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News Release

Historic Hutchinson Ranch protected in Chaffee County

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More than 150 years of Colorado ranching history has been permanently protected announced The Trust for Public Land and the Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) today.

Located along U.S. Highway 50 between Salida and Poncha Springs, the 700-acre Hutchinson Ranch was originally homesteaded in the 1860s by Joseph Hutchinson before Colorado achieved statehood. The ranch has been passed down through six generations, making it the oldest family-owned ranch in the Upper Arkansas Valley.

The Trust for Public Land purchased the development rights to 470 acres of the Hutchinson Ranch putting a total of 650 acres under easements that allow the family to continue to own and work the land, while ensuring it can never be subdivided or fragmented.

“If ranching teaches you anything, it is the need to be flexible. In order to preserve the ranch legacy, we needed every ounce of that flexibility in order to keep this ranching heritage alive. Pursuing a conservation easement was our best option, and our family appreciates greatly all who helped make this preservation effort become a reality,” said Art Hutchinson.

In recent years, Chaffee County has grown in popularity as a tourist destination and location for second homes. Over the past few years, the Hutchinson Family worked with The Trust for Public Land, CCALT, and Land Trust of Upper Arkansas (LTUA) to permanently protect nearly the entire ranch and provide them with the financial resources they needed to continue to work the land. Abby Hutchinson, granddaughter of the family’s patriarch, Wendell “Doc” Hutchinson, will continue to manage the ranch.

“We are very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with the Hutchinsons to help them secure their family’s legacy,” said The Trust for Public Land Colorado State Director, Tim Wohlgenant. “It’s very rare to work with a family that’s been in the Upper Arkansas Valley since Colorado was a territory and has played such an important role in the region’s history.”

The ranch is also one of the last working cattle ranches in the area. In 2003, the ranch and its original homestead were listed in the top five properties by Colorado Preservation Incorporated’s list of prestigious and most endangered places. The Hutchinsons donated the original homestead, which is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places, to the Town of Poncha Springs.

“The Hutchinson Ranch conservation project truly embodies the mission of CCALT which is to ‘protect Colorado’s agricultural land, heritage and families for future generations by conserving working rural landscapes.’ We are excited to see the completion of this important project and to have been a part of helping the Hutchinson family achieve their conservation goals and providing Abby Hutchinson with an opportunity to carry on the family’s rich ranching heritage in the Upper Arkansas Valley,” said Chris West, CCALT Executive Director.

The Trust for Public land secured funding from lottery funded Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO),the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, Chaffee County, and the Colorado Parks & Wildlife Habitat Protection Program to purchase two conservation easements totaling 470 acres on the ranch in 2011 and 2013, both of which are held by CCALT. A third conservation easement of 180 acres, held by LTUA, was donated by the Hutchinsons in 2010 bringing the total acres conserved to 650.

“GOCO is pleased to continue its partnership to protect ranch lands in the Arkansas valley,” said GOCO Executive Director, Lise Aangeenbrug. “The recent grant for the Hutchinson ranch will not only help continue a family ranching tradition, but will also preserve water, wildlife and scenic views so important to the valley and our entire state.”

"The impact of what a program like the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program can do for the sustainability of the quality of life we all come to enjoy in the country is significant," said Tim Macklin, Acting NRCS State Conservationist for Colorado. "The continuing partnership with our agency, the Hutchinson family and the other natural resource stakeholders is the key component to the development of this historical easement."

"The Chaffee County Commissioners are very happy to have been able to help and support one of the pioneer families in the valley," says Chaffee County Commissioner Frank Holman. "Preserving the land and the water and this historic way of life is very important to us, and we are pleased to have been a part of it."

To date, over 3,000 acres of productive agricultural land has been protected in Chaffee County.

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