

NEWS RELEASE

Colorado Cattlemen's
Agricultural Land Trust



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ROUTT COUNTY HELPS PROTECT THE HISTORIC ELKHEAD RANCH

Routt County, in partnership with the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT), has purchased a conservation easement on 645 acres of the historic Elkhead Ranch, located 15 miles north of Hayden along Routt County Road 56. The easement, which is held by CCALT, is the third phase of an effort to protect the entire 3,550 acre ranch. To date, 1,000 acres of the eastern portions of the ranch have been protected through donated conservation easements. The 2009 conservation easement was made possible by a \$400,000 grant from the Routt County Purchase of Development Rights Program (PDR).

The Elkhead Ranch is one of the oldest ranches in Routt County. Homesteaded in 1883, the Ranch once served as the center of the Elkhead community. At one point, the Ranch headquarters contained the post office and community school. The Ranch was officially granted historical designation by the Routt County Historical Society in 1996.

The Ranch is comprised of irrigated hay meadows, riparian areas along Elkhead Creek and sage-dominated rangelands. Elkhead Creek traverses the property for approximately five (5) miles and is lined with mature cottonwoods and willows. The Ranch provides important habitat for numerous wildlife species including elk, deer, pronghorn, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, fox, sandhill cranes, Columbian sharp-tail grouse and greater sage grouse.

“Protecting ranches like the historic Elkhead Ranch will help to ensure that the ranching heritage of Routt County is preserved for future generations”, said Chris West, Executive Director of the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust. He went on to say that, “it is a privilege to work with landowners who are dedicated to the land and the agricultural values that have shaped Routt County and Colorado for more than 150 years.” The landowner hopes that her work to protect the Elkhead Ranch will lead to additional conservation in the Elkhead Valley. “I hope that my efforts to protect my ranch will eventually lead to the protection of the entire Elkhead Valley and its rich ranching history.

This valley is one of a few remaining intact ranching landscapes in Colorado and I hope that it will remain that way for future generations.”

Conservation easements are one tool that can help landowners protect their properties and sustain the ranching legacy of Colorado and Routt County. Easements are tailored to fit each specific property and each landowner’s differing needs and goals. Landowners work with individual land trusts, such as CCALT, to develop a conservation easement that will both protect the property in perpetuity and allow the landowner to continue their agricultural operation in a sustainable fashion.

“The PDR program is a great testament to the importance the citizens of the County place on preserving the rural and agricultural character of Routt County”, said CJ Mucklow, Routt County Extension Agent and member of the CCALT Board of Directors. Mucklow went on to say that “in a lot of instances this program provides landowners with the means to stay on their property, continue in production agriculture and pass on the operation to the next generation.”

Routt County awarded \$400,000 in PDR funds towards the purchase of the third conservation easement on the Elkhead Ranch. “The dedication of the landowner to preserve her important ranchland and her significant contribution to this project, as well as her conservation leadership in the Elkhead Valley are truly remarkable. This is precisely the kind of special place the PDR Program was developed to protect, but without passionate landowners, we wouldn't have a program,” said Ron Roundtree, Chairman of the Routt County Purchase of Development Rights Citizen’s Advisory Board.

The landowner released a written statement which expressed her gratitude to the organizations which are working to protect the Elkhead Ranch. Through that statement the landowner said, “I would like to thank all of the organizations involved in preserving the Elkhead Ranch. Thanks first goes to the Routt County Commissioners and the PDR Board who have provided much needed funding and have been a great champion of agriculture. Thanks also goes to the Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust for facilitating the Elkhead Ranch conservation initiative.”

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 211th conservation easement, and now holds more than 20 percent of all conservation easement acreage in Colorado — 331,629 acres.

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