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Ranchers give Mesa Land Trust largest easement yet



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By GARY HARMON/The Grand Junction Daily Sentinel

Sunday, August 16, 2009

The family of Augie and Maxine Aubert will still run sheep and cattle high atop Pinyon Mesa overlooking the Grand Valley, but now under the auspices of the Mesa Land Trust's largest-ever conservation easement.

The owners of the Lobe Creek and Leslie Place ranches, which comprise 3,700 acres, will celebrate completion of the easement today. The easement will preserve family and local history and allow the family to look toward the future, said Chele Hawks, the daughter of Augie and Maxine Aubert.

"Ranching is as much about the lifestyle as the income" and the easement allows for the preservation of both, Hawks said. "We'd like to keep the ranching heritage in the family. Working and spending time on the ranch gives our children an appreciation and respect for the land in a way that no other experience can."

Conservation easements allow landowners to receive state and federal income tax credits in exchange for agreeing to preserve a tract of land that has scenic, recreational, historic or agricultural value.

The Aubert easement is the culmination of four years work by the land trust, the Aubert and Hawks families, the Colorado Conservation Partnership and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, said Rob Bleiberg, executive director of the Mesa Land Trust.

The Division of Wildlife and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation provided funding for the project, with the landowners making a significant donation of easement value, Bleiberg said.

"This is the perfect example of multiple parties coming together to make a wonderful conservation project happen," said Bleiberg. "We thank the landowners especially for their stewardship and generosity."

The Aubert and Hawks families "had many options for the land, and we are glad they have elected to conserve it," said Bleiberg. Velarde, northwest regional manager of the Division of Wildlife.

The properties contain deer and elk habitat, as well as that of several other species. The Aubert family has runched the mesa since the 1940s, and its sheep were sheared for wool used for uniforms in World War II, Chele Hawks said.



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The ranchland has “a magnificent history,” she said.

Maxine Aubert, who as a new bride was the camp cook for the sheep ranching outfit, said ranching was a hard life, fond memories of family times.

The easement also fulfills a longer-term hope, Maxine Aubert said.

“We are here for such a short time; it is our responsibility to be a good and wise steward over the land,” she said. “I accomplished that.”

With the conservation easements on Lobe Creek and Leslie Place ranches, the land trust now has easements on 38,800 acres of ranchland and wildlife habitat on Glade Park and nearly 58,000 acres of land in and around Mesa

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