



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE PROGRAM AWARDS \$22.4 MILLION TO SUMMIT LAND CONSERVANCY**

*The Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant will fund the protection of critical agricultural lands in the Kamas Valley*



**(Summit County, Utah) November 7, 2023** – Park City’s local accredited land trust, Summit Land Conservancy, has been awarded significant federal funding for conservation projects in the Kamas Valley. On November 1, the Conservancy received news they had been awarded \$22.4 million from the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service: one of 81 projects nationwide

granted through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The Regional Conservation Partnership Program leverages a voluntary approach to conservation that expands the reach of conservation efforts and climate-smart agriculture through public-private partnerships. Historic funding is made possible by both the Inflation Reduction Act, part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda, and the Farm Bill.

"RCPP not only provides an opportunity to work hand in hand with our partners in conservation like Summit Land Conservancy, it allows us to use tools like conservation easements to treat resource concerns in a way that is mutually beneficial to the community," said Emily Fife, NRCS State Conservationist for Utah.

The Kamas Meadows are characterized by farmland and expansive wetlands, with the Weber River flowing through the northern limits of the valley, and the Provo River running through the southern fringe. These rivers serve as a backbone to Northern Utah's agricultural and urban cores, providing water for irrigation and serving as an important drinking water source for over 65% of Utah's population. The Weber River is one of the main inflows of water to the Great Salt Lake and its surrounding wetlands which are facing unprecedented danger. Currently, the Weber River is one of Utah's most degraded and threatened river basins due to habitat fragmentation, widespread watershed degradation, and increasing water demands from urban expansion. The agricultural properties within the Kamas Meadows and along the Weber River provide a rich landscape of open space, wildlife habitat, and agricultural production, but are at risk of being displaced by rapid land conversion from meadows to housing and commercial developments. Conservation easements permanently protect these lands and encumber the water rights to allow the water to continue to serve its main ecological function by flowing to the Great Salt Lake.

Summit Land Conservancy worked with Emily Fife, NRCS State Conservationist for Utah who declared the Kamas Meadow an area of statewide importance due to unique soil and aquifer functions. Working in partnership with local landowners, the Conservancy will protect agricultural and environmental resources through permanent conservation easements. Preventing development within the Meadows will also maintain water quality and water flow through the Weber River basin ensuring the watershed for the Great Salt Lake.

The Conservancy plans to use the \$22.4 million RCPP funding to leverage other funding sources, including donations from individual donors, private foundations, and funds from Summit County's \$50 Million General Obligation open space bond passed by voters in 2021.

"Summit Land Conservancy is honored to be awarded this critical federal funding to help save the Kamas Valley," stated Chief Executive Officer of Summit Land Conservancy, Cheryl Fox. "I used to look out at the Kamas Meadows and think that there was no way we could save this essential landscape from the forces of development. This RCPP award changes all of that. Together with our partners at the NRCS, Summit County, landowners, and many individual supporters, we now have the opportunity to truly save this essential natural resource for the future."

In July 2023, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) approved Summit Land Conservancy as a Certified Eligible Entity for Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)-Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) programs. The NRCS determined that the Conservancy had an established agricultural land protection program that purchases easements and demonstrated an ability to acquire, manage, steward and enforce those easements. Such "Certified Entity" status is indicative of the confidence the NRCS has in the professionalism and experience of the Summit Land Conservancy and enables the Conservancy to fast-track its ACEP-ALE conservation easement applications.

Since 2011, Summit Land Conservancy has closed on 11 NRCS funded conservation easements. The most notable projects have been the Osguthorpe Farm "Green Heart of the Basin" (2019) and the Historic Monastery Farm in Huntsville (2022). These iconic properties each received ALE funding and had widespread community support and recognition. Currently, the Conservancy has two projects nearing completion from a 2020 RCPP award of \$9.4 million. Additionally, the NRCS has committed Agricultural Land Easement funding for two projects expected to close this year (Richins Chalk Creek and Andrus Farm). New 2023 grant awards for Wright Echo Canyon and Sulphur Springs have recently been obligated.

The newest RCPP funding allocation will allow Summit Land Conservancy to continue its vision to save large swaths of the Kamas Valley Meadows and aquifer for the benefit of people and nature.

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### **About Summit Land Conservancy**

Founded in Park City in 1998 as a project of Leadership Park City, the Summit Land Conservancy works with communities to protect and preserve land and water along the Wasatch Back for the benefit of people and nature.

In 2011, the Conservancy became the first land trust in the state of Utah to be nationally accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. It currently holds 51 permanent conservation easements and manages 2 preserves on over 13,500 acres of open space, much of it with public access in and around Park City. It protects swaths of Round Valley, Quarry Mountain, Empire Canyon, and the McPolin Farmlands, as well as farms and ranches along the Weber and Provo Rivers. It is currently working to preserve an additional 5,000+ acres across the Wasatch Back.

The Conservancy's goal when it started in 1998 was to raise money locally to save land locally, and that hasn't changed. Since 2011, the Conservancy has brought in over \$31 million federal dollars for local land conservation.

As a regional land trust, the Conservancy understands that open space is the heart of our rural and recreational communities. Area residents' sense of place is clearly defined by the shared landscapes that anchor them here. The mountains, trails, farms, and rivers connect people to each other and to the natural world. The Summit Land Conservancy cares for these lands forever, nurturing a healthy community that is founded on its strong connection to the places it has protected together.

More information is available on the Conservancy's website ([wesaveland.org](http://wesaveland.org)) and on Facebook ([facebook.com/WeSaveLand](https://facebook.com/WeSaveLand)), Instagram ([instagram.com/wesaveland](https://instagram.com/wesaveland)) and Twitter @Summit\_Land ([twitter.com/summit\\_land](https://twitter.com/summit_land)).