

Wahl/Coleman conservation easement established

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DENVER -- Colorado Open Lands announced JBS Family Enterprises has donated a 701-acre conservation easement over the Wahl/Coleman Ranch, including Baker Lake and a biologically rare portion of the property.

JBS is a family partnership of Jeff Smith, owner of Classic Companies in Colorado Springs. The partnership purchased the Wahl/Coleman Ranch this summer. Smith has no immediate plans for the ranch, although his family ultimately intends to build a home on the property.

"We're excited about the ranch and becoming part of the South Park community. Being able to preserve this unique place is very important to us," Smith said.

In 1999, Park County and Colorado Open Lands partnered to tie up the property with the goal of finding a buyer willing to protect the ranch's unique natural resources. The County Trust Fund, Great Outdoors Colorado and the Colorado Division of Wildlife all helped in the effort to protect the ranch's diverse resources and abundant water rights.

"The tremendous cooperation and support for this effort is indicative of the area's importance to the citizens of Park County, and all of Colorado," said Commissioner Leni Walker. "This project has been a challenge, and we're pleased with the outcome."

The Wahl/Coleman Ranch was originally owned by Albert

and Ada Wahl and is one of the oldest ranches in South Park (1885). It is also one of the few ranches in the area that has not sold its water rights to Front Range municipalities.

Protection of the property fulfills the dream of Dutch and Mary Catherine Coleman, the Wahl's successors on the ranch.

Located at the base of Kenosha Pass, the 1,819-acre Coleman Ranch dominates the magnificent view you see when descending the pass from the east.

A 1996 Park County study identified the property as the highest priority for protection based upon its natural, cultural and agricultural values. Surrounded by the peaks along the Continental Divide, the ranch's lush landscape and beauty is marked by extensive meadows, forested slopes and upland grassland. An extreme rich fen-rare plant community supports two globally rare and eight state-rare species. In addition, the ranch provides diverse wildlife habitat, including a very large wintering elk herd, numerous migratory waterfowl, deer, antelope, blue grouse and raptors.

The ranch is also an integral part of the South Park Heritage Resource Area, one of the state's first two State Heritage Areas. Local ranchers, business leaders and county officials established the Heritage Area Program in 1994 to conserve South Park's most unique and valuable resources and utilize them to create new sustainable economies.v