

open SPACES

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACE



Sagebrush
Steppe Land Trust
For Generations To Come
FALL 2025

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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PO Box 1404
Pocatello, ID 83204
208.240.6045
www.sagebrushlandtrust.org

Mission

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

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Matt Coombs

**Conservation Easement
Project Manager**
Matt Martens

**Community Conservation,
Communications and Marketing
Coordinator**
Carly Flandro

Legal Advisor
Andy Wayment

Cover Photo

By: Sarah Jackson, view of
Oneida Narrows from a
conservation easement

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Well in case you haven't noticed, there have been a lot of changes at Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust. In the past eight months we have lost our beloved Matt Lucia (although he is close at hand) to the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Amme to the federal government in her home state back east, and Lilly to her dream job of ranch management in Colorado (not to mention her boyfriend).

Due to these departures we needed to replenish our team, so we have added Abby Kiefner (office administrator), Emma Morton (Development Coordinator), and Carly Flandro (Community Conservation/Communications Coordinator)! I could not be more happy with the team, top to bottom the best I have ever worked with!

Through our group effort we have launched a corporate partnership campaign, started a group targeted campaign for increasing membership, community integration, community partnerships, and visibility (Emma, Carly, and Abby). All while continuing our work to steward our current easements and fee title properties (Eric and Hannah), and working very diligently to protect more land.

I am sure you are aware of the funding challenges we are facing due to the changes in the way the federal government is doing business, and thankfully with the new additions to this team I feel that SSLT is better positioned than ever to not only survive but thrive in this environment! That said, your contribution to SSLT and our mission have a greater priority and need now more than ever. **Our mission is to protect, connect, and enhance wildlife habitat (open spaces), working lands (food security and an Idaho way of life) and community spaces (working with communities to impact the health of our inhabitants) here in Southeast Idaho.** Investing in our future is going to be more imperative and difficult than ever.

I can point to my predecessor, our partnership with Bear River Land Conservancy, and our conservation team (Matt Coombs and Matt Martens) to show success in our ability to take your unrestricted donation and use it as a match to produce a much greater impact in our landscape than the actual value of a gift could pay for on its own. For example, we received an anonymous pledge of \$500,000 dollars to be used in an unrestricted manner in the Bear River Watershed. The gift has allowed us to dynamically respond to the work that was needed to protect 5,000 acres in the past two years, with an additional seven active projects that will result in several more thousand acres in protection as they close. Due to the unrestricted nature of this gift, we have been able to leverage \$11.5 million in public and private funding to protect land in the Bear River Watershed, protect 5,000 acres and give our highly skilled, committed team the ability to do their work.

So every dollar you can spare could have an order of magnitude greater impact in protecting our beloved South East Idaho Landscape.

Please stop in for coffee and conversation, we would love to introduce you to the team.

I hope you are having a great fall, and PLEASE STAY SAFE!

Heath Mann
Executive Director



Heath Mann

MEET OUR *newest* SAGEBRUSH STEPPERS!



Carly Flandro

We are thrilled to welcome Carly Flandro to the team! Carly joined the staff in late July as our community conservation, communications and marketing coordinator.

Carly is a Pocatello local who grew up biking, running, skiing, and hiking in the hills surrounding her hometown. She has come to love the sagebrush steppe and all the life it teems with — from junipers and wildflowers to mule deer and songbirds. Today, she continues to enjoy it in all four seasons with her husband, daughter, and two dogs.

With a background in education and journalism, Carly is excited to share the land trust's mission and vision with a wider audience, and to forge stronger partnerships with Southeast Idahoans who care about conserving open spaces in this special corner of the state. Carly has a master's degree in English from Idaho State University and a bachelor's degree in journalism and Spanish from the University of Montana.



David Doran

We are excited to announce that David Doran joined our board of directors in June.

As a descendant of pioneering settlers who helped shape the Bear Lake Valley with cattle and horse ranching, Dave carries forward a multi-generational love affair with Idaho's wild places. When not connecting people and resources, you'll find Dave carving turns on backcountry slopes, casting flies on remote streams, pedaling mountain trails, or shouldering a pack toward the next ridge. This outdoor obsession isn't just recreation—it's a calling that drives his commitment to preserving the open spaces and wildlife corridors that make Idaho extraordinary.

With a Master of Public Administration from Idaho State University (emphasis of Environmental Sciences), Dave's experience includes connecting multimodal transportation systems, rural community and economic development infrastructure, executive non-profit management, and transformative fundraising, grantmaking, and government-corporate relations.

Dave's experience in national, state, and regional coalition building, along with transformative philanthropic advancements in technological innovation and higher education, has positioned this board member to use these crafted skill sets in support of the SSLT organization and mission.



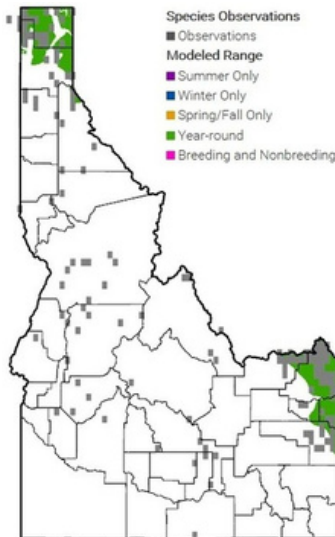
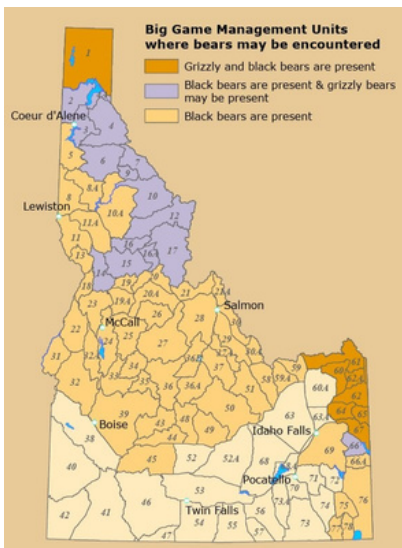
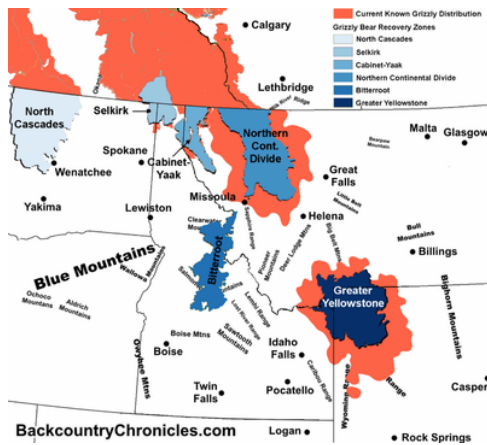
BEYOND THE SIGHT LINE: GRIZZLY BEARS, CONSERVATION, AND THE LAND WE LOVE

By Matt Martens

Grizzly bears may not be the first thing that come to mind when you think of Southeastern Idaho, but this region is actually an important connection to one of their well-known homes — the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem or GYE. While mule deer, elk, and migratory birds are more common frequenters of this corner of the state, the chance of a bear finding its way into, say, Caribou County, is becoming a real possibility. With grizzly populations increasing since landing on the endangered species list in 1975 (rising from a dangerously low estimate of 300-400 animals to something around 2,000 bears today), their footprints are splaying into mud that hasn't seen such tracks for decades.

From desert to woodlands, Southeast Idaho is a wildlife destination

There are two distinct ecological regions in the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust (SSLT) service area, according to the 2023 Idaho State Wildlife Action Plan 2023. The westernmost region, the Intermountain Semi-Desert and Desert Province, encompasses landscapes surrounding the Snake River Basin, including the majority of vital sagebrush steppe habitat which gives our land trust its name. This ecosystem — so well-suited for species like the greater sage grouse and ferruginous hawk — surrounds working farms, population centers, and countless homes dotted throughout the seven counties of our service area. It is famous both for its conservation values and the identity derived by those who work and play among its many coulees and vast expanses. But as those long, sunset-straddled ranges give way to mountains towering over our highways and backyards, the second ecoregion of our land trust territory comes into stark view.



“ Southeast Idaho is famous both for its conservation values and the identity derived by those who work and play among its many coulees and vast expanses. ”

The Southern Rocky Mountain Steppe – Open Woodland – Coniferous Forest – Alpine Meadow Province, which might hold the record for longest ecoregion moniker, makes up the remainder of the acres in which we do our work.

It is this ecoregion, varying in elevation from around 4,800 feet to pushing 10,000 feet, mixed with quaking aspen, lodgepole pine, and evergreen needleleaf forest, that connects us to the grizzly bear. The ecological boundary essentially follows the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. This massive world of its own encompasses over three million acres across Southeastern Idaho, Western Wyoming, and parts of Utah. On a 2D map it resembles fingers of green moss eking their way into the Snake River Basin from a center mass swallowing Yellowstone National Park and Jackson Hole, Wyoming. These latter haunts are legendary for grizzlies, but as their populations increase, they will be roaming beyond those familiar territories.

Wandering bears, expanding territory

As managers, state and federal agencies, and conservation groups work to protect habitat and wildlife populations, the importance of connectivity becomes glaringly obvious. Grizzly bears need a home range covering anywhere from 50 to 500 square miles depending on sex, environmental factors, and resource availability. Bears, especially juvenile males, are known to wander as much as 50 miles a day. Sightings have increased in recent years in counties bordering Montana and Wyoming. Caribou County could easily be next.

Grizzly bears can present an enormous challenge for landowners and cattle producers (not to mention recreators and the general public) as their population increases. The risk of encounters and livestock depredation rises with the success story of their recovery. The good news on this front is that the odds of running into *Ursus arctos horribilis* in our service area remain extremely low. In the 2020 brochure “How To Hunt Safely In Grizzly Bear Country” issued by Idaho Fish and Game, there were no big game management units within our operating area indicating “grizzly bears may be present.” The closest — big game unit 66 — begins approximately eight miles north of Caribou County. However, considering their home range requirements and how much ground they can cover in 24 hours, it’s not hard to imagine this wild carnivore crossing that imaginary line.

How grizzly bears could boost conservation efforts in Southeast Idaho

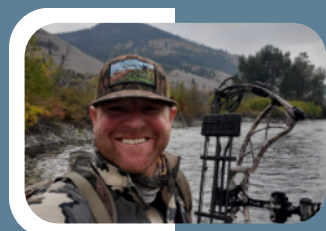
SSLT works with donors and organizations that prioritize large-scale conservation as a means of establishing the “most bang for their buck”. These entities are potentially more likely to fund a certain project such as a conservation easement if it has a connection to even larger landscapes such as the GYE. And even if there is no known or established grizzly bear population in our region, that doesn’t mean the habitat connecting our corner of the world with more known bear ranges can’t benefit from the spotlight. The monies prioritized for species such as grizzlies can go to work in a way that benefits countless others, from moose to monarch butterflies.

In my mind, thinking about an increasing grizzly bear population is akin to thinking about conservation easements. It’s all about balance. The challenge for land trusts is to fundraiser in a manner that meets landowner expectations and demand, allowing them to stay on the landscape making a living the same way their parents and grandparents did. One of the pools of funds traditionally tapped to accomplish this comes from entities and programs designated to help species like the grizzly. Land trusts use some of this money to help fund conservation easements — a willing agreement which can help landowners to continue to use the land the way they’ve always used it while also limiting potential development and prioritizing conservation practices. It really can be a win-win. Case in Point: The Keep it Connected initiative

For example, The Heart of the Rockies Initiative, a public charity headquartered in Missoula, Mont., has provided a funding pool of over \$48 million dollars to land trusts across five states (including Idaho) and two Canadian provinces since 2002 through a funding initiative called Keep It Connected. This initiative states, “The open spaces of the Transboundary Rocky Mountains of North America are essential to the wildlife that call this region home. Pronghorn antelope, elk, mule deer, grizzly and black bears, and many migratory birds are among the species that depend on the ability to move freely across the landscape. But it’s not only wildlife that benefit from maintaining the open spaces that characterize the region’s iconic geography. When we conserve wildlife habitat and the pathways animals need to move, we also conserve the ecosystems that are the foundation of our rural economies and well-being.”

“There’s a lot of wild country beyond the sight line. That country connects to the trail you’re on, and somewhere in the green there’s a grizzly bear that, without knowing it, is leaving tracks that connect landscapes in new ways.”

Without organizations like Heart of the Rockies Initiative and many more like it, it would be impossible for land trusts to do the work of conserving landscapes and preserving traditional farming and ranching. So, the next time you’re driving along highway 34 or exploring Gray’s Lake National Wildlife Refuge or simply looking at a map of the Caribou Range, look to the northeast. There’s a lot of wild country beyond the sight line. That country connects to the trail you’re on, and somewhere in the green there’s a grizzly bear that, without knowing it, is leaving tracks that connect landscapes in new ways.



Matt Martens is our conservation easement project manager for southeast Idaho. He is also a writer, and his work has appeared in *The Drake*, *Backcountry Hunters and Anglers*, *High Country News*, *Elk Hunter Magazine*, literary anthologies and more.

CELEBRATING THE STEPPE

By Carly Flandro

Community conservation, communications and marketing coordinator

At first glance, the sagebrush steppe might seem like a drab and barren landscape. But look closer and you'll see that it's teeming with life and beauty.

Just ask a member of the High Desert Master Naturalists. Show them a ten-foot plot of sagebrush steppe land, and they'll show you more than a half dozen plant species. At least that was my experience on a recent monitoring outing with Paul Allen, chair of the Master Naturalist High Desert Chapter in Pocatello, and president of the Sawabi Chapter of the Idaho Native Plant Society.

Allen is a walking encyclopedia of plant knowledge, able to identify and name species by both common and Latin names with ease. So I put him to the test on a sunny September day as we were walking Nancy Armstrong and E.J. Zita's 500-acre farm in Robin to catalog plants and collect seeds (done with the landowners' permission).

"How many species can you name here?" I asked, pointing at the plants around my feet.

"Antelope bitterbrush, mule's ear, *Artemisia tripartita*, *Artemisia tridentata*, arrowleaf balsamroot, Rocky Mountain dwarf sunflower, lamb's quarters, Sandberg bluegrass," he rattled off, getting particularly excited about the last one. "That's the first native grass I've actually identified here."

Allen was brimming with visible excitement about a stretch of land we'd just come across.

"This land hasn't been disturbed in a very long time," he said. "This is as close to a native landscape as we're likely to find."

Allen cares about plants because they tell a story. And the patch of land we were on was no different.

"It tells me a story about the landscape," he said. "It also tells me about what belongs in a native plant community... It tells me that when you've got an established perennial native plant community, it will keep out the invasives."

His attention to detail made me start seeing the sagebrush sea for all its unique parts, cutting through what I recently heard termed as "plant blindness."

I'm from Pocatello and have seen how a brown, sleeper hillside can burst into color each spring as wildflowers punctuate the hillside with glorious reds, yellows, pinks and oranges. But spending time with master naturalists has helped me recognize the sagebrush steppe's beauty even in its more muted phases.



Volunteers helping monitor the
Armstrong / Zita property.
Photos by: Carly Flandro

Maria Pacioretty, a regional habitat biologist with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, has a similar affinity for what to others seem like brown, empty expanses: “I grew up in the sagebrush, so it’s always been very special to me.”

The sagebrush steppe is common in Southeast Idaho, but also surprisingly unique and fragile. “The sagebrush steppe is a very unique ecosystem and it doesn’t exist anywhere else in the world, only here in North America,” Pacioretty said. “Over the past several decades, we’ve been losing a huge percentage of our sagebrush steppe habitat due to various things like wildfires, development, invasive species, that sort of stuff.”

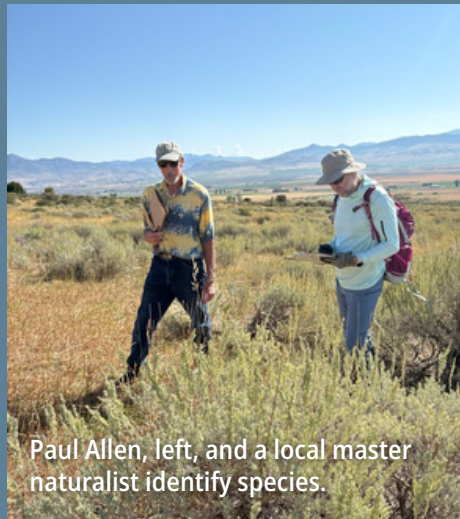
For every acre of sagebrush steppe lost, there’s a lot at stake. This special ecosystem is what Pacioretty termed a “carbon sink.” Like a forest, the steppe helps offset carbon and purify air and water.

And there are many iconic North American mammals, birds and reptiles that call this type of habitat their home, including a number of obligate species that “can’t really exist or function” without the steppe, Pacioretty said. Some examples include the greater sage-grouse, the pygmy rabbit, the pronghorn and the sagebrush sparrow.

“Just because (the sagebrush steppe) doesn’t look like a forest, doesn’t mean that it’s not serving a function,” Pacioretty said, “especially when you think of the importance of open space and clean water, clean air, and migration routes for deer and pronghorn and elk and all these little critters and birds that need these areas to migrate through — like they’ve been doing for thousands of years.”

So the next time you find yourself wandering through a sagebrush steppe, slow down, look around, and soak in all that makes it special.

Local master naturalists and volunteers collect native plant seeds.



Paul Allen, left, and a local master naturalist identify species.



A master naturalist photographs a plant species.

APPRECIATING THE “SAGEBRUSH SEA” — A HABITAT UNDER SIEGE

A fragile ecosystem

Sagebrush dominates much of western North America, with approximately 165 million acres of potential habitat. It is the “gray sea” or “sagebrush ocean” familiar to all who travel in western North America. In spite of its prevalence, it is considered a fragile ecosystem that is under siege from a combination of forces. Estimates of habitat loss vary widely depending on region, but since settlement by Europeans, at least half of the area once covered by sagebrush has been lost.

What’s at stake

Sagebrush steppe is prized for its diversity of flowering plants, shrubs and associated grasses. It grows where there is little rain, winters are harsh, and trees are restricted to streams or protected mountain slopes. Sagebrush provides critically important habitat for a number of wildlife species as well as domestic animals. It provides rangeland for cattle and sheep in areas where they co-exist with endemic wildlife such as the iconic greater sage grouse, sage thrasher, sage sparrow, and pygmy rabbits. Large animals such as mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, moose, black bear, pronghorn, mountain lions, coyotes, and gray wolves also share the broad expanses of sagebrush steppe with human inhabitants.

Source: *Pocket Guide to Sagebrush* by Leila Schultz



Maria Pacioretty at Edson Fichter Nature Area.

A TIME FOR GIVING AS WE CLOSE THE YEAR

By Emma Morton, Development Coordinator

As the year winds down, many of us may find ourselves reflecting on what matters most — the places we enjoy, the people we love, and the work that we do. For the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust, that reflection can be turned into action with your gifts. Year-end giving is a powerful way to protect the landscapes that sustain our health, economy, and quality of life. Whether you choose to make an end-of-year gift through our typical donation form or take an opportunity to give during Giving Tuesday or our Holiday Party, you have the ability to join others in creating impact for the region we all call home and hold dear memories of.

Giving Tuesday — the global day of generosity that follows Thanksgiving — is more than a single 24-hour push. It's a rallying point: a time when small gifts add up, new donors discover causes they care about, and long-time supporters renew their commitment. For land conservation, where projects take years and stewardship is ongoing, gifts made on Giving Tuesday often provide the flexible, early funding that turns an idea into momentum. Your year-end gift can seed a conservation easement, fund critical habitat restoration, support land management that keeps working farms productive for generations, or help us engage our wider community to learn more about the importance and impact of the land around us.

Holiday Party — our 21st annual gathering to celebrate donors, volunteers, and the work of SSLT over the past year. By purchasing tickets, participating in the silent auction and High Steppers Raffle, you are providing critical support to our organization WHILE also having fun with friends and fellow land trust supporters! Your contributions at the Holiday Party directly support our work. Additional donations to the organization are accepted at the party and increase your impact that night! Join us Nov. 15, 2025, at the Museum of Clean in Pocatello for a night to remember.

No matter how and when you choose to give at the end of 2025, your year-end gift supports everything from the administrative work of negotiating easements to boots-on-the-ground restoration and long-term stewardship. It funds community outreach that helps neighbors understand conservation options and supports monitoring that ensures the protections we create today endure tomorrow.

What does your impact look like right now:

Land Protection

- Over the past two years, more than 5,000 acres have been protected in the Bear River Watershed, with thousands more across our region in the works.
- Closing the gap on conservation easement projects: either getting them started or getting them to the finish line, your unrestricted gifts allow our team the ability to be dynamic in our approaches to land protection.
- Support for two to three team members to be working on land protection work throughout our seven-county region (over 9,000 square miles) and in partnership with Bear River Land Conservancy.

Stewardship

- Building staff capacity by supporting an annual internship for monitoring season and enabling us to hire a new full-time stewardship team member to help steward the 10,000+ acres our organization protects in Southeast Idaho.
- Volunteers and staff working side-by-side monitoring properties, mitigating hazards, and aiding in research.
- Learning opportunities for students and volunteers through day- and overnight-trips throughout the region.

Administration, Community Conservation and Development

- Enabling staff growth and development with a new Executive Director and Office Administrator, and additions of a Community Conservation, Marketing and Communications Coordinator and a Development Coordinator.
- Increasing public awareness through social media, press coverage, and event participation.
- Developing more robust funding streams via donor engagement and grant research and writing.

Gifts of all sizes get the work done and there are numerous ways to give at any time of the year: one-time donations, monthly sustaining gifts, gifts of stock or IRA distributions, legacy/planned gifts for long-term impact, and in-kind support for projects and events. You are always welcome to reach out to myself or our team to get more information on how to give and what impact your gift has on our work everyday.

As the year comes to a close, on this Giving Tuesday and through the holiday season, please consider a year-end gift to the Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust. Your support helps protect the places that make our region healthy, prosperous, and resilient. To give or learn more, visit our website or contact me at emma@sagebrushlandtrust.org or (208) 907-2126. Every gift matters — and together we can ensure these landscapes are here for our children and grandchildren.



LESSONS FROM MOTOR CITY

TAKEAWAYS FROM THE 2025 NATIONAL LAND CONSERVATION CONFERENCE

“Rally,” as the conference is known, is a time for land conservationists to learn, share ideas and inspire one another to strengthen our work to build strong communities with open space, clean air and water, sustainable food sources and natural habitats. **We asked our staff what stood out most—here’s what they said!**



REPPING THE STEPPE

Nancy Armstrong, Heath Mann, Hannah Clawson and Abby Kiefner represented Sagebrush Steppe in Detroit.

HANNAH CLAWSON

Biggest Takeaway: Learning about the importance of working land, and the specific challenges small farmers are currently facing. The consolidation and loss of local farms is rapidly occurring across the country. Supporting sustainable practices, using the Buy-Support-Protect-Sell method and building trust through transparency are ways land trusts can combat the issue.

ABBY KIEFNER

Biggest Takeaway: Witnessing the vast community of land trusts and all of the ebbs and flows nonprofits face on a daily basis. What really impressed me was everyone’s openness and willingness to comfort, give advice, and validate the different obstacles we are facing, and the generational support that was given so freely.

HEATH MANN

Biggest Takeaway: We are not alone, land trusts and conservancies throughout our country are facing the same issues and concerns that we are and there are a variety of solutions that are being incorporated. This allows us to look for solutions that may meet our needs, and or can meet our needs with a few tweaks.



📍 Idaho Museum of Natural History
698 E Dillon St. Pocatello, ID 83201

OPEN *spaces*

**THE ROLE OF LAND TRUSTS IN
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION**

OPENING NOV. 6



**Idaho Museum of
Natural History**

Sagebrush
Steppe Land Trust



PRESENTS THE 21ST ANNUAL

Holiday Party & Fundraiser

15 NOVEMBER 2025

DINNER, DRINKS, MUSIC,
SILENT & LIVE AUCTIONS

6 - 9 PM
MUSEUM OF CLEAN
711 S. 2ND AVE, POCA TELLO

\$35 ENTRY AT THE DOOR, \$30 IN ADVANCE.
GET YOUR TICKETS AT SAGEBRUSHLANDTRUST.ORG OR CALL
(208) 240-6045

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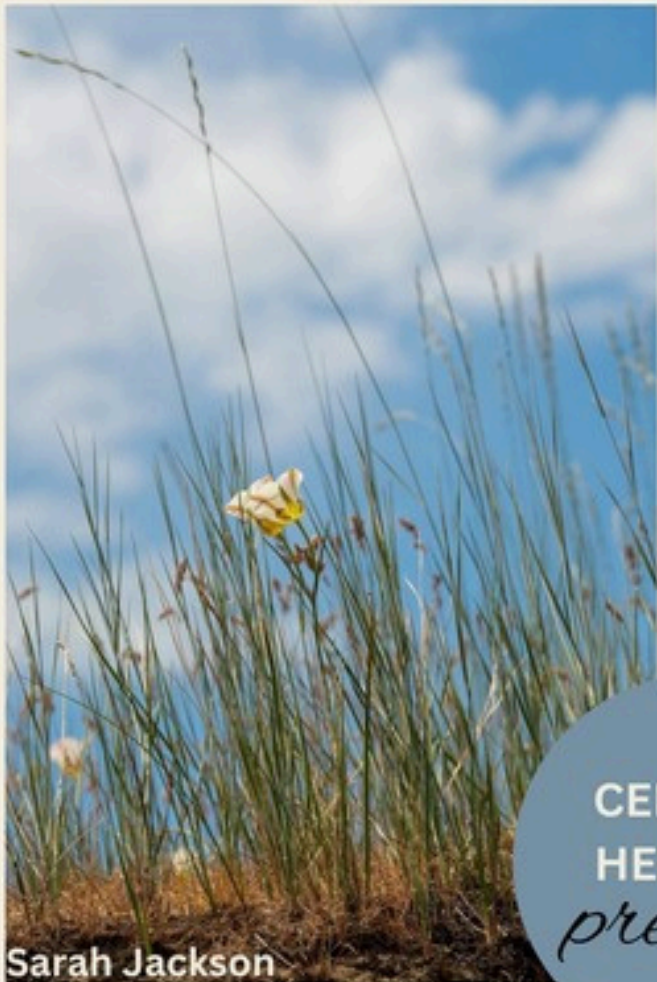
**BE OUR 2026 ARTIST
IN RESIDENCE**

Application period
Opens **Nov. 1st**

Details at:
sagebrushlandtrust.org

SNAPSHOTS

from the steppe



Sarah Jackson



Duane Dyer

CENTURY
HEIGHTS
preserve



Duane Dyer



Carly Flandro

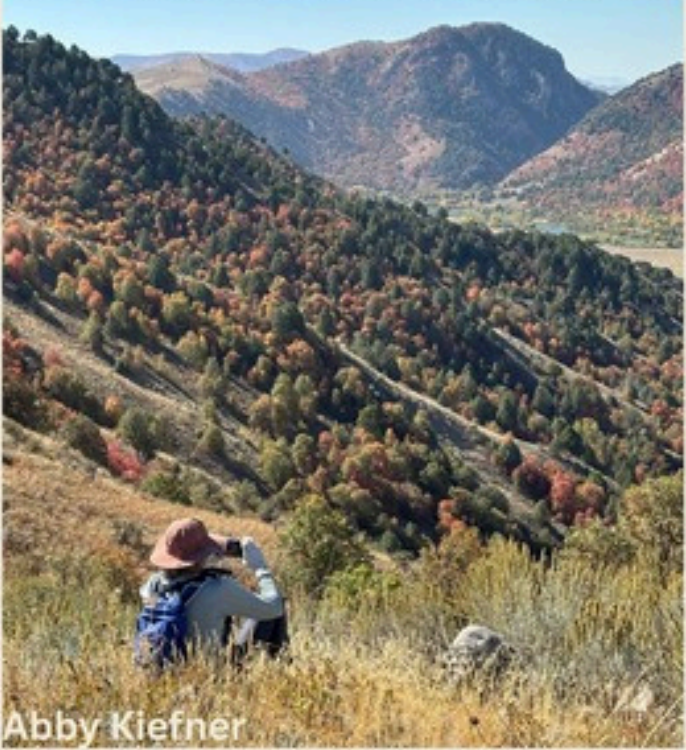
ONEIDA *Narrows*



Abby Kiefner



Sarah Jackson



Abby Kiefner



Sarah Jackson

ROBIN *monitoring*



Sarah Jackson



Sarah Jackson



Sarah Jackson



Sarah Jackson

KACKLEY RANCH *work day*



Sarah Jackson



Sarah Jackson

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

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

Event Calendar

OPEN SPACES EXHIBIT OPENS | NOVEMBER 6

Discover *Open Spaces* at the Idaho Museum of Natural History and explore how land trusts connect wildlife habitat, protect open lands, and support biodiversity.

HOLIDAY PARTY & FUNDRAISER | NOVEMBER 15

Celebrate conservation with us from 6–9 p.m. at the Museum of Clean event space. Enjoy dinner, good company, and shared inspiration. Tickets available online at sagebrushlandtrust.org or at the door.

OPEN SPACES LECTURE | NOVEMBER 18

Join our executive director, Heath Mann, and stewardship manager, Eric Pankau, for a talk on the role and impact of land trusts. Visit sagebrushlandtrust.org for details—we'd love to see you there!

GIVING TUESDAY | DECEMBER 2

Join the global day of generosity! Your gift can help protect working lands, restore wildlife habitat, and ensure open spaces thrive for generations to come. Every donation — large or small — makes a difference.