additionally, "These challenges disproportionately affect farmers of color. ...80 percent of farmworkers are people of color, yet people of color own just a tiny fraction of U.S. farmland less than 2 percent." The consequences of this shift are significant. Valuable agricultural land is at risk of development, and the knowledge and traditions of farming could be lost, all while barriers to farming for the next generation continue to exist. Locally, a growing number of young, passionate individuals are eager to farm but face the same challenges.

This is where Fozzie's Farm comes in. For several years now, Fozzie's has been envisioned as a potential incubator location for new farmers—providing the space, resources, and guidance needed to launch a viable agricultural career. That vision is now within reach as MLC continues to transform the farm to be ready to welcome a rising producer.

The Work That Brought Us Here

This transformation that brought us to where we are today by no means happened overnight. It took years of dedication, collaboration, and hard work. Past and present MLC staff, including Jay Loschert and Aidan Gaughran, along with numerous apprentices, volunteers, and supporters, have poured their energy and resources into building an environment where future farmers can thrive. Over the last eight years, since Fozzie's was generously donated to MLC, critical infrastructure has been put in place. Wildlife fencing, funded by the LOR Foundation, now protects the fields. A well-planned irrigation system, developed with support from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and local partners, ensures that water reaches the land where it is needed most. The classroom space welcomes students, while the living quarters upstairs provide a home for MLC staff who live on-site and steward the land. Thousands of volunteer and staff hours, generous donations, and a steadfast belief in the power of this vision have made these advancements possible.

Yet, some of the most important progress has happened beneath our feet.

The Magic Beneath the Soil

At Fozzie's, we often say that we are soil farmers first. Healthy soil is the foundation of everything we do. Over the years, we have worked tirelessly to restore and build soil vitality—using rotational grazing, strategic removal of invasive species, and regenerative practices. What was once a struggling landscape is now thriving, capable of sustaining crops and livestock in a way that aligns with ecological principles.

The transformation of the soil is a testament to patience, perseverance, and a focus on land stewardship. The hard work of restoring the land means that Fozzie's is more ready than ever to support a new generation of farmers. The vision below ground has been realized; now, it's time to bring that vision to the surface.

Welcoming a New Generation of Farmers

As Fozzie's prepares for this next phase, we are thrilled to have recently welcomed our new Community Programs Director, Andres Esparza, who comes to MLC with a wealth of knowledge, many years of experience working in conservation and education, and a proven track record for getting things done! Under Andres's leadership, picking up on the foundation that Jay and Aidan have started, we can't wait to see where this work will go. We are equally excited to welcome our new farm manager, a brand-new staff position at MLC, in Tanner Besse. Tanner, after graduating from Fort Lewis College with a Bachelors of Arts in Environmental Conservation and Management and a Regenerative Food Systems Certificate, is eager to continue exploring his passion in food systems and to gain hands-on experience cultivating resilient communities above and below the soil. Tanner will support MLC's farm apprentice program and steward the land as our team gets it ready for our first new producers. With a newly expanded team of three at Fozzie's in Andres, Aidan, and Tanner, MLC will ensure that the knowledge, skills, and community connections cultivated here continue to grow.

Reaching all of the above-mentioned milestones and growth is not the end of the journey. In order to realize the dream of farm access by working producers, we still need to accomplish a few more critical tasks such as installing drip irrigation infrastructure, acquiring some final farm implements and tools and, among the most important elements, constructing a wash and pack shed.

The Next Steps: Remaining Infrastructure

A wash and pack shed is a crucial element in any small-scale farming operation. After produce is harvested, it must be washed and packaged in a clean, food-safe environment before heading to market. This facility, once completed, will enable young farmers at Fozzie's to prepare their crops for sale efficiently, whether for farmers' markets, CSAs, or local grocery stores and restaurants. This, and the other final infrastructural components needed to support a rising producer, will ensure that Fozzie's can function as a fully equipped incubator farm in the not-too-distant future. This project is more than just the continued development of Fozzie's Farm—it represents the culmination of years of work and the bridge to the future of agriculture in our region.

A Call to Action

Like everything else that has already come to fruition at Fozzie's, this vision can only be realized through the collective efforts of those who believe in the power of sustainable agriculture and land stewardship. By investing in this effort, MLC will expand our community impact into the realm of helping to launch the careers of aspiring farmers, preserve agricultural land, and strengthen our local food system.

The Future is Now

Fozzie's Farm has always been a place where dreams can take root. The work done over the past eight years has brought us near to the tipping point—where vision meets reality, and where a new generation of farmers can step onto the land and begin their journey.

We invite you to be a part of this ongoing transformation. With your support, we can complete the final pieces of the puzzle and ensure that Fozzie's Farm reaches its highest potential and fulfills its purpose as a place of growth, learning, and opportunity.

Join us in making this vision a reality. The future of farming starts here.

montezumaland.org

Protecting the West Fork of the Dolores River

In late November 2024, Montezuma Land Conservancy (MLC) completed a highly impactful conservation easement to help protect the West Fork of the Dolores River for future generations. The Sturdevant Conservation Easement, totaling 302 acres, adds to MLC's ongoing efforts to protect and conserve the greater Dolores River watershed.

The newly conserved landscape was a high conservation priority on the West Fork due to the long length of river corridor it encompasses within its boundaries. The property follows the river uninterrupted for nearly two miles, notably farther than the other private parcels along the river's banks. Paired with another MLC conservation easement along the West Fork, the Sturdevant Easement now contributes to about five miles of continuous river corridor that is protected either through private land conservation easements or through Forest Service land protection. When taking into account MLC's conservation efforts within the larger Dolores River watershed, our organization now protects and stewards over 1,200 acres of land that runs along the Dolores River for a

total of six river miles. Despite increasing developmental pressure throughout the valley, this growing number of protected lands will help preserve the natural beauty of the area and permanently conserve the land and water of these easements for wildlife habitat, agricultural uses, and restoration efforts.

"The Sturdevant Easement contains conservation values only rarely found in the land conservation operational environment."

-Duncan Rose, Dolores River Anglers

In addition to the pressures on the West Fork from development and subdivision, MLC and our partners are also committed to working towards solutions to the ecological pressures on these landscapes presented by a changing climate. Warming temperatures, decreased water supply, and other issues are currently threatening habitat and food sources for native trout along the West Fork and the main stem of the Dolores. To address these challenges, there is a critical need for concerted and collaborative restoration efforts along these waterways. One of the key restoration techniques starting to be implemented on the West Fork is the installation of natural structures that increase the complexity of the river. These projects can include strategically placing larger rocks in the riverbed or adding large woody debris to certain areas in order to help recreate lost pools and pockets that are vital for trout habitat. To be successful, such efforts must include cooperation and partnerships with private landowners, public lands agencies, and non-profit conservation organizations like MLC, Trout Unlimited, and others. While MLC works to identify, assist, and work with landowners on restoration efforts along

these impacted waterways, it will take a village to make a lasting and sustainable impact. Restoring the trout population on these rivers is just the beginning as we work to improve watershed and forest health in the region.

The completion of the Sturdevant Easement would not have been possible without the landowner's long-term vision and love for this land, nor without the support of the Dolores River Anglers, the local chapter of Trout Unlimited. For Duncan Rose, conservation chair for the Dolores River Anglers, "The Sturdevant Easement contains conservation values only rarely found in the land conservation operational environment. Such alignment with the existing easement and U.S. Forest Service land creates the opportunity to enhance and strengthen challenged trout habitat with a breadth of strategic scope and scale rarely found in the San Juan Mountains."

MLC would like to extend a special thank you to the landowner of our new conservation easement, Trout Unlimited, project funders Keep It Colorado and The Walton Family Foundation's Colorado River Basin program, as well as the many other local landowners who have worked with MLC to conserve nearly 50,000 acres of important landscapes in Southwest Colorado. Landowners in Montezuma, Dolores, and San Miguel Counties interested in more information about conserving their land in partnership with MLC are always encouraged to contact our Conservation Director, Austin Easter, at austin@montezumaland.org, to chat about easements, and how your special place in our landscape can add to a growing legacy of conservation for generations to come.

Six Quick Facts About Conservation Easements

Conserving your land is always a big decision. Yet there is one thing that all landowners who have done so have in common: they love their land, they know it is part of their legacy, and they have a commitment to the future of our community. Here are a few key points to consider if you or someone you know is interested in land conservation.

For further information, please visit our website montezumaland.org or call us at 970-565-1664.

1. Ownership Retained

You retain your private property rights and can sell, lease, or pass your land on to your family.

2. Voluntary

Farm, ranch, or wildlife conservation easements are voluntary and do not require public access.

3. Tax Benefit

In Colorado, you can now receive up to 90% of the easement value in state tax credits.

4. Tailored to You

Each conservation easement is unique to the land it conserves and to your vision for your property.

5. Flexible

Farming, ranching, hunting, recreational uses, and a limited number of house sites and/or property divisions may be permitted.

6. Estate Planning Benefit

Conserving your land can help with your estate planning, reduce your estate taxes, and allow for a transition to the next generation.







During the late 1880s and early 1900s, the displacement of Indigenous peoples accelerated through land exchanges between the Spanish and United States governments and the establishment of the reservation system. The lands inhabited and hunted in by the Weenuche Band of the Ute people, now known as the Ute Mountain Ute, were reduced from an area covering the western flank of the Rocky Mountains in what is now Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, to the present-day Ute Mountain Ute Reservation, an area that in large part fits within just Montezuma and La Plata Counties in Southern Colorado, a mere fraction of the Weenuche ancestral homelands.

Last year, on a beautiful spring day in 2024, Ute Mountain Ute Elder Lisa Jacket walked and visited with landowners on County Road 39 near Mancos, Colorado. She spoke in the Ute language expressing gratitude to be back on the land where the old ones, her ancestors, lived and gathered. She imagined a time when people would have had their lodges set up here and movement would have started in the early morning hours. Now, here with the current owners of these properties, she shared what her mother and elders taught her growing up about being diligent and duty-bound, serving family and Mother Earth. The focus of this meeting between Lisa and the landowners was to plan for upcoming restoration efforts that will support future opportunities for traditional harvesting on privately owned lands by more members of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe (UMUT). "Being together, sharing the homelands of our ancestors gives us the pathway forward," said Lisa. "This opportunity will allow for us to move forward to teach our Ute communities, and future generations to learn the land and carry on."

That restoration work Lisa and project partners imagined on Road 39 began later last year on a brisk fall morning. Project coordinator Jesse Ramirez and MLC Conservation Director Austin Easter had organized a volunteer workday to plant seedlings on numerous Road 39 properties, voluntarily opened to the project by the landowners. Members of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and local volunteers gathered to transplant species with cultural value in order to increase the presence of plants that will soon be harvested to support Tribal ceremonies and traditions. The Traditional Harvest Project, a partnership effort between the UMUT, MLC, and international organization Trees, Water and People, was created to address some of the barriers that keep the Ute people from harvesting in their traditional and ancestral homelands: displacement and reservation establishment, and climate change. Being limited to access within the finite boundaries of the reservation, overharvesting has guickly become a serious issue for the Ute people. The impacts of climate change and drought threatening culturally significant plants have only exacerbated the problem of habitat loss for these plant communities.

Sequoia Whiteskunk of the UMUT joined the planting effort accompanied by her son Kiowon. Loading their backpacks with gloves, snacks and instructions, Sequoia and Kiowon were both filled with great excitement and curiosity. They were amazed at the beautifully scenic location with views to Mesa Verde and relatively near to the reservation. Kiowon brimmed with energy as they walked to locations they thought would be great homes to the plants they carefully carried. "My heart is happy that someone cares for the trees, and I am happy for those who took the time to grow the trees," shared Kiowon. "I am proud of myself and everyone that worked hard. I am happy we can have trees and plants we can use if we need them." Sequoia, too, reflected how rejuvenating it was to have the opportunity to share space with others and contribute such delicate assets to our environment, communities, and humanity. "On a day-to-day basis, we are selfish about our needs or wants but we never stop to think about our surroundings, plants, animals, and environments. I feel a sense of accomplishment as a being in the world to be able to aid in the healing of our Mother Earth. She provides so much. It was an honor to spend the day planting trees with others selflessly. I was proud to share the learning experience with my son firsthand. I hope he can carry this experience for a lifetime."

"Being together, sharing the homelands of our ancestors gives us the pathway forward. This opportunity will allow for us to move forward to teach our Ute communities, and future generations to learn the land and carry on."

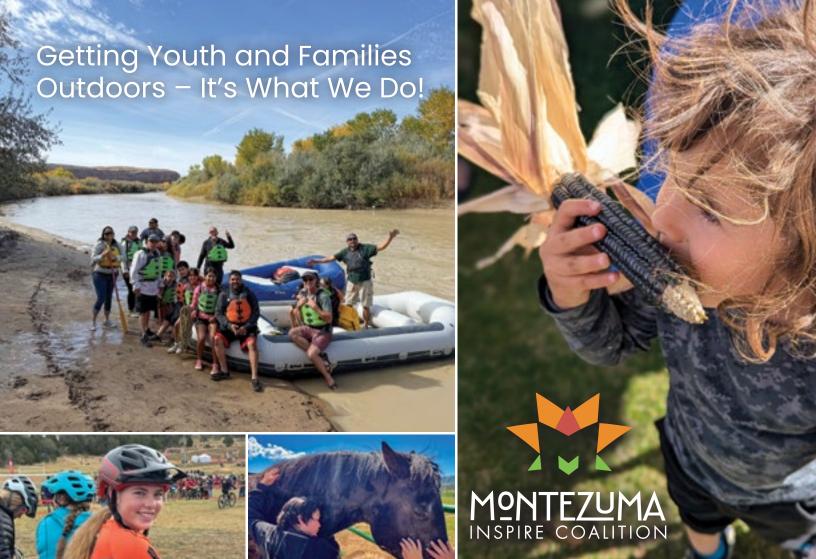
—Lisa Jacket

Another Ute Mountain Ute Tribal member in attendance, Dennis Orange, shared with others around him stories his grandmother told about harvesting willows to make cradleboards for the babies. As the day wound down to its close, and a sense of fulfillment and a vision for tomorrow was instilled in the volunteer group, Dennis asked organizers, "When is the next planting going to happen?"

With the challenges of today, MLC and our partners in this work seek opportunities to collaborate with others to make this kind of work a reality—partners such as volunteer landowners willing to allow for Tribally informed restoration and cultural harvesting opportunities on their lands; non-profit partner organizations like Trees, Water and People and Mountain Studies Institute to assist with site and restoration plans supporting the project; and the many community members who showed up to lend a hand and plant hundreds of trees. Relationships between people, and between people and the natural world are the strongest opportunities we can call upon to achieve great things, together.



We thank everyone in the MLC sphere who has joined us in supporting the Traditional Harvest Project: landowners, volunteers, project partners, and donors. As this effort continues to grow and reach more people and more land spaces, we invite everyone to get involved, in whatever way you can. For more information, please contact MLC Conservation Director Austin Easter, at austin@montezumaland.org, and stay tuned for updates on our next volunteer planting and restoration work events.



The mission of the **Montezuma Inspire Coalition** (MIC) is to get youth and families in Montezuma County OUTSIDE, learning, playing, discovering, and enjoying the outdoors. We are made up of nine different organizations in Montezuma County who all work together on this goal. The Montezuma Land Conservancy (MLC) is the fiscal agent for, and active partner in, the Montezuma Inspire Coalition. A few of our accomplishments, activities and programs we provided last fall include:

- Provided 33 outdoor field trips to rivers, canyons, gardens, agricultural lands, and forests for Montezuma County youth.
- Delivered garden programs for Mancos Schools, Cortez Middle School, Kemper and Mesa Elementary schools (reaching 989 students).
- Supported Nature Clubs in Mancos and Friday Fundays in Dolores (62 youth).
- Guided youth throughout the county in life skills development including leadership, character strengths, and social-emotional learning activities.
- Coached 47 youth in mountain biking while also teaching compassion, confidence and perseverance.
- Provided outdoor jobs for six youth and young adults in agriculture and mountain biking.
- Connected with 460 members of the public through community events.
- · Loaned outdoor gear to 29 community members.
- In 2024 overall we took over 5,110 participants outdoors through programs, jobs, and community events!

MIC is gearing up for spring field trips, summer camps, jobs and other outdoor opportunities for Montezuma County youth and families. Remember to keep an eye on our Facebook page and website (montezumainspire.org) for more information.

With Gratitude

Montezuma Land Conservancy's community-centered conservation work is only possible because of the generosity of our community of supporters. It is your passion plus action that makes our community a special place to live, work and play for today, tomorrow and generations to come. THANK YOU for your belief in MLC and our mission. Together, we are changing lives through land conservation by connecting people to place, forever. *Please notify our office of any errors or omissions.*

Kris Abrams & Lisa Martin

William Aldorfer

Jane Anderson & William Morris

Anonymous (3)

Anonymous IHO Pauline & IMO Richard

Claire Ashworth Doug & Deanna Bagge Robert & LouAnn Ball

Richard & Mary Lyn Ballantine

Patrick Barker

Eileen Barrett & Sam MacBride

The Robert & Virginia Bayless Family Fund

David Becher

Jeanne & Joe Becker Linda & Bernard Bell Courtney Bennett Lee Bennett

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Rick Corbitt

M Deborah Corley & Gary Whiteside

Robyne Cote Sammie Coulon Lauren Cramer Ken & Shelley Curtis Jeffrey Custer Jon Davison Durfee Day Laura DeWitt

Julie Dobson IHO Katherine Dobson

Katherine Dobson

Joellen Dickey

Mary Dodd

Jody Donnelly IMO Vince Lee

Emma Duke Lynn Dyer

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Dolores Food Market
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Love Sprouts Botanical Bodyworks
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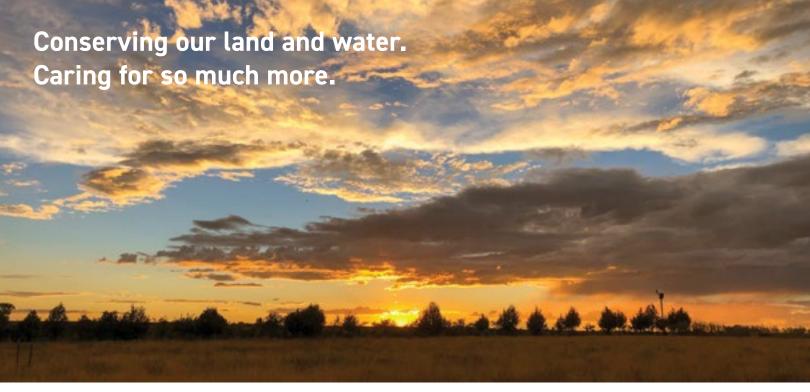
Catena Foundation
City Market Cares
Colorado Health Foundation
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Community Foundation serving Southwest Colorado
Gates Family Foundation
Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO)
Keep It Colorado
Land Trust Alliance

Mesa Verde Gardeners
Moniker Foundation
Mountain Studies Institute
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation
Rakuten
Southwest Basin Round Table
Southwest Health System
Telluride Foundation
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Virga Foundation

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Kokopelli Bike and Board
Mama Bears Bakery & Books
Montezuma Orchard Restoration Project
Painted Turtle Studio & Gallery
Patagonia Telluride
Road 39 Ranch



With your support, together we are caring for:

Our past – by preserving our histories through land conservation and storytelling
 Our future – by engaging and inspiring the next generation through conservation
 Our culture – by protecting the rural, Indigenous, agricultural, and recreational traditions that define our region
 Our community – by making conservation about more than land, but about our connections to both land and each other

The work that MLC does every day would not be possible without our community of supporters. **Every day, your contributions make a lasting impact on the lands and communities of Southwest Colorado.** Whether it's through annual membership, monthly Sage Support, or other planned giving, you help us make a difference. If you or your family desire to leave a lasting investment, please visit our "Ways to Give" page on our website for more information, or call our office at 970-565-1664 to start the conversation.

WAYS TO GIVE

Sage Support

Through ongoing monthly contributions, Sage Supporters help sustain our work all year through. It is so easy to become a member or renew your support. Just visit our website at montezumaland. org/donate to set up an automatic, recurring monthly gift through our Sage Supporter program, or a one-time gift.

Sandstone Circle – A Legacy Giving Circle
One of the easiest ways to leave a legacy gift is through a
Beneficiary Form Designation. When you leave a gift via your
will or estate planning to MLC, you leave a lasting impact on
our community that will live on for generations. If you choose to
leave a planned legacy gift to MLC, please let us know so that
we may thank you in your lifetime.

Donations of Real Estate

A donation of property can be considered a tax-deductible gift and may be an opportunity to further support the mission of conservation, land access, or community-centered programs. Landowners considering a gift of real estate are encouraged to reach out to us to discuss their visions for the property and ways in which it may support our mission now, or in the future.

Gifts of Stock

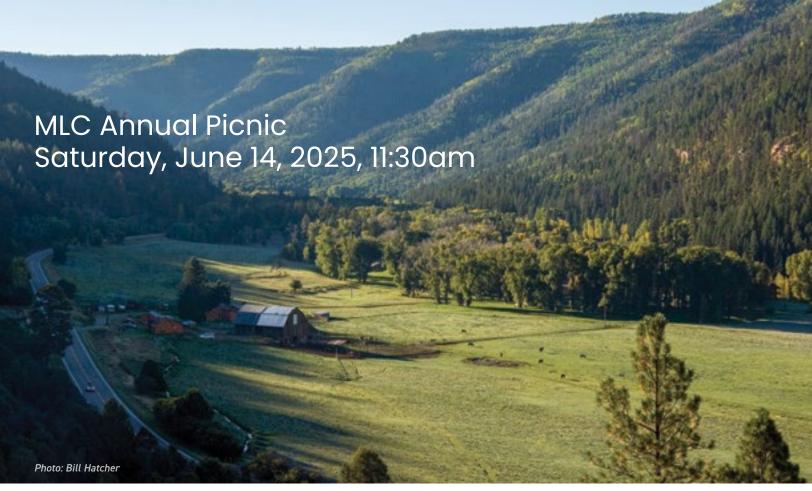
Gifts of stock, bonds, or mutual funds are a great way to support MLC and can additionally help a donor avoid capital gains taxes or receive an income tax deduction. Simply contact us for our account info and authorize your broker to transfer shares to Montezuma Land Conservancy.

In-Kind Gifts

We are in need of large items like working vehicles, trucks, and farm tools and equipment. If you have items related to our work that you no longer need, please contact us to discuss if our wish list matches your old, unneeded items.

Support MLC While You Shop

MLC participates in the City Market Cares Program. You can help MLC while you shop for groceries simply by setting your City Market shopper account to donate to MLC. Your purchases automatically result in quarterly donations to us.



Please join us for our Annual Picnic! This event is one way we like to thank and celebrate the many members and partners of our organization who help to make our community-centered conservation work possible.

This year's event will take place at the conserved Redburn Ranch located at 26204 Highway 145. A complimentary lunch and a short program will be followed by an opportunity to take a walk on the property along the Dolores River.

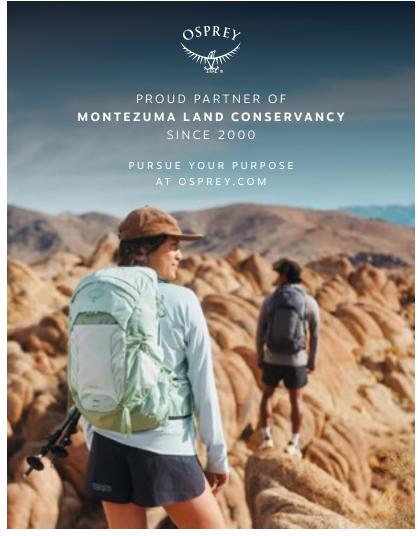
Please bring your own outdoor chair. No dogs, please.

RSVP by June 8 to ensure your lunch!

RSVP using the QR code or link provided, or by calling our office at 970-565-1664.



https://forms.office.com/r/CM8P62aSRD





P.O. Box 1522 Cortez, CO 81321 970-565-1664

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Keep connected.

Stay in the know about new projects, volunteer opportunities, conservation tips, and community events.

Call us or find us online:

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