



Black Canyon Regional Land Trust

Connecting us with the lands we love.



Scenic landscape between
Hidgway and Ouray

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We will begin using this colorful
new logo in early November.



**COLORADO WEST
LAND TRUST**

Our new website cowestlandtrust.org
will go live on Saturday November 4th.

Dear Friends,

Historian Wallace Stegner got it right when he wrote that “cooperation, not rugged individualism, is the quality that most characterizes and preserves” the West. Reminders of this surround us. Parents and children ride bikes at Lunch Loop on trails constructed by volunteers across land purchased through community fundraisers. Fruit-growers enter into conservation agreements with your local land trust, ensuring future harvests. Ranchers partner with the land trust to protect habitat that forms critical migration corridors for elk and mule deer. These are but a few examples of the power of cooperation and how it shapes our future.

We have taken this lesson to heart and over the past year, Mesa Land Trust and Black Canyon Regional Land Trust have explored how we might cooperate to increase our impact and better serve our region. We are pleased to announce the creation of Colorado West Land Trust, a new umbrella under which we will work together to

conserve the region’s landscapes and connect our friends and neighbors to the natural lands that surround us.

The region we serve together, from the San Juan mountains to the Bookcliffs, from the state line to Blue Mesa Reservoir; encompasses the best of Colorado. Our high alpine peaks, desert canyons, fertile irrigated valleys, and wildlife-rich rivers define our region and make it a great place to call home.

But today these lands and waters face unprecedented threats. According to our state’s projections, millions of new residents are headed to Colorado. We must act today to conserve the lands we love for future generations.

Colorado West Land Trust aims to do just that. I invite you to read about our work in the following pages and ask you to support our efforts. Only by working together can we conserve the magnificent landscapes that surround us.

Warm Regards,

Tom McLeod
President

Rob Bleiberg
Executive Director



**Colorado West Land Trust Staff, Left to right –
Mary, Julie, Allison, Jeremy, Rob, Ilana, Libby, Diana**

Colorado West Land Trust:

A collaborative effort to better serve the region

Delta County Landscape, staff photo

By Sharon Sullivan

With the goal of increasing the pace, quality and permanence of conservation in western Colorado, Grand Junction-based Mesa Land Trust and Montrose-based Black Canyon Regional Land Trust are entering into an innovative partnership to better serve the region.

The two land trusts are consolidating operations with the creation of Colorado West Land Trust. This umbrella organization will serve a region that spans the Book Cliffs to the San Juan mountains, from the Colorado-Utah border to Blue Mesa Reservoir on the Gunnison River. The service area includes all or part of Montrose, Ouray, Delta, San Miguel, Mesa and Gunnison counties.

“Our region faces incredible pressures in the coming years,” said Rob Bleiberg, Executive Director of Mesa Land Trust. Two million new residents are expected to relocate to Colorado in the next 25 years. During that period Mesa County is expected to grow the equivalent of the current city of Grand Junction; Montrose County is projected to add one and a half times the population of today’s city of Montrose; and Delta County will increase in population equal to another city of Delta, Hotchkiss and Paonia combined – that’s all according to the Colorado State Demographer’s Office.

Fortunately, Mesa and Black Canyon Regional land trusts are working together to ensure that western Colorado – despite future population increases – retains precious agricultural lands, as well as its scenic beauty and important wildlife habitat.

“This unprecedented threat to our natural heritage demands a strong response,” said Rob Bleiberg, MLT executive director. He will serve as Executive Director of the new effort.

The collaboration will increase our ability to protect “the precious landscapes that surround us,” Bleiberg said. Western Colorado has some of the country’s

most stunning landscapes, as well as some of the most productive agricultural land in the state.

The two land trusts began discussions in 2015 to explore ways that they could work together to be more effective.

“We talked about how to be more efficient and open up new areas for conserving lands,” Mesa Land Trust board president Chuck McDaniel said. “We’ll be creating a new identity that encompasses both organizations while (each) remaining independent.”

Mesa Land Trust was founded in 1980 by a group of Palisade farmers; Black Canyon formed in 2000 as a result of a merger with a Paonia-based group, Three Rivers Land Trust (North Fork, Gunnison and Uncompahgre rivers), and the Montrose-based Valley Land Conservancy.

Mesa Land Trust has conserved more than 65,000 acres through 200 conservation transactions in and around Mesa County. In Montrose, Delta and Gunnison counties, Black Canyon has protected 55,000 acres via 300-plus transactions.

Six staff members will remain in Grand Junction with Mesa Land Trust, while two will continue to operate in Montrose at the Black Canyon office. Colorado West Land Trust advisory committees will work across the region to engage in dialog with Western Slope residents to learn communities’ priorities.

“It is critical that our work be informed by local community members,” Bleiberg said. “We recognize that Ridgway conservation priorities might be different from Grand Junction’s. We want to be responsive to each community’s goals and priorities. This (collaboration) provides a path forward that will increase our capacity to serve.”

Consolidating operations will save money and time by



Grand Valley Landscape, photo by Malcolm G. Childers

eliminating redundancies within the two organizations and helping them achieve economies of scale.

“It’s exciting, and a positive answer to our administrative needs,” said BCRLT board of directors’ president Tom McLeod. “This collaboration can be a role model for other land trusts in rural Colorado.”

“Land trusts are a positive answer to what we need in this nation,” said Steve Smith, BCRLT board treasurer. “If we can keep Colorado beautiful as it is we’ve really accomplished something terrific.” ■

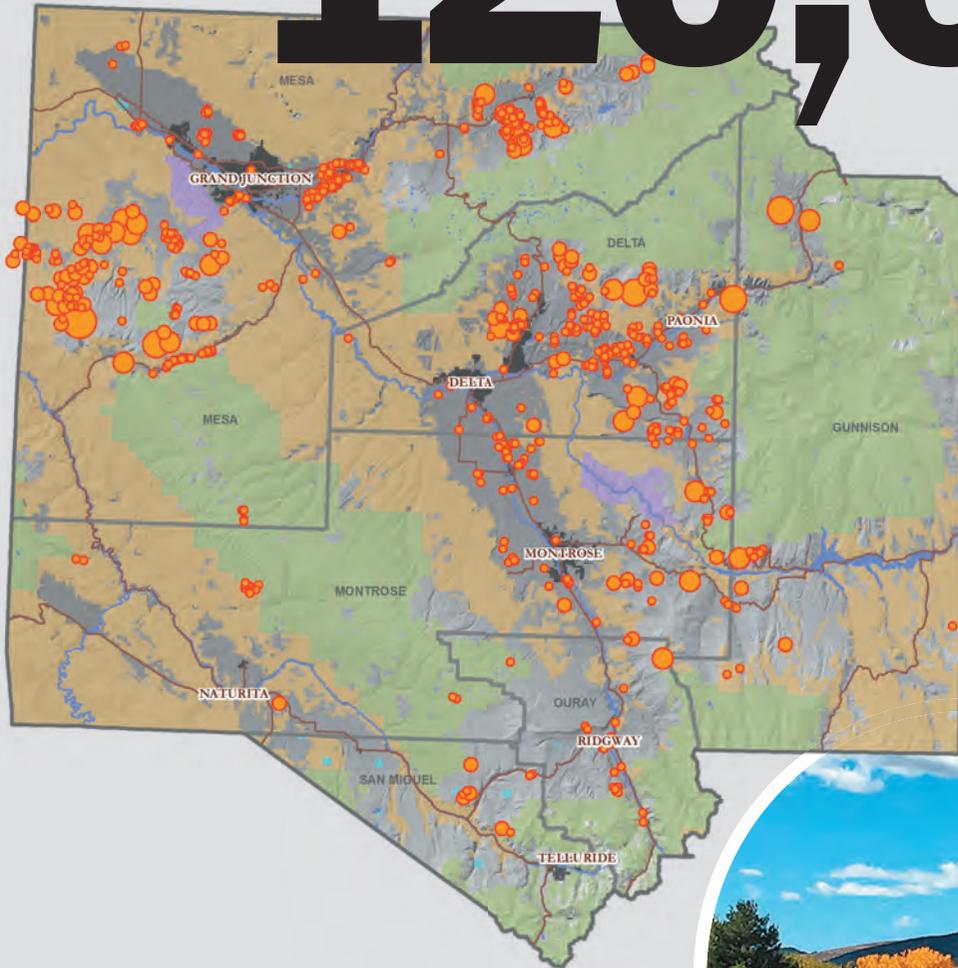


COLORADO WEST
LAND TRUST

Partnership Produces

120,000

total
acreage
preserved



- CWLT Properties**
- 1 - 200 acres
 - 201 - 700 acres
 - 701 - 2000 acres
 - 2001 - 4300 acres
 - 4301 - 9000 acres
- Lakes & Reservoirs
 - West Slope Rivers
 - US & State Highways
 - County Boundary
 - Municipalities
 - US Forest Service
 - Bureau of Land Mgt.
 - National Park Service
 - State of Colorado

5000

conservation
agreements



20,000

irrigated
acres

Regional Results

88,000

acres of elk
winter range

1,870

acres preserved
fruit land in
Mesa and
Delta counties



82,000

acres of
natural
habitat

Rocky Mountain High

Conserved ranch preserves Colorado views immortalized by singer John Denver

By Sharon Sullivan

When Joe and Mary Olk purchased the Red Dog Ranch three years ago they recognized they owned a precious landscape worth protecting forever.

Located near Placerville in San Miguel County, on the southern slopes of the Uncompahgre Plateau in the vicinity of Iron Springs Mesa, the property affords astounding views of Mount Sneffels, Mount Wilson, and the La Sal Mountains in Utah.

It was those “magnificent” vistas that led Joe Olk to approach Black Canyon Regional Land Trust about conserving his 386 acres with a conservation easement.

“It’s a beautiful area and I was worried that down the road it would be developed,” Olk said. “I didn’t want it subdivided. This conservation easement protects that from ever being done.”

The elevation ranges from 8,400 feet where McKenzie Creek leaves the property to 8,920 feet on top of the hill near the Olk residence.

The conservation agreement preserves important habitat for the abundant and diverse wildlife that thrive in the area. The property also preserves wildlife’s connectivity to adjacent conserved lands. The area is significant natural habitat for wide-ranging animals such as black bear, mountain lion, mule deer, and elk.

Additionally, designated critical habitat for the federally threatened Gunnison sage-grouse falls within a portion of this property. Through the efforts of private landowners, as well as state and federal agencies, and Native American tribes, the threatened species has been

sufficiently protected to allow for its exclusion from the more restrictive “endangered” status.

The conservation easement also protects habitat for “sensitive species” like the Gunnison’s prairie dog, and, it provides an undeveloped buffer of intact habitat to potential Canada lynx habitat less than a mile away.

Native plant species, such as sagebrush steppe, oakbrush, upland meadow, wet meadow, and a variety to forest types, including ponderosa pine, ponderosa pine-aspen-oakbrush, ponderosa pine-oakbrush, and mixed montane riparian forest, is protected under this conservation easement.

The Olks have also ensured, with this agreement, that the land remains available for agricultural purposes. A local rancher holds a long-term lease to graze his cattle on the property in the fall for several weeks out of the year.

The conservation transaction, which closed on September 5, was a “smooth process,” Olk said. “Julie Barger (BCRLT projects manager) was a pleasure to work with. It was easy; she was terrific. She was willing to go the extra mile that I was pleased, and she accomplished it in a timely and good fashion.”

The semi-retired ophthalmologist may consider a future purchase of adjacent property, currently for sale. If he does, Olk said the first thing he intends to do is preserve it with Black Canyon Regional Land Trust.

“My goal is to preserve this magnificent property for years to come,” he said. ■



Joe and Mary Olk, Red Dog Ranch

Thank You

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Online www.bcrlt.org. After Nov. 4th www.cowestlandtrust.org.

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5TH
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landscapes that enrich our lives.
Visit our website for more information.

Western Slope

conserved lands ensures local food and agriculture's viability for years to come

Wink Davis Vineyard

By Sharon Sullivan

Steve Ela moved his Ela Family Farms to the North Fork Valley years ago after subdivisions were built on three sides of his family's Grand Junction farm where his great-grandfather first planted an orchard in 1907.

In 2003 and 2004, the Elases conserved their 100-acre Hotchkiss farm with the Black Canyon Regional Land Trust.

"As fourth generation farmers, we really believe in growing food and want to see our land stay in agriculture," Ela said. "A conservation easement guarantees the land will stay in agriculture forever. We don't want to see it broken up into lots – a house here and there. We have seen the effects of development on agriculture."

Ela grows organic peaches, pears, apples, plums, sweet cherries and heirloom tomatoes. During harvest season, he delivers produce weekly to 500 CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) members – who purchase a share of the harvest at the beginning of the season. Ela additionally supplies Roan Creek Ranch Grocery in Fruita, Big B's Delicious Orchards in Hotchkiss, and Straw Hat Farm Market and Kitchen Store in Montrose – as well as Front Range farmers markets. Customers also come to the farm to buy directly from Ela.

In Paonia, Lynn and Tom Gillespie conserved their 130-acre farm with Black Canyon because "they love farming" and want to preserve the land for that purpose, Lynn said. The tax credits they earned were helpful, considering profit margins for farming are often tight, she said.

The Gillespies grow strawberries and raspberries and an array of organic vegetables at The Living Farm. They also raise dairy sheep, pigs, turkeys, chickens and cows for its meat and eggs. The food is sold locally at stores and through a CSA. Lynn and her daughter also create woolen products from their sheep.

Truly a family business, two of their children work with their parents on the land and another son runs The Living Farm Café in Paonia, which sources roughly 90 percent of its food from the farm.

"It's a true farm-to-table restaurant," Lynn said.

When Wink Davis and his wife Max Eisele bought their 36-acre Mesa Winds Farm and Winery in Hotchkiss the property was already conserved.

"There are protected properties on three sides of us – it makes this more valuable because we know there won't be a junkyard or other incompatible land use going in next door," Davis said.

Davis and Eisele grow peaches, apples, wine and table grapes at their certified organic orchard and vineyard. They also raise sheep – an heirloom variety known for its good-tasting meat and benefits to orchards where the animals graze on the grass and fertilize trees.

Mesa Winds uses its own grapes when making its wines, which are sold in Hotchkiss, Paonia, Crested Butte, Delta and Montrose, and served at various North Fork restaurants. You can sample the various wines in Hotchkiss at ShadeScapes, 122 Bridge St., during tastings each Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m.- 5p.m.

The Western Slope has proved to be a local foods oasis thanks to dedicated farmers like the Elases, The Living

Farm, and Mesa Winds Farm and Winery. And, with their foresight, land in western Colorado will continue to be available for growing food for years to come. ■



Living Farm Restaurant



Ela Family Farm Peaches