

# Nature Conservancy Hires Team for the San Luis Valley

The Nature Conservancy has launched its regional program in the San Luis Valley by hiring program managers Nancy and Chuck Warner, who have worked for the Conservancy in California for the past eight years.

Nancy initiated innovative and successful community outreach programs at California's Carrizo Plain Natural Area, the Pecho Coast, and at the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Reserve. Chuck oversaw a variety of projects including Santa Cruz Island, the Carrizo Plain Natural Area and others. He also served as The Nature Conservancy's statewide expert for rangelands and grazing related issues.

The Warners grew up in Colorado and were introduced to the Conservancy here when they volunteered for a project inventorying birds on the Mueller Ranch in the late 1970s. They are thrilled to be back, especially for an opportunity as exciting as managing the San Luis Valley program.

They will be managing the 2,300-acre Mishak Lakes Preserve in Saguache County and working with local citizens to identify other conservation projects that help meet the Conservancy's mission of protecting Colorado's natural heritage for future generations.

At Mishak Lakes Preserve, the Warner's will be working with others to conduct the research needed to guide future management of the area. Along with studies of shorebirds use and the effects of grazing on wildlife and vegetation, the Conservancy will be assessing how the shallow, intermittent waters of Mishak Lakes relate to the entire corridor of wetlands in the Valley. They also hope to expand the preserve to make public access easier (the preserve is currently open to the public on specific dates for guided field trips).

To further guide the Conservancy's program in the San Luis Valley, they are requesting a grant from the Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund to conduct a biological inventory in the Closed Basin portion of Saguache County. The information gained through on-the-ground surveys of public and private lands where owner permission is obtained, will enable the Conservancy and their partners to plan for growth in appropriate areas and provide for long-term conservation of those areas that are more environmentally sensitive. A biological survey of the Valley will also help quantify what species or habitat could be lost if the aquifer should be compromised through the years.

If funded, staff from the Colorado Natural Heritage Program based at Colorado State University in Fort Collins will conduct the inventory work. Teams of biologists and ecologists will use aerial photographs, existing geographical information system vegetation maps and satellite images to target those areas that merit closer attention. When completed, the results of the survey will be made available to the public to use planning for the future conservation growth of Saguache County and the greater San Luis Valley.

Chuck and Nancy recently established an office for The Nature Conservancy's San Luis Valley Program at 537 Main St. in Alamosa, above Cafe Maya. They welcome people to stop by and get acquainted with them and The Nature Conservancy.