

CASE STUDY:

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS AND THE CONSERVATION EASEMENT TAX CREDIT

Like much of the land in Montezuma County, MB and Chuck McAfees' 2,300-acre ranch is a mix of dry farmland and rough, rocky terrain dotted with cactus, junipers and other drought-tolerant plants. The McAfees' property is also like many others in the region in that it is loaded with important cultural sites, some as small as one square foot where a piece of pottery or footing for a dwelling was found.

Chuck remembers that growing up, the land was always dry-farmed, a practice that relies on natural rainwater rather than irrigation. In recent years, consistent rains have diminished, and the land has become increasingly arid and brittle. Farming has been less and less reliable. As time and climate have taken their toll, Chuck and MB have explored ways to protect the land. At the heart of their long-term goals is a practice Chuck's grandparents established: protecting the land from development.

Voluntary Conservation

The McAfees put their land under a conservation easement - in turn giving up their rights to develop and subdivide the land. In addition, they participated in the Conservation Reserve Program with the federal government wherein a landowner agrees to stop growing crops, replant perennial grasses and let the land rest. While the program required the McAfees to stop farming, it also helped them preserve the land as it existed when Chuck's family first moved to it, including keeping intact the hundreds of Native American sites throughout the property.

Recently, the McAfees recognized they needed to adapt their approach to better handle changing climate conditions and to work intentionally toward improving soil health. Today, they encourage regenerative grazing, which focuses on building soil health by managing livestock on perennial and annual forages, and support human and ecosystem health, farm profitability, and community and food system resilience.

Landowner Incentive: The State Tax Credit

Chuck says he and MB were able to protect the property for which they are stewards because the tax credit helped off-set the costs associated with donating the easement. "The anticipation of the tax credit helped us fund the easement, and thereby removed a barrier - the barrier being cost," he said.

Landowner:

Chuck and MB McAfee

- **County:** Montezuma
- **Acres conserved under easement:** 2,300
- **Benefits:** Water loss prevention, regenerative grazing
- **Year conserved:** 2000
- **Tax credits leveraged:** Yes
- **Partner land trust:** Montezuma Land Conservancy

"Focus on the values, the reasons for protecting the land, the long-term vision for the land." - Chuck McAfee
on his advice to others considering a conservation easement

[Read "McAfee Ranch: Preserving a Family Legacy through Land Conservation" for more.](#)

