



Eagle County and Minturn have a contract for \$2.3 million to purchase this 4-acre lot from the U.S. Forest Service in Minturn. The county is paying 90 percent of the price and Minturn is covering the rest.

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# Minturn Boneyard plot to stay in public hands

Eagle County, Minturn have \$2.3 million contract with Forest Service for land

By Derek Franz

EAGLE VALLEY ENTERPRISE

MINTURN — After an up-and-down auction, the Minturn “Boneyard” property is going to remain public land.

Eagle County Open Space and the town of Minturn now have a contract with the U.S. Forest Service to buy the 4.39-acre parcel for \$2.3 million. The deal closes March 14. The county is paying 90 percent of the price and Minturn is covering the rest.

The Forest Service put the property on the auction block for a starting bid of \$1.25 million in December. It was an online auction and the county was the only bidder until January. On Jan. 17, the county won the auction for \$1.68 million — or so people thought. The Forest Service rejected the bid and said it would not accept a penny less than \$2.3 million.

“It was a strange call,” said Eagle County Open Space Director Toby Sprunk. “The guy told me congratulations, and then he told me we didn’t get it.”

Sprunk wasn’t surprised.

“I’d heard that they were really set on \$2.3 million — which was the appraised value of the land in 2011 — and we were secretly prepared to offer that much in anticipation of that,” Sprunk said. “If they had said \$2.4 million, we would have walked.”

The 2011 appraisal was \$900,000 less than the 2009 appraisal.

The Boneyard borders the Eagle River on the south end of Minturn and has a storage building the town could use.

“This is not a project we would have necessarily considered if it hadn’t been so important to the town,” Sprunk said.

In other open space news, the Eagle Valley Land Exchange is set to close March 8.

“People thought that was already a done deal because we had finished the agreements, but March 8 is when dollars and deeds actually change hands,” Sprunk said.

The complex exchange of land and cash — which was finalized Nov. 6 and was expected to close in January — includes 478 acres between Avon and Singletree. That land belongs to the U.S. Forest Service and is used by hikers, cyclists and people who just want a great view of Avon’s Fourth of July fireworks. It took years to bring the deal to a conclusion because so many entities were involved.

“The open space fund started with \$20 million — now we’re starting to run out of money!” Sprunk said, referring to the program’s busy year of buying land while prices have been drastically reduced from four years ago, when the economy was at its peak.

The Eagle County Open Space program was initiated from a dedicated tax approved by voters in 2002. The bulk of those collections remained untouched until recently. Sprunk started his job as the program’s first director less than two years ago.

“He’s done a great job,” Commissioner Jon Stavney said at Tuesday’s State of the County Address. “He’s ready to be out of the spotlight for a while now, I think.”

Sprunk nodded.

Vail Daily Business Editor Scott Miller contributed to this report.