LAND TRUSTS JOIN FORCES TO PRESERVE “CROWN JEWEL OF OGDEN VALLEY”

Summit Land Conservancy and Ogden Valley Land Trust have partnered to protect the Huntsville Monastery, a spiritual icon of Ogden Valley, for future generations.

Pictured: Trappist monks used agricultural production as a form of prayer and devotion.

(Huntsville, Utah) April 6, 2021 – Summit Land Conservancy, Park City’s local accredited land trust, and Ogden Valley Land Trust, are coming together to help protect an iconic 1,080-acre property which was once home to the Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity, a Trappist Cistercian monastery established in 1947 in Huntsville, Utah.

Well-known throughout Northern Utah, the Huntsville Monastery, founded by 32 monks who were mostly veterans of World War II, served 84 monks and novices at the height of its operation in
the 1960s. The monks were active farmers, ranchers, and beekeepers who used agricultural production as a form of prayer and devotion. While most of their production provided food for the monastery, the monks also sold products in the Abbey's bookshop, including their famous creamed honey. The bookshop adjacent to the chapel was open to the public, where the monks sold religious items and texts, as well as fresh baked bread, jams, and crafted items including clocks that were hand built by Brother Nicholas. In August 2017, the monastery officially closed. The surviving monks currently reside in a senior living facility in Salt Lake City and plan to return to the monastery as their final resting place.

“Over the last 75 years, the Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity graced the southern end of Ogden Valley as a symbol of spiritual strength, human industriousness, and communal cooperation,” stated Gail Meakins, Chair of Ogden Valley Land Trust. “While the legacy of the Monks will live on in our hearts and memories, it is with great joy and humble thankfulness that we now have the opportunity to preserve these fields and vistas forever.”

There are fewer than 30 monasteries left in the United States, and when a monastery closes its doors, the land is typically sold for development. In 2016, Huntsville local Bill White purchased the monastery property to save the land as open space. In 2019, White worked with the Summit Land Conservancy to place his 85-acre heritage ranch in Henefer under a conservation easement. Despite the potential economic gain of selling for development, White recognizes the Monastery has cultural and historic value that far exceeds the face value of the land. He plans to preserve the monastery largely in its current form as an active agricultural operation and as significant wildlife habitat, while continuing to invest in the long-term sustainability of the farm.

“The historic Trappist Monastery in Huntsville is one of the last few remaining farms in Ogden Valley. The area is under intense development pressure as more and more people move into the valley seeking the lifestyle that comes with three ski resorts, a beautiful lake and miles and miles of hiking trails in the surrounding mountains,” said White. “When the Monks decided to close the Monastery because of their advanced ages, I realized that this was a ‘once in forever’ opportunity to save this beautiful farm from development. With the help of many selfless and caring people, we can finally see the finish line.”

In addition to the historic and cultural significance of the property, the Monastery also holds important conservation values that provide benefits to wildlife and biodiversity, watershed health, and the community. Situated close to the sub-alpine forests in the Wasatch Range, the 1,080 acres of agricultural open space are prime habitat for several species of importance. The farm serves as a wildlife corridor and provides potential habitat for two endangered species: the Canada lynx and yellow-billed cuckoo. The property is also used as rangeland and wintering ground for elk and deer; and owl, hawk, and wild turkey populations thrive in the wooded areas at the edges of the farm’s pastures. The neighboring Deseret Ranch, a 200,000-acre elk preserve, enhances the monastery’s property value as elk habitat and range, and a branch of the south fork of the Ogden River runs along the property’s edge providing seasonal wetlands for migratory birds.
The Ogden Valley General Plan specifically highlights the Monastery property as “significant open space important for preservation” in its Open Lands map. The property forms part of the rural, agricultural landscape and scenic viewshed that gives the Huntsville area its character.

In order to purchase and place a permanent conservation easement on the Huntsville Monastery, the Summit Land Conservancy has secured a federal grant of $8.8 million from the Natural Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). The landowners have generously agreed to donate 58% of the appraised property value. The Conservancy, along with Ogden Valley Land Trust, is launching a capital campaign to raise the remaining $300,000 needed from community members and individual donors by November 1, 2021.

“The Summit Land Conservancy knows that land can only be saved through powerful partnerships. We’ve worked with NRCS and conservation-minded landowners for many years. We’re thrilled to join with Ogden Valley Land Trust, a sister organization, to save this beautiful property,” said Cheryl Fox, Executive Director.

If you are interested in saving the Huntsville Monastery, more details can be found at www.wesaveland.org or www.ogdenvalleylandtrust.org.

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**About Summit Land Conservancy**

Founded in Park City in 1998 as a project of Leadership Park City, the Summit Land Conservancy works with Summit County’s communities to protect and preserve land and water along the Wasatch Back for the benefit of people and nature.

In 2011, the Conservancy became the first land trust in the state of Utah to be nationally accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. It currently holds 42 permanent conservation easements on over 6,800 acres of open space, much of it with public access in and around Park City. It protects swathes of Round Valley, Quarry Mountain, Empire Canyon, and the McPolin Farmlands, as well as farms and ranches along the Weber and Provo Rivers. It is currently working to preserve an additional 5,000+ acres across the Wasatch Back.

The Conservancy’s goal when it started in 1998 was to raise money locally to save land locally, and that hasn’t changed. But it has expanded its efforts throughout the years to tap additional funding resources. Since 2011, the Conservancy has brought in over $31 million federal dollars for local land conservation.

As a regional land trust, the Conservancy understands that open space is the heart of our rural and recreational communities. Area residents’ sense of place is clearly defined by the shared landscapes that anchor them here. The mountains, trails, farms, and rivers connect people to each other and to the natural world. The Summit Land Conservancy cares for these lands forever,
nurturing a healthy community that is founded on its strong connection to the places it has protected together.

More information is available on the Conservancy’s website (wesaveland.org) and on Facebook (facebook.com/WeSaveLand), Instagram (instagram.com/wesaveland) and Twitter @Summit_Land (twitter.com/summit_land).

About Ogden Valley Land Trust
Ogden Valley Land Trust’s mission is to protect the natural diversity and beauty of Ogden Valley for present and future generations by 1) preserving significant open land areas having scenic, wildlife, recreational, watershed and agricultural uses; 2) fostering appreciation and understanding of the local environment, and 3) educating the Valley’s citizens as to the importance of cooperatively avoiding over development.

In 1998 a group of passionate community members formed Ogden Valley Land Trust (OVLT) and its first easement was recorded in 2000. The original Mission Statement still rings true today, recognizing, then and now, the threats to the Valley from unbridled growth and development. The aim today is still to provide landowners with alternate opportunities and strategies to realize the value of their land while keeping it open, natural, and if desired, agricultural. By preserving open land that is scenic, provides habitat for wildlife, allows for productive agriculture, and protects our watersheds, we can maintain our quality of life and insure that our community will flourish for years to come.

OVLT holds conservation easements on close to 6,000 acres in the Ogden Valley and vicinity. More information can be found at ogdenvalleylandtrust.org, and on Facebook (facebook.com/OVLandTrust).