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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Easement on Historic Ranch Conserves Wildlife Habitat and Town of New Fork

Driving to Pinedale from Farson on Highway 191, travelers pass by the abandoned town of New Fork. Two old stores and a dance hall provide a glimpse into the social and commercial interests in the Green River Basin a century ago, and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and as a Wyoming State Historic Site.

Surrounding the old town are productive ranchlands owned and managed by the Richie family – Jephtha and his daughter Carole and Jep’s brother, Norm. The Richie brothers’ purchased the old Vible Ranch property in 1959 and the family has run cattle and raised a hay crop on it ever since.

In late September, the Richie family placed a conservation easement on 1,291 acres of the property which conserves the ranch headquarters, ponds, wetlands and riparian corridor which water extensive hay ground and pastures. The family also chose to convey public fishing access through a permanent agreement with the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission.

Quote from the Richies here: “I am proud to be part of a family who sees that conservation and preservation of the land is of utmost importance. By placing the Vible land in an easement with the WSGLT we can rest assured that the historical significance, the wildlife habitat and the agriculture value of the land will be preserved for generations to come.”

The ranch’s terrestrial and aquatic habitats support a great variety and abundance of wildlife, due to the abundance of water on the property in contrast to the majority of the surrounding arid basin. It is likely that Native Americans used the property

extensively in the past due to the abundance of water and nearby river confluence and is evidenced by stone chippings and other artifacts found on the private land.

The historic town of New Fork was one of the earliest settlements and commercial centers in the region. It was developed in 1888 by John Vible and Louis Broderson to capitalize on trade with emigrants traveling the Lander Cutoff of the Emigrant Trail (Oregon, California and Mormon Pioneer Trails) and Bannock and Shoshone Native Americans in the area. The town was short-lived due to deaths of some of the founders from diphtheria and scarlet fever. It lost postal service in 1918. The original Broderson homestead cabin is also still found on the property.

Cold water riverine habitats include the New Fork River and the East Fork River, both of which are class 5 streams. The confluence of the two rivers occurs on the southwest corner of the property, where the New Fork River becomes a class 6 stream. These rivers are shallow and fast moving, with primarily sand, gravel, and cobble bottoms. The New Fork River runs north and south and bisects the property in the southwest corner for approximately 1 mile. Aquatic habitats include six ponds which are fed by the rivers, streams, irrigation ditches, and groundwater on the property.

“Public access to our major river systems are limited in this area,” said Hilda Sexauer, Pinedale Regional Fish Supervisor for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. “We greatly appreciate the willingness of the Richie Family to allow anglers an opportunity to fish the East Fork River.”

The project was completed through a unique partnership. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department championed the project and raised the funds for the purchase of the conservation and access easements. Traditional ranchers, the Richie family asked the Stock Growers Land Trust to hold the conservation easements while the WGFD will oversee the fishing access which will open to the public next spring.

“A partnership between the Stock Growers Land Trust and Wyoming Game and Fish has once again conserved historic agricultural lands as it provides the public with fishing access, unique viewsheds and important wildlife habitat. Along with the Sommers Grindstone project we completed in 2010, the Vible Ranch easements provide a powerful example of how agriculture and wildlife are inextricably linked in Wyoming and how we can work together to protect intact ranch lands and habitat for future generations of producers, anglers and wildlife,” said Pamela Dewell, Executive Director of the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust.

The project was funded through grants from the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program through the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust. Important “keystone” funding was received from The Conservation Fund which is working to galvanize efforts to conserve lands in sage grouse core areas.

About the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust

The Stock Growers Land Trust is dedicated to conservation through ranching and holds more than 171,000 acres of working lands under easement. Founded in 2000 by the 140-year old Wyoming Stock Growers Association, the Stock Growers Land Trust is the 9th largest conservation holder of 1,659 regional land trusts in the United States.