



Spring Newsletter

— SPRING 2021 —



Photo credit: DJ Glisson

The highlight of my job is sharing CCALT's conservation successes. No matter where this newsletter finds you, I hope you enjoy reading about the land trusts' first three ranches conserved in 2021. These projects are our collective success and they only happen because of the conservation ethic of exceptional ranching families and the support of dedicated CCALT donors and partners.

These projects are prime examples of how impactful ranchland conservation can be for local wildlife. Whether they fly, swim, migrate, or meander, many species call these properties home, and thanks to conservation that won't change! Perpetually conserved, these ranches will continue to support the Colorado way of life that we all cherish, not only by protecting habitat from development, but by conserving views that we enjoy, and securing local food sources that we rely on. Broadly speaking, we're excited to celebrate the many ecological benefits that come from the resource stewardship of our farmers and ranchers, and the role that private lands play in our western landscape.

Conservation projects like those in this report don't happen without boots on the ground. For years, the CCALT team has been in need of increased staff capacity. This year, we welcome two new staff members to our conservation team – helping CCALT meet the growing interest in conservation across the state. While I am eager for you to meet Sally Ross and Brendan Boepple in person, I hope this report provides an adequate introduction in the meantime.

Forever Colorado,

Erik L. Glenn

Erik L. Glenn, *Executive Director*

SAGUACHE CREEK RANCH

2,300
ACRES
SAGUACHE COUNTY

CONSERVED: JANUARY 22, 2021

“There’s something special about Sandhill Cranes — I’m not sure if it’s their rattling bugle, their distinguishable red capped heads, or just simply their impressive size — but these birds are distinctive and spectacular. Which is why every year people flock (pun intended) to the San Luis Valley to see Sandhill Cranes as they make their annual migration.

— BRAD CORY, CCALT CONSERVATION MANAGER

Wetlands and irrigated hay meadows are ideal Sandhill Crane habitat, and Colorado’s San Luis Valley has both. **Saguache Creek Ranch** is located in the north central part of the San Luis Valley. The property’s lush hay meadows are framed by the iconic Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and the ranch is home to over 1,840 acres of dense wetlands. As its name implies, more than two miles of Saguache Creek and the North Branch of Saguache Creek bisect the property. The ranch is a rarity in Colorado — where wetlands cover only 2% of the state.

Dale and Andrea Gerstberger purchased Saguache Creek Ranch in 2014, after moving their cow-calf operation from Kansas to Colorado. Word of mouth and a friendly neighbor turned Dale and Andrea on to CCALT’s existing conservation work in the region — the land trust has previously conserved more than 21,000 acres in the San Luis Valley.

To Dale and Andrea, conservation offered a vehicle by which they could protect their ranch from mounting development threats, relieve financial pressures related to drought, and combat debt from their recent purchase of the property.

Saguache Creek Ranch will continue to support Dale and Andrea’s high functioning agricultural operation, as well as provide important wildlife habitat. A 30 mile segment of Saguache Creek both east and west of the town of Saguache is now conserved. That’s good news for Sandhill Cranes, for the people whose lives have been enriched by them, and for anyone who loves the views along Highway 287.



Photo provided by the Gerstberger family

FUNDING PARTNERS

- Great Outdoors Colorado
- North American Wetlands Conservation Act
- Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust

CONSERVATION VALUES

- Wetland and Riparian Habitat
- Connectivity to Previously Conserved Land and Water
- Agriculture
- Scenic Views

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Wetlands are areas where water covers soil all or part of the time. Wetlands are important because they protect and improve water quality, provide fish and wildlife habitats, store floodwaters and maintain surface water flow during dry periods. Farmers and ranchers who utilize flood irrigation in the San Luis Valley maintain wetland habitat. **Wetland habitat throughout the San Luis Valley is dependent on these working lands.**

STRAWBERRY RANCH

2,462
ACRES
RIO BLANCO COUNTY

CONSERVED: JANUARY 28, 2021

“The Etcharts are the type of people that make my job at CCALT so rewarding! John and Sheryl Etchart, and their partner Douglas Proctor are dedicated to the Meeker community and committed to making their agricultural operation work into the future. Utilizing conservation, they have expanded and diversified their ranch responsibly and they will leave a legacy in Meeker that will outlast themselves and benefit all of us for years to come.

— MOLLY FALES, DIRECTOR OF TRANSACTIONS

The Etchart family isn't new to conservation or to CCALT. In 2014, John and Sheryl Etchart worked closely with the land trust to conserve a portion of their property near Meeker, Colorado. Since then, the family has been committed to expanding their conservation legacy in Rio Blanco County. The Etcharts are hopeful that even as Colorado's population grows, agriculture, and open space will continue to play an important role in the future of this region — a place that has been defined by its landscape for generations.

Strawberry Ranch is part of the Etchart's larger agricultural operation and is a 2,462-acre parcel adjacent to the Windy Gulch Wilderness Study Area. While the Etchart's previously conserved parcel sits along the river, Strawberry Ranch is at a higher elevation, made up of sage brush, shrubland, and pinion juniper forests.

The family grows hay and grazes the property during the growing season, but predominately manages the ranch as a hunting operation. Managing a property to support wild game entails supporting and improving the natural resources and ecological values that attract wildlife to the property in the first place. Strawberry Ranch supports northwestern Colorado's deer and elk herds, which are some of the largest in the country. Deer and elk rely on the ranch as a migration corridor and for winter habitat. The Etcharts partner with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) to plant wildlife friendly seed mixes and invest in infrastructure to improve the ranch's watering systems for livestock and wildlife.

In addition to conserving the ranch, the Etcharts simultaneously worked with CPW to develop a 10-year access easement for several late season elk hunters on the property. Hunters, like those that will purchase licenses to hunt on Strawberry Ranch, are the primary funders of CPW's conservation programs.



Photos provided by the Etchart family and CCALT staff



FUNDING PARTNERS

- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- The Nature Conservancy

CONSERVATION VALUES

- Wildlife Habitat
- Agriculture
- Scenic Views
- Connectivity to Public Land

ELK MOUNTAIN RANCH

637
ACRES
GRAND COUNTY

CONSERVED: FEBRUARY 5, 2021

Alicia Ninesling believes in conservation and community. She is a long time Grand County resident, a retired West Grand Elementary School teacher, where she taught for 30 years, and she is the second generation of her family to own and operate Elk Mountain Ranch. Alicia approached CCALT about conserving Elk Mountain Ranch to protect a landscape that she cherishes and to aid in transitioning the property to her children and grandchildren — the 3rd and 4th generation of her family on the land.

Elk Mountain Ranch contains more than one square mile of diverse habitat where sagebrush steppe slopes into evergreen forest. Approximately 53 species of neotropical migratory birds utilize the property, in addition to black bears, bald eagles, and big game. 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.

Elk Mountain Ranch shares a nearly 4-mile boundary with the Bureau of Land Management and is within 10 miles of 10,828 acres managed by CPW. This large swath of undeveloped, connected land creates ideal habitat for wildlife.

Elk Mountain Ranch is the first CCALT conservation project to utilize funding from Grand County's newly approved Open Lands, Rivers, and Trails Fund (OLRT). Grand County voters approved funding for the program in 2016, and since 2018 OLRT has been committed to funding projects that keep water in the Colorado River, conserve and maintain agricultural lands and natural areas, and provide support for local trails in Grand County.

Alicia Ninesling is proud to know that the Elk Mountain Ranch will remain as it is today, forever. Her next project? Exploring ways she can use her education background to share the benefits of conservation with her neighbors!



Photos provided by the Ninesling family and CCALT staff



FUNDING PARTNERS

- Colorado Parks and Wildlife – Habitat Partnership Program
- Grand County Open Lands, Rivers, and Trails Fund
- The Nature Conservancy
- US Fish and Wildlife Service

CONSERVATION VALUES

- Wildlife Habitat
- Connectivity to Public Land
- Rivers and Streams
- Agriculture

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

The staff and board of CCALT would like to thank Rick Knight and Kenny Rogers for their combined 31 years of service on the CCALT Board of Directors. Ranching and farming families and anyone who calls Colorado home will forever benefit from Kenny and Rick's leadership on the CCALT board, their passion for conservation, their dedication to ranching families, and their belief in protecting Colorado's western heritage for future generations. **Thank you!**



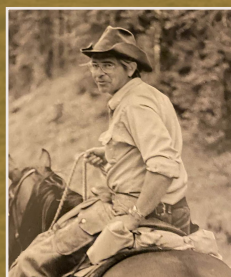
RICK KNIGHT | YEARS OF SERVICE ON BOARD: 2000-2020

"What do I remember from my time on the CCALT board? The ranch families! These are people who view land as sacred, not just a commodity to be sold to a developer. They are people that believe producing food is a hallowed calling. These are families that are emotionally and economically committed to a belief in America and in agriculture. We should pause and give thanks to these folks of the land, that husband animals, feed our nation, and steward our iconic Colorado landscapes. Their kind are not common, but they are always exceptional!"



KENNY ROGERS | YEARS OF SERVICE ON BOARD: 2009-2020

"In all my years on various boards and commissions, I have always been associated with folks walking lockstep with me because they were in the livestock or agricultural industry. The land trust board is a horse of a different color, and I mean that in the best possible way. The diverse backgrounds represented on the board range anywhere from law to banking to academia to ranching and everything in between. At the end of the day, we all had one thing in common: help CCALT be the preeminent organization that it is today. The vision at its inception by the Cattlemen's Association to help ranching families deal with a variety of issues still holds true today. A most memorable experience and I sincerely hope my time served made some impact upon the success of the CCALT."



IN MEMORIAM | PETER DECKER

This winter the CCALT community said good-bye to longtime supporter and former CCALT board member, Peter Decker. Peter and his wife, Deedee, bought the Double D Ranch in Ridgway, CO in 1974 and conserved the property in 1996. Peter often said he "preferred to ride with those who know best the working end of a rope, a shovel, or a quarter horse." Peter was a passionate advocate for the West and he will be missed by many. His legacy lives on at the Double D Ranch, and in the countless people and places he left an imprint on.

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

CCALT is pleased to welcome Diane Evans (Elizabeth, CO) and Tim Lehmann (Powderhorn, CO) to the CCALT Board of Directors. Both Diane and Tim bring agricultural backgrounds and a wide range of knowledge and experience to CCALT's work.

WELCOME TO THE CCALT TEAM

This year our team grew by two! With your support, we were able to welcome the following individuals to CCALT's staff and expand our capacity:



SALLY ROSS

Sally joined CCALT as the Restoration and Resiliency Program Director. Sally will work to develop and implement CCALT's new restoration program in support of CCALT's long term land stewardship goals. Previously, Sally worked throughout northern Colorado as a project director for The Nature Conservancy. Sally also spent a decade working as a seasonal wildland fire fighter and backcountry wilderness ranger for the US Forest Service in Idaho, Montana, and Utah.

What aspect of CCALT's work are you most excited to be a part of?

"Having work that allows my family and me to more deeply understand where we live, who we live with, and how we may contribute to ensure the qualities we value are protected, is such an honor. I've worked alongside CCALT in a partnership capacity and have always been very impressed with CCALT's authenticity and ability to get things done."



BRENDAN BOEPPLE

Brendan joined the CCALT team as a Conservation Manager at the end of the year. Brendan's focus will be on managing conservation projects and developing new opportunities for landowners to conserve and steward their lands. Prior to joining CCALT and returning to Colorado, Brendan worked in the Housatonic Valley in New England coordinating conservation transactions with local land trusts and state and federal agencies. Brendan is the former director of the State of the Rockies Project at Colorado College.

What aspect of CCALT's work are you most excited to be a part of?

"The people. There's a great team working for CCALT and I'm excited to be a part of that committed and dynamic staff. Equally exciting is the opportunity to work with the landowners that CCALT serves to achieve lasting conservation outcomes."

NEW! RESTORATION AND RESILIENCY PROGRAM

Understanding how critical it is to support landowners and communities in the stewardship of working lands and the natural resources they possess, CCALT's new restoration program will work with and support landowners in implementing restoration/enhancement projects. These projects will have multifaceted objectives that support both operational and ecological needs, as well as CCALT's long-term stewardship goals. **Example projects may include:**

- Fire Mitigation
- River Restoration
- Habitat Enhancement
- Grassland Improvement
- Infrastructure Upgrade
- Weed Management

Please reach out to Sally Ross at sally@ccalt.org if you have a project that would be a good fit for the Restoration and Resiliency program.



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SAVE THE DATE FOREVER COLORADO BBQ

August 14, 2021 • Fetcher Ranch, Clark, CO

To learn more visit www.ccalt.org

*If you are interested in sponsoring,
please contact Morgan at morgan@ccalt.org*

We've pushed our BBQ celebration back one weekend to August 14th! For those joining us on the 14th, CCALT will monitor county and state guidelines pertaining to COVID-19 and organize accordingly in order to put on a safe and compliant event.



FOREVER COLORADO HATS & GLOVES NOW AVAILABLE!

To purchase a hat visit: forevercolorado.org

To purchase Forever Colorado gloves visit: Allen's Clothing,
Ski Haus or the Community Ag Alliance in Steamboat or
contact Amber at amber@ccalt.org

THANK YOU TO OUR 2021 ANNUAL PARTNERS



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