

Land Trust completes conservation deals

By THOMAS DEWELL
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The Jackson Hole Land Trust accepted a 37-acre conservation easement from John and Bobbie Nau last week, capping a year in which the organization completed three projects.

The easement completed last week conserves the majority of a parcel of land owned by the Naus along the Snake River north of Jackson and preserves habitat for boreal toads, Snake River fine-spotted cutthroat trout and elk, which use the property for rutting, calving and migration routes between Grand Teton National Park and the National Elk Refuge, according to a trust press release.

Also this week, the trust finalized the first phase of the Flat Creek Corridor Project, a partnership with the town of Jackson to conserve approximately 40 acres of wildlife habitat along Flat Creek and recreational trails on the northwest slope of Snow King Mountain. The balance of the project will be completed during the next four years, giving the town and the trust time to raise money to pay for the deal.

"These two projects demonstrate the importance of our creeks and rivers to the wildlife here in Jackson Hole," said Laurie Andrews, executive director of the trust. "These waterways provide habitat for aquatic species and form corridors for elk and other animals that move between different parts of the valley."

This year, the trust also protected a 940-acre ranch near Dubois and launched a 10-year, 1,500-acre conservation effort

in Alta.

In total, the trust conserved more than 1,000 acres in 2010, according to the trust press release.

The Nau easement was part of a planned residential development. The couple used a county land-use tool to get additional residential square footage in exchange for clustering development and conserving open space.

Completing conservation projects in 2010 has not been easy because the town and Teton County are rewriting the valley's land-development regulations, Andrews said. That has left people unsure of what the development potential will be on their property.

At the same time, the economy has people considering easements as a way to get money out of their land, and the federal government has extended tax credits for conservation easements.

"It is mixed," Andrews said of the climate for getting deals done. "The plan still being in play has a lot to do with it. The economy and the tax benefits have helped motivate people."

The rocky economy has left some people looking for ways to get money out of their land. The trust may be able to complete deals in 2011 if it can bring some funds to the table.

"People need some money," Andrews said.

In the coming year, the trust will be working on a few projects that could have big results for the valley, Andrews said.

"We've got some things in the pipeline," Andrews said. "To see them come through would be great. I hope I can say that a year from now."