



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Bray Ranches Conserved – Multiple ranches connected under single conservation easement**



Photos: Courtesy of Bray Family

110 years after they arrived in southwestern Colorado, the Bray Family continues to cement their ranching legacy using conservation easements. The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) is proud to have partnered with this family to conserve 9,257 acres of the Bray Ranches operation. This conservation easement is made up of five different ranches that are integrated in the family's larger agricultural operation, a portion of which the Brays had already conserved. The Bray Family began their relationship with southwest Colorado in 1910 when Edgar Bray, Robert's grandfather, settled near Redvale, CO. later purchasing the Cone Ranch where he ran a small sheep operation. Today, Robert Bray, his three sons (Lance, Zandon, and Chayden), and grandchildren operate a large hunting, cattle, and hay operation.

Despite the ranch's long history, drought, unstable commodity markets, inflated input costs, and family dynamics threaten the future of Bray Ranches bring the specter of selling off one or more of the ranches. Instead, the Brays turned to conservation and CCALT. Conservation was an ideal solution for the Brays as it allows the agricultural operation to continue and will enable the family to continue to transfer the ranch to the next generation while paying down debt.

“Transitioning a ranch to the next generation is one the most challenging and most rewarding things facing family ranches. With each additional family member comes shared visions and circumstances but also different ideas and hopes and dreams,” noted Robert Bray. “We are trying to blend old proven ways with more modern, technological ways in the face of drought and other challenges. Leaving the land intact is the one constant. I take great pride that my sons have been raised in an environment that led them to love and appreciate the lands as much as I do and



dedicate their lives to working with it. While I don't think I can ever say the ranch is out of the woods, I feel that I have now done my part to provide the chance for the next generation."

Throughout their tenure, the Bray Family has worked to improve these landscapes, grown the business across multiple generations, and has invested in the communities of San Miguel and Montrose counties. In 2018, facing historically dry conditions, the family sold off 80% of their herd. Though an excruciating decision to make, they were able to ensure that wildlife habitat and forage was protected for the big game communities on the ranch. In 2019 the ranch was rested. In 2020, Robert's sons reinvested in the livestock operation adding close to 600 cow-calf pairs to the ranch. The Brays utilize a rotational grazing system facilitated by internal cross fencing. This system allows livestock to be rotated through forage and for longer periods of rest for pastures. All fencing on the ranch is wildlife friendly.

"We appreciate the partnership with Bray Ranches and the family's continued commitment to conserving lands that provide tremendous benefit to Colorado's wildlife. Private-public partnerships are key to wildlife conservation efforts and vital to our mission at Colorado Parks and Wildlife," said Colorado Parks and Wildlife Southwest Region Manager, Cory Chick.

The five ranches are at varying elevations and terrains providing the Brays with winter, spring, summer, and fall grazing in addition to hay production. Cattle can walk between the ranches as they move to higher elevations in the summer and return to lower elevations in the winter allowing the Brays to move cattle between ranches without trucking them. Portions of the operation are irrigated with water from the Lilylands canal and reservoir, though the water rights do not always have a consistent yield. The water is also used to fill stock ponds to provide livestock and wildlife with drinking water.

Molly Fales, CCALT's Staff Attorney, noted that the "Bray Ranches has grown significantly since it was started by Robert's grandfather over a century ago. Today, Robert, Lance, Zandon, Chayden and their families have recommitted to the operation and community by conserving five of their ranches in perpetuity. CCALT is thrilled to have partnered with the Bray Family to build upon their conservation legacy and give the operation a chance to exist for another 100 years."

San Miguel County will contribute \$65K through the Parks and Open Space Land Heritage Program, which prioritizes the heritage of landscape, wildlife, agriculture, stewardship and lifestyle. Goals of the Land Heritage Program include prioritizing the protection of open space, encouraging viable agriculture, protection of wildlife habitat/migration and riparian areas, and protecting the natural beauty, which is so vital to the regional economy. Kris Holstrom, Chair of the Board of San Miguel County Commissioners shared how "pleased San Miguel County was to assist with this incredibly important conservation easement. We applaud the actions of the Bray Family using innovative and caring approaches to stewarding their land. The model of conservation easements and agricultural trusts helps address some of the many challenges our farmers and ranchers face. Our deep appreciation to the Brays and CCALT for making this a reality."



“The Bray Family’s commitment to prime working agricultural lands is evidenced throughout their operation,” says Eugene Backhaus, acting NRCS State Conservationist in Colorado. “The NRCS is proud to partner with the family and other ag organizations on this conservation effort.”

Funding for this conservation easement was provided by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), San Miguel County Parks and Open Space Department, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Transaction cost assistance was provided by the Muley Fanatic Foundation.

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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 the USDA 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 prioritizes conservation planning and 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.*

***About Colorado Parks and Wildlife***

*Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) works to perpetuate the wildlife resources of the state, provide a quality state parks system, and provide an enjoyable and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities that educate and inspire current and future generations to serve as active stewards of Colorado’s natural resources.*

***About San Miguel County Parks and Open Space Department***

*The Parks & Open Space Department manages several program areas including county fairgrounds, parks, trails, open space and historic preservation. The vegetation control program is also funded in part by the Parks & Open Space Department.*

***About Muley Fanatic Foundation***

*The Muley Fanatic Foundation works to ensure the conservation of mule deer and their habitat and to provide such supporting services to further the sport of hunting and sound wildlife management.*