

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Located in the scenic Crystal River Valley, the 65-acre Red Wind Point Open Space (RWP) protects critical bighorn sheep winter range and provides a unique recreation experience on the former Crystal River Railroad grade along the Crystal River. RWP was apparently named by the railroad engineers, who were forced to slow down to “wind” around the large red rock that juts out into the Crystal River. Other common names for this property are Wine Point or Crystal River Flats. This property contains a scenic section of the Crystal River, the former Crystal River Railroad grade that is currently used as a social trail, an open dry meadow on top of the rock formation that RWP is named for, an intermittent creek that flows into the Crystal River, and a riparian area filled with mature cottonwoods. The property is a major landmark along the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife identified this property as extremely important to preserve due to the critical winter range of the upland dry meadow and upper slopes to bighorn sheep. From December through April, bighorn sheep forage on the upper sections of the property. Many other species of wildlife use RWP for forage and breeding sites.

RWP meets the goals of the Pitkin County Open Space and Trails program by protecting wildlife habitat and scenic open space and by providing recreational access to the Crystal River and the 1.25-mile trail along the former Crystal River Railroad grade. At sixty-five acres, RWP is relatively small in size, but the habitat and river frontage that is within the boundaries are critical to wildlife and people.

2.0 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT GOALS

- **Protect and enhance the bighorn sheep habitat**
- **Restore the upper pasture from cheat grass to native grasses and forbs**
- **Provide a multi-use trail along the former Crystal River Railroad grade**
- **Provide river access for anglers and boaters**
- **Monitor the riparian vegetation to determine any necessary management actions**

3.0 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTIES

3.1 Acquisitions and Legal Status

Pitkin County purchased the 65-acre RWP from Albert Frei on August 12, 2002 with \$740,000 in open space funds. Frei retained ten acres at the southwest corner of his property nearest the Crystal River Country Estates subdivision (“CRCE”). The 65-acre open space parcel was created by the Crystal River Flats Subdivision Exemption process. The open space subdivision exemption process is used to create open space parcels where no new development rights are allowed, thereby avoiding the need to address development impacts. The County also obtained a public trail and access easement along the former Crystal River Railroad grade through Frei’s retained parcel,

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

and the County obtained a right-of-way easement to access the property from Highway 133 through the CRCE and across the bridge connecting to the Highway. The County is currently paying an annual bridge maintenance fee to CRCE. As an added alternative, the County also obtained an easement from Frei that would allow a pedestrian bridge to be placed north of the CRCE Bridge (See Map 4).

The property is encumbered by mineral and oil reservations, ditch easements, Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph easement, restrictions stated in Book 216 Page 376 of the County records, right-of-way easement recorded at Book 240 Page 998.

Public Records:

Warranty Deed – Reception # 470949

Grant of Right-of-Way Easement – Reception #471143

Public Trail and Access Easement – Reception #741144

Crystal River Flats Subdivision Plat - Book 61 Page 94

3.2 Physical Characteristics

3.2.1 Location

RWP is located along the Crystal River 7.5 miles south of Carbondale and 9 miles north of Redstone on Highway 133. Located along the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway, the property is one of the scenic highlights of the route. RWP is adjacent to the subdivision of Crystal River Country Estates. The property is located in the E1/2 SE1/4 and SE1/4 NE1/4 of Section 9, Township 9 South, Range 88 West of the 6th PM. See Map 1.

3.2.2 Topography

From the Crystal River at 6520 feet to 7040 feet at the highest point of a knoll, RWP contains interesting topography. From the north, there is a gently sloping riparian area leading from the Crystal River into a narrow feeder creek that has steep banks that quickly rise 200 feet to a relatively flat meadow. This meadow has 0-5 percent slopes that lead to a knoll that rises at 10-45 percent slopes and connects to the flanks of Mount Sopris. In the middle of the property there is a large rock face that goes from the railroad grade along the river to the large open meadow. To the south there is a flat riparian area that leads to a number of narrow drainages that rise sharply and have steep, loose and rocky slopes that bighorn sheep use to access the property.

3.2.3 Geology

From Mount Sopris, which is a large intrusion of igneous rock, to the Crystal River, the geology is characterized as a mix of red slopes of Maroon sandstone and Mancos shale. RWP is aptly named because the red sandstone is very visible along the cliff leading up from the former Crystal River Railroad grade. (Chronic and Williams 2002)

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

3.2.4 Soils

Mancos shale and Maroon sandstone are the parent materials for the soils on RWP. No formal soil studies were conducted on or near RWP. A soil survey will be conducted on the upper bench to determine if soil amendments are needed for restoring the areas infested with cheat grass.

3.2.5 Hydrology

The Crystal River flows through the western edge of the property and is the main drainage. There is a small intermittent creek that flows east to west through the center of the property. The southern section of the property contains a flat riparian area that is not classified as a wetland, but contains species that depend on moister soils to flourish.

Along the Crystal River the East Mesa ditch headgate is located on RWP and creates another channel along the east side of the river. The East Mesa ditch serves ranch lands on East Mesa near Carbondale, including the John Neislanik property that is slated for a permanent conservation easement. This ditch is well maintained and OST will work with the ditch managers to protect the resources on RWP.

3.3 Land Use Considerations

3.3.1 Property Perspective

RWP protects critical bighorn sheep winter range on its upper sections and provides a trail along the Crystal River for multiple uses. The trail is along the former Crystal River Railroad grade and has been used by local residents for many years. The upland bench is an open dry meadow that provides bighorn sheep critical low elevation forage areas during the winter. The property is also used as hunting access to the surrounding White River National Forest.

3.3.2 Adjacent Land Use

RWP is located north of the Crystal River Country Estates, a medium-density subdivision that shares an access from Highway 133 with RWP. There is also private property located northwest of RWP across Highway 133. The White River National Forest surrounds the property to the north, east and west. Albert Frei retained the southwest 10-acre corner of this property to develop with a single-family homesite. Obtaining this parcel as additional open space would be desirable, if it could be achieved affordably.

3.3.3 Historical Land Use

A survey of the Crystal Valley in May of 1890 by Frank Monroe depicts a wagon road along the north side of RWP which crosses to the west side of the river near the tip of the point itself. A wagon road at this location is also shown on an undated survey of a

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

County Wagon Road that resides in Pitkin County's archives. The Crystal River Toll Road Company was incorporated in 1886, and apparently made surveys, and built wagon roads and trails along the Crystal River (McCoy 11). The Crystal River Railroad was incorporated in 1892, under the control of John Osgood, and laid track up the Crystal on the east side, much of it covering the pre-existing road (McCoy 27). However, rather than crossing to the west side at the point, the railroad continued up the east side around the point through what is now CRCE and on into Janeway. By March of 1893, the track was complete to Penny Hot Springs, including the section through RWP. The locomotives bound up valley would stop at Nettle Creek for water before rounding RWP (McCoy 29). This was apparently the only water stop between Carbondale and Marble, and occasionally a engine would run out short of the mark; hence the Nettle Creek water pipe was critical to the operation of the rail road. The railroad operated along this route for the next 51 years, hauling coal, passengers, and marble, including the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the marble used for the Lincoln Monument. Marble scraps were used by the railroad to shore up the grade, and these scraps are still visible in the river at this location and others along the Crystal. In 1942, the rails were salvaged for the war effort. (McCoy)

In 1965, RWP was divided off a larger parcel and sold to Erin and Marie Mooney, along with an easement to use the bridge and road of the parent parcel, that has since become CRCE. Al Frei acquired RWP in 1979. During Frei's ownership, the residents of CRCE and the general public were allowed access on the former Crystal River Railroad grade. In 1989 Pitkin County was presented with a petition containing over 100 signatures, in which the signatories "testify" that "this trail has a history of well known, open use, for at least eighteen years..." from the "south end of South Bill Creek Road to the Bridge at Crystal River Country Estates." The petition also requested that "the trail remain available to the public for its continued, historical, established use!"

Also, an unimproved camp on the north side of the point was reported to have been used alternatively by the Frei family. No permanent residential structures are known to have existed on RWP.

Pitkin County voters established an Open Space and Trails program in 1990, for the purpose of acquiring open spaces and developing trails. Shortly thereafter, the new program evaluated Red Wind Point as a potential acquisition due to its habitat and recreational resources. In 1992, planner Glen Horn visited the property with Kevin Wright of the Division of Wildlife and provided a memo to Open Space Director Mark Fuller recommending purchasing the property for a riverside park and for protection of the bighorn sheep habitat. Ten years later, the Open Space program purchased the 65 acres.

3.3.4 Agriculture

RWP did support limited agriculture on the upper bench. An area of forest was cleared and now provides bighorn sheep with winter forage. The upland bench is the only area

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

on RWP that would be able to support agriculture, but due to the critical bighorn sheep winter range, agriculture will not be practiced on this property.

3.3.5 Structures

The only know structures that exist on RWP are the East Mesa irrigation ditch headgate, the railroad grade, and the road to the upper meadow.

4.0 ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Vegetation and wildlife have not been formally inventoried on RWP, but OST staff has spent two years managing the property and from staff reports the main vegetation and wildlife resources have been identified.

4.1 Vegetation

Across RWP the type of vegetation that exists depends on aspect and the availability of water. Along the Crystal River mature narrowleaf cottonwoods (*Populus angustifolia*) exist along with thinleaf alder (*Alnus incana*) and a few species of willows. In the riparian area narrowleaf cottonwoods, aspens (*Populus tremuloides*), chokecherry (*Padus virginiana*), and some Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) exist on the north side of RWP, and some Douglas fir and Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*) occur on the south side.

Along the intermittent creek Douglas fir dominates with red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), mountain snowberry (*Symphoricarpus rotundifolius*), Oregon grape holly (*Mahonia repens*), Wood's rose (*Rosa woodsii*), and chokecherry, which occurs sporadically in the understory.

On the upland bench, mountain sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata var. pauciflora* (Winwood 2004)) is beginning to take over the abandoned field cleared for agriculture. On the borders of the field and leading up to Mount Sopris, Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*) occurs with some Utah serviceberry (*Amelanchier utahensis*). The Gambel oak is mature and is moderately browsed by wildlife.

The abandoned field is being taken over by cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*). Cheat grass is the scourge of the western US and is extremely tough to eradicate. Cheat grass is a winter annual, which means it germinates in the fall, then goes dormant in the winter, completes its growth cycle in the spring and puts out viable seed by June. Most native cool season grasses germinate early in the spring and with the cheat grass already germinated, find little room or available water to grow. That is one of the reasons why it is called cheat grass; it cheats natives by being able to germinate earlier and seed earlier than our native grasses and forbs. Cheat grass has low nutrient value for wildlife, and when it goes to seed, it has spikelets that can injure grazing animals. The seeds disperse in June and early July and then go dormant. When dormant, cheat grass dries out and creates an area ripe for fire. The typical fire season for this area of

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

Colorado is August through September when most native species of grass finish producing seeds.

There are some native grasses and forbs hanging on in the abandoned field, and the main species identified are needle-and-thread grass (*Hesperostipa comata*), green needlegrass (*Nassella viridula*), and fringed sage (*Artemisia frigida*).

Heading south and up away from the dry meadow, steep, loose slopes occur with mostly mountain big sagebrush and Rocky Mountain juniper. Some Gambel oak is also found on the slopes and in those areas native grasses flourish in the understory.

4.1.1 Noxious Weeds

Cheat grass is the most prevalent noxious weed on RWP and is OST's top priority for eradication. About 6.5 acres of the upper dry meadow is infested with cheat grass. The following are the steps OST will take to eliminate cheat grass:

- In 2004, OST staff mapped the area of cheat grass. See Map 2.
- Spring 2006, after the bighorn sheep move to summer range, OST will monitor cheat grass and determine if a spring herbicide treatment will be effective.
- Summer 2005 and 2006, mow and bag seeds on approximately 3 acres and on the edge of the cheat grass patch to help prevent spread of seeds. We are only mowing half of the patch to determine if this is a successful technique to eradicate cheat grass.
- Fall 2006, treat cheat grass with herbicide after cheat grass has germinated. Only the 3 acres that are not mowed will be treated since the herbicide might injure or suppress native grasses important to the bighorn sheep while OST tests this technique for its effectiveness.
- Fall 2006, drill seed native grasses on whole 6.5-acre patch.
- Spring 2007, monitor effectiveness of each technique and re-evaluate.
- Summer 2007 continue with one or both techniques if they prove effective.

Limited areas of musk and bull thistle (*Carduus nutans* and *Cirsium vulgare*) are found in disturbed areas and are treated each spring.

4.2 Wildlife

One of the main reasons for the purchase of RWP is to protect wildlife habitat. The Colorado Division of Wildlife has mapped RWP as critical winter range for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. No formal wildlife surveys have been conducted on RWP, but from informal surveys and observations it is evident that many species of wildlife utilize RWP.

From discussions with Kevin Wright and John Groves, District Wildlife Managers for the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW), RWP has significant bighorn sheep winter range on the upland dry meadow and upland slopes. Bighorn sheep traverse the slopes above the Crystal Country Estates subdivision to access the upper portions of RWP.

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

According to the DOW, bighorn sheep have not been observed on the lower sections of RWP along the Crystal River. Some local residents have observed bighorn sheep on the lower portions when sheep are on their winter range

To protect bighorn sheep habitat the upper slopes and dry meadow will be closed year round to public use and a **seasonal closure of the entire property from December 1 - April 30**. Map 3 illustrates the year round closure. OST staff and DOW personnel will be allowed in the wildlife closure to treat noxious weeds, restore habitat, monitor wildlife populations, and perform general maintenance. Hunting will not be allowed in this closure or anywhere on the property, but OST will allow hunting access to the surrounding National Forest in the fall till December 1. This closure is necessary because the wildlife characteristics of the upper portions of the property necessitate limiting public access to the trail along the former Crystal River Railroad grade and allowing sheep access to the river during the winter.

Mule deer and black bears also use RWP and can be seen on all sections of the property. This is not critical habitat for mule deer or black bears and with the closure on the upper sections, mule deer and black bear habitat will be preserved.

Many different species of birds have been identified on RWP including bald eagles, green-tailed towhees, Virginia's warblers, yellow-rumped warblers, black-capped and mountain chickadees, song sparrows, white-breasted nuthatches, hairy and downy woodpeckers, red-naped sapsuckers, and ruby-crowned kinglets. Bald eagles are the only Federally protected species on RWP. They are listed as Threatened, which does not require any additional protection than what is currently occurring on RWP.

The Crystal River is home to several species of trout and is monitored by the Roaring Fork Conservancy for water quality and riparian habitat. At RWP there is good access for angling and OST will maintain this access and work with the Roaring Fork Conservancy to monitor the river's health in this area. The Crystal River through RWP has not been sampled for fish species diversity, but it is likely that rainbow, brown, and brook trout exist.

RWP also has evidence of beaver activity, but no lodges or scent piles have been found. Willow, cottonwood, and alder show signs of beaver browsing and the East Mesa Ditch has seen attempts from beavers to dam the opening.

OST will work with the DOW to improve bighorn sheep habitat and set up a monitoring program to ensure that management actions are achieving their desired goal. OST will conserve and restore the native and natural habitat on RWP and balance visitor use so that wildlife use on the property will remain at current levels or be increased.

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

5.0 VISITOR SERVICES

5.1 Recreation Potential

RWP contains a section of the former Crystal River Railroad grade that is currently being used as a trail. This trail is located along the Crystal River and provides the local community a trail to recreate close to home. It also provides river access for anglers and possibly boaters. OST will expand the recreation potential of RWP by refining public access to the former Crystal River Railroad grade and sustainable river access. In expectation of this, OST obtained a public trail easement from Albert Frei across his retained parcel, and an easement for a potential new bridge across the river to the Highway 133 ROW. Alternatively, the County owns an access easement on the existing CRCE bridge that connects to the parcel. See Map #4. The County will work with CRCE to determine whether it is preferable to utilize the existing bridge, or to erect a new one.

The road leading to the upper meadow is gated and closed to public use to protect wildlife habitat. The road will be maintained to provide maintenance access to treat noxious weeds and restore wildlife habitat. Once the upper meadow is restored, OST will determine if the road is necessary and either let the road naturally degrade or take actions to reduce the road size to blend it into the natural surroundings.

5.2 Recreation Resources

5.2.1 Trails

The former Crystal River Railroad grade on the County Open Space will remain open from April 30-December 1 for seasonal public access through the property. This trail is part on USDA Forest Service land and RWP. The USDA Forest Service has been contacted by OST about the public use on this trail and is in support of continuing access. This trail will be incorporated into the Pitkin County Trail system, and will be referred to as the Red Wind Point Trail. Potential public access to the trail will be either from the existing CRCE Bridge or a new pedestrian bridge on the north end of the property and from the Nettle Creek Bridge, which is on USDA Forest Service Land that the Town of Carbondale has a bridge easement, on the south end of the property. OST will work with CRCE, the USDA Forest Service, and the Town of Carbondale to provide safe access to the Red Wind Point Trail.

The trail will be maintained at its current width and condition. The railroad grade was identified as one possible trail alignment in the West Elk Byway Crested Butte to Carbondale Trail Feasibility Study. Actual construction of that trail will be subject to future land use review, including a 1041 hazard review. If the railroad grade is chosen as the alignment for the Crystal River Bike Trail, the surface material of the trail may be revisited. Trail use is subject to Title 12 of the Pitkin County Code.

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

5.2.2 Trailheads

Along Highway 133 there are pullouts that are used as access to RWP. OST is working with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to evaluate appropriate and safe public access and parking along Highway 133. A preliminary site visit with the County Engineer and CDOT staff indicate a preference for a pull out approximately 200 yards north of the CRCE mail boxes, due to the maximal site lines at that location.

5.2.3 Equestrian Use

The trail is open to equestrians, however, there are no connecting trails to the surrounding National Forest from RWP. This limits equestrian use to just the 1.25-mile trail along the former Crystal River Railroad grade.

5.2.4 Angling

Fishing access to the Crystal River is allowed at RWP and sustainable access will be created. The DOW has voiced support for fishing access at RWP and OST will manage anglers to limit impacts to the riverbank and riparian vegetation. OST will work with the DOW and anglers to determine the best location for fishing access. All angling at RWP will follow DOW regulations.

5.2.5 Boating

When the Crystal River is full of spring snowmelt, the river is popular with boaters. Many boaters float from Avalanche Creek to the BRB Campground. One of the biggest rapids on that stretch is "Marble Rapid" which is on RWP. OST is not aware of anyone using RWP to launch or take-out, but with sustainable river access this may be a possible river access.

5.3 Dogs

Dogs are restricted to the trail on the Red Wind Point trail. All dogs must be leashed and dog waste must be removed. OST regulations regarding dogs will be posted on the trail and will be consistent with Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Title 12 regulations in the Pitkin County Code. OST rangers will patrol this area to ensure compliance. If leash law enforcement proves problematic, a complete prohibition of dogs will be considered.

5.4 Commercial Use

RWP does not experience significant commercial use; however any commercial guides for angling or hunting that access or use RWP must apply for a permit with OST, in compliance with Title 12 of the Pitkin County Code. Use of RWP by commercial boaters as a put-in or take-out is prohibited.

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

5.5 Education

The potential for environmental education on RWP exists and may be developed in the future. Educating visitors on the importance of RWP for wildlife and sustainable river access will be considered. OST will consult with the Forest Service, DOW, and the Roaring Fork Conservancy on educational opportunities on RWP.

5.6 Hunting

Hunting will not be allowed on RWP. This property is adjacent to private property and not large enough to keep hunters out of range of the adjacent private property. Hunting access to the surrounding National Forest has occurred through RWP and will be allowed. The area open to hunting access is from the intermittent creek flowing through the property to the northern boundary. No access will be allowed on the upper meadow or the old road to prevent trespassing onto private property and the property will be signed informing hunters where legal access can occur.

6.0 SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

6.1 Natural Resource Management

- Eradicate cheat grass and restore native grasses and forbs to the upper dry meadow.
- Perform noxious weed control on other existing weeds and monitor for other invasives.
- Close the upper slopes and meadow to the public and sign the closure area.
- Provide a seasonal closure of the Red Wind Point trail from December 1 – April 30.
- Work with the DOW to provide angling access and enhance bighorn sheep habitat.
- Monitor the riparian vegetation to determine any other necessary management actions.

6.2 Recreational Resource Management

- Refine public access and open the trail from April 30- Dec. 1 along the Red Wind Point Trail to the public and patrol the trail to ensure there is no trespassing onto adjacent private property, no access into the closure area, and that dogs remain on leash.
- Provide sustainable river access to the Crystal River.
- Work with CDOT, the USFS, and the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway to enhance pullouts along Highway 133.

RED WIND POINT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Adopted by the Open Space and Trails Board December 15, 2005

References

Chronic, H. and F. Williams. 2002. Roadside Geology of Colorado. Mountain Press Publishing Company, Missoula, MT.

McCoy, D. 1972. The Crystal River Pictorial. Sundance Publications Limited, Denver, CO.

Winword, A.H. 2004. Sagebrush of Colorado: taxonomy, distribution , ecology and management. Colorado Division of Wildlife, Denver, CO.