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Local

JH Land Trust protects 500-plus acres in '14

By MICHAEL POLHAMUS
JACKSON HOLE DAILY

The Jackson Hole Land Trust has put more than 500 acres under conservation easements this year or has otherwise protected lands from development, including nearly 170 acres protected last month alone.

The easements apply to eight properties — nearly all of which sit within Teton County — totaling 562 acres. Among them is a 35-acre easement donated to the land trust at the end of 2014. Numbered in the properties as well are two conservation easements — for 88 acres and 46 acres — donated by the O'Connor family. They were donated through a development project at the close of December.

The easements, some of which cover water bodies and riverbeds, provide critical habitat for moose, swans and aquatic creatures, according to the land trust.

"We've had a very successful and active year, thanks to the conservation landowners, partners and supporters that we work with," Jackson Hole Land Trust board President Fred Staehr said in a prepared statement Dec. 31.

Not all the protected land came through acquisition of conservation

easements on private land.

The Munger Mountain Corridor Project, for example, protected 236 acres in an elk migration corridor that also holds bald eagle nesting areas and habitat for other important species, according to land trust documents.

The Munger project was funded with Forest Legacy Program support provided through the state from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The effort was undertaken through a partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the state's Forestry Division, the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust and the privately held Snake River Ranch.

In early 2014 the land trust also acquired many easements from private landowners. They include a 3-acre land donation in the Skyline Ranch subdivision placed under easement in May, a 37-acre easement secured in July in the Bar B Bar Ranch subdivision and a 38-acre easement next to Grand Teton National Park that was accepted in September.

In 2014 the land trust also took on responsibility for 496 acres consisting of easements transferred from the Teton County Scenic Preserve Trust and the Green River Valley Land Trust, according to land trust documents.

New same-sex marriage bill lets pastors, rabbis opt out

By MICHAEL POLHAMUS
JACKSON HOLE DAILY

A Teton County state senator has sponsored a bill in the Wyoming Legislature that could exempt religious officials from the performance of homosexual marriages.

The bill would allow religious leaders to opt out of solemnizing gay marriages. It would not prevent members of the clergy from administering all the traditional rites of marriage if they so choose.

Titled HB 26 and co-sponsored by Sen. Dan Dockstader, of Afton, whose district includes parts of Lincoln, Sublette and Teton counties, the bill was written for introduction in the 2015 legislative session.

"[N]o licensed or ordained minister of the gospel, bishop, priest or rabbi, or other qualified person acting in accordance with the traditions or rites for the solemnization of marriage of any religion, denomination or religious society shall be required or otherwise com-

elled to perform a ceremony of marriage in this state," the draft bill reads.

Gay marriage became legal in Wyoming on Oct. 17, 2014, after a ruling by U.S. District Judge Scott Skavdahl of Casper.

"The court understands that every day where same-sex couples are denied their constitutional rights is another day filled with irreparable harm," Skavdahl wrote in his ruling. "But it is at least equally important that all same-sex marriages carry the same prominence and finality that attend opposite-sex marriage, including the various obligations and liabilities incumbent within the marital relationship."

Dockstader's bill providing religious leaders with the ability to refuse to solemnize same-sex marriages has two other co-sponsors: House Rep. Eric Barlow, of Gillette, and Rep. Mark Baker, of Sweetwater County.

The 63rd Wyoming Legislature will convene at noon Jan. 13 for its 2015 general session.

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