

saltlake

MAGAZINE OF THE MOUNTAINWEST

SALTLAKEMAGAZINE.COM

FOR THE LOVE OF THE LAND

HOW REDFORD IGNITED A MOVEMENT TO PROTECT UTAH LANDS

CAVING IN

EXPLORE UTAH'S UNDERGROUND

PARK CITY'S
BEST BURGERS
(FOR EVERY BUDGET)

10

←← INCLUDING THIS ONE!

GREATEST UTAH MOVIE MOMENTS

June 2022 ■ \$4.95 ■ Display until June 30, 2022



7 25274 76991 9



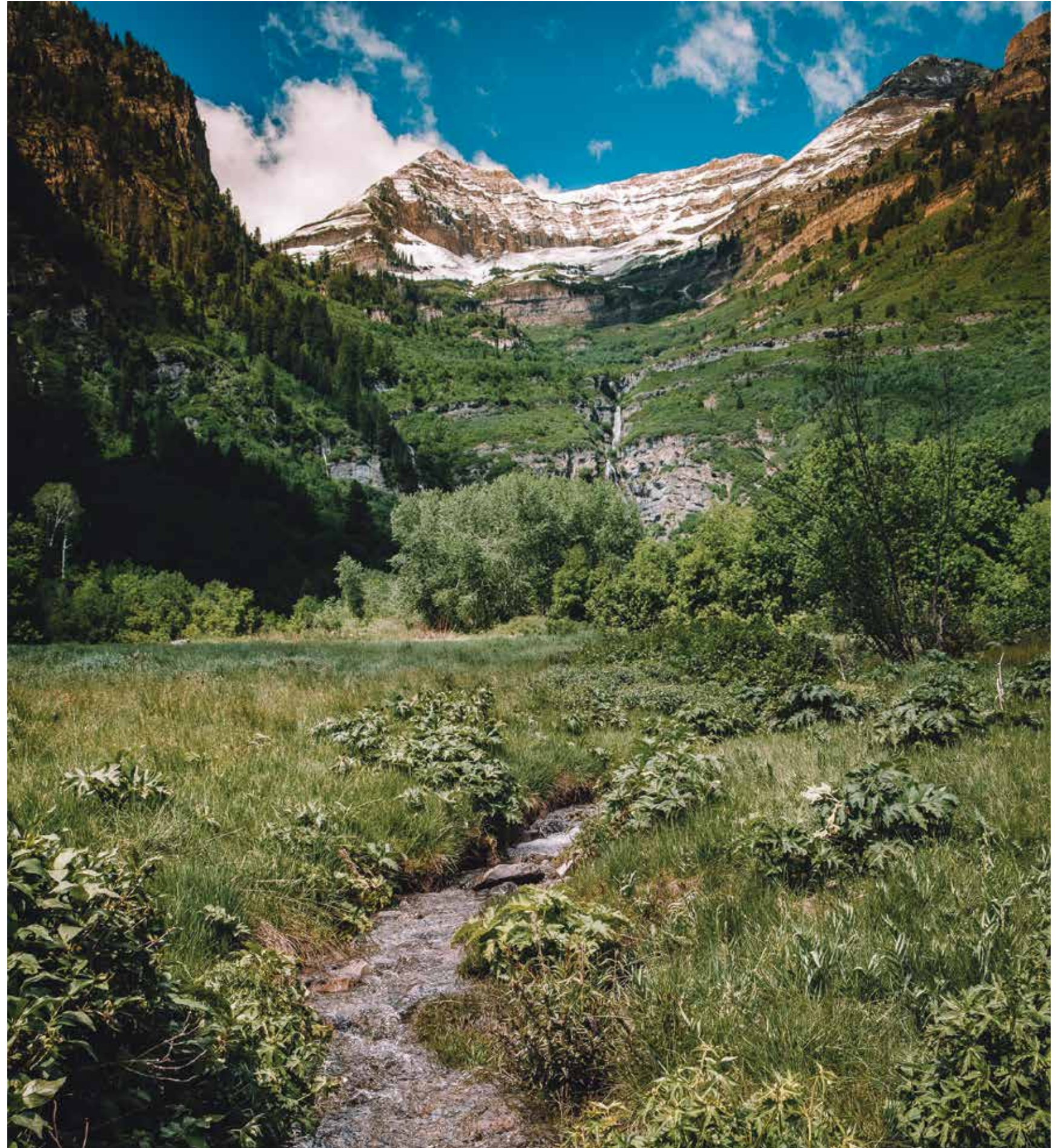
For *the* LOVE *of the* Land

How a movie star, a cowgirl
and a multigenerational
ranching family helped
ignite Utah's land
preservation movement

BY MELISSA FIELDS

PHOTO STUART RUCKMAN

(Below) Robert Redford above the hills of Sundance Ski Resort.
(Right) Stewart Falls Meadow



PHOTOS: (ABOVE) KRISTINA LOGGIA, (RIGHT) UTAH OPEN LANDS STAFF

The Movie Star

“We’re here about the future,” said Utah’s most famous transplant, Robert Redford. His sentiment was apt considering the occasion on the brisk October day in 1998 when he spoke those words while dedicating 860 acres at the base of Mount Timpanogos in Provo Canyon as the Redford Family Nature & Wildlife Preserve.

Redford was in his late teens when he first laid eyes on the near-pristine meadows, aspen stands and conifer forests that he’d eventually own and then preserve into perpetuity. He came upon that high-alpine Shangri-la in the mid-1950s by happenstance, as he took a wrong turn up the canyon while commuting between his parents’ home in Los Angeles and college in Boulder, Colo. In 1961 he purchased two acres in Provo Canyon where he built an A-frame cabin for his young family. Eight years later, Redford leveraged himself heavily, in

buy the canyon’s rickety ski resort, Timp Haven, renamed it Sundance, and pledged to “develop a little, conserve a great deal.” Over the ensuing years, Redford, his first wife Lola Van Wagenen and three of their children—James, Shauna and Amy—would spend countless hours exploring every corner of the canyon, both together and alone, using the land as a refuge from the confines of Redford’s exponentially growing celebrity and learning resilience and self-reliance along the way. “Everything I needed to survive New York City I learned in that canyon,” says Redford’s youngest daughter, Amy. “I was a feral child. Most of the wisdom I have is a by-product of what I learned in these mountains.”

As Redford’s career grew, so did his commitment to protecting land and water for future generations. He was a founding board member of the National Resource Defense Council, rallied a group of environmental activists to, in

“MOST OF THE WISDOM I HAVE IS A BY-PRODUCT OF WHAT I LEARNED IN THESE MOUNTAINS.”

—AMY REDFORD

Top: Heidi Redd, a Southern Utah rancher who broke rank with her neighbors and put her land into conservation easement. Bottom and right: The Canyonlands Research Center was established on Redd's ranch to study the intersection of climate change and land use.

1976, successfully prevent the construction of a power plant in what is now the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and attempted to find common ground among politicians, environmentalists and scientists through multiple summits at Sundance, including his so-called "Greenhouse Glasnost," held in 1989 long before most were aware of global warming's inconvenient truth. And so, considering both his familial connection to Provo Canyon and his greater concerns for the planet, the Redford family's 1998 decision to place almost 900 acres



of their backyard into a conservation easement with Utah Open Lands does not seem that unexpected. What is extraordinary, however, is how Redford, along with a southern Utah cowgirl and a multigenerational Box Elder County ranching family, embraced what was then a new idea and helped spark a movement with one goal: leaving the land be.

The Cowgirl

In the early 1990s, a few years after she and her husband, Robert, ended their 23-year marriage, Heidi Redd heard a knock at the door. "It was a real estate agent from Jackson Hole hired by Robert to sell his half of the ranch," Redd says. The ranch she is referring to is Dugout Ranch, 5,000-plus wild and scenic acres of red rock spires, desert grasslands and buttes located just south of Moab, bordered by Bears Ears National Monument, Indian Creek Recreation Area and the Manti-La Sal National Forest. "But I'm a cattle rancher, not a developer," Redd says. "And I knew that if we divided the land that it would lose its heart and the only thing left to do then would be to develop it." At the time, Redd sat on the board of the Canyonlands Field Institute. A fellow board member had recently worked with The Nature Conservancy of Utah (TNCU) to place his land in conservation easement, and it occurred to Redd that perhaps that may be the way she could prevent Dugout from becoming Moab 2.0.

"A conservation easement is like a bundle of sticks," explains Dave Livermore, longtime director of TNCU. "Lands placed under conservation easement with a land trust remain the property of the owner and can be sold like any other piece of land. But certain 'sticks'—like building or mining rights—are no longer part of that bundle, preventing those uses as the land changes hands into perpetuity." Owners of property placed in a conservation easement with a land trust are, of course, eligible for tax benefits like income tax deductions and estate tax credits, but those tax breaks rarely equate to a development cash-in. But money is, of course, not the point.

"Love for the land is, far and away, the biggest reason families put their land in a conservation easement," says Wendy Fisher, founder and executive director of Utah's oldest land trust, Utah Open Lands. "A farmer I know summed it up pretty succinctly: 'Concrete is the last crop.' Open

space is truly the final frontier and it's up to all of our collective graces to protect it."

Redd's initial conversations with TNCU evolved from placing the land under conservation easement to TNCU purchasing the land outright, with the commitment to maintain it as a working ranch and allow Redd to live there until her death. It took more than three years of negotiations with her ex-husband and other family members—"some friendly, some not so friendly," Redd says—to bring everyone to consensus. In 1997, almost eight years after her divorce, Redd entered into a union that, both then and now, many in Utah view as downright blasphemous: a partnership between a rancher and an environmental organization.

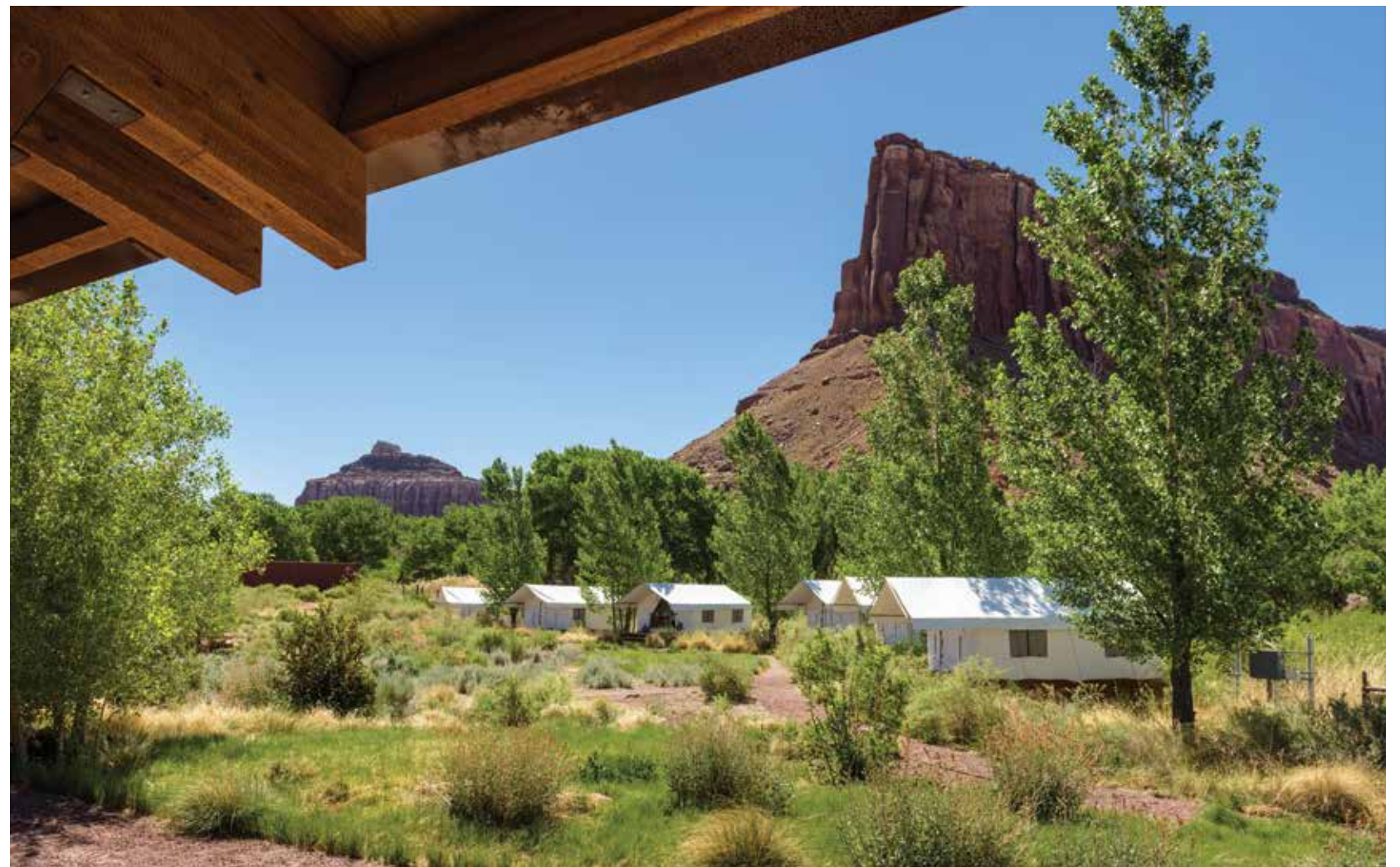
In 2009, TNCU deepened its commitment to Dugout with the establishment of the Canyonlands Research Center. There, scientists

from around the world study the intersection between climate change and land use, including how conservation and cattle ranching can coexist. Around 2015 Redd sold both her cattle herd and grazing rights to more than 300,000 acres, abutting Dugout to TNCU as well. Redd's son and daughter-in-law, Matt and Kristen, now manage the herd at Dugout which now includes the ranch's original Red Angus cows as well as Mexican Criollo cows that are smaller, lighter and able to graze farther from water.

Regardless of what her peers or local lawmakers might think, Redd has no regrets about her decision to sell her land to TNCU. "The ranch is running half as many cattle now as when I was running it, which was half as many as when my ex-husband and I were running it together. 25 years ago, very few of us talked about climate change. You just can't run the same number of

I KNEW THAT IF WE DIVIDED THE LAND THAT IT WOULD LOSE ITS HEART

—HEIDI REDD



PHOTOS: (LEFT) PORTRAIT: TED WOOD; (LEFT) STUART RUCKMAN; (RIGHT) STUART RUCKMAN



Left: Della Ranch in Northwest Utah.
Below: Jay Tanner.



“THIS IS HOME, WE KNOW WE NEED TO TAKE CARE OF IT IF IT’S GOING TO CONTINUE TO BE ABLE TO TAKE CARE OF US.”

—JAY TANNER

cows here that you once could. And I will not sacrifice this landscape for cattle,” she says.

The Rancher

“My property is not Dugout,” explains Jay Tanner, describing his sprawling Della Ranch, 17,000 acres of sagebrush and open skies located northwest of the Great Salt Lake in the Grouse Creek Valley, where his family has run cattle since the 1870s. No real estate agents have called upon Tanner—Della Ranch’s acute remoteness has seen to that—but over the years Tanner had observed how juniper trees were becoming more and more prevalent on his family’s land. “They probably got a foothold with the arrival of white settlers,” Tanner says. The trees were sucking water from the grasses he

depends on to support his herd. And, as revealed by a Utah State University study, the juniper trees had drastically diminished the grassland’s previously robust greater sage-grouse populations. “This is home,” Tanner says. “We know we need to take care of it if it’s going to continue to be able to take care of us.” And so, the Tanner family, along with a few neighboring ranchers, partnered with TNCU and National Conservation Resource Service (NCRS) to improve more than 9,000 acres of greater sage-grouse habitat on their properties. Almost immediately, Tanner noticed more greater sage-grouse on his ranch; more elk, antelope, mountain lions, coyotes and other species followed. And yes, the grasses and forage flourished for his cows, too. “What’s good for the bird is good for the herd,” Tanner says.

PHOTOS: STUART RUCKMAN

In 2017, the Tanners doubled down on their land conservation efforts by placing 7,000 acres of Della Ranch in conservation easement, allowing a huge swath of the range to remain forever uninterrupted by homes or roads. The Tanner family was compensated for the easement by TNCU, NCRS and Utah’s LeRay McAllister Critical Land Conservation Fund, but again, at a fraction of what the payout would have been if he’d sold to a developer. “There’s no question that I had a financial interest in it,” Tanner says. “It helped us reduce our debt load and expand into other areas. But we also did it out of concern for the future. Maybe 100 years from now people smarter than me will have a different opinion, but now I know this land will always be as it is right now. And as we expand, this will not be the last easement we do.”

The Movement

Whether or not the actions taken by the Redfords, Redds and Tanners have turned hearts and minds in Utah toward land conservation is speculative. But there’s no question that both the public and government are recognizing the value in keeping land open. “Conservation

was such a novel idea in the 1990s,” Fisher says. “But there’s emerged a very clear pace of landscapes being lost. The conversation started then about how we can balance open space and development to protect why Utah is so appealing in the first place.”

Not all conservation easements are on “out there” lands like Dugout and Della ranches. Urban open spaces like The Draw at Sugar House, Wasatch Hollow and Wheadon Farm Regional Park are all under conservation easement. This means that the respite they provide from the buildings, roads and homes surrounding them—as well as the functional benefits they provide like absorbing water during spring runoffs and heat in the summer—will be in place forever. All told, the conservation easements held by nonprofit and government land trusts in Utah are in the millions of acres. A few of the higher-profile land conservation efforts that have occurred in the aughts and 2010s—both as conservation easements and outright purchases—include Empire Canyon, Round Valley, McPolin Farmlands and Bonanza Flat Conservation Area in Park City; the Emigration Canyon Preserve, Grandeur Peak Natural Area, the H Rock Preserve in

LEAVE IT LOVED

For many Utahns, getting out into Utah’s public open spaces was an invaluable tool for weathering the pandemic. Many of us are now also enjoying a new remote work life that allows getting out there seven days a week versus just on the weekends. The result, says Utah Open Lands’ Wendy Fisher, is that visitation to Utah’s public spaces has increased by 300% since March 2020. Heidi Redd is seeing the impacts of exploding visitation both in the Indian Creek Recreation Area, which neighbors Dugout Ranch and on the ranch itself, where camping is strictly prohibited. “The indiscriminate camping I see has become much more frequent,” Redd says. “We don’t matter here. What matters is the land and when it’s ruined, there is no more. We all need to recognize our part in preserving this landscape.” While Fisher acknowledges that the discovery of the outdoors by so many certainly improves many people’s quality of life, “we need to figure out ways to manage our open spaces, so they are not loved to death.” As such, Utah Open Lands has launched “Leave It Loved,” described by Fisher as “a call to challenge our inner stewards so that, in the exploration of nature, we take on the responsibility of being mindful of good trail etiquette, packing out what we and others pack in and respect the natural world and the species that inhabit these open spaces.” For details, visit utahopenlands.org.



Della Ranch

Salt Lake City; Bridal Veil Falls in Provo; Moab's Castleton Tower; and Corner Canyon in Draper.

"For many years public funding for open space in Utah was very modest compared to other states," says Livermore, who has been the director of TNCU since it opened in Utah in 1984. "But in the last six years, the legislature has gotten younger and more forward-

thinking and has appropriated more and more funds to open space preservation." Livermore also credits Utah's philanthropic community for stepping up in a big way. And both he and Fisher confirmed they are seeing more of what they term as "conservation buyers," people who place land in conservation easement at the onset of purchase versus doing so after the land has been in their family for generations.

"Conservation is about protecting land, never forgetting about what it could have been and being grateful for what was saved," Fisher says. "Bonanza Flat was slated to be additional commercial ski resort development and an 18-hole golf course. I think in the end we'll be much more grateful for what was preserved than what was developed."

In 2020, after a several years-long vetting process, Robert Redford sold his beloved Sundance Resort to Broadreach Capital Partners and Cedar Capital Partners. Part of the deal included the creation of the Redford Family Elk Meadows Preserve, 300 acres of wildlife habitat, streams and the Stewart Falls hiking

trail—a corner of the canyon dear to Redford, his children and grandchildren. "Part of being a responsible steward is understanding when it's time to pass the torch forward," Amy Redford says. The Elk Meadows Preserve "is one of my favorite pieces of land on the planet and it is very important to the overall experience of Sundance. A lot of my family's emotions are connected to that place. We came together cohesively to protect it into the future and hope others will follow suit."

Not many actors or directors can claim the level of iconic, national treasure status earned by Robert Redford. But the words that he used to close out the dedication ceremony of the Redford Family Nature & Wildlife Preserve more than 20 years ago seem indicative of a legacy that matters to him perhaps even more. "This is my gift to my community, myself and most of all, my children, to pass on to their children, so they can experience the land as something real rather than something seen in movies, described in history books or only imagined." ■

PHOTO STUART RUCKMAN



ON THE RIVER'S EDGE
AT THE ENTRANCE TO
ZION NATIONAL PARK



www.desertpearl.com
435.772.8888

