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3/26/2015

Draper Ranch in line for key honor

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The Draper Ranch in Wetmore is one of three finalists for the 2015 Leopold Conservation Award through the Colorado Cattlemen's Association.

If selected, the Draper Ranch would be the third Custer County ranch to receive the prestigious award. In 2007, the award was presented to the San Isabel Ranch, owned and operated by Bet Kettle and Mike and Sara Shields, and in 2004, the award went to Randy and Claricy Rusk of the Rusk Hereford Ranch, both near Westcliffe.

The Leopold Award is given in ten states. It was established here in Colorado in 2003.

The Draper Ranch is a cow/calf operation owned and operated by Buddy and Jerry Draper and their family. They are the third generation operators of the ranch, preceded by Buddy's parents, the late George and Leona Draper, and his grandfather, Louis Draper.

Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the Leopold Conservation Award recognizes extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation practices. It inspires other landowners through these examples and provides a visible forum where farmers, ranchers and other private landowners are recognized as conservation leaders.

In his influential 1949 book, "A Sand Country Almanac," Leopold called for an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage, which he called "an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity."

Award applicants are judged based on their demonstration of improved resource conditions, innovation, long-term commitment to stewardship, sustained economic viability, community and civic leadership, and multiple use benefits.

It is presented annual by the CCA, the Sand County Foundation, the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust and other sponsoring organizations.

The 2015 recipient will receive a \$10,000 cash prize and a crystal award depicting Leopold.

The winner will be announced in April, and the award will be presented during the annual CCA convention on June 15 in Steamboat Springs.

The other two finalists for the 2015 award are the Flying

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Diamond Ranch, headquartered near Kit Carson and owned and operated by Scott and Jean Johnson; and the Green Creek Ranch in Pleasant Valley near Steamboat Springs, operated by Bill Gay.