



Photo Credit: Sonoran Institute

## SOMETHING TO SAVE

Working ranches and farms, clean rivers and streams, small towns, scenic views, and world-class recreation opportunities—these are things people enjoy about living and working in Garfield County, and the reasons tourists come to visit. Working lands and access to open spaces not only enhance our quality of life but also provide jobs and fuel our economy. They are assets worth saving.

Ironically, these assets—the very qualities that attract people to Garfield County—are put at greatest risk as more people move here. As our population grows, there will be more pressure on our remaining open lands and increased demands on our existing parks, trails, and recreation amenities.

Many people believe that we need to protect open land assets in Garfield County, but how and which ones? How do we preserve and enhance the benefits these areas

provide as we accommodate future growth? And how do we ensure that conservation investments are cost-effective and reflect local values?

In late 2011 and early 2012, a citizen's group—the Garfield Legacy Project, or GLP—led a community-wide effort to answer these questions. The group sought to identify the areas of the county where open lands are most valued—and valuable—as natural assets, and to consider how they can be protected as the population continues to grow. The result of this process is called the Garfield Greenprint for Conservation and Economic Opportunity.

By bringing into focus the types of areas that are most important to conserve, this project marked a critical step forward for local efforts to create a voluntary, non-regulatory program to conserve agriculture, develop trails and open space, and protect wildlife habitat and other important areas in Garfield County.

## THE GREENPRINT

A Greenprint is a visual roadmap for voluntary conservation based on local residents' goals and priorities. It is intended to serve as a guide for voluntary land conservation with willing landowners, and ensure that future conservation investments are strategic, cost-effective, and representative of community values. At the core of the 12-month Garfield Greenprint project was a series of discussions with residents about what they value about living here and what they feel is worth protecting.

Once the community identified these values and conservation goals, a Steering Committee discussed and ranked them. The project's Steering Committee was a diverse group of 60 people from all major geographies and industries in Garfield County. Using publicly available, science-based data, the Steering Committee translated the values into a series of "asset maps." These maps are not regulatory but are meant to provide a picture of the private lands throughout the county and within each municipality that, if conserved, would best meet Garfield County's conservation goals.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Throughout the Greenprint process, residents provided a wide range of ideas and comments concerning land conservation. The project coordinators captured these comments and developed a set of Guiding Principles intended to help direct the project, both in terms of the planning process and the Greenprint implementation.

- **Use conservation to create economic opportunity**
- **Reflect local needs and values**
- **Keep water on agricultural lands**
- **Provide for multiple uses and multiple benefits**
- **Conservation is voluntary**
- **Avoid incompatible uses of conserved lands**
- **Energy development and conservation can coexist**

**Studies show that open lands programs can provide numerous economic benefits by:**

- » Supporting agriculture and ranching industries.
- » Increasing the value of nearby land by 5% -20%.
- » Drawing and retaining businesses and talent.
- » Supporting recreation economies.
- » Protecting water supplies.
- » Boosting tourism. Garfield County's tourism economy supports more than 3,700 jobs.

## THE CONSERVATION RESIDENTS CARE ABOUT

Through a series of public meetings and open houses, citizen interviews, an online survey, and the participation of the Steering Committee, the Greenprint process identified the community's seven primary conservation goals:

**Preserve water quality and quantity** – Water is the lifeblood of the county, from sustaining wildlife and native plants, to providing a playground for recreationalists of all stripes, to irrigating hay fields and beyond. Residents identified the protection and care of drinking water and surface water features as the predominate issue in the county.

**Conserve working ranches and farms** – Residents placed a high value on the protection and sustainability of working lands in order to support the local food economy and to preserve the area's traditional economy, scenic character, and rural way of life.

**Preserve and enhance recreational/tourism opportunities** – Residents believe access to public lands, rivers, and streams is important to tourism and recreation. Hunting and fishing, hunting guiding, mountain biking, hiking, four-wheel driving, snowmobiling, and numerous other recreation and tourism businesses rely on access to the backcountry.

### Create open land buffers around communities –

The public valued having buffers between the urbanizing and rural portions of the county as a means of preserving small-town character and as a way to provide visual relief between towns. Scenery is a known economic asset.

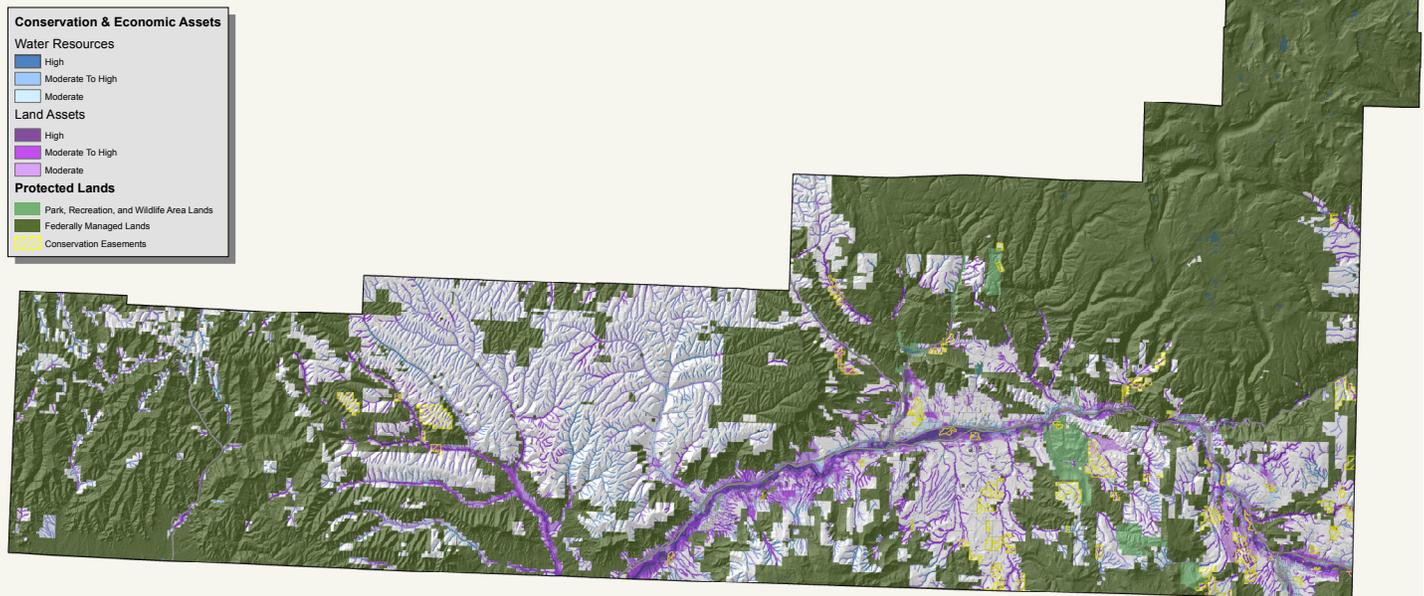
### Enhance trail systems –

Whether by foot, hoof, or wheel, Garfield County is home to people and tourists who get out and play. Trails, be they hard or soft, enhance our ability to be outside, get around, exercise, and introduce the next generation to the outdoors.

**Protect wildlife habitat and native plants –** The county has healthy populations of mule deer, elk, bears, and many species of bird for hunters and wildlife watchers. Residents value lands that provide wildlife corridors within the region and supply important habitat for threatened and endangered plants and animals.

**Restore impaired waters –** Some healthy rivers and streams in Garfield County have been compromised and need to be restored, whether by planting native vegetation, removing weeds (like Tamarisk and Russian Olive), stabilizing streambanks, or other activities.

## Garfield County Combined Conservation Priorities



## BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Recognizing the relationship between open lands, quality of life, and economic development, the maps that arose from the community’s conservation goals represent the county’s most valuable open land assets.

In addition to the individual asset maps, the Steering Committee produced one overall map of the most important assets. Using the results of a recent countywide public opinion poll, the Steering Committee applied weights to the conservation goals and then combined the individual maps into one map (pictured above). By showing where multiple goals could be accomplished in one place, this map highlights the areas that represent the biggest “bang for the buck” for future conservation efforts.

“As someone who has made a home in Garfield County, I think about how I want this home to be for my children and granddaughter. When I think of what has given me joy over the past 40 years, it isn’t the convenience of a new shopping center or a new house where a hayfield used to be; it’s a camp in the high-country, a walk along the river with my dogs, and the pleasure of a farmer’s market dinner with the family.”

—Martha Cochran

## WORKING WITH INTERESTED LANDOWNERS

Many landowners recognize the benefits of protecting their land through conservation easements, whether it is because they want to maintain their agricultural land for future generations, or to realize tax and estate planning benefits. The vast majority of landowners believe that conserving their land is important for many reasons: as a source of food, scenery, wildlife habitat, or as a link to Western heritage.

That being said, whether they are from Carbondale or Rifle or Glenwood Springs or elsewhere in Garfield County, residents want to be free to make their own decisions about their property. The Greenprint strongly respects this value and will be used only to help guide voluntary land conservation with willing, private landowners.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GARFIELD COUNTY

As Garfield County grows, we will need to make important decisions about the open lands assets that contribute to our quality of life and economic viability. The Garfield Greenprint for Conservation and Economic Opportunity provides a vision for strategic conservation based on local values and the best available science.

Not all of the lands identified will be able to be conserved, but the Greenprint can guide local governments and future conservation partners in making well-informed investments—through willing landowners—to conserve our natural, cultural, and recreational assets.

“Good friends and ranching neighbors of mine were somewhat critical of my decision to deed restrict our ranch with conservation easements. I explained to them my thinking. First, tourism is one of our main industries; people come here to look at mountains and ranches, not subdivisions. Secondly, I am being paid to keep the ranch a ranch. How great is that? Thirdly, you can still sell it as a ranch here in the mountains of Colorado. Later, I found out that my friends who were initially skeptical of my decisions got conservation easements on their place not long after we had that discussion.”

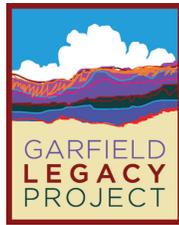
—Wendy McNulty

### Project Coordinators

Garfield Legacy Project  
The Trust for Public Land  
Sonoran Institute

### Partners and Funders

Aspen Valley Land Trust  
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The information in this document does not necessarily represent the ideas or opinions of project funders

For more information, please visit:  
[www.garfieldlegacy.org](http://www.garfieldlegacy.org) and [www.tpl.org/garfield](http://www.tpl.org/garfield)

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