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## **Painter Wayne Justus crosses the Divide to support land conservation**

*By Rio de la Vista*

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Renowned Western painter Wayne Justus, of Pagosa Springs, enthusiastically endorses “Keep the Rio Grande Grand — A Premier Art Event” and the efforts of the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT) to conserve working lands along the Rio Grande and across the San Luis Valley.

“Any kind of land conservation I am all for!” he said in a recent interview. He will be one of the many local and regional fine artists displaying his award winning art at the benefit show and sale on Aug. 15, from 6 to 8 p.m. at the South Fork Community Center in South Fork, Colo.

Justus’ highly realistic paintings reflect his love of the land and the stories of people who live close to the land. With the sound of a horse whinny just outside his rustic, aspen-log studio outside of Pagosa Springs, Justus described his extraordinary fortune in meeting a succession of mentors who guided and inspired his art. Justus’s drawing skill, appreciated when just in grade school, was “a good way of making friends.” In junior high, Wayne’s talent was recognized and encouraged by the internationally known Spanish artist, Sebastian Capella who taught him the values of light and shadow and who would set up assemblages of objects for Wayne to draw.

There was also a hometown artist, “a cowboy kind of guy” who introduced Justus to the works of Charles Russell and Frederick Remington. He took him to his first art show where Justus compared his own works and found them inferior at the time. Another mentor had been a combat artist in Vietnam. He would turn his studio over to Justus and provide canvas, paint and sometimes very dramatic advice. Once he wiped out an entire painting that Justus was working on saying, “You’ve got to make it bigger!” All of these teachers contributed to the increasing levels of expertise shown in Wayne Justus’s art, but he was “helped most by Donald Putnam,” a retired circus acrobat and clown who taught art at the Los Angeles Art Center for 12 years. Justus “never met anyone who loved to paint any more than him.” From Putnam, Wayne learned a great deal about color and composition on his way to becoming the highly acclaimed artist that he is today.

Justus started his career by painting horses and cowboys, subjects he knows well from intimate study and “living the life,” riding the range with a large cattle outfit in Arizona almost yearly. Justus is concerned with the seemingly inevitable passing of the cowboy way of life and dedicates much of his art to creating an authentic artistic record of the proud breed of the working cowboy.

A family gathering at the Shiloh battlefield when he was a child resurfaced in his memory as an adult and Justus became fascinated with the Civil War — in particular the part of the war that was waged in the West. He researches events, places and people and studiously paints the stories that tell of the Civil War, as he does the stories of cowboys and his other chief focus, the American Indian. Once a year he travels to South Dakota to paint Sioux Indians in traditional attire and activities. In his highly realistic paintings, Justus feels it is important to show the specific details of gear, tack on horses, clothing on people as accurately as possible.

In more than 35 years as a full-time artist, he has won numerous national awards. Along with a number of gold medals from the American Indian and Cowboy Artists, he received their Artist's Artist, Western Heritage and Festival Choice awards and a silver medal at the National Western Artist Show in Lubbock, Texas. Wayne has participated in the Prix de West Invitational Art Exhibition at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, the Cheyenne Frontier Days Western Art Show, the Settlers West Galleries American Miniatures Exhibition, the Masters of the American West Exhibition at the Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage, and he was the featured artist in the San Luis Obispo County Cattlemen's Association 12th Annual Cattlemen's Western Art Show. His paintings have appeared on the covers of New Mexico Stockman, Colorado Stockman, Horse and Rider, and Western Horseman and have been published in Southwest Art magazine and calendar.

For a look at his extraordinary art visit his Web site at [www.waynejustus.com](http://www.waynejustus.com). This gifted painter will join more than 25 prominent artists on Saturday, Aug. 15, from 6 to 8 p.m. to help "Keep the Rio Grande Grand."

For more information about Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust's second annual fine arts show and sale to benefit land conservation in the San Luis Valley, visit RiGHT's Web site at [www.riograndelandtrust.org](http://www.riograndelandtrust.org) or call (719) 657-0800.