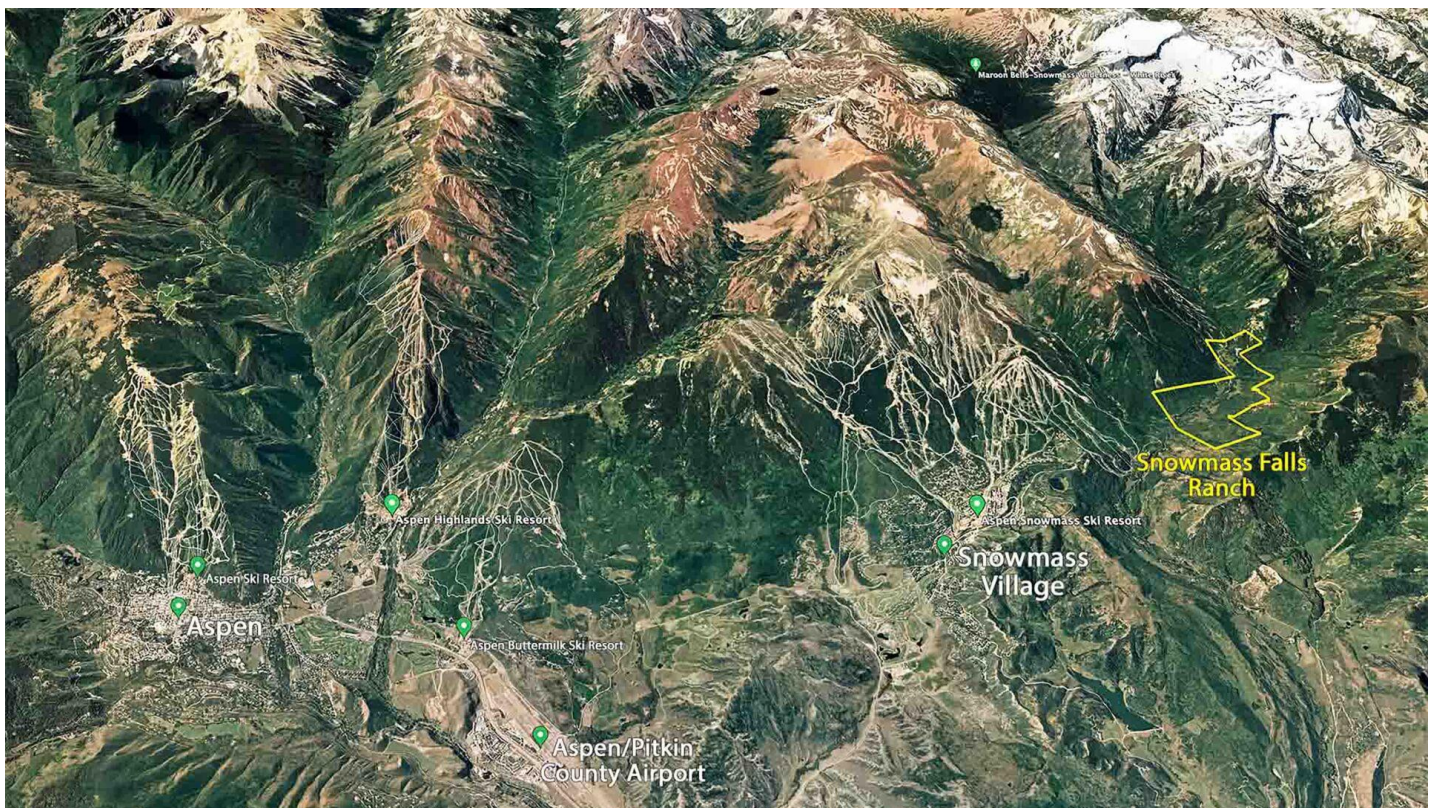


https://www.aspendailynews.com/news/pitco-open-space-scores-coveted-ranchland/article_677ac990-abdc-11ee-bd80-a337c54ba835.html

PitCo Open Space scores coveted ranchland

Scott Condon, Aspen Daily News Staff Writer
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This map shows the location of the Snowmass Falls Ranch, which is under contract for purchase by the Pitkin County Open Space and Trails program for \$34 million. The ranch is located west of Snowmass Village.

Courtesy of Pitkin County Open Space and Trails

Pitkin County Open Space and Trails officials swung for the fences and connected.

The open space program is under contract for a \$34 million purchase, the largest in its 33-year history. It is scheduled to close in February on the purchase of the Snowmass Falls Ranch — a 650-acre parcel that serves as a gateway to the Maroon Bells-Snowmass

Wilderness. The wilderness area surrounds the property on three sides. Access to the property is via Snowmass Creek Road.

The open space board of directors voted to recommend the purchase at its meeting on Thursday. It must be approved by Pitkin County commissioners. Both boards have been discussing the proposed purchase for months in sessions that have been closed to the public.

“Snowmass Falls Ranch is quite easily the most extraordinary piece of private land in Pitkin County,” Dale Will, acquisition and projects director for the open space program, said in a prepared statement.

The property has been owned by the Perry family, first by Bob and Ruth Perry and now by their descendants, who hold it through a company called Perry Family Snowmass LLC. They had the property listed for \$50 million in 2021 but no sale was achieved on the free market. Will had been trying to negotiate a deal since 2019.

“We’ve held our breath since the property was listed, but never gave up on the hope that the ranch could be preserved,” Will said. “It will be an outstanding addition to the public lands of Pitkin County.”

The land that comprised the ranch was pieced together in the early 1900s by Kate Lindvig, a Danish immigrant who used the Homestead Act and land purchases to assemble the 650 acres. Lindvig was known as the “Cattle Queen of Snow Mass,” according to research by the Aspen Historical Society. She granted easements to the U.S. Forest Service in 1933 for the Snowmass Lake and West Snowmass trails through her property, according to the open space program. Lindvig ran the ranch herself until she sold the property to Bob and Ruth Perry in 1943.

The owners released a statement from their attorney and spokesman Bart Johnson: “The Perrys have been stewards of this special and unique property for eight decades,” Johnson said. “Not surprisingly, it is with mixed emotions that they have agreed to sell

Snowmass Falls Ranch, but after careful deliberation, Perry Family Snowmass LLC has decided that Pitkin County is the right buyer at the right time.”

The ranch encompasses 2 miles of the Snowmass Creek Valley. Development is limited to five off-grid cabins and agricultural facilities. It is zoned RS-30 which potentially would have allowed development of an unknown number of homes on 30-acre parcels if it remained in private hands. Instead, the landscape will remain as aspen meadows, beaver ponds and trout streams in the shadow of the surrounding Elk Mountains. The property includes two waterfalls that are tucked out of view.



Pitkin County Open Space and Trails is under contract to purchase the 650-acre Snowmass Falls Ranch located outside Snowmass Village. The ranch, in the center foreground, is a gateway to the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness.

Courtesy of Hall and Hall real estate company

The ranch remains private until the deal closes. The open space program will keep the property closed to the public while working on an interim management plan. Gary Tennenbaum, director of the open space and trails program, said the county is interested

in working with the U.S. Forest Service on improvements to the Snowmass Lake trailhead on flat ground just inside the ranch. The current parking area for the trailhead is easily overwhelmed and inefficient.

The outlay for the Snowmass Falls Ranch is twice the previous largest amount paid by the open space program for a property acquisition. It bought 845 acres at the heart of what is now Sky Mountain Park for \$17 million in 2010. Later contributions by Great Outdoors Colorado, the town of Snowmass Village and the city of Aspen reduced the county's contribution down to about \$11 million.

The open space program also hopes to recoup some of the funds spent on Snowmass Falls Ranch. It will work with the nonprofit organization Wilderness Land Trust to try to get some amount of the property purchased by and transferred to the Forest Service.

Wilderness Land Trust President Brad Borst said in a statement that its been a longstanding goal of the organization to see Snowmass Falls Ranch protected from further development and into public hands.

“We are delighted to partner with Pitkin County with the hopes of ultimately adding this critical wildlife habitat and public trails to the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness,” Borst said.

The open space program also will explore carving out the piece of property where the five off-grid cabins are located from the rest of the ranch. It's possible that the cabin parcel could be sold with a conservation easement in place to define use and any further development, according to Tennenbaum.

The big purchase comes just as county commissioners are finalizing their budget for 2024. The preliminary budget discussed on Dec. 5 envisioned that the open space fund would collect \$20.7 million in property tax revenues for 2023 or an increase of about \$7 million from the amount collected for 2022.

Revenue growth for much of the county budget is restricted to 5.5% by state regulations. However, county voters decided to exempt the open space fund from the restrictions on growth. County officials said taking a windfall for the open space fund from rising property values was justified because major purchases were being planned.

The commissioners are scheduled to set the open space and trails fund mill levy on Jan. 10 — the same day they vote on the Snowmass Falls Ranch purchase.

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