



Land Matters

Winter 2014

A NEWSLETTER OF THE VIRGIN RIVER LAND PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

Warm holiday greetings from the folks at your local land trust. It's high time for our occasional newsletter, especially as we are excited to connect with more and more people since our 20th Anniversary celebration last fall. Read on for our latest news and stories about how our land preservation work benefits locals—both wildlife and human. In this edition, we profile the burrowing owl and our Board Chair, Chris Blake.

Spreading the Good Word at the Kayenta Arts Festival

Back in early October, VRLPA hosted an informational table at the Kayenta Arts Festival in Ivins. Volunteers (a big thank you to Pam Quayle, Ruth Reiterman, and Michelle Bonner) enjoyed beautiful fall weather while discussing our organization's mission and accomplishments with festival-goers. Many visitors to our table shared their experiences of hiking in places like Confluence Park in LaVerkin, where the VRLPA has worked with partners to conserve streamside habitat and establish a place for public recreation. Other visitors engaged in lively conversation about challenges facing conservation efforts in and around southwestern Utah. The

weekend was a great opportunity to forge connections with old friends and community members who hadn't heard about our work. Over 7,000 people attended the festival, and we appreciate everyone who stopped by our table to talk, learn, and purchase t-shirts.

Our outreach is volunteer-driven and can expand as far as our volunteer base can stretch. If you are interested in donating your time and energy, please e-mail Kristine Crandall at: kbc.crandall@gmail.com. Volunteer opportunities include board or committee participation, outreach and education, land improvement efforts, grant writing, planning, and more.



*Top masthead: East Zion, photo: Zion Mountain Ranch.
Above: Virgin River, photo: Nathan Workyns*

Save the Date— VRLPA's Annual Meeting

Our 2015 Annual Meeting will be held the evening of **Friday, April 10th**; please save the date, as this is a wonderful opportunity for members and friends to mingle with board members, enjoy delicious refreshments, and for all in attendance to explore VRLPA's land preservation projects and other activities.



Photo: David Pettit

Whoo Benefits From Open Land?

Hidden among the many creatures that benefit from conserved open space is a wide-eyed raptor called the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*). At nine to eleven inches tall, this tawny colored predator is easy to miss in its preferred grassland habitat. Look closely at fields and farm edges and you may catch a glimpse of this bird standing still on the ground near its



Burrowing owl, photo: Kenneth Schneider

burrow—usually a repurposed rodent hole. Farmers may welcome a burrowing owl sighting as much as wildlife viewers because the owl's diet of insects and small rodents provides natural pest control. Preserving open grass and agricultural land helps ensure that this bird will have habitat in southwestern Utah for centuries to come. The burrowing owl is listed by the State of Utah as a Wildlife Species of Concern in Washington and Iron counties.

Loving the Land: Chris Blake

Editor's Note: Our newsletter will regularly feature stories about people and place through this "Loving the Land" column. We are pleased to kick it off through the eyes of our Board Chair, Chris Blake.

Back in 1965, Chris Blake, a wide-eyed fifth-grader at the time, moved with his family from Cedar City to Santa Clara. Chris fondly remembers this part of his life especially because his parents bought property on the Santa Clara heights where there was nothing but open desert and the Gunlock water line. It became the backyard for Chris and his friends—they had fun riding their Honda Trail 90s all over the place. But after a few years passed, Chris started noticing that the tire tracks never went away and eventually transformed into eroded gullies. He was gaining experiential education, witnessing the fact that the desert is sensitive, that the native sage and creosote could be permanently disturbed.

Fast forward to 1979—Chris and his family moved to the outskirts of Ivins where his kids would play in what was still considered the “desert,” the neighboring lots that hadn't yet been built upon. Now, this place is full of rooftops. For Chris's kids and their families, Snow Canyon State Park and the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve are



Chris Blake, VRLPA Board Chair

precious parts of the backyard, as each new generation has fewer places that are still open desert. Chris became involved with VRLPA 15 years ago, understanding both that the county will continue to grow and the value of protecting natural areas for people to enjoy, just like he first did as a youngster in Santa Clara.

Renew or Become a Member— Contribute Today

Your support goes directly into our work to protect southwestern Utah's heritage of scenic vistas, open lands, and quality of life. Please consider renewing if you are a current member, or joining us by making a first-time contribution.

How to contribute: Online through our website (www.virginriverland.org) or mail a contribution to Virgin River Land Preservation Association, PO Box 1804, St. George, UT 84771.

Stay in touch through Facebook or e-mail us at: vrlpa@infowest.com.

