

# Land trust caps year with 3 river projects

By Kevin Huelsmann

The Jackson Hole Land Trust secured a conservation easement last month on 19 acres near the confluence of the Gros Ventre and Snake rivers, closing a year that saw the organization help conserve roughly 60 acres.

The easement was one of three projects land trust staff wrapped up in December, including the high-profile purchase of dozens of acres along the Snake River near the intersection of highways 22 and 390.

The 19-acre easement near the Gros Ventre and Snake is part of the River Rock Ranch, which is owned by John and Karin McQuillan.

The couple donated the easement to the organization.

The property, which sits west of Jackson Hole Golf & Tennis Club, is considered to be important habitat for a broad array of wildlife. The ranch is home to cutthroat trout, bald eagles, black bears, trumpeter swans and boreal toads, land trust staff said.

"Importance is not always measured in acres," said Laurie Andrews, the land trust's executive director.

Andrews said that while the acreage is not eye-popping, the area is incredibly important for wildlife.

The property also has a spring creek flowing through it that serves as spawning ground for cutthroat trout and is considered to be an important link for elk migrating between Grand Teton National Park and the National Elk Refuge.

The easement is the fourth the McQuillans have donated to the land trust since 2002. There now are 117 acres that have been protected at the ranch, which is used as a private residence.

On the same day the land trust finalized the conservation easement on the River Rock Ranch, it also closed a deal to purchase 40 acres along the Snake River through a partnership with the LOR Foundation and The Conservation Fund (see story on Page 14A).

On Dec. 2, land trust staff also completed the second piece of an ongoing project with the town of Jackson that is expected to conserve roughly 40 acres along Flat Creek when finished. The project is being carried out on an annual basis.