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Steamboat ranching family conserves iconic Colorado ranch

The Stanko family has been a part of the Routt County ranching community for four generations. Their ranch, located just a few miles outside of Steamboat Springs, was officially designated a Colorado Centennial Farm in 2007 by the State Historical Fund. The Centennial Farm program was established in 1986 to recognize the important role that agriculture has played in Colorado's history and economic development. The Stanko family was also the recipient of Colorado's Aldo Leopold Conservation Award in 2010. The award is given annually in recognition of outstanding commitment to conservation.

The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) has recently partnered with the Stanko family to conserve the final portion of the Stanko Ranch with help from the Routt County Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program and the Upper Yampa River Habitat Partnership Program.

"Conserving the Stanko Ranch has many benefits for Routt County as well as our family," said the Stankos. "Long-term benefits to the family include the ability for the older generation to retire, permitting the next generation to step into the management position and hopefully allow the ranch to continue in the family for another century."

Conserving the Stanko Ranch will benefit the public, especially those living in Steamboat Springs. "Conservation of the ranch will allow the county to keep a piece of its agricultural heritage. It provides open and agricultural views for the neighbors and tourists. The land under conservation will continue to provide habitat and migration paths for a wide range of animals, including some 160 plus species of birds, and large mammals such as elk, deer, and black bear,"

said the Stankos. The Stanko ranch also provides habitat for the sandhill crane and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, two statewide species of special concern.

The Stankos were one of the first ranching families to utilize the PDR program when they conserved 141 acres in 2000. In 2014, they conserved the central portion of their ranch, donating a 152-acre conservation easement to CCALT. The family's third and final conservation easement protects an additional 363 acres, the remainder of their ranch, and completes their conservation legacy.

CCALT has partnered with the Routt County PDR program on the conservation of more than 11,500 acres, assisting 16 ranching families across the county. CCALT holds conservation easements on an additional 16,000 acres in Routt County, and has conserved more than 465,000 acres across the state. A major focus of CCALT's work in Routt County and across the state is to help ranchers with the intergenerational transfer of their properties.

“Intergenerational transfer is one of the biggest threats facing our agricultural lands. Given the high land prices in Routt County, conservation easements are an essential tool to allow families like the Stankos to continue in a difficult, but vital, business. CCALT is proud to call the Stankos partners and to have helped them in this phase of their estate planning,” said Megan Knott, CCALT's stewardship director.