COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

VALUE OF THE VIEWSHED ROUTT COUNTY

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Privately owned agricultural lands in Routt County are central to county identity and provide valuable ecosystem services and aesthetic benefits. Development pressure in the area is significant for both residential and commercial purposes, putting these lands at risk of conversion.

The purpose of this project is to assess property-owning residents of Routt County's willingness to pay to preserve existing agricultural working lands and to protect and restore environmental resources in the area. A survey was conducted in winter of 2026 in which property owners of the county demonstrated their support for these objectives by voting on two hypothetical referendums to allow us to estimate willingness to pay.

Previous studies on ranchland conservation have been conducted in Routt County; this project in part acts as an update to those studies to showing changing perceptions and attitudes over the last three decades.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

- Update prior land conservation studies in Routt County
- Provide information to help inform conservation policy decisions
- Determine willingness to pay for the proposed conservation programs

WHAT I DID

- Cleaned and validated survey data
- Generated statistical analysis to support conservation policy decisions
- Constructed willingness-to-pay models based on contingent valuation methods
- Interpreted results with the Routt County population in mind
- Summarized findings for policymakers, stakeholders and the public via writeups and presentations

Figure 1.



Figure 2.



HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY EDUCATION

- Graduate coursework application to real-world policy
- Use of a contingent valuation framework for valuing non-market goods
- Analysis of survey data
- Communication of technical results
- Network with Colorado policymakers and agricultural & environmental stakeholders

Figure 3.



SURVEY RESULTS

Property-owning residents of Routt County demonstrated a significant increase in willingness to pay for ranchland conservation since last investigated, with willingness to pay increasing 17 percentage points since 2004 relative to the median property tax bill in the county.

Respondent characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of support for working lands conservation include higher educational attainment, longer property ownership duration and a high enjoyment of local working lands.

Respondent characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of support for natural resource conservation include education levels, while duration of property ownership increases are associated with a lowered support likelihood.

Interestingly, long-term property ownership had opposite effects on support for each referendum, contributing to greater support for the working lands program but decreased support for a broader environmental conservation program.

Table 1. Willingness to Pay Estimates

	Primary Willingness To Pay Estimate	Lower-bound Estimate	Upper-bound Estimate	Total Economic Value
Working Lands Program	$1,059	$896	$1,429	$18 million - $29 million
Environmental Resources Program	$847	$728	$1,012	$15 million - $20 million

NEXT STEPS

- Expansion into a Master's thesis
- Journal article publication of findings
- Survey and analysis replication in other counties