

Windstar Land Conservancy



Volume 1 Number 2
Summer 2001

The Valley's Best Kept Secret

The Windstar Land Conservancy (WLC) has to be one of the best-kept open secrets in the Roaring Fork Valley. The land is home to pristine aspen groves, lush native wetlands, open green pastures, and sweeping views of Mount Sopris. Right now, the coots, ducks, and geese are settling into the pond for the summer and red tailed hawks and golden eagles do daily fly-bys.

We want the special beauties and unique features on the 957-acre site John Denver loved so much to be seen, studied, and enjoyed by everyone. We want our work—supported by many volunteers,

experts, donors, and organizations—to become a model others can use, of clear successes and instructive failures, and a source of know-how and inspiration.

We want to see more of you at the WLC. We are always thrilled to have volunteers and visitors. The conservancy is a great place to get outside and enjoy nature. You are invited to work and help us to preserve an important piece of land. Now is an ideal time to see the results of what we've done so far this year, and find out what we'll be doing this summer and in the future. n

"Since the land is the parent, let the citizens take care of her more carefully than children do their mother."

—Plato



photo by Norm Clasen

Amanda Ayres (front), an RMI researcher, leads high school students and Landmark Volunteers in planting over 20,000 aquatic trees, grasses, and forbs. In total we planted 5 species of rushes, 7 sedges, 6 forbs, and 6 deciduous trees including willows, cottonwoods, alders, and birches.

Windstar Land Conservancy



photo by Norm Clasen

“Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land.”

—Aldo Leopold

Windstar Land Conservancy—A Whale’s Tale

Preserving a precious part of the Roaring Fork Valley

The natural beauty, ecological diversity, and vital wildlife habitat of the 957-acre site that is now Windstar Land Conservancy (WLC) immediately caught John Denver’s eye. Denver noticed that from the sky the land was shaped like a whale, and he felt that this heightened its uniqueness. He was correct in thinking that the land should be treasured and protected. Now it’s up to WLC to preserve this precious part of the Roaring Fork Valley.

With advice from a distinguished scientific panel, a long-term management plan was completed in 1997, providing guidance for the WLC restoration program. Parts of the restoration program were commenced immediately upon acquisition of the property. Land Steward Paul Buch and the land management team really

the valley floor, and an efficient and wider-reaching underground irrigation system was installed. The seeding and hay-bale check dams constructed on the upland Mancos shale slopes have helped mitigate erosion.

An integrated weed management plan employs cutting, pulling, grazing with goats and introducing beneficial insects. The first phase of a major wetland revegetation has been completed. With the help of Rocky Mountain Native Plants and volunteer groups over 20,000 trees, grasses, and forbs were planted in what was, and will soon be again, a rare alpine wetland along the valley floor. You can see clearly right now how different are the ecosystems just 500 yards from the building where RMI’s researchers work.

With erosion checked, wetlands and slopes revegetated, and weeds turned back, we are ready to move ahead with this summer’s projects. We will be starting an intensive grazing program, based on holistic land management principles. We will be enticing waterfowl, raptors, and other birds to the pond and wetlands, constructing an interpretive nature trail, continuing with the wetland revegetation, creating a working computer map (Geographic Information System) for the land, and establishing an education center that provides information on sustainable land management practices.

Working with professionals from the Allen Savory Center and independent consultants, we began the planning process for Holistic Land Management in February 2001. The holistic management process puts together a sustainable management plan that encompasses all of our land goals. The Conservation Easement requires that



photo by Norm Clasen

As part of our wetland restoration we removed 20,000 cubic yards of soil from the wildlife pond to fill in old, unused irrigation channels originally excavated to drain the wetland. This also increased the depth of the pond from 6 inches to 15 feet in some places creating valuable aquatic habitat.

got active in 2000, with the financial support of many individuals and groups. The existing pond was dredged, removing 20,000 cubic yards of soil and increasing the depth from six inches to fifteen feet. The soil from the pond was used to fill in old, unused irrigation channels bordering

Lions, and tigers, and bears—oh my! Okay, so there aren't any tigers at WLC but it is home to several bears—Bob (for Big Ole Bear), Roberta, (one of them left a mark on this Aspen), and a set of cubs. Mountain lions have also been spotted above the cliff-bands that border the valley. WLC also provides habitat for eagles, badgers, foxes, coyotes, deer, porcupines, hawks, chipmunks, squirrels, raptors, songbirds, owls, snakes and large migratory elk herds—up to 750 strong!



photo by Norm Clasen

the land must be used, in part for agricultural purposes, in accordance with its past uses. By design, we will be trying out some progressive intensive grazing techniques as a tool for weed management, pasture reclamation and erosion control. The goats, cattle or horses you may see when you visit are part of the sustainability of this program.

WLC is eager to prepare the next generation of caretakers for the ongoing work of stewardship. In this effort, we will be helped again this summer by the Landmark Volunteers, an organization devoted to giving young men and women hands-on experience in environmental restoration. These national volunteers will camp and help build an interpretive nature trail on the land. The 3-mile trail will be included in the Pitkin County's Open Space and Trails guide and will highlight the wetland/land restoration process, wetland ecosystems, wildlife habitat improvement and holistic land management. Funds awarded by the Aspen Skiing Co. Environment Foundation have made the trail possible.

Our local volunteers, the Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers, will work with us to finish the second phase of the wetlands work, re-establishing the original streambed and riparian ecosystem. The riparian corridor planting will cover 15 feet on either side of the stream for a length of 800 feet.

We are also currently working with the mapping firm, J.D. Russell and Associates, located in Basalt, Colorado to build an interactive computer mapping or Geographic Information System (GIS) of the WLC. Land managers are increasingly relying on GIS to help them make critical decisions. Topography, hydrology, and vegetation data is integrated, allowing us to recognize new

patterns and relationships. The combination of GIS technologies and supreme field facilities will enable WLC to provide priceless educational experiences to children and adults.

The entire WLC restoration project is meant to serve as a model of sustainable land management to landowners. This coming winter we will be compiling information for an education and outreach center. The education center will provide a place where you can learn about WLC's restoration program and how you can implement sustainable land management practices on your own property.

All of the current and future projects at WLC are designed to preserve the health and sustainability of the land and to provide a valuable resource and experience to the public. We want the WLC land to become a place for people to visit to enjoy a stunning piece of the Roaring Fork Valley and learn something about sustainable land management. n



photo by Norm Clasen

LAND MANAGEMENT GOALS

- **Preserve open space and wildlands for public enjoyment and recreation.**
- **Maximize the health of all biological communities and species and the ecological processes that maintain them.**
- **Restore the valley wetland, (at a minimum) to its original 35-acres and restore the original hydrology that supported the wetland.**
- **Create a model of sustainable, economically feasible, and holistic land management/restoration for landowners.**
- **Provide a resource to the public about ecological processes and sustainable land management.**

Windstar Land Conservancy

A Vision for the Windstar Land

A word from WLC's Land Steward



Paul Buch, WLC's Land Steward, and Bacchus.

LETTERS TO THE LAND CREW

**We want to hear
your comments,
criticism, or praise.
Please address all
correspondence to:**

**Land Steward
Rocky Mountain
Institute
1739 Snowmass
Creek Road
Snowmass, CO
81654
(970) 927-3851
fax: (970) 927-3420
pbuch@rmi.org
www.rmi.org**

Taking on the position of land steward at the Windstar Land Conservancy tested my ability to learn and implement new information and was a very rewarding experience. My predecessor, David Tice, passed away unexpectedly and is dearly missed. His passion for land and particularly the Windstar land endeared him to the Rocky Mountain Institute and Windstar communities. I was fortunate to briefly get to know David and he shared many of his thoughts on what he envisioned for the land with me. He viewed the WLC land as an ideal outdoor laboratory to apply his extensive reclamation and land management experience. Through my time with David and later studying his notes and plans I was able to piece together parts of his vision. David's ideas and input from RMI, the Windstar Foundation and friends of John Denver all contributed to the direction in which we are taking the conservancy. The land's history, the land itself and people who have worked here over the years have also been influential.

As we researched and implemented projects on the land it became clear that there was no complete and accessible support structure for sustainable land management. The information we needed was spread out among many different organizations and individuals and was hard to assimilate. Fertilizer, pesticide and seed companies have land management information readily available, neatly packaged and easily accessible to ranchers and landowners. The promise of a quick fix to

eliminate weeds or increase pasture yield is very tempting to most people. Landowners want green pastures with no weeds but are unaware of the environmental cost of this approach. Land management is often attempted using herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers, fences and brute force. The drawback, in addition to negative environmental impacts, is that anything gained by force must be maintained by force, and therefore is not sustainable.

As more open space is subdivided into 35-100 acre "lots" the need for information on sustainable land management is growing. We can not stop development but we can improve management practices, providing benefits to landowners, wildlife, and entire ecosystems. Green, productive, healthy pastures can be achieved without herbicides and pesticides.

Holistic land stewardship produces gradual, sustainable and environmentally beneficial results. Holistic land stewardship takes an entire ecosystem into account, that is, the "whole," including but not limited to wildlife habitat, land health and human needs. Weeds are a symptom of a problem within the ecosystem. Healthy pastures, maintained with holistic land management, are able to out-compete weeds, negating the need for herbicides. Healthy soil continues to regenerate through a complex symbiotic relationship with organisms, and may not require supplemental fertilizer. A balanced ecosystem is self-maintaining and provides ideal habitat for every living thing on the land, from microorganisms to wildlife to cattle to humans.

Greetings from WLC's president

It is an honor and privilege to be writing you as the new President of Windstar Land Conservancy. First, I'd like to express gratitude and appreciation to two board members who resigned last fall after more than 4 years of dedicated service and vision. Cheryl Charles served on the board as its president and a representative of Windstar Foundation since the inception of WLC in 1995. Amory Lovins, was also a founding WLC board member and representative of Rocky Mountain Institute.

Many of you know the history behind creating WLC to be the owner and steward of the 957 acres that are the subject of this newsletter and the good work by WLC. Briefly, RMI purchased 50% of the property from the National Wildlife Foundation, which owned the property with Windstar Foundation. RMI and WF wisely agreed to place the property in a conservation easement as a way to ensure perpetual preservation of the land and RMI provides day-to-day management of the property. RMI and WF each have the right to appoint 2 seats on the WLC board and the fifth "at-large" board member is mutually appointed. Last fall, the entire board was fully constituted and I am delighted to introduce you to its members.

Steve Wilson, WLC's Treasurer, represents WF on the WLC board. Steve has a long and distinguished career in land management and conservation as a wildlife biologist, environmental specialist, and administrator. He recently retired from the Arkansas Division of Fish & Wildlife, having served as its director for 20 years, is the former Chairman of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, and has served as President of Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

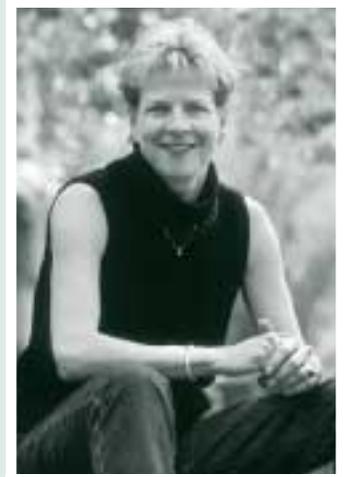
WLC's new Secretary, also representing WF on the board, is Brad Peterson, a Boulder, Colorado based attorney, and an avid outdoorsman. Brad has worked with Windstar Foundation over the years in a variety of capacities and thus became associated with and interested in WLC.

Jane Ellen Hamilton was the unanimous choice for the "at-large" board member. She is the Executive Director of the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts, a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the ability of land trusts to protect open lands in Colorado by providing education, organizational and technical assistance to land trusts

and landowners. Prior to that, Jane Ellen was CEO of the Pitkin County Open Space & Trails Program for Pitkin County and was instrumental in preparing and effecting the conservation easement that currently secures the WLC land.

Founding board member Hunter Lovins remains on the WLC board as its Vice President and a representative to the board of RMI. Hunter holds a law degree, co-founded RMI with Amory Lovins in 1982, and is very knowledgeable about the land and about resource management issues.

I am RMI's second representative to the WLC board. I have a masters degree and experience in land use planning and I was a land use and real estate lawyer before joining RMI as its Executive Director. In fact, I represented RMI during its purchase of the WLC property interest and was closely involved in the creation of the conservation easement. It is my love of this land, my values about land conservation, and my respect for the two organizations that secured and conserved the land—RMI and WF—that I believe qualify me to serve WLC well.



Marty Pickett, WLC's President

Marty Pickett

A Vision...

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Last summer we monitored changes on the land and collected data on vegetation, soil health, hydrology and wildlife and will continue monitoring this summer. Many conservation organizations are contributing information and peoplepower. Our goal is to provide information and leadership concerning sustainable land management to land owners, ranchers and the general public. The interpretive nature trail being built this summer will circle three miles of the land, showcasing methods of land reclamation, pasture and weed management and wetland creation. Habitat improvement projects will be geared towards all ages. The education and outreach center is designed to provide the public with a source of information on holistic and sustainable land management. We believe that our projects at WLC will give people an outstanding opportunity to learn about and practice responsible land management. n

Windstar Land Conservancy

Windstar's Western Heritage

How the Wild West Became a Land Conservancy

In the United States, there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is. That is what makes American what it is. –Gertrude Stein (1936)

Get along lil' dogies! Cowboys, cattle, horses, saloons, sunsets, and gunslingers – these are all images associated with the American West. The mythical image of the cowboy is ingrained in American culture, but other images such as rugged peaks, rolling arid hillsides, endless horizons and huge, open spaces also characterize the West. These icons create our modern perception of the western frontier and the role it played in American settlement and culture. Western historians often assert that Americanism and the idea of the 'American Dream' originates from the existence of a frontier where anyone tough enough could stake a claim and hack out a life from the hostile landscape.

The history of Windstar Land Conservancy is as rich and diverse as any Western land. The Old Snowmass Valley was originally homesteaded in the 1870s.

Since that time people, land, and land-use ideas in the West have changed significantly. Once a large, open valley used primarily for agriculture, Old Snowmass Valley is now host to ranches, a monastery, RMI homes, and highways. Despite the

changes, the land represents a slice of western heritage that is still paramount in

American culture. At WLC we strive to preserve the land's heritage while maintaining its health and beauty in perpetuity.

The WLC valley was originally called Bohan Gulch after John Bohan, who homesteaded the area in 1895. Bohan and other homesteaders raised livestock and grew hay for the booming mining towns nearby. In 1906, John Jurick, Sr. built a cabin on the land. A hard-working Yugoslavian immigrant family, the Juricks raised chickens and cattle and grew hay, grain and potatoes. Three generations of Juricks lived in Bohan Valley until about 1950, when farming and land values declined.

In the early 1950s, Harold (Shorty) Pabst bought 3,500 acres of land in the Snowmass Valley including the land where WLC is today. The Pabst Ranch was bounded by Snowmass Creek on the east and Capitol Creek on the west, with Bohan Valley at the geographical center of the purchase. The spring at the rear of Bohan Valley supplied water for Pabst's ranch house (now Rocky Mountain Institute's office) and for cattle that grazed in the well-sheltered valley.

In 1963, Pabst started selling parcels of his ranch. The newly established St. Benedict's Monastery acquired the ranch house and a small piece of land as retreat facilities. In 1979, John Denver purchased 94 acres of the St. Benedict's Monastery land, along with 863 additional acres of Pabst's Bohan Valley land, and gave all 957 acres to The Windstar Foundation, a non-



"Rejoice in the creative spirit that lives inside you. Use it consciously to create the life and the world you want."

John Denver



photo by Norm Clasen

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Adopt-a-Goat

Yes, A Goat!

Last summer 600 cashmere goats spent nine days on the WLC munching on noxious weeds. The goats made great lawn mowers, but because their visit to the land had to be scheduled months in advance, the timing of the grazing was not optimal for weed control. So we decided to manage our own goat herd this summer and launched the adopt-a-goat program in winter



2000. The program was set up so that \$100 “bought” a happy and productive goat. We would like to thank those who adopted goats and are helping us manage environmentally threatening noxious weeds on the WLC.

Gracie Bailey adopted Kathy.
Kathleen Corcoran adopted Sherrod.
Martha and Ralph E. Frede adopted Jitter.
Patricia and Calvin C. Nolen adopted Ralph.
Wolfe Reitz adopted Gerty.
Diana and Jonathan F.P. Rose apoted 10 goats.
Frantisek Simek adopted a goat.
Nancy and Daniel L. Streiffert adopted goats for Anita Streiffert, Alan Streiffert, and Mr. and Mrs. Sam Piazza.
Brian Cady adopted Reginald for his father, Blake Cady.



Green Ideas

in memory of David Tice

The day you gave your talk
on our progress here so far,
the thing that excited you most
was an old quotation,
new to you and us—complex
and simple, dense and clear,
like a forest or a single tree—
“Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.”

It made you happy, that sentence,
though you couldn't quite convey,
in your kind, deliberate speech,
what it was about it that made you so;
couldn't quite connect it—
though we could see you trying—
to the business we had in hand.

And then you saw another rare,
surprising thing,
that ferruginous hawk
in its survey vanishing
above the Windstar land,
the news of whose visit
you brought us
in one of your rare
electronic mails—
followed by the sighting of a pair,
with their blunt, cayenne tails.
Of these, too, you made us aware
in southern words whose spare
excited tone carried both
your feelings and your science.

Now that you have passed
like the swallow through the barn
(so incredibly, so fast!),
in whose flight the Benedictine monk
saw the course of our life; now,
as the snow begins to fall
and mount, and the sun,
in counter concert,
melts it down for drink,
that medieval juniper
whose unlikely stand
you made the theme
of your completest speech,
whose age you established
for the record—and for the time
it afforded you, your last, on the land—
is adding yet another ring
to its stature, and to yours.

9 December 1999
Mark Scott

Windstar Land Conservancy

Why Restoration?

People often ask us why we work so hard to restore the land: if left alone, wouldn't nature take over and return the land to its original, healthy state? Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Windstar Land Conservancy is a microcosm of rangelands throughout the American West. Ranches for nearly a century, with approximately 200 acres of land in hay production, and much of the rest used for grazing, it fell into disuse in the early 1960s. By the time the Conservancy was established, invading plant species were crowding out natives, noxious weeds were abundant,

and erosion was increasing: in short, the ecosystem was unbalanced. Natural succession could not occur because wildfires are no longer allowed to burn freely and because wildlife, hemmed in by humans, have changed their grazing patterns. These and other factors make the land incapable of reverting to its original wild state.

Instead, we are reclaiming and managing it as habitat for wildlife forced off other lands. We are also managing it for livestock and for recreation—hiking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing. At WLC, we hope to show how managing private land to serve both environmental and social needs can increase its value and ecological richness. We will never be able to erase the human footprint, but we can learn how to manage its impact and maintain the vital ecosystems at WLC. n



Visiting Windstar Land Conservancy

Visitors are always welcome to WLC, located 16 miles northwest of Aspen near the Y-shaped juncture of Snowmass and Capitol Creeks. The Conservancy can be accessed through its main entrance, approximately two and a half miles south of Highway 82 on Snowmass Creek Road. Parking spaces, a bike rack, and hitching posts are available. Also, volunteers are always welcome to participate in our summer restoration projects. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Paul Buch at (970) 927-3851 or pbuch@rmi.org.

Scheduled volunteer projects this spring and summer include:

May 26–27: Windstar Volunteer Weekend

July 29–August 11: Landmark Volunteers: Nature trail construction

August 25: Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers: Wetland planting n

"After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, and so on—have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear—what remains? Nature remains."

Walt Whitman 1882

Windstar's Western Heritage

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profit education and research organization he co-founded with aikido master Thomas Crum.

In 1994, the Windstar land was threatened with development. Rocky Mountain Institute offered to buy out the National Wildlife Federation's half-interest in the land on condition that the Windstar Foundation, owner of the other half, join RMI in donating all the land to a new organization, the Windstar Land Conservancy. The property was (and remains) vital to RMI's operational effectiveness: its entire Research and Communications departments have occupied the ranch house/office building on the property since 1992.

Development of the historic ranchland would also have threatened critical habitat and a critical migration corridor for one of the largest migratory elk herds in North America. In 1996, RMI completed the transaction (although it still must repay bridge loans taken out against multi-year pledges). RMI and the Windstar Foundation placed a binding conservation easement on the entire property, protecting the land in perpetuity as public open space, wildlife habitat and critical wetlands. n



photo by Norm Clasen

**"Let man heal the hurt places
and revere whatever is still
miraculously pristine."**

-David R. Brower 1966



Looking north through the WLC valley with RMI buildings in the distance.

Windstar Land Conservancy



photo by Norm Clasen

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November 15, 1999 through May 10, 2001

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The National Arbor Day Foundation
John Denver Fan Club of Germany, with special acknowledgment to Marion Iaccarino, Inge Kaminski, & Gabriele Schech, in memory of John Denver
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Kathi M. Kerr, in memory of Frances DiNatale Kerr
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Logan L. Hurst, in memory of John Denver
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Thelma & Jack B. Estep, in memory of David Tice
Patricia L. Etter, in memory of John Denver
Alice Evans, in memory of John Denver

"In losing stewardship
we lose fellowship;
we become outcasts
from the great neigh-
borhood of creation."

—Wendell Berry

Donors

Linda Ewald, in memory of John Denver
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 Patricia Miller, in memory of John Denver
 Dominique & Kenneth Mintz, in memory of John Denver
 Martha & Bruce D. Morgan, in memory of John Denver
 Donna S. Mullins, in memory of John Denver

Kerry & Ricki Newman, in memory of John Denver & his dreams
 PA Friends of John Denver: Judith A. Gabriel, Peggy Kitch, Pat Liddic, Pat Cavanaugh, & Eileen Stein, in memory of John Denver
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 Christa & Richard E. Robinson, in memory of John Denver
 Joan Russell, in memory of John Denver
 Sara & Leonard A. Schlayer, in memory of John Denver
 Devota & Phillip K. Sheffield, in memory of John Denver
 JoAnn Simms, in memory of John Denver
 Julie Slagle, in memory of John Denver
 Christie A. Smith, in memory of John Denver
 Yvonne & Stewart Springfield, in memory of John Denver
 Renee Justice Standley, in memory of John Denver
 Melissa Stegeman-Roberts & Rick E. Roberts (2), in memory of John Denver
 Jane Stone, in memory of John Denver
 Charles W. & Cathie L. Sundry, in memory of John Denver
 Geraldine & Joseph B. Tellie, in memory of John Denver
 Joan M. Theroux, in memory of John Denver
 Valerie A. Wahlstrom, in memory of John Denver
 Sandra L. Wayne
 Barry Wertz, in memory of John Denver
 Barbara & Charles M. White, in memory of John Denver
 Ruth Whyte
 Desiree S. Willis (2), in tribute to John Denver
 Cynthia & Lawrence Woytowicz (3), in loving memory of John Denver & in honor of his birthday
 Ann E. Zahn, in memory of John Denver



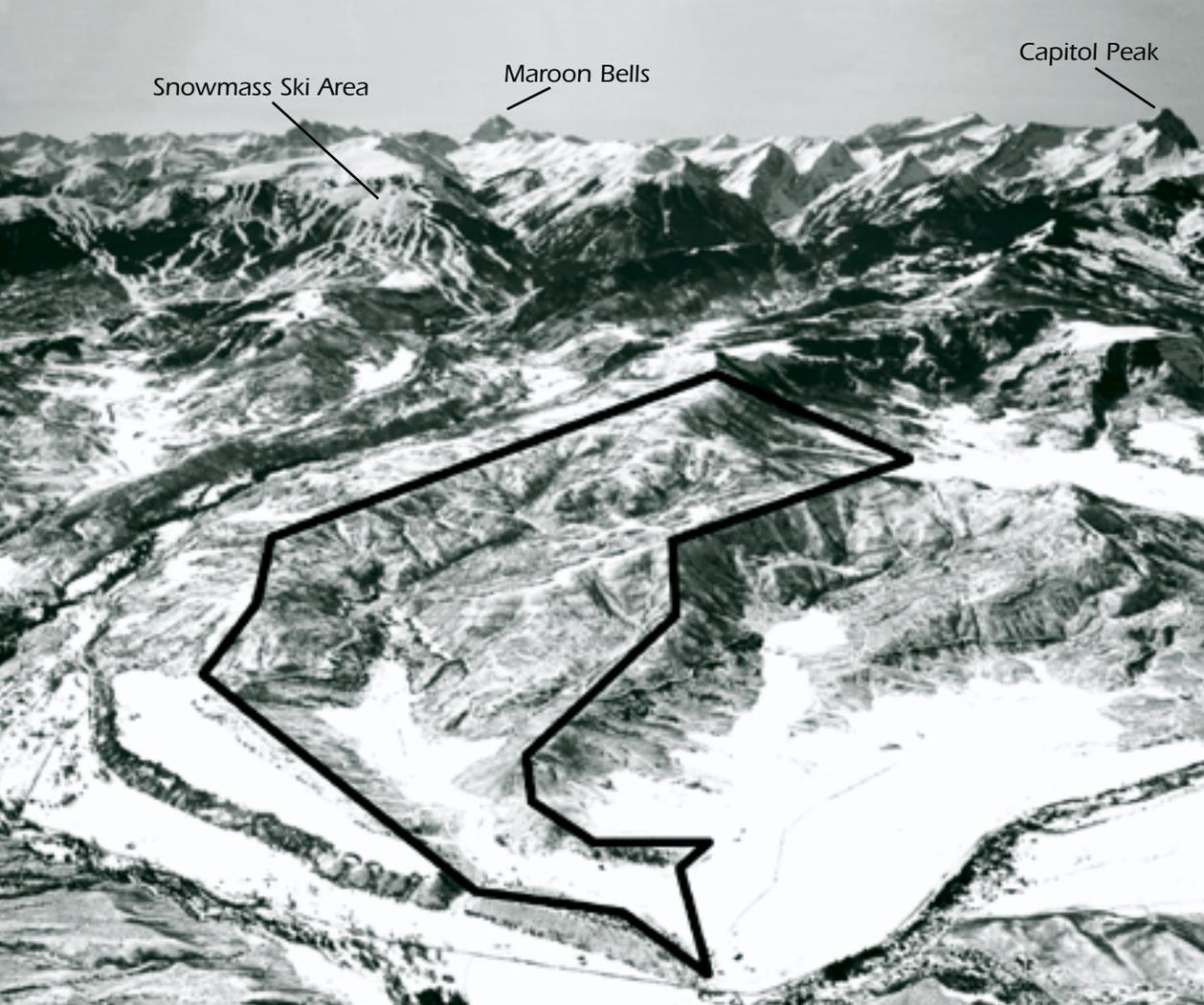
Left to right are Red Cain, John Roberts and Ethel Lossing. Doug Hill not pictured

The WLC would like to warmly thank The Norcross Wildlife Foundation, Inc., Aspen Skiing Company Environment Foundation, The Elk Foundation and Pitkin County Open Space and Trails for their recent monetary contributions.

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We would also like to thank the Windstar Foundation and volunteers, Landmark Volunteers and Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers for contributing their time and labor to the land. Without their help many large projects would not have been possible.

Last but certainly not least we would like to thank our very own maintenance crew. Ethel, Red, John and Doug – thank you! Your help last summer was invaluable—we couldn't have done it without you.



Snowmass Ski Area

Maroon Bells

Capitol Peak

photo courtesy of Stu Huck-Photo One

"In one respect every natural area has a common uniqueness—it takes everyone forever to preserve it, but one person and one time to destroy it."

E.J. Koestner 1970

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