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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 223-acre high mountain meadow just outside of Salida.

The meadow is part of the Hutchinson Ranch, a working cattle ranch designated a "Colorado Centennial Farm". It has been in the Hutchinson Family since the 1860s before Colorado achieved statehood. The ranch, located between Salida and 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.

In 2003, the historic Hutchinson Ranch and homestead was listed in the top five of endangered places in Colorado by Colorado Preservation Incorporated. The Hutchinson's also previously donated their original 1860's family homestead that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, to the Town of Poncha Springs.

In recent years, Chaffee County 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.

For the Hutchinson Family, that believes their working ranch is their key legacy, selling was not an option. Their solution has been to protect 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 Hutchinsons donated a conservation easement on 185-acres of the ranch in 2010 to CCALT. This easement was subsequently transferred by CCALT to the Land Trust of the Upper Arkansas. Now, TPL and CCALT are working to secure funding for the final phase of the transaction, which 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 outcome would meet the needs of everyone involved – particularly the landowners.

"One of the Chaffee County Commissioners' objectives is to support our counties ranch and farm families," states Frank Holman, Chairman of the Board of Chaffee County Commissioners. "Another it to keep intact our agricultural properties and irrigation water. We are honored to be a part of the partnership that protected the 223-acre Hutchinson Ranch and water."

In a statement from Art, Andy and Lisa Hutchinson descendants of Dr. Wendell Hutchinson who still resides on the ranch 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."

Easements can be a very effective way to protect natural resources, help ranchers continue to work the land and maintain a 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 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. GOCO awards grants with a portion of Colorado Lottery proceeds to local governments and land trusts, and makes investments through the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife. Since 1994, more than 3,400 projects in all 64 counties have received GOCO funding.

The History of the Hutchinson Family in Colorado

The Hutchinson family is extremely proud of its heritage in the Upper Arkansas Valley since the ranch has been owned and operated as a cattle ranch for six continuous generations. Joseph Sykes Hutchinson and Annabel McPherson Hutchinson first homesteaded the earliest portion of the ranch in 1868. Joseph came to Colorado in 1866 after being wounded at the Battle of Vicksburg during the Civil War. By the 1870's the Hutchinson ranching operation had grown to over 5,000 head of cattle that ranged over much of Colorado. Today, 6th generation Abby Hutchinson operates the ranch and cattle operation for her grandfather Dr. Wendell Hutchinson, who still resides on the ranch but is disabled with blindness.

Wendell, born in 1924, is the oldest of three boys of Mills Hutchinson and Myrtle Burkart. He has lived on and worked the ranch most of his life except when away at college and WWII. He married Mary Sue Swallow in 1949, descended from another local ranching family, and they took over the operation of the ranch following the early death of his father Mills in 1949. Wendell and Mary Sue were able to hold on to the ranch and keep it

operating by subsidizing it with his veterinary income, and a lot of hard physical work.

Wendell, "Doc Hutch" as many know him and his wife Mary Sue have always been a big supporter of the community. He served for 29 years on the Salida school board as well as many other organizations and boards, including the Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District Board, Local Bank Boards and Chaffee County 4-H Livestock Club Leader for 16 years. He also is a noted historian of the valley and often gives local history talks and presentations. He co-authored a local history book, "Under the Angel of Shavano" with George Everett, from another prominent Salida area ranch family. He is very proud of the fact that the Hutchinson family arrived in the valley in the 1860's before the roads, railroad or even statehood.