

# Space makes us special

Is the open space in Eagle County in the right space? The fact is that more than 80 percent of Eagle County is not privately owned. However, most of these public lands are located away from the population base.

Forty-five years ago, this was not as much of an issue as it is today or will be in another 45 years.

Today, and in the future, the economy of Eagle County is based on recreation and tourism. People come to Eagle County looking for something special, which Eagle County has to offer. If we look like other mountain communities that are fairly urbanized, these visitors and second-home owners will look elsewhere.

When I moved here, I seriously questioned the need for more open space as developments were being approved.

You have to remember that at that time, there was very little in West Vail and East Vail, nothing in Spraddle

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Creek or Intermountain. Farther downvalley, there was nothing in Eagle-Vail. Avon and Edwards consisted of only ranches and a few houses. Eagle and Gypsum were both very small towns located on very little land.

The majority of the land in Eagle County that is privately owned was homesteaded by people who wanted to live near the roads, streams, rivers and the relatively flat valley floor.

The land that was more rugged and nonaccessible remained in public ownership. This is great for wildlife, especially for summer habitat. But the fact of the matter is that the majority of the wildlife during the winter migrates down to the flatter, lower land that was homesteaded more than a century ago.

As a Realtor and developer, I have been responsible for some of the growth that has taken place in this wonderful place that we call home. The reason that virtually everyone purchases property here, either as a secondary or primary home, is because of the quality of life.

In the '60s and '70s, there was a tremendous amount of undeveloped private land that gave the appearance that there was open space around every corner. However, as subdivisions were approved and built, this visual open space has disappeared.

In order to preserve our special quality of life, it is important that we preserve the uniqueness of Eagle County.

Our customers today and in the future must feel that Eagle County has more to offer and is a good place to invest. One of the ways of being unique is the feeling that open space gives you.

Think of Vail today. What if we didn't have Ford Park? Back in the '70s, the voters and leaders in Vail decided to purchase the 50 acres that is now Ford Park. The original plan that the developer brought forth was for

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around 500 units on that land instead. But the people of Vail were willing to spend the money to purchase the land, and today we have playing fields, tennis courts, the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater, the Betty Ford Gardens and, yes, even some parking.

We have a community gem with Ford Park instead of 500 condos. Thinking ahead into the future means something, especially in a resort community.

Forty years ago, I was one of those who thought that with more than 80 percent of the land publicly owned in the county, why would we need more open space.

Today, I am certain we need to look into the future like those leaders in Vail in the '70s and save more open space on the valley floor and along our river corridors.

The recreational amenities that have been built in this county are phenomenal and are second to none. Our tourism and outdoor recreation-based economy will fuel the future, as

long as we protect what makes Eagle County special.

It makes sound business sense that in order to maintain and attract visitors, we need more than ever to provide a funding source like our county open space tax so that when the opportunity presents itself, there is money to purchase open space to enhance the quality of life for the local residents and our visitors.

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Bob Warner is a full-time resident who has lived in Eagle County for more than 40 years.