

Rugged ranch gets helping hand

Nature Conservancy purchases historic JE Ranch for \$21 million



COURTESY PHOTO/THE NATURE CONSERVANCY. The Nature Conservancy has purchased the JE Canyon Ranch near Branson with the intention of preserving it for future generations.

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The Nature Conservancy has purchased the rugged 50,000-acre JE Canyon Ranch located near Branson in Southeastern Colorado.

The ranch sale was for \$21 million.

The Nature Conservancy will protect the entire ranch with a conservation easement after the purchase, which will ensure there will be no future development while protecting agricultural and natural values. The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust is working with the Nature Conservancy on easement.

"It's part of a larger, exciting program that's being put together," said Matt Moorhead, Southeast Colorado program director for the Nature Conservancy. "The goal is to get it back into private hands, but we're taking risks a landowner couldn't."

The Nature Conservancy will seek a lessee for a livestock grazing operation during its ownership. After a conservation easement is in place, the Conservancy will eventually sell the ranch back into private conservation-minded ownership.

"This area defines Colorado with its natural, historical and cultural heritage, yet many people are unaware of its significance," Moorhead said. "Thanks to generations of careful land management by private land owners and ranchers in this community, the land as well as its rich history and traditions

have been conserved.”

The JE Canyon Ranch is home to the largest bighorn sheep herd in the state, as well as populations of deer, elk and bear.

There are 50 miles of canyons, 9 miles of the Purgatoire River and 5 miles of Chacuaco Creek on the property, helping support more than 850 known species of plants and animals.

There are early Hispanic settlements and pioneer homesteads on the site as well as more ancient archaeological sites. There are also modern buildings and the previous owner had been running cattle on it.

Parts of the ranch already are protected by a conservation easement, but the Nature Conservancy plans to preserve the entire 50,000 acres.

The Nature Conservancy plans to work with neighbors and community members to develop and test land management practices and stream restoration strategies. “I have spent 27 years working with several past owners and the present owner in putting the JE Canyon Ranch together in its present state,” says Corwin Brown, who helped broker the deal. “It was always a goal to conserve and protect this very special and unique property forever. The owner and I are very pleased the Nature Conservancy has stepped forward to make this goal a reality.”

The Nature Conservancy has about 1 million members and has helped preserve 130 million acres worldwide.

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