

# CASE STUDY:

## CONSERVATION EASEMENTS AND THE CONSERVATION EASEMENT TAX CREDIT

The May family has been ranching and farming near Lamar, Colorado in the southeastern part of the state for over three generations. Today, the 18,000-acre May Ranch - which includes 2,500 acres of irrigated farmland and 15,500 acres of native grass, prairie and wetlands - is recognized nationally for its sustainability and conservation efforts. The heart of the family's approach to ranching is a focus on keeping the working lands and natural resources healthy and viable for future generations. Since placing the ranch in a conservation easement, the Mays have undertaken various efforts aimed at protecting the area's animal and plant life and improving the sustainability of its ranch operations.

Partnerships have resulted in improvements to a range of natural grasslands as well as the water quality and quantity in the streams that run through the property. They have restored water, wildlife and plant habitats by installing wildlife-friendly fencing, planting additional native trees like willows and cottonwoods, and expanding watering areas for their extensive livestock operations. These activities have also revitalized the natural growth of some native plants and created larger ecosystems for birds and other fauna. Black-footed ferrets are thriving on this property - just one sign of the land's resilience after a wildfire decimated 10,000 acres in 2022.

### Voluntary Conservation

The Mays chose to place the ranch under easement to protect it from being converted to other uses - ensuring perpetual wildlife habitat protection and being able to operate it as a working cattle ranch. In Dallas's words: "We are surrounded by development, and this open space was a magnet for investors. Our ranch is home to many different species on the threatened and endangered list, and all would have been displaced at best, or lost. Today we have thriving biodiversity, and a multitude of benefits for the environment. Our easement was tailor-made for this."

### Landowner Incentive: The State Tax Credit

Dallas says that Colorado's conservation tax credit program allowed his family to move forward with conservation, and used 100% of the tax credits to make land payments. He hails the program as "pioneering" and "an absolute benefit for all the citizens of Colorado."

### Landowner: May Family

- **County:** Prowers
- **Acres conserved under easement:** 18,000
- **Benefits:** Restoration of water/wildlife/plants, wildfire resilience, species reintroduction
- **Year conserved:** 2015
- **Tax credits leveraged:** Yes
- **Partner land trust:** Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust
- **Other key partners:** Audubon Society, Denver Botanic Gardens, Ducks Unlimited, The Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy

**"If somebody is simply seeking financial gain, it is exponentially easier to simply list your property for sale. Colorado's conservation community has made it possible for thousands upon thousands of acres of Colorado to remain for future generations."**

*- Dallas May*

[Read "May Ranch: A Sustainable Way of Life" for more.](#)

