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Stock Growers Land Trust Conserves Ranch for Agricultural Production in Perpetuity

The “Charlie Ball Place” conservation easement will protect more than 1,700 acres of rangeland and important wildlife habitat from development and subdivision, keeping it in agriculture and available to wildlife and future generations of producers. The Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust expressed its appreciation to ranchers Zach and Patty Roberts for placing a portion of their long-time ranching operation under conservation easement. Almost two miles of Horse Creek and over three miles of Onion Creek and other tributaries to Horse Creek offer significant riparian habitat to wildlife and the conservation easement encompasses property entirely within the Daniel Sage Grouse Core Area.

In addition to providing forage to the Roberts Cattle Co., the property provides significant habitat resources for large game in Sublette County. The property is entirely within Mule Deer and Moose Crucial Ranges as well as Elk and Pronghorn Antelope Seasonal Range. Zach and Patty Roberts said “We are very happy to have finished this conservation easement with Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust and its funding partners. This conservation easement assists in protecting wildlife habitat and sage grouse habitat for future generations.”

Funders to the project include Wyoming’s Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT) which, under the guidance of Executive Director Bob Budd, has supported a number of projects benefitting Sage Grouse, including habitat enhancement projects as well as permanent conservation easements in Core Areas in order to help stave off the listing of Sage Grouse as an the Endangered Species. Bob Budd said, “This easement with the Roberts family is another great example of the landowners of Wyoming taking steps to maintain their ranching heritage, and at the same time, conserving habitats of critical importance to species like Sage-grouse and mule deer. Zach and Patty are great resource managers with their hearts in the right place. Congratulations to them on this achievement.”

The US Fish and Wildlife Service cites habitat fragmentation as a leading factor in the decline of Sage Grouse in the western states, and the voluntary commitment of private landowners toward the goal of minimizing or precluding habitat fragmentation was acknowledged in a letter to the WWNRT, “Conservation easements can serve as an extremely valuable tool in accomplishing that goal. Given the typical ‘in perpetuity’ term placed on these easements, we consider easements not only biologically effective in preventing and reducing the habitat fragmentation that negatively

affects the sage grouse, but also as a regulatory mechanism we can fully consider in our listing decisions.”

In his Executive Order, Governor Mead stated, “It is critical that existing land uses and landowner activities continue to occur in core areas, particularly agricultural activities on private lands.” Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust Executive Director Pam Dewell underscored the important contribution of private lands to the Cowboy State’s defining wide open spaces. “Wyoming leads the country in the size of ag operations, averaging 2,745 acres per farm or ranch, versus the national average of 418 acres in 2014. With more than 30 million acres of agricultural land, we can thank Wyoming producers for keeping these lands open and available for the production of food and fiber and the magnificent views we all enjoy every day.”

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About the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust

The 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 204,000 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.