

THE ASPEN TIMES

Land swap passes House, heads to Senate

By [John Colson](#)
September 30, 2006

The protracted effort to prevent development of 35 acres near the ghost town of Ashcroft took, what officials say is, a positive turn on Sept. 27.

That's when the U.S. Senate passed a bill authorizing a land swap between Pitkin County and the U.S. Forest Service. Officials are hopeful the Senate bill will be reconciled quickly with a similar House version and sent soon afterward to President Bush for his signature.

The swap involves the 35-acre Ryan parcel at Ashcroft, bits and pieces of land on Smuggler Mountain and the Roaring Fork Valley floor, and a large property in the Crystal River Valley. Officials hope the complicated deal, including title transfers, will be complete this fall.

Mark Fox/The Aspen Times Max Powers dismantles the roof of an old cabin near the Cathedral Lakes trailhead Wednesday for relocation near the historic town of Ashcroft.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

[Browse Aspen Times Photos](#)



Mark Fox/The Aspen Times Max Powers, left, and Dan Bunta, working with ACES and the Aspen Historical Society, dismantle a cabin near the Cathedral Lakes trailhead, which will be moved and reassembled near Ashcroft.

[Click to Enlarge](#)

Meanwhile, two workmen under contract to the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies and the Aspen Historical Society have spent the week dismantling an old cabin on the Ryan parcel, just uphill from the ghost town of Ashcroft.

The work has alarmed some, including one neighbor who refused to be identified but who claimed two "knuckleheads who don't know what they're doing" were doing the work.

But a local official said the move is in accordance with the appropriate historic preservation guidelines, and that the two local men doing the work - Max Powers and Dan Bunta - are experienced and capable of getting the job done.

According to ACES Director Tom Cardamone, the relocation of the cabin is part of the effort to prepare the Ryan parcel for transfer to U.S. Forest Service ownership under the land swap, which has been years in the works. The cabin is to be moved to the Toklat property near Ashcroft.

Theodore "Ted" Ryan, a skiing pioneer who once had dreams of turning the upper Castle Creek Valley into a downhill ski resort, originally owned the parcel. The property is surrounded by public lands.

The swap started when the most recent private owner of the Ryan parcel received a permit to build a 15,000-square-foot luxury home on the property in the late 1990s.

Eager to prevent development so close to the Ashcroft Ski Touring Center and the ghost town, Pitkin County and the Aspen Valley Land Trust, acting jointly, bought the parcel for \$3.2 million in 2000. After that, USFS and county officials went to work on the swap, which won approval from the U.S. House of Representatives late last year.

Under two separate bills, H.R. 1129 and S.B. 100, the county will transfer two parcels to the Forest Service - the Ryan parcel and about 18.2 acres of patented mining claims on Smuggler Mountain.

In return, the federal government will transfer three pieces of property to the county. They are a 5.5-acre tract south of Aspen that the county will transfer to private ownership after reserving a permanent public easement for a trail; nearly six acres on Smuggler Mountain; and a 40-acre tract of Bureau of Land Management land along the Crystal River.

The cabin, which Cardamone said he lived in for a short time three decades ago, soon will become either a classroom or temporary quarters for visiting professors in the ACES environmental education programs.

Cardamone said the relocation of the Royal cabin, which originally came to the Ryan property from another private holding on Castle Creek, has to be done this fall because the USFS does not want any buildings left on the parcel when the transfer is complete.

He said he won't get a bill from Powers and Bunta until the job is done. But, he predicted, it will be significantly less than the \$20,000 estimate he received from another contractor who, after submitting his bid, told the county he would not be able to do the work this fall because he was too busy.

According to Pitkin County Open Space Director Dale Will, the other two cabins are either to be sold to private buyers, moved by the county or demolished. He said the decision on the cabins' fate has not yet been made.

John Colson's e-mail address is jcolson@aspentimes.com

[BACK](#) 