



FALL 2010 NEWSLETTER

FROM THE DIRECTOR: THE NEXT GENERATION

In my mid-forties, I find myself at the age where I spend more and more time talking about “the next generation”. How do we effectively engage “the next generation?” What does our work mean for “the next generation?” Instead of just asking those questions, we decided to tackle the answers, and for the first time this year did a series of outreach and education enterprises targeted to youth. This work was inspired in part by the lives and work of both Doug Shriver and Ray Wright, who were each passionate about conservation and youth. We have always known that our work ultimately benefits the generations that follow, and this year we were able to put that into practice.

This year wasn't only about the next generation though. No matter what your age, getting out to spend time on the beautiful private ranches of the valley is something that thrills us all. That's why we also organized activities for people of all ages to experience these extraordinary places. We held two Plein Air Paint Outs (where we invited the public out to watch and visit with artists at work) and hosted a photography workshop, taught by Mike Blakeman. Conservation of our private land benefits us all, and helping people experience that for themselves is something we can give back to our community.

Conservation is much more than the sum of individual projects. It's about stopping along Highway 149 at the Silver Thread Scenic Byway pull out near the Rio Grande Reservoir turn off and knowing that the spectacular ranch below you will be protected forever. It is about saving important habitat for migrating birds, big game and gold medal trout. It is about the sustainability of agriculture, local foods and food security; and it is about protecting our water rights, which make everything else possible. To be able to enjoy this in my generation and get to pass it on to the next, is really something special.



Nancy Butler (left) at our Rio Grande Initiative Celebration thanking four generations of the Willett Family for conserving the Cross Arrow Ranch, the largest private ranch on the Rio Grande in Colorado. Also pictured: Jim Rhett (with photo), and Rio de la Vista (right)

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*Our Mission:
 To conserve our land, water, and way of life in
 Colorado's San Luis Valley*

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RAY WRIGHT MEMORIAL DONATIONS

Last Winter, the San Luis Valley lost two dear friends in a tragic accident, Ray Wright and Doug Shriver. Both men were outstanding leaders on water issues in the San Luis Valley and will be deeply missed. We are honored that Ray’s loved ones chose RiGHT as one of the recipients of his memorial donations and want to thank everyone who made a donation. In honor of Ray and his work, RiGHT is working to inspire and support the next generation of conservation leaders. You can read more about this work on pages 4 & 5.

\$ 500

Agro Engineering
Rio Grande Water Users Association
Rio Oxbow Ranch

\$ 150 - \$ 400

Consulting Petroleum Engineer
Michael and Peggy Blenden
Peterson Farms, LLC
Mary Ann Wright

\$ 100

Malon and Kathy Anderson Blanford, Inc. CAH Farm, LLC *	Mary Jo Merkley Peter Nichols Jim and Jane Rhett
Colorado Water Congress Ralph and Gloria Curtis	Southern Colorado Farms LLC Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District *
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\$ 15 - \$ 40

Gene Anderson Gerry and Tammy Anderson Jack Felmlee Robert and Betty Felmlee Glen and Beatrice Getz Sandra K. Haller Pam and Jon Kolseth Larry and Katherine McDaniel	Off Island Ranch Dean and Nancy Prentice Margy Robertson Betty and Alfred Schaak Paul and Joan Schulz Pat Steinhart Tom and Donna Templeton
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* Indicates an additional memorial donation for Doug Shriver.

Contact us today if you or your family is interested in making a memorial donation or bequest to RiGHT.

CONNECTING TO THE LAND - BY CHRISTY HAYES

In the spring of 2005, my husband and I purchased an old dairy farm in the heart of the San Luis Valley in Monte Vista. We were drawn to this area after falling in love with South Central Colorado while vacationing in the area. The clean air, the breathtaking mountain views, along with the gentle cadence of small town life had us yearning to spend as much time as possible in the valley. After an exhaustive search, and with the help of local real estate broker Karla Shriver, we began our adventure in creating what we now call the "Lazy Dawg" Ranch--our home away from home. The property needed some serious TLC, and we've spent considerable time and effort restoring the ranch by focusing on fence repair, river restoration, irrigation maintenance, pasture recovery and weed reduction to help

restore its natural beauty. We've kept the place as an active cattle ranch, and work with a local valley resident to manage it.



When our family passes through the gates of the ranch, we shed the hustle and bustle of the city like a snake shedding its skin, and regain a whole new perspective on life. Our morning walks at the ranch are accompanied by the occasional buzz of a crop duster, dogs barking unencumbered in the distance without fear of retribution or the shock of a collar, and we can barely see our closest neighbor. Our kids play with each other instead of fighting and we spend quality time as a family in ways that are not possible at home: we fish and float the river, clean the property, cut firewood and enjoy the simple pleasure of a drive-in movie and an occasional ice cream at the Dairy Queen.



During our down time at the ranch we often talk about the future and what we want for ourselves and our children. When we began to think long term about the property, what it would mean to our children when we aren't around and what it would mean to the full time residents of the valley, we discussed putting the property into a conservation easement. This turned out to be quite the undertaking. After roughly three years of planning and with the help of the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, our property is now permanently protected from development and will remain a haven for beaver, birds, cows, deer, ducks, eagles, elk, frogs, geese, owls, porcupines, Sandhill cranes, skunks and all the other natural wildlife we have yet to encounter at the ranch. Furthermore, the conservation easement has preserved a way of life for the valley by permanently ensuring its continued use as a working cattle ranch.



In case we ever forget what a gem we have found in the valley, all we have to do is look out our windows at the tranquil 360 degree views, listen to the river idle by along the bank, or watch the sun set over the pasture. Our friends who come to visit from around the country remind us to be thankful for the world class skiing within an hour's drive, the trophy trout fishing along the majestic Rio Grande River, and the priceless memories we make in a town a few years ago we never knew existed. Putting the property into a perpetual easement is our way to give back to the valley that has given our family so much.



RiGHT completed this project in 2009 with the help of Great Outdoors Colorado Lottery Funds, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and the Gates Family Foundation.

*Photos (top to bottom): Fly fishing the Rio Grande by Joe Zinn/
Evening light during this year's monitoring visit / A good day to be a kid by Chris Hayes*

OUTREACH & EDUCATION: CONNECTING WITH THE NEXT GENERATION

A big part of our work at the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust involves reaching out to the public and teaching them about our land and water protection efforts and how it benefits the San Luis Valley. To do this, we provide educational workshops, make regular presentations to our partners and elected officials, and work hard to provide opportunities for the public to visit some of our protected properties.

Thanks in part to donations through the Ray Wright Memorial Fund, we were able to begin a special effort this year to engage youth - something we feel especially passionate about when we consider the importance of our work for future generations.

SCIENCE FAIR:

RiGHT sponsored three “Conservation Excellence” awards at last year’s San Luis Valley Regional Science Fair (and we’ll do the same this year). The winner in each division (elementary, junior high, and high school) received a cash award and was invited on a birding tour on a conserved property.

“Along with the award, my parents and I were given the unique opportunity of visiting the Gilmore Ranch for a birding tour. Through this experience I was truly able to see the importance of the conservation easement process. Seeing the many types of birds in their natural habitat provides more than enough reasoning to protect this environment. It was very intriguing to see what a beautiful place this was and will always be.”

- Johanna Phillips, high school division winner

BEAVER CREEK CONSERVATION CAMP:

Each summer, groups throughout the valley coordinate to hold a “Conservation Camp” in South Fork that brings in students to learn about range science, botany, forestry, and more. With help from the Ray Wright Memorial Fund, RiGHT provided four students with scholarships to attend this year’s camp and taught an experiential class on conservation.

FORT LEWIS COLLEGE VISIT:

This Spring, a group of students from Fort Lewis College visited the San Luis Valley as part of a Society & Ecology class. They connected with RiGHT to learn about our work. We took them to a few of our projects, including a visit with Board member Pete Atkins, a tour of the goat dairy at the Knoblauch Ranch, and a mini-water rights lesson with Don Jansen at the Jansen Ranch.

With so many small family farms and ranches disappearing ... it was good to see some places would be preserved in their glory for the next generation to witness.

- Dustin Sibik, Fort Lewis College Student

Photos (top to bottom):

*Science fair award winners with their families on a birding tour at the Gilmore Ranch/
Don Jansen at the Minor Ditch headgate explaining the importance of water/
Class in session in the back of Don Jansen's pickup*



As we visited the ranches in Del Norte that were part of the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, I was able to see firsthand the true benefits of land trusts in our community. In addition to bolstering conservation efforts in the area, the Land Trust works to preserve a way of life that depends on the stewardship of land.

Personally, as a vegetarian, minimalist and student of permaculture design, I never thought that I would learn something about sustainability from a conventional small-scale cattle rancher that would radically affect my world view. That is, however, exactly what happened early this May in Del Norte.

Apart from any philosophical or idealistic reasons, it is practical to keep your land healthy. Using resources responsibly is common sense. Here are a few things that I learned about sustainability from cattle ranchers:

- Your life depends on the dirt beneath your feet. Literally.
- When you know your land, you love it.
- No amount of money is worth dismembering healthy open land.
- Nothing is more important than knowing the health of your water and your soil. If the land you walk on is not healthy, you have no livelihood.
- A career shift to Ranch Hand from anything else is a promotion.

- Betzi Sherman, Fort Lewis College Student



Photos: Fort Lewis College students at the Knoblauch Ranch aka LazEwe 2 Bar Goat Dairy

CONSERVING LAND & WATER

In September, we celebrated closing on another conservation easement on the Rio Grande river! Situated halfway between Monte Vista and Del Norte, this beautiful 350 acre ranch encompasses nearly two miles of the river and is of particular importance as it holds shares of the first and second most senior water rights on the Rio Grande in Colorado, adjudicated in 1866. Our land trust started out of a water organization in the 1990's working to protect the Valley's water resources, so securing these senior water rights really brought us back full circle to our

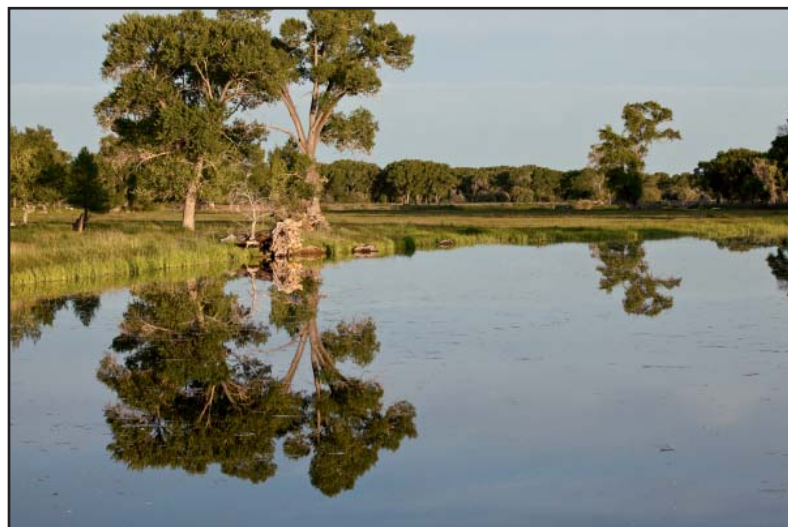


Photo: Slough reflections by Mike Blakeman

beginning. In an arid region like the San Luis Valley, 75% of the wildlife use river corridors like the Rio Grande to meet their habitat needs. Private ranches with water rights play a crucial role in filling up seasonal oxbows, sloughs and wet meadows, that provide this essential wildlife habitat.

As part of the *Rio Grande Initiative* (RiGHT's collaborative effort to protect river corridor ranches), completing a conservation easement on this ranch brings the total amount of land conserved on the river to over 19,000 acres! In the last three years RiGHT and our partners have effectively doubled the pace of conservation along the river, leading to one of the most successful conservation efforts in Colorado.

CELEBRATING THE RIO GRANDE

We feel truly lucky to live where we do along the headwaters of one of America's great rivers, and this year we celebrated the mighty Rio Grande in a multitude of ways. In August we held our third annual "Keep the Rio Grande Grand" Fine Art Benefit Sale, a great event that celebrated the fantastic local artists and food of our region. In October we held a celebration of the *Rio Grande Initiative*, hosted by the Willett Family at their beautiful Cross Arrow Ranch. On a picture-perfect autumn day, over 100 people gathered to help us thank the many landowners, funders, and supporters for their contributions and investments in the future of our community. Over the last three years, we've more than doubled the pace of conservation along the Rio Grande from the prior 20 years, which means our community has a lot to celebrate!



Celebration Photos: Hay ride on the Cross Arrow Ranch / Future ranchers Riley & Peyton Willett



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