

For Immediate Release – December 20, 2011



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), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) and Chaffee County, has succeeded in permanently protecting a high mountain meadow just outside the City of Salida, which is part of the historic Hutchinson Ranch in beautiful central Colorado.

The 223.6-acre meadow is part of a working cattle ranch that is designated a "Colorado Centennial Farm" and has been in the Hutchinson Family since the 1860s before Colorado achieved statehood. The ranch, located between the City of Salida and the town of Poncha Springs on US Highway 50, is bordered by federal land and other private and public protected properties, includes frontage along the South Arkansas or "Little Arkansas" River and is important habitat for wildlife. The Hutchinsons also previously donated their original 1860's family homestead, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, to the town of Poncha Springs and is managed by Salida Parks, Open Space & Trails (SPOT).

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 traditional ranching operations cannot support.

Today, 6th generation Abby Hutchinson operates the ranch and cattle operation for her grandfather, Dr. Wendell Hutchinson, a retired veterinarian who still resides on the ranch but is disabled with blindness. For the Hutchinson Family, who believe that their working ranch is their key legacy, selling was not an option. Their solution has proven to be protecting the property through conservation easements. Working with TPL, CCALT and their advisors, the Hutchinsons 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.

"I feel very lucky to have the opportunity to work with the Hutchinsons to secure their family's legacy," says TPL Project Manager, Wade Shelton. "It's very rare to work with a family that's been in the Upper Arkansas Valley since Colorado was a territory and has played such an important role in the region's history."

Protecting the meadow completes the second phase of the conservation easement project. The Hutchinson's donated a conservation easement on 185-acres of the ranch in 2010 to CCALT, which will be held permanently by the Land Trust of the Upper Arkansas (LTUA). Last week, TPL and CCALT secured funding from GOCO for the final phase of the transaction and hope to secure the remaining funds from NRCS in 2012. The final phase of the transaction is expected to close in 2013.

"NRCS is thrilled with this partnership," states Dawn Jackson, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs in Colorado. "The FRPP Program is designed to protect and keep productive farm and ranchlands in agricultural use for future generations."

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

In a joint statement from Art, Andy and Lisa, Wendell's descendants, they said, "This is a milestone event for our family, and we are pleased that so many have joined us in this effort and hope that others in the area will also see the value in preserving the valley's agricultural lands and waters. We trust that future generations who live or simply visit this spectacular valley will also see that land protection is valuable and will have this open space as a tangible tie to its rich history."

While easements are not necessarily a good fit for every landowner or every property, 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, over 2,000 acres of productive agricultural land has been protected in Chaffee County.

"Working with the Hutchinsons to protect the oldest working ranch in the Upper Arkansas Valley and keep it in ranching property and keep it in ranching has been very rewarding," says CCALT Executive Director, Chris West. "This project should also help to build momentum for additional agricultural preservation in Chaffee County."

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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."

GOCO is the result of a citizens' initiative passed by 58% of the voters in 1992. As the recipient of approximately half of Colorado Lottery proceeds - \$56 million in Fiscal Year 2011 – GOCO exists to help preserve, protect, enhance and manage Colorado's wildlife, park, river, trail and open space heritage by awarding grants to local governments and land trusts, and making investments through the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife. Since 1994, more than 3,400 projects in all 64 counties have received GOCO funding.

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