

Behold the Beauty

Boyd Clark is all-eyes on the land as a volunteer easement monitor



Just a few high clouds dotted a blue August afternoon sky when Conservancy Volunteer Boyd Clark crossed Stone Bridge in his Toyota 4Runner to make his annual visit to Bunny Dines' Boxcar Ranch just north of Salida.

George, a ranch hand wearing a bright red shirt, baseball cap and rubber boots, walked over

from an irrigated field to offer a friendly greeting. The 90-acre Boxcar Ranch borders the Arkansas River and is surrounded on three sides by public lands. It was placed under conservation easement in 2014, tying shares in the New Salida Ditch to the property to protect the water from being sold off and moved to the Front Range.

The men exchanged hellos and just as George began telling tales about rattlers and bull snakes spotted on the property in recent days, Boyd glanced up to see a dozen Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep grazing in the middle of a nearby pasture.

"I can't understand why there isn't a long list of volunteers clamoring to get involved with the easement monitoring program," Boyd says. "I get to see this land, land that has conservation values, that is usually private and sometimes not open to the public. I get to walk the land and talk to the people who have a connection with it."

Boxcar Ranch's conservation values include irrigated pasture, protection of the riparian corridor along the river, habitat for the bighorn sheep, buffering of public lands, and protection of the scenic vista from the Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway.

Boyd monitors six of the Conservancy's 35 easement properties. The land trust's duty as the easement holder is to monitor every property each year to make sure it retains its conservation values.

Before visiting a property, Boyd reviews a baseline document describing the land and its values, taking notes. His job is to observe and record what he sees, so he brings a camera and his binoculars. If he visited the property the prior year, he reviews those notes and pictures. He spends a few hours on each property, then a

few more completing an 8-page monitoring form, which is returned to Conservancy staff for evaluation.

"Volunteers are not charged with making any determinations about the property," Boyd says. "These are fun visits where many times, I get an oral history of the property, what animals they are seeing and other information about the land."

A former software engineer, Boyd moved to Chaffee County from Colorado Springs with his wife, Pat, after their children grew up and left home. The family owned a cabin near Mount Princeton hot springs, visiting frequently and eventually deciding they'd like to live full-time in the Arkansas River Valley.

The Clarks made the move in 2008, eventually settling near Nathrop. They joined the Greater Arkansas River Nature Association, where they became active in a birding group and met Conservancy Executive Director Andrew Mackie.

Both Boyd and Pat have become dedicated birders since moving to the area. Boyd says he especially appreciates the vast amount of public land in Chaffee County and likes the rural nature that still supports agricultural production.

"I wanted to try to do my part to help preserve and protect the wonderful aspects of the county and the Arkansas River Valley," he says of joining the Conservancy in 2009.

In addition to easement monitoring, he volunteers as a member of the organization's Land Committee, which with the Board of Directors and staff, determines whether a proposed property holds the conservation values needed to pursue a conservation easement.

His position on the committee is similar to the monitoring work, in that he enjoys visiting properties and talking with the owners about their land.

The Conservancy is looking for additional volunteers to help monitor our easement properties. Please contact Lucy Waldo at lucy@centralcoloradoconservancy.org for more information. 🍌

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