

# MAINTAINING THE RANGE

FALL 2016



## PARTNERING FOR CONSERVATION

The Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust (WSGLT), along with the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust (WWNRT) and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), joined together with ranch owner, Dave Slover to conserve portions of the Gooseberry Creek Ranch in the Big Horn Basin.

The 1,450 acre easement, located southwest of Worland, is the second portion of the ranch to be conserved with the WSGLT. The first easement consisted of 1,920 acres and was completed in 2007.

Ranch owner Dave Slover noted at closing “I am proud to have entered into this conservation easement with the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust, and their partners to preserve this land for ranching while simultaneously protecting wildlife habitat for future generations. What makes this unique is that it ties in with our previous easement, and those of neighbors, to create approximately 7 miles of contiguous riparian corridor that is conserved under easements with the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust.”

The easement will conserve 235 acres of the Oregon Basin Sage Grouse Core Area, adding to the 74,168 acres of grouse habitat the WSGLT has already conserved. The easement also includes 972 acres of Mule Deer Crucial Range, and 51 acres of Pronghorn Crucial Range which provide seasonal, and year-long habitat for the animals.

John Kennedy, Deputy Director of WGFD commented on the role of the WGFD in the conservation of this key habitat area. “This project represents an important private land-wildlife habitat conservation partnership in the Big Horn Basin. The collaboration among the landowner and other partners involved in this project, and their desire to conserve agricultural land and wildlife habitat, is impressive. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department is proud to be a part of this outstanding partnership.”

The ranch borders both BLM and State Trust lands and offers one of the only water sources for livestock and wildlife in the area. The public lands surrounding the ranch are enjoyed by outdoor enthusiasts, and the conservation of this property will allow them to continue to enjoy uninterrupted views of Wyoming’s wide-open spaces.

Bob Budd, Executive Director of the WWNRT spoke about the importance of the conservation easement for Wyoming. “This project connects multiple conservation easement projects funded by the Trust. When we are able to conserve multiple ranches in a contiguous fashion, we achieve conservation at the landscape scale which is truly a major win for Wyoming.”

This important conservation project which began in 2010 nearly fell apart after the loss of federal funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”) in late 2015 because of a report that showed low potential for future oil and gas development on the property. After the NRCS pulled their funding, organizations around Wyoming including the WWNRT, the WGF, the WSGLT, and ranch owner Dave Slover joined together in true Wyoming spirit to complete the easement.

Bo Alley, Executive Director of the WSGLT commented on the closing saying, “Many thanks to our partners at the Game and Fish and the WWNRT. This project stands as an example of Wyoming entities, through multi-organizational cooperation, making the right decisions and conserving another piece of Wyoming’s productive agricultural lands, wide-open spaces, wildlife habitat, and cowboy culture for generations to come.”



# LUND RANCH PROFILE

About 40 miles west of the Big Horn Mountains, in Johnson County, lies the small town of Kaycee. Maybe best known for the late country artist Chris Ledoux, Kaycee is an agricultural community steeped in Wyoming ag-history.

Since 2010, the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust (WSGLT) has been hard at work conserving the landscape of the place that is referenced in Ledoux's songs. Recently, on a beautiful spring day, we had the opportunity to sit down with Kevin and Judy Lund owners of Four Mile Creek and Powder River ranches.

The ranches, which are a rich mixture of irrigated and range lands and prime wildlife habitat, were the first properties to be put under easement by the WSGLT in Johnson County. On any given day you can look into one of the pastures and see any number of wildlife from a herd of elk to a rafter of turkeys, and if you are particularly lucky, a bob cat breaking from its camouflaged shelter. During our interview, the couple pointed out photos and paintings placed around the house of the wildlife that roam the ranch. Kevin noted how the ranch has become more wildlife friendly over the years.

"The fences are wildlife friendly, we got rid of most of the woven wire." Kevin said "We have 5-6 head of elk that spend the winter here and nobody bothers them. None of the neighbors. It's just a different mindset that is going on here the last 10-15 years."

The ranch has rich family history and has been in the Lund family since Kevin's parents purchased the riverside property in 1949. Since then the ranch has served as a productive Ag operation, artist's inspiration, family gathering spot, and support system for troubled teens.



Part of the Four Mile Creek Ranch with the Bighorn Mountains in the background.  
Photo Credit: Leah M. Burgess

Kevin commented on the importance of conserving the ranches, "All the people that this place has touched, one way or another, there's hundreds of them, and you're not going to find that in a town or in a subdivision. You are just not going to find that."

The couple has had several offers in the past that would have taken the ranch out of production agriculture, but they believe the price of keeping the lands open was far greater than those that were offered to build a subdivision, RV park, or trailer court. They recognize that the cost of ranching is increasing, but so is the importance of keeping ranches in agricultural production.

"When I was growing up you never figured your own time in anything whether it was farming, cowboying, or gardening." Kevin recalled "You can't do that anymore, your time is worth something whether you do something here or go work in the oil patch."

This realization was one among many that led the Lunds to want to conserve the ranches. However, the couple was not quite sure where to start. Kevin and Judy learned about conservation easements from Judy's daughter-in-law. After starting an easement with another organization, the couple was referred to the WSGLT. "It was better fit [with the WSGLT]." Judy noted "You have a bit more leeway for what you want to do with the ranch."

When asked why agricultural easements are important to the Ag industry in Wyoming Kevin responded with his adoration for the open nature of the property. Judy explained further, "It's the same thing as a wilderness [area], it's in perpetuity and it will be here for generations to come, and that why it's important to us. Future generations will have this ranch."

When it comes to the future of agriculture, what will be left for those future generations is something that is on the minds of many. According to Wyoming's State of Space, 26 million acres, or 93% of the state's private land base, produce our food and fiber, sustain our local economies and support generations of hard-working families in Wyoming. Yet, the majority of land going into low density rural development, is coming from the sale of quality farm and ranch lands.

Helping to prevent the loss of these prime agricultural lands, which are the foundation of Wyoming's culture and heritage, is why the WSGLT was founded. Each and every year we conserve this foundation, one ranch at a time. Subdivision and development are sometimes necessary, but ranches like those that the Lunds own are irreplaceable – as are the traditions they inspire, the food and fiber they produce, the wildlife they support, and the “Wyoming” views they provide.

*Maggie Rux, External Relations Coordinator*



Powder River Ranch View of the Big Horn Mountains  
Photo Credit: Leah M. Burgess

## HUNTING & CONSERVATION: WHAT STORIES WILL WE TELL?

From upland birds to big game, I've hunted on private ranchlands in the West for over 20 years. Even before I was old enough to hunt, I would go out with my father and grandfather to help find birds and spot deer. I can still remember the hunting stories from my grandfather when he was kid. Many of them involved an abundance of game and bountiful harvests. Since my grandfather's childhood, a lot has changed in western landscapes. Much of the private land is under threat of rural residential development, which does not bode well for wildlife habitat, productive agricultural land, and the cultures that they support.

Much of Wyoming's 26 million acres of private lands (approximately half of the state) are maintained as open spaces managed primarily for livestock and hay production. But these lands are disappearing at a rate that exceeds that of other western states, due to land conversion. If this trend continues, researchers at the American Farmland Trust estimate that Wyoming will lose another 2.6 million acres in the next 10 years. This is roughly the size of Yellowstone National Park.

Beyond providing food and fiber, private lands produce public benefits like wildlife habitat, open space, connection between protected areas, the cultural landscape of rural life and many other ecological functions that many of us take for granted. In addition, these lands play a major and stable role in Wyoming's economy.

Wyoming Governor, Matt Mead, recently acknowledged the importance of hunting and other recreational activities to the state's economy by announcing a new initiative to promote the outdoor recreation industry. Governor Mead said, “Wyoming has world-class opportunities for hunting, fishing, photography and other recreation.” The hunting industry plays a key role in Wyoming tourism and the overall state economy. According to a study conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service in 2011, both resident and non-resident hunters spend close to \$300 million in the state annually. The hunting industry and associated income would not exist without the natural habitats and open spaces provided by private agricultural lands.

Generations of Wyoming's farmers and ranchers have been the primary stewards of the land, providing wildlife habitat and open spaces while maintaining their livelihoods. Many Wyomingites recognize the symbiotic relationship between agriculture and wildlife, but some may not. It is up to us to communicate this relationship to hunters and other interest groups that do not make this connection. If we don't, the hallmarks of Wyoming will continue to disappear and the stories from our grandfathers will no longer resonate to future generations.

*Eric Schacht, Conservation Director*





PO Box 268  
Cheyenne, WY 82003-0268  
Phone: 307.772.8751  
Email: [info@wsgalt.org](mailto:info@wsgalt.org)  
[www.wsgalt.org](http://www.wsgalt.org)

NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
CHEYENNE, WY  
PERMIT NO. 47

Please contact us if you would like to be removed from our mailing list.



## 2016 ANNUAL APPEAL

With the holiday season just around the corner, we are in the midst of our 2016 Annual Appeal. The support earned during the appeal allows us to conserve ranches all across the state, promote agriculture and conservation, and help to keep the western culture alive in Wyoming. With this in mind, we would like to invite you to join us in keeping Wyoming's working landscapes vast and unbroken.

Since our founding in 2001, the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust has conserved 236,397 acres of Wyoming's working lands, enabling 70 families to keep their ranches intact for generations to come. Your support will help us continue to conserve family ranches and the values they inspire. Bo Alley, Executive Director of WSGLT commented on why he will be donating this year. "This year I'm donating because I know there is no other place like Wyoming, and I am blessed to be able to call it my home. I love our clean air and water, wide open spaces, abundant wildlife, unique culture, and way of life."

As you gather with family this holiday season, please think about the Wyoming that you would like to pass onto the next generation. Your gifts help ensure Wyoming continues to be "Wyoming".

On behalf of our staff, Board of Directors and Board of Trustees, we would like to say thank you for all of your support, whether it has been donating to our organization, practicing conservation, or just telling your friends and family about what we do, we are grateful. We hope you, and your family, have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

*Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust Board of Directors*