

## Silt to get \$1.1 million for open space project along Colorado River

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SILT, Colorado – The town government in Silt will be getting \$1.1 million in a Great Outdoors Colorado grant to preserve more than 160 acres along the south bank of the Colorado River, known as the Valley Farms Open Space Project.

Working with the Aspen Valley Land Trust (AVLT) organization, based in Carbondale, Silt will acquire 160.8 acres, part of a 1,400-acre ranch, located on the other side of the river from the town.

The land, according to the town, is to be managed as open space, wildlife habitat, with some ranching, and public access to a boat ramp and pedestrian trails – all of it clearly visible from cars passing on Interstate 70.

Two approved but unconstructed gas-well pads, owned by the Antero Resources firm, may or may not end up as part of the open space parcel, an official confirmed on Thursday.

“Residents of Silt and the surrounding communities will directly benefit from the recreational opportunities afforded by this addition of open space to the area,” said Jim Lochhead, GOCO board member and a Garfield County resident.

The parcel features more than a half-mile of Colorado River frontage, part of an island, a quarter-mile of Dry Hollow Creek, and open meadows containing relatively natural riparian woodlands and shrublands, ponds and grasses that provide habitat for a number of wildlife species, according to a statement from GOCO.

Among the wildlife there are two active bald eagle nests and a large heron rookery, and the property provides winter range for mule deer and elk.

Martha Cochran, director of AVLT, said that the grant originally was written for 210 acres, with 50 acres to be used for an “active” park featuring athletic fields and other amenities. The 50-acre parcel, however, was not funded.

The exact shape and boundary of the remaining 160 acres, she said, is “still kind of fluid,” and the ultimate configuration may not cover the sites of the well pads.

Describing the parcel, Cochran said, “This is a very undisturbed, very cool property.”

The Silt grant is part of a larger, \$24 million package of Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grants announced on Thursday, in which 23 projects in 16 counties received grants.

GOCO is the result of a citizens' initiative that was passed by 58 percent of the voters in 1992 and receives approximately half of Colorado Lottery proceeds, which amounted to \$54.3 million in Fiscal Year 2009.

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