Pipe Springs Ranch: Colorado's 2011 Leopold Conservation Award Winners

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In the southeastern-most part of the state, lies the historic town of Springfield, CO, a city known for its farming and cattle ranching communities.

It is also the city that now boasts one of Colorado's exceptional stewards of conservation, Pipe Springs Ranch LLC. This 14,000-acre ranch has been named the 2011 recipient of the Leopold Conservation Award, an award which honors farmers and/or ranchers who demonstrate responsible stewardship and management of natural resources.

Pipe Springs Ranch is owned and operated by siblings Jo Ann McEndree, Kaye Kasza, Steve McEndree, and Cathy Tebay. They are fourth generation ranchers who are committed to leaving a sustainable operation for their descendents.

They inherited the ranch in 1994 and have worked to improve the ranching enterprise while they improve the ranch's natural habitats. The ranch includes the homesteads of their grandfather, great grandfather, and several uncles and aunts. The siblings all view the land as an invaluable legacy to be maintained and improved.

"The siblings have good communication and we feel like we all can trust each other to make the right decision that will affect the livelihood of our ranch," said Jo Ann.

Despite the ten years of severe drought conditions in their community, the four siblings share a love of the land and remain steadfast in pursuing alternatives which allow the ranch to be a more profitable operation while improving the natural ecosystems for the future.

"It's been ten years since we've had good moisture but we've made a lot of improvements to the land within those ten years," said Steve.

A large part of their land stewardship was placing pipelines to distribute water across vast ranch. As a result, they created smaller pastures and were able to plant two windbreaks to offer protection for both livestock and wildlife. This allows for shorter grazing periods, which increases the productivity of the soil and plants.

Other conservation methods used on Pipe Springs Ranch LLC include:

- Decreased average pasture size from 3,000 acres to 750 acres
- Installed 25 miles of water line
- Installed 20 water tanks
- Installed one shallow water habitat for migrating birds
- Installed two windbreaks for livestock and wildlife protection
- Increased wildlife habitat due to increased plant diversity
- Installed 17.5 miles of wildlife friendly two-strand permanent fencing
- Installed a new water collection system to allow better water flow
- Maintained 24 ponds for flood control of bindweed
- Installed 34 ladders in tanks for wildlife escape with 27 more to be added this year

The McEndree siblings partnered with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on their conservation efforts.

“The Natural Resources Conservation Service has played a tremendous role in facilitating educational workshops using our land as a teaching tool to help others in the community learn about land stewardship and sustainability,” said Kaye.

Future plans for the ranch include more water lines and fencing to create even smaller pastures, and shorter, more intense grazing periods. By purchasing temporary fencing materials, the family will be able to split a section into quarters for grazing purposes.

“We are cutting back to a few days of grazing per year in each quarter section to allow for adequate regrowth of natural grasses during the remainder of the year,” said Steve.

The Leopold Conservation Award, named in honor of world-renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, is comprised of $10,000 and a Leopold crystal. The award is presented annually in eight states to private landowners who are doing tremendous work for agriculture and conservation and is presented by the Sand County Foundation in partnership with the Colorado Cattlemen’s Association, the Colorado Agricultural Land Trust, Encana Oil & Gas (USA) Inc., and Peabody Energy.

The video can be viewed on YouTube at the following link:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_zp2ps0p_o