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Routt County Board of Commissioners

Coberly Creek Ranch conservation emblematic of the 1880s in South Routt County

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Steamboat Springs — The final piece of the conservation of the sprawling Coberly Creek Ranch in South Routt County was approved by the Routt County Board of Commissioners Nov. 8, and the 400-acre Trapper Jack parcel alludes to an obscure piece of local history.

Owners Mike Neelis and Merrilee Ellis have now put conservation easements on 3,350 acres of their ranch south of Yampa. The ranch lies just east of the intersection of Colorado Highway 134 where it heads up

the west side of Gore Pass, and Colorado Highway 131 where it parallels Egeria Creek.

Within the new conservation easement lie the remnants of a little pioneer dwelling known as Trapper Jack’s Cabin, named after an early owner.

The Board of Commissioners approved using \$325,000 of dedicated property tax

dollars to facilitate the easement.

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The easement, which was facilitated by the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust and taxpayer funding through Routt County's Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, ensures the parcel will never be developed. PDR Chairwoman Claire

Sollars observed that Trapper Jack alludes to the early days on Egeria Creek.

"This conservation easement adds to the sense of place that is Routt County," Sollars said. "The Coberly Creek Ranch is now part of South Routt's signature quilt in representing our core agricultural and open space values."

There is more known about the Coberly brothers, the first ranchers in the area, than there is about Trapper Jack himself.

The agricultural history of the [Coberly Creek Ranch](#) dates back to the 1880s. The Coberly brothers ran cattle in the Kremmling/Egeria Park area. In 1879 and 1880, they wintered approximately 2,000 head of cattle in that area, but that winter was so severe they almost lost their entire herd.

The harsh climate forced the family to relocate their cattle operation to Grand County, but the family is remembered in South Routt by the creek and ranch that bears its name.

Ellis said the Trapper Jack easement represents the final 15 percent of the conservation of the ranch and her family's intent has been to ensure that ranching remains a viable lifestyle for them.

"When we first began to plan for placing a conservation easement on our ranch, our goals were to conserve the agricultural status of the ranch, maintain the open space and incredible views," Ellis said in a news release.

Funding for the county's PDR program comes from 1.5 mills of voter-approved property taxes that were last renewed in 2006. The PDR program is intended to give landowners an economically attractive alternative to selling land for development by instead compensating them for the development rights they agree to put under a conservation easement. By giving up those future development rights, the owners typically donate more than half of the appraised value of the land.

The final Conservation Easement at the Coberly Creek Ranch was valued at \$648,000. The PDR program will contribute \$304,000 (46.9 percent) at closing plus \$21,000 toward closing costs. The balance of \$344,000 (53.1 percent) is contributed by the landowners by foregoing the ability to develop the land in the future.

Coberly Creek Ranch is currently operated by Neelis and Ellis, along with Dustin Neelis and his wife, Whitney, and Ellis's daughter Lindsay Hartzel and her husband.

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