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**GOVERNOR RITTER ANNOUNCES PRESERVATION OF
138,000 ACRES WITH \$57 MILLION IN GOCO/LOTTERY GRANTS**

DENVER – Governor Bill Ritter today joined with members of the Lottery-funded Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Trust Fund Board in announcing the investment of \$57 million in Legacy grants to 15 projects that will help preserve 138,000 acres across the state. Several of the projects receiving funds are based around river corridors including the South Platte River in Adams and Arapahoe counties, Fountain Creek in El Paso and Pueblo counties, the Rio Grande River in the San Luis Valley and in the Crystal and Upper San Juan watersheds in western Colorado. The projects will expand urban recreational opportunities, provide critical wildlife habitat, protect scenic viewsheds, prevent communities from growing together and result in the construction of 40 miles of new trail.

“As Colorado’s land, air, and water are second to none, the projects funded by the Legacy Grants are critical for keeping them that way,” said Governor Ritter at the State Capitol where he spoke to project sponsors. “The investments in our natural assets by the GOCO Board are not just good for the assets themselves, but they’re good for our citizens and our economy.”

Legacy grants were first awarded by GOCO in 1996 and have been offered periodically as GOCO’s Lottery cash flow allows. Prior to today’s award, 40 Legacy projects have been funded. Today’s \$57 million investment provides additional dollars to nine previously funded Legacy projects and creates six new projects. “The GOCO Board greatly values the work that is being done by land trusts, local governments, the Colorado Division of Wildlife and Colorado State Parks,” said GOCO Board Chairman Norma Anderson. “We are very excited to be able to help start six new efforts, all centered around one of the state’s most valuable assets -- rivers.”

The six new Legacy projects, all of which are marked by extensive partnerships, are:

- **The Northeast Greenway Corridor Project sponsored by Adams County and the South Platte Greenway Project sponsored by Arapahoe County with each entity receiving a \$5.25 million grant** for efforts centered on the South Platte River which provides an important wildlife system and recreational amenity in the Denver metro area.

Adams County will use its \$5.25 million grant to protect three farms comprising 300 acres along Riverdale Road creating an 800-acre contiguous block of protected irrigated farmland for wildlife habitat and as an open space buffer. It will expand the Elaine T. Valente Open Space Park by 30 acres providing important trail connections. Funds will also be used for the construction of trails and pedestrian bridges that will complete a portion of the Front Range Trail as it runs through Adams County. As the fastest growing county in the state, farm, riparian and wildlife lands in the area are under intense growth pressure. This is the first phase of the project that has the long-term goal of creating an urban greenway and open space network covering 150 miles of trails that will surround the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge and extend from Denver to Brighton and Commerce City to Aurora, and take in the South Platte River.

Arapahoe County will invest its \$5.25 million in beautifying and enhancing the South Platte River corridor as a recreational and habitat amenity extending from Englewood to the Arapahoe County line south of Littleton. Arapahoe County is also undergoing rapid change as it transforms from an industrial corridor to retail, office and residential developments. Because of the growth pressure resulting from these changes, the majority of GOCO's funds will be used to acquire open space that will add to the Greenway while improving east/west connectivity, expanding limited trail space and restoring important riparian habitat. Twenty-one specific projects have been identified by the County and its partners as part of this effort.

- **The Rio Grande Initiative, sponsored by Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, was awarded \$7.38 million** to protect 5,682 acres with conservation easements on working ranches that lie along the Rio Grande River Corridor in the San Luis Valley. These lands provide significant open space values including vital riparian wildlife habitat. The Initiative aims to protect as much of the intact private land and water along Colorado's Rio Grande corridor as possible through voluntary land conservation, and to pursue an unprecedented opportunity to conserve significant, sizeable ranches with important senior surface water rights at the headwaters of one of the nation's major rivers. Unlike the many highly fragmented river systems in the west, the Rio Grande in Colorado has retained much of its exceptional wildlife habitat, in addition to its traditional farms and ranches. Approximately 54,000 acres of private land remain in 80-acre or larger, intact parcels along the river. The Initiative will work to protect at least 50% of these acres over time. The Rio Grande's riparian zone, with its many oxbows, sloughs and wetlands along the meandering floodplain, supports abundant wildlife including endangered species.

- **The Crystal Watershed Project, sponsored by Pitkin County, will use \$5 million in GOCO funds** to protect the most essential open space in the watershed while providing the first leg of a recreational trail through it, as well as opening new river and climbing access points. While nearby resorts have boomed, the Crystal River Valley has remained largely unscathed. The Crystal's headwaters lie within the spectacular Maroon Bells Wilderness. During a precipitous 40-mile plunge to its mouth on the Roaring Fork, the river crosses Pitkin, Garfield and Gunnison counties. A stunning landscape of unspoiled river bottomland, red sandstone cliffs and high mountain peaks envelops this cultural gem with unsurpassed open space and recreational resources. GOCO funds will be used to protect land in fee title and through conservation easements, including a parcel that provides needed access to the Roaring Fork River and Cold Mountain Ranch along the heart of the Crystal Trail.
- **The Peak to Prairie Conservation Initiative in El Paso, Pueblo, Lincoln and Crowley counties, sponsored by Colorado Open Lands, will use a \$4.75 million grant** to address the mixed needs of a region facing rapid growth and the challenge of maintaining working agricultural lands. It is a 10-year project to protect approximately 250,000 acres encompassing 28 miles of the Fountain Creek corridor. These lands provide breathtaking scenery, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities in two types of landscapes -- riparian corridors and imperiled shortgrass prairie. Fountain Creek (the last undammed major river corridor on the Front Range) and its associated habitat support a high density of species and is accessible to a significant number of people. By building on holdings of private landowners, the State Land Board and military reservations, the project partners will knit together swaths of Fountain Creek corridor, prairie habitat, State Land Board holdings and military buffer lands. This connected landscape will remain as open space ensuring ecological, agricultural and recreational benefits, as well as providing a visual respite and community separator between Colorado Springs and Pueblo. Lastly, this project will preserve the long-term viability of Department of Defense installations by precluding incompatible uses adjacent to them. In this phase, more than 6,000 acres will be protected in the Fountain Creek Corridor, a significant amount of which is highly visible from I-25. Another 48,655 acres of Central Shortgrass Prairie will also be protected.
- **The Upper San Juan River Watershed Project in Archuleta and Mineral counties, sponsored by The Conservation Fund, was awarded \$4.15 million** that will help protect up to 4,400 acres on two ranches in this watershed. Protection of these lands will secure vital wildlife linkages, habitats, watershed buffers and some of the best remaining scenic and working landscapes of southwest Colorado. The San Juan River is one of the state's most spectacular and important rivers. From its source at Wolf Creek Pass on the Continental Divide, to its confluence with the Colorado River in red rock canyon country, the San Juan is emblematic of our state's richness and diversity.

In addition to the six new projects, nine projects will build upon previously awarded Legacy grants:

- Colorado Wildlife Habitat Protection Program, a statewide effort sponsored by the Colorado Division of Wildlife -- \$8 million
- San Juan Skyway Project in Ouray, Montezuma and La Plata counties sponsored by the Black Canyon Land Trust -- \$4.39 million grant
- Gunnison Headwaters Project in Gunnison and Saguache counties sponsored by Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy and the Crested Butte Land Trust -- \$3 million grant
- Wet Mountain Valley Ranchland Preservation program Phase II in Custer County sponsored by the San Isabel Land Protection Trust -- \$ 2 million grant
- Yampa Rivers to Ridges Project sponsored by the City of Steamboat Springs -- \$2 million grant
- Preserving the Top of Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs sponsored by Colorado State Parks -- \$2 million grant
- Colorado Front Range Trail sponsored by Colorado State Park -- \$2 million grant
- Water for St. Vrain State Park in Weld County sponsored by Colorado State Parks -- \$2 million grant
- Manitou Section 16 sponsored by the City of Colorado Springs -- \$1 million grant

Speaking at the news conference Lottery Director Peggy Gordon said, “The grants announced today exemplify the outstanding partnership the Colorado Lottery has with Great Outdoors Colorado. For almost 25 years, the Lottery has helped maintain Colorado’s beauty, and working with GOCO just strengthens our commitment to keeping this state a wonderful place to live.”

Great Outdoors is the result of a citizens initiative passed in 1992. It receives up to half of Lottery proceeds. GOCO’s mission is “*to help preserve, protect, enhance and manage the state’s wildlife, park, river, trail and open space heritage.*”

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