

Crystal  
Valley  
Environmental  
Protection  
Association

**Crystal Clear** Spring, 2024

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the Environmental  
Watchdog for Colorado's  
Crystal Valley  
since 1972.*



## Crystal River Protections Taking Shape

Tait Andersen

It's fitting that for the last year the Wild and Scenic and other Alternatives Steering Committee has been meeting primarily at the Marble Firehouse. For those of us who do not live in Marble, each meeting starts with a drive up the very stretch of river that we are all aiming to protect. No matter the time of year, the drive elicits a sense of wonder and awe, as around each bend in the road I'm met with a view of intense beauty, whether it be a deep pool of teal water, churning rapids, or a glimpse of Chair Mountain high above it all. I always arrive in Marble passionate and excited to work towards protections that honor the magnificence of the river.

In 2024, the committee's focus has shifted from information gathering and discussions about what protections are plausible, to really hammering out the details on three protections that the committee has agreed are all worth pursuing.

To that end, at the February 29 meeting, the committee divided itself into three sub-committees, each tasked with drafting details for the protection that they are working on, to be presented to the full committee next summer. The three subcommittees are as follows:

**An Intergovernmental Agreement Subcommittee** – This committee is tasked with developing a draft intergovernmental agreement (IGA) between governmental entities in the upper Crystal (Town of Marble, Pitkin County, Gunnison County) that would memorialize a collective commitment to protecting the Crystal River against mainstream dams and trans-basin diversions. This can also include a commitment to protect outstanding remarkable values, as is done on a federal level with Wild and Scenic Designation.

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# Wild & Scenic, continued

**A Peaking Instream Flow Subcommittee** – This committee will work with the Colorado Water Conservation Board to draft a peaking instream flow to protect peak flows during runoff and prevent diversions of the free river by those who might seek to utilize that water in the future.

**A Wild and Scenic Subcommittee** – This committee will continue to build a Crystal River Wild and Scenic proposal that is tailored to meet the specific needs and flexibility desired by the Steering Committee.

These protections are not mutually exclusive. Thus, all three can be enacted on the Crystal at the same time. The benefit of the first two options is that they are much easier to put into place, and take far less time. They would provide the river added protections quickly. As many know by now, Wild and Scenic Designation takes years, sometimes decades, and unwavering community support to obtain.

It has been wonderful to see the committee evolve from an information gathering body to one that is taking real steps towards meaningful protections. This transition has relied on the bond that holds all committee members together: a shared love of the Crystal River and the valley that it flows through.

# Methane Project To Present Findings

The Coal Basin Methane Project may have seemed dormant over the winter, however the wheels have been spinning internally. Last summer, Chris Caskey from Delta Brick and Climate Company collected an extensive bank of test data on methane emissions being released from the Coal Basin mines. This was gathered using methane sensors on the ground at specific locations around the area, as well as fly-over data collection. Chris and his team have been reviewing this information, as well as previous studies performed by Colorado State University, to determine how to mitigate these methane emissions. CVEPA has stayed involved throughout the process as a member of the Advisory Group, which discusses the monthly reports from their team on how the research has been developing.

Delta Brick and Climate Company and Community Office for Resource Efficiency, or CORE, will be hosting two events to present the findings and what they have determined to be the best mitigation options. These meetings will help the team collect public feedback on how to move forward, so it is important for the community to participate in these presentations.

**Basalt Regional Library – Tuesday, March 26 from 6-8 p.m.**

**Church at Redstone – Thursday, April 4 from 6-8 p.m.**

Hope to see you there!

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# Snowmass Falls Ranch Acquired By Pitkin County

On February 5, 2024, Pitkin County's Open Space and Trails program purchased the 650 acre Snowmass Falls Ranch. While this property is somewhat outside the Crystal Valley, the historic importance of this acquisition should be of high interest to CVEPA members. The ranch is an inholding surrounded by public lands and largely within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. Anyone familiar with the trail to Snowmass Lake will have hiked

unprotected.

In 2020 the ranch was listed for sale at \$50,000,000. Pitkin County's zoning for the ranch is RS30, which gives it a theoretical potential to become a 21 lot subdivision. The neighborhoods immediately to the north, typified by luxury home developments, provide a likely example of development if the land had sold privately.

Back in 1990, Wilderness Land Trust (WLT) founder Jon Mulford had sought to acquire the land on behalf of the USFS for inclusion in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. Funding available for such a USFS purchase was dramatically enhanced in 2020 with passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. The legislation provides \$900 million in permanent annual funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), managed by the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior. With WLT's assistance, Pitkin County has



through this property, which borders the first two miles of the trail.

In the late 1890s, an enterprising Danish woman named Kate Lindvig immigrated to Colorado. With grit that might merit a Hollywood portrayal, Kate established Snowmass Falls Ranch during the original settlement of Aspen. Her earliest water right filing was 1901 for the "Lindvig" ditch. By 1906, she had proven herself as an agrarian thereby gaining title to the property under the Homestead Act and other acquisitions. Registering her own stock brand (a backward L with a 2 on its front side) she became known as the "Cattle Queen of Snowmass."

In 1934, Ms. Lindvig deeded trail easements through the Ranch for what are now known as the Snowmass Lake and West Snowmass trails. See Map and Forest Service documents on [Maroon-Snowmass Trail to Snowmass Lake #1975](#), and the [West Snowmass Trail #2187](#). Approximately two miles of these routes are within the property. In 1943, Lindvig sold the land to Bob Perry, his wife Ruth Brown Perry, and Ruth's brother D.R.C. Brown. Bob and Ruth Perry became the sole owners in the early 1950s. They would refer to it as "Kate's Place" or "Cow Camp." The ranch remained in the Perry family for 80 years until its purchase by Pitkin County last month.

The original Wilderness Act of 1964 created the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness along with four others in Colorado. This 181,535 acre wilderness is Colorado's fourth largest. Its 100 miles of trails and nine passes above 12,000 feet attract hikers and backpackers from around the globe. Many visitors were likely unaware that the wilderness on the Snowmass Lake and West Snowmass Trails traversed lands that were until recently,



Photo of Kate Lindvig courtesy [Aspen Historical Society](#).

secured a written commitment from the White River National Forest to pursue these LWCF dollars for Snowmass Falls Ranch.

With all of this at stake, Pitkin County took the plunge and purchased the Ranch. Talks are underway with the USFS to see which portions of the property may merit federal purchase and integration into the wilderness. Meanwhile, County ownership has now eliminated the threat of development.

# Prescribed Burns Planned for Two Crystal Valley Locations

US Forest Service

Pending favorable weather conditions this spring, firefighters with the Upper Colorado River Interagency Fire and Aviation Management Unit (UCR) will conduct prescribed burn operations east of Filoha Meadows and at Braderich Creek. The prescribed burn will target up to 400 acres of vegetation at Filoha and up to 2,000 acres at Braderich Creek.

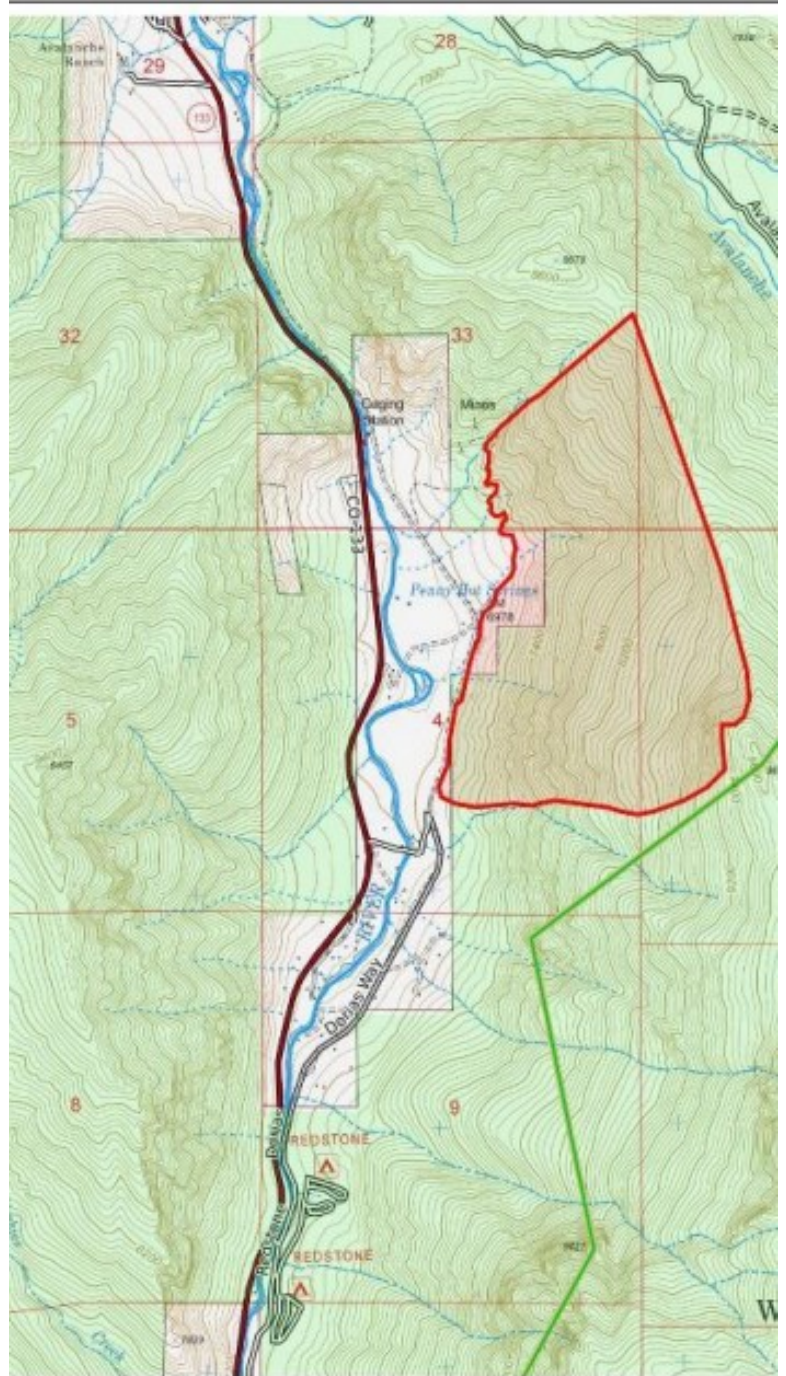
These will be planned events. Gambel oak, mountain shrubs, and aspen will be targeted but not all of the available area will be ignited: 50-75% ignition is expected based on the distribution of fuels and barren ground. These prescribed fires will be implemented in accordance with written burn plans that prescribe specific weather and smoke dispersion conditions to exist before crews are able to proceed. Prescribed fire and fuels specialists also coordinate with local partners like Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), Pitkin County, and fire protection districts in advance. When conditions allow, crews are responsible for igniting vegetation, monitoring control and spread of fire and smoke, ensuring fire is held by control features and monitoring fire behavior. Springtime conditions including wet aspects and snowpack are favorable control features that will be utilized on this prescribed burns.

These prescribed burns are part of the ten-year Aspen-Sopris wildlife habitat improvement project that uses prescribed fire and mechanical treatments in key forest, shrubland and grassland vegetation across the district to improve habitat and benefit wildlife. The low intensity flame of the prescribed fire will improve habitat conditions by consuming fuels, clearing patches of dense vegetation as well as dead grasses and leaf litter, and promoting existing vegetation to sprout and regenerate during the upcoming growing season.

An additional benefit of prescribed fire is hazardous fuels reduction in areas adjacent to communities and homes. In the event of a wildfire incident, treatments such as prescribed fires reduce the potential for fire to move quickly across a landscape and threaten residential communities by decreasing the density of available fuels and creating fuel breaks for firefighters.

Window for the work is this spring, anytime from around mid-March to mid-May, but is dependent on favorable conditions and priorities of other prescribed fires also planned across the zone. Approximately 20 firefighters, 2-4 engines, and a helicopter or unmanned aircraft will be used on each project. If prescribed conditions don't materialize this spring, we will look to next spring for conducting the burn.

For the latest updates follow us on Facebook here: [U.S. Forest Service – White River National Forest.](#)



The prescribed fire at Filoha Meadows will be ignited across some 400 acres in targeted blocks of aspen and shrub vegetation that is decadent, of poor condition, and degraded forage value. Ignition will take place over a 1 -3 day period. During this time, ignition operations typically last 6- 8 hours per day.

# President's Letter

John Armstrong

March has lived up to its reputation! The Lion arrived with ferociously high and damaging winds which transported hundreds (or thousands) of tons of red Utah dust onto our mountains. We also received 2-3 feet of moist snow to boost our snowpack at altitude to 110%! Our heartfelt sympathies go out to the Redstone General Store for the large spruce that landed on their roof and to all the water managers and conservationists (and skiers) who will suffer the repercussions of red snow throughout the spring. It is an exciting and unpredictable environment we share.

March also marks the long awaited transfer of the conservation easement of the Marble Wetlands from the current owner Trust for Land Restoration (TLR) to the Aspen Valley Land Trust (AVLT)! Hallelujah, this 53 acre riparian gem is now protected in perpetuity under guidelines and restrictions that guard the character and environmental qualities of this property. Pat Willits of TLR (2023 recipient of the CVEPA Founders Award) has continued to work tirelessly for several years behind the scenes to ensure this very special riverfront area will remain perfectly just the way it is. Pat was in constant consultation with AVLT, the Town of Marble (TOM), Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), CVEPA and other entities to provide the best protection possible for the Wetlands. CVEPA is eternally grateful to Pat. We share our joy and pride with all our colleagues and neighbors.

Many unforeseen expenses were incurred during this laborious process. Through a recent State of Colorado Conservation Tax Credit Program, TLR will receive monies dedicated to incentivize conservation easements in our state. Some of these funds will help maintain the Wetlands Preserve. This program is different from the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund mentioned in Dale Will's article on the acquisition of Snowmass Falls Ranch. (See page 3.) We are

indeed fortunate to have programs such as these to make conservation attractive and affordable at a time when the rush to acquire and develop land is so great.

Pat and TLR continue their work to finalize the management agreement with the ultimate goal to donate this property to the Town of Marble. CVEPA is designated as "the local representative" in the management plan "for responsibilities assigned to TLR." These responsibilities include entry signage, protective signage at the smelter site and tax responsibilities. CVEPA paid the taxes for 2022 for the Marble Wetlands with the anticipation of reimbursement, in great part due to the tax credit program. CVEPA also enjoys the rights for Wetlands outreach and education in cooperation with the Town of Marble.

The conservation of the Marble Wetlands would not have happened without the timely and focused efforts of the Crystal Valley Environmental Protection Association with the support of you, our members! TLR, AVLT, CVEPA, TOM, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Great Outdoors Colorado and Pitkin County Open Space and Trails are developing a legacy of conservation in Marble Valley. Marble Wetlands Preserve joins the Darien Ranch Conservation Easement, Marble Base Camp and the Colorado Outward Bound School Properties in this vision to protect Marble Valley and keep it just the way it is.

In a few weeks the Marble mayoral chair and numerous trustee seats are up for a vote. Find out how you can be involved in the future of your valley. The decisions that will shape your environment (positive or negative) will be made by the people who stay engaged!

See ["A Success for Pubic Lands in Marble"](#) in the March 20 Aspen Daily News for more about the wetlands.



# Spring is Here



If you look closely, you might soon find a clump of *Clematis hirsutissima*, also known as sugar bowls, hairy clematis, lion's beard or vase flower. Its preferred habitat is grassy slopes, meadows or ponderosa forests between 5,000 and 10,000 feet. It is native to Pitkin county and can also be found throughout the Rocky Mountains and other areas in the western U.S. Meriwether Lewis is credited with the

first explorer's discovery of this plant on May 27, 1806. He spotted it while the Corps of Discovery was camped in the Bitterroot mountains waiting for the snow to melt so they could make their way home.

This beautiful wildflower can be blue or violet or even white.

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](http://cvepa.org/newsletters)

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