Teaching kids why we need to save our land

"Forever? Even after 100 years?"asked a Walking Mountains Science Center student during an education day hosted by Eagle Valley Land Trust as part of our 2013 Summer Education and Outreach Program. Yes, the mission of the Eagle Valley Land Trust is "to preserve forever our scenic vistas, open spaces, historic lands, waterways and wildlife habitats that represent the uniqueness of Eagle County and the central Rocky Mountains." Forever is a long time. But it's worth it, and it's up to us to ensure that future generations understand its importance.

Lindsey Ratcliff
Trust Our Land

Every minute, two acres of farmland or ranchland is being lost to development. Our land and our precious open spaces are our greatest natural resources as well as our greatest economic engine in the Vail Valley. Our beautifully scenic vistas, forests, and wildlife habitats are the factors that drive people to seek out Eagle County in the first place, and they deserve to be protected for the future economic benefit and recreational values of our community.

It's important that these beautiful open spaces that brought us all here are protected and preserved so that future generations can continue to gain and learn from the natural world. To ensure that our special open spaces are preserved in perpetuity, we must invest in our local children through environmental education and empowerment.

By exciting kids through personal discovery in the natural environment, we will inspire an ethical relationship between people and land. So, when we pass the conservation baton to the next generations, young environmental stewards will be prepared and passionate about fighting for environmental and land issues that impact our beloved mountain community.

That is just what Eagle Valley Land Trust's 2013 Summer Education and Outreach Program sets out to do. Made possible by a generous grant from Vail Resorts Echo, this summer over 100 local students will travel to permanently protected lands that the Eagle Valley Land Trust holds under conservation easement to partake in hands-on conservation learning. Participating students will come from Walking Mountains Science Center, SOS Outreach and the local Cub Scout and Boy Scout troops. The education days will take place on both the Eagle River Preserve and Taylor City conservation areas and will involve service learning activities.

The Eagle River Preserve, permanently protected with a conservation easement by the Eagle Valley Land Trust in 2005, is publicly accessible open space. West of The Gashouse Restaurant, the preserve is across from the ambulance district in Edwards. With 72 acres of land consisting of hiking trails, cascading meadows, and more than 1.5 miles of pristine Eagle River access, the Preserve provides an excellent classroom for local kids.

Similarly, the Taylor City conservation area, located on Tennessee Pass, offers a tremendous learning opportunity as it hosts more than 50 bird species, 75 different wildflowers and Rocky Mountain mammals. Because the property borders U.S. Highway 24, Colorado residents and visitors enjoy its natural beauty as they drive along the "Top of the Rockies" scenic byway. Taylor City, contains the historical remains of a 19th century mining town and also protects more than 30 acres of wetlands at the headwaters of the Eagle River, which provides an excellent example of a riparian habitat for students to experience.

Lesson plans and objectives promote a basic understanding of the Eagle Valley Land Trust's role in conserving land through easements, the history of the land, and the ecological importance of the area. Several education days have already occurred with SOS Outreach and Walking Mountains Science Center, and eight additional days will take place throughout the remainder of the summer. Thank you so much to Vail Resorts Echo for investing in conservation education for our local kids and helping the Eagle Valley Land Trust teach the conservationists of the future!

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