

To: Responsible official: Scott G. Fitzwilliams, Forest Supervisor

National forest and/or ranger district: White River NF; West Zone/Sopris Ranger District

Proposed project: El Jebel Administrative Site, Upper Parcel Conveyance Project

From: Susan Hessel Eagle County Resident

Date: 10.30.22

I moved to Basalt in [REDACTED] when I was 7 years old with my family. My father was the Basalt White River Forest Ranger for 5 years. My parents divorced. My dad moved and transferred his way up the ladder in the Forest Service. My mom stayed in Basalt and I have lived and worked here since then. The mid valley was a beautiful rural agricultural residential mountain valley with the frying pan and Roaring fork Rivers running through it. The Forest Service properties we are discussing, the Upper and Lower Parcels and Crown Mountain Park, were surrounded by several large local family owned working ranches. Hwy 82 was a 2 lane road, and Basalt and Carbondale were very small ranching and mining Towns. There wasn't much development between the 2 towns, between Basalt and Aspen. As the popularity of skiing grew, and the costs of housing in Aspen grew. The workers gradually moved down valley to where they could afford to start a family and buy a home. The down valley communities grew and housing costs were driven up gradually at first and in the last decade to extreme levels. Somehow the land in Pitkin County between Aspen and Basalt has remained relatively undeveloped, especially from Old Snowmass and up valley, while in the mid valley most of the old ranches have been developed to house workers for housing. Now we have an affordable housing crisis in the mid valley fueled by Aspen / Snowmass Village / Pitkin County's inability and refusal to use it's open space to house it's workers within it's borders. While open space has been preserved in Pitkin county it has been gobbled up by development in the mid and lower Roaring Fork valley.

The Open Space provided by the the Upper and Lower Parcels and Crown Mountain Park should be preserved as open space. Being federally owned they are owned by us, the citizens of the United States of America. Obtaining new land to preserve open space in the mid valley has become extremely difficult if not impossible due to the astronomic increase cost of land, driven by Aspen / Snowmass Village / Pitkin County. Our government should do the right thing for the down valley residents and visitors to our area. The Lower Parcel is adjacent to the Roaring Fork River corridor and should be preserved as a buffer for this narrow river corridor which is abundant with eagles, ospreys, hawks, deer, elk, bears, coyotes, marmots and other wild animals. Their habitats are fast disappearing. The sale of the Upper and lower Parcels at El Jebel / Crown Mountain for high density housing is in direct conflict with the Forest Service mission "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations ... and to help people share and enjoy the forest, while conserving the environment for generations to come."

As the daughter of a former life time Forest Service employee I was taught better. Shame on you Forest Service for even suggesting this option of high density housing on such beautiful land enjoyed by so many in our community. It is sad to see what this wonderful valley we live in has become from the days when I moved here 57 years ago. Please preserve what little is left of what it our beautiful valley was. Please don't contribute to the continuing breaking of my heart as I watch the changes occur in the Roaring fork Valley.

I object to the sale of the Crown Mountain Lower Forest Service Parcels as proposed. The Lower parcel should be preserved and enhanced as natural open space as it adjoins the river riparian corridor. I would only support a sale of the Lower parcel if it were deed restricted in forever, in perpetuity, as natural open space. I would support a modified proposal the Upper Parcel. The western portion of the Upper Parcel should be as open space for an extension of Crown Mountain ball fields

4. Quality of Human Environment. The increase in development in the Roaring Fork Valley has maxed out our infrastructure. Hwy 82 has significant traffic jams at rush hour through the mid valley area which has 5 traffic lights. This valley was a rural mountain valley when I first moved here in 1967. That's why many of us moved here to escape city traffic and congestion. That quality needs to be preserved as it is fast disappearing. The commute to Carbondale, Glenwood and Western Garfield County where many Aspen / Snowmass workers live will be significantly impacted by the forest service proposal. Adding that many cars and time to that commute time is not acceptable.

5. In addition to the traffic impacts above, Holy Cross Electric has identified an electricity supply shortage and the potential for rolling blackouts. Emergency services and other services are stretched thin. The impacts of already approved development in the mid valley still under construction have not yet been seen. Adding to these and other adverse human impacts should not occur, further development should not occur until the effects of the already improved development or seen.

6. Precedent: The value of the land as a current ecological resource far outweighs the potential benefits of high-density development on that parcel. The implementation of the proposed action would set a precedent to make USFS land and other land in Rural Residential areas and Open Space areas in the mid Roaring Fork Valley available for development.

7. Significant cumulative impacts. The cumulative impact has been addressed above as noted. Simply the multitude of development in the mid valley presently under construction will negatively impact, traffic, demand for electricity, air pollution which could impact trees and other flora and fauna as high alpine environments are sensitive, run off from road and paved areas and roofs on developed properties into our rivers and negatively impact our trout population which is a significant economic and intrinsically valued resource, etc. The forest should be protecting the environment not adding to negative impacts to our environment.

#### **WHO GETS IT:**

The Lower Parcel should not be sold to Eagle or Pitkin County unless it is permanently designated as natural open space as it has been forever. If Eagle and / or Pitkin County are not willing to make this designation of the lower parcel, and, the Forest Service cannot keep it, then a buyer such as Crown Mountain, if it will make the same designation as permanent natural open space, the Aspen Land Trust, Wilderness land Trust, or Nature Conservancy, or other similar entity should be pursued to keep it natural open space. This would be more in keeping with the Forest Service mission statement. Eagle County should be given priority over Pitkin county to purchase the land. Eagle County only has 2 miles along Hwy 82 to locate affordable housing for its residents who live in the Roaring Fork Valley. This Upper parcel is located within that 2 miles. Pitkin has 20 miles along Hwy 82, all closer to where their workers are needed in Snowmass and Aspen with plenty of Open Space rural land. Pitkin County needs to be held accountable and solve its affordable housing issues within its borders. Pitkin County has the space and money to solve this issue within its borders, it must have the will as well. Housing Pitkin County workers in Pitkin county means less of a commute for these workers and less traffic on Garfield and Eagle County roads and Hwy 82 down valley. Eagle County needs affordable housing for its own residents and workers. The best partner in my opinion for affordable housing would be Habitat for Humanity. The land should be given to Habitat to keep costs down and Habitat single family dwellings could be built for down valley residents much like the Habitat development built near the Basalt High School. The dwellings should be 1 story to not adversely effect the view of the surrounding mountains and hills.

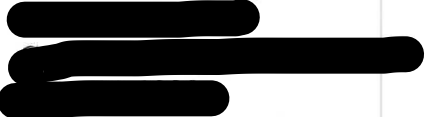
The mid valley should not be required to give up what little public land it has in the Roaring Fork Valley to solve the housing issue for Pitkin County that has more land and funding.

Aspen /Pitkin County could should build a Town at the Intercept lot, the junction of Brush Creek Road to Snowmass Village and Hwy 82 to Aspen. Call it the Town of Intercept – underground parking, transit station, grocery store shops for workers and multi story employee housing, and monorails or subways Aspen and Snowmass Village. Aspen /Pitkin County and it's residence have the money to do this. BUT ... AGAIN if either County is allowed to purchase the Lower Parcel it should be designate it as natural open space in perpetuity, forever. It is now and always will be next to the Roaring Fork River corridor and should be a buffer to protect and enhance the Roaring Fork River.

Finally, this land is public land owned by the public. Let it stay with the public. The Lower Parcel should be sold only if it is designated and remains permanent and natural so that all the the citizens of the United States of America can enjoy and benefit from it, locals and visitors. If the Forest Service cannot continue to maintain this asset as natural open space the then grant it to an entity that will.

Sincerely,

Susan Hessel, Objector

  
Susan Hessel 10/30/22