

# THE ASPEN TIMES

## Deal preserves Crystal River property

CRMS, land trust place acreage in conservation

### Valley Journal Staff Report

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CARBONDALE — Colorado Rocky Mountain School and the Aspen Valley Land Trust have reached a deal to preserve an 18.5-acre stretch of land abutting the Crystal River just west of the CRMS campus in Carbondale.

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.

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 in Carbondale. The land was recently placed into a conservation easement, preventing its development. (Trina Ortega photo)



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Currently an undeveloped piece of the school's 300-plus-acre campus, the scenic open space is also habitat for various species of wildlife, 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, chairman 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 the school's science classes, allowing students to 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," said CRMS spokesman Jeremy Simon.

The stretch of river also annually hosts the Crystal River Kayak Races, one of the country'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. The school retains the right to low-impact private recreational use and building trails there, along with grazing and raising of livestock, and construction of a small boathouse 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, thanks in part to a \$1 million donation by the Pettit Foundation and facilitation from neighboring rancher Sue Rodgers, owner of the Crystal River Ranch.

The land was also purchased at 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.

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