



5,000 acres added to the Saguache Creek Conservation Legacy

Project builds upon twenty years of conservation work in the upper San Luis Valley

Saguache, Colorado. –The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT), in partnership with Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service, are proud to announce the conservation of more than 5,000 acres in the San Luis Valley. This conservation project connects to hundreds of thousands of acres of public land, including the Rio Grande National Forest and the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness, forming more than 21,000 acres of permanently protected land along Saguache Creek.

“Much like the rest of our state, Saguache is experiencing unprecedented growth as more people discover the area and the rest of the San Luis Valley,” said Wade Shelton, a Senior Project Manager with the Trust for Public Land who led the effort to help the Hill Family conserve their ranch operation. “By conserving this land, we’re not only preserving the Hill Family’s legacy and the agricultural heritage of the Saguache Creek Corridor, we’re also ensuring that hunters, anglers, hikers and mountain bikers will continue to have incredible outdoor experiences and will continue to enjoy the scenic nature of this special part of Colorado.”

The newly conserved land is made up of six ranches owned by the Hill family, and marks a more than 20-year initiative to conserve critical natural resources in the northwest corner of southern Colorado’s San Luis Valley. The Saguache Creek Corridor has a long history of sustaining productive ranches, stretching 25 miles west from the Town of Saguache. This latest effort will keep the Hill Family’s land in agricultural production, while protecting significant wildlife habitat and ensuring water quality for both humans and wildlife. The six ranches are located in one of the very few locations in Colorado where healthy populations of elk, mule deer, moose, mountain lions, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, and pronghorn coexist. The project also preserves high-priority water rights and ensures water quality for native fish species, complementing the hundreds of thousands of acres of adjacent and nearby public land.

After the final conservation papers were signed, the Hill Family didn’t celebrate or buy anything new, they did what they do best; they went home and worked their cattle until dark, excited about what would come next for their family and the opportunities that the conservation of their land has given them. When they were driving back home, 10-year-old Rivers Hill had this to say, “You know, it’s pretty cool that we preserved the ranch today, and now we can do this forever.”

The Trust for Public Land purchased the development rights to each of the six ranches in the form of a conservation easement, ensuring that the Hill Family can continue to own and work the land, while ensuring that its land and water rights will never be developed and will stay in ranching. CCALT will hold the conservation easement conserving all six ranches in perpetuity, ensuring that this incredible agricultural, ecological and scenic resource stays that way for future generations.

“The Saguache Creek corridor is one of the best examples of landscape scale conservation in Colorado and the Hill Family has been central to that effort. This latest conservation success adds to the Hill Family’s conservation legacy and showcases their commitment to agriculture and their community. We are proud to have worked with the Hill Family, the Trust for Public Land, the NRCS, and Great Outdoors Colorado to continue expanding this important conservation work along Saguache Creek,” said Erik Glenn, executive director of the Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust.

The Trust for Public Land secured funding from Lottery-funded GOCO and the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program to purchase the conservation easement covering the entire property. Both GOCO and NRCS have been critical funding partners to the Trust for Public Land and CCALT as they have worked to protect working agricultural land and water rights along the Saguache Creek Corridor over the past 20 years.

“GOCO is proud to have supported this project, and over the course of decades, the conservation of 21,000 acres of land in the Saguache Creek Corridor. With this latest project, our partners at the Trust for Public Land and Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust continue to build on an incredible legacy of conservation in the region,” said GOCO Executive Director Chris Castilian. “We wish to express our deep gratitude for the many conservation-minded families in the corridor whose vision led to the permanent protection of dozens of Colorado ranches, and with this project closing, especially to the Hill family for making an enduring contribution to Colorado’s wildlife, waterways and wetlands, and people who enjoy the scenic beauty of the region.”

“The Hill Family Ranch personifies the purpose of NRCS’ Agricultural Conservation Easement Program,” said Clint Evans, NRCS State Conservationist in Colorado. “The 5,000 acres protected through ACEP is a cornerstone in ensuring the entire Saguache Creek Corridor remains uninterrupted and a safe haven for birds, aquatic and wildlife.”

To date, over 21,000 acres of productive agricultural land and water rights have been protected along the Saguache Creek Corridor in Saguache.

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About The Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. Millions of people live near a Trust for Public Land park, garden, or natural area, and millions more visit these sites every year. To support The Trust for Public Land and share why nature matters to you, visit www.tpl.org.

About The Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust

The Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) is a nonprofit land conservation organization whose mission is to “...protect Colorado’s agricultural land, heritage and families for future generations by conserving working rural landscapes.”

About Great Outdoors Colorado

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) invests a portion of Colorado Lottery proceeds to help preserve and enhance the state’s parks, trails, wildlife, rivers, and open spaces. GOCO’s independent board awards competitive grants to local governments and land trusts, and makes investments through Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Created when voters approved a Constitutional Amendment in 1992, GOCO has since funded more than 5,200 projects in urban and rural areas in all 64 counties without any tax dollar support. Visit GOCO.org for more information.

About the Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service provides technical and financial assistance to help agricultural producers and others care for the land. The Agency uses conservation programs in the Farm Bill to implement most of its efforts including the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program which is designed to protect the agricultural viability, grazing uses and related conservation values of prime agricultural land by limiting nonagricultural uses of that land.