

Colorado Ranchers Stay in Business While Protecting the Sage Grouse

In lush valleys threaded with free-flowing rivers and linked by sagebrush uplands to aspen forests flanking high peaks, ranchers in Northwest Colorado are embracing conservation easements and restoration projects at an unprecedented rate. A partnership built on trust is showing the results of Farm Bill funding since 2010, when the Natural Resources Conservation Service launched the [Sage Grouse Initiative](#). The initiative's goal is to proactively conserve sage grouse and the working lands that support them, and prevent a need for an endangered species listing.

"For us, it's always been about staying in agriculture, protecting the wildlife, and restricting development that we don't want anyway," said multi-generational rancher Jay Yust. He and his father Jim spoke on their historic ranch by the Colorado River near Kremmling, the first stop of a five county tour in early August hosted by the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) and the Sage Grouse Initiative.

Landowner-led efforts were on full display over three days. Northwest Colorado is home to the largest populations of sage grouse in the state and the least developed private ranchlands remaining.

Sixty miles north of Kremmling in North Park, the most intact valley remaining in Colorado, 10 landowners have placed some 17,000 acres in conservation easements through CCALT. Seven have Sage Grouse Initiative funding that speeded up the process and helped ranchers keep their operations in the black. John Rich, who's a North Park rancher, a municipal judge, and

former county commissioner, is entering a conservation easement project this year with Sage Grouse Initiative dollars. He said the money he will receive will help with ranch labor that's getting harder for him to do as he and his wife Donna grow older, and the easement itself offers peace of mind.

"I can be assured that in another 100 years, people will be raising cattle on land that my grandpa started," he said. "If you start busting it up, the rancher and that little bird have trouble making it," Rich said. "You can have both. You can have agriculture and you can have the bird."

Throughout the tour, a common theme emerged of ranchers seeking ways to keep their lands viable for ranching, while diversifying their income from raising livestock to include hunting and other wildlife recreation. Conservation easements help them succeed, and so does range enhancement. Both programs are intended to be flexible to meet the needs of working operations.

Across the five counties spanning the tour, one rancher after another shared a philosophy of stewardship and dedication to the future of ranching for their children and for the nation's food independence. For the sage grouse, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will make its listing decision in 2015. At the heart of conservation partnerships is the Farm Bill. That's where Colorado's delegation works together across party lines to assure the funding continues at a critical time. Find out more at www.sagegrouseinitiative.com.

Legislative Watch

S. 258 and H.R. 657— Grazing Improvement Act

To amend the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 to improve the management of grazing leases and permits, and for other purposes. NCBA urges a **YES** vote on S. 258 and H.R. 657. Key Sponsors: Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), Rep. Raúl Labrador (R-Idaho)

S. 1195 — Renewable Fuel Standard Repeal Act

Would repeal the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) in its entirety. NCBA urges a **YES** vote on S. 1195. Key Sponsors: Sens. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), Pat Toomey (R-Pa.) and Mark Pryor (D-Ark.).

S. 1343 — Farmer Identity Protection Act

Protects the personal information of livestock producers from being distributed to third parties. NCBA urges a **YES** vote on S. 1343. Key Sponsors: Sens. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Joe Donnelly (D-Ind.).

S. 1420 and H.R. 317 — Judgment Fund Transparency Act

Requires a public accounting of the taxpayer funds distributed to litigants who bring prevailing claims against the federal government. NCBA urges a **YES** vote on S. 1420 and H.R. 317. Key Sponsors: Sens. Deb Fischer (R-Neb.), Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) and Rep. Cory Gardner (R-Colo.).

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