

Testimony of Ogden Driskill  
Before the House Committee on Agriculture  
Cheyenne, Wyoming  
May 4, 2010

Chairman Perterson, Ranking Member and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to discuss conservation and the new farm bill.

I am a working, 6<sup>th</sup> generation rancher. Our family began ranching in Texas in the 1850s and trailed cattle into Wyoming by 1871. Love for the land and livestock has kept our family with a keen sense of the values of intact ranchland. I am a member of the WY Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust Board of Directors. I also serve on the Board of the Land Trust Alliance, a national trade organization dedicated to establishing guidelines for quality conservation as well as ethical transactions and organizational oversight. From these perspectives, I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of voluntary, conservation incentives on private lands, particularly those that protect our working ranch lands, permanently.

Thank you for some of the positive changes gained in the 2008 Farm Bill which provided:

- a. Generous funding of the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program;
- b. Reauthorization of the Grasslands Reserve Program;
- d. Elimination of the need for the federal government to be a co-holder of conservation easements but rightfully acknowledges the United States as funder.
- e. Recognition of the importance of land trusts as 3<sup>rd</sup> party entities that can hold, manage and enforce easements on private working landscapes.
- f. The ability to count a landowner donation of a portion of the conservation value as match;

**Why is the conservation of private ranchland in Wyoming important?**

- 43% of the land in Wyoming is privately owned. 93% of the private land is in agricultural production. We rank 1st in the nation for the average size of ranches and farms: the av. size is 3600 acres with 80% of farms/ranches operating on 5000 acres or more). These lands are the most productive in the state, agriculturally as well as from a broader biological perspective. They encompass much of our riparian lands, often buffer national parks and forests, and tend to be in the transition areas linking mountains and plains. They are highly sought after by developers and trophy landowners.
- Nationally, about 40 million acres of land were newly developed between 1982 and 2007, bringing the national total to about 111 million acres. The American Farmland Trust describes the current rate as one acre every two minutes.
- Population growth in the Intermountain West has stimulated competition between exurban developers and agricultural producers for the allocation of land and other natural resources.
- The average price of a ranch in Wyoming increased by more than three times on a production-unit basis from 1993-1995 and 2002-2004, and the average price for irrigated meadowland in Wyoming nearly doubled.
- 8.7 million acres of agricultural land in Wyoming are managed by operators 65 years-of-age and older. What happens when they retire? These funds can help enable a new generation of producers by providing much needed capital and helping to keep ranches at ag value.

## **Why are the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program and Grasslands Reserve Program Critical to Conserving Wyoming Ranchlands?**

- Wyoming's wide open spaces and working ranchlands define the Cowboy State. There is a culture here which is clearly separate from the more urban areas of our country. The land use patterns of our state preserve this uniquely western culture, and also provide wildlife habitat – particularly winter range, breeding grounds and uninterrupted migration routes. They enable our second-largest industry, tourism, and co-exist with our first – the production of energy.
- WY ranchers are hit hard with regulatory programs – this voluntary, incentive program has the potential to do far more good in the long run, at less cost.
- FRPP dollars leverage millions of dollars – from private individuals and foundations as well as state investment. The Trust for Public Land has determined that for every dollar spent on private land conservation, \$6 is returned in natural resource benefit, including forage for both livestock and wildlife and other ecosystem services.

## **How can we build and improve these programs?**

- This year, \$6 million will be allocated to WY projects. There is at a minimum, a \$50 million backlog according to our state NRCS office – but just submitted projects. Every land trust in this state has even more projects in the pipeline, without any advertising whatsoever. Please keep FRPP and GRP fully funded. Take the long view. The benefit of conservation easements does not produce instant gratification. They are an investment in our future. Keep these important tools in the 2012 Farm Bill. They provide the most efficient bang for our buck.
- Private land trusts are community based! And, they provide conservation benefit through the protection of private lands far more efficiently than the federal government! Enable private land trusts with the right tools:
  - Reduce or eliminate the required cash match with FRPP. Allow third-party easements the same benefit of no cash match required as the federal government receives with GRP. Match dollars are difficult to raise and the need exponentially increases each year.
  - Consider funding the transactions costs for donated easements.
  - These two suggestions would make our federal investment go many times further.
- Stay clear of using these funds for the benefit single species management. The best thing we can for species like the sage grouse, for example, is to keep large open lands unfragmented, sparsely populated, and available for the production of natural resources.

## **What is working the best?**

- Private land conservation groups that are geared specifically to working farms and ranches are making huge strides at protecting large critically important lands from development or conversion. They have the trust of the agricultural community as well as the expertise to write, document and enforce easements.
- PORT (Partnership of Rangeland Trusts), consisting of agricultural land trusts in Wyoming, California, Colorado, Montana, Oregon, Nevada, Kansas and our newest Texas has conserved over 1.7 million acres of ranchlands in the last 15 years, making it the fastest growing conservation segment in the country today. As of 2008 PORT members held 1 in 6 privately held easements in the United States.
- FRPP and are great programs-all they are lacking is slight refinement and increased funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to being a part a helping agriculture remain viable into the next century.

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#### Bio

Ogden is a 6<sup>th</sup> generation rancher managing the family ranch located at Devils Tower, He is a graduate of Hulett High School, Casper College and attended the University of Wyoming before returning to manage the ranch in 1981.

Ogden and his wife Rosanne, have three children. Andrea, Katerie and Lincoln. All are actively involved in the ranch and associated businesses.

Ogden is active in numerous organizations and boards. Of special pride are being a founding member of the Wyoming Stockgrowers Agricultural Land Trust (WSGALT) and a founding member of Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT) with over 1 million acres under easements. He is a board member of the Land Trust Alliance.

Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules\* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2007.

Name: Ogden Driskill  
Address: P. O. Box 155 Devils Tower, Wyoming 82714  
Telephone: 307-680-5555  
Organization you represent (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2007, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do **NOT** require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: - None - Amount: \_\_\_\_\_  
Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2007, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_  
Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: 

\* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.

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U.S. House of Representatives  
Information Required From Non-governmental Witnesses

House rules require non-governmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Ogden Driskill

2. Business Address: P.O. Box 155

Devils Tower, Wyoming 82714

3. Business Phone Number: 307-680-5555

4. Organization you represent: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:

Founding Member Wyoming Stockgrowers Assn Land Trust  
Found Member Partnership of Rangeland Trusts  
Board Member Land Trust Alliance

6. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.