

Open space effort gets Garfield County's green light

'TLC' trying to get county into the land conservation business

[JOHN COLSON](#)

POST INDEPENDENT STAFF

GLENWOOD SPRINGS, CO COLORADO,

GLENWOOD SPRINGS, Colorado — A group of land conservation advocates is moving ahead with plans to figure out how to get Garfield County in the land conservation business, following a meeting this week before the board of county commissioners.

The Garfield Trails and Land Conservation Initiative, informally known as TLC, got started last year, largely in response to the controversial Sutey/Two Shoes land exchange involving a proposed trade of private land for land owned by the public.

In October 2009, the BOCC gave informal approval to a collection of citizens to work on ways to preserve land for continued agricultural operations, open space, trails and other uses that avoid residential or commercial development. The BOCC appointed long-range planner Tamra Allen to work with the group.

On April 6, some of the group appeared again before the BOCC to offer an update on their activities and see if the commissioners were comfortable with the direction they were taking.

Commissioners Trési Houpt and Mike Samson gave a green light to the group's approach. Commissioner John Martin was absent.

"The commissioners seemed really supportive of the idea," said Clark Anderson, local representative of the Sonoran Institute and one of those involved in the early work on TLC.

At the meeting, Anderson said, proponents suggested a variety of ways to fund a land conservation program, which included the use of energy impact fees or some sort of tax.

But, Anderson stressed, "I don't think there's any expectation that this is something that's going to happen right away."

First, he said, there must be a determination about how the county's electorate feels concerning land conservation, initially through some type of polling.

One of the early proponents of the open space program for Garfield County, ranch worker Jock Jacober, agreed that the two commissioners seemed intrigued with the idea.

"I think the commissioners are finally recognizing that they have to participate in ... some kind of method to keep agriculturists motivated to keep their land," he said on Thursday.

Jacober and others noted that the county already has an open space district approved by voters about a decade ago. But funding for the program never was authorized, and it lies dormant today.

Martha Cochran, director of Aspen Valley Land Trust in Carbondale, and one of the supporters of TLC, said her organization is not set up to do what the TLC would do because AVLT is a private, non-profit

organization, funded entirely by donations and grants.

She said that typically, as is the case in Pitkin County, the open space/land conservation program has a permanent, often tax-supported, funding source of its own, which can be used to “leverage” other sources of money, such as state grants.

In that way, she said, programs have the cash to actually buy and hold property that is deemed valuable for human, wildlife or other uses besides development.

jcolson@postindependent.com

<http://www.postindependent.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100411/VALLEYNEWS/100419998&parentprofile=search&template=printart>