

Ranch to remain undeveloped

Press release | Posted: Wednesday, November 2, 2011 6:44 pm

The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) is pleased to announce the protection of 8,684 acres of the Purdy Ranch. The working ranch near Agate is home to a vibrant agricultural operation and rare prairie wildlife. The ranch is visible for seven miles along Interstate 70 in an area where development pressure is increasing and is spreading east from Metropolitan Denver. The conservation easement ensures that the land will never be developed and will remain available for agricultural production.

The ranch has been owned and managed for most of the last 100 years by the Purdy family, longtime Elbert County residents who are very active in their local agricultural community as well as the statewide Colorado Cattlemen's Association.

The Purdy family partnered with CCALT to secure grant funding from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), the Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's North American Wetlands Act Program (NAWCA). The funding entities' interests were piqued by the extraordinary wildlife habitat the ranch provides.

The ranch contains over 6,500 acres of unbroken native shortgrass prairie, one of the most imperiled ecosystems in North America and worldwide. Colorado has lost approximately 50% of its native shortgrass prairie. In addition, a large 48.5-acre playa wetlands complex exists on the ranch. These seasonal wetland lakes play an important role storing water in a part of the country that receives as little as 20 inches of rain a year. Consequently, playas support an astounding array of wildlife, including migratory birds and rare prairie amphibians.

The Purdys found out about the usefulness of conservation easements from long-time family friend, neighbor and past president of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Miles Davies.

"This country is a lot different from when I grew up. We have been seeing our valuable agricultural lands go out of production," said Dale Purdy. "This Conservation Easement was a way for wildlife to pay the freight while allowing agriculture to continue to steward the land. We are proud of what our family has accomplished here," he continued.

CCALT has been partnering with TNC for the past four years to protect native grasslands and rangelands. By focusing on landscapes where our conservation goals overlap, CCALT and TNC together have protected 11 ranches totaling over 21,750 acres. "The Purdy project both accomplishes important conservation and demonstrates the power of partnerships in Colorado's grasslands," said William Burnidge, The Nature Conservancy's Grasslands Program Director in Colorado.

Elbert County resident and CCALT Board member, Ben Duke said, "The Purdy easement is an important one not only for those of us living in Elbert County but for all Coloradans. The Purdy ranch represents history, biological diversity and an exceptional ranching operation. We at CCALT are proud to now have the Purdy family as partners in protecting Colorado's unique working landscapes."

Taken together, successful conservation efforts in the area play a vital role in Elbert County's agricultural economy. The loss of any of the large ranches from the area would threaten the sustainability of the other agricultural operations in the area. CCALT and TNC currently hold over 35,000 acres in conservation easements in Elbert County alone. CCALT has protected over 381,000 acres in conservation easements statewide.