

PITKIN COUNTY OPEN SPACE & TRAILS AND THE CITY OF ASPEN PURCHASE WILKINSON'S SMUGGLER PROPERTIES

MERRY CHRISTMAS ASPEN!

The most anticipated open space acquisition in the Aspen community's history was completed on Dec. 20, when Pitkin County Open Space and Trails (OST) and the City of Aspen joined forces to acquire all of George "Wilk" Wilkinson's property interests on Smuggler Mountain. This purchase brings to fruition several years of planning to preserve some 200 acres on what is often referred to as Aspen's back yard. The \$15 million acquisition includes all of Wilkinson's land and mineral rights on Smuggler Mountain. This is by far our most expensive open space purchase to date.

Flanking the east edge of Aspen, Smuggler Mountain provides the town with a scenic backdrop and a portal to Hunter Creek Wilderness. Once rich with silver ore, Smuggler Mountain is now rich with history, and with recreational resources for the community. The citizens of Aspen and Pitkin County have long enjoyed Smuggler Mountain for its trails and open vistas. Wilkinson's properties are traversed by both the Hunter Creek "Cutoff" Road and the Warren Lakes Road, both heavily traveled by many forms of recreationists. **The Aspen Valley Land Trust (AVLT)** holds a conservation easement on the property, ensuring that it will remain free from development for future generations.

Patti Clapper, chair of the Board of County Commissioners, said, "I live in the shadow of that mountain and I have been working to protect it since the superfund days with the mine. This purchase secures for all residents our sense of place, and will ensure we are not hemmed in by upscale development."

Though the area's open space qualities have long been appreciated, the public's enjoyment has been haunted by the threat of residential development. In response, the County has been acquiring lesser Smuggler properties parcels over the last couple decades, acquiring several smaller parcels since 1972. Pressure for public acquisition of the remaining properties fueled the establishment of the County and City Open Space programs, in 1990 and 2000, respectively. In 2001, the County made a deal with Harley Baldwin for the bargain sale of the famous observation deck, and some surrounding lands. Most recently, the City and County partnered on the acquisition of the 20-acre Music Associates of Aspen mining claims.

Jesse Boyce, chair of the Open Space and Trails Board and member of the City Open Space Board, acknowledged that bringing Wilk's property in to public hands was truly a community effort.

"This acquisition was achieved through the efforts of all of the past and present County and City open space board members and the efforts of our staff who have pursued this goal over the years. The voters and tax payers of Aspen and Pitkin County deserve the ultimate credit for initiating and funding the two open space programs, and the Aspen City Council and Pitkin County Board

of Commissioners are to be thanked for approving the expensive, yet invaluable purchase,” Boyce said.

Fred Peirce, Chair of Aspen’s Open Space Board, echoed Boyce’s recognition of the success of this collaboration. “It was a long time coming, but we’re fortunate that when the stars were finally aligned, both jurisdictions were able to respond quickly and jointly, to make a deal that will benefit the residents of Aspen and the County for years to come.”

Throughout this effort, Wilkinson held the largest private acreage on the mountain. The County and City had each tried previously to reach an agreement. Each time, talks failed on the issues of price and reserved development rights. In the end, this deal came together as each side went beyond its prior positions: Wilkinson agreed to sell his entire interest in the mountain, and the City/County agreed to dig deeper into their limited open space funds.

“Faith, persistence, and collaboration do pay off. What more perfect finish for 2005 than the acquisition of the Wilkinson parcels on Smuggler Mountain. Aspen and Pitkin County can celebrate this season of miracles knowing this valuable and significant open space will be preserved for future generations,” said Mayor Helen Klanderud.

The County program will exhaust most of its cash reserves on this purchase. This purchase does not preserve all Smuggler Mountain. There are other privately owned parcels left on the “face” of Smuggler visible from town. The City and County programs will attempt to secure these remaining inholdings over time. However, we now own the largest private property on Smuggler Mountain. Merry Christmas Aspen!

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails closed on two other open space acquisitions today, giving county residents an open space hat trick.

Complementing the Smuggler acquisition, OST completed its purchase of the B&M Lode from the Harley Baldwin Estate. This mining claims hosts the popular observation deck up on Smuggler. OST purchased the first half of the Baldwin property in a bargain sale in 2000. Today’s transaction closed an option agreement to sell the second half of the property, again at a bargain price. AVLT will also hold a conservation easement on this parcel, to ensure that it will not be eyed for development in the future.

OST are also co-grantees on a conservation easement on the John Nieslanik Ranch on the East Mesa. The Aspen Valley Land Trust closed today on an important conservation easement, which is hoped to be the first step towards protecting the bucolic East Mesa, above Carbondale. This project preserves 166 acres, and draws on partners at the local, State and Federal levels. Grants from the federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Project, from Great Outdoors Colorado and from the Colorado Conservation Trust were necessary to make this acquisition possible. Although located outside of Pitkin County, the conservation of this property is important to Pitkin

County because the East Mesa crosses the County line. If development were to begin on this more vulnerable portion of the East Mesa, it could mean the end of agriculture on the Mesa.