



- Courtesy Pitkin County Open Space and Trails

GOCO awards \$2.5 million to Droste purchase

Allocation the largest in the state this year

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ASPEN — The Great Outdoors Colorado board of directors on Wednesday voted unanimously to award \$2.5 million from Colorado lottery funds to Pitkin County for the purchase of the Droste property outside of Snowmass Village.

The action, at the board's meeting in Longmont, was not a surprise — the GOCO project committee had recommended the allocation — but Dale Will, county Open Space and Trails director, was pleased nonetheless.

“It wasn't unexpected, but you always breathe easier when you see it happen,” he said in a phone call from the road after the meeting.

“We couldn't be more thrilled — to get everything we asked for,” he said.

The grant was the largest that GOCO awarded this year, Will noted.

In all, 55 projects in 32 counties across the state were awarded grants totaling more than \$24 million on Wednesday. GOCO, which administers about half of the Colorado Lottery proceeds, received 108 applications for about \$40 million in projects.

The latest round of grants will enhance outdoor recreation, fund the creation of plans for future projects and protect 13,595 acres of open space, the organization said.

Among the grant recipients was the town of Carbondale, which will receive \$105,000 for a community/school tennis and skatepark complex, and the town of Marble, which secured \$70,233 for a playground project.

Two members of the GOCO board paid a visit to the Droste property this fall, taking in the views from the hilly ridge that separates the Brush Creek and Owl Creek valleys, extending from near Snowmass Village almost to Highway 82.

In awarding the grant, GOCO noted the Droste property serves as a critical elk migration corridor and a connection to various other open space parcels, many of which received GOCO funding.

“Protection of this property will create a 3,000-acre continuous range land that benefits wildlife and provides trail connections with Forest Service land,” said a GOCO press release.

Open Space officials have said they intend to open the Droste ridge to hiking, mountain biking and equestrian use, though it will be closed during the winter months out of deference to wildlife.

The county and the Drostes recently amended their initial purchase agreement to include roughly another

100 acres, bringing the parcel to 841 acres and dropping the price from \$18 to \$17 million. Closing is scheduled Dec. 29.

Partners in the purchase include the county, with a \$10 million contribution; Snowmass Village, \$2 million; Aspen, \$1 million; and GOCO, \$2.5 million. The rest is to be raised privately by Dec. 29.

While the county will own the property outright if the purchase goes through, Aspen Valley Land Trust will hold a conservation easement on it, serving as another layer of protection, according to Tim McFlynn, chairman of the county's Open Space and Trails Board.

"That ensures in perpetuity that the owners – Pitkin County Open Space – can never sell the asset and see it developed," he said.

As a nonprofit, AVLTT will collect the private contributions for the Droste purchase, though the county is spearheading the fundraising, McFlynn said. So far, \$500,000 has been pledged privately, Will confirmed last week.

Anyone interested in making a contribution can go through www.avlt.org to connect with the organization.

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