



Crystal Clear Winter, 2023

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

Staying True to Ourselves

For the last 51 years, CVEPA has worked tirelessly to protect the Crystal Valley. Our organization exists to preserve the natural environment—its wildlife and its ecosystems, its scenic resources and the uniquely free-flowing Crystal River itself—through passionate advocacy, watchdogging and environmental leadership. We value the history of the valley and seek to educate others about what came before us. We are committed to public access to public lands and to the type of human conduct that shows respect for those places. We are driven to these efforts by our love of our home and are grateful to share that deep love with our members, friends, and other non-profit partners. Your help, your support, and your engagement with our work enables us to do our best to protect this place until the end of time.

As you may have heard, Merriam Webster chose “authentic” as their word of the year. As tempting as it is to stay cocooned in our Crystal Valley bubble, life forces an engagement with the news, perhaps with social media, that sometimes shows us a world in which the line between real and fake is increasingly blurred. Whether its as innocuous as using a filter to appear at your best in a selfie, or as damaging as misrepresenting another human by creating a deepfake, tweaking or zhuzhing, altering or even deceiving appear to be more and more accepted as a part of daily life. It's disturbing to contemplate that truth, like words, may not matter as much as we wish. Encountering the counterfeit is bad enough, but recognizing it as a “value” that's increasingly influential makes me want to hide under the covers of the valley's cottonwoods, peaks, rocks and river sounds. I turn there—perhaps you do too—because nature is always authentic.

The good news is that CVEPIans are great at knowing what's real and what's important. We are really good at aligning our actions with our core beliefs. The CVEPA board and you, our members, see the value of what we are surrounded by. We're grateful to be able to experience it and to turn to it when we need a reminder of the power of reality. It's a joyful thing to have such authenticity to protect and it's especially gratifying to protect it alongside you. Whether you are a long time supporter or a new member, we thank you for your support of CVEPA.

Suzy Meredith-Orr

President's Update 2023

John Armstrong

Every year is different and brings a new set of challenges. For several years running we have had significant issues and environmental transgressions in our valley, some high profile. 2023 seems quiet in comparison. CVEPA is monitoring, learning and advising different projects throughout the valley. Remember that you as members are the eyes and ears of the valley!

Before our big but tame spring runoff, the Marble Airstrip ownership mitigated some of the riverine manipulation that had been done the year before. Work was completed before runoff. Gunnison County said the owner is working toward compliance.

The Wild and Scenic and Other Alternatives initiative has been a year long process with a comprehensive group of stakeholders. Virtual unanimity supports strong protection of a free flowing river. CVEPA has a seat at the table with Tait Andersen representing our interests. See Tait's article "Protecting the Future" on page 3.

Treasure Mountain Ranch in Crystal City has changed their vision for development on their 750 acre ranch. TMR seeks a land exchange of approximately 110 acres along the Crystal River for United States Forest Service acreage near 11,000' on Treasure Mountain to provide skiing as part of their business model. TMR convened an orientation meeting of stakeholders this fall to present their proposal. They have retained Western Lands Group, an entity that brokered the Wexner Sopris land exchange, to assist them.

CVEPA was integral in the federal investigation that led to the subsequent conviction and fining of four local men who had been snowmobiling throughout the Maroon Bells-Snowmass wilderness area between Marble, Aspen and Crested Butte last winter. The intrusion had been going on for years with increasing frequency. CVEPA was disappointed that USFS made no press release. Public knowledge of conviction is a deterrent to other perpetrators. Our request for the report fell on deaf ears.

The conservation easement and management plan for the Marble Wetlands project is nearing fruition. The Trust for Land Restoration (TLR), and specifically Pat Willits, has put in countless hours on this process which is essential to the future protection of this riparian property. The Aspen Valley Land Trust and the Town of Marble have played a key role in this conservation success. Thank you Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers for your weed mitigation this June!

This summer was very busy for the Coal Basin Methane Group. Staff and volunteers hiked all over Coal Basin moving instruments essential in determining the location, quality and quantity of the greenhouse gas. Hearty volunteers and Avalanche Outfitters horses moved heavy instruments to numerous sites while drones and fixed wing aircraft assisted from above. They plan to present information and results of their investigation soon.

The Yule Marble Quarry (CSQ) has offered a tour to CVEPA next spring. We are eager to see the work CSQ has done to foster a living creek through the quarry site.

We are grateful to CDOT for the sophisticated and expensive work they have done to enhance safety on the Crystal River Corridor. With chagrin we still await completion of the revegetation of the Placita and Horseshoe debris dump sites on McClure Pass. Starting in 2007, the mutually crafted reclamation plan has now stalled for eight years. Despite Ranger Warner's direction this spring for CDOT to complete the project the sites languish. CVEPA has offered volunteer labor for years, RFOV is willing to help and CVEPA is donating the specific seed mix to complete the project.

Our valley's favorite little cross country ski area just got better! Working with North Thompson Cattlemen's Association, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Pitkin and Garfield Counties, Spring Gulch is expanding its trails system to adjust to climate change. They are undergoing a major capital campaign. Visit springgulch.org for more info.

The Wildrose access to Filoha Meadows, commonly known as Dorais Way, remained locked this year. A judge's decision is due this coming spring and it is critical that this historic public access is restored to the people.

Internally, CVEPA is expanding! Three qualified and capable locals have expressed strong interest in becoming more involved in our mission so we have decided to increase our board count back to the original nine. We couldn't be more excited to welcome the new energy. We're also grateful to Denny Meredith-Orr who has volunteered his expertise as CVEPA's new bookkeeper.

The eyes and ears of the Crystal are heard when we are a united voice. Thank you all for your continued support for environmental defense of the valley.

Add Your Support and Protect the Crystal Valley!
Become a CVEPA Member! Memberships begin at just \$20.
Donations gratefully accepted!

Scan here:



Or mail a check to

CVEPA
PO Box 921
Carbondale, CO 81623

Thank You!

cvepa.org

Protecting the Future

Tait Andersen

As I write this, I am looking across the table at my three-month old son, Axel. Although his present occupations primarily include trying to suck his thumb and wiggling, he will grow up in the Crystal Valley. The future has never seemed so real. At the last Wild and Scenic and other Alternatives Steering Committee meeting at the firehouse in Marble in November, Ron Leach, Marble's Town Administrator, opened the meeting with a similar sentiment. Success in this process, Ron said, is that this committee makes recommendations that preserve the ability for future kids to grab a fishing pole, walk down to the Crystal River, and enjoy a full nature experience.

It's a sentiment that is shared between committee members and the community at large. At the Community Summit, hosted at Roaring Fork High School on October 26th, 210 community members showed up to express their interest in protecting the Crystal River for generations to come. The summit provided a platform for experts to share different protection options, from state and local mechanisms to federal Wild and Scenic Designation. Attendees were provided a survey to rank the different options according to their own preferences.

While survey data is still forthcoming, what was clear in conversations throughout the summit is the passion and love that everyone there, no matter their relationship to the river, has for the Crystal River.

In 2024, the Steering Committee will shift its focus from information gathering, to building recommendations for protection. These recommendations will be judged according to criteria developed by the committee. Criteria include protection being durable and effective, providing sustainable public access, preventing dams and out of basin diversions, protecting local agriculture and water rights, protecting local control of the river and property rights, protecting the natural hydrograph and ecosystem health, limiting the impacts on the river from future development, and making sure solutions are capable of being funded, managed and maintained.

These are certainly lofty criteria, and weaving them together is no easy feat. However, each Steering Committee meeting has been extremely positive, and I believe that is because we all have the same starting point: a shared love of a free-flowing river, a river with an intact personality. The kind of river we all want our children to know this place by.



Winter Trail Closures

Many Pitkin County trails are closed seasonally for the protection of wintering wildlife. Some areas are closed to protect elk and other wildlife during the spring calving season. Please obey closure signs and dog restrictions. The following closures in the Crystal Valley are in effect during the winter/spring seasons:

JANEWAY / AVALANCHE – Access to Janeway through Tarr property (an Open Space and Trails access) closed December. 1 to May 1.

FS Road 310 (Avalanche Creek Road) and surrounding area closed to dogs November. 23 through May 1.

Area north of road closed to people November. 23 through May 1. Road closed to vehicles and bicycles November. 23 through May 21.

PERHAM CREEK TRAIL – Trailhead access closed December 1-March 31 (reopens April 1).

FILLOHA MEADOWS NATURE PRESERVE – Closed October 1 through June 30 (reopens July 1). Public access limited to north-south wagon road through property. No dogs or bicycling permitted. Closed dusk to dawn.

RED WIND POINT OPEN SPACE – Closed Dec. 1 through April 30 (reopens May 1).

Thoughts on Wildlife McCarthyism, Impact Credits, and the Humility We'll Need to Share Earth's Beauty in an Equitable Manner

Dale Will

Early in my career, I clerked at the Environmental Defense Fund trying to help negotiate changes in California's massive irrigation system, trying to stave off the extinction of the Sacramento River Winter Run of Chinook Salmon. The irrigation system, known as "the Central Valley Project," irrigates a good share of the fruits and nuts produced in our country overall. The pumps and dams were hell on Salmon, and the Winter Run Chinook had fallen to a mere 42 individuals. As our negotiations failed, my task was to petition the federal government to list these fish as "endangered," thereby forcing changes. With a species on the brink of extinction, and a billion dollar farm economy pumping the river, that was a hum dinger of a wildlife fight. In the high mountains of Colorado we are perhaps blessed that we have few species facing extinction. Yet biodiversity protection remains no less important.

I don't believe I have ever met another human who doesn't care about wildlife. We humans are thrilled to share the planet with so many interesting and different creatures. Perhaps for this reason, wildlife protection is a common foil for those wanting to stop various groups of humans from doing various things. No one wants to be accused of indifference to wild things. Having spent a career working with these issues, I am increasingly concerned with what I might call "wildlife McCarthyism." That is, accusing someone or something of being particularly harmful to wildlife as a mechanism to stigmatize that thing for selfish reasons.

Some years ago, in my work with Open Space and Trails, we held a retreat to focus on biodiversity protection. We spent a day with Rick Knight, then dean of conservation biology research at CSU. Professor Knight is widely regarded as an expert on things like recreational impacts on wildlife. He organized his presentation into some basic phenomenon he wanted us to understand. First, he noted that the ecosystem is complex and armchair generalizations are often wrong; some species are more tolerant of humans than others, their tolerance is more or less at different times of year, and site specific studies of specific activities and habitat types is necessary to understand these relationships. And second, he observed that *almost universally people tend to overestimate the wildlife impacts of others' activities while underestimating*

their own.

Thinking of our valley in light of Knight's observation, the ironies are endless. We have residences smack in the middle of habitats whose owners claim *visitors* threaten those same places. We have agrarians who want public grazing lands shielded from recreationists while opposing the restoration of keystone native species. We have leading environmentalists priding themselves on their personal access to wild spaces while condemning activities that might create access for the less privileged. To the general public it must be rather bewildering.

When listening to wildlife rhetoric I always ask myself two questions. 1. Has the complaint been backed up by a qualified study of the specific species and habitat? 2. Have *all* human activities been equally considered? If the answer to

either question is no, one may assume the rhetoric has something to do with "turf," i.e. the desire of one group to control a piece of the landscape. And that is just a disservice to the larger cause at hand.

None of us live without impacts. Every time we buy an airplane ticket, start our car, or turn up our thermostats (carbon neutral homes excepted), we're likely harming arctic animals. All of us need a dose of humility about these issues. If I was a science fiction writer, I might pen a sequel to

"Ecotopia" wherein we live in a world where the biosphere's tolerance for human impacts is both known and carefully allocated by some egalitarian formula. Much as fuel was rationed during WW2, we'd all be given an equal amount of "impact credits." One person might use their credit on a flight to Hawaii, while the next would use theirs on a season pass to a favorite hiking trail. The impacts would be objectively allocated on an equal basis. Fights over turf masquerading as wildlife activism would be over.

Of course my sci-fi fantasy will never happen; our knowledge of the biosphere, and our systems for equitable resource allocation, are both too imperfect. In the absence of such knowledge and systems, I suggest that when approaching habitat conservation, we promote the study with the best available science, we question all assumptions, and we check our egos at the door.



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Valley Voices:

“Making Outdoor Fun Greener”

mountainFLOW EcoWax

In a world grappling with climate change and the fragility of mountain ecosystems, the winter sports industry bears a responsibility to address its environmental impact. One local entrepreneur, Peter Arlein, has taken on this challenge by creating “mountainFLOW” a company committed to playing a pivotal role in creating a greener future.

Carbondale-based mountainFLOW sells plant-based ski wax and other environmentally friendly gear—a claim no other outdoor company can match. This desire to provide an alternative to toxic outdoor products grew out of Arlein’s youth in rural New York, college in Maine and an eventual move to Aspen where he worked as a ski tech, ski patroller and a raft guide.

Once Arlein learned that most ski wax was made with petroleum, it inspired him to change things. He says “it took me two years and over 200 iterations, but eventually I created a plant-based ski wax that worked as well or better than the competition and was completely biodegradable and non-toxic.”

The trailblazing company began in 2016, but really gained a spotlight after Arlein appeared on the ABC reality show “Shark Tank.” The support he received gave the company the shot in the arm it needed to hit the national scene and address the growing environmental consciousness of skiers and snowboards everywhere.

While most employees live in Carbondale, two, including Peter and his family, and Director of Marketing, Dax Myers, live in the Crystal Valley, which helps ensure the environmental benefits impact this place as well as winter playgrounds throughout the country.

Traditional ski and snowboard waxes are laden with harmful chemicals and petroleum-based ingredients and have long been an often overlooked source of environmental concern. As winter sports continue to gain in popularity, the environmental toll of maintaining equipment has become more pronounced. Fluorocarbons in ski wax contain PFAS (per and polyfluoroalkyl substances, also known as ‘forever chemicals’.) These compounds have long existed in waterproof apparel and ski wax, but the catalyst for a recent halt in their use was the discovery that they were present in drinking water, and had even been shown to bioaccumulate in human blood.

mountainFLOW instead uses a petroleum-free, non-toxic formulation that provides conscientious riders with high performance alternatives that align with their eco-friendly values.

Complementing the eco-friendly formulation, mountainFLOW’s waxes boast a biodegradable composition. Traditional waxes often leave behind residue on the slopes, negatively impacting mountain ecosystems. In contrast, mountainFLOW’s waxes break down naturally, leaving minimal traces.

The mountainFLOW ethos is further solidified through its Fluorinated Wax Takeback Program. The program ensures the responsible collection of toxic waxes in conjunction with the EPA, mitigating their potential harm to the environment, particularly to water bodies and ecosystems. mountainFLOW is proud to have led the nation’s largest fluorinated wax takeback program since 2022.

It’s also the only company to sell recycled aluminum ski poles and are one of the absolute few to be doing petroleum-free, non-toxic bike products.

With a commitment to performance excellence, a dedication to eco-friendly practices, and the initiation of the nation’s largest fluorinated wax takeback program, mountainFLOW provides skiers and snowboarders the opportunity to embrace a more sustainable and thrilling journey down the slopes. The company believes that those who carve their way through the snow should not only revel in the exhilaration of the ride but also tread lightly on the planet.

To learn more, visit mountainflow.com, or check out their unmissable videos on Instagram at [@mountainflowecowax](https://www.instagram.com/mountainflowecowax).



Photos courtesy of mountainFLOW.

Volunteers Rock!

CVEPA members and friends joined Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers to help with weed eradication in Filoha Meadows in September. The meadow is the only location in the Crystal Valley that provides the correct habitat for rare Stream Orchids. We thank the volunteers who helped control invasive Canada thistles to protect a special part of the Crystal Valley.



Photo courtesy RFOV.

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/support-cvepa>



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