

Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy

970-641-4386

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Fulton Family Preserves Land Near Blue Mesa

Bob and Alice (Carpenter) Fulton have granted a conservation easement that will protect 279 acres of scenic grazing land on the eastern slope of Soap Mesa, overlooking Blue Mesa Reservoir. Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust holds the conservation easement. Local grassroots organization Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy coordinated the project and secured grants and donations to fund the deal. The land is now restricted to allow only one additional home on the entire 279 acres.

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), funded by the Colorado Lottery, granted \$185,285 for the agricultural land preservation project. The Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund and private donations to Gunnison Ranchland Legacy provided the remaining cash. Contributions to the Jim Gebhart Memorial Fund also helped finance the project. The Fulton Family donated \$242,500 worth of easement value.

Part of the land included in the easement was homesteaded around 1900 by Alice Fulton's grandparents Frank Deming and Della Olive Carpenter. The Carpenter family raised sheep in the Soap Creek area until the 1950s, when they switched to Hereford cattle. Later, the construction of Blue Mesa Dam in the mid-1960's divided the family ranch.

"As with many ranches in the valley, our homes, barns, corrals, other farm buildings, and hay fields were located where the water now fills the Blue Mesa Reservoir today," according to Alice Fulton. "Only the hillside grazing land remained above the boundary of the U.S. Reclamation Project. The opportunity to preserve this piece of our family's land is a dream come true."

The Fultons will continue to graze livestock on the property. The conservation easement will also ensure that scenic views from the West Elk Loop Scenic Byway will be preserved. The property includes a productive mix of spring-fed meadows, aspen, gambels oak, spruce, and sagebrush grazing land. The easement does not permit public access to the property.

Gunnison Ranchland Legacy has also secured partial funding for a conservation easement on the Fulton's adjacent 120 acres. However, Legacy still needs to raise another \$45,000 in donations to protect the additional acreage.

Gunnison Legacy has facilitated the placement of 35 easements on 15,794 acres in the Gunnison/Crested Butte area. GOCO has provided more than \$10 million in lottery proceeds to assist with these easements. The Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund has also contributed \$1.3 million toward these ranchland conservation easements. More than a million dollars in private donations have also helped Gunnison Legacy complete these projects, according to Lucy Goehl, Executive Director for the organization.

"We are very grateful for our many supporters whose contributions ensure that we can continue our mission to preserve ranching and conserve ranchlands in the Gunnison Country," Goehl commented. "Conservation easements help protect productive ranch lands while also preserving wildlife habitat and scenic views."

Further information is available at Gunnison Legacy's website, gunnisonlegacy.org.