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For Immediate Release

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The Nature Conservancy Expands Protection of Lander Front

Over 3,500 contiguous acres of critical wildlife habitat and agricultural use maintained.

LANDER, WY — The Nature Conservancy has completed a project that permanently protects the Double A Ranch from residential development. This comes after the Conservancy's recent success safeguarding an adjacent ranch from development and selling it to a local rancher.

The 2,354-acre Double A Ranch located near Lander, Wyoming will now be permanently available for agriculture. It abuts the recently conserved 3 Bar X Ranch, resulting in over 3,500 contiguous acres of protected land. The Conservancy is now seeking to sell the protected property to a buyer interested in maintaining the ranch as an agricultural operation.

In a unique transaction, the Conservancy worked with long-time ranch owners interested in protecting the Double A's natural values and maintaining its ranching tradition. The collaboration secured a conservation easement on the ranch that restricts future subdivision and uncontrolled development. The Conservancy then purchased the ranch to accommodate the owners' goals and will now sell the protected property based on its agricultural and open space values.

In making the decision to undertake the project with The Nature Conservancy, local rancher Rick Allen said, "We have a strong tie to the land and did not want to see it carved up, but we were ready to move on. Working with The Nature Conservancy to protect it and maintain its agricultural values seemed like the best way to meet our needs."

Recently, the Double A Ranch and several adjacent properties along the Lander Front faced mounting development threats. The Conservancy recognized the importance of acting quickly and innovatively to permanently protect these properties. With broad backing from the community and financial support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition/Wyoming Wildlife-The Foundation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and private donors, the Conservancy worked with the owners to place a conservation easement on the property to prevent future subdivision and uncontrolled development. With the support of private donations it then acquired the property, as stipulated by the landowners, with the goal of selling it to a Wyoming producer.

"Maintaining the habitat values of the properties was important, but it was also important to the community that these ranches remain intact, which is why we received so much local support," says Andrea Erickson Quiroz, State Director of The Nature Conservancy in Wyoming. "Our hope is that we can find a conservation buyer who will keep these lands as a working agricultural operation."

James Rinehart, with Western United Realty in Laramie, was instrumental in facilitating the purchase and eventual conservation of the Double A ranch, along with the neighboring 3 Bar X Ranch. According to Rinehart, “While it can indeed be disappointing to see the landscape of ownership change and the neighbors change, ranches will continue to be sold and purchased. If we can do a small part in continuing agriculture in the area and conservation of the vital open space ranching provides, we will successfully keep a focus on the conservation aspect of the business for generations to come. I applaud The Nature Conservancy for their work in this arena and striving to keep ranches in ranching as they are with the Double A and 3 Bar X”

The property serves as crucial winter range and yearlong habitat for deer, elk, and moose, as well as summer range for pronghorn. In addition to the wildlife values for big game animals, the ranch also hosts breeding and nesting habitat for the greater sage-grouse and several miles of streams that provide important wetland habitat for a variety of plants and animals. The ranch connects a network of other protected areas including 14,000 acres of working ranchland already under conservation easement in the area, and more than 500,000 public acres that provide crucial big-game migration corridors and a variety of recreational opportunities for local residents.

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The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy and its more than 1 million members have helped protect 130 million acres worldwide. Visit The Nature Conservancy on the Web at <http://www.nature.org/wyoming>.