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(Neb.) - Governor Heineman Announces Recipient of the 2012 Leopold Conservation Award

By: John Thayer Posted at: 04/20/2012 10:53 AM

In honor of Earth Day, Governor Dave Heineman announced the Buell family as the recipient of the 2012 Leopold Conservation Award April 20, during a ceremony at the Capitol.

The Leopold Conservation Award, named in honor of world-renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, is comprised of $10,000 and a Leopold crystal. Sand County Foundation, Nebraska Cattlemen and Cargill present the award annually to agricultural families in Nebraska who practice responsible land stewardship and management.

"As we prepare to celebrate Earth Day, we acknowledge the conservation efforts of Nebraska landowners, including this year's award recipients, the Buell family," said Governor Dave Heineman. "More than ninety percent of Nebraska's land is used for farming and ranching. It is being well cared for by those who take on the responsibility of leaving things better for future generations. Conservation on private land is something Nebraskans do very well. We all benefit from the work of private landowners who are preserving the natural beauty of our state."

The Buell family is part of the fabric of the Nebraska Sandhills. For nearly 130 years, they have ranched in the region, while caring for the land, water and wildlife that each Buell generation passed on to the next.

The Buell family's legacy in the Sandhills began when Benjamin Franklin Buell settled in the Sandhills in 1882 and began a ranch tradition that included the preservation and enhancement of the unique landscape of the Nebraska Sandhills. Today, the Buells' Shovel Dot Ranch is owned and managed by brothers Larry and Homer Buell and their wives, Nickie and Darla, respectively, who carry on the commitment to conservation they inherited from their predecessors.

The Buells continue to maintain and expand upon an environment in which water quality and the region's native plant life and animal habitat can flourish alongside livestock and crop production.

With the help of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) the family installed high tensile electric cross fencing and over fifty miles of pipeline, watering close to one hundred pastures. This allows for more effective cattle distribution, giving pastures more rest between grazing periods, which leads to improved recovery, better ground cover, and increased production.

Many of the Buells' management decisions are made to benefit wildlife habitat. Approximately fifty acres is fenced off around two lakes on their land to provide space for deer, turkey, swan, ducks, and geese. Abundant vegetation along two creeks on the ranch attracts several native wildlife species and trees are planted to provide windbreaks for cattle and habitat for turkey and deer.

"The determined, dedicated and innovative Buell family clearly cares about the health of natural resources in the Sandhills region and Nebraska, in general," said Dr. Brent Haglund, Sand County Foundation President. "A commitment to open space, clean air and water and robust plant life and animal habitat is synonymous with the name 'Buell' and has been for many generations."

The Leopold Conservation Award in Nebraska is sponsored by: Burlington Northern Sante Fe, Cargill, , Farm Credit Services of America, The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Nebraska Cattlemen Research & Education Foundation, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Farm Bureau, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Nebraska Land Trust, Nebraska Nature Conservancy, Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, Sandhills Task Force, The Nature Conservancy and Union Pacific.

Past recipients of the Leopold Conservation Award in Nebraska include:

2011 – Mathewson family (Cheyenne County)

2010 – Kalkowski family (Boyd County)

2009 – Todd & Kristen Eggerling and Lyle & Alice Sittler, Bluestem Valley Farms (Lancaster County)

2008 – A.B. Cox (Hooker County)

2007 – Rod & Amy Christen (Pawnee County)

2006 – Wilson family (Sheridan County)

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In 2012, Sand County Foundation will present Leopold Conservation Awards in California, Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin and Wyoming. The awards are presented to accomplish four objectives: First, they recognize extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation on the land of exemplary private landowners. Second, they inspire countless other landowners in their own communities through these examples. Third, they provide a visible forum where leaders from the agricultural community are recognized as conservation leaders to groups outside of agriculture. Finally, the award program brings representatives from agriculture, environmental organizations, government, industry and academia to advance private land stewardship.

For more information, please visit: www.leopoldconservationaward.org or www.nebraskacattlemen.org.

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