



SPRING 2010 NEWSLETTER

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From the Director

It is with a sad heart that we send out this newsletter mourning the loss of our dear friends and colleagues, Ray Wright and Doug Shriver, who died in a tragic accident in March. Their lives were a testament to community involvement and what we can accomplish if we join together and listen to one another. Our work was touched by their lives and how they lived them. Today and in the many many days ahead we'll be working hard to honor their commitment to the San Luis Valley.



Executive Director, Nancy Butler, spending a day cutting and storing ice from the Rio Grande

One of the ways we hope to honor Doug and Ray is to continue doing good work. To that end, I couldn't be more proud to announce that we were recently accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance. We now join the other 92 land trusts across the U.S. who have earned this distinction. We are honored to be part of the state and national community of land trusts who are always striving to achieve important conservation objectives, with the highest quality in both our process and our results.



The process to achieve accreditation was voluntary and we embarked upon it knowing that the long hours of documentation and meeting with our policy committee would pay off. Kudos to our Stewardship Director, Aaron Derwingson, for putting all this information together, but the full congratulations go to our excellent staff and consultants, Board of Directors, partners and community members for constantly pushing us to be better.

The next steps from here involve creating more outreach opportunities with our landowners and community members to further strengthen our work. To that end, RiGHT was recently awarded a grant from lottery-funded Great Outdoors Colorado to research and pursue outreach opportunities and additionally was chosen as one of two Colorado land trusts to participate in a Community Engagement program, designed and funded by the Colorado Conservation Trust.

As we compile our notes and thoughts from all these recent events and opportunities, hopefully the good energy from them will be reflected on these pages and in our further work. You'll note, for starters, that we have a lot of activities coming up this summer. Please join us for them, and if you have any thoughts you'd like to share, we'd love to listen.

Continued on Page 2.

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

From the Director - Continued...

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We'd also love to hear personal stories from you about why you value conservation. On page 3 of this newsletter, Dale Pizel, manager of the Rio Oxbow Ranch, writes about his horse, Spot. The Rio Oxbow Ranch is a project high in the San Juans and along the Silver Thread Scenic Byway that we spent three years working to conserve and completed in 2009. The ranch was featured in John Fielder's recent "Ranches of Colorado" book and included a picture of Dale's old and beloved horse, who was unfortunately sick with Cushing's syndrome. For those of you who attended our November slide show with John Fielder you may remember that he asked Dale to tell Spot's story. Here's the full story. As you'll read, it's a love story.

RiGHT Selected for Community Engagement Program

RiGHT is very proud to be one of only two land trusts in Colorado chosen to participate in a community-based pilot project. This program, sponsored by the Colorado Conservation Trust, brings national consultants in to help us work more effectively within our community. And it all starts with listening, because it is not about what we can teach you, it is about what you can teach us.



RiGHT Executive Director Nancy Butler addresses attendees at a recent community listening session in Monte Vista.

Thanks to all of those who attended our first ever "Listening Session" on Thursday, March 4th in Monte Vista. That was the first step in listening to the reasons people value living here, what some of their concerns are and how we can improve our conservation efforts to align

more with those thoughts. We were moved by the many profound connections that people have to the Valley and why they live here (beauty, sense of community, wildlife, recreational opportunities) and listened carefully to their concerns (lack of funding for education, wildlife loss, water, development while maintaining an agricultural economy, long range planning and out of scale and destructive energy development).

On-the-ground ideas that resulted from that session included sponsoring a Conservation Excellence Award at the recent San Luis Valley Regional Science Fair. We are looking forward to taking our three award winners (grade, middle and high school) and their chaperones out on a tour of a conserved ranch in the near future. Be looking for us to talk more about youth education in the future. We also anticipate sharing the beauty and learning opportunities our conserved ranches have to offer through more tours, photography/art workshops and events held on these special places. You can see some of the events coming up under "Happenings" on Page 5.

Our listening process hasn't ended with one meeting. We'd love to hear from you about why you like living in or visiting the San Luis Valley, what your concerns are and what you'd like to see us be doing. We'd also love to get you more engaged in our work through volunteering for events or in the office, serving on a committee, or writing an article for a future newsletter. Contact our office or stop by for more information.



Connecting to the Land: The Story of Spot by Dale Pizel



It is said you will have one truly good horse in your life. You may have noticed a sort of poor looking spotted horse in John Fielders 'Ranches of Colorado', but only a cruel disease made the best look that way. Born from an Appaloosa stud and Arabian endurance racing dam, logic would tell you who ever devised that concoction isn't the sharpest tool in the chest, and logic would also tell you that Spot would never be the one truly good horse. But sometimes heart and desire defy breeding, as was the case with Spot.

Born on the Rio Oxbow Ranch, three hundred yards from his final resting place, Spot gstarted packing the San Juans when he was two, and became the best in the field. Because of his trustworthiness, he became not only my top horse but also the horse I could put the dudes on, like my wife when she was first learning.

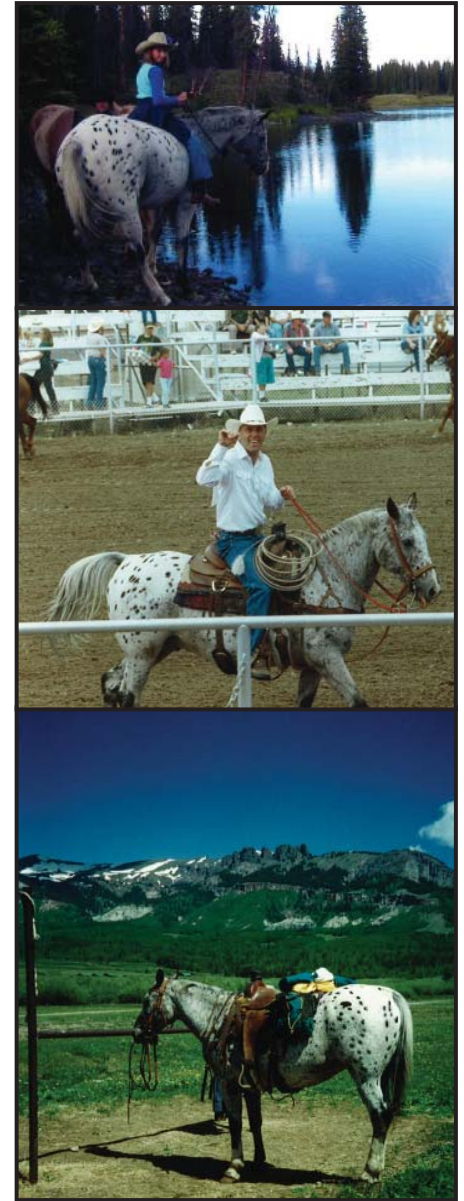
Being from Chicago, Anne had never ridden before so one day after paying close attention to how it's done, she took off on her own. As she trotted down the trail she and her saddle were suddenly looking up instead of down. Not knowing horses Anne didn't realize what a wreck it could have been, she told me Spot quietly stopped, looked down at her and seemed to say, we might want to review that saddling lesson again. Spot helped me court Anne, and appropriately, we were married on him. Later Spot helped me raise my two daughters, who went on to win many, many trophies and ribbons on him.

Over the years he never missed a day's work and although he protested, true to his breeding, he would give more than his all to every task. Spot and I had many jobs but one was operating a trans-mountain diversion 12 miles into the Weminuche Wilderness once a week for 20 years. By summer's end Spot could travel the 24 miles round trip in 4.5 hours, showing his mother's and father's endurance and winning many a boast at the local tavern. He went from top pack and trail horse to my top team roping heeling horse. When my daughters started riding and competing I walked to the corral and said, "Spot you ever been a barrel and pole horse before?" He of course said, "Not yet."

Spot and I attended a roping clinic lead by a national clinician and roper. Before starting he joked about a student who had shown up with an Arabian horse once. Everyone chuckled. I raised my hand and said I'm riding a half Arabian and half Appaloosa, which was greeted with audible groans. On the last day as I roped two feet, and swung down and ground tied Spot to retrieve my rope, the instructor loped over on his tall Texan Quarter horse and said, "When you said what you were riding the first day I was actually a bit concerned, but that's one of the neatest little horses I think I have ever known." Yes he was.

Spot and I witnessed many changes to the upper Rio Grande in his 30 years, with our sleepy ranching valley changing from prime cattle country to prime real estate for second homes. Prices for ranch land hit historic and unprecedented heights, making it almost impossible for the old ranch families to resist the temptation to sell for development, especially when yearly income from these ranches was meager at best. Not only are we lucky to live in 'God's Country' but to also be blessed with organizations such as RiGHT and its partners who work tirelessly to help preserve the old ranches as they are, for the ranch families, wildlife and waterfowl, fisheries and communities. For this reason Spot only has to share his final resting place on the banks of Rio Grande River, with the bugling bull elk, a coyote yipping to his friends, and a random fly fisherman enjoying the day.

It is said you will have one truly good horse in your life.



*From top to bottom:
Abbey Pizel with Spot at Ruby Lake,
Dale Pizel and Spot at the Ski-Hi Stampede,
and Spot at the Ute Creek Tralihead*

RiGHT Earns National Recognition

Accreditation Awarded by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission

RiGHT is happy to announce that we were recently awarded accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance. The Land Trust Alliance (LTA) is a national conservation group that represents over 1,700 land trusts throughout the U.S.



“Accredited land trusts meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever,” said Commission Executive Director Tammara Van Ryn. “The accreditation seal lets the public know that the accredited land trust has undergone an extensive, external review of the governance and management of its organization and the systems and policies it uses to protect land.”

RiGHT was awarded accreditation this March along with two other Colorado land trusts and eight other land trusts from across the country. With these additions, there are now 93 land trusts throughout the nation that have been awarded accreditation since the fall of 2008. Accredited land trusts are able to display a seal indicating to the public that they meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent. The seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation, and you’ll see the seal on RiGHT’s publications now.

“For the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, accreditation provides our landowners with assurances they need in a changing and sometimes uncertain economic climate. They can be confident that RiGHT has earned the respect and stamp of approval from our national association for our practices, our standards and the quality of conservation projects.”

- Nancy Butler, Executive Director

Accreditation is a voluntary process in which LTA reviews organizations against a series of standards and practices. The program involved a significant commitment of both time and resources on behalf of RiGHT, but we felt it was an important step in showing our commitment to conservation in the San Luis Valley. The process has also helped strengthen our organization, and we will continue to hold our practices to the highest standards. At a time when land trusts have come under increased scrutiny, accreditation shows that RiGHT is completing quality projects that are truly worthy of conservation, and that we are completing these projects in a manner that will stand the test of time.

Accreditation is a major accomplishment for RiGHT, but it would not have been possible without all of our partners, our dedicated board and staff, the landowners who complete conservation easements on their property, and the support of our local community. We want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for involvement and support of RiGHT and conservation in our area. Special thanks are also in order to Cathy McNeil, RiGHT’s founding President, and Ralph Curtis, one of RiGHT’s founding Board members. Not only were Cathy and Ralph involved in the initial creation of RiGHT, but they both continue to serve the organization today. Without their leadership, RiGHT would not be what it is today.

“We are honored to be part of the statewide and national community of land trusts who are always striving to achieve important conservation objectives, with the highest quality in both our process and our results.”

Happenings...



Keep the Rio Grande Grand Art Benefit

Mark your calendars now for the third annual *Keep the Rio Grande Grande* Fine Arts Benefit Sale this summer. **The event will be held on Saturday, August 14th from 6-9 PM at the South Fork Community Center.** Like last year's event, we will feature fine arts in a diverse media from both local and regional artists.

Our preparations are already in full swing and we anticipate enjoying another enchanting evening of fine arts, fine food, and great wine & beer -- all benefiting RiGHT's efforts to conserve the working lands, vital wildlife habitat and scenic beauty along the Rio Grande river corridor and across the San Luis Valley. We hope you'll be able to join us for a great night supporting a great cause.

Photos from our 2009 Benefit (from left to right): Artist Karolyn Walker, South Fork Community Center, Artist Karen Bonnie



Plein-Air Paint Outs on Conserved Properties *NEW*

In the run-up to our annual art sale, we are hosting two new events featuring local artists at work on some of our conserved properties. These "Plein-Air Paint Outs" will be an opportunity for you to come visit a protected ranch and see an artist at work as they capture the landscape on their canvas. We're excited to create deeper connections with the art community and to show off the beautiful places we've all worked so hard to protect.

The first paint out will be held **Saturday, May 22nd, from 8am-2pm at the Gilmore Ranch** just west of Alamosa. The second event will be held **Saturday, June 12th, 8am-2pm at the Upper Wright's Ranch** in Mineral County. Both events are free and open to the public and we'll have more details soon.

Photos (from top to bottom): Spring at the Gilmore Ranch, Upper Wright's Ranch ponds

Adams State College 2009 Earth Week Celebration 6k Run/Walk Benefiting RiGHT!

Lace up your shoes and head down to the Adams State campus on Sunday, April 18th for this fun run/walk. Onsite registration starts at 1pm outside the Rex Activity Center and the run/walk kicks off at 2pm. Registration is \$5 and all proceeds benefit RiGHT and our conservation work.



"Any river is really the summation of a whole valley. It shapes not only the land but the life and even the culture of that valley. To think of any river as nothing but water is to ignore the greater part of it."

- Hal Borland, *Beyond Your Doorstep*

Meet our Partners:

Colorado Division of Wildlife Habitat Partnership Program

In 1990, the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) created the Habitat Partnership Program (HPP) to help reduce wildlife conflicts caused by deer, elk, pronghorn and moose to private landowners by using the concept of “Locally driven resource issue resolution, focusing on integrated agricultural and wildlife land stewardship”. The program develops partnerships between landowners, land managers, sportsmen, the public and the CDOW. Their program is made up of local committees throughout the state, of which there are two in our area, the San Luis Valley and the Mount Blanca Committees. These local committees have the ability to solicit, review, fund, implement and evaluate a whole host of projects including habitat improvements, fencing repairs and new construction, grazing management plans, educational forums and conservation easements. HPP projects can be done on private or public lands in order to reduce the conflicts being caused to landowners by big game.



Dugan Ranch, protected in 2007 with help from the San Luis Valley HPP

RiGHT has been extremely fortunate to work with both our local HPP committees and the HPP State Council on numerous conservation easement projects. While they don't fund the acquisition of conservation easements themselves, they can fund some of the costs associated with completing a conservation easement such as the cost of an appraisal to determine the value of a conservation easement or a biologist to complete a report detailing the present condition of the property, both of which are required elements of all projects. RiGHT works closely with each landowner to look for ways to meet some of those costs and the HPP Committees' support has made a huge difference. Since 2003, the committees and the State Council have helped fund five workshops and a portion of the costs on 14 of RiGHT's projects around the Valley, helping us to conserve over 12,000 acres of private land.

By helping landowner's achieve their conservation goals of keeping private land intact, HPP addresses issues related to the effect development has on wildlife including the displacement and loss or degradation of habitat and the increase of mortality when wildlife habitat and corridors are fragmented due to roads, utility lines, subdivisions and other activities. HPP's work throughout the State to reduce wildlife conflicts is an obvious win-win-win for wildlife, landowners who provide much of the habitat and those of us who enjoy living in a state where wildlife is so abundant.

To learn more about HPP or to contact your local HPP committee about a project, please visit: <http://wildlife.state.co.us/landwater> or contact your local Division of Wildlife office.



King Ranch, protected in 2006 with help from the Mount Blanca HPP



“As landowners, completing a conservation easement on our ranch was extremely important to us, and the funding for transaction costs for our project helped us reach our goals.”

Carol Lee Dugan (pictured left), along with her husband Bob, protected their ranch along the Rio Grande in 2007

Why I Serve by Jim Rhett



My introduction to Colorado and the West was in 1968 when I arrived from “back East” to work at a lodge. I fell in love with the mountains and the scenery. It took me a few more years to become a permanent resident, and then in Utah, but I have never regretted the move and am still in love with the land. That is why I am so honored to help the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust conserve beautiful lands in the San Luis Valley.

Serving on the Board has given me the opportunity to be directly involved with conserving lands that mean so much to me and the people of the San Luis Valley. I am not just serving my personal need for beautiful vistas and bountiful wildlife, but I am helping my neighbors hold onto things they value and will treasure for generations to come. I spent many years helping to manage public lands in Colorado, but I feel a great satisfaction today in knowing I am working to conserve landscapes, habitat and water for the future without resorting to government purchase. Easements maintain all these irreplaceable values and more while leaving ownership in private hands and the land in agricultural or other private enterprise. I look forward to meeting my first grand-child in June and someday showing him the Rio Grande and telling him of the small part I was privileged to play in its preservation.

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

On behalf of the RiGHT Staff and Board of Directors,
thank you to all of our 2009 donors, we could not do it without you!

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Special Thanks

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Sue Komarek for donating art work for our
2010 Keep the Rio Grande Grand Art Benefit
Virginia Simmons for donating furniture for our office
Judy Boles Pena and **Donna Rosingana** for donating art work for our office

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In Memoriam

On Friday, March 19th the San Luis Valley lost two dear friends in a tragic accident. Jim Rhett, RiGHT's Board President commented:

"Both men were leaders in Valley water issues and conservation. Both were supporters of land conservation and of RiGHT. On a personal note both of these men did much to make me, a new-comer to the Valley and water issues, welcome and useful here. I will greatly miss them both. Please, join me in keeping their families in our thoughts and prayers."

Doug Shriver grew up in the San Luis Valley. He was a farmer and one of the Valley's outstanding leaders on water issues. Doug served on the Colorado Ground Water Commission and was President of the Rio Grande Water Users Association. He and Ray were close friends and worked together crafting creative solutions to address water issues both here in the Valley and throughout the state.



Ray Wright also grew up in the San Luis Valley. He was a farmer, an artist, and another of the Valley's leading water experts. Ray served as President of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District and as a member of the Interbasin Compact Committee. Ray also built handmade bamboo fly rods, several of which we were fortunate enough to have featured in our annual "Keep the Rio Grande Grand" art benefit. Here's what Ray had to say about RiGHT's work:

"Whenever we see another piece of the river corridor lost, why it creates a pain in all of us. Growing up in this area and travelling to the headwaters since I was a child, I've seen so many changes that I have regretted the loss of the landscape. The Rio Grande Initiative and RiGHT have been the vehicle now that has gone beyond 'I wish we had done something.' to 'Let's do something!'"

In the same interview, Ray commented on the process of creating his fly rods and on the patience and attention to detail the work requires. He said it was about having the ability to slow down and make the journey as important as the destination. Ray and Doug will be deeply missed.

We are honored that Ray's loved ones chose RiGHT as one of the recipients of his memorial donations. To see the full video of Ray's interview, or to make a contribution, visit RiGHT's website at www.riograndelandtrust.org



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