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Eastern Colorado Conservation Legacy Project Moves Forward

ARVADA, Colo. (Oct. 31, 2017) – With support from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) successfully conserved another piece of important agricultural land in their Agate Prairie Conservation Legacy Project. The Basin Ranch is located off of U.S. Interstate 70 in Elbert County. Brothers, Russell and Dawson MacLennan own the property and worked with CCALT to conserve their 3,500 acre ranch.

Basin Ranch is visible from a six mile stretch of I-70 near the town of Agate. The project represented an opportunity for CCALT to achieve significant conservation of productive agricultural land and natural habitat along a major transcontinental thoroughfare. Less than 45 minutes east of Denver, this region of Colorado in particular has faced increased development pressure as the population and cost of living in the Denver Metro Area has increased.

While many Coloradan's have unknowingly driven past the Basin Ranch, few are aware of the importance of the grassland prairie ecosystem that makes up the property and much of eastern Colorado. Colorado's eastern plains are some of the most ecologically diverse habitats and agriculturally productive lands in the state. The Basin Ranch and other properties that make up the Agate Prairie Conservation Legacy Project are part of one of the nation's largest remaining expanses of native prairie. Prairies represent rich and fertile landscapes that have long been known to provide humans with food, fiber, and energy. Prairie grasslands also provide human-valued resources such as erosion control, nutrient cycling, water purification and recharge and wildlife habitat.

Beyond its conservation and scenic values, the Basin Ranch is also part of a large hunting operation that is used specifically to host kids and first-time hunters. As the hunting population decreases and more ranchland is developed, there are fewer opportunities for first time Colorado hunters to learn how to hunt, as well as places for them to actually go hunting. As a result of this conservation project, the Basin hunting operation will continue, introducing more people to the sport at a time when hunting licenses are critical to Colorado Parks and Wildlife's conservation programs and financial sustainability.

"The Agate Prairie Conservation Legacy Project is important for both its scale and location. Production agriculture depends on scale. Conserving working ranches in a landscape helps to keep the supporting industries of agriculture viable. The Basin Ranch's location near I-70 and Denver put it directly in the path of future ag land conversion. CCALT is proud to work with the MacLennan family and to be a part of helping them achieve their conservation goals." Said Erik Glenn, executive director of the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust.

The Basin Ranch is the second of three properties to be conserved in CCALT's Agate Prairie Conservation Legacy Project. The project aims to conserve important components of the open space, grassland

ecosystem, and western heritage of Elbert County and will build on almost 60,000 acres of existing conserved private land in the area.

Conserving Basin Ranch is part of a \$2.1 million grant from GOCO awarded through its Protect Initiative, a five-year effort to fund once-in-a-lifetime land conservation projects across Colorado. Including the Agate Prairie Conservation Legacy Project, GOCO has already helped protect more than 100,000 acres through this initiative.

“This project presented a unique opportunity for large-scale conservation of critical habitat in eastern Colorado that connects a significant area of land that is already permanently protected,” GOCO Executive Director Chris Castilian said. “Basin Ranch, and the Agate Prairie Conservation Legacy Project, are a prime example of what GOCO aims to achieve with our Protect Initiative.”

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Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust conserves Colorado's western heritage and working landscapes for the benefit of future generations. For more information visit www.ccalt.org.

Great Outdoors Colorado (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 investments through Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Created when voters approved a Constitutional Amendment in 1992, GOCO has since funded more than 5,000 projects in urban and rural areas in all 64 counties without any tax dollar support. Visit www.GOCO.org for more information.