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**Ranch conservation easement first step in protecting
Little Snake River Valley**

The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) announced today the first conservation easement in northern Routt County's spectacular Little Snake River Valley. Pat and Sharon O'Toole have worked with CCALT in order to protect the Ladder Ranch Bull Pasture, which is a critically important part of the ranching heritage of the area and contains an important stretch of the cottonwood-lined Little Snake River. The Little Snake River parallels Routt County Road 129 north of Steamboat Lake on the Colorado-Wyoming border. The easement, held by the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) was made possible by \$381,000 in funding from the Routt County Purchase of Development Rights Program.

The ranch has gently rolling terrain that slopes towards the Little Snake River which flows along the northern property boundary and the state line. The permanently protected 236 acres is an integral part of a large and complex ranching operation that spans two states and includes over 470,000 deeded or leased acres. This project is only made possible by the landowners donating a significant portion of the conservation easement value to CCALT.

"We are honored to place this easement on our Bull Pasture. It is a crucial part of our ranching operation for both cattle and sheep. We value it for the critical wildlife habitat it provides, both riparian and upland. Our valley is under tremendous pressure from both subdivision type development and energy development. We see this as the first step in protecting the agricultural nature of the upper valley. CCALT and the Routt County PDR have been a pleasure to work with, and we appreciate their efforts," said landowners Pat and Sharon O'Toole.

Concern for the future of the Valley prompted approximately twelve landowners to join together with the Routt County Extension Office a decade ago to formulate a plan to preserve the agricultural heritage that has dominated the Valley landscape for more than 100 years. For the past two decades, Routt County has seen dozens of large generational ranches sold off and transformed into 35 acre residential parcels. The ranchers of the Little Snake River Valley have

real concerns about this indiscriminate parceling of land and they are taking action to protect their agricultural heritage and rural landscape.

“There aren’t many places like the Little Snake River anywhere in Colorado. It is an untouched valley and we applaud the efforts of the local ranchers to protect this special landscape.” said Chris West, CCALT Executive Director.

The undeveloped ranchland provides valuable habitat to a wide array of wildlife species including elk, pronghorn, sage grouse, bald eagles, cutthroat trout and mule deer. Sandhill cranes nest nearby and the Little Snake River Valley hosts one of the largest populations of this species in Colorado. An estimated 90% of Colorado’s wildlife species depend on wetlands and riparian areas for survival and most of those areas are found on private agricultural lands. The conservation easement will help preserve impressive views from Routt County Road 129 and buffer National Forest lands to the north.

This conservation easement is just one part of the Cattlemen’s Land Trust’s protection efforts across Routt County. CCALT holds seven easements on working ranches in Routt County, covering more than 3,500 acres. The organization is working on many new ranch conservation efforts that will protect upwards of 8,000 acres in Routt County in the next few years.

CCALT’s roots in Routt County are deep. As a result of significant interest in conservation by the local ranching community in the 1990’s, the Colorado Cattlemen’s Association formed the land trust in 1995. One of the land trust’s founding members, Jay Fetcher, is a lifelong rancher from Clark. CCALT has been instrumental in protecting more than 285,000 acres of land across Colorado on 182 farms and ranches using conservation easements.

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Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust helps Colorado's ranchers and farmers protect their agricultural lands and encourage continuing agricultural production for the benefit of themselves, their families and all of Colorado's citizens. To date, CCALT has partnered with nearly 182 ranchers across the state in the protection of more than 285,000 acres. For more information visit www.ccalt.org.

The Routt County PDR Program has, to date, completed 20 conservation projects totaling 11,760 acres and currently has eight projects in process totaling an additional 4,512 acres.