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Ranch property conserved at confluence of Colorado and Blue Rivers

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Ranch



Noted Colorado photographer John Fielder has documented the beauty of a ranch in three of his books and inspired partners to join together for an easement that protects both sagebrush country and the irrigated hay meadows at the confluence of the Blue and Colorado Rivers. (Photo courtesy of CCALT.)

Posted: Wednesday, May 27, 2015 12:00 am | Updated: 10:33 am, Thu May 28, 2015.

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The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust recently conserved one of the state's spectacular working ranches along both the Colorado and Blue Rivers in Grand County near Kremmling. The Yust family's desire to leave an intact working ranch legacy resulted in a 995-acre conservation easement held by CCALT.

"With places like Yust Ranch, it's easy to say that Colorado is home to some of the country's most spectacular landscapes," U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet (CO) said. "As we've seen first-hand on this working ranch, active cattle production can co-exist with thriving sagebrush habitat and wildlife. Everyone involved in finally making this conservation easement a reality should be very proud."

Sen. Bennet visited the ranch in 2014 to see the benefits of farm bill conservation programs, including the Sage Grouse Initiative, a partnership launched by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in 2010.

Fifth generation rancher Jay Yust grew up ranching here and, with his father Jim, shares a passion for the family's home and their land.

“The easement absolutely made this ranch more economically viable, and it will stay that way in the future whether we’re here or not,” he said.

The Yust family has tended their ranch with a strong sense of stewardship for wildlife as well as their livestock operation. The ranch is home to healthy populations of sage grouse, mule deer, elk, pronghorn and moose. Bald eagles routinely roost in the cottonwoods that line the Blue River.

“This area is one of Colorado’s truly special places,” said Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper. “Keeping this large landscape together provides not only important habitat for sage grouse, but also conserves river corridors that nourish ranchers, recreation and other wild animals. Protecting these elements sustains our environment, economy and quality of life.”

Strong partnerships and dedication from the Yusts and the CCALT staff brought a seven-year project across the finish line. The significance for sage grouse led to funding from the farm bill via the Sage Grouse Initiative. Great Outdoors Colorado (lottery funded), Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Trout Unlimited and the Gates Family Foundation all stepped up to contribute dollars to purchase the easement.

Noted Colorado photographer John Fielder has documented the beauty of a ranch in three of his books and inspired partners to join together for an easement that protects both sagebrush country and the irrigated hay meadows at the confluence of the Blue and Colorado Rivers. The easement includes a mile and half of the Blue River on both sides and over three miles of the south side of the Colorado River.

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