A Collaborative Framework for Ecological Resilience and Sustainable Recreation

North Star Nature Preserve Management Plan

2026 APA COLORDAO NOMINATION RESILIENCE, SUSTAINABILITY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN AWARD

North Star Nature Preserve in Aspen, Colorado, balances river recreation with the protection of wetlands, wildlife corridors, and climate-resilient ecosystem services. The 2026 Management Plan demonstrates how a community can avoid privatization of public lands while sustaining ecological integrity through science-based, adaptive management.



Photo: A moose at North Star, Fall 2024

INTRODUCTORY FACT SHEET

North Star Nature Preserve provides long-term protection of biodiversity, natural ecosystem processes, landscape connectivity, and opportunities to connect with nature. Management efforts restore natural processes and promote ecological resilience in the face of challenges, including climate change, upstream water diversions, agricultural land use legacies, and surrounding development pressure. Habitat complexity exists across the property to benefit diverse wildlife species as well as the continued provision of ecosystem services for the Roaring Fork Watershed, including flood protection, hydrological function, wildfire fuel break, and air and water quality. North Star in its entirety is managed first and foremost for ecological integrity and resilience, while allowing human presence in limited areas for environmental education, research, respectful recreation, and access to nature.

PROJECT TITLE
North Star Nature Preserve Management Plan Update

AWARD CATEGORY
Resilience, Sustainability, and Environmental Design Award

LOCATION
Aspen, Colorado

AWARD LEAD
Carly O'Connell AICP, PLA, Pitkin County Open Space and Trails carly.oconnell@pitkincounty.com 970-379-4840

PROJECT TEAM
PITKIN COUNTY STAFF:
Gary Tennenbaum, Jessie Young, Carly O'Connell, Liza Mitchell, Jami McMannes

CITY OF ASPEN STAFF:
John Spiess, Shelly Braudis

CONSULTANT ADVISORS:
Steve Lawson, Annie Engen, Chris Monz, Jonathan Lowsky

WORKING GROUP:
Andrea Tupy (Roaring Fork Conservancy), Andre Wille, Bud Tymczyszyn (Aspen Valley Land Trust), Evan Cree (Commercial Outfitter), Eliza Voss (Aspen Chamber Resort Aassociation), Frank Arenella, Jennifer Schuller (U.S. Forest Service), Jim Kravitz (Aspen Center for Environmental Studies), Jonathan Rose (Aspen Valley Land Trust), Jordan Curet, Kurtis Tesch (CPW), Lange Adams (Commercial Outfitter), Morgan Boyles (Neighbor), Sallie Bernard (Neighbor), Tom Cardamone (Watershed Biodoversity Initiative), Tina Person (Wildwood School)

TIMELINE
Initial acquisition (1978) → prior plans (1989, 2000, 2015, 2020) → plan update effort (2025) → 2026 adoption

WEBSITE
Plan Document: https://pitkincounty.com/DocumentCenter/View/35413
Project Site: https://pitkincounty.com/1581/North-Star-Management-Plan-Update

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STEWARDING A LANDSCAPE UNDER PRESSURE

North Star Nature Preserve is one of the most ecologically significant landscapes in the Upper Roaring Fork Valley—a convergence of wetlands, wildlife habitat, river systems, and public connection to nature. Home to more than 192 plant species, 95 bird species, 12 mammal species, and a rare 8,000-year-old fen wetland, North Star provides irreplaceable ecological functions and ecosystem services to the Roaring Fork Watershed, with an estimated annual value exceeding $1 million. It is also one of the region's most popular paddleboarding destinations, attracting 8,000–9,000 visitors each summer.

CHALLENGE

Since Pitkin County acquired the first 170 acres of North Star in 1978, the preserve has been managed to protect ecological integrity while allowing appropriate public access. Over the last decade, rapid growth in river recreation, tourism, and demand for outdoor access created unprecedented pressure on this sensitive landscape.

Increasing visitation led to concerns about river crowding, parking congestion, wildlife disturbance, habitat fragmentation, wetland impacts, and user conflicts. At the same time, long-term ecological monitoring showed many key indicators at North Star remained stable or improving, reflecting early investments in ranger presence, visitor education, restoration, and stewardship.

This disconnect between perception and data mirrored a broader challenge facing mountain communities across Colorado: how to sustain meaningful public access to beloved natural areas, especially on the river, without degrading the ecological systems that make those places special.

RISK

North Star's ecological sensitivity heightened the stakes. The preserve includes critical elk and deer migration corridors, riparian wetlands, active beaver complexes, and rare fen ecosystems. As recreational use increased, local–visitor tensions rose, and some community members called for significantly reducing or eliminating public access.

The community faced a pivotal choice: either restrict the river so severely that North Star would effectively become a "public lands, private access" preserve, or design a more sophisticated, science-based framework that allows river recreation while protecting wetlands, wildlife, and ecosystem services.

RESPONSE

Adopted in 2026 by the Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners, the updated North Star Nature Preserve Management Plan responds to these pressures with a science-based, collaborative, and implementation-focused framework.

Grounded in long-term ecological monitoring, visitor-use data, adaptive management, and extensive public engagement, the plan charts a clear path for balancing conservation, river recreation, and climate resilience. The plan:

- Confirms that 77% of the preserve remains closed to public access to protect sensitive habitat and migration corridors.
- Concentrates public use in river and beach areas where ecological impacts can be effectively managed and monitored.
- Establishes transparent, quantitative thresholds linked to management actions for river crowding, parking capacity, and ecological conditions, ensuring decisions are tied to measurable indicators rather than perception alone.
- Integrates education, ranger presence, and stewardship messaging as core management tools, not afterthoughts.

OUTCOME

The result is a resilient and implementable management framework that demonstrates how communities can balance conservation, recreation, and climate resilience in highly valued natural landscapes. Through collaborative planning and science-based stewardship, the North Star Nature Preserve Management Plan provides a transferable model for protecting ecological integrity while sustaining meaningful public connection to nature.

A SCIENCE-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR RESILIENCE

ORIGINALITY, BEST PRACTICES, AND INNOVATION

THE NORTH STAR NATURE PRESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN BUILDS DIRECTLY ON ESTABLISHED BEST PRACTICES IN ECOLOGICAL PLANNING, CLIMATE ADAPTATION, AND VISITOR-USE MANAGEMENT, AND THEN ADVANCES THEM IN WAYS TAILORED TO ASPEN'S SPECIFIC RISKS AND COMMUNITY NEEDS.

Regionally and nationally, visitor use management commonly relies on familiar tools: engineering, education, and enforcement. The North Star plan incorporates these proven approaches, but pushes further by integrating them into a single, adaptive framework. This plan is innovative because it brings a rigorous, research-driven process to a 250-acre site and makes it transferable. North Star's management framework is built on more than 28 natural resource, recreation, and social science studies, then organized through the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council (IVUMC) framework at a site scale. By using this national visitor-use model to synthesize decades of local science into clear desired conditions, measurable indicators, and predefined management triggers, the plan shows how any land manager in Colorado can apply IVUMC to their own open spaces, linking on-the-ground data with adaptive, transparent decisions about conservation and recreation.

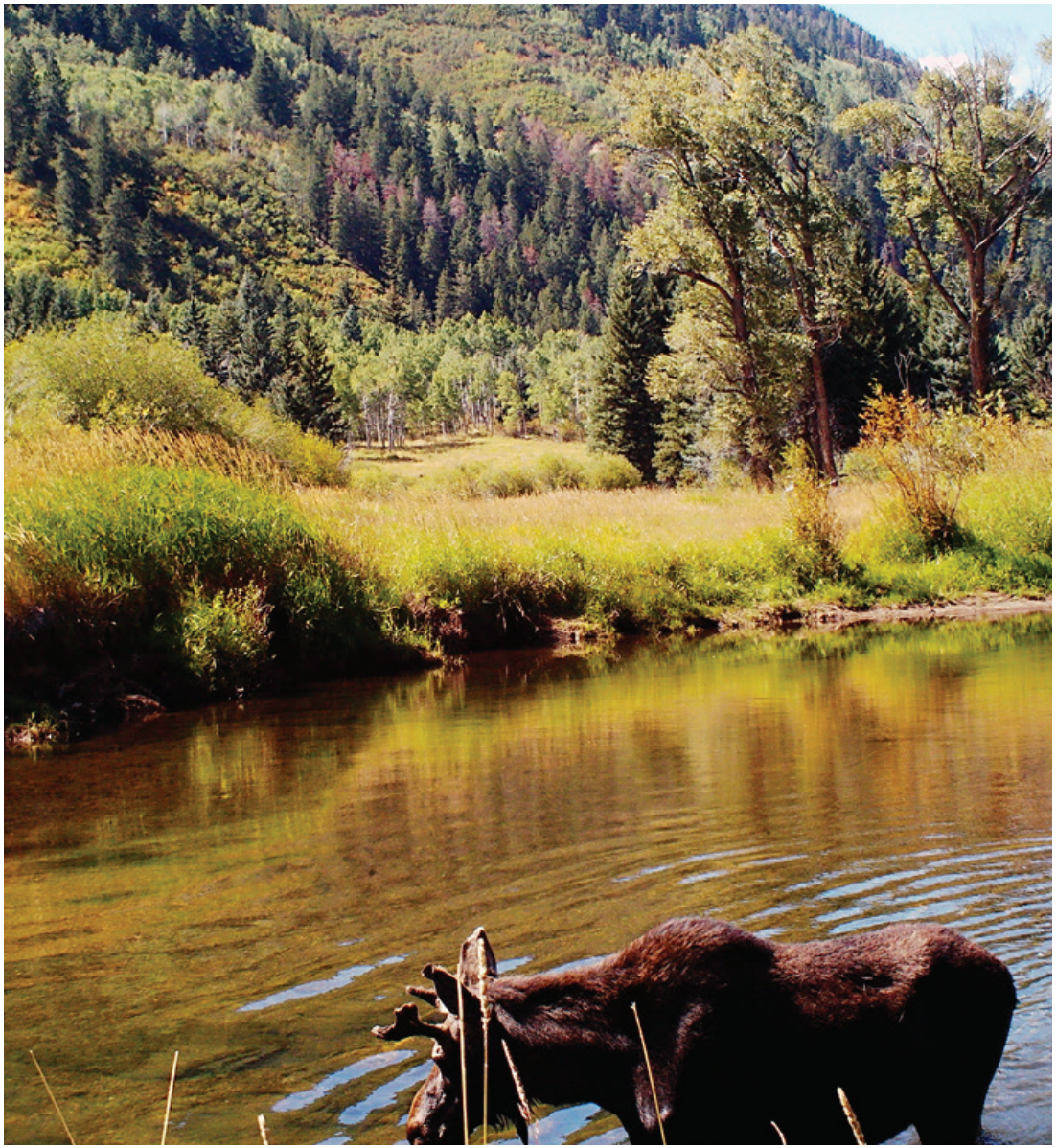


Photo: A "Naturalist" educating a visitor to North Star.

An innovative, transferable model that uses the Interagency Visitor Use Management Framework (IVUMF) to turn 28 ecological studies into a clear, data-driven framework for balancing conservation and river recreation, thereby increasing resilience to climate and social stresses.

Ecological Resilience

- Wetlands & Wildlife – Protects rare fens, riparian corridors, beaver habitats, and continuous elk/deer migration routes through large no-access zones, hydrology restoration, and habitat-friendly policies that store carbon and buffer floods.
- River & Climate – Uses a float-through river policy, designated access points, and intact wetlands to maintain river corridor integrity and moderate flood flows under hotter, drier conditions.
- Adaptive Management – Relies on long-term monitoring of vegetation, wildlife, river conditions, and visitors to detect stress early and adjust before impacts become irreversible.

Sustainable Recreation

- Targeted Access – Clearly defines where, when, and how people access North Star, emphasizing river-based use and seasonal protections to limit trampling, habitat loss, and disturbance during critical wildlife periods.
- Managed Capacity – Sets target and maximum capacities for parking, river use, and beach access linked to observed conditions and visitor experience.
- Infrastructure as Tool – Uses infrastructure, limited parking, set access points, signage, and wayfinding, to manage capacity and protect resources.

Education & Stewardship

- Rangers as Educators – Deploys rangers as on-the-ground educators and stewards to reinforce visitor expectations.
- Integrated Outreach – Combines on-site interpretation, digital tools, and partner outreach to explain why wetlands, wildlife corridors, and quiet river experiences matter.
- Data-Informed Stewardship – Tracks behavior and compliance (staying on the river, limited beach landings, quiet zones) to refine messaging, enforcement, and small infrastructure changes.

Collaboration

- Aligned Agencies – Coordinates Pitkin County, City of Aspen, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and federal partners around shared objectives for the river corridor and adjacent lands.
- Community & Stakeholders – Engages residents, neighbors, outfitters, non-profits, and local businesses through a working group that shapes the vision, tradeoffs, and implementation.
- Science Partnerships – Leverages universities, consultants, and local science organizations to design monitoring, analyze trends, and interpret findings.

Implementation

- Actionable Plan – Translates goals into clear, place-based management actions with defined timing and responsible parties.
- Monitoring & Triggers – Establishes focused monitoring protocols and explicit triggers that link observed conditions to management responses.
- Phased & Measurable – Stages implementation to match budgets and learning, using concrete metrics for ecological conditions, visitor experience, and compliance to track progress.

SURFACING TENSIONS AND FINDING COMMON GROUND

ENGAGEMENT.

The planning process was intentionally designed to build shared stewardship, not just produce a document. Pitkin County and the City of Aspen convened a diverse working group that included conservation organizations, a local land trust, federal and state agencies, commercial outfitters, educators, and neighbors.

Workshops and facilitated discussions brought ecological monitoring data, visitor-use trends, and community values into the same conversation. Participants examined past studies and monitoring results, and discussed options ranging from tighter restrictions to more structured access. Broader public participation included field intercept surveys in 2023 and 2024, an open house in June 2025, and a public questionnaire that was open from June to July 2025, reaching residents, visitors, and interested organizations. Over 1,300 public comments were received throughout the process.

The planning process helped align community perceptions with long-term ecological monitoring and management data. This alignment was critical in moving beyond polarized debates about “closing” or “opening” North Star toward a shared vision: maintaining robust ecological protections while allowing carefully managed river-based access that deepens public understanding of wetlands, wildlife, and climate resilience.

By making the science legible, elevating real experience, and transparently discussing tradeoffs, the process built durable buy-in for the plan’s recommendations and laid the foundation for ongoing collaborative stewardship.



Photo: A “Naturalist” educating a visitor to North Star.

INVESTMENTS AND CO-BENEFITS

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

Management Planning at North Star since 1989 has delivered tangible on-the-ground results, supported by multiple partners and primarily funded by Open Space and Trails, through a dedicated property tax originally approved by voters in 1990 and extended multiple times, with funding currently authorized through 2040. Tax revenue is not capped by Colorado's TABOR amendment inflation limits, allowing for consistent funding for land acquisitions and trail projects. The plan update invests in wetlands, wildlife habitat, and carefully managed river recreation to generate co-benefits for residents, visitors, and downstream communities while reducing long-term public costs from disasters and economic stress.

CO-BENEFITS

Managed river access at North Star provides low-cost, close-to-home recreation for locals, supports a stable visitor- and outfitter-based economy, and maintains an outdoor classroom for youth and educators. At the same time, intact wetlands and vegetated floodplains reduce flood damage, protect water quality, and buffer wildfire and erosion risks for downstream communities.

By investing collaboratively in natural infrastructure and equitable, well-managed access, the North Star Management Plan lessens the financial impacts that disasters and economic downturns can have on communities, while keeping a treasured river landscape open, resilient, and inclusive. (Adapted in part from and aligned with principles and findings in the Colorado Resiliency Framework, 2025.)



Photo: An education tour of North Star.

- 7.25 million Colorado residents participated in outdoor recreation on the Western Slope in 2023, with trail/road, wildlife-related, and other outdoor activities representing the largest shares and water- and winter-based use adding intense seasonal demand.
- Nearby communities hosted tens of millions of non-resident visits in 2025, underscoring sustained pressure on regional rivers and open spaces.
- Outdoor recreation supports 127,600 jobs, $5.7B in labor income, $9.5B in value added (GDP), and $17.9B in total annual economic output on the Western Slope, making careful, science-based management at places like North Star essential to sustaining both ecosystem health and the recreation-dependent economy.

(Findings from Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact Analysis, 2026, prepared for the Roaring Fork Outdoor Coalition.)

MEASURING SUCCESS THROUGH ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

EFFECTIVENESS AND RESULTS

The North Star Management Plan is built on the premise that assumptions and perceptions are not enough. Effectiveness is measured through a robust adaptive management framework that tracks both ecological and social conditions over time.

The plan uses:

- Measurable Indicators – Defined indicators for vegetation condition, wildlife use, wetland health, riverbank stability, visitor numbers, crowding levels, compliance, and visitor experience.
- Long-Term Monitoring – Ongoing, repeatable monitoring protocols that build on years of existing data, enabling trend analysis and early detection of change.
- Adaptive Management Triggers – Predetermined thresholds that, when reached, prompt management responses.
- Evidence-Based Decision Making – Management responses are driven by monitoring results and clearly documented decision pathways, rather than anecdote or short-term pressure.

This approach ensures that North Star's management remains responsive to climate shifts, changing recreation patterns, and evolving community expectations. It also creates a transparent structure that allows the public and partners to see how data informs decisions, reinforcing trust and shared stewardship.



Photo: Elk on the portion of North Star closed to public access.







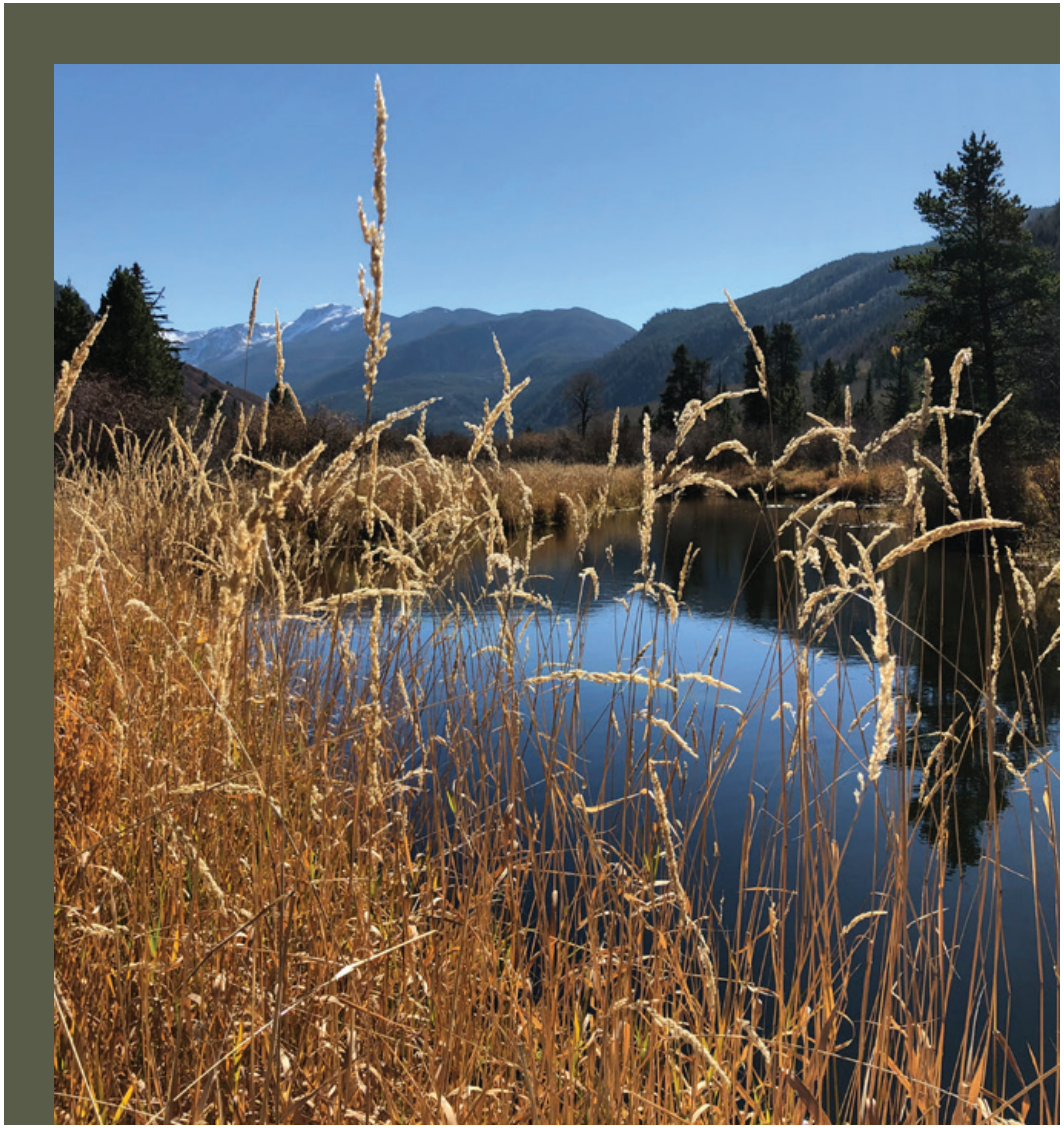
Photos (Clockwise): A beaver dam built in 2026; a ranger during peak-use in 2023; and, elk crossing the river in 2023.

FIVE NEW STRATEGIES IN THE PLAN WORTH HIGHLIGHTING

1. **Measurable thresholds, not guesswork.** For the first time, the plan establishes transparent indicators (ex. river crowding, parking relative to capacity, ecological health) that trigger a defined management response when crossed.
2. **Smarter management on busy days.** Rather than restricting overall access, management energy is concentrated on peak periods, supported by real-time monitoring, proactive protocols, and updated visitor education.
3. **Beavers as ecosystem engineers.** Beaver dams on Open Space and Trails property won't be removed unless there's a genuine infrastructure concern. When dams create obstacles for river users, portage guidance will be provided on the highway side to protect resources and preserve the west-side closure.
4. **Wildlife corridors are protected.** The plan prioritizes elk and deer migration corridors between Richmond Ridge and Smuggler Mountain, using the County's land-use referral process to minimize the impact of nearby development.
5. **Getting ahead of aquatic invasive species.** Proactive monitoring and a coordinated response protocol will help protect the river ecosystem before a problem takes hold. Floaters can help by cleaning, draining, and drying all gear after every use.

A MODEL FOR RIVER ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

INTEGRATION AND TRANSFERABILITY



North Star demonstrates a set of lessons for river ecosystem management in mountain communities and beyond:

- **Conservation and Recreation Are Not Mutually Exclusive –** By designating most of the preserve as off-limits to general public access, while concentrating and actively managing river-based recreation, the plan protects core ecological values while keeping the river experience accessible.
- **Adaptive Management is the Standard –** Quantitative thresholds, monitoring, and pre-defined triggers enable managers to respond to change in a timely, transparent way, avoiding both overreaction and inaction.
- **Stewardship Investments Produce Measurable Outcomes –** Investments in ranger presence, restoration, and education have contributed to high levels of compliance and stable-to-improving ecological indicators, even as visitation has grown.
- **Collaborative Planning Increases Trust Amidst Misinformation –** Bringing agencies, scientists, community members, outfitters, and educators into a shared process has produced a durable framework with broad buy-in and clear roles.

Photo: The North Star fen.

- **Community Development and Wildlife –** The plan extends beyond the preserve to guide how surrounding development coexists with wildlife. Through Pitkin County's land-use referral process, Open Space and Trails reviews development projects near North Star, to protect migration corridors, maintain landscape permeability, avoid floodplain development, preserve riparian zones and native vegetation, limit wildlife-blocking fencing, control noxious weeds, minimize drainage and erosion to wetlands and the river, maximize setbacks and visual screening, protect lands west of the Roaring Fork River, and maintain a 1/4-mile-wide elk migration corridor.

For other communities grappling with overcrowded rivers, legacy land impacts, climate change, and contested narratives about access and protection, North Star offers a replicable model: keep the most sensitive areas protected, concentrate access where it can be managed, and use science, education, and adaptive management to sustain both ecological function and meaningful public connection to nature.

Photo: The North Star takeout.





Photo: The North Star fen.

Key Metrics Snapshot

- **Acres protected: 250 protected, with 77% closed to public access to safeguard sensitive wetlands and wildlife habitat.**
- **Visitors annually: Approximately 8,000–9,000 summer visitors experiencing the river through low-impact recreation.**
- **Compliance improvements: Year-over-year increase in compliance with access and behavior guidelines, supported by ranger presence and education.**
- **Monitoring indicators: 39 key ecological and social indicators, with many showing stable to improving trends.**
- **Annual Education contacts: 1,187 hours of ranger–visitor interactions, 5-13 youth educational tours, and daily naturalist contacts focused on wetlands, wildlife, and river stewardship.**
- **River corridor length**
- **Partnership agencies: 5 core agencies and non-profit partners actively engaged in implementing and refining the plan.**

North Star Nature Preserve shows that with clear vision, collaborative planning, and adaptive management, river recreation can deepen public understanding of sensitive landscapes while preserving wetlands, wildlife habitat, and climate-resilient ecosystem services for generations to come.

ACES
Aspen Center for Environmental Studies

February 11, 2026

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails (OST):

Aspen Center for Environmental Studies (ACES) is happy to partner with OST on the education and management of the North Star Nature Preserve over the past 10 years. During that time, we have seen marked improvement in the management of visitors to the preserve. ACES has been involved with the 2025 North Star Nature Preserve Draft Management Plan (DMP) process as part of the working group and through partnership meetings. Having read and reviewed the plan, we are impressed with the inclusive, collaborative process employed to create it and with the hard work of the OST staff. We endorse the DMP and will offer some additional comments.

We appreciate the adaptive management strategy applied in these plans, which allows for flexibility. The last plan, approved in 2021, led to many improvements at North Star. Over the past five years, improvements that have resulted in a more appropriate use of the preserve include: the delineation of valid parking spots, a ban on dogs, glass, and audible music, increased ranger presence, the "float through only" tagline, and improved outfitter management and education. We believe that ideas for reducing congestion at Wildwood, including signs and communication technology, will help further reduce impact. Since 2021, the North Star fen was restored, aspen tree browser exclosures were piloted, and the management of noxious weeds was continued. Through these adaptive management measures, many undesirable recreation issues that erupted at North Star around 2015 are now on the decline.

The current DMP will help address issues that still require improvement. The visitor experience at North Star remains an important goal. The 2000 management plan included Key Recreation Concepts which lists opportunities for *solitude* and *quiet*. These terms, along with *peaceful*, appear in all early documents when referring to recreation at North Star.

We feel strongly these terms should be included in the Community section of Conservation Values 4.2 and Desired Conditions statement 4.3, and we also suggest including them as goals on pages x and xi of the new DMP.

The DNP implies that the river is most often not "crowded." When it is crowded (63% of survey respondents said it was frequently or occasionally crowded), quiet and solitude are not achieved. **We are encouraged that the DMP will emphasize identifying the characteristics of crowded days and times and setting triggers for action through the Peak Use Policy to reduce undesirable conditions.**Therefore, successfully identifying the triggers for action on these days will be key to reducing impact, restoring the peaceful experience desired by the community, and ensuring the long-term protection of the preserve's natural inhabitants and resources.

In addition to using metrics outlined in section 13.1 (visitor use indicators), **we suggest using the knowledge and reports of naturalists and rangers to *qualify* what makes days and times either: (1) peaceful, quiet, and providing opportunities for solitude, or conversely, (2) undesirable, loud, party-like.** By defining what these experiences are, OST can determine which actions can be taken to alleviate bad behavior before it happens. Comparing these reports with actual use data could help us get closer to identifying appropriate river use numbers. These could be hourly, daily, and seasonal numbers.

By focusing management efforts on the busy days and times and establishing an ethos of group size limits, OST can directly address the conditions that lead to a lack of quiet and opportunities for solitude at North Star. These high-use periods that often include large groups are the primary driver of undesirable, loud, and party-like atmospheres, which compromise the very community and conservation values that the preserve seeks to uphold.

When the goal of peace, quiet and the opportunity for solitude is achieved, it necessarily supports the other conservation values indicated by a significant majority of surveys, letters, and meetings, e.g. biodiversity and ecosystem integrity, riparian areas, wetlands, and wildlife habitat.

After managing a nature preserve for over 55 years, ACES has learned this: a nature preserve and its inhabitants are at their best when the above goals and conservation values are achieved.

We appreciate the hard work and dedication shown during this process.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts.





Chris Lane, CEO

Jim Kravitz, VP of Programs

ACRA DEFY ORDINARY

ASPEN CHAMBER RESORT ASSOCIATION

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT | MEMBER SERVICES | SPECIAL EVENTS | VISITOR SERVICES

Tuesday January 13, 2026

Dear Pitkin County Open Space and Trails & BOCC,

Aspen Chamber Resort Association participated in the North Star Management Plan working group meetings throughout 2024. It was an enriching experience, which really highlighted the importance of this particular open space throughout the community. The depth of knowledge from County staff, coupled with the passion from the selection of well-rounded community members and their individual expertise underscored the challenging role of managing open space for both recreation and conservation. I really appreciate the thoughtful manner in which the members of the working group were selected, and then subsequently listened to by staff and facilitators. I believe the updated plan takes into consideration the varying viewpoints and competing interests and provides us with a plan that is in alignment with the conservation values and the agreed upon desired conditions. It is no easy feat to manage a beloved parcel of land, under various public land entities; however, I believe the process conducted was collaborative and we are in support of the plan, which is also in alignment with ACRA's desire for responsible & respectful visitation and use by all those that live, work and play in our community.

We look forward to further collaboration and watching the great work and strategies of this plan unfold as it is adopted and implemented.

Sincerely,

Eliza Voss

Eliza Voss
Senior Vice President Destination Marketing
Aspen Chamber Resort Association

ASPEN VALLEY LAND TRUST

February 10, 2026

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails
530 E. Main St., Suite 202
Aspen, CO 81611

Re: North Star Nature Preserve – 2025 Management Plan Update

Dear Pitkin County OST Staff,

Thank you for your dedication and exemplary work in updating the 2025 North Star Nature Preserve Management Plan. North Star is recognized as an invaluable open space resource for both the community and the wildlife that resides in the Roaring Fork Valley. The efforts that you put into this management plan update are greatly appreciated and we are providing this letter in support of adopting the updated 2025 North Star Nature Preserve Management Plan.

As you are aware, Aspen Valley Land Trust (AVLT) holds a conservation easement (CE) over 175 acres of the North Star Nature Preserve, recorded on September 3, 2002, at reception number 472502. The stated purpose of this CE is:

> *It is the essential purpose of this Conservation Easement to preserve and protect, in perpetuity, the natural, ecological, wildlife habitat, scenic, open space, recreational and aesthetic features and values of the Property. In furtherance of the forgoing, this Conservation Easement is intended to establish permitted uses of the Property which are consistent with the purposes of the Conservation Easement and to prevent any use of the Property that will significantly impair or interfere with the Conservation Values of the Property. Grantor intends that this Easement will confine the use of the Property to those activities consistent with the purpose of this Easement.*

Furthermore, the CE provides provisions on how the property is to be managed in accordance with a management plan that is to be updated every 5 years, and how AVLT has the obligation to recommend modifications to the management plan to ensure the protection of conservation values:

> ***Section 8. Management Plan:*** *The Property shall be operated and managed by Grantor in accordance with the Management Plan. The Management Plan shall be updated by Grantor no less than once every five (5) years. As further provided in paragraph 2(d), Grantee may participate in any North Star Users Group meetings and may recommend changes to the Management Plan. No amendments or changes to the Management Plan may increase the type or intensity of recreational, commercial, or public use beyond what is specified in the existing Management Plan.*

Section 2 (Rights and Obligations of Grantee) d: *To recommend modifications to the Management Plan for the Property to accommodate Grantor's permitted uses as well as provide for measures to enhance or protect the habitat, stream, wetlands or riparian viability or other natural features of the Property, and to veto any future change in the Management Plan which would allow for a level of use that may threaten the Conservation Values of the Property.*

Involving vested interests through a collaborative effort, resulting in the formation of the North Star Working Group, has been a valuable process in this iteration of the management plan update. After reviewing the management plan, we believe the input from the working group is well represented and incorporated into the management plan. As it relates to the 175 acres under CE held by AVLT, we support the adoption of this plan. Specifically, we commend the continued application of science-based studies and management objectives to enhance and protect the biological diversity and ecological processes that are foundational to North Star Nature Preserve. As stated in Section 2d of the CE, it is the right and obligation of AVLT as the grantee to "**provide for measures to enhance or protect the habitat, stream, wetlands, or riparian viability or other natural features of the property.**"

We also recognize that while recreation is a stated conservation value and an invaluable experience for the community, it has been clearly omitted from Section 2d of the CE. It is our interpretation that the original intent of the CE is to ensure the protection and viability of the ecological processes and wildlife of North Star while also providing public benefit to access the preserve through passive recreation, with recreational interests deferring to ecological needs.

The management plan and objectives are intentional in the protection and enhancement of the ecological values of the property and also address the realities of the constraints and opportunities for thoughtfully managing recreational pressures. As OST staff continue to be adaptive in their management approach for North Star, AVLT recommends that, with regard to land protected under CE, ecological processes and function should not be harmed for the sake of improved recreational amenities or experiences. To that effect, we were able to meet with OST staff to discuss the plan and provide the following feedback. These suggestions are not requirements of our approval but recommendations that we believe would enhance management of the natural resources of the CE:

1. Consider voluntary wildlife closures for elk production, bird nesting, and other wildlife closure needs. Being more proactive than reactionary with wildlife closures may help to raise awareness and continue to educate the public on wildlife use of the property.
2. Implement an alternatives assessment for removal of beaver dams to protect Highway 82 infrastructure, with removal of dams as a last resort and considering other mitigation measures first.
3. Highlight actionable items to support beaver and ecological restoration. Concur with the more passive approach to restoration but identifying key locations to implement some low-tech and other small scale restoration activities could improve the plan.
4. Explore the opportunity to involve partners and implement monitoring efforts at a larger scope (watershed level) to help direct and assess management actions.
5. Rely on rangers and naturalists' capacity to comfortably handle and educate users at the put-in as a gauge in use metrics and guide capacity discussions.

We look forward to our continued participation in the North Star Nature Preserve and ongoing partnership with Pitkin County Open Space and Trails.



Jonathan Rose
Natural Resources Director
Aspen Valley Land Trust
Jonathan@avlt.org

COLORADO
Parks and Wildlife
Department of Natural Resources

Glenwood Springs Office, Area 8 Service Center
0088 Wildlife Way • Glenwood Springs, CO 81601
PH: (970) 947-2920

1/26/2026

Carly O'Connell
Pitkin County Open Space and Trails
530 East Main St. Suite 202
Aspen, CO 81611

North Star Draft Management Plan Update

Dear Carly,

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the North Star Draft Management Plan.

Based on CPW's Species Activity Maps (SAM) North Star Preserve contains portions of an Elk Migration Corridor and Fall Concentration Area, Moose Winter Range and Concentration Area, Black Bear Fall Concentration and Human Conflict Areas as well as Great Blue Heron Nesting Area.

CPW is inline with the key updates listed and their intents for Ecological Restoration and Support of Natural Processes, Nature Accessibility, Concentrated Recreational Use for the Benefit of Wildlife, Respectful User Behavior and Measurable Indicators to

Laura Clellan, Acting Director, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Parks and Wildlife Commission: Richard Reading, Chair · James 'Jay' Tutchton, Vice-Chair · Eden Vardy, Secretary · Jessica Beaulieu · Frances Silva Blayney · John Emerick · Tai Jacober · Dallas May · Jack Murphy · Gabriel Otero

ensure Desired Progression. CPW appreciates the Management Direction including the Conservation Values, Desired Conditions, Indicators and Thresholds.

CPW appreciates the West Side Public Access Closure and recognizes it is a key component of North Star and their effort to protect wildlife in a valley that is evergrowing. It is evident in this update that Pitkin County values the wildlife that utilize North Star and is committed to protecting that wildlife for future generations while balancing the ever increasing human presence and use.

CPW supports the North Star Management Plan Update and looks forward to future collaborations.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife appreciates the opportunity to comment on this project. If there are any questions or need for additional information don't hesitate to contact District Wildlife Manager, Kurtis Tesch at (970) 948-1662.

Sincerely,



Matt Yamashita, Area Wildlife Manager

Cc. Kurtis Tesch, District Wildlife Manager
John Groves, Assistant Area Wildlife Manager

January 22, 2026

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails
Attn: Carly O'Connell
530 E Main, Suite 202
Aspen, CO 81611

RE: North Star Nature Preserve Management Plan Update

Dear Carly and Pitkin County Open Space and Trails,

Please accept this letter of support for the North Star Nature Preserve Management Plan (Plan) Update as submitted by Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Program (OST).

Roaring Fork Conservancy (RFC), a non-profit watershed organization dedicated to protecting and preserving the rivers of the Roaring Fork Valley through wetlands and riparian habitat preservation, environmental education, water quality monitoring, scientific research, and community outreach, appreciates the opportunity to contribute in the collaborative effort to update the North Star Management Plan. RFC values the immense work by OST to put forth a comprehensive plan for this highly prized region of our watershed.

The updated Plan's policies, goals and actions support RFC's mission to preserve the conservation values of the watershed which include biodiversity and ecosystem integrity, river, riparian and wetland ecosystem health, wildlife and habitat protection, and community outreach. Situated near the headwaters of the Roaring Fork River in an area that is threatened by increased recreation and development the continued protection and management of the conservation values of North Star ensures this valuable and diverse ecosystem will be available to wildlife and support the health of our watershed for the future. RFC agrees that the support necessary to preserve the health of our watershed and the conservation values of North Star are reinforced by the guided near- and mid-term adaptive management of the Plan to achieve the long-term vision presented by OST.

Thank you for allowing RFC to be a part of the process in creating an updated Plan that supports these treasured conservation values of the North Star Preserve.

Sincerely,

Andrea Tupy
Ecologist
Roaring Fork Conservancy

United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
White River National Forest
Aspen-Sopris Ranger District
620 Main St
Carbondale, CO 81623-0309
970-963-2266

File Code: 1920
Date: 02/05/2026

Carly O'Connell
530 E Main St.
Aspen, CO 81611

Dear Carly,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Pitkin County Open Space & Trails Updated North Star Nature Preserve Management Plan. It appears that you have incorporated the changes per our request.

We greatly appreciate the work that has gone into creating the Management Plan and how the update has been built on decades of conservation, monitoring, and community involvement.

The management plan largely aligns with land management priorities on National Forest System lands. Specifically, the plan aligns with recreation, wildlife and their habitat, Riparian and Wetlands while preserving a mosaic of high-quality native ecological communities that support biological diversity while allowing public access. The plan also ensures that North Star will continue to be managed responsibly amid changing conditions.

If there are any questions or need for additional information don't hesitate to contact the district's Recreation Manager, Kendra Head at kendra.Head@usda.gov, or the districts Lands Specialist, at michael.braudis@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

JENNIFER SCHULLER
Acting District Ranger