

EAGLE POST 31

The newsletter of **Friends of Eagles Nest Wilderness**, apprising you of important activities in and around Eagles Nest, Holy Cross, and Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness Area.



December 2018

Dear *|FNAME|*
Greetings! Our topic this month is
Saving the Lower Blue River Valley
by John Fielder

BEFORE WE BEGIN...

COLORADO GIVES DAY is this Tuesday. As an all-volunteer organization we

target every dollar in our budget directly to protecting three Wilderness Areas in Summit and Eagle counties, with programs like Volunteer Wilderness Rangers and Trail Maintenance, and Forest Health projects. FENW is critically dependent upon the generosity of others. If you can support these efforts click [HERE](#) to donate to FENW. Any amount works. \$35 buys a shirt for a Volunteer Wilderness Ranger shirt. \$100 supports a Rocky Mountain Youth Corps crew for an afternoon. A larger contribution might build a bridge on a lovely trail. Consider donating to our [ENDOWMENT FUND](#), which will make your gift give year after year.

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IN ADDITION... Look for your **FENW Fall Newsletter!** It was mailed out a week ago. If you haven't received one, *WE DON'T HAVE YOUR MAILING ADDRESS*. Send it to us at info@fenw.org and we'll send you the newsletter - it's

SAVING THE LOWER BLUE RIVER VALLEY

INTRODUCTION

An open pit mine is proposed for the lower Blue River Valley, in the last stretch that retains the historic purity of meadowed and pastured ranchlands, nestled between Eagles Nest and Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness Areas. The proposal arrives like a gut punch to those who cherish the place, because they thought they had gained a respite from the relentless (some say voracious) spread of gravel quarries from farther upstream.

Several years ago, the Summit Sky development on Maryland Creek, originally approved for 80 homesites, suddenly was allowed to triple in size to 240, and was annexed by the town of Silverthorne. Preservationists appealed, but lost. There was, however, a consolation: developer Tom Everist put a deed restriction on the downstream (northern) part of his property, which blocks additional annexations by Silverthorne (town annexations must border existing town boundaries). A sigh of relief arose from farther downstream.

Alas, the consolation didn't prevent this new application for an open pit gravel quarry in the pastoral valley below.

John Fielder, our Photographer Laureate of Colorado and champion of environmental causes, has founded a grass roots effort to block the creation of the quarry. Below, John pleads his case in a personal essay. Below that (and at the [FENW website](#)) is his public call to action.

[photos by John Fielder]

To my Friends of Eagles Nest Wilderness

By John Fielder
Photographer

I moved to Summit County in 2007. I had always known that when my children flew the coop, I would head for the hills... permanently. I found land high in the Acorn Creek drainage of the Williams Fork Mountains 10 miles north of Silverthorne. I built a home that overlooks the Lower Blue River Valley, and I can see the entire Gore Range to the west. As a nature photographer, I know a good thing when I see it...it's my job!



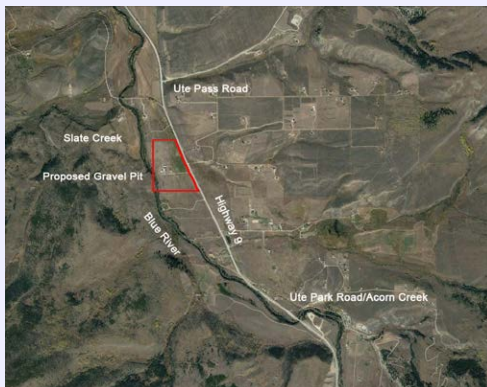
John Fielder



Over the past 40 years I have photographed just about the entire Eagles Nest Wilderness, including all of its alpine and subalpine lakes. The Gore Range and the Needle Mountains in the Weminuche Wilderness are my two favorite ranges in Colorado. They are both rugged, remote, and partly untrailed, my definition of paradise.

The Lower Blue River Valley is not only one of Colorado's most scenic riverine valleys, it's one of its most bucolic. In between the two mountain ranges lie working cattle ranches, most of which are protected forever from development by conservation easements, including the 1,123-acre Knorr Ranch, eased in September. In addition, there are more than 8,000 acres of Summit County Open Space open to the public.

The valley, itself, is a collection of superlatives. The second largest purple lupine wildflower meadow that I have photographed in Colorado lies along a certain public road. Not far away bloom the stalks of green gentian (monument plant) in a meadow that *is* the largest I know of in Colorado. Our aspens are the highlight of any Summit County autumn, and Lower Cataract Lake provides my favorite two-mile hike around a subalpine lake. And how about those magnificent elk and mule deer herds that hang with us down low in spring and fall?



All of these values are now threatened by a proposed new gravel mine at the confluence of Slate Creek and the Blue River along the west side of Highway 9 immediately south of Ute Pass Road. As I write this, I look down on this soon to be ravaged 80-acre property, the river itself, and the Gore Range behind it all. If the mine is approved, views from Ute Pass and other high places will be destroyed,

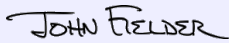
230 gravel trucks a day on the highway will send their tire noise through home windows up and down Highway 9, dust will cloud the valley, those elk and deer will disappear to friendlier places, and I can only imagine the adverse impacts on the already dwindling fresh waters of the Blue River.

I have created a non-profit organization, ***Lower Blue Residents United***, to lead the

fight to defeat the mine. Let there be no doubt, we will stop it, but we must do our diligence. Please email me and I will add you to our list of supporters, and apprise you of developments. We must raise \$100,000 immediately to hire the expert witnesses and attorney to present our case at the first Summit County review, which could be as early as February. Consider how badly you do not wish to have gravel mining in the Lower Blue River Valley. Send your generous checks now to:

Lower Blue Residents United
c/o John Fielder
POB 26890
Silverthorne CO 80497

Sincerely,



John Fielder

Acorn Creek

john@johnfielder.com

ABOUT JOHN FIELDER

With more than forty coffee table photography books published - including Colorado's all-time best-selling book (*Colorado 1870-2000*) - John Fielder knows our mountains with an intimacy borne of countless backcountry trips. Among his many honors, he is the recipient of the Sierra Club's Ansel Adams Award, the Aldo Leopold Foundation's Achievement Award (first time given to an individual), and most recently (2017) an Honorary Degree in Sustainability Studies from Colorado Mountain College.



Those backcountry photography expeditions doubled as scouting trips for John as he sought a spot to build a mountain home of his own. His ultimate choice was smack in the middle of FENW country - next to Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness, looking west across the Blue River valley into the heart of Eagles Nest Wilderness. It is easy to understand his passionate desire to protect the last slender thread of unsullied river valley that connects those two magnificent

Wilderness Areas, to preserve the pastoral ranchlands and bucolic public wildlands.



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... make a difference!

Join us in 2019 - There are many ways to take part!
 Our **2018 Trail & Campsite Projects**, led by Trail Boss Kate Demorest, took us to Slate Lakes, Piney Lake, Salt Lick Trail, Gore Creek, Deluge Lake, and more. We were greatly aided by two very special friends - Dom and Powell - LLAMAS! Join us in 2019 - learn more [HERE](#).

Volunteer Wilderness Rangers met more than 10,000 wilderness visitors in 2018. Become a VWR in 2019 - training will be held on a Saturday in early June. Learn more [here](#).

Join us! for our next **Planning Meeting**
 THURSDAY, December 13, 5:30 PM,
 USFS Offices (video link) Silverthorne
 ([MAP](#)) and Minturn
 Details at www.fenw.org/

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Our **hard copy newsletter** is available.

It contains two dozen fun and informative articles, all of them about FENW - past, present, and future. If you haven't received your copy, then *we don't have your mailing address* - please send it to us at info@fenw.org.

[Recent monthly eNewsletters](#)

CITY MARKET COMMUNITY REWARDS PROGRAM

Please [register](#) your City Market Value Card, linking it to FENW, which will send rebates to FENW without compromising your earned fuel points. Please note that each card holder may only sign up for one tax exempt organization. **THANKS!**



PUBLIC LETTER FROM JOHN FIELDER

Stop gravel mining in the Lower Blue River Valley

November 18, 2018

Hello Neighbors of the Lower Blue River Valley:

On October 15, our neighbor Julie Hillyard sold her 80-acre lower Blue River ranch to Peak Materials (formerly LG Everest), operators of the Maryland Creek gravel/aggregate mine north of Silverthorne. Her ranch lies along the west side of Highway 9 near the confluence of Slate Creek and the Blue River. Peak Materials is a subsidiary of Kilgore Companies, which in turn is a subsidiary of Summit Materials, a national company based in Denver that specializes in mining aggregates and making concrete. (<http://summit-materials.com/companies/kilgore-companies>)

Peak Materials apparently has determined that only limited inventory of aggregate remains at the Maryland Creek site necessitating the company to seek new gravel mining locations. We understand that Peak is planning to mine aggregate at the Hillyard site and truck it to Maryland Creek for processing. This proposal would fundamentally change the character of the Lower Blue River valley and would require up to 230 truck trips per day (full load south, empty load north).

Summit County Planning Dept. requires that a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) be acquired for such operations. The application would be evaluated based upon the Summit County Land Use and Development Code. The Lower Blue Planning Commission is responsible for conducting the review, which could happen as early as February of 2019. The Hillyard property permit would be a new one, but Peak Materials may also need approval of an updated Maryland Creek permit since that permit may not allow material to be imported from other locations (processing operations may increase in intensity).

As neighbors in the Lower Blue Valley, we must sustain and protect the valley's traditional agricultural character, promote the safety of the residents, livestock and wildlife, and maintain the environmental integrity of the valley through education, collaboration and community involvement. We cannot allow our water quality and air quality to be degraded. A gravel mining operation would be antithetical to these values and as neighbors we must influence the permitting process to defeat this destructive project.

Specifically, we will need to:

- gain the support of the entire Lower Blue Valley community, as well as other interested and/or vested parties
- evaluate the impact of gravel mining on Highway 9 traffic (noise from both the trucks and the mining), air quality (from dust and diesel fumes), water of the Lower Blue River and its groundwater, wildlife, wetlands, recreation, and overall property values
- hire expert witnesses to evaluate these impacts who can effectively testify at hearings and proceedings before the county and State. We will need to retain a mining engineer, wildlife expert, water expert, property appraisers, and others.
- hire a consultant to develop, coordinate, and oversee our strategy

- hire an attorney to advise us in certain matters
- raise the money needed to finance the campaign

All of this must happen immediately. We must have our evidence available by the date of the earliest possible hearing of the Lower Blue Planning Commission (LBPC), which could be the first Thursday in February. If that body votes not to issue the CUP, Peak Materials has the right to appeal the decision to the Summit County Board of Commissioners. At that time, we would need to present the same case again with the expert witnesses.

The Colorado Mined Land Reclamation Board (MLRB) also has jurisdiction over gravel mining in Colorado. An applicant can apply for a permit from MLRB through its staff agency, the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety (DRMS). This can precede or follow review by Summit County. We do not know in what direction Peak Materials will go, therefore, we must begin to prepare a case to present to MLRB with the same research. The denial of a permit at either the state or local level usually signals the defeat of the application. However, the mining company can continue the process with litigation.

The existing valley advocacy organization, Friends of the Lower Blue River (FOLBR), cannot be involved, other than to provide unbiased information, due to conflicts of interest related to its three board members who simultaneously serve on the LBPC. Therefore, I volunteer to supervise the campaign for no compensation and use my full visibility as nature photographer to gain support for the campaign. I have reached out to Harris Sherman, one of Colorado's premier natural resource experts, to serve as our strategist and consultant in this effort. Harris is a former Executive Director of Colorado Dept. of Natural Resources, former Chairman of MLRB, and former Undersecretary USDA overseeing the U.S. Forest Service. He supervised the 2017 defeat of a proposed gravel quarry near Colorado Springs. He has agreed to represent us in this matter.

The name of the entity that will lead the campaign is Lower Blue Residents United. It is the new trade name of a non-profit corporation I started 20 years ago. The first phase of our campaign will be to make a presentation to LBPC as early as February and will require us raise initially \$100,000 to finance the hiring of the aforementioned experts, an attorney, and Harris Sherman. I have already begun the fundraising process. If the IRS approves the reorganization of Lower Blue Residents United, donations will be tax deductible. We will learn this outcome in 30-90 days.

In any event, we are now soliciting donations to stop gravel mining in the Lower Blue Valley. Please consider just how much you wish not view, smell, and hear an industrial operation in our valley, and give generously. Send your checks today to:

Lower Blue Residents United
c/o John Fielder
POB 26890

Silverthorne CO 80497

Finally, there must be public outrage to this unacceptable attempt to rape our valley with an industrial operation. For now, the best thing YOU can do, other than donate money, is to be patient. A unified force of valley voices leading the charge will be far more effective than each of you individually speaking your mind at this time. The first and best opportunity for you to do exactly that will be at the Lower Blue Planning Commission hearing early next year. In the meantime, we will keep you up to date on any and all developments, and prompt you when good opportunities arise for you to express your feelings to the state, county, and the media.

We WILL stop this outrageous attack on our beautiful valley!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JOHN FIELDER". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large 'J' and 'F'.

John Fielder, Acorn Creek
john@johnfielder.com

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