



# SILT RIVER PRESERVE

The Town of Silt would like to formally acknowledge and thank the sponsors of the Silt River Preserve.

Revenue sources:



Aspen Valley Land Trust



## **SILT RIVER PRESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**Location:** The Silt River Preserve is located south of the Colorado River on County Road 346, not quite a mile west of the junction of Dry Hollow Road (County Road 331) and Mamm Creek Road (County Road 346), within Sections 9 & 10, Township 6 South, Range 92 West of the 6<sup>th</sup> Principal Meridian, outside of the Town of Silt, but within Garfield County. The property is bounded on the west by an operating gravel pit owned by Gypsum Ranch LLC, as well as a ten-acre ranch owned by a private individual for residential and livestock purposes. Across the Colorado River, the Silt River Preserve has northern neighbors of the Town of Silt Water/Wastewater Treatment Plants, the un-annexed Herons Nest RV Park, an un-annexed five-acre private property currently used as residential and equipment storage, as well as the annexed Ferguson Crossing commercial development, meant for retail, limited manufacturing and other highway commercial. There is an island on the east owned by APC Resources that will likely develop as a gravel pit, and which may annex to the Town at a later date, but which has been used fairly regularly for cattle grazing and has one residential unit. The property is bounded on the south by the Dixon Water Foundation, within which property is an easement owned by the Town for access to the Silt River Preserve from County Road 346, and which property is used exclusively for extremely limited residential and almost exclusively for farming and ranching.

### **Ownership**

#### **And Land**

#### **Improvements:**

The Silt River Preserve is a 132-acre parcel that was once part of a larger 1,400-acre parcel owned by the McPherson Family until 1964 and used extensively for farming and ranching. Roger McFarland Dixon purchased the large 1,400-acre parcel in 1964, and continued the practice of cattle grazing on the property known as the Silt River Preserve. In 1995, a developer sought approvals through the Town of Silt for Annexation, Zoning and Subdivision of a 1,298 unit single-family and multi-family project, including forty-acres of commercial development on the 1,400-acre property. Although the Town granted approvals for the Stillwater Annexation, Zoning and Subdivision of the property between 1995 and 2007, the developer was unable to obtain financing for the Stillwater venture, and ultimately, the Town de-annexed the entire 1,400-acre property in 2008. Following the passing of Roger McFarland Dixon, the entire 1,400-acre property was deeded to the Dixon Water Foundation, who then offered a portion (132-acre Silt River Preserve) to the Town of Silt for purchase in 2009. The Town of Silt partnered with Great

Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), the Aspen Valley Land Trust (AVLT), the Gates Family Foundation, Williams Energy, Encana Energy, Bill Barrett Corporation, Antero Resources, Colorado River District, and Garfield County in order to help fund the purchase of the Silt River Preserve, Colorado River District. The Silt River Preserve was formally deeded to the Town in 2010. At that time, it was formally placed within a conservation easement, to be managed as wildlife habitat and open space, as well as agricultural purposes.

There were a few structures on the property at the time of purchase by the Town of Silt, including a small barn, an old log dugout or cellar structure, an old foundation where a mobile home had recently been removed, and three small wooden hunting blinds. The small barn and the old log dugout will remain on the property for historic purposes. An overhead utility power line that once served the mobile home is still visible, but the power source has been re-routed to serve irrigation pumps.

A domestic water well is in the location of the former mobile home location, with three groundwater monitoring wells in the northeast part of the property on the south side of the Colorado River, and likely all four will remain for the foreseeable future. Multi-stranded barbed wire livestock fences are still evident in the vicinity of the ponds, and livestock corrals constructed of a variety of materials are present in the vicinity of the barn.

Irrigation infrastructure, including a lined canal for the Rising Sun Ditch, the Hangs diversion ditch (lateral at the head gate of the Rising Sun Ditch with some buried pipe), and the Last Chance Ditch diversion structure will remain on the property.

Two historic ranch dumps were on the property at the time of purchase, but much of the above-grade materials have been removed. All old appliances have been removed from a large debris pile, but some wooden pallets remain.

### **Agricultural**

**Land Value:** The property historically used for agricultural hay production within the Silt River Preserve is a fifty-five (55) acre area that is mainly flat and functioned well as agricultural property for many years, by recently providing a grazing area for the cattle that Valley Farms (Dixon Water Foundation) raised on the entire parcel. Evidence of hay production, recreational hunting and fishing, residential use, wildlife habitat and small-scale gravel extraction is present on the property, although the

property has not been maintained or irrigated for hay production in the last few years, and weeds have infested the area. The following weed species are present on the property in the historic agricultural area and should be removed: kochia (*Kochia scoparia*), Russian knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*), field bindweed, Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), Russian thistle (*Salsola kali*), Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*), purple aster (*Machaeranthera canescens*), and curlycup gumweed (*Grindelia squarrosa*). Remnant and scattered pasture grasses and alfalfa are not as prolific as the bare ground patches. Without removal of weeds, reseeding and irrigation of this fifty-five (55) acre area, it will continue to be a haven for non-native species.

**Riparian Area:** The northern edge of the real property has an approximate ten (10) foot drop in elevation to the Colorado River's edge, and contains approximately thirty-nine (39) acres. The riparian area along the Colorado River corridor, including a river island in the northeast part of the property, a river side channel/slough in the northwest part of the property, and the Last Chance Ditch, has woodlands, shrublands and herbaceous plant communities. Large slash piles, woody debris and standing snags are in the riparian corridor and provide critical habitat for a number of native species, such as rodents, songbirds, great blue herons, and raptors. Overgrazing has damaged a number of cottonwood seedlings (*Populus angustifolia* and *Populus deltoides wislizenii*). Non-native weedy species tamarisk (*Tamarix* sp.), Russian olive (*Eleagnus angustifolia*), and Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) are evident in many areas of the property. Other less invasive herbaceous weeds like sorrel (*Rumex* sp.), ironweed (*Bassia hyssopifolia*) and common cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*) can be effectively crowded out with the planting of more native species like softstem bulrush (*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*), spikerush (*Eliocharis* sp.), Nebraska sedge (*Carex nebrascensis*), three-square bulrush (*Scirpus americanus*), and arctic rush (*Juncus arcticus*).

### **Semi-Desert**

**Shrubland:** This sixteen (16) acre area contains a few remnant species of native plants such as big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) and prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia* sp.), but Russian knapweed and kochia have taken over much of the area. Since semi-desert shrub communities provide habitat for reptiles and rodents, hunting habitat for raptors, breeding habitat for songbirds and cover and winter browse for big game ungulates, these communities should rebound as soon as the non-native species are removed.

**Pond Basin:** This three (3) acre area was created by historic gravel mining operations on the property. Although no water is present, the property has been identified as potential jurisdictional wetlands during the most recent wetlands delineation (WERI 2006), and should be preserved as such.

**Ruderal**

**Ground:** Areas identified as ruderal on the property include the north bank of the Rising Sun Ditch, and the headquarters area (immediate area of the barn, corrals, and the old trailer foundation) and collectively are four (4) acres. These areas are permanently disturbed and have a significant percentage of bare ground or weed cover.

**Threatened,  
Endangered,  
Or Special  
Concern**

**Wildlife:** According to the Baseline Documentation Report, the following animal species are listed as threatened, endangered or special concern and are either present on the property or the property is within the overall range of these species: bald eagle, river otter, Northern leopard frog, Greater sandhill crane, Ferruginous hawk, and Western yellow-billed cuckoo. Big game species that have a particular economic importance to Garfield County and to the State of Colorado include the following: American elk, mule deer, mountain lion and black bear.

**Other**

**Wildlife:** The Silt River Preserve provides habitat for a wide range of animals, reptiles, rodents and fowl, including migratory songbirds, shorebirds, waterfowl, raptors, coyote, fox, bobcat, beaver, badger, striped skunk, raccoon, cottontail, jackrabbit, porcupine, long-tailed weasel, squirrel, chipmunks, mice, voles, shrews, bats, garter snake, bull snake, western rattlesnake, sagebrush lizard, Woodhouse's toad, and tiger salamander.

**Recreation:** The Silt River Preserve has great recreational potential, with river fishing, wildlife and scenery viewing, picnicking, hiking, and boating. Native fish in the vicinity of the property include flannel mouth sucker and the mountain whitefish, both considered vulnerable and fairly uncommon.

**Conservation**

**Goals:** The goals of the conservation easement will all yield significant public benefit within the Silt River Preserve as follows:

- Preservation of the biodiversity of plants and wildlife along the Colorado River;
- Providing for the sustainable access to the Colorado River;
- Balancing the recreational demand with the protection of the significant riparian plant communities and wildlife;
- Restoring the native grasses that have been historically overgrazed by cattle;
- Managing angler use through commercial permits, signage and outreach;
- Educating commercial guides on the preservation goals;
- Continuing and expanding noxious weed control throughout the Preserve;
- Monitoring plant communities to assess passive and active recreational impact; &
- Providing environmental education through interpretive signs, Division of Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife professionals, and trained volunteers.

### **Improvements**

**by Town:** In keeping with the Conservation Goals above, the Town intends to practice the following management techniques and/or build the following structures:

1. Weed Removal shall be accomplished in stages and will be ongoing as follows:
  - a. Focus will be placed in 2013 and 2014 on cutting down and removing Tamarisk (Salt Cedar), Russian olive trees and Siberian Elm from the Riparian Zone and other wildlife sensitive areas in the Silt River Preserve, and the subsequent re-planting of two (2) cottonwood species mentioned earlier in this Plan;
  - b. In the 2013 and 2014 growing seasons, the Town shall concentrate on removing the Russian knapweed that is prolific in the agricultural area, by spraying with a liquid weed killer, and then re-seeding the entire agricultural area and irrigating;
  - c. Other less invasive herbaceous weeds like sorrel (*Rumex* sp.), ironweed (*Bassia hyssopifolia*) and common cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*) can be effectively crowded out with the planting of more native species like softstem bulrush (*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*), spikerush (*Elyocharis* sp.), Nebraska sedge (*Carex nebrascensis*), three-square bulrush (*Scirpus americanus*), and arctic rush (*Juncus arcticus*), and

this re-seeding should really take hold by the second growing season 2014;

- d. Weedy species shall be managed each year, once the above techniques have been utilized;
  - e. Re-seeding of the agricultural area will be a phased project as well, with no fertilization occurring the first and second growing seasons , but it may be necessary to apply a liquid fertilizer the third growing season ; &
  - f. Over-seeding of the agricultural area may need to occur in either the second or third growing seasons, or both years, if the seed does not take well in the first growing season.
2. Overhead power utility has been relocated to service irrigation pump stations for the proposed community garden and for the agricultural area;
  3. DOW Fencing
    - a. All non-Division of Wildlife (DOW) approved fences will be replaced or retrofitted to function as DOW fencing with top and bottom rows of smooth wire, and the middle two rows of barbed wire;
    - b. Town will install new DOW fencing to prohibit degradation of the re-seeded agricultural area, the community garden (discussed later), and any other sensitive habitat areas, such as the riparian zone where new cottonwood seedlings are planted;
    - c. The proposed fencing should have little to no effect on the smaller wildlife species, as they can navigate the fencing;
    - d. The proposed fencing, since it is DOW approved, will minimize the conflict with larger animals; &
    - e. No plastic snow fencing, pure barb wire or other fencing will be used, with the exception of the split rail fencing at the parking lot area; this fencing has not been a problem for wildlife in the past.
  4. Community Garden
    - a. A community garden will be established in the activity envelope to the west of the parking area;
    - b. The Town will prepare the plots and provide irrigation to the plots the first year;
    - c. The Town will monitor the plots to ensure that no invasive weedy species are planted that could migrate to other areas of the Silt River Preserve; &
    - d. The Town will install DOW approved fencing around the community garden, as stated earlier.

5. Scrap Metal
  - a. There may be some scrap metal still present on the property, as a result of the two historic ranch landfills; the Town may contract with a metal recycling company in order to remove all the scrap metal still remaining; &
  - b. The Town will remove rusted wire and rusted barbed wire fencing and replace as part of its retrofitting fencing to DOW-approved fencing.
  
6. Removal of Deadwood along Riparian Zone
  - a. The Town will burn some of the excess deadwood already in a pile by the riparian zone; &
  - b. The Town will not remove that deadwood that is part of the critical habitat in the riparian zone; large slash piles, woody debris and standing snags are in the riparian corridor and provide critical habitat for a number of native species, such as rodents, songbirds, great blue herons, and raptors.
  
7. Boat Ramp
  - a. The Town intends to build a boat ramp for individuals and small rafting companies, fishing guides and recreational boaters, by 2015, if practical, following a permit process through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the budgeting process through the Town of Silt; &
  - b. The Town will issue permits for usage of the boat ramp, in order to carefully control the level of activity at the Silt River Preserve along the riparian corridor.
  
8. Trails
  - a. The Town intends to install a trail to the Colorado River from the parking area on the southern boundary of the property;
  - b. This trail will be signed to discourage off-trail activities, and will provide a good viewing area for the Bald Eagle roost and for the Great Blue Heron Rookery;
  - c. The Town hopes to include volunteers in helping the Town to build the trail to the Colorado River in the summer of 2012, but in any case, this trail shall be built by 2013, with a clearly delineated location; &
  - d. Motorized vehicles will not be allowed on the trail, unless the Town must do maintenance.

9. Signage and Education
  - a. The Town will sign and monitor the riparian area to discourage degradation of this area and to encourage conservation of the natural animal and plant habitat;
  - b. The Town will place signs on the trail, advising of the requirement to stay on the trail;
  - c. The Town will sign critical wildlife areas and the agricultural area following re-seeding, in order to keep the public from entering those areas; &
  - d. The Town will sign the boat ramp, once installed, regarding the requirement for a permit through the Town and the need for adherence to guidelines.
  
10. Annexation of Silt River Preserve
  - a. As soon as practical, the Town will annex the Silt River Preserve in order to make it easier for Town officials to levy policies and conservation techniques on the users of the Silt River Preserve; &
  - b. The Annexation hearings are public hearings, and public input will be gained throughout the process.
  
11. Monitoring of Public and Town Activities on the Silt River Preserve
  - a. The Town's activities, as well as the public's activities, should be carefully managed in order to encourage the animal species to utilize the Silt River Preserve as their migratory and/or hunting habitat;
  - b. Any use not compatible with the Conservation Easement goals or the goals of this document should be abandoned immediately.
  
12. Biological Controls
  - a. Where possible, the Town will use environmentally sensitive herbicides and pesticides;
  - b. The Town will research the usage of biological controls for

Russian Knapweed and Tamarisk (Salt Cedar), if approved by the State of Colorado, Garfield County, the Aspen Valley Land Trust, and the Silt Board of Trustees.

13. Rules of the Silt River Preserve

- a. No smoking or alcoholic beverages are allowed in the Silt River Preserve;
- b. No motorized vehicles, except Town maintenance and police vehicles, shall be used on the Silt River Preserve;
- c. The Bald Eagle Roost and any other critical habitat area shall be preserved and kept clear of any activity that would discourage nesting and/or the raptor's hunting activities;
- d. The Silt River Preserve is open at 7 a.m. and closes at dusk, 365 days per year;
- e. No camping or use of fire in the Silt River Preserve, unless specifically authorized by the Town of Silt;
- f. No dogs or other domesticated animals are allowed in the Silt River Preserve;
- g. No glass containers are allowed in the Silt River Preserve;
- h. Users of the Silt River Preserve must leave the preserve as they found it;
- i. No littering or leaving of trash in the Silt River Preserve;
- j. No trespassing into closed re-vegetation areas where marked and signed; &
- k. No hunting is allowed in the Silt River Preserve.