

Press Release: September 16, 2008

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Fulton Family Preserves More Land Near Blue Mesa

Bob and Alice (Carpenter) Fulton have protected another 120 acres of scenic grazing land located below Soap Mesa, overlooking Blue Mesa Reservoir. The property is adjacent to 279 acres that the Fultons protected with a conservation easement in 2007. 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 399 acres. Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust holds the conservation easement.

Several partners contributed to this agricultural land preservation project. Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) provided \$199,700 of Colorado Lottery proceeds; the National Scenic Byways Program provided \$43,000; the Fulton family donated \$242,500 worth of easement value; and the balance came from the Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund and private donations to Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy and the Jim Gebhart Memorial Fund.

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 rising waters behind Blue Mesa Dam divided the family ranch in the mid-1960s.

"As with many ranches in the valley, our homes, barns, corrals, other farm buildings, and hay fields were inundated by the waters of Blue Mesa Reservoir," 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 cattle and horses on the property, which includes a productive mix of spring-fed meadows, aspen, Gambel's oak, spruce, and sagebrush. The easement does not permit public access to the property.

The easement will ensure that the agricultural land and scenic views adjacent to Curecanti National Recreation Area and the West Elk Loop Scenic Byway will be preserved. As one of 25 State of Colorado designated byways, the Byway's steering committee is able to compete for funding made available through the Federal Highways Administration's National Scenic Byways Program.

"We are quite pleased that the West Elk Byway received funding to assist with a project that will benefit both area travelers and local citizens," said Dave Roberts, Byway Chair and Management Assistant for the National Park Service. "It's a win-win whenever we can achieve the goals of a variety of partners, including the desires of the landowner," he added. Western Colorado Interpretive Association assisted the Byway by administering the grant.

Gunnison Legacy has facilitated the placement of 36 easements on 15,914 acres in the Gunnison/Crested Butte area. Great Outdoors Colorado has provided more than \$10 million in lottery proceeds to assist with many of 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 ranchlands that contribute to our nation’s food supply. These agricultural lands also provide wildlife habitat and scenic views enjoyed by visitors and locals.”

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