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PARTNERSHIP OF RANGELAND TRUSTS CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF IMPACT

(TOPEKA, KS)—As farms and ranches across America are presented with an unprecedented series of challenges and opportunities, the Partnership of Rangeland Trust (PORT), a nine-member alliance of land trusts in the West and Midwest with a focus on conserving working lands, is celebrating 20 years of making a difference together.

For the past two decades, agriculture has faced an increasingly uncertain future. Industrialization and urbanization have posed a threat to the nations' vast and unique private farmlands, rangelands and grasslands. Since 2004, PORT members, each with an affiliation to their state's livestock trade association, have banded together to help keep working lands in working hands.

Collectively, PORT member organizations have helped more than 2,000 families voluntarily conserve more than 3 million acres of vibrant working lands across 12 states. This regional alliance originally included six land trusts in 2004, including California Rangeland Trust, Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Kansas Livestock Association Ranchland Trust (now called the Ranchland Trust of Kansas) and the Oregon Rangeland Trust (now expanded to the Northwest Rangeland Trust,

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serving Oregon, Washington and Idaho). Subsequent additions have included Nebraska Land Trust, South Dakota Agricultural Land Trust and Texas Agricultural Land Trust (which also serves Oklahoma). The alliance's mission is to advocate for the conservation of working lands and western heritage for the benefit and well-being of future generations.

"For 20 years, PORT has led the way in encouraging western states to establish land trusts that forge partnerships with local ranchers to preserve our treasured landscapes for future generations to enjoy," said U.S. Sen. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY). "PORT has been instrumental in preserving 3 million acres of our western landscapes, and I applaud this organization for its continued commitment to protecting our land and uplifting the communities who depend on them."

"I congratulate the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts on 20 years of excellence, advocating for private land conservation across the American West to safeguard our nation's precious and disappearing rangelands for generations to come. As Deputy Secretary of the Interior to President Clinton, I know that our national conservation goals cannot be achieved through public land ownership alone. We must empower private landowners to choose conservation, as my family did for our cattle ranch with the California Rangeland Trust in 1998. The Partnership of Rangeland Trusts and its member land trusts do this critical work every day without much fuss or fanfare. On this anniversary, I hope the dedicated staff, board members, supporters and landowners look back with immense pride on 3 million acres conserved across a dozen states. Now onto the next 3 million acres!" said U.S. Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA08).

Since its humble beginnings, PORT has grown into a driving force for conservation that supports agriculture, the environment, rural communities and the hardworking families who want to ensure their lands stay healthy and productive in perpetuity. With a keen focus on advocating for voluntary, common-sense incentives that work for farm and ranch families, some of PORT's biggest successes thus far stem directly from the partnerships it has built and the respect and trust it has earned on Capitol Hill.

Earlier this year, the [2022 Census of Agriculture](#) was released showing an alarming decline of 141,733 farms and ranches nationwide compared to just five years earlier with a loss of more than 18.4 million acres during that same timeframe. [Modeling released by the American Farmland Trust](#) (AFT) estimates an additional 4.5 million acres of farm and ranch land in the 12 Western and Midwestern states PORT serves could be lost to development and conversion by

2040 if trends continue. With so much at stake, working lands conservation is more critical than ever.

Now, with the 2024 farm bill in deliberation in Congress, PORT is stressing the prioritization of voluntary conservation programs, especially with the future of agriculture facing an unprecedented range of serious threats. In July, PORT was one of 500 organizations and companies representing a diverse set of farm bill stakeholders to send a letter to congressional leaders urging passage of a bipartisan bill before the end of the year.

During the 2018 farm bill negotiations, PORT played a significant role in advocating for and helping to secure a significant increase in funding—to the tune of \$2 billion over 10 years—for voluntary, working lands conservation. These farm bill programs, including the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, represent the largest federal funding source for private land conservation and create significant opportunities for farm and ranch families to conserve high-priority, working landscapes, open spaces, wildlife habitat and water resources.

“American Farmland Trust commends PORT for significantly elevating the issue of agricultural land loss in the West—and the value of voluntary conservation programs to help landowners keep working lands working,” said Cris Coffin, AFT Senior Policy Advisor and Director of the National Agricultural Land Network. “PORT has been an invaluable partner in building support for the federal Agricultural Conservation Easement Program and making it an effective tool for landowners seeking to protect their working lands for future generations. AFT looks forward to another 20 years of close collaboration with this effective and innovative partnership.”

Regardless of political party affiliation, conservation easements are widely used and have been successful tools to keep dedicated and knowledgeable stewards on the lands that serve as our country’s agricultural foundation. These programs are not just about conserving land; they are about empowering landowners, enhancing rural economies and safeguarding our environmental heritage. Well-stewarded, working lands are essential for food production and carbon sequestration. They act as a natural purification system for water to flow, cleanse the air we breathe, provide critical habitat for many species of wildlife, offer scenic viewsheds and so much more.

“For 20 years, the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts has been committed to conserving the working lands that are the backbone of the American West. By providing farm and ranch families with conservation tools that work for their operations, we’ve not only helped them keep these lands productive and working, but we’ve also supported the resilience of rural communities,” said Erik Glenn, president of the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts. “As we look to the future, PORT remains dedicated to advancing innovative, voluntary solutions that empower landowners, strengthen rural economies and ensure that these landscapes continue to provide lasting benefits for generations to come.”

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The Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT) is an alliance of agriculture-focused conservation organizations dedicated to preserving working farms and ranches and conserving productive agricultural lands. To date, PORT members have helped more than 2,000 families conserve more than 3.1 million acres across 12 western and midwestern states. For more information, visit www.rangelandtrusts.org.