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May Ranch Receives Colorado Leopold Conservation Award

The May Ranch of Lamar has been selected as the recipient of the 2021 Colorado Leopold Conservation Award®.

The May Ranch is owned and operated by the Dallas and Brenda May family of Prowers County. The conservation practices that the Mays have implemented on their cattle ranch have improved the wildlife habitat, water quality and grass and soil health.

The award, given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, recognizes ranchers, farmers, and forestland owners who inspire others with their voluntary conservation efforts on private, working lands.

The Mays will be presented with the award on Monday, June 21 at the Colorado Cattlemen's Association's 2021 Annual Convention held at the Double Tree by Hilton in Grand Junction.

In [Colorado](#) the award is presented annually by [Sand County Foundation](#), [American Farmland Trust](#), [Colorado Cattlemen's Association](#), [Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust](#), [Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association](#), and [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service](#).

“The 2021 Leopold Conservation Award nominees and applicants showcased the diversity of agriculture in Colorado and the immense dedication farming and ranching families have to the lands they steward, their communities, and their families,” said Erik Glenn, Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust Executive Director. “This year's applicants featured an impressive array of families and operations from around the state. CCALT is proud of this year's recipient the May Ranch and the entire May family.”

“Colorado farming and ranching families proudly produce the food that feeds the world and provide invaluable benefits to their communities and the environment. These contributions, in addition to outstanding stewardship practices and conservation achievements, are exemplified by all the Leopold Conservation Award applicants,” said Janie VanWinkle, Colorado Cattlemen's Association President. “CCA warmly extends its congratulations to the May family on their well-deserved recognition, and being leaders in Colorado's conservation and ranching industry.”

“Recipients of this award are real life examples of conservation-minded agriculture,” said Kevin McAleese, Sand County Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer. “These hard-working families are essential to our environment, food system and rural economy.”

“As the national sponsor for Sand County Foundation’s Leopold Conservation Award, American Farmland Trust celebrates the hard work and dedication of the Colorado recipient,” said John Piotti, AFT president and CEO. “At AFT we believe that conservation in agriculture requires a focus on the land, the practices and the people and this award recognizes the integral role of all three.”

Among the many outstanding landowners nominated for the award were finalists: Fetcher Ranch of Clark in Routt County, and LK Ranch of Meeker in Rio Blanco County.

The Leopold Conservation Award in Colorado is made possible thanks to the generous contributions from American Farmland Trust, Colorado Cattlemen’s Association, Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Sand County Foundation, Stanko Ranch, Gates Family Foundation, American AgCredit, The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, The Nature Conservancy in Colorado, and McDonald’s.

Sand County Foundation presents the Leopold Conservation Award to landowners in 22 states for extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation.

For more information on the award, visit www.leopoldconservationaward.org.

ABOUT MAY RANCH

“We understand that our ranch is not just a collection of land, plants, cattle, and wildlife,” says Dallas May, “but it is a community.”

Conserving that community in a sustainable way is a goal shared by Dallas and his wife Brenda, and the families of their grown children: Holly, Riley and Haley.

Intense pressures to develop native grasslands cannot compete with the family’s desire to protect their land’s biodiversity. The Mays have partnered with wildlife and conservation organizations that share their land ethic. Their collaborations have improved water quality and quantity by restoring streams, wetlands, and eight playas. Managed grazing on grasslands, installation of wildlife-friendly fencing, native tree plantings, and expanded watering locations have produced a model of how livestock and wildlife can thrive together.

The wetlands on May Ranch provide an oasis for migratory birds. Beef from their grass-fed cattle is marketed with a “Raised on Bird Friendly Land” label as part of the Audubon Society’s Conservation Ranching Program. Forty years of selective breeding of registered Limousin cattle has produced cattle with traits complimentary to grasslands and a semi-arid climate. Audubon Society guidelines track the ranch’s environmental sustainability, and health, welfare and feeding of the cattle. It’s just one way the Mays use third-party verifications to measure and manage conservation success.

Their property is monitored for rangeland health as part of an innovative carbon credit offset program that assigns a fair market value for sequestering carbon in the soil of grazing lands. May Ranch has hosted surveys of bird and botanical species, including when the Denver Botanical Gardens' floristics team identified more than 90 plant species never documented in Prowers County. A conservation easement held by the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust ensures the operation will never lose its wildlife habitat and conservation values. Off the ranch, Dallas serves on a variety of community, water, and conservation committees and boards, including the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission.

Prior to 1994 the May's cropland was irrigated entirely by flood irrigation. Since then, irrigation sprinklers have vastly improved their water efficiency, allowing them to raise more crops with less water. The Mays purchase composted manure from area dairy farms as fertilizer to grow corn and alfalfa that is sold as feed for the dairies. Following the corn harvest, turnips, field radishes, and winter rye are planted as cover crops to benefit the soil.

Conservation's impact on the May Ranch is seen in ways large and small. There's the seven miles of Big Sandy Creek that runs through the ranch. While this tributary of the Arkansas River has been reduced to pools of water and remnant patches of wetland elsewhere, its entire reach across the ranch contains surface water and healthy wetlands. Then there's what a botanical survey discovered. The Wright's false willow is the host plant on which painted grasshopper nymphs can feed.

"Even though it seems disproportionate to compare grasshopper nymphs and the small area they inhabit to miles of wetland and riparian areas and all of the associated species in that large landscape," Dallas May said, "both contribute significantly to the diversity needed for a healthy and thriving ecosystem."

Whether it is the ecosystem, community, or ranch, it's in good hands with the May family.

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LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD PROGRAM

The Leopold Conservation Award is a competitive award that recognizes landowner achievement in voluntary conservation. Sand County Foundation, and national sponsor American Farmland Trust, present the award in California, Colorado, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and in New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont). www.leopoldconservationaward.org

SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION

Sand County Foundation inspires and enables a growing number of private landowners to ethically manage natural resources in their care, so future generations have clean and abundant water, healthy soil to support agriculture and forestry, plentiful habitat for wildlife and opportunities for outdoor recreation. www.sandcountyfoundation.org

AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

American Farmland Trust is the only national organization that takes a holistic approach to agriculture, focusing on the land itself, the agricultural practices used on that land, and the farmers and ranchers who do the work. AFT launched the conservation agriculture movement and continues to raise public awareness through its No Farms, No Food message. Since its founding in 1980, AFT has helped permanently protect over 6.5 million acres of agricultural lands, advanced environmentally sound farming practices on millions of additional acres, and supported thousands of farm families. www.farmland.org

COLORADO CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Colorado Cattlemen's Association (CCA) is the state's only nonprofit trade organization exclusively representing Colorado's beef producers. Founded in 1867, CCA is the nation's oldest state cattlemen's association. www.coloradocattle.org

COLORADO CATTLEMEN'S AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST

Recognizing the need to help Colorado's ranching and farming families protect their agricultural lands, in the face of growing development and economic pressures, the Colorado Cattlemen's Association in 1995 formed the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT). To date, CCALT has partnered with hundreds of ranching families in the protection of more than 675,000 acres. www.ccalt.org

TRI-STATE GENERATION & TRANSMISSION ASSOCIATION

Tri-State Generation & Transmission Assoc. is a wholesale electric power supplier owned by the 43-member electric cooperatives and public power districts it serves. Tri-State generates and delivers electricity to its member systems that serve more than one million people across nearly 200,000 square miles of Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico and Wyoming. www.tristate.coop.

USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

NRCS is a federal agency committed to helping private landowners care and make healthy choices for the land and water, while using them productively. Through voluntary incentive-based programs, the NRCS works directly with farmers, ranchers, forest owners and other land stewards to provide technical expertise and financial assistance to make conservation work on private lands. www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/co/home/