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Great Outdoors Colorado funds Meeker ranch conservation effort

🕒 January 4, 2018 👤 Reed Kelley 📁 Meeker 💬 0



MEEKER | The board of directors of Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) announced last month that they have awarded a \$420,000 grant to the Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) to help in the permanent protection of the Pearce Ranch upriver from Meeker. The ranch has been owned and operated by the Tom Pearce family, a portion of the property dating back to 1943 when it was purchased by Pearce’s father who brought his family to the White River Valley from eastern Utah. The

Correction

MEEKER

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Obituary: Dena Marie (Dotson) Byers

OBITUARIES

property where the main ranch operation is today was purchased in 1961 and was most recently operated by Denise Pearce until her death in 2015. Tom Pearce was born and raised in Jensen, Utah. He and his family moved to what is now the Wakara Ranch in 1943. History has it that when the family was moving to town, Tom's parents sent him, then 15, and his brother Bob, 11, on ahead with the cattle so the parents could bring the younger kids, the family's belongings, and the pigs and chickens. The boys and cows made it fine but the parents, pigs, and poultry were not so fortunate. They had a wreck. By the time they got everything straightened out and all the animals caught, they were very delayed getting to the ranch. Tom and Bob had crawled between two mattresses to stay warm and the ranch owner's wife, Mrs. Seymour, finally brought them something to eat. Tom was graduated from Rio Blanco High School in 1946 and ranched with his father. He and his wife, Ruth, moved to the current Pearce Ranch in 1961.

According to Tom's son, Hal Pearce, the parcel on the river was known as the Kilduff Place before it became the Seymour Place and was sold to the Pearces. The main headquarters parcel today was part of the McKinnon TI Ranch. Tom and Ruth had three kids. Denise was the youngest. Her sister, Chris, lives in California and brother, Hal, recently retired from the White River National Forest staff.

In a Herald Times feature article published in May 2010, Denise Pearce was quoted, speaking of the ranch, "This is the only place I know. They'd better bury me here, and without any damn subdivisions. Subdivision and land developer are some of the nastiest words I know, and I know all of the bad ones. I'm a professional cusser." It seems she'd be much in favor of the easement protection.

Denise was also quoted, about cattle, "I like cows. There's just hardly anything better than a cow."

GOCO reported that their action was taken as part of their open space grant program which funds public and private land conservation. Open space grants are one of 12 grant categories offered by GOCO. The open space projects are intended "to sustain local agriculture and economies, give outdoor recreationists a place to play (or simply enjoy the view), protect wildlife habitat, and safeguard the state's water supply."

According to GOCO, the grant will help CCALT, an arm of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, acquire a conservation easement on the two parcels which make up the Pearce Ranch, totaling 620 acres. Proceeds from the easement grant will assist the ranch's long-time ranch manager, Lex Collins, to completely purchase the property from the Pearce family. The specifics of the easement are to be worked out between Collins, CCALT and GOCO over the next year or two. According to Michelle Frishman, open space manager at GOCO, the GOCO grant won't actually be delivered until a specific easement is agreed upon.

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GOCO and CCALT expect that the ranch under the conservation easement will continue to be operated in concert with its ranching legacy in addition to protecting wildlife habitat and water rights benefitting all the properties under the Highland Ditch system. The combined ranch parcels comprise one of the largest areas not already protected from development in this vicinity along the White River. The easement specifically, GOCO says, is expected to protect unique riverfront habitat that not only provides homes for wildlife, but also helps control flooding. The wildlife and habitat value of the property was confirmed by Area Wildlife Manager Bill deVergie, Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

The two parcels are the last pieces connecting nearly 4,000 acres of protected land in the area just upriver from Meeker and add support to two of eastern Rio Blanco County's major economic drivers: recreation and agriculture. To date, GOCO has invested \$16.3 million in Rio Blanco County projects, conserving nearly 30,000 acres. GOCO has supported the Meeker School District stadium and track renewal project, Foothills Park in Meeker and Rangely's community trails plan.

GOCO invests a portion of Colorado Lottery proceeds to help preserve and enhance the state's parks, trails, wildlife, rivers, and open spaces. GOCO's independent board awards competitive grants to local governments and land trusts, and makes other investments through Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Created when voters approved a Constitutional Amendment in 1992, GOCO has since funded more than 5,000 projects scattered in all 64 counties of Colorado. Visit GOCO.org for more information.



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