

Vail open-space parcels are precious land pieces

Editor's note: This is the third 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.

In 1966, I moved to Vail and took a job as the night auditor at the Vail Village Inn. The years of 1967 and 1968, I worked as the accountant for Vail Associates. Needless to say, I've seen a lot of change since then and a lot of population increase. Who would have ever thought that this community would grow so much and spread so far down valley?

Due to the growth and development that I have seen since first moving to Vail over 45 years ago, I see the importance of preserving some of the valuable open space that seems to disappear so rapidly in the face of said development. This makes conservation of land in the Vail Valley very important to me.

Among my favorite conservation easements are those that preserve some of the remaining open space in the town of Vail itself. Though not as large as conservation easements farther down the valley, the conservation areas in Vail help to preserve lands that might have otherwise been built on. Because of this, my favorite conservation easements are Buffehr Creek, Meadow Creek and Ptarmigan. These easements have three things in common that contribute to their importance. First, they are all adjacent to United States Forest Service land, which helps integrate the Forest Service lands into the community of Vail. Second, they all allow public access. Third, they all have trails that help connect hikers and bikers with the Forest Service lands adjacent to the town of Vail.

Let me give you a brief description of my favorite local conservation areas so you will be aware of what the Eagle Valley Land Trust is protecting in the heart of the town of Vail.

Buffehr Creek Conservation Easement: In 2003 during the development process of the neighboring land, the town of Vail realized the importance of preserving this piece of property and the "North Trail" which passes through it, providing access to the National Forest. This concern led to the developer donating 9-plus acres of property to provide permanent trail access. The property is owned by the town of Vail and the conservation easement is held by Eagle

Valley Land Trust, protecting this land and the public trail forever.

Meadow Creek Conservation Easement: One of the more recent land preservation projects in Vail is this 2.6-acre piece of property that was purchased in 2006 for \$360,000. The town contributed \$230,000, friends and neighbors in the area raised \$65,000, and the Eagle Valley Land Trust assisted in raising funds through an application to the Eagle County Open Space Fund for the final \$65,000. This property, in the Intermountain

Neighborhood, is adjacent to United States Forest Service land and to Stephens Park. It has a public trail that provides access to Forest Service lands from the neighborhood. This property is also owned by the town of Vail with the conservation easement held by the Eagle Valley Land Trust.

Ptarmigan Conservation Easement: This is a 5-plus acre piece of property purchased by the town of Vail in 2000 with funds raised by a consortium of neighbors who wished to preserve this wooded open space and ensure public access on the "Vail Hiking Trail" that cuts through the southeast corner of the property. The town of Vail and the neighbors both contributed to the land purchase. The town is the owner of the property and Eagle Valley Land Trust is the holder of the conservation deed protecting the property forever. This heavily wooded parcel is surrounded on three sides by forest service lands and is covered with aspen and spruce forest.

One of the reasons I became a member of the Board of Directors for the Eagle Valley Land Trust is that I appreciate that the Eagle Valley Land Trust is not only interested in larger, valley-wide projects, but also looks to protect the smaller remaining treasures that lie within the confines of our individual towns. The Eagle Valley Land Trust has done this in the past with these three conservation projects that are my favorites.

We all value our open spaces, and after 45 years of enjoying Vail, I for one appreciate that the Eagle Valley Land Trust is here to help us save them.

Kent Erickson is a member of the board of directors for the Eagle Valley Land Trust. He has been a full- or part-time resident of the town of Vail for over 45 years. For more information about the Eagle Valley Land Trust and local conservation areas, visit www.evl.org.

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