



# WYOMING STOCK GROWERS AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST

## CONSERVATION EASEMENTS DONATED ON OVER 22,000 ACRES NEAR ELK MOUNTAIN

While the view at times along I-80 in Carbon County is limited to taillights in a blinding snowstorm, on clear days one is treated to sweeping views of the majestic Elk Mountain, flanked by montane forests, steep sagebrush and aspen-covered slopes, sweeping hay fields and lush riparian bottoms. What are conspicuously absent from this scene are residential subdivisions. Now, a substantial portion of these open and productive lands around Elk Mountain will be protected in perpetuity through conservation easements.

In December of 2008, WSGALT received three donated conservation easements totaling 22,509 acres on the McKee Ranch, Basin Ranch, and Vickers Complex to the east and south of Elk Mountain. An additional 21,000+ acres are protected on the Elk Mountain Ranch through a previous donation to the Nature Conservancy. The conservation easements on these properties represent a monumental commitment to the future of the working landscapes and habitats that make southern Wyoming a special place to live and work. Says Dr. Fred Eshelman, landowner, "Ranch lands are vital to preserving open space and view sheds for future generations.....Continued agricultural operations and conserving the ranch lands for wildlife are a primary goal."

Not only do the properties contain productive cattle and hay operations that support agricultural industry and employment; they also provide highly important habitat features from extensive riparian bottoms to aspen and mixed-conifer forests. The properties are located on or near migration corridors for elk, mule deer, and pronghorn antelope. The Basin Ranch and

McKee Ranch properties are currently in a cooperative Hunter Management Area program with the Wyoming Game & Fish, and the McKee Ranch borders the Wick Brothers Game Management Unit.

James Rinehart, a realtor from Western United Realty in Laramie, was instrumental in facilitating the purchase and eventual conservation of the properties. According to Rinehart, "In 18 years of focusing on ranch brokerage, we have done what we can to insure that the ranches are not sold to developers.....The majority of ranches sold, those that we sell in particu-



*Basin Ranch*

lar, are not subdivided and oftentimes have conservation easements placed on them. While it is indeed disappointing to see the landscape of ownership change and the neighbors change, ranches will continue to be sold and purchased. If we can do a small part in continuing agriculture in the area and conser-

WYOMING STOCK GROWERS  
AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST  
PO BOX 206—CHEYENNE, WY 82003  
[www.wysgalt.org](http://www.wysgalt.org) - [info@wysgalt.org](mailto:info@wysgalt.org)  
PH. 307-772-8751 FX. 307-638-1210



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vation of the vital open space ranching provides, we will successfully keep a focus on the conservation aspect of the business for generations to come.”

The Elk Mountain area embodies the open and diverse habitat and agricultural attributes people value and hold dear in Wyoming. Thanks to the broad conservation vision of a landowner and the work of many dedicated ag-land conservationists, the landscape that people gaze upon (weather permitting) as they make their way across this wonderful part of the state will remain open and productive for whatever the future may bring.



*McKee Ranch*

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[www.wysgalt.org](http://www.wysgalt.org) - [info@wysgalt.org](mailto:info@wysgalt.org)  
PH. 307-772-8751 FX. 307-638-1210