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Courtesy photo

Scott Carpenter prepares for a simulated flight at Hangar S White Room. Assisting Carpenter is Guenter Wendt, spacecraft pad leader for McDonnell Aircraft, prime contractor for the Mercury spacecraft.

Preserved Routt County ranch has links to the space program

By [Tom Ross](#)

Steamboat Springs — The Routt County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously Tuesday to approve the expenditure of \$200,000 in purchase of development rights tax dollars to help conserve the 480-acre Frye Ranch in North Routt County. The ranch has ties to pioneer days in the upper Elk River Valley and the beginnings of the American space program.

The owners of the ranch are Scott and Patty Carpenter. He was one of the original seven astronauts in NASA's Project Mercury. The ranch was homesteaded in 1904 by Scott Carpenter's great-uncle, John Frye.

"This ranch has been in our family for more than 100 years," Carpenter said in a statement issued by the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust. "The conservation easement will assure that this rich heritage is protected for the benefit of future generations."

The Land Trust will hold the conservation easement on the ranch.

Carpenter's daughter Kris Stoever told the commissioners that Frye arrived in the valley in 1895.

"I imagine him then, exploring the upper Elk River Valley and making friends in Hahn's Peak and Steamboat, learning about the countryside. Most of all, I imagine him on a spring day electing to follow Red Creek to its source up Sand Mountain. And his delight in finding one of the greenest meadows in Colorado."

Scott Carpenter, the future astronaut, spent time on the ranch as a boy and an adult, helping with cattle ranching.

"My father camped on the ranch as a boy, brought his children here to camp and hunt. (He) buried the ashes of an infant son in an aspen grove," Stoever said.

Carpenter was the second American to orbit Earth and the fourth American in space.

Meagan Manner, project manager for the Land Trust, said the conservation of the Frye Ranch was made possible by the Carpenters' willingness to donate more than 90 percent of the easement's value.

"The Carpenter family has made an impressive commitment to agriculture and tourism in Routt County," Manner said. "By protecting their ranch, they are not only ensuring the family legacy, but are adding great public value."

The ranch is close to Steamboat Lake State Park and has views of Sand Mountain, Saddle Mountain and Meaden Peak.

The PDR program is funded by a 1.5-mill property tax approved in 2006, nine years after the program first was approved for a 10-year period. The 2006 renewal is good for 20 years.

When landowners donate a conservation easement, the land permanently is protected from development.

The easement reduces the value of the restricted land, but landowners' compensation goes beyond the knowledge that the land never will be developed. The PDR program compensates landowners for the land-value loss to encourage more people to enter into conservation easements.

There are significant associated tax breaks, depending on the details of the easement.

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