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New easement will let rare flowers thrive near Carbondale

By MIKE McKIBBIN
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CARBONDALE — A parcel of open space that is home to several unique species of plants outside Carbondale will remain in its natural state, after Colorado Rocky Mountain School recently granted a conservation easement for the land to the Aspen Valley Land Trust.

The 18.5-acre parcel is along the Crystal River and is part of the private preparatory school's 300-acre campus, spokesman Jeremy Simon said.

"We've always planned to keep it as open space, so it can be kind of a buffer to all the housing development along (County Road) 109," he said. "Maybe someone later on would have different intentions for it, so this way we can make sure it remains in its natural habitat."

Colorado State University lists the site as a conservation protection area, partly due to the presence of two rare flowers — the canyon bog orchid and the yellow ladyslipper.

Wildlife, including bald eagles, osprey, elk, mule deer and bears, has been seen on the parcel, Simon said.

The school will continue to use the land for science classes and for kayak races, he said.

The school retained the right to low-impact private recreational use and trail-building, along with livestock grazing and construction of a small boathouse.

The Carbondale-based Aspen Valley Land Trust has conservation easements on more than 28,000 acres in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River valleys to preserve the land for open space, agriculture, wildlife and recreation.

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