LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD

IMPORTANT PLACES

2018 SUMMER PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

PHOTO: JOHN FIELDER
Passing Forward the Important Places
Leopold Conservation Award Winner: Beatty Canyon Ranch

Written by Maggie Hanna

The Wooten Family is one of the last of the 6th generation of ranchers to own and manage Beatty Canyon Ranch. The ranch is one of the largest in Colorado, covering 175,000 acres of private land. The Wootens define their conservation ethic as grazing cattle on native pastureland to produce high-quality beef in a manner compatible and sustainable for the ranch, while providing a high quality life for family, passing the ranch forward through deliberate succession, and achieving financial goals.

The family opens their home and ranch to tours and workshops to advance awareness of modern ranching practices and offer this important landscape for all to enjoy and learn from. Each member of the family, is a spokesperson on topics such as grazing practices, treatment for invasive species, beef production issues, wildlife and natural resource management, and family finance and succession planning.

Beatty Canyon Ranch has engaged an array of partners in their work. A notable effort and success has been their riparian work to combat an explosion and spread of tamarisk. This work relied heavily on partnerships and persistence, but today, the health of the river systems on the ranch is dramatically improved. They also worked to combat encroachment of pinon and juniper trees on soils better suited for a native grassland ecosystem. They have long worked to develop water systems for livestock, adding windmills and stock ponds, installing solar and submersible pumps, and miles of pipeline to distribute water throughout the property.

Since 1990, a hunting enterprise has generated and diversified ranch revenue, as well as spurred the creation of a partnership with neighboring ranchers to improve hunting throughout the region.

This joint effort allows the public to hunt a large swath of private ranchland, has produced significant and positive financial impact to the community, and has provided opportunities to share the importance of agriculture’s role in the ecosystem. As with their approach to land management, the Wootens are integral to their communities. Members of the family serve on the Kim School Board, the Kim Equine Pavilion, the National Little Britches Rodeo, the Pinon Canyon Expansion Opposition Coalition, the Biological/Natural Resource Inventory Committee, the CCA and CCALT boards, and the United States Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, among others.

“Steve and Joy’s land ethic is in their DNA. They are generational ranchers who understand, respect, and honor their heritage while also embracing adaptation and innovation.”

— Grady Grissom, 2017 Leopold Conservation Award Winner

The family is proud of being able to pass their land on to future generations, including their grandchildren, and is committed to preserving the land for the benefit of all.

The Wooten family on Beatty Canyon Ranch. Photo: Russ Schnitzer

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Celebrating the history of families and the important places they steward is nothing new for the Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT). Recently, the CCALT staff reviewed our own organizational history, and along the way stumbled upon a treasure chest of historical papers, handwritten notes, years of printed emails, and news clippings from across Colorado, each sorted in weathered manila envelopes, most with handwritten labels peeling off.

One document in particular caught the eyes and hearts of the CCALT team as we sorted files on the cold concrete floor of our storage unit. The letter on the following page was written by Glenn Melvin “Mel” Coleman Sr., around the year 2000. The letter, which we suspect he was asked to write by CCALT staff at the time, is Coleman’s view of what Saguache, Colorado and the San Luis Valley might look like in 20 years’ time. At the time, 2020 surely seemed like a long way away.

The Coleman Ranch was founded in 1875 (one year before Colorado became a state) and Mel Coleman was a proud fourth generation Saguache rancher who took over management of the ranch in 1950. Mel is no longer alive, but the Coleman name is synonymous with natural beef, and Mel is credited with the development and growth of Colorado’s and the nation’s natural beef industry. Mel believed deeply in conservation and the importance of ranching and agriculture to the Saguache community and the San Luis Valley. The Coleman family was among the first to conserve their ranch and then advocate for conservation easements as a useful tool for other families in the Valley.

Today, Coleman Ranch is still in operation, owned and managed by Coleman’s nephew, Tim Coleman. Mel’s 2020 vision of the Saguache community and surrounding area is right on the money: agriculture still defines this high mountain valley, the region is still populated by locals and not listed as a top tourist destination. However, in contrast to what Mel thought might be three conservation easements conserving land along the valley’s river bottoms, CCALT now holds 35 conservation easements in the Valley, conserving more than 37,000 acres of Colorado’s most productive ranch and farm land. It’s not quite 2020, but Mel would probably agree that CCALT is following his vision pretty closely!

The Saguache ranching community represented everything that Mel believed was good in the West, and this letter captures a glimpse of how important this place was to him. Sometimes history shifts the story and causes you to reassess where you are and what success looks like. When I called Mel Jr., Mel’s son, to share this letter with him and get his permission to share it with you, he remembered his dad with a few words: “The Valley was everything to him. Everything.”

I hope you enjoy reading about the San Luis Valley in the words of Mel Coleman; it was an important place for him, and it’s still an important place for many.
The Knorr Ranch conservation project preserves the very essence of what makes Summit County an important place for so many, and it is a shining example of the successes that can result when multiple partners work together towards a common goal. At the end of the day, all of the parties invested in this project had one thing in common: they believed the Knorr Ranch was an important place worth protecting. Because the Knorr Ranch will remain as it is today into perpetuity, this landscape will continue to showcase and benefit Colorado for generations of travelers, kayakers, hikers, and all Coloradans to come.

To date, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and Summit County Open Space have invested more than $10 million to conserve almost 8,000 acres around Green Mountain Reservoir and the surrounding area. CCALT holds four conservation easements in Summit County.

The Knorr Ranch Photo: Ren Martyn, Sotheby’s International Realty
Conserving Colorado's western heritage and working landscapes for the benefit of future generations.

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