



## LIFE16 PRE DE 005 – Development of a European Land Conservation Network (ELCN)

Action A.4 – Prospection for international state-of-the-art tools and techniques for private land conservation

### Summary of the ELCN Colorado Study Tour

Denver, Colorado, USA

Organised by



#### 1. Participants

Kristijan Civic - Eurosite

Ben Mehedin - Fundatia ADEPT

Luis Jordão - Montis

Dr. Tilmann Disselhoff - NABU

Kristina Barnes - NABU

Chris Steenwegen - Natuurpunt

Stefano Picchi - WWF Oasi

Jofre Rodrigo - Xarxa de Custodia del Territori

Laura Johnson – ILCN

Emily Myron – ILCN

Jim Levitt – Lincoln Institute for Land Policy

Jiven Sobrinho-Wheeler – Lincoln Institute for Land Policy

## 2. Introduction

The International Land Conservation Network (ILCN) organised a study trip for the partner European Private Land Conservation Network (ELCN). From Sunday, October 22 through Thursday, October 26, 2017, the ELCN members together with representatives from the ILCN and the Lincoln Institute for Land Policy went on an educational study tour of private land conservation projects around Denver, Colorado. Afterwards, the ELCN members attended the [Land Trust Alliance's annual Rally](#) in Denver from Thursday night, October 26 through Saturday, October 28, 2017.

The purpose of the Colorado Study Tour was to introduce the ELCN delegates to conservation tools and techniques that are not yet widely applied in the EU and to discuss the potential of their transferability with private land conservation practitioners from the US. Many of the pilot actions in the ELCN's project deal with working agricultural and forest lands; therefore, Colorado's history of protecting working lands and large landscape conservation will be highly relevant to EU participants. Over the course of the tour, participants were exposed to the use of easements, particularly on working lands; farming using conservation practices; marketing environmentally friendly products; working with farmers/ranchers (and why they would want to conserve their properties); how conservation can relate to water quantity and quality challenges; partnering with public agencies; and financing conservation areas as well as legal differences between the US (Common law) and most of the European countries (Civil law). The main pressure on agricultural land in Colorado is due to development for recreation and leisure. However, apart from selling their property to real estate developers, owners generally have a variety of options at hand, from granting conservation easements, to mortgaging, covenants, rent or lease to donation.

## 3. Study Tour Timeline and Summary

### Saturday, October 21, 2017 – Arrived in Denver

All the participants who arrived in time for dinner met at Michael Dowlings house, the Past Chair of Land Trust Alliance Board.

### Sunday, October 22, 2017 – trip from Denver to Gunnison

The group left Denver in the morning towards Gunnison via Buena Vista. Participants first stopped at the Steel Ranch, picnicked and met with Geraldine Steel (owner of the Steel Ranch), Joe Cogan (a neighbor with conservation easements), Erick Glen who represented [Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust](#) (CCALT) and Wade Shelton from [Trust for Public Land](#) (TPL).



CCALT was formed in 1995 to partner with willing landowners to conserve working rural landscapes (for more information see next page). TPL has protected more than 3.3 million acres and completed more than 5,400 park and conservation projects since 1973. Both Trusts worked closely with Geraldine Steel to conserve her ranch. The [Steel ranch](#) is made up of two parcels, under various lease agreements, with extensive river frontage along the Arkansas River, and the transaction gives TPL the ability to secure public fishing access to the river once other adjacent public access projects move forward. Participants learned that conservation easement can vary widely from simply securing

the land for agricultural use and from development to access rights and restrictions for conservation. After visiting the Steel Ranch, participants continued the tour to Gunnison.

*Personal insight from Ben, ADEPT: Joe Cogan has a micro-hydro power plant which was inherited from his father. Joe did an upgrade from 3 MW to 10 MW. With this operational unit, Joe is not just independent from the power point of view, but he sells electricity to the power supply company.*

### **Monday, October 23, 2017 – Gunnison to Grand Junction**

In Gunnison the group met with Stacy McPhail from the [Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy](#) (GRCL), a non-profit that works with land trusts on behalf of landowners and Bruce Allan, a young rancher in Gunnison area and Bill Trampe. GRCL was started in 1996 by Bill Trampe, an area rancher ([more about the Trampe ranch](#)), and Susan Lohr, the former director of the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory. The conflict here is between the developers pushing for tourism and trails and the ranchers wanting to preserve the land for further generation and who want to continue with the use of the land for agriculture. Together with the farmers Bill and Susan decided that the best way to protect agricultural land was to keep families on the land by raising the funds necessary to purchase conservation easements. Today, more than 34% of the private ranchland in the area is under conservation easement, which will increase to 50% with the completion of current projects.



### **Tuesday, October 24 – Grand Junction, CO**

The tour around Grand Junction was hosted by Rob Bleiburg, Executive Director of the [Mesa Land Trust](#). The organization was founded in 1980 by a small group of dedicated farmers concerned about increasing development pressures during the area's oil shale boom. Today, the organization holds over 200 conservation easements protecting 64,000 acres, including orchards, vineyards, cropland, working ranches, and important habitat for deer, elk and the Gunnison Sage Grouse. Rob will share experiences related to large ranchland conservation, the fruit industry, endangered species, and water management, highlighted by several site visits and discussions with landowners, land trust staff, and government agencies. The group first visited the "Palisade Peach". Palisade (Talbot family) is a major peach producer (half of the state's peach crop is grown on 3,000 acres), and protecting these important and productive agricultural lands was the inspiration for the founding of Mesa Land Trust. The associated people here had a very interesting conservation initiative for agro-bio-diversity. The Fruitlands Forever Initiative aims to preserve 1,000 acres of productive farm ground in the East Valley, which would conserve a critical mass of farmland sufficient to sustain the fruit industry in the area for the future. In five years the initiative has brought \$3.3 million of outside funding to the area, conserved 298 acres of agricultural land and 800 acres of prime fruit growing land through conservation easements.



In the afternoon the group visited another project at Glade Park and met Jay van Loan and his wife. Jay was the first to sign a conservation easement in the area for sage grouse management (restrictions) in 1999 and worked with other land owners in the area for land conservation.

The impressive work of Jay is that he is not just dedicated to conservation easements, but has also gathered climate data for more than 40 years. Jay also is open to diversify his farm, e.g. through hemp production for oil use on a few acres of his ranch.



### **Wednesday, October 25 – Grand Junction, CO to Denver, CO**

The group met with Chris Castilian, Executive Director of the unique [Great Outdoors Colorado](#) (GOCO) funding program. GOCO invests a portion of Colorado Lottery proceeds to help preserve and enhance the state's parks, trails, wildlife, rivers and open spaces. An independent board awards competitive grants to local governments and land trusts, and makes investments through Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Created by voters in 1992, GOCO has committed more than \$917 million in lottery proceeds to more than 4,800 projects in all 64 counties without any tax dollar support. In general, GOCO does not pay up front, but refunds invoices. Applications as well as refunds are dealt with via an online form. For example, GOCO supported the Trampe ranch with ~10 Mio \$ by GOCO.



After the meeting, participants travelled back to Denver through Vail.

### Thursday, October 26

The group had meetings at the Gates Family Foundation office with Peter Stein ([The Lyme and Timber Company](#)) representatives of the [Gates Family Foundation](#), Jake Caldwell of the [LOR Foundation](#), Larry Kueter, legal counsel for the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust and Janis Whisman, Real Estate Division Manager for the [Boulder County Parks and Open Space](#). These meetings focused on the logistics of developing policies at state and local levels and funding instruments that enable private land conservation. In the afternoon the ELCN Team had an internal debriefing the study trip. In the evening the group attended the international reception to network with other international participants as well as the LTR's welcome dinner.



### Friday, October 27 and Saturday, October 28

The study trip attended the Land Trust Alliance's annual Rally. The group introduced the LIFE ELCN project at the international breakfast during the Rally.

