




American Farmland Trust

ROCKY MOUNTAIN AGRICULTURAL LANDOWNERS



GUIDE TO CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

The *Rocky Mountain Agricultural Landowners Guide* is the product of a unique partnership between American Farmland Trust and Coleman Natural Foods through the Coleman Eco-Project 2015, a 10-year relationship that addresses the critical need to protect U.S. working farms and ranches. In this guide, you will find information outlining tools and federal and state programs to help farmers and ranchers conserve their land and maintain its long-term health for future generations.

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is a nonprofit organization that works across the nation with partner organizations, communities and individuals to protect the best land, keep it healthy and plan for the future of agriculture. Coleman Natural Foods (CNF), the leading natural and organic meat and poultry company in the United States, shares with AFT a commitment to protect family-owned ranches and farms and advance a holistic approach to land stewardship. The goal of the AFT–CNF partnership is to facilitate the placement of 50 million acres of farm and ranch land under sound stewardship and sustainable management practices by 2015. “We’ve undertaken our land-based eco-system program to improve and preserve our environment, and keep working lands in their highest and best use,” said Mel Coleman Jr. “This challenge is on behalf of today’s generation of Americans and for many more generations to follow.”

The Coleman family has a long and rich history in western ranching. In 1875, one year before the Colorado Territory became the 38th state, the Colemans began ranching in the grasslands of Saguache. A pioneering spirit of conservation and protecting the land, handed down through the generations, was at the center of Mel Coleman Sr.’s vision. In 1979, Mel Sr. founded Coleman Natural Meats, the first-ever enterprise to raise and market natural beef for the general public.

Twenty-six years later, Coleman Natural Foods has grown into a family of natural and certified organic meats that includes beef, pork, poultry, sausage, lamb and bison. Its practices set the standard for quality, flavor and integrity, and Coleman continues to broaden its legacy by expanding and promoting the economic, environmental and consumer-centered values of natural and organic meat production.



Photo: Coleman Natural Foods



To read more about AFT or the Coleman Natural Foods Eco-Project 2015, please visit AFT’s Web site at www.farmland.org or log onto www.colemannatural.com. The **Rocky Mountain Agricultural Landowners Guide** is also available online at these Web sites and at AFT’s Farmland Information Center online library of farmland protection and stewardship resources at www.farmlandinfo.org.

INTRODUCTION

The Rocky Mountain region is known for its breathtaking landscapes and the rugged individualism of its settlers. Its spirit has been shaped by a long tradition of agriculture, from ranches to crop farms and orchards. Today, the farms and working cattle ranches in the seven states included in this guide — Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming — are a linchpin holding together an increasingly fragmented landscape.

Competition for land threatens the land base and livelihood of western producers. Ranches require large amounts of land to sustain livestock in an arid climate. Shifting demographics, sprawling development and rising land prices all affect the viability of farming and ranching in the Rocky Mountain region, where more than 350 acres of agricultural land are converted to development every day.

Eleven percent of its ranchland is vulnerable to conversion by 2020. Montana and Idaho contain the greatest amount of strategic ranchland at risk (over 5 million acres each), closely followed by Colorado.

According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, this region's 131,424 farms cover 220 million acres and produce more than \$16 billion of crops and livestock annually. Western farmers and ranchers are proud of their natural heritage — the vast landscape, its beauty, economic productivity, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat and clean water. They, like American Farmland Trust and Coleman Natural Foods, believe strongly that private land ownership is essential to safeguard the future of working lands and their multiple economic and environmental benefits.

The purpose of the *Rocky Mountain Agricultural Landowners Guide* is to provide ranchers and farmers in these seven states with information and tools to augment both the productivity and stewardship of their land. The guide gives an overview of the variety of private options and public programs that are available to landowners who want to conserve their land and use innovative and sustainable practices to improve its productivity. Different terms may be used across the region to describe similar techniques. This guide tries to apply the most common terms when describing techniques generally but defers to the specific terms states use for their programs.

The guide is organized in four sections:

- I. Farm and Ranch Land Protection: to save farm and ranch land for future generations
- II. Conservation and Stewardship Programs: to enhance wildlife and natural resources on private lands
- III. Sustainable Ranchland Management Practices: to support the long-term environmental health and the economic viability of ranches
- IV. Resources: contact information for agencies and organizations to help landowners achieve their agricultural and conservation goals

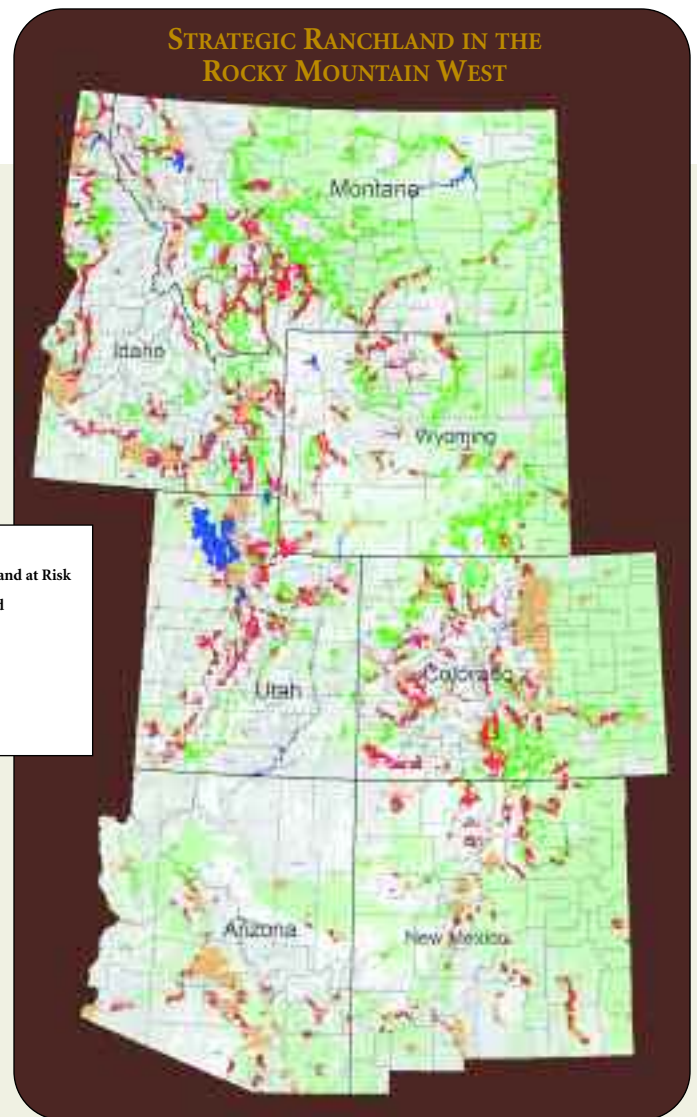




Photo: John Felder

I. FARM AND RANCH LAND PROTECTION



Photo: Jeff Vanuga, USDA NRCS

Rising land prices, due to shifting demographics and sprawling development patterns, challenge many western farmers and ranchers. They need ways to protect their investment in their land and operations and to remain economically viable. One protection available to landowners in every Rocky Mountain state is right-to-farm laws. In addition, counties throughout the region have adopted right-to-farm and ranch policies and/or ordinances. Some have published “codes of the West” or “country codes.”

The common law of nuisance forbids individuals from using their property in a way that causes harm to others. Right-to-farm laws give farms and ranches legal protection from nuisance suits, which often arise when nonagricultural land uses expand into agricultural areas. In Colorado, New Mexico and Utah, ranches also receive right-to-farm protections from “unreasonable” local regulation. Right-to-farm laws help prevent agricultural land loss caused by common law nuisance actions. They provide a more stable investment climate for agricultural infrastructure and a sense of security that new neighbors won’t overwhelm producers with frivolous lawsuits. Local laws reinforce state laws and may expand notification requirements or provide for local mediation. Country codes educate the public about agricultural practices and right-to-farm protections.

Beyond nuisance protection, the following public and private options provide farmers and ranchers with incentives to protect the large tracts of working land needed to support western agricultural operations. Unless otherwise noted, these programs are available to working landowners in all seven states covered in this guide. Programs vary from state to state, and their funding, eligibility requirements and application timelines may change year to year.

Program descriptions in this guide are general in nature and intended to outline the opportunities available. As a rule of thumb, to explore fully the pros and cons of any of these options, contact the agencies listed below the program descriptions and consult with your legal and financial advisors to find out how an option would affect your operation. The Resources section, pages 22 to 23 of this guide, provides detailed contact information for each of these programs.

PRIVATE OPTIONS TO PROTECT YOUR LAND

Agricultural Conservation Easements

An agricultural conservation easement (ACE) is a deed restriction that landowners voluntarily place on their land to keep it available for agriculture. Typically, it limits subdivision, non-agricultural development and other uses inconsistent with commercial agriculture. Landowners retain private ownership of the property and all the other rights that come with it, including the right to use it, lease, sell and bequeath it, borrow money against it, and even to further protect it from development. Most ACEs are permanent; term easements impose restrictions for a specified number of years. Regardless of the duration, the easement is legally binding on future landowners for the agreed upon time period.

Landowners who place easements on their land are easement donors. Donors must find a government entity or a qualified private, nonprofit organization, such as a land trust, to hold the easement and agree to monitor it to be sure that the terms of the easement are fulfilled in perpetuity. This organization is known as the easement holder. Easement donors may receive state and federal income tax charitable deductions, as well as a reduction in the value of the property for estate tax purposes. Determining easement value is usually the same regardless of agency involvement or whether the easement is donated or sold.

For more information on tax advantages, contact your state Department of Revenue.

Estate Planning

According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, more than 111 million acres of land in farms in this Rocky Mountain region are managed by operators 55 years old and older. Thus, millions of acres are likely to change hands in the next generation, perhaps the greatest transfer of wealth in the region's history.

Land is most vulnerable to development pressures when it passes from one owner to the next, even within a family. Farm transition and estate planning are private ways that farmers and ranchers can protect their land — often with the use of conservation easements. Passing on the land takes more than transferring the land from one generation to another. It requires a well-thought-out, thorough plan to address issues such as retirement and disability, as well as to accommodate taxes and heirs. Farmers and ranchers often would like to support conservation efforts with gifts of land, conservation easements or other charitable donations. Donating an agricultural conservation easement can ensure that your land remains in production and provide tax savings.

Most landowners have a will, which is an essential part of an estate plan. But a will is not enough to secure the future of your land and agricultural enterprise. A good estate plan goes beyond a will to accomplish at least four goals:

- Transferring ownership and management of the agricultural operation, land and other assets;

- Avoiding unnecessary income, gift and estate taxes;
- Ensuring financial security and peace of mind for all generations; and
- Developing the next generation's management capacity.

Successful estate planning is a team effort and requires effective communication to make sure it meets a variety of unique situations. Be sure to consult with your legal, financial and tax advisors.

For more information, contact AFT's Farmland Information Center or order AFT's Your Land is Your Legacy: A Guide to Planning for the Future of Your Farm by calling (800) 370-4879.

Land Trusts

Landowners often work with land trusts to protect farm and ranch land. Land trusts also partner with state and local governments to ensure that agricultural conservation easements are maintained in perpetuity. In addition to holding and monitoring easements, land trusts can help landowners receive funding from state and federal programs.

Sometimes land trusts work with national organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy, to protect working lands. There are many strong state and local land trusts in the Rocky Mountain region that can help landowners fulfill their conservation objectives and offer landowners assistance in estate planning, providing specific information about the tax laws and incentives.

For more information on land trusts in your area, contact the Land Trust Alliance or the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts. See the Resources section, pages 22 to 23, for contact information for some of the leading land trusts in the region.

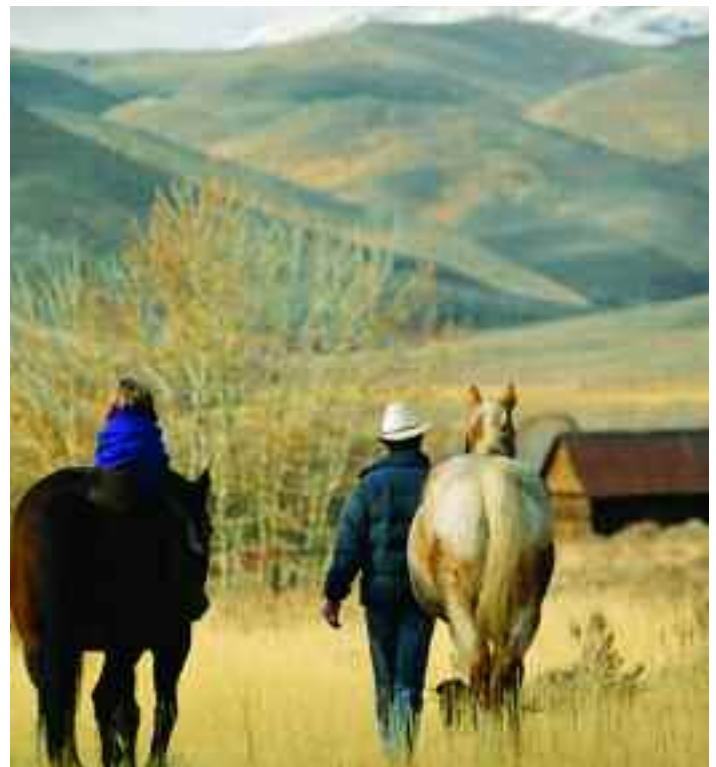


Photo: Dugald Bremner Studio, National Geographic Image Collection

FEDERAL EASEMENT PROGRAMS

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) is administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to provide matching funds to help purchase agricultural conservation easements on productive farm and ranch lands. Originally authorized as the Farmland Protection Program in the 1996 Farm Bill, it became the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program in the 2002 Farm Bill.

To qualify, landowners must work with state and local governments or non-governmental entities to secure a pending offer with funding at least equal to 50 percent of the land's fair market easement value. The FRPP can provide the remaining 50 percent for qualified applications. Only parcels large enough to sustain agricultural production are eligible. In addition, in many arid parts of the region funding depends upon the availability of water. With NRCS assistance, participants develop a conservation plan that outlines the management strategies that they propose to use on the enrolled land. The NRCS accepts applications from eligible entities during the annual application window.

For more information, contact the USDA NRCS state office or AFT's Farmland Information Center.

Forest Legacy Program

The USDA Forest Service and the state forestry agencies jointly administer the Forest Legacy Program. The program was established in the 1990 Farm Bill to fund the purchase of conservation easements on working forestland threatened by conversion to non-forested uses. Participation in the Forest Legacy Program is limited to private forest landowners. To qualify, landowners must prepare a multiple resource management plan. The federal government may

fund up to 75 percent of the cost of the easement acquisition, with the remaining percentage coming from private, state or local sources. Most Forest Legacy Program conservation easements restrict development, require sustainable forestry practices and protect other natural resource values. The Forest Legacy Program is available in all of the Rocky Mountain states except Wyoming.

For more information, contact your state forestry agency.

Grassland Reserve Program

The NRCS also administers the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) to protect, enhance and restore grasslands under threat of conversion to cropland and other uses (trees, homes, developments, strip malls, etc.) and to help maintain the viability of grazing operations. The 2002 Farm Bill authorized the program. Private lands of 40 or more contiguous acres historically dominated by grasses or shrubs are eligible for the program. The land should have livestock currently grazing.

Landowners with eligible property may receive compensation through permanent or 30-year easements, or enter into 10-, 15-, 20- or 30-year rental agreements. The program enables the NRCS to enter into restoration agreements with landowners who have a GRP easement or rental agreement. All participants must develop conservation plans that outline strategies for enhancing forage vitality and preserving the viability of the grasslands. The NRCS accepts applications for the GRP on a continuous basis, although it may identify one or more ranking and selection periods per fiscal year. The NRCS evaluates and ranks applications based on selection criteria developed by the state technical committee.

For more information, contact an NRCS representative at your local USDA Service Center.



Photo: Coleman Natural Foods



Photo: Coleman Natural Foods

COLEMAN RANCHES

When Mel and Polly Coleman founded Coleman Natural Beef in 1979, their Colorado ranch was facing debt and chronically depressed cattle prices. Today, Coleman Natural Foods is the world's leading producer and marketer of natural beef and poultry.

Coleman beef comes from cattle that have been raised from birth without antibiotics or added growth hormones and have been fed a 100 percent vegetarian diet. At Coleman Ranches in Saguache, Colorado, cattle graze on native rangeland grasses, hay and alfalfa, with a minimal amount of time in feedlots on grain. Although it takes longer for the cattle to reach market weight, Coleman is able to charge a premium for its all-natural beef. The Coleman Certified Rancher program was started after the demand for natural beef exceeded Coleman's production. Today a network of several hundred Western ranchers, stewarding millions of acres of ranch and range land, raise cattle without antibiotics or growth hormones for the Coleman program.

At Coleman, the concept of "natural" beef also encompasses environmental awareness, a holistic approach to sustainable rangeland management practices and livestock handling practices that promote higher standards of animal welfare.

During the 1960s, Coleman Ranches were among the first to work with the U.S. Forest Service to integrate a pasture rotation system into their rangeland management plan. In the 1970s, in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department, 16 miles of pristine fishing stream were put into a recreational easement with the purpose of keeping the ranch open to the public in perpetuity.

During the 1980s Coleman was recognized as a "Trail Blazer" by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) for livestock handling practices. For their conservation work and ranch improvements, Jim and Tim Coleman were named Conservationists of the Year in 2001 by the Colorado Association of Soil Conservation Districts.

"We believe that all beef should be raised under these or similar standards," says Mel Coleman Jr. "Coupled with the consumer-driven fact that natural and organic meats are the fastest growing segment in the meat and poultry industry, we believe programs like that of Coleman Natural Foods offer today's farmers and ranchers the opportunity to break away from the commodity markets and increase the value and revenue of the livestock they raise."

For more information about Coleman Natural Foods, visit www.colemannatural.com or call (800) 442-8666.

STATE PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT EASEMENT PURCHASES

In the mid-1970s, state and local governments created the first public programs to purchase agricultural conservation easements from willing landowners. People also use the term “development rights” to explain the interest in the land that is sold by the landowner, therefore these programs are called purchase of development rights (PDR) programs or purchase of agricultural easement (PACE) programs, among other names. They make it possible for landowners to separate and sell the right to restrict future development on their land to a government entity or qualified private organization, such as a land trust. In exchange, the public or private agency monitors and enforces the terms of the easement to ensure that nothing happens to interfere with present or future agricultural uses. Public access is not required.

Typically, PDR/PACE programs pay landowners for the difference between full market value and the value of the land after it has been protected for agricultural use. The “before” and “after” values are determined through a certified appraisal, preferably by an appraiser who specializes in the valuation of agricultural land.

The following Rocky Mountain state programs are — or have been — authorized to purchase conservation easements/development rights. Program requirements vary, as does available funding. Some states have local programs.

For information on local programs available in your state, contact AFT’s Farmland Information Center.

ARIZONA

Agricultural Protection Fund

In 2002, Governor Jane D. Hull signed the Arizona Agricultural Protection Act (AAPA) to enable and facilitate the conservation of the state’s farm and ranch land using agricultural easements. The act established the Arizona Agricultural Protection Commission (AAPC) to help farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. As of December 2005, the commission was working to secure a funding source for the Agricultural Protection Fund program.

For more information, contact the Arizona Agricultural Protection Commission, c/o the Arizona Department of Agriculture.



Photo: Jeff Vanuga, USDA NRCS

COLORADO

Colorado Conservation Easement Tax Credit Program

The Colorado Conservation Easement Tax Credit Program allows a tax credit to be taken against state income taxes by an individual or entity donating a conservation easement. The program allows landowners to transfer the tax credit to another individual or entity, and bargain sales qualify under the credit program.

A taxpayer is allowed to claim only one tax credit per income tax year that is generated by the donation of a conservation easement, and that credit is capped at \$260,000 (100 percent of the first \$100,000 plus 40 percent of any amount in excess of \$100,000). The credit may be carried forward for up to 20 years from the initial year it is taken.

For more information, contact the Colorado Department of Revenue.

Great Outdoors Colorado Open Space Grant Program

The Great Outdoors Colorado Open Space Grant Program (GOCO) awards competitive grants for projects that protect and enhance Colorado wildlife, parks, rivers, trails, open spaces and agricultural land. Funding comes from state lottery proceeds. Since 1994, GOCO has invested nearly \$500 million in projects throughout the state. Nonprofit land conservation organizations, local governments, Colorado State Parks and the Colorado Division of Wildlife are eligible to apply.

For more information, contact Great Outdoors Colorado.

IDAHO

The Idaho state legislature passed enabling legislation in 1999 to authorize counties to issue bonds to purchase public open space land and/or conservation easements for scenic and recreational purposes. However, while farm and ranch land may qualify as scenic open space, Idaho does not have a program to purchase agricultural conservation easements. Producers can apply for federal funding by working with land trusts that are active in the state and have preserved tens of thousands of acres of land.

For more information, contact the Land Trust Alliance.

MONTANA

Montana Agricultural Heritage Program

The Montana Agricultural Heritage Act was passed by the state legislature in 1999 to allocate state funding to purchase agricultural conservation easements on family farm, ranch and forest lands with significant public values. However, the program has terminated and is no longer acquiring conservation easements.

For more information, contact the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

NEW MEXICO

Land Conservation Incentives Act

While there is no state funded agricultural easement program in New Mexico yet, in 2003 the state legislature passed the Land Conservation Incentives Act. The act gives a tax credit of up to \$100,000 to landowners who donate land or conservation easements to open space programs or environmental organizations for natural resource, open space or agricultural conservation. To take advantage of the tax credit and protect their land, some landowners have worked with local or national land trusts to place conservation easements on their property.

For more information, contact the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department.

UTAH

Critical Agricultural Land Conservation Fund

The Utah legislature allocated funds to the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food in 1998 for the protection of “critical resource agricultural lands.” Individuals, groups and political entities can submit proposals for financial assistance from the fund to purchase conservation easements on agricultural land and to support long-term leases of agricultural property. The Critical Agricultural Lands Conservation Committee makes recommendations on which projects to support. High priority is given to projects that incorporate additional local, state, federal or private sources to match the funds requested from the committee.

For more information, contact the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food.

LeRay McAllister Critical Land Conservation Fund

In 1999, Utah’s Quality Growth Act established the LeRay McAllister Critical Land Conservation Fund, an incentive program that provides grants to local governments and nonprofit organizations to preserve open space and farm and ranch land. The fund targets land that is deemed important to the community, including agricultural land,

wildlife habitat, culturally and historically unique landscapes, and land necessary for watershed protection. The fund is administered by the Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget and the Utah Quality Growth Commission. Projects should conform with the local plan, if one exists, but can qualify for program funds even if no local plan exists. Applicants are required to provide a match equal to or greater than the amount of money received from the fund.

For more information, contact the Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget.

WYOMING

Wildlife and Natural Resource Funding Act

Wyoming does not have an agricultural easement program. However, in March 2005 Governor Freudenthal signed the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Funding Act into law. The bill establishes a \$15 million trust fund to preserve and restore wildlife habitat and open spaces, places the income from the trust fund into an account to be used to supply grants to nonprofit and government groups for specific projects, and seeds the income account with \$300,000. The bill allows the state to buy conservation easements on private land, including agricultural land.

For more information, contact the Wyoming Department of Agriculture.



Photo: Jeff Vanuga, USDA NRCS



Photo: Tim McCabe, USDA NRCS

II. CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP



Photo: Gary Kramer, USDA NRCS

In addition to the federal and state programs listed here, many private organizations work in partnership with landowners to restore and protect the environmental benefits of working lands. Most wildlife habitat in the U.S. is on farm and ranch lands. Working in partnership with organizations that restore, protect and manage that habitat, farmers and ranchers can often achieve multiple benefits for their operations.

National organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Pheasants Forever and Trout Unlimited can offer technical assistance and funding to farmers and ranchers with relevant habitat attributes on their land.

Regional organizations, such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, have partnered with landowners on easement purchases and habitat improvement plans. Some landowners are then able to generate additional revenue from their land through private hunting fees.

State and federal agencies collaborate through several voluntary programs to provide monetary incentives to help landowners achieve resource conservation goals. Unless otherwise noted, these programs are available to working landowners in all seven states covered in this guide. Beyond the programs described below, technical assistance is available to agricultural landowners through each state's USDA service center.

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Agricultural Management Assistance

The Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program provides cost-share assistance to agricultural producers to voluntarily address issues such as water management, water quality and erosion control, and to mitigate risk through diversification or transition to organic farming. The AMA program was authorized by the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000 and amended in the 2002 Farm Bill.

AMA is available in Utah, Wyoming and 13 other states where participation in the federal Crop Insurance Program is historically low. The NRCS administers the AMA program. There is a continuous sign-up with periodic ranking cutoff dates.

For information, contact an NRCS representative at your local USDA Service Center.

Conservation Reserve Program

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to encourage farmers to convert highly erodible cropland and other environmentally sensitive land to vegetative cover such as wildlife friendly tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filter strips, habitat buffers or riparian buffers. Authorized by the 1985 Farm Bill, the CRP is one of the nation's oldest conservation programs. Participating landowners receive annual rental payments for the term of their 10- to 15-year contracts. The CRP provides cost-share funding for the installation of approved vegetative practices on eligible cropland.

Landowners also may receive funding to fence streams to exclude livestock and to build grass waterways. Eligible land must have a weighted average erosion index of eight or higher and have been planted to an agricultural commodity four of the six previous years. Land also can be classified as marginal pastureland for riparian buffer enrollment. Sign-ups for environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices occur on a continuous basis. Producers may enroll all other eligible land during designated sign-up periods. The FSA ranks applications according to an environmental benefits index (EBI) and extends offers based on an application's ranking.

For more information, contact an FSA representative at your local USDA Service Center.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

A variation of the CRP, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) helps farmers and ranchers protect environmentally sensitive land, decrease erosion, restore wildlife habitat and safeguard ground and surface water. Montana is the only Rocky Mountain state that partners with the USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation to implement the CREP.



The Montana program targets 26,000 acres located in nine designated counties — Blaine, Broadwater, Cascade, Chouteau, Gallatin, Fergus, Lewis and Clark, Phillip, and Madison. Its goals are to improve the water quality and enhance wildlife habitat along the Missouri and Madison rivers. Administered by the FSA, the program requires landowners to make a 10- to 15-year commitment to keep their land out of agricultural production; haying and grazing are not permitted. In addition to a one-time signing incentive payment and annual rental payment, the CREP provides cost-share assistance of up to 50 percent for the installation of certain conservation practices, including the establishment of tree buffers, planting of native and other grasses, and the restoration of wetlands.

Eligible land must meet cropping history criteria and be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland is also eligible for enrollment provided it is suitable for use as an eligible riparian buffer. Landowners with an existing CRP contract or who have a contract pending are not eligible for the CREP until the CRP contract expires. The Montana FSA accepts applications on a continuous basis.

For more information, contact an FSA representative at your local USDA Service Center in the nine designated Montana counties.

Conservation Security Program

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a new program established in the 2002 Farm Bill to provide financial and technical assistance to support conservation efforts on tribal and private agricultural land. The program helps producers maintain existing conservation practices and encourages them to implement new practices that will provide additional

levels of conservation benefits. All participants must develop a conservation stewardship plan that outlines the conservation and environmental benefits that the land will provide while enrolled in the program. Producers choose to participate at one of three tiers. Higher tiers require a greater commitment to conservation but also offer higher payment rates. All privately owned land that meets established soil and water quality criteria is eligible. There is an annual sign-up period for the program.

For more information, contact an NRCS representative at your local USDA Service Center.



Photo: Gary Kramer, USDA NRCS

Debt for Nature

The Debt for Nature Program is available to landowners with FSA loans secured by real estate. The program reduces a borrower's debt in exchange for a conservation contract with a term of 10, 30 or 50 years. Participants may not develop land placed in the Debt for Nature Program, use it to raise livestock or for agricultural production. Eligible lands include wetlands, highly erodible lands and areas of high water quality or scenic value.

For more information on land eligibility and application procedures, contact an FSA representative at your local USDA Service Center.



Photo: Gary Kramer, USDA NRCS

Emergency Watershed Protection

Created by the 1996 Farm Bill, the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) responds to emergencies caused by natural disasters. The program has two components. Under the cost-share component, the NRCS provides communities or local sponsors with up to 75 percent of the funds needed to restore the natural functions of the watersheds. Projects on private land require a local sponsor from state, county or city government. Under the EWP's floodplain easement component, landowners sell the NRCS a permanent conservation easement that allows the NRCS to restore the natural functions of the floodplain. To be eligible for an EWP easement, land must have been impaired by flooding during the past 12 months or have a history of repeated flooding. Landowners, with permission from the NRCS, may continue to use the land for haying, grazing and managed timber harvests.

For more information, contact an NRCS representative at your local USDA Service Center.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) pays up to 75 percent of the cost for producers to implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land. Higher cost-share percentages may be available to limited resource producers and beginning farmers (fewer than 10 years in business), who must self-certify they meet the criteria. Authorized by the 1996 Farm Bill, the EQIP is open to any producer engaged in livestock, forestry or crop production on eligible land.

The EQIP provides technical and financial assistance to producers to plan, design and install conservation practices that have been approved for use in the local area. Examples of such practices include manure management facilities, grassed waterways, prescribed grazing systems, livestock watering facilities and stream bank stabilization.

The 2002 Farm Bill added EQIP funding for ground and surface water conservation (GSWC), which provides cost-share and incentive payments where the assistance will result in a

net savings in ground and surface water resources in the agricultural operations of a producer. State technical committees identify a set of natural resource concerns that landowners can use EQIP funds to address. EQIP allocations may vary between counties and states. While the NRCS accepts applications on a continuous basis, it evaluates applications and awards contracts during established ranking periods. Sign-up information for each state, the ranking criteria used to evaluate applications and links to EQIP forms are available online at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip>. Go to “State EQIP Application Information.”

For more information, contact an NRCS representative at your local USDA Service Center.

Forest Stewardship Program

Established by the USDA Forest Service in 1991, the Forest Stewardship Program provides technical assistance to any private landowner, Indian tribe or other private legal entity with at least 10 acres of forestland. The state forester is the lead individual in this multi-agency partnership, which will arrange for a forester, wildlife biologist and other natural resource professionals to meet with a woodland owner, examine the property and help prepare a Forest Stewardship Plan. The plan is based on the owner’s personal goals and objectives, and is designed to help the landowner manage his or her property for the future, while enhancing water quality protection, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

For more information, contact your state forestry office.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program helps private landowners restore wetlands and other important fish and wildlife habitats on their land. It is a voluntary partnership program administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that provides financial and technical assistance to private landowners through voluntary cooperative agreements to restore degraded wetlands, native grasslands, streams, riparian areas and other habitats for the benefit of declining federal trust species and the interests of the landowners.

Landowners usually can achieve a dollar-for-dollar cost share by working with a host of nationally based and local entities such as federal, state and local agencies, soil and water conservation districts, and private conservation organizations. Landowners must commit to maintaining projects for the life of the agreement, usually a minimum of 10 years, but otherwise retain full control of their land.

For more information, contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife Management and Habitat Restoration at your local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Authorized by the 1996 Farm Bill, the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) provides landowners with technical and financial assistance to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. Landowners can receive as much as 100 percent of the appraised agricultural market value of the property for permanent conservation easements or 75 percent for 30-year easements. They also can participate in a restoration cost-share agreement. These 10-year agreements pay for 75 percent of the cost of restoration activities and do not place an easement on the property. Eligible land includes wetlands cleared or drained for farming or pasture and must be restorable and suitable for wildlife. The NRCS accepts applications for the WRP on a continuous basis.

For more information, contact an NRCS representative at your local USDA Service Center.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

Authorized by the 1996 Farm Bill, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) provides cost-share assistance and technical assistance to develop and improve habitat for fish and wildlife on private land, tribal land, or state and local government land. Landowners work with the NRCS to create wildlife habitat management plans that list the goals and practices needed to improve wildlife habitat. As part of their conservation plans, landowners agree to implement habitat practices and maintain the enrolled acreage, usually for a period of five to 10 years. In exchange, the NRCS provides up to 75 percent in cost-share assistance to implement the plan. Fifteen-year agreements provide a higher level of cost-share assistance. Interested producers may file an application at any time with the NRCS. The WHIP is a competitively ranked program in which applications with the highest wildlife benefits receive priority for funding.

For more information, contact an NRCS representative at your local USDA Service Center.



Photo: Tim McCabe, USDA NRCS

STATE PROGRAMS

ARIZONA

Water Quality Improvement Grant Program

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality oversees the Water Quality Improvement Grant (WQIG) Program, which allocates money from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for on-the-ground water quality improvement projects that minimize nonpoint source pollution from agriculture, forestry and other sources. Individuals as well as public and private entities may apply for funding for projects that focus on improving or protecting water quality within Arizona.

For more information, contact the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality.

Arizona Water Protection Fund

Ranchers and agricultural landowners can apply to the Arizona Water Protection Fund for grants to protect water quality and maintain, enhance and restore rivers, streams and riparian habitats. The fund, administered by the Arizona Department of Water Resources, receives \$5 million annually from the Arizona state legislature. Any person, entity or municipality can apply for these grants. Priority is given to projects that enhance or maintain streamflow and associated riparian habitat, address issues in geographic areas of public concern, and include matching contributions from other sources.

For more information, contact the Arizona Water Protection Fund Commission c/o the Arizona Department of Water Resources.

Landowner Relations Program

Landowners can apply to the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Landowner Relations Program (LRP), which coordinates habitat improvement projects on private lands within the state. Every year, the LRP implements more than \$2 million in projects to enhance wildlife habitat and/or protect access to public and state trust lands. For instance, the program may pay for establishing perpetual easements into public or state trust lands in return for mutually beneficial wildlife habitat improvement projects. A variety of project funding sources are available through the program, and program administrators can recommend which would best meet a landowner's specific situation. In addition, the LRP's Adopt-a-Ranch program allows community groups to volunteer to perform ranch maintenance activities.

For more information, contact Arizona Game and Fish.

Livestock and Crop Conservation Grant Program

The Arizona state legislature created the Livestock and Crop Conservation Grant Program (LCCGP) in 2003 to help ranchers and farmers with conservation projects that "reduce the fragmentation of open spaces in rural areas." The program typically receives \$2 million per year from the state's Land Conservation Fund. Eligible applicants include individual landowners and grazing or agricultural lessees of state or federal lands interested in implementing "conservation based management alternatives." The LCCGP gives priority to applicants of greatest need — typically ranchers who are considering "subdividing their property as a last resort to financially maintain their ranch and/or applicants running smaller ranching operations." Applicants must demonstrate that their conservation projects will provide public benefits, such as wildlife habitat or riparian buffers, and help preserve open space.

For more information, contact the Arizona Department of Agriculture.

COLORADO

Cooperative Habitat Improvement Program

The Cooperative Habitat Improvement Program (CHIP) helps landowners develop or improve wildlife habitat, control erosion and enhance farm and ranch aesthetics. In addition to providing technical assistance, the CHIP makes small grants of up to \$4,000 to complete projects such as woody plantings, grass plantings, wetland enhancements and/or stream improvements. Individual landowners are eligible to apply to CHIP, a flexible program that offers landowners several options to create habitat for a specific species. Projects can be supplemented by partnering with other habitat programs, such as those offered by the NRCS.

For more information, contact the Colorado Division of Wildlife.



Photo: Jeff Vanuga, USDA NRCS



Photo: Mark Hunter

MCNEIL RANCH

Prolonged drought forced Colorado ranchers Mike and Cathy McNeil to reevaluate how they operate the family's 3,033-acre ranch. By using "holistic management" to assess the impacts of their land use, cattle management and financial planning, the McNeils have been able to stay economically viable during times of poor commodity prices and increasing pressure from land and water development interests. Today, the McNeil Ranch sells its grass-fed beef directly to consumers.

The McNeils, winners of AFT's 2001 Steward of the Land Award, are now a model of ecologically sound, profitable and community-minded ranching. The McNeil Ranch is located in the San Luis Valley, a high desert basin at 7,700 feet in elevation with a relatively harsh climate and little annual precipitation. As a first major change in their operation, the ranch transitioned from winter calving to a spring schedule that allows cows to calve in warmer temperatures. The ranch also adopted a piled hay method of forage management to make winter feeding easier and more economical.

With pressure from real estate development affecting many Colorado ranchers, the McNeils helped found the Rock Creek Heritage Project, a landowner-driven effort to secure a future for agriculture in the Rock Creek watershed. The initiative has been working to protect a block of 15,000 acres of agricultural land and water. The project involves not just land protection but also watershed enhancement, support for value-added and direct marketing, cooperatives, and training in holistic management and other sustainable practices.

The McNeils have permanently protected over 1,500 acres of their own land with the remainder scheduled for protection in 2006. "A society measures its wealth by the state and quality of its land and its ability to feed its population," says Cathy McNeil. "That's why protecting our land is important for future generations."

For more information about the Rock Creek Heritage Project, contact mcneilranch@fone.net.

Colorado Species Conservation Partnership

Great Outdoors Colorado, the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) and the U.S. Department of Interior have developed the Colorado Species Conservation Partnership (CSCP). The program funds habitat conservation easements that provide incentives to private landowners to actively assist with the management and protection of Colorado's declining wildlife species. The CSCP uses conservation easements to ensure that landscapes remain intact so they will provide fundamental wildlife resources on a long-term basis. Private landowners can choose either term or perpetual conservation easements. The program requires that its easements have a management plan agreed upon by the landowner and the DOW. Landowners, land trusts and other conservation organizations that own property with needed habitat for Gunnison Sage Grouse, Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse and other shortgrass prairie species are eligible to apply.

For more information, contact the Colorado Division of Wildlife.



Photo: Robert Bennetts

Colorado Wetlands Program

The Colorado Wetlands Program protects wetland-dependent wildlife through landowner incentives and other voluntary means, including restoration, management and/or purchase of conservation easements or fee titles by land trusts, private landowners, non-government organizations or government agencies. Grants are given to entities (including individual landowners) with relevant projects within focus areas. (For map of focus areas, visit <http://wildlife.state.co.us/habitat/wetlands>.) Grant amounts have varied from \$3,000 to \$500,000 for projects ranging from weed mitigation to conservation easements.

For more information, contact the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

Colorado Wildlife Conservation Grant Program

The Colorado Wildlife Conservation Grant Program (CWCG) supports projects that conserve, restore or enhance Colorado's threatened, endangered or declining wildlife resources. In 2005, CWCG provided \$200,000 of funding with a cap of \$50,000 for any single project. CWCG projects focus on species and habitat conservation; conservation partnerships with private landowners are a program priority. Examples of possible projects include native vegetation enhancement and riparian corridor protection. Non-Division of Wildlife entities, such as private conservation or education organizations, local governments, school districts and water districts, are eligible to apply. Most projects require a 50 percent match of federal funds; however, for planning projects, up to 75 percent of project costs can be covered by CWCG funds.

For more information, contact the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation

The Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation (CWHF) was created by the "Wildlife 21" task force in 1989 to raise additional funds to help fill the gap between available funds and wildlife needs. Projects completed by the CWHF include wetland protection and planning, conservation easements/fee acquisition, fire and drought relief, and wildlife education. Any organization with a project that benefits wildlife is eligible to apply. Since its inception, the CWHF has provided an average of \$400,000 to \$450,000 per year, funding conservation easements on thousands of acres of ranch land.

For more information, contact the Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation.

IDAHO

Conservation Improvement Grants

Idaho's Conservation Improvement Grants program provides financial assistance to eligible applicants for the implementation of natural resource conservation projects. Priority is given to projects with the greatest public benefit and conservation impact. Eligible projects include soil and water conservation, water quality and riparian area improvement, and fish and wildlife habitat protection and enhancement. Grants are limited to \$10,000. All private and public land within Idaho is eligible; any individual or entity may apply.

For more information, contact the Idaho Soil Conservation Commission.

Habitat Improvement Program

The Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) applies to both public and private lands in Idaho, but the program is designed primarily to help private landowners, particularly farmers and ranchers, enhance upland game bird and waterfowl habitat. The HIP provides both technical and financial assistance and is financed by a portion of all hunting license fees. Funds are available for cost sharing on habitat projects by Idaho Fish and Game in partnership with private landowners, non-profit organizations and state and federal agencies. On approved projects, landowners are reimbursed up to 75 percent for out-of-pocket expenses with a general limit of \$10,000 per project.

For more information, contact Idaho Fish and Game.

Range and Cropland Program

The Range and Cropland Program provides technical guidance for the management of agricultural leasing activities on state land, including cropland and grazing leases. Prior to leasing grazing land from the state, ranchers must agree to a written Grazing Management Plan that addresses all activities that may take place under the lease, including number and movement of livestock, the season of use, construction of improvements, vegetation, noxious weed control and other factors.

For more information, contact the Idaho Department of Lands.

Water Quality Program for Agriculture

The Water Quality Program for Agriculture (WQPA) provides financial incentives to owners and operators of agricultural land in Idaho to apply conservation practices that protect and enhance water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. The local soil conservation district designates lands eligible for assistance as critical areas. Project sponsors may be soil conservation districts, irrigation districts, canal companies, individuals, or other agricultural or grazing interests. Cost sharing may be provided for up to 90 percent of the cost of approved practices.

For more information, contact the Idaho Soil Conservation Commission.



Photo: Gary Kramer, USDA NRCS

MONTANA

Future Fisheries Improvement Program

The Future Fisheries Improvement Program helps Montana landowners work with their local fishery biologists to plan and finance projects that improve native and wild fish habitat, for example, restoring stream banks and natural stream channels or enhancing fish spawning. Projects demonstrate that healthy streams can be compatible with agricultural and livestock operations. About \$1 million is available annually to fund these projects. Landowners and other project partners usually share in the project costs.

For more information, contact Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Habitat Montana

Habitat Montana offers incentives to landowners to conserve fish and wildlife habitat on private land, including the purchase of conservation easements. The program, funded in part with hunting license fees, is typically used to protect wildlife habitat on ranch property. Since 1988, the program has worked with 30 Montana ranch families to protect more than 213,000 acres of key, threatened wildlife habitat through the purchase of conservation easements.

For more information, contact Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.



Photo: Jim Schmolinger, USDA NRCS



Photo: Cheryl Goodloe

SID GOODLOE

To restore his ranch in Lincoln County, New Mexico, Sid Goodloe began rebuilding the natural savanna ecosystem 40 years ago. Thanks to holistic land management that focused on short-duration grazing and vegetation management, Goodloe's Carrizo Valley Ranch is now a productive watershed. "If you provide a properly functioning watershed, everything else falls into place," Goodloe says. Overgrazing and unnatural fire suppression in the past had allowed water-hungry piñon and juniper trees to out-compete native grasses, causing erosion and drying up the ranch's creeks and springs.

Now that invasive trees have given way to an open savanna, dried-up streams and springs have come to life again, allowing native grassland plants to flourish on the ranch. Riparian areas are grazed only in the dormant (winter) season, resulting in the establishment of willows and other riparian vegetation that hold the silt and build up the water table. Goodloe uses prescribed fire to keep old-growth ponderosa stands healthy and to establish herbaceous cover that provides excellent habitat for wildlife.

Goodloe met Allan Savory in Rhodesia in 1964. He credits his own follow-up investigation and use of Savory's methods for his "out-of-the-box" approach to land management. "We have achieved the biodiversity and watershed health that has been our goal for 40 years," Goodloe says. "We even received an award this year for mule deer habitat enhancement from the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish."

Goodloe and his wife Cheryl formed the Southern Rockies Agricultural Land Trust (SRALT) to hold conservation easements on working ranches in New Mexico. "We believe it is extremely important to protect family ranching. We have our ranch under easement so our heirs can raise their families in a rural environment," he says. Goodloe now knows that he doesn't have to worry about what happens to the ranch after his death. "I certainly don't want my grandkids to drive by a new subdivision and say, 'that used to be my Granddad's ranch.'"

For more information about the SRALT, call (505) 354-2379 or e-mail sralt@hotmail.com.

Montana Wetlands Legacy

Montana Wetlands Legacy helps landowners create projects to protect, conserve and develop wetlands and riparian areas, including the purchase of conservation easements on agricultural land. Landowners may receive direct funding for the project, materials or construction work, or technical assistance in identifying funding sources.

For more information, contact Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks will share up to 75 percent of the cost for landowners to work with biologists developing upland game bird habitat. Projects may include establishing and maintaining shelterbelts, planting nesting cover and food plots, and implementing improved grazing management systems. Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program projects must be open to some free public game bird hunting and usually involve at least 160 contiguous acres.

In addition, the program's Montana Sagebrush Initiative uses federal Landowner Incentive Program funds to pay for 30-year agreements with private landowners who agree to protect sage grouse habitat.

For more information, contact Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

NEW MEXICO

Habitat Stamp Program

The Habitat Stamp Program (HSP) is funded annually with nearly \$1 million in revenue from the purchase of validation stamps by hunters, anglers and trappers. These funds are dedicated to habitat conservation and rehabilitation projects. More than 200 conservation and rehabilitation projects are developed each year in the areas of wetland, waterway and riparian improvements; vegetation projects; water developments; and numerous other projects that benefit wildlife habitat.

For more information, contact the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

UTAH

Landowner Incentive Program

The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is a new voluntary state program, funded by federal Landowner Incentive Program grants, that provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners to protect and manage habitat to benefit federally listed, proposed, candidate or other at-risk species on private lands. Habitat restoration practices include: mechanical treatment and seeding of decadent sagebrush stands, fuel breaks to control the spread of wildfires, stream channel restoration

and riparian plantings. The LIP also provides for the acquisition of conservation easements from willing sellers to protect habitats in key areas.

For more information, contact the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

WYOMING

Private Lands Public Wildlife Access Program

Under the Walk-In Area Hunting Program, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department leases hunting rights on private land for public enjoyment. Participating landowners receive monetary compensation based on the amount of land enrolled in the program. An interested landowner may contact the department to set up a field visit that evaluates the suitability of land for participation in the program. Landowners must have a minimum of 80 contiguous acres (or 40 if the land supports waterfowl hunting). Public access to a walk-in area is limited to hunting by foot traffic only, unless otherwise designated. Hunters are expected to obey safety zones next to buildings or livestock. The Walk-in Area Fishing Program leases fishing rights on private land for public enjoyment.

For more information, contact Wyoming Game and Fish.

Wyoming Game and Fish Easement Program

The purpose of the Game and Fish Easement Program is to provide habitat for wildlife and public access for sportsmen and sportswomen. The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission purchases public access easements along various waterways to allow pedestrian access within a specified width of the river bank, usually 50 or 100 feet, for fishing and waterfowl hunting. The commission also acquires vehicular right-of-way easements across private land in order to provide access to larger inaccessible blocks of public land.

For more information, contact Wyoming Game and Fish.



Photo: Bob Nichols, USDA NRCS



Photo: Coleman Natural Foods

III. SUSTAINABLE RANGLAND MANAGEMENT

Photo: Stephen Ausmus, USDA Agricultural Resource Service



Today's ranchers face many challenges, from the threats of land fragmentation to growing consumer concerns about food safety and livestock production. The goal of *sustainable ranching* is to maintain the long-term health of the environment while supporting the quality of life and economic viability of the ranch. Grasslands that have deteriorated are subject to a whole range of problems, including the loss of desirable plant species, increased soil erosion, weed invasions, desiccated watersheds and the loss of wildlife.

Sustainable beef production promotes the stewardship of natural resources, generates increased profits, addresses consumer concerns about cattle ranching and uses a whole-system approach to managing grasslands, water, energy, labor and livestock. Well-managed rangelands help maintain healthy watersheds, provide essential habitat for many species of plants and animals, and effectively convert low-quality forage to high-quality agricultural products.

This section contains brief descriptions of sustainable management practices that ranchers can follow in order to increase profits and protect natural resources. Because all ranches are unique in climate, topography, soils, vegetation and management resources, the following practices may differ in implementation on any given ranch.

Conservative Stocking

Overgrazing can degrade range conditions and threaten soil, water, plant and wildlife resources. To prevent overgrazing, ranchers should control the number of their livestock. Rangeland should never be permanently stocked at a rate higher than 60 to 70 percent of average rainfall carrying capacity. Conservative livestock stocking not only helps the environment, it also helps ranchers survive periods of extended drought.

Humane Livestock Handling

Humane conditions for livestock include suitable shelter, fresh water, access to the outdoors and balanced feed rations. In addition, low-stress animal handling techniques can help increase ranch profits. Handling practices that minimize the stress on livestock can improve cattle weight gains and reduce sickness rates and death losses.

Integrated Pest Management

Noxious and invasive plants threaten biological diversity and can have a debilitating effect on rangelands. Infestations of noxious and invasive plants should be contained and controlled using integrated pest management (IPM) techniques whenever possible. IPM is a sustainable approach that uses a variety of tactics to control unwanted plant, animal and insect species. IPM practices help protect the environment, human health and ranching profitability. For instance, herbicide use can be minimized by controlling invading weeds and brush with fire, goats and sheep, or other nontoxic means, such as high-impact, short-duration grazing.

Prescribed Fire

Over the last century, fire suppression activities have contributed to the loss of the natural western savanna, allowing trees such as piñon pine and juniper to flourish. By restoring fire to the ecosystem, ranchers can promote the return of healthy grasslands. Prescribed burns can be used to manage weeds and brush, and improve forage quality and grazing distribution. When strategic fires are used and healthy grasslands return, soils regain water absorbency, helping to control erosion and replenish watersheds.



Planned Grazing

Planned grazing monitors the effects of livestock on soil and plants. Livestock are moved according to environmental conditions in a controlled, deliberate process. Ranges are divided into separate pastures by fences and natural barriers with stock rotated when plants have been effectively grazed and fertilized. Planned pasture rotation leaves each section of pasture completely free of livestock at some point during the growing season, allowing plants to recover. Planned grazing helps ranchers reduce dependence on grain and harvested forage and minimizes overgrazing problems, such as soil erosion.

BENEFITS OF PLANNED GRAZING

- Optimizes the use of pasture while reducing feed grain and harvested forage, lowering inputs and saving money.
- Addresses social concerns about food safety and environmental degradation.
- Allows more production for a longer period of time.
- Helps to distribute manure more uniformly.
- Permits easier interaction with cattle since the animals are kept close together.
- May provide more cover for game than continuous grazing. Wildlife and lease hunting can be sources of income for ranchers.



Photo: Ron Nichols, USDA NRCS

HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT INTERNATIONAL

Holistic Management International (HMI) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting resource management in a way that restores land to health, productivity and profitability. The worldwide pioneer of Holistic Management, HMI has worked successfully with ranchers, farmers, pastoral communities and other entities since 1984.

Contrary to the belief that ranching has contributed to the desertification of parts of the American West, Holistic Management demonstrates that effective livestock management can actually improve land health. Holistic Management® Grazing Planning incorporates periodic disturbances of grasslands to simulate the herd effects of wild animals. By herding cattle in patterns mimicking the wild grazers, grassland can be revitalized and biodiversity increased, including an increase of more perennial grasses and wildlife.

Holistic Management principles involve planning livestock movements carefully so that animals do not overgraze plants but actually increase soil fertility. Livestock are moved frequently, often grazing in higher densities for shorter duration. Holistic Management practitioners monitor plant growth and recovery, concentrating on building a healthy pasture that supports microbes, earthworms and diverse plant life. Increased soil health leads to increased land and animal productivity and profit.

With high stock density, cattle more effectively graze available plants, mulch nutrients into the ground by trampling in their own manure, knock down dead plants and break the soil crust. When cattle help break up the soil, they also allow the soil to better trap moisture. By improving vegetative ground cover and increasing water infiltration, ranchers can then get the most out of limited precipitation. And with more water, plant and wildlife communities thrive.

HMI founder Allan Savory first realized that livestock could be used as land reclamation tools some 40 years ago and began working with ranchers in a number of countries to learn how to do that effectively. “Plant species not seen in decades have returned, springs have reappeared and wildlife has grown more plentiful and diverse,” says Savory. “Any number of ranchers in the Rocky Mountain West who are using this planning process and managing in this more holistic manner have received good stewardship awards for their land management. There is no reason why the grasslands in the Rocky Mountain West cannot once again sustain abundant wildlife and healthy rural communities.”

HMI offers training, educational materials and consulting to farmers and ranchers, public land managers, agricultural and development agencies, and Holistic Management educators.

For more information, visit www.holisticmanagement.org or call HMI at (505) 842-5252.



Photo: Stephen Ausmus, USDA Agricultural Research Service

Riparian Protection

Riparian areas occur next to streams, rivers, springs and other bodies of surface and subsurface water. Riparian areas provide many important watershed functions, such as groundwater recharge, nutrient cycling and maintenance of water quality. They also tend to support different plants and wildlife than adjacent uplands. Accordingly, riparian areas should be protected from sediment and chemical contamination and livestock waste. Cattle should be grazed in riparian areas in a controlled manner and only for a short time.

Time-Controlled Grazing

Grazing should be planned to match grazing times and livestock numbers to the condition of the grassland resources. The proper timing of grazing allows rangeland to recover sufficiently before being grazed again, which gives key species of range plants an opportunity to rest and re-grow after each grazing period. The correct timing, intensity and frequency of grazing will largely be determined by the individual environment of a given ranch.

Written Grazing Plans

A written grazing plan can help ranchers meet the nutritional needs of livestock while maximizing the production of forage. A meaningful grazing plan coordinates the timing of grazing with pasture conditions and management activities, such as weaning and calving. It also accounts for changes in stocking rates throughout the year and gives ranchers a means for recording and evaluating ranch management practices. Ranch management plans should also account for drought contingency strategies and financial projections.

For more information on sustainable ranching techniques, contact Holistic Management International, Malpai Borderlands Group, National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, Quivira Coalition, Society for Range Management, and Western Rangelands Partnership.

Rangeland Inventories

Sustainable rangeland management requires a lengthy system of monitoring to judge the effectiveness of grazing practices and rangeland health. Adjustments in grazing times or stocking rates should be made by monitoring rangeland resource conditions over the years. Carrying capacity should be evaluated according to the impacts of historical and current stocking rates. Photographs can be used to compare changes in the range over time.



Photo: Ralph Fisher, USDA NRCS



Photo: Jeff Yanaga, USDA NRCS

IV. RESOURCES



Photo: Joel McNeel, USDA NRCS

*CONTACT INFORMATION
IS PROVIDED HERE FOR
AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS
REFERENCED IN THE GUIDE.*

STATE AGENCIES

ARIZONA

Arizona Department of Agriculture
(602) 542-4373
www.azda.gov

Arizona Department of Environmental Quality
(800) 234-5677
www.azdeq.gov

Arizona Department of Water Resources
(602) 771-8500
www.awpf.state.az.us

Arizona Game and Fish
(602) 942-3000
www.gf.state.az.us

Arizona State Land Department – Forestry Division
(602) 771-1400
www.azstatefire.org

Arizona State Parks
(602) 542-4174
www.pr.state.az.us

COLORADO

Colorado Department of Agriculture
(303) 239-4100
www.ag.state.co.us

Colorado Department of Revenue
(303) 866-3900
www.revenue.state.co.us

Colorado Division of Wildlife
(303) 297-1192
www.wildlife.state.co.us

Colorado State Forest Service
(970) 491-6303
www.forestry.state.co.us

Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation
(303) 291-7212
www.wildlife.state.co.us/cwhf

Great Outdoors Colorado
(303) 863-7522
www.goco.org

IDAHO

Idaho Department of Agriculture
(208) 332-8500
<http://www.agri.state.id.us>

Idaho Department of Lands
(208) 334-0200
www.state.id.us/lands

Idaho Fish and Game
(208) 334-3700
www.fishandgame.idaho.gov

Idaho Forest Products Commission
(208) 334-3292
www.idahoforests.org

Idaho Soil Conservation Commission
(208) 332-8650
www.scc.state.id.us



MONTANA

Montana Department of Agriculture
(406) 444-3144
<http://agr.state.mt.us>

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
(406) 444-3533
<http://www.dnrc.state.mt.us>

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
(406) 444-2535
www.fwp.state.mt.us

NEW MEXICO

New Mexico Department of Agriculture
(505) 646-3007
<http://nmdaweb.nmsu.edu>

New Mexico Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources
(505) 476-3328
<http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us>

New Mexico Game and Fish
(505) 476-8000
www.wildlife.state.nm.us

New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department
(505) 827-0700
www.state.nm.us/tax

UTAH

Utah Department of Agriculture and Food
(801) 538-7100
www.ag.utah.gov

Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Land
(801) 538-5555
www.ffsl.utah.gov

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
(801) 538-4700
www.wildlife.utah.gov

Utah Governor's Office of Planning and Budget
(801) 538-1027
www.governor.utah.gov/planning

WYOMING

Wyoming Department of Agriculture
(307) 777-7324
<http://wyagric.state.wy.us>

Wyoming Game and Fish
(307) 777-4600
www.gf.state.wy.us

Wyoming Office of Governor
(307) 777-7434
www.wyoming.gov/governor

NATIONAL CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS

American Farmland Trust
Farmland Information Center
(800) 370-4879
www.farmlandinfo.org

Ducks Unlimited
(800) 45DUCKS
www.ducks.org

Land Trust Alliance
(202) 638-4725
www.lta.org

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
(202) 857-0166
www.nfwf.org

Pheasants Forever
(877) 773-2070
www.pheasantsforever.org

The Conservation Fund
(703) 525-6300
www.conservationfund.org

The Nature Conservancy
(800) 628-6860
<http://nature.org>

Trout Unlimited
(703) 522-0200
www.tu.org

SUSTAINABLE RANGLAND MANAGEMENT

Holistic Management International
(505) 842-5252
www.holisticmanagement.org

Malpai Borderlands Group
(520) 558-2470
<http://www.malpaiborderlandsgroup.org>

National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (ATTRA)
(800) 346-9140
www.attra.org

Quivira Coalition (*New Mexico only*)
(505) 820-2544
www.quiviracoalition.org

Society for Range Management
(303) 986-3309
<http://www.rangelands.org>

Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education / Western Region
(435) 797-2257
<http://wsare.usu.edu>

STATE AND REGIONAL LAND TRUSTS

Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust
(303) 431-6422
www.ccalt.org

Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts
(303) 271-1577
www.cclt.org

(*Colorado*) Rock Creek Heritage Project
e-mail: mcneilranch@fone.net

(*Idaho only*) Teton Regional Land Trust
(208) 354-8939
www.tetonlandtrust.org

(*Idaho*) Wood River Land Trust
(208) 788-3947
www.woodriverlandtrust.org

Montana Land Reliance
(406) 443-7027
www.mtlandreliance.org

(*New Mexico*) Southern Rockies Agricultural Land Trust
(505) 354-2379
e-mail: sralt@hotmail.com

Partnership of Rangeland Trusts
(307) 772-8751
<http://www.maintaintherange.com>

Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust
(307) 772-8751
www.wsgalt.org

FEDERAL AGENCIES

CSREES / USDA Cooperative State Research, Education & Extension Service
Directory of State Extension Partners
<http://www.csrees.usda.gov>

Soil and Water Conservation District
Local office locator
<http://nacdnet.org/resources/cdson.web.html>

USDA Forest Service
Regional office locator
<http://www.fs.fed.us/contactus/regions.shtml>

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/partners/for_farmers.html

USDA Service Centers
<http://offices.usda.gov>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
State office locator
<http://www.fws.gov/offices>

For more information about Coleman Natural Foods, call (800) 442-8666 or visit www.colemannatural.com.



Photo: Ron Nichols, USDA NRCS

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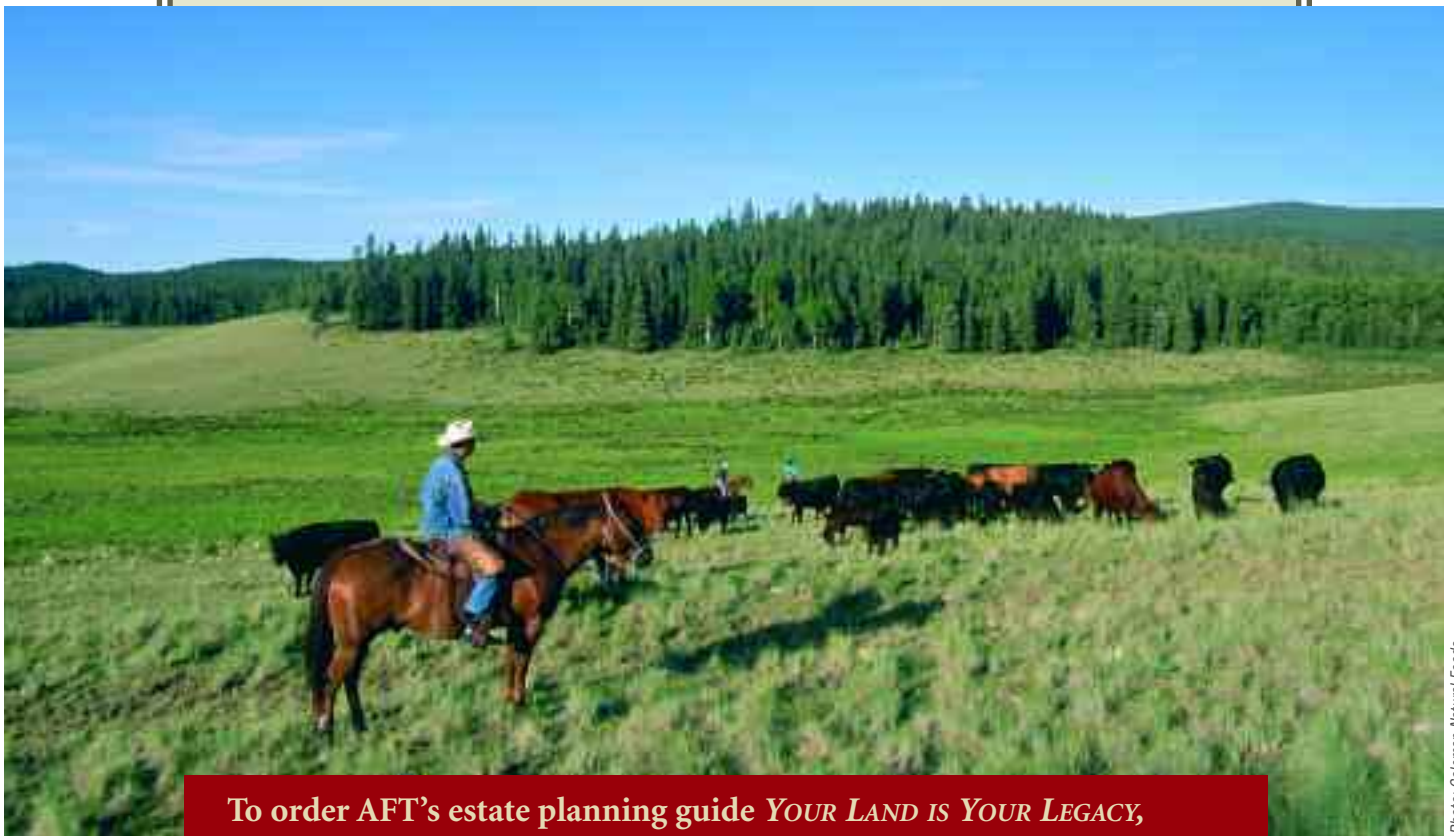
American Farmland Trust (AFT) is a nonprofit conservation organization founded in 1980 to protect our nation's strategic agricultural resources. AFT works to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment. AFT provides a variety of services to landowners, land trusts, public officials, planners, agricultural agencies and others. Services include Cost of Community Services studies, workshops on farmland protection and estate planning, farmland protection program development and agricultural economic analysis.

AFT's Farmland Information Center (FIC) is a clearinghouse for information about farmland protection and stewardship operated by AFT in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The FIC maintains an online collection of agricultural and land use statistics, laws, literature and technical resources. It also offers an answer service to provide direct technical assistance via phone, e-mail and fax.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Take the next step — learn more about the public and private opportunities described in this landowners guide. Contact American Farmland Trust, Coleman Natural Foods and other resources that can help you and your community protect farm and ranch land.
- Speak up about the benefits working lands provide. Help your community take control of its future — talk to your local planning commission and elected leaders.
- Support public programs and financing, such as PACE/PDR programs, that keep farm and ranch land in production.
- Be a steward of the land; encourage sustainable management practices that keep the land healthy.
- Prepare now for the future of your land, your business and your family. Consult with your legal, financial and tax advisors to develop your estate plan.



To order AFT's estate planning guide *YOUR LAND IS YOUR LEGACY, A GUIDE FOR PLANNING THE FUTURE OF YOUR FARM*, call (800) 370-4879.

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