

Artist David Montgomery is dedicated to conservation

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Artist David Montgomery captures the spectacular scenery of the Soward Ranch above Creede, at the land trust's June Plein Air Paint out.

SOUTH FORK Art and the beauty of the land have been themes of oil painter David Montgomery's life for decades. And now, for the third year in a row, Montgomery again shows his love for the land he paints by participating in the annual "Keep the Rio Grande Grand - Fine Art Benefit Sale" hosted by the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT) on Saturday August 14 from 6-9 p.m. at the South Fork Community Center.

As a dedicated environmental activist, Montgomery explained how he got involved with RiGHT's conservation efforts along the Rio Grande, "I'm completely with this cause and have loved the land trust for years. My personal stake in this is the land I love and look over the fence at," he explains, with his mischievous sideways glance, like a kid about to get caught at something. Turning serious he adds, "I'm blessed by the people working to protect it."

Montgomery's love for the land began in his formative years, hunting and fishing with his father, uncle and two brothers. "I continue to hunt to this day," he said, "but now I use my paint brush, canvas and easel." Having seen the landscape change dramatically during his 30 years of living and painting in the San Luis Valley, Montgomery now works to commemorate the scenic vistas that

still exist and to support conservation of both public and private lands.

"I started creating art as a small child," he said. "My family and I moved to the San Luis Valley during my early teens. When I returned to the Valley after college, I wanted to spend time looking at the landscapes. I was trained to paint and think academically, not to look at landscapes. The Valley and the 200 miles of land that surround it have become the heartland of what I paint. It's a good base of operation, because we are still primarily rural."

In the summer of 1972, Montgomery fell in love, in his case with the Wheeler Geological Area. After a six-mile hike he came to a section deemed to have "geological significance." He had never seen anything like the spectacular ash formations at Wheeler. "It was a prize that those who really make

the effort to get into that remote area can see and experience. There was an intimacy, undiluted by the masses of 'looky-loos' that one runs into when visiting the easy-to-getto attractions."

Realizing that formations like Wheeler exist throughout the mountain areas, Montgomery began investigating and learning how the public lands was being recognized and protected. By asking that question, he entered the world of public resources and the all too frequent conflicts that exist there. "There were many players with vested interests in resources such as trees, minerals, forage, and other attributes that generate income," he acknowledges. "In direct opposition to the utilization of nature in this manner though, is the viewpoint that some natural treasures are best left to their own designs, with only natural processes controlling them. In one word: wilderness."

Since that personal awakening in Wheeler, Montgomery has fought hard with both his brush and his voice to protect natural places from exploitation. Smiling and pointing to the particles blown into his painting from the RiGHT-sponsored "Plein Air Paint- Out" on the Gilmore Ranch on an especially windy day in May, Montgomery observed, "Part of this effort is getting out on the land... feeling and seeing the properties we are trying to protect." David continues to put his brush to canvas in support of the land he loves, and his beautiful work inspires a similar response from the people who appreciate and collect his fine paintings.

To learn more about David Montgomery and his artwork, visit www.davidmontgomerypaintings.com. For more information about the more than 20 participating local and regional artists and to purchase your ticket for the August 14th "Keep the Rio Grande Grand Fine Art Benefit Sale" , visit www.riograndlandtrust.org or call the land trust's Del Norte office at 657-0800 .

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