

The Northern San Juans Initiative
An innovative partnership to protect private lands.

The Northern San Juan Mountains region is facing growth pressure resulting in the conversion of working land to developed uses at an ever-increasing pace. This development threatens our family ranches, rural lifestyle, wildlife habitat, local economies and scenic vistas. In response, four independent land conservation organizations have come together to collaboratively address this issue. The Northern San Juans Initiative focuses on protecting private land by sharing information with private landowners about conservation easements and their economic benefits, and completing conservation easements with willing landowners.

OBJECTIVES:

- ❖ Find the means to protect valuable agricultural lands, scenic landscapes, wildlife habitat, historical values, and riparian areas
- ❖ Aid land owners in protecting their land and lifestyle for generations to come
- ❖ Conserve 5,000 acres or more, of the area's prime landscapes in order to provide a public good to all who live in or may visit the region
- ❖ Raise \$800,000 by the end of 2008 to advance private land protection

A NEED FOR A NEW DIRECTION

The need for options to current development patterns is clear as you drive from Montrose to Ouray or Ridgway to Telluride. The traditional ranching landscape is changing on a daily basis as a result of growth pressure from the communities of Montrose, Ridgway, and Telluride. Ranches are being subdivided and new homes and commercial developments are being built at an increasing rate. With rising land values, we find ourselves at a crossroads where these working landscapes and their western heritage are at risk of disappearing forever.

- In Ouray County from 2000 – 2005, the annual growth rate for new homes was 4.7% per year (David Theobald “Build Out Analysis”)
- It is projected that the Ouray County population will increase by 40% by or before the year 2015 (David Theobald “Build Out Analysis”)
- In Colorado, lands used for agricultural production are disappearing at a rate of 10 acres per hour (www.environmentcolorado.org)
- Increased development is less productive to a rural economy than traditional agricultural uses; demanding \$1.29 in Ouray County and \$1.65 state wide, for every \$1.00 generated by taxes. Agricultural lands, however, almost double the revenue versus municipal service costs (<http://dare.agsci.colostate.edu/csusagecon/extension/docs/landuse/apr03-02.pdf>)

- Local tourism economies are also hurt when farms and ranches are developed. Studies in rural mountain communities similar to Ouray County show that 58% of tourists state they would limit their visits if such landscapes were transformed into housing developments
(<http://dare.agsci.colostate.edu/csusagecon/extension/docs/impactanalysis/edr04-11.pdf>)

What is being done?

NSJI has begun to identify key land owners within the program area, and develop one-on-one relationships with these land owners. NSJI is also developing public support for land conservation through educational workshops and materials aimed at protecting the area's working ranches.

NSJI Goals and plan of Action

The NSJI will continue to reach out to ranchers in the program area to offer guidance and information about conservation options for this very special area that we call home.

NSJI's Goals include:

- By year-end 2007 protect at least 2,000 priority privately-owned acres between Colona and Ouray, and Ridgway to Telluride
- By year-end 2008, protect at least 250 acres of key working rangeland along the Uncompahgre River to demonstrate results to area ranchers and the public
- Enhance capacity of local organizations and communities to achieve private land conservation and stewardship for the long-term
- Build public support for private land conservation and recognition of its benefits to local communities

NSJI aims to accomplish their goals in the following ways:

- Create a support system for participants interested in land conservation
- Provide land owners with information on the fundamentals of Conservation Easements
- Generate public support for land conservation through community workshops and activities
- Work collaboratively with other conservation organizations across the state in order to meet the conservation goals of each land owner

Northern San Juan Initiative Coordinator:

A Black Canyon Land Trust staff person, Brandon Hatter is located in Ridgway to serve this coalition of conservation organizations.

Northern San Juan Initiative Partners:

Colorado Conservation Trust

Black Canyon Land Trust

The Nature Conservancy

Trust for Land Restoration