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WYOMING'S FIRST FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM PROJECT CONSERVES VITAL ELK MIGRATION CORRIDOR IN JACKSON HOLE

Munger Mountain Corridor Project Secures New Conservation Easement on Private Ranchlands, Connecting State Elk Feed Grounds to National Forest

Jackson, WY (December 4, 2014) – A first of its kind partnership between the Jackson Hole Land Trust, U.S. Forest Service, Wyoming Game & Fish Department, Wyoming State Forestry Division, Wyoming Wildlife & Natural Resource Trust, and the Snake River Ranch has secured the permanent protection of an important northwestern Wyoming elk migration corridor, as well as bald eagle nesting areas and other important wildlife habitat. This project is the first to receive Forest Legacy Program funds in Wyoming.

The Munger Mountain Corridor Project area, part of the Lower Snake River Ranch, completes a landscape-scale corridor of protected lands, connecting the Bridger-Teton National Forest, Snake River Ranch acreage previously conserved by Land Trust easements, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department South Park Elk Feedground. The purchase of the new conservation easement on the property was made possible through the support of several funding sources, including a \$3 million grant awarded in 2013 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Legacy Program, a federal funding program that works with state agencies and local landowners to protect environmentally important forests that are threatened with conversion to non-forest uses. In Wyoming, the Forest Legacy Program is administered cooperatively by the U.S. Forest Service and the Wyoming State Forestry Division. The successful project proposal was submitted by the Jackson Hole Land Trust and Wyoming State Forestry Division along with numerous letters of support from project partners as well as Teton County Commissioners, Jackson Hole Trout Unlimited, and the Snake River Fund.

“The success of this project is an incredible win for Jackson Hole’s wildlife and the public. We are grateful to the Resor family and all of our partners for their incredible commitment to the Munger Mountain Corridor Project,” said Laurie Andrews, executive director of the Jackson Hole Land Trust.

“Development of the lands around the Bridger-Teton National Forest poses an increasing threat to maintaining the integrity of our Forest’s lands. Intact forest lands supply timber products, wildlife habitat, soil and watershed protection, aesthetics, and recreational opportunities. However, as these areas are fragmented and disappear, so do the benefits they provide. This partnership is cornerstone to

assuring the Forest around Munger Mountain continues to provide the benefits that so many depend on in western Wyoming,” said Kathryn Conant, Bridger-Teton National Forest acting forest supervisor.

Also in 2013, the project was awarded a \$600,000 matching grant from the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust. The Resor family, which owns the property and operates it as part of the Snake River Ranch’s yearling cattle operation, donated the remainder of the value of conservation easement. “We’re thrilled for the Resor family and thankful to the Land Trust for the work that they do,” said Bob Budd, executive director of the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust. “It takes getting out on the ground to really get a sense of this project’s impact for migrating elk, deer, and other species coming in and out of Jackson Hole in the spring and fall. It’s incredibly important for maintaining large herds of ungulates across the landscape in northwest Wyoming.”

The property is located at the southern end of the Jackson Hole valley, on the lower, northern slopes of Munger Mountain. The property includes the ecologically-rich Snake River Corridor, rolling sagebrush, and mixed forests, which provides prime habitat for elk, moose, mule deer, bears, wolves, mountain lions, raptors, migratory birds, and cutthroat trout. Over 200 elk cows are known to use the property to migrate between parturition habitat along the Snake River to calving grounds on Munger Mountain, along a geographic feature known as Don’s Draw – a deep, narrow valley that provides protective cover. In addition to its wildlife conservation values, it is highly visible from numerous public vantage points, to travelers on highway 189/191 and tens of thousands of Snake River users floating from Wilson to South Park annually.

“The project’s wildlife values are particularly strong, and its strategic location as an elk migration corridor and connectivity to other protected lands gave this project special significance. The property’s visual prominence, proximity to the Snake River, and access it provides to the Jackson Hole valley and the internationally-important national parks beyond are also distinguishing features,” said John Crisp, Wyoming State Forestry Division senior resource forester. “This represents the culmination of a long process, and it is gratifying to see the hard work of so many bear fruit.”

The Munger Mountain Corridor conservation easement and management plan permanently protects 236 acres of the Lower Snake River Ranch for wildlife, ranching, forestry, and private or commercial outdoor recreation. “We are glad to work with the State of Wyoming and the Land Trust to add these 236 acres to the more than 500 acres that we have already protected on Munger Mountain. This new easement protects elk and wildlife habitat and agricultural uses while also allowing for guided outdoor recreation, including hunting, trail rides, and hiking. ” said Bill Resor of the Snake River Ranch. The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission holds the easement in accordance with Forest Legacy Program guidelines, and the Jackson Hole Land Trust acts as the nonprofit partner that will conduct annual monitoring and management of the easement.

“This project is testimony to what can be accomplished for wildlife habitat through strong relationships. The Game and Fish Commission thanks the Resor family and other partners for their vision and their commitment to conserve ranch lands and wildlife. We are proud to be part of this collaboration because of what it will do now and in the future,” Game and Fish Commission President Richard Klouda said.

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About the Jackson Hole Land Trust

The Jackson Hole Land Trust is a private, non-profit organization that was established in 1980 to preserve open space and the critical wildlife habitat, magnificent scenic vistas, and historic ranching heritage of Jackson Hole. By working cooperatively with the owners of the area's privately owned open lands, the Jackson Hole Land Trust has ensured the permanent protection of over 24,000 acres in and around Jackson Hole and the Greater Yellowstone Area. For more information please visit www.jhlandtrust.org.

About the Forest Legacy Program

Funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the USDA Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program supports voluntary partnerships between states, forest landowners, conservation organizations and others to help conserve environmentally important forests from conversion to nonforest uses. The main tool used for protecting these important forests is conservation easements to provide for jobs, water quality, wildlife, recreation and a host of other public benefits.

About the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission serves as the policy making board of the Wyoming Game & Fish Department and is responsible for the direction and supervision of the Director of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and through the Department provides an adequate and flexible system of control, propagation, management, protection and regulation of all wildlife in Wyoming. The Department is the only entity of state government directly charged with managing Wyoming's wildlife resources and conserving them for future generations.

About the Wyoming State Forestry Division

The Wyoming State Forestry Division is responsible for the management of approximately 263,000 acres of forested trust lands and the promotion of good forest management and protection throughout the state on all ownerships, including 2 million acres of private forest land. The Wyoming State Forestry Division is the lead agency for the Forest Legacy Program in Wyoming.

About the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust

The Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust is an independent state agency governed by a nine-member citizen board. It was founded in 2005 by the Wyoming Legislature to enhance and conserve wildlife habitat and natural resource values throughout the state. Since that time, the Trust has participated in nearly 600 projects with a total value of over 500 million dollars.