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BLM completes Sutey Ranch land exchange

SILT, Colo. – Today the Bureau of Land Management and proponents of the Sutey Ranch Land Exchange recorded the final documents completing the exchange of lands in Eagle, Garfield, and Pitkin counties. The closing follows today’s Interior Board of Land Appeals’ affirmation of the BLM’s decision to complete the exchange.

“Having the decision affirmed is great news for public lands in the Roaring Fork Valley,” said Shonna Dooman, acting field manager of the BLM’s Colorado River Valley Field Office. “This land exchange provides a substantial public benefit by conserving lands for wildlife, providing opportunities for recreation, and consolidating land ownership,”

The 557-acre Sutey Ranch north of Carbondale and 112-acre Haines Parcel along Prince Creek south of Carbondale are now in public hands. The parcels that became private lands through the exchange are all protected with conservation easements.

The Sutey Ranch provides critical big game winter habitat and has the potential to provide significant recreational opportunities based on its location adjacent to the BLM’s popular Red Hill Special Recreation Management Area. Until a site-specific management plan can be developed for this area, public access will be limited to foot travel from the Red Hill SRMA.

“While we will consider public access to this property off County Road 112 in the future, there is currently no safe place to park,” Dooman said. “Until we develop a specific management plan, no motorized or mechanized access on the Sutey Ranch or parking along County Road 112 will be permitted.”

Acquiring the Haines Parcel resolves current trespass, traffic, and safety problems on private land by providing legal and safe public access to the trail system in the popular area known as The Crown. Hundreds of mountain bikers have been riding on this parcel to access public trails for many years, despite it being private land. They can now do so without trespassing.

The proponents, Leslie and Abigail Wexner, also donated \$100,000 directly to the BLM for the development of a site-specific management plan for the Sutey Ranch, and \$1 million to the Aspen Valley Land Trust to hold in perpetuity for BLM’s long-term management of the newly acquired properties.

“We want to begin developing the management plan for the Sutey Ranch property as soon as possible, and will likely seek public involvement beginning this summer,” Dooman said.

The exchange is the result of a proposal brought to the BLM by the Western Land Group in 2011. Through extensive local coordination, the exchange has received broad public support.

To acquire the new parcels, the BLM exchanged three parcels totaling 1,268 acres in Pitkin County south of Carbondale that were mostly surrounded by private land and difficult for the public to access. In Eagle County, BLM exchanged three parcels southwest of Eagle totaling 201 acres on Horse Mountain that have little public access.

The land exchange proponents are placing conservation easements preventing development on those lands transferred out of Federal ownership.

Land exchanges are evaluated on a value-for-value rather than an acre-for-acre basis. Because the appraisals were skewed so far in favor of the United States and public, the proponent donated 235 acres of the Sutey property valued at \$2.24 million.

“Rather than request a cash equalization payment to balance the value of the exchange, the proponents made a significant donation in land value to the public,” Dooman said.

More information about the exchange, including maps, is available at www.blm.gov/programs/lands-and-realty/colorado/sutey.

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