

## Ditmer: Saving and giving in Colorado

By Joanne Ditmer *The Denver Post*

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As mammoth earth-movers rampaged across Colorado's rural landscapes 30-plus years ago, and sprawling subdivisions sprouted in place of farms and ranches, there was much concern. Could the Colorado we loved, the exhilarating open spaces and iconic Western landscapes that define the state, survive the onslaught?

Fortunately, citizens didn't just stand around worrying, but began exploring what options would keep the open spaces we loved.

In 1980, Gov. Richard Lamm called 450 citizens to the two-year Front Range Project to evaluate state priorities.

Open space was the first priority. How we could protect and preserve that irreplaceable asset?

The Colorado Forum, an association of 25 of the state's CEOs, tackled the problem and suggested a partnership of landowners, business leaders and conservationists in a land conservation trust. Thus, Colorado Open Lands was born. It is the only statewide conservation land trust created exclusively by the business community, which may explain why it has been so successful in crafting partnerships that keep farms and ranches in food production, families on the land, and the open spaces we crave.

Thirty years after its creation, Colorado Open Lands protects thousands of acres of the state's landscapes and holds conservation easements in 41 counties. Each of these easements is tailored to an individual property. Landowners give up the land's development rights — even when it's sold — and gain some tax benefits, while also ensuring that the family who owns it can keep the farm or ranch.

In addition to Colorado Open Lands, there are 25 other certified land trusts operating in Colorado, each with its own particular focus. The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust protects 270 ranches covering more than 400,000 acres, and ranks sixth nationally in acres protected by statewide/regional land trusts. In October, the trust was honored by El Pomar Foundation with the Penrose Award as the state's outstanding nonprofit.

Colorado Open Lands recently did its own honoring, giving the George Cranmer award to Sue Anschutz-Rodgers, chair and president of the Anschutz Family Foundation and owner of the Crystal River Ranch near Aspen. She grew up on a ranch in Kansas, and quotes her father as saying, "There is only so much land," instilling in her a strong interest in land conservation.

Anschutz-Rodgers has served on many non-profit boards, received the coveted Citizen of the West award in 2006, and was the first woman to be appointed to the nine-member executive committee of the National Western Stock Show.

George Cranmer, whom the award was named after, was the longtime manager of Denver Parks and is remembered for his foresight and dedication in building Red Rocks Amphitheater and Winter Park ski area.

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Colorado thrives because citizens join in efforts to improve things. One of the newest events is Colorado Gives Day, which will be held next Tuesday, from midnight to midnight. Citizens are urged to donate to 23 types of non-profit organizations, from land trusts to health organizations, the homeless, children, and on and

on.

The online event is sponsored by Community First Foundation and FirstBank and other supporters, and 100 percent of your donation goes to the charity you indicate. It's safe, easy, secure, and the FirstBank Incentive Fund will increase the value of your online donation.

Last year, donations of \$12.8 million were distributed to 927 non-profits, and this year 1,200 non-profits have been screened and accepted. Go to [GivingFirst.org](http://GivingFirst.org) to see the list of non-profits, learn their missions and study financial records. Donations begin at \$10.

"Give where you live" will help make your community a better place. That's the Colorado way.

Joanne Ditmer's column on environmental and preservation issues began in The Post in 1962.