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THE
TRUST
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LAND

CONSERVING LAND FOR PEOPLE

Colorado Cattlemen's
Agricultural Land Trust



NEWS

Chaffee County, CO -- The Trust for Public Land (TPL), working in partnership with the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT), lottery funded Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, has succeeded in permanently protecting a portion of the Rafter 26 Ranch, a high mountain meadow in beautiful central Colorado.

The 472-acre holding is part of a working cattle ranch at the base of Mount Princeton. The property has been in continuous ranching in Chaffee County since 1877. In recent years, Chaffee County, with its magnificent mountain scenery, world-renowned whitewater rafting, and welcoming community, has grown in popularity as a tourist destination and location for second homes. Although property prices have stabilized, the boom years have left long-term ranchers facing land and inheritance taxes that their ranching operations cannot support.

Selling the ranch was not an option, so another solution was found: conservation easements. Working with CCALT and TPL, the family that owns the ranch mapped out the details of a conservation easement that not only puts nearly half of the ranch under permanent protection, it also gives them the financial resources they need to continue to work the land.

"One of the great things about protecting working agricultural land is that you're helping families continue to own and work land that's been in their family for generations," says TPL Project Manager, Wade Shelton. "However, their benefits don't end there; by protecting properties like the Rafter 26 Ranch, we're ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the Upper Arkansas Valley."

The protection of the ranch will also complement existing protected land, as the easement will establish a permanently protected corridor of land between the Maxwell Park State Wildlife Area and the San Isabel National Forest. Furthermore, the property is visible from the Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic By-way and frames the view of Mount Princeton for the public as they come off of Trout Creek Pass into the Upper Arkansas Valley on United States Highway 285.

TPL secured funding to purchase the conservation easement from NRCS and GOCO and worked with CCALT to manage the transaction to ensure that the final outcome would meet the needs of everyone involved – particularly the landowners.

“It’s been our privilege to work with these organizations and to represent the Rafter 26 Ranch,” said attorney Kent Holsinger, whose firm represented the landowners. “Conservation easements help preserve the legacy of hard work and stewardship that makes private land in Colorado so valuable for agriculture, wildlife and our communities.”

Landowners that grant conservation easements also open up local conservation opportunities, as residents are more likely to consider an easement if a neighbor had a good experience. While easements are not necessarily a good fit for everyone, they can be a very effective way to protect our natural resources and help ranchers continue to work the land. And every easement strengthens the region’s rural character; to date, nearly 2,000 acres of productive agricultural land has been protected in Chaffee County.

“Working to protect this property and keep it in ranching has been very rewarding,” says CCALT Executive Director, Chris West. “This project also builds on CCALT’s prior successes in Chaffee County and should further help to build momentum for additional agricultural preservation throughout the Upper Arkansas Valley.”

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The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit land conservation organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and natural areas, ensuring livable communities for generations to come.

The Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) is a nonprofit land conservation organization whose mission is to “...protect productive agricultural lands and the conservation values they provide by working with ranchers and farmers, thereby preserving Colorado’s ranching heritage and rural communities.”

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