

CASE STUDY:

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS AND THE CONSERVATION EASEMENT TAX CREDIT

The Abell Ranch consists of about 510 acres of river and homestead property near and within Lake George. Best known for its nearly three miles of the South Platte River, it is one of the largest privately held stretches of the South Platte River in Colorado. The 400-acre river property is outstanding open space and natural habitat for several big-game species, including elk, pronghorn deer, black bear and mountain lion. Three types of wetlands provide excellent habitat for great blue heron, bald eagles, white pelican and snowy egrets, as well as the threatened Pawnee montane skipper butterfly.

Located just down the road, the ranch's 110-acre homestead property is a relic of the region's agricultural history and features buildings dating back to the 1870s. Rock outcroppings and ponderosa pine woodlands form the backdrop, creating the types of scenic vistas that make Colorado famous. The property connects existing protected lands, creating a mosaic of landscapes, and is home to state and globally ranked plant species such as the Rocky Mountain Columbine.

When John envisioned purchasing the ranch from the Abell family, he had his eye on protecting the river property, and the family was willing to consider his wish.

Voluntary Conservation

John had approached Palmer Land Conservancy several years ago with his desire to protect the Abell Ranch through a conservation easement. Using a thoughtful and deliberate approach to conservation, he had already worked with Palmer to conserve another property between Cripple Creek and Cañon City. His dream – and his promise to the original family – was realized in 2022. “Though it wasn't a condition of the sale, one thing I committed to when I bought Abell Ranch was the intent to preserve it and keep it from being developed.”

Landowner Incentive: The State Tax Credit

The tax credit allowed John and his partners to move forward with donating a conservation easement – protecting Abell Ranch and three miles of the South Platte River and scenic open space for people and nature, forever.

**Landowners: John Gunn,
C.R. Hall, Clint Packo**

- **County:** Park
- **Acres conserved under easement:** 510
- **Benefits:** Water resource protection, wildlife habitat protection, riverbank restoration
- **Year conserved:** 2022
- **Tax credits leveraged:** Yes
- **Partner land trust:** Palmer Land Conservancy

“It would be an ideal place to put in several houses. The family could have sold it to a developer, but chose not to.” - John Gunn

[Read “Protecting Iconic Colorado Views and Critical Water Resources – Forever” for more.](#)

