

Key parcel on the Yampa River above Stagecoach conserved



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Steamboat Springs — The Routt County Board of Commissioners is expected Tuesday to consider approving the use of Purchase of Development Rights — PDR — funds to enable two new conservation easements in South Routt, including one on a significant piece of the Yampa River just upstream from Stagecoach State Park.

The new easement on 86 acres of Steve and Pam Williams' Glas Deffryn Ranch would include .75 channel miles of the Yampa River and be held by the Yampa Valley Land Trust.

The PDR Board is recommending the use of \$173,000 in dedicated property tax dollars to purchase the development rights from the land in order to conserve it as open space. The voter-approved funding represents 28 percent of the \$615,000 appraised value of the property with Great Outdoors Colorado and the Gates Family Foundation supplying 44 percent, and the landowners will also contribute \$172,000 in forgone development value.

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Funding for the county's PDR program comes from 1.5 mills of voter-approved property taxes that were last renewed in 2006. The PDR program is intended to give landowners an economically attractive alternative to selling land for development by instead compensating them for the development rights they agree to put under a conservation easement. By giving up those future development rights, the owners typically donate more than half of the appraised value of the land.

When the easement closes, the latest transaction by Yampa Valley Land Trust will have added significance because it will complete an unbroken 5-mile stretch of the river corridor comprising both public lands and conserved properties upstream from Stagecoach Reservoir.

"We truly appreciate the expertise and tremendous support we have received from Yampa Valley Land Trust, Routt County PDR, GOCO and the Gates Foundation to help us realize the dream of keeping this small ranch we have cobbled together over the last 18 years as one entity into the future for the benefit of agriculture, wildlife and the natural view shed long after we are gone," Pam Williams said in the news release.

The ranch specializes in purebred Scottish Highland cattle.

Yampa Valley Land Trust is also working on the conservation of another 121 acres of Glas Deffryn Ranch, adjacent to the riverfront parcel, in a transaction funded separately by the Gates Family Foundation.

In a separate PDR transaction being contemplated by the Board of Commissioners Tuesday, the commissioners will consider using another \$595,000 in PDR funds to help fund plans by the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust to conserve the 1,600-acre Gates Ranch in Egeria Park just outside of Toponas. The ranch was valued at \$1.14 million, and the Gates family will contribute half of the ranch value to the easement by foregoing the ability to develop it.

Using proceeds from the conservation of land holdings in Burns, Doug and Kelly Gates and their son Whittier and his wife, Tiffany, purchased the Gates Ranch (formerly the Kayser Place) in 2014, according to a new release.

"Our family is connected to Routt County. We have never wanted to be anywhere else," Kelly Gates said in a news release. "We are so thrilled to have this chance to start building a legacy for the grandkids."

According to the Colorado Cattleman's Agricultural Land Trust, the ranch is a key piece in a larger area of conserved ranches — another 19,000 acres within 8 miles of the Gates Ranch are already under easements — meaning this latest easement builds on a landscape-scale conservation initiative. Located at the foot of King Mountain in the Colorado River drainage, the ranch includes active sage grouse habitat and a 4,100-acre BLM grazing lease.

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