

## GOCO funds funnel into Mesa County for local projects

\$535,500 donated to conserve ranch land in Glade Park, plus other awards

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GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. — To enhance outdoor recreation opportunities in Mesa County, the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) board recently awarded more than \$800,000 to local projects.

A grant of \$535,500 was given to the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) to protect 1,000 acres of ranch land in Glade Park. Other projects funded include \$244,100 to the City of Fruita for renovations on the Fruita Bike Park, and a \$28,750 to Mesa County for Colorado River land restoration.

### OTHER LOCAL GOCO PROJECTS

- Fruita Bike Park — The City of Fruita plans to use its GOCO grant to add picnic pavilions, a playground, landscaping and walking paths to its bike park at the south end of town.

- Grand Valley Riparian Restoration Collaborative — Mesa County will use its GOCO dollars to restore native plants to the Colorado Riverfront Trail with help from the Western Colorado Youth Conservation Corps.

"All projects up for GOCO funding undergo an extremely thorough review process by GOCO staff and outside peer reviewers to determine whether the project warrants funding, and warrants funding in a particular grant cycle," Davies said.

"The Unaweep Rim Ranch was under threat of development, and because it serves as vital wildlife habitat and has many other conservation values, it was deemed an important project to fund," said GOCO Communications Coordinator Emily Davies. "As you know, GOCO is mandated by the state constitution to direct its portion of Lottery funds to 'preserve, protect, enhance and manage the state's wildlife, park, river, trail and open space heritage.'"

With GOCO funding in hand, now the CCALT will move toward closing on a 1,000-acre conservation easement in the first part of 2013.

Though the CCALT has preserved more than 400,000 acres with 267 easements statewide, the group has done "remarkably little in Mesa County" thus far, CCALT Executive Director Chris West said.

The organization was formed by Colorado Cattlemen's Association (CCA) members in 1995, and CCA is known as the first state livestock association to form a land trust in the U.S.

"Located on the edge of Unaweep Canyon, the working ranch is highly-visible from the Unaweep-Tabeguache Scenic Byway and is part of a larger landscape identified as a high-priority conservation area by the Colorado Conservation Partnership, the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife, and Mesa Land Trust," a GOCO news release said.

According to West, "it's a project we've been working on for several years. We're expanding on lots of existing conservation work and working with a longtime ranch family to preserve their land and heritage. ... We've been working with them (the land owners) for several years to come up with a plan to protect the ranch."

"Conservation is critically important to the area," West added.

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