

Conservation on a large scale

July 2005

A chance meeting with a wildlife expert started Richard Jelinek on a 15-year odyssey that has resulted in the conservation this week of nearly 1,000 acres of his Crystal Island Ranch. During the same period, multi-year efforts by conservation groups preserved the adjacent 420-acre Mautz Ranch, creating a 1,400-acre block of meadows, riverfront and undisturbed habitat that stretch from the west side of the Crystal River to thousands of acres of federal lands that reach to the top of Mount Sopris.

Jelinek, a long-time resident who with his wife Debbie also owns a house in Aspen, traces the beginning of his vision to a meeting with Colorado Division of Wildlife Officer Kevin Wright. In 1991 the two men stood at Lewis Lake and Kevin, looking toward Mount Sopris, held out his arms east and west, embracing a section of natural habitat and asked Jelinek to keep the undisturbed uplands in tact. The notion of permanently conserving a broad landscape was reinforced some years later in a conversation with Pitkin County Commissioner Mick Ireland while the two were out running. Ireland asked that Jelinek do a master plan for the ranch rather than planning the

ranch in sections. Jelinek has spent the past several years doing just that.

While the Jelineks were working through the master plan for their Carbondale ranch in the late 1990s, developer Andre Ulrych purchased the adjacent 420-acre Mautz Ranch. He renamed it the Crystal Valley Ranch, divided it into 11 parcels and obtained 1041 building approvals for 15,000-square-foot houses along both sides of the Highway 133, the national West Elk Scenic Byway. Desperate to prevent



large-scale development of the historic Mautz Ranch, local Ruthie Brown contacted her old friend Tom Macy, executive director of the Conservation Fund, a national conservation organization. In 2001 the Fund purchased the ranch and Pitkin County obtained a security interest to stop development until a more desirable outcome could be arranged.

A complex series of transactions that were completed this week assured the conservation of the area that Kevin Wright had suggested back in 1991. In simultaneous closings, Richard and Debbie Jelinek granted a conservation easement on 533 acres of their Crystal Island Ranch to Pitkin County and AVL T; AVL T conveyed a partial interest in existing Crystal Island Ranch easements on an additional 434 acres to Pitkin County; the Conservation Fund granted a 84.5-acre conservation easement to Pitkin County and AVL T, a trail easement along the old Crystal River railroad grade to Pitkin County, and ownership to Crystal Island Ranch; and, finally, the Conservation Fund conveyed ownership in an additional 87 acres between Highway 133 and the Crystal River to Pitkin County.

This 87-acre parcel has nearly one mile of river frontage and will now become an open space preserve to rival such Pitkin County jewels as North Star on the Roaring Fork River or Filoha Meadows further up the Crystal River Valley. The remaining portion of the former Mautz Ranch was conserved in 2003 when a conservation easement was given to Pitkin County on 240 acres west of Highway 133 in 2003, prior to the Conservation Fund selling the land to Sustainable Settings, a non-profit sustainable development organization. Any future development of that parcel is now confined to the west side of the property near the ranch headquarters. While the planning that went in to this project was arduous at times, Jelinek is pleased with the result. "I used to be quite skeptical of the County and its land conservation efforts," he said. "I have come to cherish the values of this community, and I am happy to conserve my ranch as part of a larger effort."

AVLT Executive Director

Martha Cochran agreed that the years of work were time well spent. "We dream of preserving entire landscapes. This project is living the dream, she said. "Richard and Debbie have given the valley a great gift by conserving this exceptional property." The Conservation Fund's Executive Director Tom Macy is a veteran of such large-scale conservation efforts as the 60,000-acre Greenland Ranch separating Denver and Colorado Springs and the 5,000-acre Bair



Ranch at the east end of Glenwood Canyon. He is nevertheless impressed with the success of the combined projects in the Crystal River Valley. "With the rarified land values in the Roaring Fork Valley, I'm delighted to be able to play a role in conserving two adjacent ranches while at the same time securing public access along the river corridor."

Crystal Island Ranch/Crystal Valley Ranch Conservation Chronology:

- 1998 - conservation easement conveyed to AVLT on 258 acres (CIR I or CIR East)
- 2001 - conservation easement conveyed to AVLT on 70 acres (CIR II or CIR West or Duck Meadows)
- 2004 - conservation easement conveyed to AVLT on 105 acres (CIR III or CIR North)
- 2005 - conservation easement conveyed to Pitkin County and AVLT on 533 acres (CIR IV or CIR Thomas Creek). CIR II expanded to 87 acres. A partial interest in CIR I, II and III assigned to Pitkin County so that the entities can combine resources in protecting the easements.

Total acres conserved on Crystal Island Ranch: 983

Crystal Valley Ranch:

- 2000 - The Conservation Fund purchases the CVR; 11 in lots with 6 residential development approvals and an approval for a large barn 2003 - a conservation

easement on 245 acres is conveyed to Pitkin County, the remainder interest transferred by the Fund to Sustainable Settings with restricted development for agricultural and education purposes.

- 2004 - A boundary issue across the river is settled when a neighboring landowner agrees to a 5 acre conservation easement conveyed to Pitkin County in exchange for recognition of the river as the legal boundary.
- 2005 - A Trail Easement across the property east of the river is conveyed to Pitkin County
- A Conservation Easement on 84.5 acres (containing the trail easement) is conveyed to Pitkin County and AVL. The encumbered land is conveyed by the Conservation Fund to CIR and restricted to agricultural and passive recreational uses. The remaining 87 acres of CVR is conveyed to Pitkin County, for open space, recreational and agricultural uses.

Total acres conserved on CVR: 422

Total acres conserved: approximately 1,400

Total OST investment in both projects: approximately \$4,375,000