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January 24 - January 31, 2008

**News**

**CRMS grants 18.5 acres along river to conservation easement**

**Valley Journal staff report**



**Weather**

**Carbondale, CO**  
 11 °F / -12 °C  
 Clear  
 at 10:53 AM  
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Looking northwest from Thompson Creek Road across the 18.5 acres of Colorado Rocky Mountain School property along the Crystal River just west of the school campus. The land was recently placed into a conservation easement, preventing it from being developed in perpetuity. (Trina Ortega photo)

Colorado Rocky Mountain School and the Aspen Valley Land Trust have preserved an 18.5-acre stretch of land abutting the Crystal River just west of the CRMS campus as open space forever, free from the threat of future development.

The parcel stretches from County Road 109 to the Crystal River, for 500 yards along the west side of the river from County Road 108 (Thompson Creek Road) toward the Midland Point residential neighborhood.

Currently an undeveloped part of CRMS's 300-plus-acre campus, the area's rich natural habitat and scenic open space are enhanced by resident wildlife species including bald

eagles, osprey, elk, mule deer, and black bears.

"This land is invaluable to CRMS as an outdoor classroom and as open space central to the campus," Michael Kennedy, chair of the CRMS board of trustees, said in a press release. "We're delighted to preserve it forever for both the school and the Carbondale community."

The site is used by Jim Gaw's science classes, in which students study plant and insect diversity, and mammals and birds.

"CRMS certainly has an interest, not only environmental but also curricular, in maintaining the land in its natural state," CRMS spokesman Jeremy Simon said.

That stretch of river also annually hosts the Crystal River Kayak Races, one of America's largest high-school kayaking events. Its minimal human traffic consists primarily of boating-related activities.

The 11 acres located on the west side of 109 Road is used for CRMS faculty residences and a variety of agricultural uses.

"We're not considering development there at this point; that parcel's not really on our radar right now," Simon said.

In the agreement, CRMS granted AVLT a conservation easement in perpetuity, with the land preserved as open space in concert with AVLT's mission. CRMS retains the right to low-impact private recreational use and trail-building, along with grazing and raising of livestock, and construction of a small boat house sometime in the future.

"This parcel is one of Carbondale's gems along the Crystal River corridor. CRMS has taken a big step toward preserving the riverfront for future generations," said Martha Cochran, AVLT executive director.

CRMS purchased the 18.5 acres to be under easement, plus an added adjacent 11 acres (collectively known as the "Wilson Property") in 1999 for \$1.65 million,

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thanks in part to a \$1 million donation by the Pettit Foundation and generous facilitation from neighboring rancher Sue Rodgers, owner of the Crystal River Ranch.

The land was also purchased about the same time CRMS sold its commercially zoned property fronting Highway 133, approximately 20 acres, to original Crystal River Marketplace developer Brian Huster for \$5.1 million.

CRMS has valued the riverfront parcel as a buffer from external development, which is seen increasingly down the popular 109 Road stretch at Coryell Ranch, Aspen Glen and Ironbridge.

The Carbondale-based Aspen Valley Land Trust has conserved more than 28,000 acres in the Roaring Fork and Colorado river valleys for open space, agriculture, wildlife and recreation.

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