



SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER

EXPANDING OUR HORIZONS

The Colorado spirit is defined by independence, grit, and a love for new horizons. A bond between people and the land has defined this state's landscapes for time immemorial. Today, we see Colorado's centennial families as well as new farmers and ranchers embracing this Colorado spirit as they live with and care for land and water resources.

In 1995, The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) was created by the membership of the Colorado Cattlemen's Association with the intent to benefit all Coloradans by sustaining lands that are agriculturally productive and the natural resources those lands support. Our unique

conservation model puts people first with the belief that taking care of people lets them take care of the land. This is especially true for land stewards who maintain active working landscapes that nourish us and endow our state with a Western way of life that enriches us all.

CCALT values the expertise landowners have gained by living with the land. Their working hands learn from these lands, adapt to them, and understand all that they can offer. In a similar way, CCALT as an organization has also learned the lay of the land. We continue to adapt and understand that investing in skilled people, worthy policies, and new programs will

*Conserving Colorado's
Western Heritage and
Working Landscapes
for the Benefit of
Future Generations*

improve and sustain the breadth and depth of services we can offer not only to farm and ranch families, but all Coloradans alike.

The Western way of life is defined by our collective relationship with the land. With your support, CCALT has been able to literally and figuratively expand horizons. By offering farm and ranch families dynamic conservation opportunities that empower their way of life, we can collectively ensure ongoing stewardship of the open lands and vistas that continue to define Colorado.

EXPANDING *Our Team*

CCALT is well-known for delivering conservation services, solutions, and programs efficiently and effectively. With success comes even greater responsibility to our landowner partners and the conserved properties we support. In the last five years, CCALT has invested in expanding its conservation services for landowners across Colorado by strategically building additional strength in our team and resources across all departments.

Operations

CCALT committed to expanding its impact by opening additional regional offices throughout the state. This year marks the fifth anniversary of the Yampa Valley Conservation Partnership and the opening of our Steamboat Springs office. Three staff members are based in Northwest Colorado. Additionally, our work in southern Colorado has grown extensively in recent years, and adding a new office and conservation and outreach manager in Del Norte will enhance CCALT's landowner and conservation partnerships in the region.

External Relations

CCALT invested in new efforts to expand our strong relationships and to generate additional communication and outreach efforts that increase awareness and support for our mission. Our expanded external relations team will focus on fundraising, regional outreach, data management, events, and communications. This additional capacity will ensure that we can continue supporting our landowners, partners, and donors, while also reaching a broader audience that is interested in supporting CCALT's mission.

Executive Leadership

CCALT's Board of Directors is made up of 20 dedicated individuals who share a deep commitment to agriculture and conservation. Notably, 60% of board members are producers, a unique aspect facilitated by appointments from the Colorado Cattlemen's Association. Directors with varied professional and personal backgrounds ensure CCALT prioritizes landowners in conservation strategies and that our efforts are tailored to the needs and values of Colorado's farm and ranch families. CCALT's new operations coordinator will support the organization's leadership team and Board of Directors.

CONSERVATION

Easement Transactions

Conservation easements have been CCALT's bread and butter for nearly 30 years accompanied by our ongoing leadership efforts in state policy work. When Colorado's Conservation Easement Enhancement and Rural Stimulus Act went into effect in 2021, it significantly improved conservation easement tax credit benefits available to landowners. This greatly accelerated working lands conservation. In the three years prior to 2021, CCALT completed 34 conservation easements on 68,200 acres across 19 counties. In response to the legislation, CCALT expanded its transactions team to better serve the increased landowner demand for conservation easements. In the nearly three years since 2021, CCALT has been able to complete 50 conservation easements on 107,545 acres across 26 counties.

Stewardship

Conservation easements are just the beginning of CCALT's conservation services. When families work with CCALT, both parties commit to take care of these land and water resources in perpetuity. CCALT supports over 400 farm and ranch families with their land stewardship on more than 788,000 total acres. With over 216,000 of these acres conserved in the last five years, CCALT has expanded its stewardship capabilities. Three CCALT staff members are now dedicated to understanding the ongoing needs of our landowners and their conserved properties. While remote technology has helped CCALT monitor properties more efficiently, CCALT staff still visits almost 90% of conserved properties every year. This maintains the personal touch that defines CCALT's stewardship program.

Additive Conservation

CCALT and working landowners have the property's future in mind when we partner together. We established an Additive Conservation Program in 2021 to deliver additional conservation services to working landowners. Our additive conservation director works with CCALT's landowner partners, to help improve their agricultural operations' resilience and to expand their active land and water stewardship practices. The program built the Emery-Wilhelm Family Agricultural Resiliency Fund (ARF) to help landowners complete new conservation projects. In 2023, the ARF's inaugural year, CCALT provided \$48,000 in funding for seven landowner projects across the state. These projects address long-term water infrastructure, fencing, and wildlife habitat priorities.

EXPANDING *Conserved Lands in NW Colorado*

When CCALT merged with the Yampa Valley Land Trust (YVLT) in 2019, we inherited new landowner relationships and the stewardship of 79 conservation easements comprising 57,000 acres across three Northwest Colorado counties.



Nick Theos Family Ranches, Rio Blanco County. Photo courtesy of Renae Neilson

Nick Theos Family Ranches

As we begin fifth anniversary celebrations for CCALT's Yampa Valley Conservation Partnership, some of Northwest Colorado's newest conservation easements exemplify CCALT's dynamic approach to serving each farm and ranch family's unique needs.

CCALT's first conservation easement of 2024 is with a family that has worked the same land for nearly 100 years. Renae Neilson's grandfather established a sheep ranch on Theos Ranch in Rio Blanco County that he then passed on to his children, including Renae's father Nick Theos. Renae and her sister grew up working on the ranch, which included adjacent properties their father had also purchased. Upon his passing, the sisters continued managing the ranch, respecting their father's wish to continue as stewards of this landscape.

In 2022, Renae and Paul Neilson, and their three daughters made the mutual decision to conserve 3,427 acres across three parcels. They separately own the parcels but run them as a single ranch in honor of Theos' stewardship for both the land and livestock. Nick Theos embraced the livestock industry through his participation in the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, Public Lands Council, and the Colorado Woolgrowers Association.

"My dad did not want to see the ranch developed and neither did my sister or I," said Renae Neilson. "Putting the ranch into this easement so it will remain pristine, I believe, is the right thing to do. I am grateful that my family agreed with me."

Alpen-Glow Ranch

The South Valley region of Routt County has a history of many landowners who have all been dedicated to conservation. Lifelong county resident and rancher Bill Gay purchased Alpen-Glow Ranch, formerly known as JMB Ranch, in 2015. He completed a 57-acre easement on the property with CCALT in December, adding to 97 acres of the property that were originally part of a larger conservation easement that Sidney Peak Ranch completed with YVLT in 2000. As a titan in the conservation industry, Gay developed the first working lands conservation program in California in the 1980s which became a foundational model nationwide.



Alpen-Glow Ranch, Routt County

Alpine Zephyr Ranch

In central Routt County, Keith and Colleen Poole conveyed Alpine Zephyr Ranch's first conservation easement to YVLT in 1998. They later acquired additional property as part of the Emerald Mountain Land Exchange with the Bureau of Land Management. In 2021, they approached CCALT about conserving more of their ranch and the rich wildlife habitat it supported. The property features natural riparian areas, shrublands, agricultural fields, open meadows, ponds, and deciduous, conifer, and mixed forests suitable for a wide variety of animals. The addition to their existing easement was completed in November.

"The new easement will continue the preservation of the natural resource and enhance protection for the wildlife we see daily on our property," said Keith and Colleen Poole.



Alpine Zephyr Ranch, Routt County

Alpen-Glow Ranch is a highly visible ranch along County Road 131 that can also be seen from Rabbit Ears Pass. Gay understands that the area's working agricultural landscape and proximity to public lands draws thousands of tourists to Northwest Colorado each year. With sustainable ranching practices that alternate hay production and cattle grazing annually as seasons permit, the ranch offers visitors a visible example of working lands conservation in action.

"The (Alpen-Glow Ranch) has an ideal location to show that conservation can work," Bill Gay said.~



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FOREVER COLORADO BBQ
Flying Horse Ranch | Oak Creek, CO



THANK YOU ANNUAL PARTNERS!



Our **EXPANDING Reach**

CCALT builds bridges that may seem unique, but we aren't afraid to seek new ideas, models, and partnerships that can improve and inspire new solutions for working lands conservation.

CCALT has been operating outside the box since our founding to create a conservation model that works for families and communities who rely on the land for their livelihoods and local economies. Agriculture is an industry that requires constant investment to remain sustainable. CCALT has recently joined two national initiatives that focus on conserving more working lands and supporting the next generation of agricultural producers.

Last fall, CCALT joined forces with the Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and four land trusts in Texas, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Kansas in The Southern High Plains Grassland Protection, Restoration, and Enhancement Project.

This project is supported by a significant four-year, \$4 million America the Beautiful grant, and aims to conserve more than 250,000 acres of vital grasslands that benefit agriculture, wildlife, and communities across the region. Project funds will support the acquisition of new conservation easements; invest in regional landowner education and outreach; and restore and manage high-quality grasslands. The partnership is a groundbreaking effort to conserve and enhance working grasslands.

CCALT was also one of 36 land conservation organizations accepted into the American Farmland Trust's Land Transfer Navigator program. This national effort will help address the upcoming challenge of nearly 300 million acres of agricultural land nationwide expected to change hands in the next twenty years.

CCALT has always focused on supporting multi-generational Colorado farm and ranch operations, and this opportunity will allow us to develop specific programs and opportunities to support land succession and expand opportunities for young farm and ranch families to gain access to land. Conservation easements can be a powerful tool to support both the generational transfer of land and land access opportunities ensuring conserved lands will always have dedicated stewards. ~