

Press Release: June 10, 2004

Gunnison Legacy Conserves More Ranchland

Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy recently completed two conservation easements which will preserve 738 acres of family ranchlands in the Tomichi Creek Valley. On June 10, the Irby family gave up their development rights on 456 acres of irrigated meadow along Tomichi Creek, about 20 miles east of Gunnison. Several weeks earlier, on April 22, Gene Hollenbeck granted a conservation easement on 282 acres of irrigated meadow and grazing land about six miles east of Gunnison.

The Hollenbeck easement was funded by Great Outdoors Colorado, Gunnison County Land Preservation Fund, and an anonymous donation via the Colorado Conservation Trust. The Irby Ranch easement was funded by the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, the Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Fund, and Great Outdoors Colorado. The Hollenbeck and Irby families each donated 25% of the value of their development rights and received cash for 75% of the appraised development value. Gunnison Legacy coordinated the two deals, pulling together \$870,215 in grants and donations for the easements.

The Hollenbeck property includes 80 acres of sagebrush land and 200 acres of irrigated meadow. The conservation easement on this property prohibits any new development. The land will forever be available for agriculture. The ranch also includes essential habitat for the imperiled Gunnison sage-grouse.

The Irby family's property includes productive hay meadow that also provides riparian wildlife habitat. The Irby's have been ranching in the Gunnison basin for three generations. Irene Irby's ancestors settled near the Los Pinos Indian Agency when Chief Ouray was still in the valley. Stan and Dale Irby, along with their father Bob have won awards for their ranch management, including the Colorado Cattlemen's Leonard Horn Award for Federal Range Livestockman

for 1999 and the Gunnison Soil Conservation District Outstanding Cooperator for 2001. The Irby Ranch covers approximately 2,700 acres and runs 550 mother cows.

These easements add to the 18 miles of nearly contiguous easements along Tomichi Creek that protect almost 7,000 acres of riparian land and sage uplands. Since 1998, Gunnison Legacy has facilitated 27 easements on 13,424 acres in the Gunnison basin. An additional 15,000 acres remains on the Legacy waiting list for funding, according to Lucy High, Executive Director for the organization. Legacy continues to work on their mission to preserve ranching and conserve ranchlands in the Gunnison Country.