

History, nature preserved at Taylor City

Editor's note: This is the second in a multi-part series. Members of the board of directors of the Eagle Valley Land Trust are writing about their favorite conservation easements and why these open spaces and special places are important to our community. Your local Land Trust holds conservation easements on nearly 7,000 acres throughout our community that preserve and protect the land and its natural resources forever. Check back next month for another installment, or visit www.vaildaily.com to read previous columns.

If I had been George Taylor in 1879, the Leadville druggist who financed many of the mining



Dan Godec
Trust our Land

claims near Leadville, I would have been proud to have Taylor City named for my efforts. With gold discovered nearby, the energy would have spread to everyone in Leadville. Located up Tennessee Pass, the area enjoyed widely successful years from 1879-1887. Taylor City grew from a tent city to a town of 200 people and at its prime was a larger voting precinct than Red Cliff. The town folk boasted a school, church, hotel, two stamp mills and even a Literary Society. While it was producing, Taylor City, on Taylor Hill alongside Taylor Creek, was a successful gold mining area that contained rich deposits of ore that some claimed assayed as high as \$75,000 per ton.

The Taylor Hill Placer was

located along Taylor Creek in 1879, and one of the larger producing mine claims, the El Capitan Mine, was also patented that same year. The El Capitan became the scene of a Wild West claim-jumping dispute. Seems some rival miners wanted to claim El Capitan for themselves, and they gathered a group of the tougher miners and tried to attack the owners of El Capitan. Getting wind of this before hand, the Taylor Hill Prospective Association fortified the mine and drove off the attackers, shooting one and wounding another. This was the last recorded attempt at claim jumping in the Taylor City area.

The town may be gone, but the area exists today as a protected site. Several years ago, the Eagle Valley Land Trust placed a conservation easement on the property, ensuring its historic and open space qualities will be maintained forever. Evidence of the old town is there. All it takes is a good imagination to carry you back to the heyday.

The Taylor City Conservation Easement represents two different kinds of conservation easements rolled into one. First, Taylor City represents a 19th-century mining town that was part of the historic mining and railroad past of Colorado. This storied past is gone now, and in Taylor City, as in other forgotten towns of Colorado, there are only a few foundations, relics and mining pits to remind us of what once were the "boom towns" that brought to our state many of the residents who remained and helped create the Colorado we know today. Second, this conservation easement protects more than 30 acres of the natural environment that



Several years ago, the Eagle Valley Land Trust placed a conservation easement on the Taylor City property ensuring its historic and open space qualities will be maintained forever.

include the headwaters of the Eagle River and wetlands that hold several springs and significant wildlife habitat.

The total acreage protected by the Taylor City Conservation Easement is 62 acres. It was conserved in 2003 through a collaborative effort of the Eagle Valley Land Trust and the Eagle River Watershed Council. Funding was obtained through Great Outdoors Colorado, Natural Resource Damage Funds and private funders.

Maybe the Taylor City conservation easement land is best described by its owner, Marjorie Westermann, who said:

"I have lived on Tennessee Pass since 1978. I now have the opportunity to fulfill a dream by placing the entirety of Taylor

Hill Placer under a conservation easement. I asked the Eagle Valley Land Trust to spearhead this preservation. The wetlands are a riparian paradise — home to busy beaver, muskrat, pine marten, ermine, mink and a host of birds including mallards, green-winged teal, lesser scaup, red-tail hawk, ptarmigan and owl. Until the ponds are snow-covered and frozen, brook trout look like a hailstorm at day's end, catching bugs until dark when the bats take over. German brown trout swim gracefully in the ever-changing channels and chest-deep holes of pure streams. This is a watery landscape and feeding ground for elk and deer, where black bears are irregular visitors but still enjoy a drink. Coyotes howl from

the abandoned railroad tracks across the meadow and fox are often seen playing, catching mice or looking in our windows."

Taylor City is one of several conservation areas held by the Land Trust that is under private ownership. While it is not accessible to the public with physical access to the property, it helps provide the scenic panoramas and "visual access" that we all value so highly. Taylor City is an inholding in the National Forest, and as a conservation easement, it will remain preserved forever as an asset to the surrounding National Forest property.

For all who travel U.S. Highway 24 to and from Leadville, the open wetlands to the west of the highway (a few miles north of Leadville and just north of the old closed down gas station) are areas that will forever be protected.

And as you pass the old gas station going south, on the east side of the road, the former site of Taylor City is a visual landscape that is also preserved forever.

I hope you enjoy the views as much as I do of this conservation area created through the thoughtful consideration of Marjorie Westermann and the conservation efforts of the Eagle Valley Land Trust.

Dan Godec is the president of the Eagle Valley Land Trust. He has lived in Eagle County for 25 years. Historic information was taken from writings and research done by Jim and Teresa Olsen and Kyle Olsen, a "Brief History of Taylor City." For more information about the Eagle Valley Land Trust and local conservation areas, please visit www.evl.org.