

For Immediate Release:

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Conservation Easement Protects River Habitat, Wildlife and Ranching

The Nature Conservancy recently acquired a new conservation easement on the Flanders Ranch in the Morgan Bottom area north of Hayden. The property protects over a half mile of the Yampa River as well as significant upland habitat for grouse, elk and deer.

The property is adjacent to additional protected land in the area, creating a vast, relatively undeveloped swath of conserved public and private land. This corridor of protection provides a connectivity that is necessary for maintaining viable natural communities and the animal species that call this area home.

“The property is an important piece in the puzzle to connecting the protected landscape here in northwest Colorado and preserving wildlife habitat,” said Geoff Blakeslee, TNC’s Yampa River Project Director.

Conservation of this property also contributes to a larger protected landscape, which is prime habitat for greater sage-grouse. Greater sage-grouse populations have suffered recently as habitat loss and degradation have become widespread across their range. These birds need large, open shrublands and grasslands and a diversity of habitat types to thrive and this protected area contributes to their well-being.

“Northwest Colorado supports the largest concentration of greater sage-grouse population in the state. This is a great opportunity to protect their habitat,” added Blakeslee.

The property is a working cattle ranch that has been in the Flanders family for multiple generations. Protecting the ranch’s natural and agricultural values was very important to the family. “Our parents loved the land and all that lived and grew on it. I think they would be so proud that it could be preserved as a cattleman’s ranch that serves as home to wildlife in Colorado,” said Mary Beth Flanders Stepan.

The project is supported by funding from the Routt County Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program and Colorado Parks and Wildlife’s Habitat Protection Program (HPP), private donations, as well as a donation of a portion of the easement value by the Flanders family. CPW funding will also support its purchase of a hunting and fishing easement from the Flanders for limited public access to the property. The Access Easement is anticipated to be completed early in 2019.

“Conservation of the Flanders Ranch will help maintain Routt County’s rural character and protect a wide variety of conservation values including diverse wildlife habitat and open space and scenic views for all to enjoy.” Said Claire Sollars, Chair of the PDR Board.

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The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy in Colorado has helped protect one million acres and one thousand river miles. You can learn more about The Nature Conservancy at www.nature.org/Colorado.

Routt County PDR Program has, to date, completed 54 conservation projects totaling 40,598 acres. For more information, please contact Helena Taylor at Routt County, 970-879-0108.