



Elk Mountain Ranch

Elk Mountain Ranch in Grand County - CONSERVED

Hot Sulphur Springs, Colo. (February 5, 2021) - The [Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust \(CCALT\)](#) has completed conservation of the 637-acre Elk Mountain Ranch outside of Hot Sulphur Springs, Colo. The project was made possible through a partnership with landowners Alicia Ninesling, Matthew Ninesling, and Anjuli Hein; and with funding support from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Grand County's Open Land, Rivers, and Trails Fund; The Nature Conservancy; and Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Habitat Partnership Program.

Elk Mountain ranch is owned and operated by multiple generations of the Ninesling family. Alicia Ninesling, who taught at West Grand Elementary for 30 years, owns the ranch with her son Matt and her daughter Anjuli. As the second generation of her family to own the property, Alicia hopes that its conservation will enable her to pass the ranch on to her grandchildren, who represent the fourth generation on the land.

Beyond its agricultural operation, Elk Mountain Ranch contains significant habitat for regional wildlife, including large game, black bears, bald eagles, and approximately 53 species of neotropical migratory birds. The ranch sits within the transition zone where sagebrush-covered hills turn into forest. With more than 1.5 miles of tributary creeks and multiple springs on the property, wildlife rely on the ranch for winter and summer range as well as annual migration habitat. Elk Mountain Ranch also shares a nearly 4-mile boundary with land administered by the Bureau of Land Management and is within 10 miles of 10,828 acres of State Habitat Areas managed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). This large swath of undeveloped, connected land creates ideal habitat and the ability for wildlife to utilize both public and private property. CPW has also listed the ranch as potential habitat for lynx, which is a federally and state threatened species.

CPW District Wildlife Officer Jeff Behncke noted that the Habitat Partnership Program's mission to conserve critical big game and grouse habitat in Middle Park, and a good relationship between the Nineslings and a local CPW officer got the project rolling. "With critical wildlife habitat being threatened by development, we are constantly looking for private ranches that would be good candidates for conservation easements," said Behncke.

"This conservation easement protects a connection between the sagebrush steppe and the mountain slopes of Corral Creek. This project is a great example of what the taxpayers were thinking of when they passed the Open Lands, Rivers, and Trails (OLRT) ballot initiative," said Mike Crosby, Grand County OLRT advisory committee chairperson.

“The completion of this conservation project is a win for both conservation and for the Ninesling family, who can now be sure that the property they love will remain unspoiled for the enjoyment of future generations,” said Brad Cory, CCALT conservation manager.

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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 “...conserve Colorado’s western heritage and working landscapes for the benefit of future generations.”

About Colorado Parks & Wildlife - The Habitat Partnership Program (HPP), funded by revenue from the sale of big game licenses, works through local committees to develop partnerships among landowners, land managers, sportspersons, the public and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to reduce conflicts caused by deer, elk, pronghorn and moose to agriculture. HPP also assists CPW to meet game management objectives for deer, elk, pronghorn and moose. Information regarding project applications, laws, contact people, past reports and other program information for HPP can be found on the CPW website: cpw.state.co.us/HPP

About Grand County Open Lands, Rivers and Trails Fund - The [Open Lands, Rivers and Trails Fund](#) is a sales tax generated fund administered by the Grand County Board of County Commissioners through recommendations of a nine-member Advisory Committee composed of equal representation from the agricultural, land conservation, outdoor recreation, water, business, and economic development communities.

About The Nature Conservancy - The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Working in 72 countries, The Nature Conservancy uses a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. To learn more, visit www.nature.org and www.nature.org/colorado.

About United States Fish and Wildlife Service - The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) is the oldest federal conservation agency, tracing its lineage back to 1871, and the only agency in the federal government whose primary responsibility is management of fish and wildlife for the American public. The Service helps ensure a healthy environment for people by providing opportunities for Americans to enjoy the outdoors and our shared natural heritage. Funding for this project was provided from the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act grant program.

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