Two-Year Projection of Cash Need

Colorado State University

Friday, June 12, 2020

SUGGESTED MOTION: *Approve the new project listed on the Colorado State University two-year projection of cash need.*

New Project List, Requires Approval

Project Name	LEED Certification	Amount	Fund Source
Banded Peaks Ranch Conservation Easement	N/A	$13,380,000	FF

2021-074

The project acquires a perpetual conservation easement on 16,723 acres near Pagosa Springs, uniting other conservation easements at the headwaters of the Navajo River. Additional information, including a map and letters of support, is attached. Stakeholders have asked the Board of Governors of Colorado State University (CSU) to hold legal title to the conservation easement, since the Colorado State Forest Service is part of the CSU System. The university says the easement will unite about 75,000 acres of conserved working ranches in the Navajo River Watershed, and provide benefits to wildlife and people reliant on the land and waters within the watershed.

The source of cash funds for the project is a grant from the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program ($7.0 million) and a matching donation from an anonymous private foundation ($6.4 milliion).

Date Authorized Until: ***TBD***

Subtotal: New Project List, Requires Approval **$13,380,000**

Grand Total, All Projects: $13,380,000

Banded Peak Ranch Conservation Easement

Quick Facts

Location: Headwaters of the Navajo River—20 miles south of Pagosa Springs

County: Archuleta

Acreage: 16,723 acres

Ownership: Private

Funders: USFS Forest Legacy Program (Land and Water Conservation Fund), leveraged by matching funds from an anonymous private foundation. No funds from the State of Colorado will be required.

Important Considerations

Completing a 30-year Conservation Legacy

- The Banded Peak Ranch conservation easement is the third and final phase of a 50,000+ acre conservation effort on three contiguous, privately owned ranches located at the headwaters of the Navajo River, and almost completely surrounded by USFS and Wilderness lands (see attached map). The three ranches, owned by branches of the same family, are managed collaboratively, with a hunting program that runs as a single operation across the properties.
- The owners of the properties have been working with The Conservation Fund to protect the entire 50,000-acre private holding since 2000. The two upper ranches have already been protected with a series of conservation easements on 32,754 acres, including a 2008 Forest Legacy easement on 8,690 acres.
- Completion of the conservation easement on the Banded Peak Ranch will establish the final link between conserved lands in the upper reaches of the watershed and conserved ranches downstream. This effort has enjoyed broad support in Archuleta County and with local ranchers, and will result in nearly 75,000 acres of conserved working ranches in the Navajo River Watershed.

Support for the Conservation Easement

Support letters have been received from: Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW); the U.S. Forest Service; Great Outdoors Colorado; the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership; Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust; Colorado Open Lands; Chama Peak Land Alliance; Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority; and the 2-3-2 Partnership (a coalition of 2 watersheds, 3 rivers, 2 states). In addition, the following public officials have provided support letters for this project:

- U.S Senator Cory Gardner
- U.S. Senator Michael Bennett
- U.S. Representative Scott Tipton
- U.S. Senator Tom Udall (New Mexico)
- Colorado State Senator Don Coram (representing District 6 where property is located)
- Colorado State Representative Barbara McLachlan (representing District 59 where property is located)
- Archuleta County Commissioners

Willing Conservation Seller

- The conservation easement is a voluntary decision by the landowners. It is their desire to protect the property from subdivision and development and continue current ranching, hunting, and timber management activities that support their operation and the local economy.

- The landowners will retain ownership and management of the property. As a result, the property will stay on the tax rolls and the owners will continue to pay property taxes. The CSU Board of Governors will only hold title to the conservation easement.

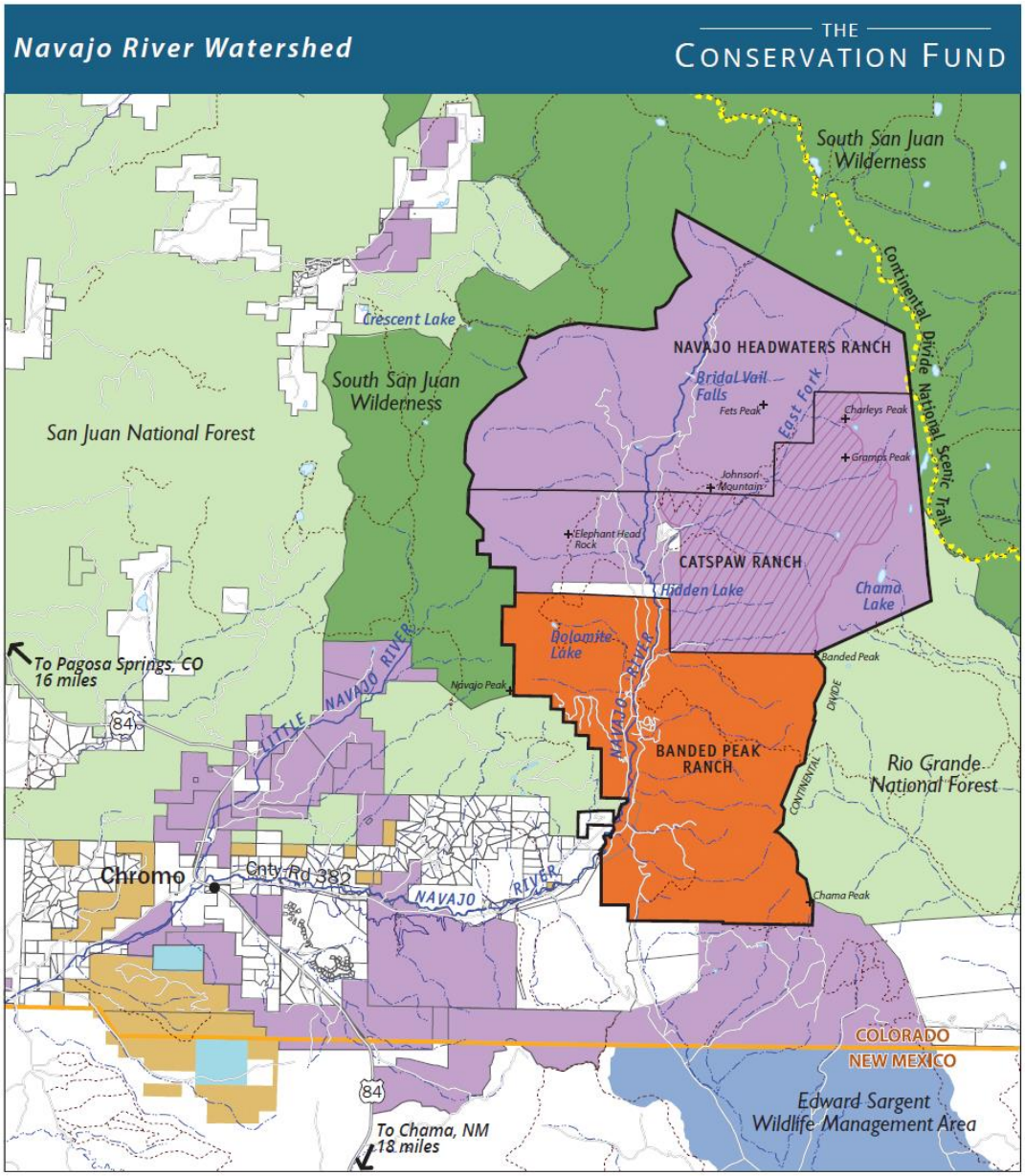
Project Funding

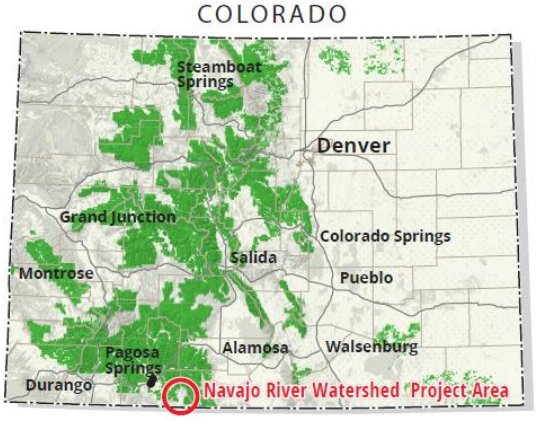
- No funds from the State of Colorado will be required for the purchase of the Banded Peak Ranch Conservation Easement. The Board of Governors of Colorado State University have approved the Colorado State Forest Service's acceptance of the conservation easement.

- $7,000,000 for the acquisition has been appropriated by Congress from the USFS Forest Legacy Program (federal Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars). This federal funding will be matched by $6,380,000 from a private foundation (granted to The Conservation Fund) to complete the $13,380,000 easement purchase.

- Due to the untimely death of the previous owner, the Banded Peak Ranch is now held by a trust which is restricted from donating or bargain selling a conservation easement. Over the last 20 years, the family has generously donated more than seven million dollars in land value associated with the conservation easements on the two upper ranches. The family also made a series of charitable contributions to support the multi-year effort to conserve the ranches downstream of Banded Peak Ranch.

Map of the Banded Peak Ranch





Legend

- Completed Easements (75,000 acres)
- Completed Easement held by CSFS
- Three Ranches - Same Family Ownership (50,000 ac)
- Banded Peak Ranch Proposed CE (16,723 ac)
- US Forest Service Wilderness
- US Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- State Wildlife Area
- State Land Board
- Private/Subdivided

1 0 1 2
Miles

N W E S

May 11, 2020

APPENDIX B
SUPPORT LETTERS

TOM UDALL
NEW MEXICO

531 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-6621
(202) 228-3261 FAX
http://tomudall.senate.gov

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 27, 2018

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
FOREIGN RELATIONS
INDIAN AFFAIRS
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

Vicki Christiansen
Chief
USDA Forest Service
Sidney R. Yates Federal Building
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Christiansen,

I write in support of U.S. Forest Service—Forest Legacy Program funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in Fiscal Year 2020 to purchase a conservation easement on the Navajo River Headwaters Phase 3 (Banded Peak Ranch) project. The conservation project will provide strategic benefits to the watershed, public lands, communities, local economies, and wildlife in a two state area, southern Colorado and northern New Mexico.

For New Mexico, approximately one-third of the drinking and irrigation water for the state originates from the Navajo and Rio Blanco River Headwaters, located in southwestern Colorado. The 15,774-acre Navajo River Headwaters Phase 3 project is the last large unprotected parcel in the Navajo Headwaters and contains 33 miles of streams, including 5 miles of the Navajo River. One-half mile south of the property, the San Juan-Chama Water project diverts water from the Navajo River under the Continental Divide and into New Mexico. Protecting this source of pristine water for New Mexico is vital to the supply of water for over 1 million people in New Mexico, including for the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority, Rio Grande Water Conservancy District, Santa Fe, Taos, the Jicarilla Apache Reservation, several smaller towns, and other regional uses.

The Navajo River Headwaters 3 project is strategic to protecting adjacent public lands, supporting the local recreation and timber economies, and ensuring an intact wildlife corridor. The property is surrounded by vast national forests and wilderness, including the South San Juan Wilderness, San Jan National Forest, and Rio Grande National Forest, and bordered by the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail for 10 miles. The property is part of the scenic view as the public hikes, fishes, and recreates on the adjacent public lands, supporting the local recreation economy. The project will enable continued active timber management and hunting access, while also providing critical migration corridors for wildlife, an important elk calving area, and habitat for the federally-threatened Canada lynx. The conservation easement will expand and enhance the protection already offered by conservation easements on more than a dozen neighboring properties, building on decades of public-private conservation efforts in the Navajo River Watershed.

I strongly support Forest Legacy Program funding for this strategic conservation project that will build on, and help complete, decades of public-private partnerships over the two-state region.

Sincerely,

Tom Udall

Tom Udall
United States Senate

STATE OFFICES:

ALBUQUERQUE:
400 GOLD AVENUE SW
SUITE 300
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87102
505-346-6791

CARLSBAD:
102 W HAGERMAN
SUITE A
CARLSBAD, NM 88220
575-234-0366

LAS CRUCES:
201 N. CHURCH STREET
SUITE 201B
LAS CRUCES, NM 88001
575-526-5475

PORTALES:
100 SOUTH AVENUE A
SUITE 113
PORTALES, NM 88130
575-356-6811

SANTA FE:
120 SOUTH FEDERAL PLACE
SUITE 302
SANTA FE, NM 87501
505-988-6511

DON CORAM
State Senator
State Capitol
200 E. Colfax Avenue
Denver, Colorado 80203
Capitol: (303) 866-4884
don.coram.senate@state.co.us

COMMITTEES

Member of:

Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Energy

Judiciary

SENATE
STATE OF COLORADO
DENVER

November 14, 2018

Carolyn Aspelin
Program Manager
Forest Legacy Program

Dear Ms. Aspelin,

I am writing in support of obtaining funding from the U.S. Forest Service from the Forest Legacy funding program for the conservation easement on the Banded Peaks Ranch located in Archuleta County, Colorado. This project is located within the area of Colorado in which I currently represent in the Colorado legislature.

The Banded Peaks Ranch is the capstone and last key part of the completion of the Navajo River Watershed Conservation Initiative, which is an effort that has been ongoing for over 30 years. The nearly 16,000 acre Banded Peaks Ranch is the last large unprotected privately-held property in the Navajo River Headwaters. This important conservation initiative will be completed following the protection of the Banded Peaks Ranch, which will represent the protection of 5 miles of the Navajo River. On its own, the Banded Peaks Ranch has 9 tributaries on the property that flow into the San Juan River, ending up in the Colorado River.

Completing the initiative to protect privately owned properties in the Navajo River Headwaters from development is essential to maintaining the water supply for both traditional and non-traditional uses that are important to local economies in the area. This watershed provides the critical water resources to working lands that ensure that the area continues to be viable for the production of agricultural products, and also supplies essential water resources to many rapidly growing towns in southwestern Colorado for domestic purposes.

I urge you to approve the requested funding from the Forest Legacy Program to protect the Banded Peaks Ranch.

Thank You,

Don Coram, Colorado State Senator

November 2018

Carolyn Aspelin
Program Manager
Forest Legacy Program

Dear Ms. Aspelin,

I am pleased to see that the Navajo River Headwaters 3 property is applying to receive funding from the Forest Legacy Program to protect the property from future development. The Navajo River Headwaters 3 property is located in the area which I represent in the Colorado legislature, and I write this letter to encourage the U.S. Forest Service to approve the property's application for funding to the Forest Legacy Program.

I understand that the Navajo River Headwaters 3 property is the last property that will ensure the completion of the larger initiative to protect privately owned ranches in the Navajo River watershed. This fact alone makes the property a high priority to fund at this time, and would ensure the completion of a conservation effort that has been ongoing in a critically important watershed for 20 years.

The Navajo River Headwaters 3 property makes important contributions to the local economy in the area. The annual timber operations on the property provide critical support to mills in Montrose, Chama, Del Norte, and Alamosa. The private hunting program on the property supports the local recreation economy. Conservation of property will help sustain tourism, the County's dominant industry and economic vitality of neighboring ranches. The open nature of the property is critical to the Navajo River watershed's intact wildlife migration corridors for elk, mule deer, and bighorn sheep from high-country summer range to lower elevation winter range.

Finally, as a member of the interim Wildfire Matters Review Committee, I understand that active management of forested lands minimizes the risk of wildfires to communities. Wildfires pose concerns to fragile local economies, and of particular concern in the area that the property is located are the Durango-Pagosa Springs wildland urban interface areas. I understand that the Navajo River Headwaters 3 property is and has been actively working with the Colorado State Forest Service to complete forest management treatments on the property, and the landowners prioritizing ongoing active forest management on this property makes it a great fit to protect with Forest Legacy funding.

Thank You,

Barbara McLachlan
(signed through email)

Barbara McLachlan, Colorado State Representative

ATAH II, LLC

August 8, 2018

Ms. Carolyn Aspelin
Colorado Forest Legacy Program
Colorado State Forest Service
5060 Campus Delivery
Fort Collins, CO 80523-5060

Re: Banded Peak Ranch Colorado Forest Legacy Application

Dear Ms. Aspelin:

This letter should serve to authorize Christine Quinlan of The Conservation Fund to apply, on behalf of the landowner, for FY2020 Forest Legacy funds under the Colorado Forest Legacy Program. It is my understanding that The Conservation Fund is applying for these funds to help purchase a conservation easement encumbering approximately 15,774± acres of Banded Peak Ranch. This is an effort that the landowner willingly and enthusiastically supports.

The Banded Peak Ranch contains some of the most pristine, private forestlands in the Navajo River area and this is an opportunity to preserve one of Colorado's most extensive, intact wildlife habitat and establish a foundation to preserve important wildlife migration routes. I represent a conservation-minded family with a history of working with your agency to manage its forests. It is the landowner's desire to protect this property so that it will remain as it is for future generations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

BY: Peregrine Financial Corporation, Co-Manager of ATAH II, LLC

Todd A. Klibansky
President

USDA United States Department of Agriculture · Forest Service · San Juan National Forest

15 Burnett Court
Durango, CO 81301
(970) 247-4874
Fax: (970) 375-2319

File Code: 1560; 2380
Date: August 28, 2018

Carolyn Aspelin
Legislative Policy Liaison
Colorado State Forest Service
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523

Dear Ms. Aspelin:

I am writing in support of The Conservation Fund's proposal for Forest Legacy funds to acquire a conservation easement on the 15,744 acre Banded Peak Ranch, which is adjacent to the San Juan National Forest and the South San Juan Wilderness. Protecting the large Banded Peak Ranch property is a critical and strategic opportunity to conserve the natural resource qualities in the area, including forests, wildlife, scenic, and water resources.

The Banded Peak Ranch is part of the Navajo River Watershed that contains some of the most pristine, productive, and undeveloped private forestland in Colorado, yet properties in this area are subject to significant pressure from land developers and commercial interests, including an extensive 35-acre subdivision. We are aware of the extensive work which The Conservation Fund has undertaken in the Navajo River watershed in collaboration with a number of land trust partners, state and federal agencies, private donors, and landowners. The proposed conservation easement would expand and enhance the protection already offered by conservation easements on neighboring properties, including a Forest Legacy easement completed on 8,690 acres of the adjacent Catspaw Ranch in 2008. The ability to work through the Forest Legacy Program on the Banded Peak Ranch is a key opportunity that will complement other nearby conservation investments, building to *protection of nearly the entire watershed*.

The proposed easement area contains high elevation and heavily forested land that includes ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, white fir, Colorado blue spruce, aspen, and Engelmann spruce. Old growth forest conditions exist in some locations, while timber harvesting has occurred in other areas to mitigate for wildfires and address beetle-kill and other forest health issues. Many species of wildlife utilize the area, including mule deer, elk, turkey, bobcat, mountain lion, bear, bald eagles, goshawks, and many other species. It is an important elk calving area and an important corridor contributing to many forms of wildlife habitat, including that of the re-introduced Canada lynx.

The Navajo River and several of its tributary streams flow through the property, and these water resources contain a valuable population of genetically pure Colorado native cutthroat trout. With its headwaters on the conserved ranch just north of Banded Peak Ranch, the Navajo River furnishes water not only for irrigation, but as part of the municipal water supply for the cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

I support the unique opportunity to protect Banded Peak Ranch's outstanding scenic qualities, wildlife, and watershed values, as well as productive forestlands that this proposed conservation easement will help to maintain and protect.

Sincerely,

Kara L Chadwick

KARA L. CHADWICK
Forest Supervisor

August 24, 2018

Ms. Carolyn Aspelin
Legislative Policy Liaison
Colorado State Forest Service
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-5060

Re: Banded Peak Ranch Conservation Easement Project

COLORADO STATE FOREST SERVICE
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
Caring for Colorado's Forests

Durango Field Office / Southwest Area
1000 Rim Drive
FLC 7233
Durango, Colorado 81301-3908
(970) 247-5250
Mark.Loveall@colostate.edu

Dear Ms. Aspelin:

Please accept this letter of endorsement pertaining to a proposed Forest Legacy Program conservation easement on the Banded Peak Ranch in Archuleta County, Colorado.

The Banded Peak Ranch is part of the Navajo River Watershed that contain some of the most pristine, productive and undeveloped private forestland in Colorado, yet properties in this area are subject to significant pressure from land developers and commercial interests. Protecting this large 15,744-acre property is a critical and strategic opportunity to conserve the natural resource qualities in the area, including forests, wildlife, scenic and water resources.

The proposed easement area contains heavily forested land dominated by tree species including: ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, white fir, Colorado blue spruce, aspen and Engelmann spruce. Management plans developed by local forestry consultants in conjunction with the Colorado State Forest, have prescribed forestry activities since 2001, with updates in 2008 and 2017 as a condition of being in the Forest Agriculture Program. In 2017 more than 200 acres of spruce salvage and fir removal treatments were completed as directed by the management plan. These treatments serve to reduce fire hazard, and in the case of fir removal, stand structure and species composition are altered in order to increase forest resilience in the face of insect activity and ongoing drought. The Navajo Headwaters and Catspaw Ranches, large adjacent properties to the north of Banded Peak Ranch, are also in the Forest Agriculture Program and are each managed under their own long-term plans.

Many species of wildlife utilize the area including: mule deer, elk, turkey, bobcat, mountain lion, bear, bald eagles, goshawks, and many other species. It is an important elk calving area and an important corridor contributing to many forms of wildlife habitat, including that of the re-introduced Canada lynx. The Navajo River flows through the property, as well as other tributaries, and these water resources contain a valuable population of genetically pure Colorado native cutthroat trout, and are an important water source for the forests and local community.

The proposed conservation easement would expand and enhance the protection already offered by conservation easements on neighboring properties, including a Forest Legacy easement completed on 8,690 acres of the adjacent Catspaw Ranch in 2008. This will help to assure that a vast corridor of undeveloped land exists from the San Juan Wilderness to the north and west, Rio Grande National Forest land to the east, all the way down through the Sargent Wildlife Area in New Mexico.

Banded Peak Ranch contains outstanding scenic qualities, wildlife, and watershed values, as well as productive forestlands that this proposed conservation easement will help to maintain and protect. I applaud the landowners for considering a Forest Legacy Program conservation easement. I strongly encourage others to support this proposal.

Sincerely,

Mark W. Loveall
Supervisory Forester

GREAT OUTDOORS COLORADO

August 23, 2018

Ms. Carolyn Aspelin
Legislative Policy Liaison
Colorado State Forest Service
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-5060

Re: Banded Peak Ranch Conservation Easement Project

Dear Ms. Aspelin:

I am pleased to write in support of the Forest Legacy Program proposal submitted by The Conservation Fund for protection of the Banded Peak Ranch in southwestern Colorado's Navajo River Watershed.

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) was created in 1992 by Colorado voters with the mission to help preserve and enhance the state's parks, trails, wildlife, rivers and open spaces. Protecting the Banded Peak Ranch is a cornerstone of the *Navajo River Watershed Conservation Plan*, an effort which GOCO has supported for decades. It will complement GOCO's investment of over $5 million on thirteen conservation easement projects in the Navajo River Watershed over the last 17 years. The Plan includes the goal of conserving three large properties formerly anchoring the Tierra Amarilla land grant, known as the "Navajo Ranches" that total approximately 50,000 acres. The 15,744-acre Banded Peak Ranch is the final unprotected property remaining to complete the landscape scale conservation that GOCO strives to support. The two other properties, Catspaw Ranch and Navajo Headwaters Ranch, now have conservation easements, including a 2008 Forest Legacy easement on 8,690 acres completed with matching funds from GOCO.

Protection of the Banded Peak Ranch will be a capstone on 20 years of conservation effort led by The Conservation Fund in the Navajo River Watershed. The U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program has enabled the protection of thousands of acres of private forested properties with high natural resource values in Colorado, many of these completed with GOCO as a funding partner. Protection of the Banded Peak Ranch through the Forest Legacy Program will result in tremendous leveraging of past conservation efforts.

We sincerely hope that you will prioritize funding for the Banded Peak Ranch. Thank you, and we look forward to working with you and the Forest Legacy Program in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Alex Castino
Land Protection Program Officer

COLORADO CATTLEMEN'S
AGRICULTURAL
LAND TRUST

August 20, 2018

Ms. Carolyn Aspelin
Legislative Policy Liaison
Colorado State Forest Service
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-5060

Re: Banded Peak Ranch Conservation Easement Project

Dear Ms. Aspelin:

I am pleased to write in support of the Forest Legacy Program proposal submitted by The Conservation Fund for protection of the Banded Peak Ranch in southwestern Colorado's Navajo River Watershed.

The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust's (CCALT) mission is to help Colorado's ranchers and farmers protect their agricultural lands and encourage the intergenerational transfer of ranches and farms. Since its founding in 1995, CCALT has helped to conserve more than 560,000 acres of Colorado land. Protecting the 15,744-acre Banded Peak Ranch would complement our work with ranchers in the Navajo River Watershed, where CCALT has worked with The Conservation to secure conservation easements on the Hartong, Bramwell, Slash Bar, Shahan, Schutz, and Spring Creek Ranches for a total of approximately 13,226 acres near this project.

The Navajo River Watershed project area represents a collaboration of public and private partners who have been working together to achieve goals laid out in the Navajo River Watershed Conservation Plan. The Banded Peak Ranch is a strategic goal of the collaborative Plan. Once protected, Banded Peak Ranch will be the capstone of a 20-year effort in the Navajo River Watershed, where 60,000 acres will have been conserved.

I sincerely hope that you will prioritize Forest Legacy Program funds for the Banded Peak Ranch. This is truly a magnificent area with great partners already in place, where we can achieve success.

Thank you, and please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Erik L. Glenn

Erik L. Glenn
Executive Director

COLORADO
OPEN LANDS

August 28, 2018

Ms. Carolyn Aspelin
Legislative Policy Liaison
Colorado State Forest Service
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-5060

Re: Banded Peak Ranch Conservation Easement Project

Dear Ms. Aspelin:

I am writing in support of The Conservation Fund's proposal for Forest Legacy funds to acquire a conservation easement on the 15,744 acre Banded Peak Ranch in southwest Colorado's Navajo River Watershed. Protecting the Banded Peak Ranch with a conservation easement via the Forest Legacy Program is a critical opportunity for this landscape and for Colorado and will build on many decades of public-private conservation efforts in this area.

Colorado Open Lands is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit land trust that exists to protect Colorado's land and water resources, with a vision that we can preserve quality of life by protecting the most special places in Colorado while we still have the chance.

The Navajo River Watershed contains some of the most pristine, productive and undeveloped private forestland in Colorado, yet properties in this area are subject to significant pressure from land developers and commercial interests. The property is in a strategic location adjacent to the San Juan National Forest and South San Juan Wilderness and complements the protection of conservation easements on several ranchland properties in the area. These include an earlier Forest Legacy easement on 8,690 acres of the adjacent Catspaw Ranch; easements held by Colorado Open Lands on the remaining 7,275 acres of Catspaw Ranch, and on the 16,872-acre northern most Navajo Headwaters Ranch; and easements on over a dozen ranches along the Navajo and Little Navajo Rivers just downstream from Banded Peak Ranch

The project is important for water resources, as the Navajo River and several of its tributaries flow through the property, and these water resources contain a valuable population of genetically pure Colorado native cutthroat trout. It is a critical wildlife corridor, including habitat for mule deer, elk, turkey, bobcat, mountain lion, bear, bald eagles, goshawks, and many other species. Forest Legacy funding to conserve the Banded Peak Ranch will leverage substantial conservation investments and will be the capstone on twenty years of conservation results in the Navajo River watershed.

I enthusiastically support this application that will provide unique benefits to conservation and the outstanding natural resources that Colorado has to offer.

Sincerely,

Tony Caligiuri
Executive Director

1546 COLE BLVD. #200 LAKEWOOD, COLORADO 80401 • WWW.COLORADOOPENLANDS.ORG • 303.988.2373

ARCHULETA COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS
P.O. BOX 1507
PAGOSA SPRINGS, CO 81147

Steve Wadley
Chairman of the Board
(970)-264-8300 / (970)-264-8306 fax
swadley@archuletacounty.org

September 4, 2018

Ms. Carolyn Aspelin
Legislative Policy Liaison
Colorado State Forest Service
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-5060

Re: Banded Peak Ranch Conservation Easement Project

Dear Ms. Aspelin:

The Board of County Commissioners of Archuleta County is pleased to support the Forest Legacy Program application, by The Conservation Fund, for a conservation easement to be held by the Colorado State Forest Service on the 15,744-acre Banded Peak Ranch located in the Navajo River Watershed. The Watershed contains some of Archuleta County's oldest operating ranches and provides a complete, intact system for wildlife from the high-country summer range to the lower-elevation winter range.

Archuleta County has been very supportive of the Navajo River Watershed Conservation Project over the last 20 years, a collaboration that has included the County, The Conservation Fund, Great Outdoors Colorado, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, the U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, Colorado Open Lands, Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, private charitable foundations, and local landowners and residents. Protecting the Banded Peak Ranch will achieve a major goal of the Watershed Conservation Project—conserving the entire 50,000 acres in the Navajo River headwaters controlled by one family. The combination of an operating wilderness ranch and the viable forest ecosystem makes the Banded Peak Ranch compelling for conservation, as well as its strategic location adjacent to two other large ranches protected with conservation easements, and near other ranches with conservation easements. Protection will support the working ranch economy in our County, the water quality along the Navajo River and throughout the watershed in our County, and the wildlife corridors with critical habitat in our area.

We support this application that will provide benefits to our county and encourage this project to receive full consideration for funding from the Forest Legacy Program.

Sincerely,

Steve Wadley, Chairman
Archuleta County Board of County Commissioners

COLORADO
Parks and Wildlife
Department of Natural Resources

Durango Area 15 Office
151 East 16th Street
Durango, CO 81301
P 970.247.0855 | F 972.382.6672

August 30, 2018

Carolyn Aspelin
Legislative Policy Liaison
Colorado State Forest Service
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-5060

Dear Ms. Aspelin,

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) appreciates the opportunity to offer a letter of support for the conservation of the Banded Peak Ranch. The property owners working with the Conservation Fund have proposed placing a conservation easement on 16,750 acres of the ranch along the Navajo River. This private land parcel is surrounded by large tracts of national forest including the South San Juan Wilderness. Adjacent on the north are Catspaw and Navajo Headwaters Ranches—both already protected with conservation easements. The Banded Peak Ranch is the southern-most of these three contiguous ranches, totaling 49,000 acres of conserved land. Traversed by the Navajo River, the ranch spans 4,000 feet in elevation from the valley floor to the Continental Divide at 12,000+ feet. The protection of this property will provide habitat continuity and connectivity for a number of valuable and unique wildlife species.

Riparian habitat is the most diverse type for wildlife, as well as the most threatened. The property is traversed by over 5 miles of the Navajo River as well as at least nine tributaries to the Navajo River. These riparian corridors provide important habitat for:

- Many species of songbirds and waterfowl;
- Bald eagles, osprey, red-tailed hawks and other raptors that can be found roosting in the trees along the river's edge; and
- River otters which have been successfully reintroduced into the San Juan River and can be expected to be found in the San Juan/Navajo River complex.

Of unique significance in the river system on the ranch is the presence of one of the last remaining wild populations of Colorado River Cutthroat Trout. These cutthroat trout possess a distinct genetic anomaly present only in cutthroat trout found in the San Juan Basin - a strain of Colorado River Cutthroat that was thought to no longer exist. In cooperation with the ranch, CPW has taken measures to protect this priceless resource on Banded Peak Ranch as well as on the adjacent Catspaw and Navajo Headwaters Ranches. These conservation measures have included instream work to secure the population from intrusion by non-native trout, development and enhancement of spawning habitat, and populating

Bob D. Broscheid, Director, Colorado Parks and Wildlife • Parks and Wildlife Commission: Robert W. Bray • Marie Haskett • Carrie Besnette Hauser
John Howard, Chair • Marvin McDaniel • Dale Pizel • James Vigil, Secretary • Dean Wingfield • Michelle Zimmerman, Vice-Chair • Alex Zipp

various waters on the ranches with the fish as reserve populations. A brood stock for these fish is being developed in the state hatchery system to further secure and propagate this iconic fish of Colorado.

The uplands associated with the river and streams of the property are also of high value to wildlife. This property is a significant part of a larger seasonal migration corridor for elk and deer. Both species spend a large amount of time on the property including during their calving and fawning periods. Black bears and mountain lions are also common on the ranch. The riparian, uplands, and gamble oak in the area result in a high level of black bear use. The remoteness and ruggedness of the Banded Peak Ranch and its sister properties are the most probable contributing factors for the presence of the last grizzly bear in Colorado being just north of the properties in the Navajo headwaters.

The upper elevations and notoriously high snow levels in the Navajo Basin provide high quality lynx habitat. Since the reintroduction of lynx into Colorado they have been documented on and adjacent to the ranch. CPW is conducting a research project to evaluate lynx populations across the state. One of the research areas includes a large portion of the Banded Peak and Catspaw ranches. The ranches have allowed and assisted CPW with the project on all of the properties.

A recently recovered member of the Endangered Species List is the peregrine falcon. Active peregrine eyries (nest sites) exist in several locations on the ranches. One of the eyries is on Navajo Peak. Navajo Peak is along the southwestern edge of the Banded Peak Ranch. As part of the post declassification of the peregrine falcon, monitoring of random eyries across the state was conducted to ensure its stability. The Navajo eyrie was monitored as part of this effort. The Navajo eyrie was occupied by peregrines and successfully fledged birds every year it was monitored.

Southern Colorado is experiencing rapid growth and development. Residents of, and visitors to the State of Colorado, will benefit from a conservation easement on the Banded Peak Ranch. An easement will secure the conservation and protection of the many unique valuable wildlife resources that exist on and adjacent to this ranch. In addition, the conservation of this ranch will ensure that wildlife can continue their seasonal migrations from high elevation summer habitats to low elevation winter ranges.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Banded Peak Ranch conservation easement. We are excited to see the potential for this ranch to be added to the protected lands in the Navajo River watershed. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me (970) 799-0843.

Sincerely,

Doug Purcell
District Wildlife Manager, Pagosa Springs East