

Land exchange approved

Deal protects 1,549 acres in Avon, Edwards

Daily staff report

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EAGLE COUNTY — Five Eagle County entities, one state agency, an arm of the federal government and a local private landowner have brought to fruition a complex land exchange that will permanently protect 1,549 acres of open space in Avon and Edwards.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Forest Service was the final of four signatories to the Eagle Valley Land Exchange Agreement, following approval by Eagle County, the Colorado State Land Board and the Upper Eagle Regional Water Authority. Additional partners in the deal include the Town of Avon, the Nottingham family, Eagle River Water & Sanitation District and the Eagle Valley Land Trust.

The conservation project has been years in the making and will result in the permanent protection of five properties, including:

- The 478-acre West Avon Parcel will be owned and managed as open space by the town of Avon.
- About 80 acres of the Avon Village parcel north of I-70 near Post Boulevard will be owned and managed as open space by the town of Avon.
- The 640-acre Colorado State Land Board property north of Berry Creek will be added to the White River National Forest.
- 184 acres of private land on the Eagle's Nest Wilderness boundary will be added to the White River National Forest.
- The 160-acre Cordillera L will become Eagle County open space.

Also, several smaller water tank properties

will be conveyed to Upper Eagle Regional Water Authority and Eagle River Water & Sanitation District, an additional public benefit from the Eagle Valley Land Exchange.

To equalize the value of land changing hands, cash is required to complete the deal. The town of Avon will contribute \$1 million, and an additional \$350,000 will be provided by Upper Eagle Regional Water Authority and Eagle River Water & Sanitation District. The majority of the funding, or \$5.3 million, will come from Eagle County's Open Space Fund. Approval of the Eagle Valley Land Exchange comes almost 10 years to the day that Eagle County voters approved the dedicated Open Space Tax, without which officials say the exchange would not have been possible.

The two properties that will be transferred to the White River National Forest had long been identified as parcels the Forest Service wished to acquire.

The Eagle Valley Land Trust will hold conservation easements to ensure permanent protection of the open space parcels obtained through the exchange.

"Every single parcel included in this land exchange provides significant and immediate public benefit for today and forever. This important agreement secures the expansion of local water storage and creates valley floor gateways to over 200,000 acres of public land," said Kara Heide, executive director of the Eagle Valley Land Trust. "This land exchange is a huge win for both local residents and guests."

Final closing on the deal is scheduled to occur in 2013. A map showing the Eagle Valley Land Exchange parcels is available at www.eaglecounty.us. For more information, call Eagle County Open Space director Toby Sprunk at 970-328-8698.