

South Routt's Gregory Ranch protected from development with PDR easement

Conservation easement completes protection of seven miles of the Yampa River above Stagecoach

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A new conservation easement at the Gregory Ranch in South Routt County connects with others in the area, shielding seven miles of the Yampa River from development.

Julie Gregory/Courtesy photo

One of Julie Gregory's favorite memories of her grandparents' South Routt County ranch was haying each year. It was rewarding to see the bails stack up, knowing it would feed the family's livestock through the winter, she said.

During haying season, Julie's grandmother Lorraine Gregory would always cook them what they referred to as dinner, a meal eaten in the middle of a long, hard day of work.

"Then we'd go back out to the field, and a lot of times, we're out there until dark, just to make sure we got everything done," Julie Gregory said.

It was always their grandparents' dream to have a ranch, and for that ranch to stay that way forever. Last year, Lorraine Gregory started the process to do just that by placing the 432-acre ranch in a conservation easement using Routt County's Purchase for Development Rights Program.

When Lorraine died in July 2021, Julie, her brother Jody and father Tom kept the effort alive, and on Tuesday, Nov. 2, Routt County commissioners approved funding for a conservation easement on the Gregory Ranch.

Commissioners approved \$400,000 to purchase the easement and another \$25,000 for transaction fees. That's equal to about a quarter of the value of the property, meaning the Gregory family donated about \$1.2 million in land value to get the easement.

The easement will ensure the land will stay productive agriculturally for future generations, just as Julie's grandparents always dreamed.

"It was really my grandpa's dream — his ranch," Julie Gregory said. "He always wanted it to be ranchland and never developed into housing"



The Gregory family brands calves at their South Routt County Ranch. The ranch got funding for a conservation easement from Routt County's taxpayer-funded Purchase for Development Rights Program, protecting it from development.

Julie Gregory/Courtesy photo

The application notes that the ranch would be prime for development, which in the unincorporated county would mean subdividing it into smaller 35-acre parcels that would each have a home — likely costing millions of dollars to build.

"They never wanted it to be sold off into parcels and be built on," Julie Gregory said. "They want the legacy of the ranch to live on, and this was one way that we thought we could do it. (Lorraine) started it and we wanted to finish the process for her."

Colorado Cattleman's Agricultural Land Trust will hold and monitor the easement into the future to ensure against improper development

"The county and PDR Board is focused very much on reducing the number of 35-acre parcels out there — suburban sprawl such as it may be," said Commissioner Tim Corrigan. "There's all kinds of other benefits, especially for conservation for wildlife (and) tying water to the land. This project fulfills those purposes."

With this land protected, six different properties just above Stagecoach Reservoir are protected from development, totaling 2,686 acres. These easements — each funded by the taxpayer-supported PDR Program — include seven miles of the Yampa River.

The Gregory Ranch borders SKCK Ranch, which was put under an easement last year and includes public fishing access to the river through a partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

The ranch includes meadows, both irrigated and dry, riparian areas, aspen woods and sagebrush. The application notes the ranch habitat for badger, red fox, coyote, long-tailed weasel, marten and snowshoe hare. The area also sees black bear, mountain lions, mule deer, elk and has active bald eagle nests.

This stretch of the Yampa River is also part of Colorado Parks and Wildlife's range for river otter, which is a threatened species in Colorado.

Protecting the land also helps several bird species of concern listed in the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservancy Act including two types of hummingbird, the Olive-sided flycatcher and Virginia's warbler, the application says.

The Gregory family has owned its ranch since the 1940s and over the years has raised cattle and sheep. Julie Gregory said they hope to eventually pass it down to the next generation, as her grandparents did.

"I think (the ranch's legacy) is what our country was built on in a sense," Julie Gregory said. "It's important to me that our little spread won't be developed and we'll get to keep it."

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