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# Newsletter of the Black Canyon Land Trust

1500 East Oak Grove Road, Montrose Colorado 81401

## The Gray Ranch – Historic Ranching and a Haven for Wildlife

The Gray sisters present a wonderful example of preserving our area’s historic ranching, while also conserving habitat for wildlife. Quiet leaders in conservation, Debbie, Gayle, Sherry and Linda have kept their great-grandfather’s 1,000 acre ranch whole and in ranching. The Grays provided important habitat for mule deer, elk, bald eagles, and other wildlife when they conserved their property.

A visit to the Gray Ranch makes you feel good about western Colorado and the hard-working people in the area. Gayle Ware and her husband continue the ranch business started by their great-grandfather in 1883. Sheep were the original stock raised here. Now the ranch supports a cow-calf operation, purebred bulls, a few goats and other farm animals. When you meet them, it’s clear the Gray sisters are open-hearted and of one mind about conservation of their property. They talk about keeping the ranch together for the family, and for preserving the land the way it’s been for a hundred years.

The ranch’s history includes many interesting tales about how early settlers managed with what the land offered them, and with the life changes experienced by all families. One story tells of how the Gray sisters’ grandfather exerted his early independence, while keeping family ties. The younger Mr. Gray had determined to move out his father’s house. Not leaving the family homestead entirely, however, he carved off a part of the house. With great effort, he took a horse team and moved that part of the house a distance away and across a gully. There he made his home, separate yet close.

This past fall, I was treated to a tour of the ranch’s impressive ridges, together with Gayle, her young daughter, and “baby doggie” in the four-wheeler. The hills are thickly wooded with mountain mahogany, Gambel oak, and other mountain shrubs. Along the trail were western grasses. These shrubs and plants offer many tasty meals for elk.

The Gray Ranch includes not only ridges leading toward the flanks of the Grand Mesa, but also steep drainages, water sources, and irrigated pasture. This mix of land types and uses helps wildlife in the area. Through the seasons, wildlife have different needs for breeding, calving, and feeding. The ranch also lies between higher and lower elevations, and next to both public lands and property conserved by other landowners. This adds to the value for wildlife, allowing free movement through large expanses of undeveloped land.

We appreciate the commitment of the Grays and other landowners who have preserved western Colorado’s historic legacy of family ranching and abundant wildlife.

*Barbara Hawke, Executive Director*



## Black Canyon Land Trust

*Encouraging and assisting private landowners in preserving and sustaining the rural heritage, natural, and cultural conservation values in the watersheds of the Uncompahgre, North Fork, and lower Gunnison Rivers, for the benefit of the public,  
..... today and in perpetuity.*

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