INVESTING IN COLORADO

For every $1 invested in conservation through the tax credit, the people of Colorado receive up to $12 in economic benefit through the conservation of prime farmland, habitat for Colorado’s wildlife, and land along streams, lakes and rivers.

Source: A CSU Study; Investing in Colorado; Colorado’s Return on Investments in Conservation Easements: Conservation Easement Tax Credit Program and Great Outdoors Colorado.

The Economic ROI of Conservation

Conservation has well-known ecological benefits—but the impacts on Colorado’s economy are also very real. Here are three examples of local economies that have benefited from conservation aided by conservation easements.

CREATING A COMMUNITY ASSET CLOSE TO HOME

On the Western Slope, following the 2008 recession, the region’s most precious landscapes became susceptible to being filled with housing developments. Colorado West Land Trust wished to enhance quality of life and connect the community to nature close to home. It purchased private land slated for development and deeded it to the City of Grand Junction for public open space—then created a paved trail to connect downtown Grand Junction and surrounding neighborhoods to the Lunch Loop Trail system. Today the trailhead is the most popular in Mesa County and is one of three there that contribute $15 million to the local economy.

SAVING A LOCAL GEM, ENABLING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In Crested Butte, Long Lake offers a balance of scenic views, wildlife habitat, recreation, clean water and critical ranchland. For a decade, public lands on the east side of the lake were slated to be auctioned off. In February 2020, the Crested Butte Land Trust completed a 750-acre federal land exchange with the U.S. Forest Service that protected 120 acres, granting public access to this beloved and popular open space; added 630 acres to the Gunnison National Forest; and generated $2.6 million for affordable housing projects in Gunnison County.

PRESERVING A FAMILY RANCHING LEGACY

In the wake of the 2008 recession, the Hanna Ranch, a fourth-generation cattle ranch between Colorado Springs and Pueblo, faced potential division due to Front Range development pressure, a family dispute and a challenging cattle market. The conservation-minded Hanna family worked with Colorado Open Lands to employ a conservation easement on part of the ranch, complementing a long history of sustainable ranching practices. The conservation easement has allowed the family to keep its ranch in production and ensure a generational transition—and also allowed the family to navigate drought and recession with more liquidity and flexibility than would have otherwise been possible.