

Crystal  
Valley  
Environmental  
Protection  
Association

# *Crystal* Clear Summer, 2025



*Published by CVEPA, the Environmental Watchdog for Colorado's Crystal Valley since 1972.*

## President's Letter

John Armstrong

What serendipity and cause to rejoice ! The long overdue end to the illegal closure of a Pitkin County Right of Way and road has come to a settlement. The Wildrose Easement, colloquially known as Dorais Way, will re-open in time for the Filoha Meadows Nature Preserve summer season. We believe this is the end of very sad and unfortunate legal battle.

Years ago a group of residents along the Dorais Way formed the Rock Creek Association (RCA). This non-unanimous group of homeowners proceeded to install a gate and signage and illegally locked everyone out except immediate neighbors. While CVEPA understands the neighborhood's concern about trail development and their sharing this bit of paradise, this effort at exclusivity was misguided. Access is an important part of the CVEPA mission, whether it to promote or restrict access.

The core group of new homeowners claimed exclusive right of access to this road which has a precedent of public use dating back perhaps over 140 years. The Pitkin County Attorney took the RCA to task in a years long legal battle that cost the tax payers a great deal of money all while public access was being usurped. Pitkin County ultimately proved that the route is a county road. The County and the RCA have reached a settlement favoring the sovereignty of the county.

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# Letter, continued



Early in this case, CVEPA learned of the facts and came out strongly and vocally in favor of Pitkin County's defense of public access. This drew the ire of some in the RCA. CVEPA e-mails and minutes were subpoenaed by the RCA at great inconvenience to CVEPA. On a beautiful summer day three years ago I, as the president of CVEPA, was deposed under oath at the office of the lawyer commissioned by the RCA. On that sunny day I was interrogated by the RCA attorney for four hours while RCA members glowered at me. Questioning ranged from anything I might have said to county commissioners to relationships I have with our local friends and neighbors and any conspiring conversations I might have had about the road closure. Nothing was found. Three years ago I was stunned that a judge had endorsed such draconian measures. Sadly, in this present day nothing from the judiciary shocks me.

Disappointment, anger, a feeling of helplessness...maybe a bit of all this was felt but it is the reason that standing up in defense and engaging in the issues is so important!

This story needs to be told. Knowledge and respect of history is the best way to avoid making the same mistakes again or fighting the same battles. A carved stone sits in the yard of a wonderful educator and role model from my youth: "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free!" It is time to get beyond this issue so the healing can begin.

The public can soon resume their peaceful and respectful access to one of the ecologically rich gems of the Crystal Valley thanks to people standing up for their rights and Pitkin County's commitment to public access. Let's celebrate with pizza and libations in Redstone after the county commissioners memorialize the settlement! Defense of Public Lands and public access could never be more important. Keep your eyes and ears peeled for an announcement and please make sure your e mail address is current at [cvepa.org](http://cvepa.org)



## We Want Your Feedback!

As CVEPA approaches its 54th year of environmental activism, we'd like to head into our next half century better informed about what you, our members and friends, would like from our organization. We want to know what you like about us as well as what we could improve upon. We'd love to hear your ideas and suggestions as we form our future plans for helping to protect the Crystal Valley.

Board member Kelsy Been put together a short survey that can be accessed by clicking here: [CVEPA SURVEY](#). If you're reading a printed copy of this newsletter, please send an email to [cvepa1972@gmail.com](mailto:cvepa1972@gmail.com) and we'll send you the link.

Thank you for your support of CVEPA, and for your willingness to share your ideas for how the organization can remain a strong and responsive advocate for our beautiful valley!



# Treasure Mountain Ranch Submits Land Use Application

Jay Engstrom

Throughout the last several years, a flow of rumors has trickled down the Crystal Valley from near its headwaters. Far upstream above Redstone and Marble in the old townsite of Crystal, a decrepit cluster of buildings have seen the tale of time. In the late 1800's, the town was a booming place, with 500 residents running mines, saloons, hotels, even a newspaper. When the silver mining industry lost its footing, difficult access and the short summer season pushed everyone out of the upper valley. By 1915 there were less than 15 inhabitants. The town never recovered, and many buildings were reclaimed by nature. Several families still venture up to Crystal every year to stay in a few maintained cabins, but few people beyond them venture past the iconic Crystal Mill up to the townsite.

Treasure Mountain Ranch is the majority owner of the private land in Crystal and has been sustaining what is left of the town. They have managed to keep the old mill standing, as well as some of the signature buildings on Main Street. Much has changed in the last 150 years. Mankind has changed. We have created new ways to profit from the mountains - ways that do not require the extraction of ore. Treasure Mountain Ranch, or TMR, are hoping to bring Crystal back from hibernation. They are attempting to develop an exclusive resort in the townsite, consisting of lofty ideas of curated cat skiing with avalanche mitigation (bombing), high-end cabins, a restaurant, and wells to create hot springs. They have attempted to be curators of the Crystal Valley over the years, all in hopes that the community will accept them and their concept. Newspaper articles have popped up randomly, but their tall ambitions and conflicts have led to delays with no updates. This has left the residents of the valley to dwell on rumors and whispers.

Until now. Last fall, a land use submission was provided to Gunnison County. After months of back and forth, the application was deemed complete this spring. They are requesting multiple lot line adjustments on their mining claims to allow for easier future development. In addition, they are proposing the decommissioning of several older cabins in exchange for building four modernized cabins

for "residential" use. This includes a significant amount of infrastructure, as well as a five thousand square foot maintenance facility. They are proposing to do repairs and additional community work to the Crystal Mill and enhance preservation of Crystal, but is this enough to offset the opinion of some in the community? The application is going through the referral process now and will be opening for public comment soon. All documents are available to the public through Gunnison County Community Development.

CVEPA has been watching the progression of this project with concern, hoping the significant obstacles would deter TMR from exploiting the Upper Crystal Valley. This finger of private land extends deep between the Maroon Bells and Ragged Wilderness areas, and a development in Crystal would have major environmental impacts.

The CVEPA board has agreed that this application appears incomplete and is not a holistic land use submittal. Instead, TMR is breaking the development into a piecemealed approach that does not reflect the overall intent of this project. Furthermore, we believe that this application should be discussed and reviewed as a commercial development, not residential. Clearly there are far reaching impacts to the town of Crystal and beyond from even this initial proposal. Not only is the applicant proposing to increase use in the townsite, but the request is subtly asking for changing what has historically been seasonal visitor access to year-round access. This project has significant repercussions to everything that must be considered with this application - from wildlife and habitat impacts to emergency access to maintaining historical integrity and much more.

The Town of Crystal has over time been reclaimed by nature, and is one of the few areas around that have had a decrease in human impact since the 1890s. CVEPA believes this is worth fighting for and will continue to bring awareness to the progress of this development. Be prepared for the upcoming public comment period to make sure your opinion is heard and accounted for in the review of TMR's first phase of development.



# Ode to the Old McClure Pass

Jacob Schmidt

The Old McClure Pass trail is a historic, primitive single track that rises up from the Crystal Valley and offers expansive views of Chair Mountain, the Crystal River, and the Ragged Mountain range. Given the trail's southeasterly aspect, gentle grades, and modest trailhead, this peaceful footpath offers premiere year-round hiking and trailing running for locals (like myself), as well as the occasional, attentive traveler. More times than not, you can expect to have this beautiful undisturbed trail to yourself— you're probably more likely to see an elk or a bear than another human being!

As someone who's been in Redstone for just the past few seasons, it is hard for me to believe that the Old McClure Pass trail was entirely paved back in 1978. Today, Old McClure has been restored to its long-desired state, as the trail successfully mirrors the natural look and feel it originally had when it was used by the Utes, miners, settlers, and ranchers prior to the twentieth century.

Given its well-preserved, historic state, Old McClure provides an authentic experience for any outdoor enthusiast seeking accommodating access and solitude alike. The "road" is consumed by wildlife and wilderness. I'm sure it's taken years for the aspen groves and wildflowers to grow in, and for the elk to wander back. At times, the trail is a bit rugged— there is a creek crossing and numerous rockfalls dominate the old road; however, the windy single track gradually traverses the natural obstacles and offers a loamy footpath that's easy on the feet.

I was heartbroken when I heard the news that the development of the cell phone tower may lead to the excavation of Old McClure. I cannot imagine how a trail so perfectly primitive will survive the wide, loud, and heavy machinery and retain its intrinsic value. So, to those who appreciate *trails* over roads, I encourage you to check out Old McClure Pass while it's still "*old*" this summer.



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**CVEPA Annual Meeting, Sunday, August 28,  
Raspberry Ridge Café and Inn, Marble, CO.  
*Watch your inbox for more info.***



# Some thoughts about Eugene Grubb, Charles McClure, and Casey Piscura

Dale Will

Since the time of initial European settlement, our valley has attracted the attention of some brilliant agrarians. These visionaries are sometimes called “bioneers.” One such man was Eugene Grubb, who in 1912 characterized the valley’s fertility as follows: “No part of the world is better fitted by nature for growing potatoes than the mountain districts of Colorado... The Roaring Fork and Crystal River Valley section of Colorado is as nearly perfect in soil conditions as can be found, and the potatoes grown there are not excelled anywhere in the world, and are equaled in but a few places.” Eugene H. Grubb, The Potato: A Compilation of Information from Every Available Source (1912)

Two years prior, another “bioneer” named Charles McClure had bred the “Red McClure” potato in the Crystal Valley. The high pass to Paonia would later be named in his honor. The work of nurturing new crops required passion and acute powers of observation. These people thought deeply about our climate, soils, and water. The early farm census for Pitkin County bears them out. Between 1910 and 1945, Pitkin County annually produced 120-220 thousand bushels (6,000,000-11,000,000 pounds) of potatoes.

Through the insights of Grubb, McClure and many others, the Crystal Valley farming economy exploded rapidly in the wake of Ute removal, feeding valley residents, and, with the arrival of the railroads, to the market outside the valley. In the “quiet years” after the collapse of silver mining, the agricultural economy shifted more into beef production, with quite a large dairy component as well. Eggs were bartered among valley residents.

The fertility of our mountain valleys remained steadfast even as a postwar real estate boom was fueled by Aspen’s resurgence as a year round resort. Suburban sprawl appeared as the nemesis of the valley’s irrigated fields. Local rancher Bill Fales once told me, “people say this isn’t a good place for agriculture. They’re wrong. It’s a great place for agriculture, if we can just save the land.”

The loss of agricultural lands was identified decades ago as a significant issue. As reported in “Losing Ground” Environment Colorado (2006; Central Mountains lost 655,000 acres to suburban sprawl from 1987-2002) and “Strategic Ranchland in the Rocky Mountain West” American Farmland Trust (4.9 million acres at risk in Colorado) have highlighted the larger problem in the Rockies.

Some years ago I was tasked with organizing a board retreat on local food production for Pitkin County’s Open Space Board. I became curious how many people the Roaring Fork Valley might feed if we immediately stop paving food producing lands. My buddy Malcolm McMichael worked up an analysis based on remaining irrigated acres and available public grazing lands. Relying on a diet very heavy in beef and potatoes, two foods we know we can grow, we concluded that the local “foodshed” could sustain about 12,000 people annually. With multiple times that now living in our valley, it is obvious that we’re way past our local carrying capacity.

While we can no longer strive to feed our current valley population entirely with local production, the preservation of what we have left remains important. If perhaps even twenty percent of our nutritional needs could be supplied locally, I believe we would all be healthier and happier. Local food systems contribute the public wellbeing in multiple ways, such as

- Human health and nutrition
- Regional economic vitality through local employment and dollar recirculation
- Protection of open lands and habitat
- Cultural, Historic, and Educational Inspiration
- Food Security

Our historic ranching has come down through the generations in the care of families like the Nieslaniks, Granges, Fales-Perry, and the Jacober brothers. To my palate, nothing tastes better than local grass fed beef. In recent times, bioneering *farming*, of the likes of Grubb and McClure, have also returned to our valley. The Sopris Sun’s recent cover story about Harper Kaufman and her brilliant work at Two Roots Farm in Emma is a keystone example.

Sadly, this February, we lost one of the most passionate and brilliant minds to re-enter this arena. I feel quite blessed to have spent time with Casey Piscura listening to him describe his work with seed breeding and plant adaptation up at Sunfire Ranch. It pains me deeply that the stresses of finance, of personality disputes, or perhaps even deeper and mysterious tragic voices led to his choice to leave this earth. As one who has endured such a loss within my own home, I can but pray that his death be a catalyst for all of us to reach harder to heal the wounds of our histories, and advance the worthy things we hold most dear.

Casey’s fascination with soil, light, and temperature most certainly rivaled that of Grubb and McClure. His breeding program created a legacy of mountain adapted tomatoes and other crops, available at Wild Mountain Seeds. Like McClure, I would certainly hope that one of Casey’s locally bred varieties will come to bear his name.

## Tune In!

CVEPA Board members Greg Albrecht and Bill Jochems will discuss the issues CVEPA is engaged with on Bill Kite’s public affairs radio show “For Land’s Sake.” Catch them at 4:30 on Monday, July 14, on KDNK!

## New Email Address!

CVEPA’s old outlook address is no more. Please contact us at [cvepa1972@gmail.com](mailto:cvepa1972@gmail.com). Our website address, [cvepa.org](http://cvepa.org), remains the same. Past issues of the “Crystal Clear” can be accessed at [cvepa.org/newsletters](http://cvepa.org/newsletters)

# Director Departs

## John Armstrong

The CVEPA quarterly publication “Crystal Clear” (CC) is colorful, inviting and always full of topical Crystal River Valley information that you won’t find elsewhere. The evolution of the CC during the last six years has brought CVEPA recognition and respect through the hard work and talent of Suzy Meredith-Orr. Suzy enthusiastically joined CVEPA in 2019 and has been a force in shaping CVEPA in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I would fall short if I tried to convey the countless hours and energy she has spent professionally crafting each CC while staying on top of the issues and often “herding cats” to bring each issue to fruition.

Suzy comes from an line of Merediths with deep roots in the Crystal Valley. Suzy is originally from Emporia, Kansas. With her husband Denny, also a tireless CVEPA volunteer, she permanently moved to the Crystal Valley from Tulsa, Oklahoma. Suzy left a career as principal pianist for the symphony in Tulsa to spend more time with family and to live in paradise. Always active in the arts, Suzy was uniquely gifted in her skills guiding the publication. She soon became CVEPA vice-president. Suzy’s commitment to CVEPA is only superseded by her devotion to family. It is with heavy heart that CVEPA honors Suzy’s retirement from our board but we wish her the very best and hope to stay very connected to her.

CVEPA doesn’t know what the next iteration of the Crystal Clear will be but one thing is crystal clear...the CC will be different moving forward than it has been with Suzy as its driving force. We as a board and all our members are so grateful to have had the good fortune of getting to know Suzy and benefitting from her depth of talent and her contribution. Thank you Suzy!

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.

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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/cvepa-membership-options>



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