



Pronghorn migrate across the Rafter 26 Ranch. Photo courtesy of Allen Birnbach.

Second Phase of Chaffee County Ranch Conserved

BUENA VISTA, Colo (April 9, 2020) - The second phase of conservation has been completed on the historic Rafter 26 Ranch in Chaffee County. Completion of the conservation project highlights the longstanding partnership between the landowners, the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) - without their collaborative efforts, conservation of the ranch may not have been possible. Financial support for the second phase of conservation on the Rafter 26 Ranch was made possible by Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The Rooks family has called this special part of Colorado home since the early 1960s, though their property has been continually ranched since 1877. With the generation before them gone, the ranch holds an even more important place in Lee and Denise Rooks' hearts. They are proud to know that their ranch will remain in agricultural production forever, and that the conservation of the ranch will continue the work Lee's father, Bill Rooks, first initiated more than 12 years ago. For the Rooks family, one of the main benefits to conserving their property with CCALT is that it is a rancher founded and operated conservation organization; they feel confident that in 50 years CCALT will still be connected to Colorado ranchers and farmers.

"The Rooks Family has played an absolutely critical role in agricultural conservation in the Upper Arkansas Valley over the past 10 years, and working with them has been one of the greatest honors of my career," said Wade Shelton, a senior project manager with the Trust for Public Land. "They were some of the 'pioneers' that helped demonstrate that conservation can be a viable alternative to selling land and water to development. Quite honestly, without the support and enthusiasm of Lee, Bill and Denise Rooks, the Upper Arkansas Valley might look very different today."

As the population in the Arkansas River Valley multiplies, the Rafter 26 Ranch will remain, establishing a permanently protected corridor between a state wildlife area and national forest. Like phase one, phase two of the Rafter 26 Ranch will be a benefit to the people, the wildlife, the western heritage, and the landscape of the valley.

"It has been an honor to learn the history of Rafter 26 Ranch, the conservation legacy of the Rooks family, and the broad base of conservation work along the upper Arkansas River," said Maggie Hanna, director of external relations at CCALT. "CCALT is immensely proud to partner once again with the Rooks family, the Trust for Public Land, GOCO, and NRCS to see this critical project across the finish line."

“We’re proud to have contributed to the conservation of this property, and most of all, grateful to the Rooks family for their generosity in making future generations of Coloradans and our state’s wildlife a priority,” added GOCO executive director Chris Castilian.

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About The Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust – [Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust](#) is a nonprofit land conservation organization whose mission is to “...conserve Colorado’s western heritage and working landscapes for the benefit of future generations.”

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 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 – *The [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#), formerly known as the Soil Conservation Service, is an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture that provides technical assistance to farmers and other private landowners and managers.*