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LOCAL & REGION

Saving land where people live

TRUST OUR LAND

JASON DENHART

Saving land for people ... forever. This is one of the things we do at the Eagle Valley Land Trust.

In addition to saving land for wildlife habitat, to preserve our Western ranching and mining heritage and to protect air, water and environmental quality, one of the Land Trust's primary goals is to ensure that the people of our community enjoy the benefits of land conservation. We believe land conservation should have a human face, especially in a community like ours that depends upon a robust outdoor recreation and tourism-driven economy.

We believe in providing front-door access from local neighborhoods to conservation areas and saving lands that are within walking distance from where people live.

According to the 2010 United States Census, there are 52,197 full-time residents in Eagle County. And we have all heard the statistics that more than 80 percent of Eagle County is public land. But also consider this: 30,877 people in Eagle County live within one mile of the Interstate 70 corridor, which is nearly 60 percent of the overall population.

The majority of the people in our community do not live close to our public lands; where they do live is along the valley floor near the interstate corridor, which is primarily all privately owned land.

Thus, it just makes good sense to be looking at land opportunities and conservation projects near where people live, so the quality of life we all enjoy here in our valley may be maintained. To that end, your local Land Trust has focused significant energy and resources on publicly accessible conservation easements on the valley floor for the enjoyment and education of the people of Eagle County.

Here are a few examples:

Last January, more than 32 acres of land and more than a mile of Eagle River frontage between Miller Ranch and Arrowhead was permanently preserved. The land is known as the Miller Ranch Community Open Space.

Five thousand, two hundred and four people live within one mile of this publicly accessible conservation easement. This area is highly used on a daily basis by parents with strollers, dogs romping with kids, runners, hikers, cross-country skiers, snowshoers, fishermen and bird watchers.

Last June, the Homestead Conservation and Public Recreation Project, a public-private partnership between the Land Trust, Eagle County and local landowners, created four new permanent conservation easements just south of the Homestead neighborhood — 4,637 people live within one mile of these four conservation easements, with 322 acres and more than four miles of connected trail systems. We have conserved this land as open space for the perpetual enjoyment of the people of our community.

The Eagle River Preserve, a 72-acre park in the heart of Edwards that was saved in 2005, is one of the signature conservation easements in Eagle County. The preserve is an outdoor recreational gem in the

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central valley, with 7,497 people living within one mile of the easement. It boasts more than one-and-a-half miles of public access to the Eagle River, an extensive nature trail system with ponds and streams, an off-leash dog area and a historic log home built by the railroad in 1909.

An estimated 6,636 people live within one mile of the West Avon-Beaver Creek Point conservation easement being finalized between the Land Trust and the town of Avon (as part of the larger Eagle Valley Land Exchange Project). These 468 acres of land will serve as a buffer between Singletree and Wildridge, forever preventing suburban sprawl in this area. The point has been a signature overlook and outdoor recreational spot as far back as any of us can remember.

Hordes of residents watch Avon's annual fireworks show here; scores of mountain bikers ride the Avon to Singletree Trail and continue on to June Creek; hikers from Singletree to the west and Wildridge to the east use the loop trails here for their daily exercise. The West Avon-Beaver Creek Point conservation easement is just the most recent example in a very long line of land conservation efforts and open space projects to benefit the people of Eagle County.

Thirteen of the 25 conservation easements held by the Eagle Valley Land Trust allow for public access. We are proud to say that more than 22,000 people live within one mile of these publicly accessible conservation easements. Saving land for people is one of the primary missions of your local Land Trust.

We are committed to land conservation projects that positively impact the lives of our citizens, and we will continue to fight for land preservation on the valley floor near where people live. At the Eagle Valley Land Trust, we are preserving the character of our community one acre at a time, and saving land for people forever.

Jason Denhart is the director of communications and development for the Eagle Valley Land Trust. Data from the 2010 United States Census data and Eagle County land parcel data were used for the statistics quoted above. For more information regarding the efforts by your local Land Trust to save land for people, visit www.evlt.org, call 970-748-7654 or email jdenhart@evlt.org.

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