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## Palisade buffer zone grows by 27 acres

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Two properties costing a combined \$200,000 have been added to a buffer zone project that provides open space between Mesa County's communities.

The Mesa County Community Separator Area program and its partners, Grand Junction, Fruita and Palisade, will announce today the addition of two conservation

easements, adding 27 acres to the existing 550 acres of easements already in the separators.

"We've got a prime and unique agricultural overlay in East Orchard Mesa and Palisade for growing wine, grapes and other fruits, and it's nice to be able to keep that and preserve it for farm production," said Fran Stecher, owner of the 14-acre easement property at 3456 Road D<sup>4</sup>.

Conservation easements can be

purchased from a landowner or donated by a landowner to protect their property from development in perpetuity. Landowners are compensated for forgoing development potential while continuing to own and live on the same property.

Stecher, who grows alfalfa on her land, plans to grow grapes in the future while continuing to have just one home site on the property.

Stecher's property in the East Or-

chard Mesa portion of the Palisade buffer zone is the third contiguous property to be protected in the 35 and E roads area.

Mesa Land Trust officials, the agency that negotiated the transactions and will hold the easements, said at least two more adjacent properties were likely to be protected in

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the coming years.

The second property, the 13-acre Likes-Durnell orchard at 3559 G Road, is adjacent to already protected easements.

The addition of the Likes-Durnell property means a half-mile block of orchard ground in the G and 35<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> roads area is now protected on three adjacent properties.

Tom Latousek, land protection specialist with the land trust, said the best thing about the two properties was the proximity to already protected lands.

"This means that we're achieving one of our Community Separator Area project objectives of creating real,

## BUFFER: 80 easements held

tangible, on-the-ground buffer zones of protected lands, while stabilizing the diminishing agriculture land base at the same time," Latousek said.

The separator program is the result of an intergovernmental agreement to keep open space between communities and allow cooperative planning on the land's future use.

Funds from Great Outdoors Colorado, Mesa County, Grand Junction, Fruita and Palisade were used in the transaction for both properties.

The Mesa Land Trust is a local, nonprofit organization that holds more than 80 easements, including the two new properties, protecting approximately 45,000 acres of land in and around Mesa County.