

Local & Region

A2 | Thursday, June 6, 2013 | Vail Daily

'It's protected forever'

West Avon Preserve dedicated as open space as part of the Eagle Valley Land Exchange

By Randy Wyrick
rwyrick@vaildaily.com

AVON — The West Avon Preserve has been a developers' daydream for more than 30 years, and Wednesday it was dedicated as open space.

"This parcel has it all and it's protected forever. Not many things in life are protected forever, and this is," said Steve Conlin, Eagle Valley Land Trust board member.

The conservation easement was signed May 9 as part of the historic Eagle Valley Land Exchange, a regional land swap that protects six parcels and more than 1,550 acres of local land.

"This is what open space is supposed to be," Avon Mayor Rich Carroll said at Wednesday's dedication.

IN PLAY SINCE 1981

Former Mayor Ron Wolfe was among those who helped pull pieces and parts of this together nine years ago. The first time Carroll saw it was during a town council meeting when Wolfe screened a 64-page powerpoint presentation.

Larry Brooks, former Avon town manager, and Wolfe fought two separate development attempts, Wolfe said.

But those weren't the first.

The land has been on developers' radar screens for more than 30 years, said Tommy Glass, of Western Land Exchange.

Glass coordinates land exchanges and said those 478 acres have been in play since 1981, when it was Forest Service land.

In 1981, the land was about to be surrounded by the growing community of Avon and the agency put it on the auction block.

About that time, then-Secretary of the Interior James Watt revoked the protective orders on more than 2 million acres of land across the country, including these 478 acres.

The National Wildlife Federation sued Watt and the Reagan administration. A federal judge agreed with the National



JUSTIN MCCARTY | JMCARTY@VAILDAILY.COM

A ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday in Avon brought many smiles to the faces of open space supporters who came out to celebrate the dedication of the new West Avon Preserve, which allots 478 acres of preserved land in between Wildridge and Singletree.

Wildlife Federation and those protective orders were allowed to stand.

ABOUT THE PRESERVE

The West Avon Preserve lies between Avon and Singletree. The site offers public access for hiking and biking along the Avon to Singletree Trail, June Creek Trail and Beaver Creek Point Trail.

A new Saddle Ridge Trail will be built by volunteers this summer, Carroll said.

"This land is easily accessed for our use and enjoyment, provides a significant natural resource buffer between our communities," Carroll said.

Avon owns the West Avon Preserve; the permanent conservation easement is held by the Eagle Valley Land Trust.

Along with the West Avon Preserve, the Eagle Valley Land Exchange added 800 acres of new land into the White River National

Forest in Eagle County and 700 acres of additional conservation easements.

During Wednesday's dedication, Carroll made sure to thank Eagle County's taxpayers, who kicked in \$5.3 million from the county's voter-approved open space fund.

Funding also came from the town of Avon, numerous local residents, metro districts and homeowners associations in Singletree and Arrowhead.



JUSTIN MCCARTY | JMCARTY@VAILDAILY.COM

Dr. Steve Conlin, center, speaks to a group of people who came out to the Eagle Valley Land Trust's dedication celebration of a new open space area Wednesday in Wildridge.



SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

The West Avon Preserve goes from central Avon to Wildridge to Singletree.