



Crystal Clear

Summer, 2023

Published by the Crystal Valley Environmental Protection Association, Environmental Watchdog for Colorado's Crystal Valley since 1972.

President's Letter

John Armstrong

The view out of my window this morning couldn't be greener. Our good fortune continues as we come out of a winter none will forget. The first snows came in October. Marbelians shoveled until they were exhausted then shoveled some more! CDOT and Gunnison County struggled to maintain two lane roads and snow equivalents in the Upper Crystal Valley pushed 200%. In the lower valley snows were very moderate but the sun was an infrequent visitor. Solar production was at a notable low. For skiers the atmospheric river brought endless bounty. Along with all this appreciated moisture came the specter of flooding and property damage. In March one three hour Utah dust storm painted a winter's worth of snow brown further complicating run off scenarios. Cool temperatures, thus far, have maintained moderate and steady river flows well into June, allaying those fears.

It would be very naive to think that we have transcended the drought or the throes of climate change. The description of smoke and carbon particulate in the Northeastern United States from the Canadian fires is not dissimilar from the storm that brought the Oklahoma dustbowl to Washington D.C. in March of 1935. The damaging vagaries of the western climate crisis is visited upon an

unsuspecting populace. The planet has become more interconnected than most have thought. We share the health, wealth and responsibility of the planet. We are a global neighborhood.

Below is an update of activities in the Crystal Valley.

Marble Airstrip:

Equipment was mobilized in early April when a lot of work was done in the river. Valley residents wrote to ask what the work was when they saw numerous large backhoes in the river.

The Airstrip owners fired their environmental consultant EROs last fall and have retained Wright Water Engineers, who have been around a very long time and have a good reputation. Upon inspection, permits were clearly available on site. Gunnison County Community Development was very open and informative about the project. Gunnison County issued an approval upon urgency to remove some of the formations in the river prior to the big runoff.

Environmental Excavation is the new contractor. They also shored up the Crystal River bank just above the Redstone main bridge this February and worked on the

Continued Page 2

President's Letter, continued

Redstone Park Renovation last fall. CVEPA is pleased to see this new team working on this project. Wright Water is submitting a total comprehensive plan for the Airstrip Project and will be ready to go when the water abates.

Wild and Scenic:

The "kickoff" event at the Marble Firehouse was a great success. <https://aspenjournalism.org/community-summit-kicks-off-talks-on-how-best-to-protect-crystal-river/> The atmosphere was very upbeat and everyone was respectful. The facilitators were very sharp and quickly helped establish that almost everyone has the similar values and goals to protect the river. How to do it and address concerns of the stakeholders is the challenge.

CVEPA will have a seat at the table of stakeholders. Tait Andersen has been our W&S liaison and has agreed to sit on the Stakeholders working group which will work under the guidance of the facilitators for the next approximately 8 months. Thanks Tait! We encourage everyone to read the W&S Act of 1968 in order to articulate your views. Join the facilitators mailing list to keep updated on this important process.

Treasure Mountain Ranch (TMR):

Gunnison County will not discuss TMR's proposal until the results of TMR's county-mandated erosion mitigation and reclamation of roads on the Crystal property can be assessed. TMR's vision is evolving throughout the process and they want to engage the public through an outreach effort this summer to stimulate input throughout the upper valley.

Coal Basin Methane Project:

CBMP plans to conduct flyovers of Coal Basin this summer and install 10 sensors on perhaps 50 locations to ascertain location and quantity of methane leaks. The sensors need to be moved every 2 weeks and they plan to do this with now impact horse and backpack energy. They are seeking volunteers to help do this. This is a great opportunity for the public to see the Basin and learn more about the project's focus. Nothing is set in stone for a path forward. This research should yield valuable information on wise and prudent decision making. See "Coal Basin" article page 3 for more info.

McClure Pass Horseshoe and Placita Debris Sites:

CVEPA met with USFS of District and WRNF levels and CDOT last month to stimulate action on the long overdue revegetation of the Placita site and the larger Horseshoe dump site. Ranger Warner stated to CDOT that he wanted to see some closure this year. The inability for CDOT to commit to a timeframe has been a challenge but they seem much closer to doing something this summer. CDOT wants to get this project off their plate but have been hampered with a series of environmental challenges from landslides and fires in the Glenwood Canyon as well as local slides, the pandemic and internal issues. CDOT is engaged in the last four rock hazard mitigation sites in the upper Crystal River

Valley, State Highway 133, this summer. That said, CVEPA first reported the unpermitted debris dumping in 2008 and has been working with the USFS and CDOT ever since. Implementation of the Horseshoe Bend Reclamation Plan remains a major goal.

Ragged Mountain Road and Winter Recreation Area:

CVEPA has reached out to the Paonia USFS District Ranger and Recreation specialist to discuss the road at the top of McClure Pass into Chair Mountain. The proliferation of social roads for camping and woodcutting have damaged environmental property as recreationalists push further into the roadless domain. When meeting with the USFS Sopris District Ranger we learned that this area on the ridge is actually on the Paonia District. CVEPA may be able to help. We reached out to the West Slope Conservation Center in Paonia who want to work with us.

The Sinkhole at MM 14 on SH 133 near Paonia has delayed our initial meeting.

Marble Wetlands:

CVEPA paid the 2022 land tax for the Marble Wetlands. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) is working on a durable agreement for access from the road to the property. The Trust for Land Restoration (TLR), the current owner, is working on developing a Conservation Easement with Aspen Valley Land Trust (AVLT) who will hold the easement. A biological assessment is in the works to establish a baseline. The Town of Marble will be the likely heir to this special property. Stakeholders strive to be clear with each other's expectations for protection and monitoring of the land. The actual transfer may not occur until next year.

The additional Bier property donation (see Spring 2023 "Crystal Clear") will be transferred to CPW as it is contiguous to their land.

CVEPA is working on verbiage for the three plaques that Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has specified for the site. What fabulous partners the TLR and Trout Unlimited (who did the reclamation) have been! We are so grateful that this property is going into conservation and we thank AVLT for their extensive and valuable groundwork.

Colorado Stone Quarries (The Yule Marble Quarry):

CSQ completed the compensatory mitigation project of road and watercourse improvement last autumn at Muds Gulch. CVEPA encourages CSQ to conduct a local presentation of their plans and vision for the section of Yule Valley where they operate the quarry. It would be a great educational and public outreach opportunity to showcase their impressive operation.

CSQ General Manager Jean St. Onge has left the company. St. Onge replaced Daniele Treves several years ago after the controversial relocation of Yule Creek. His successor is Giuseppe Telara. CVEPA hopes to continue the improved relations with the Quarry.

—John Armstrong

Coal Basin Methane Still Up in the Air

CVEPA has observed the Coal Basin Methane Project since its initiation of the Advisory Board roughly a year ago. Over this last year much has changed with the project, but it is still following true to its goal: calculating the methane levels released from areas impacted by mining up Coal Basin. This project has been a collaboration of CORE and Delta Brick and Climate Company to analyze the gases being released into the environment from the abandoned mines. These gases, specifically methane, are greenhouse gases that are negatively impacting the atmosphere.

Previously, the project proposed to cap off as many mineshafts and vents throughout Coal Basin as possible, after which, a large device would be installed at one specific location. That device would meter the flow out of the mine. This concept allowed for an accurate read on the methane, however there were environmental impacts to this idea. Specifically, the mine road rehabilitated as part of CVEPA's work to restore the area after the departure of Mid-Continent would need to be rebuilt to allow for the transport and installation of the equipment. Some residents of the Crystal Valley were hesitant about this endeavor, as was voiced at several outreach meetings over the winter.

The project team listened to the community and came up with an alternate, less environmentally impactful approach to analyzing the emissions from Coal Basin. They are now proposing to use two techniques for their research. The first will utilize methane-detecting cameras on either a plane, helicopter, or drone, which would fly over the area and determine areas of high methane. The second process involves backpacking methane detectors into remote locations throughout the basin and collecting data over several weeks. This information will then allow the team to determine the impacts the emissions have on the atmosphere. What they do with that data depends on how significant the methane is: either to collect it and burn it off, install a generator and create energy, or just leave it be.

The project is currently pending approval by the United States Forest Service. Once approved, the team will be looking for volunteers to assist in carrying sensors and equipment around Coal Basin. Keep an eye out for volunteering opportunities in the next several months - you will have the chance to be part of a fascinating experiment while at the same time getting a great workout!



Opportunities to Lend a Hand!

FILOHA MEADOWS WORK DAY

CVEPA is partnering with the great folks at Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers (RFOV) and Pitkin County to help eradicate invasive species at Filoha Meadows. One of the Crystal Valley's most iconic spots, the meadow is home to the rare Stream Orchid which is threatened by Canada Thistle. Please plan to join us on Sunday, September 17, between 9am and 3:30pm to help improve the health of this landscape, while enjoying an area currently closed to the public. Sign up is required, and can be found at <https://www.rfov.org/calendar/9/17/2023/filoha-meadows>

MARBLE STEWARDSHIP EXTRAVAGANZA

RFOV is also sponsoring a weekend of stewardship and learning projects at their "Marble Stewardship Extravaganza" June 24 and 25. Camping sites may still be available, but you must register at <https://www.rfov.org/calendar/6/24/2023/marble-stewardship-extravaganza>

CRYSTAL CLEAR MAILING

Did you know that CVEPA board members and friends get together four times a year to process and mail the "Crystal Clear?" We could sure use your help folding, stamping, and labeling for an hour or so each quarter. If you are interested, just send us email at cvepa@outlook.com.

THANK YOU!

John Osgood, Pitkin County, and the Battle at Red Wind Point

Dale Will

The first whites in the Crystal Valley had traveled on the Ute trail, as well documented by the Hayden surveys in 1873. Whites brought with them the wheel, and no sooner than the first homesteads were staked, petitions began flowing in to the nascent Pitkin County's clerk requesting a wagon road. 1886 petitioners included Myron Thompson and Floyd Grubb. A route was laid out likely on top of the Ute trail except where it could not be made suitable for wagons. The construction would be basic, using picks and mules that were gentle on the landscape. One of the eventual road contractors was James Bogan, whose hand laid rock walls remain evident today along the "Bear Creek Trail," and for whom the campground is named.

Red Wind Point was originally a tight narrows with steep cliffs immediately adjacent to the river on both sides. Neither the highway bench nor the old RR grade originally existed. The wagon road had progressed up the east side of the river, past Nettle Ck. Faced with impassible cliffs on both sides at Red Wind Point, the only feasible choice was a log bridge over the river just downstream of the point, and climb up the west bank to near the current location of the Sweet Jessup Ditch. The road crested this shoulder and dropped back to the river along the west bank until it reached Janeway. Several old sections are still visible to a discerning eye.

The wagon path was finished around 1888, allowing the valley's homesteads a few years of what must have been a very idyllic and quiet bucolic setting. My old friend Jessie Boyce once remarked that a mature civilization is one where people can safely travel by muscle power. To have walked or ridden a horse from Carbondale to Hayes Falls along this route must have been truly exquisite.

However, the quietude of the Crystal was not to last. One John Osgood wanted valley coal rendered into carbon (at the now iconic and thankfully dormant Coke Ovens) for his steel mills in Pueblo. To get coke out of the valley, he needed a railroad. Osgood was purportedly at this time the sixth wealthiest man in the world, and he wasn't inclined to worry much about those already settled here. Upon hearing reports that the railroad was obstructing the wagon path, County Commissioner John Bennet traveled up Rock Creek and was quoted in the May 14, *Aspen Daily News* saying "I don't want to do anything that would cripple or embarrass a new (rail)road into the country, but the rights of the argonauts who have gone there and through all sorts of exposure, end [sic.] hardships

wrested its riches and its charms from the wilderness must be respected. We succeeded in building the road up Rock creek at a cost of some \$6000 and -while we don't object to subsidizing a railway company and encouraging it for 'steen times that amount we must protect the outlets from the country."

Upon reaching the Red Wind Point narrows, the rail builders simply demolished the wagon bridge and blasted their way along the east bank where the iconic red cliffs still show the scars of dynamite. Now completely denied access up the valley, angry Crystal residents petitioned the County Commissioners stating that "the Red Wind Bridge on the County Road about eight miles above Carbondale has been destroyed... cutting off egress to the best market for some of the ranches, said ranches being isolated.." Petitioners included John Mobley, whose cabin yet stands in Janeway. For a priceless photo of Mobley, see <https://historyredstone.org/vintage-valley/a-real-pioneer-john-mobley/>

Just think about it. Homesteaders had persuaded the fledging County to turn the Ute trail into a wagon path with free

use to all. Homesteads were appearing and a muscle powered economy was beginning to flourish. Along comes a wealthy robber baron who, without any communication with the County or the residents, knocks down a critical bridge and constructs a private railroad, which, of course, would haul freight for a price. Class warfare? Perhaps. It was certainly an enormous



affront to the commoners' life in the Crystal.

The County Commissioners responded on April 7, 1893 by appointing a Special Attorney to prevent further obstruction and address John Mobley's demand that the County "restore the public thoroughfare to a passable condition." Wrangling between Osgood and the County with went on for decades with the railroad widening its grade to allow a parallel wagon path, and complaints of horses terrified by steam locomotives. CDOT would eventually blast its way up the west side of Red Wind Point building Highway 133; the landscape there today bears little resemblance to what the Ute had left behind. We still have the uber-wealthy deploying their economic muscle here, though nowadays drawn more by the allure of trophy ranches. And, sadly, travelling up and down the Crystal Valley by muscle power remains a difficult and frightening experience.

CVEPA strives to protect the wild landscape while also seeking to protect public access along historic routes in the Crystal Valley.

Conservation Gains in Crystal Valley

OUTWARD BOUND PURCHASE

Outward Bound's first Colorado "campus" sits on a 42 acre parcel above Marble. Many notable folks have either studied or taught outdoor education in this facility, including Senator Mark Udall and CVEPA's 50th Anniversary speaker, Maggie Fox. Outward Bound is facing tough financial times and has decided to sell the campus. In 2016, the Aspen Valley Land Trust had purchased the nearby 47 acre "Marble Basecamp" property which has also been historically used as an outdoor education facility by the Aspen School District and others. See <https://www.avlt.org/marble-basecamp.html>

As the owner of the Base Camp property, AVLT became concerned that a new owner of the Outward Bound parcel might pursue incompatible commercial uses such as ATV/snowmobile tours. AVLT has entered into a \$1,850,000 purchase agreement to ensure the Outward Bound lands stays quiet and available for outdoor education, use by school groups and nonprofits. The buildings are all located within an approximately 5-acre building envelope.

Pitkin County Open Space has pledged \$500k towards the purchase, and will acquire a conservation easement. Aspen Parks and the Aspen School District have each pledged \$200k. The willingness of the City of Aspen and Pitkin County to contribute to this purchase demonstrates the importance of the upper Crystal Valley to environmental education opportunities in the Roaring Fork Watershed overall. AVLT is seeking to raise the balance of the purchase price from Great Outdoors Colorado, Gunnison County, and private donors. Stay tuned, and contact AVLT for more information at avlt.org

SARDY FAMILY DONATION

On May 5, 2023, the Sardy family donated two Avalanche Creek mining claims to the Pitkin County Open Space program. These encompass 20 acres on Bulldog Creek comprised of the Bunker Hill and Anderson Lode Mining Claims.

Under the mining law of 1887, federal lands were patented for mineral extraction purposes, but became residential development parcels once in private ownership. Patented mining claims are often rural. Back country suburban sprawl has hampered conservation efforts. Residential sprawl is a major contributor to habitat fragmentation as well as water supply problems in the Crystal watershed. Avalanche Creek is one of two back country drainages where Pitkin County has now fully succeeded in preventing *all* rural residential development (Hunter Creek is the other).

The County had awarded one TDR in 1999 to sterilize the Sardy property. The Avalanche Creek drainage is subject to a November 15 to May 1 winter closure to motor vehicles and dogs to protect Big Horn Sheep. Hence, although development rights were stripped from the Sardy property by the TDR, private ownership could have undermined winter wildlife closures as owners could have sought motorized access to the property year round. The Sardy's donation therefore strengthens the efforts by USFS and the County to prohibit winter motorized access and quiet the whole drainage in winter months for the benefit of wildlife.



Best Wishes to Grant



It's always tough to say goodbye to a friend, but especially when they've been in your life for a shorter time than you'd like. CVEPA board member Grant Stevens was recently hired as

Communications Director for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) and has

moved on to new adventures in

the Beehive State. We, and his former employer, Wilderness Workshop, will miss him, but know he will have a great impact on the environmental issues in Utah.

We thank Grant for contributing his knowledge, insight and his good Iowa sense to the CVEPA board.

Learn more about SUWA by visiting <https://suwa.org/>

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

Board of Directors

- John Armstrong, President
- Suzy Meredith-Orr, Vice President
- Dale Will, Vice President
- John Hoffmann, Treasurer
- Tait Andersen
- Jay Engstrom

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>.



Crystal Valley Environmental Protection Association
PO Box 921
Carbondale, CO 81623
www.cvepa.org