



NEWS RELEASE

August 1, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Land returns to ranching along Elkhead Creek

Prime irrigated hay meadows would have been lost, instead it will be protected and incorporated into local ranch

The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) today completed a complex conservation transaction that saved a local ranch property from foreclosure and likely development. The 203 acre property is located along Elkhead Creek on the Routt/Moffat County line, just north of Highway 40 between Hayden and Craig. This represents CCALT's fourth conservation easement along Elkhead Creek, which is part of an effort that has protected more than 3,800 acres and over three miles of the creek since 2007.

The property is being called the Van Tassel Ranch to honor the original homestead family who owned the ranch for decades in the Elkhead Creek Valley. For decades, the Van Tassel Family ranched on most of the lower Elkhead Creek Valley, with this 203 acre parcel at the center of their holdings.

More than 85% of the property is irrigated and contains more than a mile of both sides of Elkhead Creek. Wildlife also thrives on the ranch, with significant habitat for bald eagles, sandhill cranes, sage grouse, mule deer and elk along the cottonwood lined creek and sage hillsides. The property is highly visible from the Elkhead Creek Road (RCR 29) as well as U.S Highway 40 where it enters Routt County.

The transaction was unusual, as the property had been foreclosed on by a local bank last October. CCALT worked with the previous owner, but the debt proved to be too much to overcome. The Routt County Purchase of Development Rights Program awarded funding to the project in July 2010, but by the fall it was clear that a new approach would be needed to protect the ranch.

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To complete the protection of the Van Tassel Ranch, CCALT staff worked closely with a neighboring landowner to explore whether they could together craft a solution that would save the 203 acres from becoming the latest prime meadow to be converted into small acreage ranchette development spreading east from Craig.

“Once the bank stepped in and repossessed the property, we felt that our chances of protecting the property with a conservation easement were over” said CCALT Director of Conservation Transactions Carolyn Aspelin. “Routt County PDR and the CCALT Board of Directors encouraged us to look for a new conservation solution and with a little luck, we were able to not only protect the property in the end, but also help a neighboring producer expand their historical operation” Aspelin added.

The conservation was completed by CCALT buying the property from the bank and immediately protecting the ranch with a conservation easement using \$300,000 in Routt County PDR funding. CCALT then sold the property with the conservation restrictions in place to the neighboring ranch family. The property will immediately be incorporated into their ranching operation. The addition of the extra 203 acres to their existing operation will provide much needed grazing ground for livestock associated with the operation.

“We had never dealt with a bank-owned property before” said Chris West, CCALT Executive Director, “ and we had to change our approach a little to get things moving with them, but in the end, we were able to come up a great outcome for the land.” “It feels really good to truly “save” a property and know that the family who now owns it will be great stewards of the land. It is a rare thing indeed to put a historic ranch back together.”

Ranching and Routt County are one and the same. CCALT has deep roots in Routt County and to date the organization has protected 27 properties covering more than 15,000 acres, with 5 ranches covering an additional 3,000 Routt County acres slated to be completed by the end of 2011, including over 600 more acres on Elkhead Creek. Statewide, CCALT has protected more than 375,000 acres through 254 conservation easements. This represents an area larger than the entire Colorado State Parks System.

Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust protects productive agricultural lands and conservation values they provide by working with ranchers and farmers, thereby preserving Colorado’s ranching heritage and rural communities. For more information visit www.ccalt.org

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The Routt County PDR Program has, to date, completed 28 conservation projects totaling 16,511 acres and currently has 12 projects in process totaling an additional 10,769 acres.