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NEWS

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Forest Legacy Conservation Easement Permanently Conserves Catspaw Ranch

Fort Collins, Colo. — Development of forested areas increasingly threatens Colorado’s valuable forest lands. This week, Colorado State University and the Colorado State Forest Service along with the U.S. Forest Service, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), The Conservation Fund and the owners of Catspaw Ranch in Archuleta County are taking steps to conserve 8,690 acres through a Forest Legacy Program conservation easement. Such agreements permanently restrict the type and amount of development that can occur on the landowner’s property.

“We are pleased to have the opportunity to conserve this important piece of forest land on the Navajo River for present and future generations,” said Joe Duda, forest management division supervisor, Colorado State Forest Service, an agency in the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University. “Intact forest land such as that found on the Catspaw Ranch supplies timber products and provides important wildlife habitat, soil and watershed protection, and aesthetics, so it’s imperative that we work with landowners to conserve these lands.”

This easement complements other ongoing conservation efforts conducted by many different organizations and individuals in the Navajo River watershed, the system of lands and waters linked to the river. The Navajo River, one of Colorado’s most wild and remote rivers, rises in the rugged South San Juan Wilderness in the area south of Wolf Creek Pass. The river’s watershed borders existing protected lands and is highly valued because it is intact and pristine.

“Protecting this gem hidden in the wilderness of Colorado provides numerous environmental benefits, but it also preserves the culture and heritage of family-owned ranches in Colorado,” said Sydney Macy, Colorado director of The Conservation Fund. “We thank the owners of Catspaw Ranch, the Colorado State Forest Service, the U.S. Forest Service, Great Outdoors Colorado and our supporters in Congress – Sen. Ken Salazar, Sen. Wayne Allard and Rep. John Salazar – for recognizing the value of this property and its role in the overall protection of the Navajo River watershed.

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“This milestone is the result of local communities, stakeholders and individual landowners working together to preserve one of Colorado’s signature landscapes for the benefit of generations to come,” said Sen. Salazar. “I commend the owners of Catspaw Ranch, the Colorado State Forest Service, the U.S. Forest Service, Great Outdoors Colorado and the Conservation Fund for their efforts to protect the water and wildlife habitat offered by these pristine forest lands in a manner that preserves the ranching heritage of Southwest Colorado.”

“By working with willing property owners, the public, conservation groups and local government to find mutually beneficial ways to conserve land, this effort shows how the government can succeed when preserving sensitive areas,” said Sen. Allard.

The Forest Legacy Program is a federally funded voluntary program that partners with individual states to support and protect environmentally sensitive forest lands. To maximize public benefits, the program focuses on the acquisition of portions of privately owned forest lands. It accomplishes this by purchasing conservation easements without removing the property from private ownership. Most of the easements restrict development, require sustainable forestry practices and protect other values at risk.

Colorado began participating in the Forest Legacy Program in 2000 when then Gov. Bill Owens petitioned the U.S. Forest Service to be included in the Forest Legacy Program, while designating the Colorado State Forest Service as the lead agency.

To participate in the Forest Legacy Program in Colorado, recipients are required to submit a project proposal. Proposals are rated according to criteria established by Colorado Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee and recommendations are made to Jeff Jahnke, Colorado state forester and director of the Colorado State Forest Service. The projects selected by Jahnke compete at the regional and national levels for funding. Projects must provide at least a 25-percent match to qualify for Forest Legacy funds, and Great Outdoors Colorado was an important source of matching dollars for the Catspaw Ranch project.

“The Catspaw Forest Legacy project demonstrates how all of us working together can protect environmentally sensitive forest lands,” said Rick Cables, the U.S. Forest Service’s Rocky Mountain Regional Forester. “Thanks to the willingness of the Catspaw Ranch owners, this conservation easement, established adjacent to the San Juan National Forest and in the Navajo River watershed, will in perpetuity protect a significant piece of forest land from development, thus helping to preserve valuable water, wildlife habitat and vegetative resources.”

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