

Colorado Cattlemen's  
Agricultural Land Trust



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## **Conservation easement the first to protect a working ranch in Chaffee County**

*Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust works with Great Outdoors Colorado, USDA NRCS, Colorado Conservation Trust, Chaffee County and local ranch family to safeguard productive agricultural land and wildlife habitat*

The irrigated hay meadows and juniper-covered foothills on 183 acres of a ranch west of Salida have been permanently protected through a conservation easement. The Post Office Ranch, owned by the Roberts family, is bisected by a mile-long riparian corridor of the South Fork of the Arkansas River. Mature cottonwoods, willows and alders border the river and provide important habitat for numerous species including wintering bald eagles. Adjacent public land is important winter range for local deer and elk populations which are commonly seen on the ranch. Irrigated hay meadows and pasture make up the majority of the property which is used for cow-calf operations and hay production. Senior water rights and abundant seep water enhance the biological and agricultural productivity.

The easement, held by the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT), was funded in part by Lottery dollars through Great Outdoors Colorado, the United State Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, the Colorado Conservation Trust and Chaffee County. This project represents the first easement for CCALT in Chaffee County. (The headline makes it sound like this is the first ever easement in Chaffee County versus CCALT's ... confusing.)

"Doing this, first and foremost, requires a love for the land," said Dean Roberts, owner of the Post Office Ranch. "It all worked out for me because it allowed me to clear the property ownership from other family members for my heirs. My family has owned the property since 1952. The easement makes it possible for my family to continue to own and ranch the property for as long as they want, which would probably not have been the case without a conservation easement. If you don't call that protecting family ranches, I don't know what you would." "Also

with the easement language, we made it possible to retain other ways to make income from the property other than ranching. This is important for anyone who is thinking about doing this and they should have it built in,” Roberts added. (I will leave this up to you, but I would prefer this be deleted.)

Conservation easements are one tool that can help sustain agricultural operations and the landscape and rich heritage that accompany farming and ranching. Easements are tailored to fit each specific property and landowners’ differing needs and goals.

“Keeping these ranchlands in continued productive agriculture along with the culture, water and the ability to recharge aquifers that they represent are hugely important to the County. From my perspective, the County encourages landowners who want to look at conservation easements as an option on a voluntary basis,” said Tim Glenn, Chaffee County Commissioner.

In a recent report from the Colorado Conservation Trust, “Colorado Conservation at a Crossroads”, Chaffee County is identified as one of 13 counties in the state with the highest potential threat of losing its open space, but with limited capacity to prevent it. Chaffee County’s relatively small amount of agricultural land and its proximity to the Front Range and westward population pressures make the County’s farms and ranches extremely vulnerable to rapid growth and loss of water rights. Productive irrigated agricultural land, like that found on the Post Office Ranch, accounts for only 1.8% (11,669 acres) of the total county land area.

Randy Rusk, Custer County rancher and Vice President of the CCALT Board commented on behalf of CCALT” “We are thrilled that we were able to develop a solution for this property that keeps it in ranching. The Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust is proud to be working in the Upper Arkansas River Valley. We hope that the Post Office Ranch represents the first effort to ensure agriculture’s future in Chaffee County.”

Fundraising to place an easement on the remaining 106 acres of the Post Office Ranch is underway. Great Outdoors Colorado recently awarded a \$350,000 grant for this second phase of the project.

Established in 1995, CCALT was the first land trust in the nation to be created by a group of mainstream agricultural producers and the land trust maintains a close relationship with the Colorado Cattlemen’s Association. CCALT focuses solely on the protection of agricultural lands. The land trust has recently accepted its 178<sup>th</sup> conservation easement, and now holds more than 20 percent of all conservation easement acreage in Colorado - about 270,000 acres.

*Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) 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. For more information visit [www.ccalt.org](http://www.ccalt.org)*

*Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) uses a portion of Lottery proceeds for projects that preserve and enhance the state’s parks, wildlife, trails, rivers and open space. For more information visit [www.goco.org](http://www.goco.org)*

*Colorado Conservation Trust (CCT) preserves Colorado’s special places by fostering leadership, strategic initiatives, and increased investments in conservation.*