San Miguel County Land Heritage Program
Heritage: Landscape, Wildlife, Agriculture, Stewardship, Lifestyle

Photo: Herndon Ranch beneath Lone Cone Mountain
What Is The Land Heritage Program?

- A private landowner wants to preserve his land and get some equity from it
- A party interested in land preservation steps in and purchases a conservation easement from the landowner
- The easement defines how the land is protected
- The landowner keeps their land (minus the development rights)
- The conservation easement binds the current and future owners
- The purchaser of the development rights retires them….they’re gone.
Program Goals

- Protect open space and reward resource management
- Provide an alternative way for landowners to take equity out of their land
- Reduce estate taxes
- Encourage viable agriculture
- Encourage protection of wildlife habitat and riparian areas
- Protect the natural beauty so vital to the regional economy
How It Works in San Miguel County

- Voluntary
- Interested landowners provide sealed bids once a year or as advertised
- Bids are selected on “value”
  - Most bang for the buck
  - Degree to which additional criteria are met
- Landowner
  - Keeps their land
  - Implements a conservation easement with the land trust of their choice
  - Gets $ from the County
  - County retires the development rights
Who Can Participate?

- Private landowners in the County with development rights to sell
- Land must be in one of the mapped areas
  - CDOW mapped wildlife area, CNHP natural areas, TNC Southern Rocky Mountains or Colorado Plateau Ecoregional Assessment Maps
  - County riparian maps (major tributaries of the San Miguel and Dolores Rivers)
  - Traditional agricultural lands of 100 acres or greater
Selection Criteria

- Land is on one of the previous maps
- Land is in San Miguel County
- Value (bang for the buck)
  - Competing with other landowners for limited funds
  - The purchase price can’t exceed the appraised market value
  - The difference between the value of the conservation easement and the market value is considered a donation and is good for a tax deduction and Colorado tax credit
Selection Criteria continued

- Urgency
- Parcel size
- Buffers public or protected lands
- Commitment to agriculture
- Public access or public recreational opportunities
- Commitment to resource management best practices
- Protection of historic structures or archaeological sites

Bids don’t have to meet all of the criteria
Funding

- In 2000, the program had $600,000 of which $400,000 came from Great Outdoors Colorado, $100,000 from the County and $100,000 in private donations.

- In 2001, the voters passed a 1.5 mill levy that now provides approximately $300,000 a year as program match money for the Land Heritage Program.
Funding Summary

- To date, 13,497 acres protected at a purchase price of $6,867,273.

- Source of the funding
  - $3,784,756. - GOCO
  - $3,100,284. – County open space & rec mill levy
  - $1,336,530. from other sources including The Nature Conservancy and the Telluride Foundation

- Transactions cost - $504,978.
- Donated value of the transactions - $11,709,454.
- 24 projects, 13 landowners
Who Decides?

- A review committee composed of
  - Open Space Commission members
  - A representative of the County Commissioners
  - A member of the public

- Review committee makes selections based on applications from landowners and site visits

- County Commissioners sign off

- All applications kept in confidence

- Awarded applications become public
Results: Young Oak Hill Ranch

- 365 acres protected
- Development pressure
- Borders BLM
- Easement held by CCALT
Results: Herndon Ranch
(Wire Pasture and Lone Cone Properties)

- 2084-acre donated easement, 59 development rights retired
- Visible from county roads
- Long common boundary with USFS
- The program paid the transactions cost of the executing the easement
- Gunnison Sage-grouse habitat
- Easement held by San Miguel Conservation Foundation
Results: Foley (Naturita Canyon)

- 240 acres protected in Naturita Canyon, 4 development rights retired
- Donated easement
- Creek bottom with 1.5 miles of intact riparian
- Bordered by BLM on two sides
- Easement held by The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
Results: Barrett Brothers (Hamilton Mesa)

- 1190 acres protected, 33 development rights retired
- Gunnison Sage-grouse brood habitat
- Headwaters of Hamilton Creek
- Easement held by CCALT
Results: Hamilton Land Partnership
(west side of Hamilton Mesa)

- 1054 acres
- 29 development rights retired
- Gunnison Sage-grouse mapped habitat
- Borders BLM, near Bray and Barrett easements
- Natural springs & seeps
Results: Robert & Melissa Bray
Hamilton Mesa Ranch

- 1,928 protected, 55 development rights retired
- Mapped Gunnison Sage-grouse habitat
- Seeps and springs
- Borders BLM, CDOW, and Barretts’ conservation easement
- Easement held by CCALT
Results: Howard & Temi Hughes’ Beaver Mesa Ranch
Hughes’ Beaver Mesa Ranch

- 1790 acres, donated easement, 292 acres purchased easement: 57 development rights retired
- Includes irrigated meadows, water rights
- Mapped Gunnison Sage-grouse habitat
- Scenic views
- Undivided mineral estate
- Easement held by CCALT
Results: Starks’ North Mountain Ranch

- 880 acres protected, 22 development rights retired
- Surrounded by public land
- Adjacent to the proposed McKenna Peak Wilderness Area
- Habitat for large deer and elk herd
- Views of La Sals, Abajos, La Platas, Sleeping Ute, Lone Cone, and Uncompahgre Plateau
- Easement to be held by CCALT
Results: Washburn Ranch

- 3041 acres protected
- Gunnison Sage Grouse Habitat
- Critical winter habitat for Elk Migration
- Borders BLM
- Easement held by Montezuma Land Conservancy
Results: Campbell Conservation Easement

- 125 Acres Protected
- Important wildlife migration corridor for elk and mule deer
- Runs through Ed Joe Draw
- Borders USFS
- Easement held by Montezuma Land Conservancy
Unique Aspects of Program

- Easements are held by land trust of landowners choosing
  - The Nature Conservancy, San Miguel Land Conservation Foundation, Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust, Trust for Land Restoration, Rocky Mtn. Elk Foundation, etc.

- Criteria driven
  - Allows selection of the most worthy projects
  - Provides powerful incentive for responsible land stewardship
  - Less subjective
Administration

- County role is to catalyze conservation easements
  - County doesn’t hold the easements
  - County doesn’t write the easements
  - County is not signatory to the easements
  - County writes the GOCO grants
  - County administers the GOCO grants
  - County provides match funding
  - County facilitates and coordinates the closings