



Crystal Clear

Fall, 2023

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Crystal River Wild and Scenic and Other Alternatives Feasibility Collaborative

What a name! While the title is quite a mouthful, the long name reflects a respect for the wide variety of stakeholders involved in the most recent push to craft protection for the Crystal River and preserve its present free-flowing state indefinitely.

While past efforts have centered strictly on achieving Wild and Scenic designation, this push begins from a broader and more holistic starting point. The collaborative, which is composed of representatives from CVEPA, other community members, ranchers, and public officials from throughout the Crystal River watershed, has been tasked with coming up with protection options that the whole community can support, and that still provide strong protection for the river. While Wild and Scenic is certainly still on the table, it is joined by a diverse range of other options.

There has been some discussion about how much local flexibility is possible with a Wild and Scenic designation, with some expressing concern about its durability if congress can change the protective status. Members are learning about six other tools for protection. They include:

- National Conservation Area or Special Management Area.

- Local Management or Intergovernmental Agreement
- Instream Flows and Recreational In-Channel Diversions
- Other Localized Projection and Restoration Options
- 1041 Regulations
- CDPHE Water Quality Protections for Outstanding Waters

Currently, the 20+ member Collaborative is in the process of collecting information from experts about each option, so that decision-making can begin with a shared body of knowledge.

On October 26th, the chairs of the collaborative will host a community summit that is open to the public. It will be an opportunity for community members to learn more about protection options as well as the work of the Collaborative.

CVEPA hopes to see you there!

President's Letter

John Armstrong

Aren't we in the western Rockies the fortunate ones? When we look around the nation and the world we have to be grateful for the beautiful year we have had. Ample snow and water, abundant forage on the forest and moderate temperatures (save the July heat wave).

Mother Nature also smiled on CVEPA for our **51st annual Meeting/Jubilee** in August as well. The CVEPA board gathered with about 60 members and friends in warm sunshine at the reborn Raspberry Cafe (the old Inn at Raspberry Ridge) which was acquired by Slow Groovin' BBQ. Owner, Ryan Vinceguerra, who is also the Mayor of Marble, hosted in style.

Highlighted at the event was our gem of an acquisition, the Marble Wetlands Preserve, and two of the incredibly dedicated men who saved the property from going into the private sector. Both Pat Willits of the Trust for Land Restoration (TLR) and Mark Rudolph of Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) stepped in and salvaged the faltering donation with less than a week left in the year 2021. They worked with CVEPA's Dale Will to consummate the transfer of the property into the public domain. Both Pat and Mark shared the **CVEPA Founders Award**, CVEPA's version of "Environmentalists of the Year" to a big round of applause from a grateful audience. Both humble men went beyond anyone's expectations to assure the conservation of this rich wetland parcel in perpetuity. We are forever grateful!

The Town of Marble, who supported the acquisition by becoming the fiscal agent to secure essential reclamation funds, will act as the Wetlands Preserve Manager for the next year through an agreement with TLR and the Aspen Valley Land Trust. CVEPA is at work on the interpretive plaques for the land.

Following the Founders Award, the attendees listened to Andy Mueller, General Manager of the Colorado River Water Conservation District, who explained the draft Crystal River Water Augmentation Plan. The draft is only the first recommendation to comprehensive augmentation. Everyone should read it and be informed about their river and their water. Go to <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/23883786-2023-06-01-draft-crystal-river-augmentation-feasibility> to read the current preliminary draft version of the Crystal River Augmentation Plan Feasibility Study. Attached to the draft plan as Appendix B is also the Exploration of Nature-Based Solutions for Flow Augmentation Study Summary which the River District and American Rivers funded to further explore opportunities to combine augmentation methods with expressed restoration goals in the valley.

In comparison to recent years we have experienced a quieter year for environmental challenges. There are so many things in the works that our job security seems assured:

Since CVEPA's initial reporting of the unauthorized **debris dumping at Placita** in 2007 and the completion of the CDOT reclamation plan of 2015 progress seems imminent. CDOT contacted us to report that they want to finish the Placita site this month and the **McClure Horseshoe site** in October.

CVEPA plans to donate the seed for the project—a mix of native varieties suitable for the environment. We are excited for the completion of the project after years of planning, and are grateful to CDOT's commitment to the Crystal River Corridor Rock and Mudslide Mitigation Project the past two summers.

Colorado Stone Quarries (CSQ) has a new superintendent, Giuseppe Telara, from Carrara, Italy. Benvenuto Giuseppe. This is the second year of stream restoration on Yule Creek and CVEPA has requested a site tour from CSQ this autumn. We hope CSQ is as excited to show off their work as we are to see it.

Treasure Mountain Ranch, the owner of 750 acres of Crystal City and surrounding riparian and highlands area, has invited a group of local stakeholders to the table to discuss future plans. Aspen Valley Land Trust, the US Forest Service, Crystal City neighbors, Wilderness Workshop and CVEPA met with landowners Stuart Gillespie and Chris Cox and the Western Land Group. Developers want to be transparent with their aspirations. Their original vision of two pods of 10 cabins with a central dining hall has changed. One hundred and ten acres near and along the Crystal River with wetlands is considered being offered in a land exchange for some high altitude access to ski terrain. The group will continue to meet.



CVEPA board president, John Armstrong, introduces Pat Willits and Mark Rudolph, who were presented with the "CVEPA Founders Award" in honor of their work to conserve the Marble Wetlands.

The Pitkin County Commissioners approved a generous contribution joining AVLTL, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), and others to acquire the old **Colorado Outward Bound School** above Daniels Hill. This is the second significant acquisition along with Marble Base Camp in that immediate area. This important piece of the Marble puzzle is cause for gratitude and gives promise to conservation of the Marble-Crystal Corridor. The Daniels Hill area just experienced a severe downpour and erosion this past month making the road even more of geological challenge.

Gunnison County awaits the reclamation plan from Wright Water Engineers for the Crystal River area bounded by the **Marble Airstrip**.

When is a Reservoir Not a Reservoir?

Thoughts on Mobley's Corral and the Crystal Augmentation Plan

Dale Will

The headline on Heather Sackett's recent coverage of the Crystal Augmentation Study caught my eye: "Janeway site promising for Crystal River backup water supply." (See Aspen Times, July 22, 2023 or www.aspenjournalism.org) For those of you not following this study, the West Divide Water Conservancy District (WDWCD) and the Colorado River Water Conservation District (CRWCD) are looking for water storage options to sate the thirst of residential subdivisions along the river itself.

One of CVEPA's proudest environmental victories was achieved with strong support from Pitkin County and others when WDWCD and CRWCD were compelled in 2012 to abandon their dream of a storage reservoir on the main stem of the Crystal River. The battle over the proposed Placita Dam was driven by an ambition to export Crystal water (see www.soprissun.com/west-divide-placita-dam-a-brief-history). In contrast, the current study seeks to address competing demands within the Crystal Valley.

The water supply agencies are concerned that domestic wells serving the myriad residential subdivisions sprawling between Carbondale and Marble were, in 2018, subjected to pumping restrictions to satisfy the senior water rights of agricultural irrigation ditches in the lower valley. And, these agencies are now again looking for ways to store our water. The difference this time is that no one can point at "outsiders" trying to grab the precious H2O; we have met the enemy, and it is us.

To its credit, the new water plan is seeking "natural" ways of keeping more of the spring runoff in the valley so that the river will retain enough flow late in the summer to allow domestic wells to pump even while watering alfalfa, hay and the odd potato continues. The theory is that the watershed functioned better before the railroad and then the State Highway boxed the river into a narrow channel.

Indeed there are obvious places where the highway and the old railroad blocked the river from its historic floodplain, thereby limiting groundwater storage. For example, the confluence of Coal Creek and the Crystal River used to be a mile downstream of where it is now, and one can still see the old bed of Coal Creek filling with water in the spring, even though it is now cut off from the river by Highway 133. And hence the concept of reconnecting the river to its floodplain to restore natural storage.

The problem with applying this concept to Janeway is that the evidence suggests this area dried out long before

Europeans arrived. Shortly after the Utes were marched out of western Colorado, an enterprising pioneer named John Mobley brought his family over Schofield Pass, and eventually built the cabin that remains to this day visible from Highway 133 (see www.historyredstone.org/vintage-valley/a-real-pioneer-john-mobley). The cabin, labeled "Mobley's Corral" on early maps, became a post office in 1887, several years before the Crystal Railroad was laid down. Access was via the Ute Trail, cum Rock Creek Wagon Road. The railroad bed was later constructed inland of the cabin site. Unlike areas where the rail bed was ripped against the river's edge, the grade height in this location is minimal, and the vegetation on either side of it is similar.

Meanwhile "Rock Creek" became the "Crystal River" and "Mobley's Corral" became "Janeway" (a tribute to heiress Jane Irwin Francis who resided near Carbondale and maintained a rather mysterious relationship with local miner Harry Van Syckle). There is no indication that flood waters have impacted the cabin itself, although it's been sandwiched between the railbed and the river for over 120 years.

Today Mobley's Corral can be accessed via a small trailhead near the Avalanche Creek closure gate. As Sackett's article notes, the vegetation there is not that of a seasonal wetland, but is comprised of upland xeric species

such as potato cactus, mountain mahogany and sagebrush. The whole flat is quite dry, except for the north end under the red cliffs, where the river has already reclaimed its freedom. And yet, the supply water agencies are considering a \$1.5 million project to flood this area with a 765-foot "excavated channel" into the southern (and dry) side of Janeway. Not a reservoir mind you, merely an excavated channel. "Nature-based."

Pitkin County's Assistant Attorney Laura Maker is openly critical of this idea. She suggests the need for the project can be entirely avoided by cooperative agreements between irrigators and water suppliers to "loan" ditch water during late summer in dry years. CVEPA agrees. Let's not start digging channels (reservoirs?) into historic landscapes without first seeking cooperation among local water users. And we certainly hope this entire conversation makes it obvious that our fragile little valley has reached its carrying capacity for suburban sprawl.

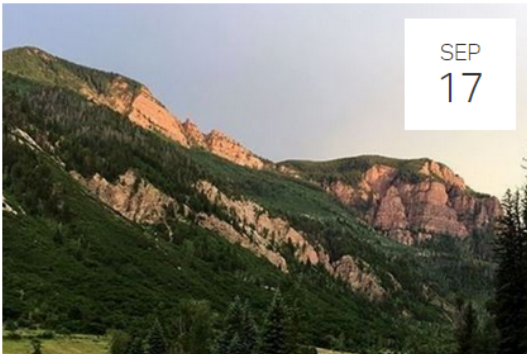
Be assured that CVEPA will continue to champion careful stewardship of the Crystal River.



John C. Mobley. Photo courtesy of Paige Meredith.

RFOV Partners with CVEPA and Coal Basin Ranch on Work Days in the Crystal Valley

CVEPA members and friends are invited to help out with two important projects in our valley in September! Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers (<https://www.rfov.org>) is partnering with CVEPA and with Coal Basin Ranch to organize these events. Just scan the codes below to register to help out. We look forward to working alongside you on behalf of our wonderful Crystal Valley!



Community Project

Filoha Meadows

Sunday, September 17, 2023

9:00 AM – 3:30 PM

6QHG+W7C Redstone Historic District, Colorado ([map](#))

Filoha Meadows is home to the stream orchid, but these rare plants are being threatened by invasive Canada thistle. You can take this opportunity to see an area otherwise closed to the public, help us control an invasive species, and protect a beautiful rare orchid.

Scan to register for the CVEPA Filoha Project



Community Project

Coal Basin Ranch

Saturday, September 16, 2023

9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Coal Creek Rd, Carbondale, CO 81623 ([map](#))

We're going back to Coal Basin Ranch to restore more natural areas at the site that was once the base for a large-scale coal mining operation. Come learn about this beautiful area while healing degraded soils and plant communities.

Scan to register for the Coal Basin Ranch Project



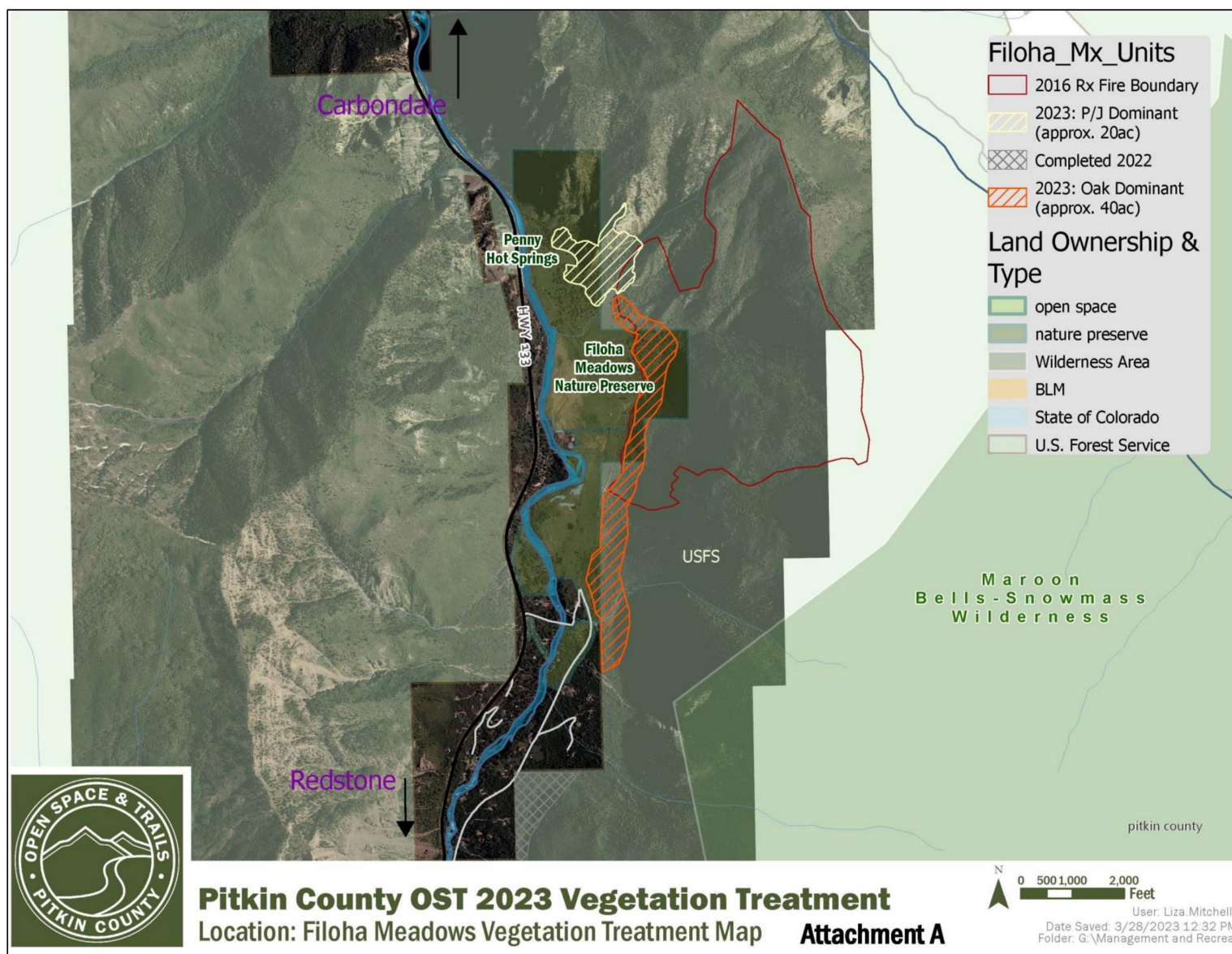
Brush Thinning in Filoha Meadows To Improve Wildlife Habitat

Work to improve habitat at Filoha meadows is occurring now in a project done through a partnership between Pitkin County Open Space & Trails and White River National Forest, with funding contributed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Pitkin County and the Carbondale and Rural Fire Protection District.

The project will provide improved habitat for wintering big game, including elk, bighorn sheep, and mule deer. It will also reduce fuels in proximity to nearby private land.

Western Vegetation Management, LLC, is contracted for 60 acres of brush work using a mastication machine to chop target vegetation. It's a similar machine to the one used at the Redstone Campground in 2022 and at Swiss Village in 2021. Approximately 42 acres of mechanical mastication and another 18 acres of hand thinning is planned on rocky ground and steep slopes where the machine can't go. This will be followed by chipping to reduce hand cut material down to finer fuels. The machine has plenty of power to chop and grind the shrubs and small trees targeted for thinning, which creates loud noise and flying debris. Word to the wise: stay back. The power to grind and chop is important so that the material is broken up to small pieces, which will increase the relative surface area of chunks exposed to soil and the elements, which aids in decomposition of the material.

Thinning will occur across 40-60% of the project area, retaining islands of existing vegetation to provide some habitat while also breaking up continuity of fuels. The project should be completed by the seasonal closure of Filoha Meadows Open Space on October 1.



Join Our Team!

CVEPA is seeking a motivated environmentalist for board trustee. If you or someone you value would enjoy such a position please contact a board member or email cvepa@outlook.com. Board members serve three year terms and meet each month. United we are heard, divided we are ignored.



Grassroots organizations love volunteers! We thank Teresa Salvadore and Denny Meredith-Orr for helping out at the membership table at our Annual Meeting! Let us know if you would care to lend a hand with future CVEPA projects.

The “Crystal Clear” is published quarterly by the Crystal Valley Environmental Protection Association, a 501c3 organization. CVEPA has been the environmental watchdog of the Crystal Valley since 1972. Past issues of the “Clear” are available at cvepa.org/newsletters

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As a grassroots non-profit organization, we rely on your support to help us protect the Crystal Valley. Please consider becoming a member by visiting <https://cvepa.org/become-a-member>.



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