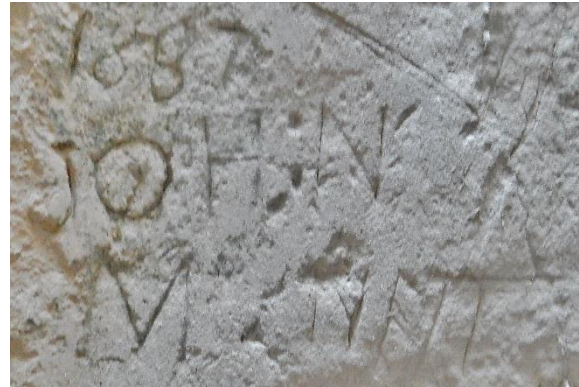


Lazy Three J Ranch: Ranching, bighorn habitat, and history are permanently conserved in the scenic Wildcat Hills

In 1887, John McNett crept up a slot canyon in the Wildcat Hills west of Chimney Rock. He had homesteaded the land and wanted to leave his mark by etching his name and year into the sandstone, in the upper reaches of what is now known as McNett Canyon. Over the years, many more names and dates would be added, creating an historic visitor registry carved in stone.



In time, ownership of the land passed into the Burchfield family; it became the Lazy Three J Ranch and its current owner, Dee Burchfield, decided to leave an indelible mark of her own. In October, she permanently conserved her family's 983-acre ranch through a conservation easement with the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) that was completed in October.

With its towering buttes and pine forest rising from grasslands, the property is prime bighorn sheep habitat and adjacent to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Williams Gap Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Because of its critical habitat, 25% of the conservation easement's appraised value was provided by the Nebraska Environment Trust (NET). In 2011, the NLT received a grant from the NET to permanently preserve bighorn habitat in the Wildcat Hills and Pine Ridge, where an additional 1,667 acres have been preserved through two previous easements.

Additional funding to preserve this working ranch was provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Grasslands of Special Significance (GSS) Program. Since the ranch has native prairie that qualified for this program, NRCS was able to provide 75% of the funds needed to purchase the conservation easement. When combined with the adjacent William's Gap WMA, a 1,989-acre block of protected land will now serve as an anchor of protected land in the scenic heart of the Wildcat Hills, in view of Chimney Rock. There will be no subdivisions, golf courses, or other eye jarring intrusions on this historic landscape. Indeed, Dee Burchfield has done much more than carve her name in soft sandstone. She has left a mark that will last forever.

