



Hello. My name is Pat O'Toole. I ranch with my family on the Little Snake River, which snakes across the Wyoming/Colorado border, reportedly 31 times. Our family raises, cattle, sheep, horses, dogs and children. We have been recognized for our conservation work on the landscape and with wildlife habitat with the Leopold Stewardship Award. Taking care of natural resources is an integral part of what we do.

I serve as the President of the Family Farm Alliance, which represents irrigators in 17 Western states. The Alliance is focused on one mission: to ensure the availability of reliable, affordable irrigation water supplies to Western farmers and ranchers. The Alliance works across the aisle. We have testified before Congress ____ times, to advocate for farmers, irrigation districts and water.

My experience, and my message, is that cooperation and collaborative work between solution-oriented stakeholders is the way—indeed the only way—to find and implement solutions. Our family works extensively with state and federal partners in order to ensure water for farmers while finding reasonable solutions for other users. The key is “reasonable”. Top-down solutions never work, while stakeholder-led efforts bring success.

Our family has worked with Partners for Conservation, a landowner group whose members work cooperatively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. The program’s model is to work with landowners to protect habitat for “species of interest.” On our ranch, we have done extensive work on Battle Creek and the Little Snake River to enhance habitat for Colorado Cutthroat Trout. These projects have also benefited other species, from bees to songbirds to willows. We are now an Important Bird Area for Audubon. The projects have also helped our irrigation systems.

Today, we have equipment in the river which is the last project to make the Little Snake River watershed fish-passage friendly. This project would not have been undertaken and built were it not for the efforts of local, state and federal partners. This includes not only the Fish and Wildlife’s Partners program, but our local Conservation District and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

I’m here to tell you that when interested parties work together, magic happens. As my friend and conservationist Larry Hicks likes to say, “people support what they’ve helped to build.”