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Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust and the Natural Resources Conservation Service Finalize 15 Month Negotiations

Cheyenne, Wyo. – After nearly 15 months of negotiations, the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust (WSGLT) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have agreed upon a conservation easement deed template for use under the NRCS’s Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

The negotiations, which began in January 2016, caused the WSGLT to eventually suspend the organization’s purchased easement program with the NRCS, a partnership which has provided nearly \$19,000,000 in conservation easement funding, and assisted in closing 37 conservation easements on agricultural lands in Wyoming over the last 16 years.

WSGLT Executive Director, Bo Alley spoke about the achievement, “To finalize these negotiations represents a huge milestone and allows a path forward with one of our most important conservation funding partners in Wyoming. We reached an agreement that recognizes Wyoming state law and provides our farmers and ranchers with the flexibility they need to manage their operations, while also meeting the purposes and needs of the ACEP program.”

Conservation easements completed with WSGLT serve as a tool to help maintain the land’s productive capacity and open character. These voluntary agreements limit the amount and type of development on a property. Landowners continue to retain title to the property and all other rights of proper ownership and each conservation easement is tailored to fit the agricultural operation.

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Wyoming Governor Matt Mead who at key points throughout the 15 month process weighed in on the issues, and made time to personally sit in on final negotiations, commented on the agreement, “Conserving our working lands is a priority. We can’t take our great places and western culture for granted. The Natural Resources Conservation Service has been a strong partner in those efforts. I am pleased that Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust was able to help find solutions that will benefit this effort well into the future.”

The new deed template, which is approved for use under the 2014 Farm Bill, will be utilized to conserve thousands of acres around the state. These acres of agricultural land often double as habitat for Wyoming’s wildlife and allow for open migration corridors as the animals pass through to different areas.

Under the ACEP program, which was put into place to support the conservation of agricultural lands by offering financial and technical assistance, the NRCS will fund up to 50 percent of the value of a conservation easement for selected projects. “Conservation easements play a critical role in protecting working landscapes while providing incentives to landowners,” said Astrid Martinez, NRCS state conservationist in Wyoming. “From providing habitat for a variety of wildlife to protecting open spaces, easements are an important tool for preserving the Western way of life in our state. We look forward to our continued partnership with the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust, other conservation partners and Wyoming’s ranchers.”

The Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust thanks Governor Matthew H. Mead, NRCS acting Chief Leonard Jordan, NRCS Easement Programs Director Kim Berns, and NRCS Wyoming state conservationist Astrid Martinez, for their efforts to conserve Wyoming’s agricultural lands that are so important to the cowboy state.

About the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust

The Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust is dedicated to conservation through ranching. Based in Cheyenne, the non-profit organization serves the entire state and is Wyoming’s only agricultural land trust. Through partnerships with ranch families, the Stock Growers Land Trust holds and stewards conservation easements on more than 236,000 acres of land on ranches and farms throughout Wyoming. Founded in 2000 by the 140-year-old Wyoming Stock Growers Association, it is one of the largest among the 1,659 regional land trusts in the United States. For more information, visit www.wsgalt.org.

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