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SOUTH PARK RANCH RECREATION PROGRAM

SUMMARY

The South Park ranch recreation program is an integral part of Park County's larger Heritage Area Program. Thanks to the efforts of many partners, we have secured perpetual conservation easements on 30,000 acres of agricultural land, restored 15 miles of stream and riparian habitat, and preserved numerous historic ranch structures. In addition to offering miles of private streams for public fishing, our ranch recreation program also protects critical habitat and encourages the continuation of agricultural use. As of this year, conservation easements have been secured and/or habitat restoration has been accomplished on all of our ranch leases.

BACKGROUND

The ranch recreation program is part of the Park County Heritage Program, a \$16 million effort that has conserved and restored 25 working ranches encompassing 30 miles of stream corridor and 30,000 acres of wetlands and agricultural lands along four headwater tributaries of the South Platte River. Conceived in 2001 by Park County Tourism Director, Gary Nichols, the ranch recreation program re-establishes opportunities that existed here in the 1960s. At that time Nichols' father would offer local ranchers a few bucks to fish on their properties, and a few bucks more to spend the night in their bunkhouse. But most of these ranches have changed hands over the years and public fishing access on private land is generally no longer an option.

It wasn't until 2003 that funding and landowner interest converged at the same time to create public recreation opportunities on private lands. Using a Legacy grant from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), Park County teamed up with a group of local ranchers to secure fishing leases on several ranches in South Park. For a reasonable daily fee, anglers now have access to some of the highest quality private trout streams in the state. Owing to effective management and recent habitat enhancements, the fishing has earned glowing reviews. In 2008 one angler wrote: "The Tarryall Creek Ranch lease is a phenomenal property...one of the top

five fishing experiences in my life...caught fish averaging 12 inches in every pocket and pool...some were 15 to 16 inches.”

CURRENT EFFORTS

This year (2009) Park County has teamed up with additional landowners to provide a variety of lodging and other recreation opportunities on or near our fishing program leases. Most notably, Park County has partnered with Beartooth Capital Partners and the CDOW acquire part of the Tarryall Creek Ranch near Como. Encompassing four miles of Tarryall Creek, the ranch supports one of the most productive brown trout fisheries in South Park, a large resident elk herd, dozens of beaver ponds, wetlands, and seasonal concentrations of migratory waterfowl.

Beartooth Capital’s dedication to conserving large properties throughout the West has made it possible for Park County, Colorado Open Lands, CDOW, GOCO, CWCB, and other partners to conserve the 4500-acre Tarryall Creek Ranch, restore one mile of riparian community along Tarryall Creek, and purchase 200 acres for the development of a much-needed public shooting (rifle, pistol, shotgun, archery) range on a remote part of the ranch.

These initial successes have engendered a much larger creative vision for the Tarryall Creek Ranch and surrounding properties. Park County is now discussing the purchase of an additional 1200 acres from Beartooth; building several guest cabins on the property; and restoring the 1924 ranch house as a management headquarters for public fishing, hunting, trail riding and two recreational shooting facilities. When fully realized, this vision will position Tarryall Creek Ranch and surrounding properties as a national demonstration project that benefits significant heritage resources, private agricultural lands, wetlands, wildlife, and the local economy.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about the Park County Heritage Program, please visit www.parkcountyheritage.com or contact Gary Nichols at gnichols@parkco.us.

To reserve one of our eight ranch leases for the day, go to www.southparktrout.com and look at “Day-Use Fishing Leases.”