

We need open space

Open space is not a narrow special interest. Open space is the primary interest of all people who live, work and play in Eagle County, Colorado.

Open space is what makes the Eagle River Valley one of the most beautiful places on Earth. Open space means purple mountain majesties and lush green valleys. Open space means crisp, clean waters and rivers. Open space means elk and deer, eagles and hawks, bears, mountain lions, trout and all forms of native wildlife.

Open space screams Colorado! Open space is the Rocky Mountain West. Open space defines the mountain lifestyle we hold so dear. Open space means opportunities to enjoy and experience the great outdoors. Open space means hiking, biking, boating and rafting. Open space means skiing, snowboarding and snowshoeing. Open space means bird watching and rock climbing and hunting and fishing.

Open space is a stroll with your kids amongst the evergreens and aspens. Open space is a blue-sky snowshoe and a picnic with friends. Open space is a perfect turn in fresh, champagne powder. Open space is a vast meadow filled with vibrant wildflowers. Open space is a dog fetching a Frisbee from his best friend. Open space is the adrenaline of a whitewater adventure, as well as the tranquility of a fun float with the family. Open space touches each and every one of us, each and every day.

Ask yourself why you came to Eagle County. Was it because of parking lots or alpine meadows? Was it due to a series of strip malls or a stretch of rolling rivers? Was it for more smog or more fresh air? Was it because of urban development or rural landscapes? Was it to experience life in suburbia or life in the mountains? Was it for the love of developed space or the love of open space?

In your journey to Eagle County, did you dream of concrete jungles or forested mountains? Did you dream of storm sewers or sparkling rivers? Did you dream of traffic jams or powder days? Did you dream of tract houses or elk herds?

Of course, in the end, we all chose the very special character of our natural outdoor environment; we all chose this lovely, rural, alpine community; we all chose the mountains and meadows and peaks and valleys of Eagle County over a massively developed, urban city or a boring, mundane, sprawling suburb. By choosing to call Eagle County home, we have all made a positive choice for open space. By moving here, we have all made a choice to have open spaces as integral parts of our daily lives.

And, we must also never forget, open space is a main driver of our local economy. Open space brings tourists and tourism dollars to our

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community. Open space provides the outdoor recreational opportunities that fuel our local businesses. Open space provides jobs. Every single tourism-based business and tourism-oriented job in Eagle County can be thankful that our community conserves and protects open space.

Without open space, the tourists will stay home. If Eagle County begins to look like Colfax Avenue in Denver, the travelers and their wallets will go away. If we lose our Western heritage, lose our Rocky Mountain landscapes and lose our precious open spaces,

then our community will no longer be a special place coveted by vacationers from around the world.

Without the guests who enjoy our open spaces, more jobs will be lost. Open space is the life-blood of the outdoor, recreation-based, tourism-driven economy in Eagle County. If we kill open space, we kill the golden goose. Remember why you came here. It is the same reason the tourists vacation here and spend their money here.

Our economy in Eagle County thrives on the great outdoors, and the great outdoors would not exist without open space. If we don't have outdoor recreational areas, if we don't have hiking and skiing trails, if we

don't have access to our rivers and streams and riparian corridors — if we don't have open space — then we will not have a thriving, tourism-based economy.

So, I guess I'll end this column in the same way I began.

Open space is not a narrow special interest. Open space is in the primary interest of all people who live, work and play in Eagle County, Colorado.

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