open SPACES

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACE

Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust

For Generations To Come

FALL 2021

Our mission is to protect, connect, and enhance wildlife habitat, working lands, and community spaces in Southeast Idaho, now and for future generations.

Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust

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Mission

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Cover Photo

Volunteers Duane Dyer and Bill Kessler on the Dugouts conservation easement property.

Welcome
TO THE LAND TRUST TEAM!

Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust is pleased to welcome Matt Coombs to the team as the Conservation Coordinator for the Bear River Watershed. Matt grew up in northern Utah helping his dad and grandfather on the family's small farm and cattle ranch. He earned a bachelor's degree in Business and Economics from the University of Idaho before moving to South America where he spent 3.5 years working with the Peace Corps to support local communities in sustainable agriculture, agribusiness, and natural resources projects.

Matt met his wife, Casey, just before leaving Ecuador and returned to her home state of New York where they spent several years managing small farms and community supported agriculture programs in New York's Hudson Valley. Matt became involved with the Orange County Land Trust (OCLT) after hosting one of their events at a farm he was managing and eventually went to work assisting with land stewardship and the development of several community-based conservation projects with both OCLT and Groundwork Hudson Valley.

Matt and Casey returned to Utah in 2011 to attend graduate school at Utah State University where Matt studied landscape architecture and earned a Master's degree in Bioregional Planning. Matt's graduate work included a baseline study to support a comprehensive management plan for Utah's sovereign land resources along the Bear River. He was hired by the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands as the Bear River Area Sovereign Lands Coordinator and spent 7 years working on everything from environmental permitting to vegetation management, recreational access and infrastructure projects at Bear Lake, Bear River and the north end of the Great Salt Lake.

Matt and Casey live in Cache Valley where they enjoy sharing the region's many wonderful outdoor and recreational opportunities with their two children, Claire and Ben. Matt looks forward to working with private landowners and partners throughout the Bear River Watershed to help preserve critical components of the landscape, support the livelihoods of local farmers and ranchers, and maintain our rich quality of life and regional identity for future generations.

Conservation Interest CONTINUES TO GROW

As the number of landowners interested in conservation easements continues to grow in our region, Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust must also increase our financial and staff capacity in order to take on more projects. Conservation easement agreements are complex real estate transactions that require significant funding and time to coordinate. Then there are due diligence costs (baseline reports, title reports, mineral reports, legal consultation, etc.) and stewardship costs (annual monitoring, legal defense, etc.) associated with every conservation easement. Growing our organization to meet the increasing needs of landowners means hiring the right personnel to negotiate, coordinate, and draw up these legal agreements with interested and willing landowners.

To increase capacity, the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust in partnership with the Bear River Land Conservancy has hired Matt Coombs to oversee conservation easements in the Bear River Watershed. As the Coordinator, Matt will work with agencies and partners within the watershed to secure funding, prioritize conservation projects, and establish conservation easements throughout the entire watershed. Since Matt will be handling easements in the Bear River Watershed, this will open up space for our Conservation Manager, Jaime Campbell to focus on securing funding and easements in other parts of our service area – protecting more land for generations to come.

Workplace Culture:
A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust is a community-based, non-profit organization serving seven counties in Southeastern Idaho whose mission focusses on protecting and conserving natural resources and landscape characteristics, that benefit people now and for our future.

Enduring conservation hinges on the land trust's ability to build partnerships with a diverse cadre of landowners and collaborators who are connected to the lands we seek to conserve. We believe conservation success begins in the workplace where staff, board members, volunteers, supporters, and external partners are encouraged to contribute to our culture of respect for people with widely diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities.

We are stronger when we work together, leveraging our different experiences and expertise to better understand the values, traditions and needs of our local communities and cultures that make our corner of Idaho so special.

That's why we are investing in our board and staff team through training and educational opportunities which focus on strengthening diversity, equity and inclusion for people and place.

This step in our growth as an organization demonstrates our commitment to building an intentional culture of belonging by honoring the differences of our colleagues, landowners, and partners which leads to practical and long-term conservation solutions. As an organization, we are committed to growing responsibly and sustainably and recognize it is a shared obligation.

Habitat
HOMES

By Tim Norton, SSLT Artist in Residence

When I was first introduced to the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust, I found myself wishing that I had the land holdings to donate a conservation easement. However, I soon realized that most conservation work has to do with habitat preservation and I did have a land holding…my own backyard!

I then began to notice different species visiting my yard; birds, bees, and butterflies that migrate and use backyards as stopover sites to forage and nest. Understanding the importance of native plants to our native pollinators, I began to create my 'Habitat Home'. Soon my bee houses were occupied by leaf cutter and mason bees, and my bird houses by three families of house wrens.

As I continue to study native bees and birds, my excitement grows. I am now as excited to see bumble bees as I am to see deer and moose in the gully behind my home.

Coming spring of 2022, Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust and partnering nurseries will work together to provide you with knowledge and supplies to create habitat for pollinators and songbirds in your very own backyard! The program will focus on water conservation techniques, native plants, xeriscaping and more.

By giving a little bit of space back to nature, we hope to invite nature back into our neighborhoods.
For those interested in a little competition, we will present a series of awards to participating individuals at the end of the growing season. Participants will need to register with the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust in March of 2022. Please keep an eye on our website and social media pages for more information as it becomes available.

Please note, this program focuses on promoting pollinator success and does not encourage creating habitat for big game species.

My Part In Restoring KACKLEY SPRINGS

By Muriel Roberts, SSLT Volunteer

Over the last three years, as a volunteer, I have tended to the trees being raised by the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust at the Chubbuck United Methodist Church. These trees were planted back in the spring of 2018 and given a chance to grow before transferring them to the Kackley Springs preserve in the spring of 2021.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of touring Kackley Springs and seeing these trees in their new home. John Sigler - a Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust Board Member who spearheaded the church nursery project - his wife Betty, and another volunteer by the name of Sandra Thorne-Brown – who was instrumental in this project – lead the tour of this beautiful 200-acre preserve west of Grace, Idaho. Not only is the preserve a beautiful natural open space, which will never be developed, but it is also actively managed for Bonneville cutthroat trout – a conservation priority species. These trees will provide the trout with cover from avian predators and contribute to the health of the ecosystem overall.

It was a pleasure to see how the trees I, and many other volunteers, had cared for all these years were thriving in their new home. A lot of time, effort, and money has been invested into these trees to provide cover for native fish – but I believe it has been worth the investment. The preserve is a very inviting place, not only for fish and wildlife, but for community members interested in nature walks, fishing, picnicking, and more. Kackley Springs is one of Southeast Idaho's natural treasures – it was a pleasure to be involved in the restoration effort.

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Plants & STEWARDSHIP

Developing a robust inventory of plants on our conservation properties is an important component of our stewardship program. Some plants provide essential nutrients to animals, while others can cause harm and even death. Some plants are invasive and outcompete native plants for space and nutrients. As a land steward, knowing which plants are on the landscape can help us make informed management decisions.

Every year, the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust and volunteers monitor each conservation easement the Land Trust holds, and the properties that it owns in fee. Although we monitor everything from landscape changes, to wildlife presence, we also identify plants for the benefit of land managers.

Take a look at two native species we were able to identify this monitoring season:

"Yellow Owl's Clover is one of my favorite plant species! The name alone evokes a happy spiritual-ness. This lovely annual (it grows from seed, flowers, fruits and dies within one year's time) is not commonly seen. I have been fortunate to observe and photograph it on SSLT conservation easement properties. It is considered an herb, which is a plant species lacking woody tissue when mature. The inflorescence is a beautiful yellow and it generally blooms July-September. Also known as *Orthocarpus leteus*, it is a native to much of western and central North America where it grows in many types of plateaus, grassland, and mountain habitats.

Yellow Owl's-Clover can grow to 1 1/2' tall and its drought tolerance is high which makes it very suited to our sagebrush steppe habitat. This unique plant likes the sun and is not shade tolerant. The name "Owl's-Clover" may refer to the eye-like spots on the petals of some species or, picturesquely, to the swollen head-like ends of the erect corollas that seem to peer from the bracts as owls peer from leaves of a tree. What do you see?" – Sarah Jackson

"Grassy Tarweed (*Madia gracilis*) is a small green plant with small yellow blossoms and a strong smell. Growing up to 36 inches in height, this annual herb grows on open to partially shaded slopes in shrublands, meadows, and grasslands. Land managers often use it to stabilize soils and control erosion in recently disturbed landscapes. Native to western North America, Grassy Tarweed provides food to a variety of small mammals and native birds." – Duane Dyer

Top: Yellow Owl Clover by Sarah Jackson
Middle & Bottom: Grassy Tarweed by Duane Dyer

Thank you, High Desert Chapter of the Idaho Master Naturalists, for supporting our mission and connecting us with volunteers who are dedicated to landscape and open space protection.

Sagebrush Steppe Biome

& ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES

By John Sigler, SSLT Board Member

SAGEBRUSH IN SOUTHEAST IDAHO

Anyone who lives in southeast Idaho is familiar with sagebrush rangelands. Take a drive anywhere from Idaho Falls to Montpelier, or through Malad and into Utah and the predominant view out the windshield is sagebrush in seemingly endless rolling hills. Taking a drive through southeast Idaho, one might assume that sagebrush habitat really is endless in this area.

Sagebrush Ecosystems occur in the Northern Mid-Latitude region of western North America, covering approximately 165 million acres. While it might seem that sagebrush habitat is endless in southeast Idaho, the reality is that barely one (1) percent of the sagebrush steppe ecotype that existed prior to European settlement remains in the western states, including losses in portions of Idaho.

Actually, two natural vegetation types are included in most descriptions of the sagebrush biome: sagebrush steppe and sagebrush shrubland. Although the distinction between sagebrush steppe and sagebrush shrubland is often difficult, there are differences. In sagebrush steppe communities, grass and forb species more or less co-dominate with sagebrush with as many as 40 species of grasses, forbs, and other brush species, while in sagebrush shrubland, sagebrush dominates, and is accompanied by few grasses and forbs. Both community types provide habitat for as many as 250 vertebrate species.

Above: Rattlesnake found and photographed by Duane Dyer on a conservation easement property along Mink Creek in Franklin County.

The international 30x30 initiative is a broad coalition of individuals, NGOs, government agencies, and state and federal stakeholders who support the concept that thirty (30) percent of all ecosystems, terrestrial, marine, estuarine, should be protected from development by the year 2030 - hence 30x30."

VALUE OF SAGEBRUSH STEPPE ECOTYPE AS WILDLIFE HABITAT

Sagebrush steppe habitat varies from location to location across Idaho and the west. One consistent factor, however, is the diversity among both plants and animals. Dozens of plant species and dozens of vertebrate and non-vertebrate animal species provide great diversity across this biome. Plant species provide forage for an abundance of primary consumers and prey species at several levels provide forage for predators such as coyotes, raptors, and snakes. Sagebrush steppe biome habitat also provides nesting and brood rearing habitat for various game birds and critical habitat for big game species such as pronghorn, mule deer, and elk.

HOW CAN INDIVIDUALS HELP PRESERVE PORTIONS OF THE SAGEBRUSH STEPPE ECOTYPE?

A variety of local and national organizations are actively working across the western United States to preserve portions of the sagebrush steppe biome. Individuals can become involved with local, regional, or national and international NGOs to help promote the 30 x 30 initiative. Local land trusts are a good resource for additional information and for opportunities to help fund preservation of wildlands.

The following websites contain more information that readers are encouraged to explore:

https://wrangle.org/ecotype/north-american-sagebrush-steppe-and-shrubland

https://massivesci.com/articles/saving-sagebrush-american-west/

https://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/sciencef/scifi91.pdf

https://wa.audubon.org/news/2021-sagebrush-steppe-initiative

https://www.nrdc.org/30x30-nrdcs-commitment-protect-nature-and-life-earth

Above: Coyote pup photographed by Mike Bass
Below Left: Sage-grouse photographed by Mike Bass
Below Right: Pronghorn

The Habitat IMPROVEMENT TEAM

In 2017, Itafos Conda, LLC (formerly known as Agrium) voluntarily provided approximately $1.2 million to establish the Southeastern Idaho Wildlife Habitat Mitigation Fund as part of the approval process for the Rasmussen Valley phosphate mine. Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust is the non-profit organization that administers these funds and coordinates the Habitat Improvement Team – a team of tribal, state, and federal agency representatives who are responsible for allocating the Habitat Mitigation Funds.

This fall, the Habitat Improvement Team conducted post-implementation site visits to 3 projects that were awarded restoration funding in 2019:

Trout Unlimited, in partnership with a private landowner, restored approximately 3,000 feet of streambank along the Upper Blackfoot River. By planting willows along the streambank, they were able to provide cover for native fish from avian predators and stabilize an eroding bank. Trout Unlimited also installed various streambank stabilizing structures.

The Idaho Department of Fish & Game completed phase one of their restoration efforts on the Blackfoot River Wildlife Management Area. Conifers were removed from upland aspen forests and then used to construct streambank stabilization structures along the Blackfoot River. Riffles were constructed within the river along with narrowing the widened channel to provide habitat complexity for native fish.

Along Tincup Creek, Trout Unlimited has successfully completed all three phases of their restoration efforts to restore eroding meander bends, reconnect old meanders, and raise the riffle elevations – creating habitat complexity along Tincup Creek.

THANK YOU, EIZAAK JORDAN

Sagebrush Steppe would like to thank our incredible Community Conservation intern, Eizaak Jordan. During his time with us he has been simultaneously working to complete his Bachelor's Degree in Political Science, and hosting the Sustainable Idaho program on KISU.

Eizaak started his internship at SSLT in May of 2021 – by taking initiative to ask if we had capacity for him to intern with us. At the time he was an active member in the ISU Sustainability Club, who had reached out to SSLT to join monthly club meetings. Since then, Eizaak has been focused on getting more involved with his community and worked with our Conservation Manager to establish a Career Path Internship position through ISU – a program which supports students in finding on-the-job experience in their field, right here in Pocatello. Now the Sustainability Club president, Eizaak is leaving an encouraging legacy for his peers – setting the stage for the club to accomplish big sustainability initiatives at ISU, and continue engaging in community conservation opportunities. His biggest strength is getting others excited about what they can do to inspire the change they want to see.

While with SSLT, Eizaak has helped plan the Poky Paddle and helped facilitate and coordinate monthly meetings for the Portneuf River Vision Action group, Portneuf Watershed Partners group, River Vision Implementation Committee, and a Portneuf River Vision Economic Development Study with graduate students at ISU. He also assists with community presentations, conservation projects, and (keeping the Conservation Manager sane.) SSLT appreciates his hard work, dedication, and his unfailing ability to make us smile.

We may not have much longer with Eizaak as he approaches the completion of his degree, but we know that he will go on to do great things for people and the planet.

JOIN PRVA

The Portneuf River is a defining feature of our great community and we take being good stewards of that seriously! If river health, community resiliency, and recreational opportunities are important to you, please consider joining the Portneuf River Vision Action (PRVA) group. This group meets on a monthly basis to accelerate the pace of the implementation of the Portneuf River Vision (for more info go to https://river.pocatello.us/) Be a part of something big in our community as we work to implement the Portneuf River Vision!

Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable organization incorporated in 2004, and a "qualified organization" within the meaning of section 170(h)(3) of the IRS Code. Federal Tax Identification Number: 82-6092501.

Donate today through our secure website at https://sagebrughlandtrust.org/ or by mailing in a check to Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust, PO Box 1404, Pocatello, ID 83204.

ONLINE AUCTION TO REPLACE IN-PERSON HOLIDAY EVENT

November 12th-19th

To best serve our community, partners, and landowners during the recent surge in COVID-19 transmission rate, Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust will not host an in-person holiday event. However, we welcome everyone to join the Land Trust in a competitive, yet friendly, round of bidding on a variety of unique items and outdoor experiences. The auction is to take place online at sagebrushsteppelandtrustauction2021.afrogs.org

High Stepper Raffles- November 1-12

The winners of each raffle will be drawn and announced on November 12th. For more information, please visit our website (https://sagebrushlandtrust.org)

Enjoy a week-long stay in a private cabin along the Henry's Fork of the Snake River in Island Park. We are selling 10 tickets at $200 each.

Enjoy an overnight float on the South Fork of the Snake River. We are selling 10 tickets at $200 each.

Giving Tuesday - November 30

Giving Tuesday is a global generosity movement, unleashing the power of people and organizations to transform communities and their world. Please consider supporting organizations within your community by volunteering, donating, and more. Visit givingtuesday.org for more information.

First Friday Art Show To Benefit The Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust In November

Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust Artist in Residence (AIR), Tim Norton, and former AIR, Cindi Walton, along with Teresa Roberts and Paige Weber, will be showcasing their artwork at the Portneuf Brewery during the month of November. Each artist will donate the proceeds from a piece of artwork to the Land Trust. Stop by and help support your local Land Trust and artists.