

AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

# Protecting a fragile landscape

Lewis Fillmore has spent a lifetime preventing damage to ranch

BY CHRIS WOODKA  
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Lewis Fillmore stood on top of a small hill by the side of Boone Road.

"There used to be a house here. There is a house here, underneath the sand. I've had Sunday dinner in this house," Fillmore said, surveying miles of spacious grassland in all directions about 10 miles north of Boone. "There were fields there, where we grew mostly pinto beans. It's all been seeded in, so the dirt stopped blowing. This soil is sandy, and fragile."

The mound of sand that swallowed the house is one of the reasons Fillmore, 81, remains passionate about preserving the land he's always called home.

Even though he commutes to his 11,000-acre ranch in Pueblo County four or five times a week from his home in Colorado Springs, the land that supports his cattle operation is always on his mind.

Not enough to keep him up at night. His sons, Ron and Don, run their own cattle operations in the area and are available to assist their father.

"They seem to appreciate my help, and as long as they do, I'll keep giving it," Fillmore said.

Drought has cut into the business. "We run hundreds of cows, where we



Cattle gather around a water tank marked by an old windmill on the Fillmore ranch.

used to run thousands."

Fillmore's grandfather, Arl Fillmore, brought the family from Kansas in 1917 to farm and ranch on a small acreage. Fillmore's father, Arthur, was 4 at the time. Arthur spent his lifetime enlarging the operation in the area north of Boone.

Working for his father, he got his first lessons about the need to protect his land.

"I've been in many a dirt storm," Fillmore said. "You'd be out working and the wind would come up. You'd have a hard time seeing anything on the way home."

Fillmore's ranch is a lifetime labor of love. He started building up the land in 1956 with a 480-acre farm his father helped finance. He's never sold that farm or any of the other land north of Boone that he

bought. Over the years, he's traded numerous properties in other areas.

He bought and quickly sold an irrigated wheat farm in Weld County in 1958.

Later, he purchased a farm closer to home in the Hanover area of southern El Paso County.

"I sold it to some people, and then they sold it to some others who subdivided it," Fillmore said. "They split it up into 40-acre tracts and moved old school buses and trailers on it. I suppose those have to go somewhere, but I still feel bad about it. I didn't know about conservation easements then."

He's put much of his own land into conservation easements to preserve it.

Starting with that 480-acre farm, he added a few hundred acres at a time. He

and his brother Larry each bought half of their father's operation in the same area.

By the early 1970s, Fillmore had 3,000 dryland acres and 3,000 irrigated acres.

"Pinto beans were a big crop in the early days," Fillmore said. "They seem to do better in this country. You could raise some wheat. In some years you could get good crops."

Beginning in 1963, Fillmore also purchased and leased land in the mountains, moving herds there for spring and returning them to Pueblo County in the winter months. He continued that for about 40 years, until freight prices got too high.

The need to protect the fragile land has always been Fillmore's core value, however.

In the 1980s, he enrolled



Lewis Fillmore stands in the middle of his 11,000-acre ranch north of Boone. He is being honored for his lifetime of conservation work.

LIFETIME HONORS

Lewis Fillmore will receive the Stuart P. Dodge Award for lifetime achievement in conservation from the Palmer Land Trust and will be presented the award at a banquet on Sept. 23 at Cheyenne Mountain Resort in Colorado Springs. Fillmore is a

former board member of the Palmer Land Trust. He also served for two terms on the District 70 school board from 1965-77.

He and his wife Linn live in Colorado Springs and have four children, six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

many acres in the federal Conservation Reserve Program. Working with six neighbors and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, 15,000 acres were planted back to grasses in the area.

The biggest changes came from 2005-07, when Fillmore and his sons put in miles of fence and water pipelines. They developed a rotational grazing plan that prevents any one portion of the ranch from being chewed down by cattle.

Fillmore also placed

7,000 acres of the most fragile land into conservation easements during that time to prevent it from ever being subdivided.

"Rotating cattle is part of the way to conserve this land to keep this old, fragile soil from blowing," Fillmore said.

Six decades into that work, Fillmore shows no signs of slowing down on the job.

"I really thought I was going to retire a few years ago," Fillmore said. "That didn't work out."

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PROBLEMS

## Human trafficking is 'here ... it's huge'

Film discussion highlight victims' sad treatment

BY RYAN SEVERANCE  
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

Human trafficking is occurring in Pueblo and its surrounding areas whether residents realize it or not.

That was one of the messages officials delivered Saturday morning during a panel discussion on the issue at El Pueblo History Museum.

"There's a perception sometimes that it's not going on here but it's here," said Gloria Gutierrez, who moderated the discussion that followed an hourlong film the some 35 people in attendance watched about human trafficking.

Sgt. Brad Unger with the Pueblo Police Department said for evidence that human trafficking is happening here, just look at the advertisements for Pueblo on free classified ad websites such as Craigslist and Backpage.com.

"It's huge," he said. Trooper Mark Buneta with the Colorado State Patrol said human trafficking in Pueblo is part of a trickle down effect.

"It's eye-opening I think, when you have smaller communities like Pueblo and you realize it's here, it's going on and at all times," Buneta said. "It trickles down from Denver, it trickles down from Colorado Springs and it trickles down to Pueblo and it's in the smaller rural communities even east of here like La Junta, Rocky Ford and Fowler."

Gutierrez, Unger, Buneta and representatives from Pueblo Rape Crisis Services and the Pueblo City-County Health Department all participated in the discussion hosted by the Alliance to Combat Human Trafficking-Pueblo.

Human trafficking is defined as a severe form of exploitation of another person involving force, fraud or coercion for labor or sexual purposes. Trafficking does not require transportation of persons across state or country borders.

Those in attendance viewed a documentary called "Tricked" before the discussion. The 2013 film documents human sex trafficking from the perspective of pimps, victims, the "johns" who pay for the sex and law enforcement who are trying to crack down on the crime.

Buneta said fighting human trafficking can be daunting.

"What you saw in the film about the difficulties of it is what we're experiencing and that is that it is in our state and finding the victims and getting them to come forward and say, 'Yeah I'm a victim' is the hardest thing that we're experiencing," he said. "As you can see, they're being manipulated and to them that's their family and they're getting love and they're getting attention and the last thing you want to do is turn on that person that's giving you that. It takes time, it takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of man hours and it takes a lot of time away from other investigations."

Gutierrez said raising awareness and educating the public about the issue will help greatly in attacking it.

"Talk to others about it. Educate them," she said.

To get help, report a tip or request services anonymously 24/7 call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 1-888-373-7888.

For more information or to get involved with the Alliance to Combat Human Trafficking, contact aht.pueblo@gmail.com.

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CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/FILE

The Colorado Department of Transportation will cease work that requires lane closures in Pueblo during the Colorado State Fair.

TRANSPORTATION

## CDOT: Lane closures Fair game

Will stop that sort of work when expo begins

BY RYAN SEVERANCE  
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

The Colorado Department of Transportation said Colorado State Fairgoers this year can expect to not have to deal with traffic delays due to construction being done as part of the ongoing Interstate 25 Ilex Street to City Center Drive project.

In an effort to support the 11-day Fair and all of the activities associated with it in the community, CDOT and contractor Flatiron Constructors will not be doing construction activities requiring lane closures during the Fair's run.

CDOT said crews will be working at night during the week of Aug. 23, but there will be no

night work during the Fair from Aug. 28 to Sept. 7.

"The State Fair has a 146-year history in Pueblo. We recognize the event's importance to this region and have scheduled our work during this timeframe to be off-road with no impacts to traffic on I-25 or any of the surrounding streets that are part of

this project," said Scott Dalton, who's managing the project for CDOT.

Interstate 25 between the accident-strewn Ilex interchange and City Center Drive is being rebuilt in phases. The total construction time is expected to last about 30 months.

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REGION ROUNDUP

### Cotter mill comment open

CANON CITY — The Colorado Department of Health is accepting informal public comment on documents relating to the Cotter Corp. Uranium Mill decommissioning.

The documents will figure prominently in the remedial investigation and feasibility

study and will help health officials make the ultimate selection of a plan to decommission the site, said Warren Smith, community involvement manager for the state health department.

Comments should be submitted to Jennifer Opila at jennifer.opila@state.co.us by Oct. 31. Documents in the collection can be accessed

at recycle4colorado.ipower.com/Cotter/hxdocs.htm.

### Nonprofit grants put on hold

SALIDA — City grants to area nonprofits are on hold pending resolution of the city's operating budget shortfall.

The program may be discontinued or

scaled back if sales tax revenue is not available. New restrictions on the use of a portion of the city's sales tax revenue, passed by voters in March, essentially defunded some government operations and budget priorities are being reassessed, said Christian Samora, deputy city clerk.

— Compiled by Tracy Harmon