



# SPRING 2009 NEWSLETTER

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It the mission of the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust to conserve our land, water, and way of life in Colorado's Rio Grande Basin.

### *From the Director: RiGHT Celebrates 10 Years!*

Ten years ago, a committed group of San Luis Valley residents banded together, as we so often do, and started a discussion about land protection in our region. While several other organizations were already doing conservation in the Valley, they saw a niche only a local organization could fill: a group broad enough to work throughout the entire Valley and tie together the conservation values we all care deeply about, from scenic beauty and water rights, to wildlife habitat and agricultural productivity.



In 1999, local rancher Cathy McNeil, environmentalist Christine Canaly, water guru Ralph Curtis, and concerned citizens Susan Pierce and Karen Henderson started the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT). Dedicated to saving one of the last best undeveloped places in Colorado, this founding group committed themselves to the demanding and unpaid work of forming a non-profit.

As with all young organizations, there was a definite learning curve, and RiGHT was mentored by larger, more established organizations including Colorado Open Lands, The Conservation Fund, American Farmland Trust and The Nature Conservancy. We drank in the information they provided us and with their help created the stable foundation for our successful organization today.

RiGHT's first conservation easement was in 2001 in Saguache County along Bonanza Creek. In 2003 we completed our first conservation easement along the Rio Grande, the Upper Wright's Ranch, which became the bedrock of our efforts to protect land along the river corridor.

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**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

- Peggy Blenden, *President*
- Ralph Curtis, *Vice President*
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- Pete Atkins, *Treasurer*
- Cathy Morin
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- Steve Russell
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*Executive Director*
- Aaron Derwingson,  
*Stewardship Director*
- Lynna Jackson,  
*Development Coordinator*

**CONSULTANTS**

- Gigi Darricades,  
*Legal Counsel*
- Rio de la Vista,  
*Co-Coordinator, Rio Grande Initiative*

*From the Director - Continued...*

Today, we've come a long way in developing our staff, Board of Directors, and projects, but we have always been, and still remain, completely local. In 10 years, we've protected over 11,000 acres throughout the Valley, including 2,300 acres along the river corridor. Our Board of Directors, led by Peggy Blenden, consists of eight dedicated individuals that includes ranchers, natural resource specialists, and fundraisers. Our staff of three full time folks was just expanded to include a Development Coordinator.

The same groups that used to mentor us now turn to us in partnership. Our work is being recognized state-wide and nationally. Recently Governor Ritter stated about our efforts to protect the Rio Grande corridor, ***"All Coloradans should be heartened to know that in these difficult economic times, creative people came together to protect the land, water and wildlife that are the heart and soul of one of our iconic landscapes."***



*Bonanza Ranch - Protected by RiGHT in 2001*

Conservation has changed since RiGHT first began. Conservation easements went from an unknown entity in the Valley to protecting over 230,000 acres of private land today. On the flip-side, this growth has also garnered the attention of the IRS and the Colorado Department of Revenue. At RiGHT, we hold ourselves to a high standard, and as a result our conservation easements have always passed muster. We've continued to work to increase our standards in step with increasing levels of requirements, including applying to the Land Trust Alliance for accreditation this year.

It has been an exciting ten years, and as we celebrate our successes in 2008, conserving three important ranches and working with our partners to conserve an additional two ranches, we look forward to the next ten years with the same sense of purpose, vision and commitment to working with landowners and donors in "Conserving Our Land, Water and Way of Life in Colorado's Rio Grande Basin, the San Luis Valley".



# The Rio Grande Initiative Rushes Forward -

*This ain't no slow moving meandering project!!*

by Cathy Morin

With funds from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, The Nature Conservancy, the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), CDOW's Habitat Partnership Program, Duke Charitable Foundation, the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable, and the Colorado Water Conservation Board, RiGHT was able to conserve over 2,300 acres along the river in 2008! Together with Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy, RiGHT's *Rio Grande Initiative* protected five exceptional ranches: the Rio Oxbow, Knoblauch, Jansen, River Valley I, and Gilmore Ranches. **None of this would have been possible without the generous donation of the landowners themselves, and we want to thank them especially for protecting their land for present and future generations.**

Launched in 2006, the *Rio Grande Initiative* is a collaborative effort to protect strategic and critical private lands along the Rio Grande as it flows through the San Luis Valley. This 175 mile river corridor in Colorado is still relatively intact, and we must act now if we want to protect its productive farm and ranch land, vast amounts of wildlife habitat, and senior water rights that contribute to the health of the river as well as the land.

A cook, researcher, fire fighter, pastured poultry farmer, boater, and hunter, Cathy Morin stays tied to the land and deeply believes



that conserving our land and water preserves our culture, heritage, and economy. Cathy has volunteered for Valley non-profits for over nine years and brings 15 years of experience in program development, project management, and grant writing to the RiGHT Board where she has served since the Spring of 2007.



There is no eddying out on this *Initiative!* Five more conservation easement projects are lined up for 2009. To put this in perspective, RiGHT completed nine easements in the past three years. Five in one year is outstanding and truly a reflection of the resources that have been developed for the *Initiative!* Thank you Donors – you are making a significant difference in our Valley.

The *Initiative* has received outstanding support from many Valley counties and organizations as well as organizations at the state and national level. Foundations such as The Nature Conservancy, the Colorado Conservation Trust, and the Gates Family Foundation have been exceptionally supportive. Receiving a GOCO Legacy grant in 2007 was a great honor and an indisputable recognition of the significance of this project not just for our valley but for the entire state.

*From top to bottom: Knoblauch Ranch, Jansen Ranch, & Rio Oxbow Ranch - Protected by RiGHT in 2008*

*Continued on Page 4.*

## The Rio Grande Initiative Rushes Forward - Continued...

Support from our donors has been heart-warming! The first annual *Keep the Rio Grande Grand Art Sale* occurred last August as a fundraising event for our conservation work. Like Cinderella, the South Fork Community Center was transformed by a team of volunteers into an elegant art gallery.

With over 150 attendees, the evening was a tremendous success in raising critical funds for the *Initiative* and was a lot of fun too! This support has truly allowed RiGHT to develop the resources it needs right now to continue to expand and meet the needs not just of the *Rio Grande Initiative*, but of all the conservation projects that RiGHT works on. RiGHT is enormously appreciative of each and every one of our supporters at such a critical time in our history.

“The care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy and, after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our only legitimate hope.”

- Wendell Berry



### Land Trust Alliance Accreditation by Aaron Derwingson

“Colorado is a national leader in conservation, and RiGHT is excited to go through the accreditation process as another Colorado organization. It will make us stronger, increase our credibility, and overall raise the good work land trusts are doing across the U.S.”

- Nancy Butler, Executive Director

RiGHT is happy to announce that we have begun the process of becoming an accredited land trust with the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), a national conservation group that represents over 1,700 land trusts throughout the U.S. The accreditation program recognizes organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. Applying for accreditation is an involved process in which LTA will review RiGHT against a set of standards and practices. The program is completely voluntary and involves a significant commitment of both time and resources. So why are we doing it?

# Accreditation - Continued...

## WHY ACCREDITATION?

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### PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY & PUBLIC CONFIDENCE:

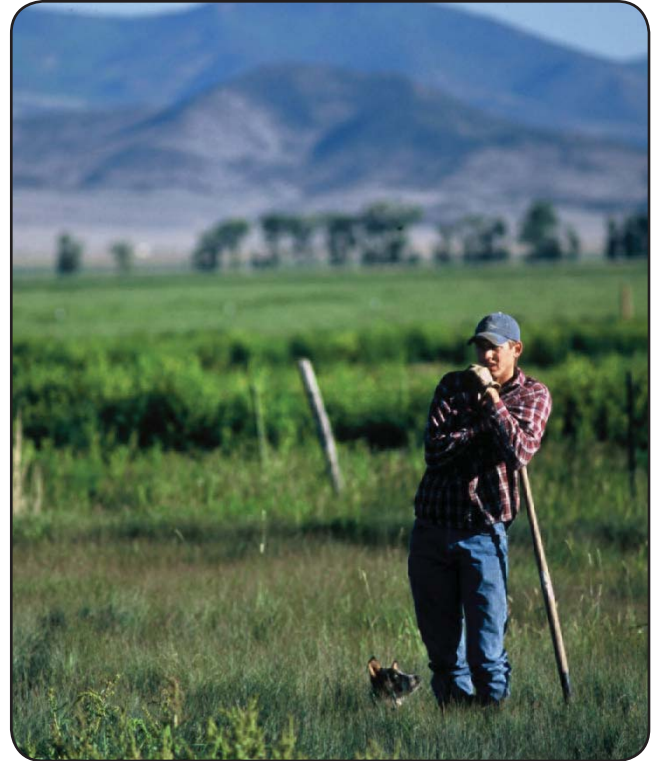
At RiGHT, we take our job of conservation seriously, and accreditation will help us show that to the public. It also helps foster public confidence in both our organization and the conservation field in general. At a time when land trusts have come under increased scrutiny, we want to show that RiGHT 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.

### INCREASED RECOGNITION:

With the increased credibility that accreditation provides, we hope to reach more landowners, funders, and supporters to further our conservation mission.

### ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH:

The process of applying for accreditation involves a significant review of our organization and our project work. Just going through this process will identify areas for improvement, making RiGHT a much stronger organization in the end.



*Dunn Ranch, Saguache County  
Photo by Jane Bernard*

## WHAT'S INVOLVED?

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For accreditation, LTA will review RiGHT against a set of 12 Standards and 37 associated Practices that cover responsible governance, land transactions and stewardship, ethical operations, accountability to donors and the public, and more. In addition to this organizational review, LTA will also closely examine a selection of RiGHT's conservation projects.

## MAKE A COMMENT:

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As part of the application for accreditation, LTA solicits comments on how RiGHT is performing in regards to the standards and practices. If you'd like to make a comment, you can do so through the Land Trust Accreditation website ([www.landtrustaccreditation.org](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org)). Comments may also be faxed or mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments, 122 Spring Street, Suite 204, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866. (Fax# 518.587.3183) Comments should be submitted to LTA by the end of August to be the most useful. Keep in mind that comments must relate directly to the Standards and Practices. For a full list of these standards, go to [www.landtrustaccreditation.org/getting-accredited/2008-indicator-practices](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/getting-accredited/2008-indicator-practices).

## Get Involved! There's Fun to be Had!

We all know volunteering is the heart and soul of any organization and an incredible way to make a difference while having a great time. RiGHT has a myriad of volunteer opportunities – come meet our team and your neighbors and lend a hand!

### OFFICE HELP:

Including filing, copying and organizing, but especially helping with documentation needed for our annual audit, accreditation process, and state certification.

### DEVELOPMENT:

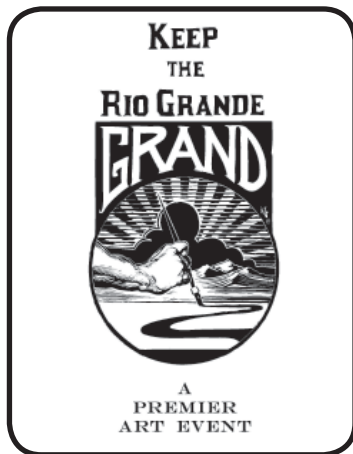
We can always use help with the newsletter and mailings. Like to write? Come join our team and share your thoughts on conservation!

### SPECIAL EVENTS:

Each year, we have several events to plan and coordinate and we need your help! We've already begun organizing our second annual *Keep the Rio Grande Grand* Art Sale on August 15th, but are still looking for volunteers for:

- Marketing, planning, and food for the event
- Mailings and outreach
- Help the day of the Event with set-up and registration

Please go to the website to learn more about this event: [riograndelandtrust.org/keep\\_the\\_rio\\_grande\\_grand.htm](http://riograndelandtrust.org/keep_the_rio_grande_grand.htm)



*2008 Keep the Rio Grande Grand Art Event at the South Fork Community Center*

Along with big events like the art sale, we also have smaller events throughout the year for volunteers who love to help entertain and meet folks, including a **John Fielder Slide Show** this fall. This will be a fund-raising and *fun*-raising slide show by John Fielder for his new book on Colorado ranches. So feel free to call Nancy or Aaron to learn more and to sign up for a great volunteer experience! (719.657.0800)

"There are no unimportant jobs, no unimportant people, and no unimportant acts of kindness."

On behalf of the RiGHT Staff and Board of Directors,  
thank you to all of our 2008 donors, we could not do it without you!

## Individual Donors

### \$1-\$99

Mary and Jon Abrams  
Mark and Carol Braly  
Broken Arrow Ranch  
Stuart Bryan  
William Carden  
Caudill Living Trust  
David Lehr and Cynthia Cherubino  
Doug Clark  
Glenn De Russy  
Joe Doyle  
Thad and Deanne Elliott  
Eric and Katherine Ellithorpe  
John Fielder  
Friends of the SLV National Wildlife Refuges  
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Green Earth Farms  
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Robert Homer  
Martin and Diana Jones  
Joel Kaufman  
Bob and Lois Kirkham  
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Sue Komarek  
Julie Kove  
Kristi Mountain Sports  
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Adelmo Medina  
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Dane Smith  
Bill Sutherland  
John and Elizabeth Taylor  
Lucia R. Vorys  
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Carl H. Zietz Jr

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Orient Land Trust  
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Steven and Mary Russell  
Randall Rutsch  
Linda Schoonhoven  
Alan and Gail Schwartz  
Scott and Connie Scidmore  
San Luis Valley Federal Bank  
SLV Trout Unlimited  
Kristina Steinberg

### \$500 or more

Mike and Peggy Blenden  
Tom Gilmore

Kam and Paul Matray  
Cathy Morin and Ian Rich

## Foundations and Corporate Donors

Wall, Smith & Bateman  
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Colorado Division of Wildlife  
Colorado Division of Wildlife Habitat Partnership  
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Ducks Unlimited  
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ERO Resources  
Great Outdoors Colorado  
The Moore Charitable Foundation

The Nature Conservancy  
Rio Grande Basin Roundtable  
Rio Grande Water Conservation District  
San Luis Valley Federal Bank  
Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation  
Walters & Mullins

## Keep the Rio Grande Grand Art Event Supporters

Abbey Lane Gallery  
Kirby and Linda Anderson  
Marty and Bonnie Asplin  
Alan and Pam Balsler  
Michael Clifford and Tawney Becker  
Gaines and Nancy Berry  
Mike and Peggy Blenden  
Ann and Bill Boies  
Fred Bunch  
Ron and Cindy Chapman  
Colorado Council on the Arts  
Steve Vandiver and Jamie Colwell  
Community Banks of the Rockies  
Ralph and Gloria Curtis  
Dave Montgomery and Cynthia Cuttis  
Gigi Darricades and Mike Gibson  
Charles and Rebecca Dees  
Beryl and Pat Delancy  
Carol Lee Dugan  
Don and Linda Earnhart  
Farish & Hobbs  
Jim Gilmore  
Suzanne and Greg Gosar  
The Green Spot

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Richard and Eileen Mackey  
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Cindy Villa  
Vinaya  
Wayne and Barb Webb  
Aaron Welch and Carishma Gokhale-Welch  
Roland and Virginia Wilson  
Wolf Creek Ski Area



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## *Rio Oxbow Ranch Protected Forever!*

Stretching along the Silver Thread Scenic Byway, Highway 149, above Creede in Mineral County, RiGHT recently conserved 505 acres of the historic Rio Oxbow Ranch. This is Phase I of a two phase project that will protect an additional 570 acres in 2009. Overall, the ranch encompasses **six miles** of the Upper Rio Grande and has an extensive boundary with the Rio Grande National Forest. The owners and managers of this ranch have been recognized for their excellent management of the riparian area, which supports abundant populations of elk, deer, moose, beaver, many other small mammals, waterfowl, and migrating birds.



*Clockwise from the top: Landowner, Alan Lisenby: View of the Rio Grande: Rio Oxbow Ranch Landscape by John Fielder*