

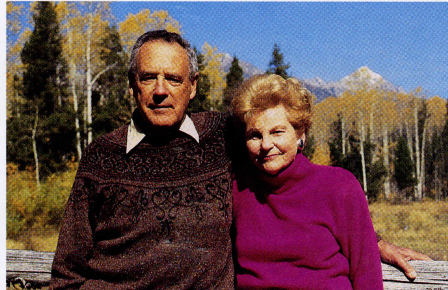
STIRNS ADD 40 ACRES TO R LAZY S RANCH PROTECTION WITH EASEMENT GIFT

NIGHTTIME AT THE R LAZY S RANCH brings a flurry of activity reminiscent of Jackson Hole's wilderness roots. If you listen carefully, you may hear the peaceful silence punctuated by the wailing of mountain lions, the howling of coyotes, the hooting of owls, the flapping of bat wings, or the rustling hooves of wintering moose, elk and deer. Daytime brings hints of the valley's homesteading days as dude ranch guests spread out on foot and horseback, often with fishing rod in hand, to explore the adjacent Grand Teton National Park and Snake River. The R Lazy S Ranch's link to Jackson Hole's past, and future, is due to the extraordinary generosity and careful planning of its owners, Howard and Cara Stirn.

This past September, the Stirns purchased a 40-acre parcel adjacent to the R Lazy S and immediately protected it with a conservation easement donated to the Jackson Hole Land Trust. That easement gift is just the latest in a series of seven conservation easement donations between 1981 and 1996, and the culmination of a year-long effort to increase protection of the ranch. This year, the Stirns also eliminated two reserved home sites and delayed for 15 years the construction of two others. Protection of the ranch now stands at 324 acres with a ranch headquarters, two constructed homes for the family, and three reserved home sites — two of which may not be constructed for 15 years. But 1996 is merely the latest chapter in this ongoing protection saga, the story really began more than 50 years ago.

Cara Stirn had been coming out to Jackson Hole since the late 1930s with her family, staying at the former Bear Paw Ranch, horseback riding in the crisp mountain air, watching the wildlife, and indulging in her hobby of fashioning abstract, water-based paintings. Her love affair with the West began when she was just three years old when she learned how to horseback ride, western style, with her father in Arizona. Cara passed her passion for Jackson Hole on to her husband Howard when they came out to pick up their eldest daughter at the Teton Valley Ranch Camp in 1966. After just five days in the valley, Howard knew he very much wanted to return. Each summer thereafter,

the Stirns visited Jackson Hole, staying in a tiny log cabin at the former location of the R Lazy S Ranch, then owned by Bob and Claire McConaughy. About five years later, the Stirns bought the Aspen M Ranch followed two years later by the purchase of the R Lazy S Ranch. Interestingly, most of the historic cabins still standing on the R Lazy S Ranch today were moved from the original location of the R Lazy S Ranch on land that is now part of Grand Teton National Park adjacent to the J-Y Ranch and the Snake River.



Some years later, in 1981, the Stirns realized that the growing popularity of dividing up and developing large tracts of privately-owned lands in Jackson Hole was increasingly threatening the area's natural beauty. They boldly decided to donate the first ever conservation easement to the newly formed Jackson Hole Land Trust. The easement gift fit in with the Stirns' vision for the land. As Cara put it, and Howard agreed, "We wanted to maintain the whole area as a wilderness and that was the main reason we bought the property in the first place." The gift successfully accomplished the Stirns' protection goals by enhancing the area's wildlife habitat. Cara observes "more wildlife on the property now than in the 1930s when I first started visiting Jackson Hole." That conservation easement gift also had very important ramifications for the fledgling Land Trust. "We were the first easement gift to the Land Trust, and others followed in our footsteps. We hope that our gift gave other people the same idea," Howard points out.

Fast forward to 1996, and the Stirns are once again leading the way with their flurry of advanced-thinking protection activity. That thinking combines increased protection of their beloved ranch with pragmatic estate planning. As Howard puts

it, "The conservation easements play a big role in our estate planning. The tighter restrictions are designed to decrease the value of the ranch so that the property can stay intact and in the family." The Stirns had found that their ranch value had been steadily creeping up as land values in Jackson Hole continued to rise. Recognizing the unique problems created by having an appreciating property in their estate, the Stirns reevaluated their estate plan and decided to eliminate two home sites and delay construction of two others for 15 years. The contribution of eliminating home sites to lowering the value of the estate is obvious. Delaying home site construction, however, is a new idea that had not yet been utilized in Jackson Hole. The 15-year construction delay lowers the present value of the estate, while preserving some future planning flexibility on the ranch for the Stirns' heirs.

In the meantime, the Stirns plan to keep on enjoying their ranch and to share that enjoyment with others. Howard studies photography, although he admits that he sometimes gets caught up in the magic of the moment and forgets to snap a potentially award-winning picture, such as when he found himself in a face-to-face encounter with a pine marten while wandering the ranch just last month. Cara continues with her abstract painting. Her works are accepted in national juried shows and sometimes displayed at local artist events. Both Howard and Cara enjoy exposing others to the wild landscape they have been so instrumental in preserving. As Howard and Cara summed it up together, they enjoy "introducing people to the area in a home-like atmosphere, providing their guests with a wonderful western experience, and maintaining the natural qualities that are disappearing in the valley." The Stirns' efforts have gone far to ensure that those natural qualities will not disappear. In fact, their latest conservation easement gift has enabled the Land Trust to protect the last remaining non-government owned parcel along Grand Teton National Park's southern boundary, thus creating a much needed buffer for the area's wildlife residents.

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