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## **GOCO Invests \$3 million in Gunnison Area Ranchland Preservation**

Great Outdoors Colorado, funded by the Colorado Lottery, awarded a three million dollar Legacy grant to the Gunnison Headwaters Partnership Project on December 3. The project is a cooperative effort of Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy, Crested Butte Land Trust, and The Nature Conservancy. These three conservation groups have joined together for the first time in an effort to preserve this region's agriculturally productive and biologically rich landscape. The Headwaters Partnership promises to leverage increased conservation dollars for the community's urgent land preservation goals.

The GOCO grant will be used to protect nearly 1,400 acres of productive ranchlands in three river valleys surrounding Gunnison and Crested Butte. The partners estimate that this three-year \$6.5 million project will require \$4.5 million in cash, plus nearly \$2 million in landowner donations of easement value. The GOCO award must be matched with \$1.5 million in additional funds. Private donations and grants will be needed for the effort. Possible sources for grants include the Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund, the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, 1% for Open Space and the Town of Crested Butte.

Protection of these ranchlands will add to the conservation work already completed by the partners in the Gunnison-Crested Butte area, much of which was accomplished with previous help from GOCO. Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy has completed 35 conservation easements covering 15,794 acres of working ranchlands, about halfway toward its goal of protecting 30,000 acres of productive ranchlands. Crested Butte Land Trust has completed 49 transactions and protected 4,096 acres, including view corridors, grazing lands, and riparian areas through conservation easements and acquisitions. The Nature Conservancy has protected 4,705 acres in the Gunnison region. TNC is especially focused on protecting Gunnison's critical sagebrush ecosystem and viable sage grouse populations.

In the Slate River Valley, the Crested Butte Land Trust plans to protect another 180 acres of the Rozman Ranch. The Rozman Ranch Phase II Project includes irrigated pasture, 45 acres of wetlands, and 47 acres of forested lands. The Rozman property is located in the view corridor approaching Crested Butte on Highway 135. This phase of the Rozman Ranch adjoins 319 acres of the ranch, which was preserved with GOCO's help in 2004.

Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy plans to complete two conservation easements that will protect another 930 acres of working ranchlands. Protection of these ranchlands will help Gunnison Legacy fulfill its goal of preserving large contiguous blocks of agricultural land, which are essential for the future of ranching in the valley. The Nature Conservancy is also working with a landowner who is interested in preserving riparian ranchland that includes habitat for the Gunnison sage grouse.

The Gunnison Headwaters Partnership reflects local citizens' desire to protect our remaining ranchlands, which provide food for our nation, as well as wildlife habitat and scenic views that are appreciated by our community and our visitors.