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The mission of the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust is to protect productive agricultural lands and the conservation values they provide by working with ranchers and farmers, thereby preserving Colorado's ranching heritage and rural communities.

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Spotlight On Colorado

Meeker and the White River Valley Conservation Helps Sustain the Heritage of the Old West

The White River Valley has attracted people for centuries, from the Utes to early settlers who established ranches along the river more than a century ago. The defining characteristic of the Valley's landscape, the White River, originates in the Flat Tops Wilderness and meanders its way through the beautiful native grass hay meadows of Northwest Colorado before meeting the Green River in Utah.

Along its path is the town of Meeker, and a healthy ranching community whose economies depend largely on the agricultural uses that are possible because of the area's abundant natural resources. The open nature and remoteness of this mountain valley landscape make the White River Valley highly desirable for recreational uses, and makes for a fun road trip back to the Old West.

The Town of Meeker, in the heart of the White River Valley, is named to honor Indian Agent Nathan Meeker who died nearby in one of Colorado's most famous conflicts with the Ute Tribe in 1879, now known as the Meeker Massacre. After that violent start, Meeker settled down and became a typical western town of frame buildings and dirt roads with nary a tree in sight. More than a century later, the community now consists of about 2,400 people, and it is the Rio Blanco County seat. Meeker remains a true western town influenced by agriculture and recreation.

The White River Valley is also the gateway to the Flat Tops, and 235,000 acres of wilderness and extraordinary big game hunting which bring thousands of visitors each year. Views of the ranches and mountains can easily be enjoyed from the Flat Tops Trail Scenic Byway which heads east of Meeker at Rio Blanco County Road 8 and extends 81 miles over Ripple Creek Pass to Yampa in Routt County.

A few miles east of town on the Byway is an interpretive roadside area that overlooks a spectacular view of one of the ranches CCALT recently protected in

Spotlight on Colorado continued

the valley. To the west of town lies Powell Park, the site of the historic Meeker Massacre, and more productive ranches. Each September, visitors arrive for the Meeker Classic Sheepdog Trials, a gathering of the best working dogs from around the world.

The White River Valley Conservation Initiative

The White River Valley Conservation Initiative was developed to assist landowners achieve their financial and agricultural goals. Most of the ranches in the valley are worked by families that, through multiple generations on the land, have kept this largely working landscape in agriculture. Land prices have increased substantially throughout the past 10 years and small acreage rural development is threatening the connectivity and historic nature of the landscape in the Valley.

These changes have forced several longtime ranching families to sell all or portions of historic ranches to pay off debt or settle estates. CCALT has long recognized the White River Valley as an important ranching community. However, it was not until the past five years that ranch families along the White River began to explore conservation as an option to preserve their productive agricultural land and way of life.

Four years ago, the Russell Ranch, run today by Ben Rogers and his family and the neighboring Nelson Family's White River Ranch run by Forrest Nelson, agreed to be "conservation pioneers" in the valley. They committed to working with CCALT to protect their historic family operations.

Collectively, these two families represent more than 160 years of continuous management and resource stewardship in a highly visible portion of the valley. They decided to move forward together in the protection of their highly-productive ranches, which include more than a mile and a half of the White River and vital habitat for a wide variety of wildlife species.

The White River on the Russell Ranch



The decision to pursue a conservation easement was not easy and both families took the time to learn about easements and what they can do for a family ranch. “The White River Valley’s rural, western character has been shaped by the traditional uses of the land and most importantly, the resilient families who sustain these working lands,” said CCALT Director of Conservation Transactions Carolyn Aspelin. “Producers like the Rogers and Nelson families manage the land with the belief that agriculture can sustain a family who in turn, sustains the land. CCALT is very proud to have worked with the Rogers and Nelson families,” stated Aspelin.

Conservation Success and Looking Forward

As 2012 draws to a close, CCALT is proud to announce the successful completion of the initial aspects of our work in the White River Valley. Both of the original projects have been completed and the number of landowners throughout the valley who are interested in working with CCALT is growing.

The Russell and White River Ranches would not have been protected without the help of funders who shared in the conservation vision of the landowners and CCALT. The lottery-funded Great Outdoors Colorado, The New Venture Fund, Trout Unlimited and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program were essential in making this a reality.

The successful partnership with these two families has also led to a significant increase in interest from fellow ranchers in the White River Valley who see that conservation easements are an effective tool to preserving agriculture and the rural working landscape that makes the White River Valley so unique.

CCALT is confident that our efforts are helping to ensure that the agricultural heritage of Rio Blanco County and Colorado will be sustained for future generations. With the challenges of ranching, the next few years may be the last opportunity to inspire significant conservation work in this unique valley.

“I never take it for granted, not its bounty of grass, nor the cows that live off that grass and have fed this family for five, going on six, generations in this place called the White River Valley. It is a place of simple beauty and grace. Unlike the overwhelming vistas found in other mountain valleys, the White River is less demonstrative, less showy and more modest, like a naturally pretty girl who doesn’t have to wear a lot of makeup, but still melts your heart without even trying.”

Ben Rogers





Sunset BBQ Raises Funds to Support Land Conservation



Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture John Salazar, Ginny Wilson & Stan Johnson

The Board and Staff of CCALT would like to thank everyone who attended or donated to our 2012 Sunset BBQ at the Wilson Rio Grande Ranch in Del Norte on August 4th. It was another successful event!

The BBQ was hosted by the Wilson family, who have protected their ranch with a conservation easement. The Wilsons and CCALT hosted a fishing derby before the BBQ. USA Fly Fishing Team Captain Anthony Naranja held a seminar and provided tips on the river throughout the day.

The annual fundraiser is held at different ranches across Colorado every summer. This is the first time that the Sunset BBQ has been held in the San Luis Valley. The proceeds from the event will go toward the protection of Colorado's beautiful agricultural lands. Photos from the event can be seen online at www.ccalt.org.

2012 Summer BBQ Sponsors

Gold



Wilson Rio Grande Ranch

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The Trinchera and Tercio Foundation



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Steele Street Bank & Trust
Tax Credit Connection
The Trust for Public Land
Walters & Mullins
Western Land Group, Inc.



New Faces at CCALT



Robbie Baird LeValley
CCALT Board Member

Robbie Baird LeValley joined the CCALT Board in June. She currently works as the Administrator for Delta County. Robbie served as the Colorado State University area livestock and range extension agent for the Tri River Area Plus region for 23 years prior to her new position as Delta County Administrator. Robbie also served as president of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association from 2010 - 2011.

She received her Bachelors and Masters of Science in Animal Science from Colorado State University in 1987 and 1989, respectively. Robbie and her husband Mark are cow calf operators in Western Colorado near Hotchkiss, Colorado. Robbie and Mark have two boys who are both active in the ranch.

Joe Kasza joined the CCALT Board in June replacing Reeves Brown who dedicated many years to serve on the Land Trust Board. Joe is a 4th generation farmer and rancher from McClave, Colorado. A graduate of Colorado State University, he has operated the family farm for 35 years. Joe served as president of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association from 1993 - 1994.



Joe Kasza
CCALT Board Member

In Memory

CCALT would like to recognize several of our landowners who have passed away within the last two years. Their legacies will live on forever through their contributions to Colorado's rich agricultural heritage.

Marvin Davis
Judy Everett

M. Oscar Green
Doris Knott

Tim Myers
Darrel Rolph

George Salisbury
Stephen Seay

Chuck Sweetland
Don Wamsley



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CCALT Receives the El Pomar Foundation's Outstanding Nonprofit Award

CCALT was honored as the state's outstanding nonprofit with the Julie and Spencer Penrose Award. The El Pomar Foundation's Awards for Excellence presentation ceremony was held on October 1st and included a \$50,000 cash prize.

"One thing that stands out to anyone spending time getting to know CCALT is that this is an organization unlike any other in the state and perhaps the country," said Peter Maiurro, El Pomar Vice President. "Colorado's natural environment is its most precious resource and CCALT has found a way to creatively bring together conservationists and ranchers to ensure that generations to come will enjoy this treasure. CCALT truly sets the standard for excellence as a dynamic organization that other Colorado nonprofits can emulate."

For more information visit our website at www.ccalt.org.



Maggie Hanna, Gael and Jay Fetcher, Penny Lewis,
Chris West and Peter Maiurro (left to right)