



# **SPRING 2023 NEWSLETTER**

**FEATURING:**

**MOUNTAIN LIONS OF COLORADO**

**A UNIQUE SOLUTION TO PROTECT GROUNDWATER**

**10 NEW CONSERVATION PROJECTS**



Did you know  
that almost  
100,000 acres of  
land conserved  
with Colorado  
Open Lands includes  
public access?

When you're planning your summer adventures, why not consider recreating on conserved public land? As you observe the sights, sounds, and experiences of that landscape, know that the land around you will remain open in perpetuity.

Here are a few of our favorite protected lands with public access.  
Scan the QR codes for more information on each!

### **SAN LUIS VALLEY SANGRE DE CRISTO GREENBELT**



Includes Rito Seco Park - one of the few accessible places to recreate in a county with almost no public lands.



### **CONTINENTAL DIVIDE MCCULLOUGH GULCH TRAIL**



A route near Breckenridge open for hiking or snowshoeing with impressive foliage in autumn.



### **DENVER METRO BEAVER BROOK TRAIL**



Parts of this well-loved trail are conserved with COL and feature incredible views and summer wildflowers.



### **GUNNISON BASIN MOUNT SNODGRASS - TEDDY'S TRAIL**



Horseback riding and mountain biking are popular in this spot near Mt. Crested Butte.



## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Friend of Colorado Open Lands,

"As you stand here, imagine you are a mother elk and you need to guide your young calf to winter feeding grounds 20 miles down this valley," the wildlife biologist standing next to me said.

I stood there on the ridgeline carved by the dirt tracks of Boreas Pass Road looking down into the valley of South Park below me. Behind me were the high mountains of the Mosquito Range – Breckenridge only 20 miles to the north. Out to my left were clusters of mountain cabins and second homes. To my right were the piles of gravel tailings and debris from decades of gold and silver mining that still left brutal scars on the land where a meandering stream used to be. But straight ahead was an expanse of more than 900 acres of meadows, trees, small streams, and not a single house or structure. It was an elk's paradise – full of food, places to wander, and an unthreatening passage to over 20,000 acres of winter feeding grounds below.

"Now imagine if there were a housing development in those meadows straight ahead. What do you think the mother elk would do knowing she has to lead her baby through barking dogs, porch lights and backyard fences? Would she risk the danger knowing it's the only path for winter forage? Or would she turn back and take her chances in the snowy high country with little food for the winter?"

It's a choice I was grateful that the mother elk would never have to make.

Because just weeks before, with the help and support of a dedicated group of people who support Colorado Open Lands, we were able to work the with owner of those 900 acres to reach an agreement that this expanse of meadow would be protected from development, forever.

It's a scene that has been repeated dozens of times this year and hundreds of times in the 42-year history of Colorado Open Lands. With the help of supporters like you, important wildlife corridors for elk, black bear, moose, and mountain lion have been permanently protected as open space.

I don't have to tell you that the Colorado we love is changing fast. Development pressure on our limited land and water resources continues to grow. People are coming to Colorado from all over. It would be easy to despair. But because of you and your support for protection of our most important open lands, there is real hope for our future.

When you consider a gift to Colorado Open Lands, you are really making a gift to Colorado. Maybe it's on behalf of a child or grandchild who you want to make sure gets to enjoy the same scenic open spaces that you have enjoyed. Maybe it's for you so that you can continue to live in a state with endless beauty and adventure. Or maybe it's simply for that mother elk who may never know why, but will nonetheless appreciate safe refuge for her young.

No matter what your reason for supporting this important conservation work, we are deeply grateful for the difference you help make.



Sincerely,

Tony Caligiuri  
President and CEO



# Our Elusive Neighbor: the Mountain Lion



**“It was one of those moments that I will remember for the rest of my life. It reminded me how fortunate I am to live in a place like Colorado.”**

That was the first reaction of Kayla Evans, owner of the conserved Arapaho Ranch in Nederland, after witnessing a family of mountain lions in a meadow on the ranch one summer afternoon. After spotting an adult female lion lounging on a tree branch, it was not long before she saw two young cubs trekking through the meadow to join their mother.

One of the special things about Colorado is the very unique neighbors with whom we share this place we call home. While we often see deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope as we travel the state, one of our most interesting and elusive neighbors is the mountain lion (or “cougar”).

Part of the reason mountain lions thrive in Colorado is that they require a lot of space – something Colorado is lucky to still have. They are territorial and need to be able to move around large swaths of open land. Mountain lions are generally calm, quiet, and wary of humans. They tend to live in remote, primitive country with plentiful deer and adequate cover. Such conditions often exist near mountain subdivisions and urban fringes of the Front Range. Because many of these areas feature a combination of public and private lands, pro-

**Scan to view a  
short video of a  
mountain lion on a  
conserved property  
in Northern  
Colorado!**



tection of these corridors and connections between private and public lands is very important to the success of these animals.

The state of Colorado encompasses 103,717 square miles of land. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) estimates that 58,822 square miles, or roughly 57% of the state, is suitable mountain lion habitat. This habitat is roughly bordered by the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains westward to the Utah state line, and in parts of the southeast corner of the state.

Cougars once had the run of the American continent, ranging far and wide. But they were virtually eliminated in the eastern United States by the early 1900s as victims of bounty hunting and habitat loss. Only a small population lives on in Florida. In the western United States, where they were also once targeted for eradication, populations have rebounded in recent decades, and now these big cats are slowly moving east again.

People rarely get more than a brief glimpse of a mountain lion in the wild. Apprehensive of humans, cougars feed mainly on deer and smaller prey. The risk of a cougar attack — on people or domestic animals — is extremely low, and almost zero with pragmatic precautions.

And while elusive and wary of humans, they have been known to occasionally take up residence in relatively urban areas. Arguably the most famous mountain lion in the United States was the recently deceased cat known as “P-22.”

## A CAT WITH MANY NAMES

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The mountain lion's scientific name is *Puma concolor* but you can call it mountain lion, cougar, puma, or catamount- they all refer to the same animal!





P-22, named by wildlife biologists with the National Park Service, lived for many years in Griffith Park in Los Angeles, and was famously photographed by National Geographic under the iconic Hollywood sign. While he was rarely spotted, in true California fashion, he had his own Twitter account and won over the hearts and minds of millions of Los Angeles residents, thousands of whom turned out at the Greek Theatre for a memorial service after his death in December 2022.

CPW estimates that Colorado is home to between 3,000 to 7,000 mountain lions. And while none are known celebrities, they do play an important role as a top predator in balancing our Front Range ecosystems. One of Colorado Open Lands' top priorities is protecting land that provides habitat for wildlife. Private lands often connect to public lands, so protecting private lands in the way that COL does gives large animals like mountain lions the space they need to thrive.

"Protecting wildlife isn't just about idyllic nature settings," writes National Wildlife Federation's Beth Pratt, "it's about culture and history. Wildlife is about coexistence, about human and non-human residents sharing space and adapting to life together. When you support the work of groups like Colorado Open Lands, you are not just protecting scenic views, you are making sure that these special neighbors have the space to move and thrive."

As a conserved property and one of the earliest conservation projects completed by Colorado Open Lands, Arapaho Ranch is home not only to mountain lions, but neighbors and guests of the ranch also regularly see bear, elk, deer, bald eagles, moose, turkey, bobcat and most recently river otters. It's something that owner Kayla Evans takes great pride in.

**"It's an affirmation of what we are trying to do here," said Evans.**

**To stay at Arapaho Ranch in Nederland and have the chance for your own mountain lion sighting on conserved land, visit**

**[www.arapahoranchcabins.com](http://www.arapahoranchcabins.com)**

## RECOGNIZE THE TRACKS



**FRONT TRACK**

**HIND TRACK**

Mountain lions usually place their hind paws in the imprint made by their front paws. Claw marks are not typically visible. Tracks are usually 3-5" wide, with 30-50" between strides, depending on sex.

*Source: Colorado Parks and Wildlife brochure: "Living with Lions"*



# Spring has Sprung!

## Spring is a great time to become a Perennial Partner

Each winter, people hunker down at home or layer up outside to stay warm and comfortable during cold weather months. Among animals, some birds fly south, bears den to conserve their energy, and some animals even change their coloring to match their snowy environment. But what do plants do? Perennial plants adapt by going dormant during the cold, short days of winter. Although they may look distressed, they still have life lurking underground as they gather energy to grow again with the arrival of spring!

*Per-en-ni-al / pə'renēəl: Lasting for an infinitely long time; enduring or continually recurring.*

At Colorado Open Lands, our Perennial Partners are a dedicated group of conservationists who continue to show their love for the land continually throughout the year. Perennial Partners donate to Colorado Open Lands every month of the year, gathering energy and keeping our work moving forward. These monthly gifts provide steady and predictable funding, allowing us to plan for the future and sustain our efforts across the state.



Our monthly giving program is customizable to any budget, from \$5 a month to \$100 a month and beyond! Best of all, becoming a Perennial Partner is quick and easy. By automating your giving online, you know that your support will always be current. You never have to remember to take out your checkbook or visit our website – you can simply set it and forget it.

Join us this year and be part of our goal to add 20 new monthly donors to our program, increasing the impact for all Coloradans! Your gift could support conserving more of Colorado's open land, fulfilling our monitoring obligations on conserved land, or helping us spread a conservation ethic across communities.

## LEARN MORE HERE!



*"I love living in Colorado because of the natural beauty of the landscape, the amazing wildlife, and the wonderful recreational opportunities. I support Colorado Open Lands because they are working to preserve the land that makes this state so special. I decided to become a monthly donor because donating a small amount each month eventually adds up to a bigger donation. Like a savings program, if you 'set it and forget it' you can make an impact that matters without a big impact on your finances!"*

**Nanette Curtis**  
A Perennial Partner since 2009



# Protecting water at the source

## A nationally pioneering tool to protect groundwater

Colorado's San Luis Valley is an agricultural community the size of Massachusetts that is suffering historic levels of drought. In this culturally and ecologically diverse valley, the persistent lack of water is threatening the livelihoods and heritage of this community, and the wildlife that live alongside them. Colorado Open Lands has been working to find a new way to protect this critically important resource - what we believe to be the **nation's first easement on groundwater**. We project that with our first groundwater easement alone, millions of gallons of water will remain in the San Luis Valley's aquifer in perpetuity.

Colorado Open Lands (COL) has been working with farmers and ranchers in the San Luis Valley for over a decade, helping landowners with conservation easements that protect their land and bring financial resources to the area. COL and the local land trust, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, began to explore whether the conservation easement tool could be applied to the area's most precious natural resource: groundwater. Irrigators, local water managers, and the state agency tasked with administering water rights all weighed in on the concept development. These conversations led COL to pioneer the use of a conservation easement to incentivize farmers and ranchers to keep water in the ground, beginning with Peachwood Farms in Saguache County. Landowner Ron Bowman has agreed to stop irrigating his 1,800-acre farm to help stabilize water levels in the aquifer to the permanent benefit of other farmers, community members, and wildlife.

Bowman said, "If by discontinuing irrigation on my farm, it means that my neighbors may be able to keep their multigenerational farms in their families, then it feels like the right thing to do."



“...it feels like the  
right thing to do.”

-Landowner Ron Bowman



Now that the conservation easement is in place, federal funds from the Natural Resources Conservation Service will help revegetate Peachwood Farms with plants that can survive drought and do not require irrigation. Senator Michael Bennet encouraged Colorado Open Lands to apply for this federal funding.

“The Upper Rio Grande Basin is vital to our regional economy and provides important wildlife habitat on working lands,” said Bennet. “I’m delighted that the Colorado Open Lands’ Rio Grande project will receive over \$6 million in funding from the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. This will unlock an innovative and locally-developed new approach to groundwater management in an effort to sustain the local agricultural economy and maintain wildlife habitat.”

Since COL began work on this easement, the idea has begun to catch on. In 2022, Governor Jared Polis signed into law Senate Bill 22-28, which directs \$60 million in federal COVID-19 relief funding towards compensating farmers in the San Luis Valley and the Republican River basin to support aquifer recovery, including through groundwater conservation easements.

A groundwater conservation easement combines permanence with flexibility. Colorado Open Lands plans to pursue projects that reduce groundwater pumping, but allow farms to stay in operation while using less water. COL staff has been conducting local outreach meetings and educational sessions to inform local landowners of this option. State Senator and local farmer Cleave Simpson was a co-sponsor of the bill and one of the first to suggest exploration of a groundwater easement with the land trusts.

“The groundwater conservation easement agreement is a permanent solution to help the San Luis Valley manage its water shortages,” said Simpson, who is also General Manager of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District. “I like solutions to help us avoid a sudden economic fallout in the valley. The groundwater conservation easement also gives farmers and ranchers more options for making money off their water rights but keeping the water in the valley.”

The Colorado Water Conservation Board will disburse the COVID-19 relief funding with guidance and recommendations from local experts.

“The Colorado Water Conservation Board recognizes the hard work that goes into pilot projects like the groundwater easement on Peachwood Farms and commends Colorado Open Lands for their leadership. Projects like this produce results that will help inform future efforts for years to come,” said Nora Flynn, Agricultural Specialist for the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

A changing climate and growing population demand that creative conservation solutions be developed to sustain Colorado’s culture, economy, and communities. It is the hope of Colorado Open Lands that the groundwater easement tool be adopted as a model to change the trajectory of our nation’s many declining aquifers.

COL’s Director of Conservation Sarah Parmar said, “Farmers and ranchers are on the front lines of the impacts of a changing climate and many are on the front lines of adaptation. We’re thrilled to develop this new tool to support those farmers and ranchers as they work to bring the aquifers they depend on back into balance.”

*Landowner Ron Bowman*





# Your \$1 × = \$6 for Colorado

Did you know that your generous contribution in 2022 allowed COL to unlock more than **\$12.9 million** of federal and state funding for land and water conservation?

Most federal and state funds go directly toward project costs but do not cover the staffing costs needed to complete the work on the ground. Our dedicated staff work year-round to put those project dollars to work. Your generosity makes this possible.

**By donating to COL, every \$1 you give is leveraged to more than 5 times its value for Colorado!**

Help us accomplish even more in 2023 by donating through the link below or by visiting [ColoradoOpenLands.org/Donate](https://ColoradoOpenLands.org/Donate)





# New Conservation Projects

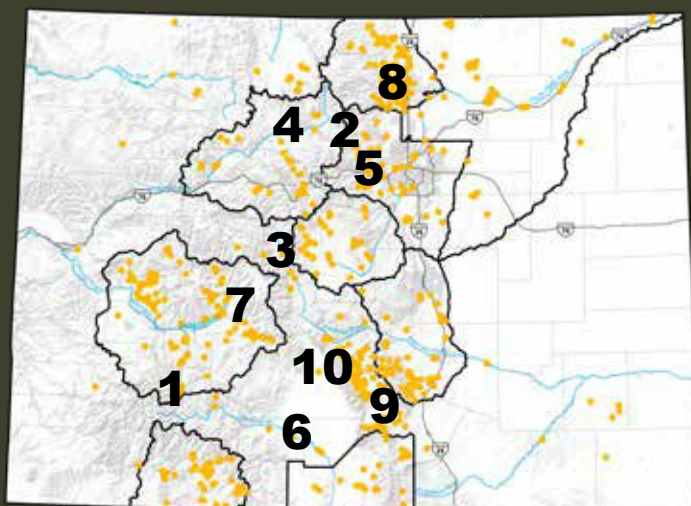
## Read on for 10 new projects across Colorado!

*Photo by Robin Gowdy*

### Rough Hollow, Hinsdale County

The 182-acre Rough Hollow property in Hinsdale County is just south of Lake City and lies along County Road 30, which is part of the Alpine Loop Scenic and Historic Byway. Rough Hollow is adjacent to U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands and is part of the heavily used Alpine Triangle BLM Special Recreation Management Area, which contains numerous trailheads and many public and private campgrounds.

Rough Hollow consists of subalpine forest, montane sagebrush shrubland, irrigated meadows, and riparian habitat along a nearly one mile stretch of the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River. Habitat is provided for bald eagle, ferruginous hawk, greater sandhill crane, northern leopard frog, bighorn sheep, black bear, elk, moose, mountain lion, and mule deer. The property provides important winter habitat and migration corridors for many of these big game species. Public lands comprise 96% of Hinsdale County, and not many large, unencumbered properties exist. The Rough Hollow property is one of the few properties south of Lake City suitable for a conservation easement, and we are excited to partner with the landowner to conserve this property.



#### CONTEXT MAP OF NEW PROJECTS

- 1 Rough Hollow
- 2 Tucker Open Space
- 3 Arkansas River Ranch
- 4 Big Country Ranch
- 5 Open Space in Jefferson County
- 6 LGM Farms
- 7 Clerkin Property
- 8 Olander Farm
- 9 Farisita Ranch
- 10 Peachwood Farms – see pp 8–9



Tucker Open Space is a 323-acre property that had been in private ownership until 2020 when it was purchased by Boulder County.

“This unique property, with its vast array of environmental resources, has been on the wish list for Boulder County’s open space program for many years. We, along with the Boulder County Parks & Open Space Foundation who also donated to this acquisition, are excited to work with Great Outdoors Colorado and Colorado Open Lands to finally protect this area for all,” said Therese Glowacki, Boulder County Parks & Open Space director.

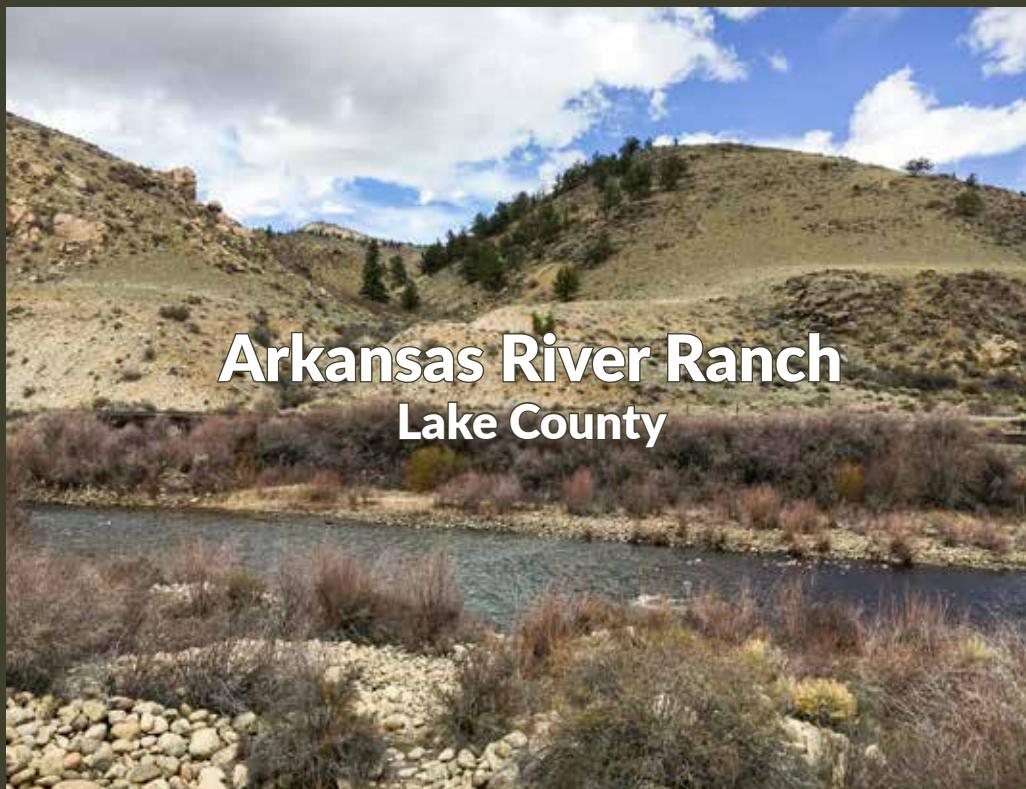


## **Tucker Open Space Boulder County**

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) provided funding towards the purchase price of the property. As a condition of the funding, GOCO required Boulder County to permanently protect the property as open space with a conservation easement. The property was homesteaded and owned by the same family since the 1880s. It is located less than a mile from the Town of Nederland and was one of the last remaining large, undeveloped parcels of land in the area. The project is bordered by U.S. Forest Service land as well as additional Boulder County open space land, for a total of 28,717 contiguous acres of open space, adding to the benefit for people and wildlife. The property is managed as open space and is open to the public for passive recreation.

Central Colorado Conservancy has purchased 110 acres along the Upper Arkansas River as a third phase of the Arkansas River Community Preserve (ARC Preserve). The ARC Preserve includes the Shawn Andrick Memorial Preserve, and with this new acquisition now totals 271 acres, with over two miles of Arkansas River frontage.

The conservation easement is held by COL, and a public access easement is held and will be managed by Lake County. Public access for activities such as hiking and fishing will be available once a management plan is approved that will balance recreational uses with wildlife habitat protection.



## **Arkansas River Ranch Lake County**



Big Country Ranch is a 698-acre property in Grand County. The ranch is located at the northern end of the Williams Fork Mountains on a scenic ridge that overlooks the Lower Blue River Valley to the west, the Colorado River Valley to the north, and Williams Fork Reservoir to the east. The property connects Arapaho National Forest to large swaths of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and to other private conservation easements, and is now part of a significant area of protected land.

## Big Country Ranch Grand County



The property is comprised of three parcels, all connected by BLM land and tied together with this easement. It is known winter range for elk and habitat for Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, bighorn sheep, black bear, pronghorn, mule deer, and numerous songbirds, raptors, small mammals, amphibians, and lizards. Wetlands, several small ponds, and a reservoir provide additional habitat value. The easement also protects the ranch's water rights. The property is visible from State Highway 9 along the Blue River and other public roads.

Grand County Open Space, Rivers, and Trails program was a project partner.

This 145-acre property is highly visible from Interstate 70 west of Golden and is bordered by Genesee Mountain Park. A large portion of the property is also visible from the beloved and popular Beaver Brook Trail. The project was brought to Colorado Open Lands through our 2020 merger with Clear Creek Land Conservancy and joins a large cluster of land protected by that group, now permanently under the stewardship of COL. This project contains a mix of forestlands, open meadows, and wetlands. It provides food, shelter, breeding ground, and migration corridors for several species, including black bear, elk, mountain lion, mule deer, and numerous species of birds.

## Open Space Jefferson County



Keep it Colorado was a project partner.



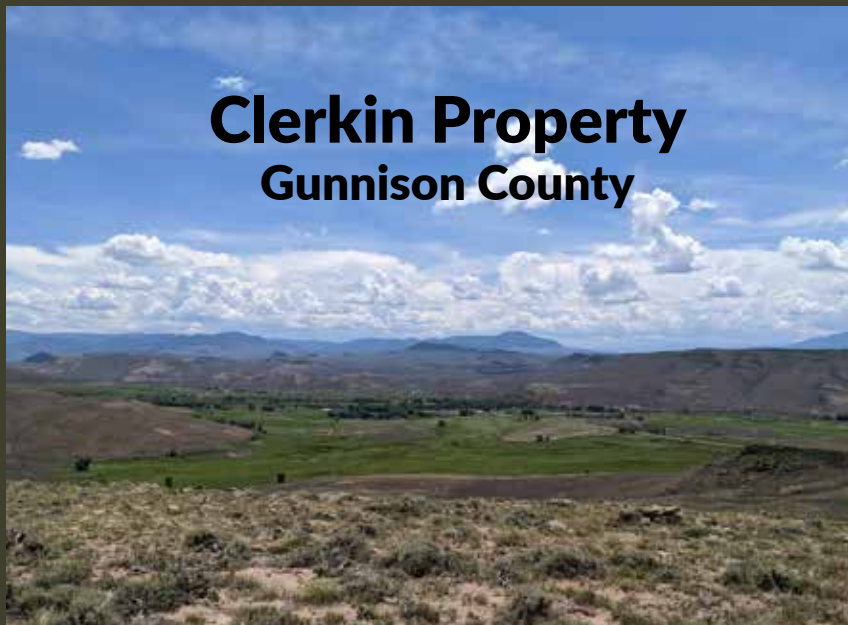
This 272-acre agricultural property has been owned by the Schaefer family since the 1940s. It contains irrigated meadows and pasture and a ½-mile of frontage along the Rio Grande River. The entire property is visible to the public due to considerable frontage along US-285. Habitat is provided for big mammals like black bear, elk, mountain lion, mule deer, and pronghorn, as well as southwestern willow flycatcher, which is federally designated as an Endangered Species. Additional habitat is offered for the burrowing owl and river otter, which are both designated as Threatened by the State of Colorado, and for the greater sandhill crane and ferruginous hawk, both Colorado Species of Special Concern. The Schaefer family manages the farm for hay, barley, canola production, and livestock grazing. It is their second conservation easement with COL and protects the remainder of their farm, now totaling 910 conserved acres.

## **LGM Farms Rio Grande County**



Funding was provided by Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Great Outdoors Colorado and the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

## **Clerkin Property Gunnison County**



The Clerkin property lies 8 miles east of the City of Gunnison, in the Tomichi Creek watershed. The property is surrounded by Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and has been managed for grazing since 1888. Sagebrush shrublands comprise the entirety of the property. Habitat is provided for Gunnison sage-grouse, bald eagle, black bear, elk, moose, mountain lion, mule deer, and pronghorn. Additionally, elk and mule deer utilize the property and surrounding area as a migration corridor. The property is visible from US Highway 50 and from adjacent and nearby BLM lands.

Sustained protection efforts over the past 30 years in the Tomichi Creek Valley have achieved conservation of much of the valley floor. The Clerkin property is one of the few privately-owned properties in the rolling sagebrush shrublands above it. Conservation of the property reinforces the efforts of dedicated landowners and conservation groups to protect this watershed and landscape.

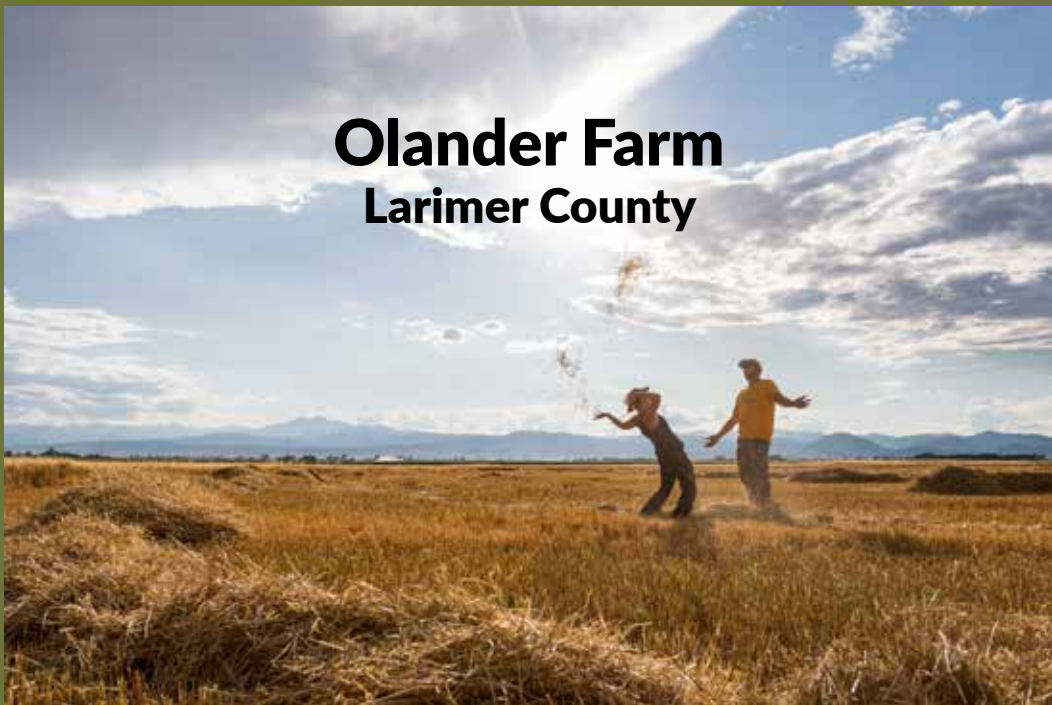
Project partners include Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy and the Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund.



The 107-acre Olander Farm lies outside of Loveland, where the family grows and malts grain. It supplies that craft malt to over 100 Colorado breweries and distilleries under the name Root Shoot Malting.

“We expanded our commitment to agriculture in 2016 when we opened Root Shoot Malting, focusing on supplying breweries and distilleries with 100% Colorado-grown, Colorado-crafted malt. Our grain-to-glass focus has propelled us to new and exciting areas of agriculture, and we are dedicated to the cause of keeping Colorado agriculture strong, sustainable, and directly beneficial to the Coloradans it serves,” said Emily Olander, Root Shoot Malting Co-Founder.

## Olander Farm Larimer County

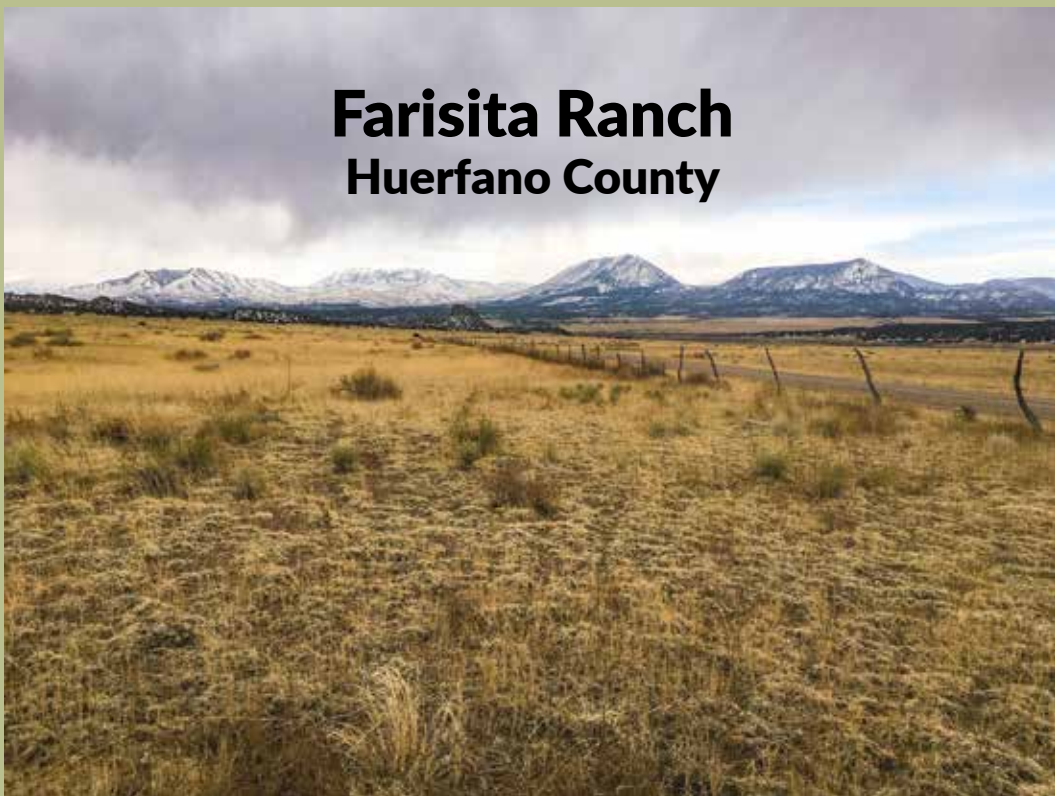


*Photo by Emily Sierra Photography*

The Olander family’s vision for Northern Colorado includes the protection of its remaining farmland, and they strive to share that vision with their broader community. The easement on Olander Farm permanently protects the land as well as the Olanders’ senior water rights. This project was made possible with funding from many partners, including Larimer County, Keep it Colorado, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), and individual and private funders.

Farisita Ranch is a 630-acre property in Huerfano County on the southwestern end of the Wet Mountains. The property is used for cattle grazing as well as piñon nut and bough harvesting. It comprises two parcels connected by Bureau of Land Management land which is leased by the owner. The property includes a stretch of Turkey Creek, with associated cottonwood gallery forests and wetlands, piñon-juniper woodlands, open montane grasslands, wet meadows, several springs, and a pond. It is visible from two county roads, and the conservation of this property protects that viewshed for travelers.

## Farisita Ranch Huerfano County





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**Save the Date!**  
Cheers for Conservation is  
**September 21, 2023**  
at 5 Fridges Farm in Wheat Ridge, CO