



## EDITORIALS

## Conservation easements

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THE BEST way to protect Southern Colorado's land and water from being dried up by urban development is the strategic use of conservation easements to preserve both environmental quality and the local economy.

Conservation groups already are investing wisely in preserving the environment, land and water in the San Luis Valley.

In the early years of this century, the Nature Conservancy, a national conservation group, supplied the impetus to permanently protect the Baca Ranch from greedy water speculators by jump-starting the \$30 million purchase of the ranch. Congress followed by establishing the nearby Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, thus preserving the valley's great natural asset forever.

Other large ranches in the San Luis Valley are being protected by similar conservation efforts.

On Nov. 3, the Del Norte-based Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, Colorado Open Lands and the Western Rivers Conservancy announced creation of a \$2 million San Luis Valley Conservation Fund. The goal is to take care of the land and water, as well as fish and wildlife habitat along the Rio Grande, through the valley.

Conservation will have a positive lasting effect on the San Luis Valley.

Now conservation groups need to cast their eyes east and north to the Lower Arkansas Valley. This agricultural region is living proof that farmers have been the first human contributors to conserving land and water of irreplaceable value to the economy, [food](#) production and natural wildlife habitat.

We appreciate the Palmer Land Trust's promising plan that, in the trust's own words, "focuses on a 1.75-million acre [landscape](#) in the western Lower Arkansas Valley. Delineated by the Arkansas River and its southern tributaries, the planning area extends from Canon City in the west to Rocky [Ford](#) in the east, and from the city of Pueblo in the north to Colorado City in the south."

The Lower Arkansas Valley looks to Palmer Land Trust success and also needs others, such as the Nature Conservancy and Colorado Cattlemen's Trust, to add their considerable weight to more extensive conservation easements.

Remember, farming and ranching are the most time-tested contributors to conservation of the environment — wildlife habitat, recreation and scenic vistas — that draw people to the beautiful state of Colorado.

The advantages of conservation easements are numerous, extending to farmers and ranchers, especially. They can receive outside income to commit to staying on the land in irrigated agriculture in perpetuity. It's a great disincentive to settling for a one-time payoff from selling their permanent water rights to be transferred north to urban areas.

Conservation easements are a win-win proposition. Now we need the conservation experts to pitch in and help save the future of the Lower Arkansas Valley.