

**Town Council Special Meeting
Town of Paonia, Colorado
January 11, 2012**

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

A Special Meeting of the Town Council held Wednesday, January 11, 2012 was called to order at 7:05 p.m. at the Paradise Theatre located at 215 Grand Avenue. Those present were Mayor Neal Schwieterman, Trustees Sid Lewis, and Lucien Pevec; and Town Clerk Barbara Peterson.

Mayor Schwieterman determined a quorum was not present and proceeded with the meeting.

New Business

Bear Ranch Land Exchange – Public Hearing

Mayor Schwieterman thanked everyone for moving to the Paradise Theatre to accommodate the large crowd. There will not be a decision made tonight, but this meeting is to take public comments. The Bear Ranch representatives gave a presentation regarding the 4500-acre ranch located east of Paonia Reservoir in Gunnison County. The cattle and agricultural production employs approximately 50 people in the area. The vegetation and wildlife management plan treats 250 acres per year for bark beetle infestation and replants conifer and riparian seedling. Bear Ranch is cost sharing with the United States Forest Service and the Department of Wildlife for cutthroat populations. The western village and museum is a private family retreat resembling an old west town and currently employs over 150 workers. Bear Ranch is requesting the land exchange to consolidated ranching operations and resolve recurring trespass and poaching issues. The proposal is to convey land in the Curecanti National Recreation Area and the Dinosaur National Monument to the National Park Service in exchange for receiving BLM and Forest Service parcels adjacent to Bear Ranch. Public benefits of the trade include 2 parcels to be placed under the National Park Service purview, enhanced public access through the Gunnison National Forest and Raggeds Wilderness near Paonia Reservoir across the former Buck Creek Ranch. A new non-motorized trail parallel to the Ragged Mountain Trail connecting to Spring Creek with Erickson Springs which may become part of the Crested Butte to Carbondale Trail. A new permanent public access and trailhead to the Jumbo Mountain area will be created and a non-motorized trail easement along County Road 12 which could link Paonia to the Crested Butte to Carbondale Trail.

Ed Marston noted that if the exchange occurs, the public will give up 3 square miles of high-elevation east of Paonia reservoir as well as physical access to an elk herd, best existing road access to the Ragged Mountain basin. The populace would gain 911 acres of sagebrush in the Curecanti National recreation Area as well as 80 acres in Utah's Dinosaur National Monument, and 2 right-of-ways at Buck Creek, build a trail at the base of the Ragged and donate land along Minnesota Creek to provide additional access to Jumbo Mountain. Mr. Marston contends that the lands proposed for exchange are not equal. The existing access has been a well-kept secret. Mr. Koch has done the area a favor by bringing attention to these areas that may be better developed for recreational tourism activities. Trails may be connected to Crested Butte and Carbondale for biking. The mines will eventually disappear, making the valley a rural gateway to Kebler and McClure Pass roads. Mr. Marston is thankful that this process has made the public aware of the accesses. Bear Ranch has structured this deal so Congress has to act, and where Mr. Koch has registered lobbyists and area citizens do not. The Park Service has withdrawn its endorsement. Gunnison and Delta Counties are in temporary disagreement over the parallel trail, which the USFS also opposes. Mr. Marston suggests the Council write letters opposing the land swap so our area may develop a comprehensive vision for this area. Both the land exchange and the proposed nominated oil and gas lease parcels dramatize this valley's vulnerability to outside money and power. We are all in this together and need to work as such.

There were 7 people who spoke in favor of the land swap: Jess Campbell, Lance Rundell, Vic Ullrey, Tracy Tooker, Gordan Durkee, Brenda Hogan, and Constantine Hirschfeld. Significant points included:

- This is a good trade
- Keeps a number of people employed; economic benefits
- More people will benefit by the exchange than just our area
- Bear Ranch projects employ local youths and provide experience on the trail projects
- Bear Ranch is a good neighbor
- Not see people utilizing and current ones are dangerous

There were 8 people who were neutral or did not speak on the intended topic: Eric Hughs, Barbara Hewitt, Randy Campbell, Mike Ludlow, Luke Reschke, Brad Robinson, Bill Roberts, Yens Lang and Myriem Le Ferrand.

There were 28 people who spoke opposing the land swap: Celia Roberts, Carolyn Metzler, Lynne Bear, Glenn Dahlgren, Tara miller, Allison Elliot, Hal Brill, Juliana Weiser, Lee Gelatt, Joe Scheetz, Tom Ricketts, Bob Shettel, Elaine Brett, Tony Prendergast, Robin Kauffman, Steve Morris, Jon Lee, Ann Rickenbough, Dave Roberts, Penny Heuscher, Sam Brown, Frank Mastrullo, Aaron Jerad, Sarah Bishop, Allison Garrett, Bill Brunner, and Shawn LaBounty.

Significant points included:

- Special area; views, serenity, pristine area
- Limits access; maintain current
- Not an equal exchange
- Land was purchased knowing was divided. Should not be able to do legal maneuvers just because can afford it for a personal playground
- Public land should not be sold to an individual for privacy sake
- Not like parallel trail proposed; damage to landscape and wildlife, unnecessary conflict
- Mr. Koch not going to be alive forever; the land swap is permanent, lose for future generations
- Mr. Koch not come to community first
- If ranch already has grazing rights, than swap not needed
- Should be a local decision, not national
- Proposal lacks environmental and planning analysis

8:35 p.m. Meeting adjourned.

Mayor, Neal Schwieterman

Town Clerk, Barbara J. Peterson