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Rehder Ranch Nature Preserve gifted to Yampa Valley Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy

Historic sheep ranch in Pleasant Valley permanently protected

(Steamboat Springs) Leaving yet another legacy to the Yampa Valley, Helen and Henry Rehder's historic sheep ranch on Harrison Creek has been preserved in perpetuity to be managed as a nature preserve, which includes the study of local plants and wildlife. The ranch is surrounded on three sides by US Forest Service land and is adjacent to Lake Catamount. In accordance with the deceased couple's final wishes to ensure their beloved Rehder Ranch is maintained, the entire 250-acre ranch in the heart of Pleasant Valley has been gifted to Yampa Valley Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy. Both nonprofit land conservation organizations were identified as the beneficiaries of the ranch property in the Rehder will. As a means to address the terms and intent of the will, YVLT and TNC agreed upon a collaborative structure where YVLT will hold the deed to the property and TNC will hold a conservation easement on the property.

Helen Rehder first approached Yampa Valley Land Trust in the late 1990s about taking on the ownership and stewardship responsibilities of the ranch after her death. Helen identified two entities, YVLT and TNC to be involved in the property to ensure her wishes were upheld. In the hope that her gift of the ranch would not become a financial liability on the managing nonprofit organization, Helen accompanied the gift of the ranch with a fund for the future care of the property. The Rehder Ranch will now operate as a unique nature preserve and a community research center – a focal point for promoting land conservation as well as studies of trout, elk, deer and a range of wildlife and ecosystems that encompass the ranch and the surrounding areas of Northwest Colorado.

“YVLT is honored by this incredible gift of the Rehder Ranch as a nature preserve and is committed to fulfilling Helen’s wishes,” says Susan Dorsey, executive director of the Yampa Valley Land Trust. “We also recognize that it is a huge financial responsibility to care for a property of this stature. We are grateful for the gift of financial support along with the gift of the land as it enables YVLT to steward the property as Helen intended.” According to Dorsey, a percentage of the interest generated from the fund will provide YVLT with a limited amount of funding for maintenance each year. The balance of any interest amount will need to be reinvested in the fund to keep up with the ever-rising cost of expenses. “YVLT will need to raise additional funds to care for the property. We will also pursue grants and other fundraising for historic preservation projects related to the house, barn and the other structures.”

Henry Rehder’s family homesteaded the Rehder Ranch around 1900. The family chose to run sheep instead of cattle because of the ranch’s relatively steep terrain. Henry died in 1998 and Helen passed away on Mother’s Day in 2004.

“I want to thank the Nature Conservancy for being such an incredible partner and collaborating with Yampa Valley Land Trust on this project,” Dorsey says. “With TNC’s assistance along with the diligence of both TNC and YVLT counsel, the Rehders’ dream of a nature preserve will now be realized.”

The arrangement between YVLT and TNC effectively establishes both a managing and a guardian entity, a cooperative effort that these two nonprofit organizations successfully embarked upon in the past for the Carpenter Ranch near Hayden. On the Carpenter Ranch, the roles are reversed, with Yampa Valley Land Trust holding the conservation easement and The Nature Conservancy owning the property.

Future possibilities for the Rehder Ranch are plentiful, but all activities will fall within the terms of Helen’s will and the conservation easement. Per the terms of the Rehder will, the land will remain private, but YVLT may bring scientists, researchers, interns and the public on the ranch for special programs that might include activities such as animal tracking, bird watching, fish and wildlife studies, historical research and archaeological studies.

Helen had a great passion for art and ancient history and collected artifacts like arrowheads from her meanderings around the ranch. Many years ago when Henry was digging fence posts by their home on the Rehder Ranch, he found a 5- to 6-inch spear point

that was estimated to be over 10,000 years old, perhaps from the Clovis culture. The Rehder's home and turn-of-the-20th-century agricultural structures, including the ranch's bank barn, are scheduled for historic assessment this summer through Historic Routt County! and the University of Colorado Denver's College of Architecture and Planning.

Having depicted much of her beloved valley in oil paintings – one of her paintings with grazing sheep hangs at the Tread of Pioneers Museum – Helen's artistic tradition will continue with one of the first events on the property. In August, the Steamboat Art Museum (which is housed in the historic First National Bank Building downtown Steamboat Springs that the Rehders bought in 1937 and bequeathed to the City of Steamboat Springs for historic preservation) will team-up with YVLT to host a Plein Air Paintout day on the ranch with local and visiting artists from across the nation depicting the beauty, flora and fauna of the area. This will be followed by a show of the artists' work at the Steamboat Art Museum's Helen Rehder Gallery located in the Rehder Building downtown. "This is an incredible way to honor Helen Rehder, her love of the arts, her ranch and historic buildings" said Shirley Stocks, President/Curator of the nonprofit Steamboat Art Museum.

The Rehder Ranch expands partnership opportunities for Yampa Valley Land Trust to create community programs with other research, educational and cultural organizations, including Historic Routt County!, Yampatika, state universities, Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. Above all else, the focus will remain on the Rehder Ranch's inherent qualities as a nature preserve.

"What better way to honor Helen," says YVLT Executive Director Susan Dorsey. "It reflects her deep love of the land, her love of art, her love for history and wildlife. This range of partners has the opportunity to touch so many aspects of this community and underscores Helen's passion and her mission. The opportunities are exciting."

