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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Rocking R Ranch Conservation Easement Protects 648 Acres in the North Fork Valley

Cheyenne, Wyo., November 16, 2026 – The Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust (Land Trust) is pleased to announce the completion of the 648 acre conservation easement on the Rocking R Ranch, owned by the Ballinger family. The conservation easement closed on October 2, 2026, permanently protecting a property located in the North Fork Valley, approximately 16 miles west of Cody and 30 miles east of Yellowstone National Park.

Situated along the southern side of the North Fork Valley in the foothills of the Absaroka Mountain Range, the Rocking R Ranch is surrounded almost entirely by state and federal lands, including Shoshone National Forest to the west, State Lands to the north and between parcels, and Bureau of Land Management lands to the south. Many of the surrounding private properties

are also already protected by conservation easements, making this addition far more than a single conservation success. This easement expands a vast, interconnected landscape of permanently conserved lands, advancing a shared vision of protecting the region's wildlife habitat, agricultural productivity, scenic character, and natural heritage in perpetuity.

The North Fork Valley has experienced significant subdivision pressure over the past 20 years as its desirable location has attracted rural residential development. By permanently protecting the Rocking R Ranch, the Ballinger family is helping maintain the valley's open landscapes, agricultural heritage, and wildlife habitat. Whit Creek and Slack Creek flow through the property, adding to its ecological value.

"This easement fulfills Merlyn Ballinger's vision of maintaining open space to be enjoyed by future generations and continuing his legacy of working lands stewardship with providing a place for Wyoming's wildlife to thrive," said Joel Adams.

The ranch features a diverse mix of coniferous forests, pockets of aspen, upland range pastures, and shrub and grassland ecosystems. These landscapes support the property's agricultural viability while providing habitat for a variety of wildlife. Located within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the ranch is home to wildlife reported by the landowners, including elk, moose, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, grizzly bear, wolves, mountain lions, wolverines, badgers, coyotes, foxes, and numerous bird species.

The property provides crucial range for elk, bighorn sheep, and mule deer and is crossed by two big game migration routes: the Cody Elk Migration Route and the Upper Shoshone Mule Deer Migration Route. It also lies within an Aquatic Crucial Habitat Range identified by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

The Rocking R Ranch also contributes to the Park County's longstanding agricultural tradition. The property has historically been managed for cattle grazing, and the Ballinger family continues that legacy by leasing the ranch to a neighboring rancher who uses it as strategic pasture at different times of the year. The adjacent TE Ranch originally belonged to William Cody, also known as Buffalo Bill, reflecting the area's deep ties to the region's ranching history. The property also supports access to hunting through Wyoming Disabled Hunters, with accommodations to meet the needs of participating hunters.

"The Ballinger family have been leaders in agriculture and conservation in Wyoming for generations, and this easement cements their commitment to Park County and Wyoming," said Bob Budd, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT) Executive Director. "In an area under extreme pressure for development, maintaining this ranch secures critical range and essential migration routes for elk and deer, and seasonal range for bighorn sheep. The WWNRT is proud to help this family realize their lasting impact on our state, our wildlife and our agricultural heritage."

Through this conservation easement, the Ballinger family has ensured that the Rocking R Ranch's agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, and open spaces will remain protected for future generations.

"Every ranch has a story, but what makes a place truly special is the people who choose to carry that story forward," said Christine Adams, Land Trust Executive Director. "For the Ballinger family, protecting Rocking R Ranch means making a deliberate choice about what the future of this place will look like, especially as development pressure continues to change the landscape around them. A conservation easement ensures that, regardless of what happens beyond its boundaries, this ranch can remain what it has always been: a place rooted in agriculture, family and a way of life that is increasingly difficult to protect. We are proud to stand alongside the Ballinger family in making that commitment. Their decision is a reminder that conservation isn't simply about what we save today, but about what we choose to leave behind for those who come next."

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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 Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust holds and stewards' conservation easements on more than 340,000 acres of agricultural land throughout Wyoming. Founded in 2000 by the Wyoming Stock Growers Association, it is one of the largest regional land trusts in the United States.

For more information, visit wsglt.org