



EAGLE COUNTY
EL JEBEL PUBLIC PROPERTIES OUTREACH
Listening Sessions Summary Report, May 2021



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Photo: Craig Turpin, Aspen Daily News

With Gratitude

Eagle County and the outreach project team extends our sincere thanks to the many organizations and individuals who shared their time and knowledge while participating in this process. The level of care, compassion, and passion of our community members in seeking to work together to solve problems and support positive outcomes is humbling and inspiring.

Special thanks to

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Kevin Warner, District Ranger
Anna Bengston, Land Conveyance Program Manager; Acting
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David Boyd, Public Affairs Officer
Greg Rosenmerkel, Engineering Minerals & Fleet Staff Officer

and

The office of Senator Michael Bennet:
John Whitney, Western Slope Regional Director
Matthew Kireker, Central Mountains Regional Representative
Alyssa Logan Western Slope Regional Representative

For your collective guidance and support of this outreach process.

Thank you

Prepared by DHM Design for Eagle County
May, 2021

Introduction

Summary of Process

In early 2021, Eagle County engaged local design and planning consultant, DHM Design, to assist in crafting and implementing a preliminary outreach effort related to Eagle County and federally owned lands in El Jebel in the Roaring Fork Valley. The intent of the process was to learn by identifying and engaging a broad range of community members, leaders, and organizations to discuss opportunities, challenges, and concerns related to the potential future development of the approximately 70+ acres of publicly-owned land west of Crown Mountain Park.

Conversations about the disposition of these parcels have been ongoing for decades. The timing of the outreach effort related directly to a number of other activities associated with the acreage – particularly the United States Forest Service (USFS) managed lands – as local USFS staff were in the process of preparing an evaluation of the conveyance of the land.

The project team, including Eagle County staff, USFS staff, and the consultant collaborated in the creation of a contact list, communications plan, meeting format, and introductory presentation to be shared in small groups via web-based meeting platform over several weeks in March, 2021. The materials were formatted to provide background information and the overarching intent of the project team was to listen and catalog the feedback received. Several follow-up meetings were held with individual stakeholders who were unable to attend meetings, and a recording of the web-based presentation was also made available.

The subject properties include a small portion of Eagle County land not currently leased to Crown Mountain Park and approximately 70 acres of federal land under management by the White River National Forest (WRNF).

The project team did not present – nor develop as a part of the findings – recommendations for program or development priorities (beyond those identified by participants), and no physical site planning studies were prepared as a part of this outreach effort. This report is the result of the outreach process and includes the identification of overarching themes, potential partners/stakeholders, reference information, and context that can inform decision making for the next steps of the process. Additionally, the information contained in this report should also be used to track and address partnerships, concerns and opportunities, and key considerations in the organization of future outreach efforts for these parcels.

Further detail of the purpose of the outreach, background of the property, basic assumptions related to the future of the property, methods used, and findings are provided below. The process was designed to generate qualitative, community-identified, informative results.



View southwest over USFS upper parcel
Photo: Scott Condon, Aspen Times

Purpose and Intent of the Outreach

Per the scope of work issued by Eagle County, the basic goals of the effort were to obtain information and feedback from the public and interested stakeholders to understand the type of potential development that is desired for the Property, what stakeholders or other partners may be interested in participating in potential development of the property and how each may be involved. The project team referred to the effort as a 'pre-planning' process. That is, these discussions were intended to set the stage, get the right people at the table, identify opportunities and challenges (physical, policy, political, partnerships), and lay the groundwork for the project team/staff to make preliminary recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners to establish an overall direction for the future of the Property (the "Project").

Critical to this outreach and reporting, and repeated frequently to participants, was the preliminary nature of this effort to resume active talks about the future of these parcels. Participants and the public were assured that future opportunities for feedback will be made available as the process unfolds. The first listening sessions included invited participants to focus the conversation on the potential opportunities and issues that merit future consideration, although any individual or group who requested to participate in the listening sessions was offered an invitation to join (and several did).

The project team was also clear in all communications that this outreach effort was not tied to the USFS's NEPA process, which was ongoing at the time of the outreach and continued after the completion of the listening sessions and submittal of this report.

The project team did not develop suggested programming or arrangement of any development scenarios and stressed that there were no predetermined outcomes; Eagle County's interest was in learning what was possible, where barriers exist, and the overall community sentiment about the properties, with an eye to understanding how the county may lead, facilitate, or participate in future acquisition and planning efforts related to the parcels. USFS's interest was similar, with a focus on understanding how scenarios might develop for the land conveyance.

Timing

A number of recent events prompted the current round of conversations on the future of these parcels. The 2018 Farm Bill created new avenues for creativity in partnerships and providing value back to the USFS.

Senator Bennet's staff reported during this process that the timeline of October 2023 expiration/renewal of the authority created by the 2018 Farm Bill creates a level of urgency for advancing local conversations; illustrating the success of the authority may be an important component of the reauthorization of the legislation. The El Jebel Administrative Sites - along with a parcel in Dillon - represent the pilot projects for this authority, nationally. To highlight and publicize the opportunities associated with conveyance of the USFS property and process, Senator Michael Bennet visited the site in late 2020 with a number of local agency/organization staff and the local press.

The listening sessions and associated outreach process was consistent with the USFS hopes for evaluation of opportunities on the local level. Also at the local level, the planned advancement of design for the improvement of the intersection at El Jebel Road and SH82 lays the groundwork for progress against a significant infrastructure cost that has been a threshold barrier in previous talks related to these parcels.

Property Background

The subject properties include land owned by Eagle County and two parcels managed by the White River National Forest. The properties are located between the Roaring Fork River and SH82, south and west of the existing signaled intersection at El Jebel Road and SH82. The Eagle County and USFS properties adjoin and both have frontage along Valley Road.

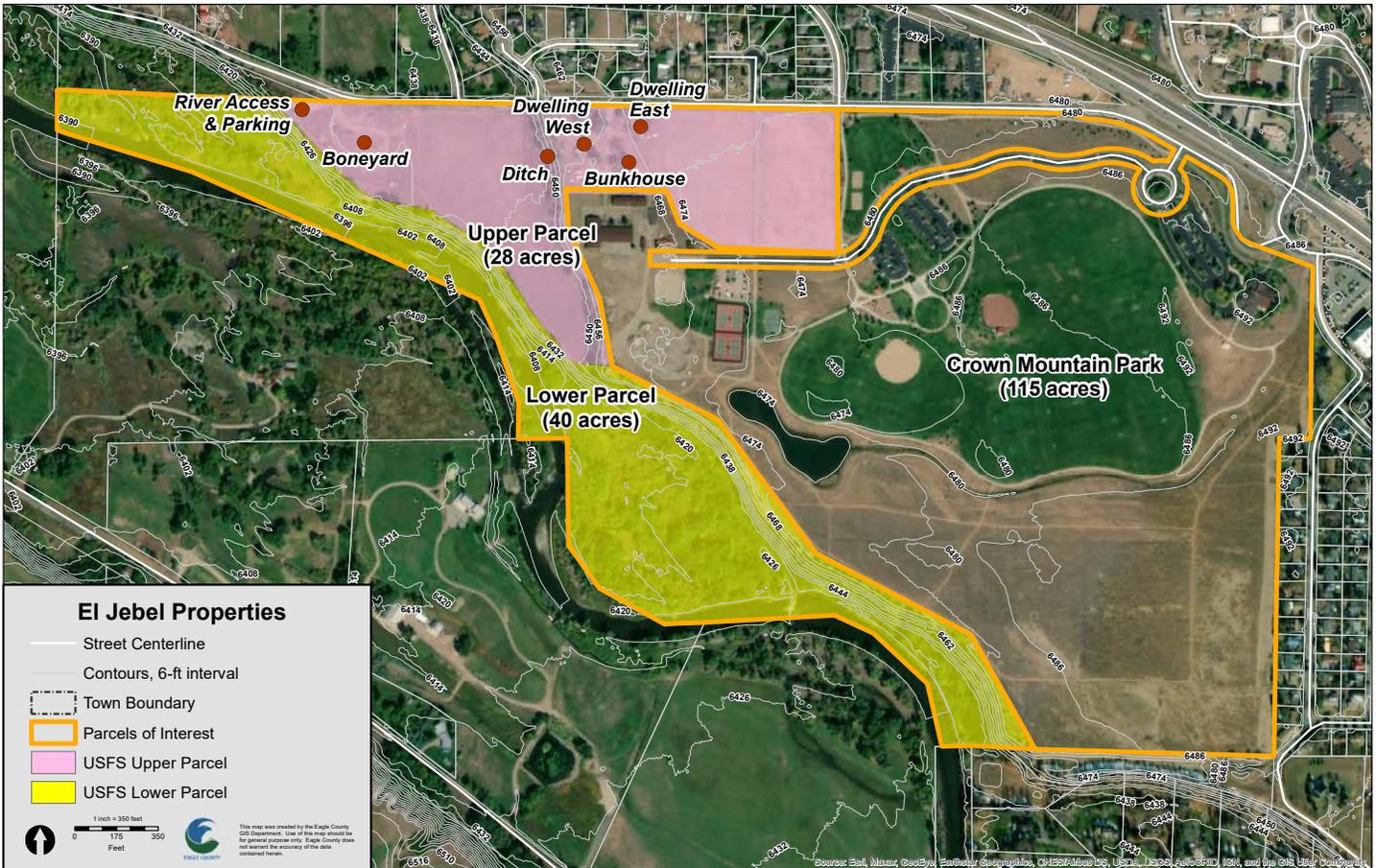


Image: Eagle County GIS

Eagle County Parcel

Most of the Eagle County acreage is under a long-term lease to Crown Mountain Park and Recreation District and the lease area, plus a native grass area south of the park lease, are not included in the conversations about future development potential (except as relates to park activities, connection to the riparian acreage of the USFS parcels, and as buffering between active recreation and habitat zones). One of the existing buildings – a large warehouse type building - on the northwest corner of the Eagle County property is outside of the land lease and was included in the listening session conversations. The northeast corner of the property includes the Eagle County El Jebel Community Center building and a shared parking lot.

The land is comprised of 132 acres, obtained from USFS in 1994, and was developed into Crown Mountain Park in the early 2000's.

USFS Parcels - El Jebel Administrative Sites

The WRNF-managed land comprises two distinct parcels totaling approximately 70 acres, with 40 acres of undevelopable land along the roaring fork river and 30 acres of developable land along Valley Road and adjoining Crown Mountain Park.

The upper parcel includes a USFS storage yard, primitive parking for river/recreation access, fallow horse pastures, and a number of existing residential buildings. The lower parcel fronts the Roaring Fork River, is largely in the flood plain and has a great deal of resource and habitat value (including a Federally Listed Threatened orchid, the Ute Ladies' Tresses). There are a number of primitive, passive recreation elements on the lower parcel, including single track trails, wood footbridges, benches, and picnic tables.

In 2005, the Forest Service Facilities Realignment and Enhancement Act prompted a planning process that identified the El Jebel Administrative Site for conveyance. The WRNF has identified that it is unable to maintain the facilities and infrastructure to the standards of the WRNF Facilities Master Plan, and so identified conveyance to direct resources to other administrative sites and facilities.

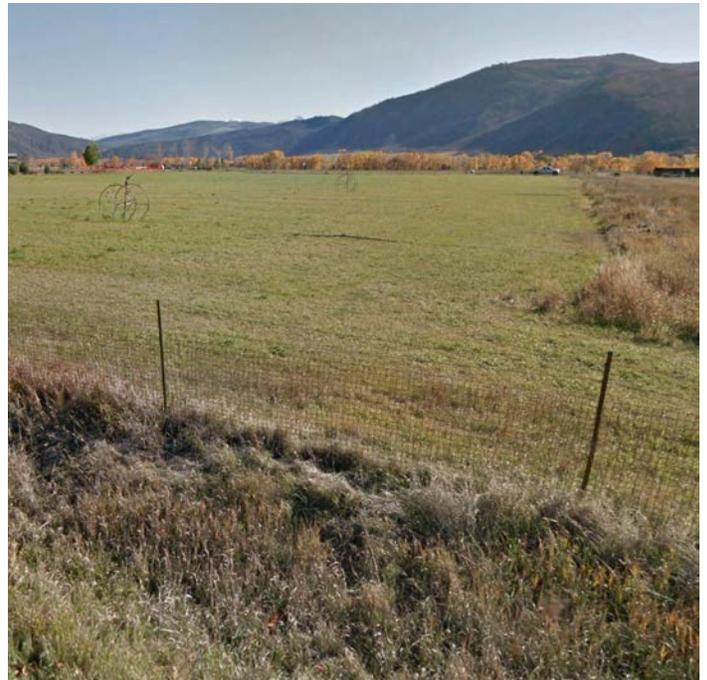
The WRNF is currently in the process of developing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to scope, evaluate, and provide recommendations for the conveyance of the property. At the time of the Eagle County outreach process, a draft of the EIS is being reviewed internally and will then be released for public comment.

Assumptions: Process & Physical Property

While there are not pre-determined outcomes of this process, there are a number of known factors and parameters that have framed the conversation and will directly affect future planning for the parcels. These baseline assumptions were shared as a part of the introductory presentation in the outreach sessions.

Process Assumptions

- The United States Forest Service is supporting the process as the manager of two of the subject parcels, is a direct stakeholder in the process, and is providing background information and federal process parameters.
 - The USFS does not seek to drive the process but to be informed by the outcomes, and to provide guidance related to the EIS process and conveyance requirements.
 - The USFS is required to receive fair market value in exchange for the conveyance of the land.
 - The value to USFS can be provided in another location or by other means (fulfilling this requirement does not require physical improvements for USFS on site).
 - The recommendations in the EIS will be intended to be broad and allow for flexibility within the USFS parameters.
 - Representatives of Senator Bennet’s office expressed a willingness to advance legislative conveyance as an option (this is viable for parks, recreation, open space only); this type of action also carries implications to the value the needs to be returned in exchange.
 - The lower 40 acres will be conserved. The process will determine when, by what mechanism, and with whom.
- Eagle County is sponsoring the process as the owner of one of the subject parcels, and is a direct stakeholder in the process. Eagle County’s interest lies in identifying programmatic opportunities and potential partners, and in understanding the potential community benefit in evaluating the three parcels of land together.
 - Eagle County land use code will be the guiding policy for development on the parcel(s).
 - USFS intends to engage Eagle and Pitkin Counties directly as a part of the conveyance process.
 - WRNF’s priority is to find (a) project(s) in the public interest.
 - Private/competitive process is not off the table.
 - Crown Mountain Recreation District long-term lease remains.



View of northeast corner of USFS upper parcel from Valley Road.
Photo: Google Earth

Physical Property Assumptions

- The natural resource values and public access of the lower 40 acres make this parcel a priority for conservation.
- The lower parcel is not developable due to flood hazards, natural resource values, and lack of road access.
- The primitive access and recreation on the lower parcel will remain and be accommodated in any new plan.
- The existing USFS housing structures do not need to be renovated/retained on site.
- The USFS would like to see the housing replaced or supplemented; this could be on site or elsewhere. It's a need, but not a fundamental requirement of the conveyance.
- The existing 6.5+ cfs of senior Robinson Ditch rights can be conveyed with the property or separately.
- An entrance to the property from Valley Road, separate from the existing park entrance, will be necessary with new development.
- The fallow pastures of the upper 30 acres has not been actively maintained for years; noxious vegetation management will be a necessary component of new development.



Aerial illustrating a portion of the riparian area of the lower 40 acres. Primitive footbridges are visible in the center of the image, with Crown Mountain Park in the upper right and the Roaring Fork River center-left. Photo: Google Earth

Methodology

The outreach process was broken into two distinct phases. The first phase included research and coordination with County and WRNF staff to create appropriate messaging and to compile accurate background information; development of base mapping for use in illustrating the parcels and context; creation of a draft contact list for outreach invitations; and refinement of the overall approach to the outreach meetings given the changing public health requirements of the Covid-19 pandemic. During the second phase, the project team developed the introductory presentation; continued adding to the outreach invitation list; invited participants; scheduled meetings; and hosted the listening sessions.

Although open to anyone who was interested, The process was not designed as a widely-advertised public outreach. Rather, the intent was to identify those would be able and interested to provide context, partnership ideas, illustrate opportunities and barriers, and convey local community perceptions related to development in the Mid Valley in general and this property specifically.

The project team created a list of approximately 200 names and organizations to invite, adding to the list as other participants made recommendations. These individuals and groups were invited directly via an email campaign with a request to opt-in to the process. Additionally, the county issued a news release to notify the community of the process. Members of the public that requested to participate in the process were invited to the listening sessions, without exception. The overarching purpose of the outreach via this method was to drive a level of participation of neighbors, agencies, stakeholders, potential partners, advocacy groups, and members of the public so the summary reporting of the process would be able to identify major issues and themes across the different groups and meetings. That is, the goal was to reach out to many, but it was not critical to speak to or involve every invitee in the process as the targeted outcome was not to seek commitments or identify priorities, but rather communicate an understanding of opportunities, potential partners, and constraints against which a future process can be organized.

The listening sessions were held as 90-minute virtual round tables using the Zoom platform, with a 20-minute introductory presentation from the project team and the remaining time in open dialogue. Each meeting was scheduled with 8-15 participants to allow for everyone to have a chance to speak. One meeting was recorded and a link provided to those who indicated interest in participating but were unable to make one of the six listening session meetings. An initial plan to hold an in-person listening session was abandoned as the public health requirements in March 2021 rendered such a meeting disallowed (and imprudent).

The meetings were originally organized around topical groups with the intention of building on the collective knowledge of the group on a particular topic while also prompting broad conversations. Ultimately, the scheduling of the meetings resulted in blended participation, which provided the benefit of allowing participants to hear the perspectives of other community leaders, organizations, and neighbors. WRNF staff participated in each of the meetings and were available for the attendees to ask questions about the EIS process, WRNF goals, and history of the property. Additionally, staff from Senator Bennet's office attended several of the meetings to listen as well as to provide information about the legislative timeline and priority of advocating for a successful conveyance under the 2018 Farm Bill authority.

Eagle County El Jebel Public Properties Outreach

The following is a list of the groups, agencies, and organizations who were directly invited to the process. Individual participants' names are not provided in this report; some organizations selected multiple representatives to participate. A number of organizations were not able to participate in this early round of outreach but requested to be engaged as the process moves forward.

Mid Valley City/County/Agency Management

Eagle County Manager's Office
Eagle County Attorney's Office
Eagle County Community Development
Eagle County Facilities Management
Town of Basalt Town Management
Town of Basalt Planning Staff
Town of Basalt Mayor
Mid Valley Metro District
Garfield County Planning Department
Garfield County Public Health
Town of Carbondale Manager's Office
Colorado Department of Transportation

Roaring Fork Valley City/County/ Agency Management

Pitkin County Manager's Office
Pitkin County Planning
Town of Snowmass Village Manager's Office
City of Glenwood Springs Manager's Office

Regional City/County/Agency Management

Town of New Castle Administrator's Office
City of Rifle Manager's Office
Town of Silt
Battlement Mesa
Town of Parachute

Neighbors, Community Leaders-at-Large, Commercial Interests

Members of the public (at-large)
Immediate neighbors (several)
Parkside HOA
Sopris Village HOA
Summit Vista HOA
Blue Lake HOA
Hooks Spur Neighborhood Collaborative
Crawford Properties
Basalt Chamber of Commerce
Mid-Valley Health Institute

Land Managers / Stewards

Eagle County Open Space
Pitkin County Open Space and Trails
Roaring Fork Conservancy
Aspen Valley Land Trust
Wilderness Workshop
Trout Unlimited
ACES Rock Bottom Ranch
Two Roots Farm
Senator Michael Bennet's Office
Representative Lauren Boebert's Office

Housing Advocates/Developers, Employers

Eagle County Housing and Development Authority
Basalt Affordable Community Housing
Aspen/Pitkin County Housing Authority
Town of Snowmass Village Affordable Housing
Habitat for Humanity
Archdiocese Housing
Garfield County Housing Authority
Aspen Valley Hospital
Colorado Mountain College
Roaring Fork School District
Roaring Fork Transportation Authority
Aspen Skiing Company
City of Aspen Asset Management
Local housing developers (free market and deed restricted)

Recreation / Trails Advocates

Crown Mountain Park Director's Office
Crown Mountain Recreation District Board
Mid Valley Trails Committee
Roaring Fork Transportation Authority
Field house advocates (public-at-large)
Roaring Fork Valley Soccer Club
Aspen Valley Ski and Snowboard Club
Aspen Hockey Club

+/- 200
Organizations /
Individuals Invited

**Public Health, Community Equity
Advocates**

Eagle County Public Health and Environment
English in Action
Manaus/Housing Equity Project
Pitkin County Human Services
Valley Settlement Project
Stepping Stones
Blue Lake Preschool
Mountain Voices Project
Voces Unidas de las Montanas
Older adult advocates (public-at-large)
Roaring Fork Fire Rescue
Mountain Family Health Centers
Tri-Color Radio
Huts for Vets

6
Listening Sessions

+/- 75
Listening Session Attendees
Including Stakeholders, Neighbors, Community
Leaders, Relevant Agencies, and Public-at-Large

Media (by request)

Aspen Times

15-20
Individual Stakeholder Interviews



Aerial illustrating the 30-acre USFS 'upper parcel' and the west edge of Crown Mountain Park. The unleased portion of Eagle County land surrounds the large warehouse building in the center of the image. Photo: Google Earth

Findings / Themes

Following the listening sessions and several additional, individual conversations, the project team synthesized the results to identify broad categories of recurring topics and specific themes/takeaways. The results of this process are intended to illustrate – qualitatively – a number of community and stakeholder-derived opportunities, priorities and challenges that can be used to inform preliminary planning alternatives for the parcels.

The findings do not suggest program alternatives, specific development priorities, or make specific recommendations for the most appropriate use of the developable land. Rather, the information is valuable in framing and evaluating future program alternatives and targeting feedback on potential development solutions related to important community issues.

The findings are organized into five categories that summarize the overarching themes from all of the conversations held in March 2021; comments are not attributable to specific individuals or organizations; comments resulting in a theme or topic were repeated and/or significant focus of group conversations during the listening sessions. The findings are presented in narrative form, with a bullet list of takeaways for each category. The five categories of findings are:

- Local Planning Guidance Related to the Parcels
- Regional View of Problem Solving
- El Jebel Neighborhood Topics
- Community Identified Uses
- Community Services and Programming

Local Planning Guidance Related to the Parcels

The overarching long-range plan for unincorporated, Eagle County areas of El Jebel is the Eagle County 2018 Mid Valley Area Community Plan and the associated Highway 82 Future Land Use Map (FLUM). Current zoning on the parcels includes ‘Resource’ (surrounding the existing building that is outside of the current Crown Mountain Park Lease) and ‘USFS’ (the +/- 70 acres of federal land). The subject parcels carry three recommended Land Use designations in the FLUM: ‘Recreation Open Space,’ ‘Moderate Density Residential,’ and ‘Public Land.’ Land Use applications will be evaluated against the goals and recommendations of the Mid Valley Area Community Plan and will inform staff review of proposed development; it is reasonable to assume that a zoning change will be a part of a conveyance action and land use application process as the ‘USFS’ and ‘Resource’ zones will not apply to likely future uses.

The Town of Basalt Master Plan also identifies a recommended future land use of the subject parcels, which fall within the Three Mile Planning Area for the Town of Basalt’s Master Plan and positions Basalt as a referral for development proposals on the properties. While *inside* the Three Mile Planning Area, the subject parcels are *outside* of Basalt’s Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) and identified as ‘Public Open Space’ in the Basalt FLUM. The town’s master plan focuses on identified sites for future development within the UGB and at increased density to mitigate against sprawl. For new built uses at Crown Mountain Park and/or the subject parcels, planning and town management staff indicated that development further east (when possible) is preferred, with a preference for development in town boundaries.

Town and County staff reported that alignment of county and town long-range planning is active and ongoing and recognized the importance of addressing housing and recreation needs while balancing these needs with an imperative to limit sprawl.

Regional View of Problem Solving

El Jebel is an interesting study in regionalism when considering the Roaring Fork Valley's challenges and opportunities. El Jebel is growing as a desirable neighborhood with increasing high-quality commercial offerings, relatively lower cost of real estate compared to the upper valley, a mild, mid-elevation climate with ample sun, and the regional draw of Crown Mountain Park for outdoor recreation and programmed activities. El Jebel is also supportive of a very diverse racial and residential mix and is a focus in the Mid Valley for community equity and advocacy organizations.

Leveraging valley-wide partnerships

The broad geographic coverage of the listening session participants drew out many comments and ideas for how individual organizations could look beyond their own typical boundaries to find mutually beneficial partnerships in the Mid Valley – helping to address any number of challenges facing the greater Roaring Fork Valley community with a regional perspective. Examples include the recognition that aging adult infrastructure and services are robust in Aspen and Rifle, but almost entirely lacking in the Mid Valley; the opportunity for organizations like Aspen Valley Ski and Snowboard Club (AVSC) to extend the reach of their programming to Mid Valley families with extended-season dryland sport activities; and opportunities for child care and/or school age youth programming to co-locate with park facilities. Similarly, examples of a regional view and partnering for land stewardship resulted in the purchase, conservation, and management of the Glassier Open Space just south of the subject properties. Perhaps the most recent example of this regional view is the Basalt Vista Housing Project, with a diverse range of partners coming together to address the significant need for long-term, deed-restricted housing in the Mid Valley while also focusing on cutting edge sustainability practices and technology.

At the same time, a number of participants cautioned about looking to one parcel to be the solution to all of the issues facing the Mid Valley and the region, urging future processes to keep sight of the context, surrounding uses, and neighborhood character when considering programming alternatives.



Fall 2020 site tour with WRNF officials, Senator Bennet, and local leaders. Image courtesy Eagle County

Depending on the program of development that is ultimately targeted for this acreage, similar regional partnership may be necessary to create a viable, thoughtful plan that is responsive to the El Jebel context, addresses the needs of the USFS in the conveyance process, and is financially viable.

Regional solutions for USFS

Similarly, a regional view of the opportunities to return value to the USFS has already been embraced and advocated by WRNF staff. The ability to look beyond the El Jebel Administrative Sites and to a significantly large region of the WRNF and Eagle County may allow partners to leverage value in creative and innovative ways.

Regional trail connectivity

A connection between the Rio Grande Trail and Crown Mountain Park, or other location central to El Jebel, is broadly recognized as beneficial to the overall shared-use trail connectivity in the valley. Increasing bike and pedestrian connectivity to the park (and any future development on the USFS parcels) is desirable to increase equity in community access and to reduce reliance on car travel. Such a connection is identified as opportunity in RFTA's Trails Master Plan and in Mid Valley Trails Plan. At the same time, concerns about the relationship of a north-south trail connection route to

the intervening private properties make this a sensitive topic that would require further study and engagement outside the scope of this effort and report. Regardless of external considerations for creating connectivity to regional systems, and with any program of improvements that may be identified, a future master plan for the subject properties should consider accommodation of neighborhood connections, and flexibility to tie into future regional connections that may be routed to and through these parcels.

Physical Characteristics of the Site

Property access

The existing access to the County Community Center and Park is unlikely suitable to serve an expansion of development onto the remaining USFS parcels, regardless of the use type. The addition of an access – or the improvement of the existing access to the USFS housing units - is a necessary consideration.

El Jebel Road / SH82 intersection improvements

The capacity and function of this signalized intersection has for years been a threshold topic when considering future improvements to the subject parcels. The cost to plan, design, vet with the community, permit, and implement modifications to the intersection circulation

and queuing have negatively impacted the viability of any proposal for these properties. During this outreach, Eagle County engineering staff described the 2021 allocation of funds for the evaluation, outreach, and design of intersection improvements. Additionally, staff indicated the direct involvement of CDOT, Crown Mountain Park, and Town of Basalt in the process, which is to include public outreach. While the implementation of the intersection improvements is not yet known, this threshold issue may be addressed in a timeline and with partnerships that will eliminate it as a barrier to implementing a plan for the subject parcels.

Valley Road Right-Of-Way

The existing Valley Road has additional traffic capacity available; neighbors identify increasing traffic volumes and observations of traffic speeds as significant concerns. The rural nature of the road template, the location of the paving in the center of the right-of-way, and the relatively narrow right-of-way presents challenges in adding a shared-use trail in the right-of-way while maintaining the current configuration of traffic lanes, shoulders, and roadside drainages. While new development on the subject parcels may not trigger engineering requirements for right-of-way (ROW) improvements, the potential use of land area of the subject parcels to improve the multi-use connectivity along the Valley Road corridor should be considered with future master planning.



View looking northeast of Valley Road / El Jebel Road / SH82 Intersection. Photo: Google Earth street view

Walkability and connectivity

The overall density and proximity relationships of this neighborhood, and lack of continuous multi-use trail infrastructure results in an overall low level of walkability when it comes to access to transit, commercial uses, and services. Prioritizing connectivity improvements relates directly to community comments related to improving walk- and rideable access to the properties and to Crown Mountain Park, and in de-prioritizing passenger cars where possible and realistic.

Health benefits of access to nature

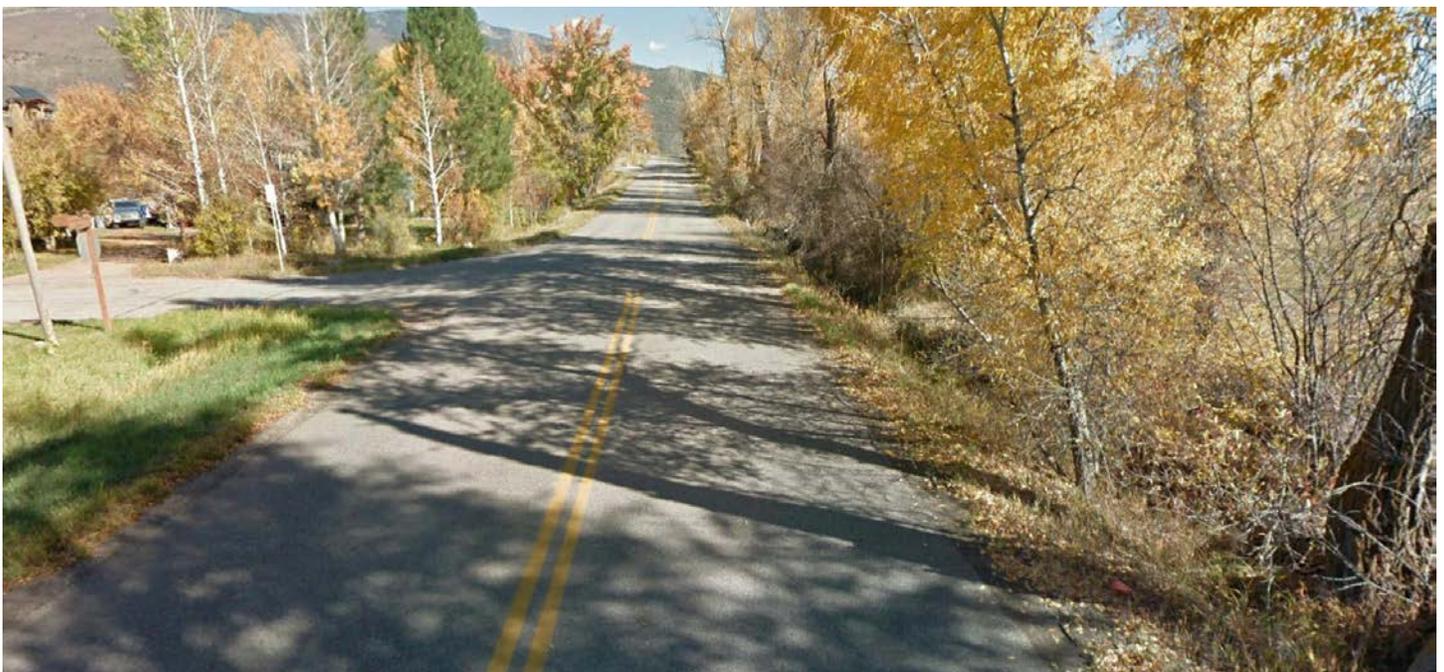
Neighbors, El Jebel residents, community health organizations, land stewards, and equity groups each identified the value of the easy and low/no-cost access to outdoor recreation, recreation programming, and passive recreation at Crown Mountain Park and to the native riparian landscape of the lower 40 USFS acres. Quality of life for those nearby, and the quality of life contributions to valley residents, was a commonly identified as a specific and important attribute of the subject parcels.

Neighborhood character

This is a sub-urban site location with a semi-rural character. This character, coupled with the access to park and natural public areas, close access to commercial services and SH82 result in a high level of desirability and quality of life by a number of metrics.

Mid Valley-based outreach participants referenced the current climate of development pressure and associated impacts as potential threats to the character of this neighborhood and the Mid Valley. During the outreach meetings, a number of ongoing residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments were planned between Basalt and the western edge of El Jebel. Sensitivity and thoughtful responses to the overall new square footage of buildings and increases in population and traffic in the Mid Valley will be important topics in future evaluation of programming alternatives and public outreach activities.

Participants encourage thinking outside of the box and asked a number of ‘big’ questions – are there bigger moves that could be made related to the location of services and facilities within the park, on the USFS land, and in/around the El Jebel Road / SH 82 intersection? As the intersection improvements are studied at El Jebel Road, do the modifications to the circulation and queuing create opportunities to occupy or beneficially use the land around the community building in a different way? These conversations need to be realistic in their scope; they may also uncover partnership opportunities or stronger overall solutions.



Typical Valley Road Character along west end of USFS Administrative Sites. View is looking east, with subject properties on the right. Photo: Google Earth street view

Community Identified Uses

Although the topics below are not exhaustive and have a number of physical and programming relationships to other topics and themes in these conversations, three primary use categories recurred most frequently related to the possible future use of the properties: conservation, deed-restricted housing, and recreation. These will be described below and are presented in no particular order. For each theme, a number of potential partners are identified as examples; the list of potential partners may evolve as alternatives are identified and evaluated, and the level of partnership may vary depending on the priorities of a given alternative.

Complementary or mutually beneficial uses

The various partners and stakeholders expressed a high degree of interest and commitment to participating in identifying and evaluating solutions. Future conversations with the community may also identify innovative opportunities, not limited to the subject property boundaries, to achieve multiple goals and priorities in a way that results in better overall outcomes ($2+2 = 5$). Numerous opportunities exist to evaluate physical and programming improvements that support the overall themes of conservation, housing, and recreation, while creating venues that foster collaboration between organizations that seek to address significant gaps in community services and infrastructure in the Mid Valley and valley-wide. For example, intergenerational facilities/programming may result in complementing uses between older adults, child care operations, youth organizations, and local athletic clubs. Seasonal housing could be shared to support the needs of the USFS and several community organizations.

Other uses

While the three themes of conservation, housing, and recreation were clearly the priority uses identified in the listening sessions, other uses, such as limited/low intensity commercial may be appropriate, particularly if such opportunities integrate with other uses and support “ $2+2=5$ ” thinking. Types of uses discussed as



Aerial view of existing USFS housing and property access from Valley Road. Photo: Google Earth

potentially appropriate include community agriculture, event spaces, ecology interpretation, education venues, etc. One such example that was presented during the listening sessions was a rural-character ‘event campus’ with relatively low-intensity uses, such as an orchard or community event center.

Uses not appropriate for the site

Uses that would typically be considered incompatible with the primary themes of conservation, housing, and recreation were universally dismissed as inappropriate for these properties. Examples cited include commercial retail development, business park, light industrial/construction, and other such similar uses with associated neighborhood impact (noise, traffic, light, etc).

Barriers to development

Outreach participants cited a number of potential barriers to development of the properties; several relate to specific uses and others to broad topics, partners, policies, or community perceptions. The most frequently identified barriers include:

- Cost burden of acquisition and development. Land acquired for development will require market value to be returned to the USFS; financial resources will need to be identified and secured.
- Timeline for acquisition and approvals. The reality of the time necessary to complete EIS, acquire the land, and obtain approvals for development can make partnership commitments difficult.
- Overall level of development in El Jebel. Numerous recent, current, and proposed land development projects in the El Jebel area are resulting in concerns about increasing population density and resulting impacts.
- Neighborhood impacts. Perceptions of negative impact of new development to neighborhood character can result in community push-back.
- Existing El Jebel Road/ SH82 intersection. Design and improvement of this intersection is necessary for any significant development to occur. The cost and time required to mitigate this intersection is a long-standing barrier.
- Adopted planning guiding documents. Eagle County and Town of Basalt long-range plans indicate low levels of development in the study area.
- Realities of walkability, transit access, and pedestrian connectivity of the site. While transit and trails are nearby, connections are lacking and distances from the properties to public transit and trails is greater than standards for a walkable/multi-modal connected site.
- Future impacts to the riparian acreage. New development on the upper portions of the site could negatively impact the habitat on the lower 40 acres.



Aerial view of El Jebel Road / SH82 intersection area, including Eagle County El Jebel Community Center building, Crown Mountain Park entry drive, RFTA Park and Ride, and commercial center. Subject properties are left (west) of this image. Photo: Google Earth

Recreation

Crown Mountain Park is an important valley asset; neighbors and El Jebel locals feel a sense of ownership and pride in the park and the value that it provides to the Roaring Fork Valley. The access to low/no-cost fitness, park facilities, open space, recreation programming, and community gathering fills a need that is also culturally important to the El Jebel population. The regional scale of the park allows for programming and events that could not be hosted elsewhere in the valley, and the relatively mild climate creates extended seasons for outdoor activity programming compared to other facilities in the valley.

Crown Mountain Park staff and board are interested in obtaining additional acreage for the park, citing examples of use pressures/carrying capacity of the current facilities, increasing population of the Mid Valley, and opportunities for additional programming/partnerships. The park routinely uses +/-4 of the easternmost acres of the USFS land for events and event parking via special use permit; staff and board members expressed that the availability of this parking is critical for the large events hosted at the park. Additionally, the park is seeing growing demand for outdoor turf fields, and cited the opportunities and existing demand for flexible, affordable indoor facilities.

Other outreach participants identified a number of opportunities to partner in improving and adding programming at the park/on the subject properties. These groups include sports-focused clubs like Aspen Valley Ski and Snowboard Club, Roaring Fork Valley Soccer Club; community services organizations like Eagle County Healthy Aging and Pitkin County Senior Services; community advocacy organizations like English in Action; and youth focused organizations.

Complementing the active recreation facilities of the park, the existing passive recreation amenities on the lower 40 USFS acres provide a great deal of value to the community. The existing primitive trails, footbridges, benches, picnic tables and river access on a such a large tract of publicly-owned

land is rare in the Roaring Fork Valley, and entirely unique in the Mid Valley. The community identified prioritizing the maintenance and improvement of the passive recreation amenities, with a focus on active management to balance potential damage to the on the resource with maintaining open access. USFS staff indicated that a base assumption is that passive use public access would continue and the river access/recreation parking would be accommodated in a new master plan.

Examples of potential partners

County Open Space departments, Crown Mountain Park and Recreation District, land and water conservation organizations, youth sports clubs, senior services agencies, aging adult advocacy groups, community equity organizations, private investors.

Takeaways

- High community value of existing and potential active and passive recreation assets
- Crown Mountain Park seeks additional acreage
- Broad facilities partnership opportunities across numerous organizations
- Broad programming partnership opportunities across numerous organizations
- Recreation values complement housing and conservation values

Conservation

The USFS considers the lower 40 acres of the El Jebel Administrative Sites (the 'lower parcel') to be undevelopable and assumes this acreage will be conserved, and the community outreach process illustrated that the conservation value of the lower parcel is uncontested. The lower parcel has been identified by a number of local land and water conservation and stewardship groups as significant for river health, wildlife corridors, public access, primitive/low-impact recreation. Additionally, substantial acreage contains protected resources such as wetlands, floodplain/floodway, and biological species of interest.

The community and the USFS also place high value on public access to this parcel. With most Roaring Fork River frontage – and riparian habitat in the valley overall – in private ownership, there is very limited opportunity for public access and conservation of a riverfront parcel this large.

The conservation- and stewardship-focused outreach participants stressed the importance of active management planning for the conservation area, particularly as the location and access becomes more publicly known. Beyond the property boundary of the lower parcel, planning alternatives should consider buffering between the conservation zone and active/programmed areas of Crown Mountain Park and any other new development on parcels the USFS acreage. As active recreation pressures increase (with population) at the park, management plan will need to be mindful of ‘creep’ impacts to buffering and conservation zones.

The USFS preference is to plan for and convey the Administrative Sites whole, but it is possible that the conservation of the lower parcel may be pursued and executed separately and more aggressively than a development proposal on the upper parcel. This may or may not be advantageous.

Examples of potential partners

County Open Space departments, Crown Mountain Park and Recreation District, Town of Basalt, land and water conservation organizations.

Takeaways

- Lower parcel is undevelopable
- Conservation of 40-acre lower parcel is assumed
- Continued public access is assumed
- Primitive, passive recreation is appropriate
- Natural resource value of lower parcel is high
- Management planning is strongly recommended to identify resource values, carrying capacities, and strategies for protecting the habitat alongside public access
- Buffering of conservation parcel from active development uses should be evaluated



Character of the Roaring Fork River along the USFS ‘lower parcel’.
Photo: Janet Urquhart Aspen Times

Affordable Housing

The region-wide need for affordable housing* is well documented in recent assessment studies and long-range planning and outreach efforts. Numerous local and regional agencies are focused on addressing the need for affordable housing; more and more those organizations are identifying creative and innovative approaches to deliver housing units. As a result, there are displayed successes in multiple public agency partnership projects, privately funded projects, and in 'public-private partnership' ("P3") arrangements in the Roaring Fork Valley and the region. Employers and housing advocates recognize that the need for housing requires a regional, 'whole-system approach' to creating deed restricted housing, and partnership opportunities extend well beyond the Mid Valley.

The housing conversation reaches across various interest groups and organizations, making partnership opportunities similarly broad. Potential arrangements will be reflective of the type of housing that may be identified for these parcels, and vice-versa. Specific housing needs and partnering opportunities included seasonal, family, aging adult, multi-generational, rental, for sale, and so on. Participants also recognized that some housing types or mixes may not be appropriate for this site or with one another.

Of particular interest during the outreach was the density of housing development with neighbors and regional stakeholders cautioning against 'maximizing density.' The appropriate carrying capacity of the site includes physical parameters such as infrastructure capacities; future evaluation should also consider the neighborhood context and other cultural factors. Direct engagement of the neighbors and El Jebel community at large will be important to test the contextual responsiveness of planning alternatives that include housing.

**For the purposes of the listening sessions and this report, "affordable housing" is used to mean, broadly: "deed restricted/rent controlled, workforce, and/or resident occupied housing."*

Aging Population Housing

Beyond housing issues, generally, the Mid Valley is a desirable location for the local aging population given easy access to transit and the Highway 82 corridor, the relatively mild climate and lower elevation as compared to the upper valley, and growing access to goods and services (including medical services). The aging adult population is a significant and growing cohort in the regional demographic and is underserved for targeted housing. Aging adult housing factors have been evaluated recently in the Greater Roaring Fork Regional Housing Study and the 2020 Older Adult Housing Needs Study. A number of factors affecting housing in the valley relate directly to the aging adult population, such as motivation to downsize, aging in place, and quality of life connected to housing security. An important consideration for older adults and the mid- and lower valley is that there exists a significant gap in physical and programming infrastructure for this demographic. For example, in El Jebel some programming services are provided in the Eagle County Community Building in a room that is also used for community court.

Examples of potential partners

Housing-focused public agencies and committees: Eagle County Housing and Development Authority; Basalt Affordable Community Housing Committee; Aspen Pitkin County Housing Authority; Town of Snowmass Village Affordable Housing

Local government: Town of Basalt

Mission-driven, not for profit organizations: Habitat For Humanity; Catholic Charities/Archdiocese Housing; Manus Housing Innovation Project; Roaring Fork Age-Friendly Collaborative

Local public and private employers: Crown Mountain Park, Colorado Mountain College, Roaring Fork Regional Transportation Authority Roaring Fork School District

Private developers of housing with public-private partnership experience

(Housing continued)

Takeaways

- Need for affordable housing is significant and well documented
- Housing-focused agencies and organizations are actively working towards development of collaborative responses to housing needs, regardless of geographic location within the region
- Housing as a priority spans across organizations, advocacy groups, and local governments, regardless of their core mission
- Many opportunities exist to explore partnerships in providing housing solutions
- Housing alternatives evaluated for this site should consider the local El Jebel and Roaring Fork Valley relationships
- Impacts related to density of development will be a key consideration for alternative evaluation and future outreach
- Responsiveness to neighborhood context is necessary
- Consideration should be given for opportunities to serve the aging adult population

Next Steps

During the outreach process, the project team stressed the preliminary nature of the effort, making it clear to participants that the course of evaluating the future use of the property is not pre-determined. Next steps were described to participants in general terms:

- Next steps are to be determined, informed by the results of the listening sessions and this summary report.
- As this is a preliminary step, the overall timeline and specific next steps are not yet identified.
- Findings will be delivered Eagle County and shared with USFS. Findings report will also be distributed to organizations that participated in this outreach process.

Participants suggested two important considerations as the process advances: (1) Develop a specific plan for genuine engagement of the Latino population. This should include community leaders and organizations focused on direct engagement and empowerment of the local Latino community. (2) Public outreach should include a component of on-site engagement, so community members can understand the context and scale of the properties and consider potential outcomes in relationship to the context of the site and neighborhood.

References

A number of local studies and guiding policy documents were referenced by participants during the outreach conversations. These documents provide a wealth of background and detailed information related to the common topics and themes identified during the outreach.

Eagle County Comp Plan – Mid Valley Area Plan

Town of Basalt Master Plan

Mid Valley Trails Master Plan

Roaring Fork Watershed Master Plan

Basalt Climate Action Plan

Housing

Greater Roaring Fork Region Housing Study

Eagle Valley Housing Needs and Solutions

2020 Older Adult Housing Needs Study

NWCCOG Regional Workforce Housing Report

Appendix

The Appendix contains a variety of information developed in support of the outreach listening sessions and includes a news release, example invitation email, and the “introductory presentation” used to set the stage for listening session dialogue.

1 - News Release

2 - Example Invitation Email

2 - Introductory Presentation

Appendix 1 - News Release

4/29/2021

Eagle County seeks feedback on future of publicly owned midvalley properties

[View this email in your browser](#)



Eagle County News Release



Eagle County seeks feedback on future of publicly owned midvalley properties

Feb. 12, 2021- Eagle County is sponsoring a series of meetings, planned for the last week of February or first week of March, to gather initial ideas and identify potential partners for managing the six county-owned undeveloped acres adjacent to Crown Mountain Park in El Jebel, as well as the 70 acres of adjacent National Forest system administrative land proposed for sale or lease.

The listening sessions will kick off with meetings of invited neighbors, community leaders, agencies, and potential partners convening to discuss the future of this important site. Upon their conclusion, a report will be released that captures the ideas, opportunities, and challenges associated with the properties, which will be presented to the Eagle County staff and Board of County Commissioners.

“Crown Mountain Park is one of the greatest community spaces in the midvalley,” said Eagle County Commissioner Matt Scherr. “This is an opportunity for everyone to share their ideas for what they want it to be in the future.”

The listening sessions are separate from the Forest Service Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process analyzing the potential sale or lease

Contact

Jill Klosterman
Chief Financial Officer
970-328-3511
jill.klosterman@eaglecounty.us

Jason Jaynes
DHM Design
970-366-1637
jjaynes@dhmdesign.com

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Eagle County El Jebel Public Properties Outreach

4/29/2021

Eagle County seeks feedback on future of publicly owned midvalley properties

of the federal agency's 70 acres of isolated administrative land adjacent to Crown Mountain Park, including 40 acres of undevelopable land along the Roaring Fork River and 30 acres of developable land along El Jebel Road and adjoining Crown Mountain Park. The Forest Service expects a draft EIS to be available for public comment later this year.

"We appreciate Eagle County's proactive efforts to build partnerships and continue the conversation about these parcels," said Aspen-Sopris District Ranger Kevin Warner. "We look forward to working with Eagle County and the public when we release our Draft EIS for public comment."

The next steps will be determined by the outcomes of this effort, but county and Forest Service officials emphasize that there will be numerous opportunities for public review and input as the separate processes unfold.

Eagle County has identified key stakeholders to participate in the listening sessions. To participate in a session, contact Jason Jaynes at jjaynes@dhmdesign.com.

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Want to change how you receive these emails? You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

Appendix 2 - Example Invitation Email

Jason Jaynes

From: Jason Jaynes
Sent: Wednesday, February 10, 2021 3:58 PM
To: Jason Jaynes
Subject: El Jebel property outreach meetings

DHM Design is working in collaboration with Eagle County and Whiter River National Forest to advance conversations about El Jebel properties. We'd like to gauge your interest in participating.

Good afternoon;

I'm Jason Jaynes, a local landscape architect and planner with DHM Design. We are helping to organize and facilitate a series of 'listening sessions' related to the USFS El Jebel Administrative Sites and the acreage owned by Eagle County adjacent to Crown Mountain Park. We are reaching out to a broad range of stakeholders, interested groups and individuals, and potential partners to learn more about the opportunities and challenges related to the possible conveyance and development of these properties.

We are inviting you to participate in a 'listening session' meeting, formatted to include a small group of individuals with related interests. You would be meeting with other agencies/organizations focused on land stewardship.

We expect your time commitment to this round of discussions to be limited to a single, virtual meeting of about 90 minutes. Although these discussions will be very preliminary, now is the time to express your ideas or concerns; at the close of the listening sessions we will be delivering a summary to Eagle County and the White River National Forest Supervisor's Office.

It's important to know that *no decisions have been made* about the future of these parcels, except that the USFS has identified the Administrative Sites as candidates for conveyance. Also important is that this is not a part of, or replacement for, the ongoing and formal USFS project to evaluate the sites for conveyance. These listening sessions are intended to be the opening round in the next chapter of discussion around the properties.

Please respond at your earliest convenience with your interest and ability to attend, with questions, or if you are not interested in participating. We will begin scheduling the meetings in the next week and expect to hold the meetings in late February or early March.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Jason Jaynes

Managing Principal | PLA

DHM DESIGN

Landscape Architecture | Land Planning | Ecological Planning | Urban Design

D: 970.425.3854 | O: 970.963.6520 x105 | C: 970.366.1637

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- 10+ year history of conversations
- 2005 and 2018 legislation
- September 2020 site visit
- USFS environmental review

HISTORY & BACKGROUND



OUTREACH PURPOSE

- Preliminary step
- Listening session format – gathering ideas and feedback
- Broad engagement of identified stakeholders, neighbors, potential partners



EAGLE COUNTY

WHAT IT'S NOT:

- Selection process
- Land Use process
- Federal EA process

There will be numerous opportunities for engagement and feedback



- Years of ongoing talks
- 2018 Farm Act – Flexible Partnership Act increased opportunities
- USFS EIS process underway
- Senator Bennet visit September 2020

WHY NOW?



MEETING EXPECTATIONS

- **Be engaged:** cameras on; mute when not talking
- **Be known:** Identify yourself / your group when speaking
- **Be heard:** We want to hear from each of you – please speak up and allow others an opportunity to speak, too
- **Be civil:** Keep comments respectful and solution-oriented
- **Please ask questions!**



OUTCOMES

- This is one of a series of similar meetings
- Information will be synthesized into a summary of overall themes, opportunities, and challenges
- Submitted to Eagle County and USFS; next steps TBD