



The Monte Vista Wildlife Refuge.

Farmers approve farmland protection measure

At its annual convention in November, the Colorado Association of State Soil Conservation Districts unanimously approved a resolution that encourages the state Soil Conservation Board (SCB) and individual soil conservation districts to hold easements designed to protect farmland.

The resolution specifically directs the state board and individual districts to accept grants of money and land to protect farmland and to enter into partnerships and cooperative agreements with the United States and other state agencies and nonprofit organizations to protect farmland.

Several divisions within DNR worked cooperatively to develop language for the 1996 Farm Bill, as well as its implementing regulations, regarding agricultural conservation programs that benefit farmers, while protecting topsoil, forests, wetlands and wildlife.

One of the programs that DNR advocated was the new Farmland Protection Pro-

gram, which will provide \$35 million to help farmers nationwide preserve their land in agriculture by providing assistance that will allow states and other units of government with existing farmland programs to purchase **conservation easements**. The United States has already awarded approximately \$14 million in Farmland Protection Program grants, and Colorado has received grants totaling approximately \$1 million of that amount.

"I believe the members of soil conservation districts throughout Colorado are realizing that **conservation easements** are an important tool in the effort to keep farmland in production. I also think many farmers fear that their farms may be jeopardized by increasing costs of production and the increasing profitability of selling farmland for urban development," said Dan Parker, Director of the SCB.

A **conservation easement** is a property interest given by the owner of a farm or ranch to a public or non-

profit entity. The easement expressly provides that the use of the land under easement will continue to be devoted to farming or ranching. In return, the owner receives money and/or tax benefits.

"Property owners also appreciate the fact that **conservation easements** are completely voluntary based on negotiations between a willing buyer and a willing seller." Parker added.

From the Colorado Department of Natural Resources January 1997 Newsletter.

"The best soil conservation practices in the world are of little use to cropland that is paved over.

In the United States, the equivalent of two New York Cities was paved over each year between 1982 and 1992."

From A World Watch Institute Report, State of the World 1997, Preserving Global Cropland