



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Final Phase of Historic Routt County Ranch Conserved**

**ARVADA, Colo. (November 18, 2016)** - The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) recently completed a conservation easement on the third and final phase of the Coberly Creek Ranch in Routt County. Since 2013, landowners Mike Neelis and Merilee Ellis have partnered with CCALT to conserve 3,350 acres of their property. This last component of the project conserved the remaining 400 acres of the ranch, adding to the growing block of conserved land in the region and permanently conserving ranch land contiguous to the Routt National Forest.

The final phase of the Coberly Creek Ranch lies in the Colorado River Basin. Sagebrush, shrublands, and colorful aspen woodlands make up the vegetative communities of the property. The parcel shares a one-mile boundary with the Routt National Forest and is 17 miles east of the Flat Tops Wilderness Area. The ranch is also nestled among a growing block of other conserved ranches in the region. Within 10 miles of the property, almost 19,000 acres of land is conserved with conservation easements, many of them held by CCALT.

Megan Knott, stewardship director of CCALT, points out that the Coberly Creek Ranch conservation easements are a key piece to a broader conservation strategy in this landscape. "Agriculture relies on large tracts of land and open space to succeed. For the past two decades, northwestern Colorado and Routt County have been focus areas for CCALT. Conserving the Coberly Creek Ranch will ensure that another property in this landscape remains intact, building on the previous conservation work, and benefiting both the agricultural and ecological values of the valley."

Routt County Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program Chairperson, Claire Sollars, certainly agrees, adding that "as the parcel name Trapper Jack suggests, this Conservation Easement adds to the "sense of place" that is Routt County. The Coberly Creek Ranch is now part of South Routt's signature quilt in representing our core agricultural and open space values."

This project would not have been possible without the dedication, persistence, and conservation ethic of Mike Neelis and Merrilee Ellis and funding support from the Routt County PDR Program. "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, and provide a viable transition and lifestyle for our family to continue ranching. Now that we have taken the final step to conserve the last 15% of the ranch, we can say those goals remain unchanged." Merrilee said.

The future of agriculture in Colorado depends on having a viable mass of land available to grow food and fiber and on families that can manage and steward the land and its resources. Conservation easements are an effective tool for keeping irreplaceable landscapes together and agricultural families on the land. Successful conservation efforts, like the Coberly Creek Ranch, are ensuring that agriculture will have a place in the future of Routt County, and in Colorado.

*Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust protects Colorado's agricultural land, heritage and families for future generations by conserving working rural landscapes. For more information visit [www.ccalt.org](http://www.ccalt.org).*

*Routt County PDR Program ensures that Routt County will always be defined by its agricultural and natural resource assets. Since its inception, the program has helped to fund 54 conservation projects totaling 40,598 acres. For more information, please contact Helena Taylor at Routt County (970) 870-5315.*

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